

Housing

Housing provides people with shelter, security and privacy. Having an adequate and appropriate place to live is fundamental to people's wellbeing, and there are many aspects to housing that affect the quality of people's lives. Dwelling attributes, such as size, number of bedrooms, physical condition, location relative to amenities and services, and affordability, are all important in this regard.

Although housing is a headline dimension of progress, there is no single indicator that succinctly captures whether people's many needs and desires for suitable housing are being met. While no headline or supplementary housing indicators are presented here, several dimensions of progress presented in this publication have a housing dimension.

The value of Australia's housing stock is a component of national wealth and is discussed in the commentary *National wealth*. Australians are continuing to invest significantly in the homes that they own. In the decade to June 2005, the household sector invested about \$400 billion (in current price terms) in new dwellings (excluding land). The value of land and dwellings owned by the household sector at 30 June 2005 represented close to 60% of the value of all assets owned by the sector.¹

The extent of homelessness is an associated issue of concern, and crisis accommodation services are often overburdened.² But housing shortages are not usually the primary cause of homelessness, and therefore it is discussed in the commentary on *Family, community and social cohesion*.

Australians are tending to live in smaller household groups, with the average household size shrinking by 13% over the 20 years to 2001. One consequence of the shrinking household size in Australia is that current housing stock can accommodate households more adequately. In 2003-04, while 5% of private dwellings across Australia required an extra bedroom to accommodate the residents of those dwellings, 69% of private dwellings had one or more bedrooms spare.^{3,4}

Some differences within Australia

The quality of dwellings is influenced by their age, the infrastructure available to support construction activity, the affluence of the communities in which they are located, and the local climate.

The physical condition and amenities of most Australian dwellings are generally good. The 1999 Australian Housing Survey showed that across Australia very few dwellings did not have running water, toilet, adequate kitchen facilities and the like. However 19% of all households in Australia lived in dwellings which had major structural problems (rising damp, major cracks in walls/floors, sinking or moving foundations, sagging floors, walls or windows that are not plumb, wood rot or termite damage, major electrical problems, major plumbing problems, and major roof defects).

Households in dwellings requiring additional bedroom(s)

	Remoteness			Australia
	Non-remote	Remote	Very remote	
	%	%	%	%
Households with Indigenous person(s)	12.0	21.5	45.9	15.7
Other households	3.4	3.2	3.9	3.4

Source: *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001*, cat. no. 4713.0

The housing standards experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples tend to be lower than those experienced by other Australians. In particular, housing standards tend to be lowest in remote area communities. Building and maintenance costs are generally higher in remote areas because of access and distance related issues, and maintenance requirements are usually higher where environmental conditions are harsh or where accommodation is insufficient, leading to overcrowding.

In 2001, almost 1 in 6 households with Indigenous person(s) (16%) were accommodated in dwellings that required at least one extra bedroom, compared with 3% of other households. For households with Indigenous person(s), the proportion of households requiring at least one extra bedroom rose from 12% in non-remote areas to 46% in very remote areas. The need for an extra bedroom for other households was much lower, with less than 4% requiring an extra bedroom in any geographical area.⁵ Overcrowding is of particular concern because it has been associated with poor health outcomes.⁶

In 2002, in remote areas, more than half (60%) the dwellings of households with Indigenous person(s) had major structural problems. In non-remote areas the proportion was 34%.⁷

The lower housing standards experienced by Indigenous Australians are also reflected in the proportion (3%) of Indigenous people in 2001 who were occupying temporary dwellings, such as caravans, cabins or tin sheds (1% for non-Indigenous people).⁵

In 2002, of Indigenous people living in households in remote areas, 10% were living in dwellings that were owned or being purchasing by that household.⁷ This reflects, among other things, the provision of housing by Indigenous Community Housing Organisations on traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands.

Links to other dimensions of progress

Housing conditions are influenced by many factors, but most particularly the affluence of households. Unmet housing needs generally reflect low levels of socio-economic wellbeing and are often associated with other areas of concern such as poor health,

economic hardship, crime and low levels of social cohesion.⁸ Housing development is often seen as important to the economy and the housing stock is a part of national wealth.

See also the commentaries *National income*, *National wealth*, *Economic hardship*, *Health*, and *Family, community and social cohesion*.

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, Australian System of National Accounts, 2003–04, cat. no. 5204.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 2 For details of unmet demand for crisis accommodation services, see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2004, Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2003–2004 Australia. AIHW cat. no. HOU126. Canberra: AIHW (SAAP NDCA Report Series 9), Canberra.
- 3 There is no single standard measure for housing utilisation. However this publication has used the Canadian National Occupancy Standard for housing appropriateness. This indicator of potential overcrowding is based on a comparison of the number of bedrooms in a given dwelling and household demographics such as the number of usual residents, their relationship to one another, age and sex. Where the standard cannot be met, households are considered to be overcrowded. For more details see *Housing Occupancy and Costs, Australia, 2003–04*, cat no. 4130.0.55.001
- 4 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, *Survey of Income and Housing, 2003–04, Australia*. Data available on request.
- 5 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Population Characteristics: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001*, cat. no. 4713.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 6 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2005*, cat. no. 4704.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 7 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2002*. Data available on request.
- 8 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics*, cat. no. 4160.0, ABS, Canberra.