High and Dry: Homelessness and Alcohol and other Drug Use
Snapshot: homelessness in the lucky country

- Homelessness is not just about “middle aged men on park benches”
- About 105,000 people are homeless on any given night
- Of these we know that …
  - about 45,000 are under the age of 25
  - 44% are women
  - about 1 in every 11 are indigenous
• Homelessness is not about “sleeping rough” either
• Of the 105,000 people homeless…
  – 16,375 people sleep on the street
  – just under 20,000 were staying in specialist homeless services
  – almost 47,000 people couch surfing
  – almost 22,000 staying in boarding houses
• Why are people homeless?
  – youth homelessness
  – domestic/family violence
  – families in financial crisis

• Other reasons
  – young people leaving state care
  – people leaving prison
202,500 people used a specialist homeless service (aka ‘SAAP’)
- 125,600 were ‘clients’
- 76,900 were accompanying children

Variety in services
- 35% of services primarily target young people
- 24% - women escaping DV
- cross target/general – about 20%
• Very small numbers of SAAP clients identified as requiring AOD services
  – 6.6% overall
  – highest for single men (about 9%)
  – lowest for women with children (about 3%)
• For those clients needing AOD services…
  – high proportion (40%) referred to AOD service
  – about 40% receive support from agency
  – 1 in 5 neither receive no help at all
Looking at Alcohol and other Drug Use amongst people experiencing homelessness

Estimated prevalence is difficult to quantify

Researchers have consistently found that rates of alcohol and other drug use are higher than for the general population
Alcohol and other Drug Use Trends

• RMIT/HomeGround/Salvation Army Study examined 5526 cases in Melbourne
• 43% met the criteria for a substance use disorder but;
• 66% developed the disorder after becoming homeless
Alcohol and other Drug Use (cont…)

• 43% (1290 people) met the criteria for a substance use disorder, most commonly heroin and alcohol.
• Of these, substance abuse preceded homelessness in 15% of cases (656 people).
• This finding contrasts sharply with public opinion (Hanover Study).
Men

Single Adult Men with substance use disorders:

- Males aged over 25- alcohol and heroin
- Males aged 18-24- alcohol, amphetamines and cannabis
Women:

- Women aged over 25 more likely than men to have used an illicit drug.
- Prevalence of amphetamine and non-prescription opiate/sedative use very high.
- Lower estimated prevalence of alcohol use disorders than men.
Young People

- Higher rates of illicit drug use generally
- Even accounting for this, prevalence among young people experiencing homelessness is disproportionately high
- Consistent finding across many studies though not reflected in SAAP data
Indigenous People

- Higher rates of ‘binge drinking’/dependent alcohol use but also abstinence.
- Cannabis use on the rise.
- Heroin use has declined steadily since 2000 among younger people.
Older Australians

• High rates of dependent alcohol use reported among older adult men.

• Acquired Brain Injury and alcohol induced dementia also cited.
Homelessness and the White Paper

• “No wrong doors”

• “No exits” into homelessness from statutory, custodial care including
  – AOD services
  – prisoners
  – children leaving the care of the state
Exploring Linkages

• Discussion: What strategies can the homelessness and alcohol and other drug sectors employ to facilitate stronger linkages and integrated service delivery?