

# Youth homelessness in Victoria

## Key statistics

### Youth homelessness in Victoria

Homelessness occurs when a person's housing is inadequate, has limited or no tenure and doesn't allow control of and access to social relations.

The [2011 Census](#) estimates that 6,117 young Victorians aged 12-24 are homeless on any given night. A further 7,976 young people were living in caravan parks and overcrowded or improvised dwellings.<sup>i</sup> Over 40 per cent of people experiencing homelessness on any given night are aged under 24.

### What causes youth homelessness?

Most young people who experience homelessness may have been forced to leave their home due to family breakdown or violence or when their family is evicted into homelessness after a crisis.

Many young people who are homeless experience poor mental health, poverty, substance abuse, social isolation and are victims of violence. These risk factors can be a precursor to homelessness or the result of episodes of homelessness. The same is true for young people who have had involvement with juvenile justice and child protection.

A Melbourne study found 40% of young people who transition from

youth homelessness to adult homelessness had been in out of home care<sup>ii</sup>

A significant number of young homeless people do not participate in either education or employment. For example, 27 per cent of people aged 18-24 are not engaged in education, training or work, putting them at increased risk of homelessness.<sup>iii</sup>

### Where do young people stay?

Young people may move in and out of homelessness. Some experience a short period of homelessness while others will remain homeless for many years.

Many young people 'couch surf' with friends, while some sleep rough in squats, cars or public spaces. Others find emergency accommodation in refuges, government-funded transitional housing, rooming houses, hostels or motels. Young people who have experience homelessness are more likely to be homeless in adulthood<sup>iv</sup>.

### What help is needed?

Young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness benefit from the right supports to find and maintain affordable housing, stay connected with their communities,



and access education, training and employment.

When working with young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, the most effective approaches include:

- access to safe, stable and affordable accommodation
- support to maintain a family connection
- assistance to recognise the concept of interdependence with others (as opposed to independence)
- recognising different needs for the different ages and stages of adolescent development
- valuing the relationship between the young homeless person and their support worker
- ensuring that support services are timely and responsive to the needs of the young person.

### Quick facts

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [\*Specialist Homelessness Services \(SHS\) Collection \(SHSC\) 2011 – 2012 Annual Report\*](#)<sup>v</sup>, 229,247 Australians were supported by homelessness services.

In Victoria:

- 20,796 young people used homelessness services. Of these:
  - 13,926 were aged 18-24
  - 3,677 were 15-17
  - 3,193 were 10 – 14.

- 2,740 people aged between 10 and 25 presented at services but were unassisted.

- young women (18-24) experiencing homelessness accessed homelessness services at almost twice the rate of young men - 9,081 women compared to 4,846 young men

### About the Council to Homeless Persons

CHP is the peak Victorian body representing individuals and organisations with a commitment and interest in ending homelessness. Our mission is to work towards ending homelessness through leadership in policy, advocacy, capacity building and consumer participation.

<sup>i</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness 2011*, Cat. No. 2049, Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>ii</sup> Johnson, G & Chamberlain, C. (2008) From Youth to Adult Homelessness, *Australian Journal of Social Issues* Vol.43, 4, p. 563-582

<sup>iii</sup> COAG Reform Council 2012, *Skills and Workforce Development 2011: Comparing performance across Australia*, COAG Reform Council, Sydney.

<sup>iv</sup> Johnson, G. Gronda, H. & Coutts, S. 2008, *On the Outside: Pathways in and out of homelessness*. Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.

<sup>v</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2011-2012*, Cat. No. HOUI 267. Canberra: AIHW.