Australian Government
Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

AIHW

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs inquiry into homelessness in Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs inquiry into homelessness in Australia. This submission highlights data available from AIHW that may be of relevance.

The AIHW is the leading health and welfare statistics agency in Australia and is regarded as an international leader in this sector. We improve the health and welfare of all Australians by providing information and statistics that can be trusted and used with confidence. Our high quality, independent evidence is used by many to improve policies and services on a range of health and welfare issues and topics, including homelessness and housing assistance.

We manage the following national housing and homelessness data collections on behalf of all state and territory governments:

- Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) National Minimum Data Set (NMDS): capturing information about people who are referred to, or seek assistance from, specialist homelessness services

- National Social Housing Survey (NSHS): capturing information on social housing tenants (including community housing tenants) and their social housing experiences

- Community Housing data collection: capturing information about community housing organisations, the dwellings they manage and the tenants assisted

- Indigenous Community Housing data collection: capturing information about Indigenous community housing organisations, the dwellings they manage and tenants assisted

- Public Housing and State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing data collections: capturing information about public housing and state-owned and managed Indigenous housing dwellings and the tenants assisted

- Home Purchase Assistance and Private Rent Assistance data sets capture state/territory financial assistance programs.

Findings from these collections are reported in a range of publications, including AIHW's homelessness services and housing assistance products, the Report on Government Services and the Council of Australian Governments' Performance Dashboard. Detailed data can be accessed via the data cubes and in the data tables in the Specialist Homelessness Services annual report. Customised data can be requested via our data on request service. Summary data pertinent to the terms of reference are presented in Attachment 1.

Should the committee have any queries about the information provided, or wish to seek additional information from the AIHW, please contact ███████████, Housing and Specialised Services Group on ██████████.

Yours sincerely

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Barry Sandison
Chief Executive Officer

10   June 2020

Attachment 1: Relevant data and information about homelessness in Australia

Introduction

The AIHW is a national independent statutory agency established in 1987. Its functions are set out in the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*.

The AIHW's purpose is to create authoritative and accessible information and statistics that inform decisions and improve the health and welfare of all Australians. The role of the AIHW is to:

- collect and produce, and coordinate and assist the collection and production of, health- and welfare-related information and statistics
- conduct and promote research into Australians' health and their health services
- develop specialised standards and classifications for health, health services and welfare services
- publish reports on its work
- make recommendations to the Minister for Health on prevention and treatment of diseases and improvement and promotion of the health awareness of Australians
- provide researchers with access to health- and welfare-related information and statistics, subject to confidentiality provisions.

The AIHW also contributes to the development of key performance indicators across a range of health and welfare domains, is a national leader in data linkage activities and is the custodian for the secondary use of My Health Record system data. The AIHW has a long history of balancing the need for publicly available data, while adhering to strict privacy requirements of data suppliers and the expectations of stakeholders and the general public.

AIHW's homelessness information activities

For many years, the AIHW has been the primary data collection and reporting authority for the national collection of data on people seeking and receiving homelessness support services, that is, support provided by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). These services are funded in accordance with the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) (CFFR 2018).

Highly qualified AIHW staff manage the following activities relating to SHS data:

- SHS agency support with the functions and data reporting requirements of the client management system, e.g. training and phone support
- Certification of client management systems to ensure compliance with national collection standards
- Collection of SHS data through the AIHW's Validata™ system
- Production of 'return-to-source' data products including quarterly summary reports and confidentialised unit record files to state/territory departments
- Data custodian activities, including management of the ongoing ethics approval and adherence to review and release protocols as described by the AIHW's privacy and security policies
- Responding to 'ad-hoc' data requests for information derived from the national collections, including aggregate data analyses and linked data projects
- Authoring and publishing of the *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report*, an online annual summary of data which includes analytical insights into the data, interactive data visualisations, data cubes and state/territory summary fact sheets

- Authoring and publishing of bespoke reports, for example, *Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services*
- Participation in national data development activities, including the Housing and Homelessness Senior Officials Network, and the related Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group.

The AIHW is also the custodian of the national social housing data collections, comprising a range of social housing programs and state/territory funded housing support payments, and manages the Australian Government Housing Data Set.

The AIHW's biennial flagship publication Australian's Welfare presents key facts on housing, education and skills, employment and work, income and finance: government payments, social support, and justice and safety. In addition, Australia's welfare 2019: data insights presents an overview of the welfare data landscape and explores selected welfare topics—including intergenerational disadvantage, income support, future of work, disability services, elder abuse and child wellbeing—in 8 original articles (AIHW 2019a).

1.   Incidence of homelessness in Australia

Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

The Census of Population and Housing (Census) provides an estimate of the number of people that are homeless, limited to 1 night every 5 years. On Census night in 2016, more than 116,000 people were estimated to be homeless in Australia (ABS 2018). Around 51,000 (44%) were living in severely crowded dwellings. Over 21,000 (18%) were living in supported accommodation for the homeless and 8,200 (7%) were rough sleepers—that is, they were living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting, staying in cars or living in impoverished dwellings. In 2016, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of homeless people (about 600 persons per 10,000 population) and Tasmania the lowest (32 per 10,000), compared with the national rate of 50.

Census data show the rate of homelessness has fluctuated, from 51 per 10,000 population in 2001 to a low of 45 in 2006, increasing to 50 in 2016. Between 2011 and 2016, most of the increase in the homelessness rate was due to people living in severely crowded dwellings (increasing from 41,370 people to 51,088 people over the period).

Specialist Homelessness Services—clients and services data (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

While Census data provide a view of the number of people in certain living situations on 1 night every 5 years, the SHS collection comprises data about people who were supported by SHS agencies because they were experiencing homelessness or were at risk of homelessness. The SHS data collection began on 1 July 2011 and includes data on all clients of SHS agencies who were provided with support, including their housing situation when support started. The most recent published data was for the 2018–19 financial year.

In 2018–19, there were just over 112,000 SHS clients who were homeless when their support began (AIHW 2019b). Of these, around 53,000 were male, and just under 59,000 were female. Around 43,000 were couch surfing (staying in a house, townhouse or flat without tenure), a similar amount in short-term accommodation and around 24,000 rough sleeping. The type of housing situation of clients who were homeless when they started receiving support differed between males and females (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of SHS clients homeless at the start of support, 2018–19
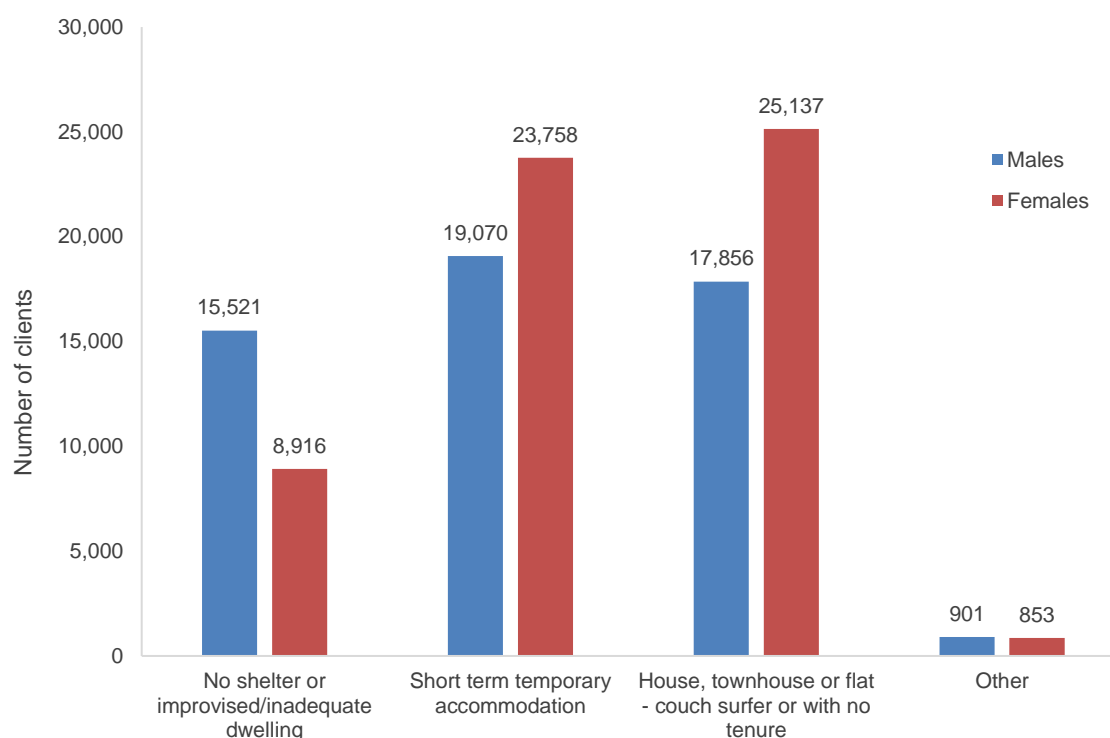
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (AIHW 2019b).

2.   Factors affecting the incidence of homelessness, including housing market factors

SHS clients—main reason for seeking support

SHS clients describe their main reason for seeking assistance. Of the 111,000 homeless clients in 2018–19 with a valid main reason (that is, excluding 'unknown' housing situation at the start of support), most (54,000 or 48.7%) nominated accommodation as the main reason for seeking support, with around one-quarter (25.8%) in housing crisis. Family and domestic violence was the main reason for seeking SHS support with around 1 in 5 clients who were homeless (around 20,000 clients) and most were female (around 15,000 clients). Detailed data are available in Appendix 1.

Changing nature of housing tenure

In order to understand the reasons behinds homelessness, it is important to understand the broader issues with housing tenure and market circumstances that may lead to homelessness.

Secure housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of Australians. While home ownership continues to be a widely held aspiration among Australians, over the last 25 years there has been a gradual decline in the proportion of households owning their own home and an increase in households in the private rental market (AIHW 2019a, AIHW 2020).

Changes in the proportion of households by tenure type between 1994–95 and 2017–18 were (ABS 2019a):

•   Decrease in home owners without a mortgage; from 42% of all households to 30%

•   Increase in home owners with a mortgage; from 30% to 37%

- Increase in households in the private rental market; from 18% to 27% and

- Decrease in state or territory housing authority households; from 5.5% to 3.1%.

Private rental accommodation is most often associated with less secure tenure (Martin et al. 2018), meaning that more households are in less secure housing tenure in 2017–18 compared with 25 years earlier.

Housing affordability

A household's financial situation, the overall demand in the housing market and housing tenure type (whether a household is seeking to rent, is renting, is looking to buy or is a home owner with or without a mortgage) all influence individual housing affordability. The simplest measure of housing affordability is the comparison of housing costs to gross household income.

In Australia, households on average spent 14% of their gross income on housing costs in 2017–18, an increase from 12% in 1994–95 (ABS 2019a). The situation is vastly different when comparing tenure type. Households with a mortgage spent on average 16% (or $484 per week) of their gross income on housing costs in 2017–18; those renting from a state or territory housing authority spent 23% ($158) and those in private rental spent 20% ($399), while households without a mortgage spent 3.0% ($53).

Housing stress is commonly defined as households that spend more than 30% of gross income on housing costs (ABS 2019a) and is a contributing risk factor for homelessness. In 2017–18, 11.5% of households nationally spent 30% to 50% of gross income on housing costs, an increase from 9.2% in 1994–95. A further 5.5% of households spent 50% or more on housing costs in 2017–18, an increase 4.6% since 1994–95.

While the household income spent on housing costs is a reasonable broad indicator, it does not take into consideration that high-income households may choose to spend more than 30% of their household income on housing. Their higher income means they have sufficient income after housing costs to avoid financial stress. By contrast, low-income households (lowest 40% of household income distribution) are more likely to lack the resources to deal with financial impacts arising from critical life events and/or housing market factors.
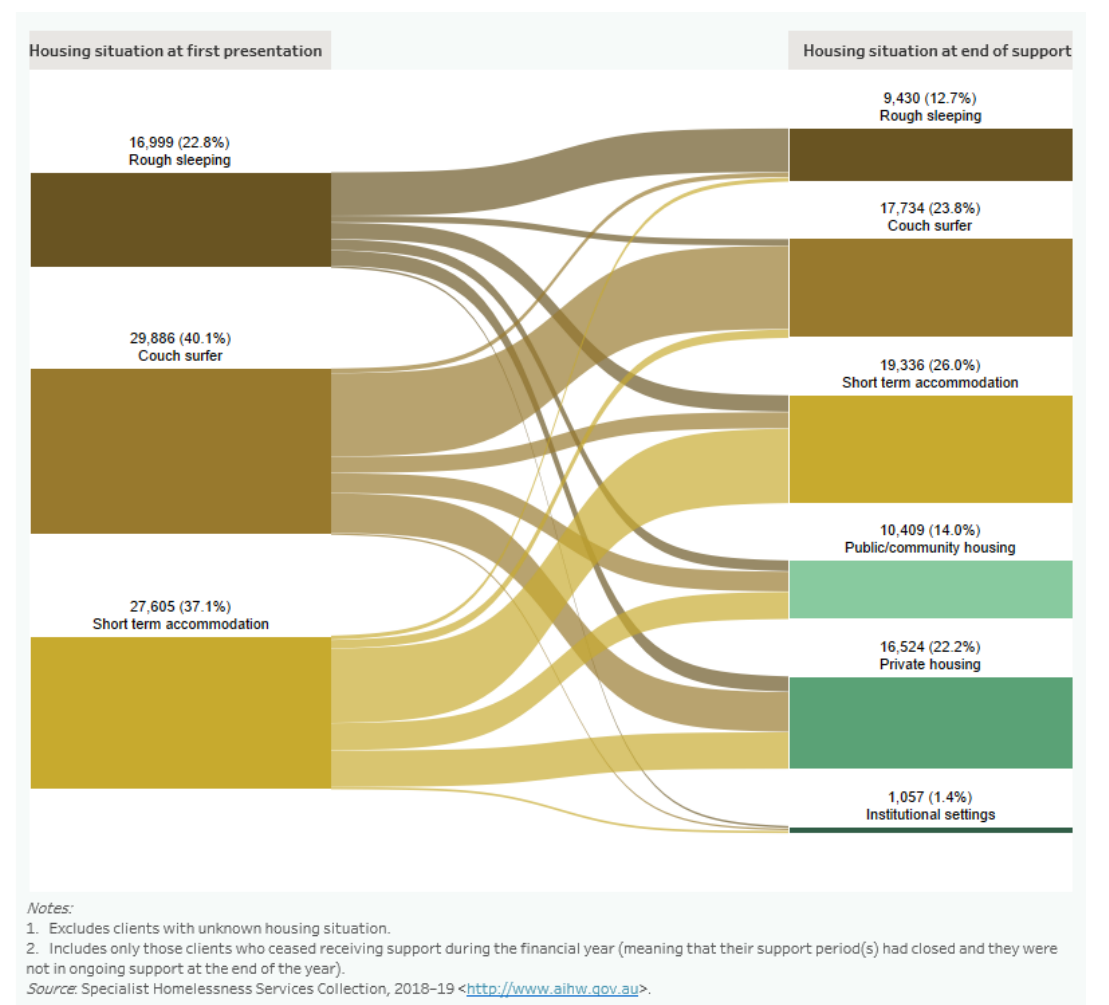
Focusing on low-income households, there were an estimated 3.7 million low-income households in Australia (ABS 2019a). Of these, around 1.0 million (or 27%) were renting in the private rental market and on average they spent 32% of gross income on housing costs. These figures demonstrate that on average low-income households in the private rental market are considered to be in housing stress which may subsequently have an adverse impact on housing stability, particularly if there is a significant life event, such as illness or job loss, which may lead to homelessness.

4. Opportunities for early intervention and prevention of homelessness

SHS agencies provide support to people who are homeless as well as those who are at risk of homelessness, thereby providing an important intervention service during times of crisis. The housing situation of clients is recorded at the start of support and when support ends.
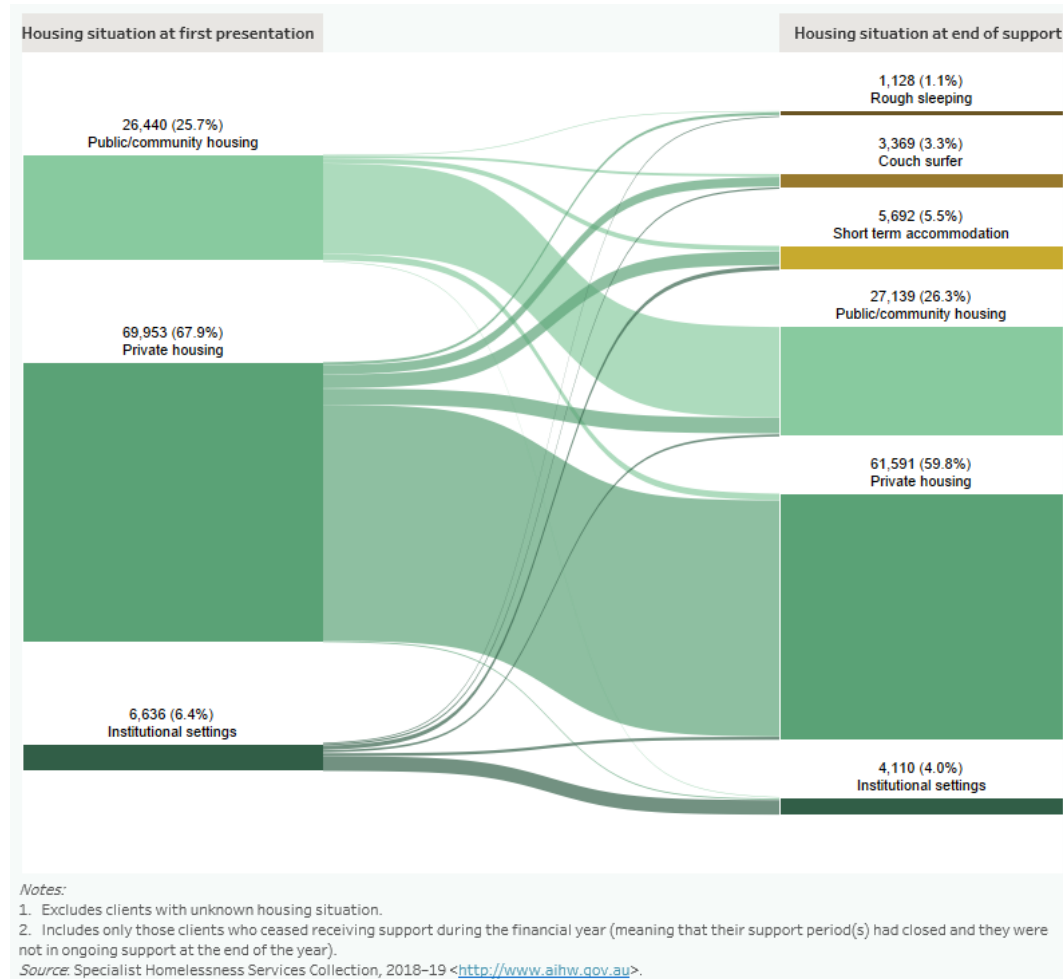
In 2018–19, of the nearly 75,000 clients who began SHS support while homeless (and had a valid housing status at end of support), SHS support assisted almost 27,000 clients into public/community housing or the private rental market (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Housing situation at the end of SHS support for clients who were homeless at the start of support, 2018–19

Housing situation at first presentation	Housing situation at end of support
16,999 (22.8%) Rough sleeping	9,430 (12.7%) Rough sleeping
29,886 (40.1%) Couch surfer	17,734 (23.8%) Couch surfer
27,605 (37.1%) Short term accommodation	19,336 (26.0%) Short term accommodation
	10,409 (14.0%) Public/community housing
	16,524 (22.2%) Private housing
	1,057 (1.4%) Institutional settings

Notes:
1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2018–19 <http://www.aihw.gov.au>.

Most SHS clients who received support during 2018–19 were at risk of homelessness, rather than homeless, at the start of support. SHS agencies assisted the majority of those who were at risk of homelessness to maintain housing (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Housing situation at the end of SHS support for clients who were at risk of homelessness at the start of support, 2018–19

Housing situation at first presentation

Housing situation at end of support

26,440 (25.7%)
Public/community housing

69,953 (67.9%)
Private housing

6,636 (6.4%)
Institutional settings

1,128 (1.1%)
Rough sleeping

3,369 (3.3%)
Couch surfer

5,692 (5.5%)
Short term accommodation

27,139 (26.3%)
Public/community housing

61,591 (59.8%)
Private housing

4,110 (4.0%)
Institutional settings

Notes:
1. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
2. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).
Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2018–19 <http://www.aihw.gov.au>.

SHS agencies provide a vast array of support services to people in need. One of the largest cohorts of clients are those experiencing family and domestic violence. In 2018–19, around 40% of all SHS clients (116,000 people) had experienced family and domestic violence, up from around 92,000 in 2014–15. The majority of these clients in 2018–19 were women (66,000 aged 18 years and over) and children (42,700 clients aged under 18 years) and most (63%) were at risk of homelessness rather than homeless (37%). Around 44% of those who were homeless at the start of support had transitioned to public/community housing or private housing at the end of support.

While SHS agencies provide many different types of services directly to clients, there are some specialist services required by clients that are not provided directly by SHS agencies. For example, in 2018–19 it was more common for SHS agencies to refer clients who needed long-term housing to other agencies than to provide the service directly. Other services with high referral rates include mental health services, drug and alcohol services and legal/financial services. SHS agencies therefore have a vital role in both delivering support directly to clients and providing connections to additional support services.

5. Services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including housing assistance, social housing and specialist homelessness services

Specialist homelessness services (SHS)

More than 1.2 million clients have been assisted by SHS agencies since the collection began in 2011–12 (AIHW 2019b). More than half (57%) of the clients supported in 2018–19 had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began. In 2018–19, around 290,300 clients sought assistance from SHS agencies, equating to 116.2 clients per 10,000 population.

In 2018–19, around 7.0 million nights of accommodation were provided; a median of 29 nights per client. On average clients spent 44 days throughout the year in support, equating to around 26.0 million days of support. As noted earlier, clients have a diverse range of needs when seeking support – see Appendix 1 for detailed information about client needs.

As mentioned above, some services are provided directly by agencies while clients may be referred to other agencies for support. In 2018–19, clients most commonly needed advice and information (needed by 78% of clients or over 227,300 people), advocacy and liaison services (55% or 160,200) and material aid/brokerage (37% or more than 106,900). SHS agencies almost always provided the required advice and information. Of the nearly 169,200 clients with need for accommodation services, 86,100 (51%) were provided with accommodation by the agency, 25,800 (15%) were referred to another agency for accommodation provision and 57,200 (34%) were neither provided nor referred for assistance. Health/medical services were identified as needed by 1 in 10 clients (just over 27,100) and were one of the services most often referred (22%) service types.

Around $61.1 million in financial assistance was provided, around half to assist clients to establish or maintain their existing tenancy and around one-fifth was for short-term or emergency accommodation.

Detailed data on the type of support needed by clients, the support provided directly by the agency, those referred only to another agency and those not provided or referred is at Appendix 2.

While the SHSC provides a rich data source to understand the services provided to clients, there is limited data on the capacity of the SHS sector, for example, the number of short-term accommodation places or the staff capacity delivering support services. There is no regular national SHS workforce data collection nor information about availability measures. SHSC data are also limited to those people who receive support as an SHS funded client – there are range of additional support services provided by the non-government sector that are provided beyond the SHS funded services. Further, the SHSC does not include the needs of the estimated 253 requests for support per day throughout 2018–19 who could not be offered assistance for a range of reasons including, the person may be seeking a service not offered by that particular agency, the agency may not have the capacity to provide assistance at that time or the person may not be in the target group for the agency.

Housing assistance

Australian governments provide a range of types of housing assistance to households, from rental assistance payments to social housing.

At 30 June 2018, there were around 436,200 social housing dwellings, a 6% increase since 2008–09 (AIHW 2019c). The majority of social housing dwellings were public housing stock in 2017–18 (72%, or 316,200 dwellings), consistent with historical trends. The number of community housing dwellings more than doubled over a decade, from 39,800 in 2008–09, to 87,800 in 2017–18, partly due to the transfer of ownership or management of public housing dwellings to community organisations. There were a further 14,700 State owned and

managed Indigenous housing dwellings and 87,800 Indigenous community housing dwellings in 2017–18.

More recent data are available for 3 programs; as at June 2019, there were around 305,200 public housing, 100,200 community housing, and 14,700 State owned and managed Indigenous housing dwellings (SCRGSP 2020). While the stock of social housing has increased, it has not kept pace with the growth in the number of households in Australia. Using the projected number of households in Australia (ABS 2015) the number of social housing dwellings per 100 households has declined from 5.1 per 100 households in 2007–08 to 4.6 in 2017–18.

In 2018, there were around 1.31 million income units (individuals and families) receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), 32,000 income units fewer than in 2017 (SCRGSP 2020). The median CRA payment was $135 per fortnight. Between 2014–15 and 2018–19, the Australian Government's real expenditure on CRA increased from $4.42 billion to $4.44 billion (2018–19 prices).

In 2017–18, Private Rent Assistance (PRA) was provided to just under 88,300 unique households (AIHW 2019c). PRA is a type of financial assistance provided directly by all state and territory governments to low-income households experiencing difficulty in securing or maintaining private rental accommodation. State and territory governments also provide Home Purchase Assistance (HPA), which is a form of financial assistance to eligible households to improve their access to, and maintain, home ownership. HPA may vary from state to state and some products are not offered by all states and territories. In 2017–18, states and territories provided HPA to almost 41,900 unique households across Australia. The most common form of HPA was direct lending, with almost 37,000 households receiving HPA in 2017–18.

6.   Support and services for people at particular risk of homelessness, including

The NHHA specifies a range of priority homelessness groups. For the most part, the Specialist homelessness services in Australia annual report (AIHW 2019b) provides detailed data on these specific client groups and summary data on the 'SHS client characteristics'. More detailed data tables are available, which include additional data on specific cohort groups. Note that there are some groups that do not precisely align with the groups specified in terms of reference, namely:

- Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence is not limited to women and children,

- Children and young people are available by 2 sub-groups; those on care and protection orders, and young people presenting alone—there may be clients who appear in both categories.

Detailed data about client cohorts receiving SHS support are available from the data cubes.

Note that there are also a number of specific publications that may be of benefit to the inquiry:

i   Older clients of specialist homelessness services includes a 5-year longitudinal analysis of client service use

ii   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness

iii   Journey reports—a series of 3 reports exploring the circumstances, experiences and housing outcomes of clients who sought assistance from specialist homelessness services between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2015:

- o   [Sleeping rough: a profile of Specialist Homelessness Services clients](#)
- o   [Couch surfers: a profile of Specialist Homelessness Services clients](#)
- o   [People in short-term accommodation: a profile of Specialist Homelessness Services clients](#)

iv   [Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015](#), a linkage study between SHS, child protection and juvenile justice datasets.

7.   The adequacy of the collection and publication of housing, homelessness and housing affordability related data

Specialist Homelessness Services Collection—a nationally coordinated approach

AIHW has collected and reported homelessness data under various intergovernmental agreements since 1995. The predecessor to the SHS data collection was the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection (SAAP NDC). The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC), which commenced in July 2011, was designed to address the information requirements of the homelessness reforms which were progressed at the same time.

As depicted in SHSC data model in Figure 4 the SHSC captures information on the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless who seek assistance from government funded homeless services. It further describes the characteristics of the client population and their housing circumstances before, during and after support.

Figure 4: SHSC data model
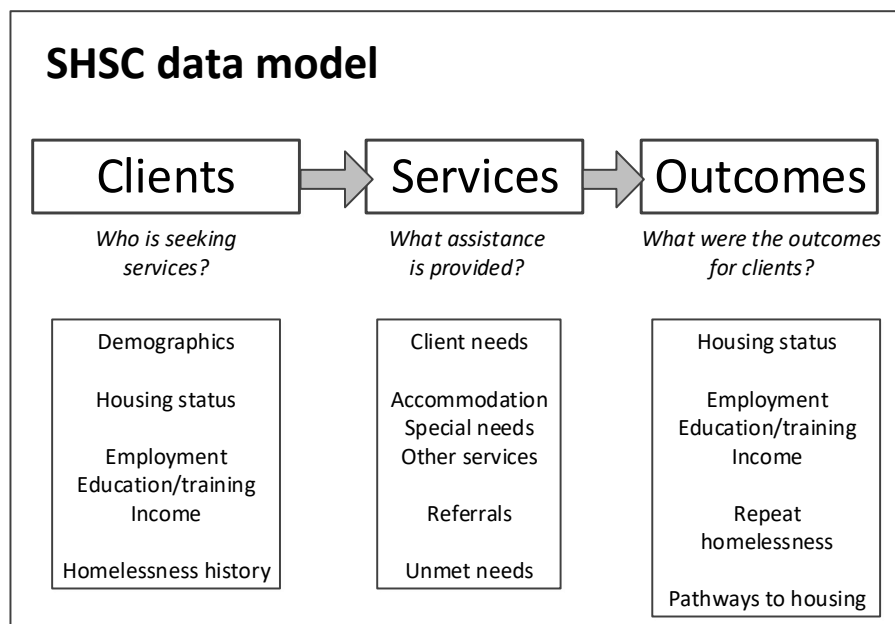
To support the client management needs of SHS agencies, AIHW developed the business and functionality specifications, in consultation with state and territory governments, to deliver a comprehensive, nationally consistent client information system (Specialist Homelessness Information Platform or SHIP). SHIP provides performance monitoring and

essential client case management functions, integral to the day-to-day operations of over 1,500 service agencies, as well as providing a consistent and reliable system solution for the national data needs. Figure 5 depicts the flow of information.

Figure 5: SHSC data flow
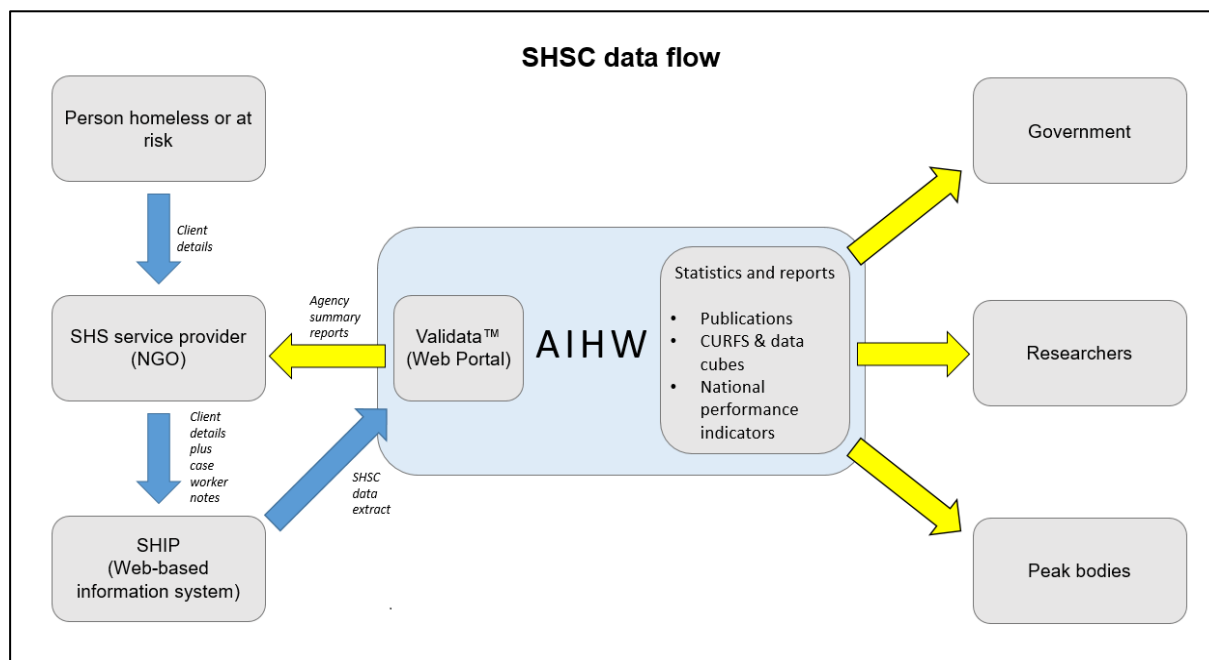
Under arrangements with each state and territory, AIHW has managed the direct data collection from non-government SHS agencies since 1 July 2011, processing data directly from service providers. This partnership arrangement has several benefits:

- superior quality data due to consistent methods of data collection from the information source and consistent application of data validation processes, and

- economies achieved through centralised processing resulting in lower costs.

The SHSC has now been collecting homelessness services statistics for over 8 years. Participation in the SHSC is high with near 100% of in-scope agencies consistently returning data each month.

SHIP Satisfaction Survey

From April to May 2019, the AIHW conducted a survey to gauge the level of satisfaction of users with SHIP. The survey included all SHIP users with a valid email address and was distributed to 4,645 SHIP users in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory. New South Wales and South Australia do not use SHIP.

The survey results show a high level of satisfaction with SHIP. Overall, 84% of respondents indicated they were satisfied with SHIP; an increase from the last survey, conducted in 2013, where the overall satisfaction was 75%.

SHSC Data products – back-to-source and state/territory data supply

Data collected from Specialist Homelessness Services are consolidated by the AIHW to produce a range of nationally consistent data products shared throughout the year with SHS agencies and the jurisdictional areas providing funding and support to these agencies. (These products are in addition to the reports described in section 6 above.)

On a quarterly basis, the AIHW provides summary data back to individual agencies to support their understanding of the number and characteristics of the clients the agency has

helped. At the same time, the AIHW provides much more detailed confidentialised unit record data to jurisdictions. The breadth of these data allow jurisdictions to monitor any changes in service provision or to quickly see the impact of changes in policy or the environment. These products are nationally consistent and have been through a rigorous quality assurance process.

Annual data products are also provided to jurisdictions. These products allow for further analysis to gain more insight into service provision and the characteristics of clients using specialised homelessness services. Some key annual products include:

• longitudinal data for analysis of service use over time since the start of the data collection in July 2011

• more detailed geographical data to assist in understanding where SHS clients are located when accessing services within a jurisdiction.

The timeliness of the SHS data products allow for more up-to-date understanding of service provision at SHS agencies and provide much more representative data to help inform decision making in the housing and homelessness sector.

Value of longitudinal data

The person-centred nature of the SHSC means support periods and services provided to individuals (de-identified) can be analysed over time. Clients of SHS may receive multiple support periods in a single financial year, or may receive more than one support period over a number of years. Analysing SHS client data over a longer time period provides much richer insights into patterns of service use among SHS clients.

The most recent example of longitudinal analysis was undertaken for the Older clients of specialist homelessness services report (AIHW 2019d). Over the period 2013–14 to 2017–18, around 86,400 older clients received support from SHS agencies. The majority of older clients (59,000 clients of 68%) only received services in one financial year. Around 9,700 clients (11% of all older clients) received services in 3, 4 or 5 years. While a relatively small cohort, these clients received around 58% of the total nights of accommodation (just under 1.2 million nights of accommodation) provided to older SHS clients over the total period.

The longitudinal nature of the collection has improved over time and the AIHW is planning for more regular reporting of the longitudinal data to improve the information available for policy development and service delivery design. As mentioned in the covering letter, existing products such as the data cubes and regional level data are currently available valuable data products that harness the value the longitudinal nature of the collection.

Social housing data

Public Housing (PH) and State owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SoMIH) data are the most robust of the social housing collections managed by the AIHW. These data have a well-established history, coverage is high and data are sourced from administrative data collections of the relevant state/territory government. These bodies approve the data set specification which outlines data definitions and other data standards.

The other social housing data collections, comprising Community Housing (CH) and Indigenous Community Housing (ICH), are collated by state/territory governments using administrative data and information reported directly by housing providers. All have varied levels of coverage, data definition alignment and completeness.

Unlike the SHSC, the social housing data sets are supplied from state/territory departments, which is the more typical AIHW data collection model. Data are still scrutinised and validated to ensure robust and accurate data are collated and publicly reported.

Shortfalls in housing data

These social housing data collections are annual unit record collections that have been in place for a number of years. Data quality statements for each collection are available in each of the housing collection links provided in the covering letter.

The quality of the CH and ICH data collections are affected by a number of long standing issues including issues associated with differences in definitions and counting approaches. There is a significant lack of consistency with regard to community housing and Indigenous community housing in particular. These inconsistencies make it difficult to understand the profile and comparative performance of the community housing sector. Improvements in data would enable the development of more evidence-based policies to support the sector.

Specific improvements could include:

- improve the alignment of terminology, concepts, definitions and counting rules across community housing reporting requirements (such as national reporting requirements, community housing regulatory requirements and funding requirements)
- improve the efficiency of collection, collation and reporting of community housing data, such as by improving the connectedness between data standards and tenancy management systems to improve data quality at the source
- improve data sharing arrangements and coordination across reporting systems, and
- establish arrangements to better support data integration projects.

Australian Government Housing Data Set

Since 2006, the AIHW has received point in time data for income units in receipt of Centrelink social security payments and families receiving Family Tax Benefit Part A. Data are provided annually by the Department of Social Services to the AIHW for the:

- production of welfare-related information and statistics
- conduct and promotion of research into the welfare of people of Australia and their welfare services
- development of specialised statistical standards and classifications relevant to welfare
- provision of confidentialised data to researchers, and
- provision of confidentialised data to jurisdictions.

National data improvement activities

Commencing on 1 July 2018, the NHHA between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments aims to improve outcomes across the housing sector and is generally directed to those most in need through homelessness services and social housing (CFFR 2018). A key element of the NHHA is the development and implementation of improved, nationally consistent housing and homelessness data sets, achieved through a nationally agreed Data Improvement Plan (DIP). At the time of writing, the final draft of the DIP is being considered by all signatories to the NHHA and is expected to become Schedule E to the NHHA once finalised.

The AIHW played a major partnership role in the development of the DIP and will be a key partner in the ongoing work program that will deliver improvements to the quality, scope and coverage of housing and homelessness data.

The AIHW has also provided input into the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) and parallel review of data reporting needs of the NRSCH, given its role in implementation of the DIP and custodian of key national housing and homelessness data collections.

Data linkage at the AIHW

The AIHW became a Commonwealth Accredited Integrating Authority in mid-2012. Since then, the volume and complexity of data linkage projects has grown substantially. Linkage to national assets, such as hospital data sets, Medicare Benefits Schedule data sets and Commonwealth welfare support payments data, are performed on a regular basis and could assist with additional analysis of clients receiving SHS.

For example, data linkage can be used to explore service use patterns and pathways, both targeted and broader outcomes for priority populations, and broader social impact and investment prioritisation. The AIHW's Data Integration Services Centre provides critical initial advice and support for data linkage projects including assessment of project technical requirements in partnership with ethics committee support services. Examples of linked data include:

- AIHW 2016. Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection—1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015
- AIHW 2016. Exploring drug treatment and homelessness in Australia: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2014
- AIHW 2015. Exploring transitions between homelessness and public housing: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013
- Additional SHSC data linkage projects approved by the AIHW Ethics Committee are described in approved AIHW linkage projects.

While such 'one-off' activities are an option, enduring national data assets are being progressed in a variety of other sectors. For example, the AIHW has created the National Integrated Health Services Information (NHISI) Analysis Asset (AA), and is a key partner in the development of a National Disability Data Asset; the Australian Bureau of Statistics is maintaining the Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE) and the Multi-agency Data Integration Project (MADIP).

There are benefits in joining data consistently and routinely over time. The housing and homelessness sector would substantially benefit from a linked longitudinal data asset. Given the intersections between housing and health, the asset could include the data domains including income support payments, health and homelessness services use and social housing. Such an asset would provide valuable insights into the intersection between health and homelessness, and the pathways through housing-related support services. We have had discussions with states and territories about the development of a national linked housing data set.

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Appendices

1. Table 1: SHS clients homeless at the start of support, by main reason for seeking assistance, 2018–19

2. Table 2: SHS clients, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, 2018–19

Appendix 1: Table 1: SHS clients homeless at the start of support, by main reason for seeking assistance, 2018–19

Group	Main reason for seeking assistance	Males (number)	Males (per cent)	Females (number)	Females (per cent)	Total clients (number)	Total clients (per cent)
Financial	*Financial*	*8,031*	*15.2*	*6,645*	*11.4*	*14,676*	*13.2*
Financial	Financial difficulties	4,218	8.0	3,060	5.2	7,278	6.5
Financial	Housing affordability stress	3,404	6.4	3,447	5.9	6,851	6.1
Financial	Employment difficulties	128	0.2	49	0.1	177	0.2
Financial	Unemployment	250	0.5	83	0.1	333	0.3
Financial	Problematic gambling	31	0.1	6	0.0	37	0.0
Accommodation	*Accommodation*	*27,863*	*52.6*	*26,400*	*45.2*	*54,263*	*48.7*
Accommodation	Housing crisis	14,511	27.4	14,242	24.4	28,753	25.8
Accommodation	Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions	9,919	18.7	8,877	15.2	18,796	16.9
Accommodation	Previous accommodation ended	3,433	6.5	3,281	5.6	6,714	6.0
Interpersonal relationships	*Interpersonal relationships*	*9,194*	*17.3*	*19,863*	*34.0*	*29,057*	*26.1*
Interpersonal relationships	Time out from family/other situation	802	1.5	1,006	1.7	1,808	1.6
Interpersonal relationships	Relationship/family breakdown	3,072	5.8	3,343	5.7	6,415	5.8
Interpersonal relationships	Sexual abuse	17	0.0	114	0.2	131	0.1
Interpersonal relationships	Family and domestic violence	5,097	9.6	15,134	25.9	20,231	18.2
Interpersonal relationships	Non-family violence	206	0.4	266	0.5	472	0.4
Health	*Health*	*2,003*	*3.8*	*1,212*	*2.1*	*3,215*	*2.9*
Health	Mental health issues	879	1.7	660	1.1	1,539	1.4
Health	Medical issues	381	0.7	223	0.4	604	0.5
Health	Problematic drug or substance use	477	0.9	247	0.4	724	0.6
Health	Problematic alcohol use	266	0.5	82	0.1	348	0.3
Other	*Other*	*5,907*	*11.1*	*4,325*	*7.4*	*10,232*	*9.2*
Other	Transition from custodial arrangements	1,009	1.9	234	0.4	1,243	1.1
Other	Transition from foster care and child safety residential placements	90	0.2	134	0.2	224	0.2
Other	Transition from other care arrangements	172	0.3	108	0.2	280	0.3
Other	Discrimination including racial discrimination	17	0.0	11	0.0	28	0.0
Other	Itinerant	1,841	3.5	1,069	1.8	2,910	2.6
Other	Unable to return home due to environmental reasons	164	0.3	186	0.3	350	0.3
Other	Disengagement with school or other education and training	50	0.1	47	0.1	97	0.1
Other	Lack of family and/or community support	638	1.2	646	1.1	1,284	1.2
Other	Other	1,926	3.6	1,890	3.2	3,816	3.4
Not stated	*Not stated*	*350*	*1*	*219*	*0*	*569*	*. .*
Total	**Total**	*52,998*	*100*	*58,445*	*100*	*111,443*	*100*

Source: Specialist homelessness services collection (AIHW 2019b).

Appendix 2: Table 2: SHS clients, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, 2018–19

Service and assistance type	Need identified	Need identified as % of total clients	Provided	Provided as % of those with need identified	Referred only	Referred only as a % of those with need identified	Not provided or referred	Not provided or referred as % of those with need identified
Accommodation provision	*169,196*	*58.3*	*86,146*	*50.9*	*25,813*	*15.3*	*57,237*	*33.8*
Short-term or emergency accommodation	112,651	38.8	66,047	58.6	11,699	10.4	34,905	31.0
Medium term/transitional housing	82,815	28.5	22,291	26.9	13,041	15.7	47,483	57.3
Long term housing	109,596	37.8	4,030	3.7	28,029	25.6	77,537	70.7
Assistance to sustain housing tenure	*98,231*	*33.8*	*79,888*	*81.3*	*3,195*	*3.3*	*15,148*	*15.4*
Assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction	97,559	33.6	79,385	81.4	3,124	3.2	15,050	15.4
Assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears	2,988	1.0	1,910	63.9	228	7.6	850	28.4
Mental health	*26,703*	*9.2*	*11,694*	*43.8*	*5,897*	*22.1*	*9,112*	*34.1*
Psychological services	10,418	3.6	3,570	34.3	2,525	24.2	4,323	41.5
Psychiatric services	5,950	2.0	2,059	34.6	1,174	19.7	2,717	45.7
Mental health services	23,018	7.9	10,093	43.8	4,771	20.7	8,154	35.4
Family	*25,009*	*8.6*	*15,117*	*60.4*	*5,029*	*20.1*	*4,863*	*19.4*
Child protection services	13,664	4.7	8,301	60.8	2,803	20.5	2,560	18.7
Parenting skills education	10,173	3.5	5,858	57.6	1,654	16.3	2,661	26.2
Child specific specialist counselling services	7,436	2.6	3,346	45.0	1,792	24.1	2,298	30.9
Pregnancy assistance	2,556	0.9	1,433	56.1	389	15.2	734	28.7
Family planning support	2,986	1.0	1,549	51.9	585	19.6	852	28.5
Disability	*3,534*	*1.2*	*1,379*	*39.0*	*710*	*20.1*	*1,445*	*40.9*
Physical disability services	1,894	0.7	735	38.8	376	19.9	783	41.3
Intellectual disability services	2,208	0.8	859	38.9	424	19.2	925	41.9
Drug/alcohol	*10,543*	*3.6*	*4,675*	*44.3*	*2,162*	*20.5*	*3,706*	*35.2*
Drug/alcohol counselling	10,543	3.6	4,675	44.3	2,162	20.5	3,706	35.2
Legal/financial services	*21,175*	*7.3*	*8,970*	*42.4*	*6,409*	*30.3*	*5,796*	*27.4*
Professional legal services	9,579	3.3	3,571	37.3	3,197	33.4	2,811	29.3
Financial advice and counselling	13,832	4.8	6,118	44.2	3,760	27.2	3,954	28.6
Counselling for problem gambling	890	0.3	385	43.3	133	14.9	372	41.8
Immigration/cultural services	*18,519*	*6.4*	*15,519*	*83.8*	*1,525*	*8.2*	*1,475*	*8.0*
Interpreter services	3,469	1.2	2,674	77.1	519	15.0	276	8.0
Assistance with immigration services	2,657	0.9	1,719	64.7	511	19.2	427	16.1
Culturally specific services	14,117	4.9	11,914	84.4	1,019	7.2	1,184	8.4
Assistance to connect culturally	9,030	3.1	7,376	81.7	728	8.1	926	10.3

Service and assistance type	Need identified	Need identified as % of total clients	Provided	Provided as % of those with need identified	Referred only	Referred only as a % of those with need identified	Not provided or referred	Not provided or referred as % of those with need identified
Other specialist services	*56,519*	*19.5*	*38,099*	*67.4*	*10,906*	*19.3*	*7,514*	*13.3*
Health/medical services	27,135	9.3	14,852	54.7	5,906	*21.8*	6,377	23.5
Specialist counselling services	14,882	5.1	8,350	56.1	3,140	*21.1*	3,392	22.8
Other specialised service	34,844	12.0	25,605	73.5	6,510	*18.7*	2,729	7.8
General services	*273,071*	*94.1*	*266,308*	*97.5*	*1,280*	*0.5*	*5,483*	*2.0*
Assertive outreach for rough sleepers	12,517	4.3	10,672	85.3	277	*2.2*	1,568	12.5
Assistance to obtain/maintain government allowance	29,781	10.3	23,578	79.2	1,975	*6.6*	4,228	14.2
Employment assistance	17,615	6.1	11,547	65.6	1,520	*8.6*	4,548	25.8
Training assistance	12,490	4.3	8,193	65.6	1,133	*9.1*	3,164	25.3
Educational assistance	23,668	8.2	17,560	74.2	1,723	*7.3*	4,385	18.5
Financial information	74,291	25.6	62,275	83.8	3,039	*4.1*	8,977	12.1
Material aid/brokerage	106,908	36.8	92,019	86.1	6,173	*5.8*	8,716	8.2
Assistance for incest/sexual assault	6,430	2.2	4,686	72.9	380	*5.9*	1,364	21.2
Assistance for family/domestic violence	84,010	28.9	74,349	88.5	1,837	*2.2*	7,824	9.3
Family/relationship assistance	52,212	18.0	43,371	83.1	1,622	*3.1*	7,219	13.8
Assistance for trauma	36,551	12.6	29,265	80.1	1,467	*4.0*	5,819	15.9
Assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems	36,959	12.7	31,967	86.5	878	*2.4*	4,114	11.1
Living skills/personal development	55,636	19.2	50,988	91.6	674	*1.2*	3,974	7.1
Legal information	37,728	13.0	27,159	72.0	3,793	*10.1*	6,776	18.0
Court support	23,164	8.0	16,638	71.8	1,590	*6.9*	4,936	21.3
Advice/information	227,337	78.3	223,259	98.2	1,361	*0.6*	2,717	1.2
Retrieval/storage/removal of personal belongings	27,866	9.6	23,013	82.6	985	*3.5*	3,868	13.9
Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client	160,157	55.2	154,140	96.2	2,007	*1.3*	4,010	2.5
School liaison	12,741	4.4	10,432	81.9	409	*3.2*	1,900	14.9
Child care	11,637	4.0	8,694	74.7	847	*7.3*	2,096	18.0
Structured play/skills development	11,893	4.1	10,300	86.6	619	*5.2*	974	8.2
Child contact and residence arrangements	7,039	2.4	5,122	72.8	430	*6.1*	1,487	21.1
Meals	48,338	16.7	45,274	93.7	974	*2.0*	2,090	4.3
Laundry/shower facilities	37,695	13.0	35,830	95.1	500	*1.3*	1,365	3.6
Recreation	30,344	10.5	28,150	92.8	707	*2.3*	1,487	4.9
Transport	57,192	19.7	52,785	92.3	1,007	*1.8*	3,400	5.9
Other basic assistance	190,191	65.5	185,013	97.3	1,242	*0.7*	3,936	2.1

Source: Specialist homelessness services collection (AIHW 2019b).