

# Accommodation and homelessness

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**Are you homeless, sleeping rough, in a refuge or couch surfing? You are not alone. Every night more than 100,000 people in Australia are homeless<sup>1</sup>.**

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## What is homelessness?

Any person who does not have a secure, stable and private 'home' is considered 'homeless'; this includes any persons living temporarily with friends, in supported accommodation, or in other temporary living arrangements. People who are experiencing homelessness may also be staying in improvised dwellings such as tents, boarding houses, or in severely overcrowded dwellings.

## Who is at risk?

Australians of any age or background can become homeless; however, there are particular groups of people that are more vulnerable to homelessness than others.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People:** While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 2.5% of the Australian population, they account for a quarter of all homeless people<sup>2</sup>.
- **People experiencing Domestic and Family Violence (DV):** 55% of women accessing supported accommodation cited DV as the primary reason they were forced to flee the family home<sup>3</sup>.
- **Males:** on census night 2011, 59% of homeless people over the age of 18 were men<sup>4</sup>.
- **Families suffering housing crisis:** Housing crisis occurs when a household in the bottom 40% of income earners is allocating more than 50% of their take home pay on housing costs<sup>5</sup>.
- **Young People:** In 2010, half of the people who sought help from a specialist homelessness service were under 25 (and a third under 17)<sup>6</sup>.
- **People affected by mental illness** are more likely to become homeless, with one study indicating as high as 94% of people living with mental illness have been homeless or without suitable housing at some time in their life<sup>9</sup>.

## Causes of homelessness

People become homeless for many reasons such as unemployment, relationship breakdowns, domestic violence, mental health issues, financial stress, alcohol, gambling and loss of income. Homelessness can be the result of social, economic and health related factors and can be experienced due to years of poverty and ongoing mental health issues, or, it can affect someone that has just been 'thrown off course', which sets off a chain reaction, leaving people without a place to live.

Unfortunately, homelessness can wreak havoc on a person's health, keep them out of work and can increase social isolation. This exacerbates an already difficult situation.

## Who is at risk?

**Anyone can become homeless; however, there are some groups that are more vulnerable to becoming homeless:**

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- people experiencing domestic violence
- males
- families suffering housing crisis
- young people
- people with a mental illness.

<sup>1,4,7,8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Social Services (2008)

<sup>5</sup> Australians for Affordable Housing (2011)

<sup>6</sup> Mission Australia (2010)

<sup>9</sup> SANE (2008)

Call  
Lifeline on  
**13 11 14**  
if you need  
to talk

### How to support someone who is homeless

- Check on their immediate needs — do they have a safe place to sleep tonight?
- Help them to access relevant services.
- Be available to talk about how they are coping, but remember they may not want to talk (it is important not to force them).
- Ensure they have emergency assistance numbers including Lifeline.
- If you are concerned about their level of coping, ask about suicide (see suicide prevention factsheet).

### Where to go for support?

Below are some of the places to go for information and support:

- **Homelessness Australia:** Visit [www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/index.php/are-you-homeless](http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/index.php/are-you-homeless) for a useful directory of services available to people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.
- **Centrelink** — Centrelink can help by distributing your payments to assist with paying your rent and can provide other services such as crisis payments and rent deduction scheme. For more information visit: [www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/accommodation-renting-and-homelessness](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/accommodation-renting-and-homelessness).
- For local services and centres in your area e.g. community groups, soup kitchens, refuges, etc. visit the Lifeline Service Seeker Directory at [www.lifeline.serviceseeker.com.au](http://www.lifeline.serviceseeker.com.au)

### Where to go for support?

Some people facing homelessness may be having thoughts of suicide. If you are thinking about suicide:

- **Contact Lifeline:** 13 11 14 (available 24/7) or Online Crisis Support Chat (available nightly at [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au))
- **Talk to somebody** — contact a helpline, your GP, a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist, a hospital emergency department, minister, teacher or anyone you trust.
- **Call 000** if your life is in immediate danger.

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**Homelessness is very common with 1 in 200 people being homeless on any one night and over 100,000 people in Australia identifying as being homeless<sup>10</sup>. Help is available and there are services that can assist.**

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<sup>10</sup> [HomelessnessAustralia.org.au](http://HomelessnessAustralia.org.au) (2016)



**Phone 13 11 14 | [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)**

**Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24/7) if you are feeling suicidal or in crisis or visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) to connect online with our Crisis Support Chat (available nightly), find a range of other useful factsheets and to find local services in your area.**

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