

Enumerating the homeless in Australia

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Australian context

- **Basic characteristics**
 - 23 million people
 - Unemployment 5-6%
 - Highly urbanized – 85% live in urban areas, mainly on the eastern seaboard
 - High rates of homeownership - approx. 70%, but declining (?)
 - Low rates public/social housing - approx. 5% (negligible growth last 2 decades)
- **Welfare**
 - Universal health care
 - Basic income support
 - Limited housing assistance for low income households
- **National homelessness response – Specialist Homelessness Service system**
 - Approx 1,800 services spread across the country
 - Plus a hoc collection of mainstream services run out of Health, Education, Justice Departments

Conceptual frameworks

- **SUBJECTIVE** approach
 - A subjective definition contends that homelessness depends on people's perceptions of their situation.
- **OBJECTIVE** approach
 - An 'objective' definition pays little attention to people's individual perceptions.
 - An 'objective' definition contends that homelessness should be measured in relation to a specified set of housing standards

1980s – The SAAP definition

According to the SAAP definition people are homeless is the only housing a person has access to:

- (a) damages, or is likely to damage the person's **health**;
- (b) threatens the person's **safety**; or
- (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide **access** to:
 - (i) adequate personal **amenities**; or
 - (ii) the economic and social **support** that a home normally affords; or
- (d) places the person in circumstances which **threaten** or adversely affect the **adequacy, safety, security and affordability** of that housing.

Source: Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994), Acts of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 4 (162), 3856-68.

1990s – Objective approaches

The ‘cultural definition of homelessness’

CULTURAL DEFINITION of homelessness contends that in any community there is a minimum standard of housing, and that anyone who is in housing that falls below the minimum standard is homeless (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 1992).

Primary homelessness refers to people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Analogous situation/definitions

Unsheltered; Literal homeless

Secondary homelessness refers to people living in various forms of emergency accommodation (refuges, hostels etc.) and people staying temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own.

Sheltered homeless; Double-up;
Couch surfers

Tertiary homelessness people living in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure.

Skid row?

Measuring homelessness: Operationalizing the ‘cultural definition’

- **Primary homelessness** is operationalised using the census category ‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’. It includes people sleeping rough, camping in derelict buildings and sleeping in vehicles.
- **Secondary homelessness** includes three situations.
 - First, there are people staying in crisis and transitional accommodation on census night.
 - Second, there are people staying temporarily with other households (DOUBLING UP; couch surfers) because they have no accommodation of their own.
 - Third, the starting point for identifying boarding house residents is the census category ‘boarding house, private hotel’. However, temporary residents of boarding houses are enumerated along with other boarding house residents in the tertiary homelessness category, because it is not possible to ascertain from census data how long people have lived in single rooms.

Enumerating the homeless in Australia.

	1996*	2001**	2006***
TOTAL (individuals)	105,304	99,000	104,676
Rate/10,000	n/a	53	53
TOTAL (households)	72,847	74,821	74,825
Females (%)	42	42	44
Indigenous (%)	n/a	8.5	9.1
AGE (%)			
18 or younger	n/a	36	33
19 – 54	n/a	50	50
55 or older	n/a	14	17
TOTAL	n/a	100	100

* Chamberlain 1999; **Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003; ***Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2008

Enumerating the homeless in Australia (cont.).

	1996*	2001**	2006***
DIFFERENT SECTORS	%	%	%
Primary	19.5	14.2	15.6
Secondary – SAAP accom	12.3	14.3	19.0
Secondary – doubling up	46.1	48.6	44.8
Secondary/tertiary - Boarding houses	22.1	22.9	20.6
TOTAL	100	100	100

2012 onwards – The new ABS statistical definition

- According to the ABS there are **three requirements**:
 - The first requirement of a HOME is to provide an **ADEQUATE dwelling** that meets the needs of the household (the **PHYSICAL DOMAIN**)
 - The second requirement is to enable households to **MAINTAIN PRIVACY** and enjoy **SOCIAL RELATIONS** (the **SOCIAL DOMAIN**)
 - The third requirement is that the household has **EXCLUSIVE POSSESSION** of the dwelling, security of occupation and legal title (the **LEGAL DOMAIN**)
- According to the ABS ‘people must lack **one or more of the three** elements listed above to be defined as homeless’ (ABS 2012b, p.11)

Enumerating the homeless in Australia.

	1996 CtH	2001 CtH	2006 CtH	2011 ABS
TOTAL (individuals)	105,304	99,000	104,676	105,237
Rate/10,000	n/a	53	53	49
TOTAL (households)	72,847	74,821	74,825	n/a
Females (%)	42	42	44	44
Indigenous (%)	n/a	8.5	9.1	25.4
AGE (%)				
18 or younger	n/a	36	33	27
19 – 54	n/a	50	50	59
55 or older	n/a	14	17	14
TOTAL		100	100	100

Enumerating the homeless in Australia (cont.).

	1996 CtH	2001 CtH	2006 CtH	2011 ABS
DIFFERENT SECTORS	%	%	%	%
Primary	19.5	14.2	15.6	6.5
Secondary – SAAP accom	12.3	14.3	19.0	20.2
Secondary – doubling up	46.1	48.6	44.8	16.5
Secondary/tertiary - Boarding houses	22.1	22.9	20.6	16.8
SEVERE OVERCROWDING	n/a	n/a	n/a	39.3
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Key reference documents

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INDIGENOUS INFORMATION

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-observatory/health-and-welfare/>

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