

Frequently Asked Questions

Homelessness



Census

What is the Census and why does it matter?

The Census is conducted every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and counts every person and household in Australia. The next Census will be held on Tuesday 11 August 2026.

The Census is the only national source of data used to estimate homelessness in Australia. Information collected helps governments, services and community organisations plan housing, homelessness and support services. Accurate Census participation helps ensure communities receive appropriate funding and support.

Is the Census compulsory?

Yes. The Census is compulsory for everyone in Australia on Census night, including people experiencing homelessness, international visitors and temporary residents.

What are the key dates?

The Census is 11th August with the 10th – 16th August being a week of activity and support for people experiencing homelessness.

How does the Census count people experiencing homelessness?

The ABS uses tailored "Inclusive Strategies" to reduce barriers and support participation for people experiencing homelessness. Different approaches are used depending on where someone is staying on Census night.

1. People sleeping rough

During the week of 10–16 August 2026, trained Community Field Officers (CFOs) in pairs, will visit locations in where people are known to sleep rough and assist people to complete a Special Short Census Form by interview.

2. People in crisis or supported accommodation

This includes, refuges, shelters, transitional housing, boarding houses and supported and brokered accommodation. Residents will usually complete a Personal Form (paper or online). Services may be supported by Community Field Officers or designated site or support staff to help residents participate.

3. People couch surfing

People who are couch surfing can participate through their household issued Census form, however to improve the accuracy of the count of couch surfing they should complete a Personal Form noting "NONE" on the address question.

4. People in severely crowded dwellings

People living in overcrowded housing are counted through the regular Census process and should be included on the household form.

Sensitive addresses, including family and domestic violence refuges, are managed through a separate and secure confidential processes.

What does "NONE" mean on the Census form?

The Census does not ask "Are you homeless?". Instead, homelessness is identified through responses to the "usual address" question. Workers should encourage clients to answer correctly:

Couch surfing or staying in a refuge/hostel - Write "NONE" in the suburb field

Temporary accommodation arranged by a homelessness service - Write "NONE – CRISIS" in the suburb field

Sleeping rough - Usually counted through interview and may not be asked this question

This is extremely important because it helps ensure people are correctly included in homelessness estimates.

Can someone complete a separate Census form for privacy?

Yes. People can request a separate Personal Form if they want privacy from other household members, are couch surfing, are staying temporarily with others or feel unsafe sharing information on a household form. Separate forms can be requested through Census staff such as Community Field Officers or by calling the Census Contact Centre on 1800 181 227.

Will Census information be shared with Centrelink, police, housing or immigration?

No. The ABS is legally required to keep Census information confidential. Personal information is protected under the Privacy Act 1988 and Census and Statistics Act 1905 and cannot be shared with police, Centrelink, housing providers, immigration or other government agencies. All data collected is used only for statistical purposes.

How can frontline workers support the Census?

Specialist homelessness services, sector employees and volunteers play a critical role because they are trusted by the people they support. You can help by explaining why the Census matters, encouraging participation, assisting people to complete forms, sharing Census information and resources and helping us by identifying local rough sleeping locations and supported accommodation and temporary accommodation locations. As well as supporting outreach activities during Census week.

What support will be available during Census?

Support available includes trained Community Field Officers, Census Contact Centre support, Census Website and Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) as well as accessible formats and translated materials. We will also be running Fill in the Forms sessions at locations across your Local Government Area where people experiencing homelessness can come for support to fill in the census form.

Where can workers or clients get help?

Census support can be found at:

- Website: census.abs.gov.au
- Phone: 1800 181 227
- TIS National: 131 450

Workers can also contact their local Census Local Engagement Officer (LEO) or Community Field Officer (CFO) for support, resources and local coordination.

Every person counted in the Census helps improve understanding of homelessness in Australia. Frontline workers are essential partners in ensuring people experiencing homelessness are seen, counted and included in future planning and services.

For further information: