



Providing a Voice for Housing Consumers

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**A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness
in Western Australia**
The final report in a series of four

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A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness in Western Australia

Introduction	3
<i>Methodology.....</i>	3
<i>Definition of Homelessness</i>	3
Results: A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness	4
<i>Method Used to Contact Agency.....</i>	4
<i>Housing and Support Needs.....</i>	4
<i>Urgency of Request for Assistance.....</i>	4
<i>Homeless by Household Type and Size.....</i>	4
<i>Homeless People by Age.....</i>	5
<i>Degrees of Homelessness.....</i>	5
<i>Household Incomes of the Homelessness.....</i>	5
<i>Access to Rental Housing.....</i>	5
<i>Cultural Background of the Homeless.....</i>	6
Key Findings Of The February 2003 Survey.....	7
Statistical Overview Surveys 1,2,3 & 4.....	8

Introduction

The objective of Shelter is to implement programmes, develop policy, and provide education directed towards the elimination of homelessness and housing related poverty

*Shelter WA Constitution
August 1990*

This report is the final in a four part longitudinal study, *A Profile of Households Experiencing Homeless in Western Australia*. The information contained is primarily based on the results of the Shelter WA: Counting the Homeless surveys Part's 1, 2, 3 and 4, each respectively undertaken during June 2001, March 2002 and September 2002 and February 2003.

Due to funding restrictions, the aim of this project is not to provide a comprehensive study of homelessness in Western Australia. Primarily, the project aims to provide a series of snapshots highlighting some of the changes in the needs and composition of the State's homeless people.

In addition, the project aims to continue to develop Shelter WA's: knowledge of homelessness; inform its policy development work; and provide a resource to agencies concerned about homelessness in WA.

Methodology

Shelter WA: Counting the Homeless surveys and information packages were distributed to 305 community agencies achieving a response rate of 31%. Participating agencies were asked to complete 1 survey form only for each homeless household requesting accommodation assistance but not housed on the night of:

Part 1: Tuesday 19 June 2001
Part 2: Tuesday 19 March 2002
Part 3: Tuesday 3 September 2002
Part 4: Tuesday 25th February 2003.

Completed surveys were returned to Shelter WA by participating agencies via fax or post. 93 Part 4 surveys were completed, including 17 by agencies that participated in the research but did not receive any requests for assistance. Country agencies represented 65% of this figure. 47% of homeless households counted were from country WA and 53% from Perth.

Agency workers completed the surveys on behalf of the household requesting assistance.

The survey form contained 10 questions designed to collect information on:

- ▶ Method of contact;
- ▶ Type of assistance requested;
- ▶ Urgency of request;
- ▶ Type of accommodation required;
- ▶ Household type making request;
- ▶ Age and sex of household members;
- ▶ Type of accommodation utilised on the previous night;
- ▶ Who the household stayed with on the previous night;
- ▶ Combined household income; and
- ▶ The household's cultural background.

Definition of Homelessness

There are several different definitions of homelessness. For the purpose of this survey, participants were asked to apply the Australian Bureau of Statistic's definition of homelessness. The definition describes 3 levels of homelessness that includes:

- ▶ **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation;
- ▶ **Secondary homelessness:** people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; and,

- ▶ **Tertiary homelessness:** People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis.¹

In this report, household refers to households coming within the ABS definition of homelessness.

Results: A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness

Method Used to Contact Agency

Respondents were asked to identify the method used by households requesting accommodation assistance. The February 03 results show that the proportion of households that made contact by phone fell to 34%, following a high of 73% in September 02. While the proportion of households that made contact in person increased from 18% in September 02 to 41% in February 03. The number of requests made by a third party increased to 25%, the highest level for series.

Housing and Support Needs

Respondents were asked to identify the type of service households approached their agency to provide. 42% of homeless households required access to housing only, down from 68% in September 02, whilst 51% required both housing and support, up from 32%.

¹ Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 2041.0 Occasional Paper: Census Of Population & Housing – Counting The Homeless 1999.

Urgency of Request for Assistance

Respondents were asked to rate the level of urgency of the request for assistance by identifying how soon housing is required. Throughout the series the proportion of households requiring accommodation within 7 days has stayed above 85%. The February survey shows that 68% of households required housing within 24 hours and a further 24% within 7 days, totalling 92% requiring accommodation within 7 days.

Type of Housing Required

Respondents were asked to identify the type of housing assistance required. The February survey result shows demand for crisis/short-term accommodation fell to 59% from 79% in September 02. Households requiring long-term rental (community, public & private) increased from 11% in September 2002 to 39% in February 03.

Homeless by Household Type and Size

Respondents were asked to identify households by household type. This survey shows a doubling in the proportion of single parent households, up from 20% in September 02 to 42% in February 03.

Indigenous households with children continue to account for an alarmingly high 66% of Indigenous households requiring assistance.

While single person households decreased from 69% in September 2002 to 46% in February 03.

Households ranged in size from 1 to 6 people and included 34 families with between 1 and 5 children. Table 1 demonstrates the median number of people by household type.

Table 1: Homeless household types by median number of persons and size February 2003.

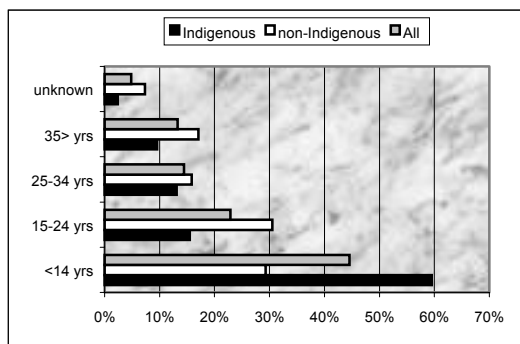
Household type	Median size	Range
Couple + children	5	4-5
Couple only	2	2-2
Single parent + children	3	2-7
Single person	1	1-1

Source: SWA: Counting the Homeless (February 2003)

Homeless People by Age

Respondents provided details on 166 homeless people. Homelessness amongst children under the age of 14 years is one of the most disturbing statistics of all. While the September 2002 findings showed a decrease in the proportion of children down to 30% from 40% in March 2002, this survey shows significant growth increasing to 45%. Figure 1 demonstrates that the reality for Indigenous children is much worse, accounting for 60% of homeless Indigenous persons. For non-Indigenous persons the largest age grouping is 15 to 24 year olds, accounting for 30%.

Figure 1: Age profile of homeless persons by cultural background February 2003.



Source: SWA: Counting the Homeless (Sep 2002)

Degrees of Homelessness

Respondents were asked to identify the type of accommodation utilised by the household on the night before the survey date. In February 03 22% came within the definition of primary homeless, 67% secondary homeless and 1% tertiary homeless.

Who did the Homeless Stay With?

Respondents were asked to identify whom the household stayed with on the night prior to the survey. 24% of households stayed temporarily with friends or relatives, 20% stayed with unrelated persons and 17% did not stay with anyone.

Household Incomes of the Homelessness

Respondents were asked to record the gross weekly income of homeless households requesting assistance. Of the households whose weekly income was known, 90% fell within the bottom quintile of income (\$408 per week in July 2000) and 6% came within the second quintile of incomes (\$576 p.w. July 2000)².

Access to Rental Housing

The proportion of income required to access median priced rental housing in Perth for homeless households is 78%. This more than doubles the National Housing Strategy, *housing stress* benchmark of 30% (See Table 2). The NHS states, those in the lowest two income quintiles who spent more than 30% of their income on housing can be said to be suffering from housing stress (ABS CAT. No. 4102.0).

² In the February return 67% of respondents did not provide household income details.

Table 2: Proportion of homeless household's income required to rent median priced private rental housing.

	Ave wkly income	Median Wkly Rent Perth	Rent as % of income
All households	\$199	\$156	78%

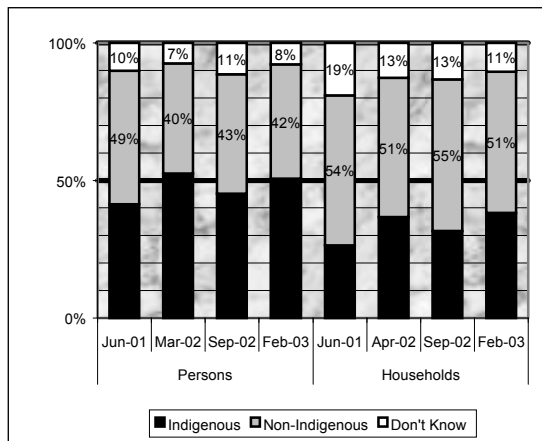
Source: SWA Counting the Homeless Survey (February 2003) & REIWA Market Update December Quarter 2002.³

Cultural Background of the Homeless

Respondents were asked to identify the cultural background of people requesting housing assistance.

Figure 2 demonstrates that Indigenous persons have not only continued to be over represented amongst the homeless but their representation has grown from 41% in the March 2001 survey to 51% in the February 03 survey. Non-Indigenous households have remained fairly constant at just over 50% of homeless households.

Figure 2: Cultural background of homeless persons and households June 2001 and September 2002.

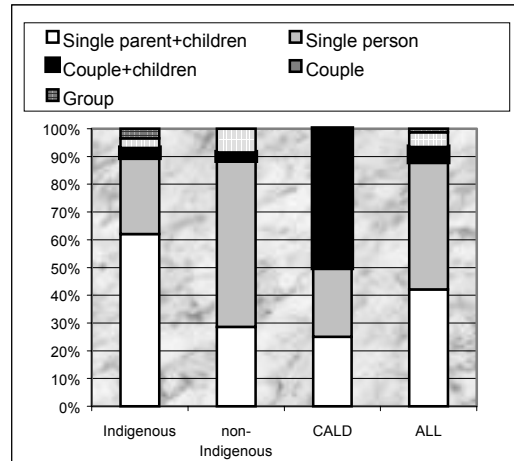


Source: SWA Counting the Homeless Survey (June 2001, March 2002, Sep 2002 and February 2003).

Figure 3 demonstrates significant differences in household profiles between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless. The February 2003 survey shows 62% of homeless Indigenous households are single parents with children, compared to

29% of non-Indigenous households. While 60% of non-Indigenous households are single persons compared to 28% for Indigenous.

Figure 3: Cultural background of homeless households by household type February 2003.



Source: SWA Counting the Homeless Survey (February 2003).

Key Findings Of The February 2003 Survey.

Households contacting agencies in person was the dominant contact type followed by phone contact and by a third party.

The need for access to accommodation only declined from the previous survey while the need for accommodation with support grew.

There was a substantial increase in single parents with children seeking housing assistance, especially for homeless Indigenous households. While the proportion of single person households declined.

The demand for crisis accommodation fell and demand for social housing grew.

Overall, children (14 & under) represent 45% of homeless people in this survey and 60% of homeless Indigenous people.

As has been the case throughout the four surveys; the secondary homeless were the most significant grouping.

Households that stayed with friends or relatives on a temporary basis were predominately Indigenous, whilst households that stayed alone were mainly non-Indigenous.

Low income continues to be a principal feature of the homeless, with 90% falling within the bottom quintile of incomes and 96% within the bottom two quintiles.

Affordability continues as a major barrier to homeless households accessing rental housing, with a median priced private rental dwelling requiring 78% of household income just to maintain rental payments.

Statistical Overview of Surveys 1,2,3 & 4.

Table 1: Households requesting accommodation assistance by contact type.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
in person	41%	38%	18%	41%
by phone	41%	54%	73%	34%
by third party	18%	8%	8%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 2: Assistance requested by type.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
accomm. Only	34%	46%	68%	42%
accomm. & support	60%	52%	32%	51%
support only	6%	1%	0%	7%
other/undefined	0%	0%	0%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	0%
	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 3. Type of accommodation required

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
crisis/short-term accomm.	55%	65%	79%	59%
medium/long-term accomm.	31%	11%	10%	18%
community housing	0%	3%	8%	4%
public housing	13%	17%	1%	13%
private rental	2%	3%	2%	4%
other/undefined	0%	1%	0%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=64	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 4: Household type making request.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
Couple with children	7%	8%	6%	5%
Couple no children	6%	7%	4%	5%
Single parent with children	29%	38%	20%	42%
Single person	57%	45%	69%	46%
Group	0%	1%	0%	1%
other/undefined	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 5: Age by Sex of household members.

AGE	Jun-01			Apr-02			Sep-02			Feb-03		
	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	ALL	M	F	ALL
<14	30%	42%	33%	29%	30%	30%	29%	30%	30%	55%	38%	45%
15-24	41%	33%	34%	26%	32%	29%	26%	32%	29%	20%	25%	23%
25-34	10%	16%	12%	24%	14%	19%	24%	14%	19%	12%	16%	14%
35-44	6%	8%	7%	4%	10%	7%	4%	10%	7%	6%	11%	9%
45-54	3%	0%	1%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	2%	3%
55-64	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
65+	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
dk	8%	0%	12%	13%	10%	11%	13%	10%	11%	3%	6%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=63	N=64	N=138	N=74	N=88	N=162	N=78	N=79	N=157	N=66	N=100	N=166

Table 6: Where the household stayed on the night prior to the survey night.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
a car/ tent/park/street/squat	13%	11%	22%	22%
emergency accomm./refuge	12%	12%	6%	9%
other supported accomm.	4%	12%	4%	5%
owned or being purchased	4%	3%	3%	7%
rented private/public/community	26%	23%	14%	41%
caravan	6%	0%	0%	3%
rooming house/hostel	7%	14%	1%	1%
hotel/motel	0%	4%	1%	1%
institution	6%	4%	2%	1%
other/undefined	21%	18%	46%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 7: Who the household stayed with on the night prior to the survey.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
alone	21%	9%	23%	17%
alone with child(ren)	7%	18%	2%	13%
with parent(s) guardian	7%	0%	3%	1%
with foster family	0%	3%	0%	0%
temp. with friend/relatives	35%	30%	31%	24%
with spouse/ partner	1%	1%	3%	8%
with spouse/child(ren)	1%	4%	1%	9%
other unrelated persons	21%	15%	9%	20%
other	6%	20%	28%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 8: Combined weekly household income.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
\$0 to 99	10%	1%	0%	4%
\$100 to 199	34%	20%	22%	22%
\$200 to 299	9%	10%	4%	12%
\$300 to 399	19%	14%	3%	20%
\$400 to 499	4%	4%	2%	4%
\$500 plus	0%	3%	1%	3%
nil income	1%	0%	0%	0%
don't know	22%	48%	67%	36%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76

Table 9: Cultural background by persons and households.

	Persons				Households			
	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02	Feb-03
Not Indigenous/CALD	49%	40%	38%	35%	54%	51%	50%	46%
Indigenous	41%	52%	45%	51%	26%	37%	32%	38%
CALD	5%	2%	6%	7%	4%	4%	5%	5%
Don't Know	10%	7%	11%	8%	19%	13%	13%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=138	N=162	N=157	N=166	N=68	N=71	N=98	N=76