19 Homelessness services interpretative material

The Homelessness services interpretative material is supporting material and includes explanations of why indicators have been chosen, and wherever possible, a link to the stated objectives of the service. It includes indicator definitions, technical details defining how the indicator is measured and guidance on how the indicator is to be interpreted, including caveats and the indicator's completeness and comparability status.

Further information on the Report on Government Services including other reported service areas, the glossary and list of abbreviations is available at https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report on government services.

19.1 Context

Information on specialist homelessness services intake and referral systems is summarised in table 19.1.

Table 19.1   **Jurisdictional homelessness intake and referral systems**

	System name	Description	Category[a]
NSW	No Wrong Door	Assessment and referral for homelessness services may be conducted by: 1) any specialist homelessness service provider; 2) the Link2home information and referral service; or 3) the NSW Domestic Violence Line. It is supported by a centralised service directory and vacancy management system.	Central information
Vic	Opening Doors	Place-based entry points operate across 17 local areas to provide assessment and coordinate intake into homelessness services, with a 24 hour response.	Central intake
Qld	Queensland Homelessness Information Platform	Assessment and referral for homelessness services is conducted by any specialist homelessness service provider. The information platform provides a consistent assessment, referral and prioritisation process.	Central information
WA	Entrypoint Perth	Provides: - information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness service providers in the metropolitan area - information on accommodation and support options in regional WA - information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness service providers for individuals and families experiencing domestic violence in regional WA	Community sector funding and support
SA	Homeless 2 Home	Provides client assessment, intake, referral and ongoing case management system accessible to specialist homelessness service providers.	Central information
Tas	Housing connect	Client intake and referral is managed using a 'front door' model by two organisations at seven offices across the State and clients receive housing and/or homelessness assistance and are connected to support from five organisations for the duration of need. Referrals to and from crisis accommodation are made so that 'no wrong door' access is available to all people seeking housing and/or homelessness assistance. A shared information system streamlines the integrated Housing Connect model.	Central intake
ACT	OneLink	OneLink is the single intake and referral provider for the ACT.	Central intake
NT	Shelter me	ShelterMe is a directory of services for homeless Territorians.	Community sector funding and support

a The category provided is the most closely aligned to the jurisdictions intake and referral system. Each State and Territory's intake and referral system has its own characteristics.

Source: State and Territory governments.

19.2 Indicators

Different delivery contexts, locations and types of clients can affect the equity, effectiveness and efficiency of homelessness services.

The comparability of performance indicator results are shaded in indicator interpretation boxes, figures and data tables as follows:

■ Data are comparable (subject to caveats) across jurisdictions and over time.

■ Data are either not comparable (subject to caveats) within jurisdictions over time or are not comparable across jurisdictions or both.

The completeness of performance indicator results are shaded in indicator interpretation boxes, figures and data tables as follows:

■ Data are complete (subject to caveats) for the current reporting period. All required data are available for all jurisdictions.

■ Data are incomplete for the current reporting period. At least some data were not available.

Outputs

Outputs are the actual services delivered (while outcomes are the impact of these services on the status of an individual or group) (see section 1). Output information is also critical for equitable, efficient and effective management of government services.

Equity

Access — Access of special needs groups to homelessness services

'Access of special needs groups to homelessness services' is an indicator of governments' objective to provide specialist homelessness services in an equitable manner (box 19.1).

Box 19.1 Access of special needs groups to homelessness services

'Access of special needs groups to homelessness services' is defined as the proportion of all clients whose need for accommodation or services other than accommodation was met and who are in each of three population groups:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- people born in non-main English speaking countries
- people with disability.

Disability is defined for this indicator as people who identify to the service provider as having a long-term health condition or disability and needing assistance with self-care, mobility or communication (core activities) – this may underestimate the number of clients with disability who need support to access and maintain housing.

This is a proxy measure as it only captures people who are clients of specialist homelessness services with an identified need for service(s), rather than all those in the population who need services. In addition, relative need among each population group for specialist homelessness accommodation and other services is unknown.

In general, the special needs groups' representation in the group of clients whose needs are met should be broadly similar to or higher than their representation in the population. Several factors need to be considered in interpreting the data — in particular, cultural differences can influence the extent to which each of the three population groups' access specialist homelessness services.

Data reported for this indicator are:

■ comparable (subject to caveats) across jurisdictions and over time

■ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

Effectiveness

Access — Unmet demand for homelessness services

'Unmet demand for homelessness services' is an indicator of governments' objective to ensure that services are accessible to those who need them (box 19.2).

Box 19.2　Unmet demand for homelessness services

Unmet demand for homelessness services is defined as the proportion of people who do not receive specialist homelessness services that they need. It is reported using a proxy measure for two broad service types — accommodation services and services other than accommodation.

- Unmet need for accommodation is measured by:

  – the number of clients with an identified need for short-term or emergency accommodation or medium-term/transitional housing or long-term housing who were not provided with or referred for these services (although they may have received other types of services), divided by the number of clients who had a need for short term or emergency accommodation or medium-term/transitional housing or long-term housing

- Unmet need for services other than accommodation is measured by:

  – the number of clients with an identified need for at least one service other than accommodation (and no need for accommodation services) who were not provided with or referred for a service other than accommodation, divided by the number of clients who had a need for at least one service other than accommodation (and no need for accommodation services).

This is a proxy measure as it only captures people who are clients of specialist homelessness services with an identified need for service(s), rather than all those in the population who need services.

A low or decreasing proportion of clients with unmet demand is desirable.

Jurisdictions with some central intake models may record high unmet demand.

Data reported for these measures are:

▢ not comparable across jurisdictions but are comparable (subject to caveats) within jurisdictions over time

▮ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

Appropriateness — Addressing client needs

'Addressing client needs' is an indicator of governments' objective to identify and address individuals' needs as appropriate (box 19.3).

Box 19.3   **Addressing client needs**

'Addressing client needs' is defined as the proportion of clients whose needs are identified and who receive services matching those needs as appropriate, and has two measures:

- the identification of client needs and how they can be appropriately addressed is measured as *the proportion of closed support periods (for clients) with an agreed case management plan*

    In some instances, a case management plan may be judged to be inappropriate (such as when a support period is short term — for example 24 hours). Jurisdictions with some central intake models may record a relatively low number of closed support periods where clients have an agreed case management plan and a relatively high number of clients with unmet need for services because, while all eligible clients receive an assessment, the provision of or referral for service is determined by their level of need relative to other clients.

    Data reported for this measure are:

    ■ comparable (subject to caveats) across jurisdictions and over time

    ■ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

- the provision of services to address clients' needs is measured as the *proportion of clients (with closed support periods) with an identified need for particular service types who are provided with (and/or referred for) at least one service of that type.*

    Data reported for this measure are:

    ■ not comparable across jurisdictions, but are comparable (subject to caveats) within jurisdictions over time

    ■ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

Holding other factors constant, a high or increasing proportion is desirable for:

- support periods where clients have an agreed case management plan

- clients who received services that matched their needs and/or were referred to another agency for that purpose.

Prioritisation of client needs and identification of goals for clients to work toward during support is a key aspect of case management and is commonly part of agreed case management plans and are reported as contextual data (table 19A.15).

Quality — Client satisfaction

'Client satisfaction' is an indicator of governments' objective to provide high quality specialist homelessness services (box 19.4).

> ### Box 19.4   Client satisfaction
>
> 'Client satisfaction' is defined as the extent to which clients find homelessness services and programs to be helpful and of a high standard.
>
> Measures for this indicator are under development.

Quality — Achieving quality standards

'Achieving quality standards' is an indicator of governments' objective to provide services that are of high quality, provided by qualified staff in a safe environment (box 19.5).

> ### Box 19.5   Achieving quality standards
>
> 'Achieving quality standards' is defined as the proportion of specialist homelessness services that meet nationally agreed quality standards.
>
> A high or increasing proportion is desirable.
>
> Data are not yet available for reporting against this indicator as there are currently no nationally agreed quality standards for specialist homelessness services.

Efficiency

Cost per day of support

'Cost per day of support' is an indicator of governments' objective to provide specialist homelessness services in an efficient manner (box 19.6).

Box 19.6	**Cost per day of support**

'Cost per day of support' is defined as total government recurrent expenditure on homelessness services divided by the number of days of support for clients receiving support and/or supported accommodation.

Across jurisdictions, there may be varying treatments of expenditure items (for example, superannuation) and different counting and reporting rules for generating financial data. Differences in expenditure data across jurisdictions may reflect to some extent differences in the way these data are compiled rather than variations in costs.

A low or decreasing cost per day of support may represent an improvement in efficiency, but may also indicate lower service quality, less complex client needs or longer waiting times for services.

Data reported for this indicator are:

■ not comparable across jurisdictions, but are comparable (subject to caveats) within jurisdictions over time

■ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

Outcomes

Economic participation

'Economic participation' is an indicator of governments' objective to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to achieve social inclusion and greater economic participation (box 19.7).

Box 19.7	**Economic participation**

'Economic participation' is defined as the change in the proportion of clients with the capacity to actively participate in the economy between the start and end of support. Two proxy measures are reported for clients aged 15 years or over (with closed support periods):

- 'achievement of employment, education and/or training on exit' — the change in the proportion of clients who are employed and/or enrolled in formal education/training between the start and end of support

- 'achievement of income on exit' — the change in the proportion of clients who have an income source between the start and end of support.

These are proxy measures as they only capture people who are clients of specialist homelessness services, rather than all those in the population who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Data are reported for all clients and for clients with an identified need for services of that type.

Holding other factors constant, an increase in the proportion from start to end of support is desirable for clients who are employed and/or enrolled in education/training and clients who have an income source.

When looking separately at employment and education/training the focus is on those seeking assistance for each, but it should be noted that whilst a decrease following support may indicate they did not achieve the individual employment or education/training outcome it does not mean that they did not achieve the alternative (for example, someone with an identified need for assistance in education may have found employment).

This is an indicator of outcomes in the short term. Longer term outcomes are important, but more difficult to measure.

Data reported for these measures are:

■ comparable (subject to caveats) across jurisdictions and over time

■ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

Achievement of sustained housing

'Achievement of sustained housing' is an indicator of governments' objective to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to achieve sustainable housing (box 19.8).

'Achievement of sustained housing' is defined as the proportion of clients living in and sustaining independent housing following support. Two proxy measures are reported:

- achievement of independent housing on exit — the change in the proportion of clients (with closed support periods) living in independent housing between the start and end of support, reported for all clients and for clients with an identified need for assistance to obtain or maintain independent housing including 'to obtain long term housing', 'sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction', or, 'prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears'

- repeat homelessness — the number of specialist homelessness service clients who change status from 'homeless' to 'not homeless' and back to 'homeless' in the reporting period, divided by the number of clients who experienced homelessness at any time in the reporting period. (The definition of 'homeless' for specialist homelessness service clients is in section 19.3).

These are proxy measures as they only capture people who are clients of specialist homelessness services, rather than all those in the population who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Holding other factors constant, a high or increasing proportion of clients who achieved independent housing in closed support periods and a low or decreasing proportion of clients who experienced repeat homelessness is desirable.

The reported data are for relatively short term outcomes achieved within a financial year. Longer term outcomes are also important, but more difficult to measure.

Data reported for these measures are:

■ comparable (subject to caveats) across jurisdictions and over time

■ complete for the current reporting period. All required 2018-19 data are available for all jurisdictions.

19.3   Definitions of key terms

Age	Age is calculated as age of the client on the start date of their first support period of the reporting period or the first date of the reporting period, whichever of the two is the later date.
Client	A person who receives a specialist homelessness service.
	To be a client, the person must directly receive a service and not just be a beneficiary of a service. Children who present with a parent or guardian and receive a service are considered to be a client. This includes a service that they share with their parent or guardian such as meals or accommodation.
	Children who present with a parent or guardian but do not directly receive a service are not considered to be clients. This includes situations where the parent or guardian receives assistance to prevent tenancy failure or eviction.
	Clients can be counted differently according to the data item that is being reported:

- Clients (demographic) — For clients with multiple support periods, reported data is based on the information at the start date of the client's first support period in the reporting period or the first date of the reporting period, whichever is later
- Clients (counted by support periods) — For each data item, clients are counted based on support periods with distinct client information. The same client can be counted more than once if they have multiple support periods with a different response for the data item. The result is that percentages do not add up to 100
- Clients (outcomes) – Clients are counted based on closed support periods where a valid response is recorded both when presenting to an agency and at the end of support.

Closed support period	A support period that had finished on or before the end of the reporting period.
Comparability	Data are considered comparable if (subject to caveats) they can be used to inform an assessment of comparative performance. Typically, data are considered comparable when they are collected in the same way and in accordance with the same definitions. For comparable indicators or measures, significant differences in reported results allow an assessment of differences in performance, rather than being the result of anomalies in the data.
Completeness	Data are considered complete if all required data are available for all jurisdictions that provide the service.
Disability	Specialist homelessness services clients who have identified as having a long-term health condition or disability and needing assistance with core activities (self-care, mobility and/or communication).

From July 2013, the specialist homelessness services collection collects information on whether, and to what extent, a long-term health condition or disability restricts clients' everyday activities across the following three life areas and they need help/supervision with these tasks:

- self-care
- mobility
- communication.

The information is consistent with data collected in the 2011 Census and the 2014 and 2016 National Social Housing Survey. Questions are based on the Census 'Core Activity Need for Assistance' concept.

Homeless definition for clients of specialist homelessness services	Clients of specialist homelessness services are defined as being homeless in each month where at least one of the following describes their housing situation:

- dwelling type is caravan, tent, cabin, boat, improvised building/dwelling, no dwelling/street/park/in the open, motor vehicle, boarding/rooming house, emergency accommodation, hotel/motel/bed and breakfast
- tenure type is renting or living rent free in transitional housing, caravan park, boarding/rooming house or emergency accommodation/night shelter/women's refuge/youth shelter; OR if the client has no tenure
- conditions of occupancy is couch surfer.

Regardless of tenure or conditions of occupancy, a client is not considered to be homeless if the dwelling type is reported as 'Institution' in one of these categories:

- hospital (excluding psychiatric)
- psychiatric hospital/unit
- disability support
- rehabilitation
- adult correctional facility
- youth/juvenile justice correctional centre
- boarding school/residential college
- aged care facility
- immigration detention centre.

Homelessness population	The ABS Census definition states that when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for, social relations.

No tenure	A type of housing tenure recorded for clients who are sleeping rough or do not have a legal right to occupy a dwelling and may be asked to leave at any time. It includes couch surfing, living in an institutional setting, living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting, using cars or railway carriages, improvised dwellings or living in long grass.
Non-conventional accommodation	Non-conventional accommodation is defined as: • living on the streets • staying in cars or railway carriages • sleeping in parks • living in improvised dwellings • squatting • living in long grass.
Non-main English speaking countries	Non-main English speaking countries are all countries except Australia, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, United States of America and South Africa.
Ongoing support period	A support period is considered ongoing at the end of the reporting period if each of the following conditions is met: • no support end-date is provided • no after-support information is provided • corresponding client data was received in the month following the end of the reporting period.
Real expenditure	Actual expenditure adjusted for changes in prices. Adjustments are made using the General Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GGFCE) chain price deflator (2016-17=100).
Referral	A referral to another agency is recorded as provided only if that agency accepts the person concerned for an appointment or interview.
Severely crowded dwelling	The ABS categorises a dwelling as severely crowded if it requires four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the number of people who usually live there, based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (ABS 2012).
Short-term or emergency accommodation	Short-term or emergency accommodation includes: refuges; crisis shelter; couch surfing; living temporarily with friends and relatives; insecure accommodation on a short-term basis; and, emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency (e.g. in hotels, motels, etc.). The following short-term accommodation options are not included: • hotels, motels, caravan parks and other temporary accommodation used when a person is on holiday or travelling • custodial and care arrangements, such as prisons and hospitals • temporary accommodation used by a person while renovating usual residence or building a new residence (e.g. weekenders, caravans).
Specialist homelessness agency	An organisation that receives government funding to deliver specialist homelessness services. Assistance is provided to clients aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. Agencies may also receive funding from other sources. Inclusion of agencies in the specialist homelessness services collection is determined by the State and Territory departments responsible for administering the government response to homelessness. Not all funded agencies are required to participate in data collection.
Specialist homelessness service(s)	Assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. The specialist homelessness services that are in scope for this collection and that may be provided during a support period are: *Housing/accommodation services*: • short-term or emergency accommodation • medium-term/transitional housing • long-term housing • assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction • assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears.

Specialised services:

- child protection services
- parenting skills education
- child-specific specialist counselling services
- psychological services
- psychiatric services
- mental health services
- pregnancy assistance
- family planning support
- physical disability services
- intellectual disability services
- health/medical services

- professional legal services
- financial advice and counselling
- counselling for problem gambling
- drug/alcohol counselling
- specialist counselling services
- interpreter services
- assistance with immigration services
- culturally specific services
- assistance to connect culturally
- other specialised services.

General assistance and support services:

- assertive outreach
- assistance to obtain/maintain government allowance
- employment assistance
- training assistance
- educational assistance
- financial information
- material aid/brokerage
- assistance for incest/sexual
- assistance for domestic and family violence
- family/relationship assistance
- assistance for trauma
- assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems
- living skills/personal development
- legal information

- court support
- advice/information
- retrieval/storage/removal of personal belongings
- advocacy/liaison on behalf of client
- school liaison
- child care
- structured play/skills development
- child contact and residence arrangements
- meals
- laundry/shower facilities
- recreation
- transport
- other basic assistance.

Support period	The period of time a client receives services from an agency is referred to as a support period. A support period starts on the day the client first receives a service from an agency and ends when:

- the relationship between the client and the agency ends
- the client has reached the maximum amount of support the agency can offer
- a client has not received any services from the agency for a whole calendar month and does not have an appointment booked with the agency
- there is no ongoing relationship.

Unmet demand (or unmet need / unassisted request)	Unmet demand for homelessness services occurs when an individual who approaches a specialist homelessness service provider does not receive, and is not referred elsewhere for, accommodation or other services that they need. For clients of specialist homelessness services, unmet demand is categorised as unmet need. For those who are not clients and do not receive any assessment, service or referral elsewhere for services, unmet demand is categorised as unassisted requests.