

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

Poverty

3.3 million people (13.4%) live below the poverty line (50% of median income), including

761,000

children (16.6%). This equates to 1 in 8 adults 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.⁽²⁾

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 2021.

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 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 2020-2021, **116,200** Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients have experienced family and domestic violence, equating to **42%** of all clients.

In 2020-2021, nearly half (**46% or 47,300**) receiving SHS support are single parents with one or more children, and have accessed these services due to domestic and family violence.

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

1. Australian Council of Social Service (ACCOSS) Poverty in Australia 2022
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Australia's Youth - Homelessness and Overcrowding 2021
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Australia's Children 2021
4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Homelessness and Overcrowding 2021
5. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020-21

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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.
AIHW Australia's Children 2021



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%).

ACOSS Poverty in Australia 2022

In 2020-2021, **278,300** clients were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), where **39%** were new clients.⁽⁵⁾

Of the 278,300 clients SHS agencies assisted in 2020-2021:

- **6 in 10** were female (60% or 167,400 clients)
- **3 in 10** were children and youth under the age of 18 (28% or 78,500 clients)
- **More than 1 in 6** (16% or 44,242 clients) of all clients were children under the age of 10⁽⁵⁾

1. Australian Council of Social Service Poverty in Australia 2022

2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Australia's Youth - Homelessness and Overcrowding 2021

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Young people and homelessness

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Homelessness and Overcrowding 2021



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



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

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.



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%).



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



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