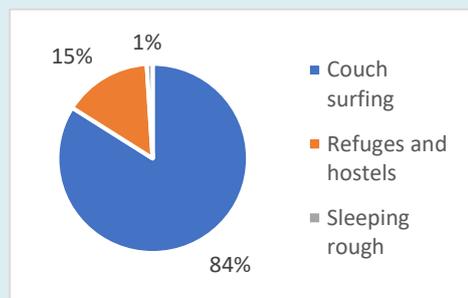


FAST FACTS

- Youth homelessness involves young people aged 12-24.

Fig 1. Where do homeless young people live?



- Youth homelessness is underestimated both by the Census and surveys of access to Specialist Homelessness Services.
- According to the 2016 Census, **4,454** young people aged 12-24 years were homeless in Queensland.
- In Queensland in 2016-17, **8,081** young people aged 15-24 years accessed specialist homelessness services.
- A 2006 survey of high school students estimated that **4,469** Queenslanders aged 12-18 years were homeless.

This paper outlines definitions of homelessness and estimates the number of young people who are homeless in Queensland. It presents evidence of an increased vulnerability for homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as for young people who have been in the child protection system.

What is youth homelessness?

Youth homelessness generally refers to homelessness among young people between the ages of 12 and 24.¹ It is important to note that there is no internationally consistent definition of homelessness. In Australia, the two most commonly used are the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) statistical definition² and Chamberlain and MacKenzie's cultural definition.^{3,4} Defining homelessness in different ways can lead to significant variations in prevalence estimates.

Experiences of homelessness are diverse.³ They can include sleeping rough, frequently moving from one temporary shelter to another (e.g. couch surfing) and living in boarding houses or refuges. The 2006 Australian National Census of Homeless School Students (NCHSS)⁵ found that the majority (84%) of homeless young people were living with friends, relatives or moving around (couch surfing), 15% were living in refuges and hostels and only 1% were sleeping rough (see Figure 1).

How many young people are homeless?

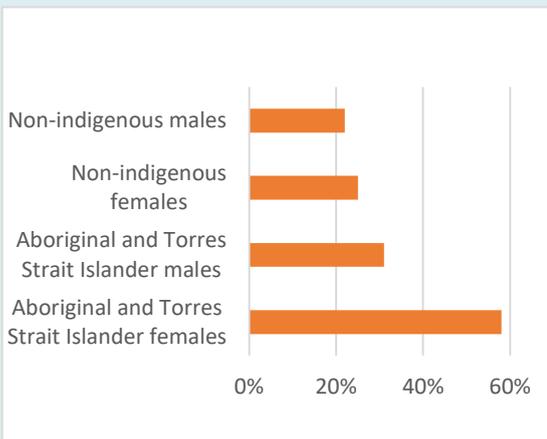
A variety of methods are used to estimate youth homelessness. It is widely recognised that some of these methods may underestimate the extent of the issue. Census data cannot easily differentiate

Youth homelessness

FAST FACTS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders are **7 times** more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous people.
- Up to **1 in 3** young people are homeless in the first 12 months after leaving OOHC.
- Up to **1 in 2** young people are homeless in the first 5 years after leaving OOHC.

Fig 2. Percentage of young people accessing homeless services within 24 months of a child protection notification (Victorian and Tasmanian data).



between young people who are 'couch surfing', a very common form of youth homelessness and those who were just visiting another household on Census night.⁶ Alternative estimates based on rates of access to Specialist Homeless Services (SHS) may also underestimate youth homelessness as only young people who have approached these services for assistance are counted.¹

With these caveats in mind, Census estimates suggest that 4,454 young people aged 12-24 years were homeless in Queensland in 2016.⁷ Records of SHS access indicate that in Queensland in 2016-17, an estimated 8,081 young people aged 15-24 years accessed these services.⁸

A number of research surveys have also estimated youth homelessness. One of the most comprehensive, the 2006 NCHSS estimated that 1,993 Queensland school students aged 12-18 were homeless.⁵ The authors argued that a more comprehensive estimate, taking into account those in this age group attending TAFE, unemployed or working, would be 4,469 homeless young people. It is important to note that this estimate does not include young people in the 19-24 age group.

Increased vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the homeless population. According to the 2016 Census, while only 4% of the Queensland population identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders⁹, they made up 20.5% of all homeless people and were around 7 times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous Queenslanders.⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also made up 25% of the clients accessing SHS in 2016-17¹⁰ The NCHSS found that, while 5.4% of Queensland students identified as Indigenous, they made up 17% of all homeless high school students.⁵



Youth homelessness

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

- Quantifying the number of young people who are homeless is important for policy and planning. It is important to be aware that current counting methods can significantly underestimate youth homelessness.
- Young people's experiences of homelessness can be diverse. Policy solutions need to be informed by an understanding of this diversity. Different policies are needed to respond to young people who are couch surfing (the most common form of youth homelessness) versus those sleeping rough.
- Tailored policy responses are needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.
- Pathways into youth homelessness can start at an early age, particularly for young people who are in contact with the child protection system. Transition from care is a critical time when extra housing support is needed. Early intervention is important.

Increased vulnerability of young people with child protection experiences

Young people with child protection experiences are over-represented in the homeless population with many first experiencing homelessness while still attending school.¹ According to the NCHSS, although only 0.5% of young people aged 10 to 17 were in out-of-home care (OOHC) in Australia in 2005, they made up 16% of the population of homeless high school students.⁵

Many young people leaving OOHC reported that they were not well prepared for transitioning to independent living. A CREATE study of 192 Australian young care-leavers¹¹ found that after their care arrangement ended, 50.5% were required to leave their placement. Of this group, 40.6% did not know where they would be moving to. On average, those who had been told that they needed to leave were given less than 2 weeks' notice.

Unsurprisingly then, young people ageing out of care have an increased vulnerability to becoming homeless. Just over one-third of the CREATE cohort (34.7%, n=66) had been homeless within 12 months of leaving care. Another Australian longitudinal study of care-leavers found that almost 50% had experienced homelessness within 5 years.¹²

Young people who have had child protection involvement frequently access homelessness support services to support their transition from care. In 2016-17 in Queensland, 224 young people accessed an SHS for assistance with transitioning from foster care and child safety residential placements.¹³ This represents around 38% of the number leaving care during the same time period (N=590).¹⁴ Rates of SHS access were substantially higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by comparison to non-indigenous care-leavers, particularly for females (see Figure 2).¹⁵

The next paper in this series will consider the impact of youth homelessness on a range of educational, employment and wellbeing outcomes.



Youth homelessness

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