

Client Pathways Report

People leaving prison: their experiences of homelessness and reoffending

Arc program - Partnerships
Addressing Disadvantage



Context

The Client Pathways project

The *2023-24 Budget* announced the public reporting of client pathways data and insights. The Client Pathways project aims to:

- Improve social services sector understanding of service pathways and touchpoints.
- Allow the social services sector to draw linkages between their own work and specific service systems to identify needs and gaps.
- Improve the broader quantification of avoided costs in demonstrating the effectiveness of early intervention.

This is the first report published under the Client Pathways project. Future reports will be published as further analysis is undertaken on selected cohorts to help inform future early interventions and social investment.

If you would like to get in touch regarding this report or the Client Pathways project, please contact earlyintervention@dtf.vic.gov.au.

Key data definitions

This report is informed by descriptive analysis undertaken using the Victorian Linkage Map (VLM) and Integrated Data Resource (IDR) which includes data from Specialist Homelessness Services and corrections.

Victorian Linkage Map and the Integrated Data Resource

The VLM is a collection of personal identifiers of all people that have had an interaction with a Victorian Government service (for example, a patient that has been admitted to a Victorian hospital or utilised a Victorian social care service). The IDR is a de-identified linked data asset of health, human services and other administrative and clinical data relating to people in the VLM.

Corrections data

Corrections data includes people that have left prison in Victoria after they have served a sentence of 3 months or longer, and excludes those on remand, not sentenced or released after serving a shorter sentence length. Information is collected on whether a person has returned to custody within three years following a release from prison.

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) data

The SHS data includes information on clients who have received a service from a SHS agency. A SHS agency provides preventative, early intervention, crisis and post-crisis responses to those experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.

The measure of frequency of SHS usage is support period. A support period is the length of time from the day a client received direct service from a SHS agency and ends on the last day on which services are provided, which can include multiple instances where services are provided over several months.

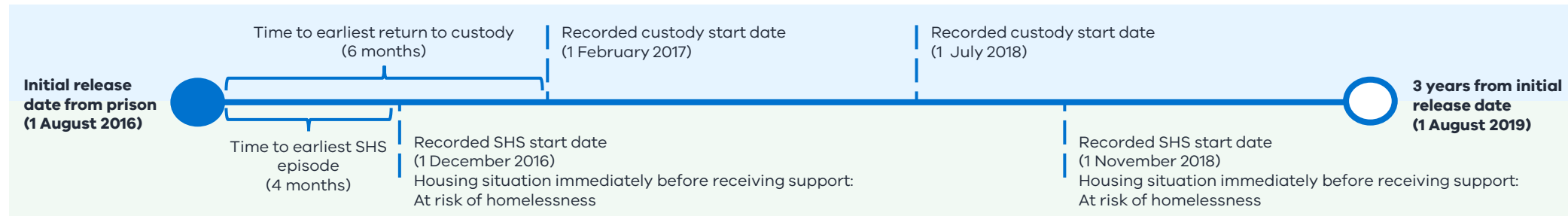
The analysis is focused on homelessness supports that occurred after an individual has exited prison and so does not capture homelessness risk or status prior to their initial prison sentence.

Illustrative corrections and SHS service usage pathway

The report analyses how people who were released from prison between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2017 and discharged from a sentence of three months or longer use corrections and specialist homelessness services (SHS) in the three-year period following a release from prison.

In analysing an individual's use of corrections services, all custody episodes after the initial release date are included regardless of their sentence outcomes or duration. In analysing an individual's use of SHS, all SHS support periods after the initial release are included regardless of the type of services provided.

Below is an example of how an individual could interact with SHS and custodial services following a release from prison, and how this type of information could provide insights as part of this report.



In this example:

- The individual was released from prison on 1 August 2016 and the analysis captures their corrections and SHS use until 1 August 2019.
- The individual has had 2 custody episodes and 2 SHS support periods since their release from prison.
- The time between their initial release from prison and the first time they return to custody is 6 months.
- The time between their initial release from prison and the first time they received SHS support is 4 months.
- The housing situation immediately before they received SHS support were assessed as 'at risk of homelessness' both times.

Importance of understanding the client pathways and baselines for those released from custody into homelessness

Entrenched homelessness is a known challenge in an individual's journey towards desistance and reintegration into the community after episodes of incarceration



Homelessness increased in Victoria by **36.7%** between 2001 and 2016. This outstripped population growth over the period which increased by **28.5%**.

Source: ABS, Census, 2001 to 2016.

The proportion of SHS clients exiting from custodial arrangements relative to total prison discharges increased from **41% to 48%** over 10 years in Victoria (2013–14 to 2022–23).

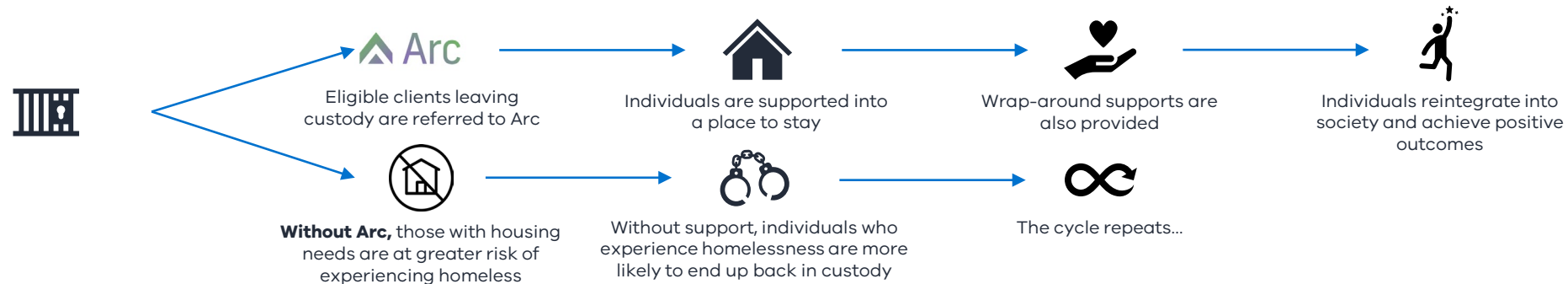
Source: AIHW, Specialist homelessness services historical tables 2011–12 to 2022–23; Corrections Victoria, Monthly time series prison and community corrections data.

Note that the number of annual prison discharges increased by 64% over this period.

How government used information in this report

The analysis within this report was first conducted during the development of the Arc Partnerships Addressing Disadvantage (PAD).

Arc is Victoria's fifth PAD initiative. Social Ventures Australia and Vacro have partnered with the Victorian government to provide specialised case management and housing support to people leaving prison, to help reduce reoffending and homelessness.



Findings from the analysis helped to inform the design of the Arc PAD, including eligibility and service needs by understanding the demographics and service usage patterns of the client base.

Data findings

The report does not aim to draw inference on the effectiveness of the corrections and homelessness services and the reasons as to why clients have used these government services in the manner they did. There are various factors that can influence client outcomes, including but not limited to program and policy changes as well as external factors.

Demographics – painting the picture

The analysis examined data for **6348** individuals



n = 5676

89%

Identify as male



n = 456

7%

Identify as female

10% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

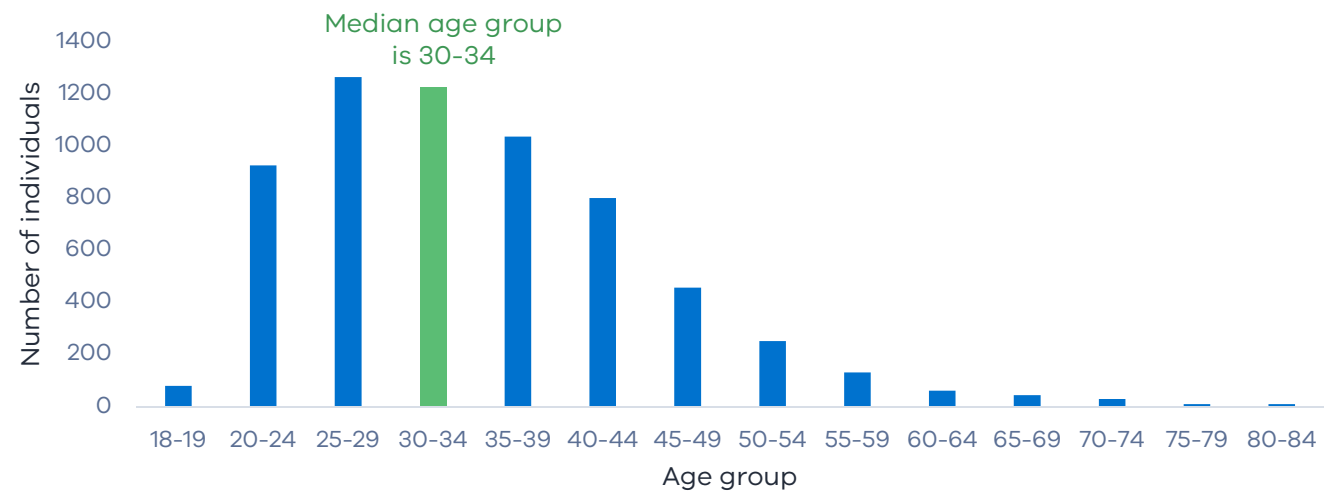
This is comparable to the total share of people in Victorian prisons that identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (**8.5%**) in 2017

ABS, Prisoner characteristics, States and territories

The target cohort of this report is people who met all of the following criteria:

- adults aged 18 and above when they were released from prison
- released from prison between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2017
- serving a sentence of three or more months (excludes remand and short-term custodial clients).

Age distribution of the target cohort



The sum of gender proportions does not sum to 100% due to some are reported as 'unknown'
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identifier is based on information collected in the Victorian corrections data

Summary of return to custody patterns by demographics



The boxes below examine the data on those who returned to custody within three years after leaving prison by gender and Aboriginal status.

In total, **around half of the target cohort** returned to custody at least once within three years.

Male

52% or 2945 men returned to custody within 3 years

Makes up **93%** of cohort returning to custody

From those that return to custody:
- Average **2.01** custodial episodes per person

Female

43% or 198 women returned to custody within 3 years

Makes up **6%** of cohort returning to custody

From those that return to custody:
- Average **2.31** custodial episodes per person

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

69% or 430 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people returned to custody within 3 years

Makes up **14%** of cohort returning to custody

From those that return to custody:
- Average **2.37** custodial episodes per person

Non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

48% or 2705 non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people returned to custody within 3 years

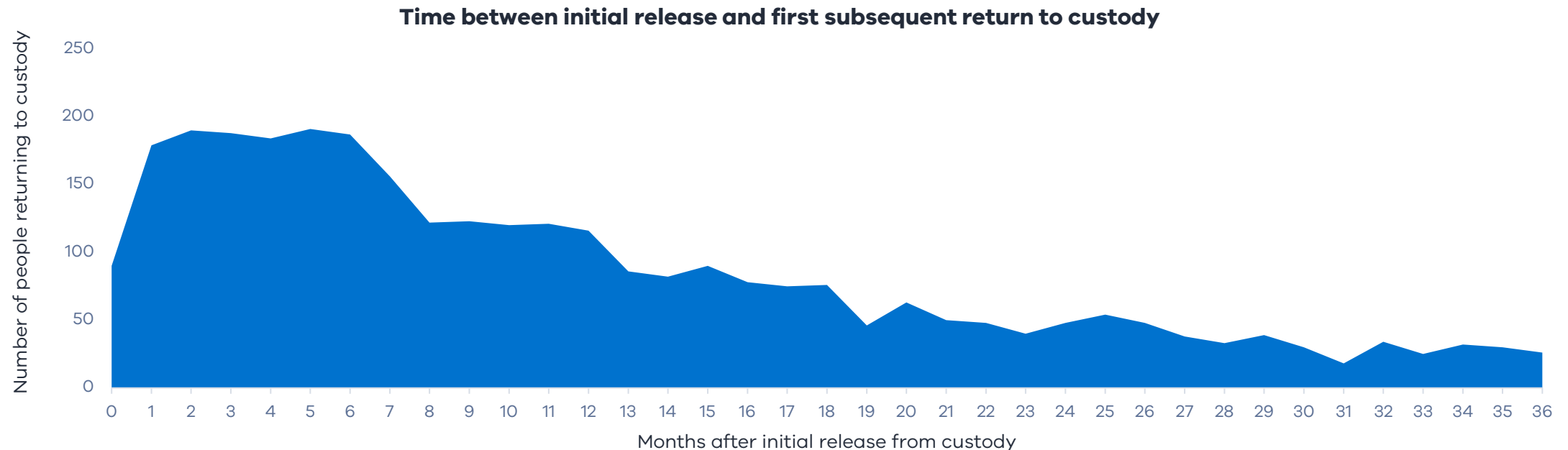
Makes up **86%** of cohort returning to custody

From those that return to custody:
- Average **1.98** custodial episodes per person

When do people first return to custody

The chart below shows the distribution of time between when an individual was initially released from prison and when they return to custody for the first time. The data only includes those who have returned to custody within three years from their initial release from prison.

People who return to custody tend to do so soon after they are released from prison - **more than half** of the cohort returned to custody within one year of their initial release.



Summary of SHS support patterns by demographics



The boxes below examine the data on those who received SHS support within three years after leaving prison by gender and Aboriginal status.

In total, **45%** of the target cohort were supported by SHS. Women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to be supported by SHS and for longer time periods.

Male

45% or 2528 men were supported by SHS within 3 years of release from prison

Makes up **89%** of the cohort that exited prison and supported by SHS

From those that were supported by SHS:
- Average **4.66** support periods per person

Female

66% or 302 women were supported by SHS within 3 years of release from prison

Makes up **11%** of the cohort that exited prison and supported by SHS

From those that were supported by SHS:
- Average **5.56** support periods per person

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

67% or 414 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were supported by SHS within 3 years of release from prison

Makes up **15%** of the cohort that exited prison and supported by SHS

From those that were supported by SHS:
- Average **5.25** support periods per person

Non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

42% or 2382 non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were supported by SHS within 3 years of release from prison

Makes up **84%** of the cohort that exited prison and supported by SHS

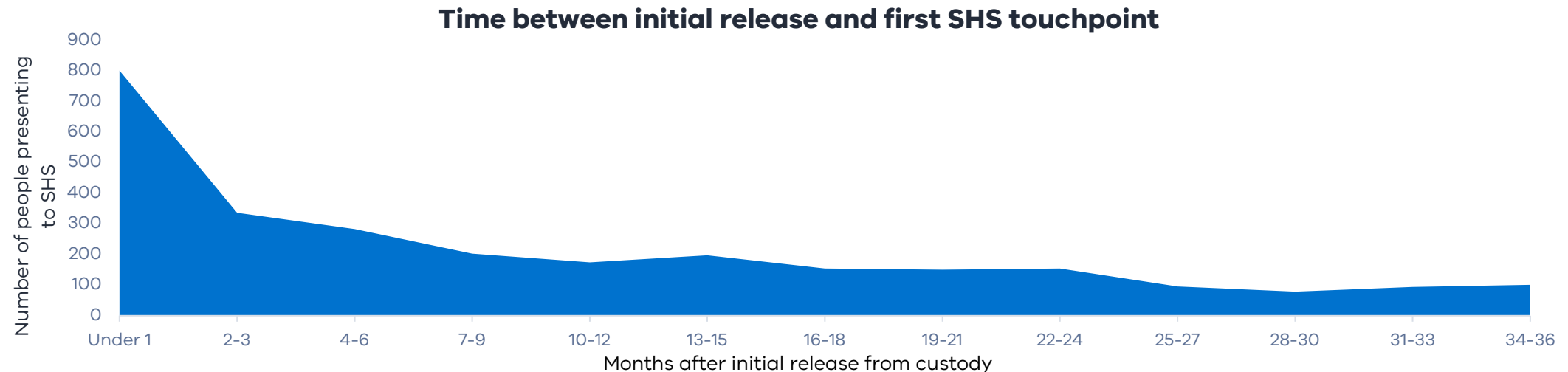
From those that were supported by SHS:
- Average **4.63** support periods per person

When do people first receive SHS support after their release

The chart below shows the distribution of time between when an individual was initially released from prison and when they received SHS support for the first time. The data only includes those who have received SHS support within three years from their initial release from prison.

Significant numbers of people received SHS support within a month of release from custody*:

- **over a quarter** received SHS support within a month of their initial release and
- **half** received SHS support at least once within 6 months



*Some supports may be available to individuals prior to their release from prison, which can contribute to the short timing between release and SHS touchpoint

Understanding the complexity of repeat SHS clients

This analysis examines the housing situation of SHS clients immediately before the start of a support period.

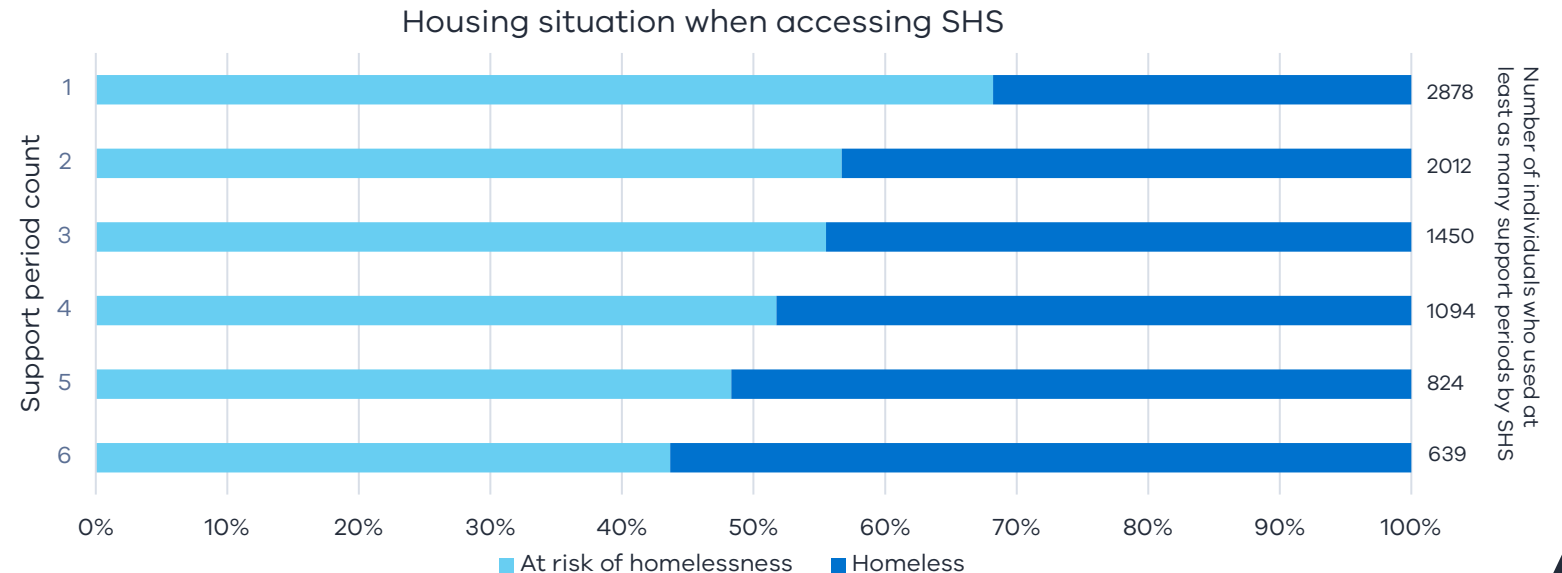
More than **1 in 5** individuals had at least six support periods within three years of their initial release from prison.

The housing situation of clients are more likely to be 'at risk of homelessness' for the very first time they receive SHS support after their initial release from prison (**68%**).

For those who had multiple support periods, their housing situations appear to be more complex. More than half (**56%**) of the clients were assessed as 'homeless' before the start of their sixth support period.

Clients who receive more periods of support are likely to have more complex needs. The data available for this analysis is insufficient to draw conclusion on the drivers of this shift.

The chart below shows the proportion of individuals who were 'at risk of homelessness' versus 'homeless' each time when they received SHS support after leaving prison.



At risk of homelessness

At risk of losing their accommodation or they are experiencing one or more of a range of factors that can contribute to homelessness.

Homeless

Living in non-conventional accommodation (sleeping rough) or short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options

Notes: The analysis exclude people whose housing situation is unknown or not stated. There are also individuals who used SHS more than 6 times.

Appendix

Appendix

Data interpretation notes

To identify the target cohort of this analysis:

- the individual must be 18 years or older at the time of release
- the individual must be leaving a custody episode where they were sentenced
- the release must have occurred between 1 July 2015 and 1 July 2017 (this is to allow 3 years of post-release observation period for every individual. If an individual has recorded an initial release date on 1 July 2015, the relevant observation for that individual is up to 30 June 2018, and if an individual's initial release date is 30 June 2017, then the corresponding observation period is up to 30 June 2020).

To identify the 'initial release date' for each individual:

- The earliest release date that met the above criteria is flagged as the initial release date for the purpose of this analysis. However, it is noted that this may not be the first time an individual is released from custody over their lifetime.

Identifying returns to custody and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) episodes:

- Each custody start date that occurred within 36 months from the initial release date is treated as a return to custody episode. No requirement is placed on sentencing outcomes or duration of the sentence
- Each SHS episode start date that occurred within 36 months from the initial release date is treated as a relevant SHS episode.

Identifying those who did not return to custody

- Individuals who have not recorded another custody start date within 36 months from the initial release date.

Data limitations

- Observation period is between 1 July 2015 and 1 July 2020, and for the most part does not capture COVID-19 impacts. Data from 1 January to 30 June 2020 may be impacted by COVID-19 resulting in disrupted sentencing and housing outcomes.
- There has been updates to the data since this analysis was undertaken, and there might be changes to results if the analysis is to be repeated today.
- The correlation between justice and housing outcomes does not necessarily imply causation, nor does it take into account a range of other individual circumstances (e.g. mental health/drug use), or legislative, policy and program responses that are associated with custody trends
- The target cohort of this analysis is not a perfect representation of the actual Arc program eligibility. Arc eligibility is also informed by other operational assessments.
- A small degree of matching error in the linking of individuals between the custody and SHS datasets is unavoidable, but is unlikely to impact on the overall patterns and relationships observed.
- Due to the different circumstances of sentencing outcomes and data entry errors, it is unclear why there is a small sample of cases observed where individuals have multiple custody start dates on the same day or have a custody start date on the same day as their initial release date. The treatments applied to these scenarios are:
 - Where a custody start date coincides with an individual's initial release date, the episode is considered as a return to custody
 - Where multiple custody episodes share the same custody start date, they are treated as separate episodes for the purpose of analyzing the frequency of return to custody.

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