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*Better information and statistics
for better health and wellbeing*

Counting the homeless 2006

Northern Territory

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PREFACE

Counting the Homeless began as a research project with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, producing one report on the national homeless population in 1996. It has since developed into a cooperatively produced national data collection, involving the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), and RMIT and Swinburne Universities. A national report was published by the ABS in September 2008, and for the first time the state and territory reports are published by the AIHW.

Funding for *Counting the Homeless 2006* was provided by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council and the Housing Ministerial Advisory Committee and coordinated by the Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). We are grateful to senior officers in FaHCSIA and the various state and territory departments which have facilitated this large and complex project at all stages.

The ABS has been a key partner from the outset and provided excellent in-kind support under its Australian Census Analytic Program. We thank our colleagues in the ABS for their continuing commitment to the project and for their generous advice and assistance, as well as their dedicated work in response to our many data requests.

Important supplementary information for the analysis comes from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection at the AIHW. The AIHW team responded quickly to our inquiries. We have greatly appreciated their interest and support.

Hundreds of people in schools, local council services and homeless agencies have assisted us during the school census and especially during the extensive national local area fieldwork. Their local knowledge has been an invaluable input to this report.

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP), Homelessness Australia, the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and the Women's Services Network (WESNET) have been strong supporters of the project from the beginning and we have greatly appreciated their encouragement. Finally, we thank our editor, Estelle Tang, who provided invaluable editorial assistance.

Chris Chamberlain

David MacKenzie

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses the cultural definition of homelessness to enumerate the homeless population on census night (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992). This definition distinguishes between people in primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness.

Primary homelessness describes the situation of all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, living in improvised dwellings (such as sheds, garages or cabins), and using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary homelessness describes the situation of people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. On census night, all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) are considered part of this category. Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own, and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis, operationally defined as 12 weeks or less.

Tertiary homelessness describes the situation of people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. Residents of private boarding houses are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992): they do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease.

2 OVERCOUNTING AND UNDERCOUNTING

Chapter 2 summarises how the national homeless count enumerated the homeless population using census and other data sets. It contains a discussion of how there can be both overcounting and undercounting of homeless people. Undercounting is most likely in the census category

‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’, and overcounting is more likely in boarding houses because of misclassification.

The problem of establishing reliable figures is compounded by the fact that the homeless population changes over time. There will always be people who are entering and leaving homelessness, as well as people moving between different locations. The challenge is to identify patterns in the population data that might inform the policy process.

3 ACCOMMODATION ON CENSUS NIGHT

The homeless population in the Northern Territory was distributed differently from the national homeless population (Table 1). Nationally, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night, whereas the comparable figure was 14 per cent in the Territory. Across Australia, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in the Territory the figure was nine per cent. The largest group in the Territory was people staying temporarily with other households; they were 44 per cent of the homeless on census night, compared with 45 per cent nationally. In the Territory, 33 per cent of the homeless were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out, compared with the national figure of 16 per cent.

TABLE 1: PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	694	14
SAAP accommodation	19 849	19	411	9
Friends and relatives	46 856	45	2092	44
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	1588	33
	104 676	100	4785	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

4 AGE DISTRIBUTION

In the Northern Territory, the age profile of the homeless population was older than the national profile (Table 2). Forty-eight per cent of the homeless in the Territory were aged 35 or older, significantly above the national figure of 42 per cent. More than one-third (35 per cent) of the homeless in the Territory were aged 45 or older, up from 25 per cent in 2001 (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2004, p. 28).

Nonetheless, a majority (52 per cent) of homeless people in the Territory were in the younger age groups. Twenty-three per cent of the

homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). Ten per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents on census night. Another six per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 13 per cent were adults aged 25 to 34.

TABLE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory		
	N	%	N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	478	10	52
12-18	21 940	21	1102	23	
19-24	10 504	10	308	6	
25-34	15 804	15	633	13	48
35-44	13 981	13	598	13	
45-54	12 206	12	634	13	
55-64	10 708	10	718	15	
65 or older	7 400	7	314	7	
	104 676	100	4785	100	

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

5 MALES AND FEMALES

In 2006, men outnumbered women in the national homeless population, 56 to 44 per cent (Table 3), and in the Northern Territory men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. In the Territory, there were slightly more females in the 12 to 18 age group (53 to 47 per cent) and in the 25 to 34 age group (51 to 49 per cent). From age 35 onwards, men outnumbered women, about 60 to 40 per cent.

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES BY AGE GROUP

Australia									
	Under 12	12–18	19–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	52	46	53	57	63	64	61	64	56
Female	48	54	47	43	37	36	39	36	44
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Northern Territory									
	Under 12	12–18	19–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	56	47	55	49	60	59	59	63	55
Female	44	53	45	51	40	41	41	37	45
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

6 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

In the Northern Territory, 30 per cent of people identified themselves as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 4 shows that Indigenous people made up 8.3 per cent of people staying with other households, 37.7 per cent of persons in boarding houses, 52.3 per cent of people in SAAP and 63.2 per cent of those in improvised dwellings. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in the Northern Territory, except amongst those staying with other households.

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY

	Boarding house (N=687)	Friends or relatives (N=2092)	SAAP (N=411)	Improvised dwellings (N=1588)	All* (N=4778)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	62.3	91.7	47.7	36.8	65.4
Indigenous	37.7	8.3	52.3	63.2	34.6
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

7 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Darwin

The census identified 2478 homeless people in Darwin and the rate of homelessness was 234 per 10 000 (Table 5). This is higher than the rates of homelessness in other major capital cities such as Sydney (39 per 10 000), Melbourne (41 per 10 000) and Adelaide (47 per 10 000). Table 5 shows the rates of homelessness in Darwin's three subdivisions: it was 276 per 10 000 in Darwin City where there were 1829 homeless people; 75 per 10 000 in Palmerston where there were 180 homeless people; and 302 per 10 000 in Litchfield Shire where there were 469 homeless people.

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, DARWIN

	Darwin City	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Number	1829	180	469	2478
Rate	276	75	302	234

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Northern Territory Balance

Northern Territory Balance has a population of 84 910 and includes Alice Springs (population 23 895), Katherine (population 8191), and Tennant Creek (population 2922). There were 49 902 people in remote communities.

TABLE 6: NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Number	415	43	446	1403	2307
Rate	507	147	187	281	272

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 6 shows that the rate of homelessness was 507 per 10 000 in Katherine where there were 415 homeless people; 147 per 10 000 in Tennant Creek where there were 43 homeless people; 187 per 10 000 in Alice Springs (446 homeless); and 281 per 10 000 in remote communities (1403 homeless).

INTRODUCTION

This is one of eight state and territory reports from the national project, *Counting the Homeless 2006* (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2008). Chapters 1 and 2 include material from the national report on the definition of homelessness, methodological issues, and a summary of how the homeless enumeration was undertaken. This report introduces new information on the social characteristics of the homeless population in the Northern Territory and the geographical distribution of homeless people. The report also includes new information on marginal caravan park dwellers and Indigenous homelessness.

The main data source for the analysis was the *ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006*. However, this data was supplemented by information from the *SAAP National Data Collection* and the third *National Census of Homeless School Students*. This data enabled us to make various technical corrections to the raw census figures and to produce the overall population estimates.

This report uses some qualitative data from telephone interviews with service providers and public officials. Local informants were selected purposively, in order to check the reliability of census data in particular communities and to understand more about what is happening on the ground. In most places, three to four people were interviewed.

Each state and territory report is set out in the same way and contains a discussion of 'undercounting' and 'overcounting'. Counting errors are always an issue when enumerating the homeless population. Chapter 2 explains why some homeless people are not counted on census night ('undercounting') and why others may be counted more than once ('overcounting'). A careful consideration of such errors is important when attempting to establish the number of homeless people in particular communities.

Discrepancies due to undercounting and overcounting of homeless people tend to be masked when data is aggregated at the state or national level, but these discrepancies are more obvious in small-area analyses. Thus, it is possible that people with local knowledge may think that there are more (or less) homeless people in a particular community than the number identified by the census.

The problem of establishing reliable figures in local communities is compounded by the fact that the homeless population changes over time. First, there will always be some people entering and leaving the homeless population. Second, homeless people are more mobile than the general population. It is common for homeless people to move from one form of temporary shelter to another. It is also common for homeless people to move both within and between states. This means that the number of homeless people in a particular community may not be the same as the number on census night. The challenge is to identify patterns in the homeless population that might inform the policy process.

Chapter 1 outlines the cultural definition of homelessness which underpinned the ABS project. Chapter 2 summarises how the national report established the homeless count, as well as discussing overcounting and undercounting. Chapter 3 outlines the social characteristics of the homeless population in the Northern Territory. Chapter 4 discusses different ways of approaching a geographical analysis, before focusing on whether the homeless population was spread evenly. Chapter 5 comments on Indigenous and non-Indigenous homelessness. Chapter 6 discusses policy issues.

1 DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The ABS uses the cultural definition to enumerate the homeless population. The cultural definition contends that ‘homelessness’ and ‘inadequate housing’ are cultural concepts that only make sense in a particular community at a given historical period (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 1992). In a society where the vast majority of people live in mud huts, the community standard will be that these dwellings constitute adequate accommodation (Watson 1986, p. 10). Once this principle is recognised, then it is possible to define ‘homelessness’.

First, the cultural definition identifies shared community standards about the minimum housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions and expectations of a particular culture. Then, the definition identifies groups that fall below the minimum community standard.

Cultural standards are not usually stated in official documents, but are embedded in the housing practices of a society. These standards identify the conventions and cultural expectations of a community in an objective sense, and are recognised by most people because they accord with what they see around them. As Townsend (1979, p. 51) puts it:

A population comes to expect to live in particular types of homes ... Their environment ... create(s) their needs in an objective as well as a subjective sense.

The vast majority of Australians live in suburban houses or self-contained flats, and 70 per cent of all households either own or are purchasing their home (ABS 2006a, Ch. 8). There is a widespread view that home ownership is the most desirable form of tenure (Kemeny 1983, p. 1; Hayward 1992, p. 1; Badcock and Beer 2000, p. 96). Eighty-eight per cent of private dwellings in Australia are houses and 75 per cent of flats have two or more bedrooms (ABS 2006a, Ch. 8).

The minimum community standard is a small rental flat—with a bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom and an element of security of tenure—because that is the minimum that most people achieve in the private rental market. However, the minimum is significantly below the culturally desired option of an owner-occupied house.

The minimum community standard provides a cultural benchmark for assessing ‘homelessness’ and ‘inadequate housing’ in the contemporary context. However, as Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) point out, there are a number of institutional settings where people do not have the minimal level of accommodation identified by the community standard, but in cultural terms they are not considered part of the homeless population. They include, inter alia, people living in seminaries, elderly people in nursing homes, students in university halls of residence and prisoners.

1.1 A MODEL OF HOMELESSNESS BASED ON SHARED COMMUNITY STANDARDS EMBODIED IN CURRENT HOUSING PRACTICES

Minimum community standard: equivalent to a small rented flat with a bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom

<p>Culturally recognised exceptions: where it is inappropriate to apply the minimum standard, e.g. seminaries, gaols, student halls of residence</p>	<p>Marginally housed: people in housing situations close to the minimum standard</p> <p>Tertiary homelessness: people living in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure</p> <p>Secondary homelessness: people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends and relatives, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses</p> <p>Primary homelessness: people without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks, etc.)</p>
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Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992, p. 291.

While it is true that the concepts of ‘housed’ and ‘homeless’ constitute a continuum of circumstances, there are three situations that fall below the minimum community standard. This leads to the identification of ‘primary’, ‘secondary’ and ‘tertiary’ homelessness. The model (shown in Figure 1.1) also includes the concept of the ‘marginally housed’.

Primary homelessness accords with the common assumption that homelessness is the same as ‘rooflessness’. The category includes people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, living in improvised dwellings (such as sheds, garages or cabins), and using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter. Primary homelessness is operationalised using the census category ‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’.

Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. On census night, it includes

all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The starting point for identifying this group is the census category 'hostels for the homeless, night shelters and refuges'. Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own. They report 'no usual address' on their census form. Secondary homelessness also includes people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis, operationally defined as 12 weeks or less.

Tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium- to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. Residents of private boarding houses do not have separate bedrooms and living rooms; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease. They are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard.

The terms primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness are widely used, particularly when talking about census counts. However, the profile of the homeless population looks different if you classify people on the basis of their housing histories, rather than on the basis of their accommodation on census night. In a study of 4291 homeless people in Melbourne, Chamberlain, Johnson and Theobald (2007) found that 92 per cent of their sample had moved regularly from one form of temporary accommodation to another. Nearly everyone had stayed with friends or relatives, but 85 per cent had also stayed in a boarding house, 60 per cent had been in SAAP/THM accommodation, and 50 per cent had slept rough. People show up in particular places on census night but many homeless people will be somewhere else a few weeks later. Transience is the typical pattern. Primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness are useful categories to describe people's housing situations on census night, but there are not three distinct groups of homeless people.

In *Counting the Homeless 2001*, we also identified 'marginal residents of caravan parks'. These people were defined as renting caravans, at their usual address, with no one in the household having full-time work. Like boarding house tenants, these households have one room for eating and sleeping and communal bathroom facilities. The 2001 research found that two-thirds (67 per cent) of boarding house residents were in the capital cities whereas three-quarters (78 per cent) of marginal residents of caravan parks were in regional centres and country towns (Chamberlain and MacKenzie

2003, Ch. 7). In some communities, there are no boarding houses and SAAP workers send people to the local caravan park if there is no emergency accommodation available.

There is some disagreement as to whether marginal residents of caravan parks constitute a separate category. Reid, Griffin and Murdoch (2005) have examined this analysis carefully. They conclude that marginal residents of caravan parks are really part of the tertiary population. Giovanetti, Reid, Murdoch and Edwards (2007, p. 275) take a similar position:

Marginal residents of caravan parks were categorised as belonging to the tertiary homelessness category ...

We have two reservations about this approach. First, it is difficult for the wider community to accept that some people living in caravans are part of the tertiary homeless population when most caravan dwellers are on holiday or own their own caravan. The 2006 Census found that 56 per cent of individuals in caravan parks were on holiday. The census was held in winter and this figure would have been much higher in the summer months. Another 25 per cent owned their caravan and many had made a lifestyle choice to live in a caravan, typically following retirement. Only 14 per cent were marginal residents on census night and this figure would be significantly below 10 per cent in the summer months.

Second, it is now common to find that cabins are the main type of accommodation in caravan parks, and cabins often have better facilities than caravans. A cabin usually has a separate kitchen and bathroom and often has one or more bedrooms. The census cannot distinguish between households in caravans and cabins with certainty, but in 2006 we estimated that somewhere between one-quarter and one-half of marginal residents of caravan parks were living in cabins (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2008, Ch. 7). This finding undermines the argument that marginal residents of caravan parks should be considered part of the tertiary population. It also means that our 'marginal residents' category is broader than indicated in *Counting the Homeless 2001*.

2 OVERCOUNTING AND UNDERCOUNTING

This chapter summarises how the national project enumerated the homeless population using the census and other data sets. It also contains a discussion of how there can be both overcounting and undercounting of homeless people. This is relevant to understanding why there can be anomalies when we examine the number of homeless people in particular communities.

2.1 IMPROVISED HOMES, TENTS AND SLEEPERS OUT

The operational category for primary homelessness is ‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’. This category includes:

Sheds, tents, humpies, and other improvised dwellings, occupied on Census Night ... It also includes people sleeping on park benches or in other ‘rough accommodation’. (ABS 2006b, p. 182)

First, we explain how the count was carried out. Then we estimate the number of persons in improvised dwellings (sheds, garages and cabins) and the number of persons sleeping rough (public places, derelict buildings, tents, cars etc). Finally, we point out that rough sleepers are a very mobile population and therefore the numbers identified on census night may not accord with what people ‘know’ on the ground.

The efficacy of the local count depends on census collectors having good local knowledge. They have to know, for example, whether there are people squatting in empty buildings in their local community, or whether there might be families living in their cars, or whether there could be people camping in the bush.

In 2006, there was a special effort to count the primary population in all states and territories. People without conventional accommodation are particularly difficult to count because they usually hide away at night to escape the cold. The 2006 Census was carried out in winter in the southern states, where night-time temperatures were generally cold. In addition, some homeless people were hostile to the idea of providing information to the government and did not want to fill out official forms. Other homeless people were hidden away in derelict buildings and census collectors were unaware of their presence. Counting the primary population is a major practical challenge.

There were a number of components to the ABS strategy. Field staff were encouraged to work closely with local service providers who might know if people were squatting in derelict buildings or sleeping rough in their community. In all states, local services provided intelligence on where people might be found sleeping rough. In some cases, census forms were handed out at these agencies. It was also widely reported that mobile food vans were a good place to hand out census forms. This strategy was used in capital cities and in some regional centres, but implementation varied across the states.

The ABS also had short census forms that could be filled out by ABS staff where personal forms were judged inappropriate. The short forms were less intimidating than the longer personal forms.

In addition, there was a procedure for filling out a substitute form when a homeless person was observed by a census collector but was not able to be interviewed. Observation is an accepted method for counting people sleeping rough. Collectors were asked to record sex, estimated age and location.

The category 'improvised homes, tents and sleepers out' also included overseas visitors and Australian residents who were on camping holidays. International visitors can be identified because they report a usual address overseas, and Australian holidaymakers can be identified because they report a usual address 'elsewhere in Australia'. Once both groups were removed, this left 16 375 individuals nationally in 'improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out', including 1588 people in this category in the Northern Territory.

Next, we estimate the number of persons in improvised dwellings (sheds, garages and cabins) and the number of persons sleeping rough (public places, derelict buildings, tents, cars etc). In public discussions about homelessness, it is sometimes assumed that there are 16 375 rough sleepers. However, the category 'improvised homes, tents and sleepers out' includes a wide range of situations from someone sleeping in a park, to someone sheltering in a derelict building, to someone living in a shed of some kind. Sheds can vary from broken-down buildings to assembled colour-bond farm sheds and garages.

There were 16 375 people in the 'improvised homes, tents and sleepers out' category, made up of 9414 households. It is not possible to quantify with certainty the number of people in improvised dwellings (sheds, garages and cabins) and the number of rough sleepers, but if we make two assumptions we can make some estimates.

First, we examined the responses of people in the 'improvised homes' category to the census question about dwelling tenure. We found that that 10 per cent were in rented dwellings and 39 per cent of households were in dwellings that were owned or being purchased. After talking with building inspectors and town planners across the country, we made the judgment that the 'owner, purchaser, renter' reply indicated that these households were usually living in improvised dwellings such as sheds, garages and shacks. In the case of owners and purchasers, this was their own property. It is also probable that people living in cars would have reported 'owning' their dwellings and this is more likely to be the case in the cities.

Second, 51 per cent of households did not answer the question about dwelling tenure and we took this to indicate that they were sleeping rough, squatting in derelict buildings, or living in other forms of temporary shelter. This assumption was in accord with other information from service providers and council staff in local areas. If both assumptions are reasonable, then we can estimate the numbers in improvised dwellings and sleeping rough, but we cannot quantify this exactly.

In the capital cities, about 75 per cent of households in the primary homelessness category were sleeping rough or squatting in derelict buildings, but in Darwin it was about 95 per cent. In regional Australia about 60 per cent of these households were living in sheds, garages and shacks, but in remote areas of the Northern Territory it was closer to 30 per cent. Most of these dwellings were on land that was 'owned or being purchased', but one-quarter of the dwellings were rented. Both owners and renters were living in rural poverty.

Building inspectors and town planners across the country reported that most people living in sheds were not building houses. In many cases, the householder had laid a concrete slab and then erected a metal shed, assembled from a prefabricated kit. We were told that people in improvised dwellings had often moved into communities where it was possible to purchase cheap blocks of land and they had probably dreamed of building houses on their blocks. However, these were also communities where unemployment was high and the newcomers remained unemployed or marginally attached to the labour force. These families may have dreamed of building a house, but the dream had not been realised and they were living in rural poverty.

In the capital cities, people in the category 'improvised homes, tents and sleepers out' are usually transient and without conventional shelter. In regional and remote Australia, about 40 per cent of households in this category were transient but 60 per cent were living in improvised dwellings

which they owned, rented or were purchasing. These dwellings were below the community standard, but these households were not ‘rough sleepers’ and they were not transient.

In the cities, people sleeping rough, squatting in derelict buildings or using vehicles for shelter are likely to move from place to place. Twenty people may show up in a particular subdivision on census night, but a week later they may be somewhere else. When we carry out a local analysis there is a risk that it will not accord with what people ‘know’ on the ground, because the population may have changed since the time of the census. However, in inland Australia, people in improvised dwellings are more stable.

2.2 SAAP SERVICES

The starting point for counting people in accommodation provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was the census category ‘hostels for the homeless, night shelters and refuges’. However, we knew that many of these dwellings were misclassified at previous censuses (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003, pp. 23–24). Youth refuges and women’s refuges often look like suburban houses and sometimes census collectors did not realise they were SAAP accommodation. These dwellings were mistakenly classified as ‘private dwellings’. The ABS convention is to replace census figures with information from the SAAP National Data Collection if the SAAP figures are higher.

In 2006, the ABS had two strategies to count people accommodated in refuges, hostels and other forms of emergency accommodation. The ‘list strategy’ required the Census Management Unit (CMU) in each state/territory to consult with the relevant government department to see if the department could supply a list of all their SAAP properties. The ABS guaranteed the confidentiality of these lists. The lists were passed on to specified ABS officers to assist with confidential data processing. The lists enabled ABS staff to identify SAAP properties that had been classified as private dwellings.

All states provided lists but they were of uneven quality. Some states provided a comprehensive list of their supported accommodation. Other states provided a list but excluded women’s refuges (for security reasons), while other states provided only partial lists of their SAAP properties.

The second component of the ABS approach was the ‘green sticker’ strategy which was first used in 2001. This involved the distribution of information to service providers offering them an alternative way to return their census forms. Service providers were advised that they could request a mail-back envelope from the census collector to ensure confidentiality.

Service providers were asked to return the census forms directly to the Data Processing Centre and to attach a green sticker which facilitated the identification of SAAP accommodation.

Overall, the census strategy worked better than in 2001, but in all states (except Victoria) the census count was lower than the SAAP count. The Victorian Department provided the ABS with a full list of its SAAP addresses as well as a full list of its Transitional Housing Management (THM) properties. We followed the established convention and replaced the census data with National SAAP Data for all states and territories except Victoria. There were 19 849 people in SAAP across Australia and 411 in the Northern Territory

2.3 FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Homeless people staying temporarily with friends or relatives were identified at the question: 'What is the person's usual address?' There was an instruction on the census form that people with no usual address should write 'none' in the suburb/locality box. In 2006, the number of people staying temporarily with other households was 32 200.

The census underestimates the number of homeless young people aged 12 to 18 who are staying temporarily with friends or relatives, because people filling out the census forms often record that these teenagers have a usual address elsewhere (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2008, Ch. 3). We corrected for undercounting in this age group using information from the third National Census of Homeless School Students.

The count of homeless school students was carried out in the same week that the ABS undertook the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. Welfare staff in secondary schools identified 7035 homeless students using the cultural definition of homelessness. This figure was used in conjunction with SAAP data on the proportion of school students accommodated in SAAP to estimate the overall homeless population aged 12 to 18. The final correction for undercounting was 14 656. The number of homeless people staying temporarily with friends and relatives was 46 856, including 2092 people in the Northern Territory.

There was no information on how the missing 14 656 young people were distributed geographically within each state and territory. An assumption was made that they were distributed in the same way as other persons staying temporarily with friends and relatives. This assumption cannot be corroborated independently, and it could mean that homeless people in this category were overestimated in some geographical areas and underestimated in others.

The method of estimating the number of persons staying temporarily with other households also depends on how people interpret the census question that asks for each person's usual address. For example, an Indigenous household may be unwilling to record that a relative escaping domestic violence has 'no usual address'. We have a method for estimating the undercount for those aged 12 to 18, but there is no method for estimating the undercount in other age groups or for Indigenous people.

Finally, it is important to remember that the number of people staying temporarily with friends and relatives also goes up and down, because most people stay temporarily with other households on a short-term basis.

2.4 BOARDING HOUSES

The final category is people living in boarding houses. This was the most complicated part of the count and it is explained fully in Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2008). Here the main points are summarised in three steps: a discussion of the 'basic rules', the '2001 conventions' and the '2006 conventions'.

Basic rules

The 2006 Census used 20 categories for coding non-private dwellings. The categories included 'hotel, motel, bed and breakfast' and 'boarding house, private hotel'. This distinction draws attention to the fact that there are major differences between conventional hotels that many travellers use and boarding houses (often called 'private hotels').

The 2006 Census identified 16 273 people in 'boarding houses and private hotels'. However, three groups had to be excluded: owners and staff members who were sleeping over on census night; guests who reported a usual address 'elsewhere in Australia'; and backpackers who reported a usual address overseas.

In addition, there are four ABS conventions to correct for the fact that census collectors sometimes misclassify 'boarding houses', 'hotels' and 'staff quarters'. After applying the 'basic rules', the number in boarding houses was 14 490 in 2006 compared with 17 972 in 2001.

2001 conventions

There was an important change in ABS procedures in 2001 which impacted on the boarding house count. Following the 1996 census, ABS staff telephoned those dwellings where there was insufficient information to identify dwelling type. Where additional information could be obtained a more accurate classification was entered. In 2001, these follow-up telephone

calls were discontinued and the number of dwellings in the 'other' category increased from 536 to 2784. The number of persons in those dwellings jumped from 12 938 to 54 636 and it remained at 54 000 in 2006.

The '2001 conventions' involve the application of five rules to identify boarding houses in the 'other' category (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003, Ch. 3). When these rules were applied in 2006, they produced a correction of 3763.

2006 conventions

Boarding houses have been closing down in the inner suburbs of the capital cities, but new boarding houses have been opening up in some outer suburbs. These dwellings often look like suburban houses and rarely have a sign outside. Census collectors could have misclassified these boarding houses as 'private dwellings'.

In 2006, an investigation was undertaken to see whether it was possible to identify boarding houses in the 'private dwellings' category. The final stage of the investigation focused on 9000 private dwellings that had five or more unrelated adults. A small boarding house or a share household could have five or more unrelated tenants. Five criteria were devised to exclude working households, student households, housing for disabled people and dwellings that were too small to be boarding houses. After the rules were applied, there were 705 dwellings remaining with 3343 residents. These were boarding houses that had been misclassified as private dwellings.

In 2006, the total number of persons in boarding houses was 21 596 ($14\,490 + 3763 + 3343 = 21\,596$), compared with 22 877 in 2001. The number of boarding house residents in the Northern Territory was 694 in 2006, compared with 929 in 2001.

The ABS conventions for identifying boarding houses are complicated and it is possible that some dwellings could have been misclassified at all three stages of the analysis. Undercounting could have occurred in some communities and overcounting in others because of misclassification. This can lead to anomalies when we examine the number of people in boarding houses in particular subdivisions.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The census provides the best data that we have on the homeless population at a point in time, but as we have seen there can be 'undercounting' and 'overcounting' of homeless people on census night. Undercounting is most likely in the census category 'improvised homes, tents and sleepers out', and overcounting is more likely in the boarding house category because of misclassification.

The problem of establishing reliable census figures for policy purposes is compounded by the fact that the homeless population changes over time. New people become homeless and some homeless people return to secure accommodation, so the number of homeless people goes up and down.

It is also common for homeless people to move between different forms of temporary accommodation within the same city, and to move both within and between states. The census data was collected in August 2006, and it is unrealistic to expect the same number of homeless people in particular areas at the current time. The challenge is to identify patterns in the population data that might inform the policy process.

3 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter describes the social characteristics of the homeless population in the Northern Territory. First, we compare the rate of homelessness in each state and territory and the number of homeless people. Then we investigate where homeless people were staying on census night. After that we describe the age and gender characteristics of the population. Finally, we comment on the number of Indigenous people.

3.1 HOW MANY?

There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population and both are important. First, there is the number of homeless people in each state and territory on census night. Second, homelessness can be expressed as a rate per 10 000 of the population. This statistic is required for comparing states and territories of different sizes.

3.1 RATE OF HOMELESSNESS PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, 2001 AND 2006

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
2006	42	42	69	68	53	53	248	42	53
2001	42	44	70	64	52	52	288	40	53

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

Table 3.1 shows that in all states except the Northern Territory, the rates of homelessness did not change much between 2001 and 2006. In the southern states (New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory), there were 42 homeless people per 10 000 in 2006, similar to the rates recorded in those states in 2001. South Australia and Tasmania each had a rate of 53 per 10 000 in 2006, again similar to their rates in 2001. The rates of homelessness in the other states were higher. In Western Australia and Queensland, there were between 64 and 70 per 10 000 at both censuses.

In the Northern Territory there were 248 homeless people per 10 000 in 2006 compared with 288 per 10 000 in 2001. However, the census may have undercounted homeless Indigenous people.

Taylor and Biddle (2008, p. v) report that:

... substantial undercounting of the Indigenous population occurred at the 2006 Census. This certainty arises from the fact that the 2006 Post Enumeration Survey (PES) was extended for the first time to include a sample of localities in remote areas. Nationally, the net undercount rate was estimated to be 11.5 per cent, but in Western Australia and the Northern Territory it was as high as 24 per cent and 19 per cent respectively.

If the 2006 Census undercounted the general Indigenous population by 19 per cent in the Northern Territory, then the census probably undercounted homeless Indigenous people by a similar percentage.

3.2 NUMBER OF HOMELESS BY STATE AND TERRITORY, 2001 AND 2006

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
2006	27 374	20 511	26 782	13 391	7 962	2 507	4 785	1 364	104 676
2001	26 676	20 305	24 569	11 697	7 586	2 415	5 423	1 229	99 900

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

Table 3.2 shows the number of homeless people in each state and territory in 2001 and 2006. In the Northern Territory, it was 5423 in 2001 and 4785 in 2006. Bearing in mind that the census undercounted homeless Indigenous people, then a typical point-in-time figure is probably between 5000 and 5200, down from 5400 in 2001.

3.2 ACCOMMODATION ON CENSUS NIGHT

The homeless population in the Northern Territory was distributed differently from the national homeless population (Table 3.3). Nationally, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night, whereas the comparable figure was 14 per cent in the Territory. Across Australia, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in the Territory the figure was nine per cent. The largest group in the Territory were people staying temporarily with other households. They were 44 per cent of the homeless on census night, compared with 45 per cent nationally. In the Territory, 33 per cent of the homeless were in 'improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out', compared with the national figure of 16 per cent.

3.3 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	694	14
SAAP accommodation	19 849	19	411	9
Friends and relatives	46 856	45	2092	44
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	1588	33
	104 676	100	4785	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; and National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

The proportion of people in various types of accommodation across the Northern Territory changed between 2001 and 2006 (Table 3.4). In 2006, the largest group in the Territory (44 per cent) was those staying with friends or relatives on census night, up from 39 per cent in 2001. The proportion in boarding houses declined from 17 to 14 per cent and the number in SAAP increased from four to nine per cent. The proportion in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough declined from 40 to 33 per cent (from 2151 to 1588 people).

3.4 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY, 2001 AND 2006

	2001		2006	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	929	17	694	14
SAAP accommodation	229	4	411	9
Friends and relatives	2114	39	2092	44
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	2151	40	1588	33
	5423	100	4785	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

The census takes a 'snapshot' of where homeless people are staying on census night, but it is important to remember that homeless people often move from one form of temporary accommodation to another. There is a high degree of permeability between the four operational categories used to count the homeless population on census night. There would have been some people living in boarding houses on a long-term basis (tertiary homelessness) and some people living permanently in improvised dwellings (primary homelessness). However, most homeless people would have been moving between different forms of temporary accommodation, including friends and relatives, SAAP accommodation, boarding houses and improvised dwellings. Transience is the typical pattern.

3.3 AGE DISTRIBUTION

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was thought that the homeless population was disproportionately made up of middle-aged and older men (de Hoog 1972; Jordan 1973, 1994). For example, Jordan (1994, p. 21) reported that there were few teenagers in the population and that 80 per cent of the men in his sample were aged 35 or older. De Hoog (1972) gives a similar impression in his ethnographic account of life on Sydney's skid row at the end of the 1960s.

Table 3.5 shows that the age profile of the population is now very different. First, we examine the national figures, then we look at the figures for the Northern Territory.

In 2006, 58 per cent of the homeless across Australia were in the younger age groups and only 42 per cent were aged 35 or older. Twelve per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with parents on census night. Another 21 per cent of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own) and 10 per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24. The age profile of the population is now much younger than 40 to 50 years ago.

3.5 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory		
	N	%	N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	478	10	52
12–18	21 940	21	1102	23	
19–24	10 504	10	308	6	
25–34	15 804	15	633	13	
35–44	13 981	13	598	13	48
45–54	12 206	12	634	13	
55–64	10 708	10	718	15	
65 or older	7 400	7	314	7	
	104 676	100	4785	100	

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

In the Northern Territory, the age profile of the homeless population was older than the national profile. Forty-eight per cent of the homeless in the Territory were age 35 or older, significantly above the national figure of 42 per cent. More than one-third (35 per cent) of the homeless in the Territory were aged 45 or older, up from 25 per cent in 2001 (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2004, p. 28).

Nonetheless, a majority (52 per cent) of homeless people in the Territory were in the younger age groups. Twenty-three per cent of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). Ten per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents on census night. Another six per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 13 per cent were adults aged 25 to 34.

3.4 MALES AND FEMALES

In 2006, men outnumbered women in the national homeless population, 56 to 44 per cent (Table 3.6), and in the Northern Territory men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. In the Territory, there were slightly more females in the 12 to 18 age group (53 to 47 per cent) and in the 25 to 34 age group (51 to 49 per cent). From age 35 onwards, men outnumbered women, about 60 to 40 per cent.

3.6 PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES BY AGE GROUP

Australia

	Under 12	12-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	52	46	53	57	63	64	61	64	56
Female	48	54	47	43	37	36	39	36	44
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Northern Territory

	Under 12	12-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	56	47	55	49	60	59	59	63	55
Female	44	53	45	51	40	41	41	37	45
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 3.7 shows the proportion of males and females in different sectors of the homeless population on census night. Nationally, 72 per cent of boarding house residents were male and in the Territory the figure was 66 per cent. Amongst people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough, men outnumbered women in the Territory, 56 to 44 per cent. There were also slightly more men than women staying with other households (51 to 49 per cent), and there were more men in SAAP (52 to 48 per cent).

3.7 PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

Australia

	Boarding house (N=21 596)	Friends or relatives (N=46 856)	SAAP (N=19 849)	Improvised dwellings (N=16 375)	All (N=104 676)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	72	52	47	60	56
Female	28	48	53	40	44
	100	100	100	100	100

Northern Territory

	Boarding house (N=694)	Friends or relatives (N=2092)	SAAP (N=411)	Improvised dwellings (N=1588)	All (N=4785)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	66	51	52	56	55
Female	34	49	48	44	45
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

3.5 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

In the Northern Territory, 30 per cent of people identified themselves as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 3.8 shows that Indigenous people made up 8.3 per cent of people staying with other households, 37.7 per cent of persons in boarding houses, 52.3 per cent of people in SAAP and 63.2 per cent of those in improvised dwellings. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in the Northern Territory, except amongst those staying with other households.

There is a risk that Indigenous people staying temporarily with other households were undercounted. The census asked for each person's usual address, and people with no usual address were asked to write this in. Indigenous people interpret this question within a different cultural frame of reference.

3.8 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY

	Boarding house (N=687)	Friends or relatives (N=2092)	SAAP (N=411)	Improvised dwellings (N=1588)	All* (N=4778)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	62.3	91.7	47.7	36.8	65.4
Indigenous	37.7	8.3	52.3	63.2	34.6
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

Often, Indigenous people do not think of 'home' as a particular dwelling, because they are attached to their traditional land. Indigenous people also have extended kinship networks and they move between dwellings belonging to extended family members. When Indigenous people leave home to escape domestic violence or other family problems, they usually move in with households that are related to them. In these circumstances, it is not culturally appropriate to record 'no usual address' on census night, because 'home' is understood in a different way. This creates undercounting in this category.

3.6 SUMMARY

The number of homeless people fluctuates because people move in and out of homelessness. In the Northern Territory, we estimate that a typical point-in-time figure is about 5000 to 5200, down from 5400 in 2001.

The homeless population in the Northern Territory was distributed differently from the national homeless population. Nationally, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night, whereas the comparable figure was 14 per cent in the Northern Territory. Across Australia, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in the Territory it was nine per cent. The largest group in the Territory were people staying temporarily with other households, making up 44 per cent of the homeless population, compared with 45 per cent nationally. In the Territory, 33 per cent of the homeless were in 'improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out', whereas the national figure was 16 per cent.

Nationally, 56 per cent of homeless people were male and 44 per cent were female. In the Northern Territory, men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. The homeless population in the Territory was older than the homeless population in other states, with 48 per cent of the homeless aged

35 or older compared with 42 per cent nationally. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sectors of the population, except among those staying with other households, where there was probably undercounting.

4 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

This chapter discusses different ways of approaching a geographical analysis. Then it focuses on the distribution of the homeless population in the Northern Territory.

4.1 NUMBERS AND RATES

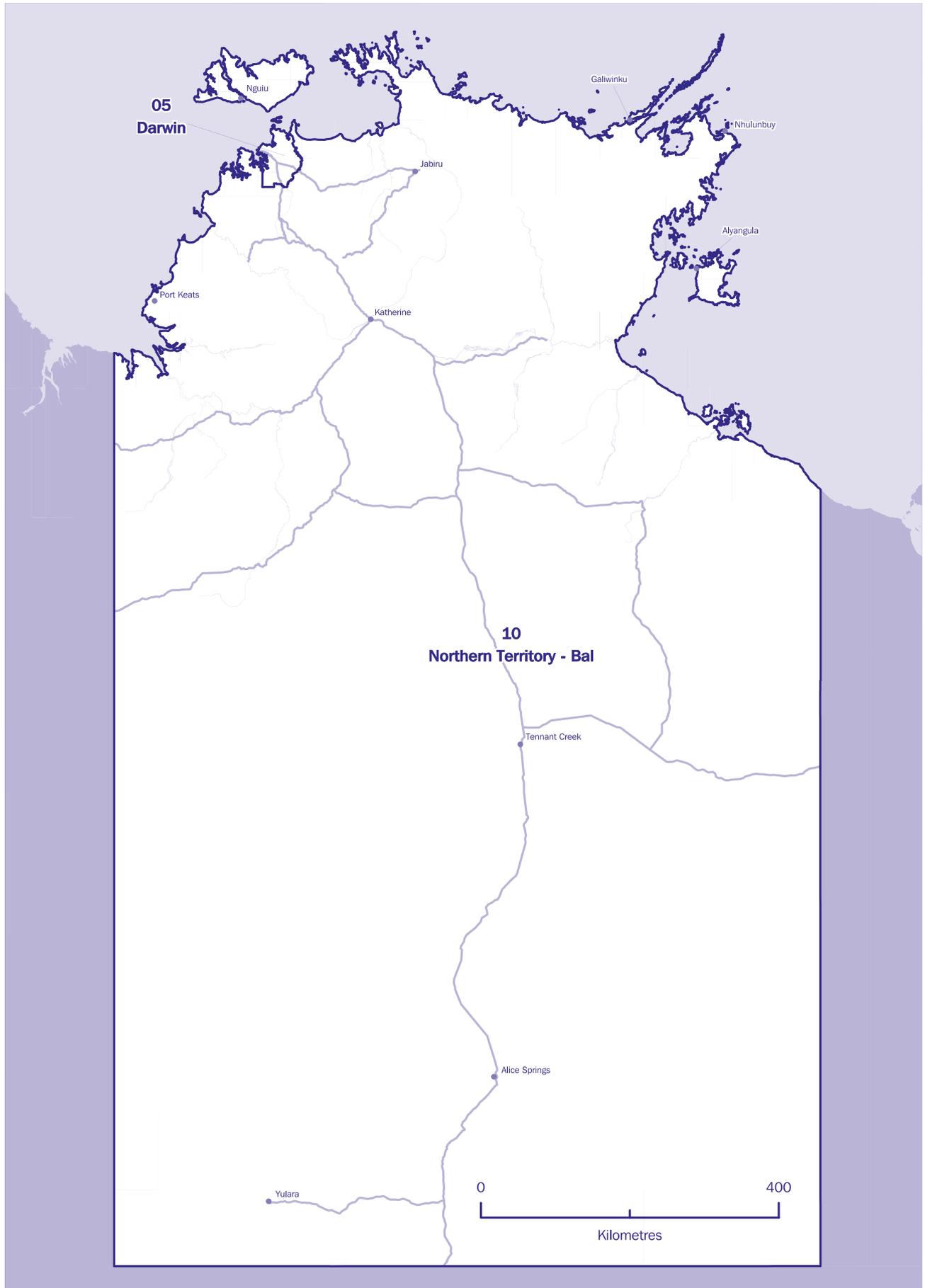
There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population and both are important. First, there is the number of homeless people in particular communities on census night. This is the 'raw' count and policy makers always need to be aware of these figures. Second, homelessness can be expressed as a rate per 10 000 of the population. This statistic is required for comparing communities of different sizes. For example, the number of homeless people will always be greater in Darwin than in regional centres such as Katherine or Tennant Creek because of the difference in population size, but the rate of homelessness may be the same.

However, it is important to be cautious when interpreting rates for two reasons. First, the rate of homelessness in a particular area does not tell us how many in that community became homeless. For example, the rate of homelessness in Alice Springs quantifies the number of homeless people in relation to the Alice Springs' population, but it does not tell us whether those people came from Alice Springs, other parts of the Territory, or from interstate.

Second, it is important to be cautious when interpreting rates for geographical areas with small populations. Suppose that policy makers have the resources to fund one new SAAP service and they are evaluating the competing claims of two communities. In a small town of 2000 people the rate of homelessness was 100 per 10 000, whereas in a regional city of 30 000 it was 30 per 10 000. Should the resources go to the rural community or to the regional city?

In the rural community, there would have been 20 homeless people ($20 \times 10\,000/2000 = 100$ per 10 000), whereas in the regional city there would have been 90 homeless people ($90 \times 10\,000/30\,000 = 30$ per 10 000). When policy makers allocate resources, they have to consider both the number of homeless people in a community and the rate of homelessness, as well as local intelligence about what is happening 'on the ground' in order to match services with expressed need.

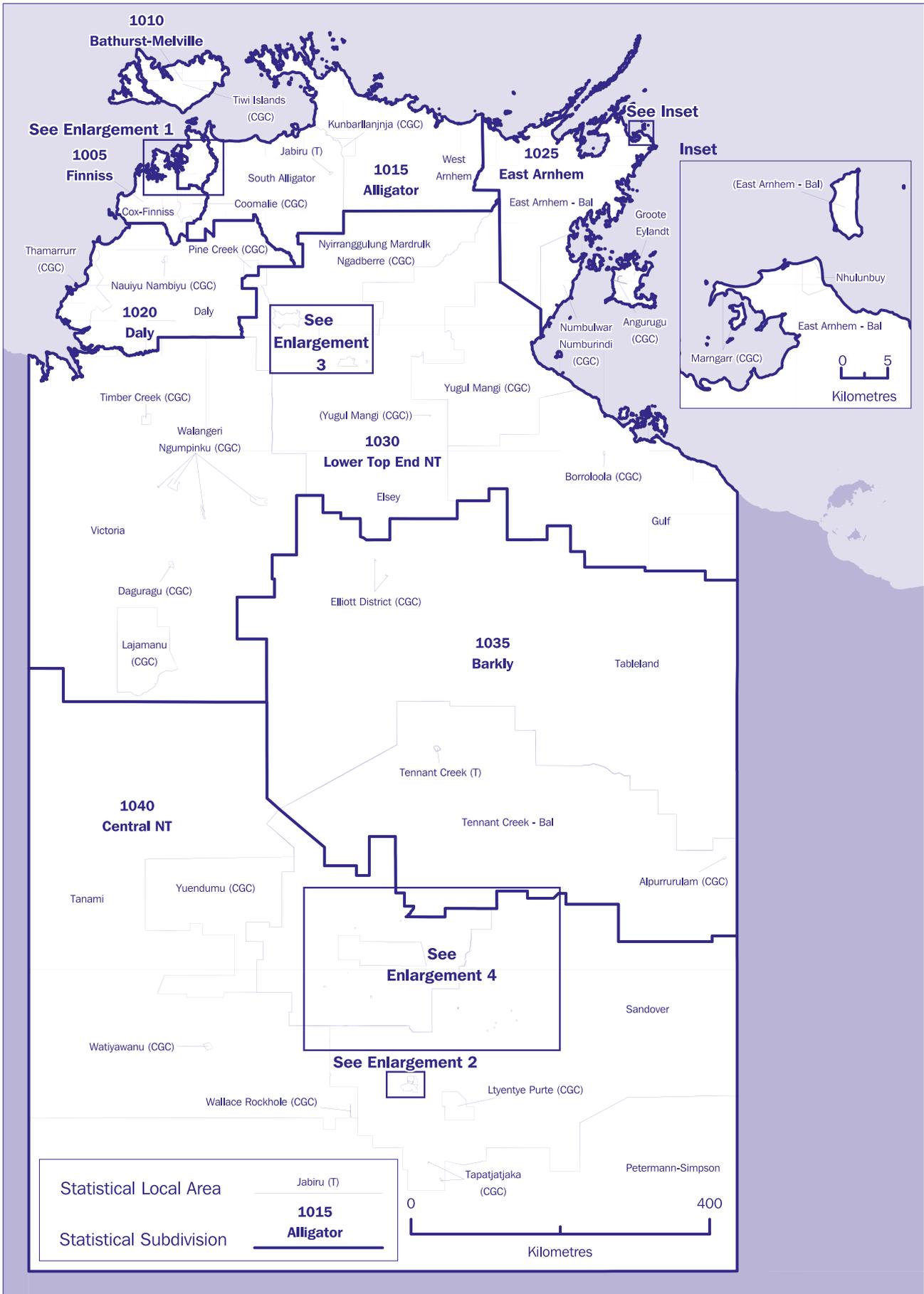
MAP 1: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Statistical Divisions



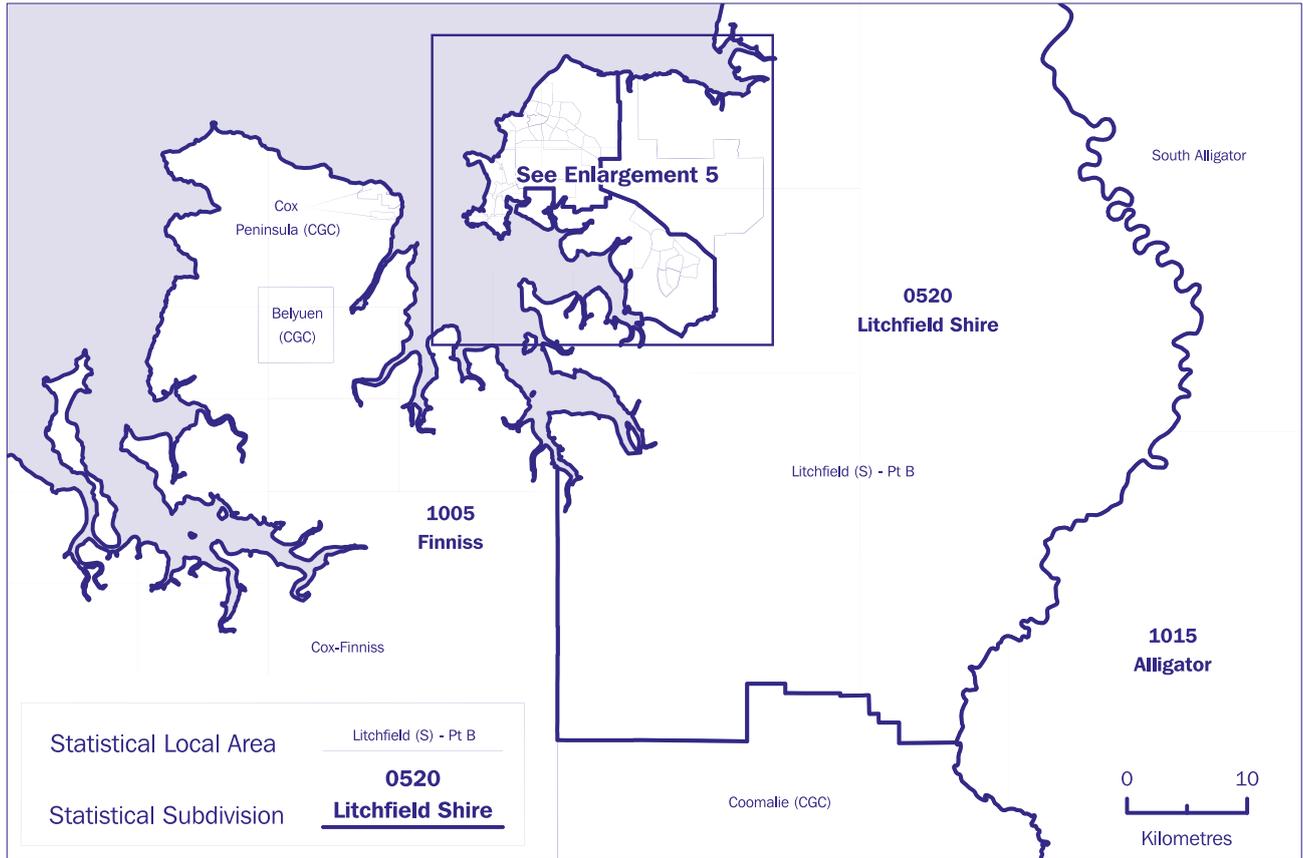
MAP 2: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Darwin Statistical Division



MAP 3: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas

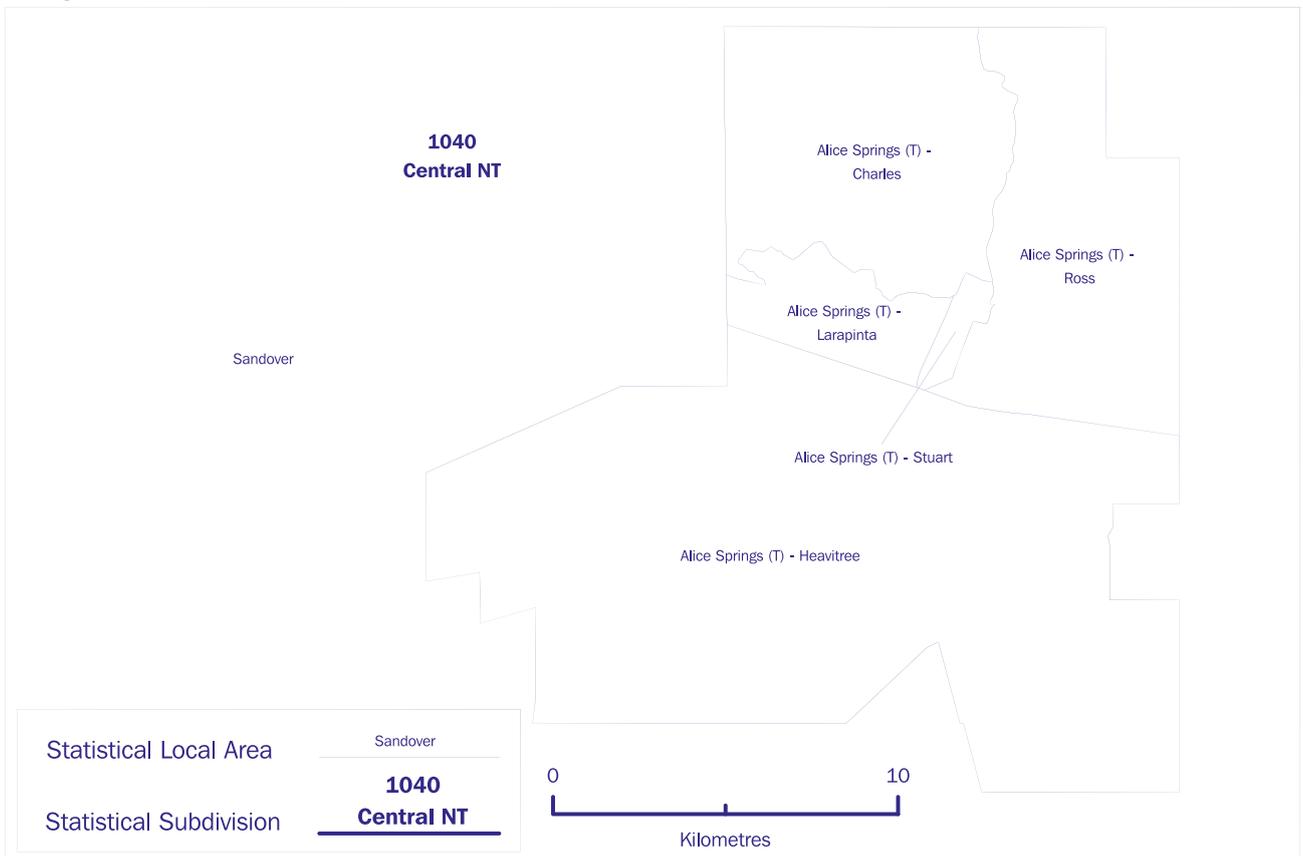


MAP 4: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargements

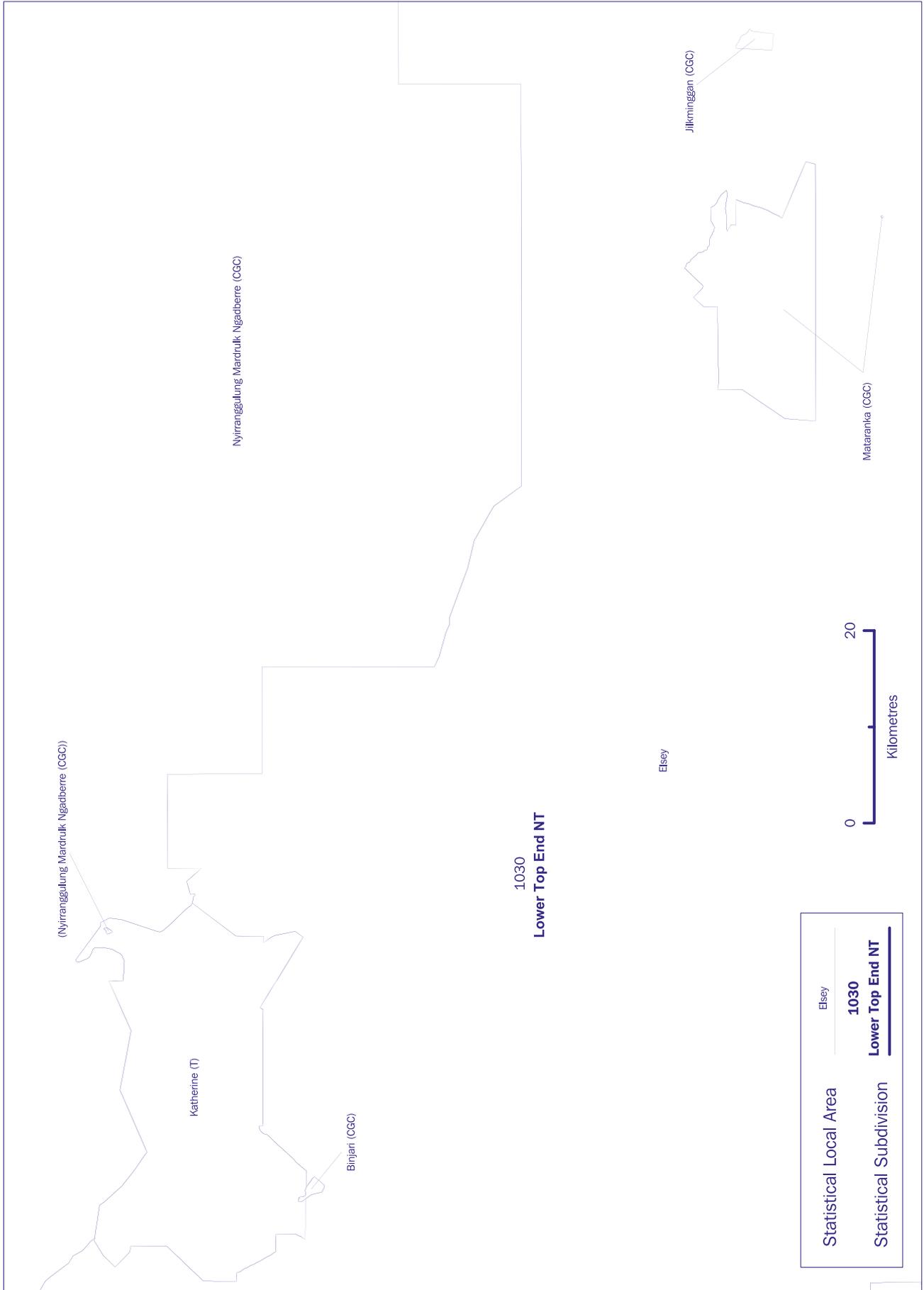


Enlargement 1

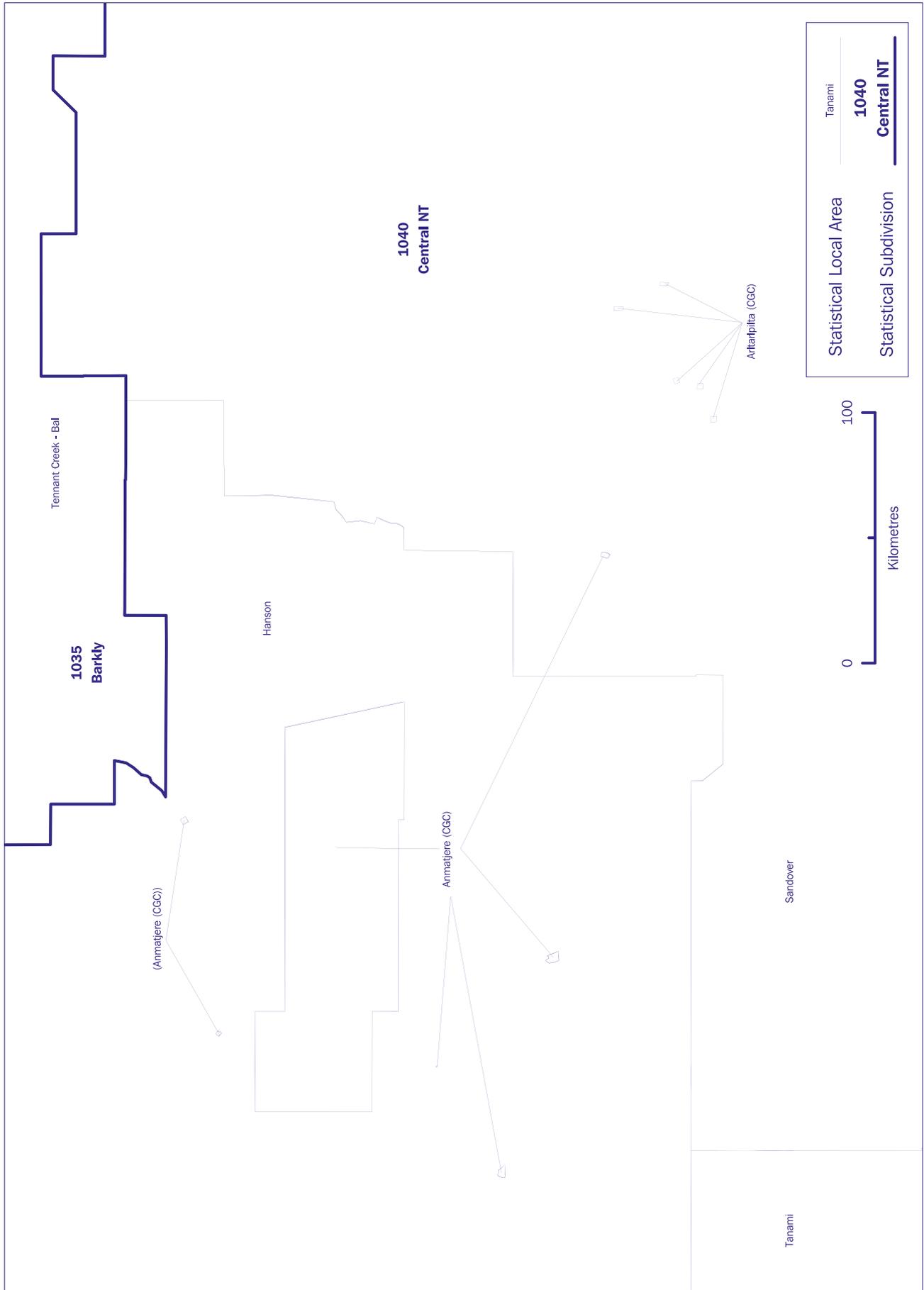
Enlargement 2



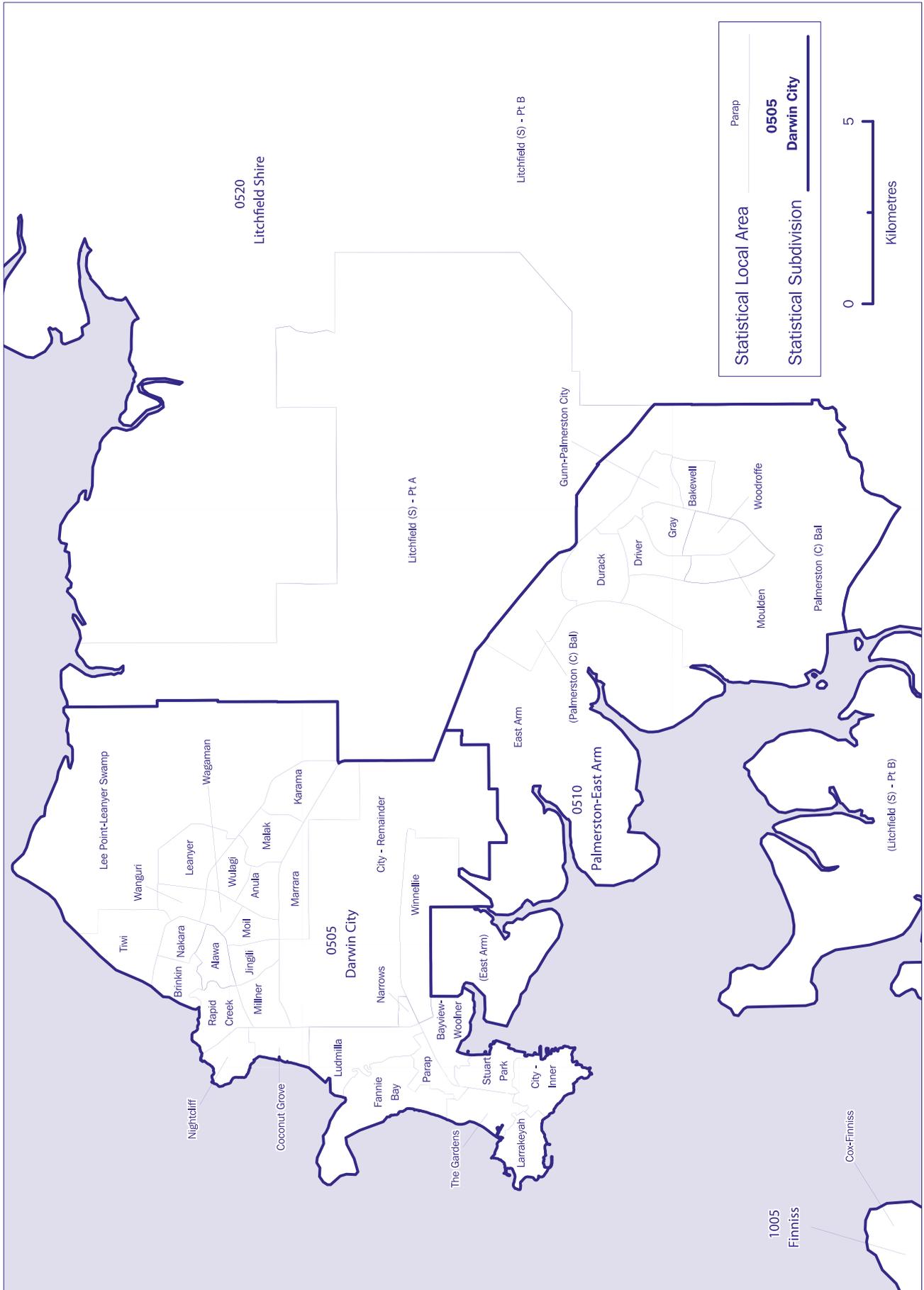
MAP 5: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargement 3



MAP 6: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargement 4



MAP 7: NORTHERN TERRITORY, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargement 5



4.2 GEOGRAPHICAL CATEGORIES

There are a number of ways of approaching a geographical analysis. The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) for the collection and dissemination of geographically organised statistics (ABS 2006c). The ASGC provides seven interrelated classification structures which are designed for different practical purposes. This report uses the 'Main Structure' which covers the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. The Main Structure comprises five hierarchical levels: census districts, statistical local areas, statistical subdivisions, statistical divisions, and states and territories. This analysis uses statistical divisions and statistical subdivisions as the main geographical categories, because patterns can be identified more easily if larger geographical categories are used.

The Northern Territory is divided into two statistical divisions (excluding off-shore and migratory). The first is Darwin (population 105 991), which includes Darwin City, the satellite city of Palmerston, and the surrounding rural area of Litchfield Shire (see Map 2). The second statistical division is Northern Territory Balance (population 84 910), which includes the subdivisions of Finnis, Bathurst-Melville, Alligator, Daly, East Arnhem, Lower Top End, Barkly, and Central NT (see Map 3).

Statistical subdivisions are defined as 'socially and economically homogeneous regions characterised by identifiable links between the inhabitants' (ABS 2006c, p. 14). Some statistical subdivisions correspond to major regional population centres. There are 44 of these across the country but none in the Northern Territory.

In other cases, statistical subdivisions cover non-urban areas. These are defined as rural areas that do not include cities with populations of 25 000 or above. These non-urban areas are said to have 'identifiable links between economic units within the region' and there may be the 'unifying influence' (ABS 2006c, p. 14) of one or more country towns. These rural/remote subdivisions have small populations, and sometimes high rates of homelessness but few homeless people.

4.3 OVERVIEW: NORTHERN TERRITORY

About half (55 per cent) of the population lives in Darwin. The census identified 2478 homeless people in Darwin and the rate of homelessness was 234 per 10 000 (Table 4.1). This is higher than the rates of homelessness in other major capital cities such as Sydney (39 per 10 000), Melbourne (41 per 10 000) and Adelaide (47 per 10 000).

There were 2307 homeless people in the Northern Territory Balance

where the rate was 272 per 10 000, also higher than in other states. Altogether, 45 per cent of the population lives outside of Darwin and 48 per cent of the homeless were in these communities.

This chapter focuses on the spatial distribution of the homeless population across the Territory. Chapter 5 discusses Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues.

4.1 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, DARWIN AND NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Darwin	Northern Territory Balance	All
Number	2478	2307	4785
Rate	234	272	248

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

4.4 DARWIN

Table 4.2 shows that the rate of homelessness in the three subdivisions of Darwin. It was 276 per 10 000 in Darwin City where there were 1829 homeless people; 75 per 10 000 in Palmerston where there were 180 homeless people; and 302 per 10 000 in Litchfield Shire where there were 469 homeless people.

4.2 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, DARWIN

	Darwin City	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Number	1829	180	469	2478
Rate	276	75	302	234

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Palmerston is a rapidly growing satellite city about 12 kilometres from Darwin. There may be more homelessness in Palmerston than indicated in Table 4.2, because homeless people in Palmerston may have travelled into Darwin. There are more services in inner Darwin, as well as more low-cost accommodation such as boarding houses.

Table 4.3 shows that 25 per cent of the homeless in Darwin were staying in boarding houses; another 40 per cent were with friends or relatives; 20 per cent were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough ('living in the long grass'); and 15 per cent were in SAAP accommodation. The number of homeless in Darwin declined from 2008 people in 2001 to 1829 in 2006,

but the numbers were up in some categories and down in others.

The number of persons in SAAP in Darwin increased significantly. In 2006, there were 274 people in SAAP, compared with 129 in 2001. The proportion of Indigenous people in SAAP increased from 10 per cent in 2001 to 45 per cent in 2006.

The number of persons staying with other households in Darwin remained steady at just over 700 (734 in 2006 and 717 in 2001).

In contrast, the number of people in boarding houses decreased from 604 in 2001 to 461 in 2006. There are a number of boarding houses in Darwin but there are also many backpackers' hostels. Backpackers' hostels will accommodate homeless people if demand for their accommodation is down. Homeless people in backpackers' hostels are counted in the census, but they are not identified as part of the homeless population.

4.3 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, DARWIN

Percentage				
	Darwin	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Boarding house	25	2	3	19
SAAP	15	6	0	11
Friends/relatives	40	74	77	50
Improvised dwellings	20	18	20	20
	100	100	100	100

Number				
	Darwin	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Boarding house	461	3	12	476
SAAP	274	10	0	284
Friends/relatives	734	134	362	1230
Improvised dwellings	360	33	95	488
	1829	180	469	2478

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Finally, the number of persons in the improvised dwellings category in Darwin declined from 558 in 2001 to 360 in 2006. In 2006, nearly everyone in this category was sleeping rough and 74 per cent were Indigenous. Local service providers were unsure whether the number of rough sleepers had 'really decreased'. Some people reported 'significant undercounting in 2006', but others said 'the number sleeping rough varies a great deal'. One census collector spoke to some homeless people a few days after the census and most of them had not filled out census forms.

Overall, the number of homeless people in Darwin declined by about 180 people between 2006 and 2001, but this is partly explained by the decline in the number of rough sleepers who were probably undercounted.

There were 180 homeless people in Palmerston (Table 4.3). Three-quarters (74 per cent) of these people were staying with other households and eighteen per cent were in the primary population. Most people in the primary population were sleeping rough and all were Indigenous.

In Litchfield Shire, there were 469 homeless people (Table 4.3). Three-quarters (77 per cent) were staying with other households and 20 per cent were in the primary population. There were about 30 households in the primary population who were in improvised dwellings such as sheds and garages. These sheds varied from broken-down shacks to prefabricated sheds assembled on a concrete block. Three-quarters of these households owned or were purchasing their dwellings.

Overall, there were 2478 homeless people in the Darwin statistical division on census night, and three-quarters (74 per cent) of the homeless were in Darwin City. Most of the SAAP accommodation was in Darwin City, as were most of the boarding house rooms.

4.5 NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

Northern Territory Balance has eight subdivisions. The population is 84 910 and includes Alice Springs (population 23 895), Katherine (population 8191), and Tennant Creek (population 2922). There were 49 902 people in remote communities.

4.4 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Number	415	43	446	1403	2307
Rate	507	147	187	281	272

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 4.4 shows the rate of homelessness in the main towns and in remote areas. The rate was: 507 per 10 000 in Katherine where there were 415 homeless people; 147 per 10 000 in Tennant Creek where there were 43 homeless people; 187 per 10 000 in Alice Springs (446 homeless); and 281 per 10 000 in remote communities (1403 homeless).

In Katherine 42 per cent (175 people) of the homeless were in the primary population (Table 4.5). All were rough sleepers and 95 per cent were

Indigenous. Local informants reported that it was common for Indigenous people to sleep in 'camps on the edge of town'. Another 40 per cent (168 people) of the homeless were staying temporarily with other households and 97 per cent of this group were non-Indigenous. In 2001, there were 21 people in SAAP; this figure increased to 61 in 2006.

4.5 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

Percentage

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Boarding house	3	65	18	7	9
SAAP	15	0	14	0	6
Friends/relatives	40	12	43	36	37
Improvised dwellings	42	23	25	57	48
	100	100	100	100	100

Number

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Boarding house	11	28	78	101	218
SAAP	61	0	64	2	127
Friends/relatives	168	5	193	496	862
Improvised dwellings	175	10	111	804	1100
	415	43	446	1403	2307

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Alice Springs had a much lower rate of homelessness than Katherine (187 compared with 507 per 10 000) (Table 4.4), but more homeless people (446 compared with 415) (Table 4.5). There was also an important change in Alice Springs. The number of homeless people declined from 727 in 2001 to 446 in 2006, and the rate of homelessness dropped from 290 to 187 per 10 000.

In 2006, 43 per cent of the homeless in Alice Springs were staying with other households (Table 4.5), similar to the proportion in 2001, but the actual number of people in this situation decreased from 304 to 193.

The proportion in boarding houses in Alice Springs was also similar (18 per cent in 2006 compared with 16 per cent in 2001), but the number of people in boarding houses had declined from 119 to 78.

The number of persons in improvised dwellings declined from 238 to 111. In 2006, about 80 per cent in this category were rough sleepers and about two-thirds were Indigenous. Local service providers were unsure whether this decrease was 'real'. Some people thought the numbers had not

changed, and others questioned whether the count was reliable. A number of people pointed out that ‘this is a very mobile population and the numbers go up and down’.

Overall, it seems likely that homelessness has decreased in Alice Springs, but the number of people recorded sleeping rough was probably an underestimate.

4.6 PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE, EXCLUDING KATHERINE, TENNANT CREEK AND ALICE SPRINGS

	Finnis	Bathurst- Melville	Alligator	Daly	East Arnhem	Lower Top End	Barkly	Central NT	Total
Improvised dwell.	88	0	153	146	77	108	10	222	804
Friends/relatives	83	0	39	65	31	142	62	74	496

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

In remote locations, 57 per cent of the homeless were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough and 36 per cent were with other households (Table 4.5). Table 4.6 shows the number of people in these categories in remote subdivisions. Overall, there were 496 people staying with other households and 804 people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough.

There were 222 in the primary population in Central NT, 153 in Alligator, 146 in Daly and 108 in Lower Top End. About 60 per cent were Indigenous and most people were living a traditional lifestyle, often moving from place to place. There were 300 to 350 non-Indigenous people. Some were prospectors, possibly living in sheds or other makeshift dwellings, as well as various people described as ‘loners’. This is a mobile population, spread thinly across the Territory.

4.6 MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS

The national report pointed out that boarding houses are more common in capital cities and less common in regional centres and country towns. In these regional and country communities, SAAP workers sometimes refer homeless people to local caravan parks if there is no emergency accommodation available. Marginal residents of caravan parks were defined as people who were renting caravans or cabins, living at their usual address, and with no one in the dwelling having full-time employment.

Seventy per cent of boarding house residents across the country were in the capital cities, and in the Northern Territory 66 per cent of boarding

house residents were in Darwin City (Table 4.7). Nationally, 71 per cent of marginal caravan park residents were outside of the capital cities, and in the Northern Territory this figure was 65 per cent (Table 4.7). In some communities, local SAAP workers send homeless people to the local caravan park if there is no alternative accommodation available. Caravan parks may also house some people on a longer-term basis because they are unable to re-enter the private rental market.

4.7 SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS IN BOARDING HOUSES AND MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

	Boarding house (N=694)	Caravan (N=273)
	%	%
Darwin City	66	35
Remainder of NT	34	65
	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

The 2001 Census identified 775 marginal residents of caravan parks in the Northern Territory, but this declined to 273 in 2006, a decrease of 65 per cent. A number of parks that used to provide budget accommodation for poor people have closed.

Table 4.8 shows that there were 96 marginal residents of caravan parks in Darwin and 51 in Litchfield Shire, but none in Palmerston. Most caravan parks in Darwin provide accommodation for tourists or for people who own caravans. Only a minority of parks still provide accommodation for poor people and crisis accommodation.

4.8 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND NUMBER OF MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, DARWIN

	Darwin City	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Homeless	1829	180	469	2478
Rate per 10 000	276	75	302	234
Caravans	96	0	51	147
Total	1925	180	520	2625
Rate per 10 000	290	75	334	248

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

There were 126 marginal caravan park dwellers in the Northern Territory Balance (Table 4.9), down from 461 in 2001. Parks that provide

accommodation for marginal people have closed in these communities as well. In 2006, there were 10 marginal residents of caravan parks in Katherine, 24 in Alice Springs and 89 in remote locations.

4.9 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND NUMBER OF MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Homeless	415	43	446	1403	2307
Rate per 10 000	507	147	187	281	272
Caravans	10	3	24	89	126
Total	425	46	470	1492	2433
Rate per 10 000	519	157	197	303	287

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

For some policy purposes, marginal residents of caravan parks might be thought of as part of the tertiary population. If these residents are included, then the rate of homelessness was 290 per 10 000 in Darwin, 197 per 10 000 in Alice Springs, and 303 per 10 000 in remote locations.

5 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

5.1 OVERVIEW

In the Northern Territory, 91 per cent of people answered the census question: 'Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander origin?' and 30 per cent identified as Indigenous. However, there was no information on the Indigenous status of the homeless young people staying temporarily with friends or relatives, who were not counted in the census. We use census data on homeless people staying with other households (the 'usual address' question) to estimate how many Indigenous young people were missed by the census.

There is a risk of underestimation, because many Indigenous people make sense of the 'usual address' question within a different cultural frame of reference. When Indigenous people leave home to escape domestic violence or other family problems, they often move in with members of their extended family. In these circumstances, it is not culturally appropriate to record 'no usual address' on census night, because 'home' is understood in a different way. This creates under-reporting in this category.

5.1 NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATES PER 10 000, 2001 AND 2006

	2001			2006		
	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Total	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Total*
Number	3559	1864	5423	3126	1652	4785
Rate	266	344	288	235	287	248

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

The research found 1652 homeless Indigenous people in the Northern Territory on census night 2006 (Table 5.1). The rate was 287 per 10 000 of the population, compared with a rate of 344 in 2001. The rate of homelessness for non-Indigenous people was 235 per 10 000 in 2006, compared with 266 per 10 000 in 2001. Indigenous people were overrepresented in the

homeless population in all states and territories in 2006, but the rate of Indigenous homelessness has decreased in the Northern Territory since 2001.

5.2 DARWIN, ALICE SPRINGS AND NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

In Darwin, the rate of Indigenous homelessness was 601 per 10 000 compared with 189 per 10 000 for non-Indigenous people. Similarly, in Alice Springs, the rate for Indigenous people was 315 per 10 000 compared with 154 per 10 000 for non-Indigenous people. However, in the Northern Territory Balance (excluding Alice Springs), the rate of homelessness for Indigenous people was 197 per 10 000, compared with 530 per 10 000 for non-Indigenous people. This result is counter to what might be expected. First, we examine Darwin and Alice Springs. Then we examine the Northern Territory Balance.

5.2 NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS HOMELESS PEOPLE IN DARWIN, ALICE SPRINGS AND NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Darwin		Alice Springs		NT Balance*		Total**	
	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.
Number of homeless	1791	684	292	154	1043	814	3126	1652
Rate per 10 000	189	601	154	315	530	197	235	287

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

* Excluding Alice Springs.

** Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

In Darwin and Alice Springs, about half of the homeless Indigenous people were camping out or sleeping rough (44 per cent in Darwin and 45 per cent in Alice Springs), compared with less than 15 per cent of the non-Indigenous people (11 per cent in Darwin and 14 per cent in Alice Springs). In urban areas, Indigenous people are much more likely to sleep rough than non-Indigenous people.

Non-Indigenous people are more likely to be staying with other households. In Darwin, 63 per cent of homeless non-Indigenous people were staying with friends or relatives, as were 59 per cent of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs. There were few Indigenous people staying with other households: 15 per cent in Darwin and 14 per cent in Alice Springs.

In the Northern Territory Balance, Indigenous people were usually camping out or sleeping rough: 97 per cent in Daly, 100 per cent in Alligator,

63 per cent in East Arnhem, 76 per cent in the Lower Top End, and 90 per cent in the Central NT (excluding Alice Springs). The proportions were lower in Barkly (28 per cent) and Finnis (33 per cent), but these subdivisions had few homeless people.

The proportion of non-Indigenous people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough varied widely: 11 per cent in Daly, 51 per cent in Finnis, 75 per cent in Alligator, 35 per cent in East Arnhem, 20 per cent in the Lower Top End, five per cent in Barkly and 31 per cent in central NT (excluding Alice Springs).

In remote communities, non-Indigenous people were often staying with friends or relatives: 81 per cent in Daly, 47 per cent in Finnis, 72 per cent in the Lower Top End, 53 per cent in East Arnhem, 88 per cent in Barkly and 54 per cent in the Central NT.

In contrast, few Indigenous people in these communities reported staying temporarily with other households: none in Alligator; five per cent in East Arnhem; and three per cent in Daly, Central NT and Lower Top End. The proportion with other households was higher in Finnis (40 per cent) and Barkly (25 per cent), but these subdivisions had small numbers of homeless people.

It was pointed out earlier that Indigenous people have a broader understanding of family than Anglo-Australians, and it is common for Indigenous people to move between different dwellings in their extended kinship group. They often stay with members of their extended family in times of crisis—for example, when there is domestic violence or other family problems. The different cultural conception of ‘home’ means that recording ‘no usual address’ on census night is inappropriate. In remote communities, the rate of homelessness for Indigenous people is lower because of this under-reporting.

5.3 MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS

Marginal residents of caravan parks were defined as people who were renting caravans or cabins, living at their usual address, and with no one in the dwelling having full-time employment. For some policy purposes, marginal caravan park dwellers might be thought of as part of the tertiary population. There were 273 people in this category in the Territory. Table 5.3 shows that 92 per cent were non-Indigenous: 96 per cent in Darwin, 79 per cent in Alice Springs, and 89 per cent in remote locations.

5.3 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS

	Darwin (N=147)	Alice Springs (N=24)	NT Balance (N=83)	Total (N=254)*
	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	96	79	89	92
Indigenous	4	21	11	8
	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

* No information on 19 people.

5.4 SUMMARY

Overall, there were 4785 homeless people in the Territory. There were 3126 non-Indigenous people and the rate of homelessness was 235 per 10 000. There were 1652 Indigenous people and the rate of homelessness was 287 per 10 000. In Darwin, the rate of homelessness for Indigenous people was three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous people. In Alice Springs, the rate was twice as high. However, in Northern Territory Balance, the rate of homelessness for non-Indigenous people was more than double the rate for Indigenous people. This is because Indigenous people staying temporarily with other households were often not counted.

6 DISCUSSION

The Australian Government's White Paper on homelessness has proposed two ambitious goals: 'to halve homelessness by 2020' and to provide 'supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it', along with interim targets for 2013. The Commonwealth, state and territory governments will work together to achieve the targets specified in the White Paper. This chapter makes some comments on the White Paper's targets, on the basis of the 2006 statistical data on homelessness.

The White Paper highlights three strategies to achieve its goals. The first strategy is 'turning off the tap', which relates to the provision of services focusing on early intervention and prevention (Homelessness Taskforce 2008, Ch. 3). The second strategy is 'improving and expanding services to end homelessness', which focuses on providing services that assist people into 'stable long-term housing, employment and training' or other forms of community participation (Homelessness Taskforce 2008, Ch. 4). The third strategy is 'breaking the cycle', whereby homeless people can 'move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not reoccur' (Homelessness Taskforce 2008, Ch. 5).

The White Paper was accompanied by a significant financial commitment of \$1.2 billion over five years, with \$800 million allocated for prevention and early intervention services, and a further \$400 million to increase the supply of 'affordable and supported housing for people who would otherwise be homeless'. Since the White Paper, the government has announced a further \$6.6 billion to be spent on the construction of 20 000 homes for public housing, the largest expansion of public housing for many years.

The aim of the government is to reduce the number of homeless people from 105 000 in 2006 to 50 000 by 2020. The White Paper is not a detailed plan, but it does provide a policy framework for the national response to homelessness and foreshadows significant funded initiatives to achieve targeted social goals. However, the international economic environment is now far more problematic than it was prior to 2008, and the global economic recession may create additional pressures that exacerbate homelessness.

6.1 HOMELESS STATISTICS

There are three main sources of statistical data that inform policy. The first is the ABS Census of Population and Housing undertaken every five years. The 2001 Census reported 99 900 homeless people and the 2006 Census reported 104 676. At both censuses the rate of homelessness was 53 persons per 10 000 of the population. On census night 2006, 16 375 people were counted in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough (primary homelessness), 46 856 people were staying temporarily with other households (secondary homelessness), 19 849 were in SAAP (secondary homelessness), and 21 596 were in boarding houses (tertiary homelessness).

The profile of the homeless population looks different if people are classified on the basis of their housing histories, rather than their accommodation on census night. In a study of 4291 homeless people in Melbourne, Chamberlain, Johnson and Theobald (2007) found that 92 per cent of their sample had moved regularly from one form of temporary accommodation to another. Nearly everyone had stayed with friends or relatives, but 85 per cent had also stayed in boarding houses, 60 per cent had been in SAAP/THM accommodation, and 50 per cent had slept rough. Homeless people show up in particular places on census night, but many of them will be somewhere else a few weeks later.

The second source of data is the National SAAP Data Collection which gathers information on all persons assisted by the SAAP program. The National SAAP Data Collection provides important information on the needs and social characteristics of people who use these services. Between 1 July 2005 and 30 June 2006, 106 500 homeless adults and 54 700 accompanying children were assisted, making a total of 161 200 persons in SAAP (AIHW 2007, p. xi). It would be possible to estimate the annual homeless population if we knew what proportion of homeless people use SAAP services, but we do not have this statistic.

The third source of statistical data is research surveys of different subgroups within the homeless population. These samples are usually drawn from service users. However, findings from this kind of research can be used to make inferences about the homeless population. In 2001, Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003) contacted all SAAP services in census week and were provided with 812 case studies. The research found that 48 per cent of SAAP clients had been homeless for one year or longer (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003, p. 42). In a study of 630 SAAP clients, Eardley, Thompson, Cass and Dadich (2008, Ch. 5) found that 65 per cent had been homeless on two or more occasions and one-quarter had received help from SAAP for between one and five years; and in a study of 4291

people, Chamberlain, Johnson and Theobald (2007, p. 25) found that 64 per cent had been homeless for one year or longer. The findings suggest that a significant proportion of the homeless population have long-term housing problems. Making good use of the available statistical data necessarily means making reasoned inferences from the different data sources.

6.2 REDUCING HOMELESSNESS: OVERVIEW

Homelessness is a process including stages of becoming homeless, being homeless and at some point recovering from homelessness. In Australia, thinking about homelessness as a process is well-established and metaphors such as the 'homeless career' (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998) and 'homeless pathways' are widely used to refer to these transitions (Clapham 2003; Johnson, Gronda and Coutts 2008). The homeless population consists of diverse groups: single men and women, families with children, and young people on their own. For some people, homelessness is a short-lived experience, while for others homelessness lasts more than one year, and some people experience repeated episodes of homelessness.

People become homeless for diverse reasons. Teenagers typically experience homelessness following a breakdown in their family situation. Some families become homeless as debt mounts and they are evicted from their housing. For other people, it is a breakdown in their conjugal relationship, often involving domestic violence, that results in one partner (usually a woman with children) losing their accommodation. Mental health issues or drug and alcohol abuse may be directly implicated in some people becoming homeless, but other people develop these issues in the homeless population (Chamberlain, Johnson and Theobald 2007).

It is known that some groups are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, such as young people who have been through the care and protection system (Johnson and Chamberlain 2008a). Also, it is known that Indigenous people are more vulnerable to becoming homeless than non-Indigenous Australians.

Reducing the size of the homeless population will require a significant investment in early intervention and applying appropriate intervention models for different subgroups in the population. There will also be a need for improved services to support people who are homeless and follow-up support to ensure that formerly homeless people can maintain their accommodation. Finally, a major investment in affordable housing, including public and community housing, will be needed over the next decade.

6.3 ROUGH SLEEPERS

The White Paper prioritises reducing the number of people sleeping rough and ‘offering supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it’ (Homelessness Taskforce 2008, p. 17). This is a commendable priority, but three points need to be borne in mind.

First, providing people with emergency accommodation can be justified on both moral and practical grounds, but moving rough sleepers into supported accommodation will not reduce the overall number of homeless people.

Second, it is important to recognise that most people do not sleep rough on a permanent basis. Chamberlain, Johnson and Theobald (2007) found that only two per cent of their sample was consistently without shelter, but 49 per cent of the sample had slept rough occasionally.

Third, the census identified 16 375 people in the ‘improvised dwellings’ category. However, this category includes a wide range of situations from sleeping in a park and sheltering in a derelict building, to living in a shed or garage of some kind. There is no simple way of disaggregating the category, but in 2006 we conducted further research. We examined census data, then we held many discussions with building inspectors, town planners and service providers across the country. This provided the basis for estimating the number of persons in improvised dwellings (sheds, garages and cabins) and the number of persons sleeping rough (for example, in public places, derelict buildings, cars and tents).

In Chapter 2, we estimated that in the capital cities about 75 per cent of households in the ‘primary homeless’ category were sleeping rough. However, in regional Australia the situation was different. About 60 per cent of households in this category were living in sheds, garages or shacks, most of which were owned or being purchased. Their living arrangements were below the community standard used to define homelessness, and in the main they were low-income households, but they were not transient and some were employed in local communities.

People sleeping rough or squatting in derelict buildings were more likely to be on their own, whereas people in improvised dwellings were more likely to be in families or group households. Overall, we estimate about 9900 persons in improvised dwellings across the country and about 6500 rough sleepers, although the latter group was undercounted.

6.4 YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth homelessness has been a major policy focus since the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s 1989 report, *Our Homeless*

Children, and in 2008 there was a National Youth Commission report, *Australia's Homeless Youth*. Youth refers to young people aged 12 to 24. However, a distinction is often drawn between teenagers aged 12 to 18 and young adults aged 19 to 24.

There have been important initiatives to assist homeless teenagers and their families. The establishment of the Reconnect program in 1999 was a major early intervention initiative by the Australian Government to reduce youth homelessness. Reconnect was implemented in phases and was not fully operational until 2003. Twenty-nine services were funded in December 1999 (DFaCS 2003, p. 22). By 2003, there were 98 Reconnect services across the country. The most recent evaluation of Reconnect (DFaCS 2003, p. 8) found that the program had achieved positive outcomes for young people and their families.

In addition, several states implemented new programs such as the Youth Support Coordinators Program in Queensland and the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program in Victoria. Some SAAP youth agencies also undertake early intervention with recently homeless young people. Since the late 1990s, several state and territory governments have expended additional funds to increase the number of welfare staff in schools and to improve assistance to young people and families in crisis.

6.1 CHANGES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	2001	2006	% change
Families with children	22 944	26 790	+16.8
Youth aged 12 to 18 (alone)	22 600	17 891	-20.8
Adults (singles and couples)	54 356	59 995	+10.4
	99 900	104 676	+4.8

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

Table 6.1 shows that the number of homeless youth aged 12 to 18 decreased from 22 600 in 2001 to 17 891 in 2006, a decrease of 20.8 per cent. This is compelling evidence that these early intervention initiatives have been effective. There are currently 98 Reconnect services across the country, but it has been estimated that 50 per cent of communities do not have a Reconnect program (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004, p. 41–43). At any point in time, there are 15 000 students across the country at risk of becoming homeless (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004, p. 42). Youth homelessness could be further reduced by expanding Reconnect to have national coverage.

In a study of 1642 homeless adults and young adults, Johnson and

Chamberlain (2008a) found that 42 per cent of their sample had been in the state care and protection system. Young people who have been in state care are at greater risk of becoming homeless than most teenagers, and they are at much greater risk of making the transition from youth to adult homelessness. Targeted intervention and a reformed care and protection system are important components of an effective early intervention strategy for youth. In addition, such initiatives will have a flow-on effect by reducing the number of homeless teenagers moving into the adult homeless population.

6.5 FAMILIES

Another group for whom early intervention is a crucial issue is families. The number of persons in family households on census night increased from 22 944 in 2001 to 26 790 in 2006, an increase of 16.8 per cent (Table 6.1). Families make up 28 per cent of SAAP users (AIHW 2007, p. 37). In 2005–06, the number of children accompanying parents in SAAP was 54 700 (AIHW 2007, p. 15).

Most commonly, families become homeless because of a housing crisis or domestic violence. Adults in families experiencing a housing crisis are typically unemployed or outside of the labour force. These families are usually poor and often have accumulated debts. In most cases, the family is facing eviction because of rent arrears.

Early intervention with families experiencing a housing crisis involves providing families with assistance before they lose their accommodation, including family counselling to resolve relationship difficulties, financial advice, some funds to settle debts, and assistance with applications for public housing. There is a small national program providing this kind of response. In 2001, a pilot program of eight services known as the Family Homelessness Prevention Project (FHPP) was launched with a single service in each jurisdiction. From 1 July 2004, the program continued under a new name as the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program.

An evaluation of the HOME program found that if families at risk of homelessness were reached with assistance before losing their accommodation, 86 per cent of those families remained in adequate housing or improved their housing situation during the period of support (MacKenzie, Desmond and Steen 2007). The evaluation highlighted two key success factors: the availability of brokerage funds and a capacity to work through issues on a needs basis. The effects of this assistance were found to be sustainable for a majority of families in the 12 months after support.

The HOME Advice program was a small-scale initiative and had only a small impact on the overall population of at-risk families. Family homelessness could be reduced by expanding the HOME project to have national coverage. Preliminary estimates indicate the need for between 100 and 250 services.

Some families become homeless as a result of family breakdown involving domestic violence. There has been a considerable investment in changing community attitudes towards domestic violence (Carrington and Phillips 2006), but it is not clear to what extent early intervention strategies have been implemented to assist women experiencing domestic violence. One impediment to implementing early intervention is that many women do not request assistance until they have left the family home.

One form of early intervention is family counselling to help couples work through their relationship issues, and another form of intervention is to remove the perpetrator of violence from the family home. Otherwise, 'early intervention' for victims of domestic violence means assisting them to move quickly to alternative, secure accommodation. The number of people using these services may not decrease, but if their time spent in homelessness services is minimised, then the number of families in the point-in-time census count will decrease over time. The current lack of affordable housing affects homeless families escaping domestic violence, by prolonging their homelessness and increasing the number of homeless people on census night.

6.6 ADULTS WITHOUT CHILDREN

There were 59 995 homeless adults without children on census night, up from 54 356 in 2001, an increase of 10.4 per cent (Table 6.1). Two-thirds of these adults were men and one-third were women. Adults without children are the largest group of service users and many have been homeless for extended periods of time or have moved in and out of homelessness. In general, early intervention strategies are not the issue for single adults with a history of homelessness, although over time early intervention for teenagers will stem the flow into the adult homeless population. The lack of affordable and appropriate housing is a major issue for this group.

Some 21 000 people live in boarding houses, and these properties are often in poor condition with issues of health and safety for the residents. Greater regulation to improve the living conditions in boarding houses and legislation to improve security of tenure would be stop-gap measures, but most people in boarding houses want affordable self-contained accommodation.

About one-quarter of the adults without children were aged 55 or older (15 000 people). An appropriate aged-care response could provide

more adequate long-term accommodation for people who currently reside in boarding houses or take up places in the homelessness service system.

A significant proportion of the people with a long-term housing problem have substance abuse issues and/or mental health issues, which complicates their exit from homelessness (Johnson and Chamberlain 2008b). Most of the adults who were homeless on census night needed assistance to find appropriate, affordable housing, and long-term support to maintain that accommodation.

The main policy imperatives for this group are the creation of sufficient affordable housing stock, continuing support for individuals with complex housing needs, and sufficient levels of support to assist people who have experienced long-term homelessness to live in the community.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The White Paper proposes a long-term effort to halve homelessness by 2020. Achieving the right mix of interventions is one challenge. About 50 per cent of the homeless population could be assisted directly by the early intervention measures discussed above. The other component of a balanced response is the need for a steep increase in the stock of affordable housing, combined with policies that guarantee access for the most disadvantaged, and sufficient long-term, case-managed support to prevent homelessness reoccurring. At this point, it is unclear whether sufficient resources have been deployed to fund the programs that are needed.

A second challenge is to recognise that it will take several years before an assessment can be made about the effectiveness of the White Paper's initiatives. It takes time to put new services in place and for those services to have their full impact. It will also take time to increase the supply of affordable housing, and other low-income people will be competing for the new housing stock.

The White Paper sets out interim targets for 2013, including an overall reduction in homelessness of 21 000 people (Homelessness Taskforce 2008, p. 18). In 2013, homeless figures from the 2011 census will become available, but it is unlikely that the impact from the new initiatives will be apparent in 2011. The findings from the 2016 Census will be of more relevance for assessing whether the White Paper's targets have been achieved.

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Appendix 1: Number of homeless people in the Northern Territory by statistical division and subdivision, 2006

	Group 1 Imp. dwell	Group 2 Friends	Group 3 Board. Hse	Group 4 SAAP	Total	Usual Res. Population	Rate per 10 000	Group 5 Caravan	Total (incl. caravan)	Rate (incl. caravan)
Darwin	488	1230	476	284	2478	105 991	234	147	2625	248
Darwin City	360	734	461	274	1,829	66 291	276	96	1,925	290
Palmerston-East Arm	33	134	3	10	180	24 145	75	0	180	75
Litchfield Shire	95	362	12	0	469	15 555	302	51	520	334
Northern Territory Bal	1100	862	218	127	2307	84 910	272	126	2433	287
Finnis	88	83	7	0	178	1954	911	8	186	952
Bathurst-Melville	0	0	0	0	0	2130	0	0	0	0
Alligator	153	39	4	0	196	5996	327	14	210	350
Daly	146	65	6	0	217	3722	583	24	241	648
East Arnhem	77	31	34	2	144	13 945	103	0	144	103
Lower Top End NT	283	310	24	61	678	16 462	412	31	709	431
Barkly	20	67	33	0	120	5391	223	8	128	237
Central NT	333	267	110	64	774	35 310	219	41	815	231
Missing data	0	0	0	0	0	1998		0	0	
Total	1588	2092	694	411	4785	192 899	248	273	5058	262
Selected SLAs										
Katherine	175	168	11	61	415	8191	507	10	425	519
Tennant Creek	10	5	28	0	43	2922	147	3	46	157
Tennant Creek (Bal)	0	29	4	0	33	1208	273	0	33	273
Alice Springs Charles	51	42	0	0	93	4545	205	6	99	218
Alice Springs Heavitree	29	78	0	0	107	2145	499	18	125	583
Alice Springs Larapinta	5	33	7	64	109	8256	132	0	109	132
Alice Springs Ross	9	15	17	0	41	7029	58	0	41	58
Alice Springs Stuart	17	25	54	0	96	1920	500	0	96	500

Appendix 2: Estimated number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless people by statistical division and subdivision, 2006*

	Group 1 Imp. dwell	Group 2 Friends	Group 3 Board. Hse	Group 4 SAAP	Total	Usual Res. Population	Rate per 10 000	Group 5 Caravan	Total (incl. caravan)	Rate (incl. caravan)
Darwin	Non-Indig Indig	1124 106	322 151	155 129	1791 684	94 601 11 390	189 601	141 6	1932 690	204 606
Darwin City	Non-Indig	657	310	147	1209	59 444	203	90	1299	219
	Indig	265	151	127	620	6847	906	6	626	914
Palmerston-East Arm	Non-Indig	0	0	8	123	28 665	43	0	123	43
	Indig	33	0	2	54	3480	155	0	54	155
Litchfield Shire	Non-Indig	95	12	0	459	14 492	317	51	510	352
	Indig	0	0	0	10	1063	94	0	10	94
NT Balance	Non-Indig Indig	794 68	106 108	41 86	1335 968	38 690 46 220	345 209	93 14	1428 982	369 212
Finnis	Non-Indig	83	3	0	163	1343	1214	8	171	1273
	Indig	5	4	0	15	611	245	0	15	245
Bathurst-Melville	Non-Indig	0	0	0	0	173	0	0	0	0
	Indig	0	0	0	0	1957	0	0	0	0
Alligator	Non-Indig	118	0	0	157	1437	1093	14	171	1190
	Indig	35	0	0	35	4559	77	0	35	77
Daly	Non-Indig	8	6	0	74	691	1071	16	90	1302
	Indig	138	0	0	143	3031	472	8	151	498
East Arnhem	Non-Indig	17	5	1	49	5023	98	0	49	98
	Indig	60	29	1	95	8922	106	0	95	106
Lower Top End NT	Non-Indig	84	11	20	416	7421	561	12	428	577
	Indig	199	13	41	262	9041	290	0	262	290
Barkly	Non-Indig	3	4	0	59	1790	330	8	67	374
	Indig	17	29	0	61	3601	169	0	61	169
Central NT	Non-Indig	81	77	20	417	20 812	200	35	452	217
	Indig	252	28	44	357	14 498	246	6	363	250

Appendix 2 (continued): Estimated number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless people by statistical division and subdivision, 2006

	Group 1 Imp. dwell	Group 2 Friends	Group 3 Board. Hse	Group 4 SAAP	Total	Usual Res. Population	Rate per 10 000	Group 5 Caravan	Total (incl. caravan)	Rate (incl. caravan)
Total	584	1918	428	196	3126	133 291	235	234	3360	252
Non-Indig	584	1918	428	196	3126	133 291	235	234	3360	252
Indig	1004	174	259	215	1652	57 610	287	20	1672	290
Missing data	0	0	7	0	7	1998		19	26	
Total	1588	2092	694	411	4785	192 899	248	273	5058	262
Selected SLAs										
	Group 1 Imp. dwell	Group 2 Friends	Group 3 Board. Hse	Group 4 SAAP	Total	Usual Res. Population	Rate per 10 000	Group 5 Caravan	Total (incl. caravan)	Rate (incl. caravan)
Katherine	8	163	0	20	191	5955	321	3*	194	326
Indig	167	5	11	41	224	2236	1002	0	224	1002
Tennant Creek	2	5	3	0	10	1285	78	3	13	101
Indig	8	0	25	0	33	1637	202	0	33	202
Alice Springs	42	172	58	20	292	19 001	154	19	311	164
Indig	69	21	20	44	154	4894	315	5	159	325

* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

Appendix 3: Percentage of homeless people by statistical division and subdivision, 2006

	Number	Percentage
Darwin	2478	51.8
Darwin City	1829	38.2
Palmerston-East Arm	180	3.8
Litchfield Shire	469	9.8
Northern Territory Balance	2307	48.2
Finnis	178	3.7
Bathurst-Melville	0	0.0
Alligator	196	4.1
Daly	217	4.5
East Arnhem	144	3.0
Lower Top End NT	678	14.2
Barkly	120	2.5
Central NT	774	16.2
Total	4785	100.0
Selected SLAs	Number	Percentage
Katherine	415	8.7
Tennant Creek	76	1.6
Alice Springs	446	9.3

Appendix 4: Percentage of homeless people and marginal residents of caravan parks by statistical division and subdivision, 2006

	Number	Percentage
Darwin	2625	51.9
Darwin City	1925	38.0
Palmerston-East Arm	180	3.6
Litchfield Shire	520	10.3
Northern Territory Balance	2433	48.1
Finnis	186	3.7
Bathurst-Melville	0	0.0
Alligator	210	4.2
Daly	241	4.8
East Arnhem	144	2.8
Lower Top End NT	709	14.0
Barkly	128	2.5
Central NT	815	16.1
Total	5058	100.0
Selected SLAs	Number	Percentage
Katherine	425	8.4
Tennant Creek	79	1.6
Alice Springs	470	9.3