

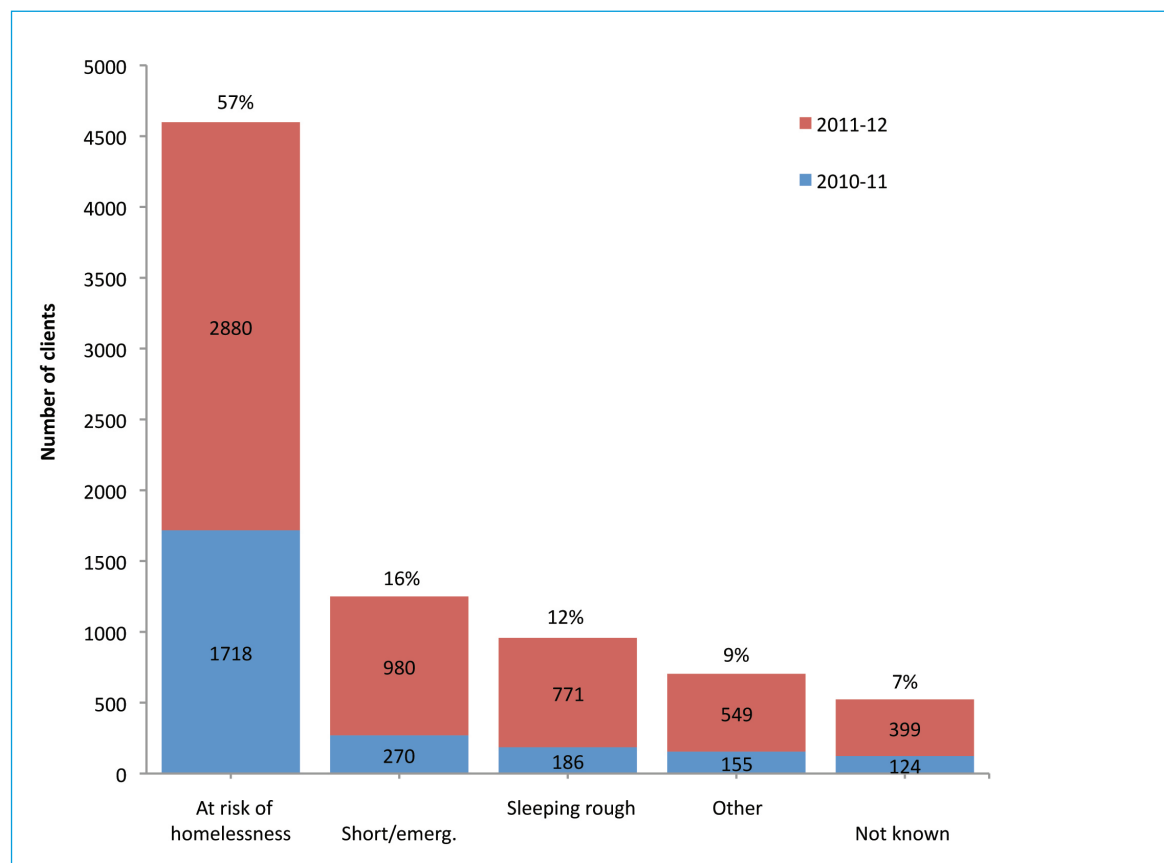
## Overall Summary of the Homelessness Action Plan Evaluation Findings

The Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) Evaluation Strategy captured evidence of the effectiveness of different service approaches used by HAP projects. This evidence note summarises the key findings across all evaluations and is based on the HAP Summary of Evaluation Findings report prepared by Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. For information on the HAP Evaluation Strategy.

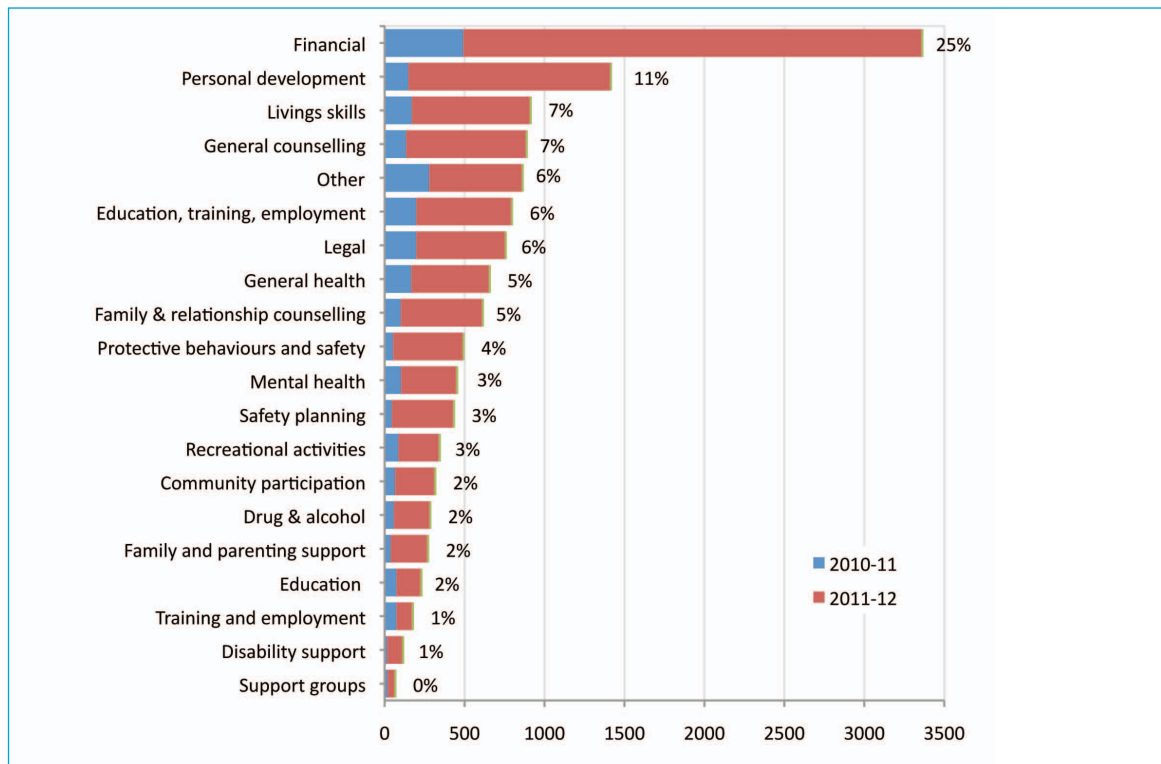
### Key findings – client groups

- All HAP projects demonstrated significant benefits for highly disadvantaged and vulnerable target groups who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- All projects reported positive housing outcomes in securing and maintaining tenancies, particularly in the private rental market.
- Data from the 36 projects which completed self evaluations showed that across the period 2010/11 and 2011/12 (to March 2012), 9,629 clients were assisted. Slightly more of these clients were women.
- Around 3,000 clients were supported to maintain their tenancy with a reported success rate of 85 percent across all projects.
- Projects were successful in engaging Aboriginal clients; 31 percent of clients assisted identified as Aboriginal.
- A range of non-housing outcomes for clients were reported including improvements in physical and mental health, family relationships, substance addiction, confidence and social support.
- More than half of all clients assisted were at risk of homelessness which reflects the focus of HAP projects on early intervention (see Graph 1).

**Graph 1: Homelessness status prior to assistance**

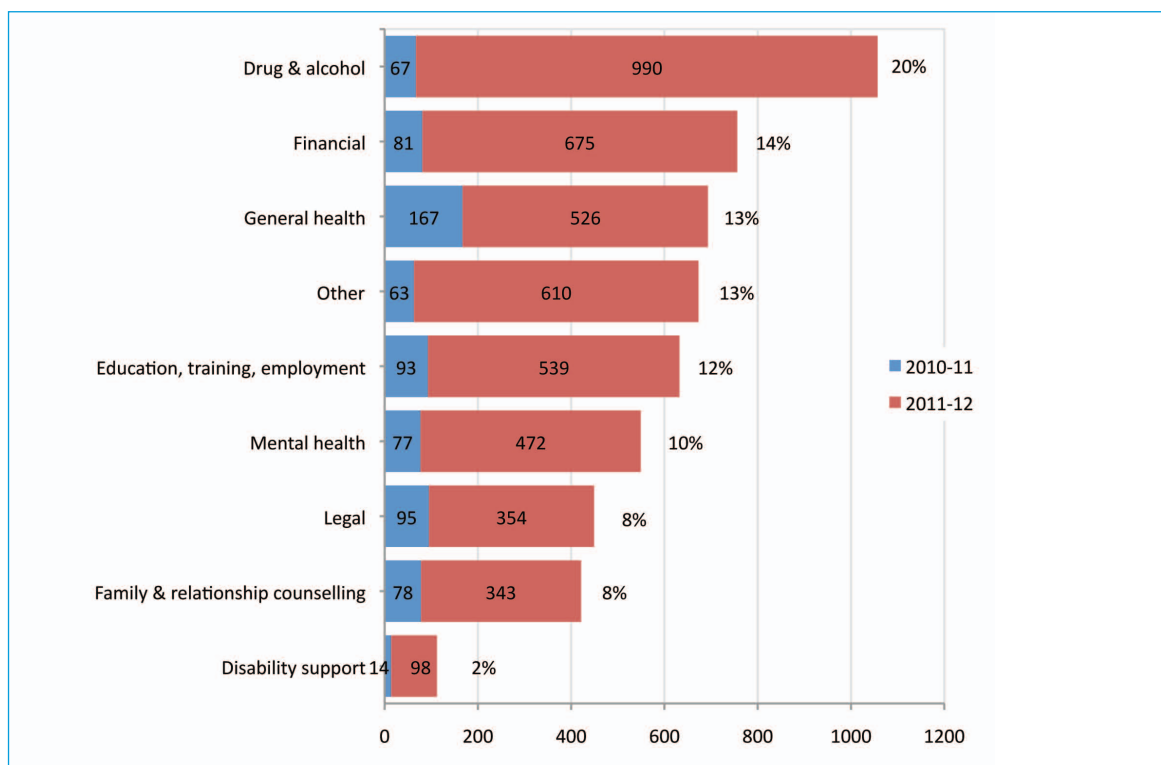


Graph 2: Non-housing support provided by projects



- Across all the projects, financial difficulty was a key issue leading to risk of homelessness.
- This may be caused by a variety of different situations – debts, fines, violence, inability to manage money, or gambling.
- Almost 50 percent of direct service provision was to resolve financial, personal and general living skill issues.

Graph 3: Non-housing support – referrals made



- HAP projects referred clients to health services including alcohol and other drug, general health and mental health services more than any other service (Graph 3).

### **Key findings – service system local coordination groups, comprising relevant agencies, delivered better outcomes for clients**

- Many of the HAP projects established multi-agency coordination groups as a key mechanism for implementation. The evidence showed that these groups enabled people to access the assistance they needed through contact with just one agency that could then draw on the other services in the coordination group.
- The evaluators found this to be consistent with the 'no wrong door' approach to addressing homelessness and minimised the risk of duplication of effort and identified gaps in services.
- Coordination groups assisted mainstream and specialist agencies to have common intake, assessment and case coordination processes.
- Coordination groups were also found to increase the capacity of services and staff through shared discussion and problem solving, as well as cross-agency training.

### **Flexible brokerage funding helped provide a tailored, person centred approach**

- A key feature of some HAP projects was the use of flexible brokerage funding. The evaluators found that availability of this funding enabled many elements of case plans, not available through local services, to be implemented.
- This included the purchase of services (such as counselling or additional caseworker time) as well as goods (such as household furniture).
- The speed with which brokerage funding could be allocated was found to be important in resolving critical issues, such as removalist costs for women leaving violent partners.
- The evaluation also found that flexible brokerage funding linked to case planning provided an incentive for service collaboration as it required services to identify and problem solve issues together prior to any allocation of funding.
- Clear guidelines for this process and accountability mechanisms for monitoring progress were also found to be crucial to achieving sustainable client outcomes.

### **Providing support for the period and intensity that a client needed**

- HAP projects provided services to a range of client groups with different needs. It was found that there is no 'one size fits all' approach for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- For many people staged support worked best, with intensity of support decreasing over time, with the capacity to increase support if needed.
- Longer periods of consistent support (up to 12 months) were found to be particularly useful for clients with more complex needs, such as those leaving custody, young people leaving out of home care and women leaving violent relationships.
- For those in institutional settings the optimum time for commencement of support was found to be prior to exit, which assisted with establishing housing stability during the immediate post exit time which can often be a time of stress and uncertainty.
- The evaluation demonstrated that the quality of the relationship between worker and client could also be critical to success.
- Employment of Aboriginal workers was identified as having an important role in the engagement and support of Aboriginal people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### **A whole of client/family perspective was needed to reduce the factors contributing to a client's risk of homelessness**

- A key element of the approach used in many HAP projects was to consider the clients holistically.
- The evaluation found that clients who accessed services had many different catalysts for homelessness, such as violence, a partner's gambling behaviour or unexpected medical bills for a child.
- It was found case planning that considered the circumstances and needs of the whole household including children achieved more sustainable housing outcomes.

### **Short-term investment up front when a tenancy is at risk**

- Tenancy support programs evaluated under the HAP offered an average of four months support for clients at risk of eviction or tenancy failure.
- Accumulation of rental arrears was identified as the key reason for eviction, and access to brokerage funding was found to be helpful in securing a tenancy.

- The evaluation also found that payment of arrears needed to be linked to a repayment plan and other financial management support, such as budgeting skills development and debt management.
- Advocacy and liaison with real estate agents, other landlords and housing providers was found to be important to negotiate rental arrears payment plans. Support to access private rental products and resolve problems with income support was also found to reduce the risk of future tenancy failure.
- Access to tenancy advice and legal support was identified to be critical for some people at risk of eviction.

### **Strong relationships with the private rental market (both landlords and agents)**

- A key feature of many HAP projects was to assist homeless clients to access the private rental market.
- It was found that a case management approach of individual clients was not always enough to secure housing in the private rental market, as the barriers to access could also lie with the private rental providers.
- The evaluation demonstrated that targeted strategies were needed for landlords and real estate agents to build good communication and understanding of the issues for clients. It was also found that these strategies needed to include a strong business focus that demonstrated financial benefits as well as client outcomes.
- Also, the use of brokerage funding to resolve the financial crisis leading to arrears was found to be useful in the initial engagement with agents.
- The evaluation identified that an engagement strategy with private rental providers could not only increase access to private rental properties but also lead to real estate agents/landlords becoming more active partners in preventing tenancy failure through making referrals to services when problems in a tenancy were identified.

### **Key challenges identified through the evaluation**

- The major challenge related to the lack of supply of affordable housing.
- While many projects worked to develop relationships with community housing providers and also with private rental providers to facilitate access to housing, they were not always successful.
- There were also issues with access to specialised services such as mental health and alcohol and drug services in some locations.
- Workforce issues included recruiting and maintaining suitably qualified staff in regional areas.
- Building an integrated case management approach takes time and resources and there were some challenges in getting participation and agreement to processes from all relevant services.
- Inconsistency in data collection was also identified as an area for improvement.

For further information on the HAP Evaluation Strategy please visit [www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)