



Homelessness
Australia

2024 Child Homelessness Snapshot



Executive summary: A national crisis

The extent of homelessness for children in Australia represents a shocking failure of public policy. In 2022-23, more than 76,000 children under the age of 18 sought help from homelessness services. Of these children, almost 16,000 approached homelessness services alone, unaccompanied by a parent or caregiver, many fleeing violence or neglect at home. Approximately 60,000 children sought help as part of a family group.

Australia's dire lack of affordable housing and the chronic underfunding of homelessness support services means an increasing number of children are remaining homeless even after seeking help. Nationally, more than 25,000 children were still homeless at their last contact with homelessness services in 2022-23, up from 24,628 the previous year, while some states saw increases of up to 20 per cent in the number of children who were still homeless after contact with homelessness services.

The growing homelessness crisis and lack of resources to meet need at homelessness services means a further 19,833 children nationally were turned away from services without being provided with any assistance in 2022-23.

These figures underscore the need for urgent action to tackle child homelessness in Australia. This should include immediate investment into homelessness services on the front line of the housing crisis, specialised support and accommodation for unaccompanied homeless children, and increased investment in the social housing and income support needed to drive down family homelessness.

Australia also needs longer-term planning to end homelessness for Australian children. This can be achieved by including firm targets and concrete actions to make the changes needed to progress this goal in the forthcoming National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

A Homelessness Action Plan to end homelessness for Australian children would put in place the

adequate income support, housing, and broader welfare supports needed to strengthen families so fewer children become homeless, and would address the specific needs and vulnerabilities faced by homeless children, including providing unaccompanied children with the care, support and homes that they need.

Australia's child homelessness crisis is a blight on our nation which stems from policy failures by successive governments at the state and federal level. However, its persistence represents a political choice. With sufficient political will, a shared vision, and a committed approach backed by adequate funding, comprehensive legislation, and robust governance, it is entirely possible to end child homelessness in Australia.

Key findings

2022-23

76,014

children nationally, under the age of 18 sought help from homelessness services in 2022-23



15,902

children approached homelessness services alone, unaccompanied by a parent or caregiver, many of them fleeing unsafe family environments



60,112

children sought help from homelessness services as part of a family group

NSW had the highest number of unaccompanied children seeking help from specialist services

7,152

followed by **Victoria (3,271)** and **South Australia (2,306)**



In Victoria

18,828

children presented to specialist services as part of a family group, followed by

15,498 in NSW and **13,149 in Queensland**



Nationally,

25,414

children remained homeless even after seeking support from specialist services, up from **24,628** the previous year. **Queensland saw a 20 per cent increase** in children still homeless after seeking assistance and **South Australia 15.9 per cent**



First Nations children are overrepresented among children experiencing homelessness, making up

32%

of homeless children nationally, despite comprising only **6.8 per cent of the population under 18**



Child homelessness in Australia

A record number of people across Australia are currently experiencing significant housing insecurity or homelessness. Among these are many families with children, as well as substantial numbers of children who present to homelessness support services alone, unaccompanied by family or caregivers.

The overwhelming majority of families experiencing homelessness have been pushed into it by Australia’s lack of affordable housing, income poverty or the ongoing epidemic of family violence. Many children are driven into homelessness by abuse, neglect or conflict in their home. This exposes gaping holes in our universal safety net and a failure to deliver on core elements of the basic social contract.

Exacerbating these issues is a systemic and long-term lack of funding for homelessness support services, which has resulted in a system that is overwhelmed by demand and lacks the capacity to

provide adequate support to the children and families who need it.

In this context, the staggering number of children experiencing homelessness represents a crisis of national proportions. In NSW and Victoria alone, more than 10,000 children unaccompanied by parents or caregivers sought help from homelessness services in 2022-23, while almost 35,000 presented to specialist services as part of a family. Nationally, the number of children presenting to homelessness services in 2022-23 would fill over 3,000 school classrooms, or more than pack out Perth’s Optus Stadium, one of Australia’s highest-capacity venues.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN PRESENTING TO HOMELESSNESS SERVICES 2022-2023

State/territory	Presenting as a child alone	As part of a family
National	15,902	60,112
NSW	7,152	15,498
Vic	3,271	18,828
Qld	1,439	13,149
WA	945	5,891
SA	2,306	3,277
Tas	413	816
ACT	189	674
NT	330	2,345

More children remain homeless despite seeking support

Lack of access to affordable homes, and lack of support capacity means that the number of children who are still homeless at their last reported contact with homelessness services is increasing.

Between 2021-22 and 2022-23 the number of children who were homeless even after seeking assistance from homelessness services increased by 3.2 per cent nationally. While some states and territories saw small declines in the number of children still homeless after seeking help, others saw significant increases, led by Queensland (20 per cent increase), South Australia (16 per cent increase) and the Northern Territory (11 per cent increase).

The shocking reality that children remain without a home, even after getting homelessness support, reflects Australia's huge wait lists for social housing, lack of adequate

crisis accommodation and chronic underfunding of homelessness support services. While homeless, children may be sleeping in cars or on the street, couch surfing or in temporary crisis accommodation.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN STILL HOMELESS AT LAST REPORTED CONTACTED WITH SERVICES

State/territory	2021-22	2022-23
National	24,628	25,414
NSW	6,969	7,086
Vic	6,728	6,476
Qld	5,541	6,658
WA	2,309	2,095
SA	1,320	1,530
Tas	678	637
ACT	474	394
NT	729	812

First Nations children are over-represented among children experiencing homelessness

While only 6.8 per cent of Australian children are First Nations, First Nations children make up 32 per cent of homeless people under 18.

	Homeless children	Per cent First Nation
National	76,012	32%
NSW	22,650	37%
Vic	22,109	13%
Qld	14,573	37%
WA	6,827	55%
SA	5,579	25%
Tas	1,232	23%
ACT	870	25%
NT	2,675	85%

Regional areas are experiencing a child homelessness crisis

Analysis of the data by area demonstrates that the child homelessness crisis is not confined to capital cities. In the Northern Territory, 67 per cent of homeless children live outside of Greater Darwin, while 63 per cent of children experiencing homelessness in Queensland live in regional areas. These figures are consistent with findings from the Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022, which showed that regional rates of use of homelessness services by people of all ages increased at more than double the rate of capital cities (13 per cent compared with 6 per cent) in the four years between 2017-18 and 2021-22.

HOMELESS CHILDREN BY CAPITAL CITIES AND REGIONAL AREA

Area	Children 0-9	Children 10-19	Total
Greater Melbourne	8,001	7,270	15,271
Rest of NSW	5,845	7,426	13,271
Greater Sydney	4,756	6,152	10,908
Rest of Qld	5,287	4,481	9,768
Rest of Vic.	3,762	4,155	7,917
Greater Brisbane	2,994	2,674	5,668
Greater Adelaide	2,306	2,443	4,749
Greater Perth	2,119	1,829	3,948
Rest of WA	1,962	1,339	3,301
Rest of NT	1,066	721	1,787
Rest of SA	689	761	1,450
Greater Darwin	429	456	885
Australian Capital Territory	409	459	868
Rest of Tas.	322	510	832
Greater Hobart	274	429	703



Policy recommendations to tackle child homelessness

Children experiencing homelessness unaccompanied by a parent or guardian are uniquely vulnerable and have a wide range of specific needs that are different to homeless adults.

They become homeless for many reasons that are unique to children, including experiencing violence and/or abuse in the family home, family dysfunction and breakdown, and family rejection as a result of homophobia and transphobia. Frequently they have been failed by state/territory child protection systems, justice systems and mental health services before becoming homeless. The harm and trauma children experience after losing

their homes has a lasting impact throughout their lives.

Children often face significant barriers to accessing homelessness support and securing a home that provides the care that they need. Some receive adult-focused responses that are inappropriate and exacerbate their vulnerability. They are also missing or poorly dealt with in some of the key policy frameworks relevant to homelessness.

For example, children experiencing domestic and family violence on their own—not those accompanying their mothers or caregivers—are mostly absent in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

Commit to halving homelessness within five years and ending it within 10 years

Ambitious targets and timelines for reducing and ultimately eliminating homelessness, and for measuring and monitoring key indicators related to homelessness prevention, are crucial.

Focussing targets on the major drivers of homelessness, including rental stress, domestic and family violence, and inadequate access to support would make huge inroads into the number of people becoming homeless, ultimately enabling us to end homelessness.

Invest in the homelessness services system

Homelessness services do not have the resources or funding to provide adequate assistance to everyone who needs help. Funding for homelessness services should be immediately increased to address current unmet need and projected growth in demand, with adjustments built in to respond to rising costs

and changing support needs. The homelessness sector should also be supported to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver evidence-based and best practice program approaches and practice models such as Housing First.

Shift the focus to homelessness prevention and early intervention rather than management

The most effective way to end homelessness is by preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. This can be achieved by ensuring that the balance of new investment is focused on prevention and early intervention measures, increasing the supply of social and affordable housing, boosting income support for renters, and strengthening the supports provided to children and families at risk of homelessness.

Develop a Homelessness Action Plan specific to children and young people

A dedicated Action Plan for children and young people would prioritise their specific care requirements. This approach would unite various child-centred services—including educational institutions, family support systems, mental health programs for adolescents, child protective services, and juvenile justice—to offer a coordinated solution to homelessness among children and young people.

Such a plan would also tackle the impacts of fractured family relationships, help to establish appropriate guardianship, support or mentor arrangements, and tackle the significant trauma, mental health and substance misuse challenges often faced by children experiencing homelessness.

Develop a First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan

First Nations people, including children, are over-represented among those experiencing homelessness. To tackle this disparity, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association should be empowered and resourced to develop and implement a national First Nations housing and homelessness plan.



Impact: What does success look like?

Homelessness Australia's recommendations provide a roadmap for tackling the complex and interrelated economic, structural and social factors that contribute to the child homelessness crisis. Successful implementation of these recommendations through the National Housing and Homelessness Plan would result in a transformative change in how we address and respond to homelessness.

As a result of this change, homelessness would become a rare occurrence, with robust prevention measures catching and addressing issues before they lead to loss of housing. If homelessness did occur, it would be brief and non-recurring, thanks to adequately funded support systems that can provide crisis prevention to avert imminent homelessness and rapidly help people who lose their homes into settled housing.

Children and families would have access to safe and affordable housing options. The number of

children experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity would dramatically decrease, with those at risk quickly identified and supported before reaching crisis point. Domestic and family violence—a major driver of child homelessness—would be addressed through comprehensive support systems, ensuring victims have safe housing options, ongoing assistance, and appropriate care and guardianship arrangements.

Finally, the homelessness sector would be funded to a level that enabled it to meet current need

and anticipated growth in demand. Specialist homelessness services would focus primarily on prevention and early intervention, with the capacity to provide immediate, tailored assistance to those in need. Guided by an adequately resourced peak homelessness organisation, the sector would have the capacity to improve evidence-based approaches, share learnings and develop a skilled workforce, all with the aim of providing better care and greater wellbeing to all those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.