Positioning Paper

Intergenerational homelessness and the intergenerational use of homelessness services

authored by

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

COAG	Council of Australian Governments
HRSCCA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NCDS	National Child Development Study
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC)

1   INTRODUCTION

Homelessness imposes severe personal hardships on those affected and carries with it significant costs to the community. These costs are magnified when homelessness is experienced over the generations. Children who experience homelessness alongside their parents or who are removed or separated from their parents as a result of their parents' homelessness, are: more likely to experience higher rates of morbidity and developmental delay; more likely to go hungry; more prone to depression, anxiety, social isolation, low self-esteem and low aspirations; and, more likely to experience poorer educational outcomes and behavioural problems than children who do not experience homelessness. These life events and experiences are likely to increase the risk of experiencing homelessness later in life. A 'cycle of homelessness' may develop in which the experience of homelessness as a child increases the risk of future homelessness and repeated use of homelessness services.

A significant research literature exists on the intergenerational transmission of poverty, family violence, and substance abuse. Much of this literature suggests that intergenerational discontinuities are as prevalent, if not more so, than intergenerational continuities, emphasizing that explanations need to be found for discontinuities as well as continuities (see Rutter, 1998). There is also an emerging literature on the effects of homelessness on children. However, there is a paucity of evidence on intergenerational homelessness itself, both in Australia and overseas.

Intergenerational homelessness occurs when homelessness is repeated in recurrent generations of the same family. In other words, it occurs when an individual who experiences homelessness in their own right has one or more parents who were also (or are) homeless at some point in their lives. It may well happen that both generations experience homelessness together as a result of the family unit becoming homeless, children being placed in care because of their parents' homelessness and inability to care for their children, or when mothers escape domestic violence with their children.

The 'cultural definition' of homelessness (Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 2003, 2008) is adopted in the present study. Under this approach, homelessness is more than the absence of shelter (living on the streets or in squats or makeshift dwellings). It includes accommodation that falls below minimum acceptable community standards of housing security and access to facilities. The cultural definition of homelessness includes the following three categories of homelessness:

→ *Primary homelessness*: those without conventional accommodation, e.g., people living on the streets or sleeping in parks;

→ *Secondary homelessness*: those in temporary accommodation, including those staying in emergency or transitional accommodation and temporarily living with other households because they have no accommodation of their own, and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis.

→ *Tertiary homelessness*: those living in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis.

It is important to note that, as defined under the cultural definition of homelessness, there is little to separate secondary and tertiary homelessness, and 'marginal housing' involving severe overcrowding or dilapidated housing, but with some security of tenure.

Our study seeks to provide evidence on the prevalence, dynamics and structure of intergenerational homelessness. It is important to know whether homelessness has persisted in either or both generations for long periods of time, or whether it is episodic or one-off in nature. Furthermore, it is important to identify which socio-demographic groups are most likely to experience intergenerational homelessness and what forms of homelessness (primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness) are experienced in the two generations. Finally, it is important to understand the key apparent drivers or correlates of intergenerational homelessness. To what extent is intergenerational homelessness associated with substance abuse, domestic violence, or severe financial hardship over the generations? How do these factors interact?

There is no robust evidence on the prevalence, structure or dynamics of intergenerational homelessness in Australia. No existing data sources or longitudinal surveys provide coverage of the issue of intergenerational homelessness. We do not know how many of those who experience homelessness in their own right also have one or more parents who experienced homelessness, nor how many who experienced homelessness as children also experienced homelessness as adults. Nor do we know about the risk factors associated with intergenerational homelessness or the extent to which homelessness in one generation increases the risk of homelessness in the next. Furthermore, we know nothing about the severity, depth and duration of homelessness experienced by those affected by intergenerational homelessness relative to other clients of homelessness services.

The pathways followed by those who experience homelessness as children, and the role of parents and other support mechanisms, are also areas where we need to know more. Why do some families experience intergenerational homelessness and others not? Why, within families, do some siblings experience intergenerational homelessness while others do not? What are the important parental factors and parental support influences that are protective for children in respect to intergenerational homelessness? What is the nature of the pathways into (or out of) intergenerational homelessness? And, given the high prevalence of homelessness for those who are in care or leaving care, what is the role played by the child protection system in terms of the intergenerational homelessness experience in Australia?

It is to the above questions that this study is directed. It explores the prevalence, causes, nature and impact of intergenerational homelessness in Australia. It also seeks to understand the intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services, largely covered under the present Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the role played by such services and mainstream services in influencing intergenerational homelessness outcomes.

The importance of the study lies not only in the knowledge it may generate on intergenerational homelessness, but also the role it may play in the development of policy and in the delivery of homelessness and mainstream services. It is important, from a policy perspective, to identify and understand the circumstances in which intergenerational homelessness and use of homelessness services is likely to occur, and to develop policy and programmatic responses that will reduce the chances of homelessness being transmitted across the generations.

A finding of a high rate of intergenerational homelessness and a severe impact arising from it, will provide an evidence base for a renewed emphasis on prevention and early intervention programs for children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and of parental support programs designed to assist families to escape intergenerational homelessness. Knowledge of the pathways followed by those experiencing intergenerational homelessness and of the risk factors involved,

will provide an improved evidence base for the types of interventions that may be most effective, the ways we may target children and young people and parents at risk, including children and young people in care, and the timing of these interventions to reduce the incidence of intergenerational homelessness.

The prevention of homelessness has been an increasing focus of the various SAAP Agreements, the National Homelessness Strategy and various state-based homelessness strategies. It has been given particular impetus in the Australian Government's 2008 White Paper on Homelessness *The Road Home: A National Approach To Reducing Homelessness. The Road Home* is built around three strategies as a response to homelessness: (a) turning off the tap (services intervening early to prevent homelessness); (b) improving and expanding services; and (c) breaking the cycle. Our study should inform the development of policy under each of these strategies.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to the formation of the new National Partnerships on Social Housing, Remote Indigenous Housing and Homelessness within a new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA).The National Affordable Housing Agreement replaced the SAAP V Agreement in January 2009. Through the NAHA, there will be a greater focus on the achievement of long-term housing outcomes and on the reduction of homelessness over time. This study will provide a crucial intergenerational perspective on the issue of homelessness and the role of homelessness early intervention programs in reducing the intergenerational transmission of homelessness.

This Positioning Paper provides the reader with a brief review of the relevant literature and describes the research design of the study, together with the policy context which informs the study. The Final Report will present the findings of the research and outline the policy implications which flow from those findings.

1.1 Method

The major source of information on those who are homeless in Australia is the SAAP National Data Collection. Over time, this collection will provide a vital source of information on intergenerational homelessness. However, the existing administrative SAAP data is inadequate in terms of its ability to be used to track SAAP clients and accompanying children over any reasonable length of time. This is because the inclusion of a unique identifier in the SAAP administrative data is of recent origin. Because of likely changes to the organisation of specialist homelessness services following the White Paper, it is also unclear at present what changes may take place in the National Data Collection. Outside the SAAP National Data Collection there is no existing longitudinal data collection capable of examining the issue of intergenerational homelessness.

As a consequence, our study will rely on its own primary data collections designed specifically to address the issue of intergenerational homelessness.

Stage 1 involves a one-off major survey, the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, of people currently experiencing homelessness, recruited through specialist homelessness (formerly SAAP) services across Australia. The sample will be stratified to ensure representation from regional and remote, as well as urban areas, and from different homelessness sectors such as the domestic violence, single adult, and family homelessness sectors. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring that Indigenous clients are appropriately sampled in the survey.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* will be designed to elicit information on the homelessness and service-use histories of current clients in homelessness services, their early-life backgrounds, the homelessness and service-use histories of their parents and siblings, and the homelessness and service-use histories of their own children. The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* will investigate key drivers of intergenerational homelessness and use of services.

Stage 2 of the study involves supplementing the quantitative data collection by carrying out qualitative analysis, using in-depth interviews and focus groups, at a range of sites around Australia. The in-depth interviews will be undertaken with homelessness service clients who participated in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, together with, if possible, non-respondents whose parents experienced homelessness but who are not presently homeless. The most obvious group to access are siblings of homeless client participants. However, this may not be possible and will be a matter for review as the study progresses. The group of homelessness service clients to be chosen for in-depth interviews will include both those respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* who identify their parents as having experienced homelessness and those whose parents are not identified as experiencing homelessness.

Focus group sessions will be held with experienced support workers in specialist homelessness services. The focus group sessions will address issues such as the pathways followed by those experiencing intergenerational homelessness, the experiences of those who have escaped the cycle of homelessness, possible key risk factors and determinants of intergenerational homelessness, and the roles interventions may play in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Interviews will also be undertaken with key policy personnel in jurisdictions around Australia to establish whether there exists any relevant evidence held by jurisdictions on intergenerational homelessness and any interventions clearly targeted at reducing intergenerational homelessness.

The purpose of the qualitative studies is to gain insights, based on clients' and practitioners' own experiences, into the factors that have contributed to homelessness being experienced across the generations. We will also be looking to identify factors which have acted to help some people, whose parents experienced homelessness and who may themselves have also experienced homelessness, escape from homelessness.

This study will provide estimates of the extent to which those who experience homelessness as an adult (aged 18 years or over) also experienced homelessness as children, and the pathways they followed; the extent to which their parents also experienced homelessness; and the extent to which their own children (if they have children) have experienced homelessness. The study will also provide insights into the factors associated with greater risk of intergenerational homelessness and use of homelessness services, and the types of effective support or other interventions that may avert or break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness.

Such evidence provides a foundation for the informed development of policy and of service delivery models to address the cycle of homelessness across the generations. Findings on the prevalence and pattern of intergenerational homelessness and use of homelessness services will provide an improved evidence base on which to best target resources to meet these problems.

Findings in regard to Indigenous intergenerational homelessness experiences will contribute to the ability of homelessness services to tailor appropriate strategies for

Indigenous clients. The findings will also contribute to the developing body of work on the outcomes of homelessness service clients and the capacity of services to boost client self-reliance. However, we would emphasise the fact that many of the questions we address in the study can only be answered fully with a prospective longitudinal survey. What this study is doing is exploratory, providing the basis for further research in the future.

1.2 Structure

The structure of the Positioning Paper is as follows.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the study's research aims and questions. In Chapter 3, we provide a broad overview of the existing literature relating to intergenerational homelessness, together with a review of the related literature on the intergenerational transmission of poverty, family violence, and substance abuse. The latter studies provide a good reference point for the present study in that the transmission of intergenerational poverty, family violence, and drug and alcohol abuse, may display similar patterns to the intergenerational transmission of homelessness. Poverty, family violence and substance abuse, together with mental health conditions, all represent homelessness risk factors.

Chapter 4 sets out the key components of the research design and the methods which will be used in this study.

2 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1 Introduction

The chapter provides an overview of the aims and objectives of this study, and of the research questions to be addressed by the study.

2.2 Aims and objectives

The key aim of the present study is to improve our understanding of intergenerational homelessness and the intergenerational use of homelessness services. It seeks to achieve this aim through examining the patterns and determinants of intergenerational homelessness and homelessness service-use in Australia, and the role and impact of service delivery and policy interventions designed to avert or break the cycle of homelessness across generations.

This project has three key objectives.

First, it seeks to examine the extent to which current specialist homelessness services (largely formerly SAAP) clients have experienced homelessness as children, the homelessness and related pathways they followed in reaching their present position, and the homelessness and homelessness service-usage histories of their parents, their siblings and their own children.

Second, the project aims to determine the individual-level and social-environmental 'risk' factors associated with intergenerational homelessness and the intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services.

Third, the project will identify factors that may avert or lead to a break in the cycle of intergenerational homelessness and use of homelessness services.

The study represents a preliminary examination of the issue of intergenerational homelessness. It is preliminary on two grounds. First, the study includes as its centrepiece a survey, the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, in which target population is current clients of homelessness services. The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* will, therefore, provide findings on the prevalence, structure and dynamics of intergenerational homelessness for those currently accessing homeless support services. It cannot provide estimates of intergenerational homelessness for homeless people who do not access support services, or for the Australian population as a whole. Such estimates can only be derived from a survey targeted at the Australian population.

Second, the study uses a retrospective design for both the quantitative and qualitative components. In other words, it examines the issue of intergenerational homelessness by asking people questions in a survey and in interviews about their past homelessness experiences and those of their parents. It does not follow people through time in a longitudinal survey. Imperfect recall and/or knowledge of past events will affect the quality of the data and may bias the results. A retrospective research design is also poor in terms of its ability to address issues of causality and the influence of mediating influences. However, a prospective study by its very nature will not provide useful findings for a considerable period of time and is many times more expensive to implement than the current study.

Intergenerational poverty, intergenerational reliance on income support and intergenerational family violence and substance abuse are issues that have attracted considerable policy and research attention in recent years in Australia (see, for

example, the reviews by Pech and McCoull, AIFS Conference, 1998; Barry et al., FaHCSIA Social Policy Research Reports No 31, 2007). However, there is no corresponding research literature on intergenerational homelessness and the use of homelessness services. Nor is there a developed evidence base on the factors that lead to, or mitigate against, intergenerational homelessness. This study aims to help fill this critical gap in the homelessness evidence base.

The study will build upon recent research conducted by members of the project team on child-based use of SAAP services and the impact of homelessness services on client self-reliance (Norris et al., 2005; Eardley et al., 2008), transitions from state care (Forbes et al., 2006a, 2006b), child and youth development and the social epidemiology of drug and related problems (Spooner, 2006; Spooner and Hall, 2002; Spooner and Hetherington, 2005), and the cost-effectiveness of homelessness programs and Indigenous housing (Flatau and Zaretzky, 2008; Flatau et al., 2008; Zaretzky et al., 2008).

The study addresses the following research questions:

→ **RQ1** *Prevalence and patterns of intergenerational homelessness among homeless people accessing homelessness services*: What is the prevalence of self-reported intergenerational homelessness among currently homeless people accessing specialist homelessness services? Is intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services (formerly SAAP services) more common among certain homeless client groups than among others? Are those clients of homelessness services whose parents had experienced homelessness (i.e., the intergenerationally homeless) different from those clients whose parents have not experienced homelessness (comparison group). Are they the same group or different? Do they have the same or different problems? Are problems more severe among the intergenerationally homeless than the comparison group? What are the characteristics of homeless people who experienced homelessness as children as compared with those who did not? What are the characteristics of their parents who did and did not experience homelessness? What housing/homelessness and socio-economic pathways did those who currently experience homelessness and experienced homelessness or used specialist homelessness services as children follow? What is known of the pathways of their parents?

→ **RQ2** *Patterns of intergenerational homelessness among Indigenous people*: What is the pattern and extent of intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services among Indigenous people as compared with non-Indigenous people?

→ **RQ3** *The role of the child protection system in intergenerational homelessness*: Of those adults currently experiencing homelessness who have children, how many have children in care or have had children in care in the past? What is the homelessness experience of their children and the pathways they have followed, particularly through the child protection system? Among currently homeless adults with children, did they themselves experience homelessness as children and what was their own history of interaction with the child protection system?

→ **RQ4** *Risk factors associated with intergenerational homelessness*: What are the individual-level and structural 'risk' factors associated with intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services?

→ **RQ5** *Factors averting or breaking the cycle of intergenerational homelessness*: What factors may avert or break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of homelessness services?

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature as it relates to intergenerational homelessness experience. There are no studies of which we are aware the sole focus of which is on the issue of intergenerational homelessness. However, there is a large international literature on the intergenerational transmission of behaviours associated with increased risk of homelessness and of forms of disadvantage associated with homelessness. Therefore, this literature has a direct bearing on the issue of intergenerational homelessness. In addition, there is an emerging literature on the experiences of children when they are homeless, and on the effects of childhood homelessness and the pathways followed by those entering homelessness, together with a significant body of work on youth homelessness. We will focus on the Australian literature in this area.

We also examine, in this chapter, the current policy context in relation to homelessness and the possible implications for policy of the issue of intergenerational homelessness and the intergenerational use of homelessness accommodation services.

3.2 Definitions

There is widespread agreement in the Australian literature that 'homelessness' is not simply the absence of shelter (Fopp, 1988; Maas and Hartley, 1988; HREOC, 1989; Victorian Government, 1992; Neil and Fopp, 1994; Smith, 1995; Casey, 2001; Strategic Partners, 2001; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2002; Norris et *al.*, 2005). Rather, the approach taken in the Australian context is that homelessness is about a lack of security of tenure, the absence of a safe living environment and unacceptable living conditions given the standards accepted in the Australian community.

There are two commonly used definitions of homelessness in Australia. The first is that adopted under the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994).* The second definition is the 'cultural' definition of homelessness advanced by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992). The SAAP Act definition is the broadest of the two. Under the provisions of the Act, homelessness is defined in terms of 'inadequate access to safe and secure housing'. This is said to exist when the only housing to which a person has access:

→   is likely to damage the person's health;

→   threatens the person's safety;

→   marginalises the person by failing to provide access to adequate personal amenities or the normal economic and social support of a home; or

→   places the person in circumstances that threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

The cultural definition of homelessness, put forward originally by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992), distinguishes between different layers of homelessness.

→   *Primary homelessness*, such as sleeping rough or living in an improvised dwelling;

→   *Secondary homelessness*, which includes staying with friends or relatives and with no other usual address, and people in SAAP accommodation or other specialist homelessness services; and

→ *Tertiary homelessness* including people living in boarding houses or caravan parks with no secure lease and no private facilities, both short- and long-term.

We shall use the cultural definition of homelessness in the present study. However, we are mindful of the fact that there is little to separate secondary and tertiary homelessness, as defined under the cultural definition of homelessness, and 'marginal housing' involving severe overcrowding or dilapidated housing but with some security of tenure. Our study will ensure that the marginal housing experiences of study participants are examined alongside their experiences of homelessness.

Intergenerational homelessness occurs when different generations of the same family experience homelessness in their own right. In other words, it occurs when an individual who experiences homelessness in their own right has one or more parents who were also (or are) homeless at some point in their lives. We are particularly interested in instances where those who experienced homelessness as children with one or more of their parents do so again as a young person or adult. This may occur in the case of family homelessness or when women escape domestic violence with their children. If their own children experience homelessness, a 'cycle of homelessness' develops.

The homelessness that may be experienced by children, by families and by adults may be a one-off episode, it may be iterative or it may be chronic and persistent. Chamberlain and Johnson (2003) model the various types of homelessness experiences as 'career' processes. Robinson (2003), examining homelessness among people with mental health conditions, developed the term 'iterative homelessness' to encourage a conceptual understanding of homelessness in terms of repeated uprooting and the process of repeated attempts to establish a home both physically and emotionally. Distinguishing between different forms of homelessness careers is an important part of the present study.

Eardley et *al.*'s (2008) recent study of SAAP clients provides a point-in-time perspective of the homelessness careers followed by those who are homeless. One in 10 study participants had an experience of homelessness going back more than 20 years, and almost two-thirds were homeless more than once. Also, six per cent of all respondents received help for more than five years, while the proportion of men getting help for more than five years was close to ten per cent.

3.3   Intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and behaviours, and intergenerational homelessness

The intergenerational transmission of an experience and cross-generational patterns or 'cycles' of that experience have been studied in a number of social contexts; most notably in the area of family violence and/or substance abuse (Bennett, 1995; Widom, 1989).

Research has shown that child maltreatment usually occurs in patterns or cycles across family generations (Cicchetti and Carlson, 1989) with considerable research linking substance abuse and spouse abuse in families across generations (Hamilton and Collins, 1981; Sheridan, 1995; Markward *et al.*, 2000; Raine, 2002). Many children are the victims of family violence at the same time as their mothers. A US study by Wilden *et al.* (1991) estimated that between 40 to 70 per cent of children entering women's refuges with their mothers as a result of domestic violence were themselves victims of abuse or neglect. The existing international research points to clear evidence that domestic and family violence shape children's health and wellbeing, and subsequently their ability to engage in fulfilling lives as adults. If the

unresolved trauma and psychosocial problems of children are not addressed, there is less chance for successful reintegration into the community in the future (Sheridan, 1995).

The intergenerational transmission of domestic and family violence has a direct link to the intergenerational transmission of homelessness. Women escaping domestic violence with their children and who are supported in a women's refuge are homeless under the cultural definition of homelessness. Their children have not experienced homelessness in their own right, but if they subsequently do, then intergenerational homelessness exists. However, not all children in this position will experience homelessness in their own right. And if they do, it may not be in the context of intergenerational domestic violence. Hence, while there is an overlap between intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational domestic violence, they are not the same thing.

Beyond the specific concern with the intergenerational transmission of domestic and family violence, there is a large literature linking socio-economic disadvantage in childhood to similar outcomes in adulthood. In the UK, the National Child Development Study (NCDS), a longitudinal study of children born throughout Britain in the first week of March 1958, and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) have been used extensively to examine the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Using the NCDS, Hobcraft (1998) identified five key determinants of a child's early years as critical in subsequent disadvantage. They were childhood poverty, family disruption, contact with the police, educational test scores and father's interest in schooling. Using both data sets, Blanden and Gibbons (2006) found that the odds of being in poverty in middle-age for those who were in poverty as children were double those for respondents who had not been in poverty as children. Studies focusing on why certain individuals escape from disadvantage using the same data sets point to the following key determinants: a mother with some extended education, fathers who help around the house with domestic tasks, children getting on with their parents, a stimulating home background, and a father who supported his children's education (Pilling, 1990; Schoon and Parsons, 2002).

Beaulieu *et al.* (2005) investigated the intergenerational transmission of reliance on social assistance in Canada and found a significant link between parental and child reliance on assistance, both during the child's pre-adult and early adult years. They suggest that an observed link between the social assistance profiles of parents and their children may originate from one or both of the following sources: a causal link between parents' use of assistance and that of their children, or an intergenerational correlation between individual or environment-specific characteristics that affect the propensity to rely on assistance. In terms of the former, the participation of parents may reduce the family stigma felt by their children and therefore reduce their reluctance to rely on social assistance (an imitation effect) and children may learn how to use the program from their parents and so they can access it more efficiently.

From a developmental perspective, research has identified the impacts of childhood experiences on adult outcomes, including drug abuse, criminal behaviour and suicidal behaviour (Spooner and Hetherington, 2005). This research can inform our investigation for pathways from childhood homelessness to adult homelessness. For example, stress associated with childhood homelessness could affect child development in a manner that reduces adult coping skills, thereby increasing the risk of homelessness (see Thornberry *et al.* (2009) for discussion of how stress during child development can impact upon adult outcomes). Alternatively, the experience of childhood homelessness could build a resolve in children to not experience

homelessness again, thereby reducing the risk of homelessness (see Rutter's 1998 discussion that highlights that most children do not experience intergenerational problems; in other words intergenerational discontinuities may be more evident than intergenerational continuities). Experiences of homelessness during adolescent years, when young people are developing their identities, could shape that process so that being homeless is considered an element of one's self-identity (see Kaplan's discussion of how labelling a young person as a drug user can contribute to that young person developing a self-identity of 'drug user', discussed in Spooner (1999)).

Beaulieu *et al.* (2005) present a useful framework to think about intergenerational homelessness. It is possible to distinguish between the direct 'learnt' experience of homelessness passed from one generation to the next and derived most likely from joint experiences of homelessness across the generations on the one hand, and the prevalence of homelessness risk factors experienced by both parents and subsequently and independently by their children as young people and adults on the other hand. A key point to make is not all those whose parents experienced homelessness will become homeless in their own right; not all families whose members across the generations exhibit high risks of homelessness will have family members who become homeless.

Foster and Hagan (2007) consider the role of incarceration in an intergenerational context. They identify a cumulative level of disadvantage beginning from a father's low levels of educational attainment and incarceration, through his children's own educational background and experiences with the justice system and emerging adult social exclusion. Interestingly, for the purposes of the present study, Foster and Hagan (2007) also found that parental incarceration increased the risk of children becoming homeless in their early adult years.

There are no detailed international studies on intergenerational homelessness per se. However, McNaughton's (2006) biographical case studies do point to the importance of homelessness as a learned experience or pattern of behaviour. An individual's ability to escape homelessness is linked to the fact that they may have experienced a relatively settled upbringing which gave them something to compare homelessness to; homelessness was not the only way of life they knew. This suggests that to break the cycle of homelessness not only do the right structural foundations need to be in place, but the psychological aspects of learned behaviour also need to be addressed.

A number of studies look at the relationships between homelessness, sex work, substance abuse and the pathways followed by those who exit this lifestyle (O'Neill, 1996; Shelter, 2002; McNaughton and Sanders, 2007). These studies highlight the links with family violence and drug use and the importance of providing supported accommodation away from negative influences, in order to help stabilise the lives of those involved. The common theme in the literature in regard to the children affected is that the quicker support help is provided the less entrenched these poor social networks, emotional and educational issues become.

In the Australian context, there has been considerable debate in recent years about the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency, with links to homelessness. Pech and McCoull (2000), using the FaHCSIA Transgenerational Data Set, found that young people from income support-recipient families were more likely to leave school early, experience long-term unemployment, and were more likely themselves to be income support recipients. The study also showed that these young people were also more likely to be classified as 'homeless' for income support purposes. The likelihood of experiencing disadvantage as a young person increased with the degree of parental disadvantage and income support dependence.

Research by Brown (2005), also based on the Transgenerational Data Set, supports suggestions that young people whose parents were disadvantaged were more likely to experience disadvantage themselves, while the level of disadvantage was again greater for children with the most disadvantaged parents. In relation to our study, it is important to note that Brown's research targeted Youth Allowees who were not able to live in the family home because their parents or families were homeless. This group of 16 to 17-year-olds at the higher 'independent' rate were categorised as being in the most disadvantaged position. The incidence of parental 'homelessness' was found to be higher for men, with one-in-forty young men listing this as the reason their parents could not take care of them. While the study provides insights into the homelessness experiences of young people in Australia and the co-location of homelessness among parents, it still stops short of providing evidence on the likelihood of homelessness as a young person or adult if an individual had parents who were homeless when they were children.

Recently, Moore *et al.* (2007) examined how homeless children in Australia perceive their homelessness and considered the pathways they followed in entering into homelessness. The main causes cited were domestic and family violence, and structural forces such as poverty and the severe lack of affordable housing. Their report recognises that some of the factors that are referred to as 'pathways' into family homelessness, such as parental drug and alcohol use, family violence and parental mental health issues, themselves make children more at risk during periods of homelessness. Moore et al. (2007) also concluded from their qualitative research that the effects of homelessness on children often persist beyond the periods of homelessness. They argue that much of the fear and distress of homelessness for the young person relates to the insecurity and unsafe nature of temporary housing. Moore et al. (2007) suggest that the provision of stable and secure accommodation being made available early in the homelessness cycle can mitigate against the lasting and extensive effects that parental homelessness has on children. Early intervention programs, designed to prevent the risk of homelessness becoming an actuality, represent cost-effective responses to the cycle of homelessness.

The importance of early intervention programs for young people has been emphasised in the Australian literature for some time. The initial impetus for debate and reform was the 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report *Our Homeless Children*, often referred to as the Burdekin Report, which highlighted the position and plight of homeless young people and argued for significant early-intervention strategies for young people who were homeless. A subsequent report in 1995 by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (HRSCCA) *A Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* (The Morris Report) also vigorously promoted early intervention and prevention strategies, including family mediation and counselling and family services, as well as direct school-based strategies. The effectiveness of early intervention and prevention strategies for young people as well as adults is a theme of the work of Chamberlain and Johnson (2002, 2003).

This brief review of the literature highlights the fact that, while the intergenerational transmission of poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse (all risk factors associated with homelessness), has been extensively studied, there is no developed literature on the topic of intergenerational homelessness itself. What the literature on the intergenerational transmission of poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse points to, is the following conjecture. The experience of homelessness in the family environment increases the risk of homelessness in the next generation in and

of itself. The risk of homelessness will be affected by the prevalence or otherwise of a range of homelessness risk factors.

However, what needs to be further explored is how the experience of homelessness in the family environment may increase the chance of transmitting homelessness across the generations, and how important this factor is as against the prevalence of homelessness risk factors such as poverty, domestic violence and substance abuse. What role may interventions play in mitigating the risk of intergenerational homelessness?

3.4 The policy context

Homelessness imposes significant personal costs on those affected and carries with it significant costs to the community. Homelessness can have a particularly profound impact on children's development given the unstable and unpredictable environment with which they are confronted. Children in care and children leaving out-of-home care are particularly at risk of homelessness, both as children and teenagers, as well as adults. The literature examined so far has demonstrated that homelessness can affect the physical, emotional and educational development of these children. This in turn will mean a higher risk of homelessness as a young person and adult.

In order to break the cycle of homelessness, it is important, from a policy perspective, to identify and understand the circumstances in which intergenerational homelessness and use of homelessness services is likely to occur and to develop policy and programmatic responses that will reduce the chances of homelessness being experienced across the generations. This involves not only working with children at risk of experiencing homelessness as adults, but also the parents of these children.

At the time of the 2006 Census, there was an estimated 105,000 Australians who were homeless, of which around sixteen per cent were in the primary homelessness category (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2008). Between 2001 and 2006, there was a fall in the number of young people aged 12 to 18 experiencing homelessness, which may be due to the impact of early intervention and prevention programs for this group. However, the 2006 Census also showed both significant increases in the number of mature-aged people who were homeless, and children under the age of 12 who were homeless. In fact, the number of children who are homeless under the age of 12 increased by twenty-two per cent between 2001 and 2006. In addition, SAAP data, cited in the White Paper *The Road Home*, confirms that family homelessness has grown, with the number of families with children who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services increasing by thirty-three per cent between 2001 and 2006. The data also reveals that families seeking accommodation are more likely to be turned away from SAAP than single people and are more likely to stay in crisis accommodation for longer than 6 months.

Key causes of homelessness include the affordability of housing, domestic violence, long-term unemployment, family breakdown, mental health and substance abuse. SAAP data shows that approximately fifty-five per cent of women with children who seek assistance from SAAP services cite domestic violence as their main reason for seeking assistance. Clearly the high and increasing proportion of the homeless population who are children gives greater urgency to tackling the issue of intergenerational homelessness.

Among those currently homeless, a significant number were in care as children. Many children enter care arrangements because of the homelessness of their parents. The child protection system, therefore, represents a crucial part of the intergenerational

homelessness experience in Australia. The Australian Federal Government is currently addressing the issue of reform of the national child protection system, and in particular the development of a national child protection framework (see *Australia's Children: Safe and Well. A National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*). The twin focus on reform of the child protection system and services to homeless people, allows us to address the nexus between intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational care experiences more effectively.

The *Road Home* highlights the fact that families and individuals in some communities across Australia are caught in a cycle of low school attainment, high unemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse. It proposes that homelessness among young children can only be addressed by a specific focus on their needs, as current specialist homelessness services are often unable to provide specialist support for the approximately 50,000 primary school-aged children they come in contact with annually.

SAAP, established in 1985, is an integrated, nationally coordinated program funded by the Australian and state and territory governments. The most recent SAAP V Agreement emphasises the importance of early intervention and prevention initiatives, and of post-crisis and transitional support. The new NAHA agreement replacing the SAAP V agreement has an even greater focus on homelessness prevention and early intervention approaches and the achievement of long-term housing outcomes.

The *Road Home's* 'turning off the tap' strategy is based on the tenet that homelessness can often be prevented and that prevention and early intervention are still the most effective and efficient ways to reduce homelessness. Homelessness prevention programs focus on populations at risk of homelessness, while early intervention programs are designed to provide tailored services to individuals at risk of homelessness. Early intervention strategies flowing from the *Road Home* will focus on key transition points and events including the 'no exit into homelessness' policy, which provides support to vulnerable children in statutory and custodial care, to ensure they have access to stable accommodation thereafter, and helping women and children experiencing domestic violence to stay safely in the family home.

The Australian Federal Government has also begun initiating programs to increase specialist support for children in order to break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness. However, in contrast to US programs, support for children is considered poor and not enough homelessness services employ specialist children's workers. The White Paper addresses a number of these concerns in recommending greater relationships between specialist homelessness services, child counsellors and schools with additional funding to meet the specific needs of children.

Beyond children-oriented programs directed toward children experiencing homelessness as part of a family unit in homelessness, or those children at risk of homelessness, are a range of mainstream programs which aim to reduce the intergenerational transmission of homelessness by reducing the role of relevant homelessness risk factors. Such programs include those targeted at young people at risk of homelessness as well as programs for those exiting prison with a high risk of an unstable housing future, those leaving residential health and alcohol and drug programs with a history of homelessness, and public and private rental tenants at risk of homelessness.

Another pressing issue addressed was the significant overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and the severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities. Indigenous people are over-represented in the homeless population and

improvements in health, education and employment to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage are needed with additional funding for new and upgraded houses to meet suitability.

4   RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts an innovative approach to the issue of intergenerational homelessness based around primary research evidence-gathering in the form of a quantitative survey, the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, in-depth interviews and focus groups.

4.1   Stage 1: Intergenerational homelessness survey

Stage 1 of the research involves a one-off cross-sectional survey of people (the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*) currently experiencing homelessness, recruited through specialist homelessness (formerly SAAP) services across Australia. The need for the quantitative survey arises as the existing administrative SAAP data is inadequate at present in terms of its ability to be used to track SAAP clients and accompanying children over time, and there exists no other cross-sectional or longitudinal data collection which addresses the issue of intergenerational homelessness.

The recent study of SAAP client self-reliance carried out by Eardley and colleagues at the SPRC (Eardley *et al.*, 2008) provides an effective model for such a survey.

Around 150 specialist homelessness agencies, drawn randomly from a list of all Australian specialist homelessness agencies, will be sent a letter asking whether they would be interested in participating in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*. The letter will explain the aims and methods of the *Survey*. The sample will be stratified to ensure representation from regional and remote, as well as urban areas.

Positive responses from specialist homelessness agencies will be analysed with a view to establishing a representative Australian sample. Representativeness will be defined in terms of the following criteria: state/territory; urban/regional; sector (youth, women escaping domestic violence, single men and women, families, Day Centres, outreach programs); Indigenous/non-Indigenous; and, agency size, type and function. If there is a gap in coverage, additional invitation letters will be sent out to agencies.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* will be extensively piloted. A key aim of the pilot survey program will be to elicit the views of homeless clients on the content of the survey, the wording of the questions and on intergenerational experiences of homelessness.

Each participating agency will be asked to administer surveys to 10–15 clients drawn randomly from those receiving support at the time of the survey. Participating agencies will be reimbursed to some limit for expenses involved in conducting the survey and responding clients will receive a $10 voucher.

The survey instrument will include a short administrative section to be completed by the agency and a self-complete questionnaire. Questionnaires will be completed by respondents in private but with a designated agency person in attendance. The agency officer will explain the survey and run through questions in the survey with the respondent. They will be on hand to guide the respondent through any questions with which he or she has difficulty. The agency officer will conduct the survey on an interview basis in the case of those respondents who are anticipated to have general difficulties with completing forms. Respondent participation will be on the basis of informed, signed consent. The survey will be designed to be completed in around 30 minutes.

Agency officers conducting the survey will be supplied with a manual explaining the survey and providing guidance on each question. Phone contact will be made with agency officers before interviews are conducted to ensure that they are aware of the appropriate procedures to follow.

Our past research suggests to us that intergenerational homelessness may be more prevalent in the Indigenous as compared with the non-Indigenous population, and so particular care will be taken to ensure that the final sample of respondents will include sufficient numbers of Indigenous people from different areas. We plan to conduct consultations with specialist homelessness services with significant representation of Indigenous clients at an early stage of project design in order to ensure that we are focusing on issues that are of relevance to Indigenous homeless people, and asking questions in ways that are culturally appropriate and recognise the particular features of Indigenous familial and housing arrangements, The project team will consult with Indigenous stakeholders at all stages in the project.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* uses a retrospective design in which respondents are asked to respond to a range of life-history questions revolving around their own histories of homelessness and services use and those of their parents, siblings and children. A retrospective research design based around the use of recall questions represents the only means to gather information on intergenerational homelessness within any reasonable time frame and at relatively low cost. Nevertheless, it is difficult for people to recall accurately all elements of their homelessness histories and more difficult still to describe the histories of their parents. Furthermore, it is difficult for children to understand the context to various life events. Children may not know that their family is experiencing homelessness if supported accommodation is quickly provided and done so with sensitivity.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* will be designed to elicit information on the homelessness and service-use histories of current clients in SAAP, their early-life backgrounds and the service-use histories of their parents and the homelessness and service-use histories of their own children. The survey will investigate key drivers of intergenerational homelessness and use of SAAP services as identified in the literature.

In particular, the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* will seek to determine how many currently homeless people accessing specialist homelessness services experienced homelessness as children and as young people, how many had parents or siblings who experienced homelessness and the extent to which their own children experienced homelessness. The survey will seek to map the housing/homelessness pathways followed by respondents over time, and will include questions relating to risk factors associated with homelessness, such as the experience of mental health conditions and substance use problems.

The role of specialist homelessness services and mainstream mental health and drug and alcohol services in influencing homelessness pathways will also be addressed in the survey.

4.2 Stage 2: Qualitative analysis: focus groups and in-depth interviews

Stage 2 of the project involves carrying out qualitative analysis using in-depth interviews and focus groups at a range of sites around Australia to supplement the quantitative analysis. Around thirty semi-structured interviews will be conducted with

clients of agencies participating in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*. Focus groups will be conducted with SAAP support staff and managers.

The research team will liaise with participating agencies to determine possible candidates for the qualitative component of the study. A strategic sampling method will be used to select participants with the aim of choosing clients who will illustrate different homelessness pathways and intergenerational homelessness experiences. The sample will be selected following preliminary analysis of the quantitative data. We will also attempt to gain access to participants whose parents may have been homeless at some point but who are not currently homeless in their own right and may never have been homeless. The most likely candidates for this group are siblings of those chosen for the in-depth interviews.

A thematic analysis will be undertaken of the interviews with clients. Around five composite case studies will also be developed which will draw upon the experiences of multiple people to illustrate some typical patterns of intergenerational homelessness.

In addition to interviews with clients of participating agencies, the research team will conduct focus group sessions in different locations around Australia with experienced support workers and managers of participating agencies. Experienced support workers and managers may well have witnessed different generations of families experiencing homelessness and are also likely to be aware of cases where individuals have followed a sustainable path out of homelessness. The focus group sessions will address issues such as the pathways followed by those experiencing intergenerational homelessness, the experiences of those who have escaped the cycle of homelessness, possible key risk factors and determinants of intergenerational homelessness, and the role of interventions in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Interviews will also be undertaken with key policy personnel in jurisdictions around Australia to establish whether there exists any relevant evidence held by jurisdictions on intergenerational homelessness and any interventions clearly targeted at reducing intergenerational homelessness.

The purpose of the qualitative studies is to gain insights, based on clients' and practitioners' own experiences, into the factors that have contributed to insecurity in housing tenure across generations and those which have helped some of these people avoid this continuing housing insecurity. The qualitative component of the study will address the issue of the risk factors associated with intergenerational homelessness and the factors which may act to avert or break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of homelessness services.

Table 4.1 outlines the method by which each research question will be addressed and the data sources used.

Table 4.1 Research questions, data and methodology

	Research Question	Data	Methodology
RQ1	*Prevalence and patterns of intergenerational homelessness among homeless people accessing homelessness services*: What is the prevalence of self-reported intergenerational homelessness among currently homeless people accessing specialist homelessness services?	*Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* → Interviewees to be recruited through specialist homelessness services throughout Australia with a focus on ensuring Indigenous clients are appropriately sampled.	Descriptive statistical and multivariate statistical analyses Descriptive statistical analyses
	Is intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services (formerly SAAP services) more common among certain homeless client groups than among others?		
	Are those clients of homelessness services whose parents had experienced homelessness (i.e., the intergenerationally homeless) different from those clients whose parents have not experienced homelessness (comparison group). Are they the same group or different?		
	Do they have the same or different problems?		
	Are problems more severe among the intergenerationally homeless than the comparison group?		
	What are the characteristics of homeless people who experienced homelessness as children as compared with those who did not?		
	What are the characteristics of their parents who did and did not experience homelessness?		
	What housing/homelessness and socio-economic pathways did those who currently experience homelessness and experienced homelessness or used specialist homelessness services as children follow?		
	What is known of the pathways of their parents?		
RQ2	*Patterns of intergenerational homelessness among Indigenous people*: What is the pattern and extent of intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services among Indigenous people as compared with non-Indigenous people?	*Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*	Descriptive statistical and multivariate statistical analyses

Research Question		Data	Methodology
RQ3	*The role of the child protection system in intergenerational homelessness*: Of those adults currently experiencing homelessness who have children, how many have children in care or have had children in care in the past? What is the homelessness experience of their children and the pathways they have followed, particularly through the child protection system? Among currently homeless adults with children, did they themselves experience homelessness as children and what was their own history of interaction with the child protection system?	*Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* Focus groups In-depth interviews	Descriptive statistical and multivariate statistical analyses Care service and family homelessness service staff focus groups Interviews with current clients of homeless services who have had children in care at a range of sites around Australia
RQ4	*Risk factors associated with intergenerational homelessness:* What are the individual-level and structural 'risk' factors associated with intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of specialist homelessness services?	*Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* Focus groups In-depth interviews	Multivariate statistical analyses Homelessness service staff focus groups Interviews with current clients of homelessness services at a range of sites around Australia together with those whose parents may have been homeless at some point but who are not currently homeless in their own right and may never have been homeless
RQ5	*Factors averting or breaking the cycle of intergenerational homelessness*: What factors may avert or break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness and intergenerational use of homelessness services?	Focus groups In-depth interviews	Homelessness service staff focus groups Interviews with current clients of homelessness services at a range of sites around Australia together with those whose parents may have been homeless at some point but who are not currently homeless in their own right and may never have been homeless

5 CONCLUSION

Children who experience homelessness or who are removed or separated from their parents as a result of their parents' homelessness, experience many life events that limit their opportunities to live a full life, and which increase their chance of homelessness as adults: A 'cycle of homelessness' is generated with attendant personal and social costs. In spite of the importance of intergenerational homelessness and a significant research literature on the intergenerational transmission of poverty, family violence, drug and alcohol substance abuse, there is a paucity of evidence on intergenerational homelessness. This study aims to help fill that gap in Australia.

This study explores the extent and patterns of intergenerational homelessness in Australia. In particular, the study seeks to assess the extent to which those homeless people currently receiving support from specialist homelessness support agencies experienced homelessness as children and the pathways they followed. The study places particular emphasis on intergenerational homelessness among Indigenous people and the nexus between intergenerational homelessness and child protection issues.

A multi-method research design is adopted, including a quantitative survey, the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Evidence from the study will provide a foundation for the informed development of service-delivery models and to address the intergenerational cycle of homelessness. Findings of the prevalence and pattern of intergenerational homelessness and use of services will provide the appropriate evidence base on which to judge how resources can best be targeted to meet these problems. Data on Indigenous experiences will contribute to the ability of homelessness services to tailor appropriate strategies for Indigenous people in urban and rural settings. Finally, the study will provide an evidence base on the role of prevention and early intervention programs in acting to avert the cycle of homelessness in Australia.

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