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chp
council
to homeless
persons

Revisiting Homelessness Data

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Contributions to *Parity* are welcome. Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people who are homeless. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor.

Parity on the CHP Website

www.chp.org.au/services/parity-magazine/
Contributions can be sent by email to *parity@chp.org.au* in a Microsoft Word or rtf format. If this option is not possible, contributions can be faxed on *(03) 9419 7445* or mailed to CHP.

Proposed 2017 *Parity* Publications Schedule

NB: Please note that this may be subject to change.
Please check out the CHP website: *www.chp.org.au* for updates.

June:	The NDIS, Housing and Homelessness
July:	Poverty and Homelessness
August:	The Future of National Homelessness Policy
September:	Social Housing
October:	Responding to Homelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand
November:	Responding to Homelessness in Queensland
December:	Victorian Homelessness Conference edition

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Cover image: detail of an installation by Ryoji Ikeda.

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As is the case across human services, it is clear that there will be a growing emphasis on high-quality, accurate data about homelessness. This edition of *Parity* is a stocktake of the data we collect, an analysis of what we are doing with it, while examining the work we need to do to ensure a future of solid, reliable data.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, and related sampling that is undertaken every five years, allows us to focus on the large numbers of people in our community who are homeless each night. This work is built upon the foundations of the ground-breaking analyses undertaken by Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie in earlier national census collections.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) collates the data we collect as service providers. This data has been available since the inauguration of the SAAP National Data Collection in the 1990s. It provides us with information about who we see, why they come to us for help, and in broad terms what we do and do not deliver in response. This data collection is designed to assist governments to develop policy and allocate resources. Where good reporting has been developed and implemented, this data can — and must — also underpin improvements we make to service planning and delivery.

In addition to the AIHW service level, data is also available about the housing market generally and the availability and affordability of rentals. These collections show the steady decline of affordability of housing particularly for those on low incomes seeking rentals.

There are some excellent examples of service programs being evaluated, providing us with information about these programs' strengths and weaknesses and, where the evidence suggests, supports the case for expansion to scale around the country.

Another example of data being generated is the important research being undertaken around the country including the seminal Journey's Home longitudinal study. A number of our capital cities undertake street counts, and as those numbers inexorably rise each year, we come to understand that those figures can mean quite different things to the various stakeholders involved.

Where you stand depends on where you sit. Your perspective can be quite different if you are local government, a city trader or a specialist homelessness service provider trying to respond to the crisis and find suitable housing and support. Most importantly, we need to consistently seek out the perspective of those actually experiencing homelessness. Recently, there's been further complexity due to tabloid media reporting an 'explosion' in the numbers of the homeless inhabiting the streets of our capital cities and vilifying those unfortunate enough to be rough sleeping.

We have more than enough data to know that there are over 100,000 Australians each night who are excluded from the basic amenity of appropriate housing. We have known for decades that there is not sufficient housing affordable to those on the lowest incomes. Any examination of social housing provision will reveal that governments of all persuasions have neglected their responsibility to provide adequate levels of social housing. We have seen short bursts of investment rather than systematic government leadership and effort.

Homelessness data collection and homelessness research unequivocally reveal that the provision of both housing and support in different ratios, depending on the individual or household involved, are required to end homelessness.

It is time to turn what the data tells us into real action.

Acknowledgements

The Council to Homeless Persons would like to that the editions sponsors, Launch Housing, VincentCare Victoria, the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services and Guest Editor David MacKenzie from Swinburne University's Institute of Social Research for their wholehearted support for this edition on homelessness data.

Turning the Soil

Sacred Heart Mission (SHM) has broken ground on $27.3 million of redevelopment, which will transform the way health care services and accommodation are provided to individuals experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

Known as Project 101, the redevelopment of buildings between the corners of Robe and Grey streets in St Kilda will officially start construction and bring together five high-quality services as well as new accommodation under the one roof to create a connected support hub.

Acting Chief Executive Officer Catherine Harris said the momentous occasion was celebrated with a 'turning of the soil' ceremony, which marked the start of official construction.

'The Mission is thrilled this redevelopment has reached construction stage after more than four years of planning and an incredible year of philanthropy, government funding, donations and financing to make our "campus of care" a reality,' Catherine says.

'This is our most transformational building project in our 35-year history, but also one of the Mission's most unique ways of banding the community together.

'Tackling homelessness relies on the sustained generosity of donors and the talents of our capable staff and volunteers. We have been touched by the overwhelming support we received from so many in such a short time. It is a testament of the generosity of Melburnians and their compassion for those less fortunate.'

SHM embarked on the *One Heart, One Home* capital campaign to harness philanthropic support for this growing social issue, and to raise $8 million of the $27.3 million required for the project.

With the support of well-known philanthropists Paula Fox AO, campaign patron, and our campaign chair, Gerry Ryan, SHM ran a successful campaign which engaged donors, and as a result brought about real social impact and change through social investment.

SHM also received a contribution of approximately $8.8 million from the Federal Government for aged care, and $3.17 million from the State Government for the rooming house and expansion of the Hands on Health Clinic.

In addition to merging two existing aged care buildings, the redevelopment includes combining a 14-bed supported rooming house, an expanded clinic that will deliver allied health services, a renovated and extended open-access Women's House as well as an administration building that allows the centralisation of administrative services for the Mission.

Aged care services offered by Sacred Heart Mission differ from other services because they support people from a younger age and 95 per cent have a history of homelessness, significant disadvantage and complex needs.

SHM needs just under half a million dollars to reach its fundraising target of $8 million, which is now well within reach. To learn more about the project and how you can help us build change, visit: *buildchange.sacredheartmission.org*

Photo by Michael Kluge

Feature:
Revisiting Homelessness Data

Introduction

Guest Editor, David MacKenzie, Associate Professor, Swinburne University Institute for Social Research and Executive Director of Youth Development Australia

In Australia, homelessness and housing affordability more generally are recognised social problems that are of concern in the community and require ongoing government funding. Social problems are constructed in the sense that a particular condition or behaviour needs to become seen as problematic and thus requiring remedial policy action. How a problem is described and defined substantially shapes the kinds of policies devised to address the problem. This homelessness data issue of *Parity* is a timely moment to reflect on just how the problem of homelessness is defined in homelessness data and just far we have come in the development of more adequate data on homelessness in Australia, as well as some of the contemporary challenges and opportunities for moving forward.

In the 1970s and 1980s, service providers began to notice that young people, women and families were experiencing homelessness in increasing numbers. The homeless population appeared to be changing. Estimates of the size of the increasing problem were based on guesstimates. However, social statistics do matter. Big numbers mean that a problem is both common and significant and that it requires attention.

However, these numbers are often contested. The media plays an important role in this process. The original national program of homelessness services, the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) was formed in 1985 from a range of disparate federal and state programs. In a review of the new program, *Homes Away from Home* (1989), Colleen Chesterman proposed a series of recommendations for improving the administration of the program including a national SAAP client data system. In the early 1990s, the national data collection consisted of a census of people accommodated in SAAP funded services throughout Australia.

A Data and Research Advisory Committee (DRAC) laboured to build a client data system that recorded data on people entering and leaving SAAP with salient information on where they had come from, where they were destined to go after being and accommodated and supported and data on their expressed needs as clients. A trial was conducted by a team from the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) in 1995. A national data collection embodying what Chesterman had advised and some more commenced in 1996. Reports from the SAAP National Data Collection were published from July 1996 to December 2011.

Several years later, beginning as a research project undertaken by Chris Chamberlain and myself, a methodology was established for operationalising the cultural definition of homeless to enumerate the extent of homelessness in Australia using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data as well as the data on SAAP clients and other data on homeless young people.

Counting the Homeless reports were published by the ABS and the AIHW using the 2001 and 2006 Census data. Following a review of Counting the Homeless model, the ABS revised the definition of homelessness to create an ABS statistical definition of homelessness and beginning with the 2011 Census data now provides the official statistics on homelessness in Australia. The ABS incorporated a category of homelessness into the General Social Survey. A third important collection of data on homelessness was funded as research following the Federal Government White Paper, *The Road Home*. This was the Journey's Home longitudinal study of a sample of people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness at the beginning of the study.

The chapters that follow in this edition are a good indication of both the distance covered since the inception of homelessness data collection, as well as the issues that still need to be examined, and the issues and problems that are still contested.

Victorian Homelessness Conference 2017

September 13 and 14

An outstanding professional development opportunity for practitioners, policy makers, researchers and consumers of homelessness services.

Held bi-annually, the **Victorian Homelessness Conference** has earnt a reputation as the leading event of its kind in Australia.

This year, running in parallel to the regular conference programming there will be a youth-specific conference stream.

Keynote speaker, **Professor Eoin O'Sullivan**, is a leading academic in Europe and editor of the *European Journal on Homelessness*.

Registrations are now open.
Go to:
www.chpconference.com.au

Chapter 1: Collecting and Interpreting Homelessness Data

Homelessness Statistics: Why They Matter and What They Say

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Homelessness is a complex issue that affects many Australians. It requires a long-term and systematic effort across agencies, sectors, and the community. Services to prevent homelessness are delivered by state and territory governments and the Commonwealth Government supports this work by funding national agreements.[1]

Homelessness data is used to establish:

- the extent and nature of homelessness in Australia
- how homelessness in Australia may be changing over time.

Data is also a critical aspect of the evidence base to inform the delivery of high-quality services to people vulnerable to homelessness. It is important that funded programs are cost-effective and work to improve the lives of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Rigorous, accurate and reliable data across service systems and program areas responding to homelessness is needed to reliably measure progress in addressing homelessness.

The 2008 *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*[2] drove investment in developing national data collections that could provide data to readily measure and evaluate efforts to alleviate homelessness.

Table 1 provides details of three national homelessness data collections — the Census of Population and Housing (Census); Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC); and the Journeys Home survey — which are key contributors to the homelessness evidence base.

Endnotes

1. Department of Social Services 2016, Canberra Department of Social Services. Viewed 24 April, *<https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support/programmes-services/homelessness>*
2. Australian Government 2008, *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
3. *http://abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/factsheetsheet*
4. *http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/*
5. *http://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/journeys-home*

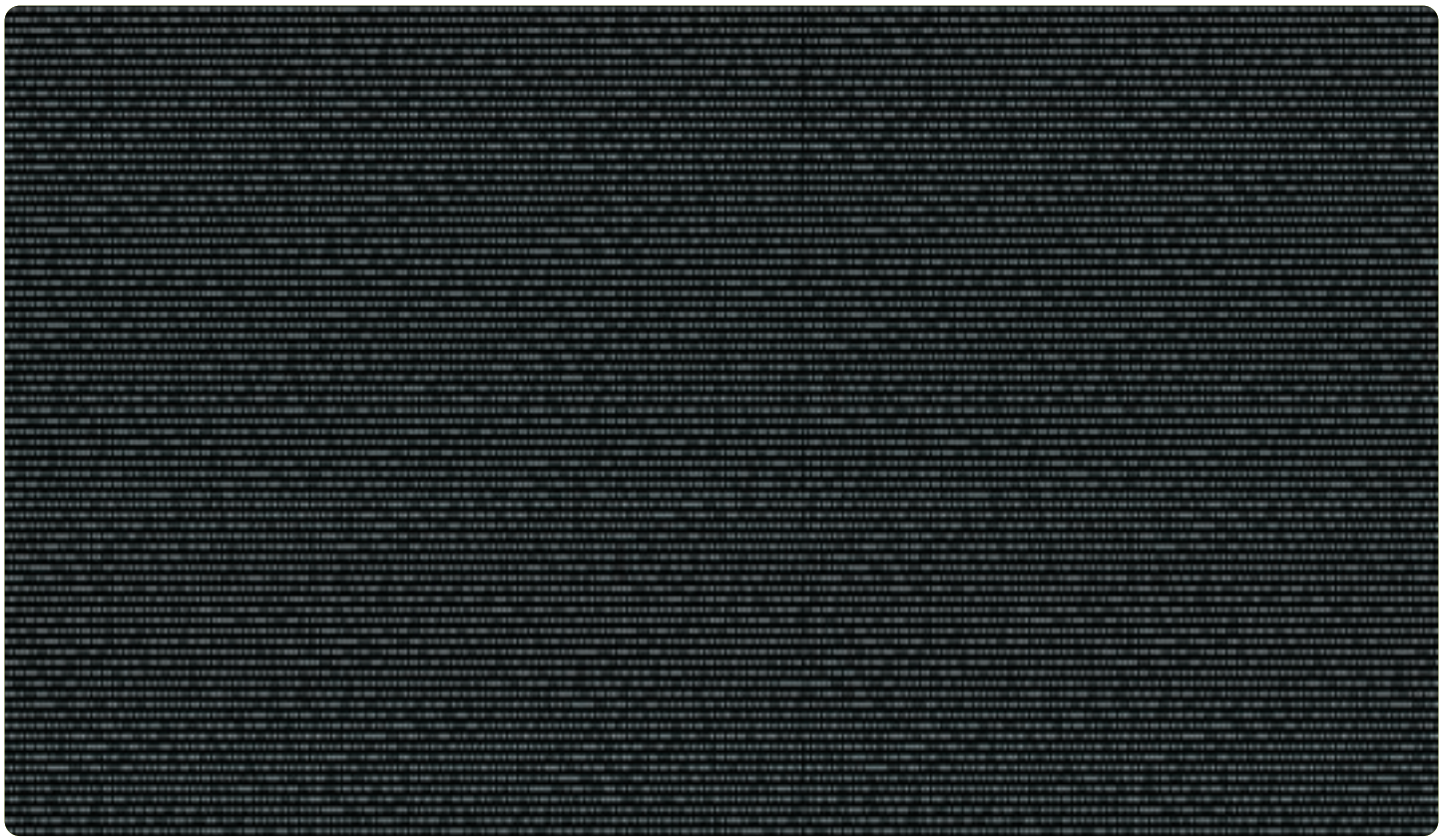


Table 1: Details of three main national homelessness data collections

	Census	SHSC	Journeys Home
Key information from data source			
Measures Prevalence	Yes	No	No
Measures flows into and out of homelessness	No	Yes, for ongoing and returning clients	Yes
Measures homelessness services	No	Yes	No
Information about data source			
Type of data source	Census data	Administrative data (designed to maximise statistical/research use)	Survey data
Description	The Census collects data on the key characteristics of people in Australia on Census night and their dwellings.	Data is collected monthly, via client management systems, from people assisted by homelessness services.	Data is from a longitudinal survey, tracking a sample of people exposed to high levels of housing insecurity.
Purpose	Aims to collect data that provides an accurate estimate of the Australian population including those experiencing homelessness.	Aims to provide data about people assisted by homelessness agencies so this can inform policy and service responses.	Aims to identify the factors leading to homelessness and the support strategies required to exit from it.
Collection methodology	Data are collected on Census night from all Australians. Estimates of the homeless population are derived using analytical techniques.	SHS agencies report standardised data about people assisted each month to AIHW.	Longitudinal survey that collected data at six points in time (waves) from a sample of people experiencing housing insecurity.
Scope	Everyone in Australia on Census night.	Everyone who seeks assistance from homelessness services.	Centrelink clients 15+ identified as vulnerable to homelessness.
Coverage issues	There are challenges in collecting Census data from people who are not housed. ABS uses a homeless enumeration strategy to improve the count of homeless people.	Only people who seek assistance are covered. Data on unassisted people is limited. Most data collected is about clients (people who receive services).	Only Centrelink clients 15+ selected for sample and virtually no aged pensioners 65+ in sample.
Geographic coverage	Australia-wide with 2011 Census data reported down to Statistical Area Level 1.	Australia-wide with postcode data collected, but reporting subject to data quality and confidentiality protections.	Sample was clustered around 36 geographical areas across Australia. Data available at Statistical Area Level 2 subject to confidentiality protections.
Frequency/timing	Every five years. Last reported 2012; 2016 Census data on the homeless population is expected to be reported in late 2017.	Data collected monthly. Annual reporting to public. Also quarterly reporting to authorised agencies.	Survey has ended. Data collected six times over 30 month period, from September 2011 to May 2014. Data set available to researchers. A number of reports have been produced from the data.
Basic collection counts	People	Client/support period/ unassisted instances	People
Size	With 2011 Census 105,237 people were counted as homeless.	Includes data relating to over 800,000 SHSC clients over five years	Almost 1,700 people in sample.
Responsible organisation	Australian Bureau of Statistics	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research
More information	Homelessness [3]	Specialist homelessness services 2015–16 [4]	Journeys home [5]

The Collection of Homelessness Statistics in the Census

Phillip Lui, Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) runs a Census of Population and Housing every five years, with Census night, 9 August 2016, being the most recent.

Every Census, the ABS uses a range of targeted approaches to enable the best possible coverage of all groups in the Australian population. The Homeless Enumeration Strategy[1] targeted people who were experiencing homelessness.

As homelessness is not a characteristic that is directly collected, estimates of homelessness are derived by using analytical techniques based on both the characteristics observed in the Census and assumptions about the way people may respond to the Census questions.[2]

These estimates enable the scale of homelessness in Australia to be measured. Data on the location and characteristics of homeless people can be used to report trends and to target services to prevent or ameliorate the circumstances.

In the 2011 Census[3] there were over 100,000 homeless people in Australia, 25 per cent of whom were Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander peoples and many of whom were youth (aged 12 to 24 years). The most common form of homelessness was persons staying in severely crowded dwellings.

Homelessness estimates from the 2016 Census are expected to be released towards the end of 2017.

How Does ABS Define Homelessness?

According to the ABS' statistical definition,[4] when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

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

Access to accommodation alternatives is contingent on a person having the financial, physical, psychological and personal means to access these alternatives. There are some exclusions from this definition, particularly those staying in convents, prisons, student halls of residence, hospitals and rehabilitation centres.

The ABS definition of homelessness has been used to produce statistics on the past experiences of homelessness from ABS household surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS), the Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers (SDAC), the Personal Safety Survey (PSS), and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS).

Our research shows that the definition is suitable for use with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.[5] ABS data collectors are specially trained to engage appropriately with this population. This population may interpret 'homelessness' differently to 'rooflessness' due to their cultural and spiritual understanding that 'home' may mean staying on spiritual land, even though they may be without a roof, or are staying with family or community.

How Does the ABS Produce Homelessness Estimates from the Census?

The Homeless Enumeration Strategy[6] complements the mainstream Census and other special strategies to ensure that everyone is enumerated on Census night. For the 2016 Census, people who were rough sleeping, couch surfing or staying in supported accommodation for the homeless were the focus of the strategy.

Leading up to and during the enumeration period, the ABS worked closely with service and accommodation providers.
Many people who had, or were currently experiencing homelessness, were recruited to assist with the homeless count.

For rough sleepers, the collectors targeted known hot-spots using a shorter personal form called a 'Special Short Form', while the household form was used largely for those in northern Australia.
To correctly identify supported accommodation for the homeless, an address list strategy was used.
Couch surfers and other people experiencing homelessness who are enumerated on mainstream forms were encouraged through awareness campaigns to report 'None' in the Census question that asks about a person's usual place of residence.
People turned away from supported accommodation with vouchers or brokerage to stay at other temporary lodgings (such as a motel, hotel, or bed and breakfast), were encouraged to report 'None — Crisis'.

Final estimates of the homeless population are calculated from the Census according to the statistical method described in the *Information Paper — Methodology for Estimating*

Homelessness from the Census of Population and Housing (ABS cat. no. 2049.0.55.001). The methodology translates these responses into estimates where people, on balance, were most likely to have been homeless on Census night.

For example, usual place of residence, employment status, income and tenure type are considered when calculating the number of homeless persons in 'improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out'. The purpose is to exclude remote construction and road workers, grey nomads, other travellers, home-owner builders and hobby farmers.

Who are Considered Homeless?

As for the previous Census, the results from the 2016 Census will be released in the *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016 (ABS cat. no. 2049.0)*. The homeless groups are:

- persons who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleepers out
- persons in supported accommodation for the homeless (for example, crisis accommodation, hostels, women's refuges)
- persons staying temporarily with other households (for example, homeless couch surfers)
- persons staying in boarding houses
- persons in other temporary lodging
- persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

The publication also includes other categories for people who are staying in marginal housing and are therefore 'at risk' of homelessness.

- persons living in other crowded dwellings
- persons in other improvised dwellings
- persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

The ABS is continuing to undertake research and development to improve the estimation of homelessness. There are limitations currently in how some key groups are counted when estimating those likely to be homeless. These groups include homeless youth, homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people fleeing domestic and/or family violence.

The ABS has a series of homelessness factsheets[7] that describe these groups in greater detail.

Who Uses the Homelessness Estimates?

The Census data is primarily used as the baseline measure in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH). It is also used to determine the distribution of funding for homeless services across States and Territories. Other uses include policy and service delivery purposes at State, Territory and local government level.

Key users of the data include the Department of Social Services, the Productivity Commission, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and State/Territory housing authorities, as well as researchers (for example, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)), service providers, and advocacy organisations (for example, Homelessness Australia, Council to Homeless Persons).

Endnotes

1. Information Paper: *2011 Census Special Enumeration Strategies* (ABS cat. no. 2911.0.55.004).
2. Information Paper: *Methodology for Estimating Homelessness from the Census of Population and Housing* (ABS cat. no. 2049.0.55.001).
3. *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness 2011* (ABS cat. no. 2049.0).
4. Information Paper: *A Statistical Definition of Homelessness* (ABS cat. no. 4922.0).
5. Information Paper: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Perspectives on Homelessness 2014* (ABS cat. no. 4736.0).
6. Information Paper: 2011 op cit.
7. *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness 2011*, Factsheets — *Youth Homelessness; Overcrowding; Domestic and Family Violence; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Homelessness.* (ABS cat. no. 2049.0).

The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Help is available for people who find themselves homeless, or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Assistance is provided through government-funded Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) agencies delivered by non-government organisations. The SHSC is an on-going collection, reporting contextual information about individuals assisted by specialist homelessness agencies, their circumstances, experience of homelessness, and their service needs over time. The Collection, currently in its 6th year, contains standardised data from around 1,500 SHS agencies across Australia. The SHSC client population not only reflects the demand for assistance, but is strongly influenced by the availability of services, both in terms of the target groups to which services are directed and the location and accessibility of available services.

Transforming SHSC Data Into Information

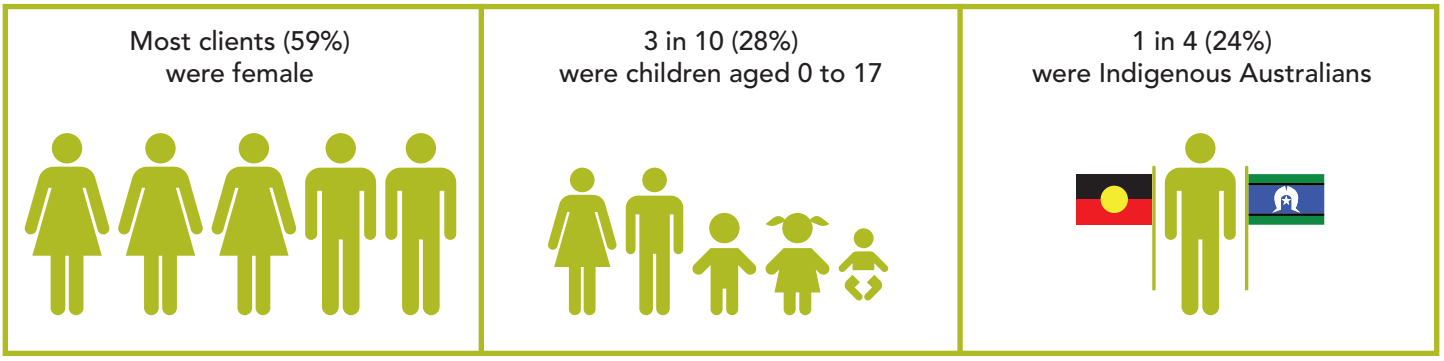
The people: In 2015–16, one in 85 Australians, about 279,000 people, were assisted by SHS agencies across Australia, an 18 per cent increase in client numbers since the Collection began in 2011–12. Just over half (53 per cent) were new clients with 47 per cent having sought assistance at some time in the previous four years. Most people were not homeless when they approached a SHS agency, but at risk of homelessness (56 per cent) — and reflects a key function that agencies perform, in preventing people becoming homeless.

Their circumstances: Certain groups within the population are at greater risk of homelessness. Vulnerable groups identified in the SHSC include young and older persons, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those with health issues (mental, drug/ alcohol, physical, those living with disability), those exiting custody, and those whose safety is at risk (people experiencing domestic and family violence, and children under care and protection orders). Information on these groups is reported annually in the SHS annual web report.[1]

For example, in 2015–16:

- 106,000 people experiencing domestic and family violence sought assistance from SHS agencies. They constitute the largest client group (38 per cent) with nearly half (47 per cent) of this group living in single parent households.
- Increasing numbers of clients with mental health issues are being supported by SHS agencies with over one in four clients, or an estimated 72,000 people, assisted in 2015–16; on average, this group has grown by 13 per cent each year since 2011–12. Half were homeless when they sought assistance; most commonly, they were living alone (46 per cent) indicating a possible lack of support networks.
- Over 43,000 young people (15 to 24 years) approached a SHS agency alone. The lack of support experienced by these young people indicates a particularly vulnerable group. They may find themselves at increased risk of long-term health effects and social disadvantage, including, and exacerbated by, repeat and persistent homelessness. Most were homeless (52 per cent) when they sought assistance and increasing numbers of Indigenous youth are presenting in this manner (25 per cent, up from 21 per cent in 2011–12).

Service needs: Agencies deliver a wide range of services, addressing both the immediate needs as well as the longer term, broader needs of people experiencing homelessness, or in insecure housing. Analysis of service needs informs agencies about both their service program effectiveness and



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2015–16.

client outcomes. The analysis also provides insights into emerging, transient, or entrenched homeless populations, and service capacity, integration and gaps.

The largest group of services needed is 'general support and assistance' followed by accommodation, specialised services (such as psychological or psychiatric services and drug/alcohol counselling), assistance to sustain housing tenure, and domestic and family violence services. The service needs, and whether they were provided, referred, or neither, are reported in the SHSC, thereby facilitating program evaluation and measurement of service response and client outcomes.

Quick Information Bites — SHSC 2015–16:

- Over 22 million days of support were provided, with half of all clients receiving more than 35 days (median) of support from services.
- Around one in three (31 per cent) received accommodation totalling almost seven million nights — where accommodated, the median number of nights received was 33.
- Over the past five years, the number of days of support received by clients has grown around 23 per cent; increases in accommodation nights have been far more modest (approx. three per cent). The data reveal a growing population, experiencing increasingly complex needs within a sector that is struggling to find appropriate accommodation options for these clients.
- In general, the needs of clients are numerous, however some vulnerable groups have more complex needs and request more services than others. On average, during 2015–16, each client needed seven services; those with mental health issues needed over ten services. These latter clients were also more likely to seek assistance multiple times during the year, requiring longer periods of support.
- Some services requested by clients are unable to be provided. This 'unmet need' is indicative of the sector's capacity to respond to the demand for particular service types, and also identify service gaps and changing trends in the homeless population.
  - Of the ten most needed services in 2015–16, the largest increase was for long-term housing, and assistance for domestic and family violence (both a 14 per cent increase compared with the previous year). Most clients needing long-term housing were unable to be assisted (95 per cent, or about 61,000). However, most clients seeking domestic and family violence assistance were provided this service (88 per cent, or about 67,000).
- Not all people seeking homelessness support are able to be assisted. These people are sometimes referred to as 'turn-aways'. Limited data are collected on this population, but importantly, it informs the sector about the unmet demand for its services and the broad type of services being requested.
  - 275 times every day across Australia during 2015–16, someone was turned away from an agency because it was unable to provide assistance.

Client outcomes: Homelessness, or its imminent risk, can be a short lived experience, but for many, it can be a long journey, requiring multiple periods of support over many years. Outcome measures available in the SHSC, include status changes in education, employment, income, and/ or housing circumstances when support has ended.

- Four in ten (44 per cent) clients were homeless when they presented to an SHS agency in 2015–16; this decreased to one in three (32 per cent, or 57,000) following support.
- The progression towards secure housing however, can be more difficult for some:
  - For those who began support homeless, stable housing was achieved following support for 37 per cent.
  - For those who started support at risk of homelessness, the support provided by the agency resulted in stable housing being maintained for 90 per cent of clients.

Homelessness in Australia Through the Lens of Service Provision—New Insights From Longitudinal Analysis and Data Linkage

The SHSC does not represent the entire homeless population; it only represents those people who seek assistance from a specialist homelessness agency. However, it does represent the most comprehensive data collection for this population.

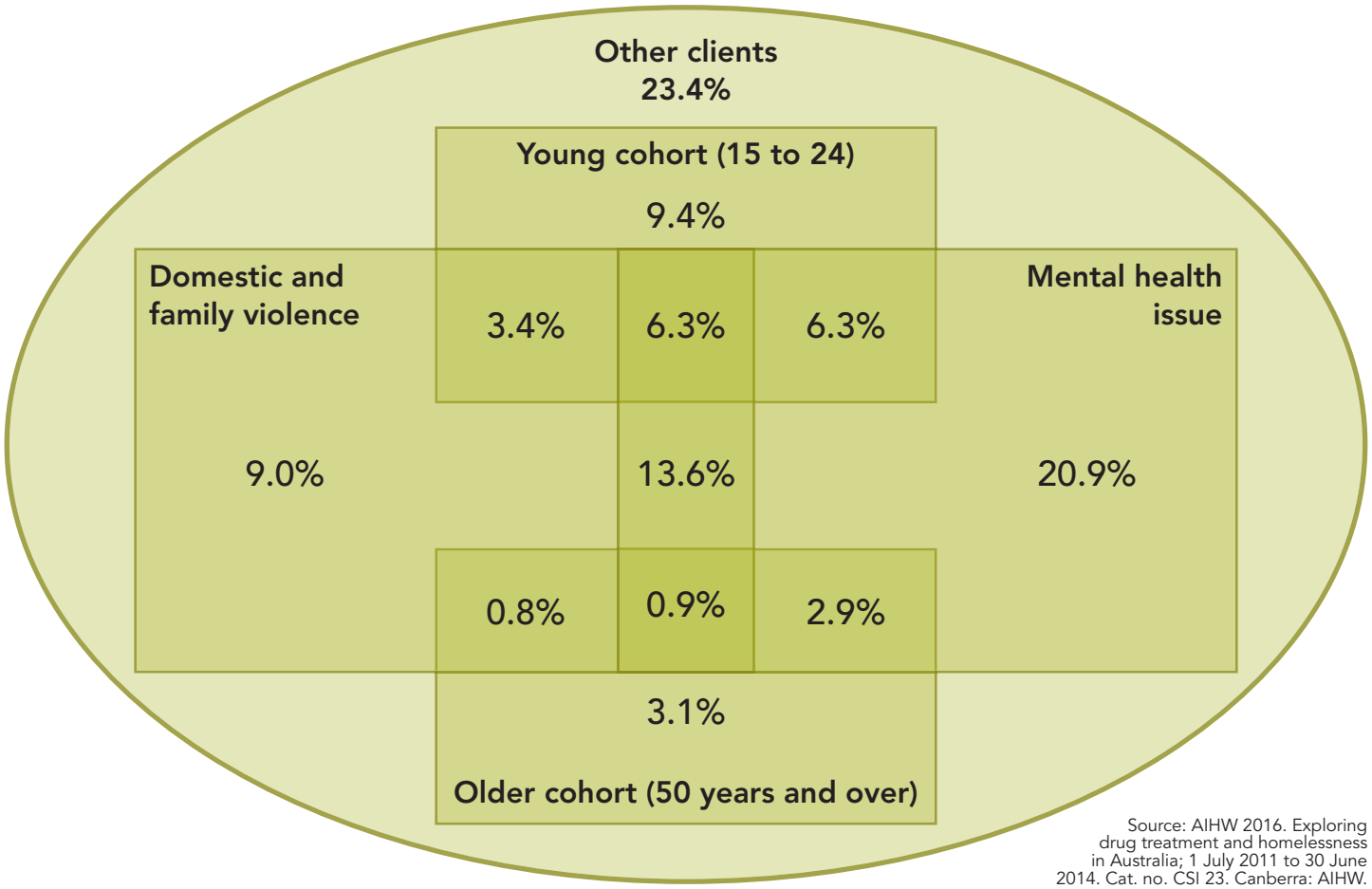
Data linkage and longitudinal analyses based on the SHSC provide opportunities to better understand the changing circumstances of these people over time, including a better understanding of the likelihood of successful outcomes for clients presenting with particular characteristics and provided with different SHS services and levels of support.

Domestic and family violence and homelessness 2011–12 to 2013–14: This longitudinal study examined vulnerable groups within the 187,000 adults and children seeking assistance for domestic and family violence.[2]

Most were women and children, followed by young women presenting alone, and Indigenous women. Analysis over the three years revealed high service use and evidence of cycling in and out of support, particularly for Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence. Almost 40 per cent of this cohort received support services spanning more than 300 days, compared with about 25 per cent of other domestic and family violence clients.

Exploring drug treatment and homelessness in Australia: Research indicates that certain groups within the population are at greater risk of homelessness and of developing harmful drug use behaviours. Linking data from two services over multiple years, the SHSC and the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Dataset (AODTS NMDS), supports this previous work, and provides contemporary evidence of a population experiencing high levels of social and economic disadvantage as well as additional vulnerabilities.[3]

Figure 1: Characteristics of those accessing both AOD and homelessness support services



Source: AIHW 2016. Exploring drug treatment and homelessness in Australia; 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2014. Cat. no. CSI 23. Canberra: AIHW.

A matched client group of around 40,000 clients was identified — that's just over one in five (21 per cent) alcohol and drug treatment clients who also accessed homelessness assistance and one in 12 (8 per cent) homelessness clients who also received alcohol and drug treatment services.

Analysis of key groups vulnerable to both homelessness and substance misuse revealed considerable overlap: over three-quarters of matched clients (76 per cent) had at least one additional risk factor, and in the largest two cohorts, the overlap was substantial — with one in five (21 per cent of clients) having experienced both domestic and family violence as well as a current mental health issue (see Figure 1).

Vulnerable young people: Interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection: In an effort to better understand the characteristics of these vulnerable children and young people, data were linked over multiple years from the SHSC, the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset, and the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Dataset.[4]

The data reveal that for many of these young people there are multiple barriers to overcome in achieving long-term outcomes, particularly for those who had interacted with all three systems.

Housing instability and repeat episodes of homelessness were more common in clients identified in the SHSC and one or more of the other data sets than those assisted by homelessness services alone. They were more likely to report mental health issues, problematic drug and/ or alcohol use, and to seek assistance for challenging social or behavioural issues.

How Does SHSC data Inform the Policy and Service Response to Homelessness

The content of the SHSC is designed to support the information needs arising from the national agreements (National Affordability Agreement) and related performance information reporting requirements (National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness), as they relate to the identification of service needs, the delivery of services and, to some extent, the outcomes for those who are supported.

SHSC data underpin numerous reports and data products including the annual reporting of homelessness performance indicators in the Report on Government Services (RoGS), annual web reporting of SHS clients, services and outcomes, concise infographics, fact sheets, targeted analytical reports, ad hoc data requests, and public and customised data sets. These combine to provide the various stakeholders with information on homelessness in Australia from a service perspective.

Endnotes

1. Specialist Homelessness Services annual web report. *http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/*
2. Domestic and family violence and homelessness 2011–12 to 2013–14. *http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/domestic-violence-and-homelessness/*
3. AIHW 2016, *Exploring drug treatment and homelessness in Australia: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2014*. Cat. no. CSI 23, AIHW, Canberra.
4. AIHW 2016, *Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015*. Cat. no. HOU 279, AIHW, Canberra.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Collection

Persons Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness

Request SHS support from service providers.

AIHW provides: **Training Support Hotline**

SHS Providers

Around 1,500 SHS agencies across Australia provide accommodation, special needs services, referrals and other homelessness services.

Agencies/ organisations produce: **Agency Data Reports**

Client Management Systems (CMS)

SHS client data are entered by agencies on an ongoing basis. The Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP) CMS allows agencies to produce agency-specific data reports.

AIHW Secure Web Portal

Monthly submissions of de-identified data are made to a secure AIHW web portal. Data are checked ("validated") and agencies can review errors and generate accurate data reports.

AIHW Data Repository

The AIHW carries out end user reporting of the SHS collection producing products available to the public or authorised entities.

AIHW SHS Reporting Products

Annual Web Report
Released annually on the AIHW website, describes the characteristics of SHS clients, the services requested and outcomes achieved during a financial year.

Infographics
Provide a visual presentation of the SHS annual report key findings.

"NEW" State and Territory Factsheets
Introduced in 2016, these provide annual key SHS trends at the jurisdictional level.

SHS data reports
Exploratory reports present data on groups of interest, such as clients experiencing family and domestic violence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, and clients experiencing drug and alcohol misuse.

AIHW SHS Data Products

SHS Data Cubes
These provide SHS client and support data, allowing users to select, filter and arrange data using drop and drag functionality.

Data Requests
These include additional data products or enhancements to existing products. They are funded by data users. They allow for:
- **population of interest** analysis
- **data modelling** analysis
- **outcomes** analysis
- **table & figure** generation

Data Files
Confidentialised files describe characteristics of SHS clients, support periods and unassisted requests for assistance.

Statistical Summaries
Promptly produced SHS data describing selected characteristics of clients, support periods and unassisted requests for assistance.

FUNDING JURISDICTIONS

Annual & Quarterly Data Files
(Client and support period data)

DATA SUPPLIERS

Quarterly Statistical Summaries
(Agency and state/territory)

FUNDING DATA USER

Data Requests
(Ad hoc and other)

PUBLIC

National Reporting
(Report on Government Services)

Reports
(Annual web report, bulletins, other)

SHS Data Cubes
(National annual summaries)

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS
Reporting and data products are made available to a variety of AIHW stakeholders.

SHS PROVIDERS | **RESEARCHERS** | **GENERAL PUBLIC** | **ADVOCACY GROUPS** | **GOVERNMENT**

More than a Numbers Game
Revisiting Homelessness Data and a Plea to Utilise it to Drive Change

Travis Gilbert, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Shelter

The ABS applies the six categories to Census data to determine an estimate of people experiencing homelessness.[1]

Making Sense of the Census

Since 2001, the ABS has employed a Homelessness Enumeration Strategy (HES) which has produced national, jurisdictional, and local area level estimates of homelessness at a 'point in time' (prevalence).[2]

What can and does it tell us about homelessness? What are its limitations and what can it not tell us?

The 2016 Census was conducted after months of controversy over data retention and storage, linked to concerns about a thing called metadata and who was keeping it, where and for what purpose. These concerns triggered public threats to 'boycott' the Census and rocked public confidence in Australia's national survey.

Then on the night… a crash! We may never know what caused this crash.

Like many, I am eagerly awaiting the first and second data releases from the 2016 Census, noting with some concern controversy pertaining to a change in the data retention and storage method/duration and related calls to boycott and the biggest crash to hit Australia.

What impact, if any, this will have on homelessness numbers?

The Five Year Itch: Data Collected Outside Census Years

I now want to address the issue of finding proxies for tracking trends in the prevalence of homelessness and identifying changes in the characteristics, composition and causal or contributing factors (pathways into) to homelessness in-between Census years.

This will require revisiting what, if any alternative data sources are out there.

Think National, Act Local — Australian Government Data

I now want to emphasise a key point I make to politicians I meet about data — in housing and homelessness, we are awash with it — there is no shortage, so please don't begin 'reform' conversations with calls for even more of it.

As the following summary of data collected and or reported on by Australian Government agencies and Departments will illustrate, the Federal Government is in fact drowning in data on housing and homelessness.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Let's start with the national statistical agency. Outside of the Census, the ABS collects data that provides deeper analysis of factors contributing to homelessness and pathways in and out. The following is a link to homelessness data currently provided by the ABS: *http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/ViewContent?readform&view=productsbytopic&Action=Expand&Num=5.8.4*

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The other Commonwealth agency that produces numerous reports using housing assistance and homelessness data is the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

The most well-known of these are of course the reports: *The Use of Government Funded Specialist Homelessness Services*.

Australia has produced national reports using data provided by homelessness services for more than 20 years. The *Homeless People in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program* (SAAP) reports that were produced from SAAP Management and Reporting Tool (SMaRT) data each financial year between 1996/97 and 2007/08.[3]

In 2010, the SMaRT was replaced by *Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting* (SHOR) or for South Australian providers, the *Homeless 2 Home* client management system has been aggregated into national reports by the AIHW.[4] Data collected by service providers on SHOR is provided to the Specialist Homelessness Information Portal (SHIP), which is managed for the AIHW.

Information extracted from SHIP is then aggregated and used to produce annual reports called *The Use of Government Funded Specialist Homelessness Services*: *http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/*

For what purpose is this data collected and published?

A cynic might answer this by saying governments collect and produced data to make services demonstrate accountability for public spending. Of course accountability for spending is important and the reports from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection demonstrate the incredible work services achieve with and for clients with an average of about $80 in Commonwealth and State/Territory funding per client, per week![5]

AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services reports are enormously useful for advocates and providers to report and reflect on changes in client characteristics/demographics, main reasons for seeking assistance identified by guests, and support needs identified through establishing relationships and supporting referrals as support periods progress.

The 'on an average day' reports produced from SHIP/SHOR data is useful for monitoring changes in expressed demand for services and capacity to meet demand for accommodation (sometimes referred to as 'turn-away rates from services').

Data from the reports on *The Use of Government Funded Specialist Homelessness Services* have been used at a jurisdictional level to guide program evaluations, procurement reform and tendering processes.

They also demonstrate the broad range of needs that services are required to consider during assessment and referral and the provision of accommodation and support.

Other Data Reports by the AIHW

In addition to publishing the reports referred to above, the AIHW has published numerous reports for its specialist homelessness collection. You can download these reports from: *http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness-publications/*

The Productivity Commission

Until 2013, the Productivity Commission (PC) had a role in monitoring the performance of Council of Federal Financial Relations agreements including the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Funding for this was cut in 2014 and has not yet been reinstated.

The PC also publishes detailed reports on things like economic participation by social housing tenants and job outcome rates for marginalised groups as well as aggregate data on government services.

Data Retention by other Commonwealth Entities

There are numerous other Commonwealth agencies and departments which collect and report on homelessness data.

For example, the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services and the National Mental Health Commission and the Department of Immigration have also published homelessness policy papers which have included homelessness data.

There are also cost-benefit analyses, interim evaluations of the efficacy of the first tranche of the NPAH.

Likewise, there are project reports from the now dormant National Homelessness Research Agenda and at one point sufficient data was held by the Commonwealth to run a homelessness information clearinghouse!

We're Having Trouble Getting Data…

What about data on homelessness experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? How is it currently used, if at all, to evaluate and improve the homelessness response for First Australians?

What data is collected by organisations servicing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities? How is it used now and what future role might it play in informing the development of nuanced and culturally sensitive responses? Do we need specific indicators to measure trends in homelessness among New and Emerging Communities? Is there sufficiently robust data to support such a venture?

What about data on homelessness among other groups who are overrepresented in homelessness counts and service use data?

Why is there next to no data on the prevalence and incidence of homelessness among people who identify as Same Sex Attracted, Gender Diverse and Intersex? In the United States, research funded by Cyndi Lauper's True Colours Foundation found young people who identified as LGBTIQ accounted for more than 20 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness in the United States.

There are the Registry Week surveys undertaken now in several cities with support from the Australian Common Ground Alliance. The Vulnerability Index Service Prioritisation Decision Assessment Tool (VI SPDAT)[6] is used by surveyors to pre-screen and triage people for referral based on a quick interpersonal assessment of health and social needs.

Equally important, if not more so, is qualitative evidence from people with lived experience of homelessness and practitioners at the coal-face.

People experiencing homelessness are best placed to tell us what it would take to end it.

Practitioners are well placed to tell us what is needed to enable them to truly support people to re-access homes they can afford to rent, what changes or additional resources are needed to truly operationalise person-centred delivery and what post-support services must accompany a person to ensure when they find a home, they can keep it.

Endnotes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, *Estimating Homelessness 2011* Cat. No. 2050.0, Canberra, Australian Government *http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Main%20Features22011*
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4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010, *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. http://www.aihw.gov.au/shsc/* (Accessed May 2017).
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6. The VI-SPDAT is a pre-screening, or triage tool that is designed to be used by all providers within a community to quickly assess the health and social needs of homeless persons and match them with the most appropriate support and housing interventions that are available.

Gender and Housing: An Overview of Data Issues

Hannah Gissane, Equality Rights Alliance (ERA)

Gender relevant and responsive housing and homelessness data has long been a source of consternation and discussion for researchers, policy-makers and advocates.

The available data on homelessness services, housing stress and housing assistance goes some way to uncovering women's housing issues, however a complete picture of the gendered contours of housing and homelessness remains elusive. A gender-responsive approach to housing policy relies heavily on this complete picture. Sex and gender disaggregation is a starting point but measures and indicators must also be responsive and inclusive of gendered experiences.

Below is an overview of just some of the gender and housing data issues I've encountered in women's housing advocacy.

Homelessness Data

The expanded definition of homelessness in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing based on homelessness, rather than houselessness, goes some way to addressing the way that homelessness definitions can hide and make invisible women's experiences of homelessness. These changes to the way we count homelessness contribute, as Petersen and Parsell note, 'to a comprehensive understanding of housing exclusion as it effects (older) women.'[1]

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Specialist Homelessness Services dataset captures crucial information on who is seeking homelessness service assistance, what types of services and for what reasons. The annual publication of this data and the detail it elaborates is a valuable resource for understanding and responding to women's homelessness. In a climate where homelessness services are reporting being unable to meet demand,[2] data is inevitably limited to counting those who are able to access services.

This is particularly relevant for population groups who face multiple barriers to accessing appropriate services that respond to specific experiences. The women who are not counted in this data reflects the service gaps that exist for women experiencing multiple and intersecting marginalisations.[3]

Household Measurements

Sex and gender disaggregation is made difficult by enumeration of data by household. The national data on the public housing waiting lists is a case in point. With almost 200,000 households waiting for public housing,[4] the data do not reveal the proportion of applicants by gender. Women are the majority of adult public housing tenants[5] and so the absence of gender data in waiting lists leaves a big gap in our knowledge on women's housing situations and needs. Where data are enumerated by household, the only limited pathways to gender or sex disaggregated data are through single households. For example, we encounter this issue with data on the gender wealth gap (relevant for housing careers) where 'studies of the gender wealth gap are confined to comparisons between single female and single male households, as Australian data collections do not permit analysis of the gender wealth gap among partnered men and women.'[6]

Household-based data doesn't just limit the possibility of disaggregation, but obscures or makes invisible the intra-household gendered relations that impact on women's housing experiences.[7] As a result, despite the evidence,[8] there is very little data on the experiences of women who are living and remaining in violent relationships because of the affordable housing shortage.

This invisibility underlines the importance of measures which centre the experiences of individuals within households, such as the Individual Deprivation Measure.[9]

Housing Wellbeing

Scratching beneath the surface of household measurements and looking at the experiences of individuals within a household, forces us to think about what it is we are measuring with housing stress. Definitions of housing stress based around the 30 per cent rule 'focus solely on the financial burden faced through direct consumption' and can be a blunt instrument overriding fundamental questions about housing need and wellbeing.[10]

In this light, there is no measurement and corresponding data that captures access to appropriate housing. An appropriate housing measure would look at quality (design, accessibility), size and location, in addition to affordability.[11] Looking at the gendered dimensions, unequal distribution of caring responsibilities and increased vulnerability to domestic and family violence are just two factors that shape the housing needs of women. An integration of the gender perspective would see housing data that articulate and capture the fulfilment of housing needs across genders.

In 2013, ERA conducted a social media survey targeted at women called the Housing Stressometer. The survey was not scientifically rigorous but allowed for an informal snapshot of women's experiences of housing wellbeing. The Housing Stressometer began with a question on housing costs as a proportion of income (to ascertain housing stress) and was followed by 13 questions on housing wellbeing which covered safety, state of repair, accessibility, size, security and so on. Eighty-four per cent of survey respondents were women and of these, 20 per cent were paying less than 30 per cent of their income on housing costs but had identified two or more issues with their housing wellbeing. This snapshot underlines the need for a housing data which goes beyond cost.

Sex and gender disaggregation is a starting point, but ultimately a greater consideration and illumination of gendered experiences and perspectives should be integrated throughout data processes.

Endnotes

1. Petersen M, Parsell C 2014, *Older Women's Pathways out of Homelessness in Australia*. Institute for Social Science Research Report for The Mercy Foundation. Retrieved from: *https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/_uploads/_cknw/files/FINAL%20Feb%202014%20Petersen%20%20Parsell%20Older%20women's%20pathways%20out%20of%20homelessness.pdf*
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Chapter 2:
Perspectives on Youth Homelessness Data Collection

Towards a Canadian Youth Homelessness Data Dashboard

By Dr Stephen Gaetz, Director, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness at York University, Toronto Canada and Melanie Redman, Executive Director, A Way Home Canada

For a long time in Canada, there was little consensus about the role and use of research and data in responding to homelessness. In some quarters there was even deep resistance and hostility to the notion, commonly expressed by the statement: 'We don't need research — we know what the problems and the solutions are'. In recent years the situation has improved significantly, as those in policy and practice now generally see the value of research and data, and researchers have become much more adept at engaging communities in this work.

At the same time, one has to be careful what one wishes for. As community interest and demands for data tools increases — around case management, assessment, performance measures, etc. — the void has at times been filled by consultant-driven proprietary products and poor quality research that over-promises evidence and outcomes and shapes practice in ways that may not be in the best interests of the clients we are hoping to serve.

All of this raises the question of what the role of quality research and data should be in the development and implementation of homelessness policies, programs and services? What sort of collaborations are necessary to ensure quality and utility, and ultimately to contribute to more effective programs and services?

To support this process, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) is working in collaboration with A Way Home Canada (AWHC) and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness (NLCYH) to design and implement a vision for a national youth homelessness 'Data Dashboard' that will be a resource to support people in communities and all levels of government in their work to prevent and end youth homelessness. The goal of this work is to generate new and useful knowledge that impacts on policy and practice, standard tools and resources to support communities, programs and services in their efforts. The values that guide our work include:

1. we address the problem of youth homelessness from a human rights perspective

2. all tools and resources must be consistent with a 'positive youth development' orientation (focusing not just on risk and vulnerability but also assets)

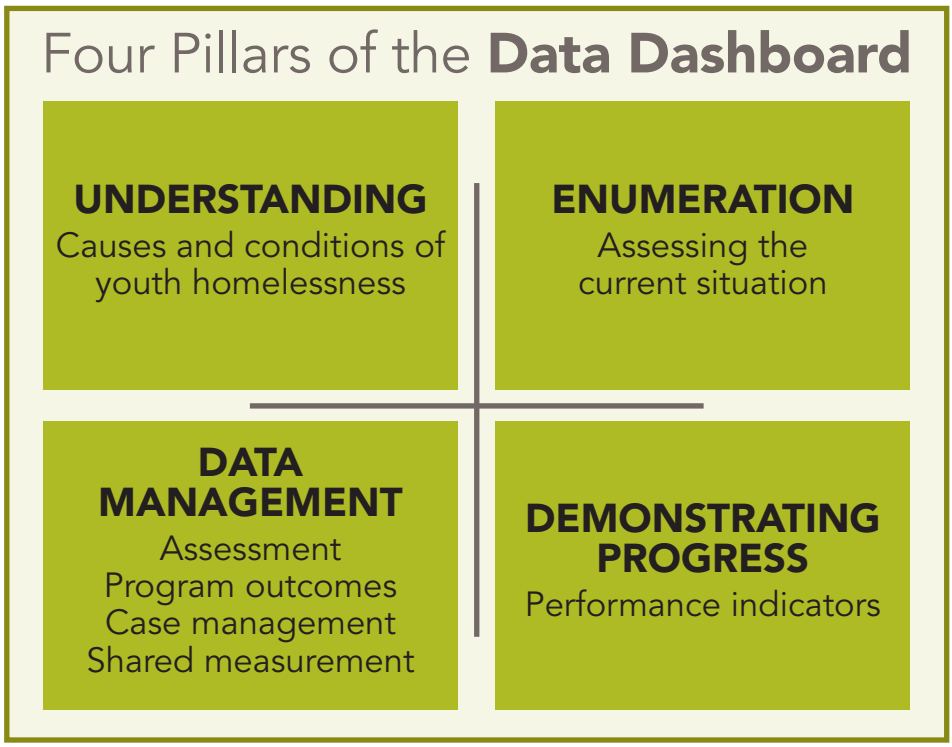
3. young people with lived experience must be meaningfully engaged in the development of these resources

4. service providers and government staff have valuable knowledge to contribute to the development of these resources

5. data resources must embrace diversity, especially the needs and experiences of Indigenous youth and LGBTQ youth

6. shared measurement is both effective and central to a Collective Impact approach for community/systems planning.

On a practical level, our work to support policy making, community planning and program delivery requires us to deepen our understanding of the needs that exist within the youth homelessness sector and government, and to make the case for the benefits of consistent and shared measurement and data collection. To get there we need to review the strengths and weaknesses



of existing tools and resources both within Canada and internationally. We also need to understand the barriers and opportunities for a more coordinated, consistent and shared approach to measurement, program outcomes and data collection, to make the case for why this is important and ensure this vision is communicated clearly.

The Youth Homelessness Data Dashboard consists of four pillars of research, which work in an integrated way.

1. Understanding — Research on the causes, conditions and responses to youth homelessness

There is a growing knowledge base about the causes and conditions of youth homelessness in Canada and elsewhere in the world. This research can and should have an important contribution to make in terms of the conceptual (re)framing of the underlying issues that produce and sustain homelessness, instrumental research that evaluates and assesses programs, policies and strategies, and through the production of solid evidence that frames public debates. If our goal is to engage in research that has an impact on policy and practice we need to be mindful of the factors that enhance the social impact of research endeavours. What is clear from this scholarship is that research impact is both a process and an outcome of relationship building, collaboration and meaningful processes of interaction between researchers, policy makers, community partners and people facing homelessness. A key example of this kind of work is the recent (and first) national study on youth homelessness, a collaboration between the COH, AWHC and NLCYH. The final report, titled 'Without a Home'[5] produced results that have contributed to a national conversation on the role of, and need for homelessness prevention. It has also led to the development of several policy briefs focusing on mental health, child protection (in press) and Indigenous youth (forthcoming).

A more ambitious collaborative project called *Making the Shift* involves a series of demonstration projects on prevention interventions as well as the Housing First for Youth framework produced in Canada. Our efforts to develop 'proof of concept' for key policy and program models will support taking this knowledge to scale.

2. Enumeration — Assessing the current situation

It is only in recent years that we have moved towards a common approach to enumerating and measuring homelessness in Canada. In 2018 Canada will embark on a truly national Point in Time count strategy, with a common methodology (and a youth specific strategy) that has been developed in a partnership between the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Government of Canada. We are exploring the idea of combining a second round of the National Youth Homelessness Survey with the national Point in Time count.

3. Data Management Tools and Shared Measurement — Program level resources

Effective data management begins with clarity about organisational goals and objectives — what is the problem one is trying to solve and what are the outcomes we want to see? As part of our work towards a data management dashboard system, we will be working with community agencies, policy makers and funders to identify and develop key data management tools to support communities to do their work, and to collect relevant data to measure progress and contribute to continuous improvement. No single tool can do all of the work, as there are a number of points of intervention from screening and assessment, to case management, to program and service level indicators.

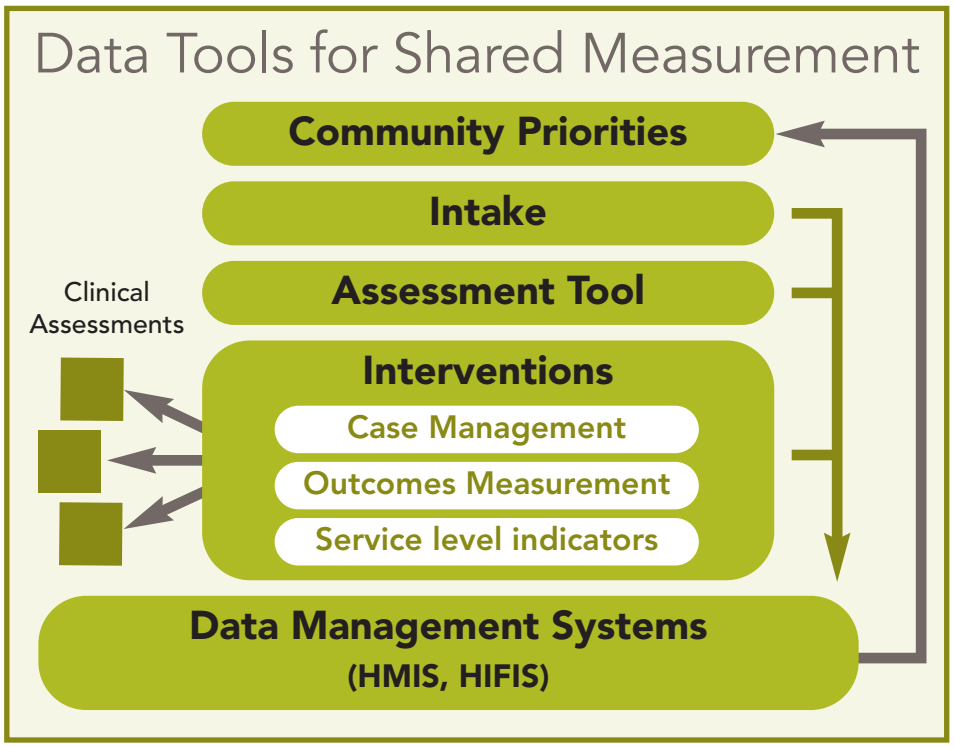
Assessment Tools

These are key resources to help determine the needs of youth, program eligibility and priority setting. We will be recommending the Youth Assessment Protocol (which includes both a 'screener' and a more extensive assessment tool) which unlike others currently being used is strengths-based, evidence informed and relies on the knowledge of both the young person and the worker. This has been field tested in Canada and will be released more broadly in the coming year.

Case Management Tools

Effective case management is best served by an approach to data that focuses on clear program objectives and outcomes which then drive the service delivery model. A positive youth development perspective should guide this approach.

Strengths-based tools that incorporate a client-driven 'stages of change' approach will be supported. Good case management data tools support outcomes measurement at the individual, worker, program and organisation level.



Underlying our approach to data management at the program and organisation level is *shared measurement*, which is key to broader social change. Having agencies and services use common assessment, case management and outcomes measures requires not only agreement within the sector but cooperation from funders. All of this works most effectively if there is also some form of data sharing agreement and platform. There are several clear benefits to shared measurement. First, it aligns program philosophies, activities and outcomes across the sector. Second, it contributes to enhanced collaboration, systems integration and a rethinking of how to collectively respond to youth homelessness. Third, and most importantly, it can lead to better outcomes for youth, as they get access to the services that are most appropriate, enables more effective flow through the system, and holds the sector accountable for better outcomes.

4. Demonstrating Progress: Performance Management supporting the prevention and ending of Youth Homelessness

Preventing and ending youth homelessness requires an integrated systems approach. Performance indicators and milestones at the community, provincial / territorial and national levels helps us measure progress and the effectiveness of these integrated systems responses. Turner[2] identifies that the goal of performance management is to help the local community or government:

- evaluate the system's impact on priority populations
- articulate what the system aims to achieve
- illustrate the level of performance expected of all services
- facilitate client participation in quality assurance activities at program and system-levels
- promote service integration across sector and with mainstream systems.

Developing and implementing efficient performance measurement processes begins with clear community priorities, a collective understanding of performance measures and targets, and that measurement systems and processes (including data management tools and shared measurement discussed above) be in place and supported.

In conclusion, the development and implementation of the Canadian Youth Homelessness Data Dashboard will necessarily rely on deep and ongoing partnerships and collaboration between researchers and the users of research and will inform how we think about data for all populations impacted by homelessness.

Collaboratively we explore some bigger questions about the role of knowledge and data collection and the values of different methodologies and approaches to measurement and evaluation. We also need to be realistic about what data can and cannot do. While data is important, we cannot oversell it as a magical solution to the challenges of working to support youth experiencing homelessness. Our desire for evidence-based decision-making should not preclude the consideration of innovation in policy and practice for which the current state of evidence for effectiveness may not yet be robust.

Endnotes

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The Premier's Priority to Reduce Youth Homelessness:

Using the New NSW Homelessness Dataset to Help Young People Move from Homelessness to Stable Housing

Anne Cruickshank, Senior Program Officer, Homelessness,
NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS)

'We know what we are,
but know not what we may be.'
— Ophelia
in *Hamlet*, Act IV, scene V

It remains an unfortunate fact that young people represent a significant proportion of the homeless and at risk population in Australia. In New South Wales (NSW), currently around one in four clients (26 per cent) of government-funded homelessness services are young people aged 15 to 24 years old (18,419 out of a total 69,715 clients in 2015–16).[1] Although the proportion of 15 to 24 year old clients is lower than in previous years due to an increase in clients of other age groups, there were still 3,681 or 25 per cent more 15 to 24 year old clients of homelessness services in NSW in 2015–16 compared with 2011–12[2] (Figure 1).

Although it is positive that more young people are being assisted by homelessness services, it is also a cause of concern for policy makers and all those who care about the wellbeing of children and young people. The client data collected from homelessness service providers relates to those young people who seek assistance, and consequently the true extent of youth homelessness remains unknown. In addition, the homeless situation of many young people who 'couch surf' with family and friends, are underemployed or disengaged from education tends to be hidden until it is entrenched and no longer sustainable.

Seeing Through the Present

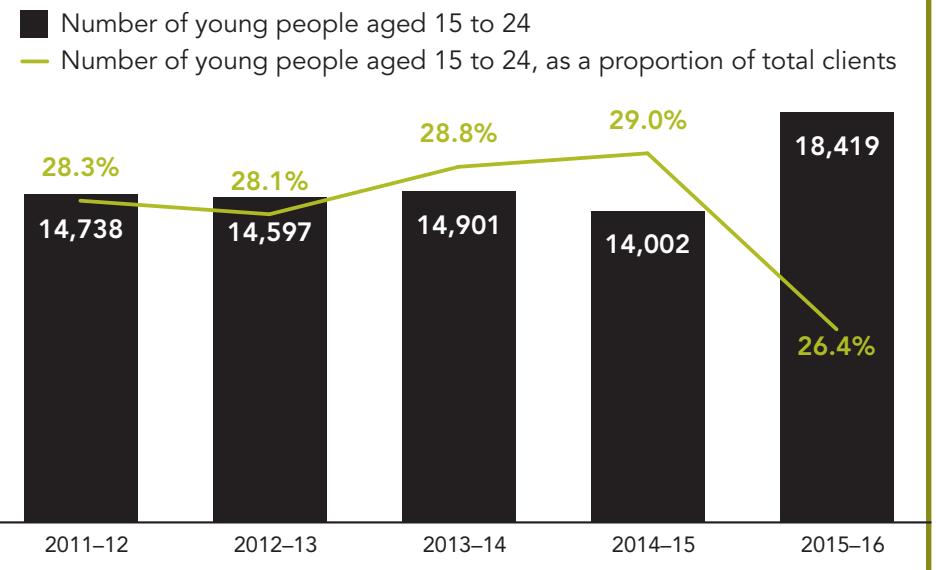
The causes of youth homelessness are complex and interrelated and are not intended to be explored in this article — some are environmental, such as housing supply and affordability, but much also derives from factors occurring within families, including household division and instability, job losses, trauma, poverty and social disadvantage, and domestic and family violence. Homelessness service providers have first-hand knowledge of this.

It is well known that homelessness, and in particular chronic homelessness, has significant impacts on the ability of young people to fully participate in society, to access education and training and to maintain physical and mental health. Like the despairing Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, without support it can be impossible for these young people to see an exit from their present difficulties and maintain a vision for what they hope to become. Our society is immeasurably poorer for the loss of that potential.

Development of the Premier's Priority

A comprehensive response to young people experiencing homelessness involves service professionals from diverse vocations coordinating to work with young people and families at an early stage, well before crisis occurs and relationships are irreparably damaged. This approach is supported by effective relationships and cooperation between government agencies such as health and education as well as with other non-government agencies, peak bodies and community organisations. The need to focus the service response on helping young people overcome the impacts of homelessness led to the creation of the Premier's Priority to Reduce Youth Homelessness. This Priority is one of the former Premier's 12 personal goals which were released in September 2015 as part of the revised state plan

Figure 1:
Homelessness services clients aged 15 to 24, NSW, 2011–12 to 2015–16



Source: AIHW public data cubes and SHS Annual Report NSW Supplementary Tables, *http://www.aihw.gov.au/shsc/*

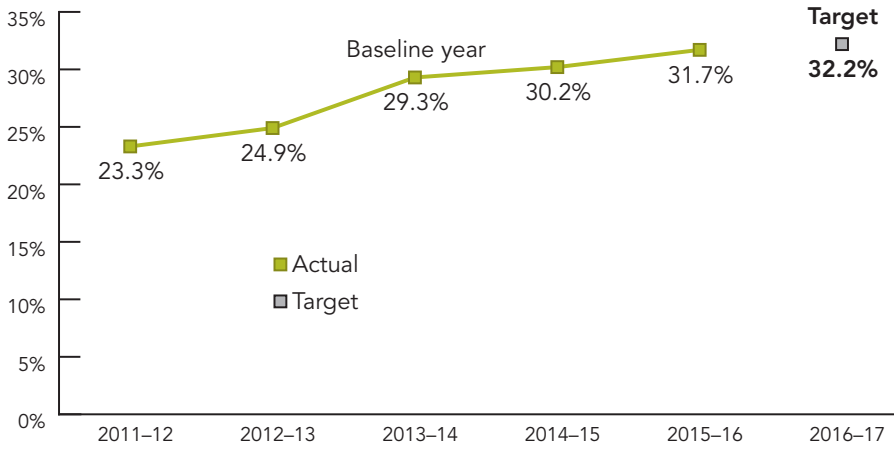
The focus group: young people presenting to homelessness services alone and living in unstable housing

The Premier's Priority to Reduce Youth Homelessness focusses on a sub-group of young people aged 15 to 24: those who present alone to homelessness services and who are living in unstable housing situations. Data analysis conducted by FACS shows that this cohort of young people is less likely than other young homeless clients to obtain stable, long-term housing. The term 'unstable housing' describes certain types of accommodation including couch surfing, living in short-term or emergency accommodation (such as a boarding house or in emergency or transitional housing) paying rent or living rent-free, as well as young people who have no shelter or who are living in an improvised dwelling.

The aim is to help more of these young people move into stable, long-term housing. The Premier's Priority defines stable housing as public, community or private housing, either paying rent or living rent-free. It includes situations where a young person returns to live with their family, if their family resides in these forms of accommodation.

Figure 2 shows that 1,739 or 31.7 per cent of young people in the Premier's Priority cohort were assisted to move to stable housing in 2015–16. This compares favourably with the 2013–14 baseline year result of 29.3 per cent. By 30 June 2017, the Premier's Priority aims to assist 32.2 per cent of young people in the cohort move to stable housing. This target figure represents a 10 per cent increase (equivalent to a 2.9 percentage point increase) in the proportion of young people in the cohort who are assisted to move to stable housing compared with 2013–14. Annual progress towards the target is represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Proportion of young people in the Premier's Priority cohort who moved to stable housing, 2011–12 to 2015–16



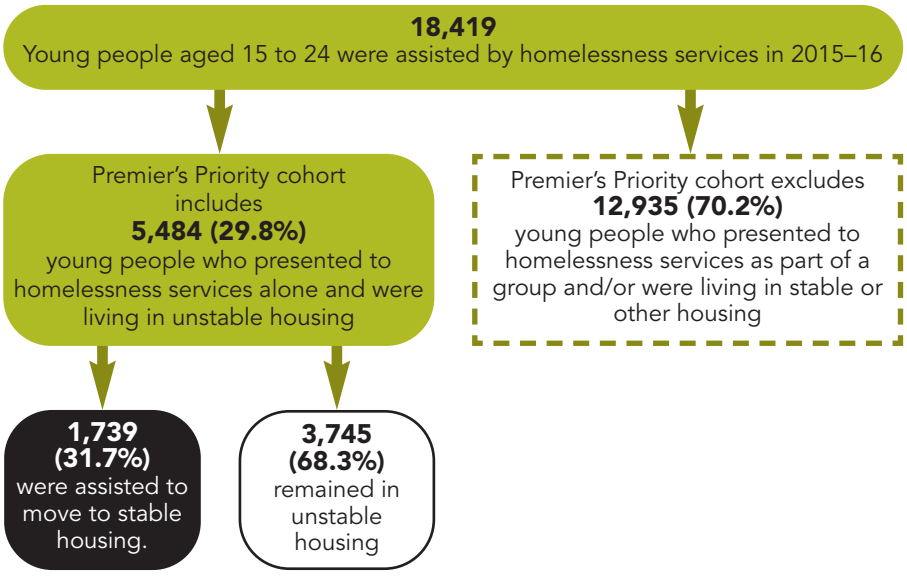
Source: AIHW SHS unpublished data (client confidentialised unit record files) and FACS analysis.

Data Challenges

Some of the most difficult aspects of tracking progress against the Premier's Priority target have been that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) client level data used to report official progress is released nine months after the end of financial year, that this data is available on an annual basis only, and that it is not readily available at FACS district level. Making data available sooner in the year and more often would mean that FACS staff and funded service providers are better supported to understand, reflect upon and plan local approaches that contribute to the state's overall progress against the target.

In order to provide timely, regular and relevant data on young people at a district level it became apparent that FACS would need to develop its own NSW homelessness client dataset. This was a major undertaking given the level of detail built into the client information management system (CIMS), the complexities of integrating with other systems, the number of providers involved (around 300) and the numerous technical, analytical and verification processes that needed to be established before any information from the new dataset could be used with reliability.

Figure 2: The Premier's Priority cohort and result for 2015–16



New Possibilities for Understanding Client Needs and Outcomes in Each District

The NSW homelessness client dataset shares records in common with the AIHW SHS Data Collection but there are some slight differences in the approach used to select records and count clients. Unlike the AIHW data, the new dataset is raw and unweighted, meaning that it does not seek to use statistical methods to

account for missing client and service provider information. Regardless, it is useful for frequently reporting actual progress in each district towards meeting the Premier's Priority target and for identifying cases where missing data can be requested from providers.

As part of the verification process, FACS compared the demographic characteristics of clients and their outcomes from the new dataset with the AIHW confidentialised unit record files and found that the results are very similar.

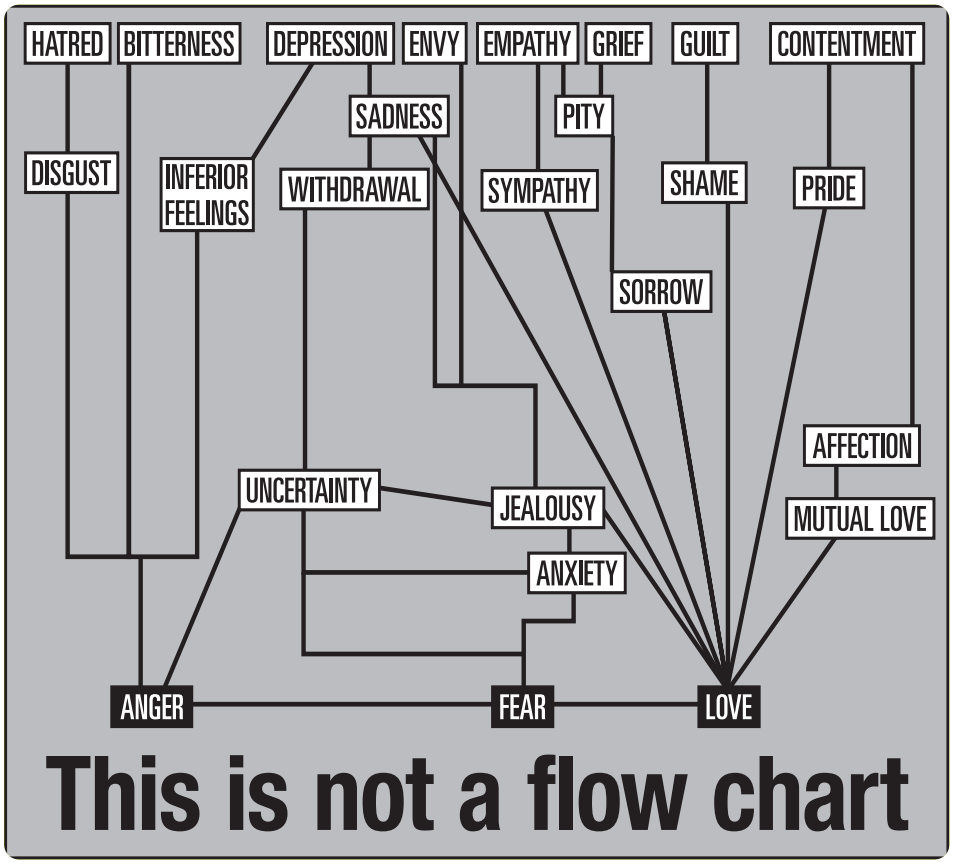
While it was primarily created to assist with tracking progress against the Premier's Priority to Reduce Youth Homelessness, the new NSW homelessness client dataset has also enabled more frequent reporting at district level for other groups of homeless and at risk clients, such as women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, young people leaving care and custody, and those of diverse cultural backgrounds, such as Aboriginal and non-English speaking clients. The greater flexibility and timeliness of the new dataset has also supported the creation of reporting tools that district staff can use to assist service planning for homelessness clients more generally.

One of these tools is a Tableau report that can be filtered for each district by client age, sex, client cohort, Aboriginal status and month. To support future service design and planning the report includes interactive maps that identify the most popular localities where clients originated in each district.

It is intended that some elements of the new dataset will be included in future quarterly editions of the FACS Annual Statistical Report (available at *https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/facs-statistics*).

The Role of Data in Sharing and Supporting Good Practice

The creation of the NSW homelessness client dataset is an important development, but not an end in itself. How does something abstract like this new dataset — an apparently dry, depersonalised statistical database of seemingly never-ending 0s and 1s — help to identify where young people are now, guide them towards more stable housing situations, and assist policy makers to determine whether young people have been adequately assisted to get there? Can data really answer questions about tangible differences in a person's life?



For the Premier's Priority to Reduce Youth Homelessness, a localised approach is being used to achieve the state-wide target of 32.2 per cent of young people moving to stable housing. Each district has developed and implemented strategies that will contribute towards the district share of state-wide improvements in stable housing outcomes for young people in the cohort. The NSW homelessness client dataset and the progress of actions within districts have been used to inform ongoing monitoring, reviewing and updating of District Implementation Plans. For example, the new dataset has enabled close monitoring of changes in the volume of young people presenting to homelessness services compared to previous years and has facilitated comparisons of service demand by young people across districts.

FACS' understanding of 'what works' will continue to deepen as more data becomes available and all districts hold good practice development workshops. These workshops will provide an environment where good practices can be tested further through practitioner discussion, innovation, application and review. FACS will also work to widen the application of good practice across NSW. Under this approach, rather than just improving existing good practices within districts, districts will identify good practices from other districts and embed them locally. Districts will continue to implement strategies to reduce demand and improve supply.

These efforts have helped to inform and encourage new ways of resolving unstable housing situations for young people. They have all contributed to achieving a state-wide increase of 2.4 percentage points in the proportion of young people who have moved to stable housing since 2013–14. There is still a long way to go but it is heartening to see that progress is being made to assist this group of young people to have a better future.

Endnotes

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *public data cubes and Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report*, NSW Supplementary Tables, *http://www.aihw.gov.au/shsc/*
2. ibid.

Why is it so hard?

The Challenges of Collecting Youth Homelessness Outcomes Data

Rhianon Vichta, Research and Evaluation Coordinator, Brisbane Youth Service

Youth homelessness service providers, like all community services, are increasingly aware that evaluation of program outcomes is no longer a luxury or optional activity. Outcomes-based investment, economic pragmatism and an enduring commitment to evidence-informed practice make it an increasingly critical priority. We need to build our individual organisation and cross-sector capacity to effectively and substantively collect data about who we support and how our work makes a difference. This is often, however, a daunting task for homelessness services and particularly those working with young people who have complex and critical support needs. Effective data in youth homelessness requires strong and concurrent commitment to engaging both young service users and youth workers in actively integrating data collection into service delivery.

Over the last two years Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) has been progressively implementing a pragmatic multi-disciplinary approach to building organisational capacity to collect and learn from evaluative data. We know that youth homelessness is much more complex than whether or not someone can access a house. We know that the more complex causes and consequences of homelessness require a much more robust and holistic approach to gathering psychosocial and circumstantial data about young people's experiences over time.[1]

We also know that there are multiple challenges to data collection associated with the nature of our client group, of ways of working and of the system we work within. We share some of our lived experience in this process in order to both normalise the difficulties faced by the sector; and to share some of the wins we have experienced in embedding data collection into the culture of youth homelessness work.

So why is it hard?

It is common knowledge that it is hard to get young people to tell adults meaningful information about their lives; and this is particularly true for young people experiencing homelessness. Some barriers are common to community services data collection, but there are specific developmental, socio-cultural and contextual factors which impact in a youth homelessness context:

- Young people in our target age ranges are at stages in life that often lean towards reactivity, spontaneity and disengagement or rejection of structured authority or compliance with external expectations.[2] Identity development is typically egocentric and characterised by identity differentiation from what others think they 'should' do.[3] This can be particularly true for those who are forced to creatively and autonomously survive homelessness and its associated experiences.
- Young people who access homelessness services are commonly highly transient. Their contact with workers is characteristically sporadic, needs-driven and unpredictable. They often simply don't stay still long enough to be measured. Phones are quickly disconnected or lost and addresses change with circumstances. The crisis-driven nature of engagement makes it difficult to get information about the times when things are improving or stabilising. The logistical and resource demands of tracking young people's movements over time are not only impractical but can be experienced as intrusive and contrary to youth work ethics.
- Young people who are homeless are likely to have experienced significant vulnerability in navigating sometimes hostile systems. It can take consistent work to gain the trust required to gather real and meaningful information about their lives and to overcome negative past experiences with those who hold power in their lives. Youth workers are put in a potentially uncomfortable dual role of empowering supporter and information extractor. This is exacerbated by the knowledge that young people who are highly vulnerable have often adaptively learned to tell people in power what they think we want to hear.

Youth work is complex

Its fundamental nature is multi-dimensional and unpredictable in the way that it behaves over time and contexts.[4] The essential nature of the work creates significant barriers to outcomes measurement:

- Young people's learning is often informal, happening indirectly around activities rather than through direct didactic interventions.
- Client-driven practice principles in youth work mean that an individual's target outcomes often evolve over time, as young people develop the capacity to focus on life beyond the here and now.[5] This means structured pre-set or standardised outcomes dimensions can seem not only superficial but contradictory to ways of working.
- Duration-of-need and flexible support models mean that there is often not a clear 'end point' at which to measure outcomes as young people sporadically engage and disengage over time.

- The significant outcomes of work with highly vulnerable homeless young people are often cumulative and longer term, outside of measurable timeframes. Shorter-term changes tend to be focussed on soft personal or social development outcomes that are highly subjective and defy measurement. Change very often cycles up and down over time rather than having a neat trajectory towards a target outcome, making 'success' highly dependent on the point-in-time that measurement is done.
- Youth homelessness outcomes are most often the result of multiple different influences over time, limiting attribution of outcomes to a particular intervention.
- The nature of youth culture is that language, knowledge, identities and ways of being in the world are particularly emergent, changing rapidly over time, and highly contextualised. Youth work outcomes are also particularly vulnerable to changes in the socio-political environment.
- Young people are developmentally oriented to relational learning.[6] This positions the mechanisms of change of youth work most often within the subjectivity, specificity and experiential nature of the worker–young person relationship. These are very hard to quantify, replicate, measure and generalise. This is particularly exacerbated for homeless young people who may be cut-off from other primary support relationships in their lives.

Youth outcomes therefore do not often neatly fit into standard linear or dimension-rating style data collection tools. Beyond being arguably really boring, old-style surveys and traditional measurement tools can be experienced as irrelevant and inadequate for the complexity and emergent nature of young people's experiences. This creates barriers to data collection for both young people and their youth workers, leaving services at risk of being labelled deficient because the measures do not meaningfully capture the richly diverse and challenging nature of the work that they do.[7]

Creativity, relevance and pragmatism are critical in youth homelessness data collection

Limited 'success' in traditional forms of data gathering does not necessarily indicate a failure to try hard enough. To improve youth homelessness data we need to think creatively and be flexible enough to keep adapting our methodologies as well as committed to developing highly contextualised data collection approaches.
Young people and their youth workers are generally not shy to express resistance to data processes that get in the way of good work. Data collection that is not specifically relevant, meaningful and overtly useful can provoke strong resistance. The use of precious program resources for data that lacks clear value will not just limit motivation, but may provoke direct animosity towards data collection.
Data methods need to be designed to yield timely and direct benefits if they are going to work.

While we need to transparently link to broader outcomes constructs, our methodologies need to lend themselves to grabbing whatever we can, whenever we can. We have learned to accept that consistent representative sampling is most often unfeasible in the context of youth homelessness service delivery.
We know that unfortunately we will not always be able to get information from the young people we can learn most from. Attempting to squash homeless young people's experiences into externally-driven standardised tools at best provokes the 'I'll tell you what you want to hear so I can get this over and done with' attitude, and at worst sees active resistance to handing over any meaningful information.

Similarly youth workers will often loyally guard their clients from data collection methods that lack overt utility, relevance, creativity and meaning. Data collection tools need to be customised to be multi-purpose where possible; to be overtly aligned with strategic applied learning goals; and to seek only the minimum amount of specifically relevant information. Data collection needs to draw on multiple adaptive sources of information to construct meaning rather than relying on generic, highly structured or single source data methodologies.

Mutual benefit is powerful

Beyond doing no harm, BYS has learned to embed data collection in overtly therapeutic processes which not only include the option to opt-out, but offer direct benefit or intrinsic reward to young people. Data collection is framed within opportunities for strength-based progress review, meaningful self-reflection and experiences of voice and influence. In some circumstances the limited use of incentives may be reasonable compensation for time and expertise; however the primary focus is on the intrinsic benefit of participation. Youth workers are engaged by focussing on how the data can improve capacity to benefit young people, rather on than compliance driven requirements. The focus is on data that helps workers do their job better or feel better about their work.

There are many more barriers and enablers than are touched on here but the key point is that we, as a sector, need to be working collaboratively, innovatively and with awareness of the inherent challenges of youth homelessness data collection. As with all great plans of mice and social researchers, BYS is still very much on a path of emergent learning. We explicitly recognise that the ideas discussed here represent ideals in signposting the rocky terrain of youth homelessness data collection. We give thanks to the young people whose honesty, integrity and colourful diversity has so richly contributed to our learning about youth homelessness data collection.

Endnotes

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2. Bynner J 2005, Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-course: The Case for Emerging Adulthood? *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol.8, no.4, pp.367–384.
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Solution-Focussed Data

Chris Stone, Senior Policy Officer, Yfoundations

Data is critical for policy advocacy in two ways: firstly to prove that there is a problem, and secondly to guide the solution. The need for data in demonstrating there is a problem is broadly acknowledged. The 'headline-grabbing' statistics, such as numbers of people experiencing homeless, are valued and used by many organisations. However, the need for data in guiding solutions is often under-appreciated.

A good example of this was the work behind the New South Wales (NSW) Government's announcement in April last year of $23 million additional funding to youth crisis accommodation services.[1] The NSW Government had accepted the advice from services that this was a critical area of underfunding and was prepared to address this. The issue was in establishing the level of underfunding.

To establish the level of underfunding required a number of pieces of data that were not initially available. Firstly, there needed to be a comprehensive list of youth crisis accommodation services in NSW. Secondly, data on the amount each was currently funded. And thirdly, an agreed figure on the real costs of running youth crisis accommodation. The government, with significant input from the youth homelessness services sector, was able to establish these pieces of information. However, the fact that the data was not initially available, despite a consensus that this was a critical area, shows that there is insufficient focus on the data needed to guide solutions.

Other cases of a lack of solution-focussed data can be seen when trying to compare general population statistics with service provision data. For example, the census homelessness estimate is a point-in-time figure,[2] but most of the data on Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) service delivery produced by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) is for a financial year, with only limited statistics given for 'any given day'.[3] If the AIHW annual SHS data reports that included a census night, such as the yet-to-be released 2016–17 report, showed data for that day it would allow a comparison showing the proportions of the homelessness population that was receiving support. This would give fundamental data for estimates of underfunding.

There are numerous other more specific instances of lack of comparable data; for example, there is data available on the educational attainment of all Australians,[4] but no comparable data for those being assisted by SHS. Data on SHS service delivery produced by AIHW only shows whether those receiving assistance are enrolled in education, not what level of education they have attained.[5] Educational attainment is a key determinant of factors, such as level of job security or income, which significantly affect the risk of homelessness. Currently we cannot say how much the educational attainment of those seeking assistance from the services system differs from the general population, or to what extent this difference changes during service provision.[6] This is critical data in designing services to assist those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

In some cases the issue is not just a lack of comparable data, but a lack of any reliable data at all. One instance of this is in the area of unaccompanied minors in SHS. If the AIHW data cubes are used to produce a report on the numbers of unaccompanied minors without a care and protection order who are accommodated in SHS in NSW they show that there were 1,360 children not with a family group aged 0 to 9 during 2012–13.[7] Talking with services across the state this is almost certainly incorrect; the true number would be extremely small, if not zero. However, this casts doubt on figures for the 10 to 14 and 15 to 17 age groups, meaning we do not have publicly available reliable data on unaccompanied minors.

The above examples illustrate the challenges in finding solution-focussed data that is usable and reliable. More needs to be done in this area, and there are a number of aspects of the design of data systems that could help:

Firstly, government and community organisations should have, as part of their strategic plans, goals to gather data on issues that they know to be critical and poorly understood.

Secondly, whenever data gathering systems are being designed or reviewed, there needs to be consideration of existing related data sources and the extent to which the data to be gathered can and should be comparable with them.

Thirdly, systems need to be designed to reduce input errors by making data entry easier and more intuitive for caseworkers (whose first priority is, as it should be, the person in front of them and not the data).

The result of solution-focussed data gaps is ultimately a negative impact on the most vulnerable, as public resources allocated to assist them are not as well targeted and thus not as effective as they could be. So it is essential that greater efforts are made to ensure that data generated is solution-focussed.

Endnotes

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4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *'Education and Work, Australia, May 2016'* (Statistical Report, 6227.0, 29 November 2016).
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6. Note Yfoundations has recently released a report that does give some data on these issues for NSW: Chris Stone, *'Skills to Pay the Bills'* (Report, Yfoundations, April 2017).
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) collection data cubes: SHS Demographics National. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/shs/data-cubes/other-outcomes/metadata/>*.

   Note that the filters applied to obtain these numbers were:
   Age equal to 0 to 9;
   State/Territory equal to NSW;
   Family type (first reported) equal to Lone person/not with group;
   Care or protection order equal to No;
   Year equal to 2012–13;
   Accommodation nights equal to 1 day, 2 days to 1 week, 8 days to 2 weeks, 15 days to 4 weeks, >4 weeks to 6 weeks, >6 weeks to 13 weeks, >13 weeks to 19 weeks, >19 weeks to 26 weeks, >26 weeks to 39 weeks, >39 weeks to 52 weeks, >52 weeks (that is, all except 0 days).

Hearts and Numbers:
Providing Relational Services in a Data-Driven World

Shae Garwood, Senior Research Officer, and Sarah Brown, Practice Leader Housing, Anglicare WA

Set against the backdrop of growing inequality and a receding safety net for those most disadvantaged in our society, government initiatives are increasingly embracing a transactional approach to delivering human services. This is evident in the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services, which promotes a market-based approach to social services. It can also be seen in the framing of the Priority Investment Approach announced by the Turnbull Government in October 2016, which uses actuarial data to determine which groups are most likely to require social supports over their lifetime. Such transactional approaches often view people as units with easily identifiable problems that can be solved with discrete, measurable solutions.

Anglicare WA works with clients everyday who have experienced abuse, loss, homelessness, abandonment and exclusion from family and/or community. They have often bounced around between different services, each service focused on a specific issue with requirements for data collection and measurement. However, what clients often need is more holistic support to address the underlying (and often harder to measure) issues that have triggered, or at least help explain, behaviours or experiences.

Through its Youth Supported Housing and Crisis Accommodation (Y-shac) program, Anglicare WA is government funded to assist young people aged 15 to 25 who are experiencing homelessness.

However, there is a growing need to house homeless teens below the age of 15 as well as 15 year olds who do not have parental permission to stay at Y-shac. Without support, these young people face homelessness due to family dysfunction, abuse, drug and alcohol misuse and/or mental health concerns at home. This is an example of clients not fitting neatly into categories aligned with funding contracts. More often than not, people's lives are complicated and the issues they face criss-cross different programs and government departments.

Anglicare WA sees its purpose as walking alongside people to achieve:

- meaning: self-worth
- belonging: love and affection, connection to community
- fulfilment: growth and contribution
- safety: security, stability and free from violence
- survival: food, drink, shelter, warmth and income

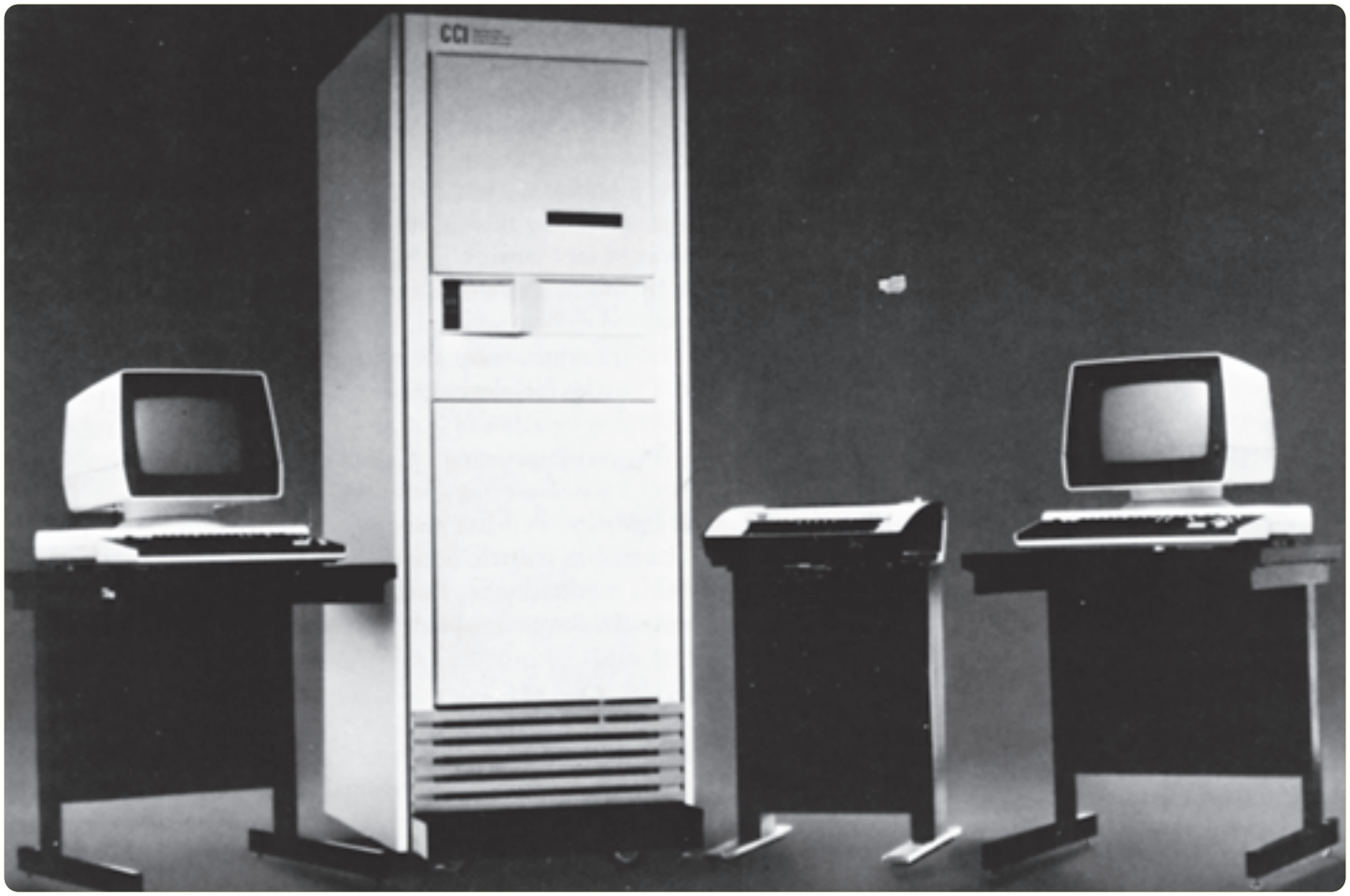
These goals are not easily achieved using a transactional approach to homelessness and other social services.

The Power of Stories

Gathering statistical data is essential to better understanding the trends and patterns of clients' experiences and the provision of services.
In relation to housing and homelessness, understanding the scale of the problem, the different types of homelessness, and the contributing factors to homelessness are required to develop good public policy. However, the singular, and sometimes exhaustive, focus on quantitative data has not always translated into better outcomes for clients. We must not lose sight of why we're gathering data in the first place.

Often what makes the difference between a positive life change and someone finding temporary relief and continuing to bounce along their journey in 'service land' from one agency to another are the relationships they develop along the way which are not captured in official statistics. One man in Gosnells who was sleeping rough under the local bridge approached Anglicare WA counselling service. Staff supported him with his immediate need for food as well as more long-term support, connecting him to relevant services. He later told Anglicare WA staff, 'I would have been dead by now if it wasn't for you two ladies and the help you gave me', reflecting the value he placed on the support he received.

Taking the time to work closely with young people may not always look efficient on paper because it takes a long time to develop trusting relationships, however it can pay off in the long-term. Young people in crisis often challenge rules, staff patience and the system. A young man who had been in and out of Y-shac due to challenging family dynamics and family violence at home, had also been using drugs for a number of years. He talked about wanting to quit drugs on his own but had been unsuccessful many times and didn't trust rehab services based on other family members' experiences. Over time, he formed a strong trusting relationship with Anglicare WA's on-site Drug and Alcohol Worker, who was able to go with the young man to visit a rehab service on a number of occasions to become more comfortable with the idea of attending rehab. Through Anglicare WA's relationship with the rehab centre, and its willingness to take a long-term approach, the young man eventually entered rehab and graduated from the program.



In another case, Y-shac supported a young girl who at 15 years of age was mistreated and abused by her extended family. She was scared, but motivated to change the course of her life. Y-shac assisted her to access accommodation, connect with mental health services and secure a scholarship. This young woman is now 18, enrolled at university and moving forward with her life. She told staff she felt supported and cared for by Y-shac, and appreciated not being treated just as a number on the books.

These personal stories are valuable, but often difficult to convert into the data required by funders. In its housing programs, Anglicare WA has changed the way staff write reports to include synopses with personal stories about individual outcomes like those of the young people described above to complement the necessary quantitative data.

In the changing social service environment, agencies will need to be focussed not just on the numbers but on the outcomes for clients. This requires relationships to be a higher priority than the number of people you house. A good example of listening to people and making a small, yet critical, change includes two Aboriginal brothers who came to Y-shac after couch surfing with family. They had only ever experienced overcrowded housing and had never had a room to themselves. The young men started not returning to the service and missing curfew. They were at risk of losing their accommodation. Staff took the time to listen to the young men and better understand why they were not returning. The boys explained it was uncomfortable and scary staying in a room by themselves. Due to this conversation the boys were assisted to move the mattress from one room into the other so they could sleep in the same room. If staff did not listen to the young men and make adjustments to the service as a result, the brothers would have eventually been recorded as 'noncompliant' and been evicted. Instead, staff addressed the cultural and personal needs of the young men.

Stories like these provide insights into the causes of homelessness, resilience factors, and what services around the country do on a daily basis to assist people who are struggling to move forward. Many of these issues would not find their way into official statistics but are nevertheless valuable in understanding the relationship-building and sustained engagement needed to achieve positive results.

Conclusion

There's no question that gathering and analysing data is worthwhile in seeking to improve our services, but we must also remember that we are dealing with real people who don't always fit neatly into existing categories.

Social services are based on social relationships and are not easily reduced to a simple transaction. Relational work is best undertaken by those embedded in the local community who are willing to make a long-term commitment to those in need.

When we stop putting our hearts into our services, we begin to see people as units to be counted, processed and moved on. We should collect meaningful data, in the form of statistics as well as stories that can inform our quest for constant improvement and ensure we are making a real difference to people's lives.

Counting Rough Sleepers

Chris Chamberlain and Guy Johnson, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University

'We found that nearly one in ten Australians have slept rough during their lives'.

In 2015 we published the results of a study that investigated how many Australians have experienced homelessness and how many people have slept rough.[1] There are three ways to count the homeless population. The first is to count people at a point-in-time, what is called a point-prevalence count. This is what the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census does. The second way is to count people over a defined period of time, often a year. This is called a period-prevalence count and the best Australian example is Specialist Homeless Services (SHS) data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The third approach is a lifetime count which will be described in this paper.

Each approach has limitations. The SHS database collects information on all persons who request assistance from homelessness services over a 12-month period. However, many homeless people do not use these agencies. One study found that only 40 per cent of homeless people had sought assistance from services while they were homeless.[2]

The Census counts those who seek assistance from services as well as those who do not, but census data has other limitations. One problem is that point-in-time counts underestimate the number of homeless people who have a short-term problem. Phelan and Link[3] refer to this as 'point prevalence bias':

As an illustration of 'point-prevalence' bias, imagine a survey conducted in a shelter on a given night in December. If residents come and go during the month, the number of residents on the night of the survey will be smaller than the number of residents over the month. If, in addition, length of stay varies, longer-term residents will be oversampled, and persistence will be overestimated (for example, a person who stays all month is certain to be sampled, but a person who stays one night has a one in 31 chance of being sampled). Finally, if people with certain characteristics (for example, mental illness) stay longer than others, the prevalence of those characteristics will be overestimated.[4]

The third approach counts the number of people who have ever experienced homelessness in their lifetime. The best known example of the lifetime approach was carried out in 1990 by Link and his colleagues (1994, 1995) in the United States. They undertook a national telephone survey in the United States of people who were housed and asked them if they had ever been homeless (N=1507). One advantage of this approach is that the short-term homeless will be adequately represented. Another advantage is that it is possible to estimate how many people have experienced homelessness during their lifetime. Third, it is possible to ask those who have been homeless if they have ever slept rough.

The findings of Link et al[5] were startling. They found that 14 per cent of Americans, or 26 million people, had been homeless at some point during their lives, and that 7.4 per cent of them, or 13.5 million people, had slept rough (literal homelessness). Our research built upon Link's approach.

Methodology

The information for our study was gathered as part of the inaugural National Social Survey (NSS) undertaken in 2014 by the Population Research Laboratory at the University of Central Queensland. The survey asked about a range of topical issues, including questions on homelessness.

The NSS was carried out by telephone and the target population was all persons aged 18 or older in Australia who were living in a dwelling that could be contacted on a landline telephone service or who had a mobile telephone number. A random sample of mobile telephone numbers was included to capture respondents from the growing proportion of the population who do not have landline telephones. Approximately one-third of the sample was contacted on a mobile telephone number and two-thirds were contacted on a landline number. To be included in the study, respondents had to be aged 18 or older and to have a usual address. The interviews were carried out during November and December 2014.

We re-weighted the data to compensate for the fact that some groups were over-represented in the sample.[6] After re-weighting, men were 49.9 per cent of the sample compared with 49.3 per cent of the population and women were 50.1 per cent of the sample compared with 50.7 per cent of the population. Overall, the social characteristics of the sample were similar to the social characteristics of the population.[7]

Lifetime Homelessness

The first Australian research into lifetime homelessness was undertaken by the ABS in 2010, as part of their General Social Survey

(GSS). The GSS[8] (ABS 2011) used the cultural definition to assess whether people had experienced homelessness during their lifetime and we used the same definition. Interviewers began by explaining this definition with the words in capitals read slowly and emphasised:

The next set of questions is about housing instability and homelessness. When we use the term 'homelessness' we mean a situation where someone has NO HOME OF THEIR OWN — OR IF THEY HAVE A HOME THEY CANNOT LIVE IN IT and they are EITHER:

- staying temporarily with friends or relatives
- staying in emergency accommodation such as a refuge or hostel
- staying in a boarding house or caravan park
- OR sleeping rough, staying in their car, in some other public place, or in an empty building.

The phrase, 'if they have a home they cannot live in it' was included because women escaping domestic violence may feel they 'have a home of their own', but are unable to live there. We asked: 'With that definition in mind, have you ever had a time in your life where you considered yourself homeless?' Respondents had no difficulty understanding the question: 99.8 per cent answered either 'yes' or 'no'.

The ABS found that 13 per cent of their respondents had experienced a period of homelessness during their lifetime and we found that 13.1 per cent of our respondents had been homeless (Table 1). Both results confirm that homelessness is much more common than previously thought.

However, the GSS did not investigate whether there were differences between men and women. Table 1 shows that 15.1 per cent of men in our study had been homeless compared with 11.1 per cent of women. The Australian population (aged 18 and over) was 18.2 million in 2014 (9.0 million men and 9.2 million women). This means that approximately 1.35 million men and 1.0 million women (or 2.35 million people) had been homeless at some point during their lives.

How Many People Have Slept Rough?

The second aim of the research was to estimate how many people have slept rough. The best information on where homeless people stay is collected by the National Census of Population and Housing held every five years. Using its statistical definition of homelessness[9] the ABS found that there were 105,000 homeless people on Census Night 2011[10] but only six per cent of the homeless were rough sleepers.

The Census undercounts the number of rough sleepers for a number of reasons. Most obviously, rough sleepers are 'hard to reach', but it is also the case that not everyone who sleeps rough does so permanently. Some will have slept rough earlier in the year but were somewhere else on Census night (for example, a boarding house, a friend's place etc.). Others will have slept rough earlier in the year but were no longer homeless on Census night. Another group were housed on Census night but slept rough later in the year. For these reasons the number of rough sleepers will always be higher in an annual count than a census count. Taking this one step further, a lifetime count should always be higher than an annual count. Direct comparisons of the results of point-in-time, annual and lifetime counts need to bear this in mind.

We asked everyone who had been homeless, 'Did you EVER sleep rough, stay in your car, stay in some other public place, or live in an empty building for any of the time that you were homeless?' We found that 7.8 per cent of ABS 2010* the sample (or about 1.4 million Australians) reported they had slept rough at some point in their lives. This means that of those people who had ever experienced homelessness over half (59 per cent) had slept rough and it was more common among men (67 per cent) than women (50 per cent). When these two pieces of information are combined, then it can inferred that about 900,000 men and 500,000 women have slept rough at some point during their lives.

The results also suggest there is an association between the age people first become homeless and whether or not they sleep rough. Table 2 shows that 76 per cent of those who became homeless as teenagers (defined as young people aged 12 to 18) had slept rough, compared with 60 per cent of those who became homeless as young adults (aged 19 to 24), and 44 per cent of those who became homeless as adults (aged 25 or older).

Conclusion

The first Australian research into lifetime homelessness found that 13 per cent of adults had experienced a period of homelessness during their lifetime. Our research confirmed that finding. Both results are much higher than reported in point-in-time accounts such as the Census, and lend credence to the view that point-in-time results underestimate the magnitude of the problem.

Table 1: Persons who have experienced homelessness during their lifetime

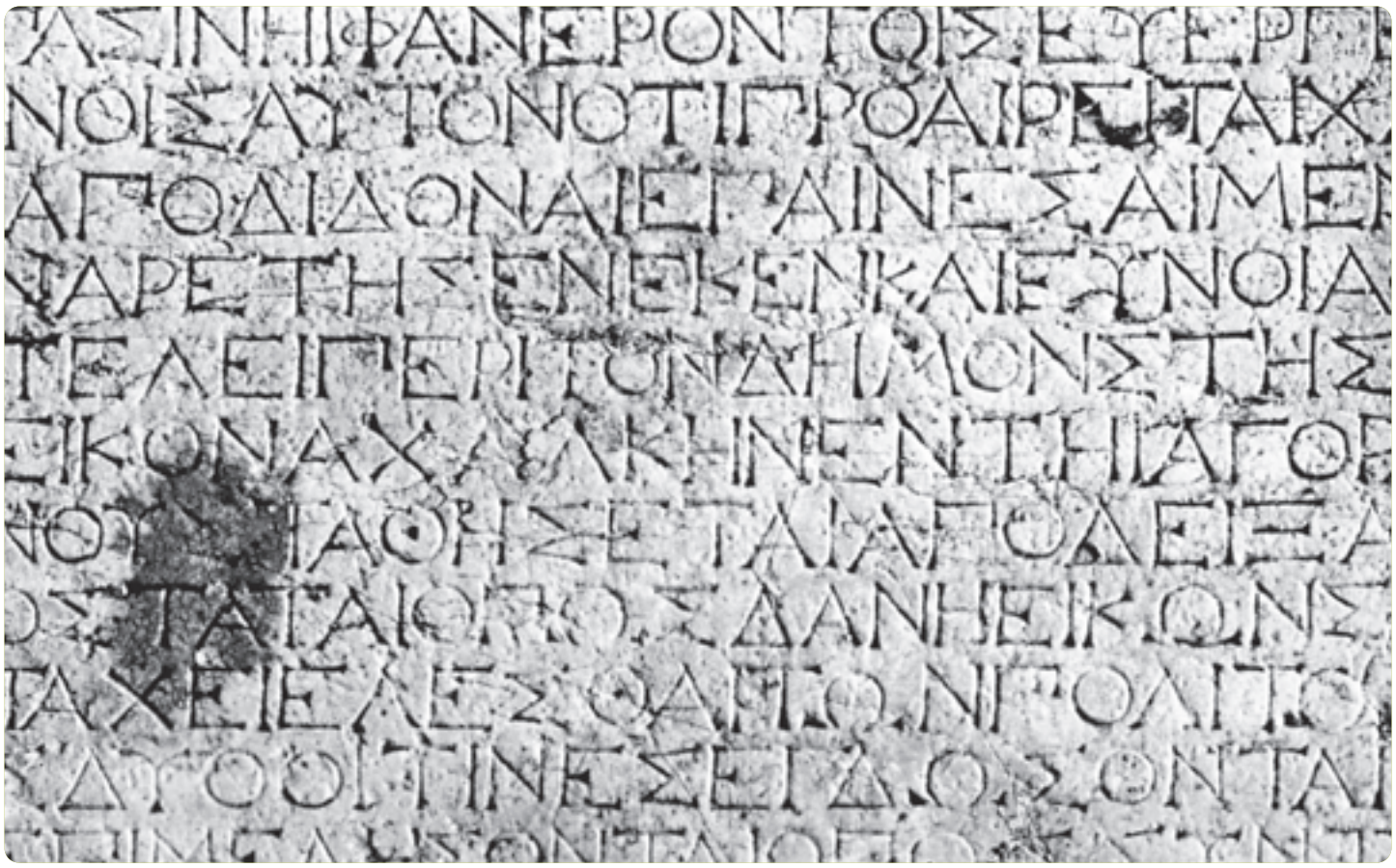
	Men (N=668)	Women (N=672)	All (N=1,340)	ABS 2010*
Percentage	15.1	11.1	13.1	13

* Source: ABS (2011, p.27)

Table 2: Persons who slept rough by age first homeless

	Age First Homeless			
	12 to 18 (N=57)	19 to 24 (N=51)	25 or older (N=64)	All* (N=176) *
Percentage	76	60	44	59

*Total includes four persons who became homeless before the age of 12



Our research also draws attention to the fact that 15 per cent of men have been homeless, compared with 11 per cent of women. This means that approximately 1.35 million men and 1.0 million women have experienced homelessness, or 2.35 million people.

The second aim of our paper was to estimate how many people have slept rough. The 2011 Census[11] reported that six per cent of the homeless (6,800 people) were rough sleepers on Census night. However, for reasons already alluded to, census counts under-estimate the prevalence of rough sleeping.

Our research revealed surprisingly high rates of rough sleeping — indeed nearly one in ten Australians (7.8 per cent) had slept rough at some point in their lives. Not only do our findings suggest that the Census under-estimates the extent of rough sleeping, but also that rough sleeping is a relatively common experience among the homeless. We found that 59 per cent of the homeless have slept rough at some point in their lives, or approximately 1.4 million people.

Our findings offer important insights into the extent of homelessness and the magnitude of rough sleeping.

However, our study suffers from some notable limitations. We have no information on the length of time that people slept rough. This is important information. Rough sleeping is commonly conflated with long-term or chronic homelessness, but it is likely some people sleep rough for only a brief period of time. Policy makers need to bear this in mind.

Most importantly, we cannot be sure that we counted everyone who has slept rough. To begin with, our study does not include those who are currently homeless. Second, people in prisons and mental institutions were not included, but they are more likely to have experienced homelessness and to have slept rough than the currently housed. Third, our study was restricted to people aged 18 and over, but we know that one-third (32 per cent) of our respondents first became homeless when they were aged 12 to 18 and 76 per cent of this group had slept rough (Table 2). Taken together, these points mean that our results could underestimate the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping. On balance, our findings provide compelling evidence that homelessness and rough sleeping are bigger problems than previously recognised.

Endnotes

1. Chamberlain C and Johnson G 2015, 'How many Australians have slept rough?', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol50, no.4, pp.439–456.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *General Social Survey: Summary Results*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Cat. No. 4159.0. p. 27.
3. Phelan J and Link B 1999, 'Who are 'the Homeless'? Reconsidering the Stability and Composition of the Homeless Population', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol.89, no.9, pp.1334–1338.
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5. Link B, Susser E, Phelan J, Moore R and Streuning E 1994, 'Lifetime and Five-Year Prevalence of Homelessness in the United States', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol.84 no.12, pp.907–1912, and Link, B, Phelan J, Bresnahan M, Stueve A, Moore R and Susser E 1995, 'Lifetime and Five-Year Prevalance of Homelessness in the United States: New Evidence on and Old Debate', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol.65, no. 3, pp. 347–354.
6. Chamberlain C and Johnson G 2015, op cit.
7. ibid.
8. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, op cit.
9. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a, *Information Paper — a Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Cat. No. 4922.0.
10. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Cat. No. 2049.0.
11. ibid.

City of Sydney Street Count: What Does it Actually Tell Us?

Digby Hughes, Senior Policy Officer, Homelessness NSW

Since 2010 the City of Sydney has organised twice yearly a street count to collect accurate and up-to-date data on the number of people sleeping rough in the local government area. The count is done in February and August to get information for summer and winter. Traditionally the summer figures are higher for a number of reasons.

This is a major logistical exercise involving close to 200 volunteers as well as advisors who are people who have experienced homelessness. On the night, the number of people staying in the service system is also ascertained. This is extremely useful as it shows that the service system is close to capacity with over 90 per cent hostel beds were occupied, clearly putting an end to the line that people should find a bed for the night.

As a policy person, I have always appreciated this data. It gives me something far more concrete to work on rather than 'the most recent Census data' from 2011 or the 'anecdotal evidence from our members strongly show'. Mind you the anecdotal evidence from our members has shown itself to be provident; from 2008 they knew there was a tsunami of people reaching out for assistance. This was vindicated in the 2011 Census which showed a 20 per cent increase in homelessness across New South Wales (NSW) from the 2006 Census.

In February 2010, the number of people counted was 418 and over the next few years this figure fell, till in February 2013 it was 274. Since then we have seen the numbers steadily climb to a peak in 2016 of 486. This year saw a decrease to 433, but this was still the second highest count on record.

What caused the numbers to drop and why have they increased since?

Many of the same systemic drivers continue, and in many cases, have worsened. Housing unaffordability has increased markedly. People are still leaving gaol and hospitals with little regard for their housing options. We still have a lack of joined up service delivery across many homelessness and mental health and AOD services.
Far too many people fall through the gaping holes. But still we did see a marked decrease in the level of rough sleeping in Sydney for a few years.

What we did see was a number of programs come to fruition in 2011. Among these were the Common Ground in Camperdown and Platform 70.

What were these programs? Platform 70 was a project of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and commenced in 2011. The project had some main objectives; to place 70 rough sleepers in the Woolloomooloo (NSW) area into long-term housing by 2012–13; and to enhance the sustainability of private rental tenancies for rough sleepers in the Woolloomooloo area by linking housing assistance with support services.

Common Ground Sydney provides housing for people who are long-term homeless and people on low to moderate incomes in the inner-city of Sydney. It is based on the Common Ground model from New York, providing permanent homes and on-site support services to help people achieve health and stability and to maximise their ability to live independently.

At their heart, both of these programs are housing first supported accommodation approaches, which is about providing people experiencing homelessness with immediate access to long-term, sustainable accommodation, rather than a shelter, followed by transitional accommodation and finally a place to call home.

Unlike other programs that seek to address issues such as alcohol and drug abuse or mental health problems prior to placing participants in housing, this approach provides secure long-term housing as the very first step. Once the person has the foundation of a home they then receive intensive support to address their issues and maintain their tenancy. Does this theory work in practice?

Common Ground has been successful in providing secure, permanent housing and support to people who had been homeless for many years. Formerly homeless tenants had been homeless for an average of 12 years before entering Common Ground. As at March 2014 there had been a 63 per cent retention rate among the formerly homeless tenants over 28 months. The vast majority (84 per cent) were satisfied or very satisfied with their housing and the majority reported that the services provided to them had been useful. The vast majority of participants also reported noticing improvements in their lives since obtaining their accommodation and support.[1]

Platform 70 housing has been seen to provide consumers with the stability needed to focus on other issues, such as health care and reconnecting with family, which were typically neglected when rough sleeping in favour of addressing fundamental needs, such as accessing shelter and food.

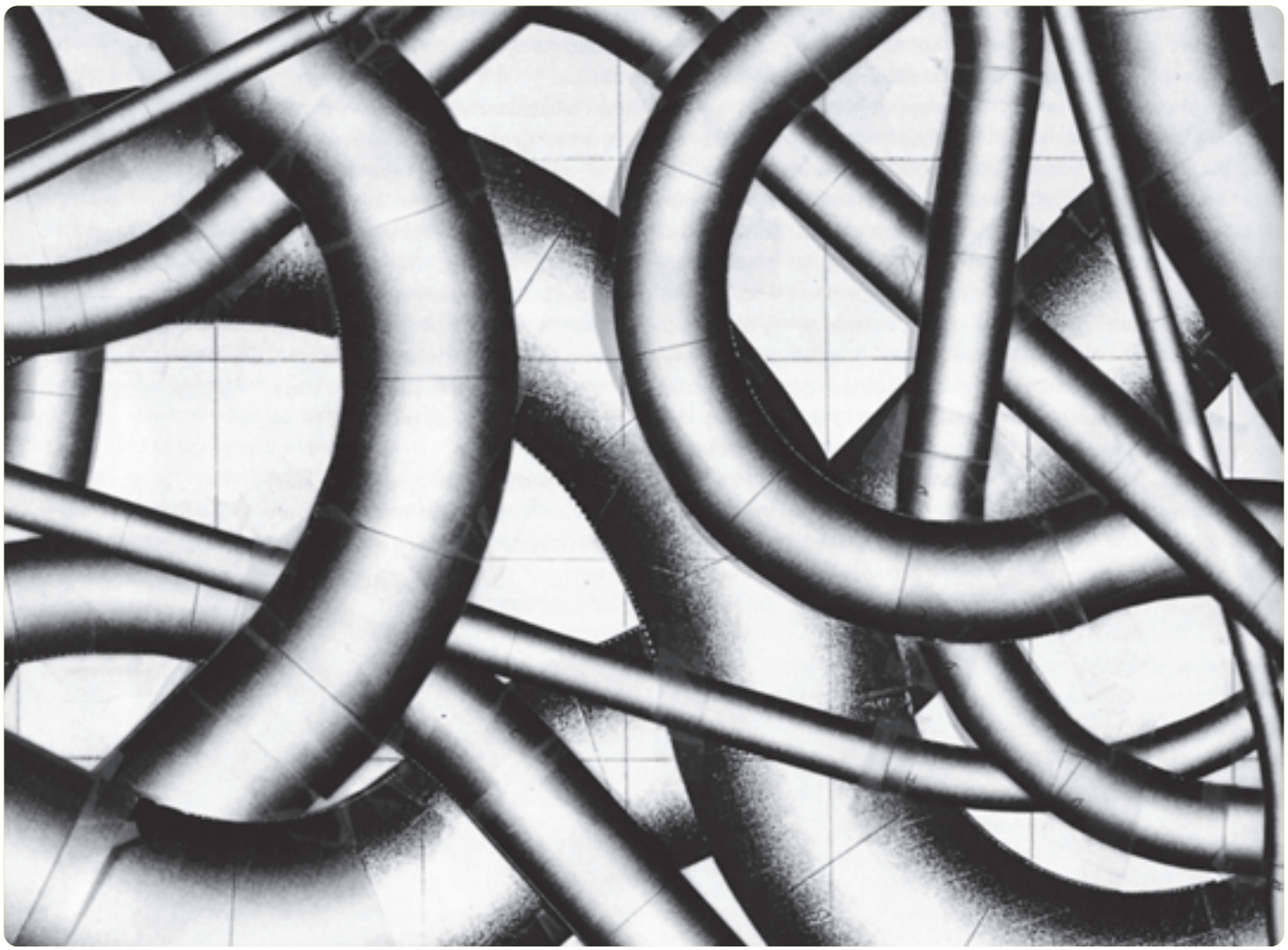
Strengths of the Platform 70 program are the immediacy of private rental market properties allowing rapid access to secure, permanent housing, and the wrap-around support services that maximised the capacity of tenants to maintain tenancies. Most importantly there has been a 94 per cent tenancy retention rate.

So, what we can see is that housing first supported accommodation programs can be extremely successful in housing people who had previously been existing on the street. It is not surprising that the numbers of people sleeping on the streets of Sydney fell when these programs were initiated. But these programs are now full of people maintaining safe and affordable housing with community support. If we want to see the numbers of rough sleepers fall significantly we need two things to occur.

The first of these is for all government agencies to take responsibility for their clients. That will turn off the tap; to end the homelessness of those on the street today we need a recommitment from Federal and State Governments to fully fund a housing first model that we know ends homelessness.

Endnote

1. *https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/InDepth_Evaluation_of_Camperdown_Common_Ground_FINAL.pdf*



Housing Outcomes for People Sleeping Rough: What Does the Data Say?

Nicola Ballenden, General Manager Research, Service Development and Advocacy
and Violet Kolar, Research Manager, Launch Housing

With unprecedented levels of rough sleeping in the Melbourne CBD (Central Business District) as well as surrounding inner suburbs, the Victorian State Government has announced a raft of spending measures to try to address the issue as well as an inquiry to advise on an overall strategy. Launch Housing is one of the biggest providers of homelessness services in the CBD and we have conducted the following review of evidence, including data from our own programs to develop an overview of the effectiveness of the homelessness system in addressing rough sleeping.

While evidence from the homelessness system overall suggests mixed effectiveness in terms of housing outcomes for rough sleepers, there is evidence from Australia and internationally on what works.

National Overview

In general, national Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data suggests that permanent housing has been difficult to obtain for rough sleepers. The AIHW[1] rough sleeper profile[2] reports that a total of 39,371 clients were sleeping rough when they first presented to a homelessness service. As shown in the Figure, only 21 per cent of this group ended their support with a positive housing outcome (12 per cent exited into private rental housing and nine per cent into public or community housing). This means that most experienced poor outcomes:

- 38 per cent remained rough sleeping at the end of support
- 17 per cent transitioned to short-term or emergency accommodation
- Five per cent ended support by couch surfing
- Two per cent ended support in an institutional setting
- 17 per cent the outcome was unknown.

Compared with the total rough sleeper population, those that ended their support 'housed' were more likely to be female.

Housing Outcomes for Rough Sleepers in Melbourne

Housing outcomes were also explored in the Melbourne StreetCount 2015 Qualitative Research.[3] Two questions asked participants if they were on a public housing waiting list and how long they have been on the waiting list. Almost half (n=40 people) of the 83 participants reported being on the public housing waiting list or similar (for example, Aboriginal housing). Of the group of 40 people, 14 reported they had been on the waiting list for five or more years.

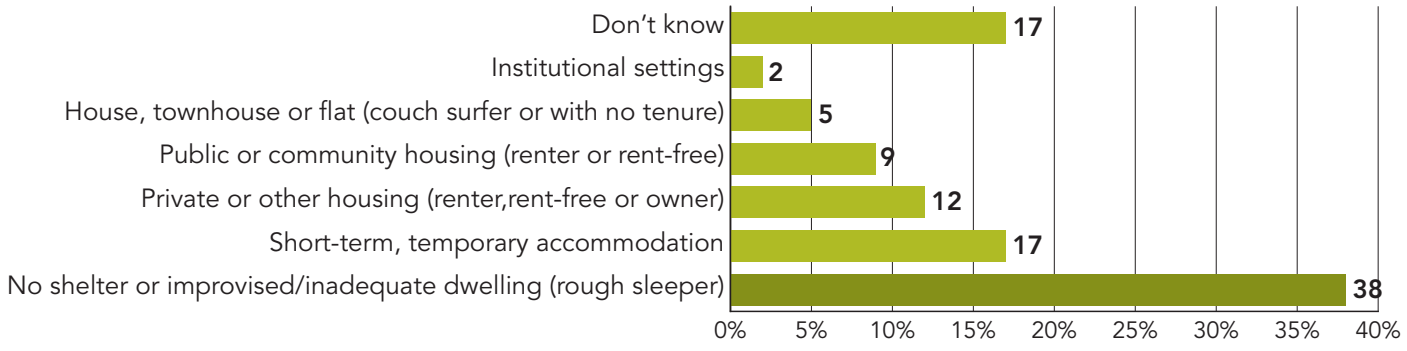
The researchers highlighted the challenges and ongoing frustrations experienced by the participants; in general, people were not keen for short-term solutions; a number of them reported:

> *'Difficulties staying in hostels, boarding houses and/or some crisis accommodation were raised by some participants. Reports of not feeling safe, being exposed to violence, drugs and alcohol, and the high costs of this accommodation were given as reasons for not using this accommodation'.*[4]

For example, one participant described his previous year in the homelessness system as:

> *'When you are first on the street you get offered a couple of nights in a hotel. Then this runs out, the*

Housing outcomes, rough sleepers, 2011–15 (N=39,371)



Source: http://wwwaihw.gov.au/homelessness/shsc/profiles-of-homeless-clients/rough-sleepers/

funds run out and you find your way to a crisis centre. You are then offered one night in a room. That night there is a lot of yelling, fights, cops in and out, someone over-doses, someone is bashed. Next day you go to another housing service and start again'.[5]

Another said:

'You work your way around the circle a couple of times and then give up. I look back a year ago and it's still the same for homeless people'.[6]

This study also found that housing was very important for people; most hoped that they would have safe, secure stable housing in the future (when asked what they hoped for in six month's time). Participants reported that housing was the one thing that would make a difference to their lives.

However, over the ten week period of the fieldwork, only three people reported that they acquired some form of housing or accommodation.

Informed by the findings of his in-depth study of rough sleepers in Brisbane, Parsell[7] explained that sometimes study participants refused to reside in homeless accommodation due to past negative experiences; a finding that was consistent with other studies.[8, 9, 10]

Launch Housing analysed data from our RSI (rough sleeper initiative) program over the last year. The data relates to all clients (n=239 over the calendar year of 2016). RSI is an initial engagement and short term support program with an average support program of two months with exits to other support programs at either Launch Housing or other organisations. Housing outcomes from this program appear to be consistent with the overall national trends, suggesting that while many participants were not rough sleeping at the conclusion of the two month support period, they tended to be in short term rather than permanent housing. A major issue in terms of determining housing outcomes is that this is a transient group who can be hard to engage, while RSI is designed as an initial engagement and short term support program with limited time for assertive outreach and follow up.

Our sample of RSI clients matches the profile of rough sleepers internationally (that is, mostly male, aged over 35, unemployed, high rates of mental illness.)

- 77 per cent were male (n=185) and 23 per cent (n=54) were female.
- The largest group is men aged 36 to 45 years.
- Most (81.2 per cent) were Australian born.
- In terms of income, (46 per cent were on Newstart, 35.1 per cent on Disability Support Pension, 5.4 per cent had no income).
- Overall 64 per cent of clients reported a prior mental health diagnosis, however, 80 per cent of the women reported a prior mental health diagnosis while 59 per cent of men did.

We also know that for many of these, mental illness likely developed after their first experience of homelessness. Chamberlain et al[11] found a high prevalence of substance use (43 per cent) and mental illness (30 per cent) in the homeless population in their analysis of a large administrative data set (over 5,000 people), supplemented with over 50 qualitative interviews. However, they also found that the majority of people with mental health issues developed them after they became homeless (53 per cent) and 66 per cent of people developed substance use issues after they became homeless.

Interventions: What Works?

While service responses in Australia have typically been focused around relatively short-term crisis or transitional interventions, according to the literature, this type of service response is not particularly well suited to meet the needs of chronically homeless rough sleepers:[12]

'We know this because most of the long-term homeless have been supported and accommodated by existing specialist homelessness services, often on numerous occasions, but their problems generally remain unresolved'.

Stability is crucial for those who are chronically homeless. The researchers noted:

'The long-term homeless need both material stability in the form of a home, and emotional stability through a long-term relationship with a key worker'.[13]

There are a few key themes that emerge in the evidence, and indeed from Launch Housing data about what is required from an effective response, these include:

- assertive outreach
- a 'housing first' approach where permanent, safe and affordable housing is provided quickly with wrap around, integrated supports.
- a longer period of support with a key worker (that is, at least 12 months).

In order to operate effectively these programs need immediate access to permanent housing (an ongoing struggle in Melbourne) and access to a range of support services.

One program that is well supported by evaluations is the Street to Home program which operates in most Australian capital cities including Melbourne (operated by Launch Housing and Salvation Army).
The program has a strong focus on supporting clients to access and sustain housing. While at baseline only 24 per cent of clients in the Melbourne Street to Home program were housed, at the 12 month follow up period 77 per cent were in housing and at 24 months, 70 per cent of clients were still housed.[14, 15]

Another 'housing first' model is supportive housing which combines affordable housing with tailored support services.[16] A range of American studies have convincingly demonstrated the cost effectiveness of this model in assisting the chronically homeless, suggesting that these models were either cheaper or close to breakeven compared to the costs of emergency services and shelters.[17, 18] They also reduce the use of other emergency health and mental health services; for example Culhane and Byrne [19] found that supported housing produced a reduction in acute health and hospital usage. In the Australian context research conducted at Launch Housing's Elizabeth Street CommonGround found that residents were far less likely to use mental health inpatient units than they had prior to being housed.[20]

However, both Melbourne Street to Home and supportive housing are very small programs that are unable to meet current levels of demand. For example, Launch Housing data suggests that for every rough sleeper that we successfully refer in to Melbourne Street to Home, there are another eight whose level of vulnerability make them eligible, but for whom there is no place.

The other major barrier faced by any homelessness provider seeking to find housing for this group is that the majority of them are on Newstart — Launch Housing data suggests this is the most common form of income support for this group. Trying to find affordable private rental for someone on an extremely low income (and a range of other complex issues) in metropolitan Melbourne is next to impossible, which means this group is reliant on public housing. While services like ours can put someone on the waiting list, like most people, this group will need to wait for public housing.

Evidence suggests that the existing homelessness system has very mixed results in terms of securing successful housing outcomes for rough sleepers. However, there are a range of programs based on housing first principles, such as Melbourne Street to Home and supportive housing that are effective in terms of their housing outcomes although these programs are far too small to meet current levels of demand. The shortage of affordable housing for people on Newstart, which is one of the lowest Centrelink incomes, is a significant barrier to resolving homelessness for this group.

Rough sleepers are a very vulnerable sub-group of the homeless population who are likely to have had a number of interactions with various service systems including health and mental health, out of home care, justice, drug and alcohol services as well as housing and homelessness providers. Rough sleeping can also be seen as a consequence of multiple system failures, and while people who end up rough sleeping often have numerous and complex needs, many of these may be a consequence rather than a cause of rough sleeping. Rather than examining how the system can best address the needs of rough sleepers, a more useful question might be how we can prevent rough sleeping in the first place. Answering this question properly would also require some rethinking of the way in which we collect and review homelessness data.

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Registry Weeks: Collecting and Using Local Data to End Street Homelessness

Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

A Seven Year History of Registry Weeks in Australia

Since 2010, there have been sixteen 'Registry Weeks' across Australia, in Brisbane, Melbourne, Hobart, Sydney and Perth. These have included both city and regional areas and suburban communities that have also taken up the methodology. Australia owes a great debt of gratitude to Micah Projects in Brisbane who originally adapted the American methodology and tool for use in Australia. Registry Weeks are now also being effectively used in Canada and parts of Europe.

VI-SPDAT

The first registry weeks used the Vulnerability Index, but since 2014 the Vulnerability Index Service Prioritisation Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) has been used. It works effectively as a 'triage' tool to understand who is homeless and what their health and housing needs are so that the right type of housing and support (if support is also needed) can be sourced. Crucially, when doing a local registry week and training people to interview people using the VI-SPDAT — the tool can then later be used as an ongoing tool for the community. Once people are housed, they come off the register and if someone newly homeless is identified they can do a VI-SPDAT and be added. It is an effective methodology for keeping track of homelessness in a community as well as keeping track of housing outcomes.

Local Understanding — Local Response

Essentially 'Registry Weeks' harness resources from the community to identify by name every individual and family requiring safe, permanent and sustainable housing. It is through knowing everyone by name that the work of permanently housing and appropriately supporting each person can truly begin. Understanding the real-time demand for housing and support services in each community also assists local organisations and agencies to understand the level of housing and support supply that their community requires to end street and episodic homelessness. It also focusses communities on ending homelessness rather than simply managing and inadvertently continuing to service homelessness (food vans, showers etc). Once each community sees that the problem is a solvable number, resources can be directed into actions that can assist people into permanent housing.

The Australian experience to date has shown that applying the Registry Week process shifts a 'guesstimate' of homelessness numbers formed from anecdotal impressions to an objective and actionable assessment of the problem as directly informed by people requiring housing.
People who are housed and living on income support will sometimes attend local 'soup kitchens' and food vans to help stretch their food budget and for companionship. Attendance at these services can sometimes be mistaken for homelessness. Understanding exactly who is homeless and what they need to move into permanent and sustainable housing is a primary value-add that sets a Registry Week apart from a generic and anonymous street count.

What a Registry Week is Not

It's also important to understand what registry weeks are not.
They are not 'research' projects or census collection exercises.
Whilst understanding the demographic profile as well as health, housing and other needs of people experiencing homelessness allows each community to better understand the quantum of people requiring housing and support, the primary purpose is to gather this information in order to prioritise people into housing. De-identified data is reported back to the community and can be a very useful tool for advocacy and for building community momentum and political will — for the ultimate purpose of rallying a community of people and services to move people into housing and not simply for a group of people to know another statistic about their town or city.

Housing First

Registry weeks are based on 'Housing First' principles and in bringing communities together to better understand the extent of their street homelessness problem; it can also sometimes serve to create better co-ordination. Importantly, they also bring local organisations together to source additional housing supply.

This can be the hardest part of the project or campaign although not impossible. For example, a regional city in New South Wales (NSW) undertook a Registry Week in late 2016. The community came together and through the Registry Week methodology found and interviewed 41 people experiencing homelessness.

Since their Registry Week, they have identified and done a VI-SPDAT with 16 additional people — bringing the total on the register to 57.
However, at the same time, all the co-operating services worked hard to get accommodation results for those whose names and needs were now known. In a few short months they have housed 28 people. They have

halved street homelessness in their city. This is a great example of how most of the work for registry weeks actually begins after the registry week has been done.

Local Campaigns

Micah Projects provides a great example of an effective community campaign using the registry week methodology in Australia. In 2014 they launched '500 Lives 500 Homes' with the intent to ensure that at least 500 individuals and families were housed. This was very much a partnership project, with multiple agencies in Brisbane participating.

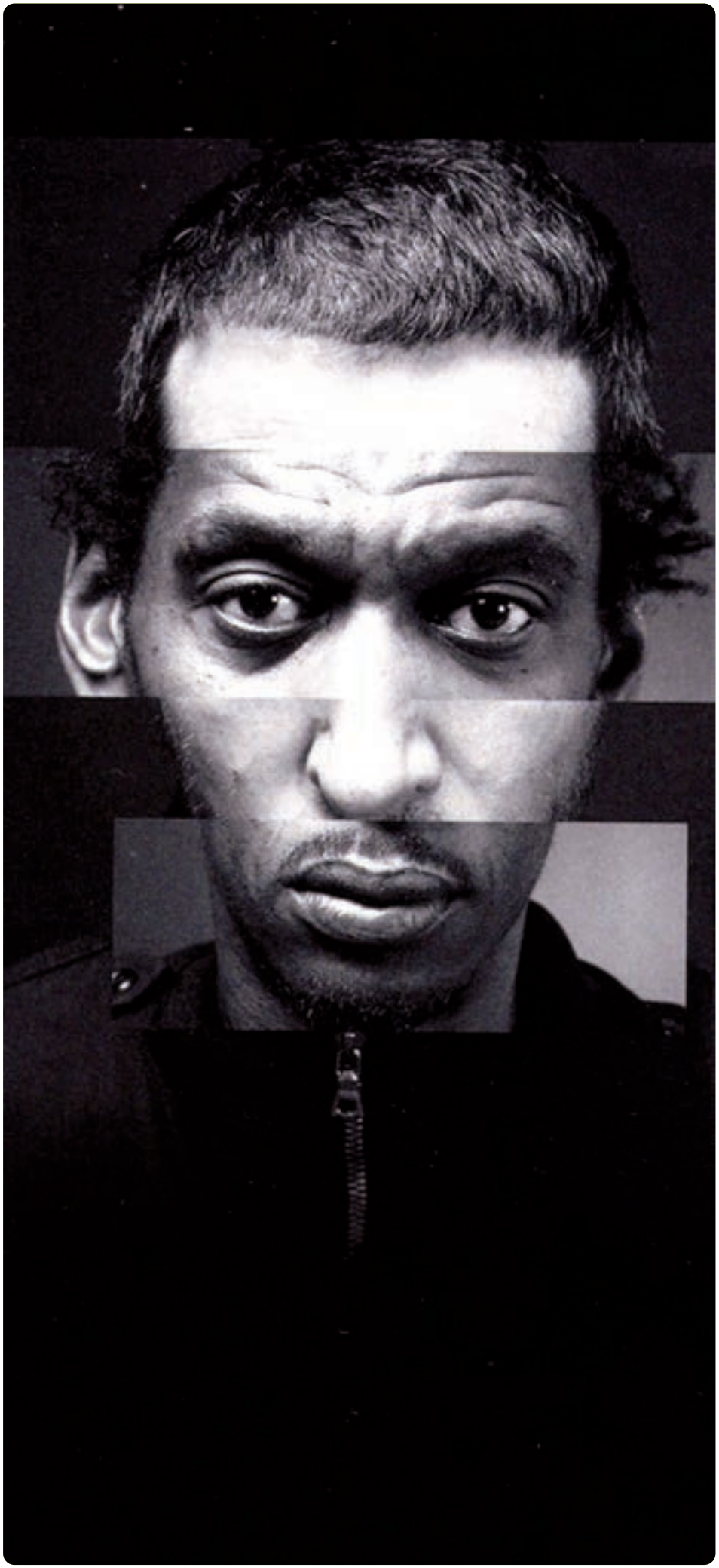
They started with a Registry Week and have ended the campaign in 2017 with more than 500 people permanently housed. RUAH, a homelessness organisation in Perth also launched a campaign in 2015; the '50 Lives 50 Homes' and the results from that campaign have seen 50 people housed at the completion of the first year of the campaign. People who had experienced long-term homelessness have been housed and supported. Work continues in many communities to ensure that people are followed up and where and when possible provided with the right housing and support.

Registry Week Kit

In NSW, the Mercy Foundation has been actively seeking out communities who want to use the methodology and advising on the process, the training and the use of the tool. In partnership with Micah Projects and the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH), the Mercy Foundation has also recently finalised a 'Registry Week' kit that will help communities undertake the project and ensure fidelity to the model and methodology.

The AAEH and its partners hope to be able to support a national campaign in the future. One that will support all communities to better understand the extent of homelessness in their community and work together to solve it by collecting and effectively using good local data.

For more information or for access to the Registry Week kit contact Felicity Reynolds, CEO of the Mercy Foundation on 02 9911 7390.



Beyond Anecdotes: Using Data to Support an End to Homelessness

Dr. Ellie Tighe, Ruah Community Services
and Shannen Vallesi, Centre for Social Impact, University of Western Australia

The 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign in Perth, Western Australia aims to provide sustainable housing and support to Perth's most vulnerable rough sleepers using the Housing First approach. An integral component of this campaign is the collaboration between 50 multi-disciplinary service providers in Perth and strong grounding in data and evidence.

Several homelessness service providers across Australia use the VI-SPDAT to run Registry Week projects and to inform service delivery and Housing First campaigns. In Perth, the Registry Week and 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign is coordinated by Ruah Community Services. Registry Week data on homelessness has been collected every two years since 2014. Ruah uses this data to support the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign and identify and resolve challenges to provide clients with sustainable support and housing. The data is also utilised by researchers at the University of Western Australia's Centre for Social Impact (CSI) in their external analysis of the 50 Lives 50 Homes project.

The VI-SPDAT questionnaire is an amalgamation of the Vulnerability-Index (VI) and Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) developed by OrgCode Consulting, Inc. The VI-SPDAT includes around 100 questions on an individuals' or family's history of housing and homelessness, demographics, interactions with health and emergency services, daily functioning and health status. This tool is used to triage the needs of homeless people in Perth and identifies the most vulnerable (those with a score of ten of more) to participate in the 50 Lives 50 Homes project.

The 50 Lives 50 Homes collective impact campaign brings together individuals and organisations from services across Perth (for example, Police, Centrelink and Hospital). Fortnightly working group meetings are held to discuss both housing and support needs. Through this process, service gaps and bottlenecks that prevent rapid allocation of housing are identified; and issues and concerns relating to the participants are raised. The data helps to identify service gaps. Some examples are discussed below.

In Western Australia (WA), ambulance call outs can cost over $900 for individuals without private insurance and there is no system to ensure those on low or no income can access this service free of charge. Thus, homeless people with complex health needs either incur large debts or will refuse an ambulance when required. The 50 Lives 50 Homes team used the data from the VI-SPDAT to map the usage of ambulances by rough sleepers and build a case to address this issue. The outcome is a microfinance project in partnership with WA No Interest Loans (WA NILS) to enable vulnerable rough sleepers to purchase ambulance cover from a health insurance provider.

In the social media space, the campaign uses VI-SPDAT data to raise public awareness about specific issues effecting the rough sleeping population. With over 1,200 surveys completed, the campaign can speak with confidence about the level of need among the homeless population. For example, for National Diabetes Week, the campaign posted on Facebook about how rough sleepers in Perth are three times more likely than the general population to have diabetes — yet don't have access to a fridge to store medication. In using the data in this way, the campaign has raised awareness about the complexity of homelessness.

The Registry Week data is also an important component of the evaluation being undertaken by Centre for Social Impact, UWA. UWA researchers have evidenced the effectiveness and accuracy of the tool in identifying the most vulnerable rough sleepers; and will use the data to document change in outcomes for 50 Lives 50 Homes participants. The Housing First approach links the provision of stability through housing and wrap-around support with improvement in individual health and justice outcomes.

We are hoping to prove that Housing First is a cost-effective method of providing sustainable support in the community. Repeating the VI-SPDAT will provide information on how these facets have changed through engagement with the project. Qualitative interviews will also be used to explore the story behind the change to understand more about what dimensions of housing and support are important to have an impact on health and justice outcomes. Self-reported data on hospital and emergency department use from the VI-SPDAT will be linked with de-identified hospital data to track changes in health outcomes.

In addition to capturing a picture of homelessness in Perth, the data generated from Registry Week has an important role to play in the everyday elements of the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign. We are interested to hear the innovative ways others have used their Registry Week data to support ending homelessness.

For more information about the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign go to https://www.facebook.com/50Lives50HomesPerth/

Last Resort Housing: What Can it Achieve and Would it Really Save Money?

Professor Guy Johnson, Unison Housing Research Program, RMIT University
and Michael Horn, Social Policy Consultant

Recently, the consulting firm SGS Economics was commissioned by the University of Melbourne to develop a business case for investing in last resort, or temporary housing. Their report — *The case for investing in last resort housing* by Ellen Witte this year — was prompted by increasing levels of homelessness, particularly rough sleeping in the City of Melbourne. The focus of the report is directed towards addressing primary homelessness.[1]

The report is one of a growing number of studies that attempt to estimate the economic benefits of homelessness interventions. A focus on the economic benefits makes some sense. If the economic benefits of a program outweigh its costs the argument to fund such programs is much stronger. Indeed, demonstrating the economic benefit of a program is now viewed as one the most persuasive and powerful ways of influencing the policy agenda.

Policy makers and service providers need to be wary when they are presented with studies that claim substantial economic benefits.

Estimating the true economic benefit of any social program is a complex, challenging and costly task. There are different methodologies, each with strengths and weaknesses. Most are particularly sensitive to the assumptions made and the quality of the available data. Poorly designed studies based on crude modelling assumptions, rather than helping policy makers make well-informed decisions, can create confusion about appropriate policy directions.

Before examining the report's economic modelling, it is worth clarifying what last resort housing is. According to the SGS report last resort housing consists of 'legal rooming and boarding houses, emergency accommodation and transitional housing … where occupants have a right to occupy a room and make use of shared facilities'.[2] Three issues stand out.

First, SGS treat tenants of last resort housing as 'at risk' of homelessness. In Australia the consensus is that people living in these arrangements are homeless.[3, 4] Second, it conflates emergency accommodation with transitional housing, rooming and boarding houses. These have different cost bases, both recurrent and capital outlays. They also provide very different forms of accommodation (cost, tenure) and support services. Third, over the last decade homelessness advocates and providers have been critical of programs that provide temporary accommodation, pointing to overseas evidence that temporary solutions cost more and are less effective than permanent solutions, particularly for those experiencing long-term homelessness with complex health issues.[5, 6]

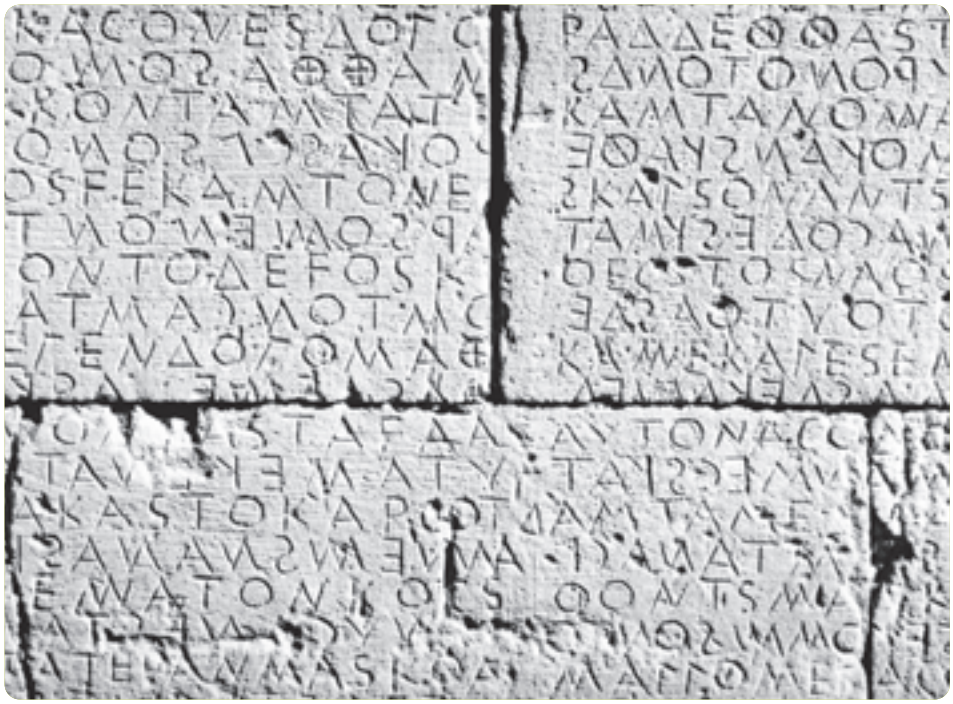
However, the report attempts to put temporary housing back onto the policy agenda by claiming it will generate substantial economic benefits — one last resort bed generating an average net benefit (savings) of $10,800 per year. The economic benefit appears to be over-estimated for the following reasons.

First, the cost benefit modelling omits the full cost of supporting rough sleepers. The cost of providing effective support to a single rough sleeper is in the order of $10 to 30k a year, well above the $3,000 per bed per annum specified for operational costs.[7] Housing chronically homeless individuals in a temporary, congregate setting with insufficient support is a recipe for disaster. The inner city 'night shelters' such as Gordon House were replaced in the 1990s by a more appropriate mix of short-term accommodation, transitional and long-term housing with support matched to the circumstances of homeless households. Should we really be advocating for a return to congregate crisis accommodation? And, is that what rough sleepers want or need?

Second, the failure to adequately account for support costs is compounded by overly optimistic estimates of possible cost reductions. For instance, the report estimates health cost savings of $8,429 per bed, per year once individuals are off the street and in last resort housing. The estimate is based on figures drawn from a single study of homeless and 'at risk' young people.[8] There is no primary data on utilisation levels for rough sleepers despite the availability of a number of well conducted studies that provide reliable data on rough sleepers' utilisation of health services, both prior to, during and after a service intervention.[9, 10, 11, 12]

These studies also reveal that most rough sleepers have chronic health problems, often more than one, and often have significantly higher health service costs. They also indicate that chronic health problems do not necessarily disappear in permanent housing. Indeed, declines in the health care costs of rough sleepers are often less than expected once they are housed because their health needs are being properly attended to. Given the available evidence, it seems unrealistic to expect that health costs incurred by the primary homeless will decline by nearly 80 per cent when they are in last resort housing.

Third, the report assumes that quality of life of rough sleepers will improve in last resort housing. While intuitively



appealing the situation is not straight forward. Placing people with complex needs in congregate living arrangements or in close proximity to each other often creates new problems, and with them new costs. Violence, intimidation and high levels of drug use are commonly reported outcomes. The estimated reduction in contact with the criminal justice system of $6,182 per bed per year does not fully take into account the potential negative effects associated with congregate living arrangements.

Fourth, the cost-benefit analysis assumes that last resort housing will 'enable individuals to reconnect with the job market and education'. The estimated savings of $4,226 per bed are based on ten per cent of the population being in paid work for 30 weeks, two years after being housed. Employment outcomes achieved by programs working with rough sleepers and chronically homeless persons that offer high intensity support and integrated employment services are much lower.[13, 14] We think that SGS make a fundamental mistake in assuming rough sleepers' employment outcomes are likely to be similar to community housing residents, on whom SGS base their modelling. In short, improvements in 'human capital' of the order identified by SGS are unlikely.

Finally, the report is not always clear but it appears the estimates are based on an assumption that people are in stable accommodation. But that is not what last resort housing is. It is a temporary solution that shifts one category of homelessness into another. Investing in last resort housing potentially takes resources away from other, potentially more effective (and longer-term) interventions.

At its core, the report assumes that rough sleepers are a homogenous group with the same backgrounds, complexity of issues and capabilities for independent living. It fails to address the structural factors that lead to homelessness and block up the current mainstream specialist homelessness service system — namely, the shortage of affordable housing (especially for singles) and the lack of ongoing support to both prevent repeat crises and build social inclusion.

The economic benefits of last resort housing calculated by SGS would likely evaporate if it drew on more reliable and relevant data and was grounded in a more complete understanding of rough sleepers' characteristics and experiences. Although the business case put forward for investing in last resort housing is weak, it might be viewed as a politically palatable solution to what is being labelled a homelessness crisis.

However, last resort housing will not solve the crisis — it might hide it from public view, but it will do little to end homelessness for the majority of rough sleepers, or do anything to prevent individuals from becoming homeless in the future.

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Chapter 4: Ongoing and Emerging Issues in Homelessness Data Collection

Harnessing the Potential of Linked Administrative Data for Homelessness Research

Associate Professor Lisa Wood, Shannen Vallesi, Professor Paul Flatau, Centre for Social Impact, UWA Business School, University of Western Australia

Linked government and administrative data sets are increasingly recognised as a powerful resource for program evaluation and policy research in a range of sectors, including health care, housing, and social services,[1, 2] and have been used world-wide for conducting health and social science research.[3]

In Australia, the use of linked administrative data for policy relevant research and evaluation is well entrenched in public health. However, in large part reflecting low levels of investment in research and data infrastructure, the application in the housing and homelessness fields is still in in its relative infancy. Relatively untapped also is the rich research potential of linking comprehensive homeless data collections (such as the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS)), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) collection and the Registry Week data (held by homelessness agencies) with government and administrative data collections from other sectors such as housing, health, justice and social services where people who are homeless are frequently over-represented. As articulated by Petrila[4]:

> *Policy initiatives in one area — for instance, housing — typically can affect individual and community outcomes in other areas such as health or education. As a result, analysing data from only one system frequently results in a one dimensional perspective that misses myriad outcomes in other systems, and thus makes it more difficult to accurately diagnose a problem and develop a solution.*

With an urgent fiscal imperative to build evidence for effective interventions that can reduce homelessness, administrative data sets provide opportunity to tap into high quality detailed information that is collected systematically and longitudinally. Administrative data sets from government agencies and departments provide rich sources of complementary data that when linked together capture the 'big picture' of an individual's experience and can be used to calculate the cost effectiveness of a program or initiative to determine the area of greatest savings.

Data linkage uses a process where data that has already been collected for other purposes is merged at the individual level using a unique identifier to create new data from existing sources.[5, 6] Illustratively, in our recent study;[7] administrative data on public housing, National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) program participation and hospital and health service use was linked to examine the health and economic impacts of supporting people who are homeless to access public housing tenancies.

Among the 3,383 previously homeless people in the study, there was a marked reduction in emergency department presentations, hospital admissions, length of stay, psychiatric unit bed-days and intensive care units, within just one year of their entry into public housing. This equated to a combined cost saving of $16.4 million for the WA health system in that single year, with the cost per person saving greatest among a cohort of 983 clients supported through NPAH programs. The study found a large cost saving of $84,135 per person per year for those receiving support from the NPAH Mental Health program, which was primarily related to a reduction in psychiatric inpatient admissions.

This study provides an example of the economic impact that can be measured by linking two datasets together by capturing the changes in health service use from the provision of public housing and support through the NPAH programs. Importantly, our study provided significant supporting evidence for the effectiveness of NPAH programs at a time when some were questioning the robustness of previous NPAH program evaluations.

Administrative data linkage is advantageous for homelessness research at differing levels, as illustrated with the examples of recent research below:

- *whole of government (where multi-agency data is linked):* as illustrated by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) study[8] which linked data from SHS agencies and public housing authorities in Western Australia (WA) and New South Wales (NSW);
- *whole of sector to evaluate the impact of a targeted government policy initiative:* our Centre for Social Impact, University of Western Australia NPAH study highlights the potential for multi-faceted interventions to simultaneously improve mental health and homelessness outcomes, and yield cost savings in both domains. This is important in the current policy climate as it strengthens evidence for the continuation of NPAH and similar programs that can yield fiscal and social outcomes across multiple sectors and government funding domains;

- *individual project level:* for example in our current evaluation of the 50 Lives 50 Homes project in WA, the evaluation dataset includes administrative data from hospitals and health services; the Ruah After Hours Support Service (providing support and access to primary health care for participants) and VI-SPDAT registry week data;
- *Agency level:* for example the use of linked administrative data to improve knowledge of client history and outcomes and to track progress of these (such as patterns of change in health service use or justice pre/post engagement with the agency).

A further benefit of administrative data is that there are standardised methods of data collection, recording and reporting, hence outcomes of different studies and interventions can be more readily compared. In homelessness research to date, comparison across studies is often difficult as there is considerable variation in the type, source and quality of data or evaluation tools and measures used. Administrative data can also be usefully triangulated with other data sources for richer understanding of homelessness trajectories and outcomes. In our NPAH study[9] administrative health and housing data was also linked to data from a survey completed by a subsample of public housing tenants in WA, which provided additional insights into homelessness and housing experiences that valuably complemented the empirical findings from the linked hospital and housing data.

Whilst the appeal of linking inter-agency data for homelessness research is compelling, it's not without its limitations. Some of these relate to the data itself, and some to the data linkage and access process.

- *Data collected for purposes other than homelessness:* Administrative data sets created for purposes unrelated for homelessness for example (such as hospital or corrections data) often do not have a variable that suffices as a robust measure of homelessness or housing status, and the use of 'no fixed address' variables is not an ideal proxy, and misses the nuances of different types of homelessness.[10] The way in which

demographic or other variables are collected can also vary from collection to collection and make matching more difficult, and people who are homeless are more likely to have missing data (for example service history records may be erratic, or missing if they have moved around the country);

- *Data access and approval processes:* Timeliness of access to valuable linked data is a challenge for research that seeks to have traction in current policy discourse and intervention development. Administrative data from government agencies is, by its very nature, often confidential and of a sensitive nature, and state-wide data linkage systems have a strong imperative to ensure that concerns about confidentiality, privacy and use for intended purpose only can be rigorously addressed.[11] As a consequence, however, the application and approval processes for use of linked data can take months, and the linking process itself is labour intensive particularly when multiple data sets are sought from different jurisdictions or sectors. This can unfortunately hinder the realisation of the vast opportunities that linked data can yield for public policy and the forging of greater links between research, policy and practice. However, as data linkage gains further momentum around Australia, the need for timely access to data is being addressed, and this should not deter researchers from considering its use. There is also a cost involved typically in obtaining linked data, but this is often far less than the cost of undertaking direct data collection on the ground, and any cost is usually well outweighed by the benefits of comprehensive longitudinal data;
- *Scope of the administrative data:* There is a misconception that administrative data sets, by their very nature, capture the records of the whole population. In spite of very broad coverage, administrative data sets typically have quite specific geographic and organisational restrictions. For example, the Australian homelessness administrative data only refer to clients of 'specialist homelessness services' (that is, services receiving specific forms of government housing/homelessness funding) not all services. Health and social service administrative data sets are invariably state/territory based at present and have not been linked across jurisdictions;
- *Scale of data and multi-agency data:* Whilst administrative data can be linked for small client samples, it is the accessing of large scale data collections from multiple service providers and/or that capture the majority of a population of interest that have the greatest potential. For example, jurisdiction level hospital record or justice data or nationally collated Centrelink data if linked to SHS collection data would provide a rich mine of data for homelessness research. However, this is more easily said than done with multiple data custodians approvals and separate ethics applications among considerable privacy concerns around potentially re-identifiable data.

A low hanging fruit for data linkage research in homelessness lies in linking SHS data to administrative data sets. The recent AIHW was the first national foray into this,[12] and used linked data from SHS agencies and public housing authorities in Western Australia and New South Wales. Two key results highlight the importance of linking housing and homelessness data. Firstly, of those adults assisted by specialist homelessness agencies into public housing who then exited public housing, just under one-half returned to a specialist homelessness agency for support.[13] Secondly, of those who only accessed support from SHS agencies after losing their public housing tenancy, almost half were identified as homeless.[14] A critical piece of future research is to extend the current work so that it combines the homelessness, health and housing data.

Conclusion

With other sectors such as health, housing and justice bearing much of the cost and consequence of recurring homelessness, we need to look beyond homelessness data collections alone if our research is to drive substantial policy and funding change. There is currently sub-optimal use of big data for policy-making and collaborative social impact[15] and if more effectively harnessed, the homelessness field has much to gain. Such gains can be amplified through a collaborative research agenda around the use of data linkage in homelessness research and policy evaluation, as there are immense synergies in leveraging shared learnings and data sources. Complex social issues such as homelessness therefore require cross-sectoral approaches that cut across government and non-government silos. Research that harnesses linked administrative data can assist in guiding and evaluating the impact of more integrated solutions to ending homelessness.

Endnotes

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A Vicious Cycle: The Lack of LGBTIQ Homelessness Data and Policy

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Sue Carlile Chief Executive Officer, Family Access Network,
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There is little doubt that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer or questioning (LGBTIQ) people are over-represented among homeless people. The Australian 2014 General Social Survey indicated that 33.7 per cent of respondents who identified as lesbian/gay, and 20.8 per cent of bisexuals, reported that they had ever experienced homelessness, compared with 13.4 per cent of heterosexuals.[1]

Gender diversity and sex characteristics were not included in this survey. Six per cent of participants in a recent survey of people with intersex variation responded that they were homeless or living precariously.[2] Recent surveys in the United States and Canada also show that sexually and gender diverse youth comprise approximately 20 to 40 per cent of homeless young people.[3]

Despite anecdotal evidence from homelessness service providers that LGBTIQ people — especially youth and trans and gender diverse — are also over-represented in homeless populations in Australia, it remains difficult to generate precise prevalence statistics.[4] Lack of prevalence data poses a huge obstacle in understanding specific needs,[5] and perpetuates the silence on LGBTIQ issues in Australian homelessness policy and training. Without this data, it is difficult to advocate for much-needed safe, inclusive, and appropriate services and policies, and so the risks and barriers for these already vulnerable groups continue.

A major reason for the lack of prevalence data in Australia is that the current system for data collection — specifically the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP) — is limited to binary male/female options, and it is not standard practice to record information on sexual orientation, sex characteristics, or gender diversity. While these details may be recorded in case notes or aliases, it is not routine, and remains difficult to filter for reporting purposes and statistics.

At present, the extent to which LGBTIQ people are reflected in current datasets among service providers would seem to depend very much on the apparent 'relevance' of LGBTIQ status at the point of crisis, the cultural awareness and resourcefulness of individual staff, and whether or not organisations have their own parallel systems for collecting this information (backed up with appropriate training).

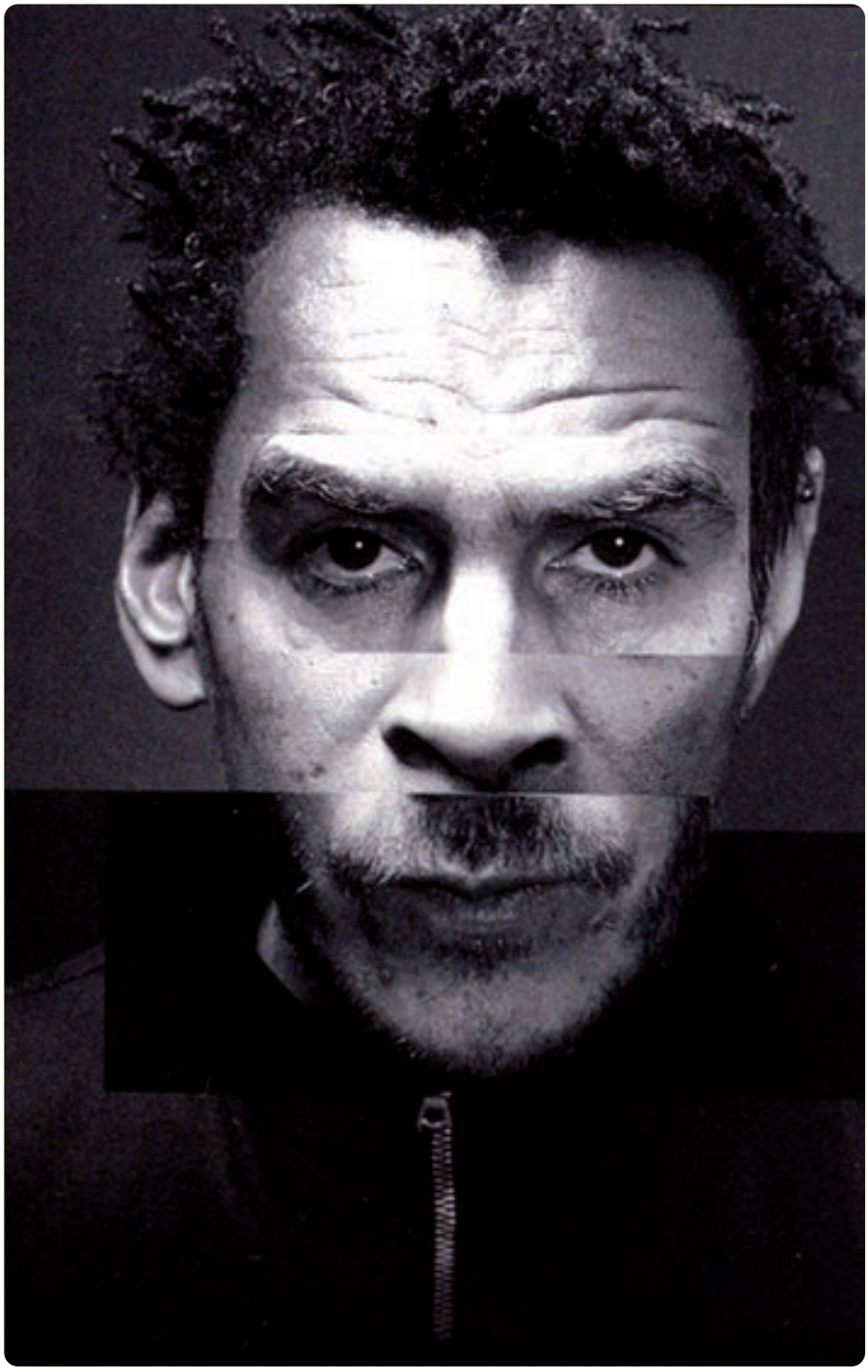
More important than generating accurate statistics, a failure to record this information at an immediate service delivery level can undermine a client's mental health, physical safety, and ability to receive adequate support. This is not to say that improving data collection systems alone will lead directly to improved outcomes. The act of disclosing LGBTIQ status can still pose risks for clients, when specific services and training are still lacking, and when wider systems of oppression and discrimination still need to be addressed. So, data collection must be accompanied by training of frontline staff and managers in facilitating disclosure, and in LGBTIQ-specific needs and referral networks.

One organisation in Victoria that does record information on LGBTIQ status is Family Access Network (FAN), which has been providing the only transitional housing service (the Alsorts program) specifically for LGBTIQ youth in Victoria since 2006, and also has Rainbow Tick accreditation.

The program is multilayered and, through negotiation with DHHS, provides a state-wide response with a dual referral pathway via Opening Doors, as well as direct referrals from services and young people. In developing the service model, FAN undertook an all of organisation approach from the Board to volunteers; audit of resources, materials, visual displays, referral pathways and linkages, assessment and case management tools, and not least language and data management systems. All of organisation training (which is a core competency requirement) has continued, and is embedded in strategic planning, recruitment and orientation practices, and the vision statement.

A specific LGBTIQ staff and management portfolio has been in operation since the development of the model and is the framework for data analysis, program review, systems reflection and improvement. FAN developed a best practice guide based on their experience as a resource for other organisations.[6] Due to the limitations of SHIP, FAN has established a system of ensuring all organisation programs fully capture LGBTIQ data. Although there are specific LGBTIQ services for young people, which include Transitional Housing, Housing Establishment Fund (HEF), Eastern Diversity Group (EDG), all FAN's services have an LGBTIQ lens. FAN is currently preparing for the second round of accreditation against the Rainbow Tick standards.

Since August 2016, the Gay and Lesbian Foundation of Australia (GALFA) has been working with Transgender Victoria, the University of Melbourne, Drummond Street Services, and Launch Housing, with



support from a wide community reference group, to pilot a model of care specifically to improve service provision for trans and gender diverse people, at four Launch Housing sites in Melbourne. This model of care encourages a whole-of-service, systems change approach that includes training around safe, inclusive and appropriate ways for staff to ask and record information about gender diversity. It is also exploring ways of improving LGBTIQ data collection at this organisation. This process has incorporated advice from FAN on their parallel data collection system and methods. It is also using evidence from the broader LGBTIQ homelessness project that includes interviews with LGBTIQ people who have experienced homelessness (*http://lgbtihomeless.com/*).

Later this year, the University of Melbourne team will also be working with Transgender Victoria, Zoe Belle Gender Collective, and others — with support from the Council to Homeless Persons — to deliver two pilot training sessions on LGBTIQ inclusive practice for staff of homelessness services in Victoria. Content will include how to sensitively ask about sexual orientation, sex characteristics, and gender diversity. These pilot training sessions will complement the development of national guidelines for LGBTIQ inclusive practice in the homelessness sector.

In the absence of changes to SHIP, however, recording information systematically about LGBTIQ clients, and advocating effectively for state-wide and national improvements in service provision and policy, will remain a challenge.

In closing, we hope that LGBTIQ people will be identified as a vulnerable subgroup within Australian homelessness policy. This would drive their inclusion in national homelessness datasets, generate service use prevalence data, and raise awareness that all homelessness services should be LGBTIQ responsive.

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Consumer Voices

Consumer Voices is a regular feature in *Parity*. Articles are written by and with consumers to ensure they have a say about the issues that directly affect them.

The Peer Education and Support Program (PESP) is the consumer participation program at the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) in Victoria. PESP is a diverse group of people who have experienced homelessness and are trained and supported to undertake a range of activities to improve the response to homelessness, educate and raise awareness about homelessness and promote consumer input into homelessness policy and service design and delivery.

Introduction

Members of our Peer Education and Support Program (PESP) have played an active role in homelessness data collection for a number of years now. The role of a person with a lived experience in homelessness data collection is a unique one.

This article describes these consumer roles and explores PESP members' reflections, learnings and thoughts for future homelessness data collection.

PESP Roles in Homelessness Data Collection

To begin with, it is important to describe the various roles PESP have had. The following is a brief description of each role and the work involved.

City of Melbourne StreetCount

In 2000 PESP first played a role as Homelessness Advisors in the City of Melbourne's StreetCount. PESP have continued to take on this role in every StreetCount since. These roles included a number of elements:

Planning

PESP discuss StreetCount, roles and methods. PESP are paired up for further work on StreetCount and dates are locked in.

Intelligence Gathering

PESP members provide advice and information about their understanding of homelessness in the City of Melbourne to inform the count.

Promotion and awareness raising

Promoting the count by attending relevant homelessness and other services in the CBD in the lead up to the StreetCount. Handing out StreetCount promotional material, speaking to individuals who may be sleeping rough to encourage their participation and speaking more formally about the StreetCount.

Training Delivery

Homelessness Advisors give a brief presentation about their experiences of sleeping rough at the Volunteer Training session, providing an opportunity for volunteers to improve their understanding of homelessness.

Counting people sleeping rough

Homelessness Advisors participate in the StreetCount as Volunteers, conducting the StreetCount survey. PESP also participate in the de-briefing session afterwards at the Town Hall. Some Homelessness Advisors visit relevant services later in the morning, to count people who may have been missed.

Feedback

PESP have an opportunity to feed back their thoughts on the StreetCount and their role. This feedback is included in the report and PESP receive a response to any recommendations.

VEC Electoral Outreach

PESP members provide assistance to the Victorian Electoral Commission in delivering electoral outreach services at homeless support service agencies in the lead up to Local Council elections.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census Special Field Officers

In 2016 PESP members were employed by the ABS to enumerate persons sleeping out by conducting collection interviews at various homelessness services and as part of an outreach team.

Peer Surveys

PESP have been engaged as peer survey conductors for a number of research projects. Consumers were interviewed by PESP and the research was used to understand the consumer experience of services and what people might need in the future.

PESP Reflections, Learnings and Recommendations: The Role of Consumers in Homelessness Data

It's paramount to have consumer roles in homelessness data collection.

The experience of the PESP team suggests that consumers engaged in data collection roles are received by other consumers in a more open and positive way. 'Being connected to CHP and having a lived experience of homelessness is a positive; it gives us a level of respectability and credibility among other consumers and they seem to appreciate that we are trained and trusted to collect the data'.

When introducing ourselves and explaining that we were in a similar situation once, it gives people hope. Seeing how far we have come shows people that change can happen.

Too often data collection is impersonal. Consumer input into data collection needs to be more intimate; consumer to consumer.

This allows you to collect better quality data, to feed into improving service delivery and government projections.

People we speak to know that we are differently motivated to collect the information; we want change, just like our peers. Conducting this work motivates us to work harder to achieve change for people who are still without a home.

As peers, we already have an established relationship with consumers, so are well positioned to provide people with an opportunity to have a say, they know they are talking to someone genuine. We encourage them to take up their right to participate.

People without a home feel judged much of the time. This can affect the answers they give to data collection questions. They give us honest answers because they know we won't judge them.

It's important that we can respond appropriately when people trust us with information about problems they are having. We can relate to a lot of what consumers are experiencing and understand what can help. We support people to approach workers for assistance when they were not even considering doing so.

It's a positive experience for consumers to be in the data collection roles. I felt validated that I was given such an important task. It is important to remember that it is also an emotionally challenging role, it can be overwhelmingly sad to listen to the difficulties people are going through. Debriefing and supervision has been an important element of our work in these roles.

When the ABS employed us for the Census it gave me a sense of importance. It was good to be trusted in the role and to have our expertise recognised. These opportunities can lead to further employment.

Consumer participation makes people happy. A negative experience is drawn on to create positive outcomes.

Learnings

You need data to help people without a home.

It's important to remember that we should not just be counting people for the sake of it. This data must be used to improve the lives of people without a home.

We have worked with homelessness services to collect data about people's experience of using the service. Again, this information must always be used to inform improvements in service delivery.

Post-homelessness data should also be collected, when people are in a better position to reflect on what worked and what didn't.

PESP experiences in homelessness data collection have highlighted the importance of working toward having Peer Support Workers in services.

Consumer roles in homelessness data are important. There must be emphasis on listening to us and working with us on the design of data collection, in order to get accurate data.

Remember, the more trust and respect you have, the better the information you get from consumers.

When recruiting consumers to these roles a number of things should be considered:

Do they have great people skills?

Do they have a broad understanding of the system?

Do they understand how data informs government decisions?

It is important that workers and consumers in homelessness services understand the importance of data collection and how it can benefit the service and through it consumers. Training should be provided prior to data collection activities, which should include why they are being undertaken, what the strategies will be and the importance of the consumer role.

Consumers want decision makers, such as governments to take more of an interest in what they have to say. There are breakfast programs they could go to and talk to people about what their issues are, to understand what is needed to best respond.

Data must be reported in a transparent way. Develop a chart which tells people in services what was learned from the data collection and what the response will be.

Looking Ahead: Collecting Homelessness Data in the Future

Consumers should play a role in all aspects of homelessness data; design of data collection, planning collection strategies, collecting the data, debriefing and providing feedback.

There should be training available and support from a key worker or Co-ordinator. Our work in these roles was supported by our Team Leader and we received training. If we had a problem we could go to our Team Leader to work through it. Sometimes you speak to people who are having some really awful experiences and talking to them about it can put you in a bad place. You need to be able to debrief and make sure you don't take it home.

It would be great to see more consumers recruited to these roles, provided they receive the training and support that we do in PESP.

At the very least consumers should never be out of pocket when they are working in these roles, so a reimbursement is important.

Another important and practical consideration is use of equipment. I had to use my phone a lot for these roles and made many calls. I'd like to see people in these roles be given a business phone or credit for a personal phone.

Lunch should be provided, especially if people are working over lunch time.

Always provide feedback to consumers and services about the outcome of the data collection. A poster could be developed to place in waiting rooms or intake areas. Finish with a THANK YOU.

What Do We Mean When We Talk About 'Homelessness Data'?

Australian homelessness data: considering issues of stigma, visibility / invisibility, societal understanding and the political context alongside methodological concerns.

Daniel Kuzmanovski, University of South Australia

Introduction

The current *Parity* edition explores the complexities associated with measuring homelessness within Australia. This complexity is reflected in part by the broad spectrum of information associated with such a branch of data, ranging from the characteristics and situations of individuals to the attributes and outcomes of services and dwellings themselves. Recent discussion has raised methodological concerns regarding the potential to underestimate the scale of homelessness. Such experience (once converted into statistical data) has been acknowledged as an influence on institutional responses to homelessness. Consequentially, discussion has focused on methodological strategies to improve such data collection.

This article introduces such methodological concerns and briefly discusses some additional factors worth considering when exploring and understanding homelessness data, namely issues of stigma, visibility / invisibility, societal understanding and the political context.

Homelessness Data Within Australia — The AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Collection and the ABS Census of Housing and Population

Within Australia, the two dominant avenues for collecting homelessness data at present are the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) collection managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing. The former is more specific to its service clients whilst the latter relates to the broader Australian population.

Since July 2011, the SHS collection has gathered information from homelessness support agencies regarding their clients and services provided.[1] Specified agencies (that is, those funded by the 'National Affordable Housing Agreement' and the 'National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness') gather information at a client's first contact, during their assistance period, and upon their case closure.[2] The agencies subsequently submit this information as standardised data to the AIHW, with the intention of ultimately 'building a picture of clients, the specialist homelessness services that were provided to them and outcomes achieved for the client'.[3]

Alternatively, the ABS Census of Population and Housing survey is conducted every five years and represents a broader societal snapshot. Rather than gathering a specific measurement of homelessness per se, it instead provides an *estimate* of homelessness based on other information, such as:[4]

- using 'no usual address' or homeless support accommodation information 'as a starting point to identify anyone who may be homeless'
- subsequently cross-analysing such information with other data (that is, income, employment status, type of tenure, rent and mortgage payments) to avoid homelessness mismatches
- identifying severe overcrowding.

Similarly, the 'General Social Survey', the 'Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers', and the 'Personal Safety Survey' are also acknowledged as providing additional relevant information.[5]

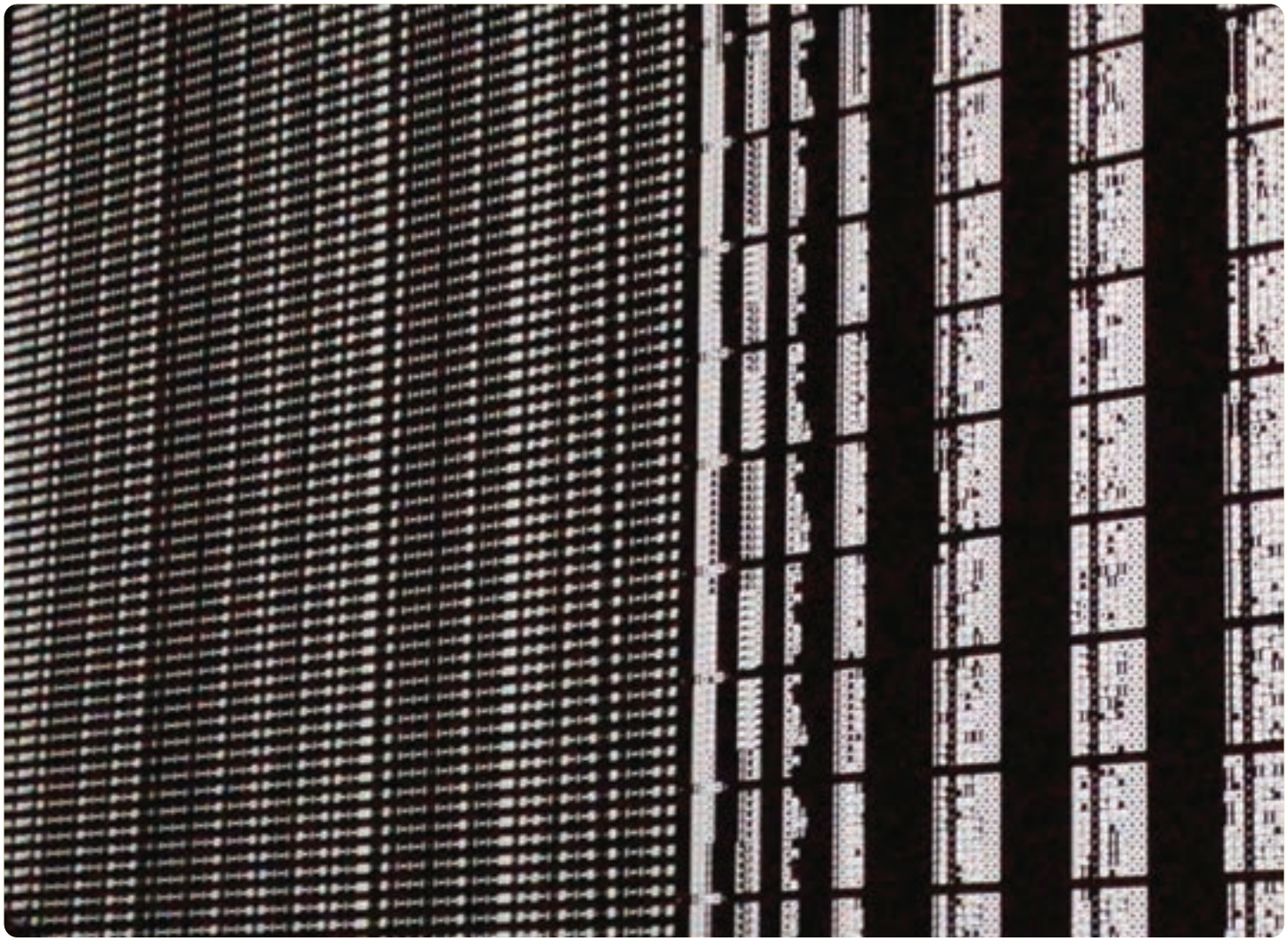
Data Limitations — Current Methodological Concerns and Strategies

Whilst the SHS collection is limited in comparison to the Census (that is, it focuses on individuals who choose to access support services from select support agencies), the ABS data collection process itself has raised methodological concerns. This involves the potential under-enumeration (that is, under-identification) and underestimation of population groups experiencing homelessness (that is, underreporting of 'no usual address'), particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, youth, and individuals displaced as a result of domestic and family violence.[6]

This is argued to reflect a range of factors, including mobility and varying cultural interpretations of 'usual address', its potential to impact the individual's 'couch surfing' arrangement, and the influence of fear and uncertainty.[7] Consequentially, potential methodological strategies identified involve further exploring the cultural appropriateness of such concepts, along with incorporating other confidential data sources (i.e. the 'Personal Safety Survey' and a potential 'homelessness school students survey').[8]

The 2011 Homeless Enumeration Strategy (HES) itself also suggests:[9]

- working with service providers to identify homelessness 'hot spots' (where individuals are sleeping rough) and undertake interviews (that is, the street count)
- using the abridged 'Special Short Form' (SSF) where necessary
- using the 'Green Sticker' strategy (a confidential self-identification of homelessness)



- promoting the use of the 'None' response where no usual address is actually held
- promoting the Census itself 'throughout the homelessness population'.

Visibility / Invisibility and Homelessness Data

The above discussion suggests that the issue of visibility is at the centre of such methodological concern. The predominant agreement amongst such reviews is that the invisibility of homelessness impacts the ability to accurately and appropriately measure it. However, it is also worth asking *why* the experience of homelessness is an invisible one?

Beyond invisibility as a methodological error, homelessness is an exclusion from society. In addition to physical isolation from mainstream resources and shelter, it is argued here that the stigma associated with homelessness also contributes towards social isolation from the wider community. The concept of stigma refers to a socially discrediting attribute (physical or non-physical), which emerges within social interaction and impacts one's identity and social participation.[10] Our socialisation to stereotypes contributes to a sense of differentness towards those judged as stigmatised, to which individuals can respond with actions to avoid such discrimination.[11]

This highlights a potential complexity between visibility and invisibility. For example, one international study found that youth experiencing homelessness engaged in 'protective anonymity' (choosing to remain invisible) to avoid stigmatisation.[12] As a barrier to service access, homelessness stigma could similarly impact the SHS collection data results.

Alternatively, fear and stigma was acknowledged by the ABS collection review as contributing to non-disclosure of having no usual address. Improving response confidentiality might alleviate concerns regarding completing the survey section. However, further methodological consideration could be given towards homelessness stigma and its potential impact on the collection as a social barrier, particularly if only physical visibility is improved via identification strategies.

Societal Understanding and Homelessness Data

In addition to counting homelessness quantitatively (as a statistic), it is apparent that the ABS collection acknowledges a qualitative component of homelessness (as a cultural / societal issue). For example, it is acknowledged that:[13]

a) one purpose of the ABS estimates is to facilitate the '[e]ffective targeting of policies and services for reducing homelessness' and ultimately 'allow society to judge the scale of homelessness'

b) the ABS collection is based on a definition of homelessness which incorporates interpretative and historically/culturally contingent elements (that is, dwelling inadequacy, tenure insecurity, 'access to space for social relations').

Homelessness stigma itself reflects a form of societal understanding of individuals and their circumstances. Opening up such methodological aspects to societal/political judgment can highlight differing and potentially contradictory societal perspectives. For example, the ABS argument that '[h]omelessness is not a choice'[14] can be contrasted with a 2014 *Homelessness Australia* survey which found that 64 percent of its respondents believed that the effort to 'get a job' would primarily resolve homelessness.[15]

This latter perspective can be critiqued as overly individualistic, on the basis that it downplays structural factors (that is, the availability of affordable housing). However, it is worth considering whether stigma (as it influences societal understanding) could unintentionally distort the intended qualitative purposes and definitions of the ABS collection (that is, by becoming incorporated into dominant homelessness discourse or formal homelessness policy).

The Political Context and Homelessness Data

A final issue to consider involves the political context surrounding homelessness. With regard to affordable housing policy, commentators have discussed a situation of disinvestment in public housing occurring since the 1990s.[16]

Reduced funding, alongside other policy changes (that is, proposed reduction in tenancy periods),[17] raises the following additional considerations:

- whether political issues (including funding priorities and policy changes) can impact aspects of data collection (that is, definitional elements such as tenure insecurity, access to services)
- conversely, the implications of methodologically downplaying attention to such issues, particularly for the societal snapshot intended for homelessness policy.

Conclusions

Rather than competing with quantitative methodological concerns, it is argued here that further consideration of additional social and political issues can enrich the process of data collection and interpretation. Ultimately, this can also enrich the picture created about the current homelessness situation, and by extension enrich the policy responses to address such a situation.

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

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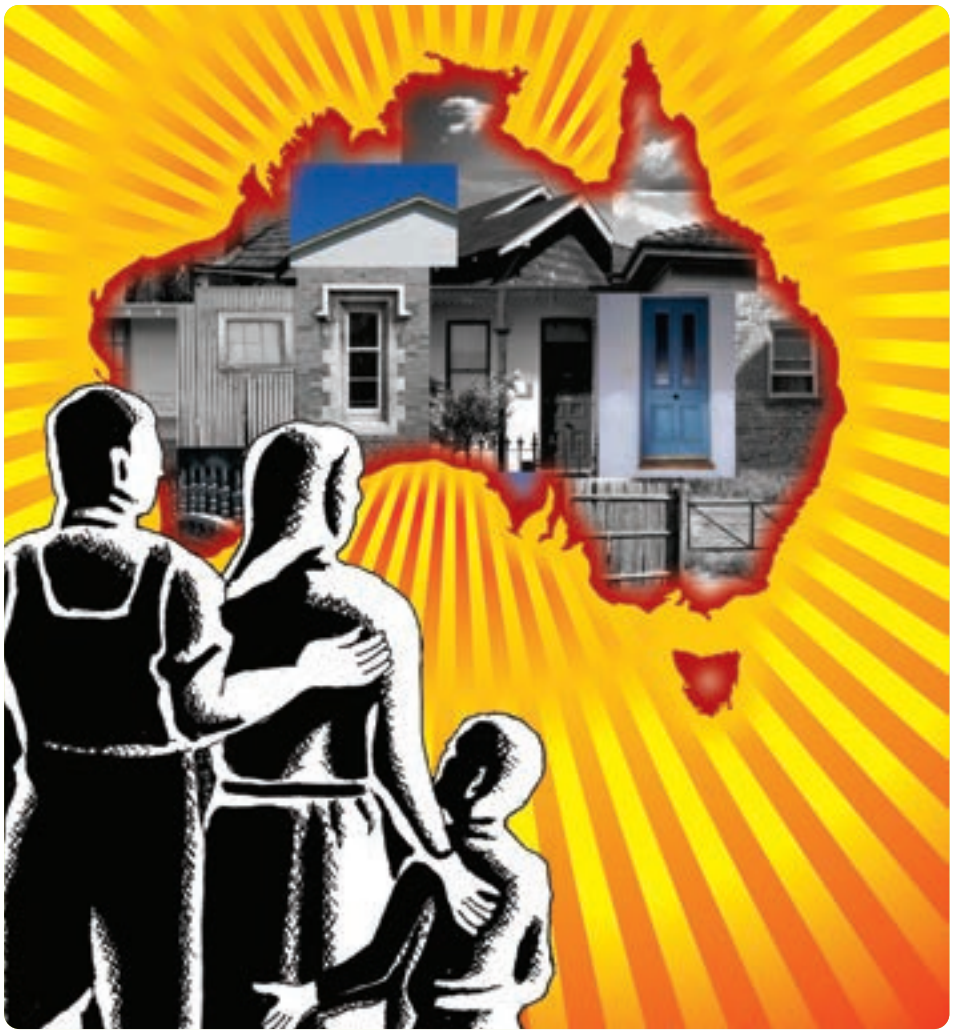


Opinion

John Blewonski

Chief Executive Officer, VincentCare Victoria

Putting People at the Centre of Homelessness Data

This edition of *Parity* is important as we consider many of the issues surrounding the collection of homelessness data. The recent profile of the 'typical' Australian published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)[1] was the 'trailer' in the lead up to the first release of comprehensive 2016 Census data by the ABS on June 27th this year. Many of the measures we will look to construct an enumeration of homelessness will appear in this first major data release.

There was an intense, almost passionate, debate that occurred in the homelessness sector in the lead up to the 2011 national census about operationalising definitions of homelessness to distinguish between people, for example, who lived in a caravan as a retirement adventure, compared to those whose caravan existence was about life on the margins as social and geographical fringe dwellers. How could the census distinguish between the rite of passage existence of teenagers share-housing, while embarking on their university education, from other teenagers couch-surfing to escape the constant fights with their parent's new partner?

In the homelessness and human services sector more broadly, an important shift has occurred and momentum has gathered over recent years in the collection and analysis of data to understand human problems. This includes the scale and characteristics, the degree and duration of these problems, where they are occurring and how they are changing over time. The data also seeks to shine light on whether the various interventions we create — prevention, early intervention, crisis or longer term recovery, are having effect, not only amongst individual clients, or those of our service delivery organisations, but across the community populations as a whole.

Several years ago, VincentCare Victoria's Board established a Research and Evaluation framework. Our involvement as a partner in the Trauma and Homelessness Initiative confronted us with many of the ethical issues surrounding the undertaking of homelessness research. All data collection about homelessness that we consider in this issue of *Parity* cannot escape the requirement to be performed to ethical standards. These ethical standards apply to the direct engagement with people who are or have been impacted by homelessness (including the availability of support or debriefing), the honest and accurate collection, analysis, reporting and interpretation of data (in all its forms) and the purposefulness of the data collection exercise itself. One of the consequences of the establishment of a Research and Evaluation framework was to ensure that all data collection that involved any of our organisation's service users addresses these fundamental ethical concerns.

In a recent online article Durrant and Coghlan,[2] countermand five myths which, the authors say, are often heard about research, and particularly its relationship to international development:

1. research is the domain of university professors, not of those implementing development programs
2. research produces data or findings which are time-consuming and difficult to interpret or apply
3. research is expensive for the return
4. the value of research is locked behind paywalls of exclusive academic journals
5. different motivations make it difficult for academics and development professionals to work together.

We should consider that these myths apply equally to data collection about homelessness as a form of research enterprise. These 'myths' could also be re-stated as a series of 'risks'. These five risks can be summarised that any data collection about homelessness risks creating a disconnect between the exercise of gathering data about homelessness, the people experiencing homelessness and what we are planning to do about it. In other words, the whole process of collecting data risks not being well connected to all stakeholders and not leading to something useful.

It is also critical when we set about to collect data on homelessness to keep front of mind that we are gathering

information about people. When we think hard about all the different experiences of 'homelessness' in any data collection, we are actually in more fundamental terms talking about the many different experiences that people have.

The Trauma and Homelessness Initiative was a sharply focussed data collection about people who had experienced chronic homelessness in Melbourne. The Trauma and Homelessness Initiative gathered data through a structured interview which revealed that people who experience chronic homelessness have experienced trauma at a ratio 24 times that of the general population.[3] It was a data collection about Trauma *and* about Homelessness and the interaction between both of these human problems. The data collection also revealed that 88 per cent of people in the sample met the diagnostic criteria for a current mental illness. This all reminds us that a data picture about people experiencing homelessness can be just as much a data picture about mental illness, alcohol and drug use or family violence — the many issues that can lead to homelessness.

In late 2016, the regular and long-standing ABS Survey Disability Ageing and Carers (SDAC) released the findings of its 2015 survey which examined the characteristics and experience of 75,211 people with disabilities and long-term health conditions, and their carers across Australia. It is possible through SDAC data to also examine many of the socio-demographic characteristics including the nature of people's dwellings, occupancy and landlord types, even unmet need for dwelling space using the Canadian Occupancy Standards. In other words, there is data of interest from a homelessness perspective, yet gathered through a survey primarily focussed on other issues.

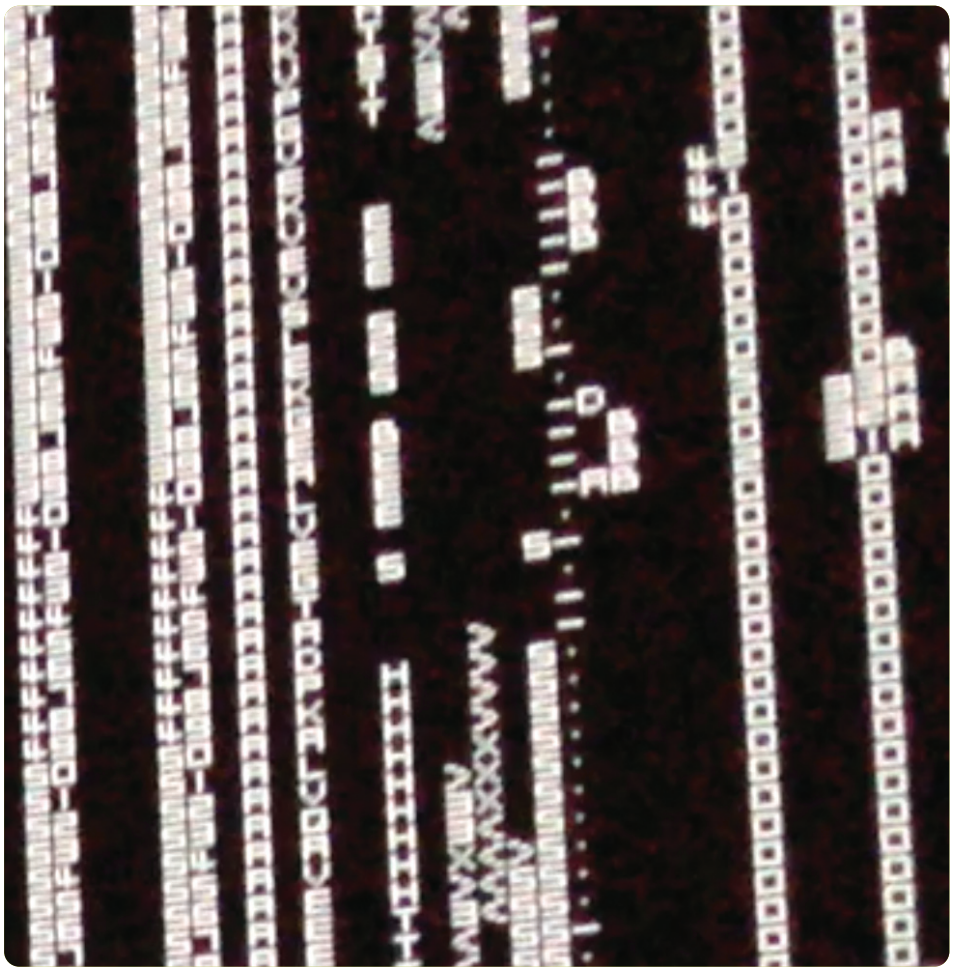
This raises the question about how people who respond to 'homelessness' surveys regard themselves when we are attempting to count homelessness or collect data about homelessness in some way? When we set out to collect data about homelessness, should we always assume that the person sees their homelessness in the same way that we do? The challenges of accurate SHIP data collection is a daily reminder for homelessness service providers to avoid this assumption. Moreover, when we start to design service responses for people experiencing homelessness, based on data gathered through homelessness surveys, do we end up designing service responses that risk missing out on other things that may have been of equal or greater importance to the person being surveyed?

No doubt this leads us to ponder how we can avoid this risk of disconnection. We need to ensure that any major homelessness data collection exercise both consults and collaborates well with stakeholders. The City of Melbourne Street Count, for example, is commendable for using Council to Homeless Persons Peer Education Support Program volunteers to help inform and guide Street Count teams.

An important lesson for anyone designing a homelessness data collection initiative is to plan and allocate resources for the involvement of relevant consumers and stakeholders. In this way we can help to ensure that we do not become so focussed on the homelessness data itself that we lose sight of the people who are at the centre of this human problem and whose needs we are continually trying to understand and solve.

Endnotes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, *Who is our 'Typical' Aussie?* Online article published 11-4-2017 at *www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/newsboard170411*
2. Durrant K and Coghlan R 2017, *Partnership in practice: dispelling myths about research in international development.* Published 16 Nov, 2016 by Australian Council for International Development at: *https://acfid.asn.au/blog-post/partnership-practice-dispelling-myths-about-research-international-development*
3. O'Donnell M, Varker T, Cash R, Armstrong R, Di Censo L, Zanatta P, Murnane A, Brophy L and Phelps A 2014, *The Trauma and Homelessness Initiative*, Report prepared by the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health in collaboration with Sacred Heart Mission, Mind Australia, Inner South Community Health and VincentCare Victoria. This report can be accessed from *https://vincentcare.org.au/images/research-projects/pdf/trauma_and_homelessness_initiative_report.pdf*



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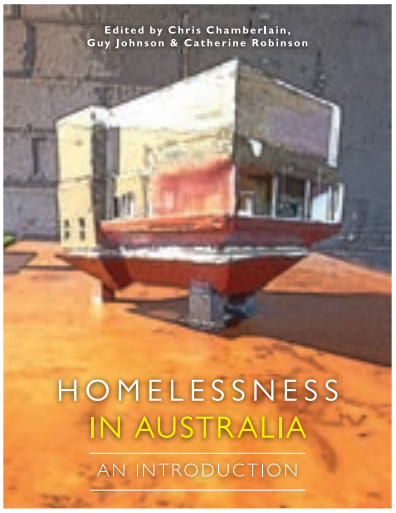

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