

QUICK FACTS: HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FAMILIES

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

Homelessness does not simply mean 'rooflessness'; it applies to anyone without a stable, secure and private place to live. Although rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, it accounts for only 6% of the homeless population. Most often, children, young people, and families experiencing homelessness are living in rooming houses, refuges, cars, and crisis accommodation, or couch surfing with friends and family. These experiences fall outside of the common perception of homelessness and are contributing to a crisis of 'hidden homelessness'.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO HOUSING

A child's right to safe and secure housing is connected to several articles of the United Nation's Convention of the Rights of the Child, including:



Article 6: Children have the right to live a full life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.



Article 27: Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. The government should help families who cannot afford to provide this.



Article 24: Children have the right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy. Richer countries should help poorer countries achieve this.¹

NATIONAL DATA

122,494

people in Australia are experiencing homelessness on any given night²

23%

of all people experiencing homelessness were under 18 years²

272,700

people were supported by homelessness services in 2021-22²

1 in 7

people experiencing homelessness were under 12 years³

76,000

children under 18 years contacted homelessness support services nationwide in 2022-23 ³

↳ **60,000**
as part of a family

↳ **16,000**
alone

Of young people presenting to Specialist Homelessness Services in 2021-22: ²



66%
were female



31%
identified as First Nations



61%
had previously been assisted in the past 10 years



48%
had a current mental health concern

Reasons young people were seeking homelessness assistance nationally: ²

- Housing crisis
- Family and domestic violence
- Relationship/family breakdown

Housing is a priority for our nation with:

7 in 10 Australians want more spent on social housing, according to recent polling ⁴

Young people involved in one of either homelessness, child protection, and youth justice systems more likely to become involved in the others. ⁵

VICTORIAN DATA

102,000 (1 in 64) = 37%

Victorians received homelessness support in 2021-22 ⁶ constituting of total clients nationwide ⁶

Reasons young people were seeking homelessness assistance: ⁶

- Financial difficulties
- Family and domestic violence
- Housing crisis

23%

of Victorians without a home are young people under 24 years ⁶

The highest rates of homelessness per 10,000 people in 2021 were for the 19–24 age group at 91 people per 10,000 ⁶

The under 12 age group increased to 48 people experiencing homelessness per 10,000 in 2021 ⁶

Victorian Youth Homelessness Snapshot by Melbourne City Mission on young people aged 15–24 years old showed: ⁷

- High rates of family violence, health emergencies, self-harm, and suicide risk among young people experiencing homelessness
- Disproportionate numbers of First Nations and LGBTIQ+ identified young people experiencing homelessness
- A third of young people first lost their homes at 16 years or younger
- 4 in 5 grew up experiencing family violence before losing their home
- Half of young people in this group were known to child protection
- 1 in 2 young people had attended a hospital emergency department due to mental health issues
- 2 in 3 young people in this group were discharged from hospital back into homelessness
- 1 in 2 young people reported self-harm, suicide ideation or attempted suicidal



Persistence of homelessness: ⁷

- 2 in 3 young people had been homeless for two years or longer
- 1 in 3 young people had been homeless for five years or longer
- 1 in 3 young people first lost their homes aged 16 or younger

THE CENTRE'S STUDY

In a recent Centre survey of over 100 of our members, who provide services to children and families, organisations reported that:

85% of these organisations, regardless of their specialisation, regularly provide support to families experiencing housing insecurity

50% are seeing significantly more housing insecurity experienced by their clients than 12 months ago

65% are seeing a small proportion of clients rough sleeping, in a car or on the streets, but 35% said they are seeing more and more clients couch surfing – temporarily staying with friends and relatives

90% said that inability to secure housing in the private rental market was the reason clients are presenting to services for housing.

↑ More employed families are seeking assistance than before.

↑ More families are experiencing homelessness due to:

- increased costs of living
- a competitive private rental market
- limited social housing
- excessively long waitlists for public housing

Key impacts of housing insecurity on families:

- depression
- stress across all aspects of life
- lack of safety
- reduced capacity for parenting

Service providers reported significant fear about child protection involvement because of housing insecurity. Families are anxious children will be removed because children are going without food and essential items, aren't regularly attending school, and have significant exposure to violence and harm

Children are profoundly impacted by their family's housing stress.

EFFECTS OF HOMELESSNESS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Sharon Bessell and her team at the Children's Policy Centre, Australian National University, conducted research with children that was released in October 2024.

Their findings reveal that homelessness subjects children and young people to multidimensional poverty. It deprives them of material stability and limits their opportunities to build community connections and maintain strong relationships. Frequent relocations disrupt social networks, erode their sense of belonging, and have a negative impact on their education.

In this study, children shared their insights on the meaning of home and their personal experiences of homelessness and housing instability.

*the children in this study, self-assigned research nicknames to protect their identities

“ When you have a home [life is good]
– Mr Potato Head, 10 years

I think kids needs a safe place and a home to
have an amazing life
– Lily, 11 years

”

“

[It's tough] just not having enough money, like paying rent or like anything that is really important in life, like houses, 'cause otherwise you're left on the street like cold with nowhere warm and that.

- Warren, 11 years

Affordable rent [is a problem], my parents can barely afford to pay rent. I mean they've got money, but Dad works one job that pays very, very badly.

- Po the Teletubby, 12 years

It's kinda difficult sometimes [doing the grocery shop] 'cause sometimes my mum won't have enough money. 'Cause we have a house that we are renting and we have to pay rent and all the other bills so sometimes it is really hard to buy the groceries.

- Apple, 8 years

”

A QUICK GUIDE TO VICTORIA'S HOUSING REFORMS

VICTORIA'S HOUSING STATEMENT

In 2023, the government created the Victorian Housing Statement which includes plans to address the following priority areas:⁹

Planning reforms

- Reform the planning system to increase housing across the state
- Clear the backlog of planning permits and standardise rules for decision making for faster processing
- Provide certainty for builders, buyers, and renovators around approval timelines

More affordable housing near hubs

- Unlocking new spaces to develop in suburbs and government land, increasing supply, and decreasing urban sprawl
- Build housing near 50 Activity Centres - hubs of transport, schools, and hospitals

Create more community infrastructure, like parks and footpaths

- Protecting renters' rights
- Closing loopholes that increase cost-of-living for renters, including restricting rent increases and banning rental bidding
- Provide more certainty for renters over leases, finances, and living standards
- Faster resolution of tenancy disputes, without involving VCAT

More social housing

- Building 769 homes through the Social Housing Accelerator, 12,000 homes through the Big Housing Build, and 4,000 social housing homes through other programs
- Rebuilding high-rise social housing towers in Melbourne
- Speeding up the roll out of social and affordable housing across the state

A long-term housing plan

- Create a robust strategy for state growth and development
- Long-term reform to create a fit-for-purpose planning system

WHAT IS THE BIG HOUSING BUILD?

The Big Housing Build is Australia's largest ever investment to public and community housing. With \$5.3 billion committed, the Build will create 12,000 social and affordable houses across the state, 9,300 of which will be social homes and 25 per cent in regional areas.¹⁰

As of September 2024, nearly 10,000 social and affordable homes are under construction or have been completed through the Big Housing Build, and almost 10,000 homes have been fast-tracked for development in the last 12 months.¹¹

WHAT IS THE REGIONAL HOUSING FUND?

With \$1 billion committed, the Regional Housing Fund will create over 1,300 new homes across regional Victoria, including social and affordable housing. Numbers of houses and locations will be determined in consultation with councils, regional partnerships, and local communities. This fund is on top of the \$1.25 billion committed to regional areas as part of the Big Housing Build. There is an allocation of houses for social housing applicants, women and children escaping violence, youth at risk of homelessness, and key workers. 130 of the homes are committed for First Nations Victorians.¹²

WHAT IS HOUSING FIRST?

The Housing First initiative provides housing support to eligible young people leaving care. With \$32.5 million committed, the program, led by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, will launch over the next four years and offers:

- housing for at least 2 years
- case work support
- tenancy support
- accommodation management (i.e. collecting rent and organising maintenance)¹³



Stage 1 – August – December 2024

Supports young people leaving residential care



Stage 2 – From January 2025

Supports young people who are aged 16.5 to 18 years, at the point of referral and who are:

- leaving residential care and who are on, or were on, an eligible order on or after their 16th birthday. Residential care includes lead tenant arrangements.
- leaving a custodial facility and who have been on an eligible order and in care on or after their 16th birthday
- leaving or have left residential, kinship, foster or permanent care, and are at immediate risk of homelessness in 6 months of leaving care, and who are, or were on, an eligible order on or after their 16th birthday¹³

* Eligible order means a long-term care order, Care by Secretary order, permanent care order, or family reunification order.

ENDNOTES

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