

Demand for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2008–09

Summary

July 2010

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

Cat. no. HOU. 231

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ISBN 978 1 74249 039 7

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2010. Demand for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2008–09: summary. Cat. no. HOU 231. Canberra: AIHW.

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Published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report.
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Overview

In Australia, government-funded specialist homelessness agencies accommodate large numbers of people every day, but cannot always meet all requests for accommodation. When a valid request cannot be met, the requestor is classified as having been 'turned away'.

This summary document presents key data on the people turned away from specialist homelessness accommodation in 2008–09 and is a companion to the more detailed *Demand for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2008–09* report (AIHW 2010). For comprehensive information, a glossary, and counting rules for the data, please refer to the full report.

There are several caveats surrounding the data presented in this summary (see Box 1). These are related to new agreements that came into effect during 2008–09, the sample size and the period surveyed. Data presented in this summary exclude Victorian data. In Victoria, accommodation for homeless people is also provided through the Transitional Housing Management program. As accommodation provided through transitional housing is not recorded in this report it is therefore not possible to derive turn-away rates for Victoria that are comparable with information reported in previous years, or with those reported by other states and territories. For more information on the reporting of accommodation data in Victoria in 2008–09, refer to *Government-funded specialist homelessness services 2008–09* (AIHW 2010b). The AIHW and the Victorian Government are working to improve data recording for future reporting.

The data nevertheless indicate that government-funded specialist homelessness agencies are operating to capacity and are unable to completely meet the expressed demand for accommodation. Some groups, such as families, experience more difficulty than others in obtaining immediate accommodation.

When purely new requests for accommodation are considered on any given day, the turn-away rates seem high, with 62% of all people who sought immediate accommodation being turned away (Figure 1). But new requests comprise only around 4% of the total demand for accommodation (new requests plus all people currently in accommodation) (Figure 3).

When considered in terms of the total demand for accommodation, just under 2% (1.7%) of all people who sought immediate accommodation were newly accommodated on any given day while close to 3% (2.7%) were turned away.

Box 1: Caution on interpreting data

New government arrangements

Some significant developments have occurred in homelessness data collection since the publication of the previous report on this topic, *Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2007–08: a report from the SAAP National Data Collection* (AIHW 2009).

On 1 January 2009, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) V Agreement between the Australian Government and the states and territories was replaced by the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Funding for the NAHA began on 1 January 2009. Funding for the NPAH, however, did not begin until 1 July 2009. As such, no services funded under NPAH are included in this summary.

The changed arrangements introduced midway through 2008–09 reporting year may affect comparisons with previous years. Most existing services under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) continued, but by the time of the second enumeration period for the Demand for Accommodation Collection (6–12 May 2009) the development and implementation of new services under the revised arrangements had begun. It is not possible to quantify the extent to which existing services had changed or new services had been added at that point, although it is known that any changes were not extensive.

Sample size, period surveyed

Readers should bear in mind that, while the measures of turn-away and other Demand for Accommodation Collection data presented here provide an indication of the overall experience of people seeking specialist homelessness accommodation, such measures:

- include only data from agencies that responded to both the Client Collection and the Demand for Accommodation Collection. These agencies represented 70% (663) of all participating agencies (945) (AIHW 2010a:Appendix 3; excludes Victorian data). No attempt has been made to extrapolate these results to the total number of people seeking accommodation from government-funded specialist homelessness agencies. Further, it is not known to what extent the activities of non-responding agencies differ from those that did respond. It is, however, known that many of the non-responding agencies were those that provided support services only rather than accommodation.
- relate to 2 weeks in the year. It is not known to what extent seasonal and other factors may result in different rates being experienced at other times of the year (AIHW 2010a: Box 1.1).

Exclusion of Victorian data

Data presented in this summary exclude Victorian data. In Victoria, accommodation for homeless people is also provided through the Transitional Housing Management program. As accommodation provided through transitional housing is not recorded in this report it is therefore not possible to derive turn-away rates for Victoria that are comparable with information reported in previous years, or with those reported by other states and territories. For more information on the reporting of accommodation data in Victoria in 2008–09, refer to *Government-funded specialist homelessness services 2008–09* (AIHW 2010b). The AIHW and the Victorian Government are working to improve data recording for future reporting.

Turn-away as a percentage of people requiring new and immediate accommodation

This measure provides an indication of a person's likelihood of obtaining government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation on a given day.

It excludes people already accommodated and continuing their accommodation.

On average, for people who required new and immediate accommodation during the collection period:

- 57% of adults and unaccompanied children who sought accommodation were turned away (AIHW 2010a:Table 6.1).
- 70% of accompanying children who sought accommodation were turned away (AIHW 2010a:Table 7.1).
- 62% of all people who sought accommodation were turned away (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Turn-away for people who required new and immediate accommodation, 3–9 December 2008 and 6–12 May 2009 (daily average percentage)

Pie chart showing: Newly accommodated (38.5%) and turned away (61.5%).

Note: Excludes Victorian data. See Box 1 and AIHW 2010a:Chapter 1 for more detail.

Source: AIHW 2010a:Table 8.1.

Requesting group

For people who required new and immediate accommodation, the requesting groups most likely to be turned away were family groups—80% of couples with children, 75% of couples without children and 69% of individuals with children were turned away, compared with 50% of individuals without children (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Turn-away for people who required new and immediate accommodation, by requesting group, 3–9 December 2008 and 6–12 May 2009 (daily average percentage)

Vertical bar chart showing, for turned away and newly accommodated, per cent on y-axis and requesting group on x-axis.

Note: Excludes Victorian data. See Box 1 and AIHW 2010a:Chapter 1 for more detail.

Source: AIHW 2010a:Figure 8.1.

Turn-away as a percentage of the total expressed demand for immediate accommodation

This measure provides an indication of the ability of agencies to meet the total expressed demand for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation. It is calculated as the daily average percentage of people who could not be accommodated relative to all people who required new and immediate accommodation plus those who were continuing their accommodation from a previous day.

People needing new and immediate accommodation account for only a small proportion of the total demand for accommodation on an average day (see Figure 3). When considered in this light, 2% of all people who had a demand for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation were newly accommodated and 3% were turned away. This was similar when broken down for adults and unaccompanied children (3%), and accompanying children (2%) (AIHW 2010a:tables 6.1 and 7.1).

The small number of people not accommodated relative to the total expressed demand for accommodation suggests that a small increase in the number of places available on an average day could have a significant impact on the level of unmet demand. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the answer is more complex than this.

For example, based on data on the length of support of existing clients, many people who are turned away are likely to require accommodation for more than one night, on average 54 days (AIHW 2010a:Chapter 9). On this basis, if all people turned away on an average day were provided with accommodation, none of the beds provided would become available for other people who require accommodation for however long those people stay.

In addition, an increase in capacity may have flow-on effects on the number of people seeking accommodation because, as supply increases, so too might the demand for that accommodation. In other words, the availability of more beds in the sector could result in an increase in the demand for accommodation. Related to supply and demand is the 'hidden need' for accommodation caused by people not seeking assistance when they need it.

Please see Chapter 9 of the full report for more detail.

Figure 3: Turn-away for total expressed demand for immediate accommodation, 3–9 December 2008 and 6–12 May 2009 (daily average percentage)

Pie chart showing: turned away (2.7%); newly accommodated (1.7%); and continuing accommodation (95.7%).

Note: Excludes Victorian data. See Box 1 and AIHW 2010a:Chapter 1 for more detail.

Source: AIHW 2010a:Figure 8.2.

Requesting group

When considered as the daily average percentage of the total expressed demand for accommodation, agencies were less able to meet the demand for accommodation from couples without children than for other groups (AIHW 2010a:Table 8.2). Five per cent of couples without children were turned away, compared with between 2% and 3% for the other groups. Couples without children, however, represented the smallest number of people requiring accommodation on an average day.

Characteristics of people with a valid unmet request for immediate accommodation

The data below show the sex, age, country of birth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of people with a valid unmet request for immediate accommodation, some of whom, although initially turned away, were accommodated later that same day (see AIHW 2010a: Chapter 5 for more information).

Sex

Over half (55%) of all people with a valid unmet request for new and immediate accommodation were female, 45% were male (derived from AIHW 2010a:Table 4.4).

Age

Over half of the people with a valid unmet request for new and immediate accommodation were under 20 years of age (56%) (derived from AIHW 2010a:Table 4.5). A further 37% were aged 20–44 years, 7% were aged 45–64 years, and less than 1% were aged 65 years and over.

Country of birth

The majority of all people with a valid unmet request for new and immediate accommodation were born in Australia (90%) (derived from AIHW 2010a:Table 4.6).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Over a quarter (28%) of all people with a valid unmet request for new and immediate accommodation were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (derived from AIHW 2010a:Table 4.7).

What types of agencies were people most likely to be turned away from?

People were most likely to be turned away from family and general agencies (AIHW 2010a:Chapter 8). People were least likely to be turned away from single men's and single women's agencies.

Why were they turned away?

The most common reason why people were turned away was a lack of accommodation (in 84% of valid unmet requests) (AIHW 2010a:Chapter 3). This was particularly the case for family groups with children.

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2009. Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2007-08: a report from the SAAP National Data Collection. SAAP NDC report series 13. Cat. no. HOU 211. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2010a. Demand for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2008-09: a report from the SAAP National Data Collection. Cat. no. HOU 230. Canberra: AIHW.

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