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## *Data Survey*

## Introducing 'Journeys Home'

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### **Abstract**

*Homelessness, despite being a major social policy issue in Australia, is an area that is not well served by data. Most sorely lacking is any large-scale panel study that follows a broad sample of persons with recent experience of homelessness and unstable housing histories. In 2010, the Australian Government set about rectifying this deficiency when it commissioned the Melbourne Institute to undertake a new panel study, now known as 'Journeys Home'. This study draws its sample from the population of Centrelink income-support recipients, targeting persons identified in the administrative data as having recent experience of homelessness, as well as others with similar characteristics who may be vulnerable to housing difficulties in the future. This article summarises the design of this new study and reports on fieldwork outcomes from the first two waves of data collection.*

## **1. Introduction**

In December 2008, the Australian Government released a White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*. A feature of *The Road Home* was an explicit commitment to the development of a long-term research agenda, leading to the release, in November 2009, of the government's *National Homeless Research Agenda 2009–2013*. A key theme running through both documents is that policy development and service delivery in the area of homelessness are impeded by the absence of high-quality, reliable data, and more specifically, the absence of a large-scale longitudinal study.

This is not to say that longitudinal research into pathways into and out of homelessness has not been previously conducted in Australia (for a review, see Pinkney and Ewing 2006). Most of these earlier studies, however, employ samples that are either very small or restricted to specific sub-groups (such as users of a particular service). In response to this data deficiency, in late 2010 the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) commissioned the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research to design and implement a new longitudinal survey to track (albeit only over a short time span) a national sample of individuals exposed to high levels of housing insecurity that would employ much more rigorous sampling methods than previously used. Indeed, this study may be a world-first. While there has been a number of important studies in both the United States and the United Kingdom employing large samples, they all focus exclusively on relatively narrow population sub-groups, such as people who access publicly funded shelters (for example, Culhane and Kuhn 1998), homeless young people (Craig et al. 1996) or homeless people who are chronically ill (Sadowski et al. 2009). To our knowledge, there has been no large-scale longitudinal study that includes both people at risk of homelessness and people currently experiencing homelessness.

This article summarises the design of this new study, now known as *Journeys Home: A Longitudinal Study of Factors Affecting Housing Stability*, and reports on fieldwork outcomes from the first two waves of data collection.

## **2. Survey Purpose and Content**

## 2.1 *Aims*

*Journeys Home* was originally conceived as a tool for enabling research that would improve understanding of the pathways into and out of homelessness in Australia and the consequences of homelessness for long-term outcomes. More specifically, FaHCSIA, in its Statement of Requirement, set out a series of research questions that it hoped the data collected in this study would help address. These included:

- What characteristics are associated with people identified as homeless?
- What factors are associated with instability or stability in housing tenancy or occupancy?
- What are the characteristics that distinguish at-risk families that become homeless from those that do not?
- What are the protective factors, including familial and psychosocial, for staying out of homelessness?
- What are the key intervention points for preventing chronic homelessness?
- What are the triggers for any changes from being at risk of homelessness to becoming homeless, including movement between levels of homelessness?
- What are the factors that are important in the road out of homelessness?
- What are the risk factors for persistent homelessness?

## 2.2 *Questionnaire Content*

The Wave 1 survey instrument was designed with a view to identifying the housing circumstances of sample members, measuring other outcomes associated with housing difficulties and capturing information about factors that influence transitions between different housing situations.

The instrument covered the following broad topic areas:

- personal details: age, sex, Indigenous status, marital status, children, education and geographical mobility;
- employment and voluntary work: work history, current employment status and working arrangements, job search behaviour and use of employment services;
- housing and living arrangements: current housing and living standard situation, housing tenure and costs, accommodation standards, search for alternative accommodation and housing history;
- support services and networks: information about family, friends, acquaintances and the welfare services that respondents use and the level of support that respondents receive from these different sources;
- health and well-being: physical and mental health, usage of health services, substance use, life satisfaction and expectations for the future;
- family history while growing up: questions on who sample members lived with and who cared for them during adolescence, the home environment and experiences with institutional care;
- contact with the justice system: questions about periods spent in detention or prison and more ongoing contact with police and the legal system;
- exposure to violence: physical violence, sexual violence and threats of violence while growing up, since turning 18 years old and in the last 6 months; and
- financial situation: income sources and levels, debts, other indicators of financial stress and gambling behaviours.

In designing the instrument, and especially the section on housing and living arrangements, primacy was given to the objective of collecting data that would not constrain researchers to using any one specific definition of homelessness. Thus, data were collected on the type of accommodation and place in which people lived, the stability of those arrangements, the security of tenure and the quality of accommodation.

An important feature of the design was the inclusion, in the income section, of a question seeking the consent of respondents to link their survey responses to their Centrelink records.

Obtaining consent both obviates the need to have to ask any questions of respondents about their Centrelink payments and provides highly accurate information about respondents' benefits history (back to July 2002).

The instrument being used in waves 2, 3 and 4 differs from the Wave 1 instrument in its focus on changes in respondents' circumstances since the previous interview, which is expected to cover, on average, a 6 month period, and in the removal of all questions about the respondents' histories prior to the survey commencing.

### **3. Sample Design**

#### *3.1 Target Population*

Previous Australian studies of homelessness pathways have drawn their samples from small sub-groups of the homeless population (for example, users of a specific type of support service), often living within a relatively small geographical area. The approach taken for *Journeys Home* is quite different. Instead, the sample was drawn from the Research Evaluation Database (RED), developed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), which in turn contains records for all of Centrelink income-support customers since 1 July 2002. This has the distinct advantage in that it provides much wider coverage of the homeless population within Australia, given the strong likelihood that the large majority of homeless persons will be in receipt of a Centrelink income-support payment.<sup>1</sup>

The main problem with this approach is that a very large number of Australians is in receipt of Centrelink payments at any point in time (4.75 million as at 27 May 2011), most of whom are not currently homeless nor are at any great risk of experiencing homelessness in the near future. Since 1 January 2010, however, local Centrelink office staff have been required to flag in their database those customers that they determine to be either 'homeless' or 'at risk of homelessness', as defined by their Homelessness Indicator service delivery tool. This enables a sample of Centrelink customers to be drawn that we expect will consist of people who have had recent experience of homelessness. It also provides the opportunity to draw a sub-sample,

using statistical techniques, of persons that have not been flagged as homeless but nevertheless have characteristics similar to those that have been. These persons might be thought of as a group of people who are, in a statistical sense, vulnerable to homelessness.

A further issue with our approach is that the flagging process is not intended to be a tool for enumerating homeless people and nor is the flag applied to all homeless people equally. Most obviously, customers who both engage more frequently with Centrelink and are prepared to disclose details of their personal situation to Centrelink staff are more likely to be flagged. As a result, the non-flagged group will include some homeless persons.

Critical are the definitions of homelessness used by Centrelink. These are set out in Centrelink's *Homelessness Awareness Training Manual* and read as follows:

A person who is 'homeless' is one that:

- is without conventional accommodation (for example, sleeping rough, squatting or living in a car); or
- lives in, or moves frequently between, temporary accommodation arrangements (for example, with friends or extended family, emergency accommodation or youth refuges).

A person who is 'at risk' of homelessness is one that:

- lives medium-to-long term in a boarding house, caravan park or hotel, where accommodation is not covered by a lease;
- lives in accommodation which falls below the general community standards which surround health and well-being, such as access to personal amenities, security against threat, privacy and autonomy;
- is facing eviction; or
- lives in accommodation that is not of an appropriate standard, which may be detrimental to their physical and mental well-being or where they have no sense of belonging or connection (for example, Indigenous Australians living in crowded conditions or disconnected from their land, family or kin, spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices).

Taken at face value, the combination of these two definitions gives a population of homeless people that roughly accords with the cultural definition of homelessness put forward by

Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) and used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to enumerate the homeless population in the 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses.

The population scope was initially established as all Centrelink customers aged 15 years or older in receipt of any income-support payment at any time during the 28 day period prior to 27 May 2011. The 28 day window permits people who have recently moved off income support, be it permanently or temporarily, to be included in the population. This population contains 27,017 persons flagged as homeless and 15,319 persons flagged as at risk of homelessness.

Identification of the population of people who are vulnerable to homelessness was based on the probability of an individual being homeless or at risk of being homeless and involved the estimation of a logistic regression equation predicting the probability of being flagged as homeless or at risk of homelessness. The choice of predictor variables was largely driven by what was available within the administrative data (that is, the RED). The list was extensive, but included controls for: key demographic characteristics; the presence of medical conditions by type (with psychological and psychiatric problems specifically identified); housing tenure type; residential mobility; labour and business earnings; income-support arrangements and history (including current benefit type, the proportion of time on income support, the number of suspensions by Centrelink in the past year, whether ever been subject to an income management plan and whether ever been in receipt of the homeless rate of Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY or Disability Support Pension); the 'regional' homeless rate (based on Census data); whether an ex-offender (that is, previously has spent time in a prison); and a range of other indicators used by Centrelink to identify 'vulnerability' (such as drug or alcohol dependence, a lack of literacy and language skills and experiencing a recent traumatic relationship breakdown).

We then defined the 'vulnerable-to-homelessness' population to be Centrelink customers who had a predicted probability in the top 2 per cent of all income-support recipients who were not already flagged (as either homeless or at risk of homelessness) by Centrelink. This resulted in a group numbering 95,755 persons. Choice of a 2 per cent cut-off point was

largely arbitrary and reflected value judgements made by the research team (but in consultation with officials from FAHCSIA) about what the size of this population should be.

In summary, and as shown in Table 1, the population we sampled from comprises three sub-groups: (i) Centrelink customers flagged as ‘homeless’; (ii) Centrelink customers flagged as ‘at risk of homelessness’; and (iii) other Centrelink customers who we identify as being vulnerable to homelessness. Together, these three sub-groups number 138,091 persons.

### *3.2 Survey Population and Sample Clustering*

The high cost of face-to-face interviewing meant that the sample had to be clustered, with only those clusters in which homelessness was sufficiently common to ensure a viable interviewing workload were retained for selection.

Clusters were formed based on the geo-coded address and postcode information that were available in the RED. The key requirement was that clusters should not be larger than 10 km in radius in the major cities and 20 km in regional and rural centres. This resulted in the survey population being divided into 739 clusters. To be eligible for inclusion in the final sample, a cluster in a major city had to have at least 45 flagged persons, while a cluster in a regional or rural centre had to have at least 65 flagged persons. Only 200 of the 739 original clusters were thus eligible for inclusion in the final sample, with the eligible population of persons now numbering 110,616.

### *3.3 Sample Selection*

Given the available budget and expected response rates, the number of clusters included in the sample was set to 36. The sample was further stratified into eight groups: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, other major cities, one regional centre in the Northern Territory and all remaining locations. Within each strata, clusters were randomly selected with a probability proportional to their size, where size was measured as the sum of the proportions that the cluster contributes to the total of each of the three sub-populations (homeless, at risk and vulnerable) for that strata.



Individuals were then randomly selected from each of the three sub-groups in each cluster based on the following sampling rate:

$$r_{cg} = \left( \frac{n_c}{N_{cg}} \right) \left( \frac{\frac{N_{cg}}{N_g}}{\frac{N_{c1}}{N_1} + \frac{N_{c2}}{N_2} + \frac{N_{c3}}{N_3}} \right)$$

where  $r_{cg}$  is the sampling rate for group  $g$  (one of the three sub-populations, represented here by  $N_1, N_2$  and  $N_3$ ) within cluster  $c$ ,  $n_c$  is the number to be selected from the cluster across all three groups,  $N_{cg}$  is the total number of persons in the population in group  $g$  and cluster  $c$  and  $N_g$  is the total population of group  $g$  summed across all clusters. The target number of interviews in each of the three sub-groups was 500.

Almost 5000 cases were initially selected. However, not all selected cases were issued to field. Specifically, we deemed as out-of-scope any cases in our sample that were subsequently identified (by DEEWR officials using the Centrelink database) as: (i) in prison; (ii) an overseas customer; (iii) requiring an interpreter; (iv) having specifically indicated to Centrelink that they were not willing to participate in research studies; or (v) having a record marked as ‘sensitive’. This resulted in about 7 per cent of the original selections being treated as out-of-scope. Further cases were deemed out-of-scope as a result of moving to locations outside of the cluster boundaries prior to field work commencing. Additionally, concerns about the difficulties obtaining parental consent led to all interviewers being instructed not to attempt interviews with persons under the age of 18 years who were still living with their parents. Finally, we deliberately selected more cases than would be needed. These additional cases were only to be used if response rates in some areas turned out to be lower than expected. In total, and as shown in Table 1, 2992 cases were issued to field.

### 3.4 *Following Rules*

In tracking people over time, we only follow those persons that responded in Wave 1. In subsequent waves, the only Wave 1 respondents that will be excluded from locating efforts

will be those who are known to have died or who subsequently withdraw their consent to be contacted. The latter, however, are still counted as part of the eligible sample.

## **4. Survey Administration**

### *4.1 Survey Mode*

The principal mode of data collection is face-to-face interviews, using a questionnaire delivered by a computer tablet console. Telephone is used where that is the sample member's preferred mode or the person has moved to a location outside the reach of the interviewer network. Just 1.6 per cent ( $n = 26$ ) of completed interviews were undertaken by telephone in Wave 1. In subsequent waves, however, this proportion will be much higher, given sample member mobility. In Wave 2, for example, 8 per cent of completed interviews were undertaken by telephone.

### *4.2 Fieldwork Period and Frequency*

The field work for Wave 1 was conducted over a 12 week period from 1 September to 23 November 2011. There will be a further three waves, conducted approximately 6 months apart.

### *4.3 Pilot Testing*

The survey instruments and fieldwork procedures were pilot-tested and amended prior to the main survey commencing. Field work for the pilot test took place over a 5 week period in May 2011 and involved a sample drawn from six cluster areas: two in the Melbourne metropolitan area, two in the Sydney metropolitan area and two in regional Victoria.

### *4.4 Pre-Field Approach*

Approximately 2 weeks prior to the beginning of field work, all selected sample members were sent a letter (the Primary Approach Letter, or PAL) informing them of their selection into the study and encouraging them to participate. Accompanying the PAL was a brochure

that provided more information about the study, including how sample members came to be selected, the voluntary nature of participation and details on confidentiality.

#### 4.5 *Interviewers and Interviewer Support*

All interviews are conducted by professional interviewers employed by Roy Morgan Research, the organisation sub-contracted to undertake the field work. Interviewers and sample members are supported by a telephone support group (Team 1800), who staff project-specific free-call 1800 telephone numbers. During field work, these numbers are staffed from 8 am to 10 pm, 7 days per week.

#### 4.6 *Making Contact*

The initial set of contact details for all sample members in Wave 1 came from the information contained on the Centrelink customer database. This typically includes a home address (available for 89 per cent of selected sample members), a postal address (94 per cent) and a mobile phone number (80 per cent). It may also include a home (landline) phone number (just 12 per cent) and a telephone number for an alternative contact (10 per cent). The original sample file was provided by DEEWR to Roy Morgan Research on 29 July 2011, with a further sample update provided just prior to field work commencing and two more during field work.

In making initial contact with sample members, interviewers were expected to follow a set of protocols:

- Making at least three face-to-face attempts for respondents with known addresses, with each attempt made at different times of the day and week.
- If the sample member does not appear to be 'home' at the time of approach, leaving a calling card with interviewer details in a place they were likely to find it.
- When arriving at a residence and finding that the target respondent no longer lived there, making enquiries with current residents and neighbours about the sample member's whereabouts.

- Either after three face-to-face attempts or earlier if it becomes apparent that the respondent will not be found at the address provided, using other available contact details provided for the respondent, which may include a telephone or short message service (SMS) call to the target respondent or approaching an alternative contact.
- Collecting contact information from people who are most likely to know where the target respondent has moved to if they change address.
- Approaching local service providers to see if they can assist.

Interviewers were also encouraged to use their own initiative in trying to locate sample members. This would include, for example, making further call attempts with disconnected mobile phone numbers and pursuing searches using the Internet or White Pages telephone directory. If the sample member still could not be contacted, the case was then returned to office for Team 1800, where they would initiate further attempts at tracking.

#### 4.7 *Incentives*

All sample members are offered a \$40 incentive each time they agree to be interviewed. In the case of face-to-face interviews, the incentive is provided as cash and paid immediately after the sample member agrees to participation.

#### 4.8 *Interview Length*

The intent was that the average interview would take 50 minutes in Wave 1 and 40 minutes in subsequent waves. The actual average interview length in Wave 1 was almost 1 hour (59.7 minutes) and ranged from a low of 24.6 minutes to a high of 166.8 minutes. In contrast, in Wave 2, interviews only averaged 34 minutes.

#### 4.9 *Ethics Approval*

All survey protocols, instruments and materials were approved by the University of Melbourne's Behavioural and Social Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee. The approval process was a two-step process, with separate approval being obtained for the piloting stage and the main survey stage (which was conditional on reporting on the pilot test's outcomes).

## 5. Response and Sample Characteristics

### 5.1 *Wave 1 Response*

A summary of Wave 1 response outcomes is provided in Table 2. As previously noted, a total of 2992 cases was issued to field. Of these, 273 were subsequently determined to be out-of-scope, mainly because the sample members were known to have moved out of the designated survey interview area (that is, cluster) prior to field work commencing ( $n = 180$ ), but also because they were away for the entire survey period, were in prison or in another institution on more than a short-term basis, were young people still at home with their parents or had died. This gives a total in-scope sample of 2719 persons.

Interviews were successfully obtained from 1676 members of this in-scope group. There was also a small number of persons ( $n = 14$ ) who terminated the interview prior to completion. We decided to include six of the 14 terminations in the responding sample. These were all cases where the termination of the interview did not result in the sample member requesting not to be reapproached in the future and where the interview was not the result of English-language problems. Furthermore, in five of these six cases, a substantial amount of data was collected prior to the termination. The useable sample thus numbers 1682 cases, giving a response rate of 61.9 per cent.

Other Australian studies that sample from seriously disadvantaged populations typically report obtaining noticeably lower initial response rates. Examples include the Residents Outcomes Research Study, which reported successfully recruiting 53.5 per cent of its target sample (Thomson Goodall Associates 2001), the Longitudinal Survey of Reconnect Clients, which reported a 45.5 per cent response rate at Wave 1 (RPR Consulting 2003) and the On the Outside project, with a 46 per cent response rate (Johnson, Gronda and Coutts 2008).

Of the non-respondents, 35 per cent refused to participate and a further 13 per cent were still unresponsive at the end of the fieldwork period despite contact having been made. Together, these two groups ( $n = 507$ ) can be thought of as representing those persons that were

unwilling to participate. The remainder was mostly persons with whom no contact had been made.

## 5.2 *Sample Characteristics and Response Bias*

While the response rate is reasonably high, it is still a long way from 100 per cent, thus raising the possibility that non-respondents are systematically different from respondents. In Table 3, therefore, we report figures on the distribution of the responding sample by selected known sample member characteristics (as recorded in the RED)<sup>2</sup> and how they compare with equivalent distributions for both the attempted in-scope sample and the total sample initially selected (many of which were not actually used).

On most characteristics, there are few sizeable differences between the attempted in-scope sample and the original sample that was selected, suggesting that sample exclusions did not markedly affect the composition of the sample. There are, however, three exceptions. First, Indigenous persons were more likely to be excluded from the attempted sample than non-Indigenous persons. This might reflect greater mobility on the part of Indigenous persons. However, it also reflects our differential sampling method, which began with the assumption that areas with high concentrations of Indigenous persons would have lower rates of response. This proved not to be true, and as a result, relatively more cases in these areas did not need to be issued to field. Second, ex-offenders were relatively more likely to be omitted or excluded, reflecting both their higher rate of mobility and their relatively greater likelihood of indicating a preference not to be involved in research. Third, and entirely as expected given our restriction on interviewing persons who move away from the selected clusters, persons who had a recent history of frequently changing address were more likely to have been excluded. Statistically significant differences were also found with respect to sex, country of birth, benefit type and time on income support, but in all of these instances we would argue that the size of the difference is too small to suggest it will make any practical difference to any analysis of the data.

More pervasive and marked differences occur when comparing the responding sample with the in-scope sample, suggestive of response bias. This can be seen by looking at the differences across groups in the response rate, reported in the final column of Table 3. Thus,

and slightly unexpectedly, response rates were lowest among the ‘vulnerable’ group (57 per cent) and highest among persons flagged as being at risk of homelessness (67 per cent). Far less surprising was that men, while still representing the largest fraction of the responding sample, were less likely to respond than women (57 per cent versus 68 per cent). This is a result common to many surveys. Other significant differences in response were uncovered with respect to: age (both the very young—under 21 years—and older persons—45–64 years—were most likely to respond; the presence of dependant children (persons with children had much higher response rates than those without); the proportion of time spent on income support (with response rates mostly rising with time on income support); and whether an ex-offender (with ex-offenders being less likely to respond). Differences with respect to Indigenous status, country of birth, marital status, whether a respondent had a recorded history of psychological problems and recent residential mobility were all statistically insignificant.

Overall, and despite the presence of a number of statistically significant differences, the characteristics of the responding sample mostly do not seem to be so different from the initial selected sample as to suggest response bias is a major problem that is either non-ignorable or cannot be dealt with by data-users.

### 5.3 *Data Linkage*

As previously mentioned, a key feature of the design of the study is the potential to link survey respondents’ data to their Centrelink administrative data records, which provides accurate information about respondents’ income-support history. Over 93 per cent of respondents agreed to their Centrelink information being used for research purposes.

### 5.4 *Wave 2 Response*

A longitudinal study requires its sample members to participate on multiple occasions. In the *Journeys Home* study, we are seeking interviews from all Wave 1 respondents on three further occasions. At the time of writing, field work for Wave 2 had just been completed. From a starting sample of 1682 persons, 1525 interviews were obtained (91 per cent response rate). Among the non-respondents were 22 persons defined as out-of-scope (deceased, moved

overseas or in prison), two terminated interviews that was unable to be rescheduled, three persons who were too ill to participate, 34 refusals, 54 persons who despite being located were unable to be successfully contacted and 42 persons who could not be located.

## **6. Want to Know More?**

Further information about this study, including copies of paper versions of the survey scripts, can be found at the survey's website: <[http://melbourneinstitute.com/journeys\\_home/](http://melbourneinstitute.com/journeys_home/)>. The intent also is that a suitably confidentialised version of the unit record data file will be made available for research purposes. Details of how to obtain these data will be made available on the study's website in due course.

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**Table 1 The Evolution of the Sample (by Sub-Sample)**

	<i>Sub-sample (% distribution)</i>			<i>Total (N)</i>
	<i>Flagged as homeless</i>	<i>Flagged as at risk of homelessness</i>	<i>Vulnerable</i>	
Starting population	19.6	11.1	69.3	138,091
Population after clustering	20.5	11.9	67.7	110,616
Sample selected	35.0	33.3	31.7	4,913
Sample issued	35.0	33.9	31.1	2,992
Final in-scope sample	34.9	34.5	30.6	2,719

**Table 2 Wave 1 Call Outcomes**

<i>Sample outcome</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Total sample issued	2992	
Less out-of-scope	273	
Total in-scope sample	2719	100.0
Completed interviews	1676	61.6
Terminations	14	0.5
Incapable	22	0.8
Refusal	369	13.7
Other non-responses		
Contact made	138	5.1
Non-contact and all calls made	316	11.6
Moved to unknown address	184	6.8

**Table 3 Population and Sample Member Characteristics (%)**

<i>Characteristic<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Selected sample<sup>b</sup> (n = 4913)</i>	<i>Attempted in-scope sample (n = 2719)</i>	<i>Respondents (n = 1682)</i>	<i>Response rate<sup>c</sup></i>
<b>Homelessness indicator</b>				
Homeless	35.0	34.9	34.5	61.1
At risk	33.3	34.5	37.3	66.9
Vulnerable	31.7	30.6	28.2	57.1
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	60.2	58.8	54.6	57.4
Female	39.8	41.2	45.4	68.2
<b>Age group (years)</b>				
15–17	10.8	11.4	12.6	68.4
18–20	14.1	14.3	14.9	64.4
21–24	12.6	12.8	12.1	58.2
25–34	23.6	23.0	21.6	58.1
35–44	21.0	20.7	19.7	59.1
45–54	13.0	12.8	14.0	67.3
55–64	4.0	4.1	4.5	67.6
>65	1.0	0.9	0.7	48.0
<b>Indigenous status</b>				
Non-Indigenous	77.8	82.3	82.8	62.2
Indigenous	22.3	17.7	17.2	60.1
<b>Country of birth</b>				
Australia	86.2	87.1	87.3	62.0
English-speaking country	5.4	5.8	6.1	65.6
Non-English-speaking country	8.4	7.2	6.6	56.9
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	93.0	93.6	93.0	61.5
Married	1.0	0.7	0.7	60.0
De facto	5.4	5.1	5.7	69.6
Unknown	0.6	0.6	0.5	56.3
<b>Has dependent children</b>				
No	86.7	86.2	83.6	60.0
Yes	13.3	13.8	16.4	73.4
<b>Benefit type</b>				
Not on income support	3.3	2.7	2.6	58.1
Student	5.4	5.8	6.2	66.2
Youth Allowance (other)	16.3	16.8	18.0	65.9
New Start Allowance	43.0	42.4	38.7	56.5
Disability Support Pension	21.8	21.6	22.1	63.5
Parenting payment	7.4	8.2	10.0	75.7
Other	2.7	2.6	2.5	60.0
<b>Proportion of time on income support (since age 16 years)</b>				

<i>Characteristic<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Selected sample<sup>b</sup> (n = 4913)</i>	<i>Attempted in-scope sample (n = 2719)</i>	<i>Respondents (n = 1682)</i>	<i>Response rate<sup>c</sup></i>
Under age 16 years	0.6	0.5	0.5	61.5
<0.1	4.4	4.0	2.6	39.4
0.10–0.24	7.3	7.7	7.8	63.0
0.25–0.49	16.2	16.6	14.9	55.8
0.5–0.74	22.6	21.0	19.9	58.4
0.75–0.89	18.8	18.8	19.7	64.8
0.9–0.99	26.4	27.7	30.5	68.2
1.0	3.9	3.8	4.2	68.3
Ex-offender				
No	77.8	80.6	82.5	63.3
Yes	22.2	19.4	17.5	56.0
Ever recorded psychological/psychiatric problem				
No	61.4	60.5	60.1	61.4
Yes	38.7	39.5	40.0	62.5
Number of recorded changes in home address in past year				
0	17.7	18.8	18.2	59.9
1	27.4	28.0	28.2	62.4
2	23.8	24.4	24.5	62.2
>3	31.2	28.9	29.1	62.3

*Notes:* (a) All characteristics are as recorded in the Research Evaluation Database on 27 May 2011.

(b) Excludes any persons known to have died prior to 27 May 2011.

(c) Calculated as the number of respondents divided by the number of in-scope sample members.

## Endnotes

1. Unfortunately, there are no available data indicating how close to complete the coverage is. We do know, however, that among users of government-funded specialist homelessness services (who represent 27 per cent of the homeless population in the revised Australian Bureau of Statistics' homeless count (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)), somewhere between 83 and 85 per cent relied on government payment as their *main* source of income in 2009–10 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011).
2. The characteristics recorded in the RED will not always accord with those obtained from survey responses. This reflects both differences in timing of data collection and in reporting. For example, many more respondents report living in a de facto relationship (15.6 per cent) than is recorded as such in RED (just 5.7 per cent).



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