



Journeys Home: Longitudinal Study of Factors Affecting Housing Stability

Fact Sheet

What is *Journeys Home*?

Journeys Home is a research study investigating homelessness and housing insecurity over a three year period. It aims to improve the understanding of, and policy response to, the diverse social, economic and personal factors relating to homelessness and the risk of becoming homeless. *Journeys Home* provides nationally representative quantitative and longitudinal data capturing the pathways into and out of homelessness.

Journeys Home combines de-identified longitudinal information held by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and a survey of approximately 1,600 income support recipients across Australia who have been flagged as homeless or at risk of homelessness. A third group, identified as vulnerable to homelessness, is also included. Participants were selected randomly from DHS records and invited to take part in the survey on the understanding that participation is entirely voluntary. The survey has been designed to ensure participants' privacy.

The survey comprises six waves, each six months apart, undertaken between September 2011 and May 2014.

Research reports exploring the data from Waves 1 to 4 are available via the **Department of Social Services** and **Melbourne Institute** websites. The Wave 5 research report will be available shortly.

What is the study about?

Journeys Home has collected information on participants':

- personal circumstances—physical and mental health; employment, education and training and significant life events
- family circumstances—family status and living arrangements; support networks and experiences of domestic and family violence
- housing circumstances—housing situation and the periods, type, and reasons for homelessness
- use of formal and informal support services.

What are some of the research questions guiding the study?

- What are the characteristics of people identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness and what characteristics distinguish people who become homeless from those who do not?
- What lengths of time have people experienced homelessness?
- What are the factors associated with housing instability/stability?
- What are some key intervention points to prevent homelessness and chronic homelessness? What are the factors that are important in the road out of homelessness?

How will the findings be used?

The data collected provides robust information on the experience and longer term impacts of homelessness, the demographics of the homeless and those at risk, as well as effective means of service provision. The evidence is assisting the Australian Government to target investments in homelessness support and inform policy development. Other government bodies, non-government organisations and academics can access a confidentialised version of the data.

How is the survey administered?

The Australian Government Department of Social Services administers and guides the project. The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (MI) at the University of Melbourne designs and manages the study. MI has subcontracted Roy Morgan Research to undertake the fieldwork.

Waves 1 – 5 Research Reports

Characteristics

The profile of *Journeys Home* respondents is very different to that of the general population. They are on average younger, more likely to be single, have no dependent children, be Australian born and be more likely to identify as Indigenous Australians than in the general population. *Journeys Home* respondents have much lower levels of education on average, the majority are not in the labour force, and the incidence of mental illness is higher than that of the general population with smoking and drinking at risky levels. Drug use is more widespread.

Experiences of homelessness

A key finding is that respondents' housing situation appears to vary considerably over time. Six months prior to the first survey, 50 per cent of the *Journeys Home* participants had been homeless and 94 per cent reported an experience of homelessness at some stage in their lives.

During the survey period, many respondents have cycled in and out of homelessness, particularly those with a diagnosed mental illness, and spent considerable amounts of time in unstable housing situations. Almost half had spent at least a year of homelessness in total over their lifetimes with 23 per cent reporting four or more years homeless.

Half the participants first experienced homelessness under the age of 18 years and almost three quarters under the age of 25 years. Family breakdown or conflict was the most common reason for first becoming homeless. A relatively low rate of respondents reported mental illness and substance abuse as major factors leading to their homelessness.

The proportion of participants who were homeless declined from 27 per cent in Wave 1 to 19 per cent in Wave 5 while the proportion of people in stable housing rose from 47 per cent to 57.9 per cent for the same period. Males were more likely to experience homelessness than females, and for longer durations.

Factors associated with persistent homelessness

Indications are that those who first experience homelessness at a young age are more likely to experience persistent homelessness. Three quarters of homelessness episodes experienced by respondents were greater than 6 months. Males (both relatively young and relatively old), migrants and Indigenous Australians experienced longer periods of homelessness on average.

Those exposed to homelessness for the longest periods were more likely to have had, in comparison to those with shorter homeless duration, adverse childhood experiences such as exposure to violence, time in state care or child protection systems and experience of poverty in childhood. They are also more likely to have diagnosed physical and mental health conditions and problematic substance use. Poor health appears more often to be a consequence rather than a cause of homelessness.

Those never homeless, or for short periods only, tend to have stronger family relationships, fewer diagnosed health conditions and less substance use.

Special Topics

Journeys Home Research Reports No. 4 and 5 each explore in more depth five key issues affecting people who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

The topics examined in Report No. 4 include duration of homelessness, diagnosed mental illness and homelessness, psychological distress and homelessness, substance use and homelessness and violence.

Report No. 5 has examined homelessness and employment, health and homelessness, social networks and social support, initiation to substance use and diet and food security.

Want to Know More?

Further information can be found at:

<http://dss.gov.au> via the **Housing Support programmes and services** page

http://melbourneinstitute.com/journeys_home/