



Providing a Voice for Housing Consumers

Address: 33 Moore St, East Perth, WA 6004
Phone: (08) 9325 6660
Email: shelterwa@shelterwa.org.au
Website: www.shelterwa.org.au

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

Prepared by:
Paul Pendergast
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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 second 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 1 and Part 2, undertaken in June 2001 and March 2002.

Due to funding restrictions, the aim of this project is not to provide a comprehensive study of homelessness in Western Australia. Rather, the project aims to provide a series of snapshots highlighting 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 251 community agencies and achieved a response rate of 29%.

Participating agencies were asked to complete 1 survey form for each homeless household requesting accommodation assistance on: Part 1: Tuesday 19 June 2001 and Part 2: Tuesday 19 March 2002.

Completed surveys were returned to Shelter WA either by fax or post. 74

Part 2 surveys were completed, including 3 by agencies who participated in the research but did not receive a request for assistance.

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

The surveys 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. This describes 3 levels of homelessness and 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 (ABS Cat. No. 2041.0).

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 to request accommodation assistance. In March 02, 38% of households made contact with the agency in person, the same as in June 01 and 54% contacted by phone, significantly higher than the 41% who made contact by phone in June 01.

Housing and Support Needs

Respondents were asked to identify the type of service households approached their agency to provide. 46% of homeless households required access to housing only, up from 34% in June 2001 and 52% required both housing and support, down from 60%.

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. 46% of households required housing within 24 hours and 52% within 7 days, compared to 72% and 14% in June 01.

Type of Housing Required

Respondents were asked to identify the type of housing assistance required. The March 02 result shows a marked increase in the need for crisis/short-term accommodation, 65% of households required this type of housing, up from 55% in June 01. Households requiring long-term rental (community, public & private) grew from 14% in June 01 to 23% in March 2002.

Homeless by Household Type and Size

Respondents were asked to identify households by household type. The March 02 survey shows a fall in the proportion of single person households, 45% compared to 57% in June 01 but single people are still significantly over represented compared to the general community. Households with children grew significantly, from 37% in June 01 to 46% in this survey and for Indigenous people this picture is much worse, with 88% of Indigenous households including between 1 and 6 children under 14 years.

Households ranged in size from 1 to 8 people and included 30 families with between 1 and 6 children. Table 1 demonstrates the median number of people by household type.

Table 1: Homeless household types by median number of persons and range March 2002.

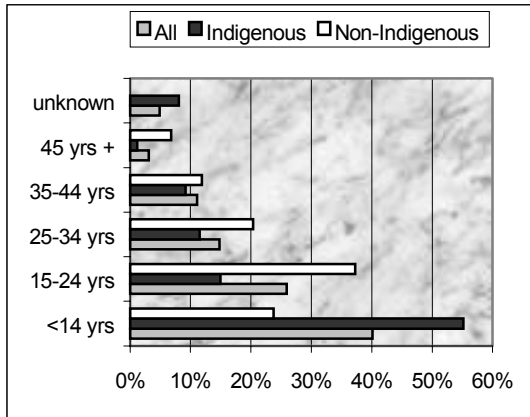
Household type	Median size	Range
Couple + children	6	4-8
Couple only	2	2-2
Single parent + children	3	2-6
Single person	1	1-1

Source: SWA: Counting the Homeless (March 2002)

Homeless People by Age

Respondents provided details on 71 households, which included 162 homeless people. Perhaps the most disturbing outcome of the June 2001 survey was that 33% of homeless people were children under the age of 14 years; the representation of children in this survey increased to 40%. Figure 1 provides a profile of homeless persons by age and demonstrates that children account for 55% of homeless Indigenous persons.

Figure 1: Age profile of homeless households by cultural background March 2002.



Source: SWA: Counting the Homeless (March 2002)

Degrees of Homelessness

Respondents were asked to identify the type of accommodation utilised by the household on the night before the survey date. 11% came within the definition of primary homelessness, secondary homeless remained the most significant grouping, accounting for 68% of households and tertiary homelessness accounted for 4%.

Who did the Homeless Stay With?

Respondents were asked to identify who the household stayed with on the night prior to the survey. 30% of households stayed temporarily with friends or relatives, 15% stayed with unrelated persons and 27% did not stay with anyone.

Household Incomes of the Homelessness

Respondents were asked to record the gross weekly income of homeless households requesting assistance. 45% of households fell within the bottom quintile of income (\$408 per week in July 2000) and all households whose weekly income was known came within the bottom two quintiles of incomes (\$576 p.w. July 2000).

Access to Rental Housing

The proportion of income required to access median priced rental housing in Perth for homeless households ranges between 44% and 54%. This clearly exceeds the National Housing Strategy housing stress benchmark of 25% (See Table 2).

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

	Ave wkly income	No. Rms	Median Wkly Rent Perth	Rent as % of income
Couple + children	\$429	4	\$208	48%
Couple only	\$299	2	\$139	46%
single parent + children	\$307	3	\$167	54%
single person	\$232	1	\$102	44%

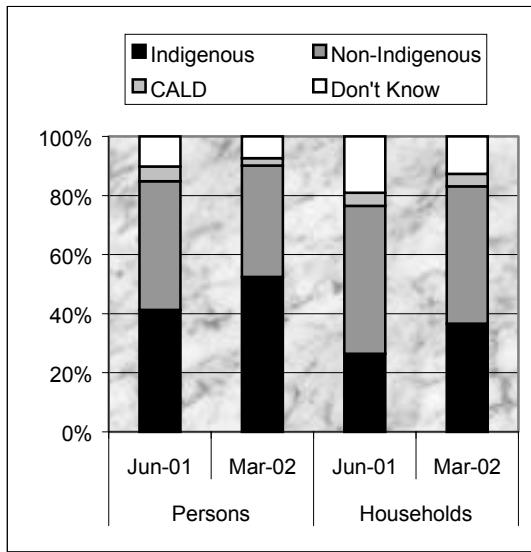
Source: Counting the Homeless Survey; Social Housing Occupancy Standard and REIWA, Market Update, March Quarter 2002.

Cultural Background of the Homeless

Respondents were asked to identify the cultural background of people requesting housing assistance. Indigenous people accounted for 37% of households and 52% of homeless people. Non-Indigenous households made up 38% of households and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background 2%.

Figure 2 demonstrates the representation of Indigenous households and persons between the March 2001 and June 2002 survey.

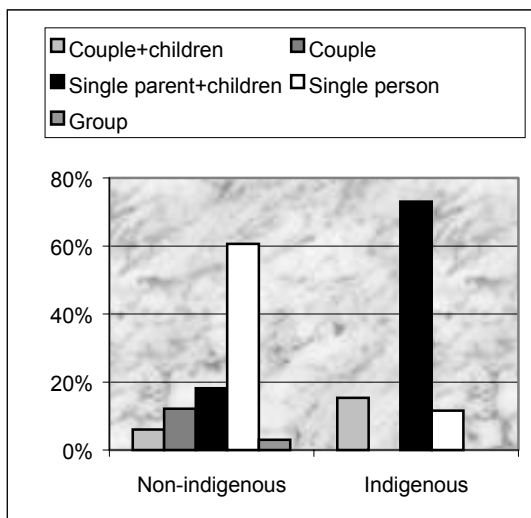
Figure 2: Cultural background of homeless persons and households June 2001 and March 2002.



Source: Counting the Homeless Survey

Figure 3 demonstrates significant differences in household types between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless. Single parents with children represent 73% of Indigenous households, compared to single persons representing 61% of non-Indigenous households.

Figure 3: Cultural background of homeless households by household type March 2002.



Additional Information:

The Homelessness Help Line

In May 2001 the Department of Housing and Works established the **Homeless Help Line**. Two of the Help Line's key objectives have been to provide some direct assistance to the homeless and collect some statistics on the extent of homelessness in WA.

Help Line Statistics

In its first year of operation the *Help Line* received 3,338 calls from 2447 separate households (891 repeat calls).

The primary homeless account for 27% of calls and secondary 73% (see table 3 for further details)

Table 3: Households Contacting the Homeless Help Line May 2001 to June 2002.

Primary Homeless	671	27%
Secondary Homeless	1776	73%
Total	2447	100%

Source: Homeless Help Line March 2002

Assistance Provided by Homeless Help Line

The Help Line utilises three main forms of assistance. These include:

Bond Assistance Loans: which provide financial assistance for households to access private rental;

Public Housing: providing priority access to Homeswest housing; and

Referral: assistance to access private or crisis accommodation.

The Help Line has been able to provide assistance to 44% of callers. The assistance provided includes: 344 with access to Homeswest housing, 255 with Bond Assistance Loans and 479 with referrals to private or crisis accommodation (Table 4 provides further detail).

Table 4: Assistance Provided by the Homeless Help Line.

Homeswest Housing	344	14%
Issued with Bond	255	10%
Referral private/crisis accom.	479	20%
Outcome Unknown	1369	56%
Total	2447	100%

Source: Homeless Help Line March 2002

The Effectiveness of Private Rental Assistance

Surveys of landlords who have signed leases with tenants referred by the Help Line (94 tenancies) and in receipt of Bond Assistance Loans, have revealed that a little over half (55%) are either good or medium tenancies (none to low rental arrears) and 45% are poor tenancies (primarily large rental arrears). While Bond Assistance is an effective way to increase access to private rental, affordability continues to be a major issue for many households.

The Homelessness Taskforce

The Final Report of the Homelessness Taskforce provides an overview of reports on the extent of homelessness in WA. It includes the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Census conducted on 15 May 2001. The Census revealed 1,273 homeless people stayed in WA SAAP Services on Census night, 39% were accompanying children, 9% young people (under 18 years) and 52% adults.

Over the course of the Taskforces investigations, it accepted that in order to reduce homelessness there is essential to maintain and increase the provision of affordable housing.

Some key Government responses include:

- ▶ \$1.2 million per year to extend the Bond Assistance Scheme;
- ▶ \$100 000 to pilot REIWA project to assist Indigenous families in private rental;
- ▶ \$270 000 to operate the Homeless Help Line;
- ▶ \$10.5 million to increase capital expenditure on public housing;
- ▶ \$3.5 million to assist homeless children; and
- ▶ \$1 million to assist people directly into stable accommodation.

Over Representation of Indigenous People Among the Homelessness

Indigenous people represent 3.1% of Western Australia's population (ABS 2001) but account for a significantly higher proportion of the homeless:

- ▶ the June 01 survey demonstrated that Indigenous people represented 41% of homeless households, since then the figure has grown to 52%.
- ▶ WA SAAP agencies assisted 8,140 homeless households in 1999/2000, Indigenous people represented 30.4% of these (FACS 2001).
- ▶ The Homeless Help Line began recording whether callers were Indigenous or not in January 2002, since then 29% of calls have been from homeless Indigenous people.

Key Findings of the March 2002 Survey

Households contacting agencies both by phone and in person remained significant and contact by third party declined.

The need for access to accommodation only grew, while accommodation with support and support only declined.

Demand for crisis accommodation grew, as did households requiring more secure accommodation.

There was growth in the representation of households containing children, both couples with children and single parent and in particular Indigenous households, while there was a small reduction in single person.

Children represent 40% of homeless people in this survey and 55% of homeless Indigenous households.

Again, the secondary homeless were the most significant grouping and while there was a small reduction in primary homeless they represented just over one in ten households.

Three out of ten households were staying with friends or relatives on a temporary basis, placing pressure on those assisting them.

Low income continues to be a dominant feature of the homeless, with 45% in the bottom quintile of incomes and all coming within the bottom two quintiles.

Housing affordability continues as a very significant issue, median priced rental housing requires between 44% and 55% of household income to maintain rental payments.

Significant over representation of Indigenous people among the homeless has continued, this is also reflected in Homeless Help Line and SAAP statistics.

Households with a single adult are strongly represented among the homeless, single parent families make up 73% of homeless Indigenous households and 61% of non-Indigenous households are single persons.

Significant action is required to address the widespread and persistent problem of homelessness in the Western Australian community. Indigenous people are significantly over represented among the homeless. While many households will benefit from access to support services, it is clear that significant capital investment in the expansion of social housing will be the most effective way to ensure access to appropriate and affordable housing.

References

Department of Housing & Works, Homeless Help Line Statistics, June 2002

Department of Housing & Works, Homeless Help Line Bond Survey, January 2002

Department of Family & Community Services, SAAP Monograph: Indigenous SAAP Clients, December 2001

Real Estate Institute of Western Australia, Market Update, March 2002

State Homelessness Taskforce, Addressing Homelessness in Western Australia, January 2002

Statistical Summary of Results, June 2001 & March 2002.

Table S1: Proportion of homeless households by method of contact with agency.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
in person	41%	38%
by phone	41%	54%
by third party	18%	8%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71

Table S2: Proportion of homeless households by type of assistance requested.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
accommodation only	34%	46%
accomm. and support	60%	52%
support only	6%	1%
other/undefined	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71

Table S3: Proportion of homeless households by urgency of request for accommodation assistance.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
within 24 hrs	72%	46%
within 7 days	14%	52%
within 14 days	13%	1%
more than 14 days	2%	0%
Total	100%	100%
	N=64	N=71

Table S4: Proportion of homeless households by accommodation type required.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
crisis/short-term accomm.	55%	65%
medium/long-term accomm.	31%	11%
community housing	0%	3%
public housing	13%	17%
private rental	2%	3%
other/undefined	0%	1%
Total	100%	100%
	N=64	N=71

Table S5: Proportion of homeless households by household type.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
Couple with children	7%	13%
Couple no children	6%	6%
one parent with children	29%	34%
Single person	57%	46%
Group	0%	1%
other/undefined	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71

Table S6: Proportion of homeless persons by age and sex.

	Jun-01			Mar-02		
	M	F	All	M	F	All
<14	30%	42%	33%	46%	35%	40%
15-24	41%	33%	34%	23%	28%	26%
25-34	10%	16%	12%	15%	15%	15%
35-44	6%	8%	7%	7%	15%	11%
45-54	3%	0%	1%	4%	0%	2%
55-64	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
65+	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%
dk	8%	0%	12%	4%	6%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N=63	N=64	N=138	N=74	N=88	N=162

Table S7: Proportion of homeless households by type of accommodation on the night before the survey.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
car/tent/park/street/squat	13%	11%
refuge	12%	12%
supported accomm.	4%	12%
owned/being purchased	4%	3%
rented	26%	23%
caravan	6%	0%
rooming house/hostel	7%	14%
hotel/motel	0%	4%
institution	6%	4%
other/undefined	21%	18%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71

i) Rented includes private, public and community housing.

Table S8: Proportion of homeless households by who they stayed with on the night before the survey.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
alone	21%	9%
alone with child(ren)	7%	18%
with parent(s) guardian	7%	0%
with foster family	0%	3%
temp. with friend/relatives	35%	30%
with spouse/ partner	1%	1%
with spouse/child(ren)	1%	4%
other unrelated persons	21%	15%
other	6%	20%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71

Table S9: Proportion of homeless households by combined weekly income.

	Jun-01	Mar-02
\$0 to 99	10%	1%
\$100 to 199	34%	20%
\$200 to 299	9%	10%
\$300 to 399	19%	14%
\$400 to 499	4%	4%
\$500 plus	0%	3%
nil income	1%	0%
don't know	22%	48%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71

Table S10: Proportion of homeless households by cultural background.

	Households	
	Jun-01	Mar-02
Non-Indigenous	50%	46%
Indigenous	26%	37%
CALD	4%	4%
Don't Know	19%	13%
Total	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71