

# Homelessness and domestic and family violence

STATE OF RESPONSE REPORT 2024



# Violence the leading cause of homelessness for women

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women, with 45% of all women and girls seeking homelessness assistance identifying family and domestic violence as a cause.

Housing insecurity and homelessness also play a critical role in enabling, or preventing, women achieving safety. Lack of access to safe housing creates an enormous hurdle that prevents many women from escaping violence.

If they do leave a violent home into homelessness, women often experience further violence.

The risks, housing insecurity and poverty women experience after leaving violence often result in them returning to a violent partner. (2)

These risks and pressures were highlighted in the 2016 Personal Safety Survey, which revealed that an estimated 275,000 Australian women suffered physical and/or sexual violence from their current partner. Of those experiencing violence, 90,000 women wanted to separate but were unable to do so, with more than 20,000 saying the lack of money or financial support was the main reason they were unable to leave their violent partner.

Over 81,000 women did leave but then returned, with more than 13,000 saying a lack of money or having nowhere to go was the reason they returned, and a further 8,300 saying that they returned because of concern for their own or children’s safety or well-being.

<b>Reasons identified for seeking homelessness assistance by women and girls (1)</b>		
Reasons	Number presenting to homelessness services	Percentage of all women and girls presenting
Family and domestic violence	73,287	45%
Financial difficulties	62,571	39%
Housing crisis	58,316	36%
Housing affordability stress	52,305	32%
Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions	39,495	24%

(1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report, 2022-23, Table: Clients 21  
 (2) Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety, Australia, 2016, Table 22.1

# Housing pathways identified as critical in the National Plan to End Violence

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 recognised the critical link between access to safe, affordable and accessible housing and the achievement of the Government’s ambition to end violence against women and children in a decade.

Action 10 in the the First Action Plan (2023-2027) committed the Australian, and state and territory governments to ‘Improve access to short-term, medium and long-term housing for women and children experiencing violence, including those living in institutional settings, and support women to stay in their own homes when they choose to do so.’



The Action Plan indicated that the Australian, state and territory governments would work together to improve access to safe and secure housing for victim-survivors escaping violence. This process of working together in relation to housing to develop both a 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan and a new five-year National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is being overseen by the Housing and Homelessness Ministerial Council.

Both the new Agreement and the National Housing and Homelessness Plan are expected to be released over the coming months. They represent an important opportunity to deliver the housing and support pathways needed to enable women and children to build lives free of violence.

This Homelessness and domestic and family violence - state of response report examines progress towards the achievement of pathways to safe housing for women and children, and identifies the actions needed to achieve safety for women experiencing violence and at risk of homelessness.

Image from page 58 of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032

# More women and children becoming homeless after fleeing violence

The latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reveals that a growing number of women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence and sought assistance from homelessness services, are sleeping rough or in cars, or couch surfing after receiving homelessness support. (3)

## National data

In 2022-23, homelessness services assisted 58,589 women and 37,825 children who had experienced domestic and family violence.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 27,975 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

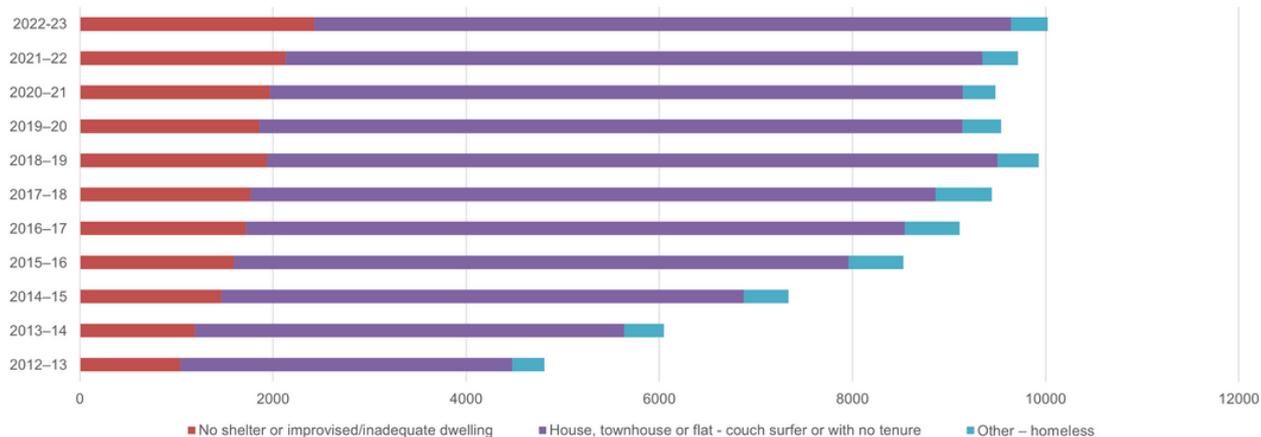
- 2,428 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 17,954 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 7,214 were couch surfing
- 379 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness have increased. From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car at the end of support has more than doubled, from 1,041 to 2,428
- the number of women and children couch surfing at the end of support has also more than doubled from 3,465 to 7,214

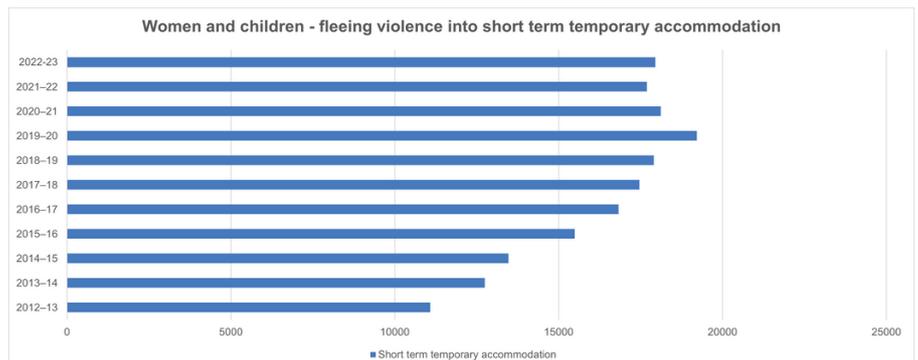
In the most recent period, from 2020-21 to 2022-23 the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support increased by 23%.

Women and children - fleeing violence into homelessness



Nationally, investment into short-term accommodation has increased over the decade, peaking during Covid lockdowns.

Women and children - fleeing violence into short term temporary accommodation



(3) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Data cubes: SHSC housing situation 2022-23 and SHSC housing situation (historical)

# New South Wales data

In 2022-23, 13,643 women and 10,773 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in NSW.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 7,770 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

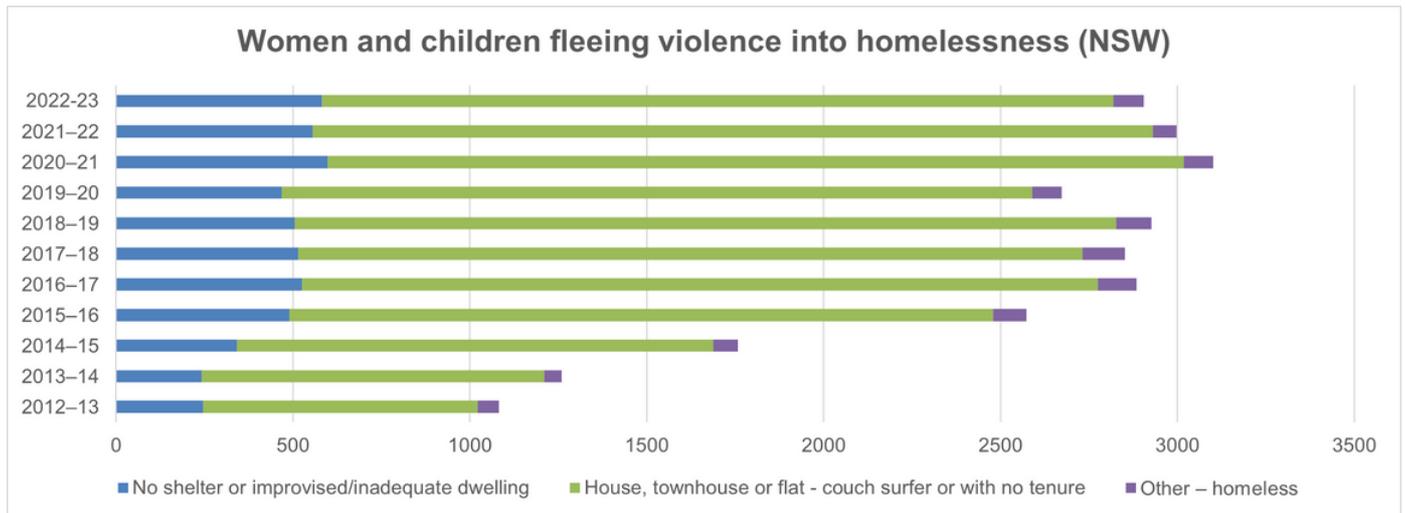
- 581 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 4,865 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 2,238 were couch surfing
- 86 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness in NSW have increased.

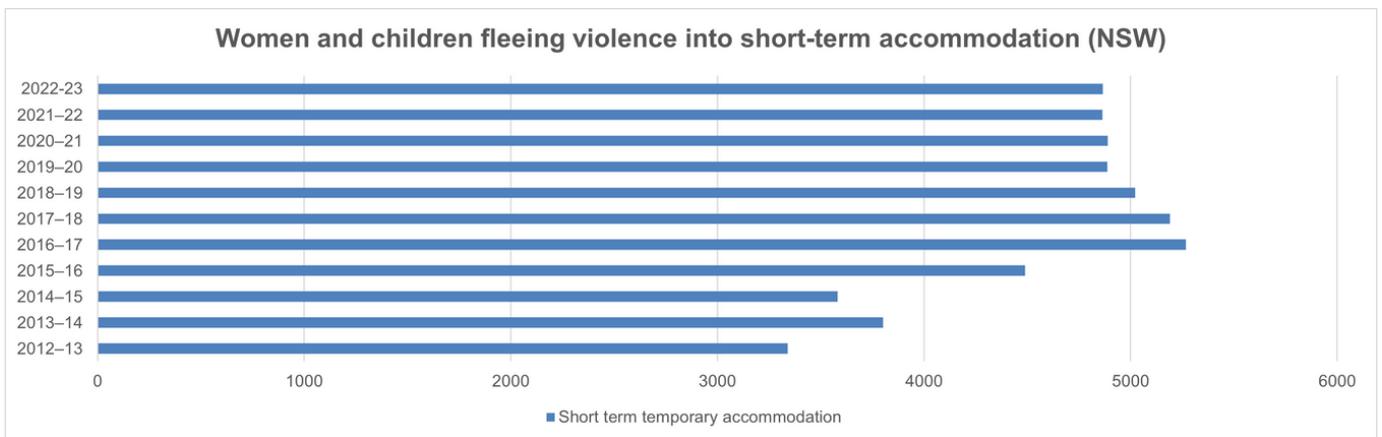
From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car has more than doubled, from 245 to 581, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing has almost tripled from 777 to 2,238.

In the past year from 2021-22 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support increased by 4%.



In NSW, investment into short-term accommodation has increased over the decade.



# Victorian data

In 2022-23, 23,415 women and 13,294 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in Victoria.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 8,509 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

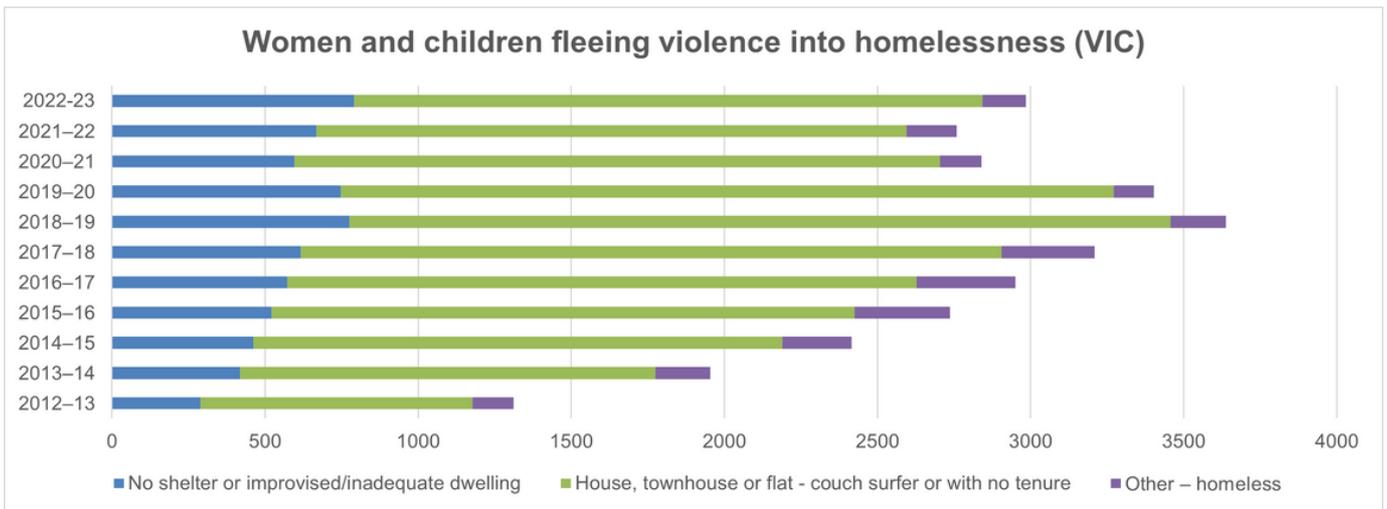
- 791 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 5,525 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 2,051 were couch surfing
- 142 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness have increased in Victoria.

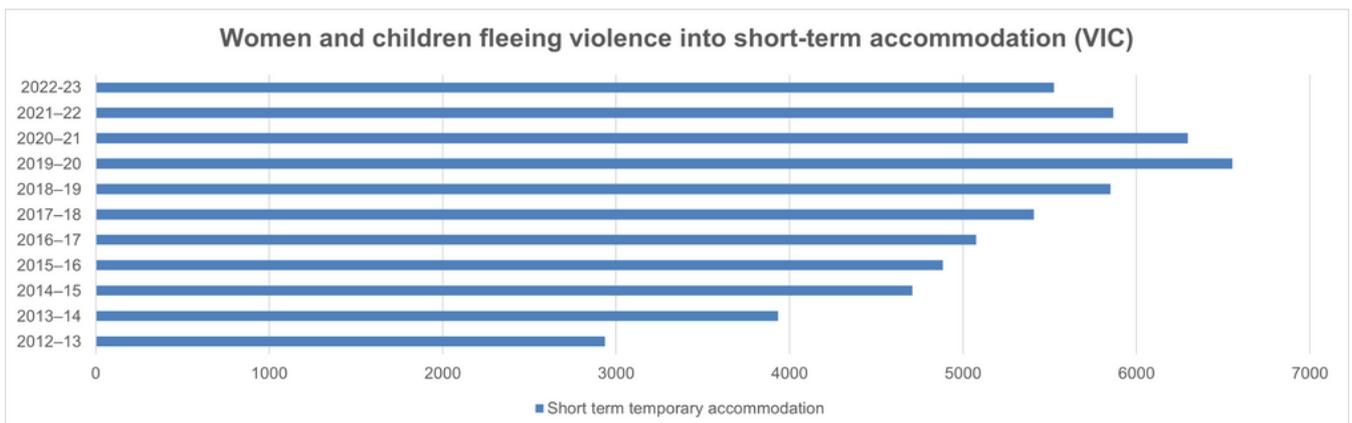
From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car has almost tripled, from 288 to 791, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing has more than doubled from 890 to 2,051.

Over the past two years, from 2020-21 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support has increased by 33%.



In Victoria, investment into short-term accommodation has increased over the decade, but cost increases for accommodation, and declining investment into crisis accommodation since Covid means less women and children have temporary accommodation.



# Queensland data

In 2022-23, 7,884 women and 5,596 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in Queensland.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 5,585 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

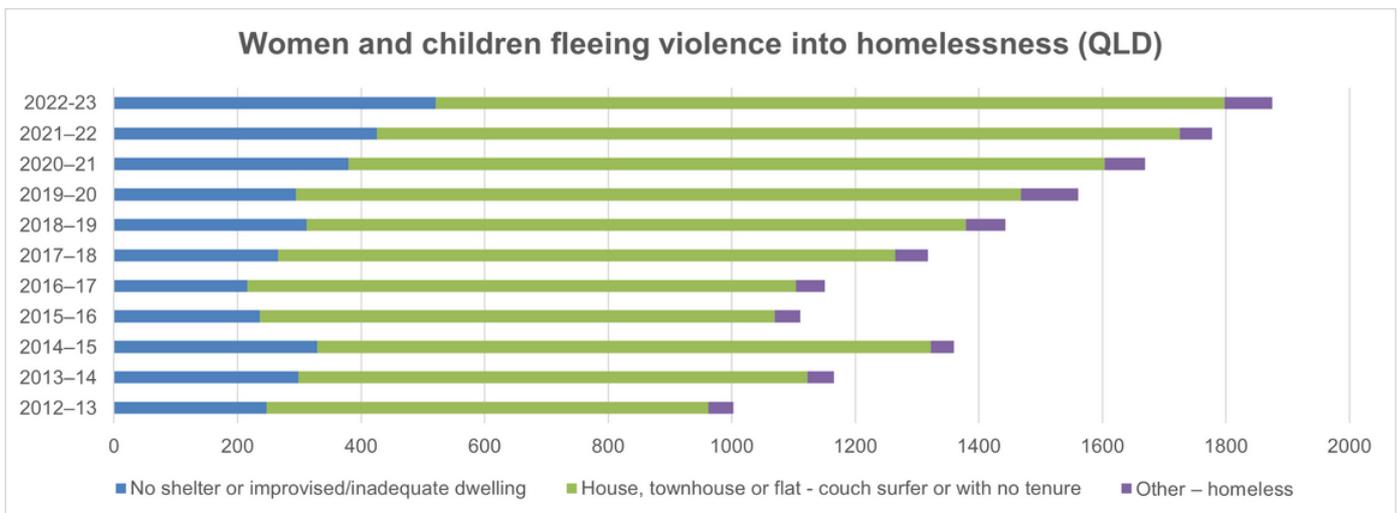
- 521 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 3,710 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 562 were couch surfing
- 36 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness in QLD have increased. From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

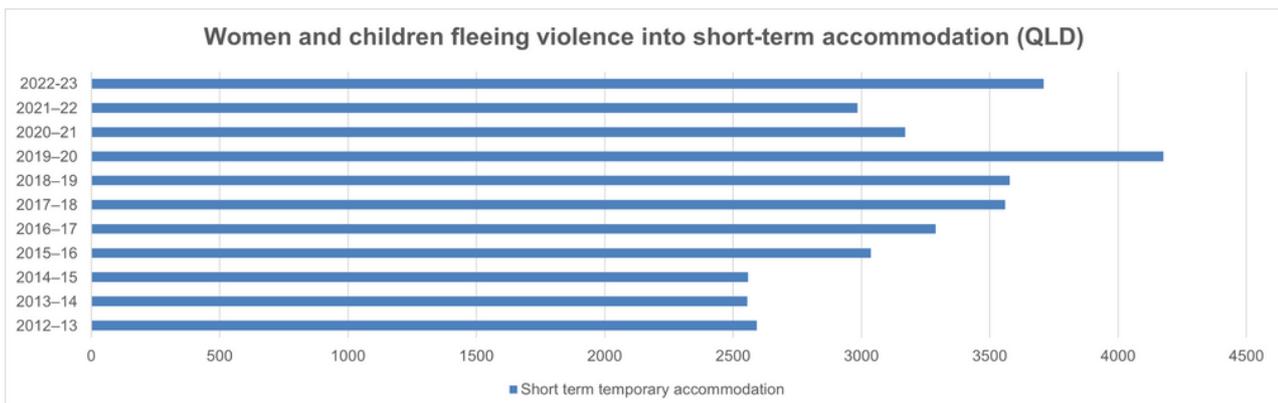
- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car has more than doubled, from 247 to 521, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing has increased by 79% from 715 to 1,277.

Queensland has seen particularly sharp increases in women and children fleeing violence into rough sleeping over the past three years, with 77% more women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support in 2022-23 compared to 2019-20.

Housing situation after support	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
No shelter or improvised/ inadequate dwelling	295	380	426	521



In Queensland, investment into short-term accommodation has increased over the decade with some fluctuations.



# Western Australian data

In 2022-23, 6,365 women and 4,399 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in Western Australia.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 3,087 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

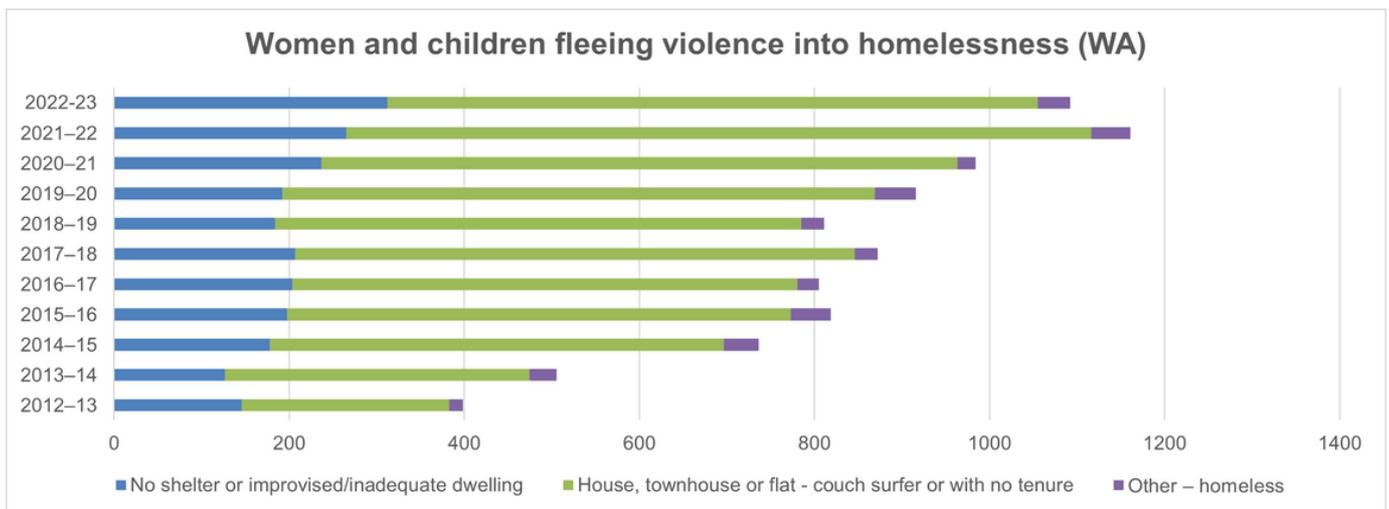
- 312 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 1,995 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 743 were couch surfing
- 37 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness in WA have increased.

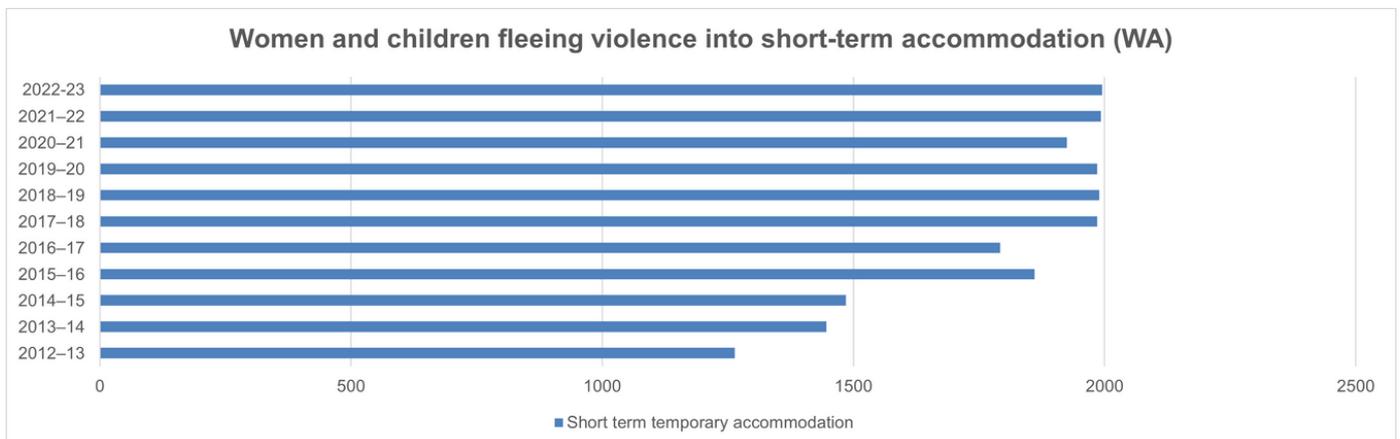
From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car has more than doubled, from 146 to 312, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing has more than tripled from 237 to 743.

Over the past two years, from 2020-21 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support has increased by 32%.



In WA, the numbers of women and children in short-term accommodation has increased over the decade, but then been relatively stable over the past six years.



# South Australian data

In 2022-23, 3,435 women and 1,563 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in South Australia.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 1,141 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

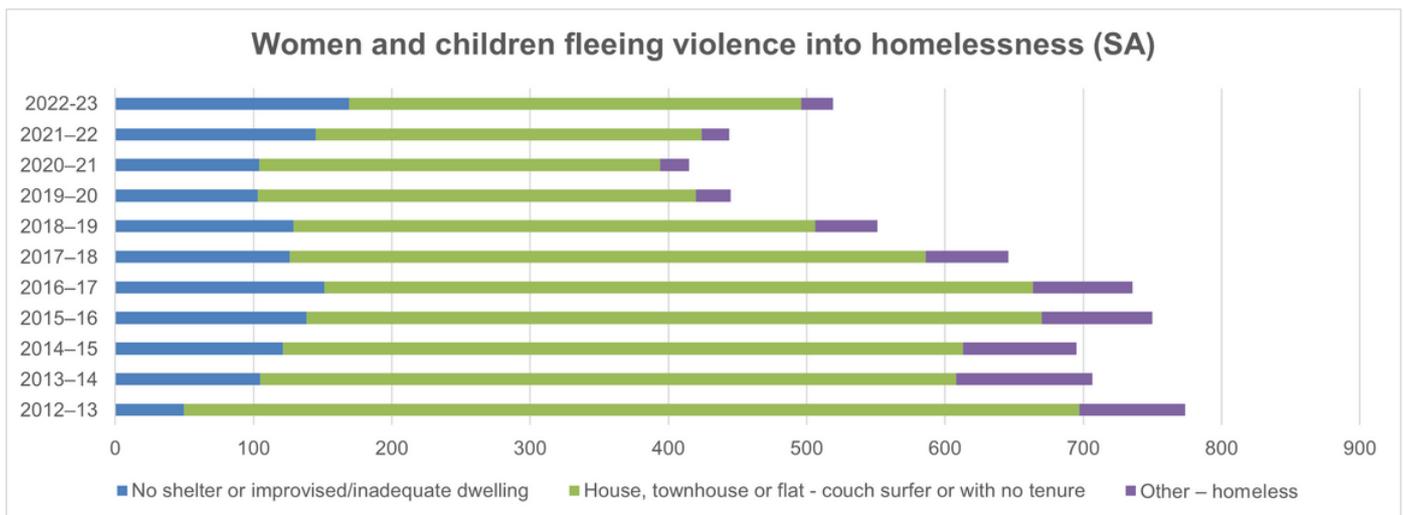
- 169 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 622 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 327 were couch surfing
- 23 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade, exits into rough sleeping for women and children in SA have increased, even as exits into homelessness overall have decreased.

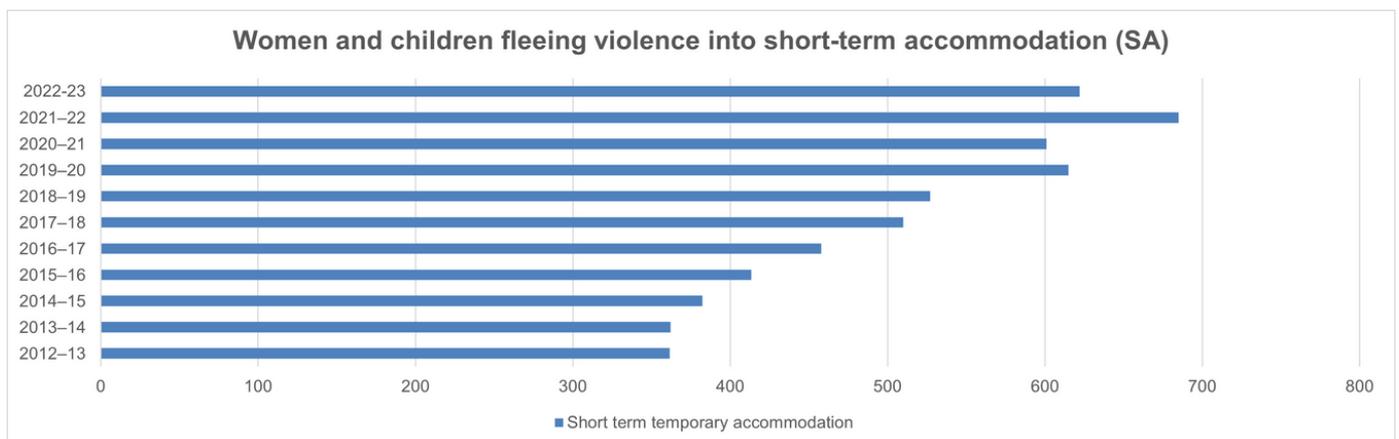
From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car has more than tripled, from 50 to 169, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing has halved from 647 to 327.

Over the past two years, from 2020-21 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support has increased by 63%.



In SA, the numbers of women and children in short-term accommodation has increased over the decade, but decreased in the past year.



# Tasmanian data

In 2022-23, 1,067 women and 517 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in Tasmania.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 761 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

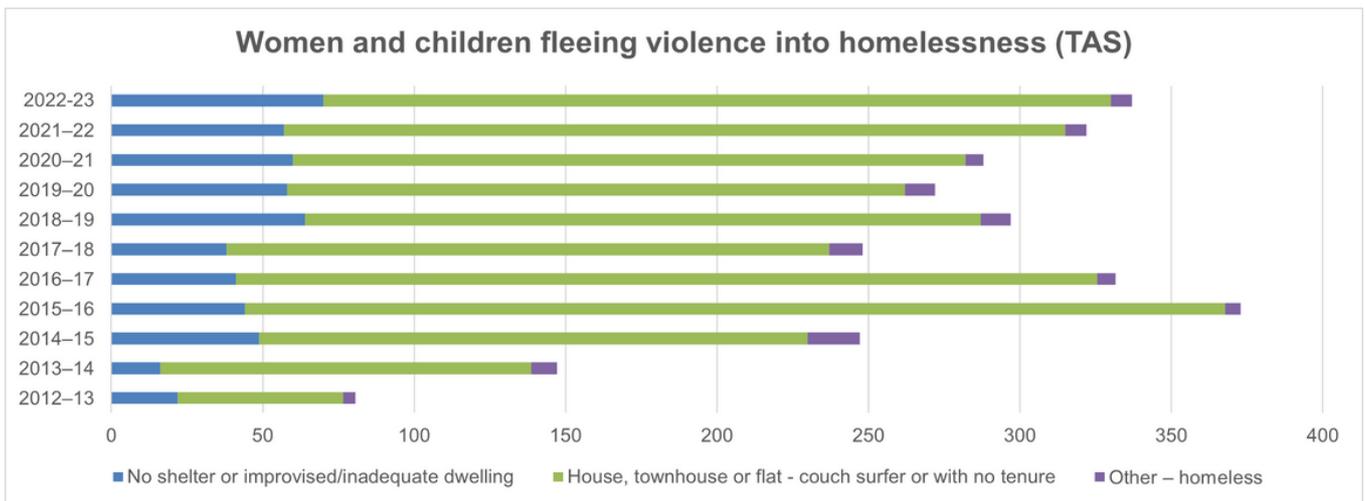
- 70 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 424 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 260 were couch surfing
- 7 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness have increased.

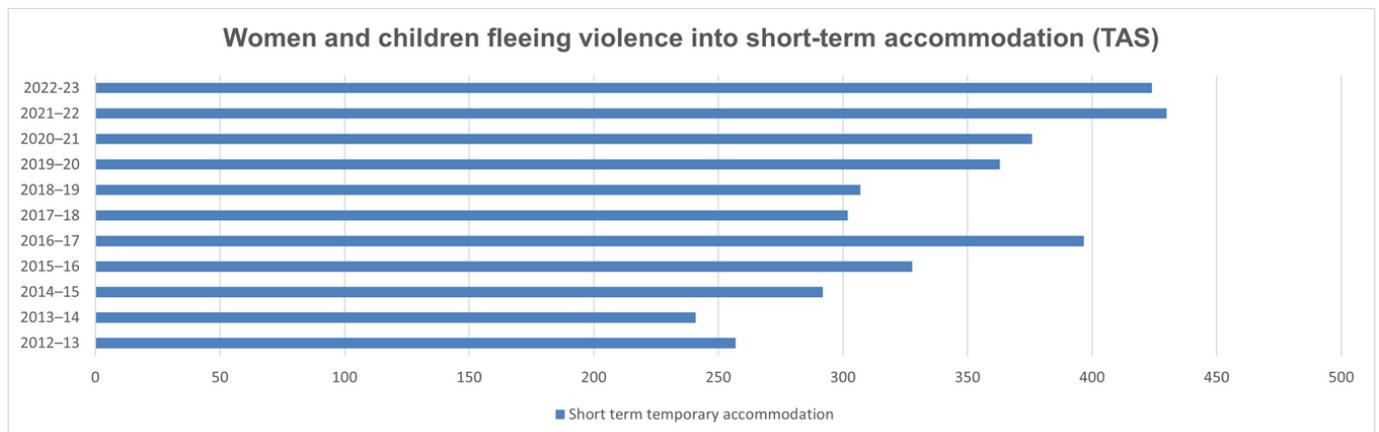
From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car has more than tripled, from 21 to 70, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing has more than quadrupled from 55 to 260.

In the past year, from 2021-22 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support has increased by 22%.



In Tasmania, the numbers of women and children in short-term accommodation has increased over the decade, but decreased in the past year.



# Australian Capital Territory data

In 2022-23, 848 women and 491 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in the ACT.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 569 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

Of these:

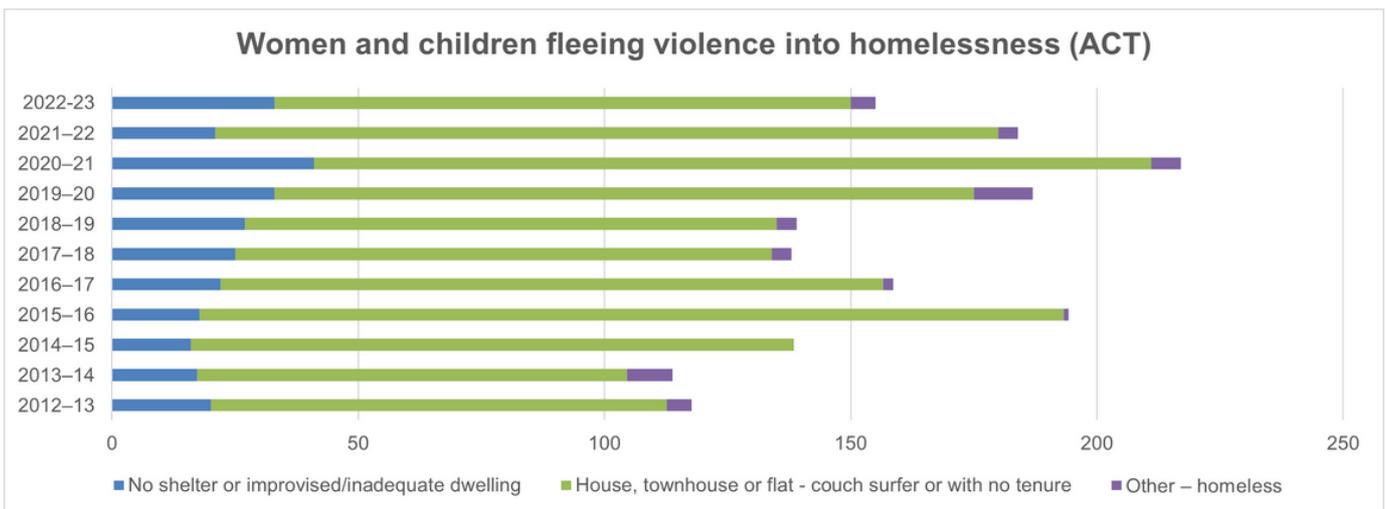
- 33 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 414 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 117 were couch surfing
- 5 were in other forms of homelessness

Over the past decade exits into homelessness in the ACT have increased, though overall exits into homelessness have decreased in the past two years.

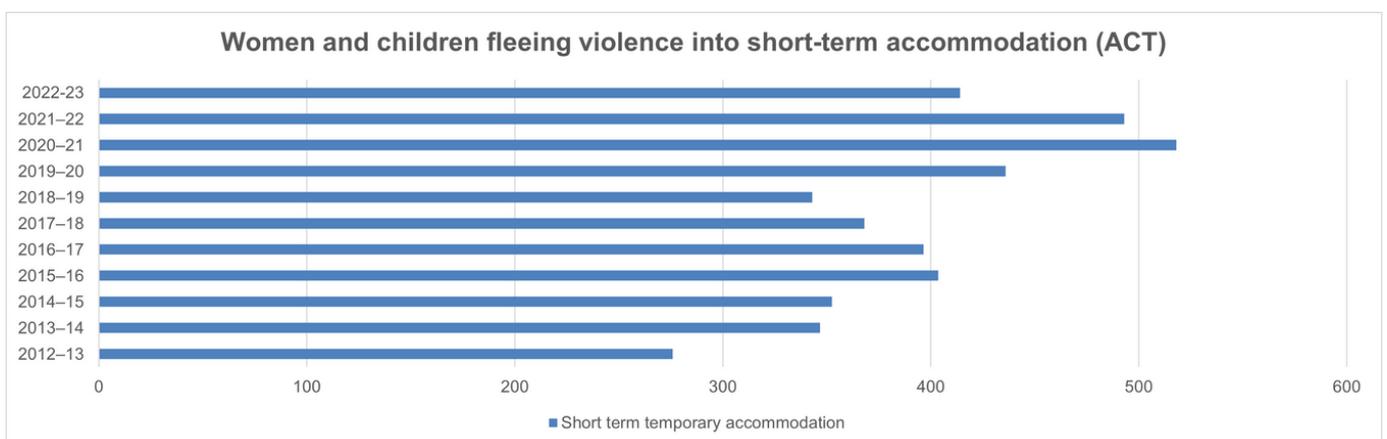
From 2012-13 to 2022-23:

- the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car increased by 64% from 20 to 33, and
- the number of women and children couch surfing increased by 26% from 93 to 117.

In the past year, from 2021-22 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough or in a car after receiving support has increased by 29%.



In the ACT, the numbers of women and children in short-term accommodation has increased over the decade, but decreased in each of the past two years.



# Northern Territory data

In 2022-23, 3,087 women and 2,031 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services in the NT.

At their last reported contact with homelessness services, 1,343 of these women and children were in housing situations that are forms of homelessness.

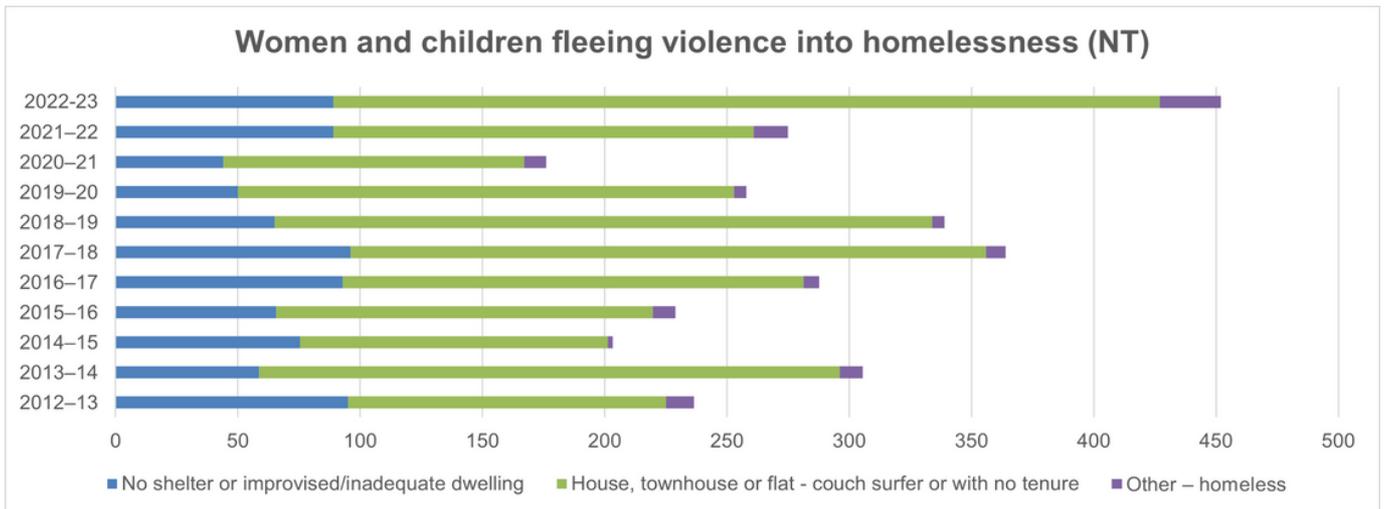
Of these:

- 89 were sleeping rough or in a car
- 891 were in short term or temporary accommodation
- 338 were couch surfing
- 25 were in other forms of homelessness

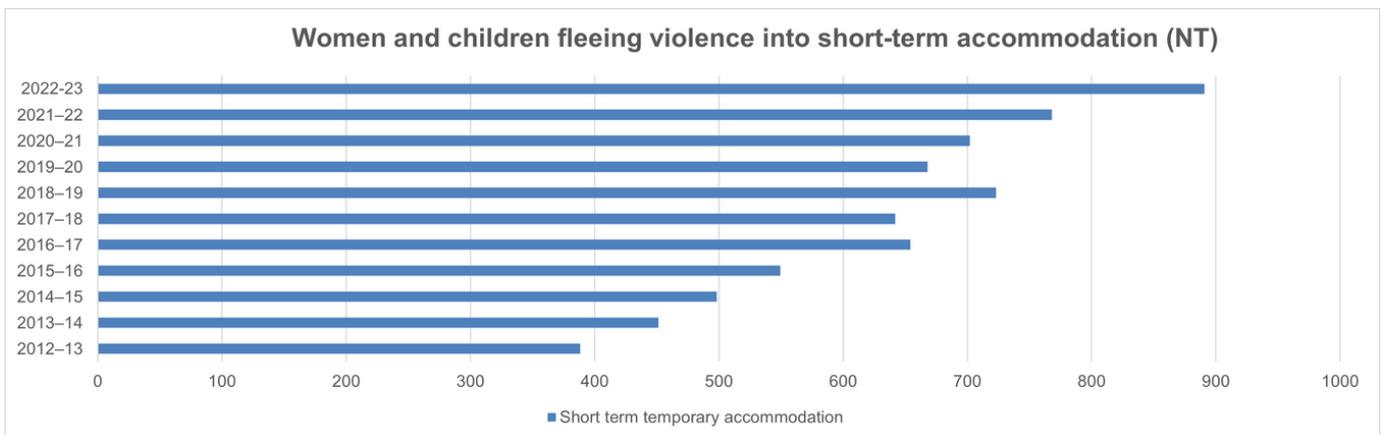
Over the past decade exits into homelessness have increased.

From 2012-13 to 2022-23, the number of women and children couch surfing more than doubled from 130 to 338.

In the past year, from 2021-22 to 2022-23, the number of women and children sleeping rough, couch surfing or in another homeless situation after receiving support has increased by 64%.



In the NT, investment into short-term accommodation has increased over the decade.



# Policy solutions to achieve safety

Pathways to safe, accessible and affordable housing are critical to enabling women and children to escape violence, and to build lives free of violence. These pathways require support, to enable women and children to gain, and in some cases to sustain a home, and access to housing.

## Homelessness support to access and sustain a home

Currently homelessness services turn away nearly 295 people per day on average; a total of around 108,000 unassisted requests for 2022–23, around 2,400 more than in 2021–22. (4)

A survey of 252 workers across frontline homelessness support services demonstrated how the homelessness crisis has been getting worse, with 93% of respondents saying that they had increasingly had to turn away people seeking help or to provide less help than was needed. (5)

Of those being turned away from the help they need, 80% are women and children.

Homelessness Australia has estimated that an additional \$450 million in homelessness support is needed to respond to new people needing homelessness assistance and people currently being turned away. (6)

### Recommendation

Increase funding for homelessness services by \$450 million annually to address current unmet need and projected growth in demand, and index funding to maintain its value as costs increase.

## Income support that makes renting affordable

Financial difficulties and housing affordability are both major drivers of homelessness for women and children.

Housing affordability is worst for people on very low incomes, with many income support recipients in rental stress even after receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)

Of households who do receive CRA: (7)

- 46% of single parent households on Parenting Payment (Single) remain rent stressed
- 63% of Jobseekers remain rent stressed
- 75% of students on youth allowance remain rent stressed

Increasing CRA and the base rates of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related working-age payments provide the income needed for women fleeing violence to gain a tenancy.

### Recommendation

Improve the affordability of renting for women and children fleeing violence by:

- increasing the maximum threshold for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) by 60% (resulting in a 110% increase in the payment), and
- increasing JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related income support to at least \$78 a day, and index payments to wages as well as prices.

(4) AIHW, [Unmet demand for specialist homelessness services](#) in Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, December 2023

(5) Homelessness Australia, [Impact of the housing crisis survey](#), December 2023

(6) Homelessness Australia, [Overstretched and overwhelmed: the strain on homelessness services](#), August 2023

(7) AIHW, [Housing assistance in Australia](#) web report at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/contents/financial-assistance> July 2023 Accessed on 12 October 2023

## Safe at home

Providing the support needed to enable women and children to remain safe at home, and have the perpetrator of violence leave the home, provides an immediate path to safe housing without an experience of homelessness.

The National Plan should include a significant investment for a Prevention Transformation Fund to support this type of homelessness prevention alongside other homelessness prevention priorities

### Recommendation

Include an initial \$500 million investment into a Homelessness Prevention Transformation Fund in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

## Access to social housing

Social housing directly targets homes to people squeezed out of the rental market, including women and children fleeing violence who can't afford to rent in the private rental market.

While the Federal Government has provided some welcome commitments to grow the stock of social housing, the national shortfall of 640,000 social housing properties far exceeds current growth projections. (8)

The 2022-23 AIHW data below highlights that the overwhelming majority of people who have experienced domestic and family violence needing settled and medium term accommodation cannot get access to a home. (9)

Homeless children and young people fleeing violence without a parent or guardian are at a particular disadvantage in the housing market. Each year more than 15,000 young people who come to homelessness services seeking medium or long term housing are turned away without a home

	No of people who have experienced domestic and family violence and sought housing	Provided	Not provided
Long-term housing	37,392	1,365	36,027
Medium-term accommodation	31,222	8,822	22,400

### Recommendation

Deliver the homes needed to end homelessness for women and children fleeing violence by:

- delivering the investment needed to create a pipeline of 25,000 social housing properties a year
- providing specific funding for Aboriginal community controlled housing to close the gap in housing outcomes for First Nations Australians
- resourcing 15,000 youth specific tenancies.

(8) Ryan van den Nouwelant, Laurence Troy and Balamurugan Soundararaj, UNSW City Futures Research Centre, [Quantifying Australia's unmet housing need: A national snapshot](#), November 2022

(9) AIHW, c, Table CLIENTS.24: Clients, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, and by state and territory, 2021-22