



FAST FACTS

Poverty & Housing

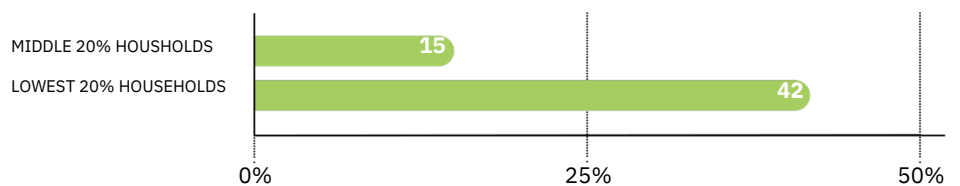


Poverty puts pressure on people – it’s constant and strong. If the pressure builds up, people can be pushed into homelessness. We can relieve the pressure on people’s lives by creating affordable housing and helping people get decent jobs. We can also help people withstand this pressure by strengthening our social welfare system and ensuring all payments stay above the poverty line. We can end homelessness and increase housing affordability. Investing in social housing is both the right and smart thing to do.

How are housing and poverty linked?

In Australia, increasing housing costs played a major role in keeping the overall poverty rate at around 12-13% from 2009 to 2017, when it would have otherwise declined. ¹

Percentage increase in Average Housing Costs 2005-2017

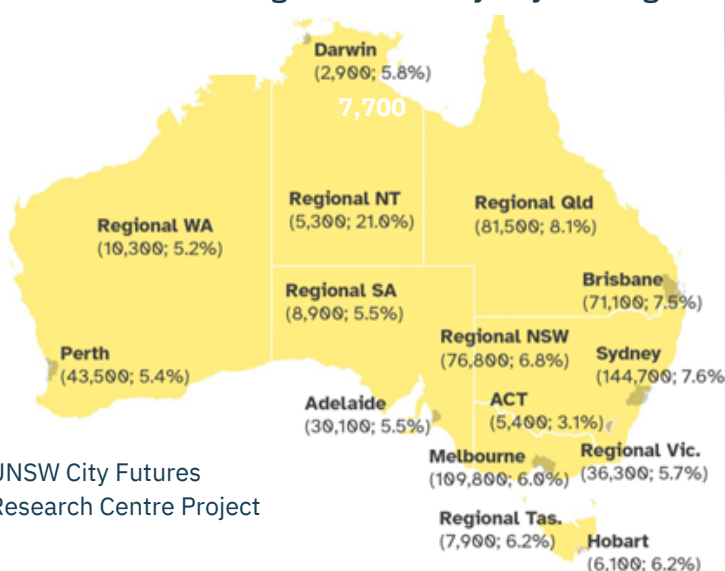


Relying on income support and renting in the private market increases the risk of poverty. For example, in 2019-20, the poverty rate for people aged over 65 years who owned or were purchasing their home was 10%. However, it was more than 5 times that - 50% for those renting privately. ²

How many people have unmet housing need?

At least **122,494 Australians were listed as homeless** in August 2021 according to the census. However over 640,000 low-income households were not in appropriate housing on census night. These Australians were either experiencing homelessness, in overcrowded homes or spending over 30% of their income on rent. Around 2/3 of unmet need is from those in the lowest 20% of household income. Families represent half of the unmet needs; an overrepresentation given families account for only around 4 in 10 of all households. For families, the need for larger dwellings can translate to higher housing costs. ³

Unmet Housing Needs 2021 by City and Region



See also [Unmet Housing Needs by suburbs/SA4](#) ⁴

“The pandemic has shown how vulnerable people are when they don’t have a home, and how urgently we need more social housing so that every Australian can have a safe place to live.”

Chair of Homelessness Australia, Jenny Smith

UNSW City Futures
Research Centre Project



FAST FACTS

Poverty & Housing



Unmet need can be met

Meeting the needs of households over the next 20 years from 2021 to 2041 would equate to a 6.5% average annual growth in non-market housing. This averages to around 47,000 homes per year over the period, according to the UNSW City Futures Research Centre.

“ The Federal Government has recently committed to new resources for social housing which is welcome, but while the housing crisis continues to drive increased homelessness, a significant funding boost is needed to cope with this unprecedented surge in demand. Australia has the means to end homelessness, we just need the will.” ⁶

Everybody's Home national spokesperson
Kate Colvin

“ It's the right thing to do. It's cheaper to get people a home. It'll save money on police call-outs, and treating people on emergency wards. Homeless is not an identity. It's an experience. And if we can make it a short experience, and one that doesn't reoccur, we can reduce the human toll and of course, the cost to the taxpayer.” ⁷

Launch Housing CEO
Bevan Warner.

Not everybody who is homeless sleeps on the street

While some people end up rough sleeping, many others are couch surfing, living in their car, or are living in other forms of unsafe and unstable accommodation.

When Ashlie lost her full-time job in her late 50s, she quickly found that the low rate of income support did not allow her to live decently. *“I had to go without at least seven meals in order to afford a haircut. Seeing a medical specialist was now out of the question, let alone a dentist. I had a couple of friends who provided me with some food so I could pay my rent.”* In April 2020, Ashlie was unable to afford a private rental, and she became homeless. Since then, Ashlie has transitioned between emergency accommodation and staying with friends for short periods of time.

The 2020 response to COVID-19 was a huge relief but it's now gone

Many people already in poverty and reliant on income support lost casual and part-time work. The Coronavirus Supplement (CVS) of \$550 a fortnight added to multiple payments in 2020, including JobSeeker Payment, helped many low-income people pay rent and, in some cases, get the bond together to get into secure accommodation (including those needing to leave domestic violence).

“I've been able to buy real ingredients and make proper meals for the kids. My rent is no longer 60% of my total income, and I can buy household items I've been needing for years and musical instruments to enrich the children's lives.” ⁸

Case workers at Mission Australia's NSW Ebbs House completed at least three reference checks in the first month that the payment was paid, meaning these formerly homeless clients had the bond to apply for rental properties. ⁹



FAST FACTS

Poverty & Housing



Drivers of homelessness include high rents, unemployment, low income security payments, increasing domestic violence and a lack of social housing.

According to the ABS [2021 Census data on Homelessness](#) released in March 2023, in 2021 there were 122,494 people who did not have a place to call home:

- 1 in 4 (28,948 or 24%) people without homes are children aged under 18 years.
- the number of homeless children under 18 increased by 12% since the 2016 Census, while overall homelessness increased by 5% (from 116,427 to 122,484).
- 68% (82,922) of homeless people were women and children under 18 years.
- 58% (71,620) of homeless people were women and children under 12 years.

Family and domestic violence should never end in homelessness, yet it is the main reason women and children leave their home. ¹⁰

Equity Economics published **Nowhere to Go** in July 2021. Commissioned by the Everybody's Home ¹¹ campaign, the report estimated that a lack of social housing is leading to 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners and 9,120 women a year becoming homeless. It found that if the Commonwealth Government invested in 16,800 additional social housing units the \$7.6 billion cost would be dwarfed by immediate economic benefits of \$15.3 billion and the creation of 47,000 new jobs.

“Home ownership rates have collapsed, the share of renters in housing stress is increasing and social housing waiting lists are out of control.” ¹²

Martin Sharp, Compass Housing.

Overstretched and overwhelmed: the strain on homelessness services report, released by Homelessness Australia in August 2023 found:

- Homelessness services are unable to meet surging demand for homelessness support and in 2021-22, 80% of those turned away were women and children, and 31% were under 18.
- The number of people using a homelessness service increased by 7.5% between December 2022 and March 2023.
- 3 in 4 people using homelessness services in March 2023 were women or children. ¹³

Low-income renters are doing it tough

Between April 2020 and March 2023 rents rose by 40% by early 2023 vacancy rates were at a record 1% low.



Crisis in rental affordability

The **2024 Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot** surveyed 45,115 rental listings across Australia and found that:

- **0.6%** were affordable for a person earning a full-time minimum wage
- **0.2%** were affordable for a person on the Age Pension
- **0.1%** were affordable for a person on the Disability Support Pension
- **0%** all sharehouses, were affordable for a person on JobSeeker
- **0%** were affordable for a person on Youth Allowance. ¹⁴

“Each year, we think the market couldn’t get any worse. And each year, we’re shocked to see that it can.”

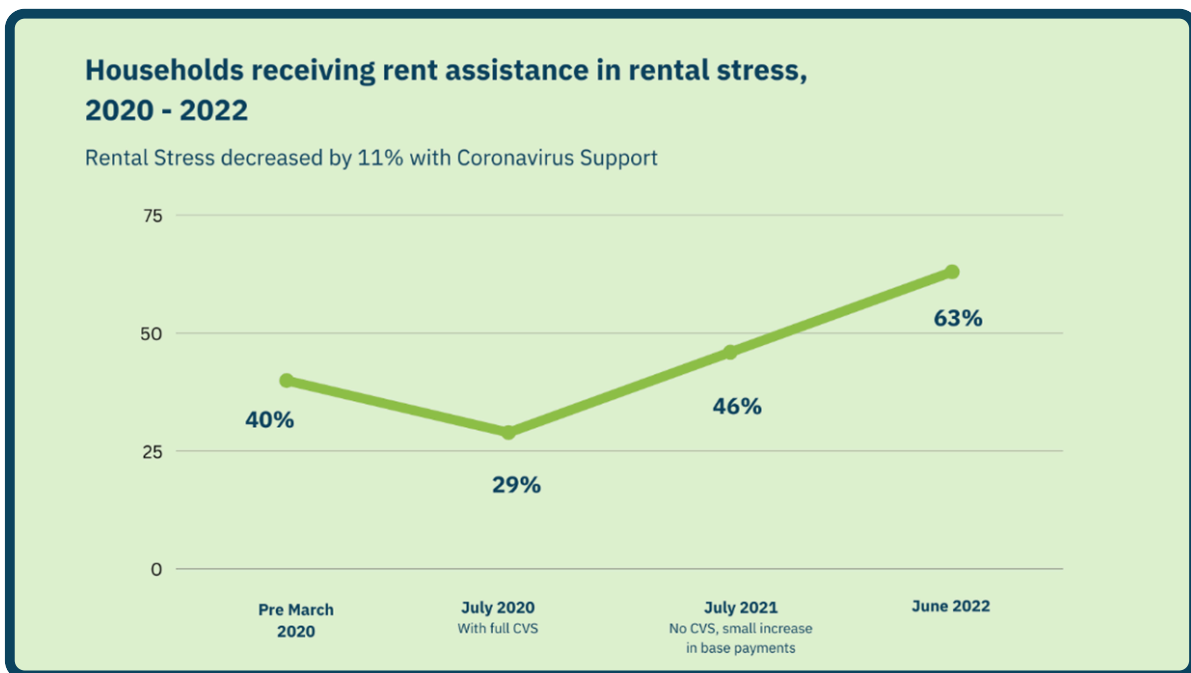
Anglicare Australia Executive Director Kasy Chambers.



Rental Stress at all-time high

Rental stress is usually defined as when housing costs are more than 30% of the gross household income. Prior to the pandemic, around 40% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance households were living in rental stress.

The full Coronavirus Supplement reduced this to 29% in June 2020, however by June 2021 - when the supplement was removed, and rents kept rising - nearly half (46%) of all households receiving CRA were living in rental stress, and it increased to 63% by June 2022 as the chart below shows. ¹⁵



Anti-Poverty Week welcomes the 15% increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance announced in the 2023-24 Federal Budget but supports the call from Everybody's Home and ACOSS for an immediate 50% increase in this payment to alleviate poverty and further homelessness.

Produced by Anti-Poverty Week as part of its **Fast Facts** series. Data correct as of 16 September 2024.

1. Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. and Wong, M. (2020), Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 1, Overview. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3, Sydney: ACOSS.

2. Davidson, P; Bradbury, B; and Wong, M (2023), Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected? Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney.

3. UNSW City Futures Research Centre Project Social and affordable housing: needs, costs and subsidy gaps by region funded by the Community Housing Industry Association.

4. <https://cityfutures.adg.unsw.edu.au/cityviz/housing-need-dashboard/>

5. Quantifying Australia's Unmet Housing Need – a national snapshot, November 2022.

6. Homelessness Australia, Media Release, 4/8/23.

7. ABC News 8/6/2020.

8. Mother responding to National Council for Single Mothers and Their Children Coronavirus Supplement Survey, May 2020. See also APW Media Release 13/7/20.

9. Ebbs House is a transitional accommodation service for adult men and women who are experiencing homelessness operated by Mission Australia in Brookvale NSW. Residents are supported with case management, practical support and social connection to help them transition into sustainable housing.

10. AHURI Brief, Housing, homelessness and domestic and family violence, 19/10/22.

11. Equity Economics, Nowhere to Go, 12/7/21.

12. Meeting Social Housing Need. A Tipping Point for Federal Intervention. Compass Housing Services, 31/8/21

13. Overstretched and overwhelmed: the strain on homelessness services report, Homelessness Australia, August 2023.

14. Anglicare Australia, 2024 Rental Affordability Snapshot, April 2024.

15. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Housing assistance in Australia, 29/6/22 and Productivity Commission, In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, Study Report, Canberra, 30/9/22.