

# Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20

Web report | Last updated: 11 Dec 2020 | Topic: [Homelessness services](#) | [Media release](#)

## About

The specialist homelessness services web report is an annual report summarising data from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC). It describes the characteristics of clients of specialist homelessness services, the services requested, outcomes achieved, and unmet requests for services.

Cat. no: HOU 322

- [Fact sheets](#)
- [Infographics](#)
- [Interactive data visualisation](#)
- [Data](#)

### Findings from this report:

- [290,500 clients were assisted by SHS agencies in 2019-20; almost 1.3 million clients since 2011-12](#)
- [Most SHS clients were at risk of homelessness when seeking assistance; most were in private or other housing at the time](#)

## Contents

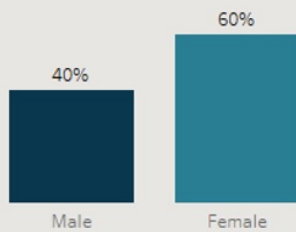
- [Summary](#)
- [Policy framework](#)
- [Clients, services and outcomes](#)
- [Client geography](#)
- [Service geography](#)
- [Unmet demand](#)
- [Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence](#)
- [Young people presenting alone](#)
- [Children on care and protection orders](#)
- [Indigenous clients](#)
- [Clients exiting custodial arrangements](#)
- [Clients leaving care](#)
- [Older clients](#)
- [Clients with disability](#)
- [Clients with a current mental health issue](#)
- [Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use](#)
- [Clients who are current or former members of the Australian Defence Force](#)
- [Technical Information](#)
  - [Data presentation and derivations](#)
  - [Rates information](#)
  - [Glossary](#)
  - [Abbreviations & symbols](#)
  - [References](#)

## Summary

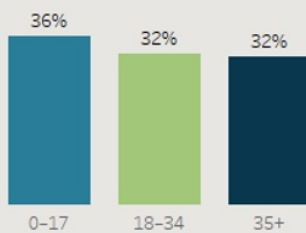
Safe, secure housing is fundamental to people's health and wellbeing. Both people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness are supported by specialist homelessness services (SHS). In 2019-20, SHS agencies provided support to almost 290,500 clients who each had a variety of different needs and reasons for seeking support.

Some of the key findings from the 2019-20 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report include:

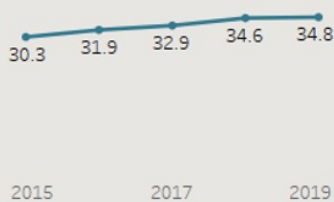
**115,800 males and 174,700 females** received assistance from specialist homelessness agencies in 2019-20



**1 in 3** clients who experienced **family and domestic violence** were under the age of 18



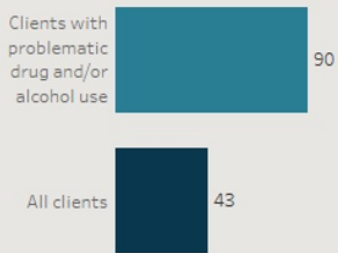
The rate of **clients with a current mental health issue** increased from **30.3** to **34.8** per 10,000 population between 2015-16 and 2019-20



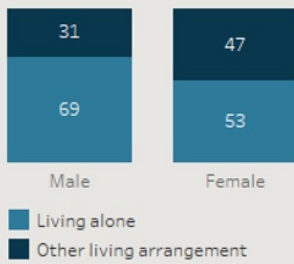
29% of young people presenting alone were 'couch surfing' at presentation, compared with 17% of the overall SHS population



Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use received a median of 90 days of support



Among older clients, 69% of males and 53% of females were living alone at presentation



# Policy framework for reducing homelessness and service response

## On this page

- [The policy framework for reducing homelessness](#)
- [The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement](#)
- [The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection](#)
- [What are specialist homelessness services agencies?](#)
- [Homelessness services across Australia](#)
- [Specialist Homelessness Services agencies and their service delivery](#)
- [How do people find Specialist Homelessness Services \(SHS\): a focus on the Ask Izzy website](#)
- [COVID-19 impacts on SHS clients in 2019-20](#)

People experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness are among Australia's most socially and economically disadvantaged. Governments across Australia fund a range of services to provide support to those who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. These services are delivered by various government and non-government organisations including agencies specialising in delivering services to specific target groups (such as young people or people experiencing family and domestic violence), as well as those that provide more generic services to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The data in this publication are produced from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC), conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Data are provided to the AIHW by more than 1,600 homelessness agencies allowing this report to be compiled and published. The AIHW thanks the agencies and their clients for making this report possible. People who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness may also access a range of mainstream services that are available to the broader community (such as income support payments or health services). These services are not described in this report.

On 1 July 2019, new data items were added to the SHSC and some other items were updated or modified. New data items include a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) indicator, main language other than English spoken at home and proficiency in spoken English. The updated or modified data items include the addition of sex=other for clients and changes to items related to receiving assistance for family and domestic violence. The ability to use and report on the new and updated data items in the Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report for 2019-20 is dependent on data quality and the number of valid responses received.

## The policy framework for reducing homelessness

Many Australians experience events in their lifetime that may place them at risk of, or result in, homelessness. Access to affordable housing is a key issue for all Australians, particularly those on low-incomes. A lack of affordable housing puts households at an increased risk of experiencing housing stress and can affect their health, education, employment and place them at risk of homelessness. It is estimated that around 1 million low-income households experience housing affordability issues due to rental stress—defined as paying more than 30% of their gross weekly income on housing costs (AIHW 2019, ABS 2019, SCGSP 2019).

On Census night in 2016, 116,427 Australians were homeless, up from 102,439 people in 2011. This equates to a 4.6% increase in the population adjusted rate of homeless persons over 5 years, from 47.6 per 10,000 population in 2011 to 49.8 in 2016. Census homeless estimates include people in supported accommodation for the homeless, people in short-term or emergency accommodation, those 'sleeping rough' and people living in severely crowded dwellings—defined as those that require 4 or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the residents. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) acknowledges that the homeless circumstance may mean that some people are not captured at all in datasets, nor will all those experiencing homelessness be captured in datasets of those accessing particular homelessness services. In addition, certain groups of people (including Indigenous populations, rough sleepers and those in supported accommodation) are more likely to be undercounted on Census night. Hence, homelessness data collected in the Census is an estimation, and susceptible to under/overestimation and under enumeration (ABS 2018).

## The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)

In the 2017-18 Budget, the Federal Government announced the establishment of a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), which came into effect on 1 July 2018. This agreement reformed previous funding agreements with states and territories (the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) supported by the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH)). The NHHA provides more than \$1.5 billion in Commonwealth funding to the states and territories a year, including dedicated funding of \$125 million for homelessness services in 2019-20, which states were required to match. Funding for homelessness services will be ongoing and indexed for the first time to provide certainty to front line services assisting Australians who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness (CFFR 2018). Most SHS must contribute data to the SHSC under this agreement.

## The objective of the NHHA

The objective of the NHHA is to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing across the housing spectrum from crisis housing to home ownership, including to prevent and address homelessness, and to support social and economic participation.

The key outcomes this agreement will contribute to include:

- a well-functioning social housing system that operates efficiently, sustainably and is effective in assisting low-income households and priority homeless cohorts to manage their needs
- affordable housing options for people on low-to-moderate incomes
- an effective homelessness system, which responds to and supports people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to achieve and maintain housing, and addresses the incidence and prevalence of homelessness
- improved housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians
- a well-functioning housing market that responds to local conditions
- improved transparency and accountability in respect of housing and homelessness strategies, spending and outcomes.

Several national priority cohorts have been specifically identified in the agreement and are expected to be addressed in each state and territory's homelessness strategy:

- 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
- older people.

In addition, several homelessness priority policy reform areas have been identified:

- achieving better outcomes for people
- early intervention and prevention
- commitment to service program and design.

## The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection

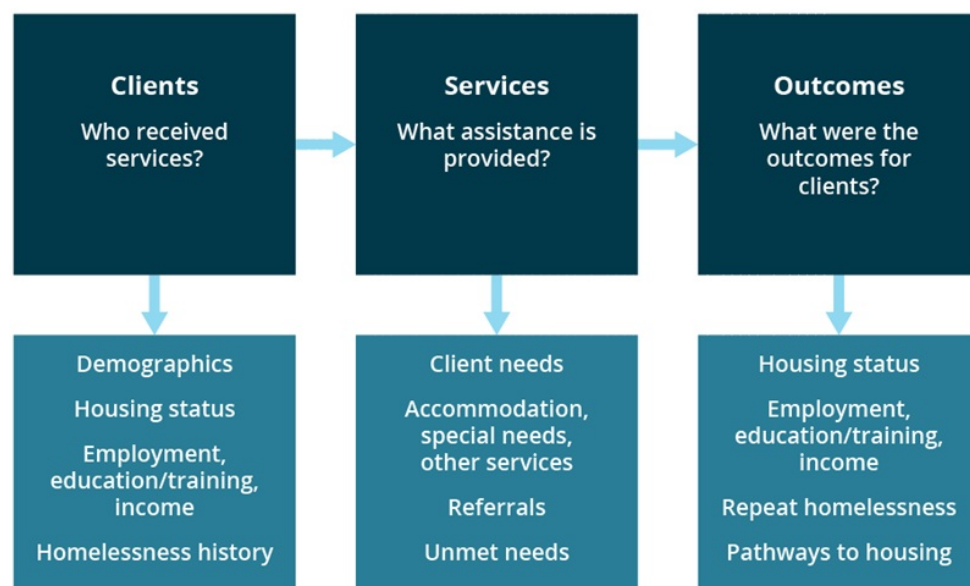
Around **1.3 million clients** have been supported by Specialist Homelessness Services since the collection began on 1 July 2011.

The SHSC collects data from homelessness agencies funded under the NHHA (and the previous NAHA and NPAH). State and territory departments identify agencies that are expected to participate in the data collection. These agencies vary widely in terms of the services they provide and the service delivery frameworks they use. The operational frameworks may be determined by the state or territory funding department or developed as a response to local homelessness issues (see [What are specialist homelessness agencies?](#) for more details).

All SHSC agencies report standardised data about the clients they support each month to the AIHW, as specified by the SHS National Minimum Dataset (NMDs). Data are collected about the characteristics and circumstances of clients when they first present at an agency. Further data on assistance received and client circumstances are collected at the end of every month in which the client receives services and again when contact with the client has ceased.

Data supplied in accordance with the SHS NMDs, known as the SHSC, builds a comprehensive picture of clients, the specialist homelessness services that were provided to them and the outcomes achieved for those clients (Figure FRAMEWORK.1). The SHSC data provide a measure of the service response directed to those who are experiencing housing difficulty. The data do not provide a measure of the extent of homelessness in the community, although SHSC data on emergency accommodation and supported accommodation do contribute to the profile on homelessness in Australia.

Figure FRAMEWORK.1: Conceptual framework of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection



The data collected by agencies are based on periods of support provided to clients. Support periods vary in terms of their duration, the number of contacts between SHS workers and clients during the period, and the reasons that support ends. Some support periods are relatively short—and are likely to have begun and ended in 2019-20—while others are much longer, many of which might have been ongoing from the previous year and/or were still ongoing at the end of 2019-20.

Further information about the collection and information about the quality of the data obtained through the SHSC for 2019-20 is available in [Technical information](#).

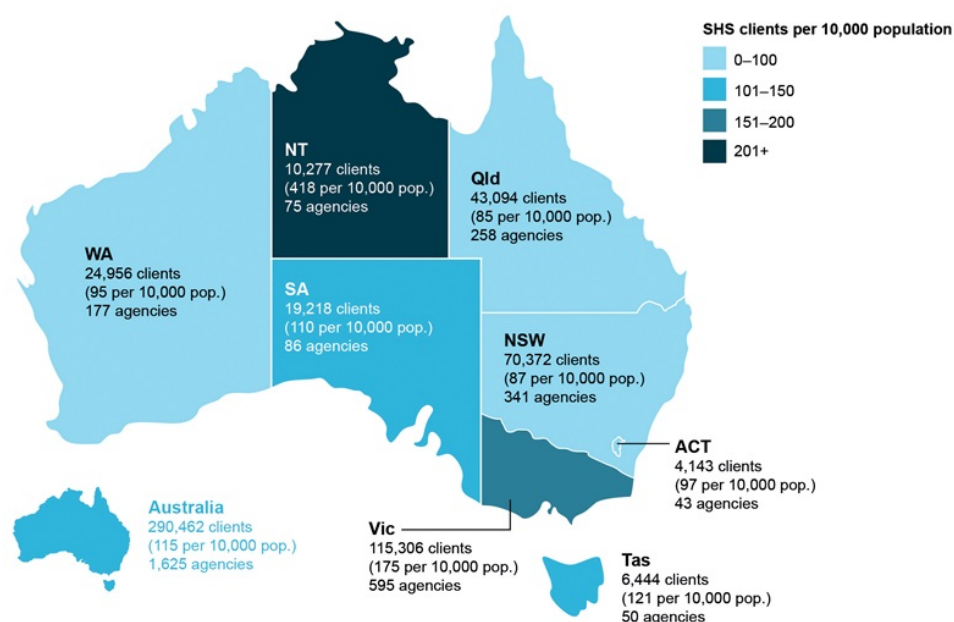
## What are specialist homelessness services agencies?

A specialist homelessness service in scope for the SHSC is an organisation that receives government funding to deliver accommodation related and/or personal services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. While it is recognised that other organisations not directly funded by governments also provide a wide range of services to this sector, these organisations are not required to provide data to the SHSC.

SHS agencies vary in size and in the types of assistance they provide. Across Australia, agencies provide services aimed at prevention and early intervention, as well as crisis and post crisis assistance to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. For example, some agencies focus specifically on assisting people experiencing homelessness, while others deliver a broader range of services, including youth services, family and domestic violence services and housing support services to those at risk of becoming homeless. The service types an agency delivers range from basic, short-term interventions such as advice and information, meals and shower or laundry facilities through to more specialised, time intensive services such as financial advice and counselling and professional legal services (see [Glossary](#) for a complete list of service types).

Nationally 1,625 agencies delivered specialist homelessness services to almost 290,500 clients during 2019-20 (Figure FRAMEWORK.2).

**Figure FRAMEWORK.2: Specialist homelessness agencies and clients by jurisdiction, 2019-20**



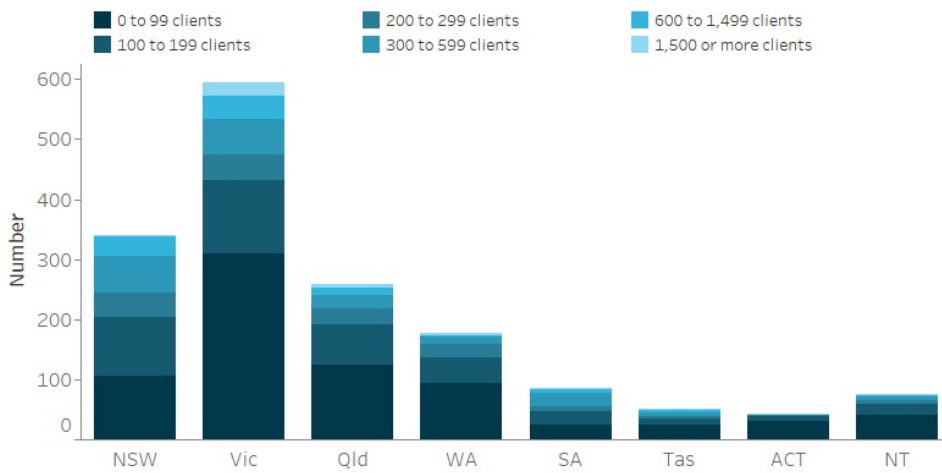
### Notes:

1. Clients may access services in more than one state or territory, therefore the Australia total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions.
2. The agency count includes only those agencies that provided support periods with a valid Statistical Linkage Key (SLK).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

SHS agencies vary considerably in size, with some agencies assisting less than 100 clients per year and others assisting upwards of 1,500. Some agencies are represented by a larger ‘parent’ organisation while others are individual stand-alone agencies. The number of client’s agencies assist (agency size) not only reflects the type and complexity of services provided, but also differing state and territory service delivery models. Agency size is also influenced by jurisdictional specific factors such as the size and geographical distribution of their population. Figure FRAMEWORK.3 illustrates the wide range in agency sizes in each state and territory. In 2019-20, almost half of all agencies assisted fewer than 100 clients (751 agencies or 46%). In New South Wales, a smaller number of agencies assisted 100-199 clients than assisted fewer than 100 clients (99 compared with 105), while in South Australia 25 agencies assisted fewer than 100 clients and 21 agencies assisted 100-199 clients. Agencies assisting a large number of clients (more than 1,500 in 2019-20) exist in all jurisdictions. Victoria had the most agencies of this size (23 agencies).

**Figure FRAMEWORK.3: Specialist homelessness agencies, by number of clients assisted and state and territory, 2019-20**



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table FRAME.2.

## Homelessness services across Australia

Each state and territory manage their own system for the assessment, intake, referral and ongoing case management of SHS clients. The key delivery systems operating in Australia are summarised in Box FRAMEWORK.1. Although presented as three distinct models, these systems are representative of a range of approaches that jurisdictions may take to coordinate entry to becoming a client of SHS. Changes implemented by state and territories in the delivery of services and their associated responses have the potential to impact SHSC annual data.

### Box FRAMEWORK.1

#### Community sector funding and support

- **Assessment and intake:** managed by individual SHS providers, consistent with state or territory policies.
- **Referral:** refer to other SHS providers if clients' needs can't be met by initial SHS provider.
- Can be supported by a coordinating service.

#### Central information management

- **Assessment, intake and referral:** managed at any SHS provider, via state or territory central information management tool.
- Central information management system assists in the identification of appropriate services and indicates the availability/vacancy of services at all SHS providers.

#### Central intake

- **Assessment, intake and referral:** managed by one or more 'central intake' agency.
- Central intake agencies prioritise access to services and only refer clients as services and/or vacancies are available.
- Central information management tool may exist to share information between SHS providers.

## Specialist Homelessness Services agencies and their service delivery

Once a person has made contact, specialist homelessness services can either be provided to the client by the agency, or a client may be referred to another agency for a specific service (Figure FRAMEWORK.4). In some instances, a client may not receive nor be referred for a service and their need remains unmet. These unmet needs are captured to assist in determining the ability of the sector to respond to client needs.

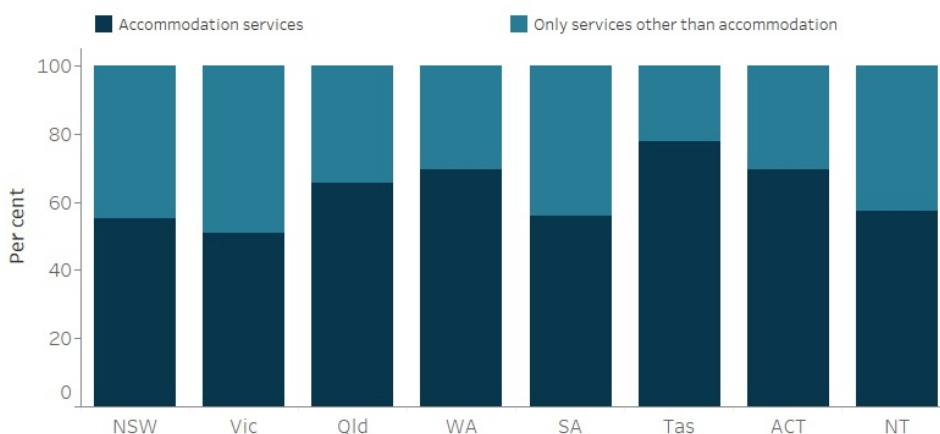
An 'unassisted request for service' is an instance where a person(s) who approaches an agency is unable to be provided with any assistance (see [Technical information](#)). Limited data are collected about these occasions.

### Figure FRAMEWORK.4: Access to and delivery of Specialist Homelessness Services



Services provided by specialist homelessness agencies in all states and territories can be categorised as either ‘accommodation services’ (either the direct provision or referral of accommodation or assistance for the client to remain housed) or ‘services other than accommodation’ (Figure FRAMEWORK.5). The proportion of SHS clients receiving accommodation services varied across states and territories in 2019-20, with almost 8 in 10 clients in Tasmania (78%) and more than 6 in 10 clients in Western Australia (70%), the Australian Capital Territory (69%) and Queensland (66%) receiving these services. In contrast, 49% of clients in Victoria, 45% of clients in New South Wales and 44% of clients in South Australia were provided services other than accommodation. This variation reflects differences in the demand for accommodation services, service delivery models and housing options across jurisdictions.

**Figure FRAMEWORK.5: Clients of Specialist Homelessness Services by service type, state and territory, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Clients provided or referred accommodation services (short-term or emergency accommodation, medium-term/transitional housing, long-term housing, assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction and assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears) are included in the accommodation services category. These clients may have also been provided additional services other than accommodation.
2. The denominator for the proportions is the number of clients who were provided or referred any service during 2019-20.
3. Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. If they received accommodation services in any jurisdiction they will be counted as having received these services in all jurisdictions in which they received services.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, Supplementary table FRAME.3

**How do people find Specialist Homelessness Services: a focus on the Ask Izzy website**

There are several avenues through which people can find nearby homelessness services. One such mechanism is [Ask Izzy](#), a ‘mobile-first’ designed website connecting people in need to housing, meals, support and counselling services in their local area. Ask Izzy is free and anonymous and has over 370,000 services listed across Australia. The website was launched early in 2016 and has received more than 2.4 million searches on the site to date (Infoxchange 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen increased use of Ask Izzy, with searches for help across Australia increasing to the highest levels in Ask Izzy’s 4-year history. During March and April 2020, Ask Izzy received over 450,000 searches for help from across the community (Infoxchange 2020).

There were also changes in the categories searched, for example food searches jumped 40% in the week that most state and territory governments declared a state of emergency and panic-buying took hold in supermarkets. The following week saw an increase in the searches for Centrelink around the time of the announcement of the JobSeeker payment by the Federal Government. Food and emergency relief have continued to be the most commonly searched categories during the pandemic (Infoxchange 2020).



## COVID-19 impacts on SHS clients in 2019-20

The COVID-19 pandemic in Australia is part of the ongoing worldwide pandemic of the coronavirus disease 2019 with the first confirmed Australian case identified in January 2020 (DoH 2020). Australian borders were closed to all non-residents in March 2020, social distancing rules were imposed on 21 March and state governments started to close 'non-essential services' (PM 2020; The Guardian 2020).

In the time period captured in this report, that is up to 30 June 2020, the following policies were implemented by states/territories as a response to the pandemic which may have impacted the number of SHS clients and the services they received:

- In NSW, the Government initiated a number of strategies in response to COVID-19 including additional funding and supports for homelessness initiatives. The funding included provisions for emergency accommodation, as well as keeping people in stable, affordable housing. Since 1 April 2020, almost 3,000 people sleeping rough have been provided with temporary accommodation and are being supported to transition to long term permanent accommodation and post-crisis support.
- In Victoria, demand for emergency accommodation has increased notably since March 2020. Significant resources have been allocated to meet demand and to provide safe housing exits for these clients.
- In Queensland, the Government delivered several responses to COVID-19 including:
  - The Housing and Homelessness COVID-19 Immediate Response Fund (IRF) to enhance existing service offerings across the housing and homelessness continuum, including delivery of additional brokerage, emergency accommodation, and outreach services to ensure vulnerable Queenslanders had enhanced access to homelessness and housing responses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - The Emergency Housing Assistance Response was initiated providing short-term accommodation to individuals and families requiring an immediate accommodation solution
  - A rapid response domestic and family violence COVID-19 initiative that to move women and their children in inappropriate accommodation in Brisbane to safer short-term accommodation with coordinated specialist supports and services, including safety planning.
  - Relocated up to 300 vulnerable Queenslanders who were residing in homelessness shelters or rough sleeping in inner Brisbane into safe, secure, self-contained accommodation to reduce the chances of COVID-19 infection or spread.

It is anticipated that an overall increase in the number of clients seeking and provided support as a result of COVID-19 will be reflected through the SHSC.

- In Western Australia, during the COVID-19 period, the Department of Communities, in line with the Department of Finance (Western Australia) instructions, reduced non-essential contract compliance requirements for services to assist organisations responding to the changing COVID-19 environment. These reductions in reporting requirements are not considered likely to have impacted on the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. In WA, relief fund grants have been available through Lotterywest and other one-off initiatives have taken place which fall outside the scope of the SHSC but may influence the numbers reported. The WA Recovery Plan [inthisogether](#) outlines other current and upcoming initiatives which may provide further contextual information.
- In South Australia, the COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Rough Sleeper (CEARS) Response to accommodate people sleeping rough in the inner city in hotels and motels has been implemented. SHS agencies are assisting these people to transition from rough sleeping into safe and affordable accommodation in collaboration with the Public and Community Housing sectors. People in greater metropolitan and regional/country areas are being supported by SHS agencies and referred to an expanded emergency accommodation response.
- In Tasmania, the Government introduced a Housing and Homelessness Support Package to assist people in housing stress and at risk of homelessness in response to COVID-19. This included uncapped brokerage funding to assist people to access emergency accommodation if required. Additionally, funding for Safe Spaces was introduced to deliver 24/7 models of care in three regions to assist people who are homeless to access day and night services. Complementing the Safe Spaces program has been the introduction of new clinical mental health services and telephone health screening for homeless Tasmanians during the COVID-19 emergency period. This has enhanced the availability of services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with the aim of improving long term housing outcomes.
- In the ACT, funding for the following has been provided:
  - Accommodation support for emergency and long term accommodation for clients dealing with physical distancing in shelters, self-isolation or quarantine.
  - Support services to clients in short- to medium- term accommodation to promote stability.
  - An increase in demand for family and domestic violence and sexual assault services
  - Brokered accommodation in motels and hotels, via the central intake system for those who cannot be accommodated through SHS
  - New accommodation programs including temporary shelters for rough sleepers, men and women with children. Additionally, the ACT's Housing First program has been expanded to provide assistance to more rough sleepers.
- In the NT, the Government implemented a Return to Country program in collaboration with a range of non-government organisations to facilitate Aboriginal people returning to their home communities from urban regional centres. The Australian Government also imposed biosecurity zones between March 26 and June 5 around remote communities in the NT. Visitors were required to quarantine for 14 days prior to entering these zones. Together, these policies restricted the movement of people between remote communities and the urban regional centres where SHS agencies are based. This would have resulted in a reduction in the number of prospective clients for SHS agencies. In addition, accommodation options were reduced to manage physical distancing measures and public health requirements around shared rooms, particularly for non-connected family members, and shared bathrooms.

## References

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## Clients, services and outcomes

### On this page

- [SHS clients at a glance](#)
- [Characteristics of clients](#)
- [Client service use in 2019-20](#)
- [Clients' need for assistance and services provided](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Specialist homelessness agencies provide a wide range of services to assist those who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, ranging from general support and assistance to immediate crisis accommodation. Characteristics of all clients assisted by specialist homelessness services (SHS) in 2019-20 are described below, including their need/s for assistance and the services they received.

### Key findings

- Around 1.3 million clients have been assisted by SHS agencies since the collection began in 2011-12.
- More than half (58%) of all clients in 2019-20 had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- In 2019-20, almost 290,500 clients sought assistance from SHS agencies, equating to 114.5 clients per 10,000 population.
- Upon first presentation, most clients seeking assistance were housed but at risk of homelessness (57% or 152,300); of these, most were living in private or other housing (61% or 92,900) or public or community housing at the time (24% or 36,000).
- 4 in 10 clients were experiencing homelessness on presentation to a SHS agency. Of these, agencies assisted about 37% into housing, most into private or other housing (almost 16,600) and a further 9,700 into public or community housing.
- The average amount of financial assistance provided totalled \$976 per client, up from \$874 in 2018-19 (not adjusted for inflation).

### SHS clients at a glance

The number of clients assisted by specialist homelessness agencies increased from 279,200 in 2015-16 to almost 290,500 in 2019-20; an average annual increase of 2.6% since 2011-12. The rate of SHS clients decreased from 117.2 clients per 10,000 population in 2015-16 to 114.5 clients in 2019-20 (Table CLIENTS.1).

It is important to note, the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) data provide a measure of service response. Changes in client numbers reflect the agency engagement of people which is not necessarily a change in the underlying level of homelessness in Australia.

Table CLIENTS.1: SHS clients—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	279,196	288,273	288,795	290,317	290,462
Rate (per 10,000 population)	117.2	119.2	117.4	116.2	114.5

#### Notes:

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### Characteristics of clients

**42% of SHS clients in 2019-20 were first time clients since the collection began in 2011-12.**

The characteristics of clients, the main reasons for seeking assistance, and the services that had been supplied to clients, have remained relatively stable over the 5 years to 2019-20. Key changes include:

- Length of support has increased with the median number of days a client was supported increasing from 35 days in 2015-16 to 43 days in 2019-20.
- In 2019-20, the number of females presenting homeless (60,000) was higher than the number of males (53,700), an increase from 55,500 females and 53,100 males in 2015-16.
- The number of SHS clients who have experienced family and domestic violence has increased; up from 105,600 (38% of SHS clients) in 2015-16 to almost 119,200 (41%) in 2019-20.

## Age and sex

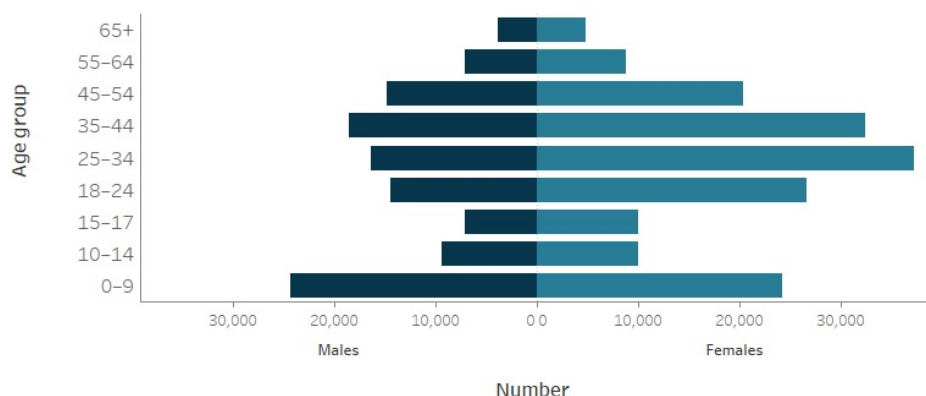
### Reporting sex in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

The additional category “Other” has been added to the question which records the person’s sex and applies to support periods and unassisted instances starting on or after 1 July 2019. Analysis of the updated 2019-20 sex of client data demonstrated some variable data quality and consistency of use among services. After detailed technical review of the data, including data quality investigations and consideration of data confidentiality issues, for the 2019-20 Annual Report these clients were combined with the ‘Female’ category for reporting purposes only. For further information, please see the [Technical Information](#).

Figure CLIENTS.1 illustrates the age and sex distribution of SHS clients in 2019-20:

- The majority of clients were female (60% or almost 174,700 clients).
- 3 in 10 clients were aged under 18 (29% or around 85,000).
- Among adult clients, the largest age group was those aged 25-34, accounting for almost 1 in 5 clients (18%), most of whom were female.
- The most common age group for males was 0-9 years (21%) while for females, the most common age group was 25-34 (21%).
- The overall rate of SHS clients was higher for females: 1 in 73 females in the Australian population received support in 2019-20 compared with 1 in 109 males.

Figure CLIENTS.1: Clients by age and sex, 2019-20

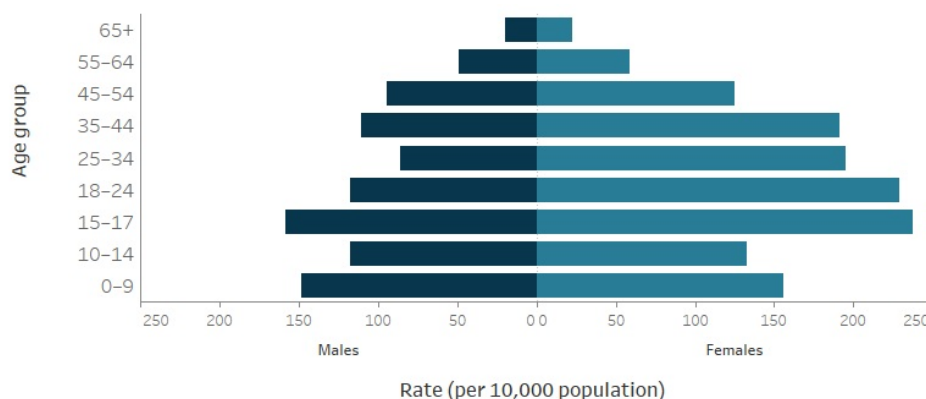


Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENT.1.

Figure CLIENTS.2 illustrates the rate of SHS clients by age in 2019-20:

- The highest rate of clients were those aged 15-17 years: higher for females (237.3 per 10,000 population) than for males (158.6).
- The lowest rate of clients was for those aged 65 and over (21.3 per 10,000 population): again higher for females (22.2 per 10,000 population) than males (20.2).

Figure CLIENTS.2: Clients per 10,000 population, by age and sex, 2019-20



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENT.1.

## Indigenous status

In 2019-20, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continued to be over-represented among SHS clients with more than one-quarter of clients (27% or almost 71,600) who provided information on their Indigenous status identifying as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. Nationally, this equated to 798 Indigenous clients per 10,000 Indigenous population compared with a rate of 85 for non-Indigenous clients.

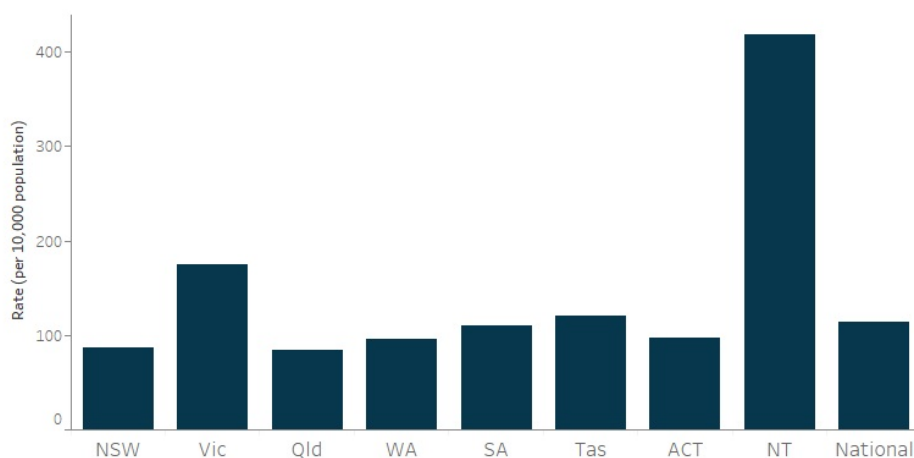
For further information please see [Indigenous clients](#).

### State and territory of clients

The largest number of clients accessed services in Victoria (115,300), followed by New South Wales (70,400) and Queensland (43,100) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.1), noting that clients may have accessed services in more than one state or territory.

- The highest rate of SHS clients was in the Northern Territory where there were 418.0 clients per 10,000 population, followed by Victoria (174.8) and Tasmania (120.6) (Figure CLIENTS.3).
- Females had higher rates of service use than males across all states and territories; the Northern Territory had the most pronounced difference between males and females where 546.9 per 10,000 females received services compared with 297.4 per 10,000 males (Supplementary table CLIENTS.1).
- Overall, more than half of clients (58%) in 2019-20 had received services at some point since the collection began in 2011-12. The proportion of returning clients varied across jurisdictions with South Australia and Tasmania reporting the highest proportion (65%) and Queensland the lowest (55%).

**Figure CLIENTS.3: Clients per 10,000 population, by state and territory, 2019-20**



*Note:* Rates are crude rates as detailed in Technical information.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.1.

### Country of birth

Almost 9 in 10 clients (86% or 226,500 clients) of specialist homelessness agencies in 2019-20 were born in Australia (Supplementary table CLIENTS.3), higher than the general Australian population (71% were born in Australia; ABS 2019). Of those clients who reported their country of birth and were born overseas, the most common country of birth was New Zealand (2%) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.4). Over half of the clients (56%) who were born overseas had arrived in Australia in 2010 or before (Supplementary table CLIENTS.5). Almost 9 in 10 (86% or almost 31,600) clients who were born overseas lived in *Major cities* (Supplementary table CLIENTS.6).

### Language

#### *Main language spoken at home other than English*

In 2019-20, the most common language spoken at home by SHS clients other than English was Aboriginal English (so described) (21%), followed by Arabic (13%) and Vietnamese (4%) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.7).

#### *Proficiency in spoken English*

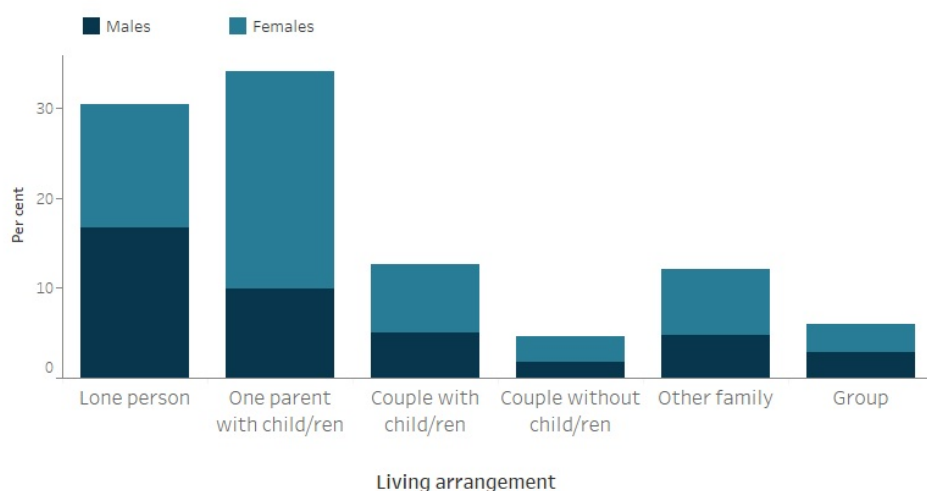
In 2019-20, proficiency was rated highest among clients whose main language spoken at home (other than English) was grouped as Northern European languages (other than English); with 71% of clients reporting they spoke English very well and a further 22% reporting they spoke English well. English proficiency was rated lowest among clients whose main language other than English was grouped as Eastern Asian languages, with 24% rating their English proficiency as very well (Supplementary table CLIENTS.8).

### Living arrangements

Living alone may be a sign of social disadvantage (De Vaus and Qu 2015). For some, it is associated with lower income, low participation in the labour force and lower levels of education. Living alone has also been shown to be a risk factor for social isolation (AIHW 2017). With limited economic resources and social networks, lone persons may be more vulnerable to homelessness. In 2016, 24% of households in Australia consisted of a lone person (ABS 2017).

The most common living arrangement reported by clients at the beginning of support in 2019-20 was lone parent with 1 or more children (34% or around 91,700), followed by lone persons (30% or around 81,600) and couples with 1 or more children (13% or around 33,800) (Figure CLIENTS.4). Female clients were more likely than male clients to be living as a single parent with 1 or more children (41% females compared with 24% males) while males were more likely than females to be living alone (41% males compared with 23% females).

**Figure CLIENTS.4: Clients, by living arrangement, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. This data item indicates the group of people with whom the client lives.
2. Per cent calculations based on total clients, excluding 'Not stated'.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.10.

**Selected vulnerabilities**

Many clients face additional challenges that may make them more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. The selected additional vulnerabilities presented here include family and domestic violence, experiencing a current mental health issue and/or problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

In 2019-20, of the almost 242,000 clients aged 10 and over, 6 in 10 (62%) reported experiencing one or more of these vulnerabilities (Table CLIENTS.2):

- 2 in 5 reported a family and domestic violence (38% or almost 91,700 clients)
- almost 2 in 5 reported a current mental health issue (37% or over 88,300 clients)
- more than 1 in 10 reported problematic drug and or alcohol use (12% or almost 28,500 clients)
- Very few (4% or almost 8,700 clients) reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.
- Almost 2 in 5 (38% or almost 92,800 clients) reported experiencing none of these vulnerabilities.

Table CLIENTS.2: All clients, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	8,684	3.6
Yes	Yes	No	27,099	11.2
Yes	No	Yes	2,368	1.0
No	Yes	Yes	12,435	5.1
Yes	No	No	53,537	22.1
No	Yes	No	40,120	16.6
No	No	Yes	4,972	2.1
No	No	No	92,751	38.3
			<b>241,966</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Notes:**

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

## National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

### The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports people with a permanent and significant disability which affects their ability to take part in everyday activities. It is jointly governed and funded by the Australian and participating states and territory governments. The NDIS began its national rollout on 1 July 2016, it was expected to be fully implemented by July 2020 (DPS 2019). Further details about the NDIS are provided in the [Technical information](#).

### NDIS participation indicator

The NDIS participation indicator was introduced into the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) from 1 July 2019. A participant in the NDIS is an individual who reports they are receiving an agreed package of support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The NDIS question is asked of all clients at the start of a support period by SHS agency. Data are only available for clients who only had support period(s) starting from 1 July 2019 onwards.

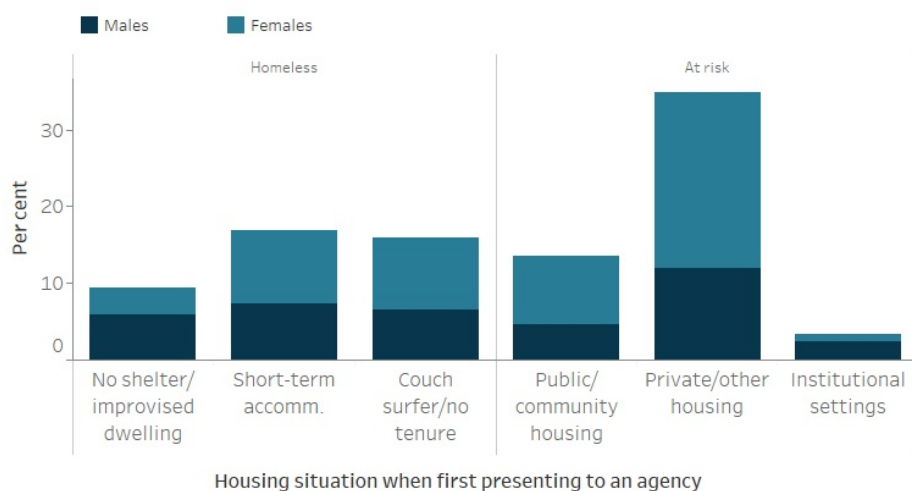
In 2019-20, 3% (almost 6,400) of SHS clients indicated that they were receiving a package of support through the NDIS, ranging from 2% in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory to 4% in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania. There was a high level of not stated responses for this indicator in 2019-20: 15% or more than 43,300 clients (Supplementary table CLIENTS.17).

### Housing situation on first presentation

Among those clients whose housing status was known at the beginning of their first support period in 2019-20:

- The proportion of males (50%) who were experiencing homelessness was higher than for females (38%).
- Most (57% or more than 152,300 clients) were at risk of homelessness rather than homeless (43% or more than 113,700 clients) (Figure CLIENTS.5).
- More than 1 in 3 clients (32% or more than 92,900) were living in private or other housing (renter, rent-free, or owner).
- Of those clients with no shelter/improvised dwelling (more than 25,000 clients), 47% were sleeping in no dwelling, either on the street, in a park or out in the open and a further 22% (1 in 5) were sleeping in a car (Supplementary table CLIENTS.13).

Figure CLIENTS.5: Clients by housing situation at the beginning of support, 2019-20



### Notes:

1. Per cent calculations based on total clients, excluding 'Not stated'.
2. Housing situation 'Other' not shown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.11.

### Main source of income

Income support was high among SHS clients with 77% of clients aged 15 and over receiving some form of government payment as their main source of income at the time they sought support in 2019-20 (Supplementary table CLIENTS.16). The most common government payments were Newstart Allowance (30% or about 58,300 clients), Parenting Payment (17% or 32,800) and Disability Support Pension (15% or 28,200). A total of 9% reported income from employment as their main source and 10% reported having no income.

It is important to note that as of 20 March 2020, Centrelink made changes to their payments. These changes included the introduction of a new payment—JobSeeker Payment and the removal of Newstart Allowance. Existing recipients of Newstart Allowance were transferred to the new JobSeeker Payment. From this date, if a client reports that they are receiving ‘JobSeeker Payment’ it is recorded under the existing ‘Newstart allowance’ category.

## Education

Of those whose educational status was known, over half of young people aged 5-24 (54% or over 47,500) were enrolled in some form of education in 2019-20 (Supplementary table CLIENTS.18). Almost 9 in 10 (85%) clients aged 5-14 were enrolled in school, 13% of clients aged 5-14 (about 4,900) were not enrolled in education. Almost 7 in 10 (69%) clients aged 15-24 were not in some form of education (around 35,500 clients).

## Labour force

Over 96,300 (51%) clients aged 15 or over were unemployed at the beginning of support in 2019-20 (Supplementary table CLIENTS.19). Males (57%) were more likely to be unemployed than females (47%). More than 69,700 (37%) clients were not in the labour force. More than 1 in 10 (13%) clients were employed and of these, 3 in 5 (67%) were employed on a part-time basis.

## New or returning clients

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table CLIENTS.2):

- More than half (58% or 168,400 clients) of all clients in 2019-20 had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- Females (59%) were more likely than males (57%) to be returning to SHS for assistance.
- The highest proportion of clients returning to SHS for assistance was in South Australia and Tasmania (both at 65%), while the lowest proportion of returning clients was in Queensland (55%).

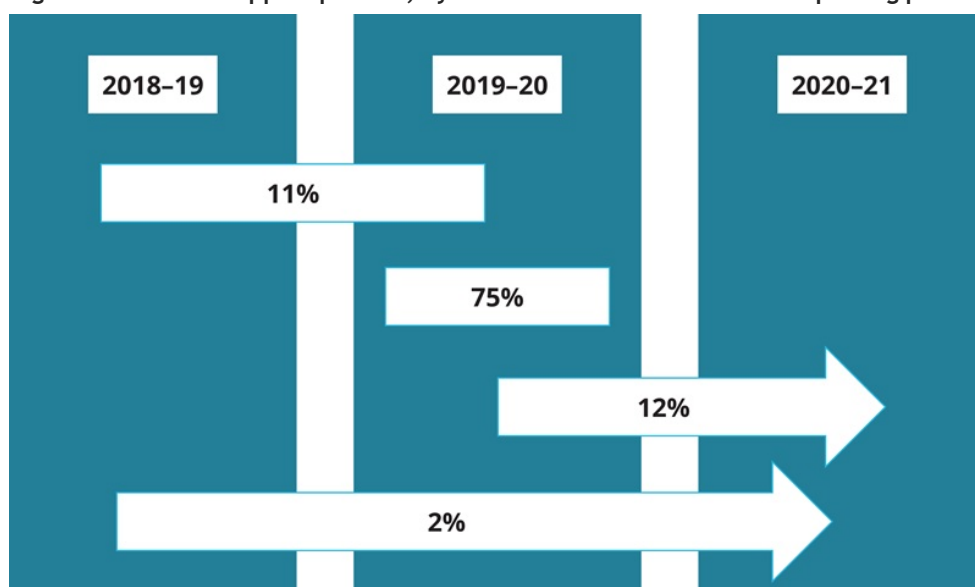
## Clients service use in 2019-20

### Support periods

Data collected by specialist homelessness agencies are based on support periods or episodes of assistance provided to clients (see [Technical information](#) for further information). Clients may have had more than 1 support period in 2019-20, either with the same agency at different times or with different agencies. In 2019-20:

- Clients assisted by homelessness agencies had more than 515,000 support periods. The number of support periods has increased by an average annual growth of 3.6% each year since 2011-12 (Supplementary table CLIENTS.1 and Historical table 1).
- Two-thirds of clients had only 1 support period (65%) while 1 in 5 (19%) had 2 support periods, 7% had 3 support periods and 8% had 4 or more (Supplementary table CLIENTS.26).
- The majority of support periods were opened and closed within 2019-20 (75% or around 385,700). An additional 12% of support periods opened during the year and remained open on 30 June 2020. Just 2% were ongoing throughout the 2019-20 reporting period (Figure CLIENTS.6).

Figure CLIENTS.6: Support periods, by indicative duration over the reporting period, 2019-20



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.27

## Number of days clients received support

26.1 million support days were provided in 2019-20.



- Nationally, 26.1 million support days were provided in 2019-20. Support provided by services in Victoria were responsible for the major share of the increase in support days (an increase of more than 200,000 days), and also reported the greatest change (increase of 10%) since the previous reporting period.
- The median number of support days for all clients was 43 days, while clients received an average of 1.7 support periods (Table CLIENTS.3).
- The proportion of SHS clients receiving accommodation has remained consistent across time from 31% in 2015-16 to 30% in 2019-20, while the median number of nights accommodated has decreased, from 33 nights in 2015-16 to 28 nights in 2019-20.
- Males (42 days) and females (44 days) received a similar median length of support (Supplementary table CLIENTS.28).
- The needs of some clients can be met relatively quickly but clients with more complex needs received more support. Three in 10 clients (30% or about 85,600) received between 6 and 45 days of support during 2019-20, while 22% received support for up to 5 days. Seventeen per cent received over 180 days of support; while 16% received support for 91-180 days.

Table CLIENTS.3: SHS clients: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	35	37	39	44	43
Average number of support periods per client	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
Proportion receiving accommodation	31	30	29	30	30
Median number of nights accommodated	33	33	32	29	28

**Notes:**

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

**Reasons that support ended**

- More than half (58%) of support periods ended in 2019-20 because the client’s immediate needs were met or case management goals were achieved (Supplementary table CLIENTS.29).
- Almost one-quarter (23%) of support periods ended because the client no longer requested assistance; that is, a client may have decided that they no longer required assistance or they may have moved from the state/territory or region.
- A further 12% of support periods closed because the client was referred to another specialist homelessness agency and 13% closed because contact was lost with the client.

**Clients’ needs for assistance and services provided**

The SHSC includes information about clients’ needs for services from two perspectives:

- The client’s reasons for seeking assistance at the start of support—both the main reason for seeking support and all reasons for seeking support are collected.
- The agency worker’s assessment of the client’s needs—this information is captured when clients first present for assistance and each month while a client is still in contact with the agency.

Technical information and Glossary provide more information about how clients’ needs for assistance are captured in the SHSC.

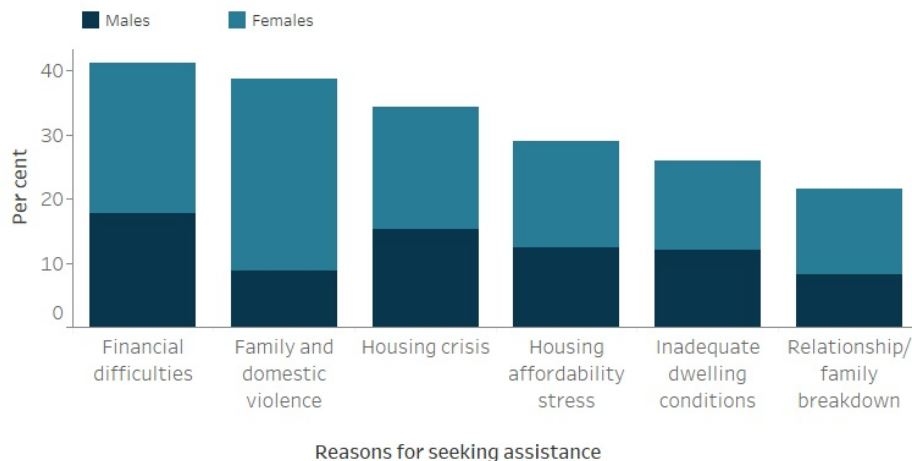
Services provided to clients range from the direct provision of accommodation, such as a bed in a shelter, to more specialised services such as counselling and legal support. These services are generally either provided to the client directly by the agency or the client is referred to another service. Unmet need provides further information about clients’ needs that went unmet.

**Reasons for seeking assistance**

SHS clients can identify a number of reasons for seeking assistance, reflecting the range of situations that contribute to housing instability (Figure CLIENTS.7). In 2019-20:

- Accommodation issues (including housing crisis, inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions or that previous accommodation had ended) were nominated by 52% of clients (or around 149,500 clients).
- More than one-third (34% of clients) were experiencing housing crisis.
- A high proportion were experiencing financial difficulties, identified by 41% of clients, while over 1 in 4 clients were affected by housing affordability stress (29%).
- Interpersonal and relationship issues, including family and domestic violence, affected over half of all SHS clients (53% or about 152,600 clients). Within this group, 39% identified family and domestic violence.

**Figure CLIENTS.7: Clients by all reasons for seeking assistance (top 6), 2019-20**



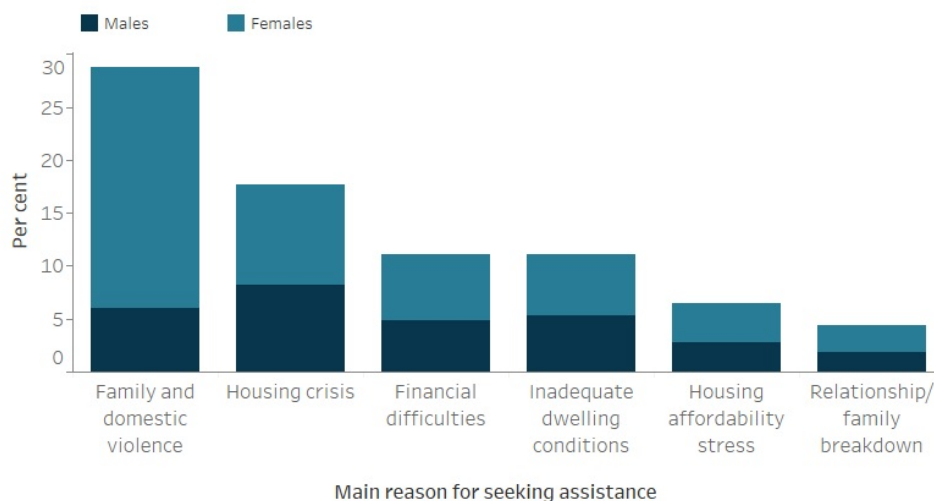
*Note:* Top 6 excludes "Other" reason and cases where reason was 'Not stated'.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.20.

While clients can identify a number of reasons for seeking assistance, SHS agencies also record the main reason for seeking assistance:

- Family and domestic violence was the most common main reason identified for seeking assistance for almost 1 in 3 clients (29% or about 82,300 clients) (Figure CLIENTS.8). For more information, see [Clients experiencing family and domestic violence](#).
- Almost 1 in 5 (18% or around 50,700) identified housing crisis as the main reason for seeking assistance.

**Figure CLIENTS.8: Clients by main reason for seeking assistance (top 6), 2019-20**



*Note:* Top 6 excludes "Other" reason and cases where reason was 'Not stated'.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.21.

For those clients presenting at risk of homelessness, the most common main reasons for seeking assistance were (Supplementary table CLIENTS.22):

- family and domestic violence (33%)
- housing crisis (15%)
- financial difficulties (14%).

For those clients presenting as homeless, the most common main reasons for seeking assistance were:

- housing crisis (23%)
- family and domestic violence (18%)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (18%).

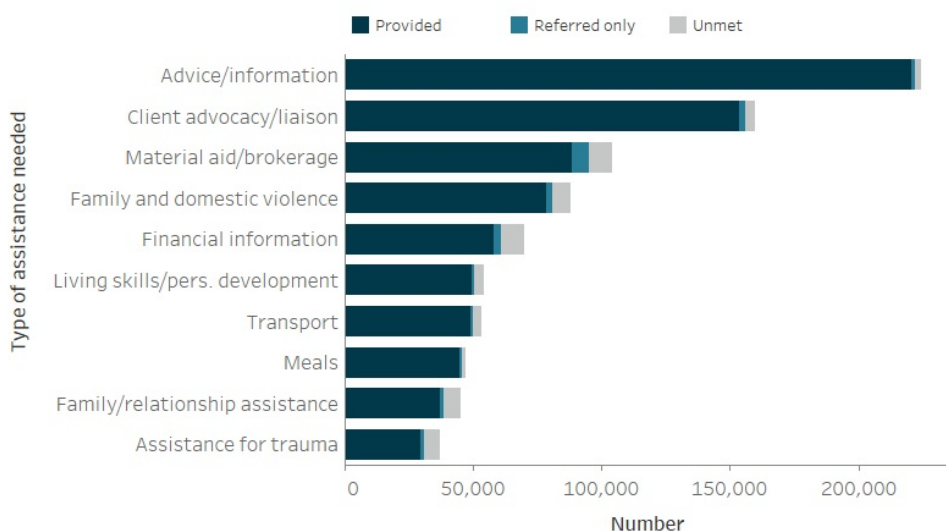
Note that from 26 March 2020, 'COVID-19' became an 'other' reason for seeking assistance. It could mean that the client and/or the agency were affected directly or indirectly by the crisis. Analyses on this reason is not presented in this report, however, can be found in the [Specialist Homelessness Services: monthly data product](#).

### General support and assistance

Some types of assistance provided by SHS agencies can be described as 'general support and assistance', compared with more specialised services. These services include advice and information, material aid, meals and living skills. In 2019-20:

- Clients most commonly needed advice and information, needed by 77% of clients (almost 224,700). The next most common need was advocacy and liaison, needed by 55% of clients (more than 159,700) and material aid/brokerage which was needed by 36% of clients (more than 104,000) (Figure CLIENTS.9).
- Services almost always provided the required advice and information. This differs from some specialised services, such as legal information and training or employment assistance, for which clients were more often referred to another agency (see Supplementary table CLIENTS.23).

**Figure CLIENTS.9: Clients by need for general services and service provision status (top 10), 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Top 10 excludes "Other basic assistance".
2. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.
3. The general services group is a count of unique clients within all categories in the service and assistance group. A client may request multiple services and assistance types, therefore the sum of the categories is not equal to the group total.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.23.

**Housing and accommodation services**

Housing and accommodation services provided by agencies include support to access:

- short-term or emergency accommodation
- medium-term/transitional housing
- long-term housing
- assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction
- assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears.

In 2019-20, 59% of SHS clients identified a need for accommodation services. Of these nearly 170,900 clients:

- 86,400 (51%) were provided with accommodation by the agency
- 27,000 (16%) were referred to another agency for accommodation provision
- 57,500 (34%) were neither provided nor referred for assistance. These clients are further described in Unmet need.

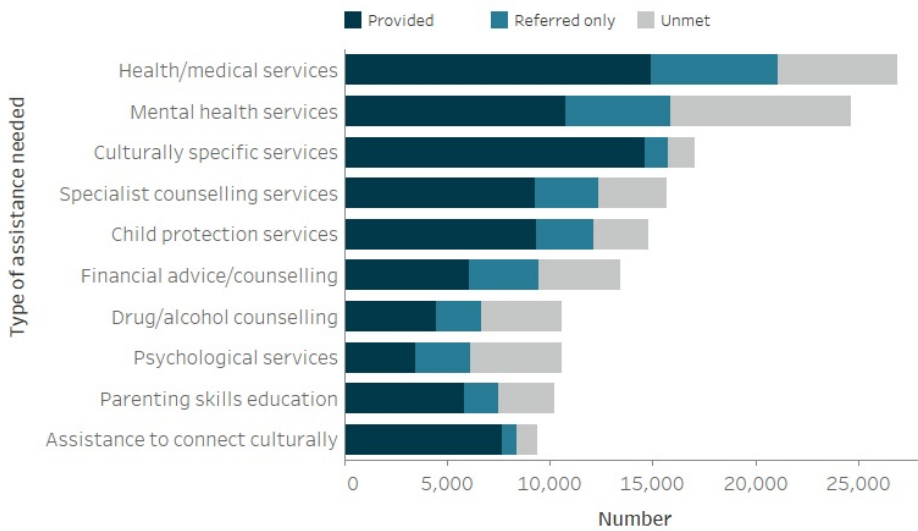
Assistance to sustain tenancy/prevent eviction was needed by 33% of clients at some stage during their support in 2019-20. This group includes those who were still housed when they approached a SHS agency and were supported to remain in that housing. It also includes those who identified a need for accommodation, were assisted to secure new housing and then supported to sustain that housing. Most clients (77,200 clients, or about 82% of those who needed it) received assistance to sustain tenancy directly from the specialist homelessness agency.

**Specialised services**

Specialised services refer to those services that require specific knowledge or skills and are usually undertaken by someone with qualifications to provide the particular service.

- Health/medical services were identified as needed by 1 in 10 clients (or just over 26,900) and were one of the services most often referred (23%) (Figure CLIENTS.10).
- There has been little change in the most common specialised services needed and provided over the past 5 years; for example, health/medical services, mental health services and specialist counselling remain the most commonly needed services.

**Figure CLIENTS.10: Clients by need for specialised services and service provision status (top 10), 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes 'Other specialised service'.
2. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.
3. The specialised services group is a count of unique clients within all categories in the service and assistance group. A client may request multiple services and assistance types, therefore the sum of the categories is not equal to the group total.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.23.

**Financial assistance**

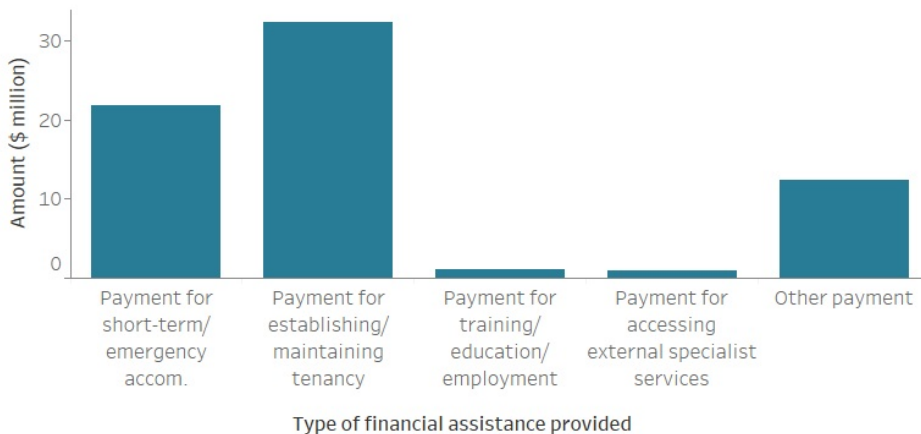
**\$68.7 million** in financial assistance was provided to clients in 2019-20.

Around \$68.7 million in financial assistance was provided to clients in 2019-20 (Figure CLIENTS.11), a 12% increase from the \$61.1 million provided in 2018-19 (not adjusted for inflation). This represents an average of \$976 provided per client requesting financial assistance, and an increase from \$874 in 2018-19 (not adjusted for inflation).

More than three-quarters of the financial assistance was used to assist clients with housing in 2019-20.

- Around \$32.3 million (47%) of the financial assistance was used to assist clients to establish or maintain their existing tenancy.
- Almost one-third of the financial assistance (32% or \$21.9 million) was used to provide short-term or emergency accommodation.

**Figure CLIENTS.11: Total amount of financial assistance provided to clients, by payment type, 2019-20**



Note: Includes financial assistance, material aid, brokerage and vouchers provided to, or on behalf, of the client during the reporting period.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.36.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, need for assistance has increased. This increased demand has resulted in some jurisdictions increasing funding for SHS services. For example, Victoria provided almost \$6 million in additional funding to SHS agencies in March and April in 2020. This increased funding was primarily aimed at purchasing short-term emergency accommodation and maintaining tenancies in mostly rental accommodation.

**Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first period of support during 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last period of support in 2019-20.

Clients whose support period(s) both opened and closed in 2019-20 accounted for 75% of all clients (Figure CLIENTS.6). A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may seek assistance again in future years.

Three aspects of a client's housing situation are considered in their housing circumstances: dwelling type, housing tenure and the conditions of occupancy. See [Technical information](#) for details on how each of these categories are derived.

- The number of clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support reduced when support ended: 1 in 3 clients (32% or over 58,200) were known to be homeless when support ended, down from 43% (80,500) at the start of support (Table CLIENTS.4).
- The reduction in the proportion of clients who were homeless following support was due to decreases in the proportion of clients rough sleeping or with no shelter or living in improvised dwellings (from 10% to 6%) and in the proportion of clients living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure (from 17% to 11%).
- There was an increase in clients living in some form of tenure over the course of support, including an increase in the proportion of clients living in public or community housing from 15% (or 28,200 clients at the beginning of support) to 21% (or more than 38,600 clients at the end of support); and an increase in the proportion of clients living in private or other housing from 39% (or 73,400 clients at the beginning of support) to 45% (or 82,100 clients at the end of support).

These trends demonstrate that by the end of support, many clients have achieved or progressed towards a more positive housing solution. That is, clients ending support in public or community housing (renter or rent-free) or private or other housing (renter or rent-free) had increased compared with the start of support.

Table CLIENTS.4: Clients (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	18,265	10,284	9.7	5.6
Short term temporary accommodation	30,945	27,109	16.4	14.7
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	31,244	20,813	16.5	11.3
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>80,454</b>	<b>58,206</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>31.6</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	28,171	38,643	14.9	21.0
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	73,374	82,069	38.8	44.6
Institutional settings	7,005	5,101	3.7	2.8
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>108,550</b>	<b>125,813</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>68.4</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>189,004</b>	<b>184,019</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>33,643</i>	<i>38,628</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>222,647</b>	<b>222,647</b>		

**Notes:**

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table CLIENTS.30.

**Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients**

In general terms, for those clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support, agencies were able to assist clients into temporary accommodation and sometimes into public or community housing or private or other housing. SHS agencies were also often successful in preventing those known to be at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless during support (Supplementary table CLIENTS.30, [Interactive data visualisation](#)).

- Over 8 in 10 (85% or 59,600) clients who were living in private or other housing were assisted to maintain their housing, while a further 5% (3,700) were assisted into public or community housing.
- Almost 9 in 10 (86% or 23,400) clients who were living in public or community housing were assisted to maintain their existing tenancy. A further 14% (1,600) were assisted into private or other housing and less than 1% (130) were in an institutional setting.

For clients with closed support in 2019-20 who were homeless on presentation to SHS agencies (Supplementary table CLIENTS.30, [Interactive data visualisation](#)):

- About 1 in 3 (36%) were assisted by agencies into housing; most were assisted into private or other housing (about 16,600) and a further 9,700 into public or community housing.
- Almost 4 in 10 (41%) of those who were in short-term or emergency accommodation were assisted into housing; most were assisted into private or other housing (about 6,800) and a further 4,800 were assisted into public or community housing.
- The reduction in clients who were homeless following support was mostly due to reductions in the proportion of clients rough sleeping or with no shelter or living in improvised dwellings (from 10% to 6% of clients) and in the proportion of clients living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure (from 17% to 11%).

#### Other outcomes for clients

Specialist homelessness agencies may support clients in a number of non-housing areas to reduce their vulnerability to homelessness. These include changes in educational enrolment status, labour force status and income. In 2019-20:

- Education: Education enrolment remained stable: 21% at the start of support and 22% at the end of support (Supplementary table CLIENTS.31). Of those who needed support for education or training assistance, 39% were enrolled at the start of support and 41% were enrolled at the end of support.
- Employment: Employment increased following support. Of those with a need for employment assistance, 16% were employed at the start of support and 22% were employed at the end of the support (Supplementary table CLIENTS.32).
- Income: Agencies assisted some clients with a need for and receiving a government payment: 70% at the start of support and 78% at the end of support (Supplementary table CLIENTS.33). There was a reduction following support in those reporting no income from 13% to 8%, and the proportion waiting for government benefits halved from 7% to 3%.

#### Achievement of case management goals

Case management plans enable agency workers to assist a client to work towards agreed goals. In some cases, support periods are too short to allow for development of a case management plan; for example, when a client stays for a 24-hour period or less. In other cases, a client may decline a case management plan. Case management approaches can differ across SHS agencies and over time as state and territory policies and practices change. In 2019-20:

- For clients with closed support, 64% (or 143,000 clients) had a case management plan—52% in their own right and 13% were part of another client's case management plan, often as part of a family (Supplementary table CLIENTS.34). The proportion of clients with a case management plan was similar in 2018-19 (65%).
- Among those who had a plan in their own right, 73% achieved some of their case management goals, 21% achieved all their goals and 7% did not achieve any goals. The proportion of clients achieving all their goals was slightly lower than the previous year (25%).
- Of the 36% of clients whose support had ended and who did not have a case management plan, the most common reason given for not having one was that the service episode was too short (71%) while a further 11% did not agree to have a case management plan.

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## Client geography

### On this page

- [Geographic profile of SHS clients](#)
- [Housing situation](#)
- [Client characteristics](#)

The rate at which people access Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) can vary geographically due to different demographics, varying service accessibility and availability and region-specific factors such as housing availability and affordability. It is important to note that the rate of SHS clients is a measure of service response and does not necessarily reflect the local level of people in unstable housing situations.

In Australia, market changes can influence the availability of housing options within an area (Wood et al. 2014). Although the rate of homelessness is higher in remote areas, it is increasingly more common in areas with decreasing availability of affordable private renting and increasing overcrowding, such as major cities (Parkinson et al. 2019).

This section provides an overview of the geography of clients supported by SHS clients across Australia based on the client's location prior to receiving SHS support.

### Key findings

- The highest rate of clients were in Western Australia - Outback (North) (583.1 clients per 10,000 or 5,700 clients) and the Northern Territory - Outback (575.9 clients per 10,000 population or 5,700 clients).
- The lowest rate of clients were around Sydney (Ryde 14.3 clients per 10,000, Baulkham Hill and Hawkesbury 15.5 per 10,000) and Brisbane - West (15.8 clients per 10,000).

### Identifying client location in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

This section examines people seeking SHS support based on where the person lived in the week before presenting to a SHS agency, as reported at the first support period during 2019-20. Clients are assigned to only one region for the financial year but may move to other regions before subsequent support periods. This location may not be a permanent address, for example, people who were couch surfing the week prior to seeking services may nominate the location of their temporary accommodation. Client location is classified to Statistical Area 4 (SA4) based on the 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) (ABS 2016). A total of 88 SA4s are reported in this section, which excludes non-geographic codes and Other Territories. Please note that other geographic analysis in the report is based on agency location. See [Technical information](#) for more details.

### Geographic profile of SHS clients

In 2019-20, SHS agencies assisted nearly 290,500 clients across Australia, up from 290,300 in 2018-19. The rate of people receiving SHS services varied by region in 2019-20 (Supplementary table CLIENTLOC.1):

- The highest rate of SHS clients were in Western Australia - Outback (North) (583.1 per 10,000 population), higher than the West Australian and national rates (95 and 114.5 respectively).
- The highest number of clients was in Melbourne - West (Victoria) (16,000 clients or 189.5 per 10,000 population).

Table CLIENTLOC.1: Client rate per 10,000 ERP, by highest and lowest 5 Statistical Area 4 (SA4), 2019-20

State	SA4	Client rate (per 10,000 population)	Client number
<b>Highest (rate per 10,000 ERP)</b>			
Western Australia	Western Australia - Outback (North)	583.1	5,712
Northern Territory	Northern Territory - Outback	575.9	5,683
Victoria	North West	303.3	4,614
Victoria	Latrobe-Gippsland	270.0	7,748
Victoria	Shepparton	267.3	3,586
<b>Lowest (rate per 10,000 ERP)</b>			

Queensland	Moreton Bay-South	22.6	495
New South Wales	Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby	18.0	796
Queensland	Brisbane - West	15.8	306
New South Wales	Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury	15.5	391
New South Wales	Sydney - Ryde	14.3	292

**Notes:**

1. Client location based on location the week before first presentation, as reported at the first support period to an SHS agency in 2019-20.
2. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTLOC.1.

**Housing situation**

Among clients whose housing status was known at the beginning of their first support period in 2019-20, around 113,700 clients presented homeless and 152,300 presented at risk of homelessness to SHS agencies across Australia (Supplementary table CLIENTS.11).

The proportion of homeless and at risk clients varied by geographic region:

- Clients presenting at risk of homelessness to an SHS agency made up the majority (more than 50% of clients where housing situation known) of clients in 60 SA4 regions while clients presenting homeless made up the majority in the remaining 28 SA4s.
- The highest proportion of homeless clients was in Perth - Inner (74% or 1,100 clients) in Western Australia’s capital region while the highest proportion of at risk clients were in Melbourne - Inner East (74% or 2,200 clients).

**Client characteristics**

The age of clients seeking SHS assistance varied by geography across Australia in 2019-20 (Figure CLIENTLOC.1):

- The greatest proportion of child clients (aged 0 to 9 years) occurred in Logan - Beaudesert (31% of clients) and Ipswich in Queensland (30% of clients).
- The greatest proportion of young people (aged 15 to 24 years) occurred in Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby (37% of clients) and Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury (36% of clients).
- The greatest proportion of older clients (65 years and over) occurred in Melbourne - North West (6% of clients)

**Figure CLIENTLOC.1: Proportion of clients seeking services, by age group, by selected Statistical Area 4 (SA4) regions, 2019-20**





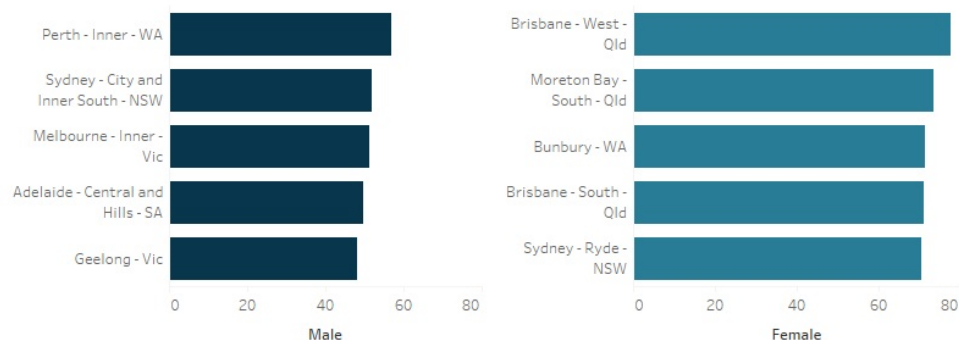
*Note:* Clients are assigned to a region based on where they lived in the week before presenting to a SHS agency in 2019-20. Clients are assigned to one region, based on the location details provided in the first support period in the reference year. Regions are defined by the 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.1 and CLIENTLOC.1.

Of the 290,500 clients presenting to SHS agencies across Australia, females made up the majority of clients in 2019-20 (60% or around 174,700 clients: Supplementary table CLIENTS.1). The location of male and female clients the week before presenting to a SHS agency varied (Figure CLIENTLOC.2):

- The highest proportion of female clients receiving services were in Brisbane - West and Moreton Bay - South (Queensland); 78% and 74% respectively.
- Male clients made up the majority of clients in more urban areas of state capital cities with the highest proportion of males in Perth - Inner (57%).

**Figure CLIENTLOC.2: Proportion of clients receiving SHS services, by sex, by Statistical Area 4 (SA4), 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Per cent calculations based on total clients excluding clients from 'Other territories' and those that have not provided address information. Proportions may not add to 100% due to rounding
2. Clients are assigned to a region based on where they lived in the week before presenting to a SHS agency in 2019-20. Clients are assigned to one region, based on the location details provided in the first support period in the reference year. Regions are defined by the 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).
3. Mapped SA4s (88) exclude Other Territories and non-geographic SA4s coded as *No usual address*, *Migratory*, *Offshore* or *Shipping*.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTLOC.1.

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## Service geography

On this page

- [Specialist homelessness services across urban and remote areas](#)
- [Trends over time](#)
- [Services needed and provided](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Access to services can become increasingly difficult the further away a client is from a major city (ABS 2018). For Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), state and territory systems for the assessment, intake, referral and ongoing case management of SHS clients vary, ranging from agency-based to centralised management models (PC 2019). This section provides an overview of the geographical distribution of SHS support services provided across Australia, based on the location of the agency.

### Key findings

- Agency client numbers increased by nearly 2,000 clients in *Remote/Very remote areas* from 2018-19 to 2019-20, while numbers in other areas decreased.
- Agencies in *Inner regional* areas had the greatest decrease in client numbers (over 1,000 clients).
- The housing situation of clients presenting to SHS agencies was different between remoteness areas, with most clients receiving support from services in *Remote/Very remote areas* (72%) at risk of homelessness, compared with just half for all other areas (56-57%).
- *The rate of clients receiving support was highest in Remote or Very remote areas*, 1 in 30 people compared with over 1 in 100 in *Major cities* and 1 in 68 and 1 in 65 in *Inner* and *Outer regional* areas respectively in 2019-20.

### Reporting service location in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

This section examines client service needs and characteristics based on the location of the SHS agency, where the service was received, that is, the profile of clients receiving support as provided by services in specific areas. Clients can access services in more than one remoteness area, however, for the purpose of the analysis, clients are assigned to one Remoteness Area based on the SHS agency where they first sought support in 2019-20. The 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) (ABS 2018) is used to classify agencies by Remoteness Area based on the location details of each agency (see [Technical information](#)).

State-wide SHS operate in some states/territories and can assist a high number of clients over the phone. Therefore, service location data may not be accurate or relevant for some clients.

In interpreting regional service trends throughout this section, 'urban areas' refer to *Major cities* and *Inner* and *Outer regional* areas and 'remote areas' refer to *Remote* and *Very remote* areas, unless otherwise stated.

### Specialist homelessness services across urban and remote areas

In 2019-20, clients seeking assistance from SHS agencies in urban and remote areas displayed distinct characteristics:

- The proportion of people who were homeless upon presentation was lower among the clients receiving support from services in *Remote* areas (28%) compared with *Major cities* (44%) (Table REG.5).
- The median length of accommodation received by clients of services in *Major cities* was 39 nights, compared with 4 nights in *Remote* areas (Table REG.2).
- Over 9 in 10 clients (93%) seeking services in *Remote* or *Very remote* areas identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.5).
- Almost 9 in 10 (86%) SHS clients born overseas were located in *Major cities* (Supplementary table CLIENTS.6).
- Of those clients with a current mental health issue (around 88,300 clients), almost 2 in 3 (65%) presented to agencies for assistance in *Major cities* (Supplementary table MH.11).
- The most common main reasons clients sought assistance across Remoteness Areas (Supplementary table REG.1) were:
  - *Major cities*: family and domestic violence (30%), followed by housing crisis (18%).
  - *Inner* and *Outer regional* areas: family and domestic violence (27% and 24% respectively) and housing crisis (17% and 20% respectively).
  - *Remote areas*: family and domestic violence (34%) and time out from family/other situation (8%).

### Trends over time

Some key geographically based service trends between 2015-16 and 2019-20 (Table REG.1 and Table REG.2) include:

- Taking into account population differences, agencies in *Remote* areas consistently reported the highest rate of SHS clients. The rate of SHS clients accessing services located in *Remote/Very Remote* areas was 3.5 times higher than in *Major cities* in 2019-20, up from 2.6 times in 2015-16.
- Over the period, SHS support in *Remote* areas provided accommodation to 3 in 5 clients each year (60%). This was higher than the proportion of clients provided with accommodation in urban areas (around 30%).

Table REG.1: Clients by agency geographic area—2015-16 to 2019-20

Year		Major cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote/ Very remote
<b>Number of clients (proportion (per cent) of all clients)</b>					
2019-20	Number	175,726	66,597	31,629	16,510
	Per cent	60	23	11	6
2018-19	Number	176,507	67,607	31,676	14,527
	Per cent	61	23	11	5
2017-18	Number	179,323	65,671	30,352	13,449
	Per cent	62	23	11	5
2016-17	Number	178,197	65,330	31,131	13,614
	Per cent	62	23	11	5
2015-16	Number	174,744	60,013	30,790	13,650
	Per cent	63	21	11	5
<b>Rate (per 10,000 population)</b>					
2019-20		95.9	148.0	153.9	339.3
2018-19		98.1	152.1	154.4	298.2
2017-18		101.5	149.6	148.2	275.4
2016-17		103.5	148.9	149.1	277.4
2015-16		103.4	138.6	147.8	273.4

**Notes:**

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Previous years' data can be found in the 2018-19 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual report.
3. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

Table REG.2: Clients by agency geographic area: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

Year		Major cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote/ Very remote
<b>Length of support (median number of days)</b>					
2019-20		42	58	38	15
2018-19		40	58	40	19
2017-18		35	53	39	20
2016-17		34	46	37	20
2015-16		33	41	36	17

## Average number of support periods per client

2019-20	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.6
2018-19	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.6
2017-18	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.6
2016-17	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.6
2015-16	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.5
<b>Proportion receiving accommodation</b>				
2019-20	29	23	32	60
2018-19	28	25	33	63
2017-18	27	25	36	62
2016-17	28	25	37	59
2015-16	29	27	39	62
<b>Median number of nights accommodated</b>				
2019-20	39	35	21	4
2018-19	40	33	24	5
2017-18	46	34	23	5
2016-17	48	31	24	5
2015-16	48	34	23	5

### Notes:

1. Previous years' data can be found in 2018-19 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual report.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

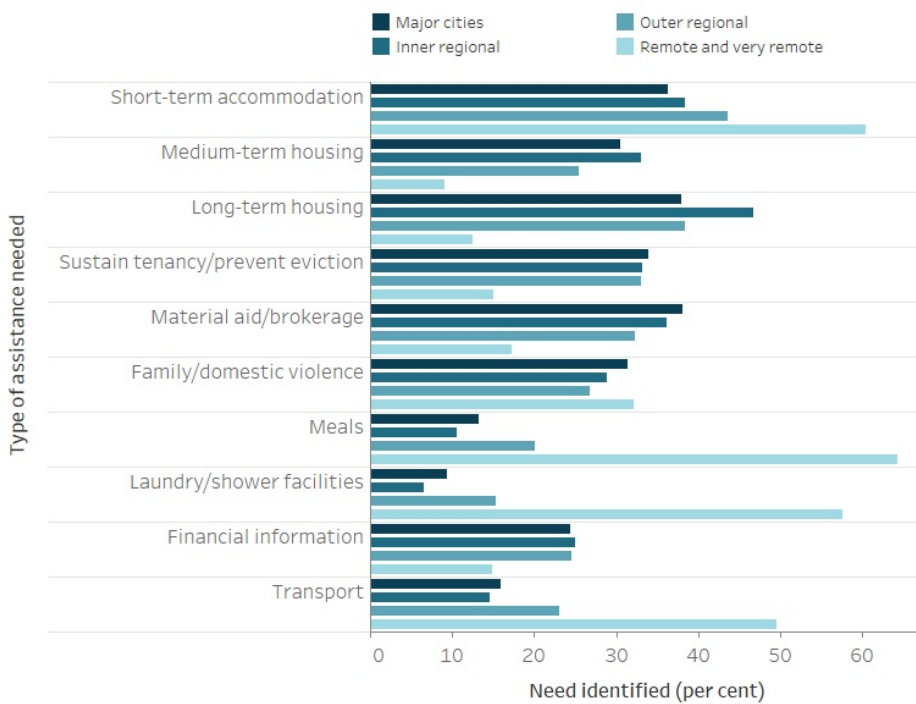
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

## Services needed and provided

In 2019-20 (Figure REG.1; Supplementary Table REG.4):

- The proportion of clients needing short-term or emergency accommodation was highest for services in more remote areas: *Major cities* 36%, *Inner regional* areas 38%, *Outer regional* areas 44%, and *Remote/Very remote* areas 60%.
- Just under half of clients of *Inner regional* services (47%) needed long-term housing compared with 38% in *Major cities*.
- Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) requests for accommodation were met by services in remote areas, while clients of services in *Major cities* and *Inner regional* areas were less likely to receive accommodation (51% and 38% of services provided, respectively).
  - Referral rates for accommodation were lowest in *Remote/Very remote areas* (3%) compared with all other areas (15% to 18%).
- Clients in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were more likely to receive short-term or emergency accommodation (93%) than those in *Major cities* (58%) and *Inner regional* (47%) areas.
- Need for mental health services was higher among clients of services in *Major cities* (11% or over 19,100 clients) and *Inner regional* areas (9% or over 6,200 clients) than those in *Outer regional* areas (7% or nearly 2,300 clients) and *remote/very remote* areas (4% or around 700 clients).

Figure REG.1: Clients by most needed services, by remoteness area, 2019-20



**Notes:**

1. Most needed excludes 'General services', 'Other basic assistance', 'Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client'.
2. Short-term accommodation includes temporary and emergency accommodation; medium-term housing includes transitional housing; and sustain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
3. Proportions have been calculated using the client count for each remoteness area as the denominator

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table REG.4.

**Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support during 2019-20. Data are limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future (Table REG.3).

- Clients accessing services in *Outer regional* areas were the least likely to end support in housing (including institutions) (66%), noting that this group also had the a similar proportion presenting to SHS experiencing homelessness (44%) as clients in *Major cities* (44%) and *Inner regional* areas (43%).
- Clients of *Inner regional* services were the most likely to be housed in private or other housing following support (49%). They were also the most likely to improve their housing situation following SHS assistance with 70% housed at the end of support, up 13 percentage points from the beginning of support.
- Clients accessing agencies in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were more likely to report living in public or community housing (62%) at the beginning of their support. The majority of clients (76%) were in housing at the end of support.

Table REG.3: Clients with closed support, by Remoteness Area, by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
<b>Major cities</b>				
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	11,333	6,169	10.2	5.7
Short term temporary accommodation	20,287	18,105	18.2	16.7
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	17,044	11,027	15.3	10.2
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>48,664</b>	<b>35,301</b>	<b>43.6</b>	<b>32.6</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	11,941	18,039	10.7	16.6

Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	46,519	51,802	41.7	47.8
Institutional settings	4,438	3,281	4.0	3.0
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>62,898</b>	<b>73,122</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>67.4</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>111,562</b>	<b>108,423</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	21,880	25,019		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>133,442</b>	<b>133,442</b>		
<b>Inner regional</b>				
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	4,359	2,683	10.0	6.3
Short term temporary accommodation	5,989	4,469	13.8	10.6
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	8,391	5,556	19.3	13.1
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>18,739</b>	<b>12,708</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>30.0</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	5,150	8,033	11.8	19.0
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	17,995	20,526	41.3	48.5
Institutional settings	1,638	1,062	3.8	2.5
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>24,783</b>	<b>29,621</b>	<b>56.9</b>	<b>70.0</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>43,522</b>	<b>42,329</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	7,007	8,200		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>50,529</b>	<b>50,529</b>		
<b>Outer regional</b>				
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	2,166	1,205	9.6	5.5
Short term temporary accommodation	3,100	3,020	13.7	13.7
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	4,596	3,231	20.4	14.7
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>9,862</b>	<b>7,456</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>33.8</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	4,095	5,449	18.1	24.7
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	7,837	8,519	34.7	38.6
Institutional settings	783	623	3.5	2.8
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>12,715</b>	<b>14,591</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>66.2</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>22,577</b>	<b>22,047</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	2,258	2,788		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>24,835</b>	<b>24,835</b>		
<b>Remote and very remote</b>				
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	407	227	3.6	2.0
Short term temporary accommodation	1,569	1,515	13.8	13.5
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	1,213	999	10.7	8.9
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>3,189</b>	<b>2,741</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>24.4</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	6,985	7,122	61.6	63.5
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	1,023	1,222	9.0	10.9
Institutional settings	146	135	1.3	1.2

<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>8,154</b>	<b>8,479</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>75.6</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>11,343</b>	<b>11,220</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>2,498</i>	<i>2,621</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>13,841</b>	<b>13,841</b>		

**Notes:**

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table REG.5.

**Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients**

For clients with a known housing status who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support, by the end of support ([Interactive Tableau visualisation](#) and Supplementary table REG.5):

- Most clients in *Major cities* (38,000 clients or 64%) were in private housing.
- Most clients in *Inner regional areas* (14,600 clients or 62%) were in private housing.
- Most clients in *Outer regional areas* (6,200 clients or 51%) were in private housing, with an additional 27% (3,300 clients) in public or community housing.
- Most clients in *Remote or Very remote areas* (6,100 clients or 77%) were in public or community housing.

For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support, at the end of support:

- In *Major cities*: 13,400 clients (31%) were in short-term accommodation.
- In *Inner regional areas*: 4,500 clients (26%) were in private housing and another 4,500 clients were couch surfing.
- In *Outer regional areas*: 2,700 clients (29%) were couch surfing.
- In *Remote and Very remote areas*: 980 clients (33%) were in short-term accommodation.

**References**

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2018. Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5–Remoteness structure, July 2016. ABS cat. no. 1270.0.55.005. Canberra: ABS.

PC (Productivity Commission) 2019. [Report of Government Services 2019: Part G, Section 19: Homelessness Services](#). Canberra: PC.

# Unmet demand for specialist homelessness services

## On this page

- [1. Unassisted requests for services](#)
- [2. Clients' unmet need for services](#)

Specialist homelessness services (SHS) in Australia supported, on average, an estimated 66,100 people each day in 2019-20. However, there were also people who approached agencies who were unable to be offered any assistance or who did not receive all the services that they required.

Unmet demand, as reported here, consists of both unassisted requests for service and unmet client needs. It only measures unmet demand for people who approach SHS agencies and is therefore not a measure of the population level unmet demand for support. Results from the 2014 General Social Survey suggest that 67% of those who had experienced homelessness in the ten years prior did not approach an organisation for support during their latest homelessness episode, possibly because most stayed with friends or relatives during periods of homelessness (ABS 2015).

For those that do approach an SHS agency, there may be a range of reasons an agency cannot provide assistance. For example, the person may be seeking a specialised service not offered by that particular agency, the agency may not have the capacity to provide assistance at that time or the person may not be in the target group for the agency. An Australian Council of Social Service survey found that, in 2019, 76% of staff in housing and homelessness services reported an increase in the number of clients they were unable to support and 36% reported rarely or never being able to meet demand (ACOSS 2019).

## 1. Unassisted requests for services

### Identifying unassisted requests for services in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

Unassisted requests for services are instances where a person requests assistance from a SHS agency and receives no assistance at the time of request. The SHSC captures limited information about unassisted requests for services, as it is not always appropriate for an agency to collect the same detailed information as they would if the person became a client.

Importantly, for some central intake models, the role of intake agencies is to identify and link clients to an agency well suited to the individual client's needs. This may decrease the number of unassisted requests for services for jurisdictions operating such central intake models.

See [Technical information](#) for more information on measuring unassisted requests in the SHSC.

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, on average, there were 260 unassisted requests per day; a total of 95,300 unassisted requests for 2019-20, which was 3,000 more than in 2018-19 (92,300).
- Three in 5 (60%) unassisted requests involved short-term or emergency accommodation and over 1 in 4 (26%) unassisted requests involved other housing or accommodation.
- Most commonly, agencies were unable to offer requests for accommodation because there was no accommodation available at the time.
- The majority of unassisted requests were for females (67%).

### Unassisted requests for services 2019-20

Across Australia, there were around 95,300 unassisted requests in 2019-20.

- On average, there were 260 unassisted requests per day (Supplementary table UNMET.1).
- Two in 3 (67%) daily unassisted requests were made by females and 33% by males (Supplementary table UNMET.2). Among females, nearly than 1 in 4 (24%) unassisted requests were from females aged 25-34 whereas for males the most common age group was boys aged 0-9 (25% males).
- Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) unassisted requests from single adults with children were from females. (Supplementary table UNMET.7).

### Unassisted requests for services, trends over time

Some key trends in unassisted requests since 2015-16 include:

- The number of unassisted requests has varied over time (Table UNASSISTED.1). The increase in unassisted requests in 2019-20 was primarily due to increases in Victoria and Tasmania. For further details, see the [data quality information](#) and [Technical information](#).



- The proportion of unassisted requests from persons living alone has decreased from 63% in 2015-16 to 57% in 2019-20 while the proportion of unassisted requests from single parents has increased from 33% in 2015-16 to 35% in 2019-20.

Table UNASSISTED.1: Unassisted requests for service—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<b>Number</b>	100,302	95,392	86,103	92,292	95,252
<b>Sex (per cent)</b>					
Female	64	66	66	65	65
Male	36	34	34	35	34
<b>Living arrangement (per cent)</b>					
Lone person	63	60	58	56	57
Single with child(ren)	33	35	37	38	35
Couple with child(ren)	0	0	0	0	0
Couple without children	2	2	2	2	2
Other family group	2	3	3	4	5
<b>Average number of times a person approached an agency</b>					
	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.7
<b>Unassisted people who become clients (per cent)</b>					
	47	46	47	45	48

*Notes:*

1. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
2. The proportion of valid SLKs used to derive the average number of times a person approached an agency and the unassisted people who became clients is relatively low, and therefore both are likely to be an underestimate.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

Analysis of how often a person requested assistance and how many later became SHS clients can only be examined and understood where the statistical linkage key (SLK) was complete and valid (around 52% of all unassisted requests). Of the valid data, in 2019-20 on average each unassisted person approached an agency 1.7 times (Table UNASSISTED.1).

In 2019-20, 48% of people with a valid SLK later went on to become clients and received services during the year, higher than 2018-19 (45%). The future service use experience for the remaining 52% were unknown; they may have received assistance from a non-SHS service, used their own support networks or continued to experience unstable housing or homelessness. Alternatively, these people may go on to become clients in future years.

## Services requested

In 2019-20:

- Three in 5 (60%) daily unassisted requests involved short-term or emergency accommodation (Supplementary table UNMET.4).
  - Females were more likely than males to have unassisted requests for short-term or emergency accommodation—on average there were almost 100 unassisted requests from females for short-term or emergency accommodation compared with 46 for males.
  - Over 1 in 4 (26%) of daily unassisted requests involved housing or accommodation other than short-term or emergency accommodation, with more unassisted requests from females than males (39 and 23 respectively).
- Unassisted requests most commonly came from people presenting alone (167 instances) or single people with children (58 instances) (Supplementary table UNMET.5).
- Most commonly, agencies reported that they could not meet requests for any accommodation because there was no accommodation available at the time of the request (Supplementary table UNMET.6).

## 2. Client's unmet need for services

Clients receiving support from SHS agencies often need a wide range of services. Some needs arise more than once in a support period and this makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the need has been met from the available data.

## Reporting unmet need for services in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

Unmet need is recorded when an SHS client has some, but not all, their identified needs for services met. Agencies can also refer clients to another service for assistance.

### Key findings

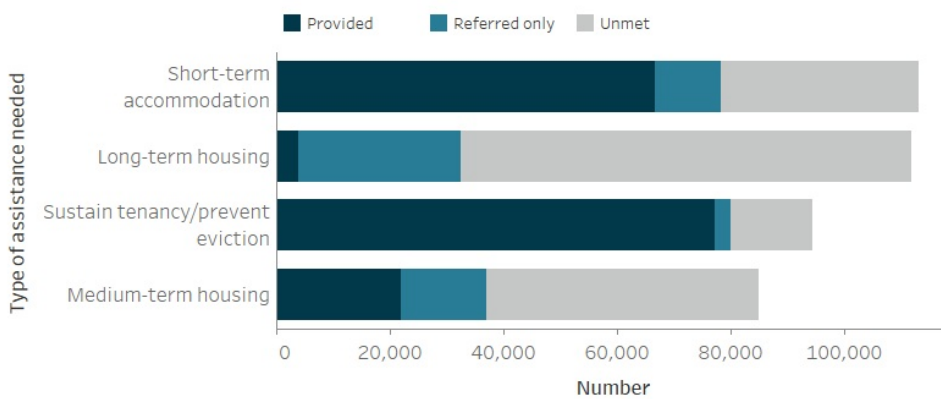
- Almost 170,900 SHS clients (59%) identified a need for accommodation services in 2019-20 and this service was provided to more than half of these clients (nearly 86,400 clients or 51%).
- The ability of agencies to provide certain specialist services was similar to the previous year. For example, in 2019-20, around 1 in 3 (35%) mental health service requests were neither provided nor referred, similar to that for 2018-19 (34%).

### Unmet need for accommodation and housing assistance services

Just over half (59%) of all clients needed at least one type of accommodation service (Figure UNMET NEED.1 and Supplementary table CLIENTS.23):

- Nearly 2 in 5 clients (39% or 113,100 clients) needed short-term or emergency accommodation; 6 in 10 (59% or 66,700) of those requesting this service were provided with assistance.
- Almost 2 in 5 clients (39% or 111,900 clients) identified a need for long-term housing; about 4% (4,000 clients) of these clients were provided with this service.
- The number of clients requesting either short-term or emergency accommodation or long-term housing were similarly large; however, the difference in the proportion of clients receiving these types of accommodation highlights the substantial unmet need for long-term housing encountered by SHS clients (71% or 79,300 clients with unmet need for long-term housing).

Figure UNMET NEED.1: Clients with unmet needs for accommodation and housing assistance services, 2019-20



### Notes

1. Short-term accommodation includes temporary and emergency accommodation; medium-term housing includes transitional housing; and sustain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
2. 'Unmet' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.23.

### Unmet need for general and specialised services

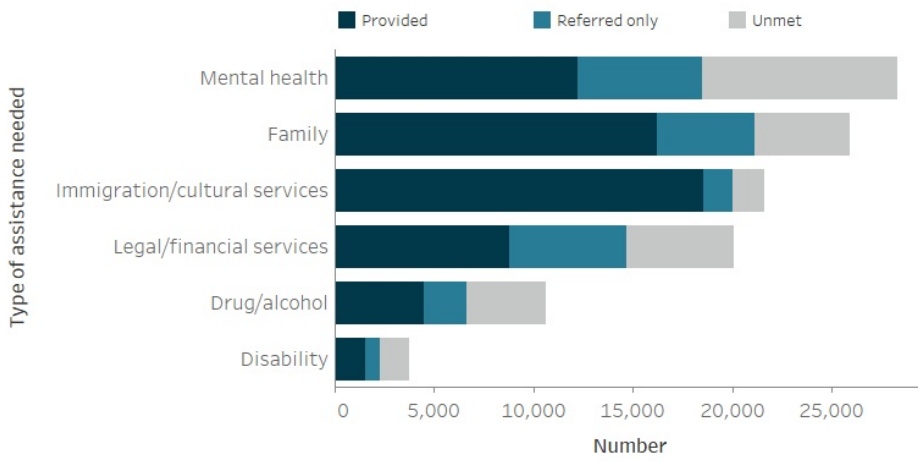
Agencies were able to meet the general needs of most clients. For example, of the over 224,700 clients who needed advice/information, 98% were provided assistance, and of the more than 159,700 clients requesting advocacy/liaison, 96% were provided with assistance (Supplementary table CLIENTS.23).

Other types of client needs were less commonly met. For example, among those SHS clients who required professional legal services (3% or 9,000 clients), the level of unmet need was substantial, around 27% at the end of support. This may be because of the specialist skills required to provide legal services and the limited availability of these skills within the SHS agencies and other referral services offered to clients.

The level of unmet need for broad groups of specialised services can be determined (Figure UNMET NEED.2)

- Mental health services, including psychological, psychiatric and mental health services, were one of the most common specialised services needed by clients; however, these needs were frequently unmet with 1 in 3 clients (35%) neither provided nor referred these services.
- Nearly 4 in 10 clients identifying a need for disability services (38%) or drug and alcohol services (37%) did not have their needs met.
- Immigration and cultural services, needed by 7% of SHS clients (about 21,600 people), were provided for most requiring them (86%).

Figure UNMET NEED.2: Clients with unmet needs for specialised services (grouped), 2019-20



**Notes**

1. Excludes 'Accommodation provision', 'Assistance to sustain housing tenure', 'Other specialist services' and 'General services'.
2. 'Unmet' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table CLIENTS.23.

**References**

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2015. General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014. ABS Cat. no. 4159.0. Canberra: ABS.

ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) 2019. Demand for Community Services Snapshot December 2019. Sydney: ACOSS.

## Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

In Australia, 1 in 6 women (17% or 1.6 million) and 1 in 16 men (6% or 548,000) have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15 (ABS 2017). Approximately 2.5 million Australian adults (13%) experienced abuse during their childhood; the majority knew the perpetrator and experienced multiple incidents of abuse (ABS 2017). Family and domestic violence affects people of all ages and from all backgrounds, but it predominantly affects women and children (AIHW 2019).

Family and domestic violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia (FaHCSIA 2008), with those who have experienced family and domestic violence making up 41% of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients in 2019-20 (see [Clients, services and outcomes](#)). Family and domestic violence has been found to disrupt housing security and is the leading cause of homelessness for women. In February 2019, the Australian Government announced \$78 million for the Safe Places package to provide safe places for people impacted by family and domestic violence. Safe places will provide new or expanded emergency and crisis accommodation for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. This program aims to build up to 450 safe places and assist up to 6,500 women and children escaping family and domestic violence each year (DSS 2020).

SHS agencies provide the principal crisis response for women and children who have to leave their home due to violence, yet data suggests that for many there is little services can do to provide a pathway into stable, secure, long-term housing (Flanagan et al. 2019). Women and children affected by family and domestic violence are a national priority cohort in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, which came into effect on 1 July 2018 (CFFR 2019) (see [Policy section](#) for more information). Effective services are required that recognise the impact of trauma and violence and the need for support in a safe and respectful environment (Flinders 2008). In order to achieve long term housing stability for those leaving a family and domestic violence situation, SHS responses often need to encompass a broad range of interventions and integrate various services and supports (Flanagan et al. 2019).

### Reporting clients experiencing family and domestic violence in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

In the SHSC, a client is reported as experiencing family and domestic violence if in any support period during the reporting period the client sought assistance as a result of physical or emotional abuse inflicted on the client by a family member or if as part of any support period a person required family or domestic violence assistance.

The SHSC reports on clients experiencing family and domestic violence of any age, including both victims and a smaller number perpetrators who may be assisted by SHS agencies. Changes made to the SHSC allows for disaggregation of victim and/or perpetrators services. However, for 2019-20, this disaggregation will not occur due to data quality concerns that are common in the first reporting period after implementation. For more information, see [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, 119,200 SHS clients had experienced family and domestic violence, equating to 41% of all clients.
- Females made up the majority (90%) of adult (aged 18 years and over) SHS clients having experienced family and domestic violence.
- Half (51%) of all younger SHS clients (aged under 18) had experienced family and domestic violence.
- More SHS clients who experienced family and domestic violence were at risk of homelessness (63%) upon presentation to an SHS agency, than were homeless (37%).
- On average, each client who experienced family and domestic violence received assistance twice from homelessness agencies over the 12 month period (2 support periods per client), with a median of 52 days of support provided.
- The largest change to housing situation at the end of service provision was for clients in public or community housing—increasing from 16% of clients at the start of support to 22% at the end of support.

### Data quality statement note:

From 2017-18 to 2018-19, there was a three per cent decrease in the total number of Victorian homelessness clients and a 10 per cent decrease in family violence clients following years of steady increases in these numbers. The decrease was primarily due to a practice correction in how some family violence agencies were recording clients. In addition, during 2018-19, a phased process to shift family violence intake to non-SHS services began, which may result in an overall decrease in the number of SHS family violence clients over the coming years. Caution should be used when comparing Victorian client numbers over recent years. For more information, see [2018-19 SHS Data Quality Statement](#).

## Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table FDV.1):

- SHS agencies assisted around 119,200 clients (of any age) who experienced family and domestic violence. This equates to 41% of the almost 290,500 SHS clients in 2019-20.
- There was an increase of around 2,800 SHS clients seeking assistance for family and domestic violence compared with 2018-19.
- The rate of SHS clients who experienced family and domestic violence was 47.0 per 10,000 population, an increase from 44.3 in 2015-16.

Table FDV.1: Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	105,619	114,757	121,116	116,419	119,182
Proportion of all clients	38	40	42	40	41
Rate (per 10,000 population)	44.3	47.4	49.2	46.6	47.0

Notes:

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. From 2017-18 to 2018-19 there was a 3% decrease in the number of Victorian homelessness clients and a 10% decrease in family violence clients following years of steady increase. The decrease was primarily due to a practice correction in how some family violence agencies were recording clients. In addition, during 2018-19, a phased process to shift family violence intake to non-SHS services began, which may result in an overall decrease in the number of SHS family violence clients over the coming years.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### Age and sex

In 2019-20, clients who experienced family and domestic violence (Supplementary table FDV.1):

- were younger than all SHS clients, with over 1 in 3 (36%) aged less than 18 years; 1 in 3 (32%) aged 18 to 34, and 1 in 3 (32%) aged 35 and over.
- Of the adults, most were female (9 in 10 or 90% adult SHS clients (aged 18 years and over).
- There was very little difference in the number and proportion of males (17,900 or 49%) and females (18,700 or 51%) aged under 15 experiencing family and domestic violence.

### Indigenous clients

In 2019-20, of all Indigenous clients (around 71,600 clients) (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.1, FDV.8):

- 2 in 5 clients (39% or almost 27,900 clients) had experienced family and domestic violence.
- 3 in 10 (28%) who had experienced family and domestic violence were less than 10 years of age.

### State and territory

In 2019-20:

- Victoria had the highest number of SHS clients who experienced family and domestic violence (53,200 clients).
- New South Wales had the second highest number of clients who experienced family and domestic violence at almost 27,500 (23% of clients or 33.9 per 10,000 population). NSW was 1 of 4 states reporting a decrease in numbers of clients experiencing family and domestic violence; a decrease of 400 clients since 2018-19.
- While recording one of the lowest number (4,500 clients or 4%) of family and domestic violence clients in Australia, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of clients at 183.5 clients per 10,000 population.

### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of the first support period more than one-third (37%) of all clients who had experienced family and domestic violence presented to services experiencing homelessness, while 63% were at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

### Presenting unit

Children experiencing family and domestic violence may seek SHS support with their family, or independently if fleeing the home. For children in particular, SHS support is critical to reduce the likelihood of a long term experience/risk of homelessness (Kaleveld et al 2018).

In 2019-20, clients who experienced family or domestic violence most commonly presented to a specialist homelessness agency for support alone or not as part of a family (53% or 63,600 clients), or as a single parent with child/ren (43% or almost 51,600 clients) (Supplementary table FDV.9).

### Living arrangements

In 2019-20, of the 105,100 clients who experienced family and domestic violence and stated their living arrangement at the beginning of SHS support (Supplementary table FDV.10):

- nearly half (48% or almost 50,000 clients) were living as a single parent with one or more children
- 1 in 5 (19% or more than 19,700 clients) were living alone
- almost 13,600 people (13%) were living with other family, which can mean a person with or without children living (in a couch surfing arrangement) with others.

### New or returning clients

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table FDV.7):

- Of the 119,200 SHS clients (of all ages) who experienced family and domestic violence, 44% were new SHS clients and 56% were returning clients, that is, had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12. This does not mean that when these people were SHS clients in the past they were experiencing family and domestic violence.
- Of the new clients, 44% (23,000 clients) were aged under 18, 50% were aged 18-55, and 6% were aged 55 and over. By contrast, of the returning clients, fewer (20,000 clients or 30%) were under 18.

### Selected vulnerabilities

People who experience family and domestic violence may experience other vulnerabilities to experiencing homelessness, such as a current mental health issue and/or problematic drug and/or alcohol use. In 2019-20, of the 91,700 clients aged 10 and over who experienced family and domestic violence (Table FDV.2):

- almost 6 in 10 (58% or more than 53,500 clients) did not report experiencing an additional vulnerability
- 3 in 10 clients (30% or 27,100 clients) also reported a current mental health issue
- 1 in 10 clients (10% or almost 8,700 clients) reported 3 key vulnerabilities (family and domestic violence, current mental health issues and problematic drug and/or alcohol use).

Table FDV.2: Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	8,684	9.5
Yes	Yes	No	27,099	29.6
Yes	No	Yes	2,368	2.6
Yes	No	No	53,537	58.4
			<b>91,688</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

### Service use patterns

In 2019-20, clients who had experienced family and domestic violence received (Table FDV.3):

- a median of 52 days of support, up from 38 days in 2015-16
- an average of 2.0 support periods per client
- a median 29 nights of accommodation.

Table FDV.3: Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	38	39	43	54	52
Average number of support periods per client	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0

Proportion receiving accommodation	39	37	35	36	35
Median number of nights accommodated	31	31	31	30	29

**Notes:**

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients who have experienced family and domestic violence. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

**Main reasons for seeking assistance**

In 2019-20, of those SHS clients who experienced family and domestic violence:

- 7 in 10 clients (69%) identified family and domestic violence as the main reason for accessing SHS services, while a further 8% identified housing crisis (Supplementary table FDV.5).
- For clients presenting at risk of homelessness, the most common main reasons for seeking assistance were (Supplementary table FDV.6):
  - family and domestic violence (75%)
  - housing crisis (6%)
  - financial difficulties (4%).
- For clients presenting as homeless, the most common main reasons for seeking assistance were (Supplementary table FDV.6):
  - family and domestic violence (53%)
  - housing crisis (14%)
  - inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (10%).

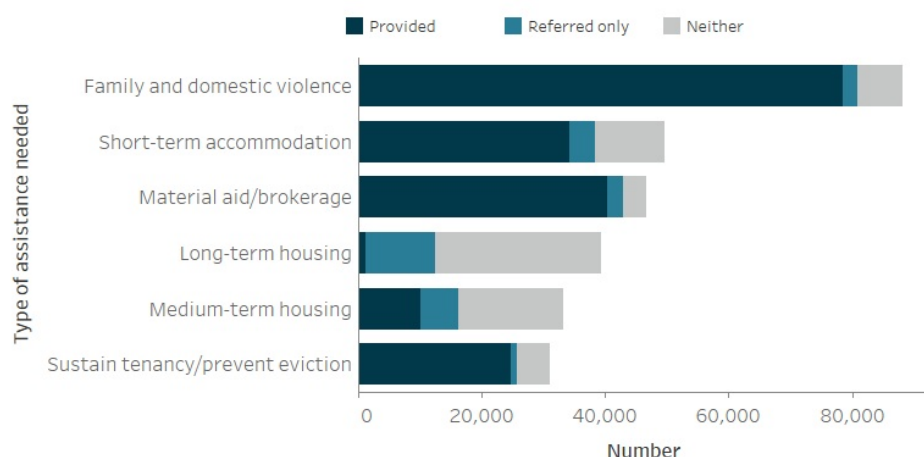
**Services needed and provided**

In 2019-20, 88,100 (74%) SHS clients who experienced family and domestic violence needed specific assistance for this reason, including therapeutic discussion or group sessions, counselling and specialised support services. Of those needing assistance for family and domestic violence, 89% were provided this assistance (Figure FDV.1).

The next most common services requested by this client group were:

- short-term or emergency accommodation (42% or over 49,500), with 69% of those needing this service, receiving this service
- material aid/brokerage (39% or 46,600), with 87% of those needing this service receiving this service
- long-term housing (33% or over 39,400), with 3% of those needing this service receiving this service and a further 28% referred.

**Figure FDV.1: Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence, by need for services and assistance and service provision status (top 6), 2019-20**



**Notes**

1. Excludes 'Other basic assistance', 'Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client'.
2. 'Short-term accommodation' includes temporary and emergency accommodation.
3. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table FDV.3.

The proportion of SHS clients who have experienced family and domestic violence with a case management plan has remained comparatively high over time (69% in 2019-20); however those achieving all case management goals has remained low (18% in 2019-20) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35).

### Outcomes at the end of support

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

At the end of the reporting period in 2019-20 (Table FDV.4):

- Just over 6 in 10 clients experiencing family and domestic violence presented to agencies known to be housed (61% or 41,500 clients), and by the end of support this had risen to over 7 in 10 (72% or 48,700). Much of the increase can be attributed to more clients living in public or community housing; an increase from 16% to 22% by the end of support.
- The most common housing situation for clients experiencing family and domestic violence at both the start and end of SHS support was private or other housing; 29,600 clients (43%) at the start, increasing to 33,200 (49%) at the end of SHS support.
- At the end of support, almost 3 in 10 clients experiencing family and domestic violence were known to be experiencing homelessness (28% or 18,600 clients). Compared with the start of support, there were 8,000 fewer clients experiencing homelessness; down from 26,700 clients (39%).
- Clients experiencing family and domestic violence known to be homeless were more likely to present to agencies while living in short term temporary accommodation (20% or 13,900 clients). This was the most common housing situation for those experiencing homelessness, and remained so at the end of support (16% or 10,500 clients living in short term temporary accommodation).

These findings demonstrate that by the end of support, there was a reduction in homeless housing circumstances and an increase in other, potentially more positive, housing solutions. That is, more clients ended support in public or community housing (renter or rent-free) or private or other housing (renter or rent-free) compared with the start of support.

Table FDV.4: Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	3,479	1,878	5.1	2.8
Short term temporary accommodation	13,850	10,493	20.3	15.6
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	9,333	6,224	13.7	9.2
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>26,662</b>	<b>18,595</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>27.6</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	10,973	14,781	16.1	22.0
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	29,591	33,235	43.4	49.4
Institutional settings	944	680	1.4	1.0
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>41,508</b>	<b>48,696</b>	<b>60.9</b>	<b>72.4</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>68,170</b>	<b>67,291</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>20,967</i>	<i>21,846</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>89,137</b>	<b>89,137</b>		

#### Notes:

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table FDV.4.

### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

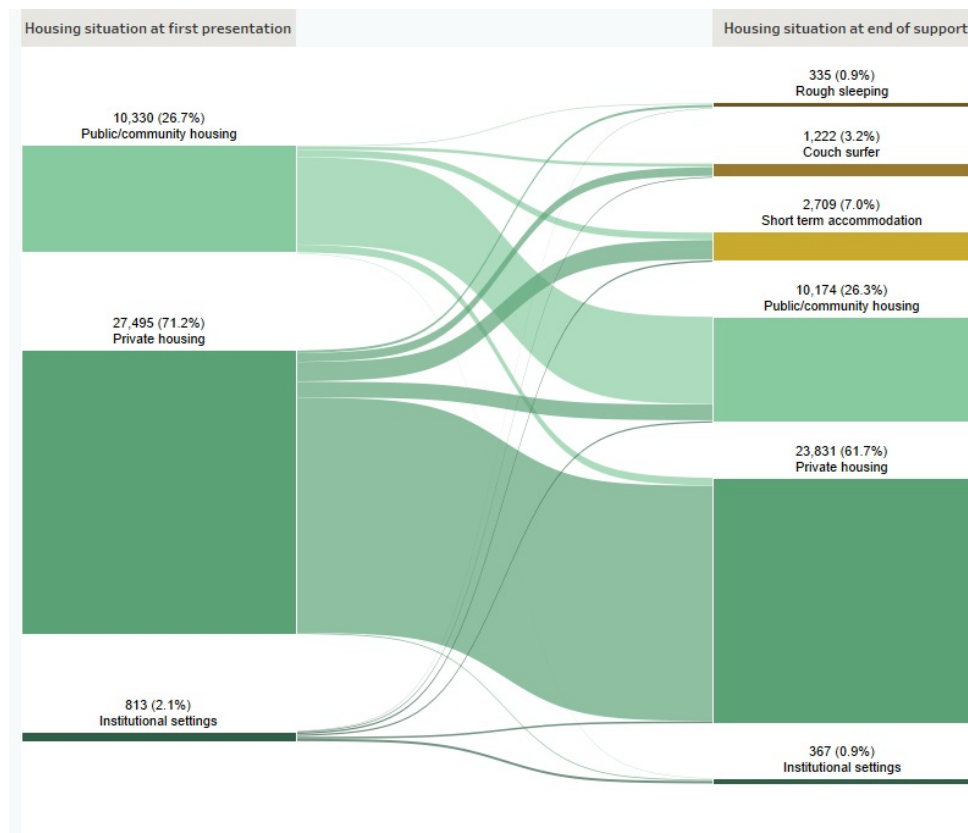


For clients with a known housing status who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support (more than 38,600 clients), by the end of support (Figure FDV.2):

- Most (23,800 clients or 62%) were in private housing.
- Around 10,200 clients (26%) were in public housing.

A smaller number were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (around 4,300 clients or 11% of those who started support at risk).

**Figure FDV.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year)/

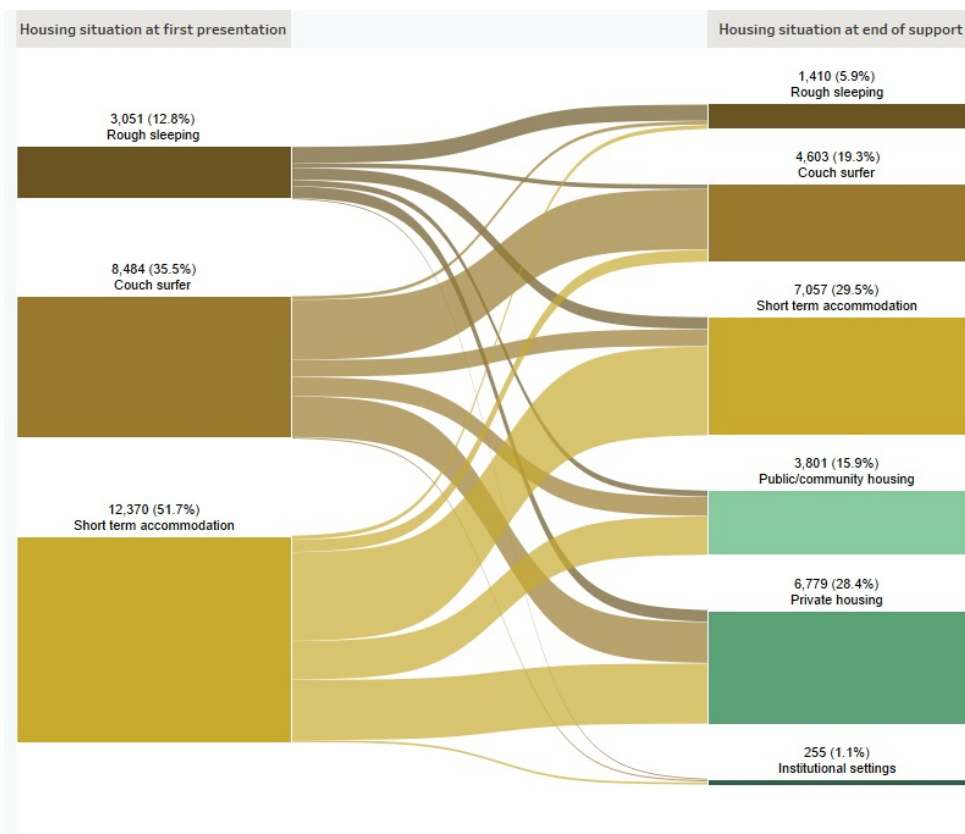
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (just over 23,900 clients), agencies were able to assist (Figure FDV.3):

- 7,100 clients (30%) into short term accommodation
- 6,800 (28%) into private housing.

A further 4,600 clients (19%) were couch surfing at the end of support.

**Figure FDV.3: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

Clients accessing SHS agencies who have experienced family and domestic violence have some notable differences from other client groups. Compared with other client groups, more clients who experienced family and domestic violence were in private housing at the start and end of SHS support. Perhaps driven by their greater likelihood of presenting while housed, their service use patterns were considerably less than other client groups and they were less likely to need accommodation overall. Short-term accommodation was their greatest housing need which is in contrast to other groups which often needed long-term housing the most. This client group was more likely to be new, rather than returning clients, and more likely to experience only one selected vulnerability (family and domestic violence).

It is important to note that this analysis is based on the almost 119,200 clients of SHS agencies in 2019-20. While there are various support services available, many people do not seek advice or support after incidents of family or domestic violence. Other research suggests that for those who experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a current cohabiting partner, 1 in 2 women never sought advice or support (AIHW 2019).

People fleeing violence often require safe, affordable, independent housing in which to live in the long term and yet, some are unable to secure it (Flanagan 2019). In the absence of an appropriate housing solution, some people may consider returning to a violent relationship (Flanagan 2019). While the availability of long-term housing is a key challenge for SHS clients overall, it is particularly so for this large client group.

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## Young people presenting alone

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Some known drivers of youth homelessness include drug issues, mental health issues, gender and LGBTI issues, difficult family situations (including parental drug and alcohol abuse and family and domestic violence), insecure employment and a lack of income (MacKenzie et al. 2020). Young people face discrimination in the private rental market due to lack of rental references and fewer financial resources (Homelessness Australia 2016) and they are less able to access social housing (MacKenzie et al. 2020). As such, leaving the parental home prior to establishing stable employment is a significant risk factor for youth homelessness (Carlisle et al. 2018, Steen & MacKenzie 2017).

Youth homelessness can also disrupt education leading to poorer educational outcomes. This may lead to further long term economic disadvantage perpetuating the cycle of homelessness in adulthood. For example, living in overcrowded housing can adversely affect the number of school years completed as students do not have enough space to do homework, get enough sleep or establish a routine (Fildes et al. 2018). There is concern that young people who do not seek support face substantial challenges in maintaining or engaging with education and employment, which is why it is important to provide greater avenues for preventing and responding to youth homelessness (Stone 2017).

According to Census estimates, around 27,700 young people aged 12-24 were experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2016, making up 24% of the total homeless population (ABS 2016). However, youth homelessness is likely to be underestimated in the Census (ABS 2016). For example, a usual address may be reported for couch surfers because the young person is staying in a household on Census night. It can be difficult to identify people experiencing this form of homelessness because of the transient nature of couch surfing and often young couch surfers do not classify themselves as homeless (Terui & Hsieh 2016). For more information, see [Couch Surfers](#). Children and young people are a national priority homelessness cohort in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (CFFR 2018) (see [Policy section](#) for more information) recognising the severe impact that homelessness may have on the lives of young Australians.

**Young people presenting alone** are defined as any client aged 15-24 who presented to a SHS agency alone in their first support period in the financial year.

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, almost 42,400 young people aged 15-24 presented alone to SHS agencies.
- Young people presenting alone made up 15% of all SHS clients but accounted for 73% of all SHS clients aged 15-24.
- Half (51%) of all young people presenting alone were known to be homeless at presentation to agencies and were more likely to be living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure (29%) compared with the overall SHS population (17%).
- 1 in 6 (16%) young people presenting alone were enrolled in secondary school at the beginning of support, 3% were enrolled in university and 1 in 10 (10%) were enrolled in vocational education or other training.
- More than half of (58%) young people presenting alone in 2019-20 had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- The proportion of young people who were known to be homeless decreased from 53% to 39% following SHS support, with the proportion of clients living in private or other housing increasing from 33% to 44%.

### Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table YOUNG.1):

- SHS agencies assisted around 42,400 young people aged 15-24 who presented alone; a decrease of almost 600 clients from 2018-19.
- Young people presenting alone made up 15% of all SHS clients but accounted for 73% of all SHS clients aged 15-24.
- The rate of young people presenting alone was 16.7 per 10,000 population, similar to 2018-19.

Table YOUNG.1: Young people (15-24 years) presenting alone—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	44,621	44,197	43,180	42,960	42,387
Proportion of all clients	16	15	15	15	15

Rate (per 10,000 population)	18.7	18.3	17.6	17.2	16.7
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**Notes:**

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Data for previous years have been updated with the improved calculation method for age. As such, data prior to 2017-18 contained in the SHS Annual Report may not match that contained in the SHS Annual Report Historical Tables.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

**Age and sex**

In 2019-20, of young people presenting alone (Supplementary table YOUNG.1):

- 3 in 5 were female (63% or almost 26,900 clients).
- 1 in 4 were aged 15-17 (26% or more than 10,800 clients).

**Indigenous clients**

In 2019-20:

- Over one-quarter of young people presenting alone identified as Indigenous (28% or almost 11,800 clients).
- Young people presenting alone were more likely to identify as Indigenous than the overall SHS population (28%, compared with 27%).

**State and territory**

In 2019-20:

- The largest number of young people presenting alone accessed services in Victoria (13,700 clients or 32%) and New South Wales (almost 13,700 clients or 32%).
- The highest rate of young people presenting alone was in the Northern Territory (72.3 clients per 10,000 population), followed by Tasmania (27.4 per 10,000 population).

**Living arrangements**

In 2019-20:

- Among young people presenting alone, the most commonly reported living arrangement at the beginning of support was lone person (42% or almost 16,500 clients), followed by other family (17% or more than 6,700 clients).
- Female clients were more likely than males to report their living arrangement as one parent with child/ren (18% or almost 4,500 clients, compared with 6% or almost 900 males) while male clients were more likely to report their living arrangement as a lone person (52% or almost 7,500 clients, compared with 37% or almost 9,000 females).

**Education status**

Of those whose education status was known, around 3 in 10 young people presenting alone were enrolled in education (29% or more than 10,700 clients).

- 1 in 6 young people presenting alone were secondary school students (16% or around 5,900 clients).
- 1 in 10 young people presenting alone were enrolled in vocational education and training or other education or training (10% or almost 3,600 clients).

**Selected vulnerabilities**

Young people presenting alone may face additional vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to homelessness, in particular, family and domestic violence, mental health issues and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

Of the almost 42,400 young people presenting alone in 2019-20, almost 2 in 3 (65%) reported experiencing one or more of these vulnerabilities (Table YOUNG.2):

- Almost half reported a current mental health issue (47% or over 19,700 clients).
- 1 in 3 reported family and domestic violence (36% or 15,100 clients).
- 6% (2,500 clients) reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.
- More than 1 in 3 (36% or 15,100 clients) reported experiencing none of these vulnerabilities.

Table YOUNG.2: Young people presenting alone, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	2,501	5.9
Yes	Yes	No	5,769	13.6
Yes	No	Yes	387	0.9
No	Yes	Yes	2,548	6.0
Yes	No	No	6,448	15.2
No	Yes	No	8,897	21.0
No	No	Yes	778	1.8
No	No	No	15,059	35.5
			<b>42,387</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 15-24.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

#### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of the first support period, half (51%) of young people presenting alone presented to services experiencing homelessness. This was higher than all SHS clients (43% presenting homeless) but lower than clients who are current or former members of the ADF (53% homeless) and clients with problematic drug or alcohol issues (58% homeless) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

#### Service use patterns

In 2019-20, young people presenting alone who received assistance from SHS agencies received (Table YOUNG.3):

- a median of 55 days of support, increasing from 54 days in 2018-19
- an average of 1.9 support periods per client.
- 1 in 3 (31%) received accommodation
- a median of 43 nights of accommodation.

Table YOUNG.3: Young people presenting alone: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	44	47	49	54	55
Average number of support periods per client	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.9
Proportion receiving accommodation	33	31	31	31	31
Median number of nights accommodated	40	44	45	45	43

#### Notes

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all young people presenting alone. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Data for previous years have been updated with the improved calculation method for age. As such, data prior to 2017-18 contained in the SHS Annual Report may not match that contained in the SHS Annual Report Historical Tables.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

#### New or returning clients

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table YOUNG.7):

- Most young people presenting alone in 2019-20 (58% or 24,400 clients) were returning clients, having previously been assisted by an SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- Returning clients were more likely to be 18-24 (80%, compared with 66% of new clients).

### **Main reasons for seeking assistance**

In 2019-20, the main reasons for seeking assistance among young people presenting alone were:

- housing crisis (17% or almost 7,200 clients)
- family and domestic violence (17% or almost 7,100 clients)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (12% or more than 5,100 clients)
- relationship/family breakdown (12% or almost 5,100 clients).

Young people who were known to be homeless at first presentation were more likely to identify housing crisis (22%, compared with 13% of clients at risk) or inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (17%, compared with 9% at risk) as their main reason for seeking assistance.

Family and domestic violence was the most commonly reported main reason for seeking assistance among young people presenting alone who were known to be at risk of homelessness (20%, compared with 10% of homeless clients).

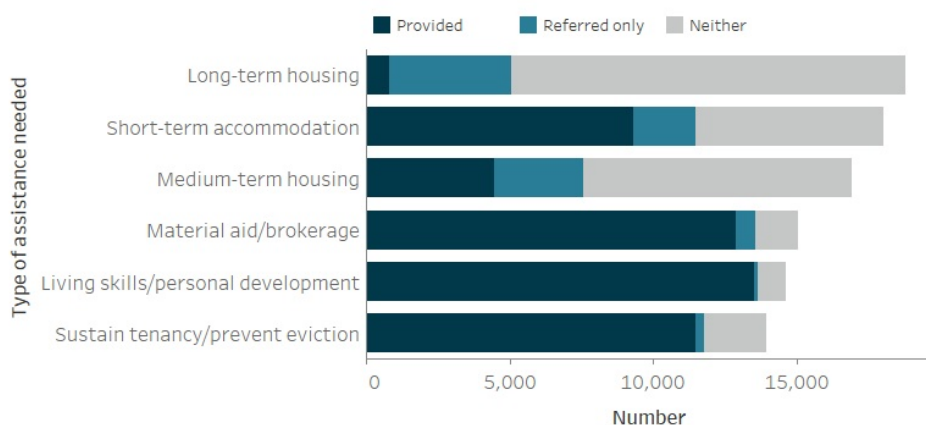
### **Services needed and provided**

Similar to the overall SHS population, the majority of young people presenting alone needed general services that were provided by SHS agencies including advice/information, advocacy/liason on behalf of client and other basic assistance.

Apart from those services, the most common services requested by young people presenting alone were (Figure YOUNG.1):

- long-term housing (44% or 18,800 clients), with 4% receiving this service and 23% receiving a referral
- short-term or emergency accommodation (43% or over 18,000 clients), with 52% of those needing this service also receiving this service
- medium-term/transitional housing (40% or more than 16,900 clients), with 26% receiving this service.

**Figure YOUNG.1: Young people presenting alone, by most needed services and service provision status (top 6), 2019-20**



### **Notes**

1. Excludes 'Other basic assistance'. Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liason on behalf of client'.
2. 'Short-term accomodation' includes temporary and emergency accomodation and sutain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
3. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table YOUNG.3.

Young people presenting alone were also more likely than the overall SHS population to request services including:

- living skills/personal development (35%, compared with 19%), with 93% receiving this service
- educational assistance (20%, compared with 8%), with 74% receiving this service
- employment assistance (18%, compared with 6%), with 68% receiving this service
- training assistance (13%, compared with 4%), with 66% receiving this service.

The proportion of young people presenting alone to SHS services for assistance with a case management plan was comparatively high (62% in 2019-20) compared with other client groups, however, those achieving all case management goals was low (16% in 2019-20) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35). This group is among one of the least likely of all SHS client groups to meet all case management goals.

### **Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

At the end of the reporting period in 2019-20 (Table YOUNG.4):

- The proportion of young people presenting alone who were known to be homeless decreased from 53% at the beginning of support to 39% at the end of support; around 4,000 fewer clients were homeless at the end of support.
- The shift in the proportion of couch surfers accounted for much of the decrease in the proportion of clients who were homeless; the proportion of clients living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure decreased from 29% to 21% at the end of support, while the proportion sleeping rough decreased from 8% to 4%.
- The largest change for those known to be at risk of homelessness was in the proportion of clients living in private or other housing, which increased from 33% at the start of support to 44% at the end (to more than 11,100 clients).

These trends demonstrate that by the end of support, many clients have achieved or progressed towards a more positive housing solution. That is, the number and/or proportion of clients ending support in public or community housing (renter or rent-free) or private or other housing (renter or rent-free) had increased compared with the start of support.

Table YOUNG.4: Young people presenting alone (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	2,178	1,087	8.2	4.3
Short term temporary accommodation	4,053	3,640	15.3	14.3
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	7,780	5,254	29.3	20.6
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>14,011</b>	<b>9,981</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>39.2</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	2,621	3,524	9.9	13.8
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	8,833	11,122	33.3	43.7
Institutional settings	1,060	826	4.0	3.2
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>12,514</b>	<b>15,472</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>60.8</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>26,525</b>	<b>25,453</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>4,360</i>	<i>5,432</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>30,885</b>	<b>30,885</b>		

#### Notes

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table YOUNG.4.

#### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

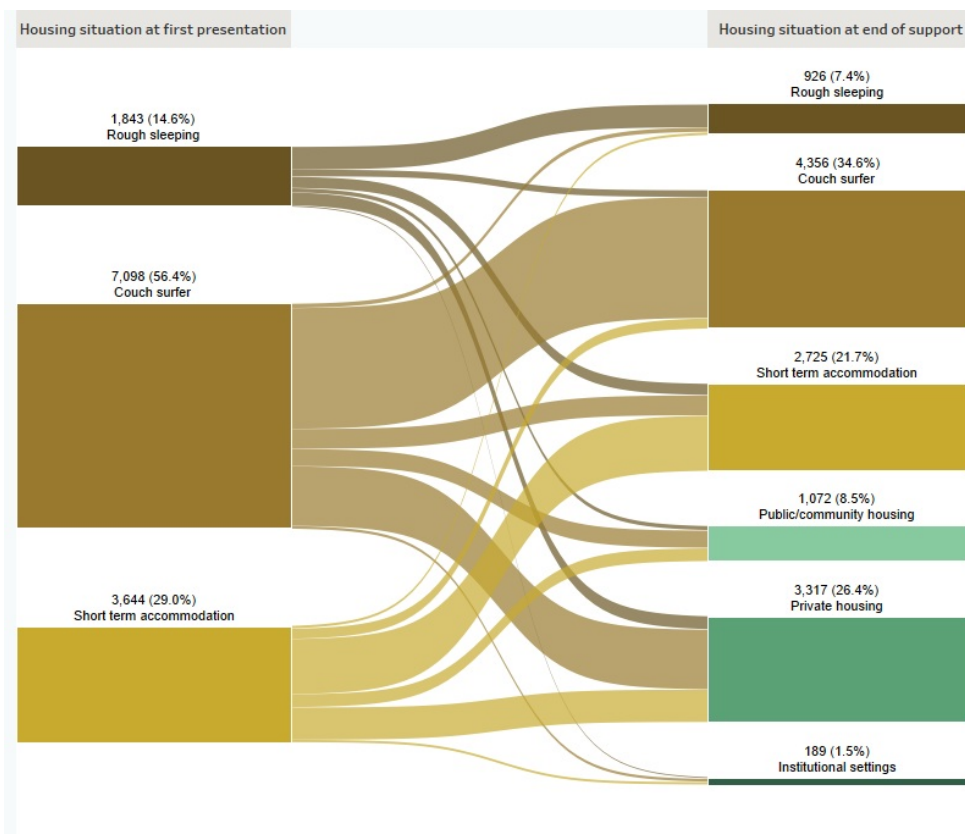
For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (almost 12,600 clients), agencies were able to assist (Figure YOUNG.2):

- 3,300 clients (26%) into private or other housing
- 2,700 (22%) into short term accommodation.

More than 1 in 3 (35% or almost 4,400 clients) were couch surfing at the end of support.

**Figure YOUNG.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**





**Notes**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

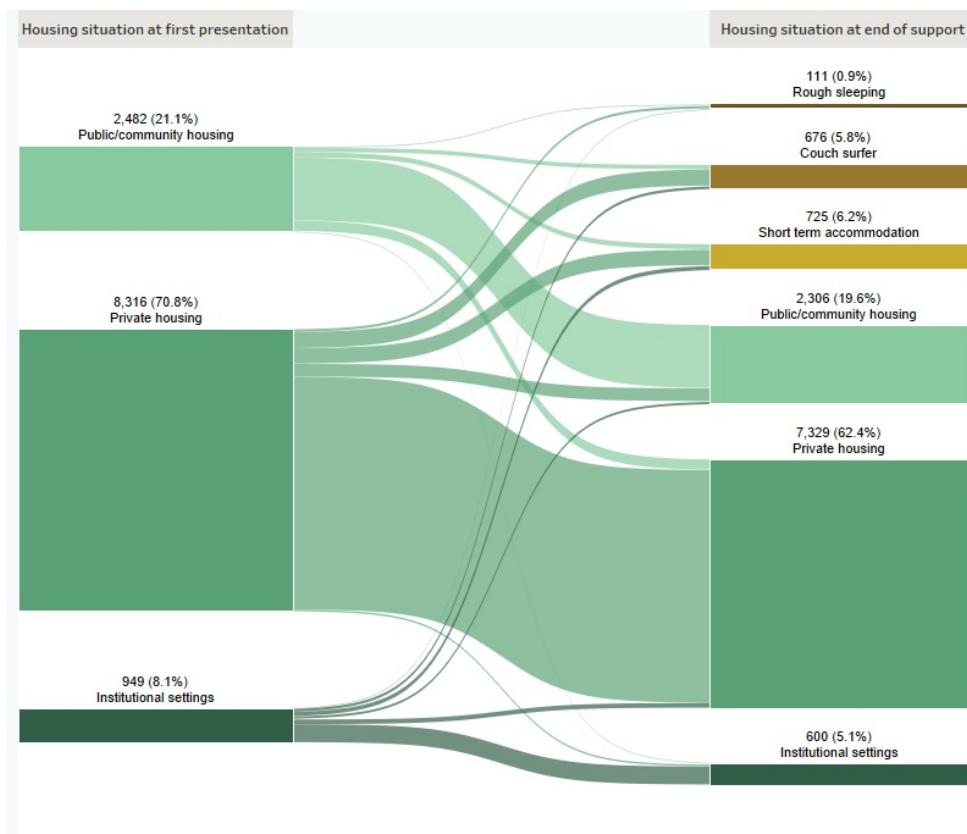
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20.

For clients with a known housing status who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support (more than 11,700 clients), by the end of support (Figure YOUNG.3):

- Most clients (7,300 or 62%) were in private or other housing
- Around 2,300 clients (20%) were in public or community housing.

A smaller number were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (around 1,500 clients or 13% of those who started support at risk).

**Figure YOUNG.3: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



#### Notes

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20.

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## Children on care and protection orders

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Care and protection orders (CPOs) are legal orders or arrangements that place some responsibility for a child's welfare with child protection authorities. In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for child protection and these departments assist vulnerable children and young people to protect them from abuse, neglect or other harm or where their parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection (AIHW 2020).

Between 2014-15 and 2018-19, the rate of children on care and protection orders increased from 9.1 per 1,000 children to 10.5 per 1,000 children (AIHW 2020). Of the 59,100 children on care and protection orders at 30 June 2019, most were living in home-based care, either with relative/kinship carers (39%) or in foster care (29%). While many children are moved into out-of-home care, others remain living at home with family support provided by community-based agencies.

Pathways into homelessness for children on care and protection orders are complex. For example, children and young people who are exposed to persistent violence, abuse and neglect in their family homes but are not removed by child protection authorities may become homeless, as they are no longer prepared to live in these households (Noble-Carr & Trew 2018). Children with unsatisfactory foster care arrangements can either voluntarily move out of their foster home into homelessness or can be placed in residential care settings by child protection authorities.

Family and domestic violence is one of the main reasons that families at risk of homelessness seek assistance from SHS agencies. It is also one of the leading reasons for statutory intervention, indicating that child protection and SHS agencies often work with the same families and children (MICA Projects 2016). Linked data has been used to describe the characteristics of children and young people who received both child protection (an investigated notification, care and protection order or out-of-home care) and specialist homelessness services (SHS) (AIHW 2016). Compared with children who accessed only SHS, children who accessed both child protection and SHS were more likely to have experienced family and domestic violence (54%, compared with 44%). For more information about children on care and protection orders, see [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#).

Two of the national priority cohorts for homelessness identified in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, which came into effect on 1 July 2018 (CFFR 2018), potentially involve children on care and protection orders: children and young people and those exiting institutions and care into homelessness (see [Policy section](#) for more information).

### Reporting children on care and protection orders in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

A client is reported as being under a care and protection order (CPO) if they are aged under 18 and have provided any of the following information in any support period during the reporting period.

They reported that they were under a CPO and had the following care arrangements:

- residential care
- family group home
- relatives/kin/friends who are reimbursed
- foster care
- other home-based care (reimbursed)
- relatives/kin/friends who are not reimbursed
- independent living
- other living arrangements
- parents, or

They have reported 'transition from foster care/child safety residential placements' as a reason for seeking assistance or the main reason for seeking assistance.

For more information, see [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, almost 8,800 children and young people on a CPO received assistance from a specialist homelessness services (SHS) agency, and just over half (51%) were female.

- Around 6 in 10 (59%) of these clients on a CPO were aged 0-9 and males were more likely to be in this age group (63% of male clients, compared with 56% of females).
- Half (50%) had experienced family and domestic violence and 42% had a current mental health issue.
- More than half (57%) of clients on a CPO had received assistance from a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- The most common care type arrangements for clients on a CPO were parents (64%) and relative(s) or kin (25%).
- The proportion of children on a CPO who were homeless decreased from 47% to 34% following SHS support, with clients living in public or community housing increasing from 17% at the beginning of support to 26% at the end of support.
- One in 7 (14%) of those with a case management plan achieved all the set goals, lower than young people (aged 15-24) who presented to SHS agencies alone (16%) and lower than that in the overall SHS population (21%).

## Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table CPO.1):

- SHS agencies assisted almost 8,800 children on a CPO, representing a decrease of nearly 400 clients from 2018-19.
- Children on a CPO made up 3% of the overall SHS population and 10% of all SHS clients aged under 18.
- The rate of children on a CPO receiving assistance from SHS agencies was 3.5 per 10,000 population; a decrease from 3.7 in 2018-19.

Table CPO.1: Children on care and protection orders—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	9,305	9,100	8,669	9,172	8,791
Proportion of all clients	3	3	3	3	3
Rate (per 10,000 population)	3.9	3.8	3.5	3.7	3.5

Notes:

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

## Age and sex

In 2019-20, of clients on a CPO (Supplementary table CPO.1):

- Half were female (51% or over 4,500 clients)
- The majority were aged 0-9 (59% or more than 5,200 clients)
- Male clients on a CPO were more likely to be in the 0-9 age group (63%, compared with 56% females) while female clients were more likely to be in the 15-17 age group (24%, compared with 17% males).

## Indigenous status

In 2019-20, 1 in 3 children on a CPO identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (36% or almost 3,100 clients) (Supplementary Table CPO.8), higher than the overall SHS Indigenous proportion (27%).

## State and territory

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table CPO.2):

- The largest number of clients on a CPO who accessed services was in Victoria (44% or 3,900 clients), followed by New South Wales (27% or 2,400 clients).
- The highest rate of clients on a CPO was in the Northern Territory (13.9 clients per 10,000 population), followed by Victoria (5.9 clients per 10,000).

## Presenting unit

- Over 1 in 5 (22%) children presented alone (Supplementary table CPO.9), with proportionally more females (25%) than males (19%).

## Living arrangements

- The most commonly reported living arrangement among children on a CPO (Supplementary table CPO.10) was a single parent with one or more children (53% or nearly 4,600 clients), followed by other family (19% or over 1,600 clients).
- Most male and female clients on a CPO usually lived as a part of a family comprising single parent with one or more children (54%, compared with 52% females).

## Care arrangement type

- The most common care arrangement among clients on a CPO (Supplementary table CPO.12) was parents (64% or 5,600 clients), followed by relative(s) or kin (25% or almost 2,200 clients).
- Most clients aged 0-9 had parents as their care arrangement (74% or almost 3,900 clients), followed by relative(s) or kin (25% or 1,300 clients).
- Among clients aged 15-17, similar proportions had parents (30% or over 500 clients), independent living (24% or over 400 clients) and other living arrangements (23% or over 400 clients) as care arrangements.
- Clients who received SHS assistance in *Remote/Very remote* areas were more likely to have family group home as their care arrangement (19%, compared with *Major cities* 3%, *Inner regional* 3% and *Outer regional* 9% areas).

## Selected vulnerabilities

Children on a CPO may face additional vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to becoming homeless, in particular family and domestic violence, a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use. These vulnerabilities are only assessed in clients aged 10 and over.

In 2019-20, of the nearly 3,600 clients on a CPO who were aged 10 and over, 2 in 3 (70%) reported experiencing one or more of these vulnerabilities (Table CPO.2):

- Half (50% or 1,800 clients) had experienced family and domestic violence.
- Over 2 in 5 (42% or 1,500 clients) had a current mental health issue.
- One-quarter (24% or 900 clients) reported only experiencing family and domestic violence while an additional 16% (600 clients) reported both a current mental health issue and family and domestic violence (and no experience of problematic drug and/or alcohol use).
- 8% (nearly 300 clients) reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.

Table CPO.2: Children on care and protection orders, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	280	7.8
Yes	Yes	No	566	15.8
Yes	No	Yes	70	2.0
No	Yes	Yes	129	3.6
Yes	No	No	876	24.4
No	Yes	No	535	14.9
No	No	Yes	47	1.3
No	No	No	1,081	30.2
			<b>3,584</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10-18.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

## Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of the first support period almost half (47%) of all children on a CPO presented to services experiencing homelessness, with 53% at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

## Service use patterns

- Children on a CPO who received assistance from SHS agencies in 2019-20 had a median of 95 days of support and an average of 1.8 support periods per client (Table CPO.3).
- 1 in 2 (48%) clients on a CPO were provided with accommodation with a median of 66 nights of accommodation.

Table CPO.3: Children on care and protection orders: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	87	99	97	95	95

Average number of support periods per client	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8
Proportion receiving accommodation	54	53	51	49	48
Median number of nights accommodated	67	69	66	62	66

**Notes:**

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all children on a care and protection order. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### **New or returning clients**

More than half of the children on a CPO (57% or 5,000 clients) were returning clients (Supplementary table CPO.7), having received assistance from a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12. Returning clients were more likely than new clients to be aged 10-17 (43%, compared with 38%), conversely new clients were more likely to be aged 0-9 years (62% compared with 57% of returning clients).

### **Main reasons for seeking assistance**

In 2019-20, the main reasons for seeking assistance among children on a CPO were (Supplementary table CPO.5):

- family and domestic violence (38% or over 3,300 clients)
- housing crisis (18% or 1,600 clients)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (8% or over 700 clients).

Family and domestic violence was the most common reason for seeking assistance for both homeless and at risk children on CPO, though the proportion was much higher for children at risk (46% or nearly 1,900 clients, compared with 28% or nearly 1,100) (Supplementary table CPO.6).

### **Services needed and provided**

Similar to the overall SHS population, most children on a CPO needed general services that were provided by SHS agencies including advice/information, advocacy/liaison on behalf of client and other basic assistance (Supplementary table CPO.3).

Apart from these, the most common services needed by children on a CPO were:

- short-term or emergency accommodation (44% or nearly 3,900 clients), with 76% of those needing this service also receiving this service
- assistance for family/domestic violence (44% or more than 3,800 clients), with 92% receiving this service
- material aid/brokerage (43% or almost 3,800 clients), with 86% receiving this service
- long-term housing (37% or over 3,200 clients), with 4% receiving this service.

Children on a CPO were also more likely than the overall SHS population to need services including:

- family/relationship assistance (30%, compared with 16%), with 85% receiving this service
- transport services (30%, compared with 18%), with 92% receiving this service
- child protection services (28%, compared with 5%), with 76% receiving this service
- living skills/personal development (27%, compared with 19%), with 92% receiving this service
- assistance for trauma (23%, compared with 13%), with 81% receiving this service.
- assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems (22%, compared with 12%), with 86% receiving this service

The majority (85%) of children on a CPO had a case management plan. However, only 14% of those with a case management plan achieved all the set goals. The proportion of children on a CPO who achieved all case management goals was lower than that in the overall SHS population (21%) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35).

### **Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

At the end of the reporting period in 2019-20:

- The proportion of children on a CPO who were known to be homeless decreased from 47% at the beginning of support to 34% at the end of support; more than 600 fewer clients were homeless following support (Table CPO.4).
- The shift in the proportion of couch surfers accounted for much of the decrease in the proportion of clients who were homeless; the proportion of clients living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure decreased from 17% to 11% following support, while the proportion staying in short-term temporary accommodation decreased from 25% to 21%.
- The largest change at the end of support was in the proportion of clients living in public or community housing, which increased from 17% to 26% at the end of support (or nearly 500 clients).

These trends demonstrate that by the end of support, many clients have achieved or progressed towards a more positive housing solution. That is, clients ending support in public or community housing (renter or rent-free) or private or other housing (renter or rent-free) had increased compared with the start of support.

Table CPO.4: Children on care and protection orders (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	249	121	5.0	2.5
Short term temporary accommodation	1,238	1,036	24.8	21.1
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	838	528	16.8	10.8
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>2,325</b>	<b>1,685</b>	<b>46.5</b>	<b>34.4</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	824	1,294	16.5	26.4
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	1,781	1,871	35.6	38.2
Institutional settings	72	54	1.4	1.1
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>2,677</b>	<b>3,219</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>65.6</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>5,002</b>	<b>4,904</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>873</i>	<i>971</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>5,875</b>	<b>5,875</b>		

Notes:

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

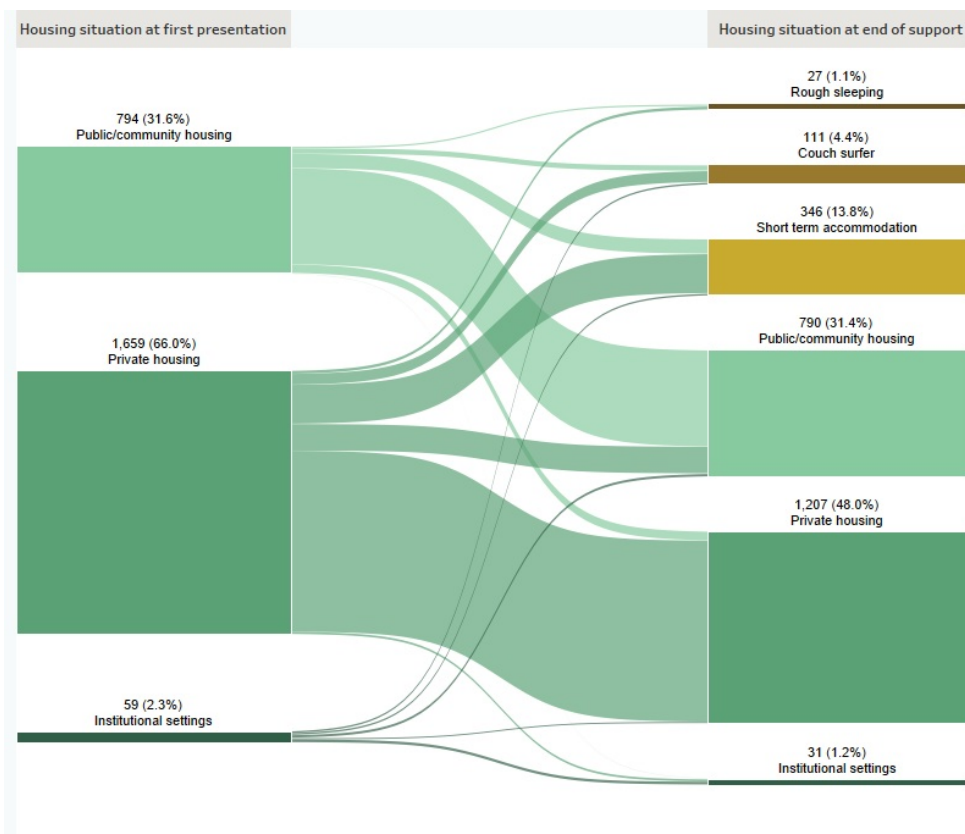
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table CPO.4.

### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

In 2019-20, 4,600 children on a CPO had a known housing status at both the start and end of support. Of these clients, more than 2,500 clients were at risk of homelessness at the start of support. By the end of support (Figure CPO.1):

- Almost half (1,200 clients or 48%) maintained private housing
- Nearly 800 clients (31%) were in public housing.

Figure CPO.1: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

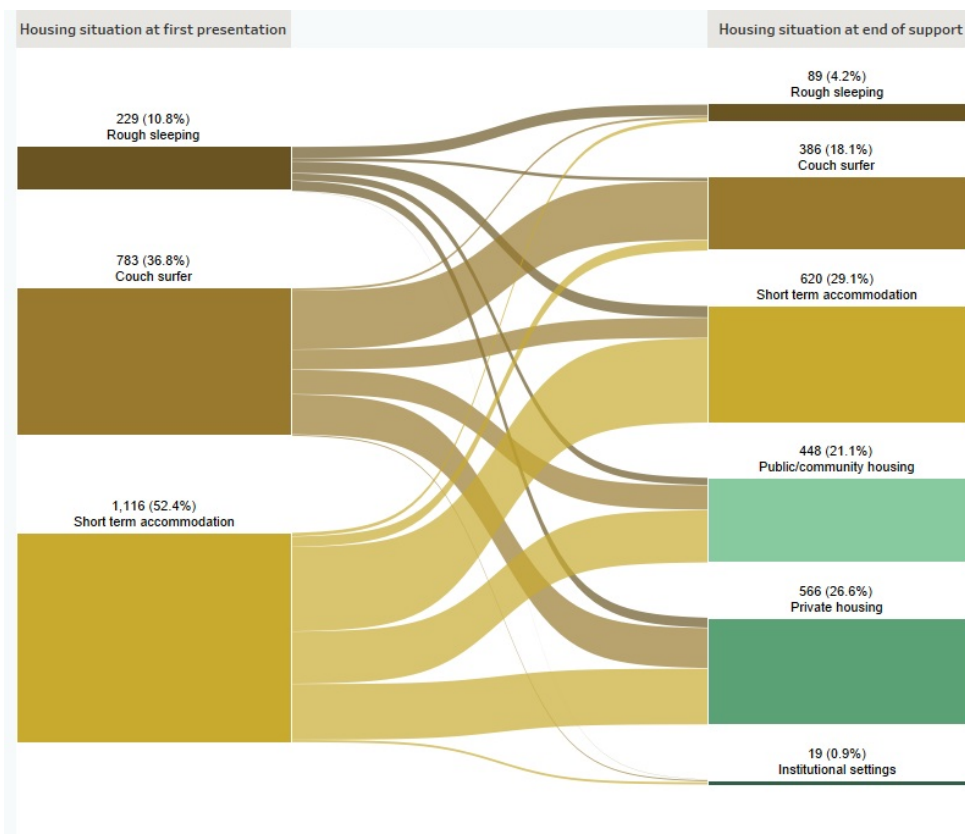
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (just over 2,100 clients) (Figure CPO.2):

- Over 600 clients (29%) ended support in short term accommodation
- Nearly 600 (27%) ended support in private housing
- Almost 400 clients (18%) were couch surfing at the end of support.

**Figure CPO.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**





**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

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## Indigenous clients

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Services use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Stable and secure housing is fundamentally important to health and well-being. Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience insecure housing, live in overcrowded dwellings and experience homelessness, including intergenerational homelessness than non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW 2019). Indigenous Australians continue to be over-represented in both the national homeless population and as users of specialist homelessness services (see [Clients, services and outcomes](#) and ABS 2018). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3.1% of the Australian population (ABS 2019), yet they made up 27% of the clients (an estimated 71,600 clients) assisted by specialist homelessness services (SHS) in 2019-20. It is important to note that Indigenous status was not reported for 8% of SHS clients in 2019-20 (similar to 2018-19; 9%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a national priority cohort in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, which came into effect 1 July 2018 (CFFR 2018) (see [Policy section](#) for more information). This agreement provides a framework for all levels of government to work together to improve housing and homelessness outcomes for Indigenous Australians (AIHW 2019).

### Key findings

- The number of Indigenous SHS clients has increased by an average of 6% each year since 2011-12 (to around 71,600 clients in 2019-20), a rate higher than the total SHS population (3% increase on average per year).
- The median length of support for Indigenous clients decreased to 47 days in 2019-20. Up until 2018-19, support length had been rising, from 44 days in 2015-16 to 49 days in 2018-19.
- The proportion of Indigenous clients receiving accommodation services remained steady at 40% in 2019-20, while the median length of accommodation continued to decrease (15 nights in 2019-20; a decrease from 20 nights in 2017-18).
- Almost 3,000 more Indigenous clients ended support in public or community housing and 1,300 fewer Indigenous clients were in short-term or emergency accommodation following assistance from SHS agencies in 2019-20.

### Client characteristics

Over 271,200 Indigenous clients have been supported by homelessness agencies since the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) began in 2011-12. The number of Indigenous clients has been steadily increasing over this time. The key trends identified were (Table INDIGENOUS.1):

- SHS agencies assisted around 71,600 Indigenous clients in 2019-20. This equates to 27% of the 268,300 SHS clients (with a known Indigenous status).
- The rate of service use by Indigenous clients has increased from 779.4 clients per 10,000 Indigenous people in 2015-16 to 798.3 in 2019-20. The rate of support was 9.4 times that of non-Indigenous clients in 2019-20.
- After taking into account differences in population size, in 2019-20 Indigenous clients living in *Remote/very remote* areas had the highest rate of service use.
- The rate of service use among Indigenous clients living in *Remote/very remote* areas increased over time; from 738.7 Indigenous clients per 10,000 population in 2015-16 to 919.2 in 2019-20. The rate ratio has also increased, from 19.1 in 2015-16 to 23.2 in 2019-20.

Table INDIGENOUS.1: Indigenous clients—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	61,700	64,644	65,184	68,853	71,582
Proportion of all clients where Indigenous status reported	24	25	25	26	27
Rate (per 10,000 population)	779.4	806.4	753.2	782.0	798.3
Rate ratio	9.0	9.2	8.8	9.1	9.4
Rate difference (per 10,000 population)	693.1	718.3	667.4	696.3	713.4
<b>Remoteness rate (per 10,000 population)</b>					

<i>Major cities</i>	716.2	726.2	717.0	730.3	727.9
<i>Inner/outer regional</i>	739.8	802.5	808.4	828.6	820.8
<i>Remote/very remote</i>	738.7	720.4	716.5	798.3	919.2
<b>Rate ratio</b>					
<i>Major cities</i>	8.9	9.0	9.2	9.5	9.5
<i>Inner/outer regional</i>	6.6	6.8	7.0	7.0	6.9
<i>Remote/very remote</i>	19.1	17.4	18.7	21.3	23.2

#### Notes:

1. Rates were directly age-standardised as detailed in the Technical information section. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

2. Rate ratio is the Indigenous rate divided by the Non-Indigenous rate and is used to compare the 2 service use rates. Rate difference reveals the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates.

3. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

#### Age and sex

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.1):

- More than half (53% or almost 38,000 clients) of Indigenous SHS clients were under the age of 25, compared with 41% (79,800) of non-Indigenous clients
- The largest age group for Indigenous male clients was 0-9 years (28% or 7,700); for Indigenous females it was 25-34 (21% or 9,200)
- The proportion of clients aged 55 and over was lower in Indigenous clients (5% or 3,600) compared with non-Indigenous clients (10% or 18,600).

#### State and territory and remoteness

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.2 and 5):

- Victoria had the highest rate of Indigenous clients (1,679.6 per 10,000 Indigenous people) and Tasmania the lowest (327.7 per 10,000 Indigenous people). Victoria also had the highest rate of non-Indigenous clients (144.7 per 10,000 non-Indigenous people).
- The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous clients (86%) and Victoria the lowest (9%).
- The proportion of Indigenous clients receiving services in *Major cities* (35% or 25,000) was lower than non-Indigenous clients (67% or 132,600).
- A higher proportion of Indigenous clients sought services in *Remote* (15% or 10,400) and *Very remote* areas (7% or 4,700), compared with non-Indigenous clients (1% and <1%, respectively).

#### Presenting unit

In 2019-20, over half of the Indigenous clients presenting to a SHS agency presented alone (55% or 39,500 clients) and a further 34% (or 24,400 clients) presented as a single parent with child/ren (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.8).

#### Living arrangements

In 2019-20, at the beginning of support (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.9):

- Indigenous clients (34% or 23,300 clients) were most likely living as a single parent with child(ren)
- 1 in 4 (16,900 or 25%) Indigenous clients were living alone
- A further 18% (or 12,100) of Indigenous clients were living with other family.

#### Selected vulnerabilities

SHS clients can face additional vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to becoming homeless, in particular family and domestic violence, a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use. Over half (55% or 30,900) of Indigenous SHS clients aged 10 years and over reported 1 or more of these vulnerabilities. In 2019-20 (Table INDIGENOUS.2):

- Less than half (45% or around 25,200) of Indigenous clients did not experience any of the selected vulnerabilities which was higher than the rate for all SHS clients (38%).
- 1 in 20 (5% or 2,700 clients) Indigenous SHS clients were experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.
- Almost 1 in 5 (16% or around 8,900) Indigenous clients were experiencing 2 vulnerabilities.

- More than 1 in 3 (35% or almost 20,000) Indigenous clients reported experiencing family and domestic violence.

Table INDIGENOUS.2: Indigenous clients, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	2,654	4.7
Yes	Yes	No	5,136	9.1
Yes	No	Yes	1,184	2.1
No	Yes	Yes	2,575	4.6
Yes	No	No	10,979	19.5
No	Yes	No	6,820	12.1
No	No	Yes	1,593	2.8
No	No	No	25,228	44.9
			<b>56,169</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Notes:**

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

**Housing situation on first presentation**

In 2019-20, at the beginning of the first support period, more than half (54%) of clients whose Indigenous status was known presented to services at risk of homelessness, while over 2 in 5 (46%) were experiencing homelessness. These proportions have remained consistent since 2015-16 (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

**Service use patterns**

Since 2015-16, the number of Indigenous clients seeking assistance from SHS agencies has increased. Key trends identified in this client population are (Table INDIGENOUS.3):

- The median number of days Indigenous clients receive support has increased from 44 days in 2015-16 to 47 days in 2019-20; a decrease from 49 in 2018-19.
- In 2019-20, 40% of Indigenous clients received accommodation services. This proportion has declined from 44% in 2015-16 but remained steady since 2018-19 (41%)
- The median number of nights accommodated has decreased, down from 20 nights in 2016-17 and 2017-18 to 15 nights in 2019-20.

Table INDIGENOUS.3: Indigenous clients: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	44	46	48	49	47
Average number of support periods per client	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.7
Proportion receiving accommodation	44	42	41	41	40
Median number of nights accommodated	19	20	20	18	15

**Notes:**

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all Indigenous SHS clients. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### **New or returning clients**

In 2019-20, there were more returning Indigenous clients (65%) (that is, those who had received SHS services at some point since the collection began in 2011-12) than there were new Indigenous clients (35%) (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.6). The proportion of returning non-Indigenous clients was lower (57%).

### **Main reasons for seeking assistance**

The three most common main reasons why Indigenous clients sought assistance from SHS agencies in 2019-20 were (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.7):

- family and domestic violence (24% or 16,900 clients)
- housing crisis (18% or 12,200 clients)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (13% or almost 9,200 clients).

### **Services needed and provided**

In 2019-20, the need for accommodation assistance was broadly similar between Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients, with the exception of short-term or emergency accommodation (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.3).

- Half of Indigenous clients (51% or 36,400) needed short-term or emergency accommodation, higher than the proportion of non-Indigenous clients (37% or 72,900). Two-thirds of Indigenous clients who needed short-term or emergency accommodation received this support (65%); a higher proportion than non-Indigenous clients (56%).

Other services commonly needed by Indigenous clients during 2019-20 were:

- advice/information (76%) with 98% provided this assistance
- advocacy/liaison (55%) with 97% provided this assistance
- material aid/brokerage (36%) with 87% provided this assistance.

Assistance for family and domestic violence was another frequently requested service (28%), with 88% of clients with this need having such assistance provided.

Around 1 in 3 Indigenous clients needed long-term (38%, provided to 4%) or medium-term/transitional housing (30%, provided to 27%) (similar proportions were recorded for non-Indigenous clients).

For some general services, needs were higher for Indigenous clients when compared with non-Indigenous clients, including meals (31% compared with 12%), laundry/shower facilities (24% compared with 9%) and transport (31% compared with 15%).

The proportion of Indigenous clients with a case management plan has remained comparatively consistent over time (69% in 2019-20); however the proportion achieving all case management goals has declined (20% in 2019-20, down from 24% in 2018-19) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35).

### **Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the changes in a client's housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the 2019-20 reporting period.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

In 2019-20 (INDIGENOUS.4):

- The proportion of Indigenous clients who were known to be experiencing homelessness decreased from under half (45%) at the start of support to 34% at the end of support; a reduction of 5,800 clients.
- The reduction in the proportion of clients who were known to be homeless following support was due mainly to a reduction in the proportion of clients living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure (from 19% to 14%). Clients who were 'rough sleeping' also decreased, from 8% to 5%.
- There was an increase in clients living in housing with some form of tenure over the course of support, including an increase in the proportion of clients living in public or community housing from 32% to 39% (or an increase of almost 3,000 clients).

These trends demonstrate that by the end of support, many clients have achieved or progressed towards a more positive housing solution. That is, the proportion of clients ending support known to be housed but at risk of homelessness had increased compared with the start of support, and the proportion who were homeless had decreased.

Table INDIGENOUS.4: Indigenous clients with closed support, by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	3,893	2,180	8.1	4.7
Short term temporary accommodation	8,242	6,985	17.2	15.2
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	9,198	6,362	19.2	13.8
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>21,333</b>	<b>15,527</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>33.7</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	15,039	18,006	31.5	39.1
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	10,049	11,523	21.0	25.0
Institutional settings	1,386	1,031	2.9	2.2
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>26,474</b>	<b>30,560</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>66.3</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>47,807</b>	<b>46,087</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>6,031</i>	<i>7,751</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>53,838</b>	<b>53,838</b>		

*Notes:*

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.4.

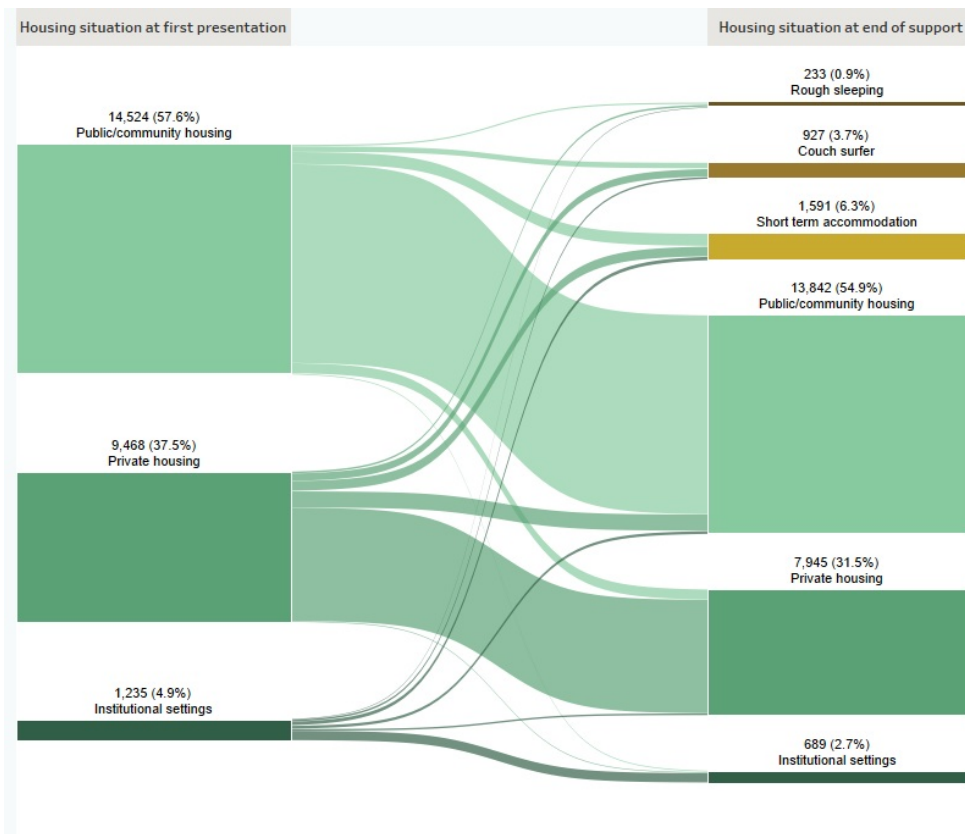
### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

In 2019-20, 44,700 clients had a known housing status at both the start and end of support. Of these clients, more than 25,200 were at risk of homelessness at the start of support, by the end of support (Figure INDIGENOUS.1):

- More than half (55% or 13,800 clients) were in public or community housing
- Almost one-third (31% or 7,900 clients) were in private housing.

A smaller number were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (around 2,800 clients or 11% of those who started support at risk of homelessness).

**Figure INDIGENOUS.1: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

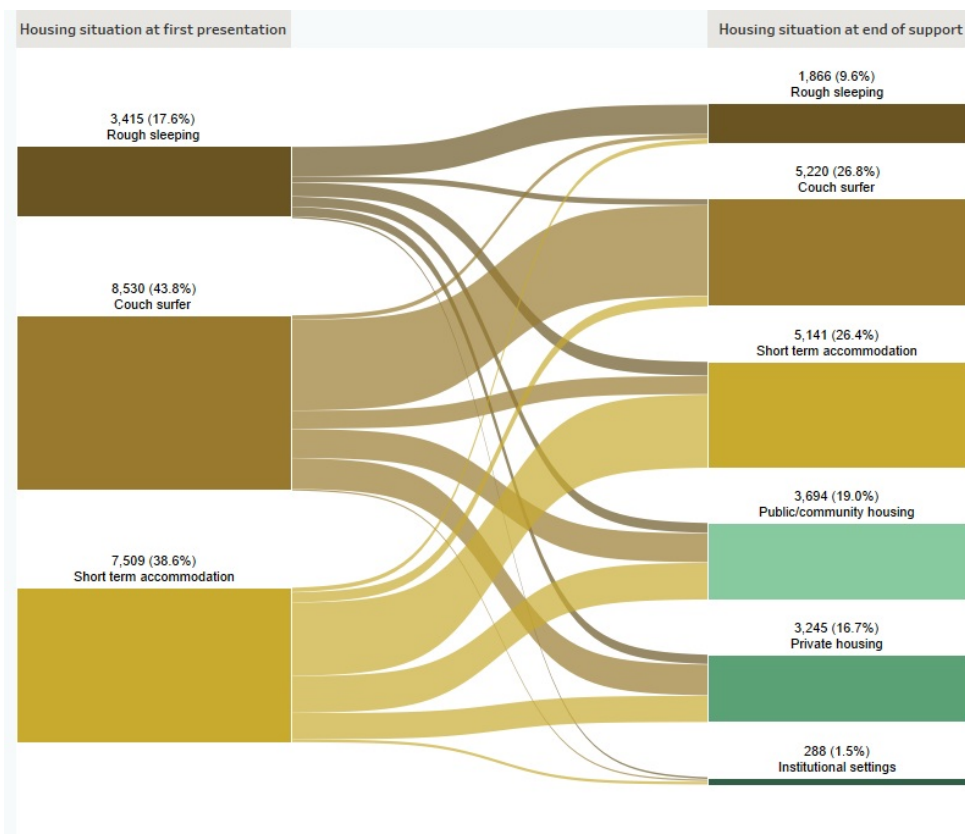
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20.

For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (almost 19,500 clients), by the end of support, agencies were able to assist (Figure INDIGENOUS.2):

- 5,100 clients (26%) into short term accommodation
- 3,200 (17%) into private housing.

A further 5,200 clients (27%) were couch surfing at the end of support.

**Figure INDIGENOUS.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20.

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## Clients exiting custodial arrangements

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Upon release, people discharged from prison can face stigma associated with a history of incarceration and discrimination from landlords and potential employers (Schetzer & StreetCare 2013). Prisoners applying for parole may experience difficulties securing appropriately located and affordable accommodation, leading to refusal of parole or breach of parole conditions and subsequent return to prison. Parole officers must approve accommodation conditions for the duration of parole and if the assigned accommodation (including temporary or supported accommodation) becomes unavailable, it puts these people in breach of their parole conditions (Schetzer & StreetCare 2013).

Prison dischargees need housing and employment for successful re-entry into the community and to reduce the likelihood of returning to prison. Without secure housing, people who are released from prison often cycle from prison into homelessness and back into prison. Prison dischargees who experience homelessness are almost twice as likely to return to prison within 9 months of release (Baldry et al. 2006). Offering pre-release support and planning, and integrated case management post-release can help people exiting custody to secure accommodation and address other transitional needs (Schetzer & StreetCare 2013).

Young people leaving youth detention can also become entangled in a cycle of detention and homelessness. Housing instability and homelessness are often cited as drivers of an increasing youth detention population, with young people remanded in detention 'for their own good' due to a lack of appropriate options for accommodation (Cunneen et al. 2016; Richards 2011). Among those released from detention, 8% of young people accessed homelessness support within 12 months of release (AIHW 2012). Often, people with a history of youth justice supervision remain vulnerable to homelessness in adulthood. Adults who were previously under youth justice supervision are almost twice as likely to sleep rough or in squats (Bevitt et al. 2015).

On 30 June 2019, there were 43,000 adult prisoners in Australian prisons (ABS 2019). More than half (54%) of prison dischargees expect to be homeless upon release, with 44% of prison dischargees planning to stay in short-term or emergency accommodation (AIHW 2019). Having stable accommodation helps people exiting prison to transition successfully into society and reduces the likelihood of reoffending. Currently, 46% of prison dischargees return to prison with a new sentence within two years (SCRGSP 2020a). With the cost of imprisonment at \$113,000 per person per year, there are substantial cost savings associated with decreasing the rate of recidivism in Australia (SCRGSP 2020b).

People exiting institutions and care into homelessness are a national priority homelessness cohort identified in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement which came into effect on 1 July 2018 (CFFR 2018) (see [Policy section](#) for more information).

### Reporting clients exiting custodial arrangements in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

In the SHSC, a client is identified as leaving a custodial setting if, in their first support period during the reporting period, either in the week before or at presentation:

- their dwelling type was adult correctional facility, youth/juvenile justice detention centre or immigration detention centre
- they identified transition from custodial arrangements as a reason for seeking assistance, or
- their source of formal referral to the agency was youth or juvenile justice detention centre or adult correctional facility.

Some of these clients were still in custody at the time they began receiving support. Note, in the SHSC, it is not possible to distinguish between clients who have sought assistance without leaving an institutional setting and those who may have left an institutional setting but returned prior to the end of support.

Children aged under 10 cannot be charged with a criminal offence in Australia. Therefore, clients aged under 10 who were identified as exiting from adult correctional facilities or youth/juvenile justice detention centres have been excluded.

For more information, see [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, almost 9,500 SHS clients were exiting custodial arrangements, comprising 3% of all clients.
- The majority of clients exiting custody (71% or almost 6,800 clients) had received assistance from a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- Around 4 in 5 (78%) clients exiting custody were male.
- Almost 1 in 3 (31%) clients exiting custody were aged 35-44 and a further 1 in 3 (31%) were aged 25-34.
- Half (48%) had reported a mental health issue and 1 in 3 (34%) had reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

- Clients exiting custody were more likely than the overall SHS population to need certain services such as assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems (18% of clients exiting custody), drug/alcohol counselling (10%) and employment assistance (10%).
- The most common housing situation for clients exiting custody, at both the beginning and end of support, was institutional settings. The proportion of clients staying in institutional settings decreased from 62% to 43% at the end of support.
- There was an increase in the proportion of clients who were homeless at the end of support from 31% to 35%.

## Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table EXIT.1):

- SHS agencies assisted almost 9,500 clients who were exiting custodial arrangements. This comprised 3% of all SHS clients in 2019-20.
- There were around 100 fewer SHS clients exiting custodial arrangements compared with 2018-19. There was an increase in the number of clients exiting custodial arrangements in 2018-19 but the number has remained stable since then.
- The rate of SHS clients exiting custodial arrangements was 3.7 per 10,000 population, decreasing from 3.8 in 2018-19.

Table EXIT.1: Clients exiting custodial arrangements—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	7,800	8,112	8,338	9,577	9,452
Proportion of all clients	3	3	3	3	3
Rate (per 10,000 population)	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.8	3.7

### Notes

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

## Age and sex

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table EXIT.1):

- The majority of clients exiting custodial arrangements were male (78% or over 7,300 clients).
- Clients exiting custodial arrangements had an older age profile than the overall SHS population, with 1 in 3 aged 35-44 (31% or over 2,900 clients) and a further 1 in 3 aged 25-34 (31% or almost 2,900 clients).
- Although fewer clients exiting custodial arrangements were female (around 2,100 clients), a higher proportion of female clients were under 18 (11%, compared with 5% males).

## Indigenous status

In 2019-20, of the clients who were exiting custodial arrangements and whose Indigenous status was known (Supplementary table EXIT.8):

- Over 1 in 4 (27% or almost 2,500 clients) identified as Indigenous
- Female clients who were exiting custodial arrangements were more likely than male clients to identify as Indigenous (36%, compared with 25% of males).

## State and territory

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table EXIT.2):

- Half of the SHS clients exiting custodial arrangements nationally accessed services in Victoria (51% or around 4,800 clients). Since 2017-18, 1,200 more clients identified as exiting custodial arrangements in Victoria, contributing to the increase in the number of clients exiting custodial arrangements nationally (Historical table HIST.EXIT).
- New South Wales recorded the second highest number of clients exiting custodial arrangements (22% or around 2,100 clients).
- Despite having one of the lowest numbers of clients exiting custodial arrangements (230 clients), the Northern Territory had the highest rate of clients exiting custodial arrangements (9.3 clients per 10,000 population).

## Living arrangement

In 2019-20, of the almost 9,500 clients who were exiting custodial arrangements and stated their living arrangement at the beginning of SHS support (Supplementary table EXIT.10):

- 3 in 4 (75% or more than 6,900 clients) were living alone
- 15% (almost 1,400 clients) were living with a group

- female clients were more likely to be living as a single parent with one or more children (11%, compared with 2% males) or with other family (6%, compared with 3% males).

### New or returning clients

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table EXIT.7):

- Of the 9,500 clients exiting custodial arrangements, 29% (around 2,700 clients) were new to the SHSC in 2019-20 and 71% (almost 6,800 clients) were returning clients, having previously been assisted by an SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- New clients exiting custodial arrangements were more likely to be under 18 (12%, compared with 5% of returning clients).
- While female clients comprised 22% of all clients exiting custodial arrangements, a higher proportion were returning clients (78%, compared with 69% males).

### Selected vulnerabilities

Clients may face challenges that make them more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. The vulnerabilities presented here include family and domestic violence, a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

In 2019-20, of the almost 9,500 clients exiting custodial arrangements, 3 in 5 (61%) reported experiencing one or more of these vulnerabilities (Table EXIT.2):

- almost half (48% or around 4,500 clients) reported a current mental health issue, as a single vulnerability or in combination with other vulnerabilities.
- 1 in 3 (34% or around 3,200 clients) reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use, as a single vulnerability or in combination with other vulnerabilities.
- 18% (almost 1,700 clients) reported both a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- 15% (over 1,400 clients) reported experiencing family and domestic violence, as a single vulnerability or in combination with other vulnerabilities.
- 7% (around 620 clients) reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.
- 2 in 5 clients (39% or around 3,700 clients) reported experiencing none of these vulnerabilities.

Table EXIT.2: Clients exiting custodial arrangements, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	616	6.5
Yes	Yes	No	357	3.8
Yes	No	Yes	144	1.5
No	Yes	Yes	1,674	17.7
Yes	No	No	313	3.3
No	Yes	No	1,880	19.9
No	No	Yes	801	8.5
No	No	No	3,667	38.8
			<b>9,452</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

- Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
- Clients are aged 10 and over.
- Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of their first support period in 2019-20, 1 in 3 (34%) clients exiting custodial arrangements were experiencing homelessness when they presented to a SHS agency while 67% were at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

### Service use patterns

In 2019-20, clients exiting custodial arrangements received (Table EXIT.3):

- a median of 46 days of support, an increase from 44 days in 2018-19
- an average of 2.0 support periods per client
- a median of 16 nights of accommodation, with almost 2 in 5 (38%) receiving accommodation

Table EXIT.3: Clients exiting custodial arrangements: service use patterns–2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	44	45	49	44	46
Average number of support periods per client	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0
Proportion receiving accommodation	38	35	37	36	38
Median number of nights accommodated	26	28	22	18	16

#### Notes

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients who have exited custodial arrangements. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### **Main reasons for seeking assistance**

In 2019-20, the main reasons for seeking assistance among clients exiting custodial arrangements were (Supplementary table EXIT.5):

- transition from custodial arrangements (66% or almost 6,200 clients)
- housing crisis (7% or almost 700 clients)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (6% or 560 clients).

Clients exiting custodial arrangements who were at risk of homelessness at first presentation were more likely to identify transition from custodial arrangements as their main reason for seeking assistance (77%, compared with 44% experiencing homelessness) (Supplementary table EXIT.6).

Clients exiting custodial arrangements who were experiencing homelessness at first presentation were more likely to report housing crisis (14%, compared with 4% at risk) or inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (14%, compared with 2% at risk) as their main reason for seeking assistance.

### **Services needed and provided**

Similar to the overall SHS population, clients exiting custodial arrangements needed general services that were provided by SHS agencies including advice/information, advocacy/liaison on behalf of client and other basic assistance.

Apart from these general services, the most common services needed by clients exiting custody were (Supplementary table EXIT.3):

- short-term or emergency accommodation (55% or over 5,100 clients), with 60% receiving this service
- long-term housing (50% or almost 4,800 clients), with 3% receiving this service and a further 24% referred for this service
- assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction (44% or almost 4,200 clients), with 88% receiving this service
- medium-term/transitional housing (38% or around 3,600 clients), with 18% receiving this service and a further 21% referred for this service.

Clients exiting custody were more likely than all SHS clients to need services including:

- assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems (18%, compared with 12%), with 84% receiving this service
- drug/alcohol counselling (10%, compared with 4%), with 40% receiving this service
- employment assistance (10%, compared with 6%), with 61% receiving this service.

### **Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

In 2019-20 (Table EXIT.4):

- The most common housing situation for clients exiting custodial arrangements at both the beginning and end of SHS support was institutional settings; over 4,300 clients (62%) at the beginning and around 2,800 clients (43%) at the end of support. Institutional settings include dwelling types such as adult correctional facilities, youth/juvenile justice correctional centres and immigration detention centres, and this housing situation is considered at risk of homelessness rather than homeless.
- Over 1 in 3 (35%) clients exiting custodial arrangements were known to be homeless at the end of support, an increase from 31% at the beginning of support.
- Almost 2 in 3 (65%) clients exiting custodial arrangements were known to be housed at the end of support, a decrease from 69% at the beginning of support.
- Although more clients were known to be homeless at the end of support with clients leaving institutional settings, the proportion living in public or community housing increased from 3% to 11% (an increase of almost 490 clients) at the end of support and the proportion of clients living in private or other housing increased from 5% to 11% (an increase of around 400 clients).
- Clients who were known to be homeless were most likely to be staying in short-term temporary accommodation. The proportion of clients in short-term temporary accommodation increased from 14% to 20% at the end of support.

These trends demonstrate that known housing outcomes at the end of support can be challenging for clients transitioning from institutional settings. While some clients progressed towards more positive housing solutions, many remained in institutional settings, returned to institutional settings or were in temporary accommodation at the end of support.

Table EXIT.4: Clients exiting custodial arrangements (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	527	352	7.5	5.4
Short term temporary accommodation	983	1,267	13.9	19.5
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	671	644	9.5	9.9
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>2,181</b>	<b>2,263</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>34.8</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	200	688	2.8	10.6
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	341	738	4.8	11.4
Institutional settings	4,342	2,809	61.5	43.2
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>4,883</b>	<b>4,235</b>	<b>69.1</b>	<b>65.2</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>7,064</b>	<b>6,498</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>264</i>	<i>830</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>7,328</b>	<b>7,328</b>		

#### Notes

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

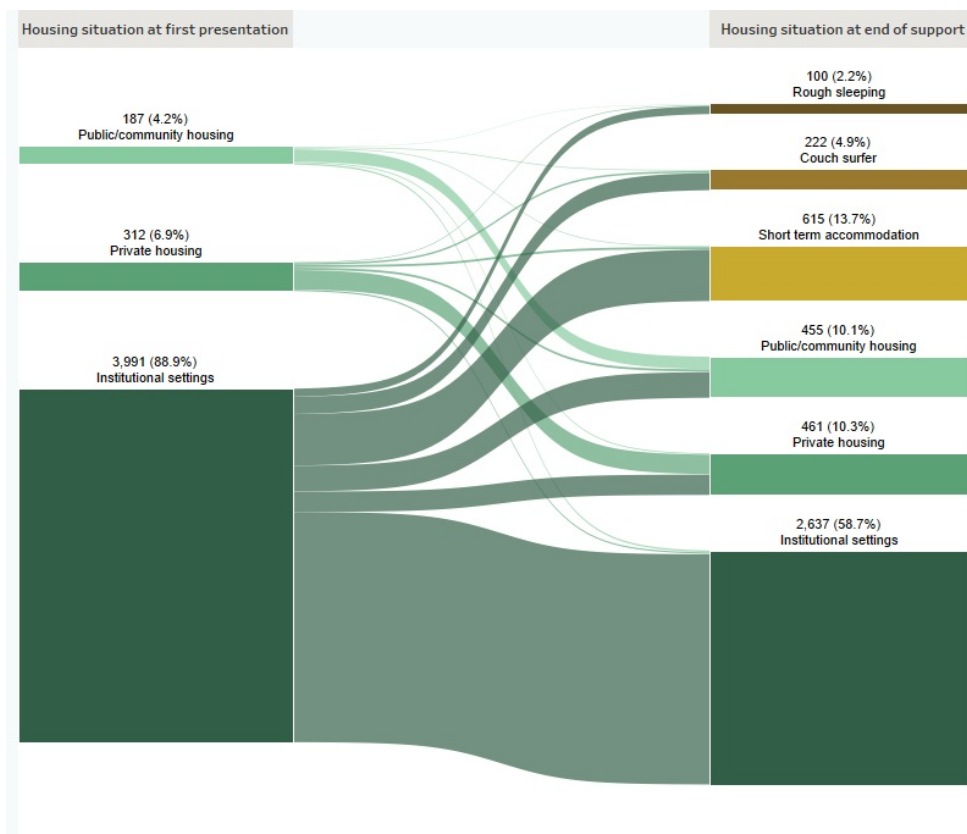
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table EXIT.4.

#### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

For clients who were at risk of homelessness at the beginning of support and with known housing status at the end of support (almost 4,500 clients), by the end of support (Figure EXIT.1):

- 3 in 5 (59% or over 2,600 clients) remained in institutional settings
- Around 460 clients (10%) were in private housing
- A further 460 clients (10%) were in public or community housing.
- 1 in 5 were known to be homeless at the end of support (almost 940 clients or 21%), many of whom were in institutional settings at the beginning of support (around 870 clients).

Figure EXIT.1: Housing situation for clients exiting custodial arrangements with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20



#### Notes

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situations.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

For clients who were known to be homeless at the beginning of support and with known housing status at the end of support (around 1,900 clients), by the end of support, SHS agencies assisted ([Interactive Tableau visualisation](#)):

- 1 in 3 (33% or almost 630 clients) into short-term accommodation
- Over 250 (13%) into private housing
- Around 220 clients (12%) into public or community housing.  
Around 150 clients (8%) who were known to be homeless at the beginning of support were staying in institutional settings at the end of support.

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## Clients leaving care

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

People leaving care arrangements, including people transitioning from health care settings (hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation and aged care facilities) and young people transitioning from out-of-home care (foster care and residential care facilities), can find themselves particularly vulnerable to homelessness. This can be due to inadequate transition planning, undertaking discharge assessments in time- or resource-pressured environments and limited options for exit into suitable and secure housing (Brackertz et al. 2018).

People exiting institutions and care into homelessness are a national priority homelessness cohort identified in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement which came into effect on 1 July 2018 (CRRF 2018) (See [Policy section](#) for more information).

In 2018-19, around 3,400 young people aged 15-17 were discharged from out-of-home care in Australia (AIHW 2020), corresponding with the end of formal support in the child protection system. One in 3 young people leaving out-of-home care experience homelessness within 12 months of leaving (McDowall 2009). Young people transitioning from out-of-home care face barriers to accessing the same opportunities as their non-care peers who increasingly rely on parental resources in young adulthood (Wilkins et al. 2019). During this accelerated transition to independence, young people leaving care need adequate support to access safe and stable housing, education, employment, financial security, supportive relationships and networks, and life skills (FaHCSIA 2011).

People transitioning from health care settings are also at risk of being discharged into homelessness. In a study of people who have experienced homelessness, 17% had been admitted to hospital for a mental health diagnosis in the previous 2 years (Wood et al. 2016). Discharge from psychiatric hospital in particular has been identified as a key pathway into homelessness among people with mental health issues (Nielsen et al. 2018).

### Reporting clients leaving care in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

In the SHSC, a client is identified as transitioning from care arrangements if, in their first support period during the reporting period, either in the week before or at presentation:

- their dwelling type was hospital (excluding psychiatric), psychiatric hospital or unit, disability support, rehabilitation or aged care facility, or
- they identified transition from foster care/child safety residential placements or transition from other care arrangements as a reason for seeking assistance.

Note that these dwelling types are part of the broad housing situation 'Institutional settings', which also includes categories relating to custodial arrangements. See the associated section for information specifically relating to [Clients exiting custodial arrangements](#).

For more information see [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, around 6,700 SHS clients leaving care received assistance from a specialist homelessness services (SHS) agency.
- Over 1 in 4 (28%) stated their dwelling type at the beginning of support was independent housing (house/townhouse/flat). A further 1 in 5 (19%) were staying in a psychiatric hospital/unit and 18% were staying in rehabilitation at the beginning of support.
- Almost 2 in 3 (64%) clients leaving care had received assistance from a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- More than half (55%) of clients leaving care were male.
- The largest age groups were clients aged 35-44 (20%), 25-34 (19%) and 18-24 (19%). A further 1 in 5 clients leaving care were under 18 (19%).
- There was an increase in the proportion of clients who were homeless at the end of support from 26% to 36%.

### [Client characteristics](#)

In 2019-20 (Table LCARE.1):

- SHS agencies assisted over 6,700 clients leaving care, equating to 2% of all SHS clients in 2019-20.
- There were around 100 fewer SHS clients leaving care compared with 2018-19. The number of SHS clients leaving care has steadily decreased since reaching a peak of 7,100 clients in 2016-17.
- The rate of SHS clients leaving care was 2.7 per 10,000 population, decreasing from 2.9 in 2015-16.



Table LCARE.1: Clients leaving care—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	6,869	7,104	6,917	6,834	6,728
Proportion of all clients	2	2	2	2	2
Rate (per 10,000 population)	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.7

#### Notes

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Data for previous years have been updated with the improved calculation method for age. As such, data prior to 2017-18 contained in the SHS Annual Report may not match that contained in the SHS Annual Report Historical Tables.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

#### Age and sex

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table LCARE.1):

- More than half of the clients leaving care were male (55% or around 3,700 clients).
- Almost 3 in 5 (58% or almost 3,900) clients leaving care were aged between 18 and 44; 20% (over 1,300 clients) were aged 35-44, 19% (around 1,300 clients) were aged 25-34 and a further 19% (more than 1,200 clients) were aged 18-24.
- 1 in 5 (19% or almost 1,300) clients leaving care were under 18 and 1 in 10 (9% or almost 590) were under 15.
- A higher proportion of female clients were under 18 (23%, compared with 16% males) while a greater proportion of male clients were over 55 (11%, compared with 8% females).

#### Indigenous status

In 2019-20, of the clients leaving care whose Indigenous status was known (Supplementary table LCARE.8):

- 1 in 4 (25% or around 1,600 clients) identified as Indigenous
- Female clients who were leaving care were more likely than male clients to identify as Indigenous (29%, compared with 22% of males).

#### State and territory

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table LCARE.2):

- The largest number of clients leaving care accessed services in Victoria (36% or almost 2,400 clients), followed by New South Wales (27% or around 1,800 clients).
- Despite having some of the lowest numbers of clients leaving care, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of clients leaving care (11.0 clients per 10,000 population), followed by Tasmania (5.8 per 10,000).

#### Dwelling type at beginning of support

In 2019-20, of the 6,500 clients who were leaving care and stated their dwelling type at the beginning of support (Supplementary table LCARE.12):

- More than 1 in 4 (28% or over 1,800 clients) were living in independent housing (house/townhouse/flat)
- 1 in 5 (19% or around 1,200 clients) were staying in a psychiatric hospital or unit
- 18% (almost 1,200 clients) were staying in rehabilitation
- 14% (around 940 clients) were staying in a hospital (excluding psychiatric).

#### New or returning clients

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table LCARE.7):

- Of the 6,700 clients leaving care, 36% (around 2,400 clients) were new to the SHSC in 2019-20 and 64% (around 4,300 clients) were returning clients, having previously been assisted by an SHS agency at some point since the SHSC began in 2011-12.
- Half (51% or almost 660 clients) of the clients leaving care who were under 18 were returning clients while 70% (over 860 clients) of clients leaving care who were aged 18-24 were returning clients. These age groups include young people who may have left foster care or other out-of-home care arrangements.
- The proportion of clients leaving care who had previously been assisted by SHS agencies was similar in males and females (63% males, compared with 65% females).

#### Selected vulnerabilities

Clients may face challenges that make them more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. The vulnerabilities presented here include family and domestic violence, a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

In 2019-20, of the more than 6,300 clients leaving care who were aged 10 and over, over 4 in 5 (84%) reported experiencing one or more of these vulnerabilities (Table LCARE.2):

- 7 in 10 (70% or almost 4,400 clients) reported a current mental health issue, as a single vulnerability or in combination with other vulnerabilities.
- over 2 in 5 (44% or over 2,800 clients) reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use, as a single vulnerability or in combination with other vulnerabilities.
- 1 in 4 (25% or almost 1,600 clients) reported both a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- 1 in 6 clients (16% or more than 1,000 clients) reported experiencing none of these vulnerabilities.

Table LCARE.2: Clients leaving care, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	608	9.6
Yes	Yes	No	574	9.1
Yes	No	Yes	94	1.5
No	Yes	Yes	1,552	24.5
Yes	No	No	262	4.1
No	Yes	No	1,664	26.3
No	No	Yes	549	8.7
No	No	No	1,034	16.3
			<b>6,337</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

#### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of their first support period in 2019-20, more than 1 in 4 (27%) clients leaving care were experiencing homelessness when they first presented to a SHS agency while 73% were at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

#### Service use patterns

In 2019-20, clients leaving care received (Table LCARE.3):

- a median of 66 days of support, an increase from 60 days in 2015-16
- an average of 2.0 support periods per client
- a median of 49 nights of accommodation, with almost half (45%) of the clients receiving accommodation.

Table LCARE.3: Clients leaving care: at a glance: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	60	62	63	67	66
Average number of support periods per client	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0
Proportion receiving accommodation	48	46	45	45	45
Median number of nights accommodated	42	49	48	48	49

#### Notes

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients who have left care. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Data for previous years have been updated with the improved calculation method for age. As such, data prior to 2017-18 contained in the SHS Annual Report may not match that contained in the SHS Annual Report Historical Tables.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### **Main reasons for seeking assistance**

In 2019-20, the main reasons for seeking assistance among clients leaving care were (Supplementary table LCARE.5):

- housing crisis (16% or almost 1,100 clients)
- transition from other care arrangements (12% or over 810 clients)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (10% or over 660 clients).

Clients leaving care who were at risk of homelessness at first presentation were more likely to identify mental health issues (9% of those at risk, compared with 6% experiencing homelessness) and problematic drug or substance use (7%, compared with less than 4% experiencing homelessness) as their main reason for seeking assistance (Supplementary table LCARE.6).

Clients leaving care who were experiencing homelessness at first presentation were more likely to report transition from other care arrangements (18%, compared with 10% at risk) or transition from foster care and child safety residential placements (10%, compared with 5% at risk) as their main reason for seeking assistance.

### **Services needed and provided**

Similar to the overall SHS population, clients leaving care needed general services which were provided by SHS agencies including advice/information, advocacy/liaison on behalf of client and other basic assistance.

Apart from general services, the most common services needed by clients leaving care were (Supplementary table LCARE.3):

- short-term or emergency accommodation (53% or almost 3,600 clients), with 61% receiving this service and a further 10% referred for this service
- long-term housing (51% or around 3,400 clients), with 5% receiving this service and a further 28% referred
- medium-term/transitional housing (47% or over 3,100 clients), with 31% receiving this service and a further 18% referred.

Clients leaving care were more likely than all SHS clients to need services including:

- living skills/personal development (35%, compared with 19%), with 92% receiving this service
- transport (32%, compared with 18%), with 92% receiving this service
- assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems (25%, compared with 12%), with 89% receiving this service
- health/medical services (19%, compared with 9%), with 60% receiving this service and a further 23% referred
- mental health services (21%, compared with 9%), with 52% receiving this service and a further 19% referred.

### **Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

In 2019-20 (Table LCARE.4):

- The most common housing situation for clients leaving care at both the beginning and end of SHS support was institutional settings; over 2,700 clients (61%) at the beginning and around 1,000 clients (25%) at the end of support. Institutional settings include dwelling types such as hospitals, psychiatric hospital/units, rehabilitation and aged care facilities, and clients in this housing situation are considered to be at risk of homelessness rather than experiencing homelessness.
- Over 1 in 3 (36%) clients leaving care were known to be homeless at the end of support, an increase from 26% at the beginning of support.
- 2 in 3 (64%) clients leaving care were known to be housed at the end of support, a decrease from 74% at the beginning of support.
- Although more clients were known to be homeless at the end of support with clients leaving institutional settings, the proportion living in public or community housing increased from 4% to 16% at the end of support and the proportion of clients living in private or other housing increased from 9% to 23%.

- Clients who were known to be homeless were most likely to be staying in short-term temporary accommodation. The proportion of clients in short-term temporary accommodation increased from 13% to 21% at the end of support.

These trends demonstrate that known housing outcomes at the end of support can be challenging for clients transitioning from institutional settings. While some clients progressed towards more positive housing solutions, many remained in/returned to institutional settings or were in temporary accommodation at the end of support. Some clients might only require short-term accommodation immediately after leaving care, others might need more support to access or maintain housing in the long-term.

Table LCARE.4: Clients leaving care (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	232	195	5.2	4.8
Short term temporary accommodation	565	854	12.7	21.1
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	353	397	7.9	9.8
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>1,446</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>35.8</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	179	629	4.0	15.6
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	391	947	8.8	23.4
Institutional settings	2,726	1,022	61.3	25.3
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>3,296</b>	<b>2,598</b>	<b>74.1</b>	<b>64.2</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>4,446</b>	<b>4,044</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	242	644		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>4,688</b>	<b>4,688</b>		

#### Notes

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

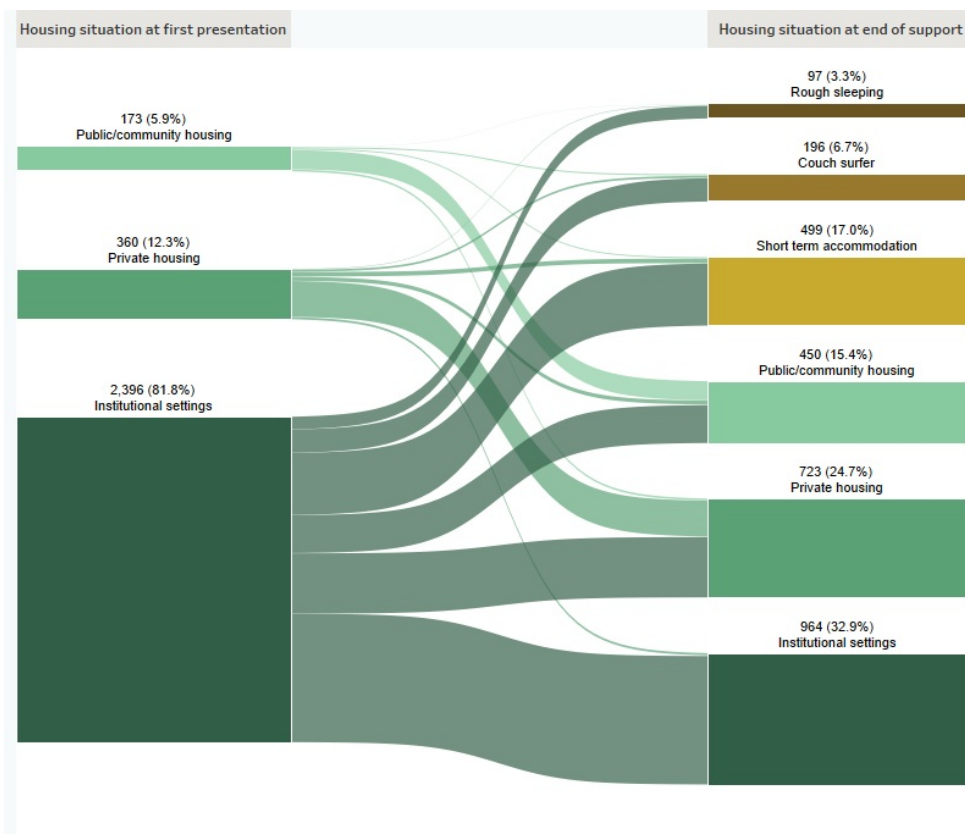
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table LCARE.4.

#### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

For clients who were at risk of homelessness at the beginning of support and with known housing status at the end of support (around 2,900 clients), by the end of support (Figure LCARE.1):

- One-third (33% or around 960 clients) remained in institutional settings
- 1 in 4 (25% or over 720 clients) were in private housing
- 450 clients (15%) were in public or community housing.
- A further 1 in 4 were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (27% or around 790 clients), many of whom were in institutional settings at the beginning of support (over 720 clients).

**Figure LCARE.1: Housing situation for clients leaving care with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



### Notes

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situations.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

For clients who were known to be homeless at the beginning of support and with known housing status at the end of support (around 1,000 clients), by the end of support, SHS agencies assisted ([Interactive Tableau visualisation](#)):

- One-third (33% or almost 340 clients) into short-term accommodation
- 1 in 5 (20% or around 200 clients) into private housing
- 160 clients (16%) into public or community housing.

50 clients (5%) who were known to be homeless at the beginning of support were staying in institutional settings at the end of support.

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## Older clients

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Older people are the fastest growing subpopulation of people experiencing homelessness and of people using homelessness services in Australia (AIHW 2019).

Australia and international research suggest that there are two main and contrasting pathways into homelessness for older people, each with different risk factors. Firstly, many people who experience homelessness for the first time later in life have led “conventional” lives (Shinn et al. cited in Petersen et al. 2014) involving employment, residential stability and family; these people only experienced homelessness after critical life events such as relationship breakdown, financial trouble or the onset of illness (Petersen et al. 2014). Three factors may be important for this subgroup, which is more often female, educated and in good health: (1) they have an element of financial insecurity, often because of a history of low paid or insecure work, (2) they are unfamiliar with health and welfare systems, (3) they may have a reluctance to draw on existing social capital (Burns and Sussman, 2018).

Secondly, there is also a population of older adults who have experienced long-term, or chronic, homelessness often with poor physical and mental health and histories of substance misuse and institutionalisation (Petersen et al. 2014). For this group, the pathway to homelessness is an ongoing issue, featuring repeated attempts to obtain assistance, long-term housing instability, little or no social capital and limited options before becoming homeless at later ages (Burns and Sussman, 2018).

Affecting both groups is the increasing cost of home ownership and of rental accommodation, which has resulted in fewer older Australians owning their own home (ABS 2019), and many older Australians on low incomes being unable to compete in rental markets (Nesbitt and Johnson, 2019). For older Australians who rely on government payments and live in private rental accommodation, rent increases or evictions are common risks for becoming homeless (Morris et al. 2005). Also relevant is a lack of age-specific services for older people as well as an unawareness of available services and, in some cases, an unwillingness to engage with services because of shame (Thredgold et al 2019).

When compared with other people at risk of experiencing homelessness, an Australian survey found that older respondents (45 years and over) were more likely to sleep rough than younger respondents and, when homeless, experience longer periods of homelessness (Bevitt et al 2015).

The experiences of [older people accessing SHS for assistance](#) have been investigated in detail in a recent AIHW report (AIHW 2019). For the purposes of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC), older people are defined as clients aged 55 years and over. For further information, see [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, there were about 24,400 people aged 55 years or older seeking homelessness services.
- The majority of older clients were living alone when they presented to SHS services (60%) and the proportion was higher for males (69%) than for females (53%).
- 2 in 3 older clients presented housed but at risk of homelessness (66%).
- More than half (54%) of older clients in 2019-20 were returning clients, that is, they had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- Housing outcomes for older clients improved; of those clients with closed support, 26% of older clients were known to be homeless at the end of support compared with 34% at the beginning.
- The proportion of ‘rough sleepers’ decreased from 11% at the beginning of support to 7% at the end of support in 2019-20.
- Most older clients known to be at risk of homelessness at the start of support were assisted to maintain a housing tenancy (94%).

### Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table OLDER.1):

- SHS agencies assisted over 24,400 clients aged 55 and over. Since 2015-16, the number of clients aged 55 and over has risen by more than 3,800 clients.
- Older clients represented 8% of all SHS clients, which has been relatively stable since 2015-16.
- The rate of older clients increased from 8.6 per 10,000 Australian population in 2015-16 to 9.6 in 2019-20.

- The age specific rate of service use among older Australians was 54.0 clients per 10,000 population for those aged 55-64 and 21.3 per 10,000 for those aged 65 and over (Supplementary table CLIENTS.1).

Table OLDER.1: Older clients—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	20,579	22,443	24,094	24,169	24,421
Proportion of all clients	7	8	8	8	8
Rate (per 10,000 population)	8.6	9.3	9.8	9.7	9.6

#### Notes

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Data for previous years have been updated with the improved calculation method for age. As such, data prior to 2017-18 contained in the SHS Annual Report may not match that contained in the SHS Annual Report Historical Tables.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

#### Age and sex

Of the more than 24,400 older clients who received SHS support during 2019-20:

- Almost 2 in 3 (65%) were aged 55-64; the remaining one-third were 65 or over.
- More than half (55%) were female (Supplementary table OLDER.1).

#### Indigenous status

The proportion of clients 55 and over was lower for Indigenous clients (5% or 3,600) compared with non-Indigenous clients (9% or 18,600).

#### States and territories

In 2019-20:

- Victoria recorded the highest number of older SHS clients (more than 11,800), representing almost half (49%) of this client group in Australia (Supplementary table OLDER.2), followed by New South Wales with 5,000 clients (21%).
- While having one of the lowest number of older clients in Australia (nearly 700 or 3% of national total), the Northern Territory had the highest rate of clients, at 27 per 10,000 estimated resident population.

#### Labour force

- In 2019-20, the majority of older clients were not in the labour force (54%). Over one third (38%) were unemployed (that is, seeking work) and less than 1 in 10 (7%) were employed (Supplementary table OLDER.12).
- Of those who were in the labour force, female clients were more likely to be employed full-time (3%) and part-time (6%) than males (2% and 3%, respectively). Conversely, males clients (41%) were more likely to be unemployed than females (36%).

#### Living arrangements

In 2019-20, of the almost 22,100 clients who stated their living arrangement upon presentation to a SHS agency (Supplementary table OLDER.10):

- 6 in 10 (60% or 13,300 clients) were living alone; higher for males (69%) than females (53%)
- more than 1 in 10 (13% or 2,900 clients) were living as a lone parent or couple with children
- over 2,600 people (12%) were living with other family which can include a person with or without children living (as a couch surfing arrangement) with others.

#### Selected vulnerabilities

The majority of older clients (53% or 12,900) reported no vulnerabilities (defined as a current mental health issue, experiencing family and domestic violence, or problematic drug and/or alcohol use) (Table OLDER.2).

- 1 in 5 older clients (20% or almost 4,900 clients) reported a current mental health issue only
- 1 in 7 older clients (15% or nearly 3,800 clients) reported family and domestic violence only.

Table OLDER.2: Older clients, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	225	0.9
Yes	Yes	No	1,418	5.8
Yes	No	Yes	105	0.4
No	Yes	Yes	743	3.0
Yes	No	No	3,756	15.4
No	Yes	No	4,863	19.9
No	No	Yes	443	1.8
No	No	No	12,868	52.7
			<b>24,421</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 55 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

### Service use patterns

Since 2015-16, the number of older clients seeking assistance from SHS agencies increased at a greater rate than other age groups. Key trends identified in this client population over the 5 years to 2019-20 are (Table OLDER.3):

- The median number of days older clients received support increased from 25 days in 2015-16 to 32 days in 2019-20.

Table OLDER.3: Older clients: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	25	27	28	31	32
Average number of support periods per client	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6
Proportion receiving accommodation	17	17	16	17	18
Median number of nights accommodated	31	30	29	22	21

#### Notes

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all older SHS clients. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.
3. In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Data for previous years have been updated with the improved calculation method for age. As such, data prior to 2017-18 contained in the SHS Annual Report may not match that contained in the SHS Annual Report Historical Tables.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### New or returning clients

More than half (54% or 13,300) were returning clients, having previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12 (Supplementary table OLDER.7). A greater proportion of returning clients were aged 55-64 (69% compare with 31% aged 65 and over) than were new clients (60% were aged 55 to 64 years).

### Main reasons for seeking assistance

The 3 main reasons why older clients sought assistance from SHS agencies in 2019-20 were (Supplementary table OLDER.5):

- housing crisis (18% or 4,300 clients)



- financial difficulties (17% or 4,200)
- family and domestic violence (17% or 4,100).

The main reason for older clients seeking assistance was different for those experiencing homelessness compared with those presenting to services at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table OLDER.6).

- For those experiencing homelessness the main reasons for seeking assistance were:
  - housing crisis (24% or nearly 1,900 clients)
  - inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (23% or nearly 1,800)
  - financial difficulties (10% or 800).
- For those at risk of homelessness:
  - financial difficulties (20% or 2,900 clients)
  - family and domestic violence (18% or 2,700)
  - housing crisis (16% or 2,400).

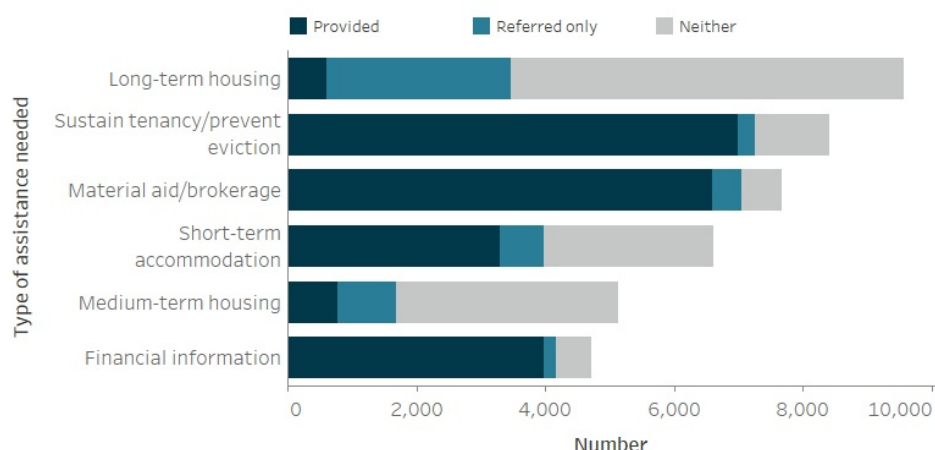
### Services needed and provided

In 2019-20, over half (51% or 12,500) of older SHS clients needed accommodation, of those 36% were provided with some type of accommodation assistance. Demand was highest for long-term accommodation (39% or 9,600 needed long-term accommodation) compared with medium-term (21% or 5,100) and short-term or emergency accommodation (27% or 6,600). Of the older clients that needed long-term housing, less than 1 in 15 (6%) were provided assistance (Figure OLDER.1).

Other services most commonly needed by older clients during 2019-20 were:

- assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction (35%), with 83% provided this assistance
- material aid/brokerage (31%), with 86% provided this assistance
- financial information (19%), with 84% provided with assistance.

**Figure OLDER.1: Older clients, by most needed services and service provision status (top 6), 2019-20**



### Notes

1. Excludes 'Other basic assistance', 'Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client'.
2. 'Short-term accommodation' includes temporary and emergency accommodation and sustain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
3. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table OLDER.3.

### Outcomes at the end of support

Outcomes presented here describe the change in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data are limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here. Instead, the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

At the end of the reporting period in 2019-20 (Table OLDER.4).

- 1 in 4 (26% or 4,200) were known to be homeless when support ended, down from 34% at the start of support.
- The reduction in the proportion of clients who were known to be homeless following support was due to decreases in the proportion of clients rough sleeping or with no shelter or living in improvised dwellings (from 11% to 7%) and in the proportion of clients living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer', with no tenure (from 11% to 8%).

- Clients living in public or community housing increased following support; there was an increase in clients living in some form of tenure over the course of support, including an increase in the proportion of clients living in public or community housing from 22% to 29% (or more than 4,700 clients).

Table OLDER.4: Older clients (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	1,842	1,109	11.2	6.8
Short term temporary accommodation	1,975	1,873	12.0	11.5
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	1,771	1,221	10.8	7.5
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>5,588</b>	<b>4,203</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>25.7</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	3,545	4,713	21.6	28.8
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	6,737	6,975	41.0	42.7
Institutional settings	547	457	3.3	2.8
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>10,829</b>	<b>12,145</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>74.3</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>16,417</b>	<b>16,348</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	<i>2,930</i>	<i>2,999</i>		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>19,347</b>	<b>19,347</b>		

#### Notes

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.

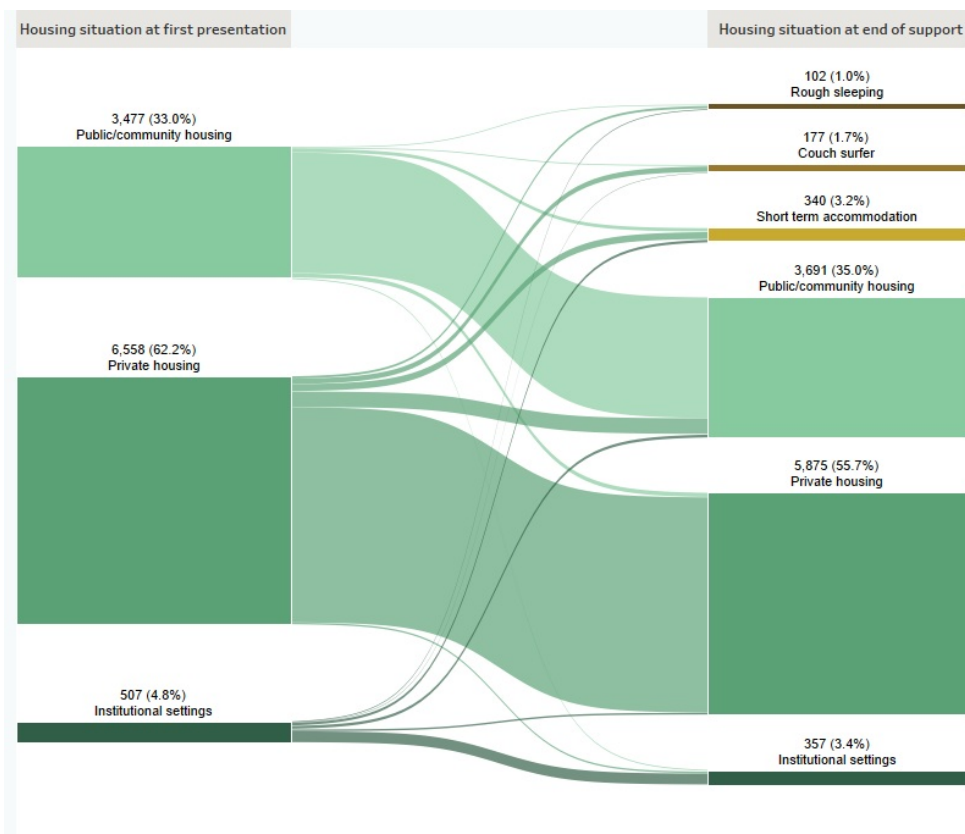
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

#### Housing outcomes for homeless verses at risk clients

For clients with a known housing status who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support (over 10,500 clients), by the end of support (Supplementary Table OLDER.4, Figure OLDER.2):

- Most clients (5,900 clients or 56%) were in private or other housing
- Around 3,700 clients (35%) were in public or community housing
- 620 clients were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (6% of those who started support at risk).

**Figure OLDER.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



**Notes**

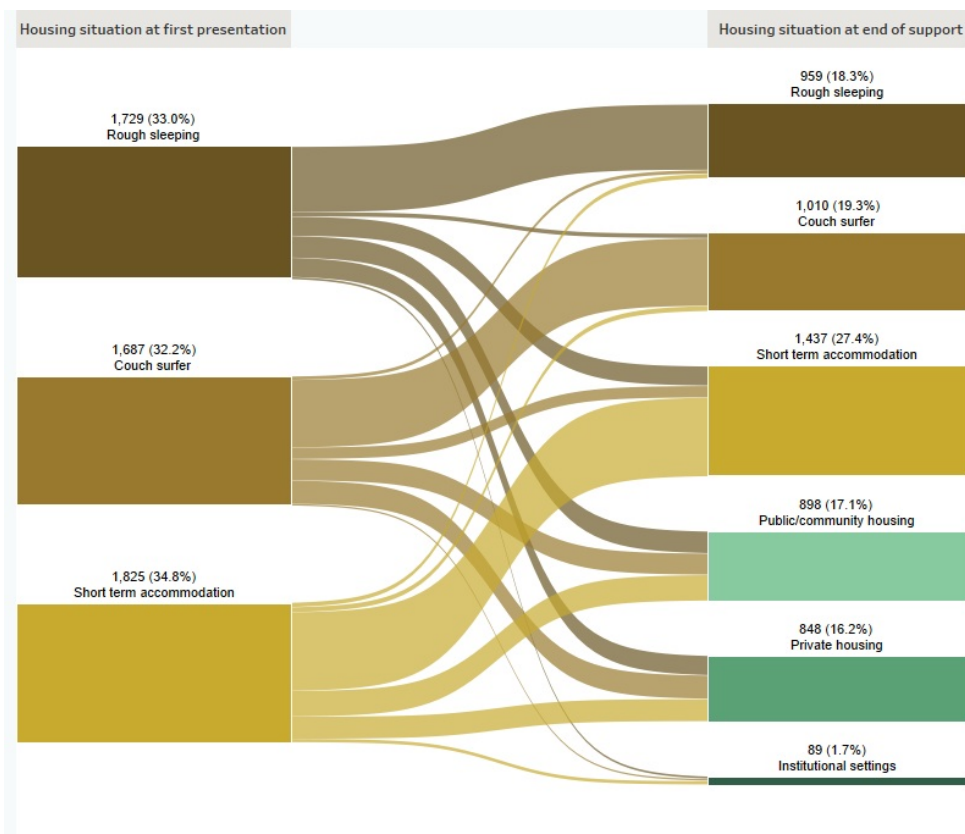
1. Excludes client with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (over 5,200 clients) (Figure OLDER.3):

- 1,400 clients (27%) were in short term accommodation at the end of support
- 850 clients (16%) were in private or other housing at the end of support.
- One in five clients (1,000 or 19%) were couch surfing at the end of support.

**Figure OLDER.3: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**



#### Notes

1. Excludes client with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

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## Clients with disability

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

People with disability are a diverse group, with varying types and severities of disability across all socioeconomic and demographic groups (AIHW 2020). Their pathways into and out of homelessness are just as varied, and can be influenced by disability type, location and the severity of their disability (Beer et al. 2019). People with disability may have a greater exposure to risk factors associated with homelessness than the general population (Beer et al. 2012). Low income, lack of social support, limited engagement with the labour market, compounded by the need for specialised assistance and services, can leave some people with disability increasingly vulnerable to the risk of homelessness and the negative impact of homelessness.

Timely access to safe, suitable and long-term housing can be critical to the wellbeing of people with disability. Affordable and secure housing can provide independence and the ability to participate in social, economic, sporting and cultural life. Housing that meets accessibility standards, is in close proximity to transport and to quality and affordable support services is also vital for those with disability (COAG 2011). The consequences of inadequate support may be severe for both those with physical and/or intellectual disabilities (Beer et al. 2012).

In 2018, an estimated 1 in 5 Australians (4.4 million people, or 18% of the total population) had disability (ABS 2019), ranging from mild to severe disabilities. Similar to 2006 and 2011, the 2016 Census identified around 5,700 people experiencing homelessness with disability in Australia (defined as people with a need for assistance with core activities) (ABS 2018). People with disability represented 5% of those experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2016.

### Reporting clients with disability in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

Disability is a challenging concept to measure and there are numerous definitions. The SHSC disability questions are based on identifying whether the client has any difficulty and/or need for assistance with 3 core activities (self care, mobility and communication). These questions are asked of all SHS clients.

Data for clients with disability who required assistance may not be comparable across age groups due to differences in the interpretation of the SHSC disability questions. This issue mainly relates to young children, and therefore any comparisons between age groups should be made with caution.

Further details about measuring disability in the SHSC and the definition of a client with severe or profound core activity limitation are provided in [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, 6,700 (2%) SHS clients reported a severe or profound core activity limitation (throughout this section termed those with severe or profound disability).
- Over half (55%) of clients with severe or profound disability were housed but at risk of homelessness when they sought SHS assistance; the other 45% were experiencing homelessness.
- Almost 2 in 3 clients with disability in 2019-20 (65%) had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at any time since the collection began in 2011-12, the remaining 35% were deemed to be new clients.
- Most clients with severe or profound disability (with closed support) ended SHS support housed (70% or 2,700 clients); with many in private or other housing (1,500 or 38%).

### Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table DIS.1):

- 6,700 SHS clients always or sometimes needed assistance with core activities (self care, communication and/or mobility). These clients are described as having severe or profound core activity limitation(s), or as living with disability.
- SHS clients with severe or profound disability represented 2% of all SHS clients in 2019-20, similar to 2018-19 (also 2%) but down from 3% in 2017-18.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	9,812	10,988	7,902	7,198	6,717
Proportion of all clients	4	4	3	2	2
Rate (per 10,000 population)	4.1	4.5	3.2	2.9	2.6

**Notes:**

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

**Age and sex**

In 2019-20, of the 6,700 clients with severe or profound disability (Supplementary table DIS.1):

- Clients were generally younger than the total SHS population, that is,
  - 40% (2,700 clients) were under 25 years; most of these younger people were less than 10 years (1,500 clients)
  - 42% (2,800) were aged 25 to 54
  - 18% (1,200) were aged 55 or over.
- There were similar proportions of male (50% or 3,400 clients) and female (50% or 3,300) SHS clients with severe or profound disability.

In 2019-20, of the 2,700 SHS clients under 25 years living with severe or profound disability there was a higher proportion of males (58%) compared with females (42%). For those aged 25 and over, there was a greater proportion of female (54%) than males (46%).

**Indigenous clients**

In 2019-20, of the 6,400 SHS clients with severe or profound disability who provided information about their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status (Supplementary table DIS.8):

- 24% were Indigenous (1,600 clients), lower than the total SHS population (27%).
- There were equal numbers of Indigenous male and female clients (800 each), but differences based on age; a higher proportion of males were aged under 25 years (56%) compared with females (40%).

Indigenous clients with disability had a younger age profile than non-Indigenous clients with disability. Thirty-seven per cent of Indigenous clients with disability were aged under 18 compared with 28% of non-Indigenous clients.

**State and territory**

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table DIS.2):

- Four in 10 (41% or 2,800 clients) SHS clients with severe or profound disability accessed SHS services in Victoria, 24% (more than 1,600 clients) in New South Wales and 12% (almost 800 clients) in Queensland.
- The Northern Territory had the highest rate of SHS clients with severe or profound disability (9 clients per 10,000 population), up from 7 clients per 10,000 in 2018-19. Both South Australia and Victoria had 4 clients per 10,000 in 2019-20, the rate in South Australia reduced from 6 clients per 10,000 in 2018-19.

**Living arrangements and presenting unit type**

In 2019-20, of the 6,700 clients with severe or profound disability, the most common living arrangement reported at the beginning of SHS support was living alone (38% or almost 2,500 clients) (Supplementary table DIS.10). The next most common living arrangement was one parent with child/ren (27% or 1,800) and then other family (14% or over 900 clients). These proportions have been similar over time.

The majority of clients with severe or profound disability presented alone (61% or 4,100 clients) to a SHS agency in 2019-20 (Supplementary table DIS.9).

**Selected vulnerabilities**

Living with disability may not be the only challenge faced by this group of SHS clients. In 2019-20, 73% (or 3,800) of clients with severe or profound disability (aged 10 and over) reported experiencing one or more selected vulnerabilities: a current mental health issue, problematic drug and/or alcohol use or family and domestic violence (Table DIS.2). The remaining 27% (or 1,400 clients) did not report any of the selected vulnerabilities.

In 2019-20:

- 3 in 10 (30% or 1,500) clients with disability reported experiencing a current mental health issue *only*
- 14% (more than 700) experienced a current mental health issue and family and domestic violence

- a further 7% (more than 300 clients) of clients experienced all 3 vulnerabilities.

Table DIS.2: Clients with disability, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	336	6.5
Yes	Yes	No	737	14.3
Yes	No	Yes	24	0.5
No	Yes	Yes	581	11.2
Yes	No	No	427	8.3
No	Yes	No	1,541	29.8
No	No	Yes	106	2.1
No	No	No	1,417	27.4
			<b>5,169</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

#### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of the first support period almost half (45%) of all clients with disability presented to services experiencing homelessness, while 55% were at risk of homelessness (where homeless status was known) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

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

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports people with a permanent and significant disability which affects their ability to take part in everyday activities. It is jointly governed and funded by the Australian and participating states and territory governments. The NDIS began its national rollout on 1 July 2016, it is expected to be fully implemented by July 2020 (DPS 2019). Further details about the NDIS are provided in [Technical information](#).

#### NDIS participation indicator

The NDIS participation indicator was introduced into the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) from 1 July 2019. A participant in the NDIS is an individual who is receiving an agreed package of support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The NDIS question is asked of all clients at the start of support from a SHS agency. Data are not available for clients who only had support period(s) starting before 1 July 2019.

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

A person can be identified as being a SHS client with severe or profound disability but not be a participant in the NDIS. This may be because the client did not meet the NDIS eligibility criteria, has not applied for the NDIS or has a pending application or does not live in an area where the NDIS is available. These clients may still be receiving disability support under the National Disability Agreement (NDA). For further information regarding the number of SHS clients receiving support through the NDIS see [Clients, services and outcomes](#).

#### Service use patterns

In 2019-20, clients with profound or severe disability:

- received a median of 86 days of support, double the general SHS population (median 43 days) (Table DIS.1 and Table CLIENT.3). This may reflect the more complex needs of these clients
- were more likely to receive accommodation (36%) than the general SHS population (30%), and for those who did, the length of supported accommodation was much longer (median 57 nights compared with 28 nights for the general SHS population)
- were less likely to receive accommodation over time; in 2019-20, 36% received accommodation, down from 39% in 2015-16. This is still higher than the total SHS population (30%).

Table DIS.3: Clients with disability: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	64	65	76	80	86
Average number of support periods per client	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.4
Proportion receiving accommodation	39	39	38	36	36
Median number of nights accommodated	55	50	58	50	57

**Notes:**

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients with disability. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the technical notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

**New or returning clients**

The episodic or cyclic nature of homelessness can be explored by analysing whether clients with severe or profound disability were new to SHS agencies, or returning clients. In 2019-20, 65% (4,300 clients) of clients with severe or profound disability had also received SHS assistance at some time since the collection began in 2011-12 (Supplementary table DIS.7). The other 35% (2,400 clients) were new clients, that is, they first accessed services in 2019-20.

**Main reasons for seeking assistance**

In 2019-20, for SHS clients with severe or profound disability (Supplementary tables DIS.5 and DIS.6):

- The most common main reason for seeking SHS assistance was housing crisis (25% or 1,700 clients). This was most common for both clients experiencing homelessness (30% or almost 900 clients) and at risk of homelessness (22% or almost 800 clients).
- Family and domestic violence was the second most common main reason (18% or 1,200 clients), more so for clients at risk of homelessness (19% or 700 clients) than clients experiencing homelessness (14% or 400 clients).
- Inadequate or inappropriate dwellings conditions was the next most common main reason (14% or 900 clients), with 17% of homeless (almost 500 clients) and 12% of at risk clients reporting this as a main reason (400 clients).

**Services needed and provided**

Four of the top 6 reasons clients with profound or severe disability sought SHS assistance were housing-related and the other 2 were financial reasons (Figure DIS.1). Of clients with disability in 2019-20:

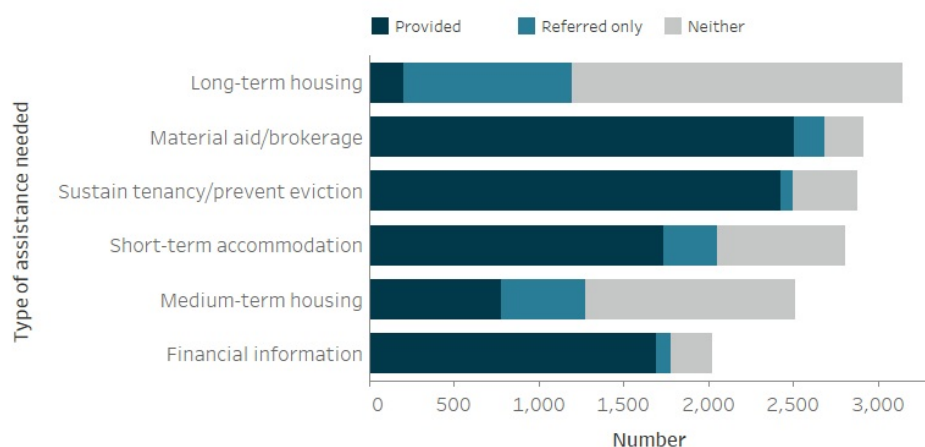
- Almost half needed long-term housing (47% or more than 3,100 clients), which is accommodation for 3 months or more. More than one in 20 clients (6% or 200 clients) with severe or profound disability received the long-term housing they needed. An additional 32% (almost 1,000 clients) received a referral.
- 43% (2,900 clients) needed assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction and this service was provided to most (84% or around 2,400) of clients with that need.
- 42% (2,800 clients) needed short-term or emergency accommodation, and it was provided to more than half (62% or 1,700 clients) with that need.
- 37% (almost 2,500 clients) needed medium-term/transitional housing and it was provided to one-third (31% or almost 800 clients) with that need.

Of the financial reasons for seeking SHS assistance:

- Material aid/brokerage was needed by 43% of clients (2,900 clients), and provided to 86% of those with that need.
- Financial information was needed by 30% of clients (2,000 clients) and provided to 84% of clients with that need.

**Figure DIS.1: Clients with disability, by most needed services and service provision status (top 6), 2019-20**





### Notes

1. Excludes 'Other basic assistance', 'Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client'.
2. 'Short-term accommodation' includes temporary and emergency accommodation and sustain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
3. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table DIS.3.

Other services that were needed by clients with severe or profound disability included:

- 1 in 5 clients (20% or 1,300) needed health/medical services and 79% (or over 1,000) of clients with these identified needs either received the services or were referred elsewhere for services.
- Clients with severe or profound disability were more likely to need transport (27% or almost 1,800 clients), assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems (20%) and assistance for trauma (16%) than the general SHS population (18%, 12% and 13% respectively).

The proportion of SHS clients with disability with a case management plan has increased over time (77% in 2019-20); however those achieving all case management goals has remained low (14% in 2019-20) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35).

### Outcomes at the end of support

Outcomes presented here highlight the changes in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first period of support during 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last period of support in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

In 2019-20, key features of the housing situation for clients with disability include (Table DIS.4):

- At the start of SHS support, more clients with disability were at risk of homelessness (almost 2,400 or 58%) than experiencing homelessness (1,700 or 42%). Following SHS support, there were fewer clients with disability experiencing homelessness (1,200 clients or 30%).
- The decrease in the proportion of clients known to be experiencing homelessness was due to the drop in those living in a house, townhouse or flat as a couch surfer (with no tenure) and those living in an improvised/inadequate dwelling (rough sleeping); both down 5 percentage points (from 13% to 8% and 11% to 6% respectively).
- For clients with disability, the greatest change in housing situation from the start to the end of support was for those living in public or community housing; increasing from just over 600 to 1,000 clients (from 16% to 26%).

SHS agencies were able to assist many clients secure or maintain housing, reducing the experience and risk of homelessness among clients with disability.

Table DIS.4: Clients with disability (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	437	218	10.6	5.6
Short term temporary accommodation	767	650	18.6	16.6
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	545	312	13.2	7.9

<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>1,749</b>	<b>1,180</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>30.0</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	638	1,018	15.5	25.9
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	1,439	1,485	34.9	37.8
Institutional settings	299	244	7.2	6.2
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>2,376</b>	<b>2,747</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>70.0</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>4,125</b>	<b>3,927</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	315	513		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>4,440</b>	<b>4,440</b>		

Notes:

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

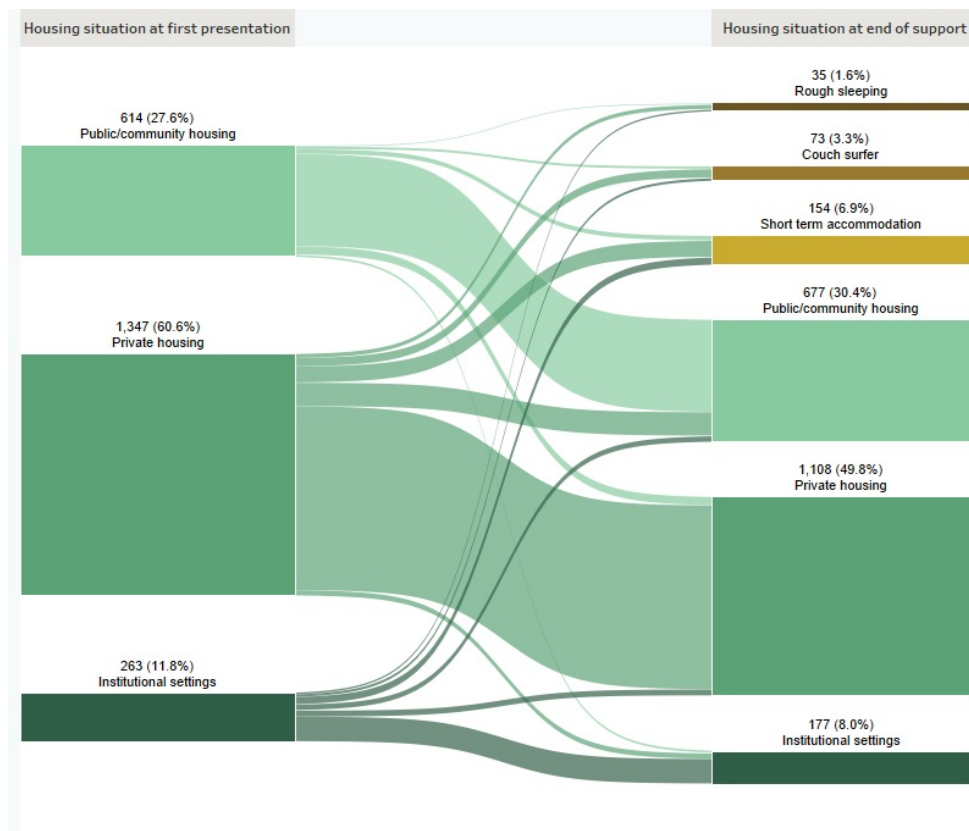
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table DIS.4.

### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

For clients with severe or profound disability with a known housing status who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support (more than 2,200 clients), by the end of support (Figure DIS.2):

- Half (around 1,100 clients or 50%) were in private housing
- Around 700 clients (30%) were in public or community housing.

**Figure DIS.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



Notes

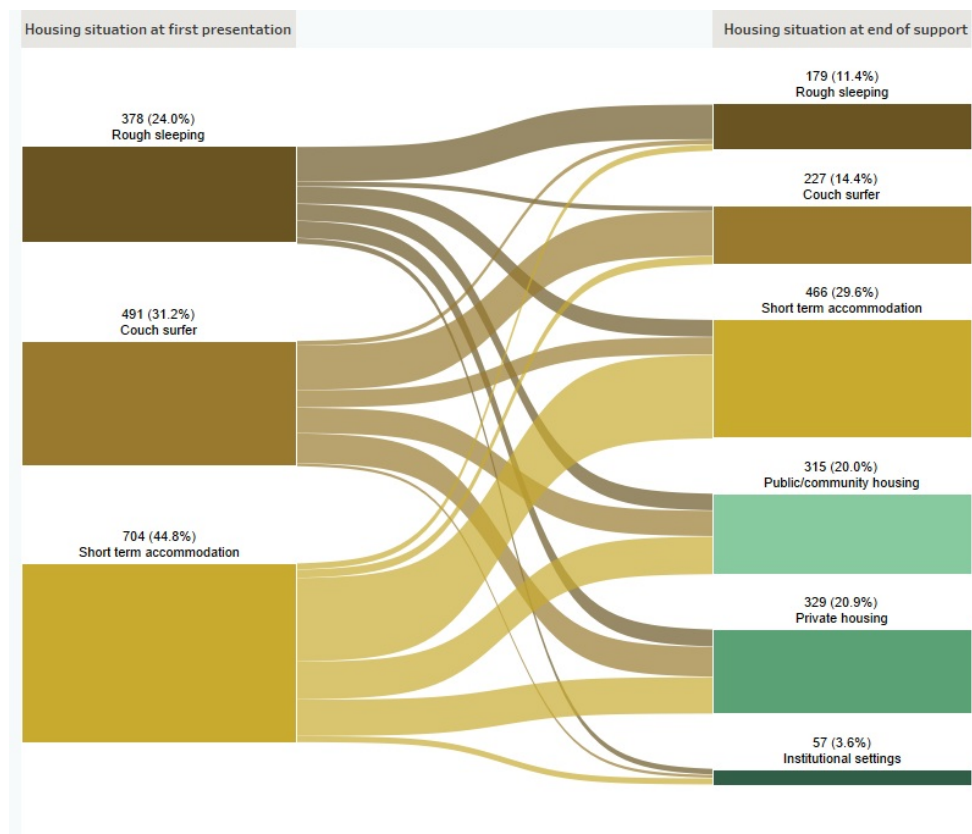
1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (almost 1,600 clients), agencies were able to assist (Figure DIS.3):

- almost 500 clients (30%) into short term accommodation
- over 300 (21%) into private housing.

**Figure DIS.3: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**



**Notes**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

For more information on people with disability, see [People with disability in Australia](#), AIHW.

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## Clients with a current mental health issue

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

Mental health is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals, their families and the population as a whole (ABS 2018). According to the most recent national Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, in 2007, 1 in 5 (20%) Australians (aged 16-85) had a current mental health issue, while 45% of Australians reported having had a mental disorder at some point in their life (ABS 2008). More recent research has indicated that around 1 in 8 (13%) Australians experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress (ABS 2018). The intertwined nature of mental health issues and homelessness is well established (Kalevald et al. 2018). People with mental health issues are a group who are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Research has shown that experiences of homelessness can trigger, exacerbate and magnify mental health issues (see for example, Kalevald et al. 2018, Brackertz et al 2018, CHP 2018 and Johnson & Chamberlain 2011). People living with a mental illness can be isolated, have disrupted family and social networks and sometimes suffer poor physical health, all of which impact their capacity to find and maintain adequate housing. Further, symptoms such as hallucinations, compulsive behaviours and anxiety can make it difficult to seek and maintain employment, which has financial impacts (Robinson 2003).

People experiencing homelessness with mental health issues need the support of various services including services dedicated to finding housing solutions, but navigating through these services can be particularly challenging. Several studies suggest that when people with mental health issues are supported by homelessness agencies, they are more likely to remain housed rather than become homeless (MHCA 2009, Du et al. 2013, Wood et al. 2016, ABS 2014).

### Reporting clients with a mental health issue in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients are identified as having a current mental health issue if they are aged 10 years or older and have provided any of the following information:

- They indicated that at the beginning of support they were receiving services or assistance for their mental health issues or had in the last 12 months.
- Their formal referral source to the SHS was a mental health service.
- They reported 'mental health issues' as a reason for seeking assistance.
- Their dwelling type either a week before presenting to an agency, or when presenting to an agency, was a psychiatric hospital or unit.
- They had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the last 12 months.
- At some stage during their support period, a need was identified for psychological services, psychiatric services or mental health services.

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, there were 88,300 SHS clients reporting a current mental health issue, an increase of 1,800 clients from the previous year.
- Clients with a current mental health issue were one of the largest SHS client groups (30% of all SHS clients) as well as one of the fastest growing client groups (increasing from 30.3 per 10,000 population in 2015-16 to 34.8 per 10,000 population in 2019-20).
- Over half of all SHS clients with a current mental health issue were known to be housed, but at risk of homelessness (50%) when they sought SHS support, and most were returning clients (68%), having previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- It was more common for clients with a current mental health issue to present to SHS agencies alone (80%) than in family units or groups.
- At the end of SHS support, fewer clients with a current mental health issue were homeless (37%, down from 49%); with 3,400 fewer clients sleeping rough (decreasing from 7,500 to almost 4,100 clients).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is posing significant health, lifestyle and economic challenges for Australians and evidence shows there is likely to be a significant negative mental health impact as a result (NMHC 2020). Common consequences of disease outbreaks include anxiety and panic, depression, anger, confusion and uncertainty, and financial stress (Black Dog Institute 2020).

COVID-19 has led to an increase in many of the risk factors for poor mental health including uncertainty, the risk of ill health, job loss and social isolation (Edwards et al. 2020). People with pre-existing anxiety or other mental health disorders are particularly vulnerable and at risk of experiencing higher anxiety levels during the COVID-19 outbreak, they may require more support or access to mental health

treatment during this period (Black Dog Institute 2020). This report presents data for the financial year up to 30 June 2020, which overlaps with the beginning few months of the Australian spread of COVID-19. Therefore, any changes to the proportion of clients receiving SHS support with mental health issues may not be evident in the following data.

## Client characteristics

Of the 290,500 SHS clients accessing services in 2019-20, 88,300 (30%) clients reported a current mental health issue. The number and proportion of clients with a current mental health issue has been increasing since the beginning of the SHSC in 2011-12. Various factors, including increased identification, community awareness and reduced stigma, may have had an impact on the increase in self-identification and reporting of mental illness among SHS clients. In 2019-20 (Table MH.1):

- Clients with a current mental health issue were one of the fastest growing client groups within the SHSC, growing by 22% since 2015-16. Between 2018-19 and 2019-20 the increase was 2%, a smaller increase than in the previous period (7% between 2017-18 and 2018-19).
- The rate of clients with a current mental health issue has remained stable between 2018-19 and 2019-20 at 35 clients per 10,000 population but has increased from 30.3 in 2015-16.

Table MH.1: Clients who have a current mental health issue—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	72,120	77,286	81,004	86,499	88,338
Proportion of all clients	26	27	28	30	30
Rate (per 10,000 population)	30.3	31.9	32.9	34.6	34.8

### Notes:

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

## Age and sex

In 2019-20, of those clients presenting with a current mental health issue (Supplementary table MH.1):

- There were more female (more than 53,900 clients or 61%) than male SHS clients (almost 34,400 or 39%), similar to the proportions in 2018-19 (60% and 40% respectively).
- Almost half (45% or 24,100 clients) of females were aged between 18 and 34 years, higher than the proportion of males in the same age group, 37% or almost 12,700 clients.
- Clients aged 18-24 increased 5% (or almost 900 clients) between 2018-19 and 2019-20 with females as the largest contributor to this increase.

## Indigenous clients

In 2019-20, around 85,400 SHS clients with a current mental health issue reported their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (Supplementary table MH.8). Key findings for this group include:

- 1 in 5 (20% or 17,200 clients) were Indigenous.
- Almost 2 in 3 (65% or 11,100) Indigenous clients with a current mental health issue were female, and 35% (6,100 clients) were male.
- Around 4 in 10 (38% or 6,500) Indigenous SHS clients with a current mental health issue were aged 10-24 years, a further 45% (7,700 clients) were aged 25-44 and 17% (almost 3,000 clients) were aged over 45.

## State and territory

There were differences across the states and territories in the rates of SHS clients with a current mental health issue. In 2019-20:

- SHS agencies based in Victoria had the greatest number of clients (35,200 clients) and the second highest rate of clients with a current mental health issue (53 clients per 10,000 population). Tasmania had the highest rate, with 61 clients per 10,000 population (Supplementary table MH.2).
- Over half (51% or 3,300) of Tasmania's SHS clients reported a current mental health issue, along with 42% (over 1,700) of clients in the Australian Capital Territory and 36% (almost 25,400) in New South Wales. By contrast, 10% (1,100) of the SHS clients in the Northern Territory reported a current mental health issue (Supplementary tables MH.2 and CLIENTS.1).

## Living arrangements and presenting unit type

In 2019-20 at the beginning of support, clients with a current mental health issue (aged over 10) were more likely to be living alone (39,800 clients or 46%) or as a lone parent with child(ren) (19,700 clients or 23%) rather than in a group (6,900 clients or 8%) or as a couple without child(ren) (4,600 or 5%) (Supplementary table MH.10).

SHS clients with a current mental health issue were also more likely to present to a SHS agency alone (80% or 70,500 clients) compared with all SHS clients (61% or 178,500) (Supplementary table MH.9 and CLIENTS.9).

### Selected vulnerabilities

In 2019-20, of the 88,300 SHS clients who had a current mental health issue, over half (55% or 48,200 clients) were experiencing additional selected vulnerabilities (Table MH.2):

- 4 in 10 clients (41% or 35,800 clients) also experienced family and domestic violence.
- 24% (21,100 clients) of clients also reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- A further 1 in 10 (10% or almost 8,700 clients) experienced all 3 selected vulnerabilities: family and domestic violence, problematic drug and/or alcohol use and a current mental health issue.

These figures provide an insight into the multiple disadvantages clients experiencing mental health issues face and highlight the value of an integrated service response to homelessness for these clients (Flatau et al. 2013).

Table MH.2: Clients with a current mental health issue, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	8,684	9.8
Yes	Yes	No	27,099	30.7
No	Yes	Yes	12,435	14.1
No	Yes	No	40,120	45.4
			<b>88,338</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes:

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of their first support period in 2019-20, 1 in 2 (50%) SHS clients who had a current mental health issue were experiencing homelessness when they first presented to a SHS agency while 50% were at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

### Service use patterns

Service use patterns for clients with a current mental health issue have changed between 2015-16 and 2019-20 (Table MH.3).

- There was an increase in the median number of days of support, from 64 days in 2015-16 to 75 days in 2019-20.
- The proportion of clients receiving accommodation decreased (from 39% to 37%), along with the median number of nights accommodated (from 44 to 39 nights per client).

Table MH.3: Clients who have a current mental health issue: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	64	68	72	75	75
Average number of support periods per client	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
Proportion receiving accommodation	39	37	37	36	37
Median number of nights accommodated	44	45	43	39	39

#### Notes:

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients who have a current mental health issue. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

### New or returning clients

In 2019-20, of those SHS clients with a current mental health issue (Supplementary table MH.7):

- Most (68% or nearly 59,700 clients) were returning clients, that is, they had previously received assistance from a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- One-third (32% or almost 28,700 clients) of those with a current mental health issue were new to SHS agencies, having not previously received services.

### Main reason for seeking assistance

In 2019-20, the most common main reasons for seeking SHS assistance for clients with a current mental health issue were (Supplementary tables MH.5 and MH.6):

- family and domestic violence (20% or 17,600 clients)
- housing crisis (20% or more than 17,400 clients)
- inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (13% or almost 11,600 clients).

There were differences in the main reasons for those clients with a current mental health issue presenting at risk of, or experiencing homelessness:

- For clients at risk of homelessness, family and domestic violence (25% or 10,600 clients) was the most common main reason, followed by housing crisis (17% or 7,200 clients).
- For clients experiencing homelessness, housing crisis (24% or almost 10,000) was the most common main reason, followed by inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (19% or 8,100 clients).

### Services needed and provided

Figure MH.1 illustrates the top 6 most-needed services (excluding advice/information, other basic assistance or advocacy/liaison) for clients with a current mental health issue in 2019-20. Four of these were related to accommodation:

- long-term housing was the most needed service (47,300 clients or 54%) yet least provided (4% of these clients were provided this assistance). A further 12,700 clients (27%) in need of long-term housing were referred to another agency and over 32,800 (69%) clients in need were neither provided nor referred long-term housing.
- short-term or emergency accommodation was needed by nearly 43,700 clients (49%), with 6 in 10 (58% or 25,100) of these clients receiving this assistance.
- medium-term/transitional housing was needed by 38,100 clients (43%) and 23% (8,800) of these clients were provided this assistance. Similar to long-term housing, this type of accommodation was commonly referred (20% or over 7,400 clients).
- assistance to sustain tenancy/prevent eviction was needed by over 37,700 clients (43%) with a current mental health issue, and a comparatively high proportion were provided with this service (82% or 31,000 clients).

Over 1 in 4 (28% or 25,000) clients with a current mental health issue identified a need for mental health-based services (Supplementary tables MH.3). Specifically:

- 25% (22,000 clients) identified a need for mental health services with 44% (9,700 clients) of these requests met.
- 10% (over 9,100 clients) identified a need for psychological services with 32% (2,900 clients) of these requests met.
- 6% (5,400 clients) identified a need for psychiatric services with 35% (1,900 clients) of these requests met.

**Figure MH.1: Clients with a current mental health issue, by most needed services and service provision status (top 6), 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes 'Other basic assistance', 'Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client'.
2. 'Short-term accommodation' includes temporary and emergency accommodation and sustain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
3. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table MH.3.

The proportion of SHS clients with a current mental health issue with a case management plan has remained comparatively high over time (72% in 2019-20, up from 70% in 2015-16); however those achieving all case management goals has remained low (16% in 2019-20, down from 19% in 2018-19) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35).

**Outcomes at the end of support**

Outcomes presented here describe the change in client’s housing situation between the start and end of support. Data is limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the year.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first support period in 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last support period in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

In 2019-20, for clients with a current mental health issue (Table MH.4):

- The proportion of clients known to be experiencing homelessness decreased from just under half (49%) at the start of support to 37% at the end of support; this equates to almost 7,700 fewer clients experiencing homelessness.
- While there was little change in the proportion of clients in short term temporary accommodation (around 17% at both the start and end), considerably fewer clients were ‘rough sleeping’ (from 13% to 8%) and ‘couch surfing’ (from 18% to 13%) following SHS support.
- One of the largest changes was the increase in the number of clients living in public or community housing (renter or rent free); increasing by over 3,600 clients (from 6,100 to 9,800 clients or 11% to 18%) from the start to the end of SHS support.

These trends demonstrate that by the end of SHS support, fewer clients with a current mental health issue were known to be experiencing homelessness, and most (63%) were living in stable accommodation, be it public or community, private or other housing or an institutional setting.

Table MH.4: Clients with a current mental health issue (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	7,483	4,070	13.2	7.5
Short term temporary accommodation	9,826	9,151	17.4	17.0
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	10,361	6,772	18.3	12.6
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>27,670</b>	<b>19,993</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>37.1</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	6,148	9,779	10.9	18.1
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	19,045	21,727	33.7	40.3
Institutional settings	3,617	2,429	6.4	4.5



Total at risk	28,810	33,935	51.0	62.9
Total clients with known housing situation	56,480	53,928	100.0	100.0
Not stated/other	4,179	6,731		
Total clients	60,659	60,659		

**Notes:**

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table MH.4.

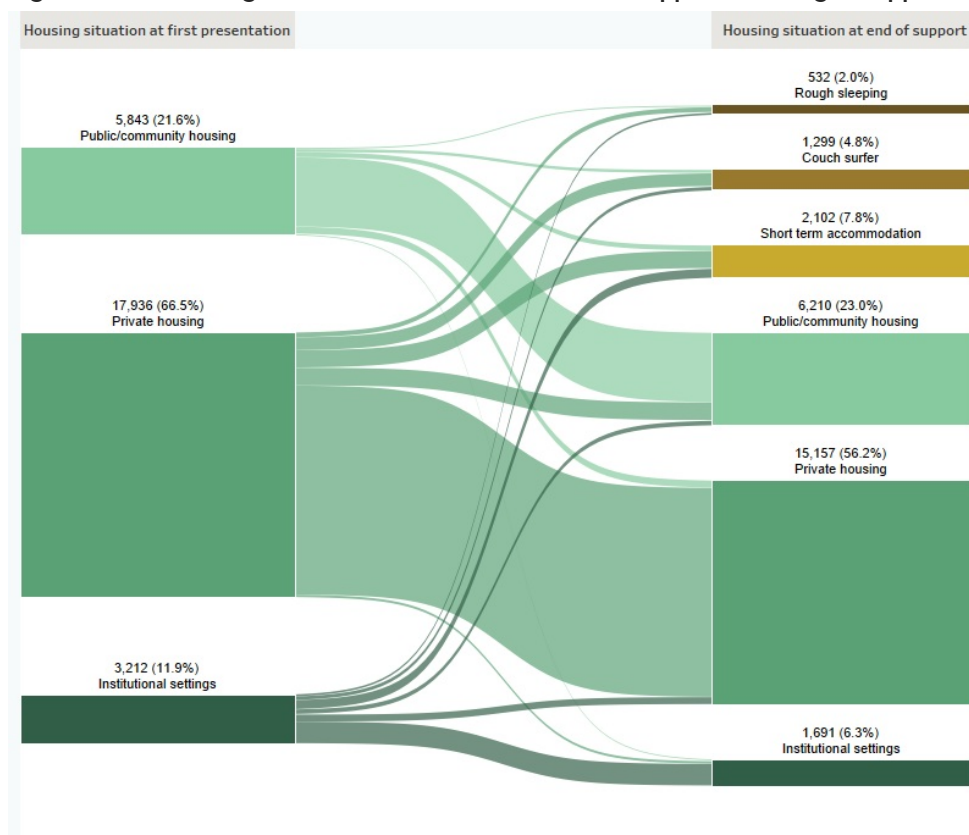
**Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients**

In 2019-20, 51,800 clients had a known housing status at both the start and end of support. Of these clients, almost 27,000 were at risk of homelessness at the start of support, by the end of support (Figure MH.2):

- Most (15,200 clients or 56%) were in private housing
- Around 6,200 clients (23%) were in public or community housing.

A smaller number were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (around 3,900 clients or 15% of those who started support at risk).

**Figure MH.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

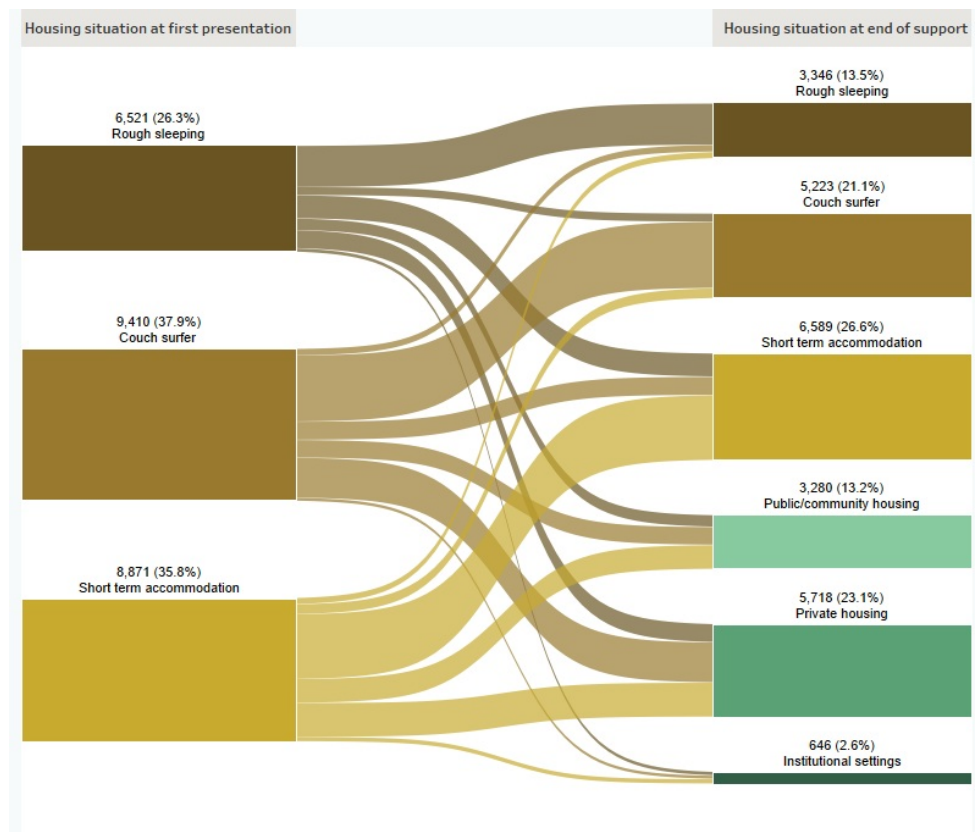
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20.

In 2019-20, there were 24,800 SHS clients with a mental health issue who were known to be homeless at the start of support. By the end of support (Figure MH.3):

- 6,600 clients (27%) were in short term accommodation
- 5,700 (23%) were in private housing.

A further 5,200 clients (21%) were couch surfing at the end of support.

**Figure MH.3: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20.

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## Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)
- [Outcomes at the end of support](#)

There is a strong association between problematic alcohol or other drug use and experiences of homelessness (AIHW 2020). Problematic drug and/or alcohol use can be a pathway into homelessness or develop while experiencing homelessness (Robinson 2014; Johnson & Chamberlain 2008). It can lock people into homelessness and compound the effects of limited service engagement and increased social isolation. Problematic alcohol or other drug use is related to several homelessness risk factors, including low socioeconomic status and family and domestic violence (Lalor 2020). The Journeys Home project identified that people were more likely to have risky levels of alcohol and drug use, the longer they were homeless (Scutella et al. 2014).

People with problematic drug and/or alcohol use are at great risk of serious and preventable health issues and death, particularly those who are homeless (AIHW 2020). They are also likely to have the most persistent and challenging problems (Johnson & Chamberlain 2008; Scutella et al. 2014).

### Reporting clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

SHS clients aged 10 and over are reported in the SHSC with problematic drug and/or alcohol use if, at the beginning of or during support, the client provided any of the following information:

- recorded their dwelling type as rehabilitation facility
- required drug or alcohol counselling
- were formally referred to the SHS service from an alcohol and drug treatment service
- had been in a rehabilitation facility or institution during the past 12 months
- reported problematic drug, substance or alcohol use as a reason for seeking assistance or the main reason for seeking assistance.

The identification of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use may be current or recent; referring to issues at presentation, just prior to receiving support or at least once in the 12 months prior to support.

For more information see [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, 1 in 10 SHS clients (10%, or almost 28,500 people aged 10 and over) were identified as having problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- Most clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were known to be homeless upon presentation (58%) compared with 43% of all SHS clients.
- Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use received more frequent support (3.0 support periods per client) over a longer period (median support length 90 days) than other client groups.
- At the end of support in 2019-20, almost half (47%) of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were known to be experiencing homelessness, which was higher than for all other client groups.

### Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table SUB.1):

- SHS agencies assisted almost 28,500 clients (aged 10 and over) with problematic drug and/or alcohol use, an increase from almost 26,600 in 2015-16.
- Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use represented 10% of all SHS clients.

Table SUB.1: Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	26,562	27,229	27,158	27,974	28,459
Proportion of all clients	10	9	9	10	10

Rate (per 10,000 population)	11.2	11.3	11.0	11.2	11.2
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**Notes:**

1. Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

**Age and sex**

In 2019-20, of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use (Supplementary table SUB.1):

- More than half (53% or almost 15,000 clients) were male which differed to the overall SHS client profile which was mostly female (60%).
- Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use had a younger age profile than other SHS client groups with around 8 in 10 (79%) clients aged under 45 years; 28% were aged 10-24 years, 25% aged 25-34 and 26% aged 35-44.
- Male clients had an older age profile than females, with 53% of males aged 35 and over compared with 41% of females.

**Indigenous clients**

- In 2019-20, around 8,000 clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use identified as Indigenous (Supplementary table SUB.8). This equates to 3 in 10 clients (28%) with problematic drug and/or alcohol use whose Indigenous status was known.
- Indigenous clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use represent 11% of all Indigenous SHS clients (Supplementary table INDIGENOUS.1).

Indigenous clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use had a younger age profile than non-Indigenous clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use. That is:

- 30% of Indigenous clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were aged 10-24 compared with 27% of non-Indigenous clients, and
- 18% of Indigenous clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were aged 45 and over compared with 22% of non-Indigenous SHS clients.

**State and territory**

In 2019-20:

- The highest number of SHS clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use accessed services in Victoria (more than 10,500 clients or 37% of national total) and New South Wales (almost 7,700 or 27%) (Supplementary table SUB.2).
- The Northern Territory had the highest rate of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use (33.6 per 10,000 population) followed by Tasmania (16.8 per 10,000 population). Queensland had the lowest rate, at 7.7 clients per 10,000 population.
- Services in the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania had the highest proportion of SHS clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use (14% each). The Northern Territory (8%) had the lowest proportion of SHS clients reporting problematic drug and/or alcohol use (Supplementary table SUB.2 and CLIENTS.1).

**Presenting unit and Living arrangements**

Almost 9 in 10 clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use (87% or almost 24,800) presented to services for assistance alone, higher than for all SHS clients (61%). A further 8% (or more than 2,300) of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use presented with one or more children, which is much lower than for all SHS clients (29%).

Similarly, the types of living arrangements reported by SHS clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use at the beginning of support were quite different from the overall SHS population and other client groups.

In 2019-20 (Supplementary tables SUB.10 and CLIENTS.10):

- Almost 6 in 10 (58% or more than 16,100) clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were living alone at the beginning of SHS support. This is higher than the proportion for all SHS clients (30%) and other client groups, such as clients with a current mental health issue (46%) and clients with disability (38%).
- Comparatively fewer clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were living as one parent with child(ren) (12% or 3,400 compared with 34% of total SHS clients), or in a group (10% or 2,800 clients compared with 6% of total SHS clients).

**Selected vulnerabilities**

Most clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use face additional challenges which may make them more vulnerable to homelessness. The selected additional vulnerabilities presented here include family and domestic violence and/or a current mental health issue.

In 2019-20 (Table SUB.2):

- More than 2 in 5 (44% or more than 12,400) clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use also reported a current mental health issue.

- Almost 8,700 (31%) clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use also reported a current mental health issue and family and domestic violence.

Table SUB.2: Clients with problematic drug or alcohol issues, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	8,684	30.5
Yes	No	Yes	2,368	8.3
No	Yes	Yes	12,435	43.7
No	No	Yes	4,972	17.5
			<b>28,459</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 10 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

#### Housing situation on first presentation

At the beginning of the first support period, more than half (58%) of all clients with a problematic drug and/or alcohol use were experiencing homelessness when they presented to services for assistance, while 42% were at risk of homelessness (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

#### Service use patterns

Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use (see Tables SUB.3) received:

- a median 90 days of support, up from 77 days in 2015-16
- an average of 3.0 support periods per client

Table SUB.3: Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use: service use patterns—2015-16 to 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	77	83	86	87	90
Average number of support periods per client	2.9	2.9	3.0	2.9	3.0
Proportion receiving accommodation	51	49	50	50	51
Median number of nights accommodated	37	40	40	35	35

#### Notes:

1. The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients who have problematic drug and/or alcohol use. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.
2. Data for 2015-16 to 2016-17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, data from 2017-18 are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2015-16 to 2016-17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards. For further information, please refer to the Technical Notes.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015-16 to 2019-20.

#### New or returning clients

In 2019-20 (Supplementary table SUB 7):

- Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were more likely to have received SHS services in the past (75% or almost 21,500 clients) than be new clients (25% or almost 7,000). That is, more clients had previously been assisted by an SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12.
- Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were more likely to be returning (75%), compared with other client groups, for example 68% of clients with a mental health issue and 65% of those with profound or severe disability. This may reflect the cyclic nature of homelessness for people with problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

#### Main reasons for seeking assistance

In 2019-20, the main reasons clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use presented to SHS agencies were:

- housing crisis (19%, compared with 18% of the overall SHS population)
- inadequate/inappropriate dwelling conditions (15%, compared with 11%)
- family and domestic violence (14%, compared with 29%) (Supplementary tables SUB.5 and CLIENTS.21).

Few clients (5%) with problematic drug and/or alcohol use reported substance use issues as the main reason for seeking SHS assistance.

### Services needed and provided

In 2019-20, the top 6 needs reported by SHS clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use mainly related to housing and tenure (Figure SUB.1). Key features include:

- Short-term or emergency accommodation was the most needed service or assistance type (63% or almost 18,000 clients) and it was provided to 67% of these clients. A higher proportion of clients in this group needed this type of short-term housing compared with other groups, such as those with mental health issues (49%) and those with disability (42%).
- Long-term housing (57% or around 16,300 clients) was also commonly needed, but was one of the services that was least able to be provided (4% of these clients).
- Material aid/brokerage was needed by around half of clients (51% or almost 14,500 clients), with assistance provided to the majority (89%) of these clients.
- Unlike other client groups, living skills/personal development (39%) was one of the top 6 needs, and it was provided to 90% of these clients.

In 2019-20, more than one-third (35% or 9,800 clients) of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use identified a need for drug or alcohol based services (Supplementary table SUB.3):

- almost half (42% or 4,200 clients) had their request met
- 2,000 clients (21%) were referred to another agency
- 3,600 clients (37%) had unmet needs for drug or alcohol based services (neither provided nor referred).

**Figure SUB.1: Clients with problematic drug or alcohol issues, by most needed services and service provision status (top 6), 2019-20**



**Note:**

1. Excludes 'Other basic assistance', 'Advice/information' and 'Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client'.
2. 'Short-term accommodation' includes temporary and emergency accommodation and sustain tenancy/prevent eviction includes assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent failure or eviction.
3. 'Neither' indicates a service was neither provided nor referred.

**Source:** Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20, Supplementary table SUB.3.

The proportion of SHS clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use with a case management plan in 2019-20 was relatively high (74%); however, those achieving all case management goals was low (13%) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.35). This group remains one of the least likely of all SHS client groups to meet all goals.

### Outcomes at the end of support

Outcomes presented here highlight the changes in clients' housing situation between the start and end of support. Data are limited to clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year—meaning that their support periods had closed and they did not have ongoing support at the end of the 2019-20 reporting period.

Many clients had long periods of support or even multiple support periods during 2019-20. They may have had a number of changes in their housing situation over the course of their support. These changes within the year are not reflected in the data presented here, rather the client situation at the start of their first period of support during 2019-20 is compared with the end of their last period of support in 2019-20. A proportion of these clients may have sought assistance prior to 2019-20, and may again in the future.

In 2019-20 (Table SUB.4):

- Over half of clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use began support known to be experiencing homelessness (57% or 9,800 clients); decreasing by almost 2,400 to 7,400 clients (46%) by the end of support. Compared with all other client groups, these clients were most likely to start and end support known to be experiencing homelessness.
- Much of the decrease in numbers of clients known to be experiencing homelessness can be attributed to the drop in clients sleeping rough (no shelter or improvised/inadequate dwellings); from 3,300 clients at the start to 1,700 at the end of support.
- One of the greatest changes in housing situation from the start to the end of SHS support was for those living in public or community housing; a 8 percentage point increase from around 11% to 19%.

While overall housing outcome figures generally reflect trends towards more favourable housing, experiences of homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, appear to be more common for clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use both at the start and end of SHS support.

Table SUB.4: Clients with problematic drug or alcohol issues (closed support), by housing situation at the beginning and end of support, 2019-20

Housing situation	Beginning of support (number)	End of support (number)	Beginning of support (per cent)	End of support (per cent)
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	3,321	1,692	19.5	10.7
Short term temporary accommodation	3,266	3,487	19.2	22.1
House, townhouse or flat - couch surfer or with no tenure	3,169	2,225	18.6	14.1
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>9,756</b>	<b>7,404</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>46.9</b>
Public or community housing - renter or rent free	1,859	2,985	10.9	18.9
Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	2,883	3,674	17.0	23.3
Institutional settings	2,502	1,736	14.7	11.0
<b>Total at risk</b>	<b>7,244</b>	<b>8,395</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>53.1</b>
<b>Total clients with known housing situation</b>	<b>17,000</b>	<b>15,799</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Not stated/other</i>	1,263	2,464		
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>18,263</b>	<b>18,263</b>		

Notes:

1. Percentages have been calculated using total number of clients as the denominator (less not stated/other).
2. It is important to note that individual clients beginning support in one housing type need not necessarily be the same individuals ending support in that housing type.
3. Not stated/other includes those clients whose housing situation at either the beginning or end of support was unknown.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Supplementary table SUB.4.

### Housing outcomes for homeless versus at risk clients

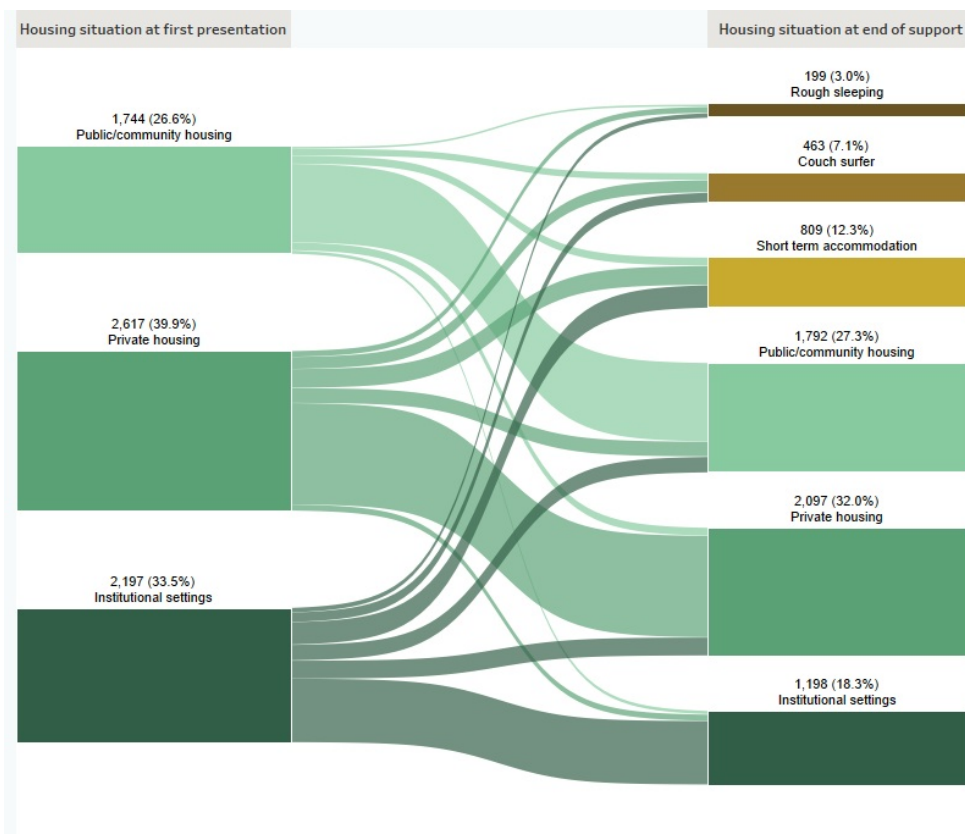
For clients with a known housing status who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support (almost 6,600 clients), by the end of support (Figure SUB.2):

- Almost 1 in 3 (2,100 clients or 32%) were in private housing.
- Around 1,800 clients (27%) were in public or community housing.

A smaller number were experiencing homelessness at the end of support (around 1,500 clients or 22% of those who started support at risk).

**Figure SUB.2: Housing situation for clients with closed support who began support at risk of homelessness, 2019-20**





**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

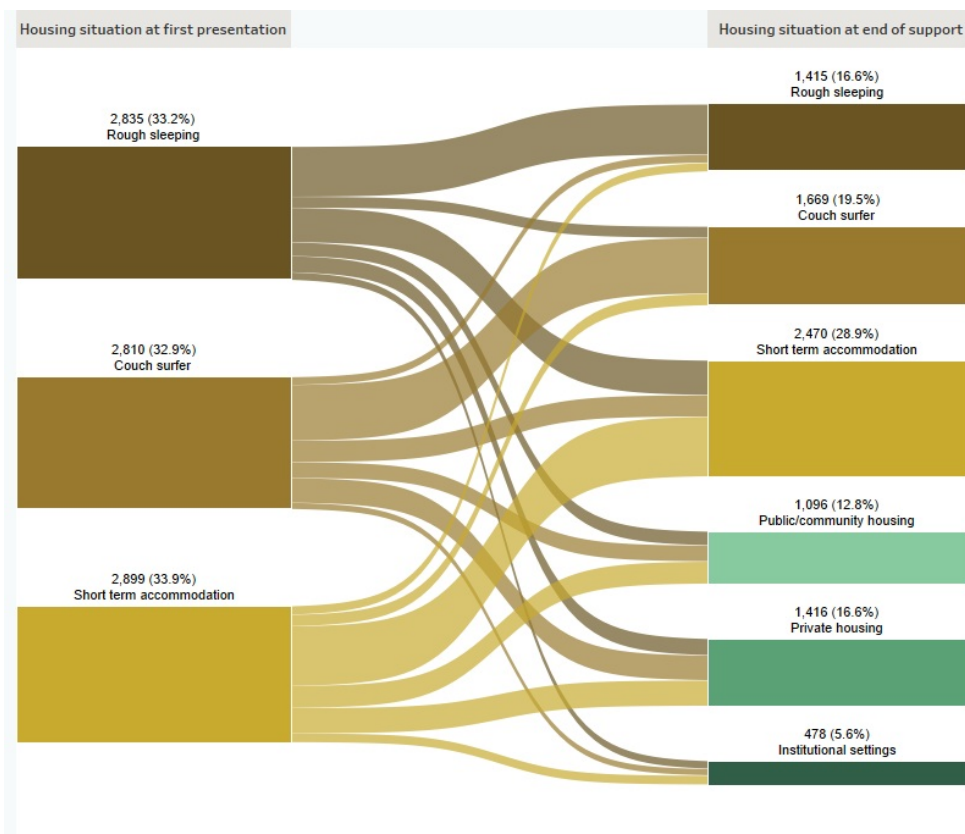
For clients who were known to be homeless at the start of support (just over 8,500 clients), agencies were able to assist (Figure SUB.3):

- 2,500 clients (29%) into short term accommodation
- 1,400 (17%) into private housing.

A further 1,700 clients (20%) were couch surfing at the end of support and 1,400 clients (17%) were rough sleeping at the end of support.

The characteristics of people with problematic drug and/or alcohol use as well as their service use patterns and housing outcomes were different from the other client groups presented in this report. Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use were more likely to be male, present to agencies alone and be homeless at first presentation compared with overall SHS clients. They were also more likely to be returning clients and use support services to a greater extent.

**Figure SUB.3: Housing situation for clients with closed support who were experiencing homelessness at the start of support, 2019-20**



**Notes:**

1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

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## Clients who are current or former members of the Australian Defence Force

### On this page

- [Client characteristics](#)
- [Service use patterns](#)
- [Main reasons for seeking assistance](#)

The long-term welfare of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members is of importance as the nature of military service may mean serving and ex-serving personnel are exposed to a greater number of risk factors that may influence their likelihood of experiencing homelessness, including:

- Complex personal needs - mental health issues and other complex vulnerabilities can be reflective of the unique demands of service (McFarlane et al. 2011).
- Financial stress - employment can become an issue for ADF members when transitioning from service to civilian life (Searle et al. 2019).

At 30 June 2019, there were more than 58,500 permanent current ADF members (Defence 2019). In addition, there were estimated to be around 631,800 living veterans, including all living persons who have ever served in the ADF either full-time or as reservists (DVA 2019).

Serving ADF personnel have access to housing and rental assistance through Defence Housing Australia. However, once personnel discharge from the ADF they are no longer able to access this housing support. Current or former ADF members can access a range of housing and homelessness services through government and non-government organisations (Defence 2017). To provide a better understanding of the extent to which current or former ADF members may need support from specialist homelessness services (SHS), the Australian Defence Force (ADF) indicator was introduced into the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) in July 2017.

It is important to note that variability in the implementation of this item has meant that coverage is still considered to be incomplete and limited analyses have been conducted to date. As is common with new data items, upon implementation there was a high number of 'don't know' (14% in 2017-18) responses to the ADF question. In 2019-20, the number of 'don't know' (9%) responses decreased. A 'don't know' response is selected if the information is not known or the client refuses to provide the information. Expectations are that data quality will continue to improve over time, at which time further analyses may be undertaken. Further details about the ADF indicator in the SHSC are provided in the [Technical information](#) section.

The [Use of specialist homelessness services by ex-serving ADF members 2011-12 to 2016-17 report](#) linked SHSC and Defence personnel data to identify contemporary ex-serving ADF members (those who discharged after 1 January 2001) who had used services between 2011-12 and 2016-17. The report provides a longer-term view of clients, prior to the implementation of the ADF indicator in the SHSC.

### Reporting ADF clients in the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

The SHS ADF indicator is applied when a client self-identifies as a current or former ADF member. The ADF indicator is not applicable to clients who may have served in non-Australian defence forces, reservists who have never served as a permanent ADF member or clients under the age of 18. Note that differences between the results of this and other publicly reported estimates may be due to differences in how an ADF member is defined. Further details about the ADF indicator in the SHSC are provided in [Technical information](#).

### Key findings

- In 2019-20, specialist homelessness services agencies assisted almost 1,400 clients who identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force, an increase from almost 1,300 clients in 2017-18, yet down from just over 1,400 in 2018-19.
- Two-thirds were male (64% or almost 900 clients).
- More than a quarter of clients were aged 45-54 (27% or almost 400 clients).
- More than half (53% or 700 clients) were known to be homeless when they sought assistance.
- 65%, or almost 900 clients, had received SHS support before, with returning males more likely to be older (32% or almost 200 clients aged 45-54).

### Client characteristics

In 2019-20 (Table ADF.1):

- SHS agencies assisted 1,373 clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF.
- Clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF made up less than 1% of all SHS clients.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of clients	1,295	1,406	1,373
Proportion of all clients	0.4	0.5	0.5

*Note:* Rates are crude rates based on the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) at 30 June of the reference year. Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

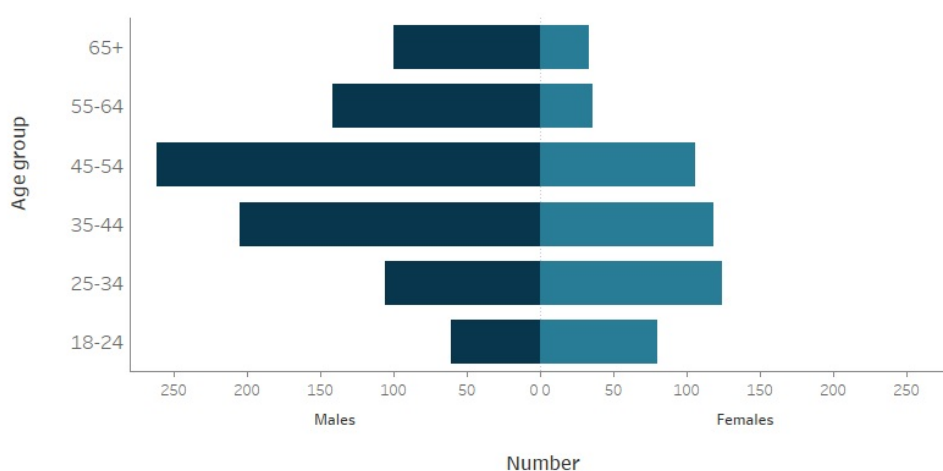
*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2017-18 to 2019-20.

### Age and sex

In 2019-20, of clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF (Supplementary table ADF.1):

- Two-thirds (64% or almost 900 clients) were male (compared with 40% in the general SHS population) and more than a quarter (27% or almost 400 clients) were aged 45-54 (Figure ADF.1).
- Young females (aged 18-34) (41% of females or 200 clients) were more likely to receive SHS support compared with young males (19% of males or 170 clients).

**Figure ADF.1: Clients who identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force, by age and sex, 2019-20**



### Notes

1. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) indicator was introduced into the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) in July 2017.
2. The ADF indicator is not applicable to clients who may have served in non-Australian defence forces or reservists who have never served as a permanent ADF member.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

### States and territories

In 2019-20, the highest number of clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF accessed services in Victoria (47% or more than 600 clients), followed by New South Wales (21% or almost 300 clients) (Table ADF.2).

**Table ADF.2: Clients who identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force—2017-18 to 2019-20**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	National
<b>Number</b>	293	639	241	87	75	52	23	26	1,373

*Note:* Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore the total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection.

More than half (53%) of clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF were experiencing homelessness at the time of seeking SHS support, which was higher than the general SHS population (43%) (Supplementary table CLIENTS.12).

### Housing situation

In 2019-20, of clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF (Supplementary table ADF.4):

- On presentation to services for assistance more than half of clients (53%) were experiencing homelessness (compared with 43% of the general SHS population). Of those presenting homeless:
  - 39% (almost 300 clients) were rough sleeping (compared with 22% of the general SHS population)
  - 35% (around 250 clients) were in short-term or emergency accommodation (compared with 39% of the general SHS population).
- Just under half (47%) presented to services at risk of homelessness (compared with 57% of the general SHS population). Of those:
  - 59% were in private or other housing (compared with 61% of the general SHS population)
  - 22% were in public or community housing (compared with 24% of the general SHS population).

### New and returning clients

In 2019-20, clients were either presenting to SHS agencies for the first time as new clients or had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011-12 (Supplementary table ADF.7).

Of those clients returning to SHS agencies for assistance (65% or almost 900 clients), males were more likely to be aged 45-54 (32% or almost 200 clients), while females were more likely to be aged 25-34 (28% or almost 100 clients).

More than a third of clients in 2019-20 were new (35% or almost 500 clients, less than the general SHS population (42%). One in 4 (25%) new clients were aged 45-54 years and an additional 1 in 5 (22%) were aged 35-44 years.

### Selected vulnerabilities

SHS clients can face additional vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to experiencing homelessness, in particular family and domestic violence, a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

In 2019-20, of the almost 1,400 clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF, almost 2 in 3 (66%) reported experiencing one or more of these vulnerabilities:

- Over half (55%) reported a current mental health issue, as a single vulnerability or in combination with other vulnerabilities, higher than the overall SHS population (37%).
- 1 in 4 reported experiencing a current mental health issue only (26% or almost 400 clients).
- More than 1 in 10 (13%) reported both a current mental health issue and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- 5% reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.

Table ADF.3: Clients who identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force, by selected vulnerability characteristics, 2019-20

Family and domestic violence	Mental health issue	Problematic drug and or alcohol use	Clients	Per cent
Yes	Yes	Yes	64	4.7
Yes	Yes	No	159	11.6
Yes	No	Yes	9	0.7
No	Yes	Yes	171	12.5
Yes	No	No	114	8.3
No	Yes	No	358	26.1
No	No	Yes	37	2.7
No	No	No	461	33.6
			<b>1,373</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes

1. Clients are assigned to one category only based on their vulnerability profile.
2. Clients are aged 18 and over.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2019-20.

### Service use patterns

In 2019-20, clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF receiving SHS support (Table ADF.4):

- received a median of 59 days and 28 nights of support.
- had an average of 2.8 support periods per client.

Table ADF.4: Clients who identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force: service use patterns—2017-18 to 2019-20

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Length of support (median number of days)	53	58	59
Average number of support periods per client	3.1	2.8	2.8
Proportion receiving accommodation	36	40	37
Median number of nights accommodated	31	23	28

*Note:* The denominator for the proportion receiving accommodation is all SHS clients who have identified as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force. Denominator values for proportions are provided in the relevant supplementary table.

*Source:* Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2017-18 to 2019-20.

### **Main reasons for seeking assistance**

SHS agencies provide a range of support services. For clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF receiving SHS support in 2019-20 (Supplementary table ADF.5 and ADF.6):

- The main reason for seeking assistance was housing crisis (22% or more than 300 clients), followed by financial difficulties (15% or around 200 clients).
- Both homeless and at risk clients identified housing crisis as either their main reason or second main reason for seeking assistance (26% or 200 clients and 18% or around 100 clients respectively).
- Clients at risk of homelessness were more likely to report financial difficulties as a main reason for seeking assistance (21% or more than 100 clients) than clients presenting as homeless (10% or less than 100 clients).

### **Services needed and provided**

In 2019-20, the provision of support services to clients varied based on their identified need on presentation (Supplementary table ADF.3):

- Advice/information was most likely to be needed by clients (90% or more than 1,200 clients) and was provided to 99% of those who needed it (or around 1,200 clients).
- More than 2 in 3 (69%) clients needed accommodation and it was provided to more than half of those who needed it (54%). Three in 10 clients were unable to be provided or referred accommodation when a need was identified (32% or 300 clients).

Compared with the general SHS population, clients who identified as current or former members of the ADF were more likely to need:

- financial information (30% compared with 24% in the general SHS population)
- health/medical services (13% compared with 9%)
- mental health services (12% compared with 9%).

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## Technical information

### Key data quality information: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2019-20

The AIHW plays a role in developing and maintaining national metadata standards. This work contributes to improving the quality and consistency of national health and welfare statistics. The AIHW works closely with governments and non-government organisations to achieve greater adherence to these standards in administrative data collections to promote national consistency and comparability of data and reporting.

One of the main functions of the AIHW is to work with the states and territories to improve the quality of administrative data and to compile, analyse and disseminate national data sets based on data from each jurisdiction.

Data Quality Statements are developed for each data set and made available on the AIHW Metadata Online Registry (METeOR). The 2019-20 Specialist Homelessness Services Collection [Data Quality Statement](#) is available from METeOR.

#### Breaks in time series

*Clients subject to care and protection orders:* Improvements made in 2015-16 to the method used to identify clients subject to care and protection orders mean that data from 2011-12 to 2014-15 are not comparable with data from 2015-16 onwards.

*Source of income—DVA pension or payment:* In 2017-18, the response options for source of income were updated and the three response options relating to payments or pensions from the Department of Veterans Affairs (disability pension—DVA, service pension—DVA and war widow(ers) pension—DVA) were replaced with a single response option of 'DVA pension or payment'. As the single 'DVA pension or payment' response option can include more payment types than the three options previously available, data on the 3 DVA pension or payments from 2011-12 to 2016-17 are not comparable with data on 'DVA pension or payment' from 2017-18 onwards.

*The addition of 'Other' to the Sex item:* On 1 July 2019 the inclusion of a Sex = Other category in both the Client and Unassisted persons components of the SHSC was introduced. This change had minimal impact on the collection with under 0.6% of clients identifying as Sex = Other in 2019-20. However, this change has meant that there has been a break in time series for some clients as their SLK (client identifier) has changed to reflect their change in recorded sex.

This change has also been implemented differently across states and territories with much higher numbers of clients identifying as Sex = Other in some states and in the unassisted collection. The Sex = Other option may have also been applied by some agencies to young children where their sex was not obvious or for those who did not want to state their sex.

Due to these issues, as well as the confidentiality concerns that accompany small numbers of clients, those clients identifying as Sex = Other have been included in the 'Female' category when reporting the data for 2019-20. This merging of Sex = Other clients with Female clients has not caused any impact on the validity of Female clients for 2019-20 as the number of Sex = Other clients is so small.

As more data is collected, and the data quality of this item improves, AIHW will review how this data is presented.

#### Data issues that require caution when making comparisons

*Disability:* Data for clients with disability who require assistance may not be comparable across age groups due to differences in the interpretation of the disability questions; this issue relates mainly to young children.

*Presenting unit type:* Data for presenting unit type may not be comparable across age groups due to differences in interpretation of presenting units and how they are recorded. This issue mainly concerns young children and presenting unit type 'lone person'.

*Housing crisis, financial difficulties and housing affordability:* Improvements made during 2014-15 resulted in changes to the way agencies were required to report 'main reason' and 'reasons for seeking assistance'. In addition, wording providing a specific example of housing crisis was removed from the section relating to reason for seeking assistance. Caution should be used when making comparisons over time as the reporting of these items may be inconsistent between agencies. These changes in agency reporting were evident in the data from all states and territories.

*Children presenting alone:* South Australia has a comparatively high number of children reported as presenting alone. This may be due to a difference in how presenting units are recorded in South Australia's client management system. Caution should be used when comparing data for children presenting alone in South Australia with other states and territories.

*Case management:* Some aspects of case management are recorded differently in South Australia's client management system. Caution should be used when comparing data on case management for South Australia with other states and territories.

*Services and Assistance: Assertive outreach:* In 2017-18, there was a clarification made to the response option used to record clients who needed, or were provided, or referred assertive outreach services. The option was changed to specify that this service was directly targeted at rough sleepers. Due to this change, caution should be taken when comparing the number of clients receiving assertive outreach services before and after 2017-18.

**COVID-19:** From 26 March 2020, SHS agency workers were instructed to add 'COVID-19' in the free text section of the 'Other reason for seeking assistance' item if the client and/or the agency were affected directly or indirectly by the crisis. This change has been implemented differently across jurisdictions and therefore caution should be taken if making any comparisons between jurisdictions.

Funding for COVID related social support was also implemented differently across jurisdictions and SHSC data will only show services delivered where funding was provided to SHS agencies.

**Jurisdictional changes:** In 2019-20, NSW provided additional funding and supports for social housing and homelessness prevention as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the intense bushfire season. However, much of this additional funding and support was provided outside of the scope of the SHSC. This could have caused the overall decrease in SHSC client numbers in NSW in 2019-20, as possible SHSC clients may have accessed this alternative funding and support.

Over the years there have also been many other changes made by jurisdictions to the way SHSC data is collected and/or policies regarding homelessness have been managed. If making jurisdictional comparisons over time please read the [SHSC Data Quality Statement](#) to ensure all these changes are considered in the analysis.

## Improvements to data items

**Mandatory data items:** Changes made in 2014-15 resulted in a substantial improvement in data quality for mandatory data items and in particular resulted in a decline in the number of non-response or missing values for these data items. Care should be used when comparing results from 2011-12 to 2013-14 with results from 2014-15 onwards.

**Housing situation:** Following improvement in the derivation for housing situation used in the SHSC in 2016-17, clients with a tenure status of 'life tenure scheme' are now counted under the housing situation category 'private or other housing (renter, rent-free or owner)' if their dwelling status was 'housing/townhouse/flat'. This change has very little impact on housing situation percentages and hence does not constitute a break in time series.

**Age:** In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Caution should be used when comparing results with publications from December 2018 onwards that include 2017-18 data with previously issued publications.

**Family and domestic violence:** In July 2019 the following changes were made to improve the collection of information regarding family and domestic violence (FDV) in the SHSC:

- The inclusion of an 'FDV agency' option in the 'Formal sources of referral' item to capture clients referred from non-SHS funded FDV services.
- A change to the 'Services and assistance' received item to separately identify clients who received services for 'FDV victims' and/or services for 'FDV perpetrators'.
- The inclusion of an FDV services category to the 'Type of service requested' in the unassisted persons component of the SHSC.

These changes have not resulted in any break in time series as the addition of the new FDV referral item has only increased the number of FDV clients by 0.5%. The change to collect both victim and perpetrator services can also be combined to reflect the general FDV services item used prior to 1 July 2019.

The split between victim and perpetrator services has not been widely reported in 2019-20. This is due to the change being implemented differently between agencies causing data quality issues, as well as the small numbers of perpetrator services provided resulting in confidentiality issues.

**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Clients:** On 1 July 2019, a question was added to record a client's main language spoken at home. A follow up question was also added for those who did not speak English as a main language at home. This second question collects information on how proficient the client feels they are at speaking English. These questions have been added to strengthen the data collected regarding clients from CALD backgrounds.

**Clients with disability:** On 1 July 2019 a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) indicator was included to gain an understanding of the number of clients who were receiving an agreed NDIS package of support at the time of presentation to an SHS agency. This indicator was introduced to strengthen information regarding clients with a disability. However, variability in the interpretation and implementation of this item across agencies and jurisdictions has meant that this indicator is incomplete for 2019-20 and reporting has been restricted.

Further information on the data quality of 2019-20 SHSC data can be found in the Explanatory notes in the [Supplementary tables](#) and the [SHSC Data Quality Statement](#).

## Imputation and weighting

Data from 2011-12 to 2016-17 are weighted to account for variable rates of agency response and SLK validity. However, due to improvements in agency response and SLK validity rates, data for 2017-18 onwards are not weighted. Unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards are directly comparable with weighted data for 2011-12 to 2016-17. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series.

The annual SHS report and accompanying products presenting financial year data for 2011-12 to 2016-17 are weighted. However, other AIHW publications that analyse the pathways of individual clients over time periods more than a single financial year and publications using SHS data linked with data from other collections, do not use weighted data.





## Technical information

### Data presentation

Data presented in the report and in the supplementary tables are mainly based on ‘clients’, with some data based on ‘support periods’ or ‘client groups’ (or ‘presenting units’—which identify clients who present together to a specialist homelessness agency, including clients who present alone—and receive a service). Information on clients who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or part of a group of special interest, is mostly client-level data and information on agencies, unmet demand and trends data is predominantly support period data.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has strict confidentiality policies which have their basis in section 29 of the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987 (AIHW Act)* and the *Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act)*. Cells in supplementary tables may be suppressed for either confidentiality reasons or where estimates are based on small numbers, resulting in low reliability. Information that results in attribute disclosure, (that is, if as well as being able to identify the entity, other details are revealed), will be suppressed unless agreement from the particular data provider to publish the data has been reached. Information on AIHW’s Privacy policy is available on the [privacy page](#).

### 2019-20 Data derivations

#### Homelessness status and other housing categories

All clients of specialist homelessness services are considered to be either homeless or at risk of homelessness. Homelessness and at-risk status is determined by the specific criteria described below using three aspects of a client’s housing situation: dwelling type, housing tenure and their conditions of occupancy.

Clients are considered to be homeless if they are living in any of the following circumstances:

- No shelter or improvised dwelling: includes where dwelling type is no dwelling/street/park/in the open, motor vehicle, improvised building/dwelling, caravan, cabin, boat or tent; or tenure type is renting or living rent-free in a caravan park.
- Short-term temporary accommodation: dwelling type is boarding/rooming house, emergency accommodation, hotel/motel/bed and breakfast; or tenure type is renting or living rent-free in boarding/rooming house, renting or living rent-free in emergency accommodation, or renting or living rent-free in transitional housing.
- House, townhouse or flat (couch surfing or with no tenure): dwelling type is House/townhouse/flat, and tenure type is no tenure or conditions of occupancy is couch surfing.

Clients are considered to be at risk if they are living in any of the following circumstances:

- Public or community housing (renter or rent free): dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat and tenure type is renter or rent-free in public housing, or renter or rent-free in community housing.
- Private or other housing (renter, rent-free or owner): dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat and tenure type is renter or rent free in private housing, life tenure scheme, owner—shared equity or rent/buy scheme, owner—being purchased/with mortgage, owner—fully owned, or other renter or rent free.
- Institutional settings: dwelling type is hospital, psychiatric hospital/unit, disability support, rehabilitation, boarding school/residential college, adult correctional facility, youth/juvenile justice correctional centre, aged care facility or immigration detention centre.

Clients who did not provide any information regarding the three aspects of their housing situation are classified as ‘not stated’.

In some cases, information about a client’s dwelling type, tenure and conditions of occupancy may be partially complete and therefore there is not enough information to assign a client to any of the specific housing situation criteria above. Where analysis and report content relates to these more detailed housing situation categories, those clients with incomplete information are grouped with other clients with missing data as ‘other/not stated’.

However, there may be enough information to determine whether the client is broadly homeless or at risk, in which case the client will be assigned to either ‘other - homeless’ or ‘other - at risk’ for some analysis.

More specifically, those allocated to ‘other - homeless’ includes clients who stated that they have ‘no tenure’ or that they are a ‘couch surfer’. Clients in the ‘other - at-risk’ category are clients that have stated a response to at least one of the three aspects of their housing situation but there is not enough information to classify them as homeless.

Please see the footnotes for each table or figure to confirm the inclusion or exclusion of ‘other’ and ‘not stated’ categories.

The homeless and at-risk categories are designed to, as far as is possible, align with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical definition of homelessness (ABS 2012a). However, there are some key areas where alignment may not occur. The ABS definition includes people living in severely crowded dwellings and as no specific question on crowding is included in the SHSC, this group cannot be separately identified.

Also, the ABS exclude certain groups of people from the homeless count where they appear to have accommodation alternatives or where there is a clear choice about the type of accommodation (for example, people who are travelling, people returning from overseas, certain owner builder or hobby farmers, and students living in halls of residence). However, if people in these circumstances become clients of specialist homelessness agencies, they are included here as either homeless or at risk of homelessness, depending on their housing situation as reported.

### **Support periods**

The period of time a client receives services from a specialist homelessness agency is referred to as a support period. A support period starts on the day the client first receives a service and ends when:

- the relationship between the client and the agency ends
- the client has reached their maximum amount of support the agency can offer
- a client has not received any services from the agency for a whole calendar month and there is no ongoing relationship.

The end of the support period is the day the client last received services from the agency.

### **Calculating total length of accommodation (and total length of support)**

To calculate accommodation and support length, every night (for length of accommodation) or day (for length of support) the client received support or accommodation in 2019-20 is added together. This means that the total number of days/nights presented for clients does not necessarily represent a consecutive number of days/nights the client received support/accommodation. For example, a client who received accommodation for 7 nights may have had 2 separate periods of accommodation: 1 for 5 nights and another for 2 nights.

### **Agency remoteness area**

Agencies have been classified according to their remoteness area (RA) as defined by the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure (ABS 2016). The latest available version of the RA indicator (from the 2016 Census) has been developed by the ABS. The Remoteness Areas divide Australia into five classes of remoteness on the basis of relative access to services. Access to services is measured using the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), developed by the Hugo Centre for Migration and Population Research at the University of Adelaide. ARIA+ is derived by measuring the road distance from a point to the nearest Urban Centres and Localities in five separate population ranges.

Using this classification, agencies participating in the SHSC were assigned to an RA based on their recorded state, suburb, postcode and/or Local Government Area (LGA) values. Where available, a combination of these fields was used to assign RA for a given agency to improve accuracy.

### **Client geography**

Clients have been assigned to a region based on where they lived in the week before presenting to a SHS agency. Regions are defined by the 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), developed by the ABS (ABS 2016a).

Clients are assigned to only one region, based on the location details (locality, postcode and state/territory) provided in the first support period active in the reference year. The first support period is defined as the earliest starting support period active in the financial year.

Where there are multiple support periods that meet this criteria (i.e. share the same start date), a support period is randomly selected as the first support period.

In 2019-20, approximately 10% of clients could not be assigned to a statistical area 2 (SA2) region due to missing or incomplete address information.

## **Identifying and meeting service needs**

### **Identifying clients' needs for a service**

The SHSC collects information on the needs of clients during their period of support from a specialist homelessness agency. Needs may be identified by the client and/or the service provider. Although this information is collected at the beginning of a support period, updated at the end of each month a client is supported and again at the end of each support period, each individual need is only recorded once in any collection month. For these analyses, a client need for a service is recorded if the client needed that service at any time in 2019-20. For example, a client is recorded as needing short-term accommodation if they were recorded as needing short-term accommodation in any collection month of 2019-20, regardless of the number of months over which this need was recorded, or the number of times during 2019-20 they presented with this need.

### **Meeting clients' service needs**

There are several aspects to analysing the extent to which clients' needs for assistance are met. The first is to analyse the services provided to a client directly by the specialist homelessness agency. Where agencies are unable to provide services directly to clients or unable to fully meet the need they often refer the client to other organisations (either other specialist homelessness agencies or other organisations) that can provide those services. This referral information is also collected in the SHSC and is considered an important form of assistance that agencies provide, although it is not possible to know if these referrals resulted in the provision of services.

All information on services that are provided, whether referred or not, are recorded in the same way as service needs. That is, a service is recorded as provided if the client was provided that type of assistance at any time in 2019-20.

In some circumstances, an agency will not be able to either provide required services directly to clients, or refer them to another organisation—this is considered to be an unmet need. Further information about unmet needs can be found in the [Unmet demand](#) section of the report.

### **Indigenous clients**

A client is considered as Indigenous if, in any support period in 2019-20, they identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

In the SHSC, information on Indigenous status is only provided with explicit client consent to report this information. Indigenous status was not reported for 8% of clients in 2019-20.

### **Clients born overseas**

A client is identified as overseas-born, if in the majority of support periods in 2019-20, they identified that their country of birth was a country other than Australia.

In the SHSC, information on country of birth is only provided with explicit client consent to report this information. Country of birth information was not reported for 9% of clients in 2019-20.

### **Young people presenting alone**

Young people are defined as clients aged 15-24 who presented alone in their first support period in the reporting period.

The age of the client is defined as the client's age on the start date of their first support period in the reporting period. For those who were ongoing clients at the beginning of the reporting period, the client's age on the first day of the reporting period is used.

### **Older people**

Older people are defined as clients aged 55 or older.

The age of the client is defined as their age on the start date of their first support period in the reporting period. For those who were ongoing clients at the beginning of the reporting period, the client's age on the first day of the reporting period is used.

### **Clients who experienced family and domestic violence**

SHSC clients were counted as experiencing family and domestic violence (FDV) if any support period during the reporting period:

- The client was formally referred from a non-SHS FDV agency to an SHS agency, or
- 'family and domestic violence' was reported as a reason they sought assistance, or
- during any support period they required family or domestic violence assistance.

Note: The option for including clients formally referred from a non-SHS FDV agency was introduced on 1 July 2019 and only applies to support periods starting on or after this date.

### **Clients with a current mental health issue**

A client was identified as having a current mental health issue if they provided any of the following information:

- They indicated that at the beginning of a support period they were receiving services or assistance for their mental health issues or had in the past 12 months.
- Their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a mental health service.
- They reported 'mental health issues' as a reason for seeking assistance.
- Their dwelling type either a week before presenting to an agency, or when presenting to an agency, was a psychiatric hospital or unit.
- They had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the last 12 months.
- At some stage during their support period, a need was identified for psychological services, psychiatric services or mental health services.

This analysis does not include clients aged under 10.

In the SHSC, information on a mental health issue is only provided with explicit client consent to report this information.

### **Clients on care and protection orders**

A client is identified as being under a care or protection order if they are aged under 18 and have provided any of the following information in any support period (any month within the support period) during the reporting period (either the week before, at the beginning of the support period or during support):

- They reported that they were under a care and protection order (and the care arrangement was known).
- They have reported 'Transition from foster care/child safety residential placements' as a reason for seeking assistance, or main reason for seeking assistance.

In the SHSC, if a client is under the age of 18 and has a care and protection order, consent is required to determine their care arrangements.

### **Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use**

A client is identified as having problematic drug and/or alcohol use if they were aged 10 years or older and have provided any of the following information either at the beginning of support or in any support period during the reporting period (either the week before or at beginning of the support period):

- Their dwelling type was recorded as rehabilitation.
- Their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a drug and alcohol service.
- During their support they required drug/alcohol counselling.
- They have been in a rehabilitation facility/institution in the last 12 months.
- They have reported 'problematic drug or substance abuse' or 'problematic alcohol use' as a reason for seeking assistance or main reason for seeking assistance.

### **Clients leaving care**

Clients are counted as transitioning from care arrangements if, in their first support period during the reporting period, either in the week before or at presentation:

- The dwelling type was: hospital (excluding psychiatric), psychiatric hospital or unit, disability support, rehabilitation or aged care facility, or
- Their reason for seeking assistance was transition from foster care/child safety residential placements or transition from other care arrangements.

### **Clients who were exiting custodial arrangements**

Clients are counted as leaving a custodial setting if, in their first support period during the reporting period, either in the week before or at presentation:

- their dwelling type was: adult correctional facility, youth or juvenile justice detention centre or immigration detention centre or
- their reason for seeking assistance was: transition from custodial arrangements or
- their source of formal referral to the agency was: youth or juvenile justice detention centre, or adult correctional facility.

Some of these clients were still in custody at the time they began receiving support.

Children aged under 10 identified as exiting from adult correction facilities or youth/juvenile justice detention centres have been excluded because of concerns about the quality of the data, as children aged under 10 years cannot be charged with a criminal offence in any jurisdiction in Australia.

### **New and returning clients**

Clients are identified in the SHSC as new clients if, in their first support period during the reporting period, they:

- had not previously been assisted by a specialist homelessness agency, at any time since the collection began in 2011-12.

Clients are identified as returning if, in their first support period during the reporting period, they:

- had previously been assisted by a specialist homelessness agency at any time since the collection began in 2011-12.

This measure provides contextual information about service use patterns.

### **Unassisted requests for services**

Unassisted requests for services provide a measure of the number of instances where a person received no immediate services from a specialist homelessness agency. It is not a measure of the number of people who did not receive services from an agency. Numbers exclude multiple requests from the same person (at any agency) on the same day, but may include requests from the same person (at any agency) on different days.

The data are presented as a daily average of requests for services because the information that is used to create the SLK was not available for 53% of the unmet requests for service in 2019-20. Without a valid SLK, it is not possible to identify whether a person requested the same service more than once from the same agency or from different agencies on different days. Similarly, people who received services at a later date, thus becoming clients, cannot be identified where a valid SLK is not available.

Over recent years, a number of jurisdictions have made changes to services delivery models and in particular toward central intake service delivery models. In practice, these systems often require agency workers to provide assistance of some kind to all presenting individuals. Therefore, caution should be used when comparing data over time and between states and territories, particularly data relating to unassisted requests.

## Technical information

### Population estimates used for rates calculations

All rates in this report, including historical rates, have been calculated using population estimates based on the 2016 Census. All Indigenous rates in this report are calculated using the Indigenous population estimates and projections, based on the 2016 Census.

### Population rates

Crude rates are calculated using the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population (ERP) at the start of the range (for example, rates for 2011-12 were calculated using the ERP at 30 June 2011). Rates for 2019-20 data were calculated using the preliminary ERP at 30 June 2018.

Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

### Age-standardised rates

Population rates were adjusted (standardised) for age to enhance the comparison between populations over time that have different age structures. Specifically, direct standardisation has been used where age-specific rates are applied to a standard population (the ERP as at 30 June 2001, unless otherwise specified). This effectively accounts for the influence of age structure on the calculated rate and is referred to as the age-standardised rate. In this publication direct age-standardisation has been used to compare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW 2011).

### Rate ratio

Rate ratios are mainly used to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates and provide a measure of the level of Indigenous over-representation. A rate ratio is calculated by dividing the client rate for Indigenous Australian by the client rate for non-Indigenous Australians.

### Average annual rates of change

The average annual rates of change or growth rates have been calculated as geometric rates:

$$\text{Average rate of change} = ((P_n/P_o)^{(1/n)} - 1) \times 100$$

where:

$P_n$  = value in the later time period

$P_o$  = value in the earlier time period

$n$  = number of years between the 2 time periods.

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## Technical information

Concept	Definition
Accommodation services	<p><b>Accommodation services</b> include short-term or emergency accommodation, medium-term/transitional housing, assistance to obtain long term housing, assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction and assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears.</p>
At risk of homelessness	<p>A person is described as <b>at risk of homelessness</b> if they are at risk of losing their accommodation or they are experiencing one or more of a range of factors or triggers that can contribute to homelessness.</p> <p>Risk factors include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• financial stress (including due to loss of income, low income, gambling, change of family circumstances)</li><li>• housing affordability stress and housing crisis (pending evictions/foreclosures, rental and/or mortgage arrears)</li><li>• inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions, including accommodation that is unsafe, unsuitable or overcrowded</li><li>• previous accommodation ended</li><li>• relationship/family breakdown</li><li>• child abuse, neglect or environments where children are at risk</li><li>• sexual abuse</li><li>• family/domestic violence</li><li>• non-family violence</li><li>• mental health issues and other health problems</li><li>• problematic alcohol, drug or substance use</li><li>• employment difficulties and unemployment</li><li>• problematic gambling</li><li>• transitions from custodial and care arrangements, including out-of-home care, independent living arrangements for children aged under 18, health and mental health facilities/programs, juvenile/youth justice and correctional facilities</li><li>• discrimination, including racial discrimination (e.g. Aboriginal people in the urban rental market)</li><li>• disengagement with school or other education and training</li><li>• involvement in, or exposure to, criminal activities</li><li>• antisocial behaviour</li><li>• lack of family and/or community support</li><li>• staying in a boarding house for 12 weeks or more without security of tenure.</li></ul> <p>The measurement of this concept in the SHSC is defined in the Data presentation and derivations section.</p>
Client	<p>A <b>Specialist homelessness agency client</b> is a person who receives a specialist homelessness service. A client can be of any age. Children are also clients if they receive a service from a specialist homelessness agency. To be a client the person must directly receive a service and not just be a beneficiary of a service. Children who present with an adult and receive a service are considered to be a client. Children of a client or other household members who present but do not directly receive a service are not considered to be clients.</p>

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**SHS clients are identified as being on a care and protection order** if they are aged under 18 and provided any of the following information in any support period (any month within the support period) during the reporting period (either the week before, at the beginning of the support period or during support).

They reported that they are on a care and protection order and that they had the following care arrangements:

**Client on a care and protection order**

- residential care
- family group home
- relatives/kin/friends who are reimbursed
- foster care
- other home-based care (reimbursed)
- relatives/kin/friends who are not reimbursed
- independent living
- other living arrangements
- parents; or
- they have reported 'Transition from foster care/child safety residential placements' as a reason for seeking assistance, or main reason for seeking assistance.

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**SHS clients with a current mental health issue** are identified as such if they have provided any of the following information:

**Client with a current mental health issue**

- they indicated that at the beginning of a support period they were receiving services or assistance for their mental health issues or had in the last 12 months
- their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a mental health service
- they reported 'mental health issues' as a reason for seeking assistance
- their dwelling type either a week before presenting to an agency, or when presenting to an agency, was as a psychiatric hospital or unit
- they had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the last 12 months
- at some stage during their support period, a need was identified for psychological services, psychiatric services or mental health services.

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**SHS clients with a current problematic drug and/or alcohol use** are identified as such if they are 10 years or older and have provided any of the following information:

**Client with problematic drug and/or alcohol use**

- their dwelling type was recorded as rehabilitation
- their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a drug and alcohol service
- during their support they required drug/alcohol counselling
- they have been in a rehabilitation facility/institution in the last 12 months
- they have reported 'problematic drug or substance abuse' or 'problematic alcohol use' as a reason for seeking assistance or main reason for seeking assistance.

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**SHS clients with severe or profound disability** are identified as such if at any time they have provided the following information:

- they 'always/sometimes need help or supervision' with self-care, mobility or communication for any support period during the reporting period.

**Client with disability**

The definition used to identify clients with disability (for the purposes of analyses for this report) is similar to that used for ABS Census questions that measure 'core activity need for assistance'. The Census questions are a simplified version of the comprehensive questions used in the ABS Survey of Disability and Carers (SDAC). The Census's simplified questions are conceptually comparable with 'severe or profound core activity limitation' in the SDAC.

The ABS Census aims to identify people who need assistance in their day-to-day lives with any or all of the following core activities: self-care, mobility or communication (ABS 2012b). The SHSC takes a similar approach in gathering information from clients of specialist homelessness services about disability.

To align with the ABS definition of 'core activity need for assistance', clients who did not report needing assistance (such as 'have difficulty but don't need help/supervision' or 'don't have difficulty, but use aids/equipment') with self-care, mobility or communication are not included as clients with severe or profound disability for SHS analyses.

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### Measuring disability in the SHSC

A long-term health condition is one that has lasted, or is expected to last, 6 months or more.

Examples of long-term health conditions that might restrict everyday activities include severe asthma, epilepsy, mental health conditions, hearing loss, arthritis, autism, kidney disease, chronic pain, speech impediment and stroke.

Disability is a general term that covers:

- impairments in body structures or functions (for example, loss or abnormality of a body part)
- limitations in everyday activities (such as difficulty bathing or managing daily routines)
- restrictions in participation in life situations (such as needing special arrangements to attend work).

### Disability measurement in the SHSC

The SHSC collects information on whether, and to what extent, a long-term health condition or disability restricts clients' everyday activities across the following 3 life areas:

- Self-care—the client needs help/supervision with self-care (e.g. showering or bathing, dressing or undressing, using the toilet or eating food)
- Mobility—the client needs help/supervision with mobility (e.g. moving around the house, moving around outside the home, or getting into or out of a chair)
- Communication—the client needs help/supervision with communication (e.g. understanding or being understood by other people, including people they know).

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### General services include:

- family/relationship assistance
- assistance for incest/sexual assault
- legal information
- material aid/brokerage
- financial information
- educational assistance
- training assistance
- employment assistance
- assistance to obtain/maintain government allowances
- assertive outreach for rough sleepers
- child care
- assistance for trauma
- assistance for challenging social/behavioural problems
- living skills/personal development
- court support
- advice/information
- retrieval/storage/removal of personal belongings
- advocacy/liaison on behalf of client
- school liaison
- structured play/skills development
- child contact and residence arrangements
- meals
- laundry/shower facilities
- recreation
- transport and
- other basic assistance.

### General services

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For the purpose of the SHSC a person is defined as homeless if they are living in either:

- non-conventional accommodation or ‘sleeping rough’, or
- short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options.

Non-conventional accommodation (primary homeless) is defined as:

- living on the streets
- sleeping in parks
- squatting
- staying in cars or railway carriages
- living in improvised dwellings
- living in the long grass.

## Homelessness

This definition aligns closely with the cultural definition of primary homelessness.

Short-term or emergency accommodation (secondary homeless) includes:

- refuges
- crisis shelters
- couch surfing or no tenure
- living temporarily with friends and relatives
- insecure accommodation on a short-term basis
- emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency (for example, in hotels, motels and so forth).

This definition aligns closely with the cultural definition of secondary homelessness.

The measurement of Homelessness in the SHSC is defined in the Data derivation section.

The ABS definition of homelessness for estimates derived from the Census of Population and Housing can be found in ABS catalogue 2049.0 (ABS 2012a).

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## National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS provides support to eligible people with intellectual, physical, sensory, cognitive and psychosocial disability. If a person meets the eligibility criteria they can apply for the NDIS.

To become an NDIS participant, a person must satisfy the following access criteria:

- be under 65 years of age
- live in Australian and be an Australian citizen, permanent resident or special category visa holder
- have a permanent and significant disability or a developmental delay
- need support from a person or equipment to do everyday activities (NDIS 2020).

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## Other support services

**Other support services** refer to the assistance, other than accommodation services, provided to a client. They include family/domestic violence services, mental health services, family/relationship assistance, disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, other specialist services and general assistance and support.

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## Specialist homelessness agency

A **specialist homelessness agency** is an organisation which receives government funding to deliver specialist homelessness services to a client. These can be either not-for-profit or for profit agencies.

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## Specialist homelessness service(s)

**Specialist homelessness service(s)** is assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. The specialist homelessness services in scope for this collection include accommodation provision, assistance to sustain housing, family/domestic violence services, mental health services, family/relationship assistance, disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, other specialist services and general assistance and support.

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## Stable housing

**Stable housing**, for the purpose of the SHSC, refers to clients ending support in public or community housing (renter or rent free), private or other housing (renter, rent free or owner), or Institutional settings.

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## Technical information

### Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CPO	Care and Protection Order
ERP	Estimated Resident Population
DSS	Department of Social Services
FDV	Family and Domestic Violence
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
SDAC	Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
SHSC	Specialist Homelessness Services Collection
SLK	Statistical Linkage Key

### Symbols

—	nil or rounded to zero
. .	not applicable
n.a.	not available
n.p.	not publishable because of small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data

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## Technical information

1. ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2012a. [Census of population and housing: estimating homelessness, 2011](#). ABS cat. no. 2049.0. Canberra: ABS.
  2. ABS 2012b. [Census data quality statement: core activity need for assistance](#). Canberra: ABS.
  3. ABS 2016. Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure July 2016. ABS cat. no. 1270.0.55.005. Canberra: ABS.
  4. ABS 2016a. Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 1 - Main structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas July 2016. ABS cat. no. 1270.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS.
  5. AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2011. [Principles on the use of direct age-standardisation in administrative data collections: for measuring the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians](#). Data linkage series. Cat. no. CSI 12. Canberra: AIHW.
  6. NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) 2020. [Am I eligible](#). Viewed 30 July 2020.
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## Interactive data visualisation

Data visualisation for Australia's specialist homelessness services dashboard contents. This includes specialist homelessness services 2019-20; specialist homelessness services historical trends 2012-20 and supplementary information.

### Australia's Specialist Homelessness Services Dashboard Contents

Click on topic of interest to explore further

#### Specialist Homelessness Services: 2019–20

<b>Client Characteristics</b>	<b>Client Geography</b>	<b>Client Outcomes</b>
SHS client characteristics 2019–20	SHS client geography, SA4 2019–20	SHS client housing outcomes 2019–20

#### Specialist Homelessness Services Historical Trends: 2012–13 to 2019–20

<b>Historical Trends</b>	<b>Indigenous Trends</b>
SHS client group trends 2012–13 to 2019–20	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients 2012–13 to 2019–20

#### Supplementary information

<b>Explanatory Notes</b>
Data technical notes



## Fact sheets by state and territory

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## On any given day infographics

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# Data

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## Report editions

### Newer releases

- Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22 |  
**Web report** | 08 Dec 2022
- Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020-21 |  
**Web report** | 07 Oct 2022

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### This release

Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20 | 11 Dec 2020

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### Previous releases

- Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018-19 |  
**Web report** | 18 Dec 2019
- Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017-18 |  
**Web report** | 13 Feb 2019
- Specialist homelessness services annual report 2016-17 |  
**Web report** | 12 Feb 2018
- Specialist homelessness services 2015-16 |  
**Web report** | 15 Dec 2016
- Specialist homelessness services 2014-15 |  
**Web report** | 11 Dec 2015
- Specialist homelessness services 2013-14 |  
**Publication** | 15 Dec 2014
- Specialist homelessness services 2012-13 |  
**Publication** | 17 Dec 2013
- Specialist Homelessness Services 2011-12 |  
**Publication** | 18 Dec 2012



## Related material

### Resources

### Related topics

- [Housing assistance](#)
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