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Homelessness increase no surprise; homelessness is not a Federal priority

2016 Census shows 13.7% increase in homelessness; 2-in-5 homeless under 25; spike in older people homeless; rough sleeping & severe overcrowding

The peak body for homelessness says the increase in homelessness is no surprise given that successive Federal Governments have failed to tackle the housing affordability crisis, and we do not have a national homelessness policy.

The ABS today released the 2016 Census data showing that 116,427 Australians were homeless, up 13.7% since 2011. Of the 116,000 people counted as homeless, 43,552 (39%) were people under 25. The full data set is available at www.abs.gov.au

“For over 116,000 people, children, women and men, the struggle to keep a roof over their head, pay the bills, put food on the table has become too much,” said Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia.

“The Census simply puts a number to what our homelessness services have long been reporting – that demand for homelessness help is growing every year. *Every day* in Australia, homelessness agencies are turning away 250 people because there is not any housing available, in which to put them – temporary or otherwise.”

Amongst the trends, Homelessness Australia is concerned about:

- 27.7% increase in homelessness among people aged 55+
- 39% of the homeless population is under 25 years of age
- Women’s homelessness rose faster than population
- 8,200 Australians rough sleeping (up 20% since 2011)
- 51,088 people were in severely overcrowded homes (up 23% since 2011)
- 1-in-5 people homeless are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

“It has been 10 years since the Rudd Government made a commitment to halve homelessness by 2020, and yet today, the number of Australians experiencing homelessness is greater than ever.

“While the housing crisis that underpins homelessness has worsened – a housing crisis that ironically is driven by Federal housing policy - political interest in solving homelessness has waned.

“This Census data is a wake-up call. Australia currently does not have a plan to address our housing and homelessness crisis, and we are seeing the symptom of that neglect in every city, suburb and town.

Homelessness Australia says that the solutions include:

- a monumental boost to our social housing stock, which has fallen nationally to just 5% of all housing. There are 200,000 Australians waiting for social housing,
- reform of the housing taxation system which encourages investors to own many properties while thousands don't have a roof over their heads
- An increase to Centrelink incomes, especially the Newstart income, which leaves people just \$20/day after they've paid for housing
- Proper funding of our homelessness services so they're not turning people away, and can intervene earlier to prevent homelessness happening in the first place

The Federal Government's new National Homelessness and Housing Agreement, is before the Senate and likely to come into effect on 1 July.

"The Agreement currently on the table brings not a single extra dollar of homelessness or housing funding in real terms." Says Ms Smith.

"Our homelessness crisis has been growing for a long time, and it will not be solved overnight. It needs concerted effort from every level of government. The solutions that will make homelessness a brief, once off and supported experience, are at our fingertips; we just need the political will to make it happen."

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2016 Census – Homelessness data snapshot (The full data is available at <http://abs.gov.au/>)

National increase

There has been a 13.7% increase in the number of Australians experiencing homelessness. Of the 116,427 Australians experiencing homelessness, 58% were male 42% were female

	2011	2016	Percentage change since 2011
Total number of Australians counted as homeless	102,439	116,427	13.7% increase*

** Increase is not explained by population increases alone. Population growth over the same period was 8.8%*

Women's homelessness

On Census night, 49,017 Australian women were recorded as being homeless, which is 42% of the homeless population

There has been a 9.5% increase in homelessness among females since 2011. However, homelessness funding is inadequate to meet demand from women – last year homelessness services turned away 166 women each day.

	2011	2016	Percentage change since 2011
Number of Australian women experiencing homelessness	44,746	49,017	9.5% Increase since 2011

Older people and homelessness

There has been a significant rise in the number of older Australians recorded as homeless. There has been a 28% increase people aged 55 and over experiencing homelessness, with faster growth amongst

women in that age group vs men. Although over 55s represent a smaller cohort of the homelessness population (about 16% of the homeless population are 55+), they are a rapidly growing age bracket.

Age	2011	2016	Percentage change since 2011
Number of Australians aged 55+ experiencing homelessness	14,581	18,625	27.7% increase

Children and young people's homelessness

Children and young people make up nearly 2-in-5 of all people counted as homeless; 38% of the people counted as homeless on Census night were under 25 years of age.

Age	2016	Percentage of the homeless population in this age group
Under 12	15,872	14%
12–18	9,955	9%
19–24	17,725	15%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness: 1-in-5 people experiencing homelessness are Indigenous

	Number	Number per 10,000	Proportion of the homeless population that are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
Number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians counted as homeless	23,437	361 per 10,000 (vs 49 per 10,000 in the non-Indigenous population)	22%

Indigenous Australians continue to be drastically over-represented in the homeless population. Despite only making up 2.8% of the Australian population, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people represented 22% of the homeless population. 23,437 Indigenous Australians were recorded as homeless on Census night – equivalent to 1-in-5 of the homeless population.

What form did homelessness take?

Rough sleeping represents just 7% of all Australian homelessness. The other major forms of homelessness are below

Type of homelessness	2011	2016	What percentage of the homeless population
Rough sleeping	6,810	8,200	7%
Couchsurfing	17,374	17,725	15%
Rooming houses	14,944	17,503	15%
Living in severely crowded dwellings	41,370	51,088	44%

2016 Census homelessness data – State breakdown

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	National
Number	37,715	24,817	21,671	6,224	9,005	1,622	13,717	1,596	116,427
Rate of homelessness per 10,000	50.4	41.9	46.1	37.1	36.4	31.8	599.4	40.2	49.8