

# Definitions of homelessness

There is no one definition of homelessness.

Homelessness Australia uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical definition of homelessness.

## **Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical definition of homelessness.**

“When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations”.

The ABS definition of homelessness is informed by an understanding of homelessness as ‘home’lessness, not ‘roof’lessness. It emphasises the core elements of ‘home’ in Anglo American and European interpretations of the meaning of home as identified in research evidence (Mallett, 2004). These elements may include: a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space. Homelessness is therefore a lack of one or more of the elements that represent ‘home’.

The definition has been constructed from a conceptual framework centred around the following elements:

- Adequacy of the dwelling
- Security of tenure in the dwelling and
- Control of, and access to space for social relations.

Some of the other recognised definitions of homelessness are:

## **Mackenzie and Chamberlain’s cultural definition of homelessness**

Mackenzie and Chamberlain’s (1992) definition includes three categories in recognition of the diversity of homelessness:

- Primary homelessness is experienced by people without conventional accommodation (e.g. sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings);
- Secondary homelessness is experienced by people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another (e.g. emergency accommodation, youth refuges, “couch surfing”);
- Tertiary homelessness is experienced by people staying in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards (e.g. boarding housing and caravan parks).

This definition was adopted by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness in 2001 and is widely used in the homelessness sector.

## **United Nations definition of homelessness**

The United Nations identifies homeless people under two broad groups:

- Primary homelessness (or rooflessness). This category includes persons living in the streets without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters
- Secondary homelessness. This category may include persons with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodations (including dwellings, shelters and institutions for the homeless or other living quarters). This category includes persons living in private dwellings but reporting 'no usual address' on their census form.

## **FEANTSA definition of homelessness**

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations in Europe. Their definition of homelessness is:

- Rooflessness – without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough
- Houselessness – with a place to sleep but temporarily in institutions or shelter
- Living in insecure housing – threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence
- Living in inadequate housing – in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding.