

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness

The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses six categories of homelessness when conducting the Census of Population and housing:

- Improvised dwellings (tents or sleeping out)
- Supported accommodation
- Staying temporarily with other households
- Boarding houses
- Other temporary lodgings
- Severe overcrowding.

Across NSW, 35,011 people were identified through the Census as experiencing homelessness. Of this population, close to 16%, were residing within SESLHD. The greatest number of people experiencing homelessness were in the Sydney LGA, followed by Randwick and Bayside LGAs¹. People living in severely overcrowded dwellings continue to be the largest population of people experiencing homelessness, followed by people living in boarding houses.

Across these two groups, over 40% are between the age of 19 and 34, and more than 60% are born overseas.¹

The rate of homelessness in NSW has steadily increased in recent years. Between 2006 to 2016 the rate per 10,000 of the population rose from 33.9 to 50.4, an increase of nearly 49%. However, homelessness in the 2021 Census decreased by 14% to 43.4 per 10,000.¹

In 2021, there was an increase in people living in boarding houses and people in other temporary lodgings with decreases in other categories of homelessness.

Two factors may have influenced the decreased number of people experiencing homelessness in the 2021 ABS homelessness data:

- (1) The 2021 Census was conducted during a COVID-19 lockdown period when there were limitations on the ability of Census field staff to perform counts, particularly of rough sleepers in metropolitan areas, and
- (2) during COVID-19, the NSW government provided increased assistance for people experiencing primary homelessness to access emergency accommodation in hotels.¹

People at risk of or experiencing homelessness are generally socio-economically disadvantaged, have increased health risks, and experience inequities in their health status and access to health services.²

In addition to this, people at risk of or experiencing homelessness often have complex care needs and require more structured care coordination and support to ensure that their health needs are addressed. There is often a broad range of interacting factors that contribute to homelessness, and therefore a holistic approach to health care, with increased integration of services, is required when working with people who may be experiencing homelessness.³

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023, 'Estimating Homelessness: Census, 2021.'

2. Commonwealth of Australia, 'Bridging our growing divide: inequality in Australia The extent of income inequality in Australia.'

3. Fazel, S., Geddes, JR., Kushel, M. 2014, 'The health of homeless people in high-income countries: descriptive epidemiology, health consequences, and clinical and policy recommendations,' *The Lancet*, vol. 384, no. 9953, pp. 1529–40.