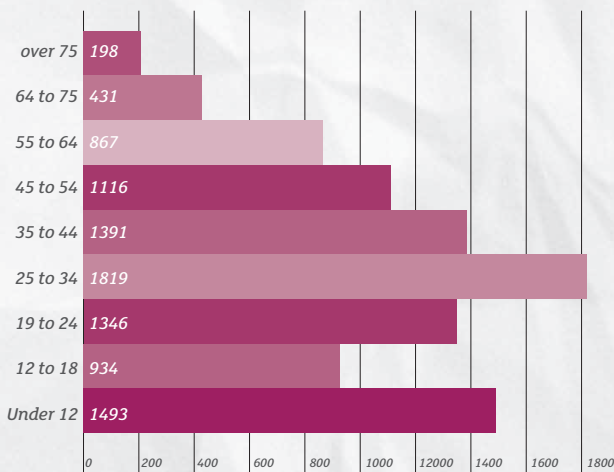


3.0 Setting the scene: Homelessness and young people

Youth homelessness does not involve a particular type of young person but a process of events that happen in a young person's life.³

A person is defined as homeless when they do not have access to one or more of the elements that constitutes home. These elements include a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control living space.⁴ The most recent data from the 2011 Census illustrated that there were 105,237 people experiencing homelessness across Australia, this is an increase of 15% from 2006.⁵ Approximately 25% (26,238) of homeless people on Census night were between the ages of 12 and 24. In Western Australia, 9,595 people are homeless on a given night and 25% (2,280) of these people are between the ages of 12 and 24 (see Figure 1.0). Due to the nature of Census data collection methodology these figures are likely to be significantly underreported.⁵

Figure 1.0 Number of homeless people in WA on Census night 2011 by age group



The main risk factors for homelessness are family conflict (including abuse and neglect), economic hardship, poor mental health and problems with substance misuse.³ Certain groups of people are over-represented in the young homeless population including those who have been in state care facilities,³ Aboriginal people,³ refugees and recent arrivals to Australia.⁶ It is thought that young people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Gender Questioning (LGBTIQ) are also overrepresented in the homeless population as being LGBTIQ is recognised as a main pathway into homelessness, however homelessness data does not capture this information.⁷

Young homeless people experience higher levels of physical and mental illness and considerably higher levels of mortality than other young people.⁸⁻¹⁰ Young people who are homeless are more likely to be victimised and experience violence,^{3, 11} engage in harmful behaviours such as alcohol abuse, drug use and sexual risk taking.^{3, 12} Homeless young people are often disengaged with usual social support structures such as schools, employment, family units, services and programs.¹³⁻¹⁵