



Social Justice STOCKTAKE



Homelessness

Attributable to Secretary for Mission, Captain Stuart Glover

The Salvation Army's 'Homelessness Project' shows that 67 per cent of clients reported being homeless on more than one occasion in their life, with half of these experiencing homelessness at least four times, and that 33 per cent of clients presenting to The Salvation Army's homelessness services are doing so for the first time.

Were you surprised to see homelessness come after housing affordability in the Stocktake or do the two go hand in hand?

Homelessness and housing affordability are intrinsically linked, but they are also separate issues. Indeed, where issues of housing affordability may be experienced by, and an issue raised by Australians across the geographic and income spectrum, homelessness will more likely be experienced by those who already have financial and other difficulties.

Nevertheless, both issues were ranked within the top five concerns nationally.

What is the association between mental ill-health and homelessness you see in your work?

There are often a range of co-occurring presenting issues which we see increasing both in terms of prevalence and complexity at our homelessness services – most particularly mental-ill health.

The Salvation Army's data shows that an experience of homelessness leads to increased impact and complexity of existing trauma, substance use and mental ill-health.

People living with mental health issues are more likely to experience homelessness and those with severe mental illness are more likely to experience higher housing stress and live in unstable housing compared to all people with a mental health issue.

Our data shows that, in 2018-19, 38 per cent of clients who presented to The Salvation Army's homelessness services were experiencing mental health issues.

We also know that the financial strain arising from rising housing costs and the fear of losing existing housing is causing mental health issues for many others.

What options can The Salvation Army offer to those presenting as homeless?

As one of the nation's largest providers of homelessness services, The Salvation Army delivers a diverse range of interventions - from prevention and early intervention, through crisis and transitional accommodation, to supportive long-term housing.



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We also provide specialist services for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, young people, single men and couples. Within these groups, we also cater to people from diverse backgrounds including CALD, LGBTIQ+, First Nation peoples and people living with a disability.

Given the breadth of other services and activities available within The Salvation Army, we are also able to support people to access a range of other personal and social programs (along with those that we can make referrals to externally) that can help address the needs of clients.

There is a traditional view of a homeless person as someone sleeping rough on city streets. What is the reality?

As the most visible form of homelessness, people sleeping rough on city streets are often mistakenly thought to be representative of people experiencing homelessness. But this is only a part of the picture. There are people experiencing homelessness across every part of Australia in different ways.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (when estimating homelessness as part of the Census of Population and Housing), the following categories (and percentages) of homelessness are outlined:

- Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (rough sleepers) (7%)
- Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless (18%)
- Persons staying temporarily with other households (15%)
- Persons living in boarding houses (15%)
- Persons in other temporary lodgings (<1%)
- Persons living in severely crowded dwellings (44%)

During lockdown, state governments managed to safely house the homeless in a matter of weeks. Now lockdown is over, what is happening with these people? Will their accommodation continue?

The unexpected emergence of the pandemic, lockdown and social distancing presented unprecedented challenges across every facet of life as we knew it.

This was no less the case for state governments and services providers in responding to people experiencing homelessness (particularly those who were rough sleeping or staying in crisis accommodation).

Indeed, in several states it seemed that street sleeping was literally eradicated overnight, as spare capacity in city hotels was quickly occupied (with state government funding) by people experiencing homelessness.

The news got even better, as many of those temporarily accommodated in hotels were supported into long-term affordable housing. Many of these people will remain permanently housed.



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However, this success story was by no means sufficiently comprehensive across Australia, and in many cases exits from hotels meant exiting back into homelessness.

Women over 55 are reported to be increasingly vulnerable to homelessness in this country. Do you see this reflected in the work of The Salvation Army?

Women over 55 are widely reported to be increasingly vulnerable to homelessness across Australia. In fact, any older person who does not own their own home outright and is reliant on the pension or other income support is highly vulnerable to homelessness.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, the number of older homeless women in Australia increased by over 30 per cent between 2011 and 2016 to nearly 7000 women. This is expected to rise exponentially in the coming decade.

Women experiencing homelessness will typically stay with friends or family, live in their car or in severely crowded dwellings, or are physically 'hiding'. Often older women are experiencing homelessness for the first time at this later stage of life and may still be working or seeking work.

In the case of older women, this segment of the population is at a greater risk of financial and housing insecurity than older men due to compounding and systematic factors. These include:

- Women in this older age group today did not benefit from compulsory superannuation at the beginning of their working lives.
- They were more likely to have been paid at a lower rate than their male counterparts.
- Were likely to have taken time out of paid workforce to have children and fulfil caring roles.
- In 1950, the basic wage for females was set at 75 per cent of the basic wage for males. Additionally, a significant number of women in the cohort (currently aged over 70) were required to resign their paid employment upon marriage.
- Many women in this age group today would have either been required or expected to leave paid work when they became pregnant.