

Homelessness

Causes and Consequences

Being homeless can mean living without conventional accommodation, living in sub-standard accommodation, or living in places of insecure tenure. Being homeless can mean living in poverty, unable to afford adequate housing, and being cut off from the support of relatives and friends. Being homeless can mean being unsafe, unwell, alienated, isolated and excluded from the social, economic and civic opportunities that most citizens enjoy. It's hard to hold down a job, go to school, stay healthy or keep a family together if you don't have a secure home. Being homeless means different things to different people but it is always a consequence of structural inequalities.¹

South Australia has an unacceptably high rate of homelessness. It is recognised as a complex problem and is increasing.² There are a range of economic and social factors which are the structural causes of homelessness. These include unemployment, low levels of income (low wages and salaries, as well as inadequate income support payments) and lack of access to affordable and appropriate housing. The immediate impact of these factors is poverty, which in turn can compound the risk of homelessness.

Other important individual (but secondary) factors and events contributing to homelessness can include: family breakdown, intergenerational disadvantage, non-completion of schooling, school exclusion, sexual or physical abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, drug and alcohol misuse, problem gambling, experience of being under the care of the State and having been in a correctional facility.³

Homelessness can affect the young or old, families or single people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds...Homelessness creates instability, leaves people vulnerable to chronic unemployment and ill health...Homelessness means that members of our community are living without their most fundamental human rights.⁴

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Shelter SA
Housing: a basic human right

Homelessness

Defining Homelessness

The definition of homelessness in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act* is:

...a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing.

The Act then goes on to define inadequate access to safe and secure housing as being:

...if the only housing to which the person has access:

- a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or*
- b) threatens the person's safety; or*
- c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
 - (i) adequate personal amenities; or*
 - (ii) the economic and social supports that a home normally provides; or**
- d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.*⁵

The Australian Bureau of Statistics used the following definition of homelessness in the 1996 and 2001 Census. It was developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992), and identifies three segments of the homeless population:

- ◆ **primary homelessness:** people without conventional shelter, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.
- ◆ **secondary homelessness:** people who move frequently between from one form of temporary shelter to another. This includes all people staying in emergency or transitional housing provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own, and people staying in boarding houses for 12 weeks or less.
- ◆ **tertiary homelessness** refers to people who live in boarding houses for 13 weeks or longer. They are considered homeless because their accommodation is seen to be below 'minimum community standards': that is, they do not have a separate bedroom and living room, they do not have bathroom and kitchen facilities of their own, their accommodation is not self-contained, and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease.⁶

The advantage of the ABS definition in terms of the collection of statistics about homelessness is that it allows an objective measurement of the number of people who are homeless. This is because it is not dependent upon people's perceptions (e.g. if the housing is likely to damage their health) but rather is related to a minimum community housing standard (equivalent to a small rented flat with a bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchen).⁷

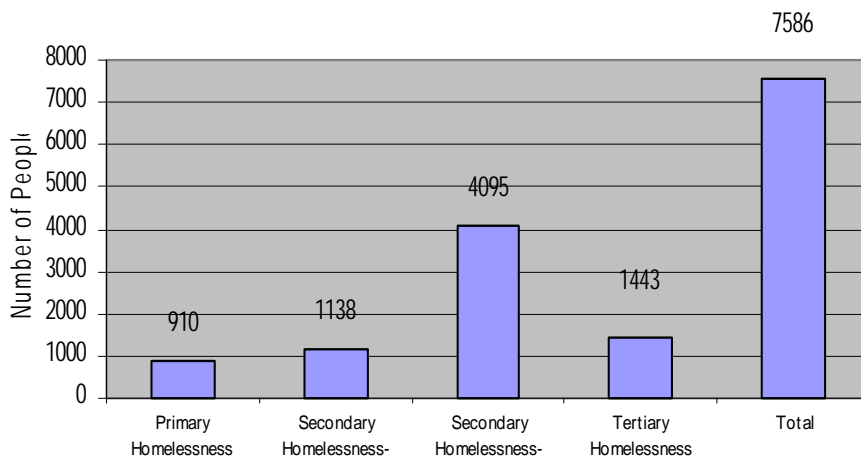
Both definitions are important as they include accommodation which is inadequate in standard in the medium to long-term as a defining characteristic of homelessness, as well as the absence of shelter.⁸

*I believe that as a community, we cannot and should not ignore the problem (of homelessness).
As a Government, we have a responsibility to get to the heart of the problem
and then do everything we can to find the path out of this maze of poverty, desperation and despair.*⁹

Mike Rann, Premier of South Australia

Homelessness

Number of People Who Are Homeless in SA



Persons Experiencing Homelessness in SA, 2001¹⁰

There were 7,586 people who were recorded as being homeless on Census night, 2001:

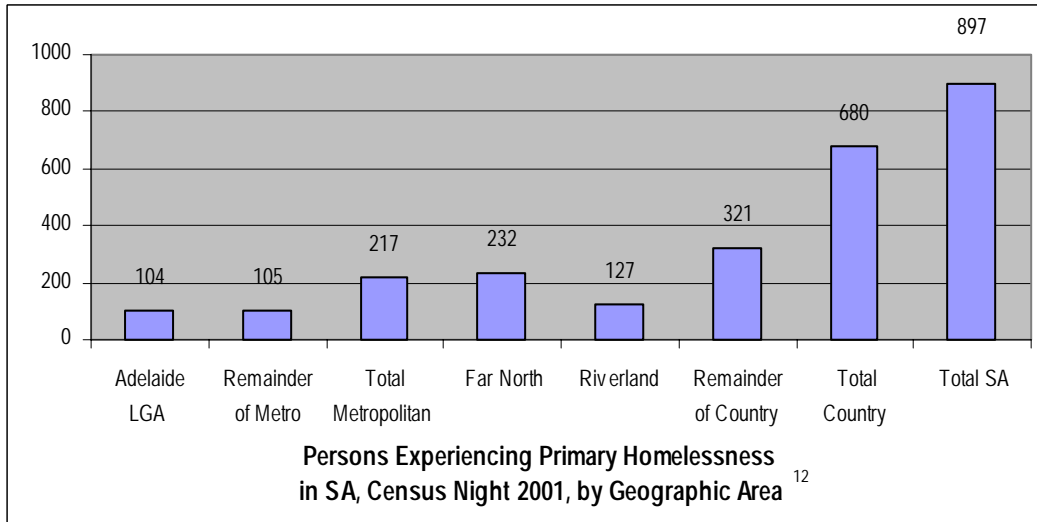
- ◆ 910 people (12%) in primary homelessness.
- ◆ 1,138 people (15%) staying in services funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).
- ◆ 4,095 people (54%) staying temporarily with other households or for short periods in hostels or boarding houses.
- ◆ 1,443 people (19%) staying long-term in boarding houses.¹¹

Footnotes

1. Clay, N., 2003, 'Stop Tinkering Around the Edges', presented at the 3rd National Homelessness Conference, Brisbane, April 2003.
2. *Reducing Homelessness in South Australia*, SIB, July 2003, p.5
3. *Everyone's Responsibility*, SIB, July 2003, p.v
4. www.afho.org.au/7_facts/2002_03/2002_2003_national.htm
5. www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-saap_nav.htm#saap2
6. *Counting the Homeless 2001 ABS 2003*, p.1-2
7. Background Paper: *Homelessness*, SIU, 2002, p.3
8. State Housing Plan, Issues and Options Paper #5, p.83
9. *Reducing Homelessness in SA*, SIB July 2003, p.1
10. ABS, Census Data 2001, quoted from *SA Strategic Plan 2004: Volume 2*, p.54
11. *Ibid*, p.54
12. ABS data quoted in *Current Levels and Trends of Primary Homelessness in SA*, SIU, 2003, p.12
13. Information provided by ABS
14. ABS data quoted in *Current Levels and Trends of Primary Homelessness in SA*, SIU, 2003, p.13
15. *Ibid*, p.13
16. *Ibid*, p.14
17. *Ibid*, p.14
18. www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-saap_nav.htm#saap2
19. *State Housing Plan, Issues and Options Paper*, p.86
20. Burke, P; *South Australian State Homelessness Conference Report*, Homelessness SA, March 2003, p.12
21. *Homeless People in SAAP*, NDC 2002-03, p.4, Table 2.1
22. *Ibid*, p.6, Table 3.1
23. *Ibid*, p.28, Table 7.2
24. *State Housing Plan, Issues and Options Paper*, p.89
25. Information provided by SAHT
26. *State Housing Plan, Issues and Options Paper*, p.91
27. ABS, Census Data 2001, quoted from *SA Strategic Plan: Volume 2*, p.54
28. *Ibid*, p.10, Table 4.1
29. *Ibid*, p.12, Table 4.3
30. *Ibid*, p.12, Table 4.3 and p. xv.
31. *Ibid*, p.10, Table 4.1
32. *Ibid*, p.36, Table 9.1
33. *Ibid*, p.19, Table 5.3
34. ABS data quoted in *Current Levels and Trends of Primary Homelessness in SA*, SIU, 2003, p.12
35. *Counting the Homeless 2001*, p.2
36. 'Homelessness', Discussion Paper, SIU, Dec. 2002, p.5.
37. *National Overview of Boarding Houses in Australia*, National Shelter, Nov. 2000.
38. Rogers, N; Bagshaw, M; Stephenson, T; *Reports of their death have been greatly exaggerated: Boarding Houses in South Australia*, presentation made at National Housing Conference, Adelaide, Nov. 2003
39. *Reducing Homelessness in SA*, SIB, July 2003, p.5
40. *Ibid*, p.6
41. *SA Strategic Plan 2004: Volume 1*, p.54
42. *Reducing Homelessness in SA*, SIB, July 2003, p.1

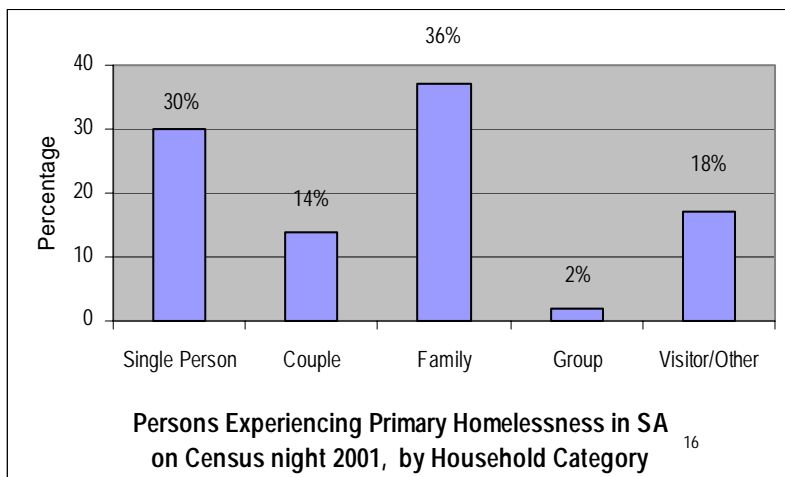
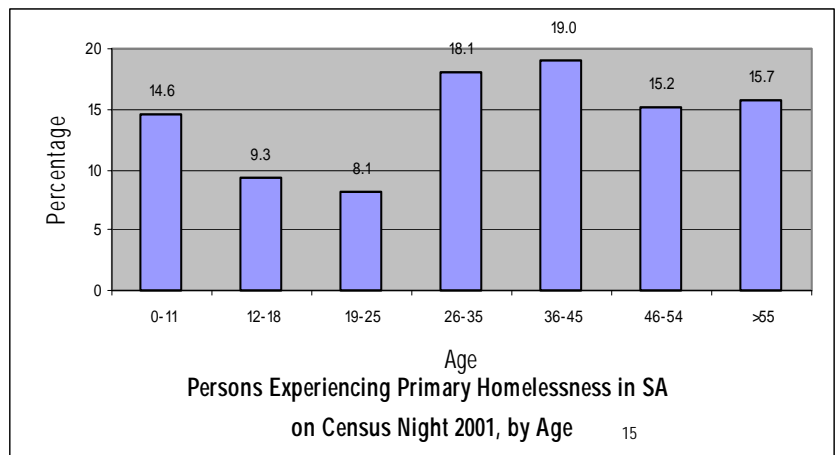
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Primary Homelessness



◆ Note: The figure of 897 homeless persons for SA as a whole, as reported here, was subsequently adjusted by the ABS to a total of 910.¹³

- ◆ 23.9 % of persons experiencing primary homelessness on Census night were less than 18 years old.
- ◆ 8.1% were 19-25 years old.
- ◆ 52.3 % were 26-54 years old.
- ◆ 15.7% were more than 55 years old.¹⁴



Of those that experienced primary homelessness on Census night 2001:

- ◆ 267 people (30%) were single
- ◆ 126 people (14%) were couples without children
- ◆ 323 people (36%) were families, (includes both single parent and couple families)
- ◆ 17 people (2%) were classified as a 'group' and 158 (18%) were classified as 'visitor/other'.¹⁷

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Secondary Homelessness

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) assists people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, through a range of support and supported accommodation services. The overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services, in order to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence.¹⁸

SAAP is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments. SAAP funding totalled \$27.49 million (including \$2.9 million in one-off funding) in 2001-02.¹⁹ *According to the 2001 Productivity Commission report, since 1995-96, South Australia has lagged behind every other State in its call on available Federal Government resources for SAAP. Since that time, we have had a growth rate in SAAP (in SA) of 6% compared to a National Growth rate of 18%. In other words, we have not taken up two thirds of available Federal funding for SAAP because we have not been able to equal that investment as a State in the recent past.*²⁰

There are 87 SAAP services in South Australia: 50 in Metropolitan Adelaide (Eastern: 30; Western: 5; Northern: 8; Southern: 7), and 37 in Regional SA.²¹ They supported 9,400 clients during 2002-03, and due to repeat visits by some of these, actually supported 14,100 people on separate occasions during the year.²² It is estimated that 3,750 requests for SAAP services in SA could not be met during 2002-03.²³

SAAP services include both crisis accommodation and transitional housing. Crisis accommodation is short-term accommodation that has on-site staffing and does not offer independent tenancies. Transitional housing is defined as *time limited accommodation which is managed by a not for profit organisation to assist the transition from homelessness to adequate housing*. In general, transitional housing offers independent accommodation, has lease agreements with tenants, is SAAP funded and uses leased SA Housing Trust stock from the Supported Tenancies Scheme.²⁴ As of May 2004, there were approximately 790 transitional housing properties throughout SA.²⁵ The effectiveness of Transitional Housing and short-term accommodation depends on the ability of people in that accommodation to move on to appropriate long-term housing options. This transition is often affected by the lack of affordable housing and the lack of ongoing support.²⁶

According to the 2001 Census data there were 1,138 people who were in SAAP Accommodation on Census night.²⁷ Of those who accessed SAAP services during 2002-03:

- ◆ 37.3% were male and 62.7% were female.²⁸
- ◆ 15.3% were Indigenous clients, although they are only 1.5% of the overall population of SA.²⁹
- ◆ 7.0% were born in countries apart from Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, UK, USA or Australia, (compared to 11.1% of the overall population of SA).³⁰
- ◆ 20.7% were under 20 years of age, 29.5% were 20-30, 42.5% were 30-50, and 7.4% over 50 years old.³¹
- ◆ There were 5,350 accompanying children (0-17 years, with 89% 0-12 years old).³²

The most common reasons stated for accessing SAAP services were:

- ◆ Domestic and family violence (29.5%).
- ◆ Relationship / family breakdown (13.4%).
- ◆ Eviction / previous accommodation ended (9.7%).
- ◆ Usual accommodation unavailable (8.7%).³³

A further 4,095 people, (54% of the homeless population) were staying temporarily with another household or living for short periods in hostels or boarding houses.³⁴

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Tertiary Homelessness

- ◆ People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis are classified as homeless by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as this type of accommodation is *deemed to be below minimum community housing standards (equivalent to a small rented flat with a bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchen) and lack security of tenure.* ³⁵
- ◆ The definition of homelessness is viewed by some as *imposing the 'Australian dream' of a traditional house and garden, without acknowledging or validating other housing aspirations.* ³⁶
- ◆ Boarding houses are recognised as having an important function in the housing sector. ³⁷
- ◆ The policy tension of residents of boarding house being considered to be homeless and boarding houses being seen as one of the solutions to homeless was discussed at the National Housing Conference in Adelaide (November 2003) during a presentation titled *Reports on their death have been greatly exaggerated : Boarding Houses in South Australia*, and illustrated by the following quote from that presentation:
It is our perception that boarding houses occupy an uneasy and ambivalent place in housing policy and planning; we are uncomfortable about them and don't like them very much, but we also promote them and champion their cause. ³⁸
- ◆ While it is important to ensure that boarding houses are well managed and up to approved standards, the tenure type in itself is not inherently bad. Certainly there are some people who would prefer a boarding house in the city, to a house in the suburbs. Refer to Shelter SA's *Snapshot, Boarding Houses* for more information.
- ◆ While long-term caravan park residents are not included in the tertiary homeless statistics, there is growing recognition that many of these residents should also be considered as being in tertiary homelessness. Refer to Shelter SA's *Snapshot, Caravan Parks*, for more details.

Social Inclusion Initiative

- ◆ The SA Labor Government *set a target of reducing homelessness in South Australia by 50% during its time in office.* This included people in primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness, i.e. approximately 7,000 people. ³⁹
- ◆ In response to the target set by the State Government, the Social Inclusion Board developed a comprehensive report called *Everyone's Responsibility: Reducing Homelessness in South Australia.* It contained 37 recommendations and a 14 point 'Immediate Action Plan'. As a result, in July 2003 the Government allocated \$12 million over 4 years for the Social Inclusion homelessness initiatives. ⁴⁰ The State Government allocated a further \$8 million over 4 years in the May 2004 Budget.
- ◆ Another target set by the State Government and included in the *South Australian Strategic Plan* (March 2004) is *to halve the number of 'rough sleepers' in South Australia by 2010.* ⁴¹

The basic human right to access adequate and suitable housing for every person in South Australia must be a goal not only of Government but of the whole community. ⁴²

Monsignor David Cappo, Chair, Social Inclusion Board

Homelessness

Shelter SA Policy Statement 6 Homelessness

- 6.1 Shelter SA believes every person has a right to safe, secure, affordable housing.
- 6.2 Shelter SA supports a State Housing Plan which aims to provide all South Australians with opportunity for safe, secure, appropriate and affordable accommodation.
- 6.3 Shelter SA supports a whole of government approach to prevent homelessness.
- 6.4 Shelter SA urges the State Government to increase and expand funding for services assisting vulnerable tenants and homeowners who are at risk of homelessness.
- 6.5 Shelter SA urges Commonwealth and State Governments to recognise the effect of homelessness on children and develop a specific plan and allocate resources to address this problem.
- 6.6 Shelter SA urges Commonwealth and State Governments to increase funding for crisis, emergency and transitional accommodation, including couples, women and young people.
- 6.7 Shelter SA supports the expansion of the early intervention and other prevention strategies used in the Housing Trust, to help sustain tenancies in the public and private sectors, to prevent homelessness.
- 6.8 Shelter SA urges the State Government to establish and support a Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service, managed by a non-government organisation, to assist all renters.
- 6.9 Shelter SA urges the State Government to increase funding of the social housing sector, to increase the supply of affordable housing for people on low incomes.
- 6.10 Shelter SA believes that all relevant State Government Departments should address both structural and secondary causes of homelessness, especially recognising the effects of homelessness on health, education and employment.
- 6.11 Shelter SA urges the State Government to better coordinate mental health services and housing support services.
- 6.12 Shelter SA urges the State Government to develop specific programs to address Indigenous homelessness, and facilitate the employment of Indigenous workers in such programs.



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References and Further Information

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