

Snapshot: Who is Looking for Housing Assistance in South Australia?

Sean Sheehy, Research Assistant, Shelter SA

Shelter SA consistently receives telephone calls from people experiencing difficulties with their housing situation or a lack of housing and support. Based on a six month period, this article provides an analysis of the demographics of callers.

Age

Age is an important demographic for the purposes of providing referral information to callers as there are numerous services designed to specifically assist younger and older people. In South Australia (SA), approximately 20 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are young (below 25 years old) and 24 per cent of all calls received by Shelter SA were from young people. Young callers had not heard of services specifically designed for young people like Trace-a-Place and St John's Youth Service. Shelter SA has previously identified that young people cannot easily find or access the services that are available to them. Only four callers identified as being over the age of 55 and the majority of callers were 25 to 55 years old, so fit the criteria for generic homelessness services (in SA, 12 per cent of people who are homeless are over the age of 55). Though a relatively small sample size, Shelter SA caller demographics closely reflect the wider homelessness population.

Gender

Females made up 60 per cent of callers to Shelter SA. Considering 42.6 per cent of people who are homeless in SA are women, this figure is proportionally quite large. Some callers let us know they were fleeing domestic violence, one of the major causes of homelessness.

With Children

More than one in five callers specified that they were accompanied by a child. Five callers reported that they were pregnant at the time of calling. A person who experiences homelessness as a young child is more likely to experience homelessness later on in life than someone who has not. It appears that families, whether mothers or fathers with children, find it difficult to access appropriate crisis accommodation services and more accommodation is required for families.

Other Demographic Information

The most significant other demographic variable was domestic violence (DV) leavers. People who said they were escaping DV accounted for 27 per cent of callers (with a further four per cent reporting they were leaving relationships). Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness in South Australia.

Other demographics large enough to mention were Aboriginal people (13 per cent), people with mental health issues (ten per cent) and immigrants (eight per cent). The four main extra groups mentioned then, of whom all are very vulnerable, account for nearly 60 per cent of all callers.

Interesting to note is that 13 per cent of callers were Aboriginal people, yet 24.5 per cent of homeless people in Australia are Aboriginal. There are specific barriers for Aboriginal people to access mainstream services.

Reasons for Calling

The main reason people were calling was because they did not have a safe, secure, appropriate or affordable place to call home. There were five main outcomes that callers were looking for when they called Shelter SA:

- immediate emergency housing (56 per cent)
- non-immediate housing (33 per cent)
- tenancy assistance (seven per cent)
- community support groups (two per cent)
- rental bond assistance (two per cent)

Overall Observations

It is important to note that there did not seem to be an upwards or downwards trend in any one demographic area. The timing of calls was sporadic, with no predictability around days and times. While the amount of calls per month was consistent, May saw a significant spike. Some callers seem to have exhausted all of the suggestions we could offer them and remained unable to obtain what they needed. When callers are very distressed, there is little Shelter SA can offer as a peak body rather than a service provider. We have a comprehensive list of resources that is kept up to date and staff meet to discuss strategies to improve our referrals to callers.

What Next?

Shelter SA consistently receives telephone calls from people who do not know where to seek assistance, enter the homelessness service system or find suitable accommodation. A more consumer-friendly method of relaying where and what the services are to support people could provide a much more effective and efficient method of community service delivery.

Shelter SA is in the process of developing a mobile phone App for people who need assistance, has commenced the production of videos and sharing on social media to highlight the source of helpful supports and continues to advocate for systems and services that support vulnerable South Australians.¹

Endnote

1. All external statistics were taken from; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating*