

Children accompanying homeless clients 2002–03

**A report from the SAAP
National Data Collection**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

AIHW cat. no. HOU 106

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ISBN 1 74024 380 3

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004. Accompanying children in SAAP 2002–03. AIHW Cat. No. HOU 106. Canberra: AIHW (SAAP NDCA report).

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Cover art by Viruch Pikhuntod

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Published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

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Preface

This is the second thematic report on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection. The report provides information on children that accompanied their parents or guardians to a SAAP agency, or received assistance as a result of their parent or guardian being a client of the same agency.

A productive and cooperative partnership has continued between the SAAP National Data Collection (managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), SAAP agencies and the SAAP Information Sub-committee. Valuable support and encouragement have been provided by the SAAP Coordination and Development Committee, which is responsible for the national direction of the SAAP program.

This partnership has been built on shared goals and mutual trust. The key has been agencies' willingness to collect and provide data to the National Data Collection Agency, knowing that any personal information provided by clients is protected by the extremely strict confidentiality provisions of the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*.

This large and complex project has not only a high level of support but also a high level of accuracy. We are confident that we can further improve the quality of the information provided to help policy makers and the community better understand and provide for the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of being so.

Richard Madden
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SAAP Coordination and
Development Committee

Acknowledgements

This report was written and prepared by Anne Giovanetti and Manjiree Kulkarni of the SAAP National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Justin Griffin, Felicity Murdoch and Diane Gibson provided helpful comments on the draft report.

Table programming and production were carried out by Qasim Shah and Ashfaq Hussain. Data entry was managed by Mandi Rawlings. Without the efforts of Kay Grzadka, Paul Halliday, Gloria Jackson, Neil Angel, Stirling Lewis, Toni Stepniak and Natalie Sugden, who ensured that the data were collected and processed, this report would not have been possible.

The SAAP Information Sub-committee (comprising government, community and expert representatives) and the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services provided valuable support and comments throughout the development and drafting of the report. The authors also acknowledge the assistance provided by Ainsley Morrissey and Lauren Di Salvia in preparing the report for publication.

Finally, the authors acknowledge the vital role played by data providers. This report draws together a large amount of statistical material and could not have been produced without the efforts and cooperation of SAAP service providers and clients, who provided service and client information, and of the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and state and territory funding departments, which provided administrative data.

Abbreviations and symbols

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
DV	Domestic Violence
NDC	National Data Collection
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Symbols

..	When used in a table, means not applicable
–	When used in a table, means nil or rounded to zero (including null cells)

Summary

An accompanying child is a person aged under 18 years who accompanies a client to a SAAP agency during a support period or who requires and/or receives assistance from a SAAP agency as a result of their parent or guardian being a client of the same agency. An accompanying child may or may not require or receive assistance. These children constitute a large proportion of the people who are in SAAP because they are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

This report provides an overview and analysis of accompanying children in SAAP in 2002–03, including their demographic characteristics, patterns of SAAP use and the reasons why their parents or guardians sought SAAP support. There is also information about the services children receive from SAAP agencies, and their living arrangements before and after support. Domestic violence is a major theme of this report, as the majority of children accompany their mother or other female guardian who has reported domestic violence as a reason for seeking SAAP assistance.

Readers are advised to consult the Glossary for an explanation of the terms used in this report, and to take into account variations in child support period numbers across the states and territories as reported in Appendix 1. More information about the way accompanying child data has been collected and analysed is contained in Appendix 2. The following is the summary of the major findings of the report.

SAAP use by accompanying children

- There were 53,800 accompanying children in SAAP in 2002–03. These children had 71,250 support periods.
- 86% of child support periods were for children accompanying a female client. These children had an average of 1.3 support periods each, a median length of support of 18 days and a median length of accommodation of 9 days.
- Children accompanying couples or male clients had a slightly lower average number of support periods (1.2), but median lengths of support and accommodation that were at least double those of children accompanying female clients.
- Agencies that target women escaping domestic violence provided the highest proportion of support periods with accompanying children (49%), followed by cross-target, multiple or general agencies (24%) and family agencies (16%).

Daily support and unmet requests for accommodation (2001–02)

- On a daily average basis, there were 14,650 accompanying child support periods. Accompanying children contributed 42% of the total number of occasions of support each day (34,750).
- An average of 800 instances of one-off assistance per day were provided to accompanying children during the Casual Client Collection period (21 February to 6 March 2002).
- A daily average of 200 accompanying children had valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation during the Unmet Demand Collection period (22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002).

Characteristics of accompanying children and their parents or guardians

- 88% of accompanying children were aged 12 years and under.
- 95% of accompanying children were born in Australia.
- 68% of clients with accompanying children were 25–44 years old, 22% were 18–24 years old and 7% were aged 45 years and over. Only 2% were under 18 years of age.
- The majority of clients with accompanying children were Australian born non-Indigenous (62%). Indigenous Australians represented 22% of all clients with accompanying children.
- People born overseas in predominantly English-speaking countries were more likely to be accompanied by 2 or 3 children than other cultural groups, while Indigenous clients were more likely to be accompanied by 4 or more children than other cultural groups.

Service provision and unmet needs

- The majority of needs for all service types were for accompanying children aged 0–4 years and 5–12 years. This reflects the greater proportion of accompanying children in these age groups compared to those aged 12–17 years.
- Children aged 0–4 years had the highest number of support periods with identified needs for SAAP or CAP accommodation, assistance with access arrangements, health or medical services and child care.
- Children aged 5–12 years had the highest number of support periods with identified needs for sexual or physical abuse counselling, skills education, school liaison and help with behavioural problems.
- Where SAAP or CAP accommodation was needed, agencies were able to provide this service in at least 95% of cases for all age groups.
- Help with behavioural problems, sexual or physical abuse counselling, health or medical services and assistance with access arrangements had the highest levels of unmet needs and referrals for all age groups.

Domestic violence

- Children accompanying clients who presented due to domestic violence had the majority of accompanying child support periods (39,700, or 67%).
- SAAP agencies were able to meet the identified needs of children who accompanied clients presenting due to domestic violence in proportionately more support periods than children who accompanied clients with other reasons for seeking assistance.

Circumstances of accompanying children before and after support

- The proportion of support periods for clients with accompanying children who rented public or community housing increased from 18% before support to 25% after support. Renting in the private market remained at 25% from before support to after support.
- The proportion of support periods where clients were living alone with their children increased from 32% before support to 50% after support. This change was influenced by the high proportion of female clients with children who presented due to domestic violence.