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1-in-85 Australians sought homelessness help in 2017-18; 40% were people with children: new national report

- *1-in-85 Australians sought homelessness assistance in 2017-18*
- *Housing issues and family violence primary drivers*
- *236 people turned away from assistance each day*
- *30% of people seeking help are under 18*

New data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) due to be released on Friday reveals 121,000 parents with children sought help from a homelessness agency in 2017-18, the vast majority of them single parents. The report also shows family violence and housing issues continue to be the primary drivers.

The AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services data report reveals that a total of 288,795 Australians sought homelessness assistance last financial year; equivalent to 1-in-85 Australians.

A lack of affordable accommodation for people on low incomes is driving demand for homelessness assistance, says Homelessness Australia.

‘The waiting list for social housing has blown out to 200,000 and rising rents in the private rental market are pushing low income earners into rooming houses, motels and caravans,’ said Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia.

‘Families on low incomes have simply run out of options when it comes to finding a home they can afford,’ said Ms Smith.

The data shows a deeply gendered problem, with women and girls making up 61% of people needing help.

Table: Number of Australians seeking assistance from homelessness agencies in 2017-18 (AIHW)

	No. of people	What proportion of total are M/F?
Male	113,163	39%
Female	175,632	61%
TOTAL	288,795	100%

‘Women are on lower incomes, they’re more likely to be victims of family violence, they’re more likely to have children with them so they’re at higher risk of experiencing homelessness,’ said Ms Smith.

Housing issues (e.g being evicted, inability to afford the rent, or being pushed out of severely overcrowded dwellings)

represent the number one reason people seek help, with family violence a close second, according to the AIHW data.

The AIHW data also shows 236 people / day were turned away from help last year – which Homelessness Australia says is a symptom of homelessness services stretched so thin that they must focus only on the most critical clients, while pushing others to the back of the line.

Ms Smith explained that a number of Commonwealth policies impacted demand for homelessness services, including inadequacy and insecurity of Centrelink benefits, inadequate federal investment in social housing, and the lack of a national homelessness strategy.

‘The federal government holds the biggest levers when it comes to tackling homelessness and rent stress, and there does not appear to be an appetite to use those levers to address these complex social problems,’ said Ms Smith.

Ms Smith says that homelessness agencies are struggling because federal housing and homelessness funding has failed to keep pace with growing demand, and the cost of renting keeps rising faster than incomes, pushing a constant and increasing flow of people to their doors.

‘Static federal funding, pitifully low Centrelink incomes and not enough social housing stock have created a perfect storm of increasing homelessness,’ said Ms Smith.

Table: Why are Australians seeking help from homelessness services?

Reasons for seeking homelessness assistance (AIHW, 2017-18)	% of clients who said this was their main reason
Housing (including housing affordability stress, overcrowding, eviction)	40%
Family violence	30%
Financial and employment difficulties	11%
Family breakdown and interpersonal relationships	5%
Gambling, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol addiction	3%
Transition from prison	2%
Other	9%

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