



AT

BREAKING POINT

The Red Shield Report
JUNE 2023



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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value people of all cultures, languages, capacities, sexual orientations, gender identities and/or expressions. We are committed to providing fully inclusive programs. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.



Our values

- **Integrity**
- **Compassion**
- **Respect**
- **Diversity**
- **Collaboration**

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion:

[salvationarmy.org.au/about-us](https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/about-us)

The Salvation Army is an international movement, and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international movement, with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is also one of Australia's largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion. The Salvation Army provides more than 1000 social programs and activities across each state and territory in Australia. The organisation is active in communities in local hubs and community centres, co-located with other support services and agencies, and through churches and corps centres. Main program areas include:

- Emergency relief, material aid and case work
- Financial inclusion and counselling
- Housing and homelessness support
- Family and domestic violence support
- Alcohol and other drug support and addiction treatment and recovery
- Youth services
- Emergency disaster and strategic response
- Employment services
- Chaplaincy
- Aged care services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Recognition

Thank you to all participants who completed surveys and shared your views and experiences with us. We appreciate your time and insights.

Thank you to all the dedicated Doorways staff, volunteers, officers and members of our Salvation Army corps.



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KEY FINDINGS

INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

- Overall, the median weekly income for respondents was **\$550**, less than one-third of a typical Australian household
- **88%** of respondents received government income support payments and had a median weekly household income of \$400
- **7%** of respondents were in paid employment, of these, nearly half were living below the poverty line
- **38%** of respondents in casual and part-time employment were looking for additional work
- **23%** of all respondents were actively looking for paid employment and had already spent 13 months trying to find work
- **50%** of respondents receiving JobSeeker Payment were actively seeking work for more than 16 months — more than twice as long compared to those already in full-time employment
- **24%** reported that finding or maintaining employment was one of their greatest challenges of the past year

HOUSING

- Overall, respondents spent an average of **\$250** each week on rent — a 14-percentage point increase^a compared to the previous year's research findings
- **Three in four** respondents experienced housing stress, spending **30%** or more of their household income on rent or a mortgage
- Half of the respondents experienced extreme housing stress, spending **50%** or more of their household income on rent or a mortgage
- **26%** of respondents could not pay the rent or mortgage on time because of a shortage of money, compared to **7%** of the Australian population
- **39%** of respondents with a mortgage were behind on their repayments
- **27%** of all respondents were behind on their rent, mortgage or board payments
- Among those with arrears, **51%** were behind by up to two weeks, and **78%** were behind by up to four weeks
- **35%** of private renters reported finding and maintaining a safe and affordable place to live, as well as almost facing homelessness, as one of their greatest challenges of the past 12 months
- **57%** expressed significant concerns regarding their current living arrangements, such as high costs, disrepair, temporary living arrangements, lack of safety, inadequate basic amenities, and limited access to essential services

^a Percentage point increase is the difference when comparing two different percentages, e.g. 40 to 50% is a 10-percentage point increase

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND POVERTY

- **77%** reported financial stress and difficulties were one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months
- **73%** of respondents reported affording enough food as one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months — 17 percentage points higher compared to the previous year's research findings
- **50%** described their financial situation as poor, a 10-percentage point increase from the previous year's research findings, and another **45%** reported that they were just getting by financially
- **37%** were uncertain if their household financial situation would improve in the next two years, and **30%** expected their financial situation to worsen — 13 percentage points higher compared to the previous year's research findings
- **77%** of respondents were living below the poverty line, of these, **20%** reported an income shortfall of at least \$300 below the poverty line
- Those on JobSeeker Payment had both the highest poverty rate of **90%** and the largest weekly household income shortfall of, on average, \$211, compared to all other income support recipients
- **78%** could not afford to have at least \$500 in savings in case of an emergency
- **50%** of all respondents could not afford essential medical or dental treatment and **41%** could not afford medicine when prescribed by a doctor
- **48%** were unable to afford a computer or laptop — a 10-percentage point increase compared to the previous year's research findings
- **33%** could not afford at least one filling meal each day — a six-percentage point increase compared to the previous year's research findings

COST OF LIVING

- **97%** reported an increase in at least one of their primary household expenses over the past 12 months, such as the cost of groceries, fuel, utilities, housing or health
- **93%** found it difficult to afford essential household expenses like housing, groceries, utilities, healthcare, clothing, and transportation — nine percentage points higher compared to last year's research findings
- **6%** of respondents who paid for household utilities reported being unable to pay their electricity, gas, or telephone bills on time, compared to **10%** of the Australian population
- **52%** reported skipping meals due to a shortage of money in the past year — a significantly higher proportion compared to **3%** of the general Australian population
- After paying for essential living costs such as housing, groceries, health, fuel and utilities, respondents had only \$40 left over each week or less than six dollars per day to save or spend on other household expenses



FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

- **46%** of households were families with children or grandchildren, on average, each household had three children (aged 0 to 18 years)
- **75%** of households with children were living below the poverty line, with a median household income of \$400 per week
- After paying for essential living costs such as housing, groceries, health, fuel and utilities, households with children were left with less than **\$23 per week** or three dollars per day to save or spend on other household expenses; single parents fared worse, with only **\$15 a week or two dollars per day**
- **63%** of couples with children experienced extreme housing stress, spending **50%** or more on housing
- **31%** of couples with children were behind on their rent, mortgage or housing payments
- **95%** of family households found it difficult to meet necessary living expenses, such as housing, utilities, food, transport and health care — eight percentage points higher compared to last year's research findings
- **65%** of respondents with children reported that their mental health had recently affected their daily lives
- **52%** reported their children's health deteriorated, and **32%** reported their children were hospitalised because they could not afford essential healthcare
- **42%** reported their children's mental health and emotional wellbeing was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months
- **63%** of households with school aged children could not afford a computer or laptop, and **48%** could not afford to purchase school uniforms or sports gear
- **24%** could not afford medical and/or dental treatment for their children when needed
- **20%** could not afford to provide their children with three meals a day
- **16%** could not afford three meals a day or medicine prescribed by a doctor for their children

MENTAL HEALTH, PHYSICAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

- **33%** of respondents rated their mental health as poor, while **40%** rated it as fair
- **73%** reported that their mental health and emotional wellbeing was their greatest challenge in the past 12 months
- **70%** indicated that recently their mental health had a negative impact on several crucial aspects of their lives, including their ability to take care of themselves and their families, their ability to participate in social activities, and their ability to manage their finances, employment and housing
- **54%** reported that feeling lonely and socially isolated was one of their greatest challenges of the past 12 months
- **37%** reported experiencing persistent loneliness during the past year
- Among those with children who reported that their mental health had negatively impacted their daily life, **37%** said it affected their ability to care for their family and children
- **66%** reported their health deteriorated and **38%** reported their health was more difficult to treat because they could not afford essential healthcare
- **47%** faced challenges accessing essential healthcare, medical treatment and support services — a 20-percentage point rise from last year's research findings
- **35%** identified themselves as a person with disabilities

IMPACT OF THE SALVOS

- **88%** of all respondents reported that without the assistance received from The Salvation Army, they would have been unable to manage their financial situation the past year





RISE IN CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (CPI %) IN PAST 12 MONTHS (MARCH QUARTER 2022-2023)⁴



Gas +26.2%



Electricity +15.5%



Housing +9.8%



Food +8.0%



Health +5.3%



Fruit and vegetable +4.9%



Transport +4.3%

OVERVIEW

Rising inflation and cost-of-living pressures continue to impact Australians, especially those already experiencing financial hardship. In the 12 months to March 2023, inflation rose to 7%, down from a 30-year high of 7.8% in the previous quarter.¹ This increase has pushed up the prices of essential living expenses such as food, transport and utilities. As a result, low-income households and those receiving government benefits are struggling even more to afford food for their families and pay household bills. Everyday items are costing more, and unfortunately, many people with limited resources are forced to go without.

Inflation has also affected housing and rental affordability, leading to rising interest rates for mortgage owners and sharp hikes in private rental prices. With limited options available, people are left with no choice but to either relocate in search of cheaper housing alternatives or pay exorbitant prices for housing each month. There are also greater numbers living in shared houses or moving back to live with family. More Australians are struggling to make ends meet, with little room to manage unforeseen expenses. This situation is unsustainable, and only increases people's financial vulnerability to hardship, inching them closer to homelessness.

While food insecurity affected more than two million households in Australian last year, it typically remains a hidden issue.² Every day, more than 500,000 households are forced to cut down on their portion sizes, skip meals or simply go hungry because they cannot afford enough food.³ Limited income and rising cost-of-living expenses are the main factors that cause food insecurity.





The economic pressures of recent times are taking a toll, causing ongoing financial stress and impacting the mental health and wellbeing of many low-income Australians. Across the community sector, the demand for assistance is increasing and the capacity for organisations to respond is becoming more challenging.⁵ Experiences of hardship are driving more Australians to reach out and seek help from community and charity organisations.

Last year, more than **one in three (36%)** people who accessed assistance from The Salvation Army's Doorways emergency relief services did so because of financial issues, struggling with inadequate income to meet the rise in basic living costs and difficulties managing unexpected expenses. In the first quarter of 2023, the proportion of visits to our Doorways emergency relief centres by people in paid employment has increased **25%** compared to the same time the year before.

This highlights that even a job does not prevent experiences of hardship. People on limited incomes are struggling, and their resources are being stretched too thin to manage alone. With inflation expected to continue rising during 2023, there is no relief in sight.

Last year, The Salvation Army's Doorways and community support services provided emergency relief and material aid to more than **118,000** people, and more than **265,000** sessions of care to people in need.

For some community members, experiences of hardship are one-off occurrences, often arising from difficulties managing a range of unexpected and adverse life events. For others, however, it can be more enduring, battling prolonged periods of disadvantage and poverty, and struggling to make ends meet week-to-week.

The Salvation Army's emergency relief centres provide practical assistance, food vouchers, material aid and case work to people experiencing disadvantage and hardship. Emergency relief also provides a doorway and referral point, working collaboratively with other specialist services to support community members who need additional support. The Salvation Army remains dedicated to helping people get through difficult times when they are in need.

IN 2022, THE SALVATION ARMY DOORWAYS EMERGENCY RELIEF AND COMMUNITY SERVICES^{b,c}:



Assisted approximately 118,000 people



Provided more than 265,000 sessions of assistance to those in need



Distributed \$16.8 million in financial assistance^d



Assisted more than one in three people (36%) facing financial issues such as difficulties meeting the rise in basic living costs

^b Includes Doorways emergency relief and case management and Mission and Communities Stream. | ^c Data extracted from SAMIS TSA internal information management system. | ^d Includes cash, gift cards, food vouchers and assistance with household bills.

OUR RESEARCH

The Salvation Army conducts research each year to better understand the experiences of the people we serve. This research project focuses on the experiences of financial hardship, housing stress, mental ill-health, cost of living pressures and life challenges that community members have experienced in the past year. The findings of this research offer valuable insights into the lives and circumstances of people who seek assistance from The Salvation Army emergency relief services

The report highlights the financial difficulties many people endure when living on limited incomes as they struggle to maintain a basic standard of living. Most respondents could not keep up with the rising cost of living. Many were unable to afford their rent, household bills or access affordable medical and healthcare services. Food insecurity was also a major concern for many households, with many skipping meals or unable to provide three meals a day for their children. Experiences of financial hardship were prevalent among all groups of respondents, including many households with children. Respondents also reported dealing with several adverse life challenges in the past year, such as mental ill-health, poor physical health and disability, and prolonged experiences of loneliness. A large proportion of respondents reported that their mental health had negatively impacted their ability to undertake essential daily activities, self-care, looking after their children and managing their finances. Finding employment was also difficult for many job-seekers. Most reported significant barriers to finding paid work. Consequently, most respondents were reliant on government income support, as well as financial assistance from charity organisations.

Financial hardship was common among respondents, with nearly all of them living below the poverty line after paying their essential household expenses such as housing, groceries and energy bills. As a result, many were forced to turn to family and friends for financial help and sought assistance from charities and community organisations to survive. This is an undignified way for people to live and many people are at breaking point. The data highlights the gap many people are trying to bridge between temporary hardship and enduring poverty, as they strive for a more secure financial future.



METHOD

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The purpose-designed questionnaire was based on a combination of existing survey tools. It was designed to gather data about people's financial situations and cost-of-living expenses, housing situations and conditions, their mental health and wellbeing, challenges they have faced in the past year, and the impact of receiving assistance from The Salvation Army.

QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTION

Qualtrics online survey platform was used to host the questionnaire. A random sample of 15,000 people who accessed assistance from The Salvation Army emergency relief services in the past twelve months were invited to participate in the survey via text message. The questionnaire was open for responses throughout November and December 2022. Participation was voluntary and responses were confidential. The questionnaire was closed once a sufficient sample size was reached. A total of 1725 respondents completed the online questionnaire (12% completion rate).

DATA ANALYSIS

Missing responses varied for each question and ranged between zero to six per cent of the total sample. Data cleaning and analysis was conducted using the statistical software platform SPSS Statistics. Demographic information (e.g., respondents age, gender, postcode, residency status and country of birth) was obtained from participants at intake to The Salvation Army Doorways emergency relief services and later matched to the survey results.



THEMES

Key themes from this research project included:

- A. Experiences of financial hardship and deprivation, and inability to afford essential items
- B. Financial stress and pressure to meet the rising cost-of-living expenses for housing, utilities, food, fuel and health
- C. Food insecurity and skipped meals were common because of a shortage of money
- D. Limited access to medical health care and inability to afford prescription medication
- E. Extreme housing stress and concerns regarding current housing situations such as the high cost, lack of amenities and overcrowding conditions
- F. Poor physical health, disability and the prevalence of mental ill-health and loneliness were significant life challenges, impacting many respondents' daily functioning
- G. Jobseekers experienced significant vocational barriers in finding employment

MAIN FINDINGS

Demographic profile

A total of 1725 respondents completed the survey.^e Most were female (75%), and **one in four (25%)** were male. Respondents were aged between 18 to 78 years old; the average age was 47 years old. Most respondents were from Victoria (33%), followed by NSW (29%), Queensland (15%) and SA (10%). Most respondents lived in major cities (53%) and regional areas (44%).

Respondents were mainly Australian citizens or permanent residents (99%), with one in seven (14%) born overseas. **One in five (21%)** were First Nations peoples, more than six times higher than the total proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' population in Australia (3.2%).^e Three per cent identified as belonging to a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background. Approximately **one in twenty five (4%)** identified as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and individuals who identify with other minority sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Overall, more than **one in three (35%)** respondents identified themselves as having a disability.

Approximately four in ten respondents were private renters (42%) or lived in social housing (38%). There was a smaller proportion of mortgage holders or respondents who owned their own home (10%), lived with friends and/or family (5%), or were homeless (4%). Nearly half were single adults (47%), and the other largest group was family households with children or grandchildren (46%).

^e Not necessarily a representative sample of TSA ER population.
^{*} Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

FIGURE 1. AGE AND GENDER (N = 1722)

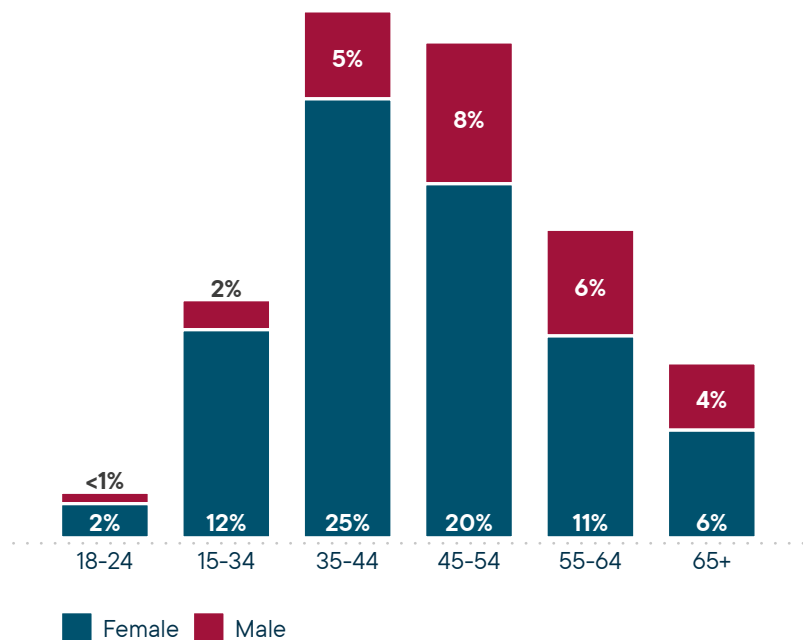


FIGURE 3. HOUSEHOLD TYPE (N = 1719)

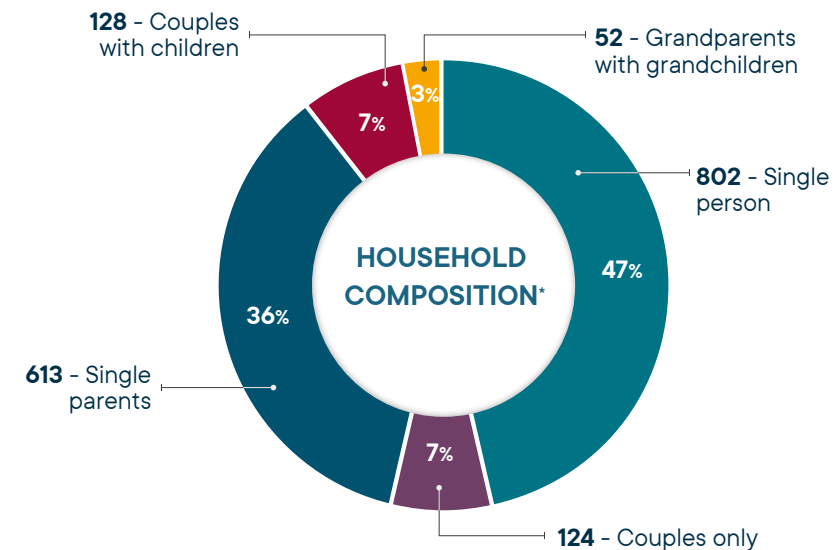


FIGURE 2. RESIDENCE BY STATE OR TERRITORY AND REMOTENESS (N = 1725)

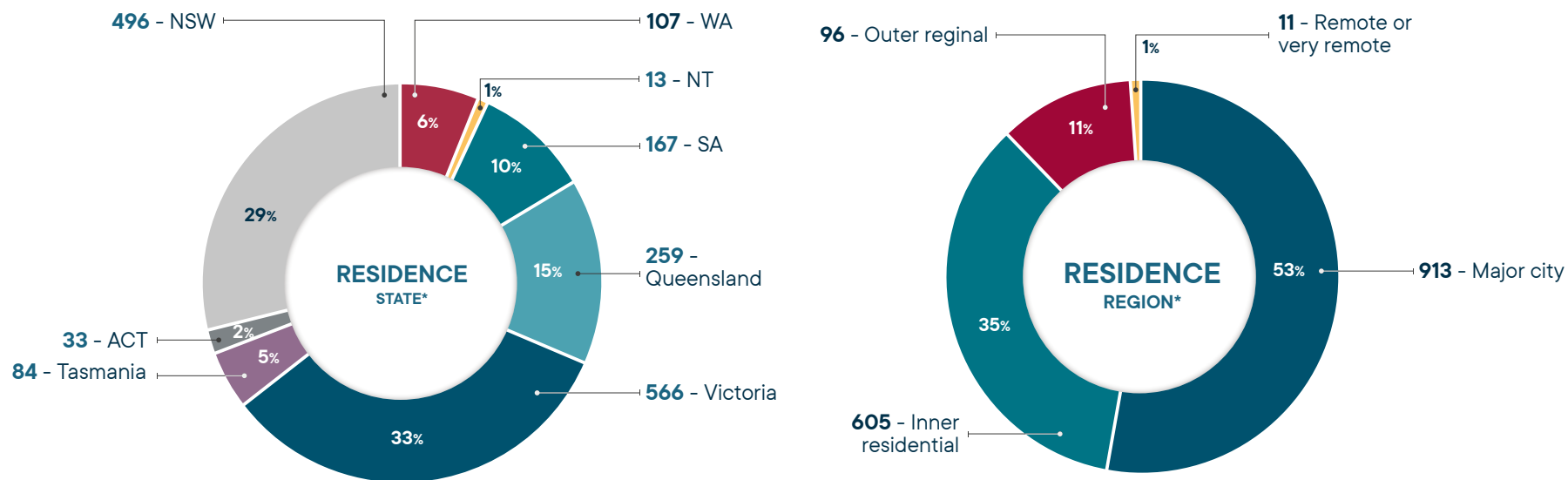


FIGURE 4. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY INCOME SOURCE (N = 1725)

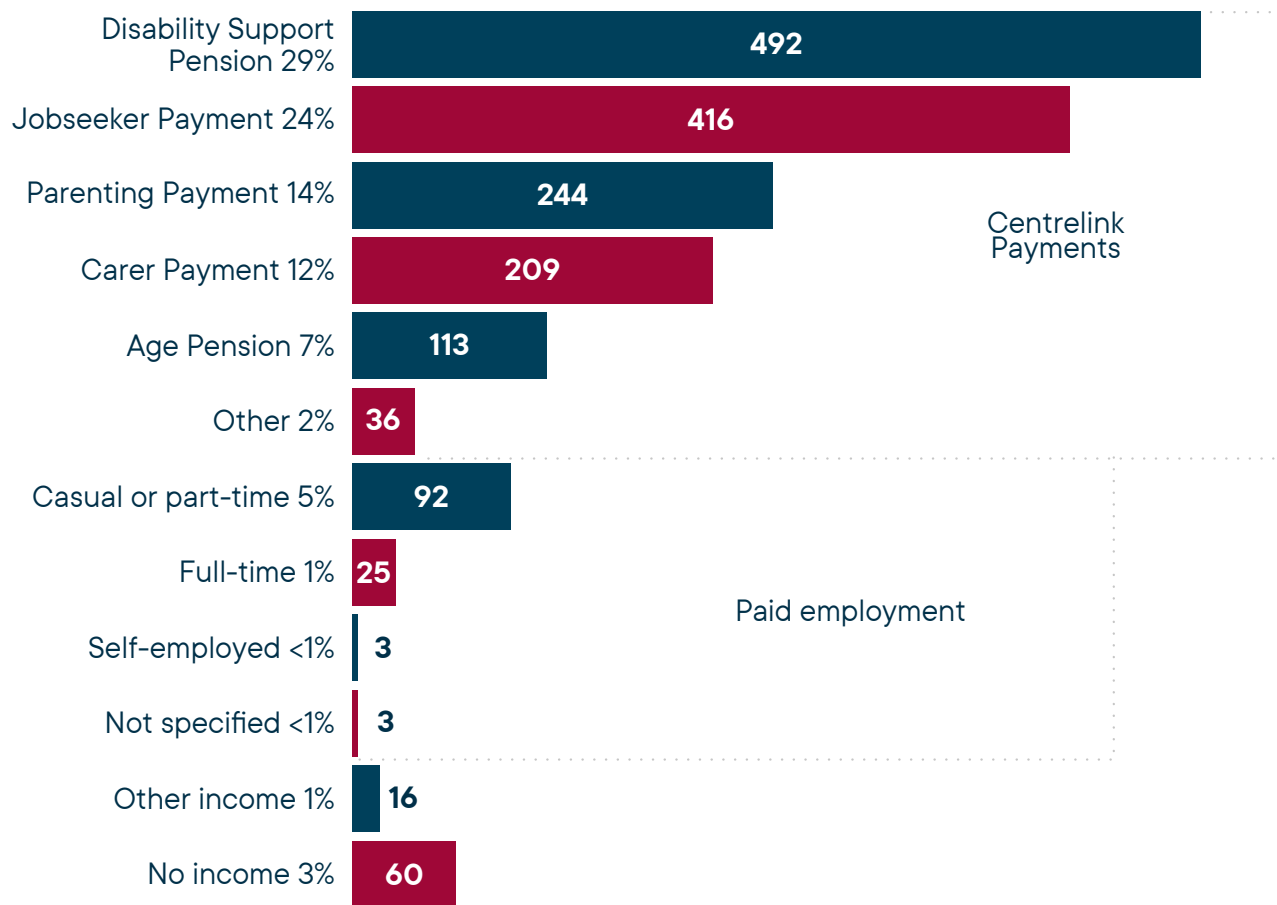
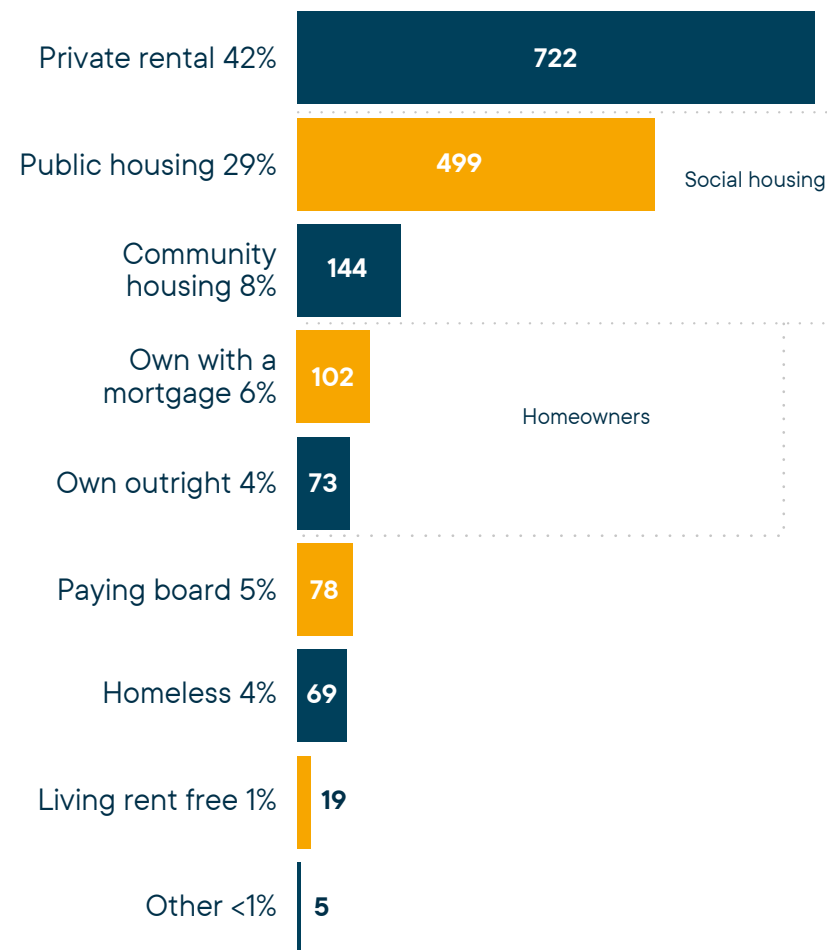


FIGURE 5. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY HOUSING SITUATION (N = 1711)



Income

INCOME SOURCE

Nearly **nine in ten (88%)** respondents received government income support payments as their main source of income. Of these, **one in three (33%)** were recipients of the Disability Support Pension, nearly **three in ten (28%)** were Jobseekers, **one in six** received the Parenting Payment (**16%**), **one in seven** received the Carer Payment (**14%**), and **one in fourteen** received the Age Pension (**7%**). Additionally, **one in fourteen (7%)** were employed, mostly part-time or casually, and **3%** reported they received no formal income.

Respondent's income was one-third of the median Australian household annual income⁷ and two-thirds of the national minimum wage⁸. Nearly **four in ten (38%)** reported their weekly income was below \$500, compared to only 10% of the Australian population.⁹ These figures highlight the stark disparity and significant financial hardship Salvation Army respondents experience compared to other Australians.

“ We are just scraping by. There is no such thing as 'spare' money. I can barely afford the essentials, much less take my children anywhere. – 33-year-old female from Tasmania

FIGURE 6. HOUSEHOLD INCOME RANGE (N = 1725)*

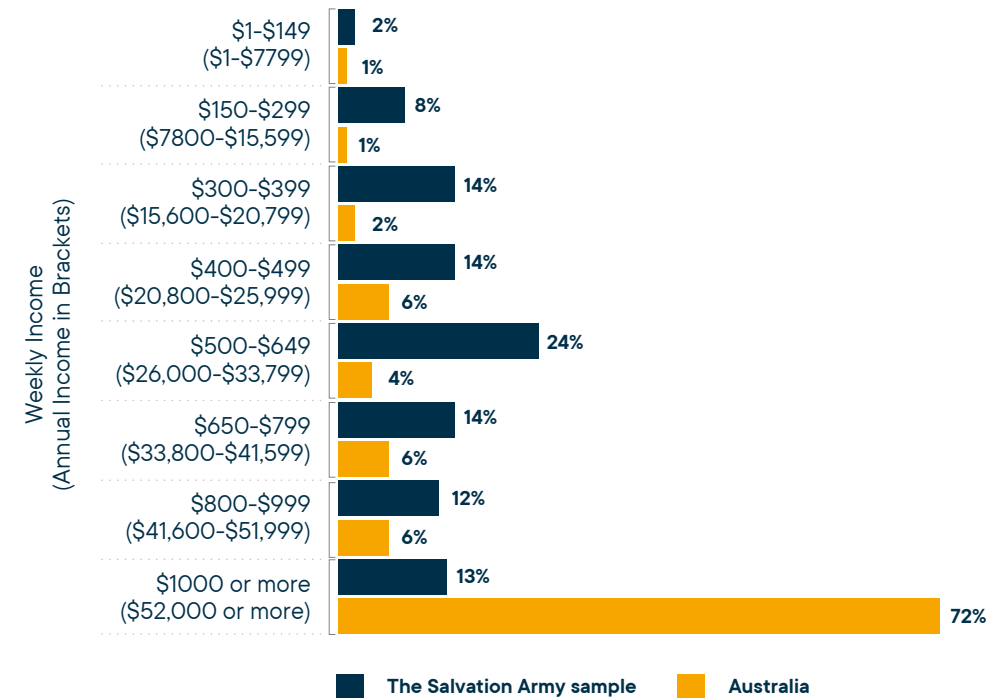


TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES.

Group	Median yearly household income	Median weekly household income ^f	% comparison to Australian population
Australian population ^g	\$90,792	\$1746	100%
National minimum wage ^h	\$42,255	\$813	47%
The Salvation Army respondents	\$28,600	\$550	32%

^f Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). 2021 Australia. Census All persons QuickStats. ABS. <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/AUS>
^g Median household income | ^h National Minimum Wage as of 1 July 2022. Minimum wages - Fair Work Ombudsman
 * Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2. HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY INCOME SOURCE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, HOUSING SITUATION, INDIGENOUS STATUS AND GEOGRAPHICAL REMOTENESS.

Cohort	Median weekly household income	Median daily household income
INCOME SOURCE		
Centrelink payments	\$400	\$57
Disability Support Pension	\$442	\$63
JobSeeker Payment	\$335	\$48
Parenting Payment	\$385	\$55
Carer Payment	\$462	\$66
Age Pension	\$471	\$67
Paid employment	\$556	\$79
Casual or part-time	\$500	\$71
Full-time	\$750	\$107
Households with children	\$400	\$57
Single parents	\$409	\$58
Couples with children	\$389	\$56
Grandparents with grandchildren	\$296	\$42
Households without children	\$411	\$59
Single person	\$402	\$57
Couples only	\$453	\$65

Cohort	Median weekly household income	Median daily household income
INCOME SOURCE		
Homeowner	\$422	\$60
Own outright	\$400	\$57
Own with a mortgage	\$472	\$67
Private rental	\$462	\$66
Social housing	\$350	\$50
Government housing	\$335	\$48
Community housing	\$375	\$54
ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STATUS		
Identifies as Indigenous	\$350	\$50
Does not identify as Indigenous	\$416	\$59
GEOGRAPHIC REMOTENESS		
Major city	\$400	\$57
Inner regional	\$400	\$57
Outer regional or remote	\$369	\$52

Note: These figures are based on median values to account for the significant skew in the data and are adjusted to account for differences in household size and composition.





RESPONDENT MEDIAN WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$556

Paid employment

\$369

Outer regional and remote areas

\$350

First Nations peoples

\$350

Social housing

\$335

JobSeeker

\$296

Grandparents looking after their grandchildren

There were differences in median weekly household income depending on the respondent's main income source. Those receiving Centrelink income support payments were worse off compared to those in paid employment, receiving a median household income of **\$400 and \$550 per week** respectively. Those in full-time employment were in the best financial position compared to other groups, with a median household income of **\$750 per week**.

Couples with children and grandparents looking after their grandchildren had the least household income compared to other household types, managing on as little as **\$296 per week** or **\$42 per day** before they pay for their essential living expenses.

Differences in people's housing situations were also noticeable. Respondents living in social housing had the lowest household income of **\$350 per week** or **\$50 per day** before paying for their essential living expenses, compared to homeowners and those in private rental. Those renting from a not-for-profit, charity or housing co-operative reported a slightly higher weekly income compared to those living in government or state-provided housing.

Respondents who identified as Indigenous reported a lower median household income of **\$350 per week**, considerably lower compared to non-Indigenous respondents who reported a median household income of **\$416 per week**.



Poverty

In Australia in 2022, **one in eight people (3.3 million)** were living below the poverty line¹, including **one in six (761,000)** children aged 15 years and under.¹⁰ Although these figures are slightly lower than the year prior, the number of people in poverty remains alarmingly high.¹¹ The poverty line refers to the minimum income level required for a person or household to meet their basic needs, including food, shelter and clothing. When a person or household's income falls below this line, they may struggle to maintain an acceptable standard of living without additional resources.

In Australia in 2022, a single adult with no children was considered to be living below the poverty line if their weekly income was less than \$541.¹² Our research findings highlighted that more than **three in four (77%)** respondents were living below the poverty line. Grandparents caring for their grandchildren (**85%**), those living in social housing (**85%**) and Indigenous Australians (**81%**) were some of the most impacted groups.

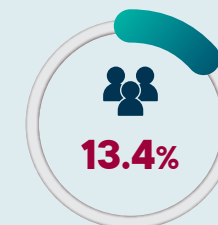
Those who received JobSeeker Payments (**90%**) were the worst affected group and experienced the largest gap below the poverty line¹. These findings suggest that individuals and families living on government benefits and households with children have fewer financial resources and struggled to maintain a basic standard of living.

There was a difference in poverty rates depending on the respondents' income source. **Eight in ten (80%)** receiving Centrelink payments were living below the poverty line. While having a stable job may decrease the likelihood of living in poverty, **four in ten (45%)** of respondents in paid employment were living below the poverty line.

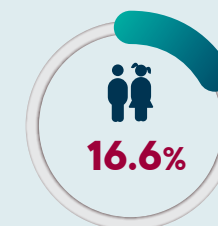
“

Rent takes up 99% of my JobSeeker Payment. Previously, I have chosen to buy food over rental payments, and this led to impending eviction. I now pay the rent on time and seek help from welfare agencies for food. It is soul destroying living below the poverty line and I constantly have to search for reasons to live.
– 60-year-old female from Western Australia

PEOPLE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE IN AUSTRALIA



of the total population



of children aged 15 years and under

¹ The poverty line is defined as half the median household income (before or after housing) of the total population (Davidson et al., 2020).
¹⁰ To account for differences in household composition and size, the median equivalised household income before and after housing is used when comparing household income before and after housing in the current sample to the poverty lines.

RESPONDENTS LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE:



90%
of JobSeeker
Payment recipients



82%
of homeowners



82%
of households receiving
the Parenting Payment



75%
of households with children



45%
in paid employment

TABLE 3. POVERTY RATES BY INCOME SOURCE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, HOUSING SITUATION, INDIGENOUS STATUS AND GEOGRAPHICAL REMOTENESS

Cohort	Percentage living below poverty line	Weekly shortfall below poverty line
INCOME SOURCE		
Centrelink payments	80%	\$191
Disability Support Pension	74%	\$173
JobSeeker Payment	90%	\$211
Parenting Payment	82%	\$184
Carer Payment	69%	\$166
Age Pension	82%	\$91
Paid employment	45%	\$173
Casual or part-time	52%	\$191
Full-time	22%	\$72
Households with children	75%	\$195
Single parents	75%	\$186
Couples with children	71%	\$208
Grandparents with grandchildren	85%	\$270
Households without children	79%	\$171
Single person	79%	\$172
Couple only	82%	\$154

Cohort	Percentage living below poverty line	Weekly shortfall below poverty line
INCOME SOURCE		
Homeowner	82%	\$141
Own outright	93%	\$141
Own with a mortgage	75%	\$150
Private rental	69%	\$146
Social housing	85%	\$221
Government housing	88%	\$223
Community housing	76%	\$203
ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STATUS		
Identifies as Indigenous	81%	\$233
Does not identify as Indigenous	76%	\$177
GEOGRAPHIC REMOTENESS		
Major city	76%	\$191
Inner regional	78%	\$191
Outer regional or remote	80%	\$191

Note: These figures are based on median values to account for the significant skew in the data and are adjusted to account for differences in household size and composition.

MEDIAN WEEKLY INCOME SHORTFALLS TO REACH THE POVERTY LINE



- Casual and part-time employees **\$191**
- JobSeeker Payment recipients **\$211**
- Parenting Payment recipients **\$184**



- Households with children **\$195**
- Households without children **\$171**
- Grandparents looking after their grandchildren **\$270**

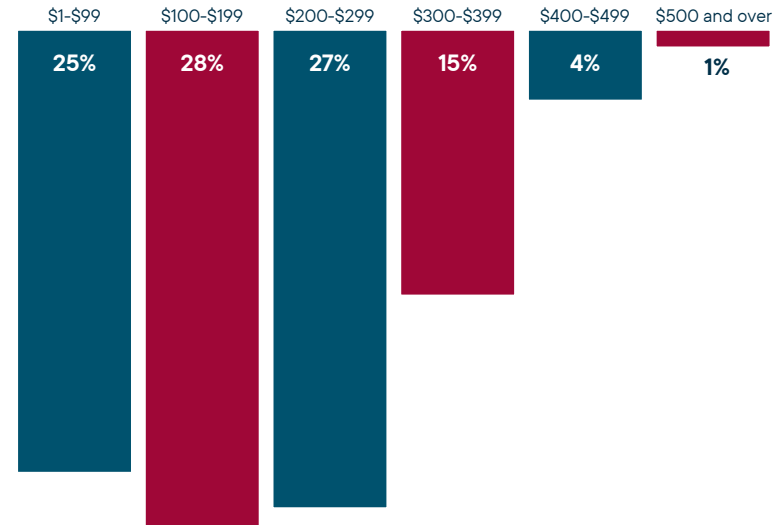


- Social housing **\$221**
- Homeowner with a mortgage **\$150**
- Private renter **\$146**



- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples **\$233**
- Non-Indigenous people **\$177**

FIGURE 7. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE BY INCOME SHORTFALL RANGE (N = 1219)



“

Poverty runs my life and I have no way out...It has removed all trust, all hope and has been the greatest consumption of my will, time and quality of life.

– 60-year-old male from NSW





Employment

UNEMPLOYMENT AND BARRIERS FINDING A JOB

As of March 2023, Australia's unemployment rate remained stable at 3.5%.¹³ More than **one in four (27%)** respondents reported that finding or maintaining employment was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months. Finding a job was a struggle for nearly **one in four (23%)** respondents who actively looked for paid work in the past month. Of these people, **nine in ten (90%)** said that they faced significant barriers to finding employment, such as ill health, disability and transport issues. Respondents also reported their current education, training, skills, experience or age as common barriers, making it extremely difficult to secure work in a highly competitive labour market.

The low rates of government benefits may also be a barrier to finding work. Insufficient economic resources may limit people's ability to access technology to look for jobs, prevent them from traveling to interviews or from affording suitable clothes or uniforms for work. This effectively traps those already experiencing hardship into longer-term poverty.

Respondents who were actively seeking paid employment had already spent an average of 13 months looking for work. Those who identified their health or disability as a barrier to employment spent more than 17 months looking for work, which was nearly twice as long as those who did not face

this challenge. Furthermore, approximately **one in ten (9%)** looking for work reported difficulties finding childcare as a barrier to obtaining paid employment.

Among those not seeking work, **nearly half (48%)** reported being retired or unable to work due to a medical condition or disability. Approximately **four in ten** were responsible for caring for children (**38%**) or individuals who were ill or disabled (**40%**).

“

Can't afford to live a healthy lifestyle. Socially isolated. Anxious and depressed. Can't fix car or household necessities. No internet at home as I can't afford it. Can't get to job interviews. Can't afford proper regular food. Feeling shame.
– 64-year-old male from Queensland

“

I am actively looking for work but have not found a job in my profession yet. My son is also going to preschool five days a fortnight. If I were to go to work, where would I leave him? I don't have any family here and cannot afford more childcare.

– 38-year-old female from WA

FIVE MAIN BARRIERS PREVENTING RESPONDENTS FROM FINDING WORK



Health issues or disability (40%)



Transportation (27%)



Unsuitable hours (24%)



Lack of education (24%)



Competitive job market (20%)

FIGURE 8. REASONS FOR JOB SEEKING BY INCOME SOURCE (N = 386)

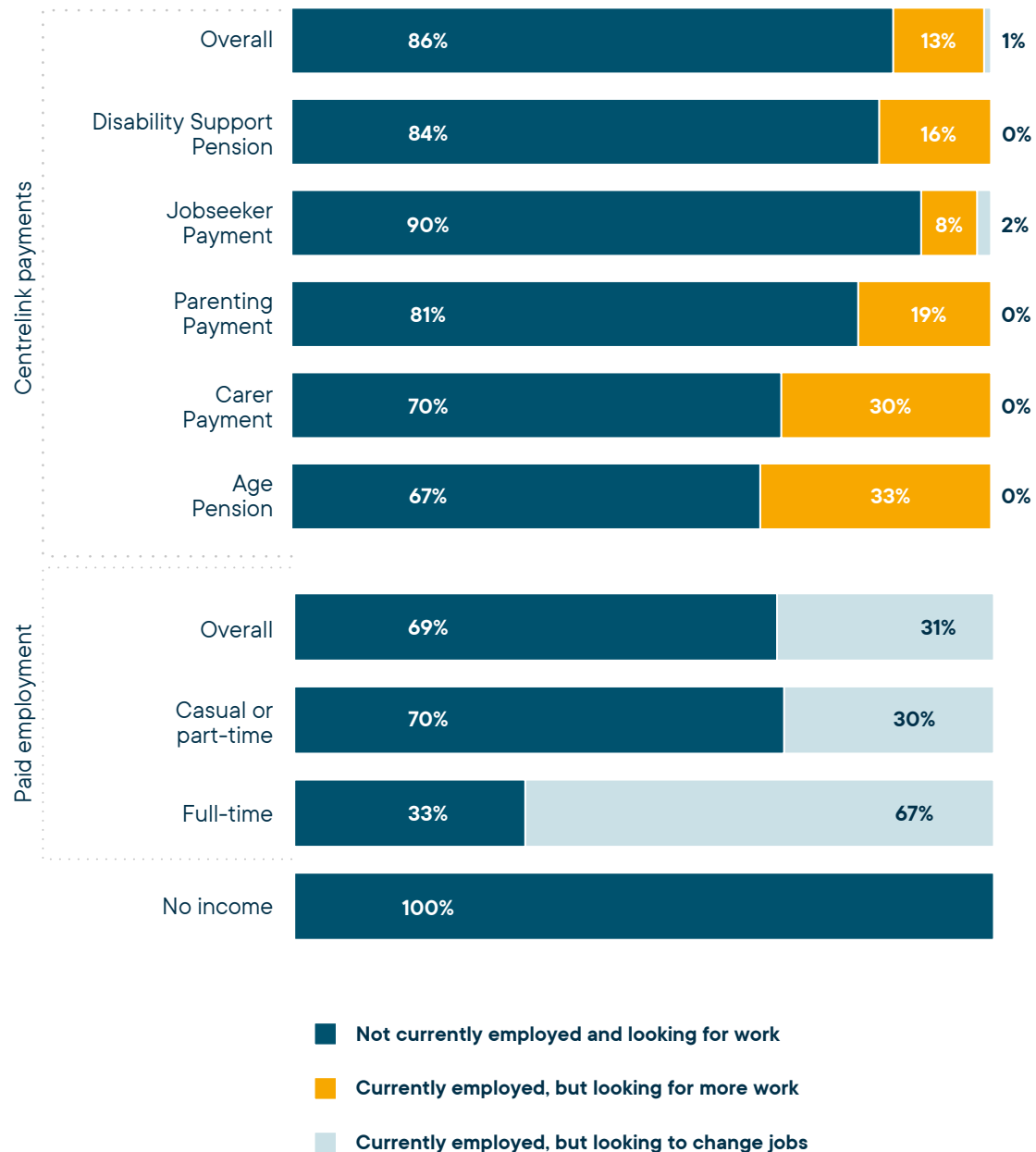


TABLE 4. JOB SEEKING BY INCOME SOURCE (N = 1699)

Income source	Percentage looking for work	Average time looking for work (in months)
Centrelink payments	22%	13
Disability Support Pension	10%	7
JobSeeker Payment	50%	16
Parenting Payment	17%	5
Carer Payment	10%	9
Age Pension	3%	4
Paid employment	34%	12
Casual or part-time	38%	13
Full-time	16%	6
No income	28%	7



UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Underemployment was a significant issue for nearly four in ten respondents (**38%**) already in casual or part-time work. Many struggled to find more work and had been job searching on average for 13 months. Among these respondents, **seven in ten (70%)** were looking for additional paid work or more hours, leaving many already employed casually or part-time to continue struggling on insufficient income.

One in six (15%) reported that underemployment and the cost of education and training (**18%**) as major challenges in the past 12 months. In the first quarter of 2023, the proportion of visits to Doorways Emergency Relief for people in paid employment increased **25%** compared to the same time the year before. This suggests that despite having a job, these people were still struggling financially, and these people were reaching out to charity organisations for help.

FIGURE 9. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BARRIERS TO FINDING EMPLOYMENT (N = 390)

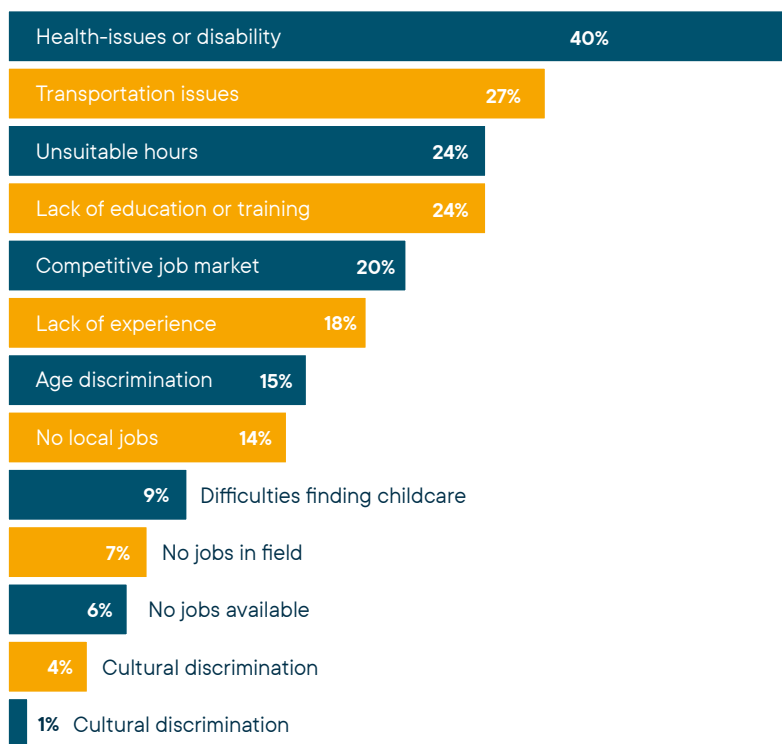
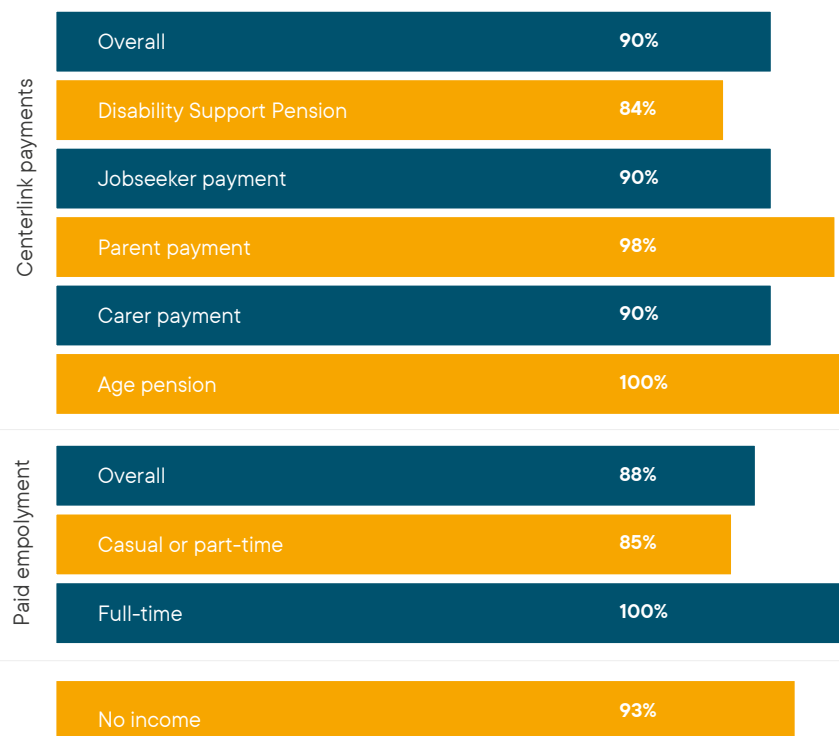


FIGURE 10. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BARRIERS TO FINDING EMPLOYMENT BY INCOME SOURCE (N = 388)



of those in casual or part-time employment were looking for more work



of currently employed respondents were looking for additional work



of those receiving Centrelink benefits were actively looking for work for more than 13 months



of respondents reported that finding or maintaining employment was one of their greatest challenges over the past 12 months



of respondents looking for work reported difficulties finding childcare as a barrier to obtaining paid employment

Housing

RENTAL AFFORDABILITY

As mortgage interest rates continue to rise, so too does the cost of rental properties. Annual rental growth has increased 10 % in the past 12 months.¹⁴ The national median rent in Australia is now \$550 per week, with Canberra and Sydney being the most expensive cities to rent in Australia at approximately \$680 per week.¹⁵ These high rental rates are unaffordable for people on low incomes or government income support benefits, making those already vulnerable more susceptible to housing stress and at a higher risk of homelessness.

Two in three (67%) respondents reported their housing costs had increased in the past 12 months. Nearly **six in ten (57%)** had major concerns about where they were living, and of these, nearly **four in ten (39%)** said their housing was too expensive. The lack of affordable housing options and low vacancy rates have made it particularly challenging for people to find affordable listings.

In 2022, less than one per cent of properties on the market were affordable for those on most government support benefits.¹⁶ Households are resorting to relocating to more remote areas, live in substandard housing or in overcrowded conditions. Limited economic resources mean limited choices and housing options for respondents. Unfortunately, the rental affordability crisis is expected to persist for years to come.¹⁷

“

After bills, there is no money to enjoy life. We are just scraping by. There is hardly any room for everyone, we are sleeping on top of each other and even in the detached garage. We cannot afford to rent a bigger house and the rent has risen...We don't even have a backyard for the kids to play. Food is more expensive, fuel is more expensive, power is rising. We have had to pull our older children out of school to work.
- 26-year-old female from Queensland



**FY 2021-2022,
THE SALVATION ARMY:**



Housing services provided more than 1700 properties to people needing a stable and safe home to live in



Aged care services provided more than 100 low-cost units to elderly Australians in need



Social programs^k provided more than 1 million bed nights to people in need of accommodation

^k Social programs includes homelessness, family and domestic violence, alcohol and other drug treatment services, residential and youth services.

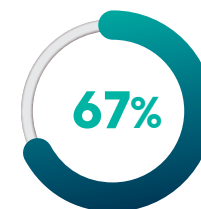
Access to public and community housing remains a critical issue in Australia. Each year, waitlists for public and social housing continue to increase, and demand surpassing the capacity to provide low-cost accommodation.¹⁸

In Australia as of June 2021, there were 163,500 households on a waitlist for public housing and more than 12,000 on the waitlist for state-owned and managed Indigenous housing.¹⁹ As the private rental market becomes more unaffordable, there is likely to be a surge in the number of people seeking public and social housing, further increasing waitlist times to house vulnerable members of the community.

“

It has been extremely stressful as well as making my health worse. Our landlord increased our rent \$200 a week so we had to leave. We have been trying for three months to secure a new rental, so far without success. I am 75 and terrified I will have to sleep in my car on the beach. We are homeless except for staying at a friend's house while she is away for three weeks.

– 75-year-old female from Queensland



respondents reported their housing costs had increased in the past 12 months



reported their housing was too expensive



HOUSING STRESS

There have been 11 interest rate rises since May 2022, the highest number in 10 years.²⁰ Interest rates for mortgage holders have more than doubled from 2022 to 2023, putting financial pressure on many Australians. Our research findings demonstrated that respondents spent approximately **two-fifths (41%)** of their total income on housing. These rates are significantly higher than the general Australian population, who typically only spend 14% of their income on housing.²¹ Those in private rental spent **half (50%)** their income on housing. Family households paid the most for accommodation and spent the largest proportion of their household income on housing. Couples with children spent **two-fifths (41%)** of their household income, while single-parent households spent **45%** of their income on housing.

The prevalence of housing stress among respondents was high. **Three in four (75%)** of all respondents experienced housing stress, spending 30% or more of their household income on rent or a mortgage and **four in ten (40%)** experienced extreme housing stress, spending 50% or more of their income on rent or a mortgage. These rates are almost seven times higher than the prevalence of extreme housing stress for the Australian population, where only 6% of households fall into this category.²² This significant disparity highlights the immense challenges faced by people on a low-income. These individuals are constrained to spend an ever-increasing proportion of their limited incomes on housing, leaving them at a higher risk of housing instability and homelessness.

Housing stress was the most prevalent among private renters. Almost **nine in ten (88%)** private renters experienced housing stress, and **over half (54%)** experienced extreme housing stress. This may be attributed to higher market rates and limited subsidies for private rentals compared with government and community housing. Approximately **two in three (65%)** respondents with a mortgage experienced housing stress. These rates are more than 10 times higher than the prevalence of housing stress amongst Australian mortgagees and indicative of additional financial pressure from recent interest rate rises.²³

“

Increased rental prices means I can't afford to rent privately. Public housing waitlists means I will be homeless. I feel vulnerable and depressed.
– 55-year-old female from NT

Respondents on low or limited incomes were particularly vulnerable to housing stress and experiences of hardship. Those receiving JobSeeker or Parenting payments spent a higher proportion of their household income (**44%**) on housing and were more likely to experience housing stress and extreme housing stress than those on other Centrelink payments. Respondents in full-time employment spent the most on housing \$350 per week and experienced the highest rates of housing stress (**78%**), spending more than 30% of their income on housing. These figures suggest that employment is not a safeguard against financial hardship.



HOUSING STRESS – PAYING >30-50% OF TOTAL INCOME ON RENT/MORTGAGE



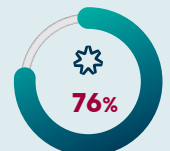
of respondents in private rental experienced housing stress, nearly three times higher compared renters in the general Australian population



of respondents receiving Parenting Payment experienced housing stress



of households with children experienced housing stress



of respondents receiving JobSeeker experienced housing stress

TABLE 5. HOUSING COSTS AND HOUSING STRESS BY INCOME SOURCE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, HOUSING SITUATION, INDIGENOUS STATUS, AND REMOTENESS AFTER PAYING FOR MAJOR LIVING EXPENSES

Cohort	Weekly amount spent on housing	Proportion of housing costs to household income	Housing stress (30% or more on housing)	Extreme housing stress (50% or more on housing)
INCOME SOURCE				
Centrelink payments	\$240	41%	74%	39%
Disability Support Pension	\$220	40%	72%	37%
JobSeeker Payment	\$200	44%	76%	46%
Parenting Payment	\$300	44%	81%	42%
Carer Payment	\$291	38%	67%	29%
Age Pension	\$210	41%	68%	39%
Paid employment	\$350	42%	78%	38%
Casual or part-time	\$346	43%	75%	40%
Full-time	\$400	40%	87%	30%
Households with children	\$300	43%	79%	42%
Single parents	\$280	45%	80%	56%
Couples with children	\$350	41%	77%	63%
Grandparents with grandchildren	\$220	38%	68%	68%
Households without children	\$200	41%	72%	40%
Single person	\$185	42%	72%	42%
Couple only	\$250	37%	72%	31%

Cohort	Weekly amount spent on housing	Proportion of housing costs to household income	Housing stress (30% or more on housing)	Extreme housing stress (50% or more on housing)
INCOME SOURCE				
Homeowner	\$234	38%	60%	31%
Own outright	\$100	21%	38%	29%
Own with a mortgage	\$267	39%	65%	31%
Private rental	\$330	50%	88%	54%
Social housing	\$180	35%	65%	28%
Government housing	\$158	33%	62%	25%
Community housing	\$232	40%	76%	36%

ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STATUS				
Identifies as Indigenous	\$234	42%	75%	42%
Does not identify as Indigenous	\$250	41%	74%	39%
GEOGRAPHIC REMOTENESS				
Major city	\$250	41%	74%	41%
Inner regional	\$250	42%	76%	39%
Outer regional or remote	\$230	39%	72%	36%

Note: These figures are based on median values to account for the significant skew in the data.

EXTREME HOUSING STRESS — PAYING >50% OF TOTAL INCOME ON RENT/MORTGAGE



of couples-with-children households experienced extreme housing stress



of respondents in private rental experienced extreme housing stress; five times higher compared renters in the general Australian population



of respondents who identified as from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background experienced extreme housing stress



of respondents working full-time experienced extreme housing stress

RENTAL OR MORTGAGE ARREARS

More than **one in four (26%)** could not afford to pay their rent or mortgage on time because of a shortage of money. More than **one in four (27%)** respondents reported they were late in paying their rent, mortgage or accommodation costs. Of these, **half (51%)** were behind by at least two weeks and nearly **eight in ten (78%)** were behind by up to a month. Those paying a mortgage fared the worst, with nearly **two in five (39%)** behind on their payments, a considerably higher rate than other respondents in arrears in other housing situations (**26%**).

“

For the first time ever, I'm behind in rent and I've never had that happen in my 13 years of renting.
– 31-year-old male in Victoria

Nearly **three in ten (29%)** reported that finding or maintaining a safe and affordable place to live was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months. The rising cost of housing and intense competition in the rental market has pushed many into financial distress. Some respondents expressed their concerns about being evicted or even becoming homeless due to their inability to afford their housing costs.

“

I was evicted from my past accommodation, as I was behind in rent. I still owe about \$6000 to my old estate agent. I owe a lot of money to friends and family and owe money to lenders. I cannot afford to live.
– 56-year-old female in Victoria,

FIGURE 11. LENGTH OF TIME IN ARREARS FOR RENT, MORTGAGE, OR BOARD (N = 384)

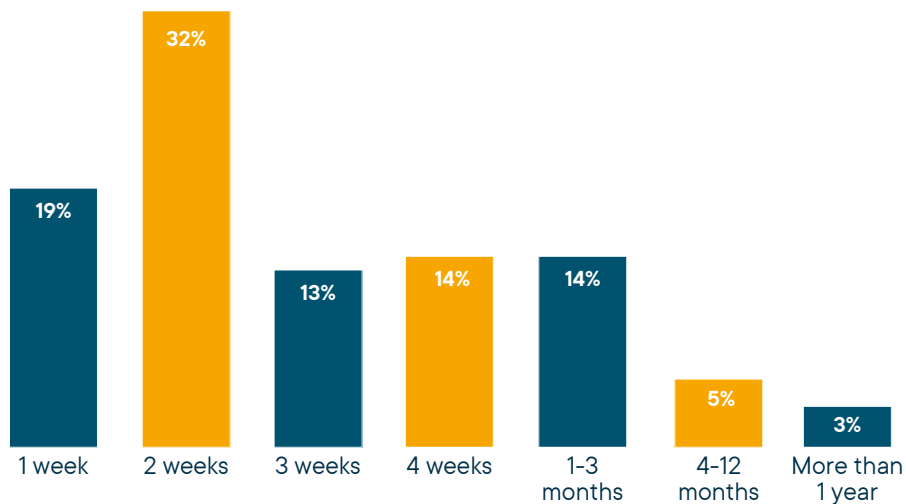
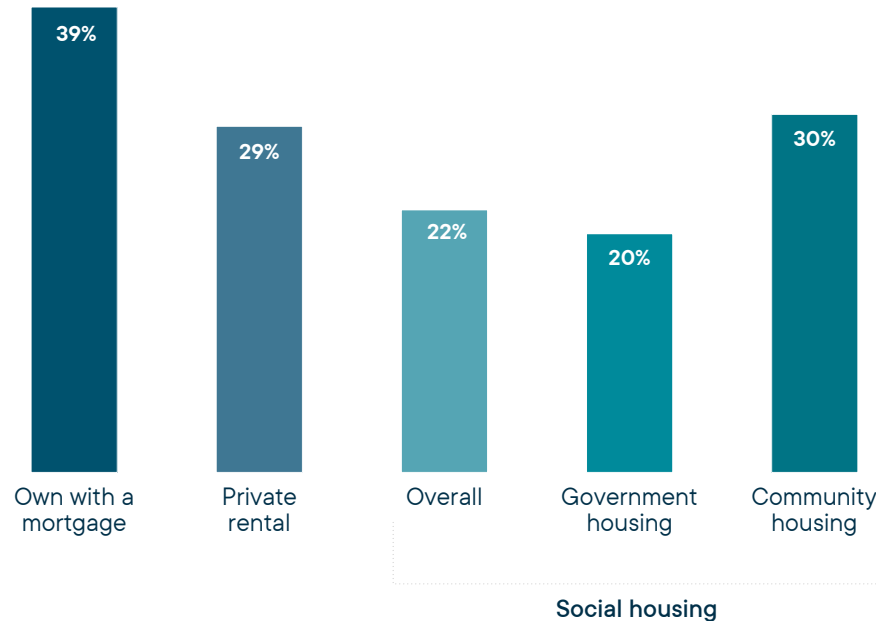
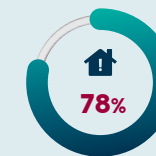


FIGURE 12. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS IN ARREARS BY HOUSING SITUATION (N = 1517)*



* Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



were behind in their rent, mortgage or housing up to a month



of those with a mortgage were currently in arrears



of private renters were currently in arrears



could not afford to pay their rent or mortgage on time because of a shortage of money



HOUSING CONDITIONS

Nearly **six in ten (57%)** respondents had major concerns about their living conditions. Among these respondents, the primary issues identified were that their housing was:

- Too expensive **(39%)**
- In poor condition and required major repairs, such as a leaking roof, broken windows or mould **(25%)**
- Deemed unsafe **(18%)**
- Only temporary and they could only live there short-term **(17%)**
- Overcrowded, with not enough bedrooms for everyone **(16%)**
- Lacking basic amenities, such as toilet facilities, cooking facilities, clean running water, electricity or heating **(15%)**

“

My house leaks so my carpet is wet and mouldy. My furniture has become damaged. I now have to pay for a storage shed to protect what little I have left. I'm worried my roof will collapse in my lounge room.

– 40-year-old female from New South Wales

Limited affordable housing options, particularly for low-income earners, left some people with no choice but to settle for substandard or unsuitable housing. Others reported that they did not want to upset their landlords by raising maintenance issues and were worried about eviction.

More than **one in three (35%)** private renters reported finding and maintaining a safe and affordable place to live, as well as almost becoming homeless, were some of their greatest challenges of the past 12 months. More than **one in ten (11%)** respondents living in private rentals reported receiving a notice to vacate or being evicted with no alternative living arrangements. This figure is more than double compared to homeowners or social housing residents **(5%)**, which highlights the precarious nature of renting and the instability many private renters experience.

“

We have been evicted from our house because we fell behind in rent. We're currently in a motel room, all five of us.”

– 42-year-old female in South Australia

Many respondents reported a lack of permanency, living in temporary accommodation until something more suitable became available. However, with vacancy rates at record lows²⁴ and rental costs at peak highs, people may be waiting for years without finding a safe, affordable and permanent place to call their own.

“

I have been in temporary accommodation in the last 12 months. I have to motel hop for four months, then just moved another three times. All self-funded.

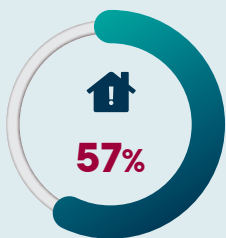
– 45-year-old female from Victoria

One in five (21%) respondents in social housing reported overcrowding and insufficient number of beds for everyone in their home — these were significantly higher rates compared to homeowners and private renters **(12%)**. A further **one in six (17%)** reported a lack of personal space to maintain privacy, compared to homeowners and private renters **(11%)**.

“

We recently had to move unexpectedly and the only property available was smaller but \$90 a week more expensive ... I now share a bedroom with one of my sons. I have had to glue my children's school shoes together as I could not afford new ones. Things are just getting too difficult with no relief in sight.

– 51-year-old female from Queensland



had major concerns about where they were currently living



reported that finding and/or keeping a safe and affordable place to live has been a main challenge in the past 12 months

Concerns raised varied between homeowners, those in private rental, and respondents living in social housing. There were some variations between groups based on their housing type.



Mortgage

- 46% reported their home was in poor condition and required significant repairs
- 38% reported their mortgage was too expensive
- 22% reported lacking essential amenities such as toilet facilities, cooking facilities, clean running water, electricity or heating



Private rental

- 59% reported their housing was too expensive
- 22% reported their home was in poor condition and required significant repairs
- 14% reported their housing was unsafe



Social housing

- 30% reported their home was in poor condition and required significant repairs
- 29% reported their housing was unsafe
- 21% reported their home was overcrowded and there were insufficient beds for everyone

FIGURE 13. CONCERNS WITH CURRENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT BY HOUSING SITUATION (N = 945)





HOMELESSNESS

Not everyone has access to stable, safe and affordable housing. The latest Australian census data highlighted that 122,494 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness in 2021, an increase of 5.2% since 2016.²⁵ Our findings highlighted that **4%** of respondents were currently facing homelessness. Some reported they had no fixed address, lived in overcrowded situations, or were sleeping rough.

The high cost of housing, lack of affordable properties and inadequate income support are three factors that can lead to experiences of homelessness.²⁶ With nowhere to go, respondents experiencing homelessness faced additional struggles and uncertainties. Some did not have money for food, medication or access to basic facilities such as toilets and showers. Others were worried about their personal safety and deteriorating health.

For **three in ten (31%)** respondents, one of their main concerns in the past 12 months was facing or almost facing homelessness. This highlights the tenuous and unstable housing situations encountered by many respondents and the increasing vulnerability they face in maintaining stable housing.

Challenges relating to food insecurity, homelessness, and access to employment and training was significantly higher among respondents receiving the JobSeeker Payment. Of these, **eight in ten (80%)** reported that being able to afford enough food to eat was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months, and **four in ten (41%)** reported facing or almost facing homelessness as a significant worry.

“
I'm scared because if I'm evicted, I'll be homeless again.
 – 51-year-old female from SA

“
My children and I are currently homeless and unable to find housing. We have been couch surfing for a little over a year now. Never been in a situation like this before. I now have severe depression and anxiety and so do both of my children ... I'm constantly in fight or flight mode ... I lost my job and unable to get other work because I'm so unwell. I'm now in debt which I have never been.
 – 42-year-old female from Queensland

“
It has been really hard and challenging at times and sometimes you're not sure where or how you're going to get the next shower or meal from.
 – 41-year-old female from Queensland

“
I feel anxious constantly wondering when I will be living on the street. I have stopped any social life and have begun to drink more alcohol. I have lost an enormous amount of confidence and feel very unstable with a very short-term lease.
 – 61-year-old female in SA



Financial stress

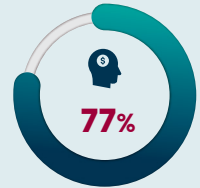
Nearly all respondents experienced some form of hardship, with many struggling to get by. Our findings highlight that nearly **nine in ten (89%)** experienced financial stress, facing more than two instances of financial hardship in the past year.²⁷ This included struggling to pay the bills, skipping meals, pawning personal belongings or seeking financial assistance to make ends meet. Couples with children (**95%**) and sole-parent households (**90%**) were the most impacted. Respondent experiences of financial stress were nine times higher compared to the general Australian population (**10%**). More than **three in four (77%)** reported that managing financial stress and difficulties was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months.

“

I'm a sole parent, I have felt overwhelmed, and I've become depressed due to the stress of not being able to take care of our basic financial needs to live. Our financial struggles have taken over my life. I've taken out loans trying to get out of this situation which in the long run has made things worse.
– 41-year-old female from Queensland



experienced financial stress, reporting that they faced more than two instances of financial hardship in the past year



reported that managing financial stress and difficulties was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months

Cost of living



The rising cost of living is a critical issue for many Australians. In the 12 months to March 2023, inflation had risen to 7%, down from a 30-year high of 7.8% in the December quarter.²⁸ Australians are paying more for goods and services, placing increased economic pressures on households, especially those already financially disadvantaged.

Rising living expenses disproportionately impact people on low incomes, as they have less disposable income to cover the increased cost. Our research findings indicated that more than **nine in ten (93%)** respondents found it difficult to meet the necessary cost of living expenses, such as housing, electricity, food, clothing and transport in the past 12 months. This figure was nine percentage points higher than the year before. Unlike previous research, this year, the cost-of-living pressure was felt across all groups, including those on higher rates of Centrelink benefits, households without children and those in paid employment.

“

Car repairs are out of reach. Rent has skyrocketed. Food, petrol, utilities and general spending have inflated beyond income levels. Outings and social activities are curtailed. Charity is essential.
– 66-year-old female from Victoria

FIGURE 14. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING DIFFICULTY MEETING LIVING EXPENSES BY INCOME SOURCE (N = 1704)



FIGURE 15. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING DIFFICULTY MEETING LIVING EXPENSES BY HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION (N = 1372)





HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES

Amount (\$) of median weekly disposable household income spent

Proportion (%) of weekly household income spent



\$250
Housing



41%
Housing



\$150
Food and groceries



25%
Food and groceries



\$50
Fuel



9%
Fuel



\$46
Utilities (including electricity, gas water)



8%
Utilities (including electricity, gas water)



\$23
Health (including medical bills and medication)



4%
Health (including medical bills and medication)

The survey results revealed that respondents allocated most of their income towards essential household expenses, such as housing, groceries, health, fuel and utilities.

Some groups fared worse than others. Those employed paid significantly more for housing (**\$350**) and fuel (**\$63**) each week. Respondents residing in private rental paid the most in housing costs each week (**\$300**), even compared to those with a mortgage (**\$267**). While respondents on Carer Payments spent the most on fuel, utilities and health compared to other Centrelink recipients.

TABLE 6. WEEKLY SPENDING ON ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES BY INCOME SOURCE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, HOUSING SITUATION, INDIGENOUS STATUS AND GEOGRAPHICAL REMOTENESS

WEEKLY AMOUNT SPENT ON					
Cohort	Housing	Groceries	Fuel	Utilities	Health
INCOME SOURCE					
Centrelink payments	\$240	\$150	\$50	\$46	\$23
Disability Support Pension	\$220	\$100	\$50	\$40	\$25
JobSeeker Payment	\$200	\$100	\$50	\$35	\$16
Parenting Payment	\$300	\$200	\$55	\$50	\$21
Carer Payment	\$291	\$200	\$60	\$53	\$25
Age Pension	\$210	\$100	\$38	\$40	\$23
Paid employment	\$350	\$150	\$63	\$46	\$23
Casual or part-time	\$346	\$150	\$63	\$46	\$23
Full-time	\$400	\$150	\$70	\$40	\$35
Households with children	\$300	\$200	\$60	\$50	\$23
Single parents	\$280	\$200	\$55	\$50	\$23
Couples with children	\$350	\$200	\$70	\$60	\$25
Grandparents with grandchildren	\$220	\$150	\$50	\$50	\$25
Households without children	\$200	\$100	\$40	\$31	\$20
Single person	\$185	\$100	\$38	\$30	\$20
Couple only	\$250	\$125	\$50	\$50	\$30

WEEKLY AMOUNT SPENT ON					
Cohort	Housing	Groceries	Fuel	Utilities	Health
INCOME SOURCE					
Homeowner	\$234	\$150	\$60	\$50	\$23
Own outright	\$100	\$150	\$60	\$46	\$30
Own with a mortgage	\$267	\$200	\$60	\$58	\$23
Private rental	\$330	\$150	\$50	\$46	\$23
Social housing	\$180	\$150	\$50	\$40	\$23
Government housing	\$158	\$150	\$50	\$40	\$23
Community housing	\$232	\$150	\$50	\$40	\$23
ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STATUS					
Identifies as Indigenous	\$234	\$150	\$50	\$50	\$25
Does not identify as Indigenous	\$250	\$150	\$50	\$46	\$23
GEOGRAPHIC REMOTENESS					
Major city	\$250	\$150	\$50	\$40	\$23
Inner regional	\$250	\$150	\$50	\$46	\$23
Outer regional or remote	\$230	\$150	\$50	\$50	\$23

Note: These figures are based on the median weekly spend and have been adjusted for household size and composition.



DISCRETIONARY INCOME

Our research showed that housing and groceries were respondents' largest household expenses, leaving many households with very little discretionary income after paying for their essential living costs.^l

Overall, the median household income was **\$550 per week**, and after paying for housing, groceries, fuel and health, respondents were left with **\$40 per week** or less than **\$6 per day** to live on. This situation was worse for respondents on Parenting Payment, who had just **\$25 per week** or **\$4 per day** for other expenses. For those on the JobSeeker Payment, the situation was more dire, as they did not have enough money to cover their basic needs. These findings highlight the financial struggles many experience on inadequate government support payments, with many left with very little to save or pay for other expenses. Many are struggling to stay afloat.

Households with children were spending between 50 to 100% more on housing, groceries, fuel and utilities each week compared to households without children. This may be attributed to the need for larger homes with more living space, more food and increased utility usage. Households with children are left with a median disposable

income of **\$23 per week** or **\$3 per day**, significantly less than those with no children, left with a disposable income of **\$60 per week** and **\$9 per day**. Single-parent families were the worst off. This highlights the increased financial pressure for households with children and the additional expenses of raising them.

On average, respondents from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were left with a median income of **\$7 per week**, or just **\$1 per day**, after paying for their basic living expenses. In contrast, non-Indigenous respondents had a median income left over of **\$43 per week**, or

about **\$6 per day**. These amounts would make it very difficult for people to survive, let alone build long-term financial security or afford discretionary items such as social outings, entertainment, hobbies, and holidays, which are important for overall wellbeing and a decent standard of living.

“

This isn't living, it's surviving. I'm living week-to-week and getting deeper into debt. I feel like life is an elastic band that I keep stretching, but I'm just waiting for it to snap, causing everything to come crashing down.
– 36-year-old from NSW

^l Discretionary income left after paying for housing, groceries, fuel, utilities and health NB: Equivalised total household income considers the size and composition of households and adjusts for differences in their needs and resources. (ABS, 2016).
^m Discretionary income left after paying for housing, groceries, fuel, utilities and health



Households with children were spending between 50% to 100% more on housing, groceries, fuel, and utilities each week compared to households without children



Overall, respondents had \$40 per day or less than \$6 per day after paying for their essential living expenses^m



Single-parent households had the least disposable income, left with \$15 per week or \$2 a day after paying for their essential living expenses



Indigenous respondents had only \$7 per week, or just \$1 per day after paying for essential living expenses



FIGURE 16. MEDIAN WEEKLY DISCRETIONARY INCOMES BY INCOME SOURCE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, HOUSING SITUATION, INDIGENOUS STATUS, AND REMOTENESS AFTER PAYING FOR MAJOR LIVING EXPENSES.

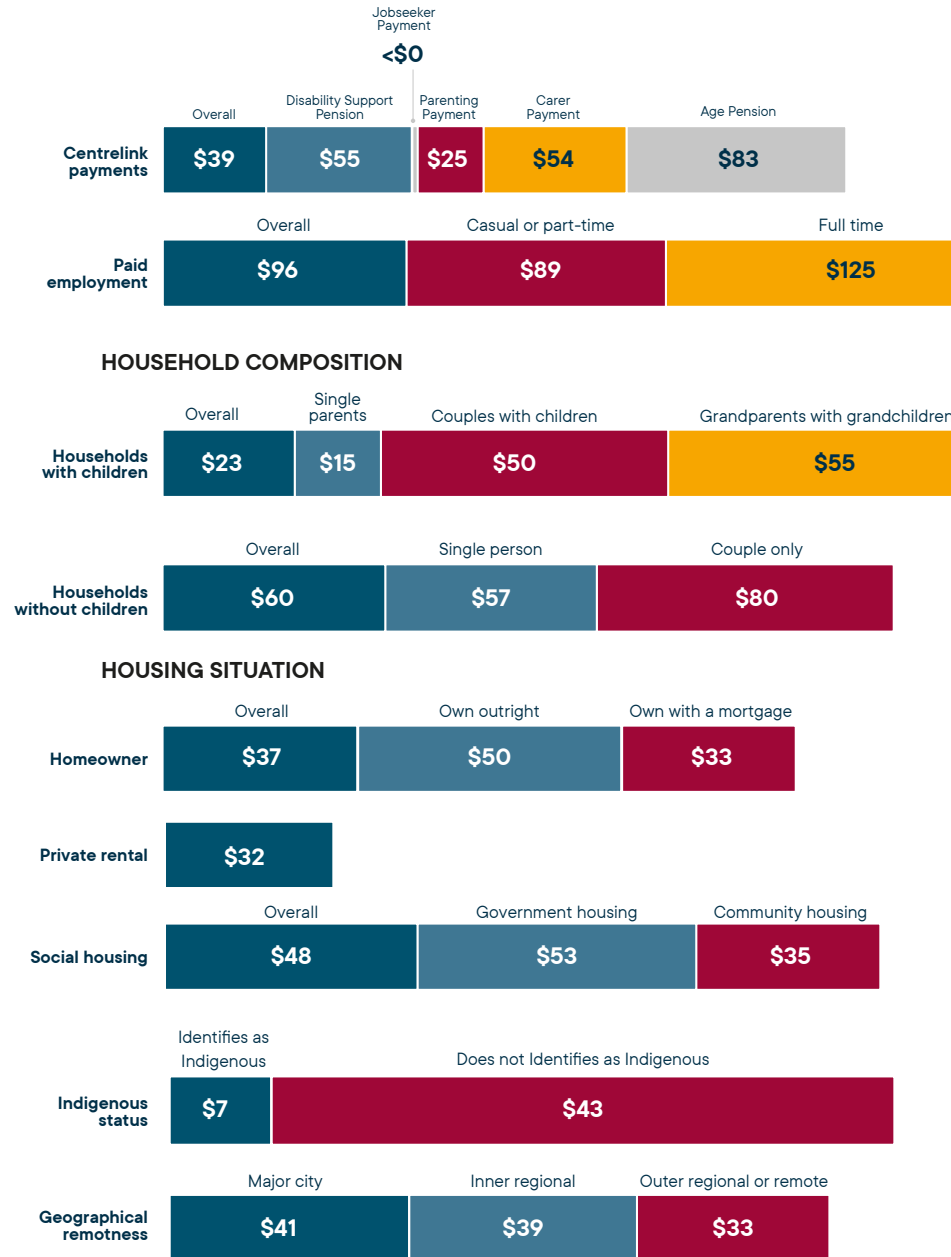


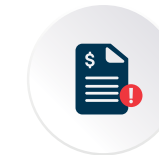
FIGURE 17. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING INCREASES IN HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES (N = 1255-1592)



92%
Food and grocery costs have increased



88%
Fuel has increased



81%
Utilities have increased



88%
Household costs have increased



56%
Health costs have increased

INCREASED HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES

Nearly all (**97%**) respondents had experienced an increase in at least one of their household costs in the past 12 months. Most (**92%**) respondents reported that they experienced increased costs of purchasing food and groceries, followed by approximately **eight in ten** who reported increases in petrol and fuel bills (**88%**) and household utilities (**81%**) in the past 12 months. These rising living costs are putting increasing pressure on many low-income households.

“
I'm constantly juggling things ...
I just can't afford the rent, bills, rising food
and petrol costs, my Centrelink is not
enough to cover all the main costs of
life let alone for anything extra.
– 41-year-old female from Victoria

More than **one in four (26%)** could not afford to pay the rent or mortgage on time. **One in two (50%)** could not afford home and contents insurance, and **one in three (33%)** could not afford an internet connection at home. **Two in three (66%)** with a car could not afford fuel, and more than **one in four (27%)** could not afford a washing machine. These figures highlight that many respondents struggle to afford basic household essentials that are often taken for granted.

Many resorted to borrowing money to get by financially. Nearly **three in four (78%)** could not afford \$500 in savings for emergencies. **Six in ten (61%)** sought financial assistance from family and friends, and **nearly half (46%)** pawned or sold something because of a shortage of money. Respondents reported a range of financial struggles, some being able to afford clothing, shoes or a haircut. More than **one in four (26%)** had to resort to taking out a loan from payday lenders. These findings suggest that the situation for many experiencing hardship is bleak.

“
I find it extremely difficult to look after myself as a woman. I can't get my hair done, can't afford make-up or face cream. [I'm] wearing clothes so old and feel like a nobody. Can never go anywhere because of no money. Being unemployed really takes a toll on you. Even though I am grateful I get unemployment benefits, I still live in poverty. You want to feel good but it's impossible, and [I] actually feel sick from the situation I'm in. Honestly, most times [I] feel numb.
– old woman from Queensland

Last year, **one in three (36%)** people sought assistance from The Salvation Army Doorways emergency relief services due to financial difficulties such as cost of living and unexpected expenses. In the first three months of 2023, there has been a 10% increase in the number of people assisted by The Salvation Army Doorways emergency relief servicesⁿ compared to the same time the year before. It is expected that people will continue to reach out for help and demand for the service is predicted to rise.

“
My son wears shoes that do not fit.
We borrow a laptop from his school. I drive my car in an unroadworthy state. I only shower twice a week. We rehomed our pet bird. I cut our hair poorly. I sell things online to survive.
Neither of us have ever had new clothes.
– 46-year-old female from Victoria

ⁿ Includes Doorways and Corps Based Social Emergency Relief programs



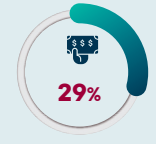
experienced an increase in at least one of their household costs in the past 12 months



of those on JobSeeker and Parenting Payment reported they pawned or sold something because of a shortage of money



found it difficult to meet necessary living expenses, such as housing, utilities, food and health care; nine percentage points higher than the year before



of households with children resorted to taking out loans from pay-day lenders because of a shortage of money



reported an increase in the cost of food and groceries



could not afford to pay the rent or mortgage on time because of a shortage of money



of respondents in private rentals could not afford at least \$500 in savings for an emergency

FIGURE 18. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS USING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE COST OF ENERGY AND WATER BILLS (N = 1492)



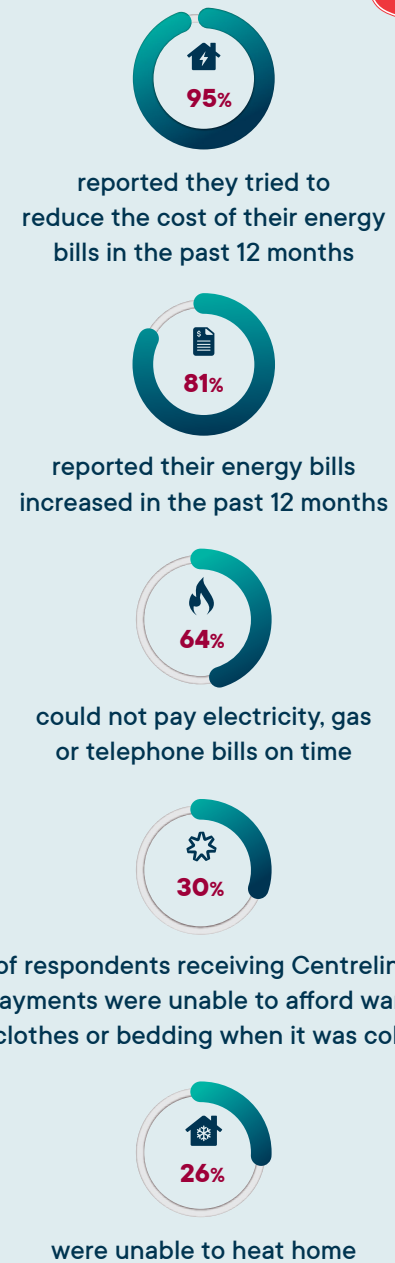
ENERGY POVERTY

Energy prices have risen considerably in the past year and are forecast to increase a further **30%** in the next 18 months.²⁹ These price hikes disadvantage low-income households the most, who must spend a greater share of their disposable income on energy bills.³⁰ **Eight in ten (81%)** respondents reported an increase in their energy bills in the past 12 months. **One in four (26%)** reported they could not afford to heat their home, nine times higher compared to the general Australian population. A further **two in three (64%)** could not afford to pay their electricity or gas bill on time because of a shortage of money, four and half times more compared to the Australian population.³¹ These findings highlight the inequity and significant disadvantage faced by people who seek assistance from The Salvation Army and the difficult choices they must make.

Almost all (**95%**) respondents resorted to 'energy saving' strategies to reduce their utility bills, such as cutting back on using heating and cooling (**74%**), reducing using the lights (**70%**) and taking shorter or fewer showers (**60%**). More than one in three reported they did not have guests over (**36%**), and others went to bed early to keep warm (**34%**). These extreme measures underscore the impact of rising energy costs on low-income households, leading many to experience deprivation.

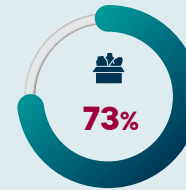
“

I had to sell my car. I had to get a high interest loan. I can't afford to pay my bills. I've had to get help to attain food. I stay at home all the time I go to bed early to save electricity. I don't feel like socialising or talking to friends.
– 54-year-old male from Victoria

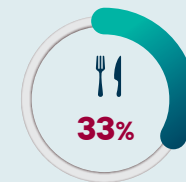




said their food and grocery costs have increased in the past 12 months



reported that being able to afford enough food was one of their greatest challenges in the past months – 17 percentage points higher than the year before



could not afford at least one filling meal a day because of a shortage of money – 10 percentage points higher than the year before



FOOD INSECURITY

Surveyed respondents faced significant food insecurity, with many struggling to afford enough to eat. More than **nine in ten (92%)** reported their food and grocery bills had increased in the past 12 months, more than any other household expense. Many respondents reported going hungry and skipping meals to make ends meet. The findings highlighted that **more than half (52%)** of respondents went without meals, and those on JobSeeker Payments were worst affected, with **two in three (66%)** going without meals because of a shortage of money. **One in three (33%)** could not afford at least one filling meal a day because of a shortage of money.

Food appears to be one of the first items to be cut from the budget when finances are tight. Nearly **three in four (73%)** said that affording enough food to eat was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months, a substantial increase of 17 percentage points compared to the year before. This illustrates the immense struggles that people on low incomes face just to put food on the table.

“

I cannot afford to buy food for my kids sometimes, and most times I go without food and have lost 40kgs in the last nine months because all my money goes on keeping a roof over my kid's heads and trying to keep them in a safe place. I am eight weeks behind in rent and I will be evicted soon.

– 55-year-old female from Western Australia

HEALTHCARE

More than half (56%) of respondents reported that their health and medical costs had increased in the past 12 months. Accessing healthcare was a struggle for many, leaving some respondents to attend the emergency department in hospitals because they could not afford to see a doctor. Many reported being unable to afford essential healthcare in the past 12 months, with **half (50%)** unable to afford essential medical or dental treatment. More than **four in ten (41%)** could not afford to buy medication prescribed by their doctor, which is five percentage points higher compared to research findings the year before.

Among those not able to pay for prescription medicine or necessary medical or dental treatment:

- **66%** reported their symptoms or condition worsened
- **43%** developed additional health issues
- **38%** said the symptoms or condition became harder to treat
- **27%** experienced negative side effects or withdrawal symptoms
- **23%** ended up in the hospital or emergency department

Six in ten (61%) reported that managing their physical health or disability was their greatest challenge in the past year. Overall, more than **one in three (35%)** respondents identified having a disability, and of these, more than four in ten was a physical disability (**42%**). **Nearly half (47%)** reported that being able to afford health care, medical treatment or support services when needed was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months, a vast increase of 20 percentage points compared to last year's research findings.

Respondents receiving the Disability Support Pension or JobSeeker Payment were particularly vulnerable to affording essential healthcare expenses, which had a negative impact on their health. Among those receiving the Disability Support Pension or JobSeeker Payment:

- **Nearly half (47%)** reported they developed additional health issues, compared to **36%** of those on other Centrelink payments
- **Four in ten (40%)** reported their symptoms or condition become harder to treat, compared to **33%** of those on other Centrelink payments
- **Three in ten (31%)** reported experiencing negative side effects or withdrawal symptoms, compared to **22%** of those on other Centrelink payments

These findings highlight that many respondents did not have the available finances to pay for unexpected bills or be able to attend to their health and medical care.



“

In the past 12 months, my children and myself and partner have suffered mould sickness. My partner and I haven't been able to have more than two meals a week so the boys can eat. I'm suffering from major depression and am on strong medication. I've had to pawn everything I hold dear.

– 40-year-old female from Queensland

“

I have a serious medical condition... cancer and not all medical is bulk billed and medical costs are destroying me.

– 70-year-old male from Victoria

“

I have had to reorganise [my] finances ... with the increased cost in utilities, groceries, medication (sometimes going without) which affects my terminal heart condition... I have had to reduce visits to my GP (doesn't bulk bill). My mental health issues are acute (can't afford a psychologist).

– 54-year-old female from ACT

“

I have missed out on medication a few times because of shortage of money. This had caused me some ongoing problems medically, such as ongoing seizures and going without food on a few occasions.

– 58-year-old female from NSW



FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Most respondents struggled financially. More than **four in ten (45%)** reported they were just getting by financially. **Half (50%)** described their financial situation as poor, with not enough money for basic household essentials. These figures are 10 percentage points higher compared to last year's findings. This suggests that people's financial situation are not improving year to year.

Respondents receiving Centrelink payments, particularly those on JobSeeker (**59%**) and the Disability Support Pension (**52%**), and those living in major cities, were more likely to perceive their financial situation as poor. This finding contrasts with those in paid employment (**62%**) who were more likely to see themselves as just getting by financially.



There is a fine line between being poor and feeling destitute. Have no social life, every cent is accounted for. It is lonely and depressing and feel quite useless.
– 59-year-old male from Victoria

A significant proportion of respondents expressed pessimism about their future financial prospects. Nearly **four in ten (37%)** expressed uncertainty about whether their situation would improve. **Three in ten (30%)** respondents expected their financial situation to worsen, 13 percentage points higher than the previous year's research. Those on the Age Pension, those without children and those living in major cities reported a more negative outlook about their financial prospects and future.

FIGURE 19. ITEMS RESPONDENTS WERE UNABLE TO AFFORD FOR THEIR HOUSEHOLD (N = 1214-1647)



I have become extremely anxious and depressed. Every day is a real struggle to pay overdue accounts. Feel very worried about our future. The day-to-day financial worries cause me to not sleep at night.
– 72-year-old female from Victoria



of those receiving the Disability Support Pension reported their physical health or disability was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months



of respondents from households without children could not afford medical or dental treatment if required



reported being able to afford health care, medical treatment or support services (when needed) was their greatest challenge in the past 12 months; 20 percentage points higher compared to last year's research findings



of respondents on JobSeeker or the Disability Support Pension could not afford medicine prescribed by a doctor



described their financial situation as poor and 45% reported they were just getting by financially



expected their financial situation to worsen, 13 percentage points higher from the previous year's research

FIGURE 20. PERCEIVED HOUSEHOLD WEALTH (N = 1697)*

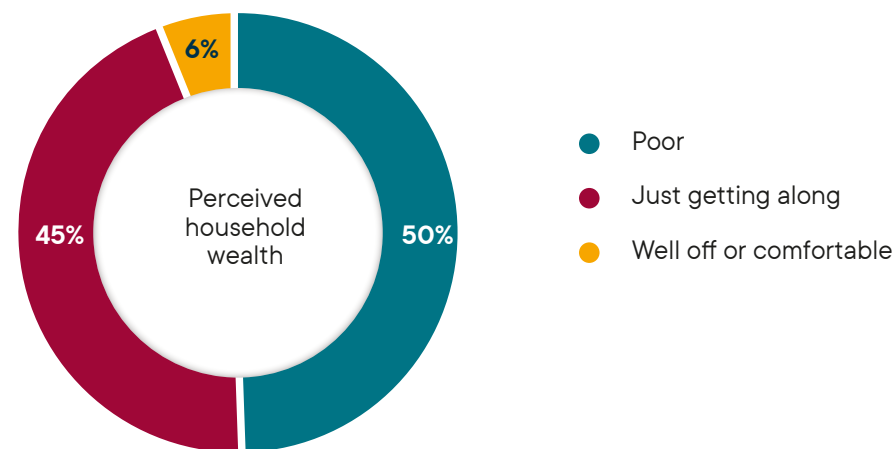
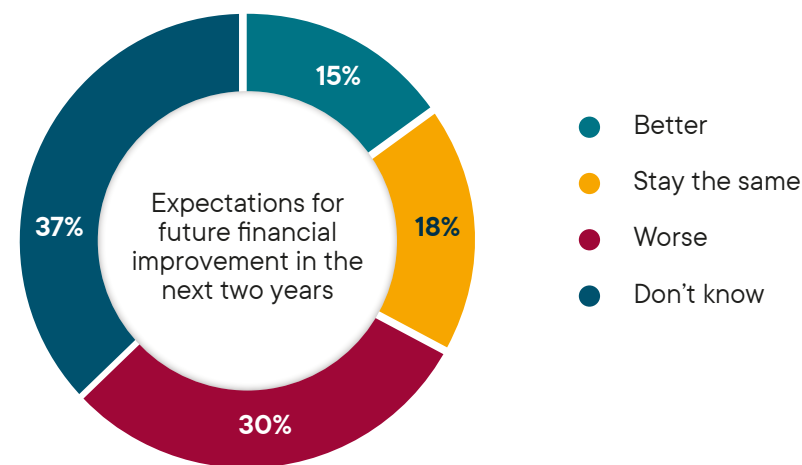


FIGURE 21. EXPECTATIONS FOR FUTURE FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS (N = 1667)*



* Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

SEEKING ASSISTANCE

Financial hardship had a considerable impact on most respondents. Nearly **seven in ten (68%)** reported seeking assistance from a welfare or community organisation on more than one occasion. In 2022, the main reasons people sought financial and material assistance from The Salvation Army emergency relief were for:

1. Money issues (**44%**)
2. Health-related issues and costs (**10%**)
3. Income issues (**9%**)
4. Homelessness (**8%**)
5. Housing costs (**5%**)

In 2022, people on government support payments (**46%**) were more likely to seek assistance from emergency relief centres for money issues, such as the inability to meet unexpected bills or afford the rise in the cost-of-living expenses, compared to those not on government benefits (**24%**). This may suggest those managing on income support payments experienced a range of financial difficulties such as affording household essentials.

“
[I] feel powerless, live in fear of another bill arriving, can't meet all bills with one pension, mentally it's draining, and I feel like giving up.
– 56-year-old female from Victoria



Children and families

There was a higher proportion of families seeking emergency relief compared to previous years. **Nearly half (46%)** of respondents had children aged 0 to 18 years, equalling 793 families and representing approximately 2200 children across these households. Of these, **three in four (77%)** were sole-parent families, **one in six (16%)** were couples with children, and **one in fourteen (7%)** were grandparents looking after their grandchildren.



46% of respondents were households with children



793 families



Average of 2.8 children per household



Approximately 2220 children represented in sample



of households with children were living below the poverty line and had a median household income of \$400 per week



of couples with children experienced extreme housing stress, spending 50% or more on housing



of households with children described their financial situation as poor



of couples with children were behind on their rent, mortgage or housing payments

FINANCIAL SITUATION

Children growing up in low-income households experience numerous disadvantages and inequalities compared to those in more prosperous homes. Unlike last year's findings, experiences of hardship were common across all family households, including single parents, couples with children and grandparents looking after their grandchildren.

More than **nine in ten (95%)** families with children found it difficult to meet the necessary cost of living expenses such as housing, electricity, water, health care, food, clothing or transport in the past 12 months. This represents an increase of eight percentage points compared to last year's research findings and highlights the significant financial difficulties that nearly all those with children face in keeping up with rising expenses.

Overall, households with children were left with less than **\$23 per week** or **\$3 per day** after paying for basic living expenses such as housing, groceries, fuel, utilities and health. This amount was significantly lower than households without children, who had **\$60 per week** or **\$9 per day** remaining. Nearly **seven in ten (69%)** could not afford to pay their electricity, gas, or telephone bills on time, and **three in ten (30%)** households with children could not afford to pay their rent or mortgage on time. Nearly half of single-parent households (**49%**) and couple households with children (**48%**) described their financial situation as poor, while nearly **six in ten (59%)** grandparent households looking after their grandchildren reported they were just getting by financially. Given these challenges, it was not surprising that nearly **two in three (66%)** were forced to ask asked for financial help from friends and family to get by.

Nearly **four in ten (38%)** respondents reported that taking care of their children was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months, with the highest rate observed among Indigenous respondents (**50%**). The pressure of living on limited income caused immense stress, with many family households uncertain about their financial futures. Couple households with children were more likely to say that they expected their financial situation to worsen within the next two years. However, most households did not know what their financial future held for them.

“
 Being short of money makes it very hard to feel proud or like you are worthy of a better life when this is a constant environment. It is hard to remain positive and not allow it to impact mental health and relationships in and out of the home. I am practically housebound because I can't afford to have a social life or interact outside of the home. That rolls over to the children too because we can't even afford to go day tripping. – 44-year-old female from Victoria



HARDSHIP

Households with children experienced a range of hardships and economic disadvantages, and many struggled to afford essential items for their families. Particularly concerning was the difficulties these households had in affording medical care. Nearly **one in four (24%)** households with children could not afford medical or dental treatment for their children, and **one in six (16%)** could not afford medicine for their children when prescribed by their doctor. As a result of the lack of affordable healthcare and medications, many respondents reported that their children:

- Had symptoms or condition got worse **(52%)**
- Had symptoms or conditions became harder to treat **(32%)**
- Developed additional health issues **(21%)**
- Experienced negative side effects or withdrawal symptoms **(17%)**
- Ended up in the hospital or emergency department **(14%)**

Households with young children (0 to 5 years) also struggled to afford the basic essentials. Approximately one in three could not afford:

- Childcare, preschool or day care fees **(37%)**
- Formula, nappies, cot or a pram **(32%)**

This highlights the disadvantage and needs many people with young families face and the increased vulnerability of some children in our community.

Households with school-age children (5 to 18 years) did not fare much better. Our findings revealed that more than **three in four (77%)** families with school-aged children could not afford to give their children some money to save each week. **Two in three (64%)** could not afford money to pay for extracurricular classes, hobbies or sports activities. Approximately **half (46%)** missed out on the opportunity to participate in school activities such as camps and excursions, or even afford school uniforms. Some respondents expressed feelings of embarrassment and shame regarding their inability to provide for their children.

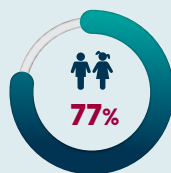
Our research indicated that a significant number of respondents faced challenges providing the basic nutritional needs for their children. **One in five (20%)** respondents could not afford to provide their children with three meals a day, and **one in three (29%)** could not afford a daily portion of fresh fruit and vegetables for their children. Consequently, many respondents resorted to extreme measure to prioritise their children’s wellbeing. This included skipping meals themselves, delaying bill payments and even selling their possessions to ensure their children would not go without.



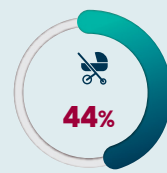
I'm hungry and scared. I've been selling my things to feed the kids and animals, and trying to hide it all from the kids is getting harder. I feel like a failure.
– 53-year-old female from Tasmania



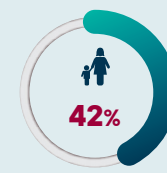
of couples with children could not afford \$500 in savings in case of an emergency



could not afford to give their children pocket money



of couples with young children could not afford essential items for their children, such as baby formula, nappies, a cot or a pram



reported their children’s mental health and emotional wellbeing was one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months

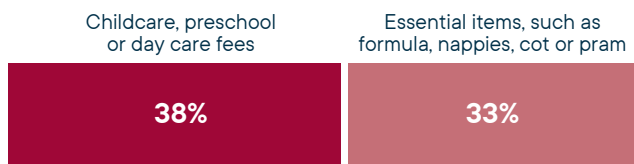


of couples with children reported getting enough paid work as one of their greatest challenges in the past 12 months

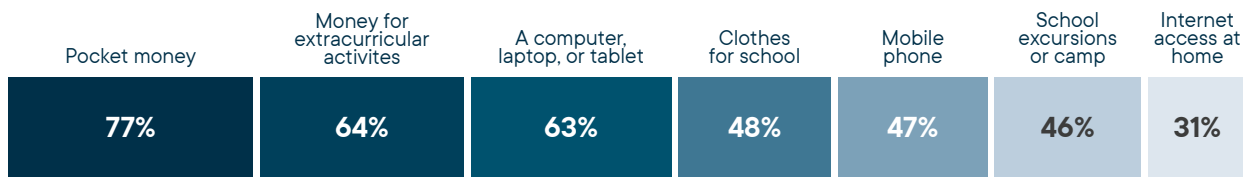
FIGURE 22. ITEMS RESPONDENTS WERE UNABLE TO AFFORD FOR THEIR CHILDREN
(N = 295-727)



ALL CHILDREN (0-18 YEARS)



YOUNG CHILDREN (<5 YEARS)



SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN (5-18 YEARS)

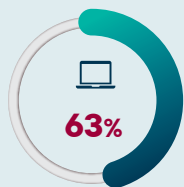
TECHNOLOGY

Access to digital technology is often taken for granted, but it remains unaffordable for many individuals with low incomes. Our findings revealed significant digital exclusion among respondents. **One in three (33%)** could not afford access to the internet at home, **nearly half (48%)** could not afford a computer, laptop, or tablet and nearly **one in four (24%)** could not afford a home or mobile phone. The rates of digital exclusion for those on JobSeeker Payment were even higher, with **four in ten (41%)** unable to afford the internet at home and **three in ten (31%)** unable to afford a mobile or landline telephone.

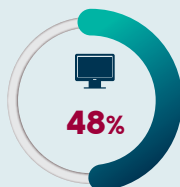
The inability to afford digital technology restricts these individuals' opportunities for work, education, and social connection, further exacerbating existing inequalities in economic and social outcomes. The findings also showed that the impact of digital exclusion also extended to households with children. Nearly **two in three (63%)** were unable to afford a computer, laptop, or tablet for their children and **nearly half (46%)** could not afford a mobile phone for their children. Such barriers make it more difficult for these children to be able to complete homework, access educational resources, and communicate with their friends and peers.

“

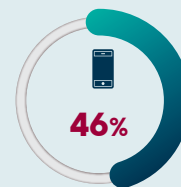
Literally living hand to mouth... only get groceries if there is money left after paying mortgage and bills. Dreading school next year as I don't know how I'll afford uniforms, books and a computer for son going into high school (it is a requirement for his schooling). Between being unwell, fighting MS, and trying to stay on top of expenses, I'm barely holding it together.
– 47-year-old female from Victoria



could not afford a laptop, computer or tablet for their children



could not afford a computer, laptop or tablet



could not afford a mobile phone for their children



of single-parents with school-aged children could not afford access to the internet at home

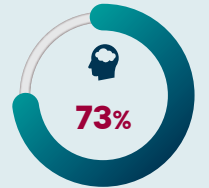


Mental health and wellbeing

MENTAL HEALTH

Good mental health is a positive state of wellbeing that enables us to effectively manage and cope with life's ups and downs. If our mental health deteriorates, it can have a profound impact on our daily functioning, affecting our personal relationships, work life, and overall quality of life. More than **four in ten (44%)** Australians will experience some form of mental ill-health during their lifetime. According to the recent Australian Census, one in ten or approximately 2.2 million Australians reported they had been diagnosed with a mental health condition.³²

Mental ill-health was prevalent among respondents. **One in three (33%)** rated their mental health as poor, while another **four in ten (40%)** rated their mental health as fair. Nearly **three in four (73%)** respondents reported that their mental health and emotional wellbeing were among their greatest challenges in the past 12 months, which represents a seven-percentage point increase compared to last year's research findings. More than one in three respondents reported living with a disability, and of these, more than four in ten reporting a psychiatric disability (**43%**).



reported that their mental health and/or emotional wellbeing was a major life challenge for respondents in the past 12 months, a seven-percentage point increase compared to the year before



rated their mental health as poor, while another 40% rated their mental health as fair

IMPACTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

The data highlighted that poor mental health negatively affected several crucial aspects of people's lives, including their ability to take care of themselves and their families, participate in social activities, and their ability to manage their finances, employment and housing. **Seven in ten (70%)** of all respondents reported that their mental health had negatively impacted their everyday life in the past four weeks. Among those who reported negative impacts, more than **seven in ten (72%)** had difficulties looking after themselves, nearly **two-thirds (65%)** stated that their mental health negatively affected their ability to participate in social and community activities, while **over half (52%)** reported that it impacted their ability to manage their finances.

Those with poorer mental health were nearly three times more likely to report that their mental health had negatively impacted important aspects of their lives in the past four weeks (**94%**), compared to those with good-to-excellent mental health (**34%**).

“

I don't have money to buy clothes, shoes or food, let alone rent and bills. My mental health is suffering badly. I lack motivation to do normal day-to-day tasks and lack energy to maintain my duties.
– 41-year-old male from South Australia

FIGURE 24. IMPACT OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH ON KEY ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE (N = 1126)



Those on the JobSeeker Payment or Disability Support Pension reported:

- Higher rates of poor mental health (**38%**) compared to respondents on other types of Centrelink benefits (**24%**)
- That their mental health negatively impacted their daily life and regular activities in the past four weeks (**77%**) compared to those on other Centrelink payments (**59%**)

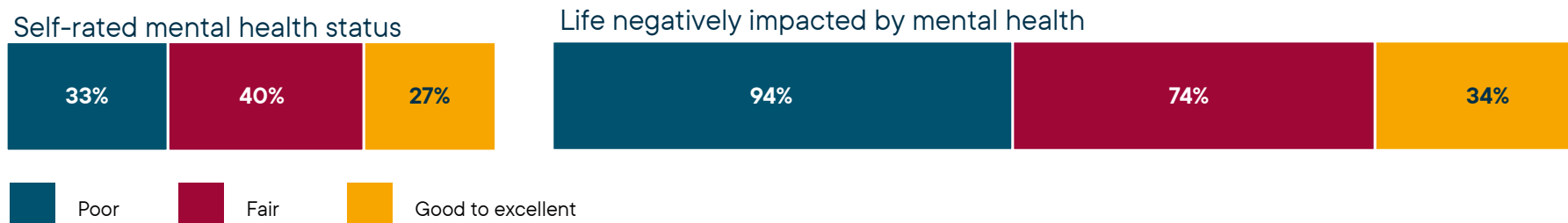
Respondents receiving the JobSeeker Payment reported significant impacts of their mental health on their ability to manage their employment and housing situations. **Nearly half (47%)** stated that their mental health was impacting their ability to find and sustain paid employment. Almost **one in four (23%)** reported that it was affecting their ability to find and maintain suitable housing, which was considerably higher compared to other respondents receiving Centrelink payments (**13%**). These findings suggest that lower levels of income support can exacerbate experiences of financial hardship and contribute to mental ill-health.

While the data revealed that respondents without children had poorer self-rated mental health, **one in three (29%)** respondents with children reported that their mental health was poor, and **two in three (65%)** said their mental health adversely affected their daily life. Among those with children who reported that their mental health had negatively impacted their daily life, over **one-third (37%)** said it affected their ability to care for their family and children.

“

I can barely afford to pay rent and put food on the table. The constant stress over finances has impacted my mental health, making it even harder for me to return to work.
– 35-year-old female from Queensland

FIGURE 23. SELF-RATED MENTAL HEALTH STATUS (N = 1649)



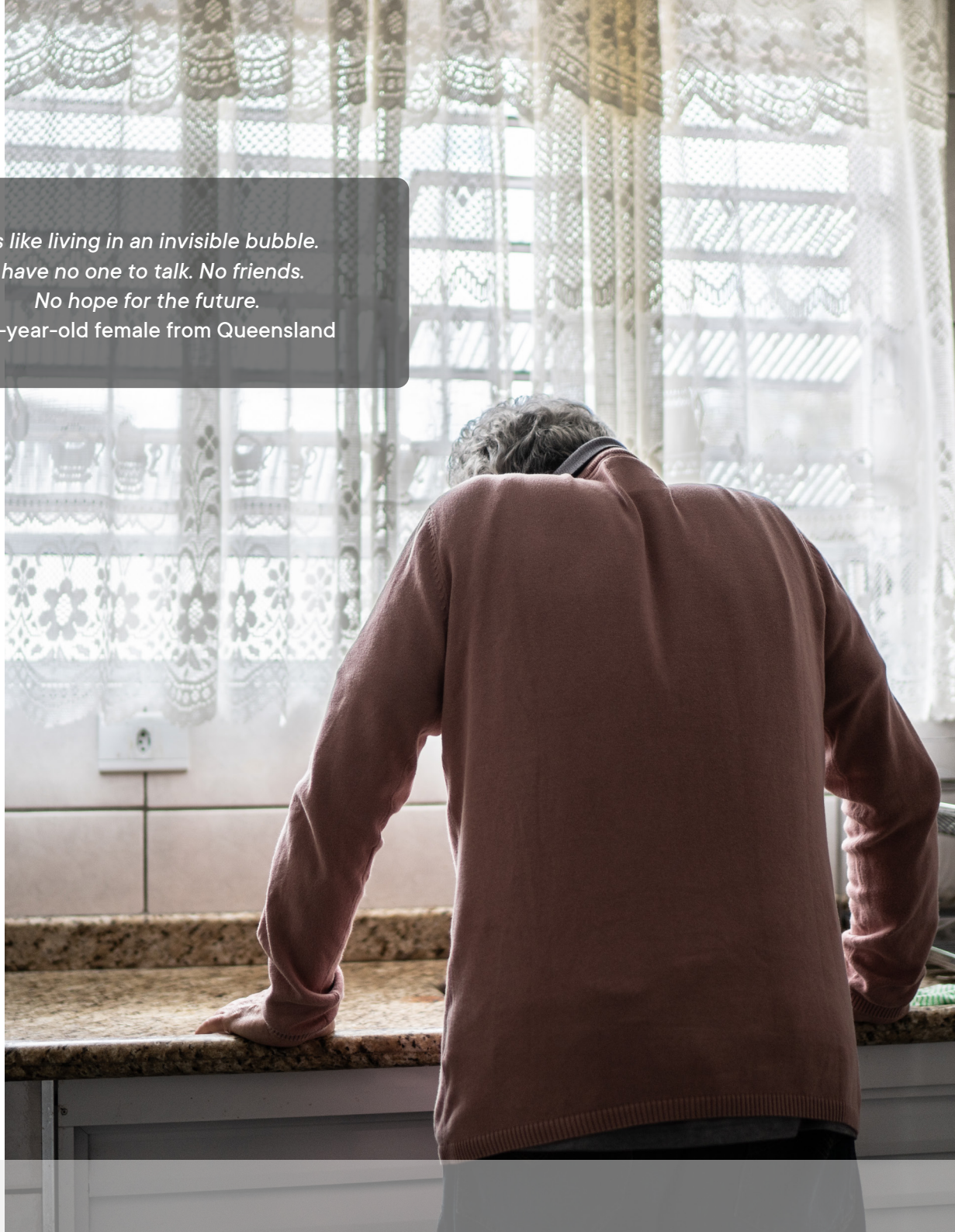
ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Social isolation and loneliness can have detrimental impacts on people’s mental and physical health.³³ Our findings revealed that experiences of isolation and loneliness were common among respondents. Nearly **four in ten (37%)** reported they felt lonely most or all the time in the past 12 months. In stark contrast, only **one in ten (11%)** reported that they rarely or never felt lonely. Experiences of persistent loneliness were more pronounced among single-person households (**47%**), those on the Disability Support Pension (**45%**), and respondents in full-time employment (**42%**). There was also a higher incidence of loneliness among older and middle-aged groups compared to younger respondents. Many respondents expressed that their financial struggles compounded their feelings of loneliness and isolation. Limited resources precluded people from connecting with others, engaging in social activities, and being actively involved in their communities.

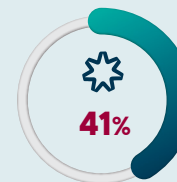
“
*It’s like living in an invisible bubble.
 I have no one to talk. No friends.
 No hope for the future.*
 – 48-year-old female from Queensland

“
*I pay my bills and cannot afford
 to socialise or buy clothes. I am very isolated,
 with limited family support. It has exacerbated my
 symptoms of depression, anxiety and loneliness.
 I feel like giving up, I’m tired and feel hopeless.*
 – 48-year-old female from South Australia

The research findings also indicated that those with poor mental health tended to experience loneliness most frequently. **Two in three (66%)** respondents with poor mental health reported feeling lonely most or all of the time, while only **one in nine (13%)** of those with good-to-excellent mental health reported the same. More than **one in two (54%)** reported that feeling socially isolated and lonely was a major life challenge in the past 12 months. These rates were even higher for respondents with children and those on the Disability Support Pension and JobSeeker Payment (**62%**).



reported that feeling socially isolated and lonely was a major life challenge for them in the past 12 months



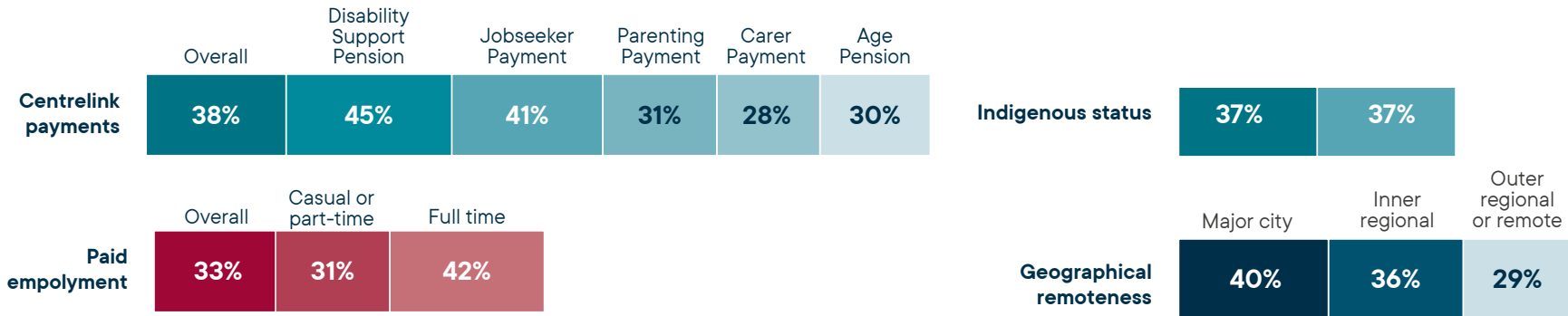
receiving JobSeeker experienced loneliness most or all the time in the last 12 months



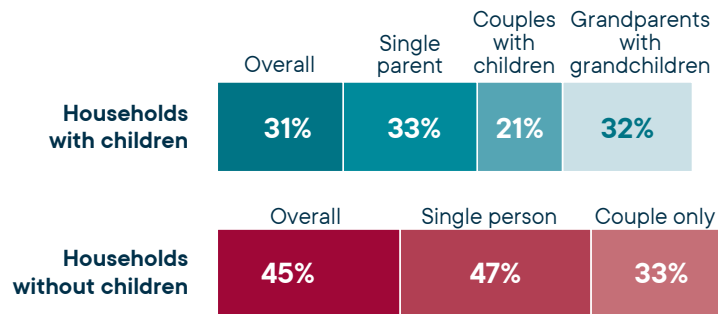
reported that they felt lonely most or all the time in the past 12 months

FIGURE 25. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED LONELINESS “MOST OR ALL OF THE TIME” IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY INCOME SOURCE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, HOUSING SITUATION, INDIGENOUS STATUS, AND REMOTENESS

INCOME SOURCE



HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION



HOUSING SITUATION

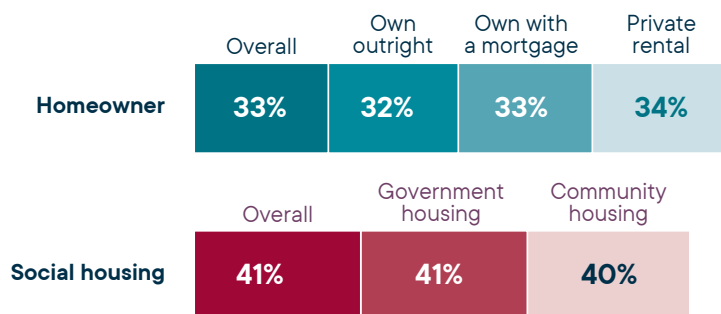


FIGURE 26. FREQUENCY OF LONELINESS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (1626)

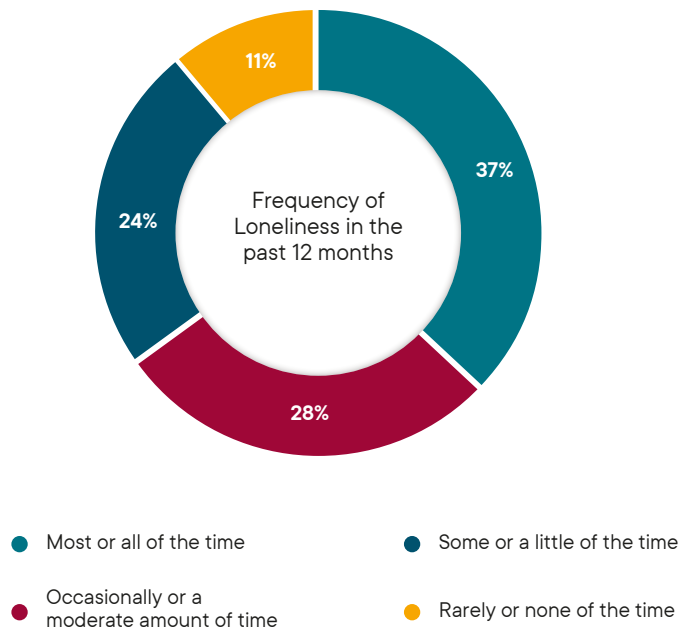
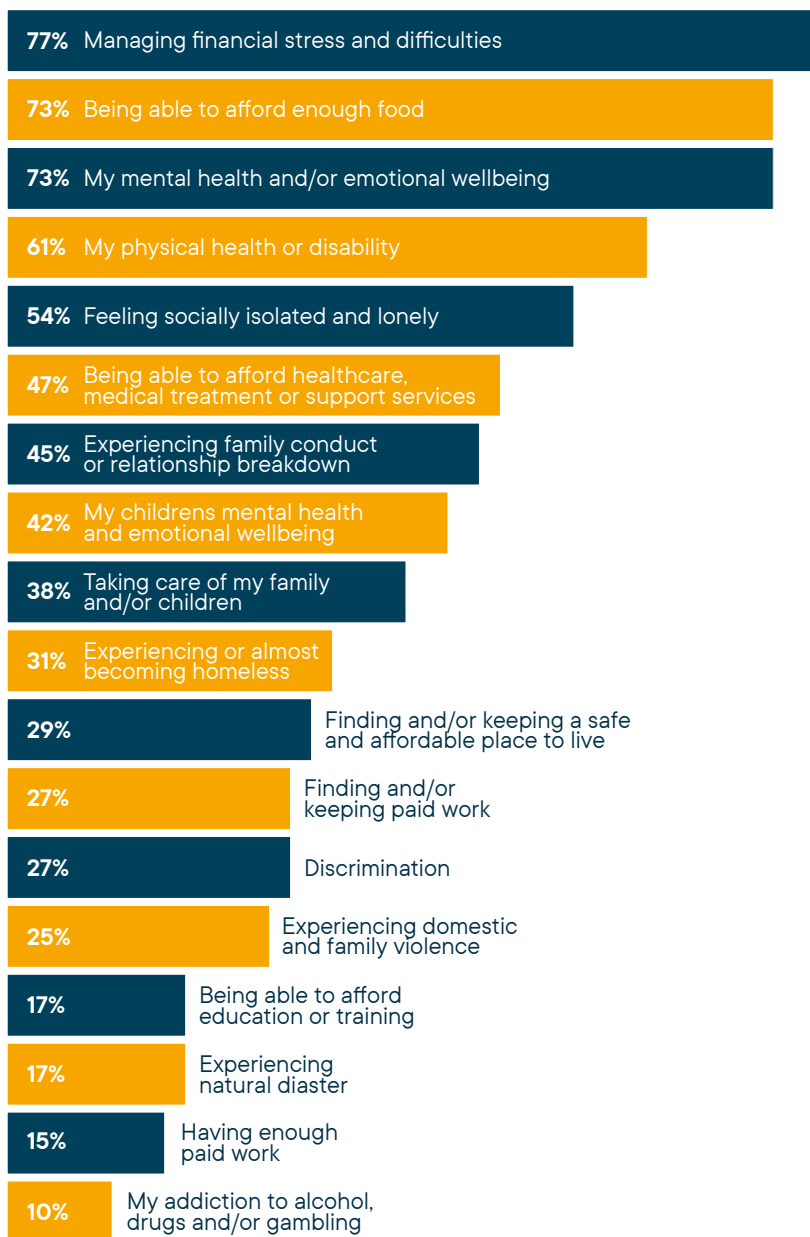


FIGURE 27. MAJOR LIFE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (N = 1600-1638)



Other life challenges

Respondents also shared a range of adverse life experiences and struggles they experienced in the past 12 months, such as financial stress (77%) and difficulties affording enough food (73%). Many also encountered personal struggles, with more than **four in ten (45%)** experiencing family conflict or a relationship breakdown. Family and domestic violence was also a main challenge for **one in four (25%)** respondents, which was a six-percentage point increase from the previous year's research findings. This rate was even higher for households headed by single mothers, affecting more than **one in three (36%)** of them.

“

I have come out of a severe domestic violence relationship, and I have been struggling a lot financially and emotionally. I'm still trying to get back on top of everything, but it's not been easy.

– 47-year-old female from NSW

“

Such great help. No questions, no discrimination, no judgement. Pure help. Keep doing good and making a big difference to people's lives. Thank you so much.

– 36-year-old female from Western Australia, on assistance she received

DISCRIMINATION

Many of our community members have unfortunately faced discrimination or prejudice based on their personal characteristics such as their gender, race, age, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.³⁴ More than **one in four (27%)** respondents reported experiencing discrimination as a main challenge in the past 12 months. Among these, experiences of discrimination were due to respondent's:

- Age (55%)
- Disability (53%)
- Cultural background (27%)
- Gender (19%)
- Sexuality (13%)
- Religion (9%)

One in six (15%) also reported that they experienced age discrimination as a barrier when looking for work, citing that they were deemed too old or too young for advertised positions by a prospective employer. A few respondents reported that their criminal record and mandatory COVID-19 vaccination regulations served as additional barriers preventing them to secure employment.



How we make a difference



of respondents reported that they would not have managed financially without the assistance from the Salvos

The Salvation Army remains deeply committed to helping people experiencing hardship and disadvantage. Our research findings revealed that nearly **nine in ten (88%)** respondents reported they would not have managed financially without the assistance they received from the Salvos. The data presented up to this point have unequivocally demonstrated that respondents who sought financial or material assistance from The Salvation Army emergency relief services represent some of the most financially disadvantaged individuals in Australia, who have faced tremendous economic and social adversities throughout the past year. The magnitude of this hardship is profound, with many individuals struggling to stay afloat and provide for their families on extremely limited incomes. In such dire circumstances, the emergency relief assistance provided by The Salvation Army serves as a vital safety net, offering essential support to those who would otherwise have nowhere else to turn to for help.

When reflecting on the impact of The Salvation Army in their lives in the past year, respondents frequently expressed gratitude for the positive experiences and emotional support provided by the frontline staff from Doorways emergency relief services. They emphasised the significant role played by compassionate staff members who genuinely listened to their stories and concerns with empathy and understanding. As a result, many respondents felt a sense of security and hope in otherwise hopeless situations. Respondents also said that these positive interactions with staff contributed to increased feelings of confidence and helped them feel less pessimistic about their situation.

Feedback respondents shared with us

A large number of respondents shared positive feedback about the transformative difference the Salvos had made to their lives and the lives of their families.

Respondents expressed a profound sense of relief and appreciation for the assistance provided by The Salvation Army. They highlighted that the support they received was essential for their survival and the wellbeing of their children. For many, the assistance helped lift the burden of stress from their shoulders, ensuring they did not go hungry or go without essentials such as medical care for themselves and their families. The immense impact of The Salvation Army's support was deeply appreciated by respondents, who recognised that their lives would have been significantly more challenging without this vital assistance.

The Salvation Army remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting individuals during challenging times. It is heartening to witness the appreciation and recognition from those who have benefited from our services, as their feedback underscores the value and impact of our work.

I never imagined that I would need to reach out to a charity for help. When it was offered, it was offered with compassion and kindness. Being given assistance with paying electricity and food vouchers actually made me shed tears of joy, to have that pressure relieved was enormous. I am so grateful.
– 51-year-old female from NSW

I don't know how I would have got through without the Salvos, especially with rising cost of living — it's having an impact on most areas of my life.
– 48-year-old female from NSW

It gave me the will to keep on striving and helped put food on the table. Thank you for helping when I thought I was or had nothing. Thank you.
– 54-year-old female from NT

The Salvation Army has made a massive difference for my family. They helped me feel like I wasn't alone, helped me feed my beautiful boys, clothing for me and my boys, clean sheets, petrol, pillows and provided me with the hope that people do care. The Salvation Army workers go out of their way to help and make you feel like it's going to be ok. I hope that someday I will be able to pay back their fantastic workers and helpers.
– 40-year-old female from Queensland

The Salvos have saved my life at times when I have been at my lowest and most desperate personally and financially. They are the only thing that has saved me from complete destitution.
– 56-year-old male from NSW

When I was overwhelmed and felt like I had the weight of my family on my shoulders, the Salvos lifted that weight, and I finally felt like I could breathe again, even if just for a while.
– 43-year-old mother from Queensland

You were there when I needed food and someone to talk to and ask for help without judgement. That was a really positive outcome for me.
– 67-year-old male from Victoria

CONCLUSION

The past 12 months have been incredibly hard for many Australians. Rising inflation and the increasing cost of living in placing immense pressure on individuals and families, especially those already facing financial hardship.

This research project sheds light on some of the social and economic challenges faced by those who accessed support through the Salvation Army emergency relief services in the past year. The findings consistently revealed that most respondents struggled to manage the rising cost of essentials such as housing, food, utilities, fuel and healthcare, often resulting in financial stress and simply going without. Many were unable to pay the rent or mortgage on time, found themselves in arrears, and had to settle for substandard housing conditions due to their limited financial means. Many respondents also could not afford enough food to eat, with many going hungry or skipping meals to make sure their children were fed. The data highlights the sobering reality for the majority of community members who seek our assistance, with three in four respondents living below the poverty line and facing daily challenges simply to survive.

Households were living on minimal incomes but were doing their best to make ends meet. After paying for essential expenses such as housing, food, utilities, transport and health, respondents were left with only **\$40 per week** or less than **\$6 per day**. However, for some, their basic household expenses exceeded their income, leaving them in deficit. The burden of hardship was often the most prevalent among single parent households, JobSeeker recipients and Indigenous respondents.

Given that our respondents had household incomes three times lower than the typical Australian, coupled with ever-rising housing costs, it is not surprising that housing expenses emerged as the most significant financial burden for respondents and their households. This financial strain has resulted in many experiencing housing stress, with three in four respondents spending **30%** of their household income on rent or a mortgage, and two in five spending more than half of their income of housing. As a result, many people experiencing housing stress

often found it harder to keep up with their rent or mortgage repayments, leaving many worried about the real possibility of eviction, repossession, housing instability and the risk of homelessness.

This year's report also highlights the difficulties many respondents faced in meeting their health needs and medical costs. More than half of the respondents revealed their struggles with health issues, and many frequently went without healthcare or medicine prescribed by their doctors because of a shortage of money. Many respondents reported that these unmet healthcare needs had dire consequences, exacerbating their symptoms or condition, and in some cases leading to hospitalisation. Without adequate income and opportunities for people to thrive, the situation for people on low incomes remains grim.

Numerous families reported struggling and their children often went without essentials. Many respondents were unable to afford necessities for their children such as childcare, formula and nappies, school uniforms, technology to engage in education and extracurricular pursuits. **One in five** could not afford three meals a day for their children and many could not meet the costs for essential medical care for their children. These experiences of financial disadvantage have a profound impact on the wellbeing and future prospects of these children, denying them the vital opportunities and resources necessary for their healthy development and growth.

Respondents also grappled with the detrimental effects of poor mental health and emotional wellbeing, which had a profound impact on their ability to carry out daily activities and engage in regular life pursuits. These challenges were further compounded by the financial stress and hardships experienced by respondents, creating a complex web of adverse circumstances in their lives.

On a positive note, the overwhelming majority of respondents expressed gratitude for the vital support provided by The Salvation Army, acknowledging that they would not have managed financially without this assistance. This highlights the crucial role of the Salvos in providing essential services to support people in need and those facing significant disadvantage. While some respondents remained hopeful about their financial future and anticipated better days ahead, many others expressed uncertainty. It is a reminder that hardship and poverty should not prevent people from leading a life with dignity. Despite these challenging times, The Salvation Army remains committed to continue supporting individuals, families and communities across Australia and to bringing hope to anyone in need.



CASE SCENARIO



Irena* lives with her two children, Marco (five years old) and Tai (seven years old), in a two-bedroom unit in Adelaide. She would love a bigger place so the boys could have their own room, but she can't afford it right now.

It's been tough the last 18 months, especially after being retrenched. The family had to move to a smaller place, and finances have been tight. Irena lives with a disability and struggles with anxiety. Irena wants to return to work, but this has been a barrier in finding a new job.

Marco and Tai attend the local primary school, just walking distance from their place. The kids are settled and have made friends. Irena's extended family live in Sydney, and they don't have anyone close to them in Adelaide. She misses her family but can't afford to visit them at the moment.

Tai has been complaining of a toothache for weeks, but Irena is worried about the cost of the dentist. She knows she should go but can't afford to take him. Irena feels guilty about this.

For the past few weeks, Irena has started skipping meals. The price of food has gone through the roof, and she can't always make ends meet. Irena often goes without, so Marco and Tai have enough food to eat. Irena makes sure to pack the boys a healthy lunch for school, as she doesn't want them to miss out or go hungry. But this week, it was going to be a struggle to put food on the table and in their lunch boxes.

Irena is behind on the rent. She is trying to pay back the arrears on top of the \$30 a week rent rise. Irena is worried they might get evicted. Irena wants to stay even though the place is a bit small and needs some repairs, as she has nowhere else to go. Something has to give; she doesn't want to end up homeless.

Irena was feeling very stressed, and her anxiety was getting worse. Irena knew that if something didn't change quickly, it was a downward spiral for her. It was hard. She had to remain positive and strong for her boys. It's tough as a single parent. Irena needed help.

Irena reached out and contacted the Salvos Phone Assistance line. She spoke with Gina for at least 30 minutes, who was very understanding and kind. It was so good to speak to someone about what's been happening, rather than trying to hide it. Irena visited one of the Salvos sites near her and collected a food voucher, a hamper of fresh fruit and vegetables, milk, bread and pantry staples. Irena was also referred to a Doorways case manager, Jess, to support her financial and housing situation, as well as referred to a GP about her stress levels and anxiety.

Irena felt supported. She didn't have to do things alone. She'd heard that the Salvos do good work and are there to help people in need... and they were. Jess was able to negotiate with her landlord and property manager about a smaller rent increase and set up a repayment plan for the arrears so they could stay in the unit. Irena was so relieved they weren't going to be evicted. Irena seemed less stressed. The GP really helped and developed a treatment plan to manage her anxiety. Things are still tight financially, but Irena and the boys are managing. Jess has also introduced Irena to another colleague from the Salvos Employment Plus services. Things are looking up for Irena and the boys.

**The names and some details in the case scenario have been changed to respect the individual's privacy. The image is a stock photo—the model is not associated with this case scenario.*



LIMITATIONS

Although this project represents an empirical attempt to examine the experiences of community members and their families, all findings reported here should be interpreted considering the following research limitations.

REPRESENTATIVENESS

Representative analyses were conducted on several important demographic variables to examine how closely the characteristics of the survey respondents matched those of the larger Doorways Emergency Relief population they were drawn from. The results of these analyses revealed that the characteristics of the survey respondents in this report differed significantly from those of the Doorways Emergency Relief population, based on their state or territory location, remoteness, gender, age, and income source (all $ps < .001$). Specifically, the survey had a higher proportion of people from NSW and ACT, inner regional areas, women, respondents aged 45 years and over, and those in paid employment, and a lower proportion of people from WA and the NT, major cities, men, respondents aged 18 to 34 years, and those receiving Centrelink payments and with no personal income.

However, it is important to note that the proportions of people from Queensland, Victoria, SA, and Tasmania, as well as from outer regional areas, respondents aged 35 to 45 years, and Australian citizens and permanent residents in the survey were similar to what we would expect based on the larger Doorways emergency relief population. These similarities suggest that the survey may be representative of these groups, despite the differences observed in other demographic variables.

Nevertheless, the differences observed across these important demographic variables have important implications for the interpretation of the results, as they may not accurately reflect the experiences of the wider Doorways emergency relief population. While not fully representative, these findings are highly relevant and insightful in providing support to advocacy work and raising attention to critical social issues facing many people in hardship.

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