



Providing a Voice for Housing Consumers

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

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A Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness in Western Australia

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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 third 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, and 3, each respectively undertaken during June 2001, March 2002 and September 2002.

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 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 35%. Participating agencies were asked to complete 1 survey form only for each homeless household requesting accommodation assistance for Part 3: Tuesday 3 September 2002.

Completed surveys were returned to Shelter WA by participating agencies via fax or post. 114 Part 3 surveys

were completed, including 16 by agencies that participated in the research but did not receive any requests for assistance. Country agencies represented 18% of this figure whilst metropolitan agencies provided 82%.

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 (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 requesting accommodation assistance. The September 02 survey results show that the number of households that made contact by phone rose to 73% compared to April 02 figure of 54%. The number of households that made contact in person decreased to 18% compared to 38% recorded in March 02 survey. The number of requests made by a third party stayed the same at 8%.

Housing and Support Needs

Respondents were asked to identify the type of service households approached their agency to provide. 68% of homeless households required access to housing only, up from 46% in March 2002 whilst 32% required both housing and support, down from 52%.

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. A staggering 85% of households required housing within 24 hours, 7% within 7 days, 3% within 14 days and 5% more than 14 days, whilst March 02 figures show that 68% required assistance within 24 hours and 32% within 7 days.

Type of Housing Required

Respondents were asked to identify the type of housing assistance required. As was the case with the previous two surveys, the September 02 result shows a marked increase in the need for crisis/short-term accommodation. 79% of households required this type of housing, up from 65% in March 2002. Households requiring long-term rental (community, public & private) decreased from 24% in March 2002 to 11% in September 2002, placing more strain on crisis/short term accommodation agencies.

Homeless by Household Type and Size

Respondents were asked to identify households by household type. The September 2002 survey shows a striking increase in the proportion of single person households, 68% compared to 45% that represented single person households the in March 2002 survey. Whilst households with children decreased from 46% in March 2002 to 27% in September 2002, the current findings highlights the fact that Indigenous households with children accounted for 57% of Indigenous households requiring assistance.

Households ranged in size from 1 to 7 people and included 26 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 September 2002.

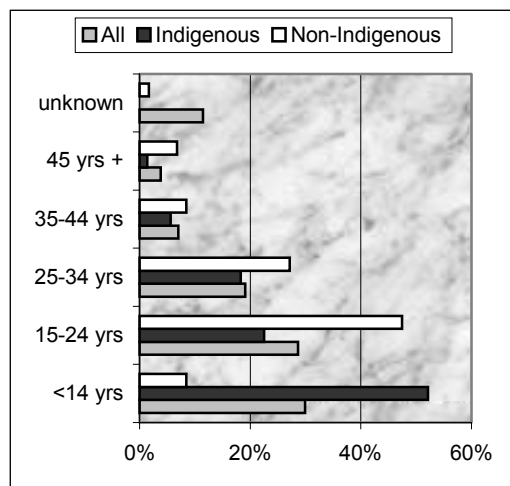
Household type	Median size	Range
Couple + children	5	3-7
Couple only	2	2-2
Single parent + children	4	2-6
Single person	1	1-1

Source: SWA: Counting the Homeless (Sep 2002)

Homeless People by Age

Respondents provided details on 98 households, which included 157 homeless people. As was the case from the first two surveys, homelessness amongst children under the age of 14 years is perhaps the most sobering statistic of all. Whilst the March 2002 survey recorded homelessness within this age group at 40%, the September 2002 findings notes a decrease in proportion at 30%. Even though this is an encouraging sign, the reality is that Indigenous children under the age of 14 years account for 52% of homeless Indigenous persons.

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



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. 22% came within the definition of primary homelessness, secondary homeless accounted for 31% of households, and tertiary homelessness accounted for 1%, whilst 46% of households did not identify the method of accommodation.

Who did the Homeless Stay With?

Respondents were asked to identify whom the household stayed with on the night prior to the survey. 31% of households stayed temporarily with friends or relatives, 9% stayed with unrelated persons and 23% 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, 91% fell within the bottom quintile of income (\$408 per week in July 2000) and 97% came within the bottom two quintiles of incomes (\$576 p.w. July 2000)¹.

Access to Rental Housing

The proportion of income required to access median priced rental housing in Perth for homeless households ranges between 37% and 52%. This percentage figure clearly exceeds the National Housing Strategy housing stress benchmark of 30% (See Table 2). Those in the lowest two income quintiles who spent more than 30% of their income on can be said to be suffering from housing stress (ABS CAT. No. 4102.0).

¹ In the September 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	No. Rms	Median Wkly Rent Perth	Rent as % of income
Couple + children	\$399	4	\$208	52%
Couple only	*\$299	2	\$139	*46%
Single parent + children	\$466	3	\$172	37%
Single person	\$211	1	\$105	50%

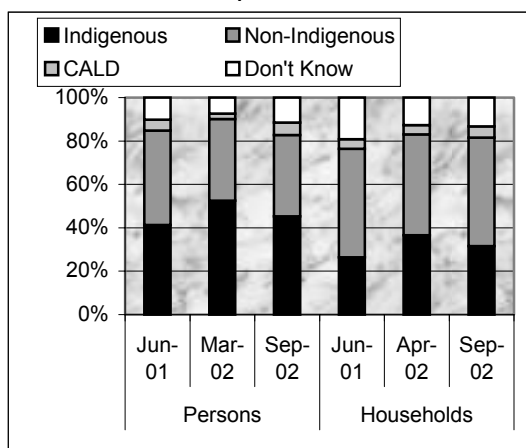
Source: SWA Counting the Homeless Survey (Sep 2002) & REIWA Market Update June Quarter 2002.²

Cultural Background of the Homeless

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

Figure 2 demonstrates the change in representation of Indigenous households and persons between the March 2001 and September 2002 surveys shows that Indigenous people accounted for 32% of households and 45% of homeless people. Non-Indigenous households made up 50% of households and CALD background 5%.

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

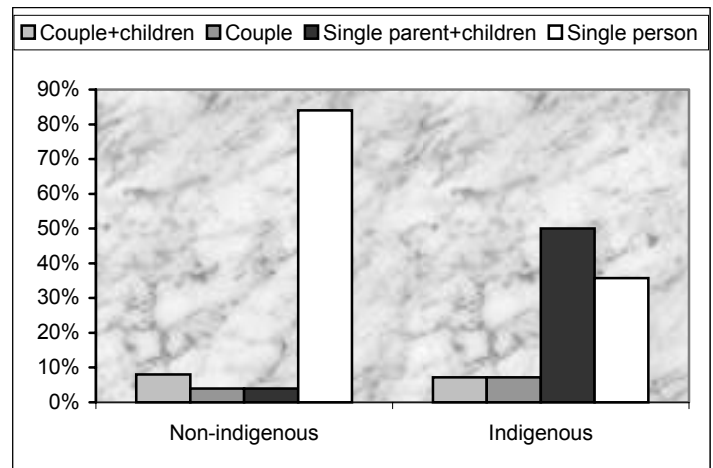


Source: SWA Counting the Homeless Survey (June 2001, March 2002 & Sep 2002).

² * Denotes that no data was recorded for this household type. Data sourced from March 2002 survey.

Figure 3 demonstrates significant differences in household types between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless. The September 2002 survey shows 84% of non-Indigenous single households seeking assistance compared to Indigenous single households at 36%. Whereas the single parent Indigenous households figure stood at 50% as opposed to Non Indigenous single parent households at 4%.

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



Source: SWA Counting the Homeless Survey (Sep 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

Since its inception, the *Help Line* has received 4179 calls from 2995 separate households (1184 repeat calls). The primary homeless account for 26% of calls and secondary 74% (see table 3 for further details)

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

Primary Homeless	2177	74%
Secondary Homeless	778	26%
Total	2955	100%

Source: Homeless Help Line September 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 40% of all callers. The breakdown of assistance provided includes: 365 with access to Homeswest housing, 305 with Bond Assistance Loans and 523 with referrals to private or crisis accommodation (Table 4 provides further detail).

Table 4: Assistance Provided by the Homeless Help Line.

Homeswest Housing	365	12%
Issued with Bond	305	10%
Referral private/crisis accom.	523	17%
Outcome Unknown	1802	60%
Total	2995	100%

Source: Homeless Help Line September 2002.

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:

- ▶ All three surveys demonstrated an over representation of Indigenous people among the homelessness. Indigenous people represented 44% of homeless people, by March 2002 the proportion escalate to 54%, whilst the September 2002 has the proportion at 45%.
- ▶ The September 2002 survey shows that a staggering 52% of homeless children aged 14 years and under are Indigenous.
- ▶ WA SAAP agencies assisted 9,300 homeless households in 2000/2001; Indigenous people represented 34% of this figure (SAAP NDCA report. Series 6 2001).
- ▶ Of the 62% female head of household SAAP clients assisted during 2000/2001, 47% were Indigenous females (SAAP NDCA report. Series 6 2001)
- ▶ The Homeless Help Line began recording whether callers were Indigenous or not in January 2002, since then 25% of calls have been from homeless Indigenous people.
- ▶ Only 9.5% of all Indigenous SAAP clients compared to 17% of non-Indigenous SAAP clients have rented independently in the private rental market (SAAP Monograph 2001).

- ▶ Almost one in two Indigenous SAAP clients who had been sleeping rough prior to receiving SAAP support were still sleeping rough after exiting SAAP support (SAAP Monograph 2001).

Over Representation Of Young People Among The Homeless

- ▶ The September survey shows that young people accounted for 58% of the total number of homeless persons.
- ▶ Again the survey highlights that Indigenous young people account for 58% of all homeless young people.
- ▶ The estimated number of homeless young people is 18 per 1,000 of the youth population in Western Australia (Youth Homelessness 2001).
- ▶ Compared to their interstate counterparts, homeless young people in Western Australia are the most likely to be unemployed and least likely to be in some form of education or training (Youth Homelessness 2001).

Significant action is required to address the widespread and persistent problem of homelessness in the Western Australian community; especially pertaining to the Indigenous people and young people who are both significantly over represented among the homeless. While a number of households will benefit from access to support services, it is clear that a significant injection of capital investment towards the expansion of a dwindling social housing pool will be the most effective way to ensure access to appropriate and affordable housing.

Key Findings Of The September 2002 Survey.

Households contacting agencies by phone has increased significantly whilst contact in person and by third party has declined.

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

There was a substantial increase of growth in the representation of single households experiencing homelessness, particularly within the non-Indigenous demographic.

The demand for crisis accommodation has increased dramatically to 85%, ultimately pushing crisis accommodation agencies beyond the limit.

Overall, children (14 & under) represent 30% of homeless people in this survey and 52% of homeless Indigenous people.

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

The number of households who were staying with friends or relatives on a temporary basis was predominately Indigenous, whilst the numbers of households residing alone were mainly non-Indigenous households.

Low income continues to be a principal feature of the homeless, with 91% in the bottom quintile of incomes and 97% coming within the bottom two quintiles.

Housing affordability continues as a very significant issue, median priced rental housing requires between 37% and 52% of household income to maintain rental payments.

References.

- ▶ Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 2041.0 Occasional Paper: Census Of Population & Housing – Counting The Homeless 1999.
- ▶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2001. SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2000-2001 Western Australia supplementary tables. AIHW cat. No. HOU 65. Canberra: AIHW (SAAP NDCA report. Series 6).
- ▶ Department of Housing & Works, Homeless Help Line Statistics, September 2002
- ▶ Department of Family & Community Services, SAAP Monograph: Indigenous SAAP Clients, December 2001
- ▶ Real Estate Institute of Western Australia, Market Update, June 2002
- ▶ State Homelessness Taskforce, Addressing Homelessness in Western Australia, January 2002
- ▶ Youth Homelessness 2001, Chamberlain & Mackenzie, RMIT University, July 2002

Statistical Summary of Results includes findings from: June 2001, March 2002 & September 2002.

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

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
In person	41%	38%	18%
By phone	41%	54%	73%
By third party	18%	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98

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

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Accomm. only	34%	46%	68%
Accomm, & Support	60%	52%	32%
Support Only	6%	1%	0%
Other	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

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

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Within 24hrs	72%	68%	85%
Within 7 days	14%	32%	7%
Within 14 days	13%	0%	3%
More than 14	2%	0%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	N=64	N=71	N=98

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

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Crisis/short-term accomm.	55%	65%	79%
Medium/long-term accomm.	31%	11%	10%
Community housing	0%	3%	8%
Public housing	13%	17%	1%
Private rental	2%	3%	2%
Other/undefined	0%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table S5: Proportion of homeless households by household type.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Couple with children	7%	8%	7%
Couple no children	6%	7%	5%
Single parent with children	29%	38%	20%
Single person	57%	45%	68%
Group	0%	1%	0%
Other/undefined	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

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

AGE	Jun-01			Apr-02			Sep-02		
	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	ALL
<14	30%	42%	33%	29%	30%	30%	29%	30%	30%
15-24	41%	33%	34%	26%	32%	29%	26%	32%	29%
25-34	10%	16%	12%	24%	14%	19%	24%	14%	19%
35-44	6%	8%	7%	4%	10%	7%	4%	10%	7%
45-54	3%	0%	1%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
55-64	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
65+	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Dk	8%	0%	12%	13%	10%	11%	13%	10%	11%
Total	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

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

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Car/tent/park/street/squat	13%	11%	22%
Crisis accomm/refuge	12%	12%	6%
Other supported accomm.	4%	12%	4%
Owned/being purchased	4%	3%	3%
Rented private/public/community	26%	23%	14%
Caravan	6%	0%	0%
Rooming house/hostel	7%	14%	1%
Hotel/motel	0%	4%	1%
Institution	6%	4%	2%
Other/undefined	21%	18%	46%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98

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

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Alone	21%	9%	23%
Alone + Child(ren)	7%	18%	2%
With parent/s or guardian	7%	0%	3%
With foster family	0%	3%	0%
Temp with friends/relatives	35%	30%	31%
Spouse/partner	1%	1%	3%
Spouse/child(ren)	1%	4%	1%
Unrelated persons	21%	15%	9%
Other	6%	20%	28%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98

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

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

Table S10: Proportion of homeless households by cultural background.

	Jun-01	Apr-02	Sep-02
Non-Indigenous	50%	46%	50%
Indigenous	26%	37%	32%
CALD	4%	4%	5%
Don't Know	19%	13%	13%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	N=68	N=71	N=98