



References

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Homelessness Australia

Unit 2, 15 Hall St, Lyneham, ACT, 2602

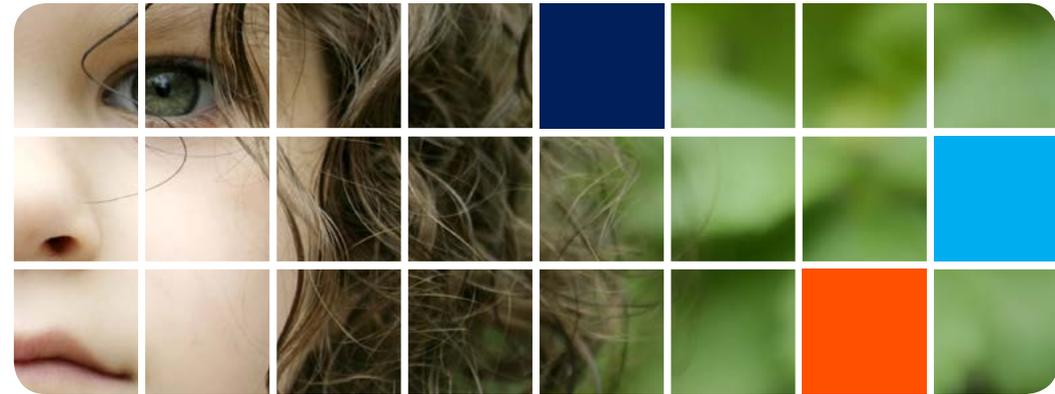
Ph: 02 6247 7744

www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

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@HomelessnessAus

Homelessness and Children



1 7 8 4 5

children under 12
were counted homeless

4 0 2

children under 12
were sleeping rough

Despite popular belief, children are one of the largest groups of Australians experiencing homelessness.

In fact, children under the age of 18 make up 27% of people experiencing homelessnessⁱ. And this figure is likely to be an undercount due to the limitations of the Census as a vehicle for capturing people aged 12-18 who are staying temporarily with friends and relativesⁱⁱ.

Children are also heavy users of specialist homelessness services. Children 0-17 were overrepresented among those who received assistance, with 29% of clients aged 0-17, and 17% aged 0-10ⁱⁱⁱ. More than 70,000 people supported by homelessness services in 2011-12 were children aged 0-17.



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness





Why are children homeless?

Children who are experiencing homelessness are almost always in a family group, most likely with a single mother. This is especially true of children supported by specialist homelessness services, around 30% of which are funded to support women and children escaping domestic and family violence^{iv}.

Recent research has highlighted the problem of single fathers in the homelessness service system. Many of these fathers are reluctant to reveal they have children for fear they will lose visitation rights^v and as a result have not been in contact with their children for a long period of time.

There are many factors which appear to contribute to family homelessness including domestic and family violence, financial crisis, housing affordability, poverty, mental illness, substance or gambling dependency and abuse.

Growing up in a household where no parent works, or has ever worked, and being born into a situation of intergenerational disadvantage and poverty may mean there are no economic resources to draw on in the event of a financial crisis. This problem is compounded for families living in private rental as opposed to social housing as the increasing unaffordability of the private rental market means that families are spending a substantial proportion of their take home pay on housing costs.

Research has shown that intergenera-

tional homelessness is a lived reality for many Australians. Around half of those receiving support from specialist homelessness services reported that their parents were homeless at some point in their lives^{vi}. The rate of intergenerational homelessness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is significantly higher at nearly 70%.

Increasingly housing crisis is contributing to increased levels of homelessness amongst families. Housing crisis is where a household in the bottom 40% of income earners is allocating more than 50% of their take home pay on housing costs^{vii}.

Changes to parenting payment eligibility may place more sole parent families at risk of homelessness as a result of being moved to the lower Newstart Allowance.

Impact of homelessness

For a child, homelessness means missing out on many of the things that other kids take for granted (for example having the opportunity to have a friend over to your house after school is impossible if you don't have one). Homelessness may mean missing out on school excursions and new uniforms. It can become increasingly difficult to stay engaged in education.

Homelessness can affect children in different ways. Children don't necessarily see homelessness as whether they have a house, but rather the level of connectedness to family, the presence or absence of fear and feelings of instability and insecurity^{viii}.



Health

Experiencing homelessness has an impact on both the physical and mental health of children.

Children experiencing homelessness experience increased likelihood of:

- Ear infections
- Developmental delays
- Nutritional deficits
- Asthma
- Infectious illness
- Emergency room use and hospitalisation
- Dental problems
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Abdominal pain
- Anxiety and depression
- Behavioural issues
- Low self esteem and self-confidence

In addition, children who are experiencing homelessness have been found to have less access to health services due to increased mobility, lack of transport and financial difficulties.

Immunisation among children who are experiencing homelessness is low and leads to increased risk of infectious diseases.



Education

Homelessness in children has been found to restrict children's access to and participation in school.

Due to the transience of homeless families, children often end up attending a number of schools.

Some issues children experiencing homelessness face at school are:

- Emotional isolation and difficulty relating to their peers
- Difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships
- Discrimination and stigma in the schoolyard or play ground
- Children in homeless families suffer a considerable amount of stress
- Reduced concentration skills
- Academic and learning delays
- Increased absenteeism
- Increased likelihood to leave school early
- Difficulties in making and keeping friends.

