

The impact of poverty and homelessness on children and young people in Australia

Poverty

In Australia there are 3.24 million people (13.6%) living below the poverty line (50% of median income) including

774,000

children (17.7%) and 424,800 young people (13.9%). This equates to 1 in 8 people and 1 in 6 children living in poverty in Australia.⁽¹⁾

Poverty is one of the main reasons why families become homeless. They don't have enough money for the basics and have very limited access to affordable and available housing.

Poverty can be the result of many social, economic and health-related factors. Individual factors, such as low educational attainment, unemployment, experience of family and domestic violence, ill health (including mental health issues) and disability, trauma, and substance misuse.⁽⁴⁾

Definition of homelessness

Data on homelessness comes from the ABS Census of Population and Housing collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) every 5 years, with the most recent data available for 2016.

According to the ABS, a person is considered to be experiencing homelessness if they are:



Staying temporarily with another household and do not have a usual residence, also known as 'couch surfing'.



Living in an improvised dwelling, tent or sleeping out in supported accommodation for the homeless.



Staying in a boarding house or other temporary lodging, or living in a severely crowded situation.⁽²⁾

Domestic violence and homelessness

In 2019-20, **119,200** Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients had experienced family and domestic violence, equating to **41%** of all clients.⁽¹⁾

In 2017-18, almost half of children (**45% or 29,600**) receiving SHS support accessed these services for interpersonal reasons such as domestic and family violence or family breakdown.⁽²⁾

Family and domestic violence is the **main reason** women and children leave their homes in Australia.

1. ACOSS Poverty in Australia 2020
2. AIHW - Australia's Youth - Homelessness and Overcrowding 2021
3. AIHW Australia's Children 2020
4. AIHW - Homelessness and Homelessness Services 2020
5. AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020

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Children and homelessness



Children experiencing homelessness are also at increased risk of being homeless as adolescents and adults. ⁽¹⁾



Homeless children are more likely to have a physical disability, emotional or behavioural problems. ⁽¹⁾

19,400
(0.4%) children aged 0-14 were homeless on Census night in 2016. ⁽³⁾



Homelessness is disruptive to children's education with decreased engagement in the classroom and poor academic achievement. ⁽¹⁾



Preschool and school-aged children experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience mental health problems. ⁽¹⁾



Food insecurity is also frequently reported by young people experiencing homelessness, putting them at increased risk of adverse health outcomes. ⁽¹⁾

Families and homelessness

Children living in sole parent families have a poverty rate of

44%

which is 3 times that of couple families (13%). ⁽¹⁾

In 2019-20, **290,500** clients were assisted by Specialty Homelessness Services (SHS), equating to **1.1%** of the Australian population.

Of the 290,500 clients SHS agencies assisted in 2019-20:

- **6 in 10** were female (60% or 174,700 clients)
- **1 in 6** were children under the age of 10 (17% or 48,500 clients)
- **1 in 10** were children and youth aged 10-17 (13% or 36,500 clients)
- **Over 1 in 3** (34% or 91,700) clients were living in single-parent with 1 or more children families when they sought support⁽⁵⁾

1. ACOSS Poverty in Australia 2020

2. AIHW - Australia's Youth - Homelessness and Overcrowding 2021

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Young people and homelessness



Being homeless can limit access to medicine, treatment and basic hygiene and expose young people to sexual exploitation, violence and social isolation. ⁽⁴⁾



Young people are particularly vulnerable to the enduring harm caused by disruption to their education and transition to employment. ⁽⁴⁾

24,200

young people aged 15-24 (0.8% of all young people) experienced homelessness on Census night 2016. ⁽²⁾



Homeless young people can also experience high levels of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, behavioural problems and alcohol and drug misuse and face a high mortality rate. ⁽⁴⁾



In 2016, rates of homelessness were substantially higher among young people aged 15-24 living in remote and very remote areas (6.2%) than among those living in major cities (0.8%). ⁽⁴⁾



Being homeless can substantially harm young people's health and wellbeing, whether they are part of a family or living alone. ⁽⁴⁾



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