

Fact Sheet: Aboriginal Australians and homelessness

Aboriginal Australians are overrepresented in the homelessness system around Australia and Victoria. In Australia, Aboriginal people seek help from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in disproportionate rates to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. In Victoria 17 per cent (8,077) of the Aboriginal population sought help from homelessness services in 2015-16, the highest rate of any state or territory in the country.

The statistics

- 61,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sought assistance from homelessness services across Australia in 2015-16
- Around Australia approximately 25% of people who access specialist homelessness services [identified as Indigenous](#)ⁱ
- In 2016 the number of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness rose by 16 percent compared with ten per cent in the non-Indigenous populationⁱⁱ
- Of Indigenous clients, 61% were femaleⁱⁱⁱ
- Nationwide almost 23% of Indigenous clients using SHS in 2016 were children under 10 years old^{iv}

- In Victoria 'severe crowding' accounted for 6% of the homeless Indigenous population^v.

As with the non-Indigenous population, the single most cited reason for seeking help from a homelessness service was family violence.

Why are Indigenous people so overrepresented in the homeless population?

There are a number of historic and current reasons that can help to understand why Aboriginal Victorians are over represented in the homelessness population. The history of colonisation in Australia, in which Aboriginal land was taken, resulted in significant dispossession and displacement of tribes. The effects of colonization went further as legislation in 1897 and 1915 allowed government officials to control the movement of Aboriginal people, removing them from their connection to land, and creating what we now recognize as spiritual homelessness.^{vi}

Legislation changed up and through to the 1970's through various assimilation policies, resulting in what is now known as the Stolen Generation. The intergenerational trauma experienced by people of the Stolen Generation continues to impact on a range of



wellbeing outcomes, including homelessness.

What it means to be 'home' for Aboriginal Australians

The meaning of 'home' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities can be different than that of other groups in Australia. While many people associate 'home' with having a house, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the concept of 'home' can refer more strongly to country. So the idea of 'my country' or 'not my country' could have more meaning than the terms 'home' or 'house.' As a result, the ABS believes Census data doesn't adequately reflect the full spectrum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness. Therefore as part of the 2016 Census development the ABS is considering how to better identify homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

ⁱ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness 2011, Catalogue 2049.0, ABS, Canberra, 2012, p.11

ⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) *Homelessness Among Indigenous Australians* Cat. no. IHW 133. Canberra: AIHW.

ⁱⁱⁱ AIHW (2014) *Homelessness Among Indigenous Australians*

^{iv} AIHW, *Results from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection*

Closing the gap^{vii}

Closing the gap is a strategy that aims to close the health and life expectancy gaps between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. Housing is an essential part of closing the gap and needs strategies to:

- Ensure design and construction are appropriate for each community and are built utilizing established cultural standards and accumulated knowledge;
- Early intervention and prevention programs around homelessness as well as supporting people with a mental, physical or intellectual disability
- Maintain infrastructure and Indigenous environmental health workers to ensure healthy living practices

More detailed information on each of the closing the gap building blocks can be found [here](#).

2011/12, AIHW, Canberra, December 2012, p.7.

^v Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Homelessness Among Indigenous Australians* (2014) p. 13

^{vi} AIHW (2014) *Homelessness Among Indigenous Australians*

^{vii} www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/what-works