



**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**

The unfair divide

REPORT SUMMARY

**Disadvantage faced
by young people
who are homeless**

A Mission Australia
Youth Survey Report



Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia, and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and **we recognise the importance of the young people who are our future leaders.**

A special thank you to the young people who participated in the 2023 Youth Survey. We appreciate the views they shared on current issues and personal concerns, as well as their responses to questions relating to housing and finance, education and employment, community and supports, and mental health and wellbeing. We would also like to thank Orygen for their valuable contribution to this report and the Mission Australia front line service staff who provided their expertise.

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A Message from our CEO

Welcome to Mission Australia's 2024 youth homelessness report. Every two years, Mission Australia delves into our most recent Youth Survey data to glean insights into the perspectives and experiences of young people aged 15-19 who have faced homelessness.

In a country as wealthy as Australia, it's unacceptable that any young person should lack a safe, stable home as they navigate their path to adulthood. Yet youth homelessness remains persistently high. Some receive effective assistance from community services and housing providers like Mission Australia, but funding does not stretch to cover all who seek help. This, coupled with a lack of affordable housing across Australia, means that all too often young people are forced to try to find refuge with friends, relatives or strangers, or to live in unpredictable, uncomfortable or unsafe settings.

To every young person who has been homeless but has taken the courageous step of asking for help, such as engaging with a housing and community service, you inspire us with your resilience, drive, grit and achievements.

This report sheds light on the stark realities faced by young people who experienced homelessness in the past year and compares this to their peers who had stable housing. This comparison reveals an unfair divide. Our 2023 Youth Survey revealed that close to one in 10 respondents experienced homelessness in the previous year. This underscores the pervasive nature of youth homelessness in our communities, where young people grapple with the challenges of education, employment and wellbeing without the security of a home.

Youth Survey respondents who were homeless in the past year were more likely than their peers with stable housing to suffer from a mental health condition, experience loneliness, struggle to fit in socially and face financial hardship. They were also seven times as likely to have strained or poor family relationships.

Homelessness can impact a young person's development and its effects are often long-lasting. More must be done to help them.

Although young people who have been homeless face challenges, our Youth Survey highlighted their resilience and determination, as they persist in pursuing education, extracurricular activities and building connections.

Empowering young people to start their journey to adulthood on a solid footing can transform lives. Skilled and caring frontline staff at Mission Australia and other organisations provide wrap-around support to young people and their families, helping them to find and keep safe housing and build brighter futures. It's a testament to the effectiveness of Mission Australia's approach that most young people who were at risk of homelessness remained living in their home and avoided homelessness after receiving our help.

When things go wrong for young people, it's clear the right supports and housing must be quickly put in place. However, amidst Australia's housing and homelessness emergency, the demand for safe, affordable housing far exceeds supply. Too many young people are slipping through the cracks of the system and are pushed into homelessness.

The housing needs of children and young people are met in few cases. Among young people who presented alone to a homelessness service last year, a small proportion of those who needed long-term housing received it, and only around half of those who needed short-term or emergency accommodation received it.

We and our sector colleagues cannot help everyone find a suitable home because of Australia's housing emergency – as we see more and more young people returning to homelessness after leaving our services. This would be avoided, simply by building more homes.

Ending youth homelessness is possible. It requires a comprehensive approach, including the concrete solutions outlined in this report such as investing in housing supply, ensuring adequate rental subsidies, implementing prevention measures and expanding youth housing options like Youth Foyers.

As one of Australia's largest community services and community housing providers, Mission Australia is ready to work with all levels of government, our sector, communities, philanthropists, donors, the public and private sector to end youth homelessness in Australia.

I urge everyone to engage with the solutions outlined in this report and join us in creating a future where every young person has a safe, secure place to call home and the support and care they need to thrive. The wellbeing and future success of our nation's young people depend on it.



Sharon Callister

Sharon Callister

Mission Australia CEO

When young people experience homelessness, it makes everything harder

We continue to see persistently high and rising rates of youth homelessness in Australia.

Young people are over-represented in the homeless population.



Across different areas of their life, **young people with experience of homelessness have more challenges to overcome** compared to their peers who have not faced homelessness.

Stable, affordable and suitable housing is essential for the development and wellbeing of young people. **The effects of homelessness are often long-lasting.**



We want to see an Australia where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. But currently, for young people, it is none of these.


I was forced out of my childhood home with my mum after my father made terrible financial decisions, this led to us becoming homeless... Female, 18-year-old, Victoria

Key findings

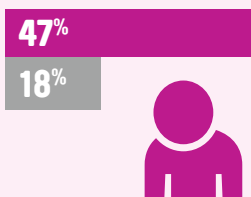
The Mission Australia Youth Survey seeks to understand the perspectives of young people aged 15-19 years regarding current issues, concerns and experiences.

The findings allow us to develop informed initiatives to address issues and advocate for the needs of young people and their families.

As highlighted below, young people who have experienced homelessness face extra challenges compared with those who have stable housing.

In 2023, close to
1 in 10

Youth Survey respondents
experienced homelessness
in the previous year

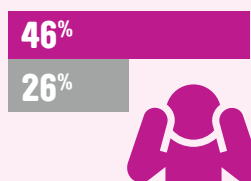
LONELINESS



Almost half experienced loneliness *all or most of the time* (47% compared to 18% with stable housing)

Feelings of loneliness were high for young people with experience of homelessness. Compared with their peers with stable housing, they were more likely to show pessimism about their future and report a lack control over their lives.

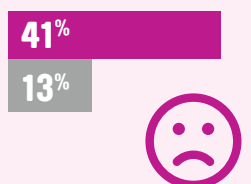
SOCIALISING



Close to half found it hard to fit in and socialise with other people (46% compared to 26%)



It can be harder for young people with experience of homelessness to fit in and socialise, undertake everyday activities like others do, and feel as though the community meets their needs.

MENTAL HEALTH



2 in 5 identified as having a mental health condition (41% compared to 13%)

Mental health issues were a significant challenge for young people with experience of homelessness. They rated their mental health and wellbeing lower, and psychological distress was more prevalent for them.

-  Experienced homelessness in the last year
-  Never experienced homelessness



2 in 5 sought financial help or could not afford essentials like food, housing, school or transport (42% compared to 10%)

Young people or their families with experience of homelessness were more likely to have faced monetary difficulties, like seeking financial help or not being able to afford the essentials.

1 in 3 changed schools at least twice in the past three years (34% compared to 14%)

A greater proportion of young people with experience of homelessness changed schools multiple times and faced more barriers to achieve their goals. Positively, most young people with experience of homelessness were engaged in study, but on average, satisfaction with their studies was lower.



Experience of strained or poor family relationships was seven times higher (34% compared to 5%)

Strained family relationships were more prevalent among young people experiencing homelessness. They were also less likely to turn to parents/guardians and other family members as sources of support.

Moving homes more often was much more likely (41% compared to 13%)

Young people who experienced homelessness in the last year were significantly more likely to have had the disruption of moving house at least twice in the last three years, and/or live in a home that does not sufficiently meet their needs.



There are significant disparities between young people who have experienced homelessness and those who have not, which exacerbate their vulnerability. **More must be done to help them.**

We know what works. However, without enough appropriate housing, we cannot help all these young people

Mission Australia has a positive impact in the lives of many young people. Most leave our services with an improved housing situation and outlook on life.

Through holistic, goal-based support to address the issues impacting their housing stability, most of the young people we helped made wellbeing improvements.

Overall, subjective wellbeing improved after they engaged with Mission Australia. They also improved in their level of satisfaction with their:

- standard of living
- future security
- feelings of safety
- personal relationships
- control over their life

SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

65.3 at service entry

74.0 at service exit

Pleasingly, the average wellbeing scores after leaving our services met the normal range for Australian adults (74 to 77).

Measured using Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), a validated measure of subjective wellbeing.

Many young people who Mission Australia assists have positive outcomes.



96% of young people at risk of homelessness maintained their housing, avoiding homelessness.

But for some, the housing emergency means that they did not achieve a safe, stable home.



77% of young people who were homeless at entry left our services with an insufficient outcome. Of those, close to seven in ten were in crisis accommodation, which is safe but only short-term. The remaining young people (31%) did not even have this; the inadequate housing and support system meant that they had to return to insecure arrangements (e.g. couch surfing) or rough sleeping.

Young people leaving services into anything other than a proper home should not be acceptable. But in the current housing emergency, we cannot help everyone find a suitable home.

Young people affected by homelessness across Australia are far too often unable to access the housing and support they need

Most efforts to reduce homelessness are crisis measures that target people who have already lost stable housing.

These can have positive outcomes, but they do not prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place.

But this is what can be done

Ending homelessness for young people will require a range of approaches to make sure that experiences of homelessness are rare, brief and non-recurring.

Much more investment is needed in measures that address the spectrum of its causes, from universal prevention responses, such as ensuring sufficient affordable housing, through to responses that address system failures and target young people and families in circumstances of high homelessness risk.

Responses need to be flexible and person-centred, reflecting the circumstances, needs and preferences of young people who are experiencing homelessness.



Policy recommendations

Our policy recommendations are made across six domains, encompassing a range of solutions needed to end youth homelessness:

1 PUT YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE OF HOMELESSNESS RESPONSES

- Recognise young people as a priority cohort in future national homelessness and housing strategies and funding agreements
- Integrate homelessness and other elements of the human services system at policy and service delivery levels
- Engage young people with lived experience of homelessness in the design and delivery of policy and programs

2 CREATE MORE LONG-TERM HOUSING PLUS SUPPORT

- Increase youth housing options in social housing and private rental, including:
 - Develop and maintain a national pool of at least 15,000 dedicated social housing youth tenancies
 - Construct ten 40-unit Youth Foyers over the next three years

3 IMPLEMENT UNIVERSAL HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION MEASURES

- Increase income support and improve rental subsidies, including:
 - Increase JobSeeker and Youth Allowance to \$80/day
 - Increase the maximum threshold of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 60% and review it together with other rental subsidies, including specific new measures to address the rental gap to remove disincentives for landlords to grow youth-specific housing
- Screen early for homelessness risk through schools
- End gender-based violence by fully funding the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children
- Ensure adequate funding for mental health care

Our policy recommendations are made across six domains, encompassing a range of solutions needed to end youth homelessness:

4

ADOPT FURTHER PREVENTION MEASURES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ELEVATED RISKS OF HOMELESSNESS

- Instigate a \$500 million Homelessness Prevention Transformation Fund, delivering targeted prevention programs and policy reform for groups of young people with elevated or immediate risk of homelessness
- Support at-risk families, through evidence-based early intervention support programs
- Keep at-risk young people engaged in education

5

ADOPT FURTHER PREVENTION MEASURES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AT IMMEDIATE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

- Rebuild family relationships and households if safe, including by expanding the Reconnect program
- Support youth tenancies through early intervention tenancy support programs

6

IMPLEMENT MORE CRISIS RESPONSES

- Implement more crisis support and accommodation responses for young people that are adequately-funded, person-centred and located according to demand

At Mission Australia, we believe every person across the country should have access to safe and secure housing

Here is some advice for different groups:

YOUNG PEOPLE

Seek help in ways that best suit you.

Know that there are people ready to help.

Get involved to improve youth housing and supports.

FAMILIES

Sometimes other members of the family are struggling just as much as the young person.

There are services that can support the whole family unit, helping them thrive in safe, stable housing.

SCHOOLS

Schools, teachers and other staff play a vital role in helping a young person at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Create the conditions where students feel safe to seek help and are supported when they do.

POLICYMAKERS

Develop and implement a framework of responses that spans permanent housing, homelessness prevention and crisis responses.

SERVICE WORKERS

See young people as the experts in their own lives.

Involve them in service delivery and design.

Think innovatively about how to support young people's housing needs.

BUSINESSES

Make workplaces safe for young people.

Provide them with support while they try to find housing.

MEDIA

Provide compassionate platforms for young people to share their stories.

Hold politicians and government to account for the role they play in ending youth homelessness in Australia.

RESEARCHERS

Involve young people in the design and evaluation of homelessness solutions.

Champion the voices of young people to understand their experiences and to identify gaps in the current system.

Reach out. It is the best thing that you can do in a situation where you are facing struggles with your housing situation, and it is better to seek help rather than keeping things to yourself as it is likely that this will do more harm than good.

Female, 17-year-old, New South Wales, Advice from a young person with experience of homelessness

Who is Mission Australia?

Mission Australia is a national Christian charity motivated by a shared vision of an Australia where everyone has a safe home and can thrive. Since 1859, we've been standing alongside people in need across Australia, offering real hope that has lasting impact.

Backed by our supporters, churches, partners and funders, we work together for the long-term wellbeing of anyone who needs us, reflecting our values of respect, compassion, integrity, perseverance and celebration.

We collaborate with people experiencing homelessness or disadvantage to tackle the root causes of their challenges through providing access to safe, affordable homes and innovative, evidence-based support services.

Every day we deliver homelessness crisis and prevention services, provide social and affordable housing, assist struggling families and children, address mental health issues, fight substance dependencies, support people with disability and much more.

Mission Australia believes a person's circumstances shouldn't define their future and that given the right support, everyone can reach their full potential.

That's why we stand together with Australians in need, until they can stand for themselves



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Contact us

For further information please contact us at:



youthsurvey@missionaustralia.com.au



missionaustralia.com.au

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