



UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a serious community issue, often caused by complex, interrelated personal, social and economic factors. Family and relationship breakdown, mental illness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse and disability may lead to homelessness. Coupled with a shortage of affordable housing and unemployment, homelessness may become entrenched.

It is important people experiencing homelessness are supported to address the range of issues contributing to their situation and this requires an integrated approach.

Responding to homelessness is fundamentally linked to housing, however it is much more than this. It also involves providing support to meet health, employment, social and personal needs.

The Western Australian community services sector, government and specialist homelessness services have been working for many years to support homeless people.

The Western Australian State Government is committed to addressing this issue.

General understanding of the types of homelessness are:

- **Primary homelessness** - means people without conventional accommodation, and it includes people living on the streets and in other public places such as parks, squatting in buildings or using vehicles, for temporary shelter.
- **Rough sleeping** - means primary homeless people.
- **Secondary homelessness** - people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation and people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own. It also includes people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided by government and non government organisations and people residing temporarily in boarding houses for twelve weeks or less.
- **Tertiary homelessness** - people living in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis for over 12 weeks.

What causes homelessness?

People can become homeless for many reasons including breakdown of relationships, domestic violence, financial difficulties and eviction.

Many people who are homeless experience more than one problem in their lives. They may need help for several issues such as drug and alcohol problems, family conflict, financial difficulties, disability and mental health issues.

Types of accommodation

Emergency accommodation is provided through refuges, shelters and hostels. People can immediately access the accommodation and remain for an agreed period of time, usually up to three months. Where this type of accommodation is full or unavailable a number of government and non government agencies can assist by paying overnight motel/hotel/ caravan park fees.

Transitional accommodation is where people can live in a house or a flat on a temporary basis while they stabilise, with support workers available to assist them. People can develop skills and resources to manage after an incidence of family violence, relationship breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse etc. Young people and families can be assisted to develop skills to manage their own accommodation, address outstanding debts and manage their finances.

Long term accommodation can be provided directly through the Department of Housing which also provides assistance for people by way of a loan towards bond money to help them into private rental accommodation.

The Department of Health, along with the Disability Services Commission, provide support services to help people with mental illness, acquired brain injury and other disabilities, to maintain their home.

The Department of Corrective Services assists ex-prisoners to access accommodation and support services.

How else is the WA State Government supporting homeless people?

The Western Australian State Government has invested heavily in initiatives addressing homelessness:

- The Government has provided \$43 million a year through the joint Commonwealth State National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) for a range of crisis and medium term accommodation and support services, meals and day centres on a daily basis.
- In addition, under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), the WA State Government has committed more than \$68 million over four years towards reducing homelessness. This includes funding for a range of new programs, including expanded support for women and children experiencing domestic violence, additional housing support workers, services for rough sleepers, and a development to provide supported independent accommodation for young people.
- The 2011/12 WA State Budget allocated \$5.4 million for building and operating a new acute homeless night shelter in Perth's CBD.

How many people are currently homeless in WA and on Perth streets?

- The latest available data is from the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Counting the Homeless 2006 census data which indicated in the whole of Perth metropolitan area had a population of 270 homeless people sleeping rough on census night. Across Western Australia 2,392 were sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings on census night.

- In 2009/10 around 19,800 people used Government funded specialist homelessness services in Western Australia.

At what rate is this increasing or changing?

The next count of the homeless population was recently undertaken as part of the ABS census in August 2011 and is yet to be released.

What is the Department for Child Protection's responsibilities to young people who are homeless?

The Department is responsible for the care and protection of children up to the age of 18 years. On this basis, the Department will assess each young person who comes to the Department and assist them in developing solutions. One solution is to return to the family, including the extended family, and this option is always explored.

Can the Department for Child Protection compel teenage runaways to return home to their families?

There is no legislation which allows the Department for Child Protection to forcibly return runaway teenagers and children to their parents or guardians.

Wherever possible, Department staff work with the young person and their family and support them to be reunited. The Department also links teenagers and their families into other appropriate services as needed.

Help for people in crisis

People who are in crisis and urgently need somewhere to stay can contact Crisis Care on (08) 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008.

More information

Further information regarding homelessness and the services available can be accessed on the Department for Child Protection website (www.dcp.wa.gov.au) links:

[National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness](#)

and

[Crisis Homelessness Services](#)
