

Government-Funded Specialist Homelessness Services Synthesis 2010-11

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has released the 2010-11 annual report of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). This document contains the key points of the South Australian SAAP annual report.

Key Points

- An estimated 23,500 South Australians received support from a government-funded specialist homelessness agency in 2010-11. Of this number 13,000 were clients and 10,500 were children accompanying clients. This is equivalent to 1 in 70 people accessing services in South Australia.
- Those who accessed services were predominantly female, representing 59% of all service users and 67% of clients.
- Those who accessed services were relatively young – service users had an average age of 21 years, clients 32 years, and accompanying children 7 years.
- The highest rate of service use was by people aged 19 years and under - an equivalent of 1 in 30 South Australians aged under 15, and 1 in 36 South Australians aged 15 – 19 years.
- Although service users were largely non-Aboriginal (77%), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were over-represented (23%) relative to population size (1.7% of the South Australian population – ABS).
- People most commonly seek support because of interpersonal relationship issues (54%), financial problems (6%), accommodation problems (22%), health problems (4%), and other issues (14%).
- South Australian clients were supported for an average of 79 days. For clients who were accommodated, the average length of accommodation was 60 days.
- The overall needs of clients were met in 92% of cases and the needs of accompanying children were met in 95% of cases. However, AIHW reports that the support needs of service users were met in a lower proportion of cases overall than in the other states, primarily because of the relatively low provision of accommodation and accommodation-related support in South Australia, which is linked to the model of homelessness service delivery used.
- Immediately following support, most clients: were unemployed or not in the labour force (88%); were receiving a government pension or benefit as their main source of income (84%); and were living in a house or other dwelling (95%) with some form of tenure (80%).
- From 2006-07 to 2010-11 there has been an increase in service use from 1 in every 73 people to 1 in 70 people; a decrease in the proportion of support periods that include a period of specialist homelessness accommodation from 36% to 26%; an increase in the overall length of support and accommodation; and an increase in people seeking assistance because of accommodation-related and financial reasons.

What Do These Figures Mean?

An increasing number of people are using SAAP services and they are predominantly traditionally disempowered groups of people: women, young people, Aboriginal people, and minority groups. While Aboriginal people represent a lower percentage of SAAP service users overall, they are over-represented relative to population size. This may also be the case for people from Sudan, the second most common country of birth amongst services users. Shelter SA takes a particular interest in Aboriginal and refugee housing and homelessness issues as represented in our [submission](#) to the SA Housing Strategy Green Paper, and facilitates Branches that meet to advise and guide our work in these two important areas. The Branch meeting dates for 2012 will appear on our [website](#) early next year. This report should also cause us to consider the consequences of the reduction of homelessness accommodation linked to service provision.

Numbers can be misleading because they don't provide you with a complete picture of the circumstances of the people who makeup these figures. It is reported that there has been an increase in the number of people seeking assistance because of accommodation related reasons including overcrowding, eviction, and ending of emergency or previous accommodation, and financial reasons including gambling, budgeting problems and too high rent. It is not clear however if these are the same people who have been service users previously, or if lack of affordability is creating new clients. It is also unclear what 'needs were met' means. Who defines these needs and to what extent are they met? It's reported that generally circumstances had improved post-service. How then can we account for the gradual increase in people accessing services? These are questions that require further consideration that does not rely solely on enumerating people, but also understands the quality of outcomes from the client perspective, of homelessness service use. This is a point that Shelter SA has argued for in [previous work](#).

If you would like to share your views on the AIHW report, please comment on our [facebook](#) page. Alternatively, you can contact Natalie.Greenland@sheltersa.asn.au.

The full AIHW report can be accessed via their [website](#).