Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR)
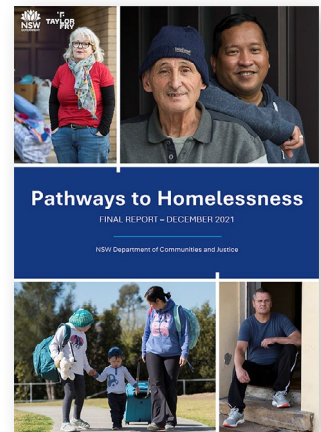
Key findings from the Pathways to Homelessness report

In December 2021, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) released the Pathways to Homelessness report.

Prepared by Taylor Fry, and commissioned by the DCJ Homelessness Strategy Unit, the report analyses a major cross-agency linked dataset to identify the factors that lead people to seek assistance from homelessness services, and highlights opportunities to support people who are at high risk of homelessness. The findings support investment in initiatives with the greatest potential to improve outcomes across the whole service system.

Pathways to Homelessness is a key action under the 2018-2023 *NSW Homelessness Strategy* to improve the evidence base for homelessness prevention and early intervention programs.
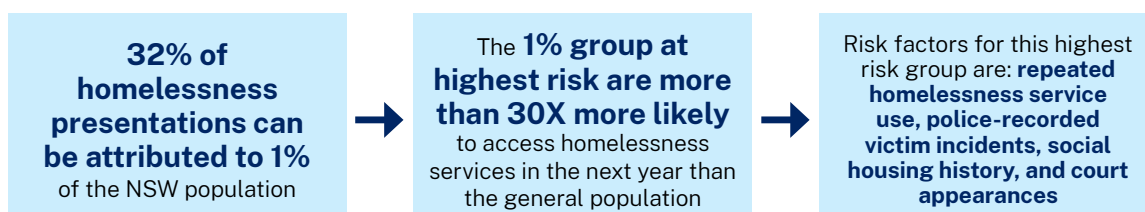
What did the report find?

People at risk of homelessness are more likely to access other government services

People accessing Specialist Homelessness Services have significantly higher use of other government services than the broader population, often over ten times the rate. Compared to the broader NSW population, in any given year people accessing Specialist Homelessness Services are:

24x	**20x**	**16x**	**13x**	**10x**
more likely to be in controlled drug treatment	more likely to have been in custody	more likely to be receiving private rental assistance	more likely to access Legal Aid	more likely to appear in Court

Risk of homelessness is concentrated in a very small proportion of the population

32% of homelessness presentations can be attributed to 1% of the NSW population → The **1% group at highest risk are more than 30X more likely** to access homelessness services in the next year than the general population → Risk factors for this highest risk group are: **repeated homelessness service use, police-recorded victim incidents, social housing history, and court appearances**

Communities and Justice

Many government services are good potential early intervention points

The analysis suggests **walk-in mental health services**, **court appearances** and **Legal Aid** are all potential strong intervention points in preventing future homelessness. These services provide a good balance on three measures - they target groups who are at high risk of using homelessness services, have good coverage in terms of the number of people they will reach, and generate high potential cost savings across NSW Government services if people who access the service do not go on to access homelessness services.

People who have used **walk-in mental health services**, **court appearances** or **Legal Aid** in the past 12 months are between 13 and 17 times more likely to access homelessness services in the following year, compared to the broader NSW population. An intervention at any one of these points could capture around 16% of future homelessness clients and, if successful, could have savings of around $55-70k per person across Government services over three years.

A number of groups of people are at elevated risk of homelessness compared to the general population

These include young people leaving care, people on income support, and Aboriginal people. In addition to these groups, the following cohorts have an increased likelihood of accessing homelessness services compared to the broader NSW population:

8x	9x	20x	20x
people with **drug and alcohol-related** service history	people with a history of **acute mental health issues**	women who have experienced a **DFV incident** within the last year	people **exiting custody** (double for Aboriginal people in this group)

People who sleep rough are a particularly vulnerable group

- Over the two years to June 2017, 8% of all homelessness presentations were people sleeping rough.

- Compared to all people who access homelessness services, people sleeping rough are more likely to be male, older and Aboriginal.

- People sleeping rough are more likely to require additional support for mental health issues (21%), followed by drug and alcohol use (17%), DFV (13%) and legal issues (9%).

People aged 15-24 are twice as likely as the general population to access homelessness services

- 43% of homelessness presentations for this cohort are from within the 1% group at highest risk.

- Completing Year 12 is associated with a 30% reduction in later risk of homelessness.

- Out-of-home care history increases the risk of homelessness by 17%, however the proportion of the population this relates to is small (<1%).

Aboriginal people are overrepresented among people presenting to homelessness services

One-third of people (30%) who access homelessness services identify as Aboriginal, while making up around 3% of the NSW population. Aboriginal people have elevated service use across all services compared to the broader NSW population, but particularly for homelessness services (10x),

court appearances (7x), Legal Aid (6x) and walk-in mental health services (4x). Aboriginal people with previous homelessness service use in the past three years are at very high risk of future homelessness. People experiencing repeat homelessness represent nearly half of homelessness presentations by Aboriginal people.

What's next?

Stakeholders can use the findings from the report to enhance the effectiveness of homelessness prevention and early intervention services, and reduce the costs of homelessness for individuals, communities and government services. DCJ will use the findings to inform the development of the annual Action Plan under the No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness Framework, particularly the findings in relation to intervention points and service linkages. This will ensure greater collaboration and accountability between agencies that are responsible for reporting on programs with a focus on early intervention.

Overall, this evidence will continue to inform key initiatives to deliver the Premier's Priority to halve street homelessness by 2025 and the development of the next NSW Homelessness Strategy.

About the data

The linked dataset created for the **Pathways to Homelessness report** is one of the most comprehensive datasets related to homelessness in Australia, covering 625,000 people across 19 NSW and Commonwealth Government services including housing, health, welfare, justice, education, and out-of-home care. The dataset includes data from 2011-2017.

Taylor Fry undertook analysis and predictive modelling of this dataset to help understand who was most at risk of homelessness, potential intervention points and to estimate elevated costs across government services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The Pathways to Homelessness report is accompanied by an **interactive data dashboard**, where the data informing the report can be explored further. Please see instructions for using the dashboard.

If you have any questions or feedback about *Pathways to Homelessness* please contact the DCJ Homelessness Strategy team at Homelessness.Strategy@facs.nsw.gov.au

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