

# Youth homeless study looks at community costs

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On World Homeless Day researchers from Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Western Australia (UWA) have found young homeless Australians are spending up to five months sleeping on a friend or relative's couch, also known as couch-surfing, in order to have a roof over their head.

Researchers, Dr Monika Thielking, Associate Professor David MacKenzie and Adam Steen from Swinburne Institute for Social Research, along with Professor Paul Flatau from UWA Centre for [Social Impact](#), are examining the lifetime cost to the community of supporting [youth](#) who become permanently homeless and its effects upon the nation's [economic prosperity](#).

The Australian Research Council Linkage Project, *The [Costs](#) of Youth Homelessness in Australia*, has the support of Mission Australia, The Salvation Army and Anglicare Canberra Goulburn.

Dr Thielking said the 257 participants in the three-year study were from across Australia, except the Northern Territory and Tasmania, and were aged between 12-25 years.

"Results from the first 12 months show thirty-nine per cent of participants spent an average of five months couch-surfing within the past year, and the average stint was for two weeks at any one time," Dr Thielking said.

"Forty-two per cent of those who couch-surfed also spent more than three months in crisis accommodation in the past 12 months."

Researchers also found that almost half of participants (45 per cent) in the study were diagnosed with a mental illness, and of that 45 per cent half of them had not sought help for their condition in the past 12 [months](#).

Of those participants who sought crisis or emergency accommodation, 65 per cent were female.

Dr Thielking said this was the first longitudinal study done in Australia on a national level that would focus on the economic cost of providing services for youth homelessness.

"The aim of the project is to ascertain the service usage costs of being homeless, as well as the social costs to the community and personal costs to the young people who experience homelessness" Dr Thielking said.

"We will be looking at what happens to the participants during the study

over a period of three years to see how many have used services, the types of services they have accessed and whether or not they are still [homeless](#). "

"We know that intervention focused on young people at the earliest stages of homelessness can often short circuit the slide to chronic homelessness."

The study will follow participants for another two years, with researchers interviewing them at 12 month intervals.

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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