

CASE STUDY

Gathering evidence on older women and homelessness

The research paper informing the second stage of the Victorian Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy identified older women, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as an emerging issue of concern.

It is difficult to get an accurate estimate of the extent of homelessness among older women, as this is a group whose needs are often hidden due to a lack of access to or availability of services. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) does not publish data on older women as a specific category for analysis.

The paper found gendered pathways into homelessness include:

- disruptive life events such as a family, health or housing crisis, for example, a child's marriage breakdown, may result in an inability to support ageing parents
- long-term itinerant or transient lifestyle patterns, for example, due to family violence
- the inability to achieve or retain home ownership (due to unemployment or rising rents) and financial insecurity
- a physical or mental health problem that impairs the ability to function to some degree
- lack of knowledge of where to go for help.

According to the research paper, issues to be addressed include safe and appropriate accommodation as well as other health and wellbeing issues, such as women living with a disability, the availability of carers, the need for financial support, access to information and social and support networks. The paper identified the need for a coordinated approach to providing support to older women experiencing homelessness⁹.