

Fact sheet: Children and Homelessness

Children is one of the biggest groups experiencing homelessness in Australia, with 17 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness under the age of 12ⁱ. In Victoria children and young people under 18 make up 26% of people experiencing homelessnessⁱⁱ.

Why do children become homeless?

Children don't always identify themselves as being 'homeless' even when they're without secure shelter. For children feeling homeless can be about the absence of a sense of safety, security, place, and connection to supportsⁱⁱⁱ. Like adults, not all children will experience homelessness in the same way.

The causes of homelessness are complex, however for many children, homelessness is the result of family violence which typically involves a woman with children escaping a violent partner.^{iv} Family Violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Australia.

Other reasons children become homeless is due to a housing crisis, inadequate or

poor housing conditions, parental substance misuse or parental mental health issues.

The impact of homelessness on children

Homelessness is associated with factors we know can have a negative impact on a child's development such as poverty, violence and instability.

Moving around a lot means it can become harder for a child to stay engaged with school.^v Children experiencing homelessness miss out on things that most children take for granted and are important in the developmental process, for example having friends over, school activities such as school excursions and uniforms.

Experiencing homelessness as a child makes it more likely that people will go on to experience homelessness in adult life. Around half the people seeking support from a SHS report that their parents experienced homelessness at least once.^{vi}



How many children are homeless in Victoria and Australia?

| | Victoria | | Australia | |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| | Number | Percentage* | Number | Percentage* |
| Under 12 | 3,638 | 16% | 17845 | 17% |
| Aged 12-18 | 2,285 | 10% | 10913 | 10% |
| Under 12 in improvised dwellings or sleeping out | 22 | 0.09% | 402 | 0.38% |
| Under 12 in supported accommodation | 2195 | 10% | 5488 | 5% |
| Under 12 – staying temporarily with other households | 325 | 1.4% | 1698 | 1.6% |
| Under 12 – Staying in boarding houses | 36 | 0.15% | 186 | 0.17% |
| Under 12 in severely overcrowded dwellings under 12 | 1095 | 5% | 10071 | 10% |

*Percentages are of the homeless population

ⁱ ABS, 2012, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness 2011

ⁱⁱ ABS, (2012), op cit

ⁱⁱⁱ Moore et al 2007

^{iv} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services 2013-14, 2014

^v Keys, C, 2009, Children and Homelessness: literature review

^{vi} Flatau et al (2013) Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia