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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Homelessness:

clearer picture,

better future

Specialist Homelessness Services

July–December
2012





Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

*Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing*

Specialist homelessness services

July–December 2012

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Canberra

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We are especially grateful to all homelessness agencies and their clients for participating in the data collection.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAAP NDC	SAAP National Data Collection
SHSC	Specialist Homelessness Services Collection
SLK	statistical linkage key
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Symbols

..	not applicable
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Summary

In the 6-month period from July to December 2012:

More than 157,000 clients accessed specialist homelessness services

Almost half (47%) were already homeless when they began receiving support, and 22% of these clients were sleeping without shelter or were in an improvised or inadequate dwelling. Homeless males were more likely than females to be in this situation (27% of homeless males compared to 16%).

Most clients were female, and the majority were aged 18 to 44

Females represented 58% of all clients. Women aged 18–44 represented 60% of females and 35% of all clients.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented

Almost one-quarter (23%) of clients who provided information on their Indigenous status identified themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

One-quarter of clients sought assistance because of domestic and family violence

The most common main reason given for seeking assistance was 'domestic and family violence', reported for 23% of all clients (32% of females and 9% of males). 'Financial difficulties' were reported by 15% of clients as the main reason (17% of males, and 14% of females).

More than half of all clients needed accommodation assistance

More than half (56%) of all clients needed accommodation-related assistance. Two-thirds (66%) of all clients who needed some kind of accommodation assistance got it from the agency that was supporting them; 14% were referred to another service provider and the remaining 20% were neither provided the service nor referred. More than 3.6 million nights of accommodation were provided by specialist homelessness agencies.

Almost \$12 million in financial assistance was provided to clients

Financial assistance was provided to 31,000 clients. On average, those who got financial assistance each received \$398.

Many at risk of becoming homeless were assisted

Of clients who were at risk of homelessness when they began receiving support (and who were not being supported at the end of the reporting period because they did not need it or for other reasons), 86% were not homeless at the end of their support, and 4% were in an institutional setting; 10% were homeless at the end of support.

While most of those who were homeless at the beginning of support remained homeless, 23% were in private, public or community housing at the end of support, and 1% were in an institutional setting.

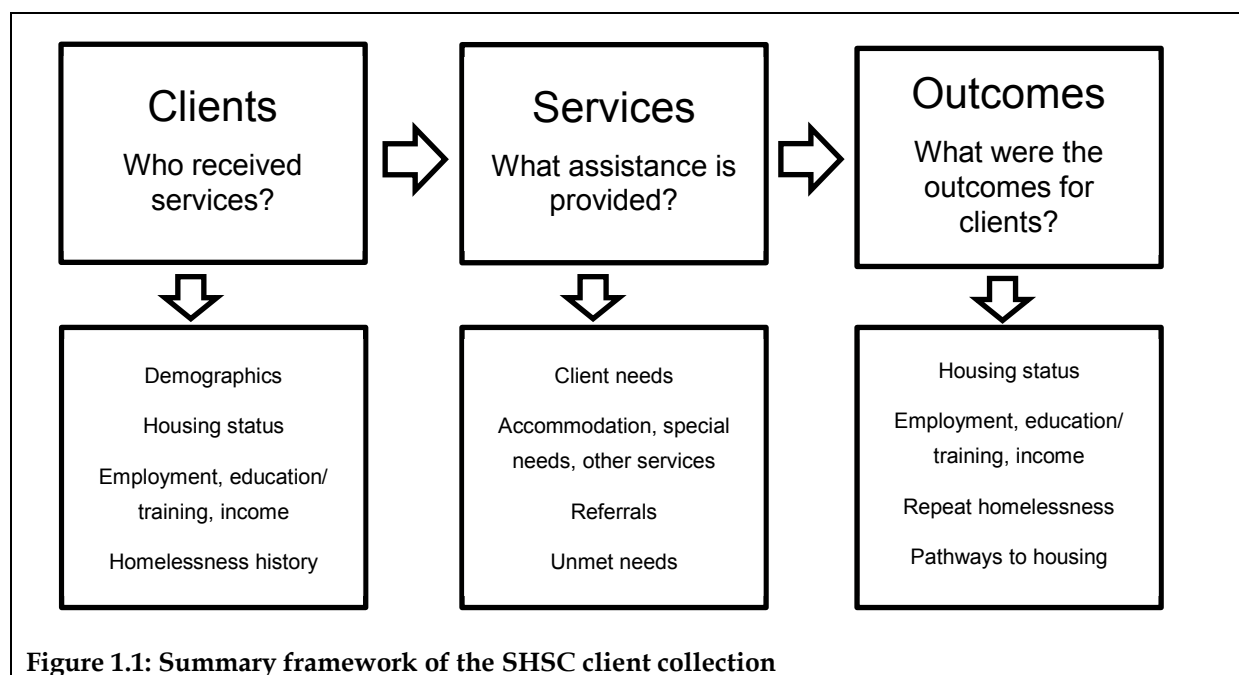
1 Introduction

This report presents results from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) for the six-month period from July to December 2012. These data describe all clients of specialist homelessness agencies who were supported at some stage in this period, the assistance they received and their changes in circumstances following support.

1.1 About the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection

The SHSC began on 1 July 2011. Specialist homelessness agencies funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (COAG 2012) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) (COAG 2009) are in scope for the collection. These agencies provide a variety of services under a range of state or territory homelessness programs developed as a local response to homelessness taking into account characteristics of the population at risk, the geographic distribution of clients, and identified priority groups.

All specialist homelessness agencies participating in the collection report a standard set of data about the clients they support each month to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Data are collected about the characteristics and circumstances of a client when they first present at an agency, and on the assistance they receive, their circumstances at the end of each month and at the end of the support period (Figure 1.1).



The data collected by agencies are based on support periods, or episodes of assistance provided to individual clients. Certain information collected about the client (selected letters of name, date of birth and sex) is used to construct a statistical linkage key to enable a single record to be constructed for clients who have multiple support periods (either with the same

agency or with different agencies). Information about clients who present to an agency in a family or other group is also linked together.

Further information about how the collection is conducted and definitions and concepts used in it can be found in AIHW (2012a) or on the AIHW website <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/shsc/>>.

1.2 Data in this report

The AIHW published data for the September, December and March quarters in 2011–12 as well as annual data for that year (AIHW 2012 b, c, d, e).

In 2011–12, all support periods were reported as beginning on 1 July 2011. For this and future reports, all support periods open at the start of the reporting period (in this case, 1 July 2012) draw on data collected at the beginning of that support period (which began in the previous reporting period). This affects the comparability of analyses presented in this report with previous reports.

From 2012–13, the first report in the reporting period will describe all clients and assistance provided in the July to December period of the reporting year, and the following report will describe the clients and assistance provided in the full 12-month reporting period (July to June).

The availability of data on a 6-month basis ensures that ongoing monitoring of homelessness services can occur, and the early emergence of trends can be identified. However, care should be used inferring annual information from 6-monthly data. This is because the shorter the observation period, the lower the proportion of support periods that opened and closed within the period will be (compared to the proportion of support periods in the count that are open at the beginning or end of the period). As a result, the shorter the reference period, the higher the relative proportions of support periods outside the reference period that are included. Therefore, the count of support periods (and clients) in a 6-month period will not be comparable (around half) to the count in a 12-month period.

Similarly, comparisons of average (mean and median) lengths of support periods will be affected by the length of the reference period. There may also be seasonal influences that affect client numbers and the types of clients when comparing 6-monthly data to annual data.

Supplementary data tables for this report can be found in AIHW (2013).

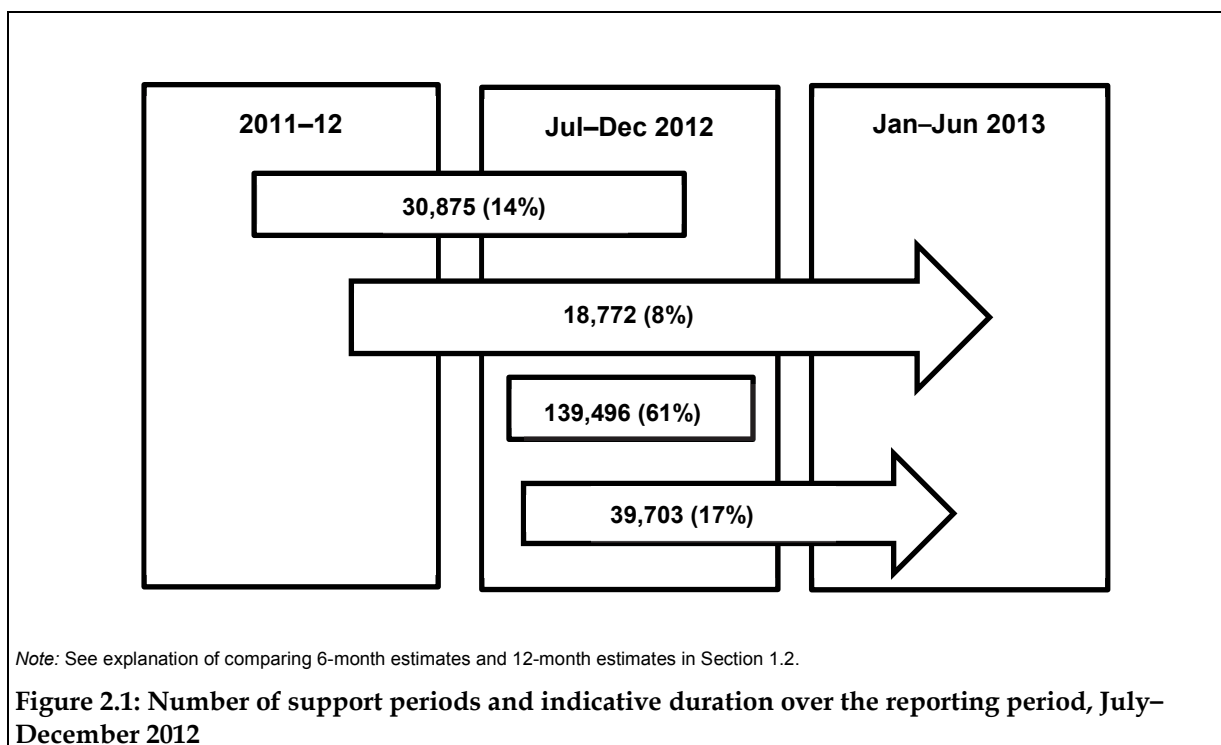
Before the SHSC, from 1996 to 2011, homelessness agencies reported data to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection. There are some significant differences between the SHSC and SAAP NDC (as described in AIHW 2012b, AIHW 2012e) in terms of scope, content and the inclusion of children as clients. As a result, caution should be exercised when making comparisons between these datasets.

A data quality statement for data reported in this report is at Appendix A.

2 A profile of clients

In the period July–December 2012, specialist homelessness agencies provided assistance to an estimated 157,236 clients in 214,343 support periods (Table S2.1 in AIHW 2013).

The data collected by agencies are based on support periods, or episodes of assistance provided to individual clients. Many of these support periods are relatively short (and began and ended in the period July–December 2012), and others are longer—some of these were ongoing from the previous reporting period, or were still ongoing at the end of December 2012 (Figure 2.1).



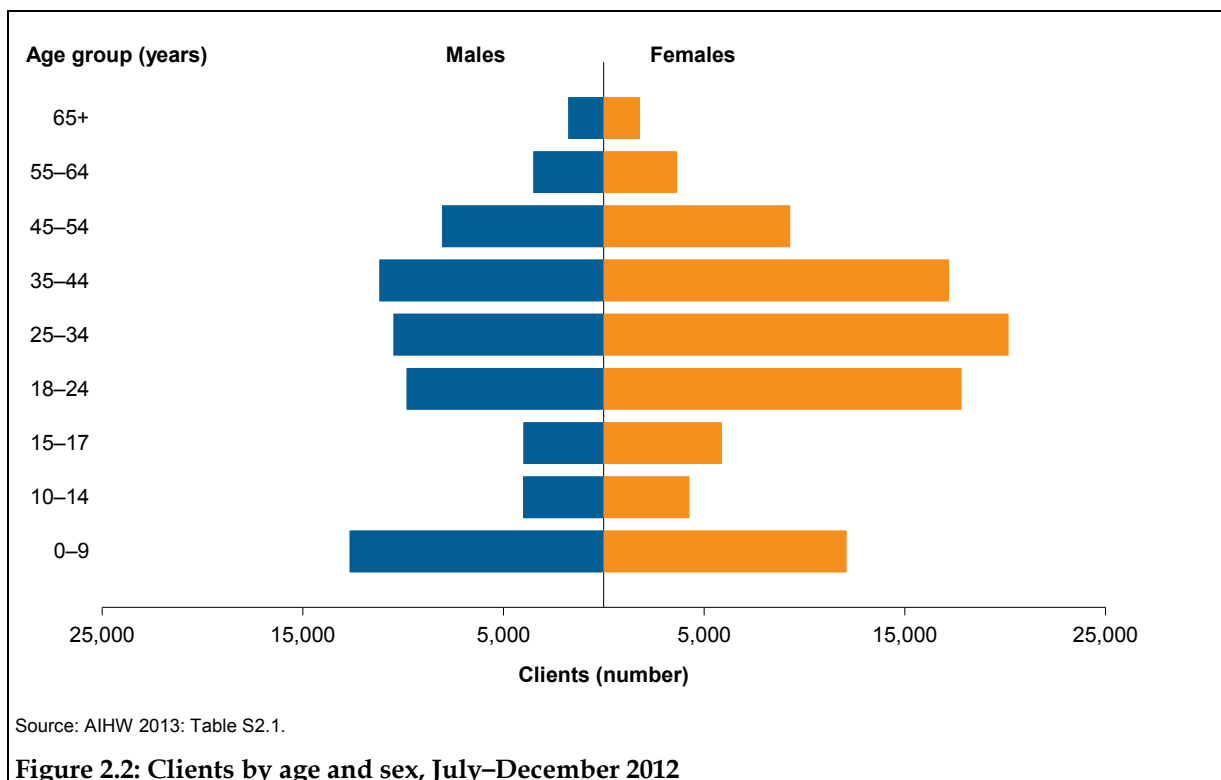
Depending on the complexity of clients' circumstances and the availability of services to meet their needs, many clients access specialist homelessness services more than once within the reporting period or may be receiving services from more than one specialist homelessness agency to have their needs met. In the period July–December 2012, clients had an average of 1.4 individual periods of support.

2.1 Characteristics of clients

Age and sex of clients

Females represented 58% and males 42% of people accessing support from homelessness services in the period July–December 2012. Women aged 18–44 were most likely to access specialist homelessness services, accounting for 60% of female clients and 35% of all clients (Figure 2.2).

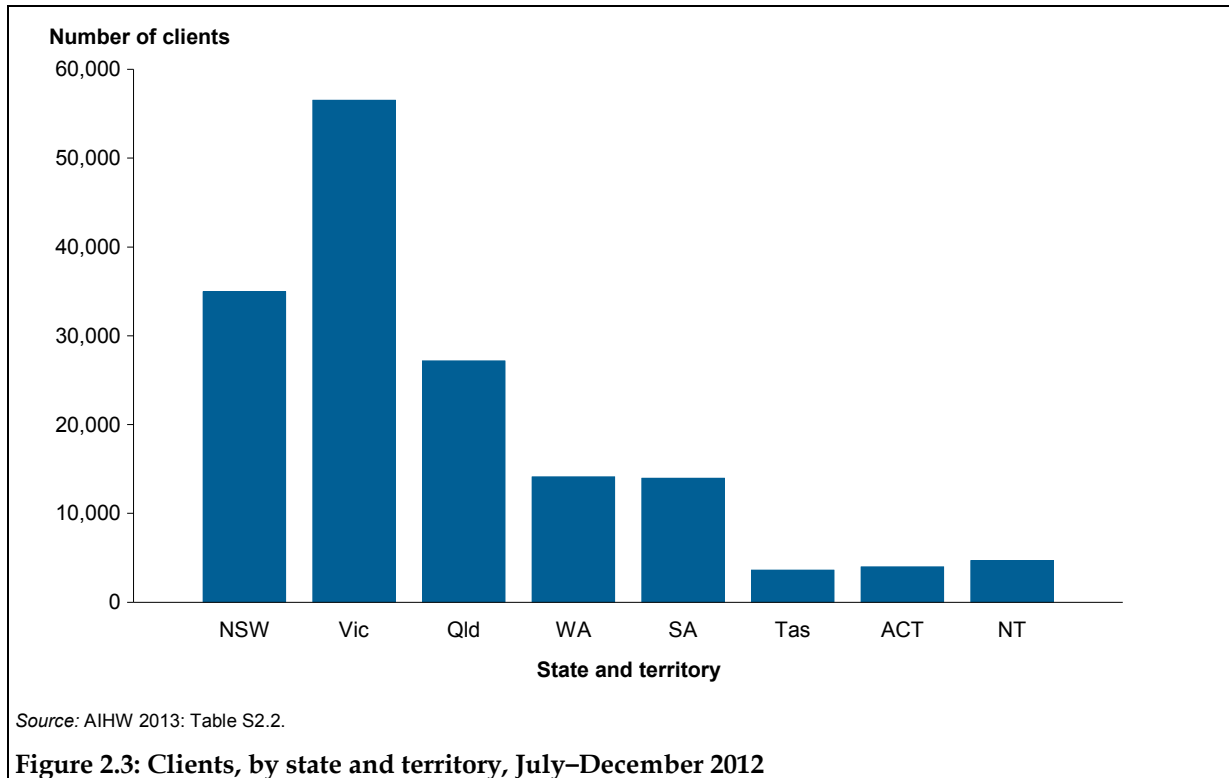
Children aged 0–14 accounted for 21% of clients, with three-quarters of these children (16% of all clients) aged 0–9. There were similar numbers of boys and girls among children.



Location of clients

Victoria had the most people accessing specialist homelessness services (56,527), followed by New South Wales (34,936) and Queensland (27,132) (Figure 2.3). Although the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory had the lowest numbers of clients, compared to their population size they had the highest rate of people accessing specialist homelessness services—199 per 10,000 people in the Northern Territory and 105 per 10,000 people in the Australian Capital Territory (Table S2.2).

Most clients (63%) accessed specialist homelessness agencies based in *Major cities*, followed by *Inner regional* (22%) and *Outer regional* (11%) areas. Five per cent of clients accessed services in *Remote* or *Very remote* areas (Table S2.3).

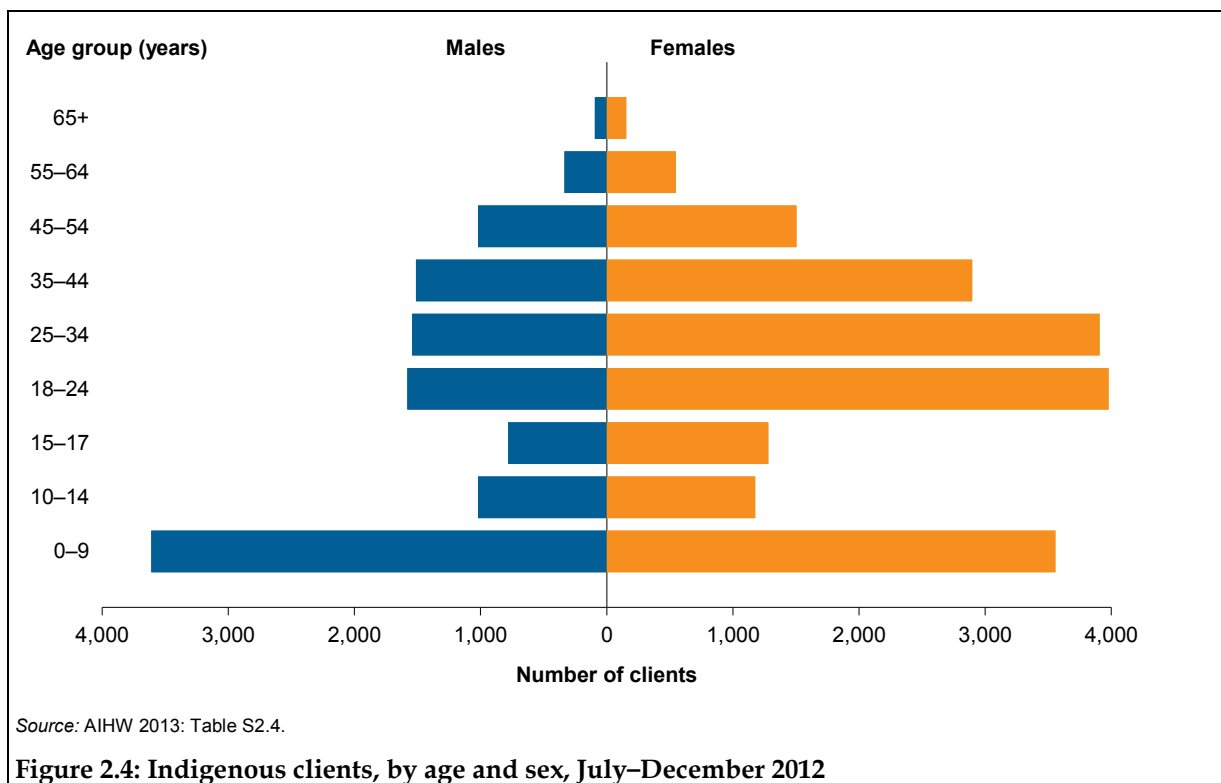


Indigenous status

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented among clients of specialist homelessness services. Almost one-quarter (23%) of clients who provided information on their Indigenous status identified themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (Table S2.4), compared to 2.5% of the Australian population (ABS 2012a).

The age and sex characteristics of Indigenous clients was similar to that for the overall client population; however, the proportion of female Indigenous clients was slightly higher at 62%, compared to 58% for all clients. The proportion of Indigenous children aged 0–14 was also higher (31% compared to 21% for all clients).

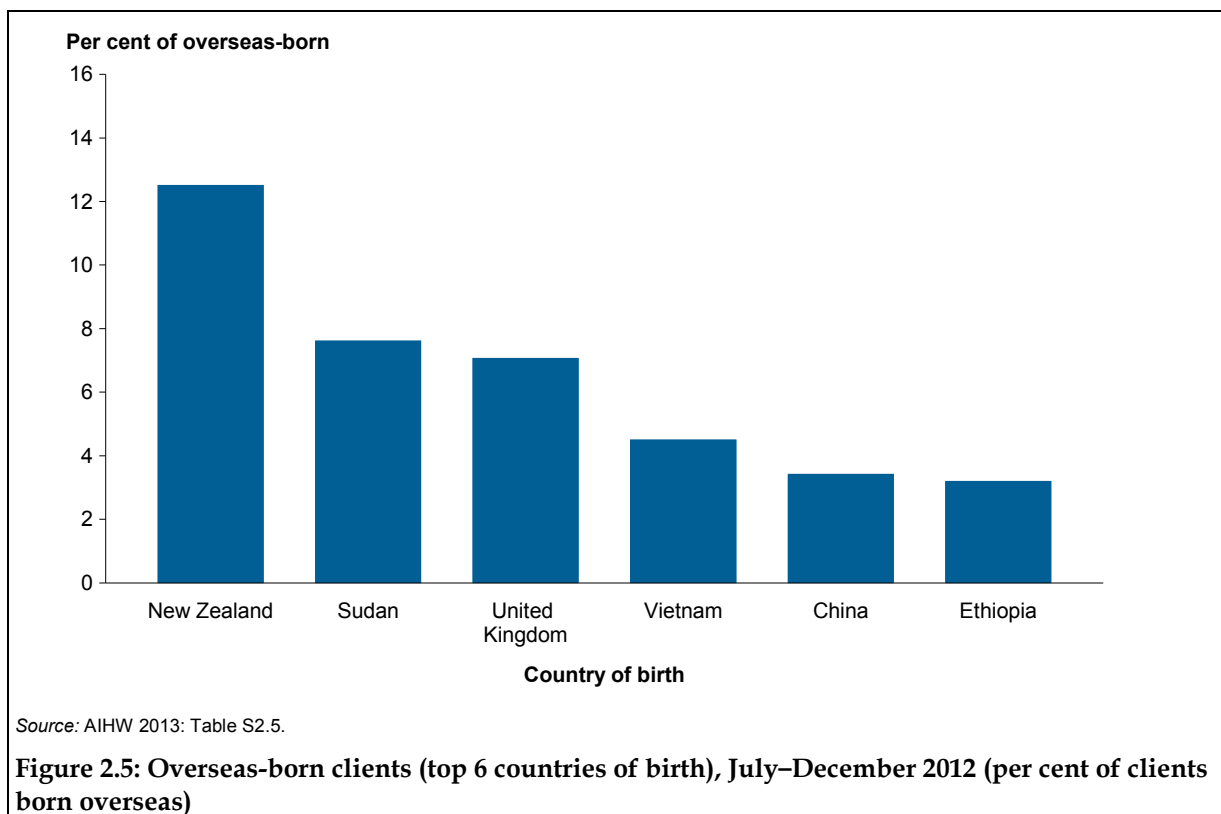
Within the Indigenous client population, females aged 18 to 44 were most likely to access specialist homelessness services, representing 35% of all Indigenous clients and 57% of female Indigenous clients (Figure 2.4).



Country of birth of clients

The majority of specialist homelessness services clients who provided information about their country of birth were born in Australia (85%) (Table S2.5). This was higher than the general Australian population, where around 73% of people are Australian-born (ABS 2012b).

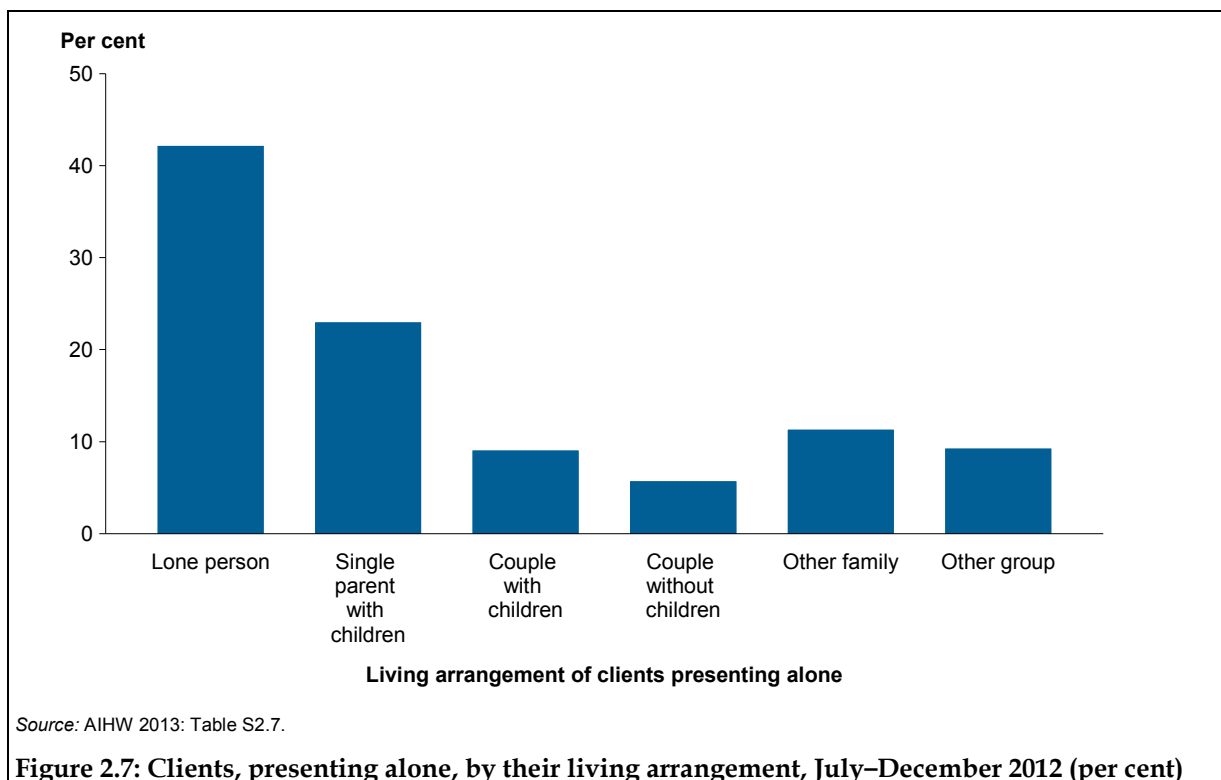
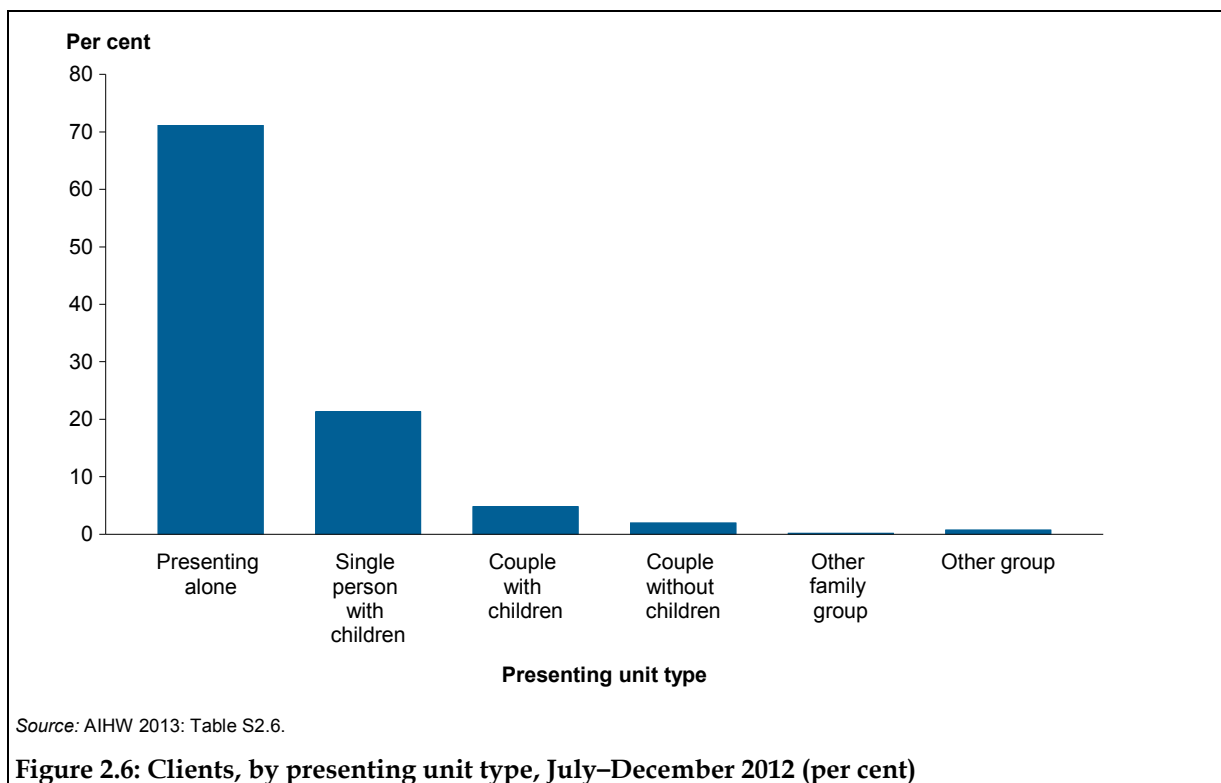
For those born overseas (15% of all clients), the most common country of birth was New Zealand (13% of clients born overseas), followed by Sudan (8%) and the United Kingdom (7%) (Figure 2.5).



Clients presenting alone and in groups

Specialist homelessness agencies provide support to single people, families and other groups of people who present together. Between July and December 2012, most clients who received support presented alone to an agency (71%). Twenty-eight per cent of all clients presented to an agency as part of a family—of these, 76% were single parents and their children, 17% were couples and their children, 7% were couples without children and less than 1% were in another type of family group (Figure 2.6).

Regardless of whether the client presented alone or as part of a group to the agency, some clients who presented alone were living with family members (or other people) at the time they presented. Among those clients who presented alone to an agency, almost half (49%) indicated they were living with family members at the time they presented to the agency and 9% were living with non-family members (Figure 2.7).

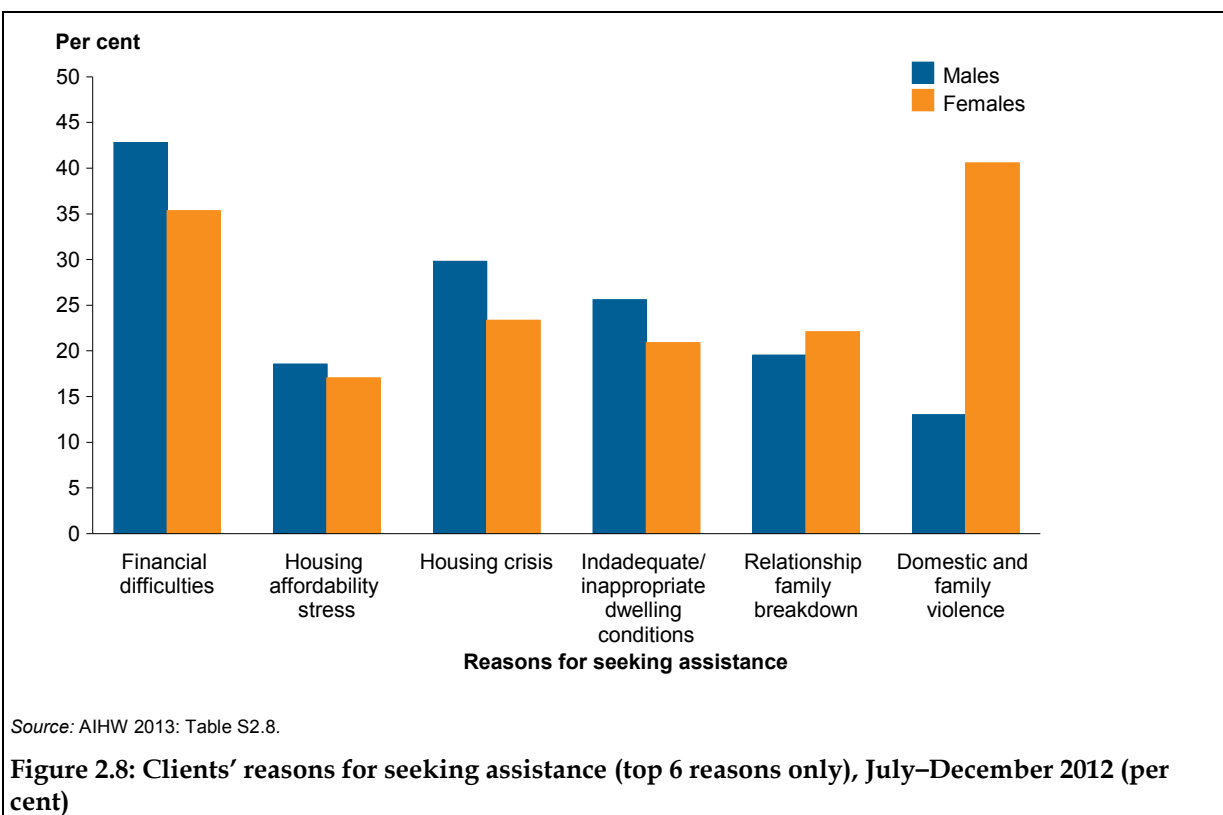


Reasons for seeking assistance

The pathways into homelessness can be many and varied and the reasons clients seek assistance can highlight the major risk factors for homelessness.

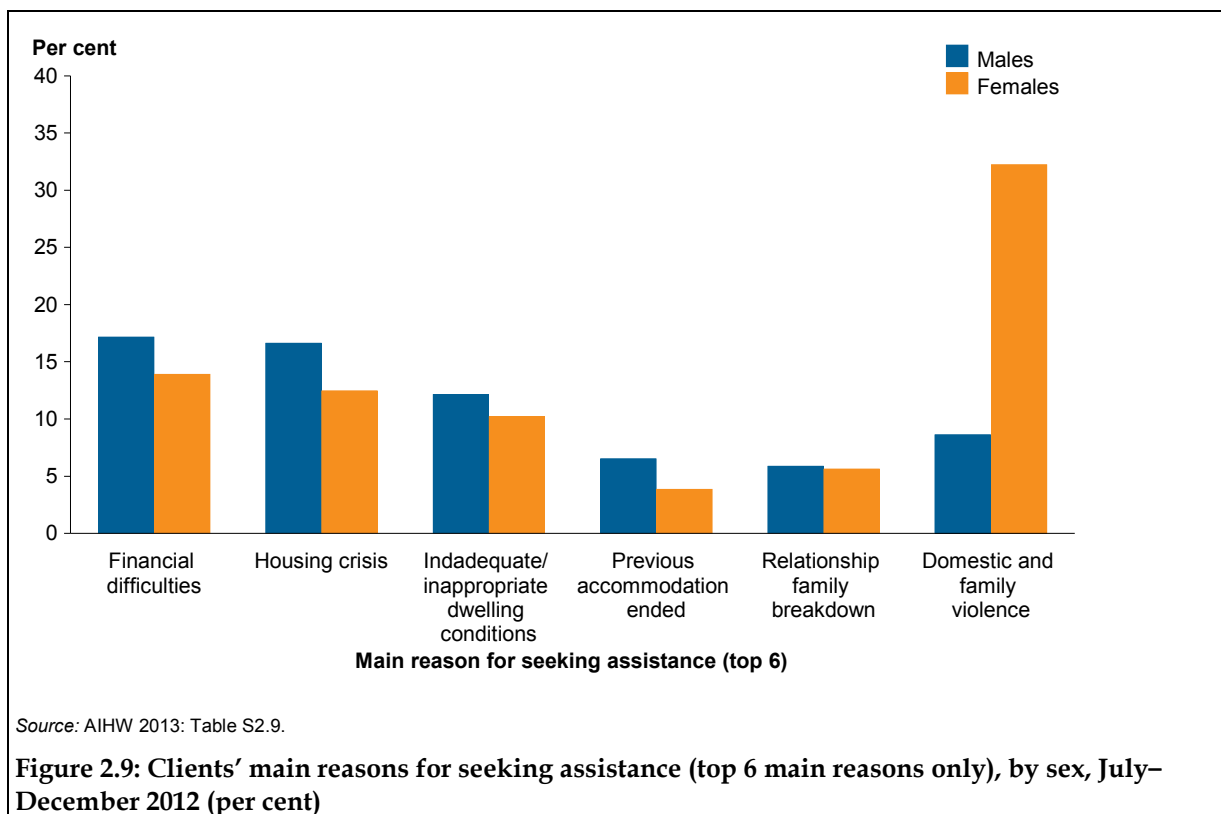
A person may indicate a number of reasons for seeking assistance from a specialist homelessness agency. When considering all reasons, 'financial difficulties' was most commonly reported (reported by 38% of clients), followed by 'domestic and family violence' (29%), 'housing crisis' (26%), and 'inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions' (23%) (Figure 2.8).

'Financial difficulties' was also the reason most commonly reported by males (43% of males, compared to 35% of females). For females, the most commonly reported reason was 'domestic and family violence' (reported by 41% of females and 13% of males).



When looking at the *main* reason given for seeking assistance, 'domestic and family violence' was the most common, reported by almost one-quarter of all clients (23%). The second most common main reason was 'financial difficulties' (15%) followed by 'housing crisis' (14%) and 'inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions' (11%) (Table S2.9).

'Domestic and family violence' was the most common main reason for seeking assistance reported by female clients (32% of females and 9% of males), while male clients most commonly reported 'financial difficulties' (17% of males and 14% of females) (Figure 2.9).



2.2 Need for assistance and services provided

Specialist homelessness agencies provide a wide range of services to people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. The majority of clients seek accommodation of some type. However, many seek support to maintain an existing tenancy while others seek a range of other support services that deal with housing issues. Many agencies provide basic support services to a broad cross-section of clients. Other services, however, are more specialised in nature and directed at clients with more specific needs (for example, youth services). This section describes clients' needs for services and the types of services provided. Information on how clients' needs and service provision is recorded in the SHSC and reported on in this report is provided in Box 2.1.

Among the broad types of services needed by clients, most common were 'general services' (at least one service of this type was needed by 92% of clients). This was followed by accommodation assistance (56%), assistance to sustain housing tenure (either a lease or home ownership) (26%) and other specialist services (18%) (Figure 2.10).

Box 2.1 How clients' needs and service provision are recorded in the SHSC

Identifying clients' needs for a service

The SHSC collects information on the service needs of clients during their period of support from a specialist homelessness agency. Information about clients' needs is based on the assessment by agency staff, but may take into account clients' expressed needs for assistance. The information is collected at the beginning of a support period and updated both at the end of each month a client is supported and at the end of each support period. Each individual need is recorded only once in any collection month.

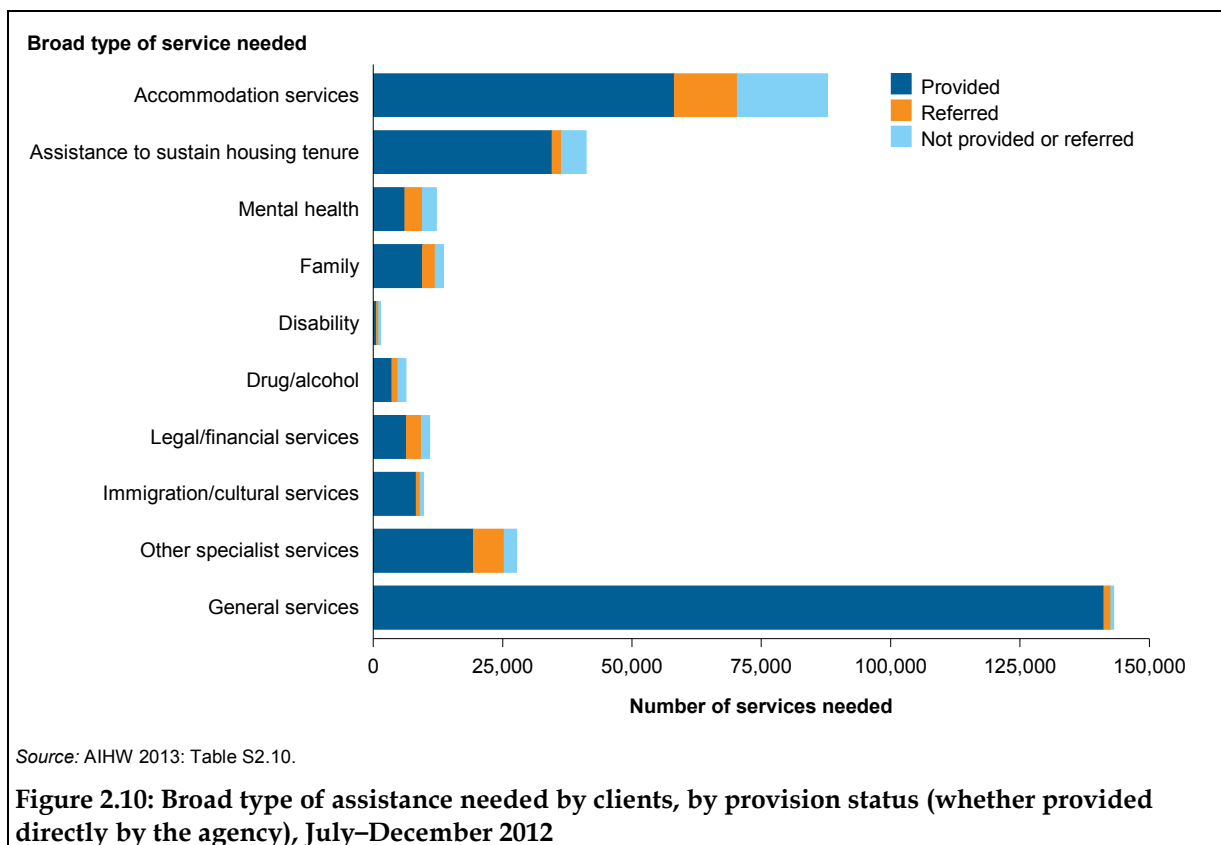
In this report, a client need is reported if the client needed that service at any time in the period July–December 2012. For example, a client is reported as needing short-term accommodation if they were recorded as needing it in any collection month between July–December 2012. This is regardless of the number of months over which this need was recorded, or the number of times during this period that they presented with this need.

Meeting clients' need for a service

There are several aspects to analysing how a client's need for assistance is met. The first is to analyse what services a client was provided directly by the specialist homelessness agency. Where agencies are unable to provide services directly to clients, they will often refer the client to other organisations (other specialist homelessness agencies or other organisations) that can provide those services. This information is also collected in the SHSC and is considered an important form of assistance that agencies provide, although it is not possible to know if these referrals resulted in the provision of services.

All information on services that are provided, whether referred or not, are recorded in the same way as service needs. That is, a service is recorded as provided if the client was given that assistance at any time in the period July–December 2012.

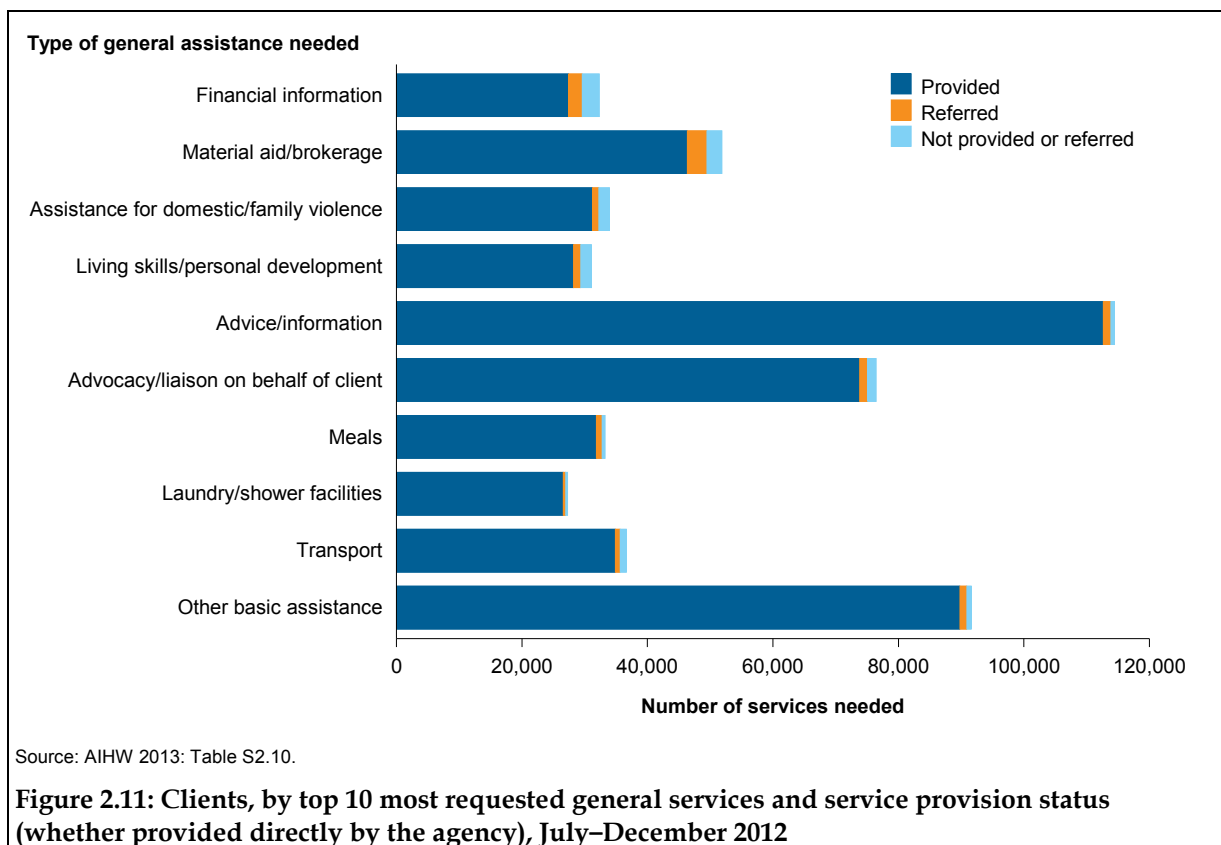
In some circumstances, an agency will not be able to either provide required services directly to a client, or refer them to another organisation. This is considered to be an unmet need.



General assistance needs

In the period July–December 2012, most clients (92%) needed some kind of ‘general services’ at some stage during the reporting period. Within this category, ‘advice and information’ was needed most often (by 74% of all clients). ‘Advocacy/liaison on behalf of the client’ was needed by almost half of all clients (49%) and ‘material aid and brokerage’ was needed by one-third (33%) of all clients. Assistance with transport and for domestic/family violence, meals and financial information were all needed by around one-fifth of all clients (23%, 22%, 21% and 21% respectively) (Figure 2.11).

Specialist homelessness agencies were able to directly meet the needs of nearly all clients requiring these general services. ‘Advice/information’ and ‘other basic assistance’ were the general services most likely to be provided directly by agencies (for 98% of clients needing these services). ‘Employment assistance’, ‘training assistance’ and ‘legal information’ were the general services least likely to be provided directly by agencies (although they were provided to 65%, 66% and 71% of clients, respectively).



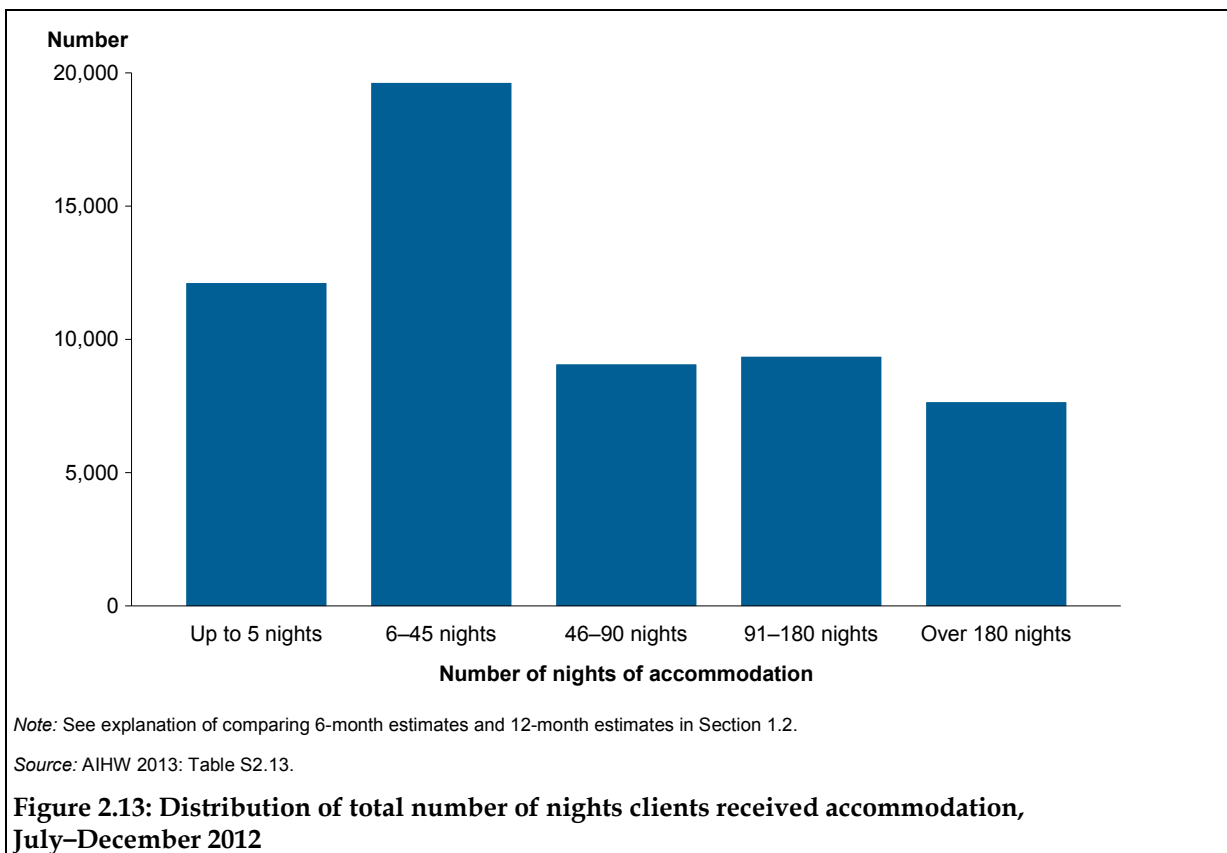
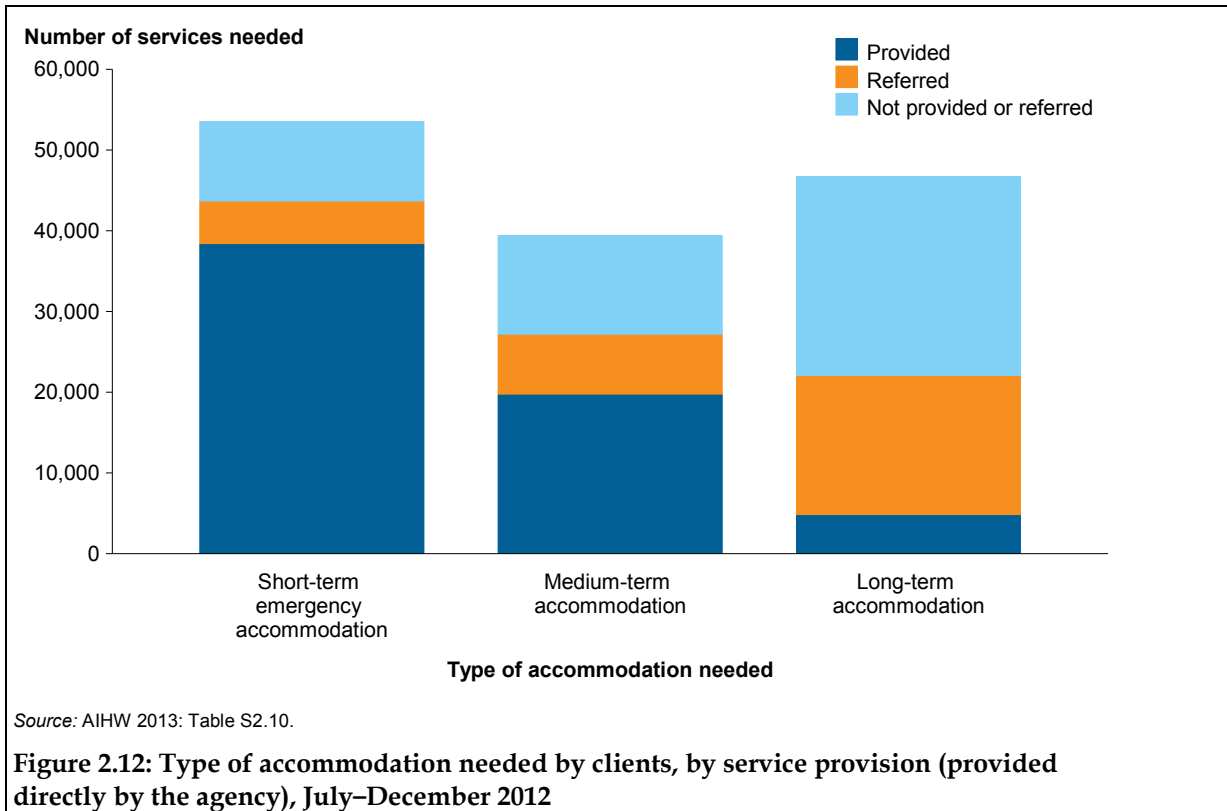
Clients' needs for accommodation

More than (56%) of all clients were identified as needing accommodation or accommodation-related assistance from July–December 2012. Short-term or emergency accommodation was the most commonly needed type of accommodation (34% of all clients), followed by long-term accommodation (30%) (Figure 2.12).

Agencies were able to directly provide short-term or emergency accommodation to most of the clients seeking this type of accommodation (72%). A further 10% of these clients were referred to other organisations for short-term accommodation.

Long-term accommodation needs were least likely of all accommodation services to be provided directly by agencies (10%), reflecting the primary focus of specialist homelessness agencies on dealing with immediate needs for emergency or short-term accommodation. More than one-third (37%) of clients seeking long-term accommodation were referred to another organisation for this assistance.

For support periods that were active in the period July–December 2012 accommodation was provided directly by specialist homelessness agencies to more than one-third (37%) of all clients. In total, 3,680,622 nights of accommodation were provided in the reporting period. On average, clients who received accommodation were accommodated for 64 nights (median accommodation length was 35 nights) in the reporting period. One-fifth (21%) of clients who received accommodation were accommodated for up to 5 nights, and more than one-third (34%) received 6–45 nights of accommodation. Thirteen per cent of clients who received accommodation were accommodated for the entire reporting period (July–December 2012) (Figure 2.13). Information on how total length of accommodation is calculated is provided in Box 2.2.



Box 2.2 How total length of accommodation and total length of support is calculated

To calculate accommodation and support period length, every night (for accommodation) and day (for support) the client received accommodation or support from July to December 2012 is added together. The total number of nights/days presented for clients, therefore, is not necessarily consecutive nights/days. For example, a client who received accommodation for 7 nights may have had two separate periods of accommodation, one for 5 nights and another for 2 nights.

Sustaining housing tenure

In addition to providing accommodation, specialist homelessness agencies also commonly help clients to maintain their existing housing situation. In the period July–December 2012, one-quarter (26%) of clients needed assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction. A further 1% of clients needed assistance to prevent foreclosure or for mortgage arrears (Table S2.9).

This type of assistance was usually provided directly by specialist homelessness agencies; it was provided to 84% of clients requiring assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction.

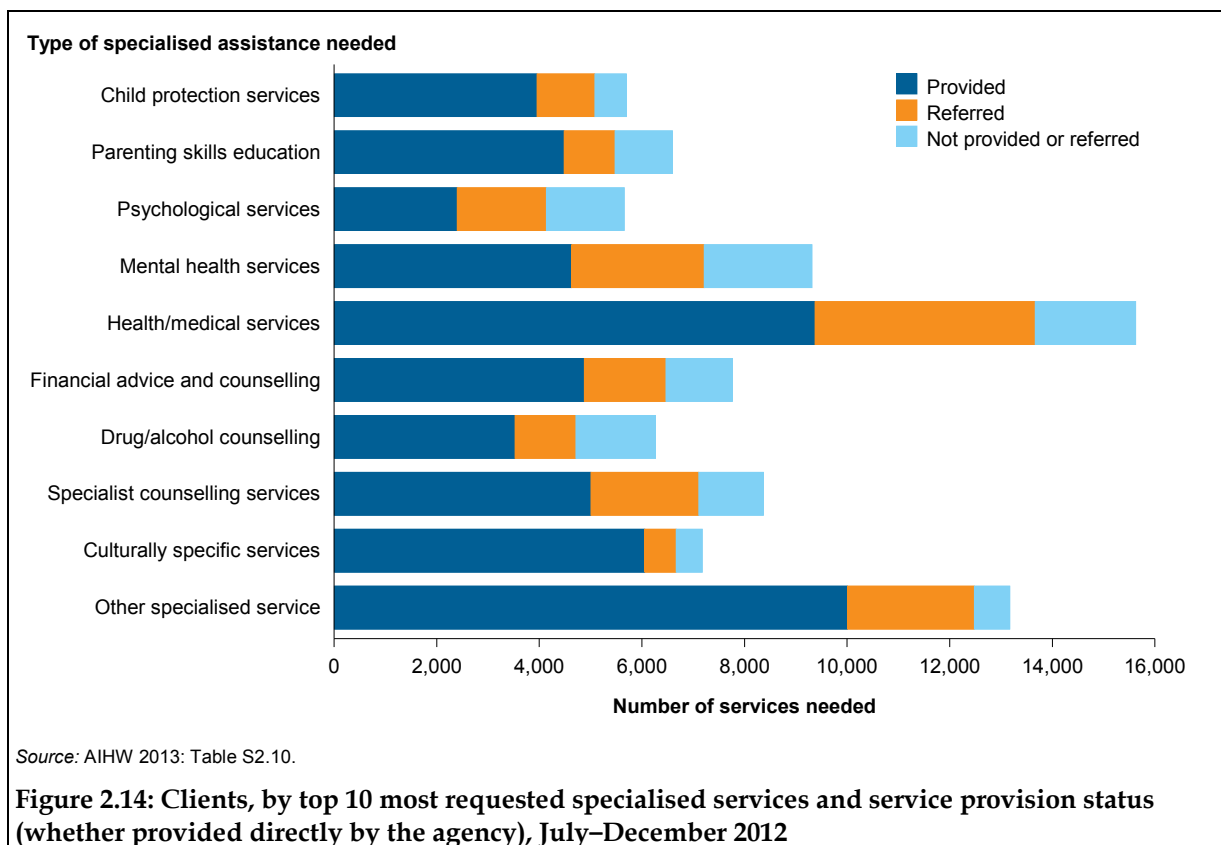
Specialised services

In addition to accommodation and basic support services, agencies also provide a range of specialised support services to clients. These may include, for example, child protection services, financial advice and counselling services, drug/alcohol counselling and professional legal services.

Compared to other broad types of need, fewer clients needed specialised services. ‘Health and medical services’ was needed most often (by 10% of clients at some stage in their support period), followed by ‘other specialised services’ (8% of clients) and ‘mental health services’ (6% of clients) (Figure 2.14).

Overall, specialised services were less likely to be provided directly by specialist homelessness agencies than other services. This reflects the specialised or professional skills required to deliver these services. ‘Culturally specific services’ were most likely to be provided directly by agencies (provided directly to 84% of clients needing this service), followed by ‘interpreter services’ (82%) and ‘assistance to connect culturally’ (79%).

‘Psychiatric services’ were least likely to be provided directly by agencies — 40% of clients who needed these services received it directly from the agency, and 32% were referred to another organisation.



Financial assistance provided to clients

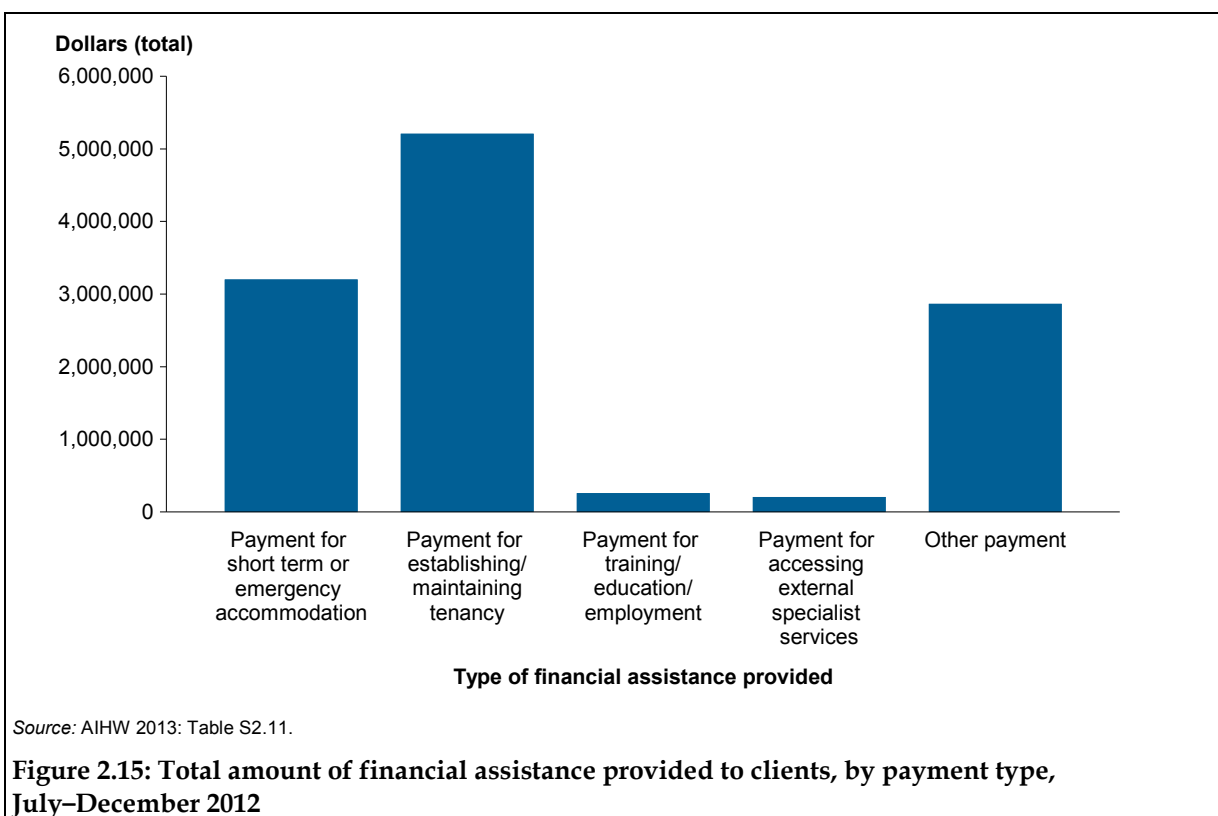
In addition to accommodation and other services, many agencies provide clients with financial assistance. Agencies may pay for commercially provided accommodation (such as motels) in emergency situations, or to help clients in financial difficulty with their current housing arrangements (for example one-off payments for rental bonds or mortgage repayments), or to cover other needs such as education-related expenses for children).

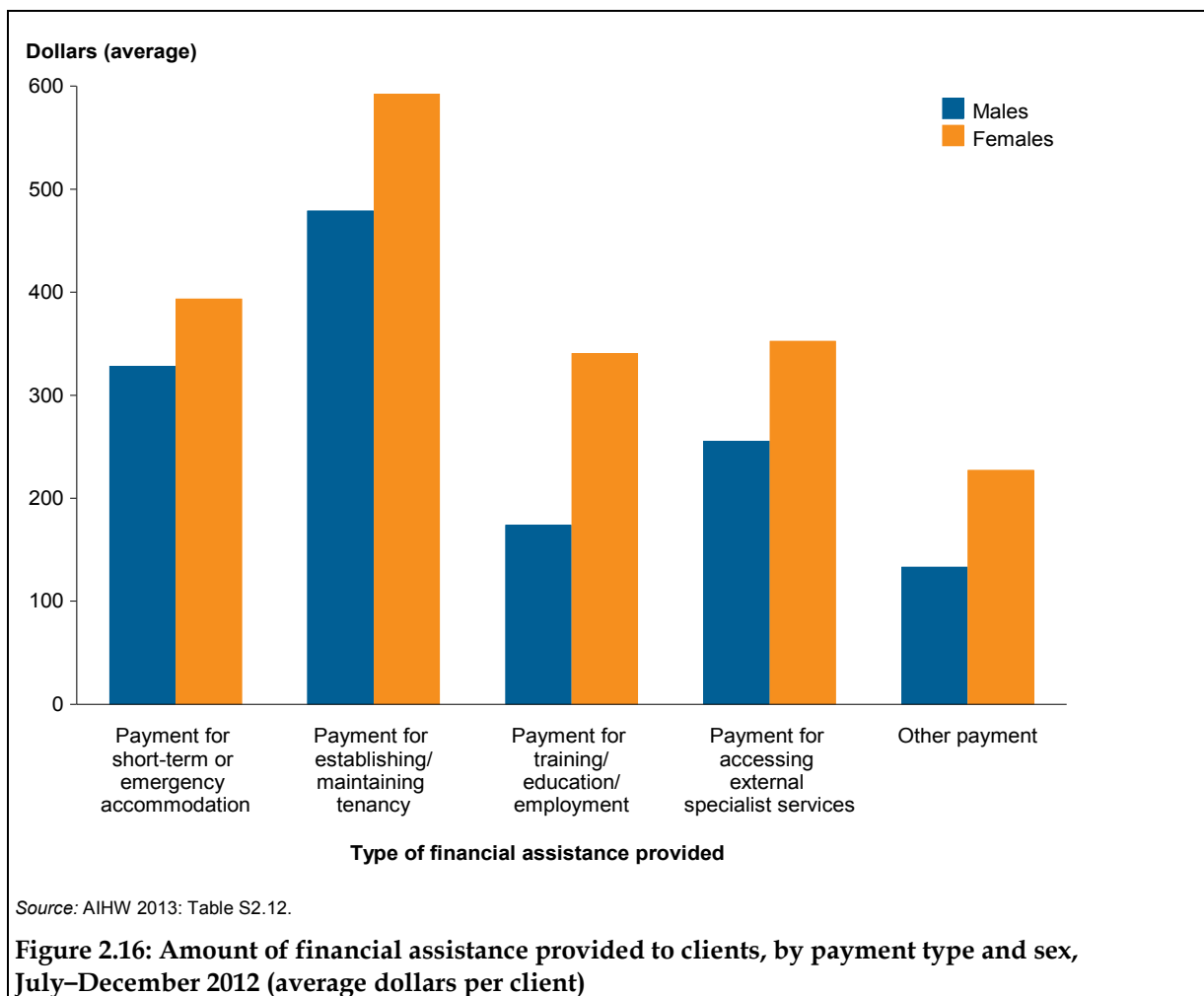
The financial assistance provided directly to clients by specialist homelessness agencies does not reflect all financial assistance by governments for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In some states and territories financial assistance is provided directly to people in need by state or territory departments, and many programs are delivered separately from homelessness services through housing-specific programs. New South Wales, for example, has a significant financial assistance program for those with emergency accommodation needs, which is provided directly by Housing NSW.

Between July–December 2012, almost \$12 million in financial assistance was provided to 31,052 clients (20% of all clients) by specialist homelessness agencies – an average of \$398 per client who received financial assistance (tables S2.11 and S2.12). Financial assistance does not include the cost of accommodation or other services provided directly by specialist homelessness agencies.

Financial assistance to establish or maintain a tenancy was the most frequent payment provided by agencies (to 9,969 clients), with more than \$5 million paid in total (an average of \$550 per client who received this type of assistance) (figures 2.15 and 2.16). Financial assistance for short-term or emergency accommodation (for example, in motels and hotels)

was paid to 9,132 clients (totalling more than \$3 million—an average of \$360 per client who was provided this assistance).

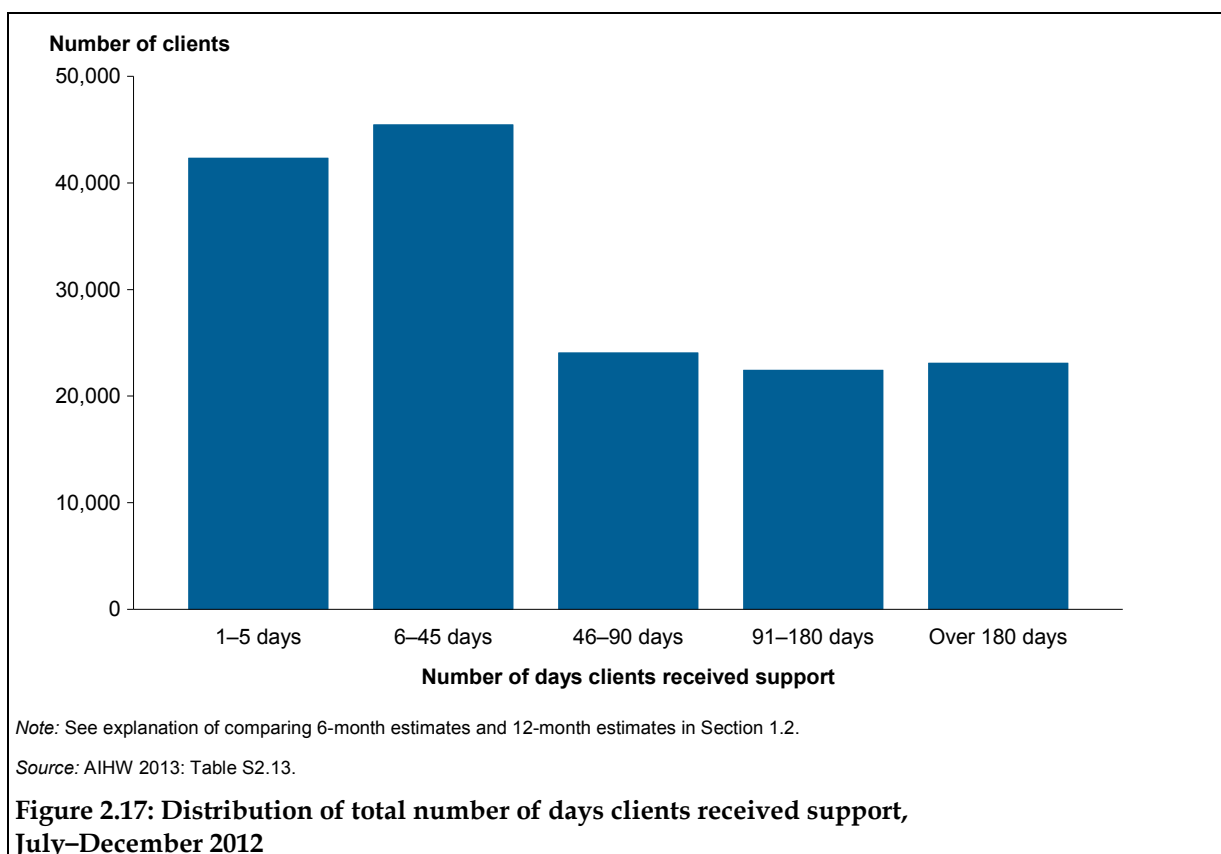




Total number of days clients received support

The total days of support clients received from specialist homelessness agencies varies greatly between individual clients. In the period July–December 2012, more than one-quarter (27%) of clients were supported by agencies for up to 5 days in total, and a similar proportion (29%) were supported for between 6 and 45 days (Figure 2.17). Fifteen per cent of clients were supported for the entire reporting period by one or more specialist homelessness agencies.

On average, clients were supported for a total of 65 days, with a median of 33 days of support. See Box 2.2 for an explanation of how days of support are calculated.



Case management plan status

For those clients who had a support period that closed in the reporting period, just over half (53%) had a case management plan in place during their period of support. The most common reason for not having a case management plan was that the service episode was too short (75% of those who did not have a case management plan); a further 13% of clients did not agree to have a case management plan (Table S2.18).

For clients who had an individual case management plan (and a closed support period), around one-quarter (26%) achieved all their case management goals and a further two-thirds (66%) achieved at least some of their goals. Eight per cent of clients achieved none of their case management goals.

Reasons support periods ended

For those clients whose period of support ended during the reporting period, the most common reason for ending support was that their immediate needs were met or they were able to achieve their case management goals (51% of clients with a closed support period). A further 27% of clients ended their support period as they no longer requested assistance (Table S2.19).

2.3 Client outcomes following support

The following section outlines changes that occurred in clients' housing situations and other circumstances (for example, income source, labour force status, participation in education) over the course of support. Box 2.3 outlines how client outcomes are measured in the SHSC.

Box 2.3 How client outcomes are measured in the SHSC

A client may have multiple support periods during the period and their circumstances may change over the course of support (for example, housing situation, labour force status).

Outcomes for a client are measured as the change in their circumstances between the beginning of their first support period that was active in the reporting period and the end of their last completed episode of support in the reporting period.

Client outcomes are reported only for clients who had closed support periods and did not have ongoing support at the end of the reporting period. Of all clients who received services during the reporting period, 65% had their support period closed during this time.

Housing outcomes

Table 2.1 shows clients' housing situations at the beginning of support compared to their situation at the end of support. The accommodation categories are described in Box 3.1 (pg. 25). Overall, 59% of clients with a closed support period were in housing (private, public or community) with tenure at the end of support. Half of all clients supported remained in public, community or private housing with tenure (48%).

Ten per cent of all clients with closed support periods were homeless at the beginning of support and were assisted into a house, townhouse or flat with tenure—2% were living without shelter or in an improvised or inadequate dwelling at the beginning of support, 5% were in short-term temporary accommodation, and 4% were in a house, townhouse or flat but with no tenure.

Many homeless clients remained in the same housing situation between the beginning of support and the end of support—6% of clients who had no shelter at the beginning of support remained without shelter at the end of support, 11% of clients started and finished their support in temporary accommodation throughout support and 9% of clients who were without tenure in a house, townhouse or flat at the beginning of support were in the same situation at the end of support.

Table 2.1: Clients in closed support periods, by housing situation at beginning and end of support, July–December 2012 (per cent)

Housing situation at beginning of support	Housing situation at end of support						Total
	Homeless			Not homeless			
	No shelter, improvised or inadequate dwelling	Short-term temporary accommodation	House, townhouse or flat with no tenure	Institutional setting	Public or community housing	House, townhouse or flat with tenure	
Homeless clients							
No shelter, or improvised or inadequate dwelling	6.5	2.3	0.5	0.1	0.9	1.1	11.4
Short-term temporary accommodation	0.4	11.5	0.6	0.2	2.4	2.2	17.2
House, townhouse or flat with no tenure	0.4	1.9	9.2	0.1	1.4	2.3	15.3
Clients at risk of homelessness							
Institutional settings	0.1	0.7	0.1	1.9	0.3	0.2	3.3
Public or community housing	0.1	0.8	0.3	0.0	14.0	0.7	16.0
Private or other housing (owner or renter)	0.4	2.3	1.0	0.1	1.7	31.4	36.9
Total	7.7	19.5	11.8	2.4	20.7	37.9	100.0

Note: Excludes clients for whom sufficient housing information wasn't available at the beginning and end of support.

Source: Table S2.12.

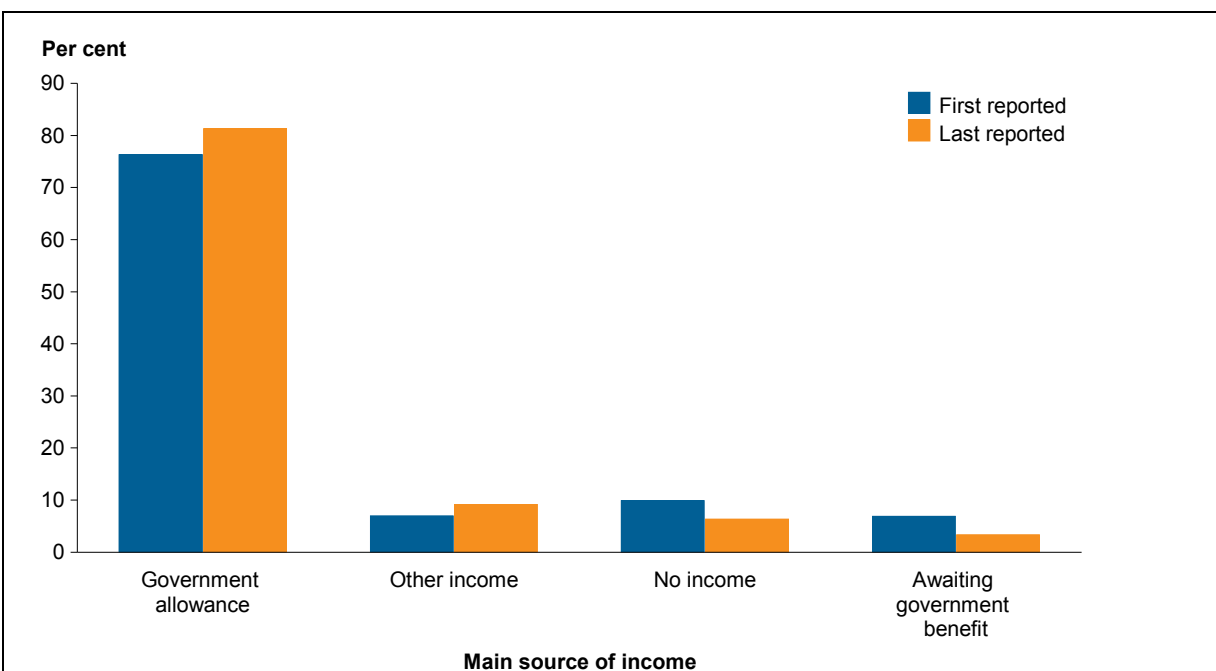
Other outcomes for clients

Main source of income

Most clients aged 15 and over (85%) were receiving, or awaiting their first payment of, some form of government payment at the beginning of their first support period that was active in July–December 2012 (Table S2.15). One-quarter of all clients aged 15 and over were on Newstart Allowance (25%), followed by Parenting Payment (22%) and Disability Support Pension (19%).

For clients with a closed support period there was little overall change in the profile of clients when comparing their main source of income between the beginning and the end of support. There was a reduction in clients with no income by 1 percentage point, and a 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of clients who were receiving income as an employee.

There were slight improvements for those clients with a closed support period who identified a need for assistance to obtain/maintain a government allowance or employment assistance. Fewer of these clients had no income (6% compared to 10% when first presenting), and slightly more were receiving a government payment (85% compared to 83% when first presenting) or were receiving income as an employee (8% compared to 6% when first presenting) (Figure 2.18).



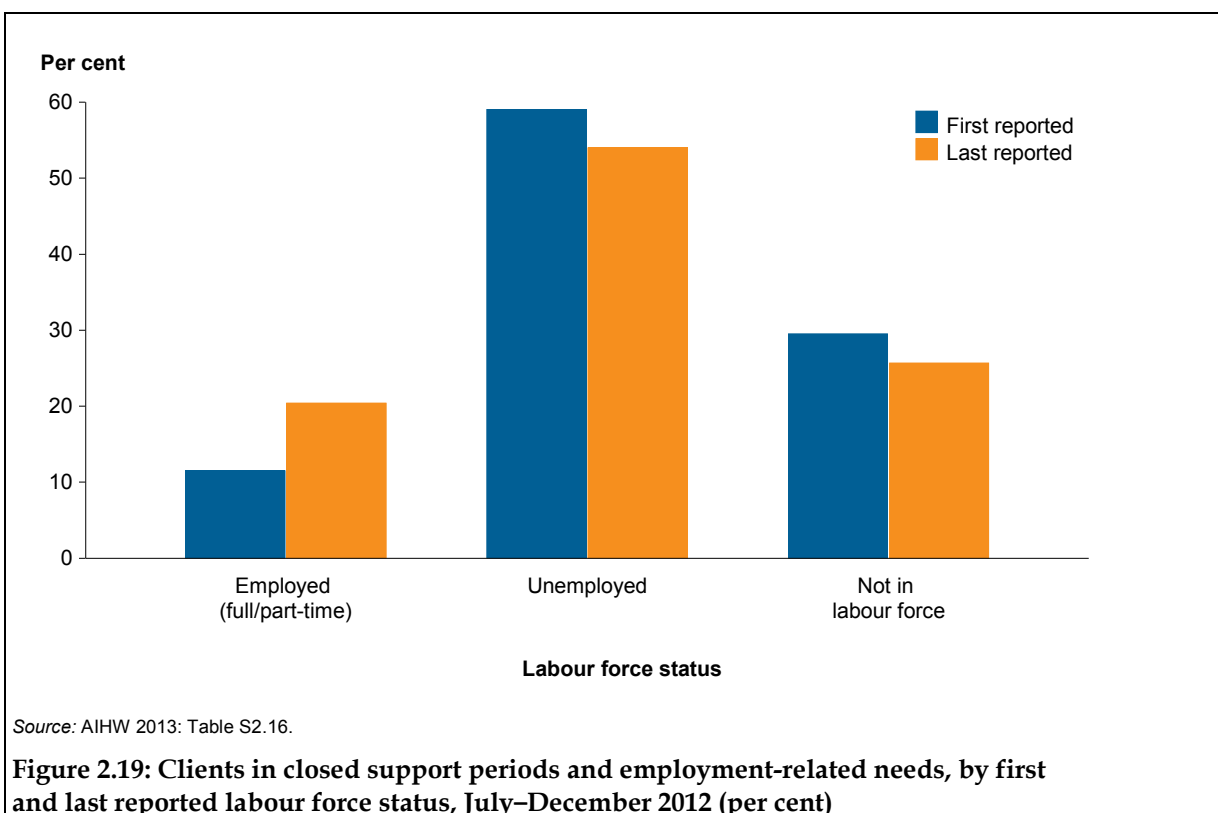
Source: AIHW 2013: Table S2.15.

Figure 2.18: Clients in closed support periods and with an income related need, by first and last reported main source of income, July–December 2012

Labour force participation

The majority of clients were either not in the labour force (49%) or unemployed (40%) when they first presented to a specialist homelessness agency in the period July–December 2012. Eleven per cent were employed, of whom 3% were employed full-time (Table S2.16).

Overall, the profile of clients with a closed support period changed little from when they first presented to the end of support. The proportion of clients who were unemployed reduced by 2 percentage points, and the proportion employed part-time increased by 1 percentage point. Clients with closed support periods and an identified need for employment-related assistance showed better improvement, with one-fifth (20%) of clients employed at the end of support compared to 12% when first presenting to an agency (Figure 2.19). Part-time employment rose from 8% to 13% and full-time employment from 3% to 6%.

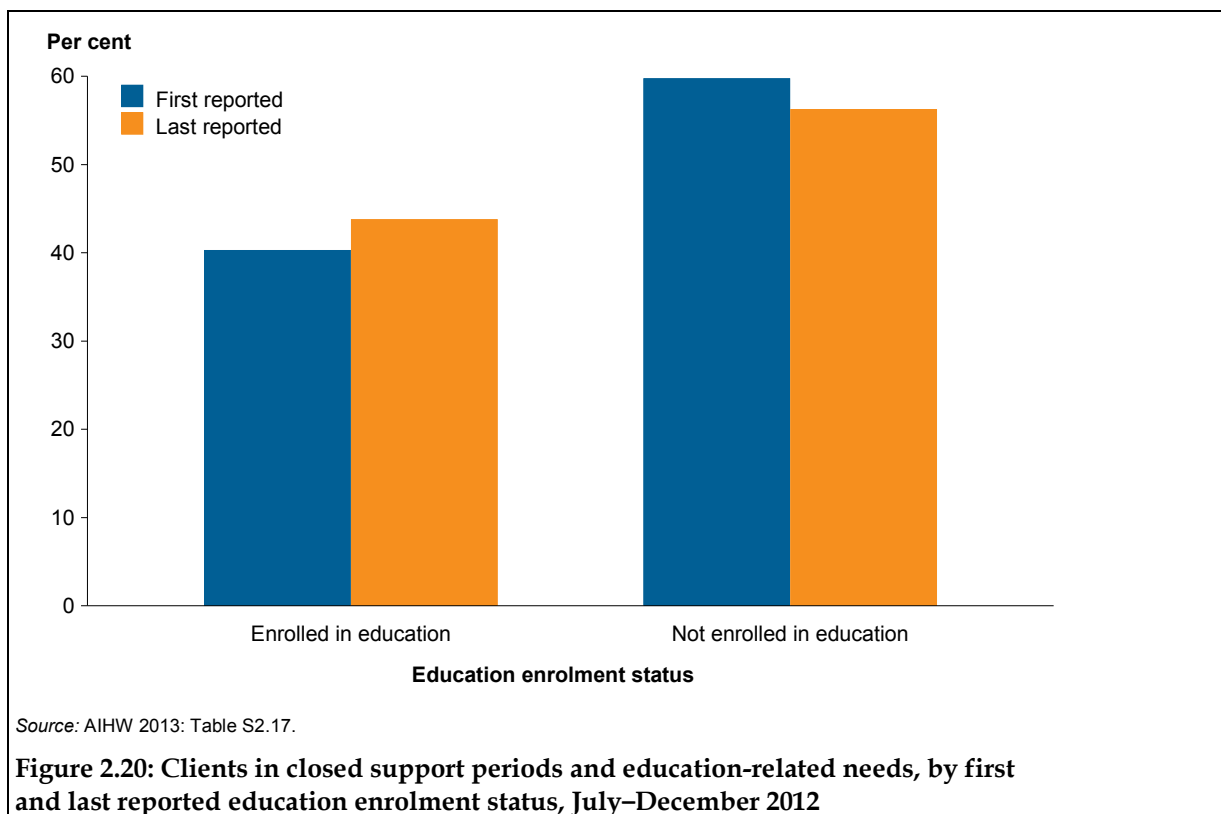


Participation in education or training

Nineteen per cent of clients were enrolled in some form of education or training when they first presented to an agency in the period July–December 2012. Children attending primary school accounted for 34% of clients enrolled in education or training, and those attending secondary school accounted for 31% (Table S2.17).

For clients with a closed support period there was very little change in clients' education enrolment status, with slightly more being enrolled in education or training (19% compared to 17% when first presenting to an agency).

An estimated 40% of clients with a closed support period who had a need for assistance related to education were enrolled in education or training when first presenting to an agency. Most of these clients were attending secondary school (20%), primary school (10%) or vocational education or training (5%). There was a small overall improvement in the proportion of those in educational enrolment, rising from 40% when first presenting to an agency to 44% at the end of support (Figure 2.20).



3 Homeless and at-risk clients

In addition to supporting clients who are homeless, a key aim of specialist homelessness services is to prevent homelessness from occurring among those who find themselves at imminent risk of becoming homeless (for example, because of financial difficulties or family violence).

This chapter examines the differences between those who were already homeless at the beginning of their first active support period between July and December 2012, and those who were not homeless when they first presented. The characteristics of clients are compared, along with their reasons for seeking assistance and their housing outcomes.

For these analyses, clients are identified as being homeless or at risk based on their housing characteristics at the beginning of their first support period that was active in the reporting period. The housing characteristics examined to determine homelessness status are: dwelling type, tenure type and conditions of occupancy associated with their accommodation. Further information on how homelessness and at-risk status is derived and reported is provided in Box 3.1. It should be noted that clients who were identified as being at risk may have experienced homelessness in the past, and may have become homeless at a later stage in the reporting period.

Among the estimated 157,236 clients who received assistance from specialist homelessness services in the period July–December 2012, 47% were homeless and 53% were at risk of homelessness at first presentation (based on those clients whose housing situation could be assessed) (Table S3.3). Among those who were at risk at the beginning of their support, 10% went on to experience homelessness during their period of support, so in total, 53% of clients experienced at least one episode of homelessness at some time during the reporting period. Four per cent of clients experienced a repeat episode of homelessness during the 6-month reporting period.

Box 3.1: How homeless and at-risk status is derived in the SHSC

Homeless and at-risk status for clients is determined by information reported about the client's dwelling type, housing tenure and their conditions of occupancy relating to their accommodation at the beginning of their first support period in the reporting period (which may have begun before the reporting period).

Homeless

A client in the SHSC is considered 'homeless' if their housing situation was any of the following:

Without shelter: dwelling type is no dwelling/street/park/in the open or motor vehicle.

Improvised shelter: dwelling type is improvised building/dwelling.

Inadequate accommodation:

Inadequate caravan: dwelling type is caravan, *or* dwelling type is not caravan but tenure type is renting or living rent-free in a caravan park.

Inadequate other: dwelling type is tent, cabin or boat.

(continued)

Box 3.1 (continued): How homeless and at-risk status is derived in the SHSC

Short-term temporary accommodation:

Short-term temporary boarding: dwelling type is boarding/rooming house, *or* dwelling type is not boarding house *and* tenure type is renting or living rent-free in boarding/rooming house.

Short-term temporary supported: dwelling type is supported accommodation *or* dwelling type is not supported accommodation *or* hotel/motel/bed and breakfast *and* tenure type is renting or living rent-free in supported accommodation or transitional housing.

Other temporary lodgings: dwelling type is hotel/motel/bed and breakfast.

Couch surfing:

Couch surfing: dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat *and* conditions of occupancy are couch surfing.

No tenure (not otherwise classified): dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat *and* tenure type is no tenure and conditions of occupancy is not couch surfer.

At risk

All other clients are considered to be at risk of homelessness. A client in the SHSC is considered 'at risk' if their housing situation was any of the following:

Public and community housing include the following:

Renter: dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat *and* tenure type is renter-public housing/renter-community housing.

Rent free: dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat *and* tenure type is rent-free public housing/community housing.

Private or other housing includes the following:

Renter/owner: dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat *and* tenure type is renter-private housing, life tenure scheme/owner-shared equity or rent/buy scheme/owner-being purchased/with mortgage/owner-fully owned.

Rent free: dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat *and* tenure type is rent-free private/other housing.

Institutional settings includes the following:

Care: dwelling type is hospital, psychiatric hospital/unit, disability support, rehabilitation, or boarding school/residential college.

Custodial: dwelling type is adult/youth/juvenile justice correctional centre/immigration detention centre.

Clients who did not report sufficient information to assess their homelessness status are excluded from these analyses.

The homeless status categories outlined above align closely with the ABS statistical definition of homelessness (ABS 2012c); however, there are some key areas where alignment cannot occur, such as identifying people living in severely crowded dwellings. People in this situation may be recorded in other categories if their circumstances allow.

Generally, clients who were at risk of homelessness were living in a house, townhouse or flat at the beginning of their first support period (83% of at-risk clients who provided sufficient information to determine homelessness status—26% were in public or community housing

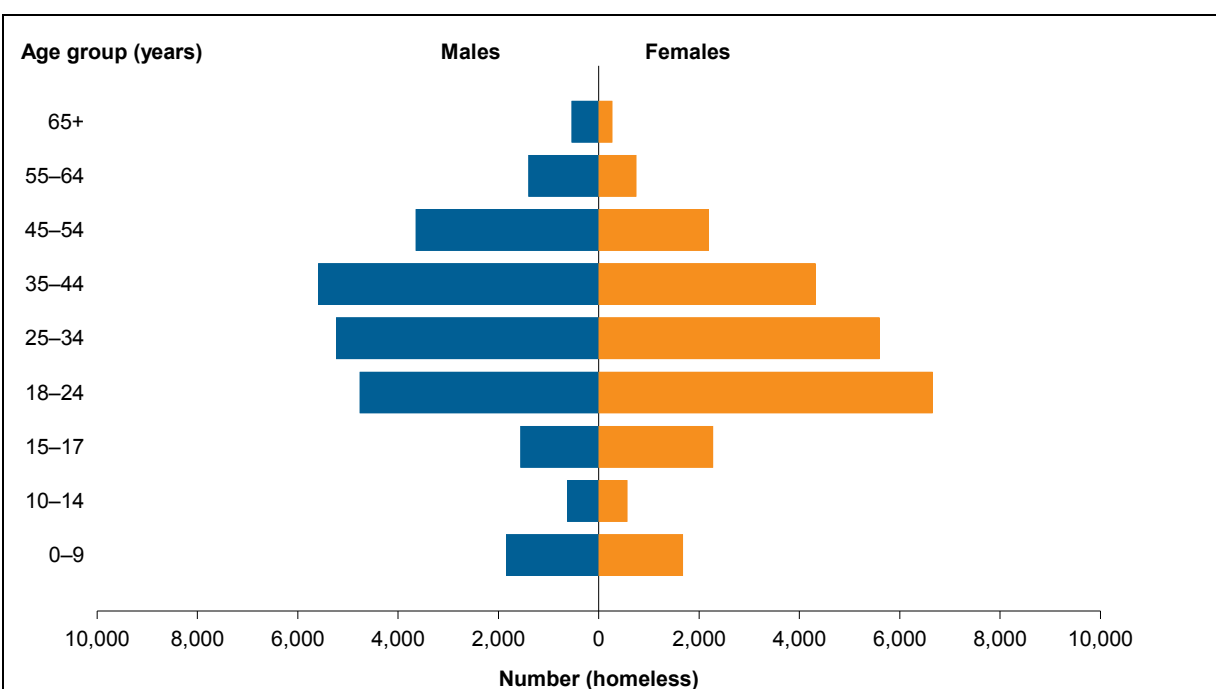
and 57% in private housing). One per cent of clients were living in an institutional setting (either a care or custodial setting), and the specific housing situation was not known for 16% (Table S3.3).

In contrast, clients who were homeless when they first started receiving assistance from a specialist homelessness agency reported a range of different accommodation situations. On presentation, the most common accommodation arrangement for those who were homeless was living in a house/townhouse/flat with no tenure or couch surfing (33% of homeless clients), followed by living in short-term temporary accommodation (25%); 22% were living with no shelter or in an improvised or inadequate dwelling, and the specific housing situation was unknown for 21% of homeless clients (Table S3.3).

3.1 Characteristics of clients

Roughly equal numbers of male and female clients were homeless at the beginning of their first support period (51% were male and 49% were female). However, females represented the majority of those who were at risk (69% of at-risk were female, 31% were male).

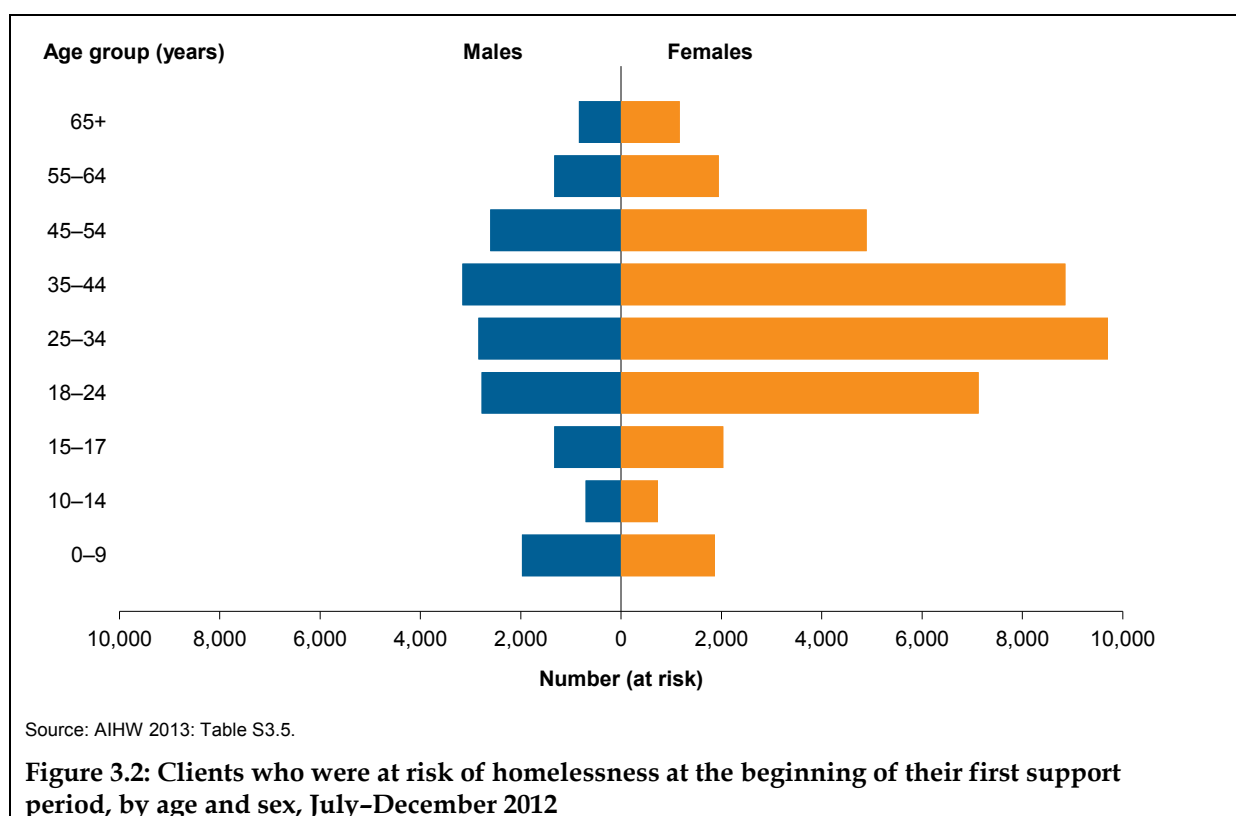
Among those who were homeless when they first began receiving support, there were similar numbers of boys and girls aged under 15, but females made up the major proportion of homeless clients in the 15 to 34 age groups, and males represented the majority in all older age groups (Figure 3.1).



Source: AIHW 2013: Table S3.4.

Figure 3.1: Clients who were homeless at the beginning of their first support period, by age and sex, July–December 2012

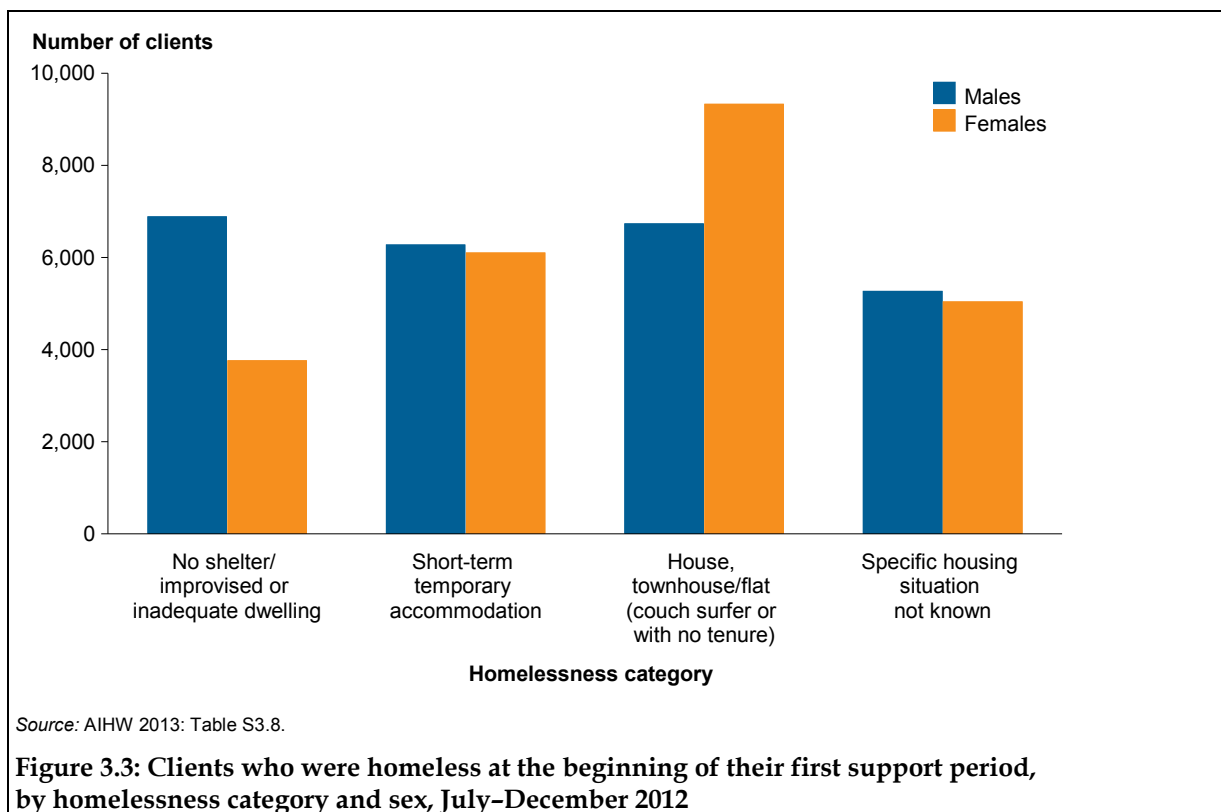
Among those who were at risk when they first began receiving support, there were similar numbers of boys and girls aged under 15, but there were greater numbers of females in all age groups 15 and over, particularly among those aged 18–44 (Figure 3.2).



Homeless males were much more likely than females to be sleeping with no shelter or in an improvised or inadequate dwelling (27% of male homeless clients compared to 16% of female homeless clients) (Figure 3.3).

Homeless females were more likely than homeless males to be living in a house/townhouse/flat, temporarily with other households, couch surfing or otherwise without tenure (38% of homeless female clients, compared to 27% of homeless males). Homeless males and females had a similar likelihood of being in short-term temporary accommodation when they first began receiving assistance (25% of both homeless male and female clients).

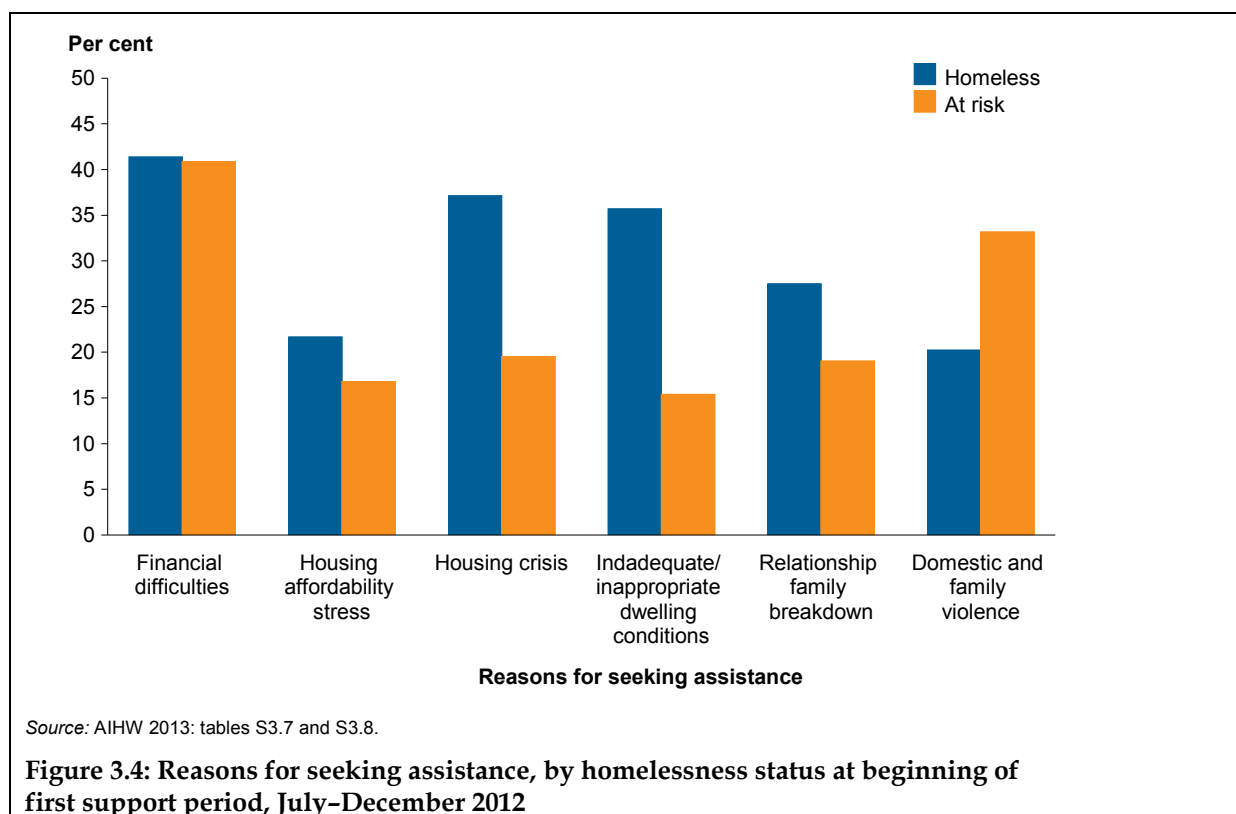
There were also significant differences between the two groups in their past experiences of homelessness. Nearly two-thirds of people (64%) who were homeless at the beginning of support reported that they had had a previous episode of homelessness in the past 12 months, compared to 16% of clients who were at risk (Table S3.6).



Reasons for seeking assistance

When comparing reasons for seeking assistance, those who were homeless at the beginning of their first support period in the reporting period generally indicated many more reasons for seeking assistance, compared with those who were at risk at their first presentation. Each of the top 6 reasons for seeking assistance were reported by more than one-quarter of all homeless clients (Figure 3.4). For those at risk, only two main reasons were reported by more than one-quarter of clients ('financial difficulties' and 'domestic and family violence').

At-risk clients were less likely than homeless clients to seek assistance for 'mental health issues' (10%, compared with 18% for homeless clients), 'unemployment' (7%, compared with 13%), and for 'inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions' (15%, compared with 36% for homeless clients). One-third (33%) of clients at risk of homelessness required support due to domestic and family violence; at-risk clients were substantially more likely to need support for this reason than homeless clients (20%).



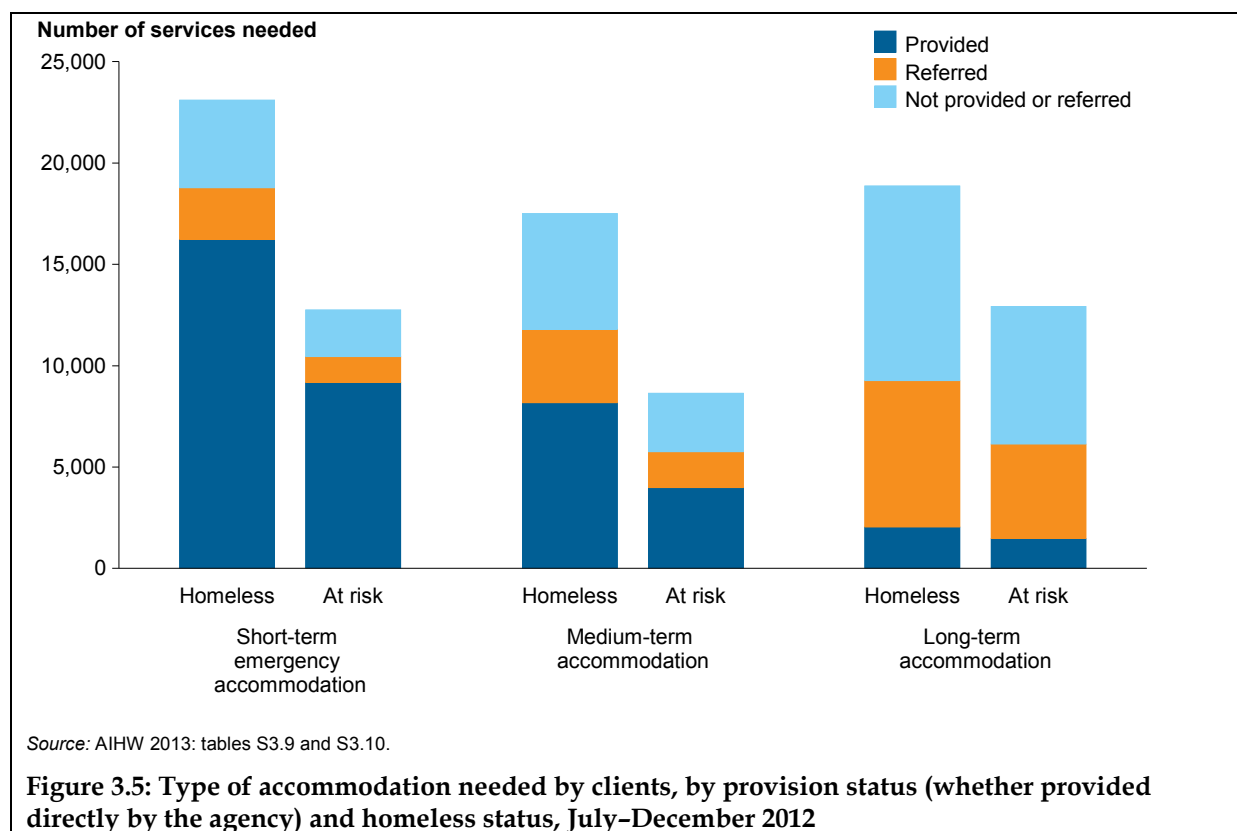
3.2 Need for assistance and services provided

Clients who were homeless when they first presented in the reporting period were more likely to need accommodation compared to those at risk (72% of homeless clients compared to 41% of at-risk clients). This is consistent across all types of accommodation, with more homeless clients than at-risk clients reported as needing assistance across all three categories of accommodation (short-term/emergency, medium-term/transitional, and long-term housing) (tables S3.9 and S3.10).

Short-term emergency accommodation was the type of accommodation most needed by homeless people (47%, compared to 23% for clients who were at risk of homelessness); homeless clients also recorded relatively high needs in relation to other types of accommodation (36% needed medium-term or transitional housing and 38% needed long-term housing). For clients at risk of homelessness, short-term or emergency accommodation needs were recorded in similar numbers to needs related to securing long-term housing (23% each); medium-term accommodation was needed by 16% of at-risk clients.

Both homeless clients and those at risk of homelessness who identified a need for accommodation had a similar likelihood of being provided accommodation within each category. Short-term accommodation was provided to 70% of those homeless clients who identified a need for this compared to 72% of those at risk; medium-term accommodation was provided to 47% of homeless clients who identified a need for this type of accommodation compared to 46% of those at risk; and long-term accommodation was provided to 11% of clients within both groups who identified this need (Figure 3.5). Agencies' decisions to accommodate clients will depend on factors such as: their agency's capacity to provide accommodation directly, other support needs of the client, and other circumstances of the client (for example, their current accommodation situation and other

accommodation options available to the client, and whether the client is part of a family group with children).



Similar proportions of clients who were homeless or at risk were identified as needing at least one general service (94% of homeless clients and 93% of at-risk clients). However, looking across all specific types of general support services, greater proportions of homeless clients were identified as needing these services when compared to those at risk apart from needs relating to ‘court support’ and ‘legal information’, which were needed slightly more often by people at risk of homelessness than homeless clients. Homeless clients were particularly more likely to need, at some stage during their support, basic services such ‘laundry/shower facilities’, ‘meals’, ‘transport’ and ‘other basic assistance’.

Overall, clients who were homeless and those at risk had similar needs for specialised services, although needs for specific specialised services were more likely to be recorded for slightly higher proportions of homeless clients than at risk clients in relation to most specialised service types. The greatest difference occurred in relation to ‘assistance for domestic/family violence’ which was needed by 26% of those at risk and 13% of those who were homeless. This was also the specialised service need most commonly identified for at-risk clients. The specialised service most needed by both homeless and at risk clients was ‘health and medical services’. Homeless clients were nearly twice as likely to require this service as at-risk clients; 15% of homeless clients compared with 8% of at risk clients who identified this as a need.

3.3 Housing outcomes following support

In this section, the housing outcomes achieved for clients who were homeless when they first began receiving support in the reporting period are described, along with outcomes achieved for clients who were at risk. For the purposes of reporting outcomes, only those clients who have a closed support period are included in the analysis. Information about how client outcomes are measured in the SHSC is provided in Box 2.3.

Housing outcomes for homeless clients

Among clients who were homeless at the beginning of their first support period that was active in the reporting period and who had a closed support period, most remained homeless at the end of support (although their particular housing situation may have improved). Nearly one-quarter of homeless clients (23%) were in private, public, or community housing at the end of support; the remaining 1% were in an institutional setting at the end of their support (Table 3.1).

Among those homeless clients with closed support periods who began support with no shelter or who were staying in an improvised or inadequate dwelling (26% of homeless clients), and where their housing situation could be assessed at the beginning and end of support, 57% remained in that situation at the end of support. Twenty per cent were in short-term temporary accommodation at the end of support, 5% were staying with other households, couch surfing or in a house/townhouse/flat with no tenure, and 17% were in private or social housing (Table S3.12).

Table 3.1: Clients in closed support periods who were homeless at the beginning of their first support period, by housing situation at beginning and end of support, July–December 2012

Housing situation	At beginning of first support period (per cent)	At end of support (per cent)	Percentage point change
Homeless			
No shelter, improvised or inadequate dwelling	25.9	16.5	-9.4
Short-term temporary accommodation	39.3	35.8	-3.5
House, townhouse or flat—as couch surfer or with no tenure	34.8	23.7	-11.2
Not homeless			
Institutional setting	..	0.9	+0.9
Public or community housing—renter/rent-free	..	10.6	+10.6
Private or other housing—owner/ renter/rent-free	..	12.6	+12.6
Total	100.0	100.0	..

Note: Excludes clients for whom sufficient housing information wasn't available at the beginning and end of support.

Source: AIHW 2012: Tables3.12.

Housing outcomes for at-risk clients

For clients who were at risk of homelessness at the beginning of their first support period and who had a closed support period, 86% were not homeless at the end of their support, and a further 4% were in an institutional setting (which can include care and custodial settings) (Table 3.2). The remaining 10% had become homeless.

Of the 66% of clients who were at risk (provided sufficient information was available to assess their housing situation at the beginning and end of support) and who were living in a private dwelling (either renting, purchasing or living rent-free) at the beginning of support, 85% remained in private housing at the end of their support, 5% had moved into social housing, and 10% were homeless at the end of support (3% in a house/townhouse/flat as a couch surfer or with no tenure, 5% in supported accommodation, 2% on other temporary accommodation, and 1% with no shelter or in an improvised or inadequate dwelling (Table S3.12).

Similar proportions of clients who were at risk at the beginning of their first support period in the reporting period were living in social housing at the beginning and end of support (28% at the beginning and 29% at the end) (Table 3.2). Of the 28% in social housing at the beginning of support, 88% remained in social housing at the end of support, 5% were in private housing, and 8% had become homeless (4% in supported accommodation) (Table S3.12).

Overall, 7% of at-risk clients were in supported accommodation or transitional housing at the end of support, and 1% were living without shelter or in an improvised or inadequate dwelling (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Clients in closed support periods who were at risk of homelessness at the beginning of their first support period, by housing situation at beginning and end of support, July–December 2012

Housing situation	At beginning of first support period (per cent)	At end of support (per cent)	Percentage point change
At risk/not homeless			
Private or other housing—owner/ renter/rent-free	65.7	57.7	–8.0
Public or community housing—renter/rent-free	28.5	28.6	+0.1
Institutional setting	5.8	3.6	–2.2
Homeless			
House, townhouse or flat—as couch surfer or with no tenure	..	2.5	+2.5
Short-term temporary accommodation	..	6.7	+6.7
No shelter, improvised or inadequate dwelling	..	0.9	+0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	..

Note: Excludes clients for whom sufficient housing information wasn't available at the beginning and end of support.

Source: AIHW 2012: Table S3.12.

Appendix A

Data quality statement: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, July–December 2012

Summary of key data quality issues

- All agencies that receive funding under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) or the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) to provide specialist homelessness services are in scope for the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) in general, but only those that received funding for at least 2 months during the July–December 2012 period are in scope for this reporting period. Covered agencies are those in scope agencies for which details have been provided to the AIHW by the relevant state/territory department.
- 90% of covered agencies (1,489 agencies) returned support period data for July–December 2012, although many did not return data for all 6 months.
- The rate of invalid/‘don’t know’/missing responses was high for some data items, and some other data quality issues are evident in some data items.
- Matching of data from individual clients who presented at different agencies and/or at different times requires a valid statistical linkage key (SLK). Ninety-four per cent of support periods had a valid SLK in the reporting period.

Description

The SHSC collects information about people who receive specialist homelessness services. The agencies that participate are funded by state and territory governments under the NAHA or the NPAH to support people who are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness. A limited amount of data is also collected about clients who seek, but do not receive, assistance from a specialist homelessness agency.

Data are collected monthly from agencies participating in the collection.

Institutional environment

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is a major national agency set up by the Australian Government under the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987* to provide reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. It is an independent statutory authority established in 1987, governed by a management Board and accountable to the Australian Parliament through the Health and Ageing portfolio.

The AIHW aims to provide authoritative information and statistics to promote better health and wellbeing. The Institute collects and reports information on a wide range of topics and issues, ranging from health and welfare expenditure, hospitals, disease and injury, and mental health, to ageing, homelessness, disability and child protection.

The Institute also plays a role in developing and maintaining national metadata standards. This work contributes to improving the quality and consistency of national health and welfare statistics. The Institute works closely with governments and non-government

organisations to achieve greater adherence to these standards in administrative data collections to promote national consistency and comparability of data and reporting.

One of the main functions of the AIHW is to work with the states and territories to improve the quality of administrative data and, where possible, to compile national data sets based on data from each jurisdiction, to analyse these data sets and disseminate information and statistics.

The *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*, in conjunction with compliance to the *Privacy Act 1988*, ensures that the data collections managed by the AIHW are kept securely and under the strictest conditions with respect to privacy and confidentiality.

For further information see the AIHW website <www.aihw.gov.au>.

The SHSC was developed by AIHW in conjunction with the states and territories and is administered by the AIHW.

Timeliness

The SHSC began on 1 July 2011. Under the collection guidelines, specialist homelessness agencies provide their data to the AIHW each month, although delays in the provision of data from agencies do occur. Once validated, submitted data are regularly loaded to a master database. From this master database 'snapshots' are created at particular points in time for reporting purposes.

The July–December 2012 snapshot contains data submitted to the AIHW for the July to December 2012 collection months, using responses received and validated as at 25 March 2013.

Accessibility

Published results for July–December 2012 are available in this report and elsewhere on the AIHW website. Annual data for 2012–13 will also be published. Data not available online or in reports can be obtained from the Communications, Media and Marketing Unit on (02) 6244 1032 or via email to <info@aihw.gov.au>. Data requests are charged on a cost-recovery basis.

Interpretability

Information on the development of the SHSC, definitions and concepts, and collection materials, manuals and processes can be found on the AIHW website, <www.aihw.gov.au>.

Relevance

Scope and coverage—agencies

The SHSC collects information about people who seek and receive services from specialist homelessness agencies. All agencies that receive funding under the NAHA or NPAH to provide specialist homelessness services are in scope for the SHSC in general, but only those who received funding for at least 2 months during the July–December 2012 period are in scope for this reporting period. Agencies that are in coverage are those in-scope agencies for which details have been provided to the AIHW by the relevant state/territory department.

Of all agencies expected to participate in the collection in at least 1 month during the reporting period, 90% submitted information for all 6 collection months and 97% submitted data for at least 1 month.

Note that scope and coverage were defined differently in some previous SHSC reports (for example, AIHW 2012b, 2012e), which means that there are some comparability issues between data presented in this report and in those reports.

Scope and coverage—clients

The SHSC collects information about clients of specialist homelessness agencies—that is, people who receive assistance aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. In addition, some information is also collected about unassisted people—that is, any person who seeks services from a specialist homelessness agency and does not receive any services at that time.

Not everyone in scope for the SHSC is homeless, because specialist homelessness agencies provide services to people at risk of homelessness, as well as to people who are currently homeless.

Not all homeless people and people at risk of homelessness are in scope for the SHSC—only those who seek services from specialist homelessness agencies are in scope.

Data about clients are submitted based on support periods—a period of support provided by a specialist homelessness service agency to a client. Information about clients is then linked together based on an SLK (see ‘Statistical Linkage Key (SLK) validity’ below).

A client may be of any age. Children are clients if they receive specialist homelessness assistance.

Reference period

The reporting period refers to data for July to December 2012 inclusive. It includes data about clients (and the assistance they received) who had an active support period in a covered agency at any time in that period, and unassisted people who sought services in a covered agency at any time in that period.

Geographic detail

Data are published at the national and state/territory level primarily, with some data presented by remoteness area types. Where data are presented by remoteness area in the report, agencies participating in the SHSC were assigned to a Remoteness Area (as defined by the ABS based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Indicator Australia (ARIA) and their recorded Local Government Area (LGA) code.

Statistical standards

Standard Australian Classification of Countries 2008 (ABS 2008) codes were used as the code-frame for questions relating to country of birth.

Australian Classification for Source of Income 2010 (ABS 2010) codes were used as the code-frame for questions relating to a client’s source of income.

Accuracy

Potential sources of error

As with all data collections, the SHSC estimates are subject to error. These can arise from data coding and processing errors, inaccurate data or missing data. Reported findings are based on data reported by staff of specialist homelessness agencies.

Data validation

Data received by the AIHW generally go through two processes of data validation (error checking). Firstly, data validation is incorporated into the client management systems most agencies use to record their data. Secondly, data are submitted through the AIHW online reporting web portal, Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting (SHOR). SHOR completes a more thorough data validation and reports (to staff of the homelessness agency) any errors that need correcting before data can be accepted.

Statistical Linkage Key validity

An individual client may seek or receive support on more than one occasion – either from the same agency at different times or from a different agency. Data from individual clients who presented at different agencies and/or at different times are matched based on a statistical linkage key (SLK) that allows client level data to be created. The SLK is constructed from information about the client's date of birth and sex and an alphacode based on selected letters of their name.

If a support period record does not have a valid SLK, it cannot be linked to a client, and thus it is not included in client-level tables (although it is included in support period-level tables). Ninety-four per cent of support periods had a valid SLK in this reporting period.

Incomplete responses

In many support periods in this reporting period, valid responses were not recorded for all questions – invalid responses were recorded, 'don't know' was selected, or no response was recorded. For example:

- 'Facilities/institutions the client has been in in the last 12 months' and 'time period the client received assistance for their mental health issue' have the highest rates of invalid/'don't know'/missing response—54% and 53%, respectively.
- The 3 responses used to derive a client's 'homeless'/'at risk of homelessness' status (with their percentage of invalid responses) are:
 - dwelling type (at presentation) (28%)
 - dwelling type (last service date in the reporting period) (28%)
 - tenure (at presentation) (34%)
 - tenure (last service date in the reporting period) (33%)
 - condition of occupancy (at presentation) (35%)
 - condition of occupancy (last service date in the reporting period) (34%)
- 'main reason for seeking assistance' has an invalid/missing/don't know response rate of 17%.

Support periods with invalid/'don't know'/missing responses were retained in the collection and no attempt was made to deduce or impute the true value of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses. Some data items with very high rates of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses are not reported on in this publication.

Non-response bias

Less than 100% agency participation, less than 100% SLK validity and a high rate of incomplete responses do not necessarily mean that estimates are biased. If the non-respondents are not systematically different in terms of how they would have answered the

questions, then there is no bias. Given the results of analyses of agency participation, SLK validity and incomplete responses performed to date, some non-response bias is expected.

Imputation

An imputation strategy was developed to correct for 2 types of non-sampling error: agency non-response and data error in the SLK data item, which is used to link information about individual clients together to provide a complete picture for that client.

This strategy has two parts. The first deals with agency non-response by using implicit imputation and results in agency weights. The second part deals with the impact of invalid statistical linkage keys on the total number of clients and results in client weights.

Agencies that were out of scope for 5 months in the reporting period were deemed to be out of scope for the whole period and excluded from all calculations.

Further information about the imputation strategy is available in Appendix B.

Coherence

The SHSC replaces the SAAP NDC, which began in 1996. The SHSC differs from the SAAP NDC in many respects.

The major definitional differences between the SAAP and the SHSC relate to the capture of information about children and support. In the SAAP NDC, children who accompanied a parent or guardian were counted as accompanying children (with only limited information collected); in the SHSC, children are included as clients (in their own right) if they directly received a service. In the SAAP NDC, support was considered to entail generally 1 hour or more of a worker's time; in the SHSC no time-related condition exists. Further information on the comparability of the SHSC and the SAAP can be found in AIHW (2012b).

Comparison with other collections

The other major data sources on homelessness are outlined below. Because these collections differ greatly from the SHSC in scope, collection methodology, definitions and reference periods, comparisons between collections should be made with caution.

Census of Population and Housing (ABS)

The ABS Census collects data from all persons in Australia on Census night, including data allowing respondents' homelessness status to be derived. The ABS considers a person to be homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives and if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate, or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations (ABS 2012e, p.7)

In addition, the ABS recognises some groups of people who are marginally housed and are likely to be at risk of homelessness. These are: people living in people living in other crowded dwellings, people in other improvised dwellings, and people who are marginally housed in caravan parks (ABS 2012e).

The characteristic of homelessness is derived using a number of variables available from Census data (ABS 2012f). Estimates based on the 2001, 2006 and 2011 census are currently available (ABS 2012c, 2012d).

Previously, estimates of homelessness based on Census of Population and Housing data (and supplemented by other data sources) were undertaken by Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2008). Those estimates were based on the 'cultural' definition that identifies minimum housing standards developed by Chamberlain & MacKenzie, in three homelessness categories:

- primary homelessness: includes all people without conventional accommodation.
- secondary homelessness: includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, including all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided by specialist homelessness services; people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own; and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis.
- tertiary homelessness: refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium- to long-term basis (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008).

Estimates based on these definitions are available for 2001 and 2006 only (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003, 2008).

General Social Survey (ABS)

The ABS General Social Survey's homelessness module (ABS 2011) collects data from usual residents of private dwellings, including data on whether respondents have ever been homeless. The survey defines homelessness as being without a permanent place to live for a selection of reasons. Data are currently available for 2010 only.

National Census of Homeless School Students

The National Census of Homeless School Students collected data on homeless school students via principals of all government and Catholic secondary schools (Mackenzie & Chamberlain 2008). Both the cultural definition of homelessness and a service delivery definition are used. Data are currently available for 2006 and selected earlier years.

Appendix B

Imputation strategy for the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2012–13

This appendix describes the methodology applied to the SHSC 2012–13 data in an effort to reduce errors caused by agency non-response and invalid or missing statistical linkage key (SLK) information in support period records.

An imputation strategy for the collection was required to correct for 2 types of non-sampling error: agency non-response and data error in the SLK key data item, which is used to link information about individual clients together to provide a complete picture for that client.

This strategy has two parts. The first deals with agency non-response by using implicit imputation and results in agency weights. The second part deals with the impact of invalid statistical linkage keys on the total number of clients and results in client weights.

Imputation for agency non-response

This part of the imputation strategy dealt with the bias caused to estimates by agency non-response by implicitly imputing data for support periods.

For an agency to qualify for imputation it must have been in scope for part or all of the reference period and:

- have not reported any data for the reference period, or
- have provided data for less than 50% of the time spent in scope during the reference period.

Qualifying non-responding agencies were placed into imputation classes defined by jurisdiction, ARIA category and size, with size based on the average number of clients per month (<50, 50–<100, 100–<500, 500+). There were a number of qualifying agencies for whom size was unknown—the imputation classes for these units were defined by jurisdiction and Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) category.

A donor class was assigned to each imputation class. The donor class consisted of responding agencies (called donor agencies) that were considered likely to be similar to the non-responding agencies and was used to implicitly impute the data for the non-responding agencies. For an agency to be included in a donor class it must:

- have been in scope for the full reporting period, and
- have been a fully responding unit.

Imputation classes defined by jurisdiction, ARIA and size have donor classes with the same definition or, if necessary, using the closest neighbour.

Imputation classes defined by jurisdiction and ARIA have donor classes with the same jurisdiction and ARIA and size less than 100.

To impute for total non-response:

- The initial weight ($w_{i,1}$) was set as follows:
 - For agencies that were in scope for the whole reference period, $w_{i,1} = 1$.

- For agencies that were in scope for part of the reference period and:
 - did not require stage 2 imputation, $w_{i,1} = 1$
 - require stage 2 imputation, $w_{i,1} = \frac{\text{\# months in scope}}{12}$.
- For units that were out-of-scope for the whole reference period, $w_{i,1} = 0$.
- For each donor unit the final weight (w_i) was calculated by:

$$w_i = w_{i,1} + \sum_{d \in DG_i} \frac{\sum_{k \in K_d} \sum_{j \in (k \cap S2)} w_{j,1}}{\sum_{j \in (d \cap CR)} w_{j,1}}$$

where

- $w_{i,1}$ is the i^{th} agency's initial weight
- DG_i is the set of donor classes agency i belongs to
- K_d is the set of all imputation classes using donor class d
- $S2$ is the set of agencies subject to stage 2 imputation so $(k \cap S2)$ is the set of agencies in imputation class k subject to stage 2 imputation
- CR is the set of donor agencies so $(d \cap CR)$ is the set of donor agencies in donor class d .
- Each agency subject to imputation had its final weight (w_i) set to 0.

Note that agencies who were in-scope at any time during the reference period but did not contribute to stage 2 imputation have a final weight $w_i = 1$.

Imputation to adjust for invalid SLK data

This element of the strategy is required to reduce the impact of invalid SLK data on estimates of the number of clients receiving assistance. Weights will be calculated at the client level aiming to take into account both agency non-response and invalid SLKs.

Support periods (and hence clients) included in this imputation must:

- have been reported by an agency that has been in-scope for part or all of the reference period and have been open during the in-scope period, and
- not have been reported by an agency that has been imputed in the non-response imputation.

Imputation classes were defined by jurisdiction, ARIA category and size, with size based on the average number of clients per month (<50, 50–<100, 100–<500, 500+).

To impute for non-responding agencies and invalid SLKs:

- For each eligible support period in imputation class k an initial weight ($w_{j,2}$) was calculated as follows:

$$w_{j,2} = w_i \times \frac{N_{S,k}}{n_{S,v,k}}$$

where

- w_i is the final agency weight (see non-response imputation section above)
- $N_{S,k}$ is the number of support periods for which data was supplied in imputation class k
- $n_{S,v,k}$ is the number of support periods with a valid SLK in imputation class k .

- For each unique client (that is, valid SLK) observed in the eligible support periods, the final client weight (w_c) was calculated as follows:

$$w_c = \frac{1}{1 - \prod_{j=1}^{n_c} (1 - w_{c,j,2}^{-1})}$$

where

- w_c is the client weight
- $w_{c,j,2}$ is the j^{th} initial weight for client c
- n_c is the number of observed support periods for client c
- $\prod_{j=1}^{n_c}$ is the product over all support periods for client c .

Counting rules and glossary

The following concepts and terms have been used in this report. More detailed descriptions of data concepts can be found in the *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Manual* (AIHW 2012a).

age: Age is calculated as age of the client on the start date of their first support period of the reporting period or the first date of the reporting period, whichever is the later date.

conditions of occupancy: Refers to the security of a client's accommodation arrangement. Responses include:

- leased tenure – nominated on lease
- lease in place – not nominated on lease
- couch surfer
- boarder
- living with relative fee-free.

The information provided is usually analysed in conjunction with other housing information such as 'tenure type' and 'dwelling type' to determine the overall nature of a client's housing situation.

no tenure: A type of housing tenure recorded for clients who are sleeping rough or do not have a legal right to occupy a dwelling and may be asked to leave at any time.

It includes couch surfing, living in an institutional setting, living on the streets, sleeping in parks, or in improvised dwellings.

presenting unit (including family types): Presenting units are identified by a specific presenting unit id that may cover one client or a group of clients who present together to a specialist homelessness agency.

The type of presenting unit a client is classified into is determined by the presence of and relationship to other clients in the presenting unit.

A person (aged 15 and over) who presents by themselves to a specialist homelessness agency is classified as a single person.

Where two or more clients present together for services to a specialist homelessness agency, and they are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, they are classified into the relevant family type. Otherwise they are classified as 'Other unrelated group'.

The following presenting unit types have been identified through this analysis:

- single person – a person who presents by themselves to a specialist homelessness agency
- single person with child(ren) – a single parent/guardian with one or more child(ren), step child(ren), foster child(ren), niece/nephew, or grandchild(ren) only
- couple with child(ren) – a couple (spouse/partner) with one or more child(ren), step child(ren), foster child(ren), niece/nephew, or grandchild(ren) only
- couple without children – a couple (spouse/partner) only.
- other family – any other relationship that follows the definition of family above.

- other group – any group of people who present together to a specialist homelessness agency, where there are no family relationships between members of the presenting unit.

specialist homelessness service(s): Assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness.

The specialist homelessness services in scope for this collection have been grouped as follows:

- *Accommodation provision*
 - Short-term or emergency accommodation
 - Medium-term/transitional housing
 - Long-term housing
- *Assistance to sustain housing tenure*
 - Assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction
 - Assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears
- *Mental health*
 - Psychological services
 - Psychiatric services
 - Mental health services
- *Family*
 - Child protection services
 - Parenting skills education
 - Child-specific specialist counselling services
 - Pregnancy assistance
 - Family planning assistance
- *Disability*
 - Physical disability
 - Intellectual disability
- *Drug/alcohol*
 - Drug/alcohol counselling
- *Legal/financial services*
 - Professional legal services
 - Financial advice and counselling
 - Counselling for problem gambling
- *Immigration/cultural services*
 - Interpreter services
 - Assistance with immigration services
 - Culturally specific services
 - Assistance to connect culturally
- *Domestic violence services*
 - Assistance for domestic/family violence

- *Other specialist services*
 - Health/medical services
 - Specialist counselling services
 - Other specialised services
- *General services*
 - Assertive outreach
 - Assistance to obtain/maintain government allowance
 - Employment assistance
 - Training assistance
 - Educational assistance
 - Financial information
 - Material aid/brokerage
 - Assistance for incest/sexual assault
 - Family/relationship assistance
 - Assistance for trauma
 - Assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems
 - Living skills/personal development
 - Legal information
 - Court support
 - Advice/information
 - Retrieval/storage/removal of personal belongings
 - Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client
 - School liaison
 - Child care
 - Structured play/skills development
 - Child contact and residence arrangements
 - Meals
 - Laundry/shower facilities
 - Recreation
 - Transport
 - Other basic assistance

support period: The period of time a client receives services from an agency. A support period starts on the day the client first receives a service from an agency. A support period ends when any of the following conditions applies:

- the relationship between the client and the agency ends
- the client has reached the maximum amount of support the agency can offer
- a client has not received any services from the agency for a whole calendar month and there is no ongoing relationship.

Where a client has an appointment with the agency that is more than a calendar month in the future then it is not necessary to close the support period. This is because it is expected that there is an ongoing relationship with the client.

The end of the support period is the day the client last received services from an agency.

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Related publications

Other reports that present results from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection:

- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2012. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection: first results (September quarter 2011). Cat. no. HOU 262. Canberra: AIHW
- AIHW 2012. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection: December quarter 2011. Cat. no. HOU 263. Canberra: AIHW
- AIHW 2012. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection: March quarter 2012. Cat. no. HOU 265. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2012. Specialist Homelessness Services: 2011–12. Cat. No. HOU 267. Canberra: AIHW.

Details of other publications on homelessness produced by the AIHW, including reports from the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program National Data Collection can be found on the AIHW's website: <www.aihw.gov.au>.



Specialist homelessness agencies helped more than 157,000 clients and provided more than 3.6 million nights of accommodation in the 6 months from July to December 2012. Almost half of clients were already homeless at the beginning of their first support period and the rest were at risk of homelessness. The most common main reasons given for seeking assistance were related to domestic or family violence and financial difficulties.