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18% jump in Australians seeking homelessness help over 4 years, whilst Fed funding remains static

New data shows a quarter of people turned away due to lack of housing, staff and resources

The number of Australians seeking help from homelessness organisations last financial year jumped to 288,273, a 19% rise over four years, according to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data released today. The figure represents 1 in 84 Australians.

Australia’s housing crisis is to blame, says the peak body for homelessness, with the waiting list for social housing having blown out to 200,000 rising rents in the private rental market pushing low income earners into rooming houses, motels and caravans.

Table: Number of Australians seeking assistance from homelessness agencies (AIHW)

	2012-13	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	4 year increase
Male	101,122	103,951	113,431	115,744	14%
Female	143,054	151,707	165,765	172,530	21%
TOTAL	244,176	255,658	279,196	288,273	18%

The AIHW data also shows 261 people / day were turned away from help last year – 1-in-4 clients - which Homelessness Australia says is a symptom of homelessness services stretched so thin that they must focus only on the most critical clients, while pushing others to the back of the line.

HA says that agencies are struggling because Federal housing and homelessness funding has failed to keep pace with growing demand, and the cost of renting keeps rising faster than incomes, pushing a constant and increasing flow of people into homelessness.

“Despite thousands more people lining up at agency doors every year, Federal homelessness funding to the States has not increased in real terms. The federal government is asleep at the wheel while we’re left bucketing water on the titanic,” said Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia

“Static Federal funding, pitifully low Centrelink incomes and not enough social housing stock have created a perfect storm of increasing homelessness, “ said Ms Smith.

Housing issues represent the number one reason people seek help, with family violence a close second, according to the AIHW data.

Table: Why are Australians seeking help from homelessness services?

Reasons for seeking homelessness assistance (AIHW, 2016-17)	% of clients who said this was their main reason
Housing (including housing affordability stress, overcrowding, eviction)	46%
Family violence	27%

Financial and employment difficulties	11%
Family breakdown and interpersonal relationships	7%
Gambling, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol addiction	3%
Other	6%

HA says the new data sends a stark message to both State and Federal governments.

“Homelessness will continue to rise until Governments drastically boost social housing and properly fund homelessness services,” said Ms Smith.

Homelessness Australia has called for 100,000 new social housing properties over the next five years to meet demand from low income earners.

“Women and children fleeing domestic violence, young people who can’t stay with their families and long-term rough sleepers looking for a bed for the night are paying the price while the Federal Government sits on its hands.”

Key AIHW data for Australia (2016-17):

- Last financial year, 288,000 Australians sought assistance from a homelessness service, up from 255,00 the year before (an increase of 3% over 12 months and 18% over four years)
- This equates to 1 in 84 Australians seeking homelessness assistance last year
- 261 requests for homelessness assistance were unable to be met each day – that’s 25% of all people who sought assistance
- 60% of Australians who sought homelessness assistance were women
- Over the last four years, there has been an 18% increase in the number of Australians seeking homelessness assistance
- people are turned away from Australian homelessness services -
- Most of homelessness clients (33%) are in private rental or own their own home
- Family violence and a lack of affordable housing continue to be the key drivers of homelessness
- Sixty-two per cent of people seeking homelessness help identified housing affordability stress and/or financial difficulties as one of the reasons for seeking assistance

Background housing stats:

- There are 200,000 households waiting for public and community housing in Australia
- Newstart recipients receive \$268/week + up to \$66 Commonwealth Rent Assistance. The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Melbourne is \$290/week (DHHS, 2016). The median rent for a newly-let one-bedroom property in Sydney is \$480/week (Housing NSW, 2016)
- In Melbourne, just 3-in-1000 private rentals are affordable to someone on Newstart

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