



Latest news

After several months of considered work with the Homelessness Statistics Reference Group (HSRG) (of which CHP is a member), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is preparing to release the outcomes from the review of *Counting the Homeless, 2006* (CTH). Drawing on the learnings from Australia's leading homelessness academics Professors Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie, advice from the HSRG; international research and local evidence, the ABS will launch a September 2012 paper that:

- outlines the ABS statistical definition of homelessness
- reports on its new methodology for estimating homelessness with the 2011 Census data
- releases estimates from the 2001 and 2006 Censuses based on the new methodology
- summarises key findings from the CTH review

This sector briefing provides more detail on each of these issues. Please contact Sarah Kahn (sarah@chp.org.au or 8415 6203) CHP's Manager of Policy and Communications with questions or for additional information.

Background

Professors Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie have contributed significantly to homelessness research and estimation. Their pioneering work led to the cultural definition of homelessness and the use of Census data to produce estimates of homelessness. This work addressed a key gap in Australian statistics.

In 2008, following widespread discussion in Australia about the meaning and measurement of social inclusion and exclusion, the ABS recognised the need for more comprehensive homelessness data. ABS recognition of homelessness as a key social issue also coincided with the release of the Federal Government White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home*, where the need to prevent and end homelessness was identified.

Building on the strength of these efforts, the ABS committed to produce *official estimates* (beginning in 2012) of homelessness from the Census *and* to improve homelessness measurement across a range of *other* data sources. The ABS began this work by looking at the way in which estimates have most recently been derived from the Census data. They launched a review of the methodology used for the *Counting the Homeless 2006* report (the Review).

Throughout the Review process, CHP and the ABS sought feedback from leading experts and key stakeholders. Several consultation forums highlighted the many challenges associated with measuring homelessness in the Census. With any approach, some people who *are* homeless will inherently be left out of estimates—like young people couch surfing or people fleeing violence—and some people who *might not* be homeless, will be included.

Improving homelessness statistics: progress update

Considering the challenges with homelessness measurement, as well as the consistent recommendations made from several key stakeholders, the ABS determined it needed to:

1. Be guided by a Homelessness Statistics Reference Group (HSRG).

The HSRG was developed to provide advice to the ABS as it continues to refine and develop its work program on homelessness. Over the last year, the HSRG—made up of Australia's leading homelessness researchers and academics, service providers, peak organisations and state and federal

government agencies—advised the ABS on a number of key projects aimed at improving homelessness measurement and compiling, for the first time, official homelessness statistics in Australia.

2. Analyse, develop and adopt a statistical definition of homelessness

For the ABS to fulfil its commitments to homelessness measurement across the ABS data sets, it needed first to have a consistent definition of homelessness—one that is measurable and can identify gaps in data. To inform the development of a statistical definition, the ABS has drawn on advice from the HSRG Definition Sub-group, local and international research on statistical definitions and on the concept of ‘home’. See the *Development of an ABS statistical definition brief* for more information.

With the adoption of a definition, the ABS can measure the scope, scale and dimensions of homelessness through a range of data sources including: the General Social Survey; Personal Safety Survey; Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey, among others. For the first time researchers, governments and the sector will have the opportunity to pull together a fuller picture of homelessness in Australia that can inform policy and service delivery.

3. Further review methods for more accurately using Census data

HSRG was also asked to provide advice on estimation methods. Given the challenges in using the Census data for accurate measurement, the ABS will continue to look for other data sources that can be used in conjunction with the Census findings. The group provided feedback on the methodologies proposed by the ABS and insight into other sources of data that might be used to supplement the Census information. Look out for the ABS guide ‘guide to homelessness statistics’ in November.

4. Improve estimation of youth homelessness

Currently the only tool available to the ABS for producing youth homelessness estimates is the Census survey. There is consensus that just using Census data will lead to an underestimation. Thus the ABS is actively working with expert stakeholders on developing and identifying new methods and data to more accurately measure youth homelessness.

In previous years, Professors Chamberlain and MacKenzie undertook a National Census for Homeless School Students (NHSS) to develop youth estimates. The ABS has indicated that aspects of the methodology prohibit them from using the same tool in 2012. The ABS is working to develop a method that will accurately measure changes in the population over time. In addition the tool must produce data that can be used in conjunction with Census data to produce official estimates. Due to past work in this area, the ABS is considering how best to target schools.

The ABS will continue work with HSRG to develop a national school survey, which they hope can be implemented later in 2012. They also note the need for additional data to develop a more accurate picture of the scale and scope of youth homelessness in Australia.

Please look out for additional information from CHP and the ABS with regard to youth estimates.

What next?

CHP will continue to update you as new information about the CTH review and homelessness estimates are made available. Look out for fact sheets and FAQs on many of the above topics. Below is a timeline of events:

SEPTEMBER 4	ABS scheduled to publish, on their website, the final statistical definition of homelessness and estimation mythology
SEPTEMBER 11	ABS release of paper with: findings of CTH review, final statistical definition, revised methodology and revised 2001 and 2006 estimate of homelessness
NOVEMBER	ABS release of a guide to homelessness statistics ABS release of paper with 2011 homelessness estimates