

Homelessness in Australia 2021 Census

KEY FINDINGS

In 2021 the Australian homelessness rate fell

- On Census night in 2021, 122,487 people were identified as experiencing homelessness across Australia, increasing from 116,367 in 2016. The Australian homelessness rate (per 10,000 estimated resident population) dropped from 49.8 in 2016 to 48.2 in 2021.

Homelessness in Western Australia and other states / territories

- In Western Australia, 9,729 people were identified as experiencing homelessness on Census night. The Western Australian homelessness rate rose marginally from 36.4 in 2016 to 36.6 in 2021 after a period of decline in homelessness rates as measured by the Census from 2001 to 2016. There was a very sharp and alarming increase in rough sleeping in Western Australia in 2021 compared with 2016 (from 1,083 on Census night in 2016 to 2,315 in 2021), which would have resulted in a significant increase in the overall homelessness rate for Western Australia had it not been for falls in other categories of homelessness. Nationally, persons living in improvised dwellings decreased by 6.9%.
- The Northern Territory continues to exhibit a homelessness rate well above the national average. NSW experienced the largest drop in the homelessness rate between 2016 and 2021.

Homelessness by gender and age

- The proportion of males experiencing homelessness was higher than females in every category except for those aged 12-18 years. However, growth in homelessness among women outstripped men overall; 10.1% women between 2016 and 2021 compared with 1.6% men. The largest increase in homelessness for women is for those aged 35-45 and girls under 18. There was also a large increase in homelessness for boys under 18 between 2016 and 2021.
- Those under 25 represent 37.4% of people experiencing homelessness in 2021.

Homelessness by Census operational group

- The largest proportionate increase in homelessness between 2016 and 2021 was persons living in boarding houses or other temporary lodgings, up 43% from 2016 to 2021.
- Trends in rough sleeping, supported accommodation, temporary accommodation and boarding houses were affected by state/territory COVID-19 lockdown provisions and policy responses to accommodating rough sleepers. Over 40% of people experiencing homelessness in Regional and Remote Western Australia were living in severely crowded dwellings.

Indigenous homelessness

- Across Australia, Indigenous homelessness rates far exceed non-Indigenous rates. However, the national Indigenous homelessness rate decreased by 15% between 2016 and 2021 down to 306.8 per 10,000 from 361 in 2016.

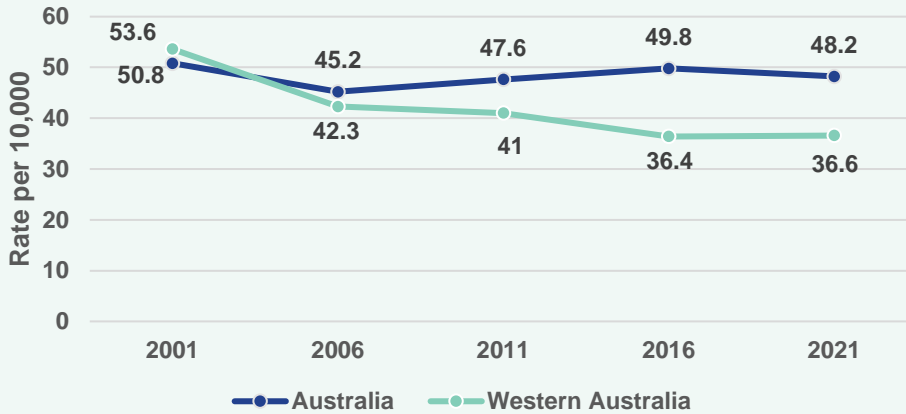
Continuing high rates of homelessness in Australia call for a national coordinated plan across prevention, early intervention, housing and support. See our review of homelessness in Australia and our policy recommendations to end homelessness in the following publication *Ending homelessness in Australia: An evidence and policy deep dive*. Perth: Centre for Social Impact, The University of Western Australia and the University of New South Wales. <https://doi.org/10.25916/ntba-f006>

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HOMELESSNESS RATES

Figure 1 Western Australia and Australian homelessness rate (per 10,000 estimated resident population) from 2001 to 2021, Census



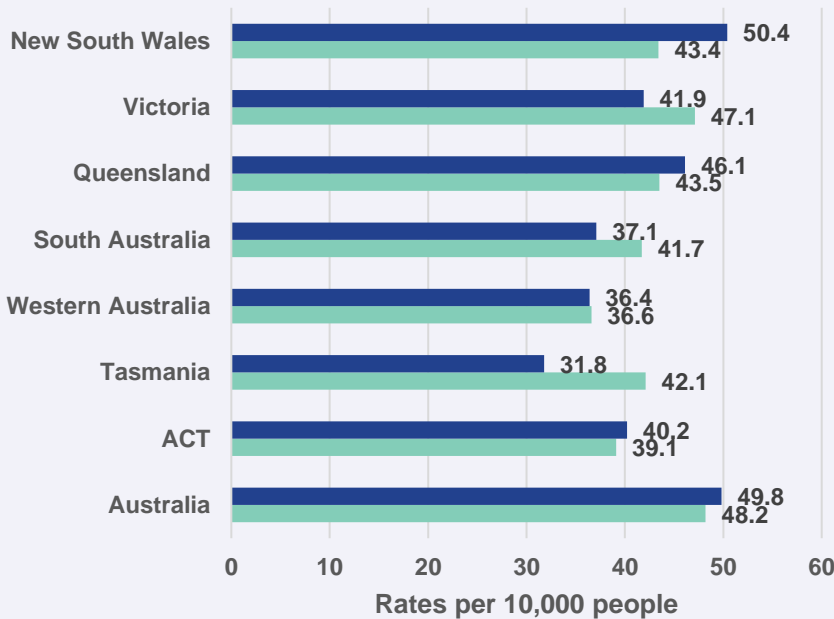
Source: 2001 to 2021 ABS Census

- The **total number of people experiencing homelessness** on Census night in Australia in 2021 was 122,487, increasing from 116,367 in 2016.
- **The Australian homelessness rate** (per 10,000 estimated resident population) uniformly increased from 2006 to 2016, but **has now fallen** from 49.8 persons per 10,000 to 48.2 persons in 2021.
- The total number of people **experiencing homelessness in WA** on Census night in 2021 was 9,729 up from 9,005 in 2016.
- The WA homelessness rate rose marginally from 36.4 in 2016 to 36.6 in 2021 after a period of significant decline.



STATE / TERRITORY PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS

Figure 2 Number of people experiencing homelessness by state / territory in Australia, 2021 Census



Source: 2021 ABS Census

■ 2016 ■ 2021

- The **Northern Territory** continues to exhibit a homelessness rate **well above the national average**.

Northern Territory Rate
2016: 599.4
2021: 563.6

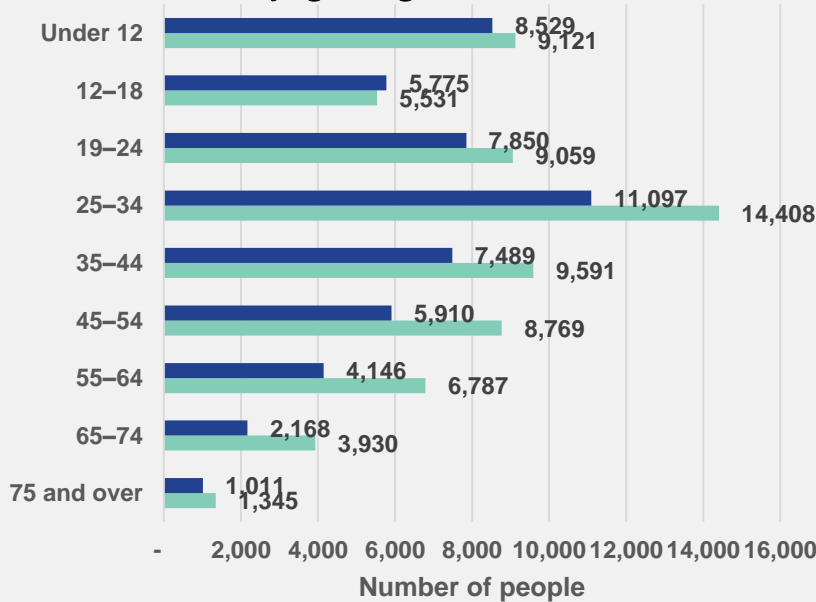
- **NSW experienced the largest drop in the homelessness rate** between 2016 and 2021, while there were large increases in the homelessness rate in both **Tasmania and Victoria**.

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AGE AND GENDER PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS

Figure 3 Number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia, by age and gender, 2021 Census



Source: 2021 ABS Census

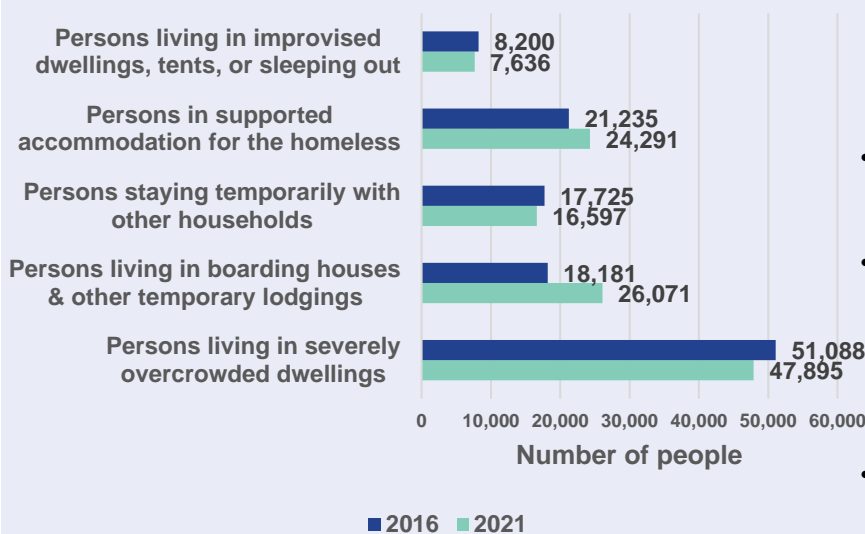
■ Female ■ Male

- There is a **higher proportion of males** experiencing homelessness than females in **every age category except 12-18 years**. However, **growth in homelessness among women outstrips men overall**; 10.1% between 2016 and 2021 compared with 1.6% for men.
- The **largest increase in homelessness for women** was for those aged 35-45 and for girls under 18. There was also a large increase in homelessness for boys under 18 between 2016 and 2021.
- The **largest proportionate difference** between men and women was in the **65-74 years age category**, with males comprising 64.5% of the age group and women 35.6%.
- **Those under 25** represented 37.4% of those experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2021. Child and youth homelessness remains a major issue in Australia.



NATIONAL STRUCTURE OF HOMELESSNESS

Figure 4 Number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia, by category of homelessness, 2021 Census



Source: 2021 ABS Census

■ 2016 ■ 2021

- **Persons living in improvised dwellings decreased** overall by 6.9% in Australia between 2016 and 2021. However, there is a high degree of volatility in state and territory rough sleeping trends. Rough sleeping in WA increased by 113.8% while NSW decreased by 62.8%.
- **Persons in supported accommodation increased** by 14% from 2016 to 2021.
- The **largest proportionate increase** in homelessness between 2016 and 2021 was **persons living in boarding houses or other temporary lodgings**, up 43% from 2016 to 2021.
- 39% of people experiencing homelessness in **Australia were living in severely crowded dwellings** on Census night in 2021.

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HOMELESSNESS BY INDIGENOUS STATUS

- Across Australia, Indigenous homelessness rates far exceed non-Indigenous rates.
- The **Northern Territory's** Indigenous homelessness rate of 1864.5 per 10,000 Indigenous people exceeds that of all other states and territories but has **decreased by 10.5% from 2016-2021**.
- The **national Indigenous homelessness rate** has decreased by 15% between 2016 and 2021 down to 306.8 per 10,000 from 361 in 2016.
- **Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania** all had increases in their rate of Indigenous homelessness from 2016 to 2021.

Table 1 Rate of homelessness (per 10,000 estimated resident population) by Indigenous status, State/Territory and overall, 2021 Census

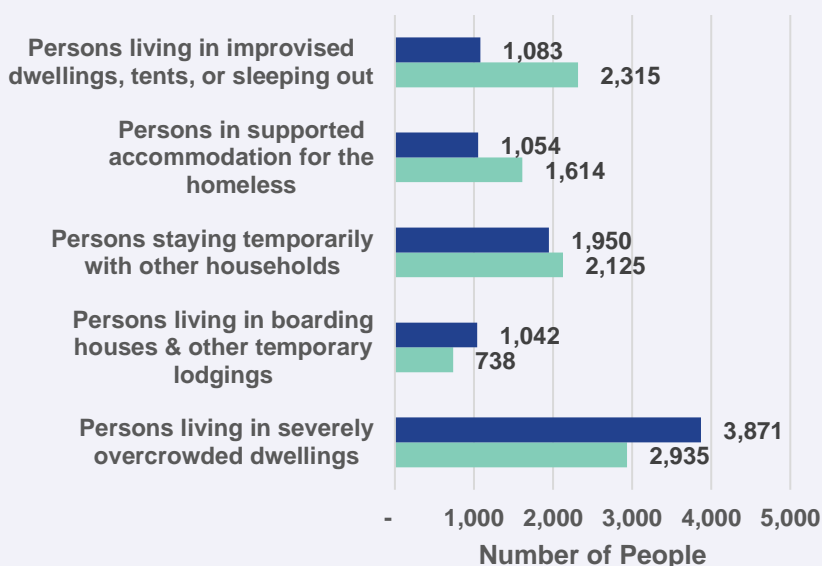
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Indigenous	90.2	168.9	201	326.8	380.9	81.8	1864.5	140.8	306.8
Non-Indigenous	37.6	38.5	33.2	30.2	22.4	36.5	68.5	30.5	34.9
Not Stated	120.3	203.1	79.7	143.2	64.6	107.5	351.9	211.4	129.6

Source: 2021 ABS Census



STRUCTURE OF HOMELESSNESS IN WA

Figure 5 Number of people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia, by category of homelessness, 2016-2021 Census



Source: 2021 ABS Census

■ 2016 ■ 2021

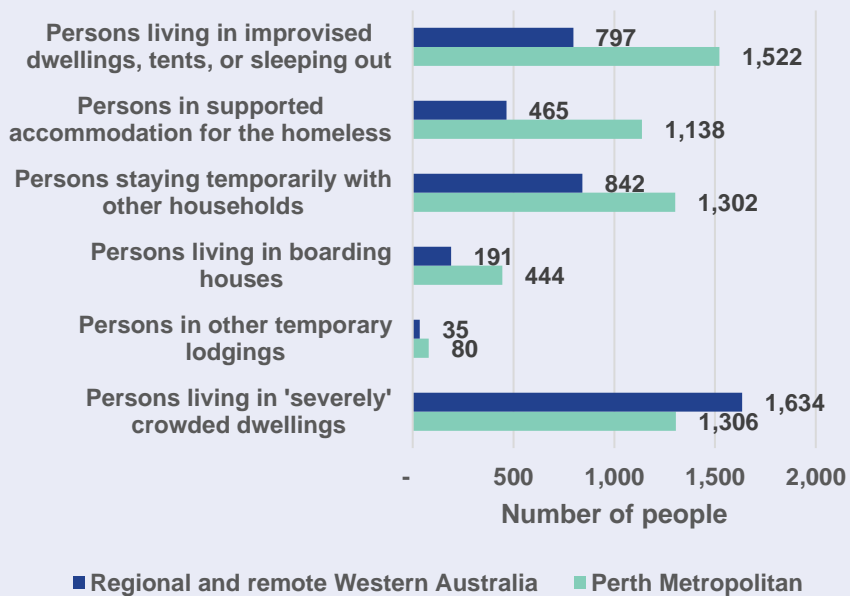
- There was a **staggering 113% increase in people living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out in Western Australia** from 2016 to 2021, representing 24% of the total Western Australian homeless population.
- The **largest proportion** (30%) of Western Australians experiencing homelessness in 2021 were living in **severely overcrowded dwellings**.

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GEOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS IN WA

Figure 6 Structure of homelessness in Perth and Regional and Remote Western Australia, 2021 Census



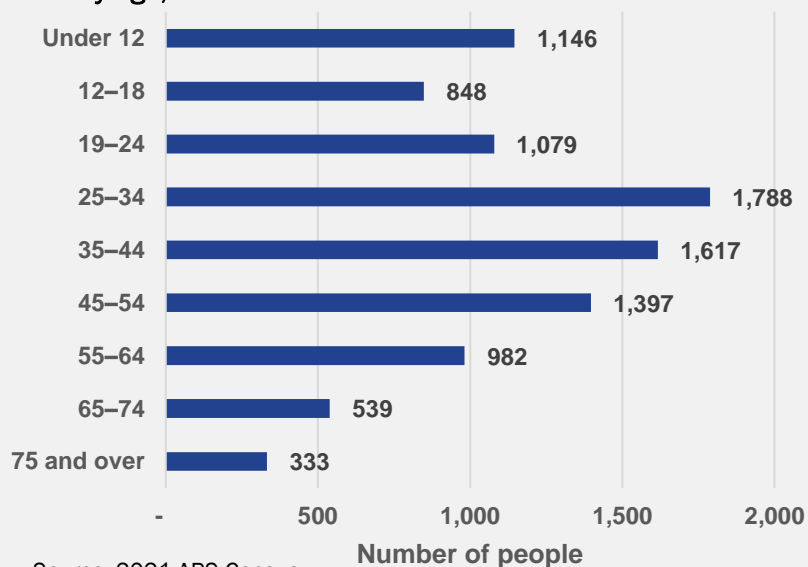
Source: 2021 ABS Census

- The **highest proportion** of people experiencing homelessness in **Perth** were living in **improvised dwellings** (26.3%).
- Roughly the same proportion of people in Perth Metro and regional and remote Western Australia were **staying temporarily with other households** (22.5% and 21.2% respectively).
- Over 40% of people experiencing homelessness in **Regional and Remote Western Australia** were living in **severely crowded dwellings**.



AGE PROFILE OF HOMELESSNESS IN WA

Figure 7 Number of people experiencing homelessness by age, 2021 Census



Source: 2021 ABS Census

- **Children under the age of 18** make up 20.5% of total homelessness, down from 21.6% in 2016.
- The largest number of those experiencing homelessness on Census night lies in the **25-54 age cohorts** (49.4%).
- **Those over 55** comprise 19.1% of the total, increasing from 16.7% in 2016.

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RATE OF HOMELESSNESS BY INDIGENOUS STATUS IN WA

- Indigenous homelessness in Western Australia far outstrips non-Indigenous homelessness.
- [Western Australia's Indigenous homelessness rate](#) increased by 10.5% to 380.9 per 10,000 from 2016 to 2021.
- The [non-Indigenous homelessness rate](#) decreased by 13.5% in the same time period.

Table 2 Rate of homelessness (per 10,000 estimated resident population) by Indigenous status in Western Australia, 2021 Census

	2016	2021	% Change
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	344.6	380.9	10.5
Non-Indigenous	25.9	22.4	-13.5
Not Stated	36.4	64.6	77.5

Source: 2021 ABS Census



Key information:

The information in this infographic is drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 census.

The 2021 Census aimed to count every person in Australia on Census Night, 10 August 2021.

At the date of Census Night, parts of Sydney and Victoria were in lockdowns due to Covid, which could have skewed some of the data.

Definitions:

Homeless operational groups

The ABS uses six groups for presenting estimates of people experiencing homelessness on Census night. These are:

- People living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
- People living in supported accommodation for the homeless
- People staying temporarily with other households
- People living in boarding houses
- People in other temporary lodgings
- People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings

ABS Census citation:

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Estimating Homelessness: Census*. ABS.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>.