

youngpeople@communities.wa.gov.au

14 December 2017

Youth Strategy - Accommodation and Homelessness

Shelter WA is the peak body for affordable housing and homelessness in Western Australia. We have taken the opportunity to provide a brief submission which draws attention to issues related to *Youth Accommodation and Homelessness*.

- Every night in Australia, there are over 30,000 young people aged between 12 and 18 years who are experiencing homelessness.
- Recent research demonstrates that for every young person who becomes homeless there is an average net expenditure of \$15,000 per person per year on health and criminal justice services.
- If you become homeless you are more likely to become sick. You are more likely to use medical services. You are more likely to need help in hospital emergency rooms. You are more likely to be the victims of violence and assault.
- Yet the government spends less on the problem than it costs the economy.

Shelter WA has a long and active interest in issues relating to youth accommodation and homelessness. We look forward to further engagement with the development of the Youth Strategy as you consult more broadly with the community services sector.

If you have any queries regarding this letter and request please contact me at email comms@shelterwa.org.au or Tel: 9325 6660.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Hall
Manager Communications and Engagement

Youth Accommodation and Homelessness

Young people are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and experience significant rates of homelessness. Traumatic and abusive experiences in the home as a young person have been identified as one of the major pathways into longer term homelessness for adults.

It's common for people to think that all homeless people sleep on the streets. But rough sleeping, is only a small part of the problem of homelessness. Homelessness is about not having a home, which means having a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control your living space.

When a young person becomes homeless (either because they have to leave home or their whole family becomes homeless) they might stay temporarily with friends, family or people they don't know very well. This is often called 'couch surfing' which might sound harmless, but in reality you don't have your own space, privacy or security and it can also be dangerous.

Most young people who are homeless are living in 'severely overcrowded' accommodation and often that means having to crash on the couch or the floor, or sharing a bedroom.

Young people not couch surfing might find emergency accommodation in refuges, government-funded transitional housing, rooming houses, hostels or motels. Some young people who become homeless might have to sleep rough in squats, cars or public spaces for a period of time.

There are a range of causes of youth homelessness, while many may see homelessness as something caused by the person, or their family circumstances, there are also external factors that cause homelessness, we call these structural, or, systemic issues.

Structural and systemic causes of homelessness are beyond the control of a young person or their family.

Shelter WA is also aware that there are discreet populations of young people who are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness, for example:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- Young people with mental health issues
- young people from a Non English speaking background, and
- LGBTI young people, and young people in rural and regional areas.

Characteristics of young people presenting alone 2016–17

In 2016–17, 42,131 young people (aged 15–24) were alone when they approached a specialist homelessness agency. Some of the characteristics of young people presenting alone in 2016–17 were:

- Just over 2 in 5 (41%) lived alone: Around 15,600 young people lived alone at the time of approaching a specialist homelessness agency and a further 18% were living with other family.
- Around 3 in 5 were female: The majority of young people presenting alone were female (62%) and 78% were aged between 18 and 24, similar to 2015–16.
- Just over half had received services in the past: 52% of this group of young people had been assisted at some other time in the previous 5 years.
- One in 4 young people presenting alone were Indigenous (26%).

Three of the main vulnerabilities observed in the SHS client population are mental health issues, problematic drug and/or alcohol use, and domestic and family violence:

- Six in 10 (59%, or nearly 25,000 clients) were experiencing additional vulnerabilities.
- Thirty-nine per cent (or over 16,000) young people presenting alone reported a mental health issue and of these clients the majority had experienced issues with either domestic and family violence or problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- 1 in 10 (11%) reported both domestic and family violence and mental health issues.
- An additional 5% reported both mental health issues and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- A further 5% reported all three vulnerabilities (mental health issues, domestic and family violence, and problematic drug/alcohol use).

From data released 14.12.17 which can be viewed at:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2016-17/contents/client-groups-of-interest/young-people-presenting-alone>