

Reports reveal youth homelessness crisis in Australia

Jason Quill, Eric Ludlow
1 April 2025

Recent reports have revealed a youth homelessness crisis in Australia amid broader social hardship fuelled by the soaring cost of living, job insecurity and the worst housing affordability on record.

The Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2023–24 (SHSAR), published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in December, provides an overview of the number of Australians who access government support for homelessness. In 2023–24, some 280,078 people sought assistance from homelessness services. This figure is a 2.3 percent increase from the 273,648 who sought support in 2022–23.

Nearly 115,000 of those who were provided support were under the age of 25. A total of 38,631 young people aged 15–24 who made homelessness service requests were in the most vulnerable cohort, appearing without family support or stable housing, or “presenting alone.”

However, a lack of services means that tens of thousands more are going without support which ranges from general support and assistance to immediate transitional accommodation.

According to the AIHW data, more than 75,000 (up from nearly 72,000 in 2021–22) people who made requests for homelessness services went unassisted. Of those who were turned away, 34,366—about 46 percent—were under the age of 25.

Couch-surfing now accounts for a significant portion of youth homelessness, with thousands of young people forced to rely on temporary stays with friends or acquaintances, further entrenching their vulnerability.

Speaking to SBS News, a 19-year-old named Chelsea described her experience: “I called everywhere for help, but there were just no places. I was told I’d have to sleep in my car, but I don’t even have a car.” Chelsea’s experience is reflective of young people across the country who have been abandoned by a system that prioritises landlords, developers and military expansion

over fundamental social needs.

A separate analysis by Australian charity the Foyer Foundation highlights the youth homelessness “hotspots” around the country.

The area with the highest youth homelessness according to the Foyer Foundation is Latrobe-Gippsland in regional Victoria. The region has more than 1,000 young people experiencing homelessness. Youth unemployment in Latrobe-Gippsland is almost 14 percent while school completion rates are below the national average.

The Latrobe Valley is a case study for the social devastation wrought by mass redundancies with the corporate-driven destruction of manufacturing and other industries in Australia, overseen by successive Labor and Liberal-National Coalition governments at state and federal level. These massive job cuts began in the 1980s and ’90s under the Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating with the full support of the trade union bureaucracies.

The demolition of energy production, logging, timber milling and paper manufacturing in the region has led to widespread poverty, unemployment and social problems like high levels of drug use.

Other major regional centres in the top 20 include Illawarra (four) in New South Wales (NSW), Ballarat (number eight) in Victoria, Hunter Valley (13) in NSW, and Cairns (16) and Townsville (17) in Queensland. Like the Latrobe Valley, these regions have experienced massive social devastation over decades brought on by the axing of thousands of jobs.

In the Hunter Valley, the destruction of coal mining in particular has seen thousands of job losses. Thousands of steelworkers, miners, dockers and transport logistics workers have also been sacked in the Illawarra in recent decades.

In the top 10 youth homelessness “hotspots” are outback regions of the Northern Territory (number two),

northern Western Australia (five) and Queensland (nine) where the vast majority of homeless youth are indigenous.

These outback areas have little to no basic social infrastructure such as healthcare and education. This is a continuation of the protracted oppression of Australia's Aboriginal people who comprise the most vulnerable section of the working class. Young indigenous people are regularly targeted by police and sent to juvenile detention centres and even adult prisons.

Working-class areas of major cities are also in the top 20 youth homelessness hotspots.

The western suburbs of Melbourne—Australia's largest city—are 10th on the list. Melbourne's west has a high population of immigrants, including those from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. The industrial north of Adelaide, the South Australian capital, is number 11 on the list and Sydney's outer west and Blue Mountains region sit at number 12.

Geelong, the second largest city in Victoria after Melbourne, rounds out the list of youth homelessness hotspots at number 20.

The wholesale assault on manufacturing and other industries has led to an overall casualisation of the workforce, particularly among younger workers. With precarious work on the rise, many young people are unable to afford rent, food or essential services.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 10 percent of Australians aged 15 to 24 were unemployed in January 2025. ABS data also shows that youth underemployment—struggling to get more work—was at 14.1 percent in December 2024.

While young people are about twice as likely to experience homelessness than the rest of the population, only 2.9 percent of public housing tenancies in 2021 were allocated to 15–24-year-olds in the state of Victoria. This is a sharp expression of the broader need to increase state assistance for housing, yet the response of governments nationally has been to destroy the last vestiges of public housing which was won by workers in the post-World War II period.

The Victorian Labor state government, under Premier Jacinta Allan, is leading the most aggressive attack on public housing in decades.

Plans are underway to demolish 44 public housing estates, including the Flemington and North Melbourne towers, displacing 6,600 residents. These demolitions have nothing to do with improving housing conditions as the government claims. Instead, they are aimed at clearing prime inner-city land for private developers, with the vast

majority of replacement housing designated for the private market rather than social housing.

In New South Wales, the state Labor government's demolition program is almost the same. There, public housing in the inner-Sydney suburb of Waterloo is being targeted, leaving 3,000 residents without a home. Similar demolitions and sell-offs are taking place in South Australia and Western Australia.

Meanwhile, the Labor federal government of Anthony Albanese has been forced to admit that virtually no new homes have been built under its \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund. The fund was promoted as part of the Labor party's election pitch at the 2022 election.

Labor says the fund's aim is to build 30,000–55,000 “social and affordable” homes over five years. This is a mere speck compared to the estimated shortfall of 600,000 affordable dwellings nationally.

As with the promotion of social housing in favour of government-owned public housing, such housing policies are primarily pitched as a potential goldmine for property developers.

The attack on public housing is part of a decades-long and accelerating assault on social spending including slashes to health and education.

Having a safe, well-built home is a social right, yet under the capitalist profit system more people are forced into homelessness. This highlights that capitalism offers no future for young people who are bearing the brunt of a global social retrogression which is making them worse off than their parents' and grandparents' generations.

To guarantee a right to housing, as well as other necessities of social life, requires an alternative perspective based on the abolition of capitalism and its replacement with a socialist system based on social need, not private profit.

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Level 1/457-459 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact