

# The homeless essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



The legal definition of 'homeless' according to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 is those who have inadequate access to safe and secure housing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics recognises that there are three levels of homelessness. The first, 'primary homelessness' refers to people who do not have any form of conventional accommodation and so are living on the streets, in parks, or in improvised dwellings. The next level, 'secondary homelessness' includes people who have only temporary accommodation. This is also known as stop-gap accommodation. Lastly, there is 'tertiary homelessness', which includes those who live in accommodation that is considered to be below the community's usual standard and is considered to be harmful to health. This form of homelessness is commonly known as insecure tenure or marginally housed. The Homeless Australia fact sheet, 'Homelessness in Australia', states that there are a number of complex issues as to why people become homeless, which I will examine as part of this case study. What are the identifying characteristics of the group?

There are a number of identifiable characteristics that are related to homelessness and to someone becoming homeless. By identifying these characteristics and factors society is able to address the underlying causes of homelessness. There are many factors that can lead to someone becoming homeless. These include, but are not limited to, lack of social support, lack of suitable and affordable housing, lack of employment (short or long term), financial pressures, family breakdowns, poor physical and/or mental health, substance abuse or domestic violence. It is important to

recognise that there is no ‘ typical’ homeless person or typical reason for someone becoming homeless.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a five level pyramid developed by philosopher Abraham Maslow that suggests five independent levels of basic human needs. It states that social interaction is highly important for everyone. As a result of being homeless, homeless people are often marginalised and live on the periphery of society. This marginalisation limits their social interactions, resulting in unfulfilled needs. Most homeless people are unemployed or underemployed and have a limited role in society. Prior to becoming homeless, they may have been living at the margins of society and lacked the social support to assist them in times of need and to manage their ongoing problems, which could have been the cause of their homelessness. By definition, the homeless live without secure and safe housing. According to the Homeless Australia fact sheet ‘ Homelessness in Australia’ 15% of homeless people are homeless due to Australia’s housing crisis and 5% due to housing affordability.

Homeless people’s accommodation becomes the streets, abandoned buildings, cars, parks, boarding houses, overcrowded dwellings and other temporary solutions that sit below the standard for accommodation.

Furthermore, 39% of the Australia’s homeless population (41, 390 people) live in a residence that needs four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the residents adequately, this is known as an overcrowded dwelling. These are the largest group of people experiencing homelessness in Australia. The ‘ Homeless Australia’ webpage states that 16% of the homeless group are

homeless due to financial difficulties. These people are unable to cope with the stress and pressure of their financial situation and so are forced to live below standard and without financial support. Statistics on the 'Homelessness Australia' webpage show that 6% of the homeless population are homeless due to relationship or family breakdowns. This is one of the major causes of homelessness in Australia.

As a result of such disruptive events in their lives mental illness then becomes very common and the longer they experience horrific circumstances such as homelessness the more likely they are to develop severe and chronic mental illnesses. Housing NSW recognises that domestic violence can lead to homelessness and this is evident in Homelessness Australia's poll. The poll shows that 23% of the homeless population are homeless due to domestic violence. Those who have been a victim have often been forced to leave their homes and financial support and a lot of the time don't have anywhere else to go which results in them becoming homeless. Substance abuse is a leading contributing factor into the cause and continuance of homelessness among individuals.

The desperation, despair, isolation and loneliness experienced by many homeless people results in a dependence on drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. It's as a result of these circumstances that many people find themselves living without adequate housing. As mentioned above, homeless people are usually marginalised from mainstream society and are considered outcasts. In many ways, the homeless are unseen and unheard; they are the

voiceless and the faceless. What are social attitudes towards homeless people?

Social attitudes to homeless people are often negative and based on stereotypes and prejudice. These misunderstandings often dominate and overshadow the real issues as to why and how they became homeless in the first place. Unfortunately, many people today have the attitude that homeless people are just bludgers, lazy, or unstable and that they choose to live on the streets. This negative and narrow mindset is a major contributor to the ongoing marginalisation of homeless people and their lack of meaningful participation in society. It is important to note that there are people in society who recognise that people may be homeless for a variety of reasons, often through no fault of their own.

The homeless population's image could be improved by the wider community seeing these people as individuals rather than generalising them. The greater population need to establish that every homeless person has a different story and not all of these people are drug and alcohol addicts and have brought their state upon themselves. We could do this by interviewing these people that are willing to share their story and get the word around that not every homeless person is the stereotypical person we think they are. What are the specific needs of the homeless?

As stated by Maslow in his Hierarchy of Needs, everyone has specific needs that have to be met for them to achieve a level of wellbeing that enables them to survive. The homeless are no different. The homeless require access to services, education, and employment, financial support, health, housing,

self-esteem and a sense of identity but the prioritisation of every need is dependent on the individual's circumstances. Very often in society homeless people need assistance to identify services available to help them and then further help to access these services. The wider population need to support the homeless population in accessing a range of support programs to help with mental health problems, drug and alcohol issues, family matters and housing concerns.

One of the greatest areas of need for homeless people is education. Education is vital for homeless people to develop skills and knowledge to be successful in the management of resources, decision making and problem solving. The lack of education for homeless people will enhance the chances of low self-esteem, lack of resources and no sense of identity or belonging. Therefore, education is a key need for the homeless. Lack of education for homeless people affects them for the rest of their lives especially in areas such as employment. Majority of homeless people have trouble finding work due to their health status, lack of confidence, limited support, and the lack of things such as correct clothing and footwear. Our community need to increase funding for those whom can't afford training and employment access as it is of great importance that we support homeless people into employment. Our world revolves around money; therefore it is highly important that homeless people have financial support to meet their basic needs.

We need to establish accommodation for homeless people that gives them access to available funding. Many people rely on Centrelink payments but as

these people do not have a fixed address their payments are often not received. Thus, it is important we develop more flexibility for funding the homeless. According to the Homeless Australia ' Homelessness in NSW' fact sheet, 28% of homeless people are in a homeless state due to their accommodation issues. This is higher than any other cause. Homeless people need affordable accommodation that is appropriate to their individual needs. Having adequate housing is important as it helps individuals develop a sense of independence, identity and individuality. To maintain a reasonable level of wellbeing for the homeless, they need access to health care that is free and holistic.

The homeless population often have multiple health needs that must be addressed to ensure their survival. These needs may be due to drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health issues, mental health issues, chronic illness or simply a lack of emotional support. The wider population needs to, instead of marginalising this group, develop services that can improve homeless people's access to services, service gaps and rehabilitation that isn't only available to those in stable financial positions. Having a healthy level of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth is important in giving someone a sense of identity. It is common that the homeless feel no self-worth due to past experiences that have affected them throughout life by giving them low self-esteem, loneliness and the humiliation attached to being homeless. The homeless population need to feel a sense of belonging to the community to give them a sense of self and to feel they have a role in the wider population of today.

Whilst every homeless person has their own story and their own issues statistics show that housing, employment and access to services are what the homeless tend to look for when in crisis. This is evident in the Homelessness Australia 'fact sheet' where it states that 28% become homeless because of their lack of accommodation. Closely followed by 22% of the homeless population according to 'Statistic Brain' that become homeless due to their lack of employment and 20% that have had no support and are left in the dark. If these are the largest causes of homelessness then these are the things that need to be targeted to prevent that state. What are the factors affecting access to resources for the homeless? There are numerous factors that affect the access to resources for the homeless. Three factors that are seen as very important include the absence of secure housing, the absenteeism of education and the location of the homeless person.

Life revolves around an individual's identity and that is how they fit into the wider population. Homeless people have no address and no proof of identity and therefore have highly limited access to resources. A residential address is a form of access to facilities and is very important in gaining information such as drivers licence, bank statements, and Centrelink forms but as homeless people do not have permanent secure housing they aren't able to access these resources. As a result of this they have no proof of identity. Education gives people skills and knowledge that will help them become aware of services available. Majority of those who are in a homeless state have not had the prior learning that helps them develop skills that enable them to be comfortable and confident enough to access help. This results in



homeless people not accessing services such as homeless shelters, women's groups, youth off the streets and more.

Location is a major factor in affecting homeless people's access to resources as those who are homeless in rural and remote areas do not have the correct services and support programs available to them along with the nonexistence of crisis accommodation. These facilities are available in regional areas but no homeless person has the financial stability to afford to access them. What community services/support agencies are used by the homeless, or could be used by this group in assistance with meeting their specific needs? Organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, Red Cross, Lifeline, The Smith Family, Youth Off the Streets, Salvation Army, Mission Australia, PILCH, Homelessness Australia, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and other community support agency's exist today to assist the homeless in meeting their specific needs. In my opinion SAAP is the most effective agency used by the homeless.

SAAP provides emergency and temporary supported accommodation along with other related services to people who are homeless or those who are at risk of homelessness. SAAP agencies use the process of case management to help homeless people who have approached them and offer a range of services such as counselling, advocacy, and housing links, and health, education and employment services. SAAP is adequate in helping these people meet their needs as it also offers health and hygiene services to those who are marginally housed which include shower and laundry facilities, meals and access to health professionals. This is an agency that offers a

range of services under the one program and whose prime focus is to put a stop to homelessness in every state and territory in the metropolitan area. They are effective in doing so as their agencies exist in every state and territory.

To further improve access and equity for the homeless population we need to stop Australians thinking that 'homeless' means just a lack of housing and instead help them to understand that this isn't the only issue that needs to be addressed. We could do this by producing advertisements that include interviews of homeless people sharing their story which could help put a stop to the social stigma towards homeless members of the community and instead encourage more compassion. If the community then develop more compassion they may stop judging people on their material possessions, socioeconomic status or appearance and instead inspire them to break the cycle of homelessness by donating to help the homeless help themselves.

What government policies and regulations currently exist to protect the welfare of the homeless? There are laws by the government that have been put in place to assist the homeless and policies that have been made to protect and improve the situation for those in the homeless state. The laws that exist to protect the human rights of people that belong to this group include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The International Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These laws are put into place to protect and promote the rights of all people which includes the homeless. Laws that ensure the homeless have access to resources in the community

have been put in place by the government. These include: Anti-discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)

Social Security Act 1991

The Commission for Human Rights

McKinney Vento Assistance Act 1987

The homeless population are entitled to protection and promotion of their human rights and are not just trying to seek attention. The homeless group want to be able to enjoy basic rights and freedoms like all Australians.

Bibliography:

All websites and textbooks were accessed every day to gain information.

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