

Poverty in Australia

Poverty is a term that is broadly defined as a person who is living below the poverty line. The poverty line is the estimated minimum income per week for an individual to secure basic necessities. Poverty in a developed country is relative to each individual and society and isn't just about their financial stability. While this is one definition, income is not the only factor contributing to an individual experiencing poverty. An individual's health and education also should be considered.

Access to education is vital as it allows more avenues for an individual to gain employment and an income, with this income, many health issues can be improved.

Financial Poverty – Someone who has good health and sufficient education but has poor economic resources.

Freedom poverty – Someone who is experiencing financial poverty and has either good health or sufficient education.

Extreme freedom poverty – Someone in financial poverty with poor health and insufficient education.

The costs indicating the poverty line in Australia are assessed and updated by The Melbourne Institute every quarter. Note this is accurate for March 2019 (bit.ly/2Nn7VaW).

- \$529.57 per week is the poverty line for a single adult living alone.
- \$994.68 per week is the poverty line for couples with two children.

Key statistics



13.2% of people in Australia live below the poverty line (one in eight).



Most people below the poverty line (53%) rely on social security as their main source of income.



The average 'poverty gap' (the difference between the incomes of people in poverty and the poverty line) is \$135 per week.



Australia has the 14th highest poverty rate among 34 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, and is part of a group of English-speaking wealthy nations with above-average poverty levels.



A major source of child poverty is the high poverty rate (32%) among sole parent families, who must generally rely on a single income.

Please note these statistics relate to the 2015–2016 period and are sourced from the Poverty in Australia 2018 report by the Australian Council of Social Service.

For more information:

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body for homelessness in Australia. They provide systemic advocacy for the homelessness sector. <https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/>

The Australian Council of Social Service is a national advocate for action to reduce poverty and inequality and the peak body for the community services sector in Australia. <https://www.acoss.org.au/>

The Melbourne Institute is Australia's pre-eminent economic and social policy research institution. It undertakes high quality, independent and impartial applied research, and contributes to the development of public policy in Australia. <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/>



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Homelessness

Homelessness is a widespread issue and there is no one picture that describes every person experiencing homelessness. There are more than 110,400 people in Australia who are currently experiencing homelessness, according to the 2016 Australian Census. Being homeless is defined by the lack of home security, privacy, stability, safety and opportunity.

Most forms of personal identification (passport, driver's license etc) require a person to have a home address. For those experiencing homelessness, not having this identification can mean they are unable to access basics such as banking, phone bills or government assistance.

There are a number of common misconceptions around homelessness. Many assume that finding employment or having access to relevant government services is the best way to regain independence and stability for the homeless, but this isn't necessarily the case.

Finding stable accommodation is the priority and most widely accepted method of ending homelessness. The health and wellbeing of a person significantly improves once they have stable accommodation.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines homelessness as someone who does not have suitable accommodation alternatives in their current living arrangement.

For more information:

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body for homelessness in Australia. They provide systemic advocacy for the homelessness sector. <https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/>

Orange Sky Australia is a group run throughout the country providing free showering and laundry services for those experiencing homelessness. They focus on providing a safe and supportive environment and connect people together during times of isolation and disconnect. <https://orangesky.org.au/>

StreetSmart is a charitable organisation which aims to simultaneously break down inaccurate prejudices about homelessness, raise vital funds for important smaller, local organisations and strengthen them through collaboration and connecting them to their community. <https://streetsmartaustralia.org/>

Key statistics



58% of people experiencing homelessness are men and 42% women



'Rough sleepers' make up 7% of people experiencing homelessness and represent just the tip of the iceberg.

As homelessness can manifest in many different ways someone who is experiencing homelessness could be living in:



Improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out 7% (8,200)



Supported accommodation for the homeless 18% (21,235)



Staying temporarily with other households 15% (17,725)



Boarding houses 15% (17,503)



Other temporary lodging 1% (678)



'Severely' overcrowded dwellings 44% (51,088)



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Gender equality

Gender equality can be defined as 'the state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender'. Note that although sex and gender often overlap these concepts can and do exist as separate personal identities. Sex is typically the organs that an individual was born with, whereas gender is how an individual identifies and portrays. There are those who are transgender, wherein they are born as one sex and transition to another gender.

Gender is not restricted to the binary of male and female as there are also those who identify being gender diverse, or 'genderqueer' and these terms can contain many other identifications including non-binary.

Additionally, there are those who are born intersex, in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. People who identify as gender diverse, intersex or transgender often experience discrimination for their identities, and this often has adverse effects on their economic prospects and their mental and physical health.

Please note that this is not a comprehensive explanation of gender diversity, more information can be found through the organisations mentioned at the end of this fact sheet.

In 2018, the *Global Gender Gap Report* ranked Australia as 39th out of 149 nations for its gender equality (bit.ly/31wG6S2).

Gender inequality affects people of all genders and can manifest in a number of ways, including but not limited to:

- Physical or verbal abuse and violence.
- Economic disadvantage.
- Lack of access to education and healthcare.

The 2016 Australian Census data (bit.ly/2lll1vt) showed a mix of write in options by Australians who identified as sex and/or gender diverse, as follows:

- 35% did not provide a more descriptive term ('other, not further defined')
- 18% another gender
- 17% non-binary
- 13% transman or transwoman
- 13% trans or transgender
- 3% intersex or indeterminate sex

Key statistics



The average full-time weekly wage for a woman is 15.3% less than a man's.



One in two women has experienced sexual harassment during her lifetime.



Women spend almost twice as many hours performing unpaid work compared to men.



At retirement women aged 60–64 had just over half of the superannuation of their male counterparts.



Transgender and gender diverse people aged 18 and over are nearly 5 times more likely to be diagnosed with depression in their lifetime.



People with an intersex variation aged 16 and over are twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety in their lifetime.

Please note the above statistics were sourced from the LGBTI National Health Alliance (bit.ly/2KeQQ28) and the Australian Human Rights Commission.



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For more information:

Black Rainbow social network for Indigenous people who identify as LGBTI, sistergirl or brotherboy. Also advocates for better mental health and suicide prevention. <http://www.blackrainbow.org.au/>

HeForShe is a movement for gender equality and an invitation for people of all genders to support gender equality. <https://www.heforshe.org/en>

Minus18 provides mental health, peer mentoring and events to support same-sex attracted and gender-diverse young people from all over Australia. [minus18.org.au](https://www.minus18.org.au)

The Australian Human Rights Commission promotes and protects the human rights of everyone in Australia by working closely with other national and international human rights organisations. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/>

The Australian Gender Equality Council has a vision to achieve gender equality in Australia by promoting national awareness via campaigns, advocacy and research. <https://www.agedc.org.au/>

The Fair Work Ombudsman is an independent office that runs under the Fair Work Act 2009. They provide free services to workers and employers in Australia to ensure that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities. <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/>

The United Nations (UN), under the fifth Sustainable Development Goal, aims to achieve gender equality. Additionally, UN Women was created by the UN to be a global champion of improving gender equality. <https://www.un.org/en/> and <http://www.unwomen.org/en>

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency was created by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 and is a statutory agency which promotes and supports gender equality. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/>

Transcend supports transgender children and their families. <http://transcendsupport.com.au/>



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Early literacy, language and learning

Up to 90% of a child's brain development occurs in the first five years. Approximately 700 new neural connections are formed in the brain every second during those first years of life (bit.ly/2Lm3YP).

Primary caregivers are usually a child's first and most important teacher as they can make home environments that lay the foundations for a positive experience with learning throughout life. This can include access to books, craft activities and interactive toys, and time spent discovering and talking about the world and their environment.

Regular activities involving singing, reading and talking from birth are vital to the development of a child. In particular, oral storytelling is important in communities that have a strong oral language tradition. All of these activities support the development of a child's phonological awareness (word sounds and patterns), and oral language (including vocabulary). Both of these skills are key elements of early literacy.

While reading ability is not completely set by school age, early literacy is a strong predictor of a child's performance throughout their education, particularly for those from a low socio-economic background.

There are two stages of literacy learning

The first is emergent literacy where a child views reading and literacy as enjoyable activities embedded in everyday life primarily learnt through shared reading, as well as singing, talking and playing. The second is the development of skills-based literacy, where literacy consists of distinct reading, writing and speaking skills with an emphasis on systematic and explicit formal teaching, these skills are developed in school.

Libraries can play a central role in supporting all literacy development, throughout an individual's lifetime.

Key statistics



The 2015 Australian Early Development Census identifies 1 in 5 children starting school as developmentally vulnerable and shows that poor language proficiency contributes significantly to these figures (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).



The latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores, from 2015, index a significant decline in Australian school students' conventional literacy skills, with only 61% of all students, and only 32% of Indigenous students, meeting the National Proficiency Standard in reading (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Underwood, 2017).



Public libraries are ideally positioned to make a positive contribution to these efforts, as they are 'the only government-funded agency available to children from babyhood, providing year-round, free access to resources and services that support reading and literacy' (ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee, 2014, p. 1).



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For more information:

Better Beginnings was developed by the State Library of WA to support parents and caregivers across the state as their child's first teacher. <https://www.better-beginnings.com.au/> and <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/>

The First 5 Forever project aims to provide a strong foundation for emergent literacy and lifelong learning for children aged 0–5 years in Queensland. They connect parents and caregivers to resources to give their child the best start to learning. <http://first5forever.org.au/>

The Australian Literacy Educators Association has created a guide for parents and caregivers to assist in running activities that children can enjoy. <https://www.alea.edu.au/>

The Little Big Book Club is based in SA and provides free reading packs for families with children from birth to five years old to assist in establishing a positive home learning environment. <https://www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au/>

The State Library of NSW and Macquarie University have reviewed research with implications for early literacy programs at NSW public libraries. bit.ly/2HdpVAW

2015 Australian Early Development Census. aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report

PISA 2015: Reporting Australia's results. <https://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/22/>

ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee - *Early Literacy Framework and Strategy for Australian Public Libraries*. bit.ly/31XtLWJ



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