



Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP)

Yfoundations factsheet

What is the Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP)?

'Homeless children in NSW are an extremely vulnerable group, who historically have had very few service options. To address this gap, the NSW Government introduced the Homelessness Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) in 2014.

HYAP is an early intervention homelessness service for 12 to 15-year-olds that offers integrated support and either referrals to, or the direct provision of, accommodation. The aim of the program is to reunify children with their families and networks, or where that is not possible, transition them to longer-term supported accommodation. HYAP is delivered by 17 non-government providers – including both youth Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and family support services – in 15 regions across the state.

What does the HYAP evaluation tell us?

In 2017, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) commissioned the Centre of Evidence and Implementation to evaluate HYAP over a three-year period. Released in 2020, the evaluation's final report found that HYAP worked relatively well for the cohort it was intended for – those aged 12 to 15 who required early intervention to either prevent homelessness or be reunified with family.

But the evaluation also found that the largest cohort of children (55.9%) who presented to HYAP had already been the subject of at least one child protection report, due to concerns about parental mental health and cognitive issues, substance abuse or family violence. These children – who represented more than half of all HYAP clients – were extremely vulnerable and had significantly more complex needs than HYAP was designed to support. Most of these children and their families required therapeutic interventions, such as [those offered](#) through the child protection system, which HYAP providers are not funded to deliver.

The evaluation also concluded that HYAP's success was limited by bigger issues in the youth homelessness system. First, it found that the state-wide lack of accommodation for this age group meant that HYAP providers did not meet the housing needs of the majority of children supported through the program. The second barrier was child protection system's unwillingness to intervene on behalf of HYAP clients, as this prevented children from accessing the more intensive level of family support that they needed. Finally, gaps in local service systems – particularly in regional and rural areas – limited HYAP providers' capacity to make referrals to appropriate specialist services.

To address the issues raised in the evaluation, DCJ began reconfiguring HYAP in the second half of 2021, with changes to be implemented in 2022. The Department has also revised its policy on [unaccompanied children accessing SHS](#), to improve the integration of youth homelessness services and child protection.



[Read our position paper on homeless 12 to 15-year-olds](#)

What does other research say?

- [In 2019-20](#), there were 2,381 unaccompanied 12 to 15-year-olds who presented alone to homelessness services in NSW. This number has remained relatively consistent for the past five years

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
12-15 Years	1,420	2,042	2,415	2,485	2,588	2,381

- The [primary reason](#) that unaccompanied 12 to 15-year-olds children seek assistance from SHS is due to relationship or family breakdowns
- But these breakdowns are not typical parent-adolescent conflict – rather they are [caused by complex issues](#) such as childhood trauma, poverty, parental abuse and neglect, domestic and family violence and alcohol and drug issues
- The [HYAP evaluation](#) showed that homeless children with a history of child protection made up the majority (55.9%) of all those accessing the program
- This cohort is particularly vulnerable and is more likely to have negative outcomes than children who have only experienced homelessness and have not had interactions with child protection
- [National data](#) from 2011-12 to 2013-14 shows that children who accessed SHS and received child protection services were more likely than those who had just accessed SHS to have:
 - a mental health issue (26% of the SHS and child protection cohort, compared to 19% of the SHS-only cohort)
 - a drug and alcohol issue (8% compared to 4%)
 - experienced domestic and family violence (54% compared to 44%)
 - experienced multiple episodes of homelessness (6% compared to 4%)
- Amongst those who received HYAP, there was also an overrepresentation of females (59.6%) and Aboriginal children and young people (29.6%), compared to the broader population. This is consistent with the [statistics on young people](#) presenting to SHS