



# Women's Health East

## Women and Homelessness

### Australian Homelessness Data

Data from the 2011 Census has shown an 8% increase in homelessness in Australia since 2006. Females account for 44% of the homeless population of 105,237 documented in the census. Victoria's homeless population is 22% of the National total. The majority of homeless people were living in severely over-crowded accommodation such as boarding houses.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) acknowledges that some women and children who have fled from domestic violence might not be included in the homelessness Census data due to not wishing to disclose their accommodation on the night.<sup>1</sup> Due to the fear of violence, such as sexual assault, women who are homeless are often more invisible than men. This may also lead to an underestimation in the data.<sup>2</sup>

ABS data shows that those who had experienced homelessness were more likely to:

- Have lower levels of educational attainment
- Have a disability or long-term health condition
- Live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- Be unable to pay bills on time
- Be unemployed
- Have gone without meals
- On government benefits
- Have a psychological disability or restriction
- Been a victim of violence in the previous 12 months.<sup>3</sup>

Homelessness is not just the result of too few houses – its causes are many and varied. Domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse all contribute to the level of homelessness in Australia.<sup>5</sup>

### Women and Homelessness

The most common reasons for women becoming homeless are domestic violence and sexual assault within the home. This causes the breakdown of the family, with the women and children generally being the parties who leave the family home.<sup>4</sup>

Child protective services will often require a woman to leave the violence to enable her to keep her children. At such a time, refuge accommodation might be all that is available to her even though this might not be her preferred option. Refuge is generally only available for a short period of time, with women and children then needing to look for other sources of accommodation. With the high cost of private rental, lack of public housing and inappropriate crisis accommodation, women can then find themselves living in unsafe and very temporary housing situations.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) 2010-2011 National Data Collection reported assistance to 230,500 people of which 57% were female. Young women aged between 15-19 years were the single biggest users of SAAP services. When children accompanying clients are included, the largest group of users was females with children (35%). 42% of all clients reported accessing services for interpersonal relationship issues with 22% of these clients citing domestic/family violence as their primary reason.<sup>5</sup>

When looking at females presenting with children, most cited interpersonal relationship issues as their main reason for seeking assistance (in 61% of their support periods)—in particular domestic or family violence (45%), followed by accommodation-related issues (19%).<sup>5</sup>

Problem gambling is said to cause a wide range of mental and physical health problems, including suicide attempts, depression, relationship and marital breakdown, criminal activity and imprisonment, as well as severe financial difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty five percent of women escaping domestic violence are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and are more likely to have four or more children accompanying them to the homelessness service.<sup>6</sup>

Unmet demand remains a major issue, with Homelessness Australia reporting that every day more than 50% of people are turned away from homelessness services when requesting accommodation. This includes 80% of families and 2 out of 3 children.<sup>7</sup>

## Single Older Women

*'One of the most disadvantaged demographic profiles for a person to have is to be old, single, poor, female and in private rental accommodation...'*<sup>8</sup>

Older, single women are an emerging cohort in the homelessness data. Many of these women have not previously experienced homelessness. Given the ageing population and the inadequate financial means of many older women, it is expected that the issue will grow significantly.<sup>8</sup>

This growing cohort of older homeless women do not have issues commonly experienced by older homeless persons such as mental illness, cognitive impairment, or alcohol and substance abuse.<sup>8</sup>

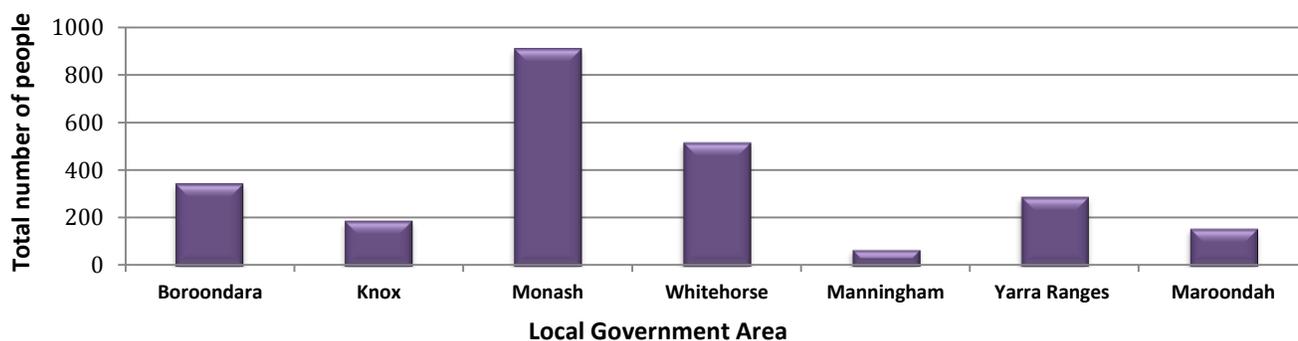
Many of these women have experienced relationship breakdown, been forced out of employment due to ill health, age or changes in skill requirements and have inadequate, or no superannuation. Private rental has become unaffordable and public housing waiting lists extensive.<sup>8</sup>

*"Unaccompanied women aged 25 and over often sought support because of domestic or family violence. Linked with this, they had a high requirement for personal support services, particularly support related to domestic or family violence".*<sup>5</sup>

## Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR)

Given that housing and domestic violence services are often required to send women to motels and hotels, estimating the level of homelessness in the EMR can be difficult. Census data for people residing in non-private dwellings includes hospitals, nursing homes, hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, boarding houses, private hotels and hostels for the homeless.<sup>9</sup>

People residing in specific non-private dwellings on Census night 2011



The above graph illustrates the number of persons who indicated they were residing in a hotel, motel, bed & breakfast, boarding house, private hotel or hostel, which are the most common dwellings for homeless persons to seek temporary accommodation, on the night of the 2011 Census. Overall, Monash recorded the highest number of persons who indicated they were residing in one of the aforementioned dwellings on Census night (912) and Manningham recorded the lowest number (69).<sup>9</sup>

*\*For more information, please see our [Violence against Women Fact Sheet](#)*

# References

- <sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, '2049.0 Census of population and housing: Estimating Homelessness 2011', retrieved 13 November 2012, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>
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- <sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, 'Government-funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2010–11: Australia', retrieved 13 November 2012, [www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737420853](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737420853)
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