

**Submission  
No 175**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA**

**Organisation:** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Date Received:** 24 January 2020

## Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Mr Barry Sandison

**Organisation Name:** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Your position or role:** Chief Executive Officer

### SURVEY QUESTIONS

**Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this inquiry into homelessness to consider::**

Rough sleeping, Services, Public housing, Indigenous people, Family violence, Housing affordability, Mental health, Employment

**What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :**

Public sector body

**Are there any additional themes we should consider?**

### YOUR SUBMISSION

**Submission:**

**Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:**

### FILE ATTACHMENTS

**File1:** 

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Barry Sandison



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare**



Parliament of Victoria  
Legislative Council, Legal and Social Issues Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3003

### **Submission to the Victorian Legislative Council Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria**

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Legislative Council Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. This submission highlights data available from AIHW that may be of relevance.

The AIHW provides accessible information and statistics on a wide range of topics about Australians' health and wellbeing. We aim to inform good decisions—and improve the health and welfare of all Australians—through strong evidence that is timely, reliable, relevant and trusted.

The AIHW publishes over 180 outputs each year, ranging from comprehensive national reports to technical documents and guides, to innovative web-based products. As required by the Parliament in Australia, flagship reports, Australia's health and Australia's welfare, are published in alternate years. Further information on the roles and responsibilities of the AIHW are available at [www.aihw.gov.au/about-us](http://www.aihw.gov.au/about-us).

The *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19* report contains the latest data relating to clients of specialist homelessness services, the services requested, outcomes achieved, and unmet requests for services during 2018–19. Victorian specific data are included in Attachment 1, along with a range of additional data that may be of interest to the inquiry, including housing tenure and housing affordability data.

Should the committee have any queries about the information we have provided, or wish to seek additional information from the AIHW, we are available to discuss at your convenience. Please contact Nikki Schroder, Head, Housing and Homelessness Reporting and Development Unit on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Barry Sandison  
Chief Executive Officer

23 January 2020

# Attachment 1: Relevant data and information about housing and homelessness in Victoria

## Introduction

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) welcomes the opportunity to provide supporting evidence to the Victorian Legislative Council's Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

The AIHW is a national independent statutory agency established in 1987 with roles and responsibilities set out in the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*.

The AIHW's purpose is to create authoritative and accessible information and statistics that inform decisions and improve the health and welfare of all Australians. The role of the AIHW is to:

- collect and produce, and coordinate and assist the collection and production of, health- and welfare-related information and statistics
- conduct and promote research into Australians' health and their health services
- develop specialised standards and classifications for health, health services and welfare services
- publish reports on its work
- make recommendations to the Minister on prevention and treatment of diseases and improvement and promotion of the health awareness of Australians
- provide researchers with access to health- and welfare-related information and statistics, subject to confidentiality provisions.

The AIHW also contributes to the development of key performance indicators across a range of health and welfare domains, is a national leader in data linkage activities and is the custodian for the secondary use of My Health Record system data. The AIHW has a long history of balancing the need for publicly available data, while adhering to strict privacy requirements of data suppliers and the expectations of stakeholders and the general public.

## AIHW's Homelessness Information Activities

For many years the AIHW has been the primary data collection and reporting authority for the national collection of data on people seeking and receiving homelessness support services. The AIHW is the custodian for a range of health and welfare data sets, including the collection detailing the support provided by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS); these services funded in accordance with the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) (CFFR 2018).

Highly qualified AIHW staff manage the following activities relating to SHS data:

- SHS agency support with the functions and data reporting requirements of the client management system, e.g. training and phone support.
- Certification of client management systems to ensure compliance with national collection standards.
- Collection of SHS data through the AIHW's Validata™ system.
- Production of 'return-to-source' data products including quarterly summary reports and confidentialised unit record files.

- Data custodian of the national collections:
  - June 2011—present; the Specialist Homelessness Services National Minimum Data Set (SHS NMDS) enhanced and ultimately replaced SAAP, and provides quality information about people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness who are seeking services from specialist homelessness agencies.
  - July 1996—June 2011; The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection (SAAP NDC) nationally consistent client data, including demographics, personal circumstances relating to their needs, demand for accommodation and administrative data about SAAP agencies.
- Responding to 'ad-hoc' data requests for information derived from the national collections.
- Authoring and publication of *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report*, an online annual summary of data which includes analytical insights into the data, interactive data visualisations and state/territory summary fact sheets.
- Authoring and publication of bespoke reports, for example, *Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services*.
- Participation in national data development activities, including the Housing and Homelessness Senior Official Network, and the related Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group.

The AIHW is also the custodian for national social housing data collections, comprising a range of social housing programs and state/territory funded housing support payments, and manages the Australian Government Housing Data Set.

The AIHW's biennial flagship publication *Australian's Welfare* presents key facts on housing, education and skills, employment and work, income and finance: government payments, social support, and justice and safety. In addition, *Australia's welfare 2019: data insights* presents an overview of the welfare data landscape and explores selected welfare topics—including intergenerational disadvantage, income support, future of work, disability services, elder abuse and child wellbeing—in 8 original articles (AIHW 2019a).

## Housing in Australia

The following summarises the presentation of information published in *Australia's Welfare Housing snapshots* (AIHW 2019a), and from the Housing data dashboard for more detailed information about Victorian specific information (AIHW 2019b).

### Changing nature of housing tenure

Secure housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of Australians. While home ownership continues to be a widely held aspiration among Australians, over the last 25 years there has been a gradual decline in the proportion of households living in their own home, and an increase in households in the private rental market.

Specifically for Victoria, changes in the proportion of households by tenure type between 1994–95 and 2017–18 were (ABS 2019) (Australia included for context):

- Decrease in home owners without a mortgage; from 45% of all households to 31% (Australia 42% to 30%)
- Increase in home owners with a mortgage; from 31% to 37% (Australia 30% to 37%)
- Increase in households in the private rental market; from 17% to 27% (Australia 18% to 27%) and
- Decrease in state or territory housing authority households; from 3.7% to 1.7% (Australia 5.5% to 3.1%).

## Housing affordability

A household's financial situation, the overall demand in the housing market, and housing tenure type (whether a household is seeking to rent, is renting, is looking to buy or is a home owner with or without a mortgage) all influence individual housing affordability (Senate Economics References Committee 2015). The simplest measure of housing affordability is the comparison of housing costs to gross household income.

For Victoria, households on average spent 14% of their gross income on housing costs in 2017–18, an increase from 12% in 1994–95, and similar to the national average (ABS 2019a). When considering tenure type, the situation is vastly different, as might be expected. Households in Victoria with a mortgage spent on average 17% (or \$487 per week) of their gross income on housing costs in 2017–18; those in a state or territory housing authority tenure spent 23% (\$161) and those in private rental spent 20% (\$386), while households without a mortgage spent 3.2% (\$56).

Housing stress is commonly defined as households that spend more than 30% of gross income on housing costs (ABS 2019a). In 2017–18, 11.5% of households nationally spent 30% to 50% of gross income on housing costs with another 5.5% spending 50% or more, increasing from 9.2% and 4.6% respectively since 1994–95. In Victoria in 2017–18, 11.7% of households nationally spent 30% to 50% of gross income on housing costs with another 4.9% spending 50% or more; increasing from 9.2% and 4.5% respectively since 1994–95.

While the household income spent on housing costs is a reasonable broad indicator, it does not take into consideration that high-income households may choose to spend more than 30% of their household income on housing. Their higher income means they have sufficient income after housing costs to avoid financial stress (AHURI 2018). By contrast, low-income households (lowest 40% of household income distribution) are more likely to lack the resources to deal with financial impacts arising from critical life events and/or housing market factors.

Focusing on low income households, there were an estimated 966,000 low income Victorian households. Of these, 257,000 (or 27%) were renting in the private rental market and on average they spent 32% of gross income on housing costs, similar to the national average for low income private rental households. These figures demonstrate that on average low income households in the private rental market in Victoria are considered to be in housing stress which may subsequently have an adverse impact on housing stability, particularly if there is a significant life event, such as illness or job loss.

## Housing assistance

Australian governments provide a range of housing assistance to households, ranging from rental assistance payments to social housing. In 2018, there were around 292,000 income units in Victoria receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), and around 9,300 households receiving Private Rent Assistance in the form of bond loans (AIHW 2019c). More recent data are available for CRA; in 2019 there were around 284,000 income units receiving CRA in Victoria (SCRGSP 2020).

As at June 2018, Victoria had around 80,500 social housing dwellings, with the majority public housing dwellings (64,300), a further 14,500 community housing and 1,700 Indigenous community housing dwellings. More recent data are available for two programs; as at June 2019, there were around 64,400 public housing and 15,100 community housing dwellings (SCRGSP 2020).

Between 2006 and 2013, there was an increase in the number of social housing dwellings, plateauing since 2013 (AIHW 2019c). Despite increases in Victoria's social housing stock, the overall proportion of social housing households has not kept pace with the growth in the number of Victorian households over the last decade. Using the projected number of households in Victoria, the number of social housing dwellings per 100 households has declined from 3.6 per 100 households in 2008–09 to 3.2 in 2017–18 (unpublished; AIHW

analysis of AIHW National Housing Assistance Data Repository 2017–18 (AIHW 2019c), ABS Household and Family Projections [ABS 2019b]).

### Homeless estimate

There were an estimated 24,800 homeless people in Victoria on Census night in 2016, up from around 17,400 in 2006 (ABS 2018). Those living in severely crowded dwellings (36% or around 8,900 people) and people in supported accommodation for the homeless (29% or 7,200 people) made up the majority of people experiencing homelessness, with a further 1,100 people (5%) living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out (also known as rough sleeping).

### Response to homelessness – Specialist Homelessness Services

Governments across Australia fund a range of services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as defined in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (CFFR 2018). These services are delivered by non-government organisations (known as Specialist Homelessness Services). Agencies may specialise in delivering services to specific target groups (such as young people or people experiencing domestic and family violence) and/or provide more generic services to people facing housing crises.

The national Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC), collated and managed by the AIHW, comprises comprehensive data on clients receiving support, from SHS agencies since 2011–12. People may be experiencing homelessness on presentation to services, or could be at risk of homelessness, for example, in private rental housing but facing eviction without a stable future tenure in place. Clients may have one or more support periods throughout the year and may have different housing situations at the start of each support period, and different needs identified in each support period.

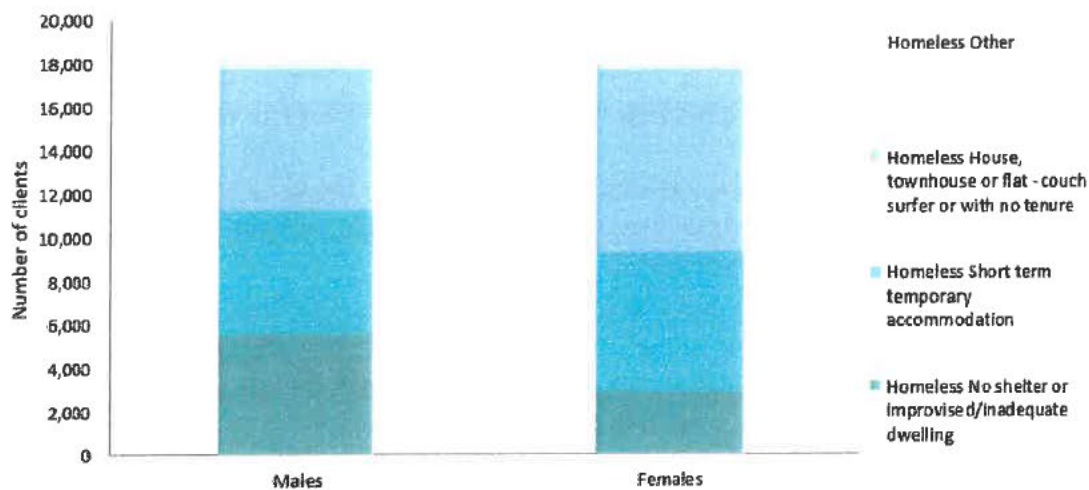
In contrast to Census data, the SHSC is an ongoing administrative data collection about all clients receiving SHS support. While it cannot be used to estimate the prevalence of homelessness in Victoria, it does provide valuable insights into people seeking and receiving support, including changes over time.

Around 113,000 clients received support from agencies in Victoria throughout 2018–19, an increase from around 86,100 clients in 2011–12 (AIHW 2019d). In 2018–19, this equates to 174.8 clients per 10,000 population, the second highest rate among states/territories, and higher than the national average (116.2).

[Note: From 2017–18 to 2018–19, there was a 3% decrease in the total number of Victorian homelessness clients and a 10% decrease in family violence clients following years of steady increases in these numbers. The decrease was primarily due to a practice correction in how some family violence agencies were recording clients. In addition, during 2018–19, a phased process to shift family violence intake to non-SHS services began, which may result in an overall decrease in the number of SHS family clients over the coming years. Caution should be used when comparing Victorian client numbers over recent years.]

Around a third of clients (36% or 36,000 clients) were homeless at the start of support in 2018–19, lower than the national rate of 42%. Of those who were homelessness on first presentation, there were equal numbers of males and females. Both males and females were most likely to be living in a *House, townhouse or flat – couch surfer with no tenure*, however, there were more male clients rough sleeping than females (5,500 males, compared with 2,900 females; *No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling*) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of SHS clients, homeless at first presentation, by housing situation and sex, Victoria, 2018–19**



Source: AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2018–19.

Further detailed information about clients receiving services in Victoria is available at attachments A (Fact sheet: Specialist homelessness services 2018–19: Victoria) and B (Infographic: On any given day, Victoria) (AIHW 2019d).

## National Data Development Activities

Commencing on 1 July 2018, the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) auspices arrangements between commonwealth and state and territory governments to improve outcomes across the housing spectrum and is generally directed to those most in need through homelessness services and social housing (CFFR 2018). A key element of the NHHA is the development and implementation of improved, nationally consistent, housing and homelessness data sets, achieved through a nationally agreed Data Improvement Plan. These improved and nationally consistent data will initially facilitate reporting on national and jurisdictional housing and homelessness outcomes, contribute to publicly available national data and support future research, policy and policy evaluation. At the time of writing, the final draft of the Data Improvement Plan is being considered by all signatories and is expected to become Schedule E to the NHHA once finalised.

The AIHW will play a key role supporting finalisation and implementation of the Data Improvement Plan as the national repository for, and custodian of, key social housing and homelessness data collections such as the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, the national social housing collections, and the National Social Housing Survey.

## Data linkage at the AIHW

The AIHW became a Commonwealth Accredited Integrating Authority in mid-2012. Since then, the volume and complexity of data linkage projects has grown substantially. Linkage to national assets, such as hospital datasets, Medicare Benefits Schedule datasets and Commonwealth welfare support payments data, are performed on a regular basis and could assist with additional analysis of Victorian clients of Specialist Homelessness Services.

For example, data linkage can be used to explore service use patterns and pathways, both targeted and broader outcomes for priority populations, and broader social impact and investment prioritisation. The inquiry may wish to explore these opportunities. The AIHW's Data Integration Services Centre provides critical initial advice and support for data linkage projects including assessment of project technical requirements in partnership with ethics committee support services.

## References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018. Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016. ABS cat. no. 2049.0. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2019a. Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2017–18. ABS cat. no. 4130.0. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2019b. Household and Family Projections, Australia (multiple releases). ABS Cat. no. 3236.0. Canberra: ABS.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2019a. Australia's Welfare 2019: data insights, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/australias-welfare-2019-data-insights/contents/summary>, viewed November 2019.
- AIHW 2019b. Housing data dashboard. <https://www.housingdata.gov.au/>, viewed November 2019.
- AIHW 2019c. Housing assistance in Australia 2019. Cat. no. HOU 315. Canberra: AIHW, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2019/contents/summary>, viewed December 2019.
- AIHW 2019d. Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19. Cat. no. HOU 318. Canberra: AIHW <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2018-19/contents/summary>, viewed December 2019.
- Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR 2018) National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, [http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/housing\\_homelessness\\_agreement.aspx](http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/housing_homelessness_agreement.aspx), viewed December 2019.
- SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2020, Report on Government Services 2020. Canberra: Productivity Commission.

## Attachments

- A Fact sheet: Specialist homelessness services 2018–19 Victoria
- B Infographic: On any given day, across Victoria



# Specialist homelessness services 2018–19: Victoria

Homelessness can profoundly affect a person’s mental and physical health, their education and employment opportunities, and their ability to fully participate in society. Governments across Australia fund a range of specialist services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) deliver services for specific groups (such as people experiencing family and domestic violence and young people) as well as more generic services for people in housing crisis.

## How many people were assisted?

One in 57 people in Victoria (Vic) received homelessness assistance, higher than the national rate (1 in 86). The top 3 reasons for clients seeking assistance were:

- family and domestic violence (44%, compared with 38% nationally)
- financial difficulties (44%, compared with 41%)
- housing crisis (37%, compared with 37%).

On average, 105 requests for assistance went unmet each day.

## Quick facts

- 112,900 clients were assisted in Vic—39% of the national SHS population (290,300 total clients).
- Of Vic clients:
- 36% were homeless on first presentation, lower than the national rate (42%).
  - 9 in 10 (91%) who were at risk of homelessness were assisted to maintain housing.
  - 3 in 10 (29%) who were homeless were assisted into housing.

## Client characteristics, 2018–19

	Vic	Australia
Sex (%)	Male	40
	Female	60
Indigenous (%)	10	26
Remoteness (%)	Major cities	61
	Inner regional	23
	Outer regional	11
	Remote and very remote	5
Living arrangements (%)	Living alone	30
	One parent with child/ren	36
	Couple with child/ren	12
	Couple without child/ren	5
	Other family or group	17
Labour force (%)	Employed	13
	Unemployed	49
	Not in labour force	38
Education status (%)	Education/training	21
	Not in education/training	79
Median length of support (days)	31	44
Median nights of accommodation	16	29
Proportion receiving accommodation (%)	25	30

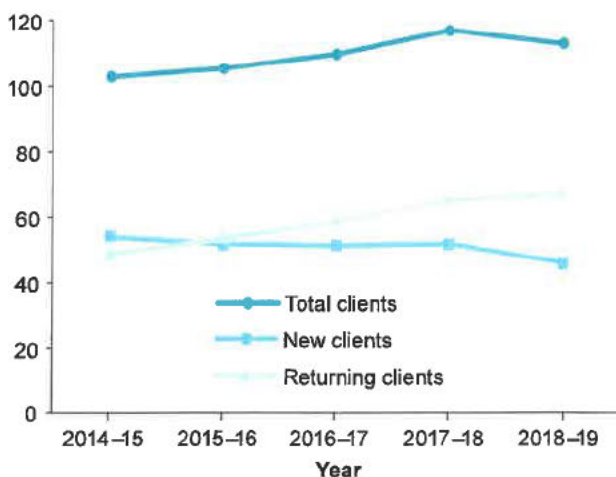
– nil or rounded to zero

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: SHSC supplementary tables 2018–19.

## Trends in Vic client numbers

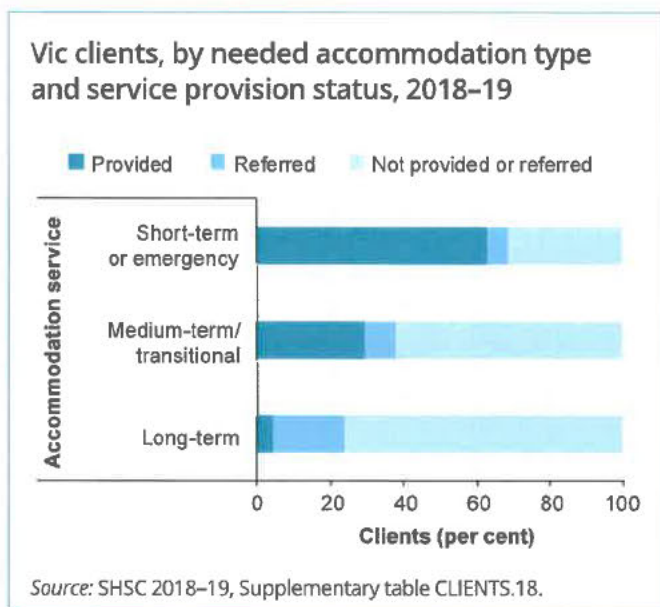
Number of clients ('000)



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) unpublished data\*\*.

## Accommodation services

A greater proportion of clients in Vic than nationally needed accommodation (49% and 58%, respectively).



## Client groups of interest

Service use rates in Vic were lower in 2018–19 compared with the previous year, except for young people presenting alone, older people, clients experiencing family and domestic violence and clients with disability.

### Clients per 10,000, by interest groups

	Vic		Australia	
	2017–18	2018–19	2017–18	2018–19
<b>All clients</b>	184.8	174.8	117.4	116.2
<b>Indigenous</b>	1,693.0	1,717.0	802.7	832.0
<b>Young people presenting alone (15–24)</b>	24.2	21.3	17.6	17.2
<b>Older people (55 and over)</b>	18.9	17.6	9.8	9.7
<b>Family and domestic violence</b>	89.7	78.7	49.2	46.6
<b>Disability</b>	5.1	4.4	3.2	2.9
<b>Mental health</b>	50.6	53.3	32.9	34.6
<b>Exiting custodial arrangements</b>	5.8	7.5	3.4	3.8
<b>Leaving care</b>	3.5	3.6	2.8	2.7
<b>Children on protection orders</b>	5.3	5.8	3.5	3.7
<b>Drug/alcohol use</b>	14.2	14.9	11.0	11.2

#### Notes

- Crude rates are used except for Indigenous rates which are directly age-standardised (see online technical information).
- Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Sources: SHSC Supplementary tables 2017–18 to 2018–19.

## Housing outcomes

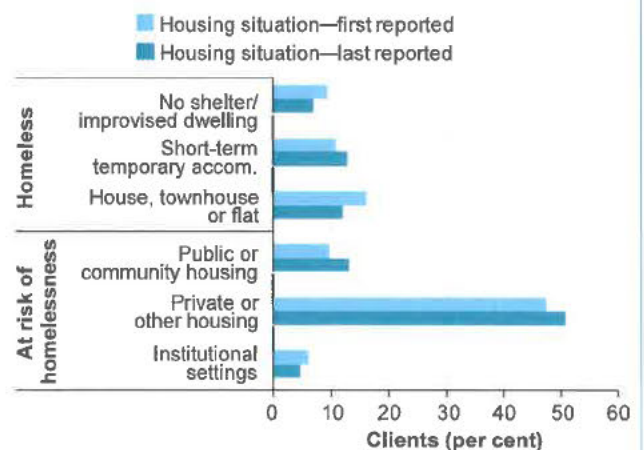
Housing outcomes are described for clients whose support ended in the financial year and detailed information about housing situation was known at the start and end of support.

Nearly 23,700 clients began support homeless in 2018–19; 29% (almost 7,000 clients) were assisted into housing. Of these, 2 in 3 (66% or 4,600 clients) were housed in private or other housing, while 3 in 10 (29% or 2,000 clients) were housed in public or community housing.

Of the more than 41,900 clients who began support housed but at risk of homelessness, 9 in 10 (91% or 38,000) were assisted to maintain housing. Of these clients at risk:

- 9 in 10 (86% or 5,700) of those in public or community housing were assisted to remain in their tenancy and a further 6% (around 400) were assisted into private or other housing.
- 9 in 10 (89% or 28,000) of those in private or other housing were assisted to remain in their tenancy and a further 3% (more than 800) were assisted into public or community housing.

### Vic clients, by housing situation at beginning and end of support, 2018–19



**\*\*Note:** Data for 2011–12 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data onwards are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2011–12 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18 onwards. For further information, refer to the Technical notes.

#### More information

More information on Vic and national SHS data is available from *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2018–19*.



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

Specialist homelessness services:  
**On any given day, across  
Victoria**



**2019**



**569** specialist  
homelessness services (SHS)  
agencies were  
supporting almost  
**23,000** clients



almost **3,400**  
of these clients  
were young people  
presenting alone\*

&



nearly **6,100**  
were children in  
families that were  
being supported



**125** clients  
received support for  
the first time ever  
from a SHS agency\*\*



almost **1,500**  
clients spent the night  
sleeping in crisis  
accommodation†



almost **2,700**  
clients report having  
slept rough in the  
last month

**104**

requests  
for assistance were  
unable to be met



agencies closed  
**206** cases  
with **70%** having  
stable housing outcomes††

\* Young people presenting alone are aged 15-24. Children are aged 0-17. In this infographic these two groups are mutually exclusive.

\*\* Clients who had not previously received SHS support since the collection began in 2011-12.

† Crisis accommodation refers to short-term or emergency accommodation, and may include hotels, motels and caravan parks.

†† Only includes cases where housing status at the end of support was known.