

95 per cent of homeless in Sydney and Melbourne own a mobile, study finds

August 6 2014

People experiencing homelessness in Sydney and Melbourne have a higher rate of mobile phone ownership than average Australians, new University of Sydney research shows.

While 92 per cent of Australians own a mobile phone, an even higher proportion - 95 per cent - of the adults, youth and families surveyed own a mobile. More than three quarters (77 per cent) of these have a smartphone, compared to around two thirds (64 per cent) of the general population. The survey found wide variation in the models and ages of the phones owned by the respondents. Almost half (41 per cent) reported that their phone was a gift, second-hand, stolen or borrowed.

The research, involving 95 clients of specialist homelessness services across inner and outer metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne, found that mobile phones are essential for survival and safety, job prospects and for moving out of homelessness.

"It's essential to be connected when experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness," said University of Sydney researcher Dr Justine Humphry, who undertook the study funded by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network's Grants Scheme. "Mobile phones help people survive and stay safe in situations of heightened risk. Mobile phones also play a critical role in helping people move out of homelessness and gain financial stability."

When asked about their reasons for using a mobile phone, around half of

those surveyed say contacting emergency services (52 per cent), support services (49 per cent) and seeking medical assistance (48 per cent) rank as important uses, after staying in touch with friends (80 per cent), making new friends (74 per cent) and contacting family (52 per cent).

Other key findings include:

- almost half (47 per cent) of the respondents use the internet to look for a job
- some 82 per cent use pre-paid mobile plans
- half use free public Wi-Fi to keep costs down, while others use Facebook (66 per cent), Instant Messenger (45 per cent), or Skype (30 per cent)
- 57 per cent find it difficult to fund their [mobile phone](#) usage
- some 32 per cent are often disconnected because they cannot charge their phone, lack phone credit or lose their phone

Of those without mobiles, 60 per cent were over 40 years old, male, single and chronically homeless; living in emergency housing, boarding houses, on the street or in temporary accommodation for two or more years.

Affordability is a big concern for our homeless population and low-income consumers," said ACCAN CEO Teresa Corbin. "Telcos need to make sure they go through all the checks and balances to ensure everyone is on the right plan so that vulnerable consumers don't end up in debt and chased by debt collectors."

According to Homelessness Australia, on any given night one out of every 200 Australians is homeless and more than 100,000 Australians fall within the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definition of homelessness.

"We need to change the way in which we look at our homeless population," said Dr Humphry. "They can often be extremely savvy consumers but face unique affordability and service availability issues with mobile services, even in urban areas where most people take coverage for granted. The benefits of digital access could be greater if aid and subsidy programs were also directed to helping out those in situations of hardship who rely heavily on their mobiles."

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: 95 per cent of homeless in Sydney and Melbourne own a mobile, study finds (2014, August 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-08-cent-homeless-sydney-melbourne-mobile.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.