

# Painting an accurate profile of Adelaide's homeless

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University of Adelaide researchers have built a comprehensive profile of homelessness and associated health issues in Adelaide. Their work is published in the *Australian Journal of Social Issues*.

"Homelessness is increasing in Australia and other countries, but inconsistent definitions and data limitations make homelessness difficult to understand. We want to change this by contributing our comprehensive study," said the University of Adelaide's Dr. Joanne Flavel, Researcher in the Stretton Institute and School of Social Sciences.

Dr. Flavel led the collaborative study with colleagues including the University of Adelaide's Dr. Toby Freeman and Professor Fran Baum.

"We analyzed data to produce a complex descriptive profile of people experiencing homelessness in Adelaide that identified differences in the demographics between rough sleepers, people who are couch surfing, in emergency accommodation or temporary accommodation, and highlighted their [health needs](#)," said Dr. Flavel.

The profile of homelessness in Adelaide included:

- Housing crisis is the main reason cited for homelessness;
- A high prevalence of poor health outcomes and use of emergency health services by [homeless people](#);
- High rates of mental health and [physical conditions](#) including depression, anxiety and dental problems;
- People that identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are over-represented in experiencing homelessness;
- Men are more likely to be experiencing rough sleeping homelessness;
- A higher rate of homelessness services used by women than men in two of five data sets (an example of such homelessness services is organizations that receive government funding to deliver accommodation-related and/or personal services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk); and
- Young people are more likely to couch surf or be in temporary

accommodation rather than sleeping rough.

The team analyzed [data sets](#) including the: national ABS Census from 2016; the Homeless to Home (H2H) state data from 2018-2019; the 2018–19 national Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist Homelessness Services Collection; the Adelaide Zero Project By-name List 2018-2019; and records from SA Health about Royal Adelaide Hospital's homeless patients from 2018-2019.

"Our approach was comprehensive because it used a wide variety of data from five sources, including local, state and national perspectives. Yet, it is likely still an underestimation of the true scale of homelessness," said Dr. Flavel.

"More accurate identification of who is homeless, their health needs and service access is important as it improves the assessment of health services used by people who are experiencing homelessness, and the consequential costs borne by the health system.

"Health care services often consider the [homeless population](#) as 'hard to reach,' but our data suggest it is services that are hard to reach, and better use of data can help service providers make their services easier to access.

"An accurate profile of homelessness helps in devising appropriate responses to crises that adequately support people experiencing homelessness.

"Our research will be provided to service providers and government to help inform more nuanced and effective services in the future, to tackle the complex public health issue of homelessness."

**More information:** Joanne Flavel et al, Counting homelessness:

Working creatively to generate complex descriptive profiles of the health and demographics of people experiencing homelessness in Adelaide, *Australian Journal of Social Issues* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/ajs4.253](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.253)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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