



# Homelessness & Employment Assistance

A research report examining the effectiveness of assessment  
and job referral procedures for income support  
recipients experiencing homelessness

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Prepared for the National Homelessness Strategy,  
Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services

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## List of Acronyms

- ACOSS - Australian Council of Social Services
- AFHO – Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations
- CACH – Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness
- CCOs - Centrelink Community Officers
- CCSOs - Centrelink Customer Service Officers
- CSP - Community Support Programme
- DEWR - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- FaCS - Department of Family and Community Services
- IA - Intensive Assistance
- JSCI - Job Seeker Classification Instrument
- NDCA - National Data Collection Agency
- NHS - National Homelessness Strategy
- PSP - Personal Support Programme
- SAAP - Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
- THM – Transitional Housing Management Program

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# Executive Summary

Both the *National Homelessness Strategy* and the *Australians Working Together* policy have outlined a commitment to increasing social and economic participation amongst disadvantaged job seekers that are not actively engaged in the labour market (Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, 2001; Vanstone, A & Abbott, T, 2001). A key strategy for increasing participation amongst disadvantaged job seekers or those who have been 'excluded' from social and economic participation is the provision of effective and timely employment assistance.

This project was initiated to improve current employment assessment procedures for those experiencing homelessness, with particular emphasis on creating stronger linkages between Centrelink, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Family and Community Services and the broader SAAP system. As one critical element in the system of employment assistance provided to job seekers, the following research project sought to investigate the completeness of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) for a sample of job seekers experiencing homelessness.

Employment has long been recognised as one of the critical pathways out of housing crisis and homelessness. However, the 1999-2000 SAAP data informs us that whilst 80% of SAAP clients within the labour force were unemployed, only 22% were assessed as in need of employment or training assistance. Similarly, a growing body of research has identified that in many instances Centrelink, as the main referral point into the Job Network, is not accurately identifying homelessness and other employment barriers. Past research undertaken by Hanover revealed that homelessness and transience could contribute to poor communication between Centrelink and this client group resulting in incomplete assessment of their situation, higher levels of breaching and inadequate assistance by Job Network providers.

Whilst the above services often have a shared client group, the absence of clear pathways and communication between sectors is contributing to incomplete identification of current employment barriers for many experiencing homelessness. Under SAAP IV, the Commonwealth, States and Territories have committed to collaborate on a range cross jurisdictional and departmental initiatives to encourage collaborative links across the service system, including employment training and income support programs (SAAP 2000-2005 Memorandum of Understanding).

In the context of *Australians Working Together* policy outlining the continuation of mutual obligation requirements and greater reliance on Centrelink as the 'gateway' into the Job Network, complete assessment of employment barriers will be crucial in ensuring that those experiencing homelessness are referred to appropriate employment assistance according to their circumstances and job readiness.

## Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the study was to improve the effectiveness of Centrelink assessment and job referral procedures for income support recipients who are in housing crisis or homeless.

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- undertake a comparative analysis of homeless agency client data with Centrelink customer data (provided by participants) to assess the completeness and accuracy of information on housing/homeless circumstances and related personal factors relevant to assessment for employment assistance and service delivery by Centrelink;
- gain an understanding of the reasons for incomplete assessment of relevant issues where it occurs;
- consider best practice strategies and make recommendations for improving the completeness and accuracy of Centrelink assessment procedures for customers experiencing homelessness; and
- draw on current trials and initiatives within Centrelink that has relevance to assessment procedures and support to at risk customers.

## Methodology

The research specifically targeted those experiencing housing crisis or homelessness who were aged 21 years and over and were currently receiving Newstart Allowance. An innovative methodology based on Freedom of Information requests, compared Centrelink customer file data with research interview responses for a sample of 135 Newstart recipients experiencing homelessness. The study sample was recruited from five participating SAAP and THM services across Victoria. The research was divided into three stages. Stage one and two of the research involved a comparative analysis of study participant interviews with their personal Centrelink records retrieved through a Freedom of Information process to identify the completeness of current assessment processes. Stage three involved broader stakeholder consultation and client focus groups. Comparing the study sample to the NDCA SAAP data reveals that the sample is broadly representative of Australian and Victorian Newstart clients utilising homeless services.

## Key Findings

### Participant Profile

- The majority (78%) of study participants were male and the average age was thirty years. Just under two thirds of study participants (59%) were aged between 21– 29 years. Three quarters of the sample (75%) were single, whilst 16 per cent were divorced or separated, and a further nine per cent were either in a de facto relationship or married. The main country of birth for participants was Australia (77%) followed by England (5%). Four participants' cultural identity was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- The majority of study participants had experienced prior episodes of homelessness and had not been living in independent or stable accommodation for more than twelve months. Frequent moving was a common characteristic of the study participant group.



- The participant profile was characterised by long-term unemployment with an educational attainment of year ten or less, indicating significant barriers to gaining ongoing and stable employment.
- The main personal factors identified affecting ability to seek and participate in ongoing employment activity included drug dependency (41%) and depression and anxiety (41%).

#### Completeness of the JSCI

- The study interviews found that in addition to experiencing homelessness, many participants had multiple barriers preventing them from being able to actively seek and participate in ongoing and sustained employment assistance. Analysis of participant JSCI records show significant under reporting of relevant factors, resulting in lower assessment scores and non-referral for JSCI supplementary assessment. The case-by-case comparison of research interview responses against Centrelink customer data file information revealed a substantial disparity for the JSCI factors of 'instability of residence (homelessness)', 'disability, medical condition or addiction' and 'other personal factors'.

*The key finding of the research is that the current procedures for conducting the JSCI are failing to record homelessness as well as relevant personal factors for homeless Newstart recipients.*

- Participants' history of involvement with employment assistance over long periods was characterised by cycling between IA, Jobsearch, the CSP and medical incapacity, providing evidence of poor outcomes from employment assistance for this study sample. Specifically, nearly three-quarters of participants had been incapacitated for an average of three times and just under a third had been referred to IA for an average of two times per participant.
- The analysis of JSCI scores indicated that 80 per cent of the sample was assessed as eligible for Intensive Assistance. This might seem to be a reasonable proportion of homeless Newstart recipients. However, the extent of discrepancy in homelessness and personal factors shows that complete assessment would have resulted in substantially higher JSCI scores and referral for JSCI Supplementary Assessment by an occupational psychologist, disability officer or social worker. A significant 10 per cent of the sample had JSCI scores below 24 points and were eligible for Jobsearch assistance only. Complete documentation of their barriers would have led to eligibility for Intensive Assistance in many cases.
- Whilst 80% of participants had an allocated score higher than 24, a significant proportion of the study participants' (43%) current Centrelink activity was Jobsearch. The automatic projection to Jobsearch (despite a high JSCI score) following the completion or cessation of a higher level of assistance or incapacity matched with infrequent updating of the JSCI may account for this discrepancy.
- The implications of incomplete assessment include the personal costs to individual job seekers and additional administrative and operational costs placed on the broader employment assistance and community sector resulting from poorer employment outcomes and long-term unemployment. A review of "breach" details on study participants' Centrelink customer files revealed that 76 per cent of participants had at least one breach recorded, with 59 per cent of participants experiencing one or more reduction of payments as a result of the breach.

## Reasons for Incomplete JSCI

Reviewing the reasons for under reporting of homelessness and other personal factors suggest that there are significant barriers both perceived and systemic. The evidence from our consultations with both service providers and homeless job seekers indicates the following weaknesses in the current procedures:

- confusion about the dual roles for Centrelink (and hence the relevance of personal factors);
- confusion between the roles of Centrelink, Job Network and CSP;
- fear of reductions in payments, particularly Rent Assistance;
- lack of privacy in conducting interviews at Centrelink open plan service centres;
- limited time to engage customers and fully explore circumstances;
- lack of skills and confidence of CSO's in engaging homeless customers;
- inconsistency in attitudes of some CSO's towards homeless customers;
- insufficient frequency of review of circumstances and barriers in the JSCI; and
- lack of integration of existing personal Centrelink customer information with the JSCI

## Recommendations

*We conclude the current interview procedures are failing to engage this group of disadvantaged job seekers in a way that will facilitate full disclosure of all relevant circumstances to making an informed assessment of their 'job readiness' and capacity to participate in employment assistance programs.*

A range of initiatives is currently underway to improve assistance to marginalised job seekers, particularly with respect to breaching. This research has identified several key areas for further improvement, which would lead to better long-term outcomes for homeless job seekers. In accordance with the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been developed:

1. An inter-departmental Working Group be convened with participation from relevant representatives with responsibility for employment policy, housing support and homelessness within FaCS, DEWR, and Centrelink. SAAP representation should also be sought via the Working Group. The role of the Working Group should be to develop detailed strategies for the trial and implementation of the recommendations of this study and to oversight additional investigation of the effectiveness and responsiveness of employment assistance for job seekers experiencing homelessness.

2. A targeted evaluation of the long-term outcomes for homeless job seekers using the range of employment assistance programs.
3. An investigation be conducted into the circumstances and outcomes for homeless job seekers with histories of medical incapacity, as a basis for introducing appropriate criteria for exemption from mutual obligation and for improving employment assistance. This should include examination of the nature of medical incapacity and its impact for ongoing engagement and participation in forms of employment assistance, in particular the new Personal Support Programme.
4. DEWR revise the JSCI to include two questions on homelessness, which identify both current experience and past episodes of homelessness in order to capture its temporal dimension. Centrelink customers answering 'yes' to both questions should be given a higher JSCI weighting in recognition of the 'chronic' nature of their homelessness.
5. DEWR and Centrelink investigate ways to improve the interface between the JSCI database and Centrelink mainframe customer file records to enable effective exchange of data that ensures the accuracy of JSCI scores.
6. Centrelink and DEWR develop and implement 'triggers' for marginalisation, including homelessness, which will automatically flag JSCI Supplementary Assessment interviews by social workers or occupational psychologists. Appropriate triggers might include:
  - address history that shows four or more changes of address in a one year period;
  - two or more requests for 'duplicate SU19JN' fortnightly forms within a three month period;
  - multiple periods of incapacity via the medical screen; and
  - identifiable emergency housing or temporary accommodation addresses.
7. The current exemption from mutual obligation for 'major personal crisis' to be explicitly expanded to include homelessness. An operational definition of homelessness to determine eligibility for such exemption would need to be developed through consultations between relevant Departments including FaCS Housing.
8. A solution be developed for the current disincentive for homeless job seekers to disclose their homelessness due to loss of Rent Assistance if they have lost private rental housing. Possible solutions might include:
  - an interim extension of Rent Assistance, or equivalent homeless allowance, for job seekers in defined categories of homelessness for a period of four weeks, with appropriate referral to local SAAP services; and
  - exemption from repayment of Rent Assistance already paid for their period of homelessness if subsequent disclosure occurs.

9. Centrelink expand appointment times allotted for review interviews conducted by CSO's with marginalised job seekers with high JSCI scores.
10. Centrelink and DEWR introduce procedures to assist and enforce the updating of Centrelink customers' JSCI record, not only during registration and review interviews, but also during any change of job seeker circumstance, particularly after cessation or completion of employment assistance programs and during extended periods of incapacity.
11. In recognition of the expanding role for Centrelink in streaming and referral of job seekers to the range of assistance programs, including the Job Network, Personal Support Programme and Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots, the capacity and skills of CSO's be enhanced to enable better engagement of customers with complex needs.
12. The Centrelink Community Officer program be significantly expanded to enable effective coverage across homeless services as key sites conducive to better engagement with homeless job seekers as a means to improve disclosure of personal factors and to resolve individual problems.
13. Consideration be given to implementing a mandatory review of job seeker circumstance prior to imposition of first penalty for non-compliance with mutual obligation requirements for those with a high JSCI score, especially over 33 points. A flexible review process should be undertaken that involves active engagement of the Centrelink customer by the local Centrelink Social Worker, including personalised follow up phone contact and extended appointment times.
14. The proposed inter-departmental Working Group conduct a review of the application of the breach applied to customers who move to regions of higher unemployment with current state housing policies for priority allocation of public housing, and where contradictions act against the interests of homeless job seekers, a procedure for exemption is implemented.
15. SAAP and Centrelink collaborate to develop a resource package for SAAP services to increase their knowledge of Centrelink, employment assistance programs, assessment procedures and mutual obligation requirements as a basis for more informed advocacy on behalf of homeless clients. The resource package should include a checklist of significant employment assistance and income support issues as a basis for SAAP engagement with Centrelink. Consultation with AFHO should be undertaken in the development of the resource package to include key elements of the NHS funded AFHO project examining breach prevention amongst young people.
16. SAAP in collaboration with Centrelink introduce into state training programs for SAAP service workers a module, or develop alternative strategies for improving their knowledge of Centrelink and employment assistance programs.
17. Following a review of the NHS Homebound initiative, the inter-departmental Working Group consider continuation of Homebound and/or additional strategies for strengthening relationships between SAAP, Centrelink and the Job Network.
18. FaCS and Centrelink take into consideration the findings of this study in finalising the procedures for assessment and entry of income support recipients into the Personal Support Programme and Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots.

# 1. Introduction

Employment has long been recognised as one of the critical pathways out of housing crisis and homelessness for both individuals and families. The national data collection on clients utilising the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) reveals that during 1999-2000, 35,600 adult SAAP clients were in the labour force, 80 per cent of whom were unemployed and the remaining 20 per cent in some form of employment. The National Homeless Strategy identifies the provision of appropriate employment assistance and income support as key goals for reducing homelessness.

The SAAP, Centrelink, and Job Network providers have an important role in enabling job seekers experiencing homelessness to fully participate in employment assistance. Centrelink, as the 'gateway' into the Job Network has the primary responsibility for 'streaming' job seekers into the most appropriate level of employment assistance according to identified employment barriers through the use of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). As one critical element in the system of employment assistance provided to job seekers, the following research project sought to investigate the completeness of the JSCI streaming process for a sample of job seekers experiencing homelessness.

Whilst modifications were made to the weightings of the JSCI following the post implementation review, there is still some concern amongst commentators that the JSCI process is falling short in identifying many of those who are particularly marginalised within the labour market (Hanover, 2000, Eardley et al, 2001; ACOSS, 2001). Past research undertaken by Hanover revealed that homelessness and transience contributes to poor communication between Centrelink and this client group resulting in incomplete assessment of their situation, higher levels of breaching and inadequate assistance by Job Network providers.

ACOSS, in their review of the stage one evaluation of the Job Network highlighted a number of concerns with the administration of the JSCI in determining access to Intensive Assistance. In particular, inconsistent administration of the tool, inadequate weighting to factors such as motivation, reliance on disclosure of personal information, and that long term unemployed do not automatically qualify for Intensive Assistance were identified as reasons for incomplete assessment (ACOSS, 2001).

The post implementation review of the JSCI undertaken by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) identified that it had been effective in achieving its aim of classifying clients into different forms of assistance provided through the Job Network. The review also found that there were areas that required significant improvement. Among the proposed improvements was the broadening of the definition of homelessness to include 'accommodation crisis' (DEWRSB, 1999).

Eardley et al (2001) through their consultations with *Job Futures* agencies also identified a number of limitations with the current structure and administration of the JSCI in obtaining accurate information from Centrelink customers at the time of a new claimant or review interview. They found that under-disclosure of personal circumstances, which could elicit a higher score for the Centrelink customer, was "...reinforced by the coercive nature of the relationship with Centrelink, a lack of personalised service, and the limited information given about the purpose of assessment in the first instance" Eardley et al (2001:31).

## Box 1: What is the Job Seeker Classification Instrument?

The Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) is a streaming tool administered by Centrelink to estimate relative labour market disadvantage of job seekers in order to determine the type and intensity of employment assistance provided through the Job Network. The JSCI is applied during new claimant interviews via the *Looking for Work* form, during *Preparing for Work* review interviews and following any change of circumstances.

In addition to questions determining eligibility for income support, the current Centrelink *Looking for Work* form has 18 factors identifying labour market disadvantage including: length of unemployment, geographical location, cultural identity, educational attainment, English literacy, prior convictions, instability of residence, personal factors etc.

The JSCI is constrained by the Privacy Commissioner and the Centrelink customer can choose not to disclose Indigenous background, whether granted refugee status, disability, medical condition or illness, addiction affecting ability to work, other personal factors affecting ability to work, and prior convictions. The CCSO is required to state prior to these questions "...the information you give will help Centrelink to help you, however you do not have to answer question...."

Depending on the job seekers' answers to certain questions (such as disclosing homelessness, disability or personal factors) at their JSCI interview, the job seeker may be referred for a JSCI Supplementary Assessment with an Occupational Psychologist, Disability Officer or a Social Worker (Social Worker for homeless job seekers since September 2001). The JSCI Supplementary Assessment, introduced in September 2001 supersedes the:

- Secondary Classification process undertaken by Occupational Psychologists for trigger factor of personal factors and Centrelink Disability Officer for a trigger of JSCI factor of disability.
- Special Needs Assessment undertaken by Occupational Psychologists if at least 3 out of 8 JSCI factors are triggered including two years unemployment, no recent work experience, disability, instability of residence, low English language and literacy, low educational attainment, personal factors and ex offender.

Relevant factors indicating employment barriers are weighted with different scores and are calculated to provide a total JSCI score. The higher the JSCI score, the higher level of employment assistance the job seeker will be eligible for through the Job Network. The three main types of employment assistance, funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and provided through the Job Network include Job Matching, Jobsearch Training, and Intensive Assistance.

*Continued over...*

### ***Box 1: Continued...***

Job seekers identified with multiple unemployment barriers and/or the long term unemployed, may be eligible for Intensive Assistance if they have a JSCI score higher than 24 points. Job seekers assessed through the JSCI Supplementary Assessment as not being 'job ready' and therefore unable to benefit from Intensive Assistance may volunteer to be referred and participate in the Community Support Programme.

The following scenario provides an example of how a JSCI score may be determined for a Centrelink registered job seeker.

<b><i>Employment factor (example only)</i></b>	<b><i>Points allocated</i></b>
Aged b/n 25-29 years	3
Completed year ten	6
No vocational qualification	2
Unemployed 2 yrs	7
Lives alone	4
Inadequate transport	2
Homeless or living in insecure, temporary or emergency accommodation	6
Total Score	30

As shown, the above job seeker has identified a number of employment barriers that calculates to a JSCI score of 30, making them eligible for a referral to Intensive Assistance by a specified Job Network Provider funded to provide this type of assistance. The JSCI streaming pathway for homeless job seekers is illustrated in Appendix 6. For further information on the JSCI and scoring procedure please refer to DEWR website for JSCI publications.

## **1.1 Aims and Objectives**

Based on emerging concerns from research and service practice, the hypothesis investigated was that the classification process undertaken by Centrelink to obtain complete and accurate information on customer circumstances (not related to the information required to determine payability of income support payment) requires significant improvement in order to effectively assist people who are homeless.

The overall aim of this project was to improve the effectiveness of Centrelink assessment and job referral procedures for income support recipients who are experiencing housing crisis or homelessness.

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- undertake a comparative analysis of homeless agency client data with Centrelink customer data (provided by participants), to assess the completeness and accuracy of information on housing/homeless circumstances and related personal factors relevant to assessment for employment assistance and service delivery by Centrelink;

- gain an understanding of the reasons for incomplete assessment of relevant issues where it occurs;
- consider best practice strategies and make recommendations for improving the completeness and accuracy of Centrelink assessment procedures for customers experiencing homelessness; and
- draw on current trials and initiatives within Centrelink that has relevance to assessment procedures and support to “at risk” customers.

## 1.2 Methodology

### Research Development

The methodology was designed to involve broad representation from both Centrelink and the homelessness sector incorporating individual interviews with SAAP clients, retrieval of Centrelink customer personal files, client focus groups and stakeholder workshops. The research was divided into three stages. Stage one and two of the research involved a comparative analysis of study participant interviews with their personal Centrelink records retrieved through a freedom of information process to identify the completeness of current assessment processes. Stage three involved broader stakeholder consultation and client focus groups.

Due to the particular sensitivities in obtaining Centrelink customers’ personal files and conditions within the Social Security Privacy Act, considerable developmental work was undertaken with the Steering Committee prior to commencing stage one of the research. Approval of the research design was sought from both the Department of Family and Community Services and Centrelink Privacy Officers before commencing data collection.

The researchers also spent three intensive days within the Windsor Centrelink Customer Service Centre prior to commencing the research. This enabled the researchers to observe the administration of the JSCI and to ensure familiarity with current Centrelink practice and language in order to interpret customers’ Centrelink data and ensure a robust methodology.

The researchers signed a declaration of confidentiality with respect to information contained within Centrelink customer files. The research undertaken was guided by Hanover’s ethics policy and the project Steering Committee was closely involved in oversight of issues pertaining to ethics and Social Security legislation throughout the duration of the research.

### Stage 1 – Interviews with SAAP Clients Experiencing Homelessness

Stage one of the research involved undertaking semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2 for interview schedule) with a sample of clients of SAAP and THM services across Victoria who were over 21 years of age and receiving Newstart Allowance at the time of the interview. The interviews identified housing and employment history and assistance, personal factors affecting ability to work and engagement with Centrelink. Study participants were recruited from the following participating services:

- Hanover Southbank (Crisis support)
- Hanover Housing (Transitional housing)
- Quantum Support Service (covering the La Trobe Valley)



- Loddon Mallee Housing Service (covering Bendigo to Mildura)
- Springvale Community Aid Advice Bureau

In accordance with ethical guidelines, study participants were provided with a plain English statement about their involvement in the research, including the data that would be accessed on their Centrelink file and completed a consent form prior to commencing interviews. Study participants were required to provide consent to participate in the study and also consent for Hanover to act as agent on their behalf to obtain their personal Centrelink customer file through a freedom of information request.

Interviews were undertaken by the primary researcher and identified caseworkers within participating services. The interview schedule was piloted within Hanover Southbank and also tested within Centrelink to ensure that data matching could occur between the study interviews and Centrelink files. Slight modifications were made to the interview schedule following the pilot.

Training sessions in conducting the interviews and gaining informed consent were provided to each participating service and a key service contact was maintained to ensure easy follow up of interview progress. Caseworkers were also provided with written guidelines for undertaking the interviews. The study interviews were between 35 to 70 minutes in duration. The interview data collection occurred over a seven-week period across participating services. Study participants were paid \$25 dollars for their participation. Completed surveys along with consent forms were returned to the primary researcher for analysis.

## Stage Two – Centrelink Data Retrieval

Completed consent forms were forwarded by the primary researcher onto the Windsor Centrelink Customer Service Office as the agreed site for retrieval of study participant Centrelink customer files. Two senior Centrelink personnel were involved in extracting the Centrelink files. Information within the files obtained for the study included accommodation and address history, Centrelink activity, Job Seeker Classification Instrument responses, breach history, Centrelink Customer Service notes, and the Sprite customer summary sheet. Downloaded files were then returned to the primary researcher at Hanover Welfare Services, copied and forwarded back to participants according to a nominated address provided on the consent form. Researchers were provided definition guides to assist with the interpretation of codes on individual Centrelink files.

The following Centrelink data sets were obtained for each study participant:

- Address History (ADH)
- Accommodation History (ACS)
- Activity Type (NAT)
- Breach Details Summary (NBDS)
- Document List (DL)
- IES - Job Seeker Registration (JOR)
- IES - Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI)
- IES - JSCI Questions
- IES - JSCI Further Classification
- IES - JSCI History (JSCH)
- Employment Services Sprite Summary

## Analysis of Data

Study interview and Centrelink files were matched manually according to key dates and questions, then entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to provide an aggregate comparison. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed using a coding tree format to identify key themes, which were then entered into SPSS.

In determining the representativeness of the study sample to the broader SAAP homeless population, a special data request was submitted to the National Data Collection Agency specifically for those SAAP clients receiving Newstart. Comparisons were made on the variables of gender, age, cultural background and accommodation history. The study sample was also compared to the general Newstart population, using recent data compiled by the Department of Family and Community Services. Case studies of the study sample were also selected from the Centrelink files, which were considered typical of the experiences of the sample of homeless job seekers. Case study names were changed to maintain confidentiality of the study participants.

## Stage Three – Stakeholder Workshops and Client Focus Group

Three Stakeholder workshops were held across Victoria, one in Morwell, Bendigo, and Metropolitan Melbourne. The purpose of the workshops was to present a preliminary analysis of the findings from the interview and Centrelink data matching, gain insight into service experience and discuss policy and practice implications and future directions. Participants attending the workshop included representatives from SAAP and Centrelink social workers, co-ordinators, service and area managers and departmental personnel from Department Family and Community Services, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, and Centrelink. A Total of 38 participants attended the workshops (See Appendix five for list of workshop attendees).

Study participant focus groups were also undertaken with seven clients with Hanover Southbank crisis service and three clients from Loddon Mallee Housing Service (See focus group interview schedule in Appendix 3). The focus groups lasted for approximately an hour and 20 minutes and were tape recorded with the permission of participants for subsequent transcription and analysis. The gender mix of the focus groups was three females and seven males, with an age range of 21-40 years old.

## Study Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the potential limitations of the current study. The research design has relied upon self-report from study participants about personal and sensitive factors affecting their ability to participate and seek employment and to gain an understanding of disclosure patterns to Centrelink. Study participants were informed at the outset that their responses were in confidence and that neither their Centrelink payments, nor the service provided within the participating service would be affected in any way as a result of their participation in the study. However, the nature of the service provider and client relationship between the participating services, where by the client presents to the service in time of housing crisis, may have contributed both to over and under reporting of personal issues.

Service experience indicates that clients accessing SAAP services are more likely to under report personal issues, particularly drug dependency, until a more trusting relationship and rapport is established between the service provider and the client. Whilst interviewers were provided with training sessions and written guidelines for the collection of interview data, individual interview styles can influence the degree of study participant disclosure and reporting. Further, the personal issues disclosed during the study interviews have been accepted at face value and have not been further verified through medical and clinical assessments.

The use of a triangulated methodology, which included study interviews, client focus groups, stakeholder consultations, and data analysis of Centrelink customer personal information has enhanced the validity of the study findings. The cross matching methodology of study interviews and Centrelink customer personal records enabled validation of study participants' employment and housing history.

### 1.3 Working Definition of Homelessness

A recent paper for the Victorian Homelessness Strategy undertook a detailed review of the range of definitions of homelessness (Chamberlain & Johnson 2000). The authors articulate three categories of definition: literal homelessness (absence of shelter), a subjectivist definition (an individual's opinion about their housing circumstances) and a cultural definition (an objective measure of housing). They conclude that *'homelessness is a concept like poverty. It should be measured objectively and does not depend on people's perceptions'* (Chamberlain and Johnson 2000:p.3).

Operational definitions of homelessness for policy or program planning or enumeration purposes have been based on an acceptance that there are dimensions to homelessness that go beyond the absence of a roof or shelter. These dimensions include:

- lack of safety and personal security;
- lack of tenure or sustainability;
- appropriateness and quality;
- temporal dimension: transience or periodic episodes; and
- social exclusion.

Thus, the Council to Homeless Persons (Victoria) defines homelessness in the following terms:

*A homeless person is without a conventional home and lacks most of the economic and social supports that a home affords. She/he is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, she/he has few independent resources and often has no immediate means and in some cases little prospect of self-support (CHP 1995).*

The definition in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994) states that:

*A person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which a person has access:*

- a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or

- b) *threatens the person's safety; or*
- c) *marginalizes the person through failing to provide access to:*
  - (i) *adequate personal amenities; or*
  - (ii) *the economic and social support that a home normally affords; or*
- d) *places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.*

Chamberlain and MacKenzie proposed a more inclusive cultural definition that identified three categories of people experiencing homelessness. This definition has formed the basis of improved enumeration strategies developed by the ABS over the past two censuses:

*Primary: people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.*

*Secondary: people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless and night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women's refuges); people residing temporarily with other families (because they have no accommodation of their own); and those living in boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.*

*Tertiary: people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease (ABS 1999, p. 1).*

The methodology for this research utilised an operational definition that participants in the primary data collection had to be clients of homeless services and thus met the eligibility criteria of homelessness contained in the SAAP Act. The interview questionnaire obtained additional information to map their experiences of homelessness. The assumption adopted by the researchers is that a point in time indicator of housing crisis or lack of shelter is insufficient for understanding the impact of their homelessness as a barrier to participation in mutual obligation activities and employment assistance programs. Thus, the temporal dimension of homelessness (secondary category) is a particularly important aspect in understanding an individual's capacity to maintain communications with services and to regularly fulfil obligations.

## **1.4 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a joint Commonwealth-State & Territory response to homelessness in Australia. SAAP provides almost \$250 million per year in funding to about 1200 community or local government agencies that are contracted to provide housing and support for people experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness. The objective of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to assist people to resolve their homelessness and to regain self-reliance and independence. In 1999-2000 SAAP agencies provided an estimated 90,000 adults with accommodation or support as clients (AIHW 2000).

## 2. Current Practice and Policy Directions

Since the final report of the *Reference Group on Welfare Reform* (2000), also known as the McClure report, current social policy has increasingly focused on strategies that seek to enhance social and economic participation through our social security system. The *Australian's Working Together* policy, the Commonwealth's response to the McClure report, will see the implementation of a number of planned changes to the delivery and incentives linked to income support and employment assistance. Within this context, mutual obligation responsibilities will continue to be a key requirement for many beneficiaries of income support.

The implications of fulfilling mutual obligation and the subsequent sanctioning of penalties for failing to meet such requirements for those who are significantly disadvantaged within the labour market, including those who are homeless, has been the subject of growing concern and investigation. The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, *Working Towards a National Homelessness Strategy* consultation paper outlines a number of goals and priority actions relating to the specific income security and employment needs of those who are homeless. The goals that have particular relevance to the current project are to:

- *establish more flexible service arrangements, mutual obligation requirements and communication procedures to reflect the special needs and circumstances of people who are homeless;*
- *ensure that the needs of the homeless are considered during the development and implementation of welfare reform strategies; and*
- *increase employment among people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.*

(Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, 2001:14-19)

The National Homelessness Strategy consultation paper recognises the significant barriers to employment for those who are homeless along with the improvements that should be implemented to ensure that the income security system does not inadvertently serve to further penalise those for their homelessness. Specifically, the Strategy asserts that mutual obligation requirements should be matched “to the circumstances and capacities of people who are homeless” (Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, 2001:15).

### 2.1 Centrelink and the Job Network

With the restructuring of the former Social Security and Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) into one service, Centrelink has responsibility for a broader range of services including both income support and referral into employment assistance. Under the *Australians Working Together* policy, Centrelink will have an increased function as the ‘gateway’ into employment assistance and ensuring increased community participation, with Centrelink playing “... a more significant role in the critical assessment and referral functions for job seekers and others needing help” (Centrelink, 2001:9).

The establishment of clear pathways for those who are homeless or in housing crisis in being able to receive appropriate assessment and effective support through the Job Network will be crucial in this context. As the first point of contact and main assessor for income support and employment assistance, Centrelink Customer Service Officers have a significant role in the initial and ongoing engagement of those who are homeless.

Current and future initiatives that specifically target or are available to those who are homeless through Centrelink and the Job Network are summarised below.

### *Centrelink*

- **Centrelink Community Officers** are located within homeless service and hospital settings to provide services to people outside the mainstream Centrelink Customer Service Office. Currently, 33 Centrelink Community Officers are located throughout Australia.
- **Occupational Psychologists, Disability Officers** and more recently **Social Workers** have the discretion to review a Centrelink customer's JSCI score. A Supplementary Assessment should be undertaken by either a Disability Officer, Social Worker or Occupational Psychologist if certain information (such as disability, personal factors, homelessness) is disclosed during a JSCI interview in order to review their JSCI score and refer to the most appropriate employment assistance accordingly.
- **Centrelink Personal Advisers** will be introduced in 2002 through *Australians Working Together* to provide additional assessment and employment assistance for those with higher needs and employment barriers. Whilst those experiencing homelessness are not a specific target group for the Personal Adviser Program, access may be based on other special needs including those on Newstart who are incapacitated or exempt from activity test, recent release from prison, Indigenous, mature age workers, or on parenting payment with youngest child aged six or over.
- **Crisis payment** is a one off payment equivalent to one week's payment for those receiving income support. The payment is available to those who are required to leave home because of extreme circumstances such as domestic violence.
- A selection of Centrelink Customer Service Centres has introduced **Weekly Payments** for those having difficulty managing fortnightly payments.
- **Centrepay** is available to provide customers with the options of having direct debit of rental or accommodation payment from their Centrelink customer payment.

### *Job Network and Employment Assistance Programs*

- Three main types of assistance are currently being funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and provided through the Job Network - **Job matching, Jobsearch Training, and Intensive Assistance**. The JSCI is used as streaming tool into one of three levels of employment assistance. A homeless person receives six points for homelessness in the JSCI and requires at present, a total of 24 points or above the calculated from the other 17 factors to be eligible for Intensive Assistance. Membership of a specific group, such as being homeless does not automatically qualify the job seeker for entry into Intensive Assistance; rather Intensive Assistance is targeted to those who are long term unemployed or at risk of long-term unemployment based on their individual characteristics and labour market skill.
- **Personal Support Programme** (currently Community Support Programme) aims to assist those who have multiple barriers in accessing the job market, including mental illness, drug and alcohol misuse and long term unemployment. The introduction of the Personal Support Programme in July 2002 through *Australians Working Together* will replace the current Community Support Programme and will result in an increase from

15,000 places to 45,000 places for those job seekers eligible for Intensive Assistance. Responsibility for the program is being transferred from DEWR to FaCS and participation will be compulsory as opposed to the voluntary arrangements under the former Community Support Programme model. The program targets Youth Allowance, Newstart, and Disability Support Pension recipients who are identified through the JSCI as having significant employment barriers. Referral to the Personal Support Programme will be following JSCI Supplementary Assessment undertaken by Centrelink social workers and occupational psychologists.

- **The Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET)** provides a range of services to young people (aged 15-21 years) who have multiple barriers to participation in education, vocational training or in obtaining employment. JPET clients include disadvantaged young people either experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The program is administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), which contracts community organisations to deliver approved services.

It should be noted that the focus of this research as agreed by the Steering Committee has been on homeless job seekers aged over 21 years. However, JPET is a mutual obligation activity for young people aged 18-21 years. Many JPET clients experience similar barriers to employment, including homelessness and transience, compared to older Newstart recipients. Many of the issues raised in this study will be relevant to JPET.

### *Enhancing Relationships*

- **Homebound Program:** Through the National Homeless Strategy, FaCS in collaboration with Centrelink is developing the Homebound program with the aim of strengthening linkages between homeless services and Centrelink. The Homebound program provides an opportunity for SAAP services to visit a nominated Centrelink Customer Service Centre to observe and gain an understanding of current practice and procedures within Centrelink. As part of the program the first four days are spent within Centrelink and on the fifth day, as an exchange, Centrelink personnel attend the participating SAAP service.
- **Preventing Centrelink Breaches among Homeless Young People (and others):** The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) is currently funded by the National Homelessness Strategy to produce a wall chart resource for homeless workers to assist them to identify whether clients are receiving appropriate Centrelink payments and address other Centrelink related issues. The project will also develop a small pocket resource booklet for young people on their rights and responsibilities with respect to Centrelink payments, including the breaching process.

## 3. About the Participants

### 3.1 Sample Size and Distribution

A total of 135 eligible participants were interviewed for the study. From the eligible sample, two Centrelink files could not be accessed; one due to privacy restrictions on the record and the other participant details could not be located on the Centrelink database. The following analysis is therefore based on a total sample of 135 interview responses and 133 Centrelink files of study participants. The analysis also includes the findings of ten focus group and 38 stakeholder workshop participants.

As shown in Table 1, just over half (56%) of the sample was recruited from Metropolitan Melbourne, whilst the remaining 44 per cent of the sample were recruited from pockets of regional and rural Victoria.

**Table 1. Distribution of interview responses across participating services**

Participating Services	Number	%
Hanover Southbank (Inner City)	48	36
Hanover Housing (Moorabbin)	21	16
Loddon Mallee Housing Service (Bendigo to Mildura)	39	29
Quantum Support Service (La Trobe Valley Region)	21	15
Springvale Community Aid Advice Bureau (Springvale, Dandenong, Noble Park)	6	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>	

Source: Interview responses

#### 3.1.1 Homeless Service Type and Length of Stay

The service type utilised by study participants at the time of the interviews was also identified to provide a more detailed indication of the intensity of support provided from the participating homeless services and to determine the length of stay for the current episode of homelessness. As illustrated in Table 2, just under half of the participants were residing within crisis-supported accommodation and a quarter was in transitional housing. In total, 78 per cent of study participants were provided with supported accommodation indicating their experience of homelessness.

**Table 2. Service type utilised by participants at the time of interview**

Service Type	Number	%	Median Length of stay (days)
Housing Information & Referral	24	18	Same day
SAAP Casual Client	5	4	Same day
SAAP Crisis Short Term Case Management	58	45	28
SAAP Intensive Case Management	14	11	98
Transitional Housing	28	22	106

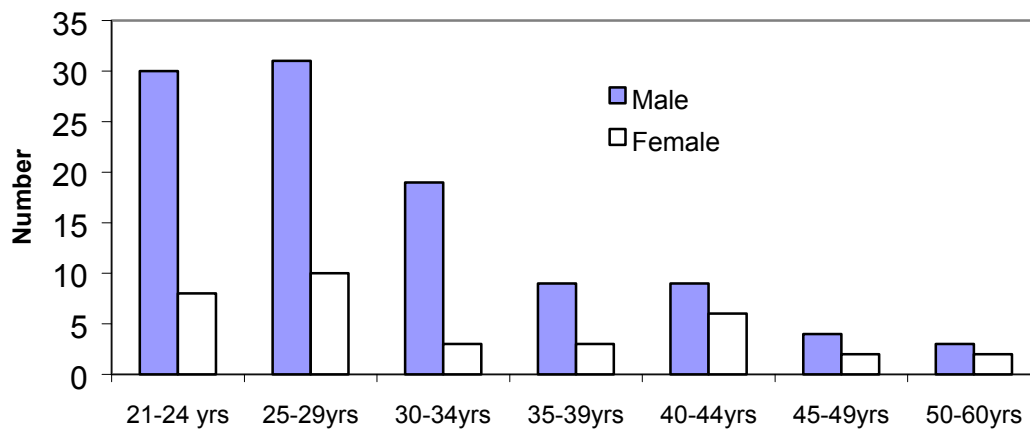
Source: Participating service client data



## 3.2 Demographic Profile of Participants

A detailed overview of demographic characteristics of the study sample by participating service is provided in Table 1 (Appendix 4). The majority (78%) of study participants were male and the average age was thirty years. Just under two thirds of study participants (59%) were aged between 21– 29 years. Three quarters of the sample (75%) were single, whilst 16 per cent were divorced or separated, and a further nine per cent were either in a de facto relationship or married. The main country of birth for participants was Australia (77%) followed by England (5%). Four participants' cultural identity was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Figure 1 illustrates participants' age range according to gender. As shown, the age distribution of males and female study participants is mainly concentrated in the age range of 21-29 years.

**Figure 1. Gender by age of study participants**



Source: Interview responses

Comparing the study sample to the NDCA SAAP data reveals that the sample is broadly representative of Australian Newstart clients utilising homeless services in terms of gender (See Appendix 4 for NDCA tables). For the six-month period from January 2001 to June 2001, 72 per cent of clients were male and 28 per cent were female. Looking at the Victorian Newstart SAAP data, there are a slightly higher proportion of females compared to males, with 36 per cent and 64 per cent respectively. As illustrated in Table 2 in Appendix 4, the age profile of the study sample closely resembles Victorian SAAP Newstart data. Cultural identity of the study sample is broadly representative of the Victorian SAAP data, with both showing approximately 81 per cent Anglo Australian, 4 per cent Indigenous background.

Comparing the study sample to the broader Newstart population in October 2001 reveals a similar male to female ratio of approximately 3:1, although there is slightly higher number of males in the current study sample (Department of Family and community Services, 2001:8). There is some variance in the age profile of the study sample to that of the general Newstart population, with 84 per cent of study sample aged 21 –39 years compared to 52 per cent of the general Newstart population for the same age range.

### 3.2.1 Housing Status

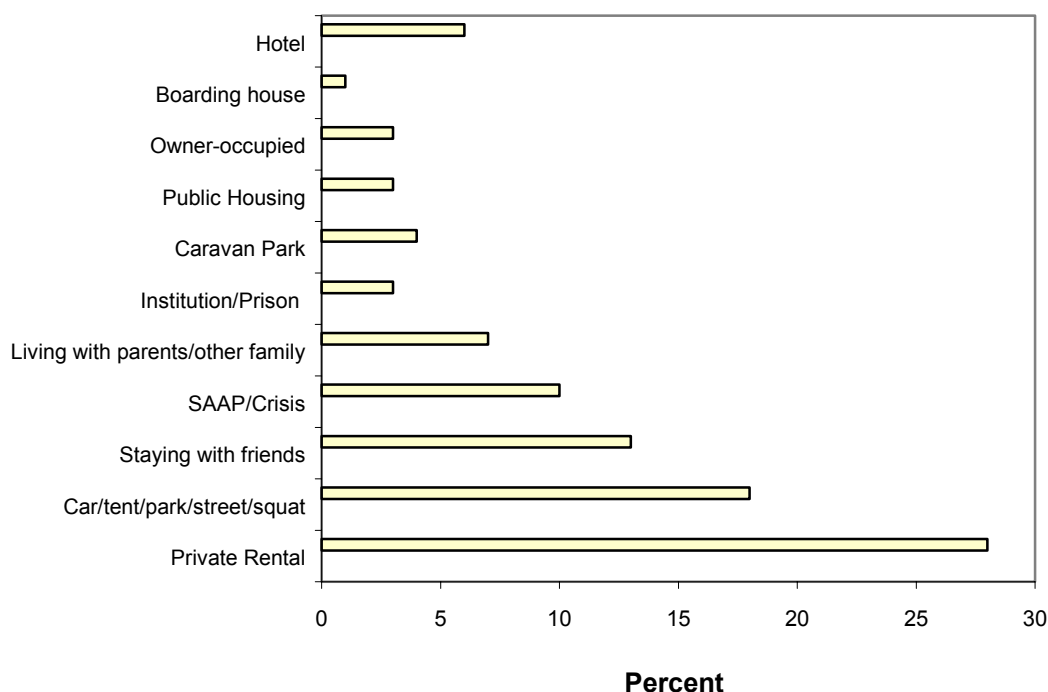
An analysis of accommodation history from both interview responses and Centrelink files revealed that the majority of study participants had either experienced a prior episode of homelessness and or had been experiencing housing instability for some time. In accordance with the SAAP definition, independent and or stable housing for this study was defined as paying rent in private rental, public housing or owner occupied. Homelessness or instability of residence incorporated primary, secondary, and tertiary aspects of homelessness as originally defined by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998). This included those sleeping out, staying with friends, living in boarding houses, hotels, caravan parks, crisis accommodation and transitional housing. At the outset, all study participants were receiving support and assistance as clients of homeless services and thus defined as homeless according to the above definitions.

#### *Accommodation Type prior to Service Access*

The main type of accommodation immediately prior to study participants accessing participating homeless service is shown in Figure 2. Consistent with the broader SAAP client population prior to accessing support, the most commonly reported type of accommodation had been private rental for 29 per cent of participants (Tables 7 and 8 in Appendix 4 detail the breakdown of accommodation type by participating service). The main observed difference between the general SAAP population and the current study sample is the proportion of study participants experiencing primary homelessness immediately prior to service access, with 18 per cent reporting that they were either living in a car/tent/park/street/squat. This number would reflect the higher proportion of study participants from inner city crisis accommodation compared to national NDCA SAAP data.

However, there is slight variance in the main accommodation type of those utilising metropolitan and regional services prior to using the homeless service. Study participants from the La Trobe Valley and Loddon Mallee region were more likely to be residing in private rental, 35 per cent and 51 per cent respectively.

**Figure 2. Type of accommodation immediately before utilising homeless service**



Source: Interview responses

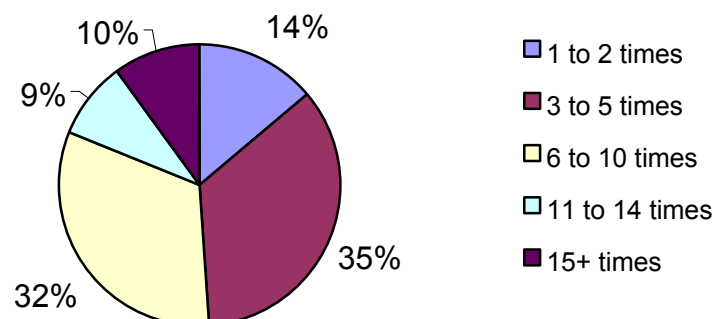
### *History of Housing Stability*

According to participant responses, the majority (58%) had not lived in independent and or stable housing for twelve months or more. Amongst those, 14 per cent had not lived in independent and or stable housing for longer than two to three years.

An examination of addresses appearing on study participants' Centrelink file from August 1999 to October 10, 2001 show that many had experienced homelessness in the two year period prior to their current episode of homelessness. The definition of "homelessness" for this purpose included homeless service addresses known to the researchers, and also the categorisation of accommodation type on the Centrelink record as lodging, boarding, caravan site, hotel and no fixed address. Of the 133 participant Centrelink files, 90 (68%) had a previous homeless address or accommodation type shown on their record. For the remaining 43 participants, a prior homeless address could not be accurately determined from their Centrelink file.

Analysis of interview responses and Centrelink files also highlighted the itinerant background of study participants, with frequent moves between accommodation types and locations within Victoria and interstate. Averaging self reported moves and recorded addresses from participants' Centrelink file, as shown in Figure 3, one third of participants (35%) had moved between 3-5 times over the past two years, a further 32 per cent had moved between 6-10 times, 19 per cent had moved over 11 times, whilst the remaining 14 per cent had moved 1-2 times.

**Figure 3. Number of moves**



Source: Taken from an average of reported moves from interview responses and identified addresses shown on study participants Centrelink record.

Based on comparisons of the two sets of data, the observed pattern of the number of reported moves by study participants was generally consistent with the number of Centrelink addresses appearing on their Centrelink file, indicating that disclosure of address to Centrelink is occurring for the majority of participants. A comparison of reported “previous address before using homeless service” from the interviews with addresses shown on Centrelink Customer file revealed that 77 per cent of study participants had disclosed their last address to Centrelink at the time of interview.

Whilst the majority of files showed that the previous address had been disclosed, 23 per cent of participants had not disclosed their most recent change of address to Centrelink at the time of the study interview. This suggests that there is a time delay in reporting address changes to Centrelink. Naturally, the longer study participants had stayed with the service and were more settled with their accommodation the more likely they were to disclose change of address to Centrelink. Table 3 shows the most commonly reported reasons for not disclosing change of address to Centrelink at the time of the interview.

**Table 3. Reasons for not disclosing change of address to Centrelink**

Reasons for non disclosure	Number	%
Have not had a chance to	14	45
Not sure how long will be staying at the service	5	16
Payments will be cut without a fixed address	3	10
Had no fixed address to tell Centrelink	2	6.3
Didn't think it was relevant	2	6.3
Use parents as postal/have a postal box	2	6.3
Other	3	10
	31	100

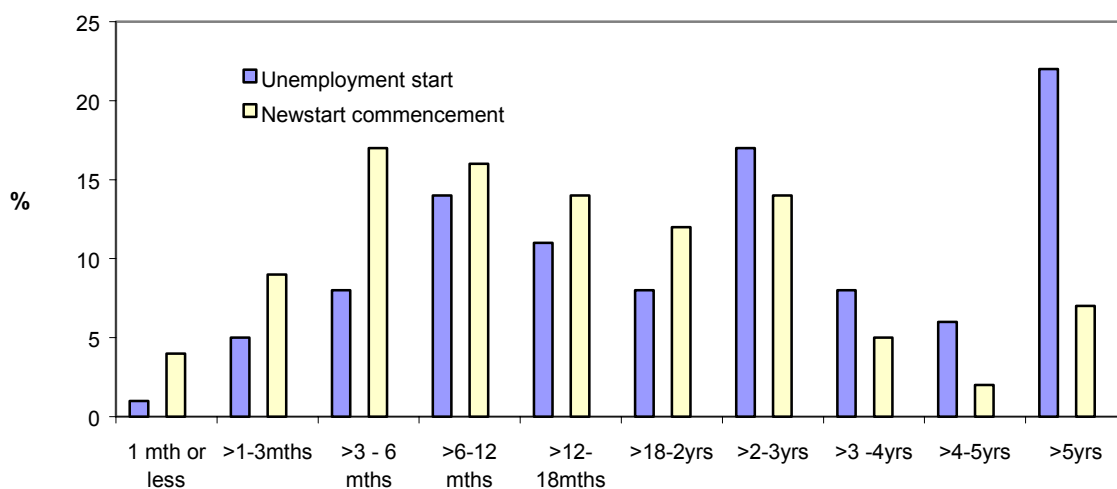
Source: Interview responses

### 3.2.2 Length of Unemployment

The unemployment profile of the study participant group is generally weighted toward the long-term unemployed. Figure 4 illustrates the length of unemployment and the duration of Newstart according to study participant Centrelink records. As shown, 72 per cent of the sample had been registered as unemployed with Centrelink for longer than 12 months. Amongst those, 22 per cent had been registered as unemployed for five years or more. Looking at Newstart commencement dates, just over half of the participants (52%) had been receiving Newstart for longer than 12 months. This compares to 60 per cent of the general Newstart population being on Newstart for over 12 months in 1999 (Department of Family and Community Services, 1999: 42).

As shown, there is a disparity between unemployment start date and Newstart commencement. This can be partially attributed to the waiting period between application and receipt of payment and short-term participation in employment where payments cease for periods of time and then resume.

**Figure 4. Length of unemployment and Newstart commencement from Centrelink record %**

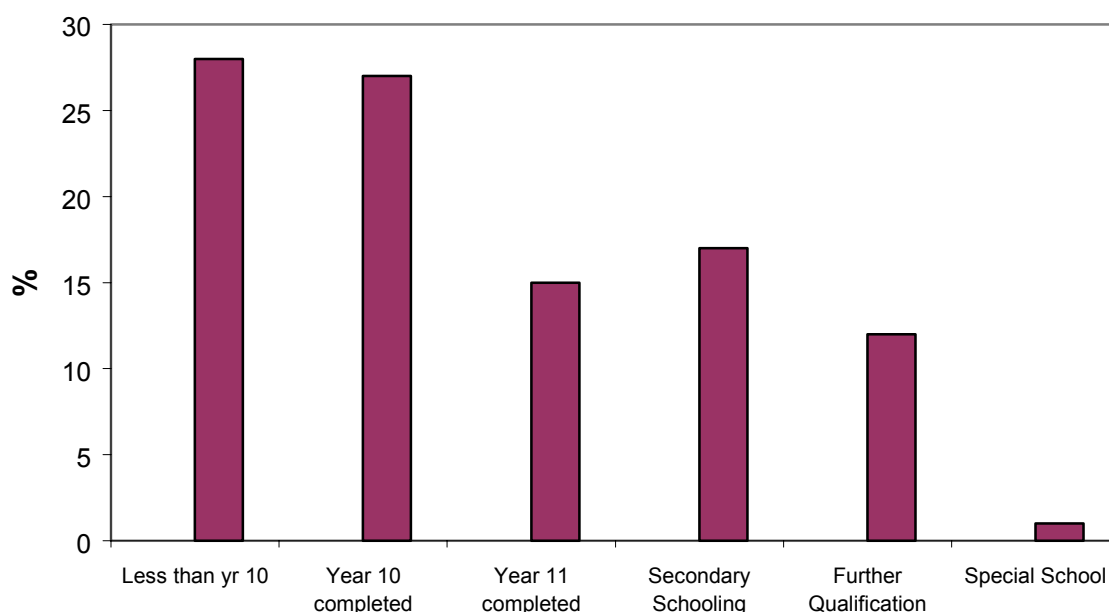


Source: Study participant Centrelink record

### 3.2.3 Educational Attainment

As illustrated in Figure 5, study participants generally had low educational attainment, with just over half (55%) of the sample having an educational attainment of year 10 or less. Only 12 per cent of the sample had post-secondary qualifications in the form of trade/TAFE, associate diploma or degree.

**Figure 5. Educational attainment of study participants, %**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record

## 3.3 Summary Discussion

The interview sample (n=135) is broadly representative of the SAAP Newstart population in terms of the key demographic characteristics of age, gender, and cultural identity. There is some similarity between the study sample and the general Newstart population, although there is slightly higher representation of males and younger age profile amongst the study group. All the participants were considered homeless under the accepted SAAP definition and eligible for assistance.

A review of study participant accommodation history, both through interviews and Centrelink files indicated that the majority of the study participants had experienced prior episodes of homelessness and had not been living in independent or stable accommodation for more than twelve months. Frequent moving was a common characteristic of the study participant group. The majority of participants were also long term unemployed with an educational attainment of year ten or less, indicating significant barriers to gaining ongoing and stable employment.

This profile further confirms that many entering the homeless service system have considerable barriers to employment, which relate to stability of housing, employment history and low educational attainment. The impact of housing instability and marginalisation, or more recently 'social exclusion', on capacity to participate in ongoing employment is well documented in the literature (O'Mera, 1995; MacDonald, 2000; and McClelland, 2000). In particular, in an evaluation of the Community Support Programme, which specifically targets those experiencing homelessness, MacDonald (2000) identified that program participants had at least five combined employment barriers linked to education, employment history, and other ongoing personal and medical issues.

## **4. Classifying Employment Assistance Needs**

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Youth Allowance and Newstart customers aged between 18 and 34 years are required to actively search for employment, participate in work for the dole or further education and training in exchange for income support. The main process for determining the intensity of employment assistance provided by the Job Network is through the JSCI, which classifies customers into different levels of assistance according to identified employment barriers.

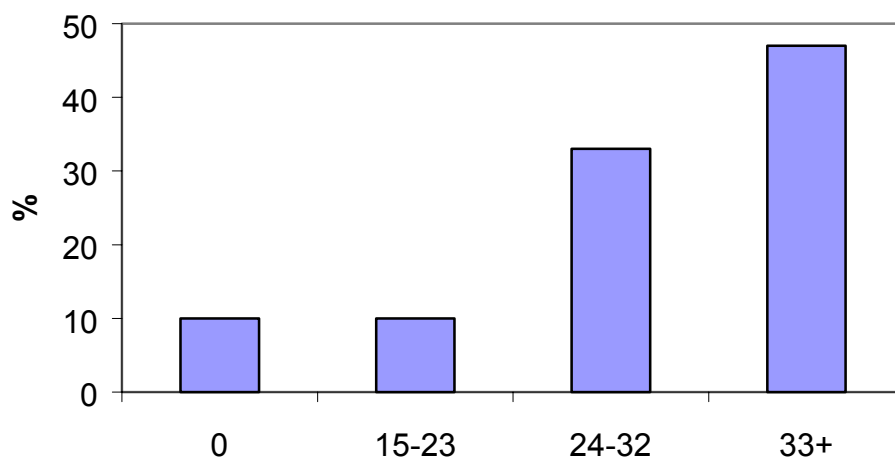
One of the main objectives of the research was to determine the effectiveness of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) as a streaming tool into the appropriate category of assistance provided through the Job Network according to identified employment barriers for those experiencing housing crisis. The following section discusses the findings from study participants' Centrelink JSCI record and provides a comparison of employment barriers identified by participants during the study interviews to the recorded barriers identified on their Centrelink JSCI record.

### **4.1 Completeness of the JSCI**

#### **4.1.1 JSCI Score**

The distribution of JSCI scores of the study participants is illustrated in Figure 6. At the time of Centrelink customer file retrieval, 13 participants (10%) had a JSCI score of 0, indicating that the JSCI was either inactive due to incapacity or that a score was pending. Amongst the remaining study participants who had been assigned a JSCI score, 80 per cent had a score higher than 24, with 47 per cent having a score of 33 or higher. As a score of 24 is the minimum score for eligibility into Intensive Assistance, this finding suggests significant barriers to employment for the majority of the study participants interviewed. Whilst the majority are assessed as being eligible for Intensive Assistance, 10 per cent of the participants were assessed as needing low levels of employment assistance such as Jobsearch.

**Figure 6. JSCI Score for total sample of participants' %**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record

#### Box 2: Case Study, Alex

Alex is aged 21 years from Bendigo and has an educational attainment of less than Year 10. He has been registered with Centrelink as unemployed since 1997. He reported in the study interview that he has moved 15 times in the past two years and was last living in independent or stable housing 2 years ago. His Centrelink record show 11 address changes for the same period. Alex arrived at the SAAP service on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2001. He recently reapplied for Newstart allowance on the same day he arrived at the SAAP service and his Centrelink file shows that his JSCI record was updated on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, same day of the study interview. Alex reported in the study interviews that he was homeless at the time of application for Newstart.

Alex was assigned a JSCI score of 34 on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, however his current Centrelink activity is Jobsearch as of 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2000. Whilst Alex reported during the study interview that he currently had an alcohol problem and family breakdown affecting his ability to seek and participate in ongoing employment, his JSCI record does not record "yes" for any personal factors or for instability of residence or identify the need for any JSCI Supplementary Assessment by an occupational psychologist or social worker. Whilst his JSCI is incomplete for these factors according to his responses in the interview, Alex's score is still high enough to make him eligible for intensive Assistance but not for the Community Support Programme because he has not been referred for a Supplementary Assessment.

Alex has been breached 11 times over the past four years, two of which have resulted in a rate reduction period. Alex reported in the study interviews that he was able to get the breaches revoked through help from the Salvation Army. Alex reported experiencing homelessness at the time of the breach. He is not currently on reduced payments. He reported that he has been referred to a Job Network provider numerous times, however maintained that because of his living situation he has not been able to use the provider to "his full advantage".

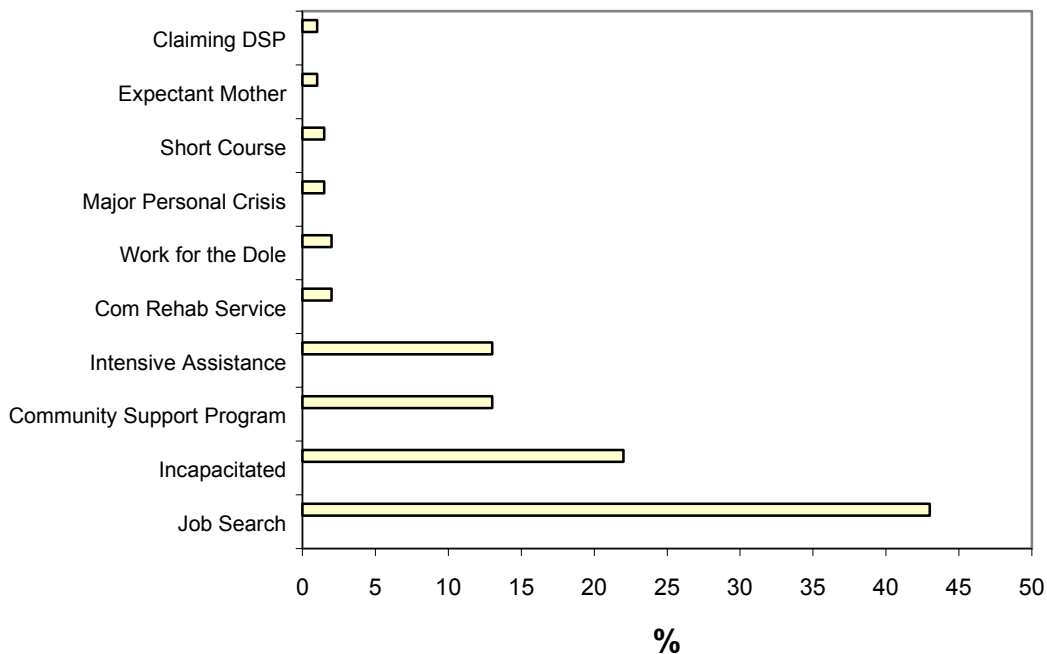
Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).



### 4.1.2 Centrelink Activity Type of Study Participants

Figure 7 illustrates the current Centrelink activity type for participants at the time of analysis. As shown, the current Centrelink activity type for the majority of participants (43%) was *Jobsearch*, whilst 14 per cent of participants' current activity was *Community Support Programme* and 13 per cent current activity type was *Intensive Assistance*. A further 29 participants (22%) were exempted from activity test requirements due to an incapacity and two participants were exempted for a 14 week period for Major Personal Crisis. One participant's activity was Disability Support Pension as this was approved during time elapsed from study interview and file retrieval.

**Figure 7. Current Centrelink activity**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record

Considering this is a sample of homeless service clients, with a range of personal issues, at face value the data indicate a low take up of Intensive Assistance, Community Support Programme, with the highest proportion on Jobsearch. This is also surprising, given that ten per cent of participants had a JSCI score to match this activity.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations require that Centrelink undertake a review of a job seeker's JSCI within two months of completing or exiting Intensive Assistance or Community Support Programme, with any changed circumstances recorded by the CSO and appropriate referrals, such as JSCI Supplementary Assessment be undertaken if need be. Similarly, if the job seeker is no longer exempted for incapacity, and then if eligible, should be referred to the Job Network or other relevant employment support according to their JSCI classification.

A possible explanation for the high number of participants on Jobsearch and where the assessment of employment barriers is “falling through the cracks”, appears to be in the automatic projection of activity type within the Centrelink computer system. The Centrelink customer personal records show that participants’ activity is automatically generated to “Jobsearch” after a period of Incapacity, Intensive Assistance, or Community Support Programme. In other words, the computer automatically categorises customers into Jobsearch without further assessment of their employment barriers, which may go undetected by the Centrelink Customer Service Officer due to the high volume of customers being assessed and the regularity in which the JSCI is updated.

Therefore the Centrelink customer may have a JSCI score that identifies significant employment barriers, however, this may not necessarily match the current activity. This projection to Jobsearch assumes that the Centrelink customer has successfully completed Intensive Assistance or Community Support Programme and is able to progress to Jobsearch, with the risk of being breached during this period increasing for those experiencing multiple employment barriers.

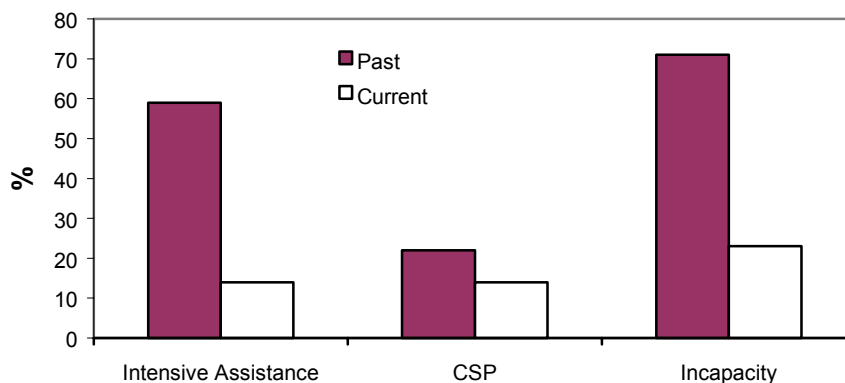
A further explanation for the disparity between JSCI scores and activity could also be attributed to customers waiting for a placement within the Intensive Assistance or Community Support Programme. Consultations with stakeholders indicated that some customers might be placed “on hold”; with their Centrelink activity still recorded as Jobsearch and still required to fulfil mutual obligations. Similarly, job seekers receiving Newstart or Youth Allowance who are exempted from activity requirements or have a medical incapacity cannot be referred onto the Job Network, Community Support Programme or Work for the Dole, as they are considered unable to participate in employment during the specified period.

Analysis of Centrelink files also show that study participants generally cycle between different activity types, many going from being incapacitated for periods of time, onto Jobsearch, then back to incapacitated. At the same time, others had gone from Jobsearch, Intensive Assistance, Community Support Programme and back to Jobsearch with little apparent change to existing employment barriers or JSCI score. The Centrelink activity history of participants, which demonstrates this cycling, is illustrated in Table 14 in Appendix four. In summary, these data show that:

- 71 per cent of participants had been *Incapacitated* for an average of three times, spanning an average period of 10 months.
- 59 per cent of participants had been referred to *Intensive Assistance* for an average of two times spanning an average period of 10 months.
- 22 per cent of participants had been referred to the *Community Support Programme* for an average of one time and average period of 7 ½ months.
- 8 per cent of participants had been exempted for *Major Personal Crisis*.

Figure 8. provides a direct comparison of current Centrelink activity and past activity history.

**Figure 8. Comparison of past and present Centrelink activity**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record

### Box 3: Case Study, Bob

Bob is 24 years old and his cultural background is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Prior to accessing the transitional housing service, he has been in prison for the past three years. He has an educational attainment of year 11. Bob last applied for income support on May 2001 and reported that he was experiencing homelessness at the time of application. Bob arrived at the transitional housing service on 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 where he was still currently residing at the time of analysis.

Bob currently has a JSCI score of 48, which was updated on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2001, however his Centrelink activity was Jobsearch up until 20<sup>th</sup> of June before seeking exemption via a medical certificate. Following a three-month incapacitated period, his Centrelink activity has gone back to Jobsearch despite a JSCI score of 48. His record shows that a JSCI Supplementary Assessment was "required" at the time his JSCI was updated in May 2001, however, does not indicate whether this has been completed\*.

Apart from his housing status, Bob reported having a heroin addiction and his prison sentence as factors affecting his ability to work during the study interviews. His JSCI does record a "yes" for instability of residence, personal factors and ex-offender. He reported during the interviews that he "wanted more information about employment services, especially if a person has a police record".

Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).

Amongst study participants whose current Centrelink activity is incapacitated (n=29), 45 per cent reported drug and alcohol dependency, and 45 per cent reported depression/anxiety as a personal factor affecting ability to work during the study interviews. Further, 39 per cent of study participants who had been incapacitated during some stage of their unemployment history reported in the study interviews drug dependency issues and 34 per cent of participants reported depression/anxiety affecting ability to work. This suggests that for a large proportion of the sample, incapacity has been a result of long-term rather than short-term conditions.

Centrelink files were also analysed to identify the proportion of participants who specifically had multiple activity types for Intensive Assistance, Community Support Programme and Incapacitated. As illustrated in Table 4 seven per cent of participants had all three activities shown on their file throughout the duration of unemployment, 34 per cent had Intensive Assistance and Incapacitated, 18 per cent had been referred to the Community Support Programme and had been Incapacitated, whilst 10 per cent had been referred to both Intensive Assistance and Community Support Programme.

**Table 4. Study participants with multiple Centrelink activity for Community Support Program, Intensive Assistance, and Incapacitated over duration of receiving Newstart.**

Activities	Number*	%
CSP, IA, Incapacitated	9	7
IA and Incapacitated	45	34
CSP and Incapacitated	24	18
IA and CSP	13	10

\*No total due to multiple responses

Source: Study participant Centrelink record

#### Box 4: Case Study, Jack

Jack is a 31-year-old Anglo Australian single male currently residing in Bendigo. Over the past two years, Jack's Centrelink file records 22 different addresses in three different States, indicating extreme transience. Many of the accommodation types include caravan parks, hotels or no fixed address, and boarding and lodgings.

Jack was interviewed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September. He reported during the study interview that he was last reviewed for income support the day before the interview and was experiencing homelessness at the time. He maintained that he disclosed his homelessness to a Centrelink Customer Service Officer. During the study interviews he disclosed that he had personal factors affecting his ability to work, including addiction, depression and a medical back problem.

Jack has been unemployed since 1993 and his Newstart Allowance commenced in 1998. His current Centrelink activity is "Jobsearch", which he has been on since 18<sup>th</sup> of September this year. Throughout the duration of unemployment, Bob's Centrelink activity has cycled from different types, mainly from Jobsearch to incapacitated back to Jobsearch and then incapacitated since 1993. In November 1999 he had been assessed as being eligible for intensive Assistance, which lasted less than a month to the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1999. Following this period, his record indicates that his activity went back to Jobsearch and was incapacitated again from the 19<sup>th</sup> of April to the 17<sup>th</sup> of September (record retrieved on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October).

Jack has a current JSCI score of 51 and this was last updated on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2001. At the time of completion, the JSCI file records "yes" to instability of residence, other personal factors and to disability/medical condition/illness/addiction. Whilst Bob has been long term unemployed and his JSCI record indicates that he is living in unstable accommodation and has other personal factors affecting his ability to seek work, his record shows no JSCI Supplementary Assessment has occurred (i.e. Jack's record does not record in the "Further Classification" section that a JSCI Supplementary Assessment is required). However, the comments section under "Further Classification Results" maintain that "*JSCI face to face required before referral to Intensive Assistance when medical certificate expires*". At the time of file retrieval, Jack had been on Jobsearch for 25 days. His record shows that he had a welfare agency referral for the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, the same day the interview was conducted for this study and attended the Centrelink Office and enquired about rent assistance on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. of October.

Jack's record shows that he has been breached on three occasions, two of which resulted in a penalty. These breaches occurred in the period from August 2000 to January 2001, when he was on Jobsearch. The reasons for the breach were failing to respond to or reply to letters, failing to declare earnings, and did not start a job/course as planned. He reported that he appealed the breach and was successful, however he "went without money for five weeks with no form of income".

Jack reported that he had been referred to a Job Network provider once, however this did not meet his needs as "everything is based on resumes which don't apply to me because I don't look very good on paper".

Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).

### Box 5: Case Study, Elaine and Frank

Both Elaine and Frank are long term unemployed and have been exempted from mutual obligation via a medical certificate for the past eight and five years respectively. Elaine is 41 and Frank is 32 years old. Elaine has a total of 1474 days of being incapacitated and Frank has 557. Both participants identified a drug dependency (currently on methadone program) as amongst one of the personal factors affecting their ability to participate or seek employment.

Elaine has been living in transitional housing for the past two years and was living in various crisis accommodation services prior to her transitional housing. Elaine has a JSCI score of 42, and the JSCI record records homelessness, personal factors, however does not record a medical condition/disability or addiction. Elaine cannot be referred onto Community Support Programme because her activity is “incapacitated”. Elaine during the study interviews reported that she attended the Community Support Programme for a short time however she “...began to feel like a professional patient and that at the time she “was too unfocused to consider anything”.

Frank stayed in crisis accommodation from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August to the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2001. He reported last living in independent and stable housing in May 1999 and has moved eight times in the past two years. His Centrelink file records nine address changes for the same period. He currently has a JSCI score of 32 and it was last updated in May 2001. Frank reported during study interviews that he was experiencing homelessness at the time and his accommodation type on his record shows that he was “Lodging” and not living in independent housing. Frank’s JSCI does not record “yes” for disability medical condition/illness or addiction or other personal factors affecting ability to work or the need for a Supplementary Assessment. However, the JSCI does record homelessness.

Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).

The combined data on Centrelink activity and case studies suggest a number of clear patterns. Firstly, the high proportion of participants currently incapacitated or who have been incapacitated at some point during unemployment indicates the existence of substantial employment barriers including drug dependency, depression and anxiety. For many of the participants, the incapacitated cycle has meant that clients have been exempted from mutual obligation and further JSCI assessment. As a result many of those experiencing housing crisis currently defined as incapacitated are effectively placed “on hold” as they cannot be referred to any assistance through the Job Network and may have to wait an extended period of years before becoming eligible for disability support pension.

Secondly, the level of multiple referrals and utilisation of Intensive Assistance through the duration of unemployment for just over half of the study participants suggests that this form of assistance has not led to sustainable employment outcomes for a number participants experiencing homelessness.

Thirdly, considering the circumstances of the sample, it is surprising that only 22 per cent had taken up a place in CSP (a voluntary program), given the long-term engagement with Centrelink. It might be expected that a far higher percentage would have been referred to CSP as the most appropriate activity.

### 4.1.3 Disclosure of Employment Barriers During Study Interviews

A specific objective of the current study was to gain an understanding of the extent of disclosure to Centrelink of homelessness and other personal factors affecting ability to seek and participate in work and where relevant investigate reasons for non- disclosure.

#### *Instability of Residence*

Of the total sample of study participants (n=135), 94 (70%) reported that they were experiencing homelessness at the time they applied for or were reviewed for income support from Centrelink, whilst the remaining study participants had become homeless since application or review. Amongst those who were experiencing homelessness at the time of application, 63 study participants (68%) reported disclosing their homelessness to a Centrelink Customer Service Officer.

Study participants were also asked whether they disclosed their homelessness to Centrelink if they became homeless after they had applied for or were reviewed for income support. Of those who became homeless after applying or being reviewed for income support, 75 study participants (60%) reported that they did disclose their homelessness.

Comparing disclosure at the time of application with disclosure after applying for income support reveals that there is a slightly higher percentage of study participants (8%) disclosing their situation during application than the period after application, indicating that study participants are less likely to disclose their homelessness during periods of non-significant contact with Centrelink, with possibly less opportunity to report their situation during 'over the counter' contact.

#### *Personal Factors Affecting Ability to Work*

Of the total sample of 135 study participants, 99 (71%) reported personal factors and or a medical condition affecting their ability to work at the time they applied for or were reviewed for income support. Table 5 below identifies the most commonly reported factors affecting ability to seek and participate in employment. It should be noted that many participants reported experiencing multiple conditions. Drug dependency and depression were the most commonly reported factors affecting ability to seek and participate in employment. Further, it is likely that the number experiencing drug dependency is higher, with some study participants possibly disclosing this as 'other medical condition'. Amongst those who reported personal factors, 68 study participants (50%) reported disclosing this to Centrelink at the time they applied, or were reviewed, for income support.

**Table 5. Personal factors reported by study participants affecting ability to work**

Personal Factors	Number*	%
Drug Dependency	41	41
Depression/Anxiety	41	41
Family Breakdown	16	16
Transport	7	7
Other Medical Condition	39	39
Limited knowledge of English Language	4	4
Other	13	13

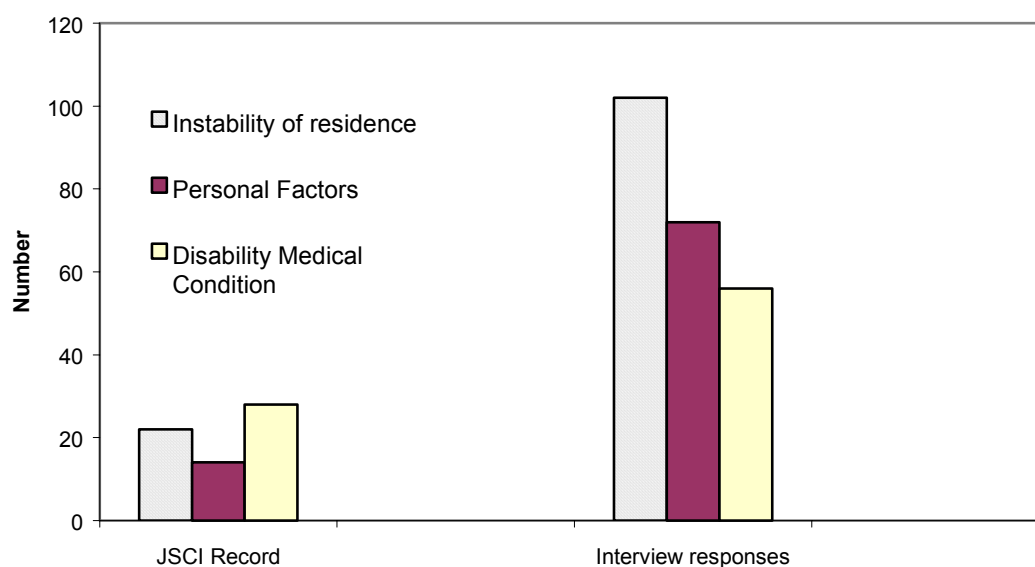
Source: Interview responses n= 99

\*Multiple responses

#### 4.1.4 Comparison of Employment Barriers

Study participants' JSCI records were examined for the presence of a "yes" score for *instability of residence*, *personal factors*, and *disability and medical conditions* for each participant of the sub-sample who had an active JSCI file (n=102). The same factors were then compared with interview responses from study participants. Figure 9 below provides a comparison between observed JSCI factors on Centrelink customers personal file and those reported during interviews.

**Figure 9. Comparison of factors affecting study participants ability to work shown on Centrelink file and disclosed during study interview period for those with an active JSCI**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record and Interview responses

\* Multiple responses from a total sample of 102 participants

\*\* 2 participants did not want to say

+ Personal factors include disability and medical condition

+ +Disability/ medical condition included drug dependency, depression and other medical conditions



As shown in Figure 9, for those with an active JSCI score (N=102):

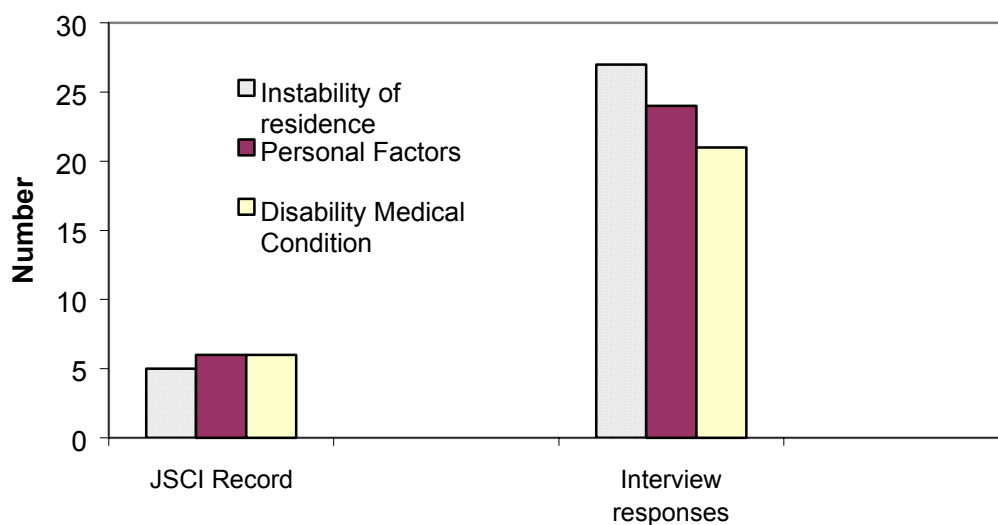
- 22 per cent of Centrelink files recorded instability of residence;
- 14 per cent of Centrelink files recorded personal factors; and
- 27 per cent of Centrelink files recorded disability and/or medical condition.

This compares to the study interviews for the same sub-group:

- 100 per cent being in unstable accommodation (being defined as such due to homeless service access);
- 71 per cent disclosing personal factors; and
- 55 per cent disclosing disability and/or medical condition.

Given that the JSCI is a point in time measure, a selection of study participants with an active JSCI file who had a length of stay or use of homeless service for two months or more (n=27) according to arrival and departure dates were also analysed. This is based on the assumption that if the JSCI was effectively capturing all those experiencing homelessness and housing crisis, it would be expected that the longer duration of homelessness or episode within a homeless service, the more complete the JSCI would be. Figure 10 provides a comparison of JSCI factors and interview responses for those who have been utilising a homeless service for two months or longer.

**Figure 10. Comparison of factors affecting study participants ability to work shown on Centrelink file and disclosed during study interview period for those with an active JSCI staying or using homeless service for 2 months or longer**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record and interview responses

\*Multiple responses from n=27

+ Personal factors include disability and medical condition

+ +Disability/ medical condition included drug dependency, depression and other medical conditions

As shown in Figure 10, a similar pattern is evident for this sub sample compared to the total sample with an active JSCI file. Specifically, for those with an active JSCI score who had a length of homeless service use for over two months (n= 27):

- 19 per cent of Centrelink files recorded instability of residence;
- 22 per cent of Centrelink files recorded personal factors; and
- 22 per cent of Centrelink files recorded disability.

This compares to the study interviews for the same sub-group:

- 100 per cent being in unstable accommodation (*being defined as such due to homeless service access*);
- 89 per cent disclosing personal factors during study interviews; and
- 78 per cent disclosing disability/ and or medical condition.

This matched comparison indicates that the process for classification through the *Looking for Work* questions is not accurately capturing homelessness and other personal factors affecting ability to seek and participate in employment. There is clearly substantial under reporting of homelessness and relevant personal factors on the customers JSCI file. The emerging reasons contributing to this disparity are discussed further in the following section.

#### Box 6: Case Study, David

David is 23 years old and is currently living in Morwell, recently moving from Melbourne. He has an educational attainment of less than year 10. Prior to accessing the current SAAP service he was residing in another short-term crisis service. He reported moving 8 times during the past two years and his Centrelink record shows 11 address changes. David accessed the participating SAAP service on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 and stayed until the 5<sup>th</sup> of September.

David was registered as unemployed in May 1999 and his Newstart commencement date was the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2001. His current Centrelink activity is Jobsearch from February 2001 and has a JSCI score of 39 last updated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August. He was previously on the Community Support Programme up until February 2001, lasting six months before his activity returned to Jobsearch.

David reported during the study interview that he had hepatitis C and a heroin addiction as factors affecting his ability to seek and participate in employment. Whilst David's JSCI was updated during the period in which he was residing in crisis accommodation, it does not record "yes" for instability of residence nor does it identify disability medical condition or addiction or other personal factors requiring JSCI Supplementary Assessment.

David has been breached eight times, all of which have been revoked. The main reasons for breaches included moving to an area of reduced unemployment, not attending interviews with Job Network providers and not attending compulsory work for the dole interview.

Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).

## 4.2 Reasons for Incomplete JSCI and Suggestions for Improvement

The findings from the data matching of the JSCI record and the study interview responses suggest that the JSCI process is not accurately capturing homelessness and other employment barriers for a proportion of the homeless population. The reason for incomplete assessment of employment barriers through the JSCI is complex and interacting. Findings from the study suggest that the incompleteness of the JSCI for the study participants is a consequence of instrument design, process of engagement, and willingness of Centrelink customers to disclose personal circumstances.

According to study participants interviewed the main reasons for not disclosing both homelessness and other personal factors to Centrelink were consistent, and include the following in order of priority (See Appendix 4, Table 17-19 for breakdown in percentages):

- did not think there was any benefit or relevance of disclosing homelessness or personal factors to Centrelink to the reason for applying for income support;
- fear that rent assistance will be cut off without an address or payments would be reduced;
- did not feel comfortable and or was embarrassed about situation; and
- Centrelink do not care or listen about your housing situation or personal issues.

These themes, together with findings from the workshops and client focus groups will be further discussed in detail in the sections below.

### 4.2.1 JSCI Design

The JSCI has one question on the *Looking for Work Form* to determine homelessness. The current wording for question 34 on homelessness is as follows:

***Are you homeless or living in insecure, temporary or emergency accommodation?***

*This could include hostel, refuge or shelter accommodation, moving every few months, staying with friends or short stays in caravan parks.*

One of the key issues emerging during preliminary consultations and supported during study workshops, was that the JSCI is unlikely to accurately capture homelessness for many, as it is a point in time measure. This single question 34 does not capture patterns of transience or temporal dimensions of homelessness.

The review of the JSCI undertaken for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) identified a number of limitations in the wording and administration of this question and the JSCI is currently in the process of being modified.

Service experience has shown that transience or itinerancy, which results in repeated periods of literal homelessness or multiple moves of accommodation is a more extreme level of disadvantage and exclusion compared to a one off loss of housing. Such transience is often characterised by loss of self-esteem, coping or living skills, chaotic lifestyles, and poor physical and mental health.

A further concern emerging from Centrelink staff feedback and review of study participant files is the lack of consistency between the JSCI Sprite record and other personal information on the customers Centrelink file. As the JSCI is considered a stand-alone streaming tool that is bound by privacy constraints, the onus is on the customer to disclose or re-disclose their circumstances to Centrelink.

*We may know about a customer's background, but unless that is disclosed we cannot add it to the JSCI because of privacy reasons. The questions are optional and customer doesn't have to answer them if they don't want to [Centrelink staff member].*

*The JSCI is an historical tool that is linear – its needs to be able to direct people toward the appropriate level of assistance and needs to be recorded more than at one point in time [Centrelink staff member].*

The timing of disclosure of homelessness and personal circumstances also appears to be a factor in the completeness of the JSCI record. Whilst the JSCI guidelines outline that the JSCI should be updated at a new claim or review interviews, and during any change of circumstances, there is evidence to suggest that this is not occurring in some instances when the person presents to Centrelink in crisis or informally discloses circumstances. There was evidence within Centrelink file notes that some study participants had disclosed homelessness and or were referred to welfare services, however their JSCI record was not updated according to their circumstance. It appears that Centrelink do not have the resource capacity to update the JSCI with sufficient frequency to reflect homeless job seekers actual circumstances.

A number of indicators for homelessness were also identified on the study participant files including frequent address changes, returned mail, duplicate fortnightly forms, and accommodation type including no fixed address. Workshop participants supported the suggestion that additional “triggers” or “special needs flags” should be linked to customer Centrelink files and the JSCI to identify those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

As previously mentioned in section 4.1.2, the extent of incapacity amongst the study sample is also likely to impact the accuracy of the JSCI and the regularity in which the JSCI can be updated to enable referral into appropriate levels of assistance including the Community Support Programme. However, a JSCI Supplementary Assessment should still be undertaken by Centrelink, particularly in the event where incapacity emerges whilst the customer is participating in the Community Support Programme, to determine the most appropriate employment assistance for the Centrelink customer. This study is not able to conclude whether participants are able to fulfil ongoing mutual obligation in the long term as a result of incapacity or the reasons for incapacity as this was beyond the scope of this study. The recycling into and out of incapacity indicates a clear limitation in the JSCI in identifying the existence of personal factors and medical conditions that may be more appropriately addressed within the Community Support Programme.

## 4.2.2 Process of Engagement

### *Interview Structure*

The way in which the JSCI is administered within Centrelink during customer interviews was also a concern emerging from the workshop consultations. Centrelink personnel reported that “time” constraints and structure of the new claimant and review interviews to be major factors preventing them from being able to effectively elicit full information from high needs customers. Participants in the workshops expressed the need for longer interview times to enable more complete disclosure of circumstances.

*Centrelink don't have the flexibility and time to spend and cater for many with a multitude of issues. If Centrelink is going to provide this brokerage service into the Job Network you can't do that in 20 mins and decide where this person should be referred. You need to look at the broader picture [Centrelink staff member].*

There was also a perception from consultations that the administration of the JSCI via a computer screen interview process restricts disclosure of personal circumstances as much of the Centrelink Customer Service Officer attention is focused on the computer screen. This format was also believed to contribute to the paraphrasing of questions rather than reading them out in entirety.

A further disincentive to disclosure emerging from the workshops and focus groups was the issue of privacy, with some participants perceiving that personal information disclosed to Centrelink is not confidential. This was particularly believed to be a concern for customers in regional Centrelink Customer Service Centres, where customers are more likely to personally know Centrelink staff members.

*Everything is put on the computer and is not confidential. They say that everything you say is confidential but its not – if you know someone who works there they can look up your file [Study participant].*

## 4.2.3 Staff Attitudes Towards Homelessness

From the perspective of study participants, the “user friendliness” or the process of engagement of Centrelink was generally seen to depend on individual Centrelink Officers and varied across Centrelink Customer Service Centres.

*It's really who you know at Centrelink – if you know the person they will go out of their way to help you [Study participant].*

*It depends where you are and who the person is – there is half a dozen that might be alright and another half that if you see them when you are waiting in line you let someone go before you [Study participant].*

A major theme also emerging from study participant feedback is that many felt uncomfortable disclosing their personal circumstances to Centrelink because they felt “judged” for their predicament and that Centrelink are not there to listen to their concerns. Associated with this perception, the most frequently reported suggestion from study participants (42%) was the need for staff training to increase awareness and understanding of homelessness and to be more sensitive to those in a crisis situation. The language used by participants included “change staff attitudes”; “staff talk down to clients”; “staff need to be able to communicate better”; “be more approachable”; “treat clients with respect”; “treating like a person”; “training about patience and tolerance”; “better listening skills”; and “stop discriminating against clients”.

*It would be helpful if people felt they were more freely able to be honest about difficult circumstances and not feel ashamed as though they were some kind of burden to the system or feeling as though there was no place for them in it [Study participant].*

*Need more supportive environment to be able to speak better and not feel so disadvantaged [Study participant].*

*They don't have time to listen to problems and don't care to hear them [Study participant].*

*More compassion and understanding from Centrelink workers – more genuine interest. There needs to be more assistance from people who actually take an interest and are concerned for your wellbeing and future [Study participant].*

Such feelings could possibly serve to reinforce the perceived power differential between the Centrelink customer and Centrelink Customer Service Officer, inhibiting more complete disclosure of personal circumstances. This cannot be considered in isolation from the perceptions of Centrelink's primary role as an assessor and regulator for income support, which is discussed in section 4.2.5.

#### 4.2.4 Strengthening Relationships between SAAP and Centrelink

Based on the recognition of a shared client group, preliminary discussions, workshop consultations and study participant responses supported the need for strengthened relationships between the SAAP, Centrelink and the Job Network in order to enhance employment assistance outcomes for those experiencing homelessness. One of SAAP's key functions is to assess client needs and make appropriate referrals to mainstream services, however, the SAAP data informs us that only 22% were assessed as in need of employment or training assistance during 1999 - 2000. Although indicative, this data suggests a low level of priority in addressing income support and employment assistance issues for SAAP clients.

Whilst the brief duration of support for many clients acts to focus assistance on immediate and more urgent needs, service experience suggests that many SAAP workers may not have accepted employment as a possible goal for their client group. A narrow focus on presenting needs can mean that a substantial number of clients do not receive a holistic response from SAAP including proactive advocacy with Centrelink employment and training programs.

While relationships have been established informally between SAAP and Centrelink Customer Service Centres and individual staff members, consultations revealed that there was limited understanding within the SAAP service system about Centrelink's role in streaming for employment assistance, and an understanding about mutual obligation and the breaching process. In Victoria, for example, there is no module in the SAAP training calendar on employment assistance, income support and Centrelink roles. Concurrently, knowledge on homelessness and the homeless service system amongst Centrelink Customer Service Officers also appears to be limited.

*More work needs to occur in identifying clients within the homeless service system in making sure clients are adequately assessed and not at risk of being breached during periods of housing crisis [Study participant]*

Study participants also reported that "communication" should be improved between different services

*...provide an integrated system at Centrelink offices that offers information services aimed at and intertwined with achieving positive outcomes for peoples' situations and associated with other service providers that can assist with showing the way forward [Study participant].*

*If referred by homeless service you should not have any address hassles [Study participant].*

*Need to correspond with homeless agencies more often so as to provide more thorough assistance [Study participant].*

*Centrelink should be more involved with crisis accommodation centres and welfare services [Study participant].*

The Homebound Program, through the National Homelessness Strategy currently being piloted in collaboration with FaCS and Centrelink is facilitating a two way sharing of information between the SAAP service system and Centrelink. The placement of Centrelink Community Officers within homeless services has also contributed to more effective engagement of those experiencing homelessness with Centrelink. However, there are limited resources (33 CCOs nationally) to outreach across key SAAP services at present. A review of the CCO role and customer focus has been undertaken and is expected to result in greater priority on high needs customers who are homeless.

#### 4.2.5 Centrelink's Dual Role

A further major theme emerging from the consultations both within the workshops and from study participants relates to understanding Centrelink's role in assessing for income support and employment assistance. This dual role does not appear to be well understood by study participants or within the broader SAAP service system. Specifically, many of the SAAP providers attending the workshops were not fully aware of the JSCI and its function.

Combining application for income support and classification of potential employment barriers in the same interview context was considered a significant disincentive to full disclosure of circumstances.

*The JSCI is conducted at the same time the customer applies for income support, which is their main priority and understanding of why they are there [Centrelink staff member].*

*Centrelink need to change their profile that they are not just about income support but also a link into employment assistance and make it more clear why the information is being collected [Housing worker].*

*You don't really get a chance to say too much to them at all because everything is done on paper. They sit you down and say that this is an activity agreement and you have to say yes no yes no and then you have to sign and that's it and if you don't do anything that is in that agreement you get breached [Study participant].*

This limitation was further validated by study participant responses in both interviews and focus groups. Overall, study participants viewed Centrelink's role as the provider of income support and that was considered the primary reason for the interaction. The high number of interview responses from participants indicating that they "did not think it was relevant" or "that Centrelink couldn't do anything" to assist with housing or other personal factors, suggests that participants do not understand the reasons why they should be disclosing information about their housing circumstances and other personal factors and the implications this has for the level of assistance they may obtain.

*Centrelink's role is to provide payments and advice about payments and places like Salvation Army Plus and Drake and that provide employment. So now Centrelink's role is, well, they are just there to police whether you go to interviews etc. Their role is nothing to do with housing nothing to do with social work or anything like that... its purely about payments and whether you deserve it [Study participant].*

*Wasn't the issue about why I was signing up for Newstart and the person I was speaking to was an office worker not a social worker and therefore I didn't feel comfortable revealing personal information, except for my homeless situation to her [Study participant].*

*Housing situation – not really they can't help you any way. That is not the reason why we are going there for [Study participant].*

### *Loss of Payments*

Linked to the Centrelink's dual role of determining eligibility for income support and streaming employment assistance is the fear that fully disclosing employment barriers including homelessness and other personal factors will serve to further disadvantage their circumstances. This was found to be a major systemic disincentive to full disclosure, acknowledged by both workshop and study participants. The main area of concern related to the loss of Rent Assistance if moving out of the private rental market. However, a number of study participants also perceived that disclosing other personal factors would also have some monetary implication for them.



*You just give them the address because that is really all they want - they don't want the details. If you haven't got an address they can't pay you [Study participant].*

*That's why I think a lot of people lie to the dole office because they are just asking the wrong questions, they would rather lie to them then tell the actual truth and still get that payment rather then get cut off for not telling the reason [Study participant].*

*I left work because of addiction, depression, and unstable home environment and knew that Centrelink would not pay income because of leaving work so I didn't tell them [Study participant].*

The loss of Rent Assistance was also considered a disincentive for SAAP and Centrelink being able to work collaboratively in ensuring that those experiencing homelessness have been accurately classified through the JSCI and receiving appropriate employment assistance. SAAP workers raised the concern that if SAAP worked too closely with Centrelink during crisis stages of intervention this could inhibit disclosure about their income and housing status to the SAAP worker.

There was agreement amongst the majority of workshop participants that the risk of losing Rent Assistance if homelessness is disclosed needs to be removed as the following quote demonstrates....

*....need a grace period for rent assistance for those who are homeless - stabilise person whilst in crisis phase and then work with Centrelink in the medium term in ensuring that the client has the right classification for their circumstances [SAAP staff member].*

### **4.3 Summary Discussion**

Comparisons between interview and Centrelink data show that the assessment process is not accurately capturing employment barriers for a proportion of the homeless population. The interviews found that in addition to experiencing homelessness, many study participants had multiple barriers preventing them from being able to actively seek and participate in ongoing and sustained employment assistance. Analysis of participant JSCI records show significant under reporting of relevant factors, resulting in lower assessment scores and non-referral for secondary classification.

The personal factors identified included chronic conditions such drug dependency, depression and anxiety. Participants with such personal factors were more likely to be exempted from mutual obligation because of an incapacity, rather than actively being assessed and referred to the Community Support Programme. The high number of those who have had multiple referrals to Intensive Assistance suggests that many of the participants are not "job ready".

Reviewing the reasons for under reporting of homelessness and other personal factors suggest that there are significant barriers both perceived and systemic. The findings relating to both disclosure of homelessness and other personal factors to Centrelink, indicate that the completeness of JSCI score is not just an issue of disclosing circumstances to Centrelink,

but also the regularity in which the JSCI is updated to reflect changing circumstances for high needs customers and the extent to which the JSCI is able to interface with existing Centrelink records. The latter can provide a number of indicators or 'triggers' that a Centrelink customer is experiencing homelessness and other difficulties impacting on their ability to meet mutual obligation requirements and job readiness.

Enhancing the JSCI streaming process needs to involve an integrated strategy that focuses not only on design of the instrument's questions, but the application through improved engagement of those who are experiencing homelessness. A range of suggestions was proposed throughout the consultations in terms of further improvements, including the following:

- redesign the wording of JSCI to identify homelessness more accurately;
- improve JSCI application and engagement process, including more regular review of high needs customers and expansion of the Centrelink Community Officer program;
- identify additional triggers for homelessness and employment barriers;
- strengthen relationships between SAAP and Centrelink, including increased training; and
- consider the systemic constraints linked to Centrelink's dual role as an assessor for both income support and employment assistance.

## 5. Implications of Incomplete Assessment

The implications of incomplete assessment include the personal costs to individual job seekers and additional administrative and operational costs placed on the broader employment assistance and community sector resulting from poorer employment outcomes and long-term unemployment. For those experiencing homelessness, implications include the following:

- inappropriate referral to Job Network providers according to recorded level of employment barriers;
- not receiving exemption and additional support for homelessness, and being required to fulfil mutual obligation requirements in a period of instability;
- increase in the likelihood of being penalised for non-participation;
- increased dependence on Centrelink and employment assistance programs over time; and
- increased use of broader community welfare resources.

This study focused specifically on the personal costs of incomplete assessment by examining the presence of penalties for non-participation in activity and administration requirements or “breaching” amongst study participants. Further investigation is required to determine the organisational impact of incomplete assessment for Centrelink, the Job Network and the broader community sector for those with multiple barriers to employment, including homelessness.

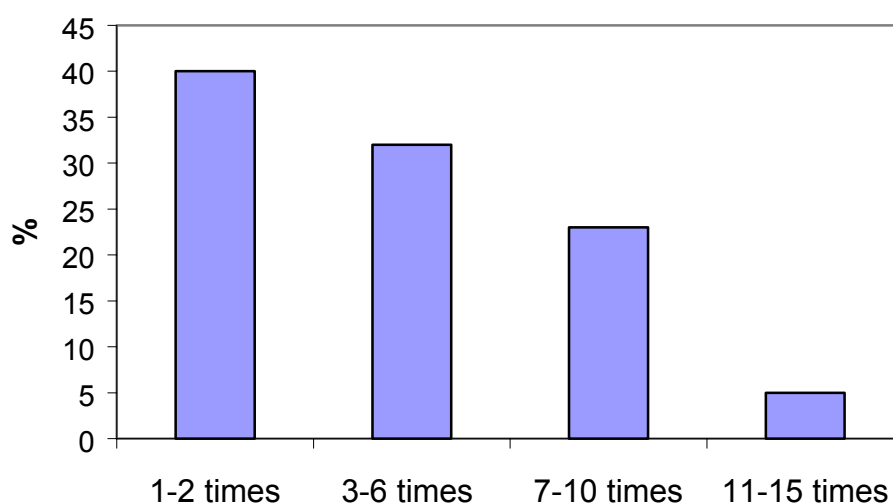
### 5.1 Penalties Imposed for Non-participation

Since the introduction of activity testing, with associated penalties for non-compliance, a growing body of research and evidence has emerged on the prevalence and impact of imposing such penalties or ‘breaches’ on disadvantaged job seekers (Hanover Welfare Services, 2000; ACOSS, 2001). This research has analysed the data on breaching for this study sample to determine the extent of breaching and its association with incomplete assessment of employment barriers and in essence, capacity to fulfil mutual obligation requirements.

#### 5.1.1 Number of Breaches

A review of “breach” details on study participants’ Centrelink customer files revealed that 76 per cent of participants had at least one breach recorded. Cross matching activity type with breach dates indicates that breaches for the study participants generally occurred during periods of being on Jobsearch and or Intensive Assistance. Figure 11 below illustrates the number of breaches recorded for the total sample. As shown, over a third (40%) had been breached between one and two times, just under a third (32%) had been breached between three and six times, and a further quarter of participants (28%) had been breach seven times or more. According to interview responses, the majority of study participants (52%) reported experiencing homelessness at the time of the breach.

**Figure 11. Number of Breaches**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record

#### Box 7: Case Study, Carol

Carroll is 27 years old and has been unemployed for the past 2 years. She has an educational attainment of less than year 10. Carol was last residing at a friend's house before accessing a SAAP crisis service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October. She had moved house approximately 12 times in the past two years. Her Centrelink record shows 11 address changes during the same period.

Carol's Newstart commenced on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1999. Her JSCI score is currently 28 and was last updated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2001. However, her current Centrelink activity is Jobsearch. She has been on Jobsearch since the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2000. Carol has been breached five times in the past year, and currently has a rate reduction of 24% until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2002. The Centrelink reasons for the breaches were not attending Job Network member interview and not complying with terms of their activity agreement. Carol reported in the study interviews that she was experiencing homelessness at the time of the breach. She has been referred to Intensive Assistance on one occasion in the past, which lasted four months.

She identified during the study interviews that she had a drug dependency affecting her ability to seek and participate in ongoing employment; she maintained that she had told Centrelink about this, but her JSCI does not record "yes" for a medical condition, other personal factors or instability of residence. Carroll also maintained that she has disclosed her homelessness to a Centrelink Customer Service Officer.

Carroll reported that when she was asked to provide an address and when she explained she was homeless, the worker stated she needed to provide an address otherwise her payments would cease. Carroll suggested to the researcher "...in crisis situations you should be able to see someone immediately instead of having to wait days later for an appointment."

Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).

## 5.1.2 Breaches Resulting in Penalties

The penalties imposed for failing to meet mutual obligation requirements are shown in Table 6.

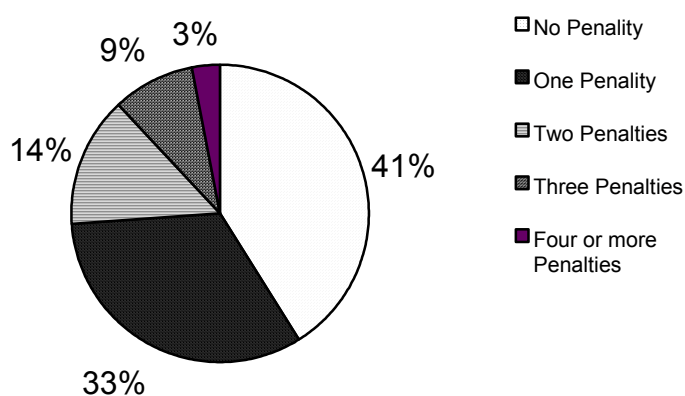
**Table 6. Centrelink penalties imposed**

Penalty type	Rate Reduction
<b>Activity Test</b>	
First breach	18% reduction for 26 weeks
Second breach	24% reduction for 26 weeks
Third breach	8 weeks no payment
<b>Administrative</b>	
All breaches	16% reduction for 13 weeks

Source: Centrelink Information, a guide to services and payments

The number of breaches resulting in a reduction of rates is illustrated in Figure 12. As shown, 41 per cent of participant breaches imposed had been waived or revoked and did not result in an ongoing reduction in payment. The remaining 59 per cent of participants had one or more penalties imposed, with 33 per cent resulting in one penalty, 14 per cent two penalties and 9 per cent three penalties. A further three per cent of participants had four or more penalties imposed.

**Figure 12. Record of number of breaches resulting in a penalty**



Source: Study participant Centrelink record

### Box 8: Case Study, Hannah

Hannah is 22 years old and was born in Somalia. She has an educational attainment of less than year ten and her Centrelink record identifies her as a Refugee in 1995. Before accessing the participating SAAP service she was residing in another short-term crisis service and had moved approximately five times in the past two years. Hannah arrived at the participating SAAP service on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August and was still “a current client” on the study cut off date of 10<sup>th</sup> of October. She reported in the study interviews that she was last living in independent and stable housing in February 2001.

Hannah has been registered as unemployed with Centrelink since October 1996 and her Newstart Allowance commenced again on June 2001. When the Centrelink file was received in October 2001, her current Centrelink activity was Jobsearch, which had been so since February 2000. However, her JSCI was last updated on August 2001 and she was assigned a score of 44 (her previous score was also 44, which was updated on June 2001). Because of her high JSCI score, Hannah’s record show that a JSCI Supplementary Assessment is “required”, however does not indicate whether this has occurred during the two and 1/2 months elapsed from the JSCI being updated and the time of file retrieval. There were no notes indicating referral to occupational psychologist or social worker (shown on Document List (DL) Screen).

Hannah has been referred to Intensive Assistance on three separate occasions, with two referrals lasting one day (March 1999 and May 1999) and the third occurring over a nine-month period (June 1999 to February 2000). Hannah did not report any personal factors affecting her ability to work during the study interviews. Her JSCI records poor English literacy, poor speaking, reading and writing, however, there is no record of referral to Adult Migrant Education on her Centrelink file. While Hannah’s Centrelink record identifies that she was paying lodgings within a homeless service at the time of application, her JSCI does not record instability of residence.

Hannah has been breached on seven occasions, and her record shows she has had 100% non-payment period from the beginning of April to the end of May this year. The main reasons for her breaches were not attending interviews with job Network providers, failing to attend compulsory work for the dole interview, not complying with terms of an activity agreement, and failing to attend a Centrelink agency office interview.

In providing a reason for breaches in the study interviews, Hannah maintained, she “...did not receive the letters”. Her Centrelink file showed six requests for a “Duplicate SUI9JN” (fortnightly Centrelink form) over the past four months, indicating that her normal mail was not reaching her on several occasions at her current address. Her record also shows that correspondence had been returned to Centrelink on one occasion.

Source: Study participant personal Centrelink record is the main source of case study material unless stated otherwise (i.e. reported during study interviews).

Overall, while 67 per cent of total breaches (or 41% of participants) had been revoked or waived following review and/or reasonable excuse from a study participant for failing to meet an administration or activity requirement, study participants reported that the onus often appeared to be on themselves or someone on their behalf to appeal or question the breach.

Amongst those who had been breached, 50 per cent reported in the interviews that they appealed the breach. This usually meant going to their local Centrelink Customer Service Centre to question a reduction in payment rather than a formalised appeal process. Of those who questioned their breach, 29 (57%) reported that they were successful in having a breach revoked.

However, many reported that they were living on reduced payments until such a decision was made as to whether the full rate reduction period would be imposed.

*[The appeal] was successful and was back paid but I went without money for 5 ½ weeks with no form of income [Study Participant]*

*I spoke to someone over the counter and benefits were reinstated on the spot – a letter was sent to the wrong address [Study Participant]*

*Appealed through help from the Salvation Army and money was paid back [Study Participant]*

*Went to see a social worker and had payment reinstated [Study Participant]*

The high number of breaches being revoked or waived following a review of study participant circumstances supports the need for more complete assessment of those experiencing homelessness and questions their capacity to fulfil mutual obligation requirements in the first instance. It also questions the appropriateness of Centrelink procedures for imposing penalties following a breach. In the context of these findings it may be argued that homeless job seekers are particularly vulnerable to being further penalised as a result of breaching policies, compounding the difficulties experienced and creating additional hardship, which can lead to more entrenched dependence.

### 5.1.3 Centrelink Reasons for Breaches

From a total of 419 recorded breaches, 259 (62%) were a result of not attending agency interviews, seminars or information sessions with Centrelink or the Job Network, or Work for the Dole interviews. The activity breach of “not attending interview with a Job Network Member” accounted for a total of 103 or 25 per cent of all breaches recorded on Centrelink records. Given that some individuals had been breached on multiple occasions for this reason, the actual number translates to 44 individuals or 33 per cent of study participants.

Other commonly identified activity breaches included “failing to attend Work for Dole interview” (8%) and “failed to declare earnings from employment” (7%). The main recorded administration breaches included “failing to attend an information session” (8%), “failing to attend agency office interview” (6%), and “failing to reply to letters from the agency” (6%). The main recorded reasons for breaches appearing on study participants’ Centrelink files are detailed in Appendix 4 in Table 19. It should be noted that some individuals have been breached for the same reason on more than one occasion.

A major concern raised during the stakeholder consultations was the contradiction between current housing and breaching policies for those experiencing homelessness. Specifically, if a homeless person is eligible for priority Public Housing, and subsequently accepts an offer in a region of higher unemployment they are at risk of being penalised by Centrelink (26 weeks with reduced income support) for moving to a location with lower unemployment.

#### 5.1.4 Current Initiatives

There was a strong view amongst workshop participants that an early intervention approach should be utilised to identify customers who are both homeless and experiencing multiple employment barriers before breaches are imposed. A range of initiatives with an early intervention focus are currently being piloted within some Centrelink Customers Service Centres including:

- customer records reviewed by Centrelink Job Network Liaison Officers before breaches are imposed;
- personalised phone contact from social workers to Centrelink customers;
- Centrelink policy that third breaches be referred to social workers; and
- interviews with prospective Job Network providers arranged during the Centrelink interview for the Centrelink Customer.

These trials are an encouraging move forward in reducing the impact of breaching and the associated administration costs of revoking and waiving penalties for those with legitimate reasons for non-participation.

## 5.2 Summary Discussion

The extent and reasons for breaches, as one implication of incomplete assessment, has been examined in this study. A review of participant Centrelink files indicated that the majority of participants had experienced at least one breach and this was during periods of either being on Jobsearch or Intensive Assistance. The records also show that over half of those breaches were revoked or waived following review of circumstances, generally at the instigation of the customer.

Recent research undertaken by ACOSS found that during the period from 1998 to 2000-01, the number of breaches imposed increased by 189 per cent. ACOSS also found that there was a significant rise in higher rate of penalties attached, which was believed to coincide with the introduction of more stringent activity test requirements through the "Preparing for Work Agreement". The report identified that homeless job seekers were amongst those who are particularly vulnerable to breaching, with significant increases in penalties being imposed through Job Network providers and from the introduction of Centrelink automatic referral systems for Jobsearch training and work for the dole (ACOSS, 2001:2-3).

The high level of breaching for this sample is clearly associated with their personal circumstances, including transience and homelessness. Within this context, there are two key issues leading to breaching. Firstly, incomplete assessment of personal factors and homelessness results in a lower JSCI score and inappropriate referral to employment assistance.



If it is the case that many in this customer group are not job ready, such referrals will be setting them up for failure and poor outcomes. Secondly, personal factors and the extent of homelessness inhibit timely and effective communications between Centrelink, Job Network and their customers. Therefore it is not surprising that a significant percentage of breaches relate to poor communication.

The introduction of individual case review procedures prior to the imposition of penalties is one step to ensure that homeless job seekers are not penalised due to their chaotic circumstances. Current initiatives within Centrelink in reducing the impact of breaching on those who are particularly marginalised within the labour market are encouraging, however, this must be matched with improvements to the initial classification process if real gains are to be made in minimising the personal, administrative and service costs resulting from breaching.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research was initiated to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of one key element in the provision of employment assistance to homeless job seekers. The main focus was to assess the effectiveness of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI), administered by Centrelink, in identifying both homelessness and personal factors that enable homeless job seekers to access employment assistance appropriate to their barriers and needs. The overall goal of the study is to inform SAAP, Centrelink and relevant government departments on ways to develop more integrated and effective support for homeless job seekers and hence improve outcomes for this client group.

The research has focussed on homeless job seekers on Newstart aged 21 years or older. The primary data collection examined whether the assessment procedures undertaken by Centrelink (new claimant and review interviews) obtained complete and accurate information on job seeker circumstances, including barriers to employment. An innovative methodology based on Freedom of Information requests, compared Centrelink customer file data with research interview responses for a sample of 135 Newstart recipients experiencing homelessness.

The sampling frame utilised five homeless services across Victoria, including inner metropolitan, suburban and regional locations. The researchers have concluded through a comparison of the sample's demographics with the SAAP client data for Victoria/Australia that the study participants may be considered representative of the broader population of Newstart homeless services users. The research design has relied on self-report from study participants and stakeholders, with the associated limitations of this acknowledged by the researchers. However, the use of a triangulated methodology, combining an interview survey, data file analysis, stakeholder and focus group consultations provide some validation and confidence in the research findings.

The key finding from our research is that the current procedures for conducting the JSCI are failing to record homelessness as well as relevant personal factors for many homeless Newstart recipients. The case-by-case comparison of research interview responses against Centrelink customer data file information revealed a substantial disparity for the JSCI factors of 'instability of residence (homelessness)', 'disability, medical condition or addiction' and 'other personal factors'.

Study participants were generally characterised as having a history of unstable accommodation and transience, low educational attainment, and one or more personal factors, including drug dependency, depression and anxiety. Homeless job seekers are likely to have low self-esteem, to lack confidence and do not appreciate the relevance of personal issues to obtaining income support.

***We conclude that the current interview procedures are failing to engage this group of disadvantaged job seekers in a way that will facilitate full disclosure of all relevant circumstances to making an informed assessment of their 'job readiness' and capacity to participate in employment assistance programs.***

## 6.1 Reasons for Incomplete Assessment

The reasons for the incompleteness of the JSCI are complex. Current interview procedures rely on job seekers to openly disclose personal and sensitive issues. The process assumes that job seekers are empowered and confident in their interactions with Centrelink. Both the participant interviews and service provider consultations show that this is clearly not the case.

The incompleteness of the JSCI records was found to not simply be a consequence of study participants unwillingness or lack of cooperation with Centrelink. Rather, incomplete assessment was due to the way in which information is sought from those who are homeless and the systemic constraints associated with Centrelink's dual functions as assessor of income support entitlements and of employment assistance (including mutual obligation activities).

The merger of the DSS and CES has resulted in a single gateway for assessment and payment of income support benefits and for employment assistance. This has resulted in a service system designed to meet the needs of 70-80 per cent of customers who can reasonably be expected to negotiate their way through the processes that are increasingly technology reliant, for example the initial telephone contact procedures and use of computers as an integral part of new claimant and review interviews.

The increased level of transactions undertaken by Centrelink can be argued to have led to the implementation of procedures by Centrelink Customer Service Officers that are inflexible and contrary to a truly customer focused service. The use of designated interview times with set durations based on a 'standard' customer may be cited to exemplify the current situation. Thus disadvantaged job seekers in housing crisis and who have underlying personal issues are not effectively engaged by a system primarily designed for high volume business.

In this respect, the JSCI itself, operationalised through the Looking for Work questionnaire using the Sprite software, is only one element of the assessment process. The evidence from our consultations with both service providers and homeless job seekers indicates the following weaknesses in the current procedures:

- confusion about the dual roles for Centrelink (and hence the relevance of personal factors);
- confusion between the roles of Centrelink, Job Network and CSP;
- fear of reductions in payments, particularly Rent Assistance;
- lack of privacy in conducting interviews at Centrelink open plan service centres;
- limited time to engage customers and fully explore circumstances;
- lack of skills and confidence of CCSO's in engaging homeless customers;

- inconsistency in attitudes of some CCSO's towards homeless customers;
- insufficient frequency of review of circumstances and barriers in JSCI; and
- lack of integration of existing personal Centrelink customer information with the JSCI

The analysis of Centrelink participant file data found that in many cases individual files do document information that would inform an assessment of homelessness, medical conditions and personal crises over time. This includes capturing transience through reasonably complete reporting of changes of address and accommodation type, use of duplicate fortnightly forms, and reasons for incapacity. However, this knowledge is not being utilised to update the JSCI.

A partial explanation for this discrepancy is that the express permission of the customer is a legislated requirement for documenting specific information in the JSCI. It is imperative that a solution be found whereby all relevant information provided to Centrelink can be utilised to ensure that the JSCI is complete and that homeless customers are not further disadvantaged because of the lack of interfacing of relevant data.

The issue of Rent Assistance as barrier to non-disclosure of homelessness also warrants specific attention if the JSCI is to be more effective in identifying homelessness. If a job seeker in receipt of Rent Assistance becomes homeless and subsequently gains a bed in a crisis accommodation service for example, s/he will be invariably considered ineligible for Rent Assistance. Consultations indicated such job seekers might not disclose their homelessness and/or change of address to Centrelink to avoid a reduction in Rent Assistance. As a result, their entitlement to higher levels of employment assistance and communications with Centrelink can be adversely affected. The latter may also result in a breach for not meeting mutual obligation requirements.

## **6.2 Consequences of Incomplete Assessment**

The evidence shows that in most cases the assessment of homelessness and personal factors is incomplete. The analysis of JSCI scores indicated that 80 per cent of the sample was assessed as eligible for Intensive Assistance. This might seem to be a reasonable proportion of homeless Newstart recipients. However, the extent of discrepancy in homelessness and personal factors shows that complete assessment would have resulted in substantially higher JSCI scores and referral for JSCI Supplementary Assessment by an occupational psychologist or social worker. A significant 10 per cent of the sample had JSCI scores below 24 points and were eligible for Jobsearch assistance only. Complete documentation of their barriers would have led to eligibility for Intensive Assistance in many cases.

Moreover, whilst the majority of participants had an allocated score higher than 24, a significant proportion of the study participants' (43%) current Centrelink activity was Jobsearch. The automatic projection to Jobsearch (despite a high JSCI score) following the completion or cessation of a higher level of assistance or incapacity matched with infrequent updating of the JSCI may account for this discrepancy.

The analysis of the sample's history of involvement with employment assistance over long periods, characterised by cycling between Intensive Assistance, Jobsearch, the CSP and medical incapacity, is evidence of poor outcomes. Specifically, nearly three-quarters of participants had been incapacitated with an average of three times per participant.

The most frequently reported causes of their incapacity were drug dependency and psychological/psychiatric conditions. The extent of repeated incapacity over extended periods suggests the existence of long-term conditions and calls into question the appropriateness of current assistance that 'recycles' this group between ineffective forms of assistance that often result in breaching for not meeting mutual obligation requirements.

The evidence from this research suggests that consideration be given to a new category of exemption from mutual obligation and Jobsearch activities for those Newstart recipients assessed as having long-term or 'chronic' conditions that need to be resolved prior to full participation in mainstream employment programs.

The high level of breaching experienced by this sample and subsequent revoking of penalties adds weight to an argument that complete initial assessment of barriers and personal factors would have resulted in more appropriate forms of assistance, possibly exemption from mutual obligation and ultimately more effective outcomes. Over three-quarters of participants had been breached at least once, and over half were homeless at the time of their non-compliance with activity test or administrative requirements. This evidence suggests a much higher level of breaching of homeless job seekers than previously reported. Recent community based research indicates substantial additional burden is being placed on welfare services through demand from marginalised job seekers subject to breach penalties (for example Salvation Army, 2001).

The need for closer collaboration between Centrelink and the relevant departments responsible for homeless services to implement integrated policies that assist disadvantaged job seekers is critical. One clear example of two government policies in opposition to each other to the detriment of homeless job seekers is the public housing and breaching policies, whereby a homeless person can be breached for accepting an offer of public housing in an area of lower employment. It may be argued that stable housing is a prerequisite for 'job readiness' and active participation in employment assistance programs.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

In the context of welfare reform initiatives that assert the importance of active participation in a range employment assistance programs and mutual obligation activities, it is critical that complete and accurate assessment of all relevant circumstances and barriers to employment for job seekers is made. The broadening of scope of the Personal Support Programme and the shift toward compulsory participation also adds to the critical importance of accurate and complete assessment.

Whilst this study has not investigated employment assistance outcomes, the evidence for this sample of homeless job seekers indicates that incomplete assessment of individual circumstances is resulting in poor outcomes. On the basis of the findings of extensive cycling between Intensive Assistance, Jobsearch, the Community Support Programme and medical incapacity, high levels of breaching and subsequent revoking of breach penalties, the researchers are confident that a cost benefit analysis of assistance to this customer population would reflect poorly on current procedures.

A range of initiatives is currently underway to improve assistance to marginalised job seekers, particularly with respect to breaching. This research has identified several key areas for further improvement, which would lead to better long-term outcomes for homeless job seekers. In accordance with the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been developed:

1. An inter-departmental Working Group be convened with participation from relevant representatives with responsibility for employment policy, housing support and homelessness within FaCS, DEWR, and Centrelink. SAAP representation should also be sought via the Working Group. The role of the Working Group should be to develop detailed strategies for the trial and implementation of the recommendations of this study and to oversight additional investigation of the effectiveness and responsiveness of employment assistance for job seekers experiencing homelessness.
2. A targeted evaluation of the long-term outcomes for homeless job seekers using the range of employment assistance programs.
3. An investigation be conducted into the circumstances and outcomes for homeless job seekers with histories of medical incapacity, as a basis for introducing appropriate criteria for exemption from mutual obligation and for improving employment assistance. This should include examination of the nature of medical incapacity and its impact for ongoing engagement and participation in forms of employment assistance, in particular the new Personal Support Programme.
4. DEWR revise the JSCI to include two questions on homelessness, which identify both current experience and past episodes of homelessness in order to capture its temporal dimension. Centrelink customers answering 'yes' to both questions should be given a higher JSCI weighting in recognition of the 'chronic' nature of their homelessness.
5. DEWR and Centrelink investigate ways to improve the interface between the JSCI database and Centrelink mainframe customer file records to enable effective exchange of data that ensures the accuracy of JSCI scores.
6. Centrelink and DEWR develop and implement 'triggers' for marginalisation, including homelessness, which will automatically flag JSCI Supplementary Assessment interviews by social workers or occupational psychologists. Appropriate triggers might include:
  - address history that shows four or more changes of address in a one year period;
  - two or more requests for 'duplicate SU19JN' fortnightly forms within a three month period;
  - multiple periods of incapacity via the medical screen; and
  - identifiable emergency housing or temporary accommodation addresses.
7. The current exemption from mutual obligation for 'major personal crisis' to be explicitly expanded to include homelessness. An operational definition of homelessness to determine eligibility for such exemption would need to be developed through consultations between relevant Departments including FaCS Housing.

8. A solution be developed for the current disincentive for homeless job seekers to disclose their homelessness due to loss of Rent Assistance if they have lost private rental housing. Possible solutions might include:
  - an interim extension of Rent Assistance, or equivalent homeless allowance, for job seekers in defined categories of homelessness for a period of four weeks, with appropriate referral to local SAAP services; and
  - exemption from repayment of Rent Assistance already paid for their period of homelessness if subsequent disclosure occurs.
9. Centrelink expand appointment times allotted for review interviews conducted by CCSO's with marginalised job seekers with high JSCI scores.
10. Centrelink and DEWR introduce procedures to assist and enforce the updating of Centrelink customers' JSCI record, not only during registration and review interviews, but also during any change of job seeker circumstance, particularly after cessation or completion of employment assistance programs and during extended periods of incapacity.
11. In recognition of the expanding role for Centrelink in streaming and referral of job seekers to the range of assistance programs, including the Job Network, Personal Support Programme and Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots, the capacity and skills of CSO's be enhanced to enable better engagement of customers with complex needs.
12. The Centrelink Community Officer program be significantly expanded to enable effective coverage across homeless services as key sites conducive to better engagement with homeless job seekers as a means to improve disclosure of personal factors and to resolve individual problems.
13. Consideration be given to implementing a mandatory review of job seeker circumstance prior to imposition of first penalty for non-compliance with mutual obligation requirements for those with a high JSCI score, especially over 33 points. A flexible review process should be undertaken that involves active engagement of the Centrelink customer by the local Centrelink Social Worker, including personalised follow up phone contact and extended appointment times.
14. The proposed inter-departmental Working Group conduct a review of the application of the breach applied to customers who move to regions of higher unemployment with current state housing policies for priority allocation of public housing, and where contradictions act against the interests of homeless job seekers, a procedure for exemption is implemented.
15. SAAP and Centrelink collaborate to develop a resource package for SAAP services to increase their knowledge of Centrelink, employment assistance programs, assessment procedures and mutual obligation requirements as a basis for more informed advocacy on behalf of homeless clients. The resource package should include a checklist of significant employment assistance and income support issues as a basis for SAAP engagement with Centrelink. Consultation with AFHO should be undertaken in the development of the resource package to include key elements of the NHS funded AFHO project examining breach prevention amongst young people.

16. SAAP in collaboration with Centrelink introduce into state training programs for SAAP service workers a module, or develop alternative strategies for improving their knowledge of Centrelink and employment assistance programs.
17. Following a review of the NHS Homebound initiative, the inter-departmental Working Group consider continuation of Homebound and/or additional strategies for strengthening relationships between SAAP, Centrelink and the Job Network.
18. FaCS and Centrelink take into consideration the findings of this study in finalising the procedures for assessment and entry of income support recipients into the Personal Support Programme and Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots.



# Appendices

## Appendix One: Bibliography

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## Appendix Two: Interview Schedule

### Research Consent & Information Request Form

I have read the project background and understand that my personal Centrelink customer information will be matched with my responses to the survey undertaken with my case worker on the terms and conditions that the information only be handled by Hanover's research staff and remains confidential. I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the background statement handed out to me.

I understand that the release of my personal Centrelink customer information will not affect my entitlement for income support or to support from the homeless agency I have been seeking assistance from. The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details if information about this project is published or presented in any public form.

I ..... authorise Hanover Welfare Services as an agent on my behalf to obtain my personal Centrelink customer information for the purposes of the Homeless and Income Support Research Project.

I authorise for my personal information to be to addressed care of Hanover Welfare Services. I understand that Hanover will make a copy of my personal Centrelink customer information to use for the research project and will shred the information (cut up finely in a machine so your name can not be identified) after the project has been completed.

Hanover will forward an original copy of my personal Centrelink information to me if I agree to have the information sent to an address that I nominate.

Would you like Hanover to send your Centrelink information to you? Yes  No

**Please note: It is important that you nominate an address that you will be moving onto or a permanent address of somebody you know and trust**

If yes, please provide address: .....  
.....

Participant's Name (printed).....

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name (printed).....

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name (printed).....

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: All parties signing the Request form must date their own signature*

## Interview Survey

This survey is to be completed with your worker once you have signed the consent form and Centrelink request form and are clear about your involvement. This survey will remain completely confidential. Please fill in the blank spaces and tick the boxes where provided. You can stop participating in the survey whenever you choose.

### SECTION 1: CLIENT BACKGROUND DETAILS

First we are going to collect some background details....

**Client First Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Surname** \_\_\_\_\_

**What name does Centrelink know you as?** (If same as above write "As Above")

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

**Have you had any other names in the past, i.e. unmarried name?** (If same as above write "As Above").

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you male**  **female**

**Date of Birth** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**Country of Birth** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cultural Identity** (i.e. ATSI) \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you Single**  **De facto**  **Married**  **Divorced/separated**

**Centrelink Reference Number** (i.e. Healthcare Card Number/CRN): \_\_\_\_\_

**Which Centrelink Customer Office do you mainly use?** \_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION 2: HOUSING STATUS

In this section we are going to talk about your housing situation....

1. **Name of SAAP/THM service** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **What was your last address before using this service?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. What type of accommodation were you last living in before using this service?**

- |                        |                          |                            |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Private Rental         | <input type="checkbox"/> | SAAP medium/long term      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public Housing         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Institution/ prison        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Owner- Occupied        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Car/tent/park/street/squat | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SAAP/crisis short term | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other _____                |                          |

**4. How many times have you had to move house in the past two years?**

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**5. When were you last living in independent and or stable housing (i.e. independent and stable being defined as paying rent in private rental, public housing or owner occupied)?**

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**6. Did you or somebody on your behalf let Centrelink know when you last changed your address? Yes  No**

6a. *If no, can you please say why?*

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**SECTION 3: INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT**

Now we are going to talk about the income and employment assistance you have received from Centrelink....

**7. How long have you been unemployed? \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/ months/ years**

**8. When did you *last* apply for income support from Centrelink (Social Security)?**

---

**9. Were you homeless or experiencing housing crisis at the time you applied or were reviewed for income support from Centrelink? (i.e. homeless being defined as not living in independent/stable accommodation – sleeping out, staying with friends, boarding house, hotel, caravan park, crisis/transitional housing)**

Yes  No

(If no, go to Q.10)

9a. *If yes, did you tell a Centrelink customer officer that you were homeless?*  
Yes  No

9b. *If no, can you please say why you didn't tell anyone at Centrelink that you were homeless?*

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10. **If you became homeless after you applied for or were reviewed for income support, did you tell or did somebody on your behalf tell a Centrelink customer officer about your situation? (i.e. not living in independent or stable accommodation).**

Yes  No

10a. *If no, can you please say why?* \_\_\_\_\_

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11. **Were there any other personal issues affecting your ability to work when you applied or were reviewed for income support from Centrelink? (i.e. medical condition – disability, depression, addiction etc).**

Yes

No

Don't want to say

*Please describe*

---

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11a. *If yes, did you tell Centrelink at the time?* Yes  No

11b. *If you had some issues but didn't tell Centrelink, can you please say why?*

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**12. Have you been referred to a Job Network provider by your Centrelink Officer?**

Yes  No

12a. *If yes, what assistance did you receive?* \_\_\_\_\_

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12b. *How many times have you been referred by Centrelink to a Job Network provider?*

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12c. *Was the assistance provided by the Job Network provider relevant to your needs?*

Yes  No

*Please describe* \_\_\_\_\_

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**13. Have you been referred to the Community Support Programme (CSP) by Centrelink?**

Yes  No   
*(If no, go to question 14)*

13a. *If yes, did you actively participate?* Yes  No

13b. *If you actively participated in the CSP, did it meet your needs?*

*Please describe* \_\_\_\_\_

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13c. *If you didn't participate in the CSP can you say why?* \_\_\_\_\_

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**14. Did you or are you currently receiving any other “special assistance” from Centrelink apart from your Newstart allowance to help you with your situation?** (i.e. referral to Centrelink social worker/occupational psychologist, receiving weekly payments instead of fortnightly, Centrepay – taking out your rent before you get your payment)

Yes  No

14a. If yes, please describe? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**15. Have you been breached by Centrelink?** (ie Centrelink deciding to reduce your payment because you haven't met an activity test/mutual obligation)

Yes  No   
(If no, go to Q.16)

15a. If yes, what was the reason given by Centrelink for the breach? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15b. How many times have you been breached? \_\_\_\_\_

15c. Were your Centrelink payments reduced? Yes  No

15d. Were you homeless or experiencing housing crisis at the time of the breach? Yes  No

15e. Did you appeal the breach? Yes  No

If yes, what was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**SECTION 4: GENERAL COMMENTS**

Moving onto the last section .....

- 16. Do you have any ideas of how Centrelink and other support services could be improved so that you are able to get the income and employment assistance you need?**

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- 17. Do you have any general comments about income and employment assistance?**

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*Thanks for your time*

# Appendix Three: Focus Group Interview Schedule

## Homelessness and Income Support Research Focus Group Interview Schedule

### Questions

1. **How long have you been using this service?**

*Prompt*

- Is this your first time?

2. **What assistance did you require when you first arrived?**

*Prompt*

- Any other assistance apart from housing?

3. **Is finding employment an issue for you at the moment?**

*Prompt*

- How long have you been on Newstart?

4. **Have you asked any of the support workers here about your employment or training needs?**

*Prompt*

- If not, why?

5. **What do you think Centrelink's role is?**

*Prompt*

- What do you understand Centrelink's role to be in providing employment assistance?

6. **What are your thoughts on Centrelink?**

*Prompt*

- What do you find most helpful?
- How do you feel when you're at a Centrelink Office?
- Do you have any concerns?

7. **Have you ever missed any appointments with Centrelink or a Job Network Provider?**

**Prompt**

- If yes, what were the reasons?
- Did you understand the consequences for not attending?

**8. Are there any personal issues that you would not tell Centrelink?**

**Prompts**

- Not living in stable accommodation
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Depression/Anxiety
- Family breakdown
- Prior conviction

**9. What would be the main reasons for not telling Centrelink?**

**Prompt**

- Loss of rent assistance
- Not aware benefit/relevance
- Not comfortable/embarrassed

**10. If you knew that telling Centrelink about being homeless or living in insecure, temporary, or emergency accommodation would not affect your payments would you tell them?**

**Prompt**

- What about talking about other personal issues affecting ability to work

**11. If you knew that telling Centrelink about these issues could help you get additional employment assistance would you tell them?**

**12. Are you currently receiving any employment assistance at the moment?**

**Prompt**

- By a job network provider – what type of assistance
- Participating in the Community Support Programme

## Appendix Four: Summary Tables

Table 1. Key characteristics of study participants by participating service

Participant Characteristics	Hanover Southbank		Housing		Loddon Mallee Housing		Quantum CGASS		SCAAB		Total Number	Percentage %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Gender</b>												
Male	36	75	16	76	32	82	17	81	4	67	105	78
Female	12	25	5	24	7	18	4	19	2	33	30	22
<b>Mean Age (Yrs)</b>												
Male	30		32		31		25		30		30	
Female	30		32		29		35		25		30	
All	30		32		31		27		28		30**	
<b>Age Category</b>												
21 – 24 yrs	13	29	5	24	8	20	9	43	3	49.5	38	28
25 -29 yrs	17	35	5	24	12	31	5	24	1	17.5	41	31
30 – 34 yrs	6	14	4	19	7	18	5	24	0	0	22	16
35 – 39yrs	3	7	1	5	6	15	1	5	1	17.5	12	9
40 – 44 yrs	6	12	4	19	3	8	1	5	1	17.5	15	11
45 – 49 yrs	2	4	2	9	2	5	0	0	0	0	4	3
50 – 60yrs	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	2
<b>Marital Status</b>												
Single	41	85	14	67	23	59	17	81	5	83	100	75
Divorced/Separated	7	15	4	19	8	20.5	2	9.5	1	17	22	16
Married	0	0	1	5	6	15.5	0	0	0	0	7	5
Defacto	0	0	2	9	2	5	2	9.5	0	0	6	4
<b>Country of birth</b>												
Australia	37	77	18	86	32	84	17	81	0	0	104	77
English	5	10	1	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	7	5
New Zealand	3	6	0	0	0	0	3	14	0	0	5	4
Vietnam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	84	4	4
Somalia	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	17	2	2
Other	1	2	2	9	5	13	1	5	0	0	13	8
<b>Cultural Identity*</b>												
Australian	41	85	17	81	32	83	16	76	0	0	106	79
ASTI	1	2	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	4	3
Other	6	13	3	14	6	17	3	14	6	100	24	18

\*Missing values = 7

\*\* Average age

**Table 2. Age comparison of study sample and Victorian Newstart population**

<b>Age Category</b>	<b>Study Sample</b>	<b>Victorian SAAP Newstart</b>
	%	%
Under 21 years	-	4
21 – 24 yrs	28	27
25 -29 yrs	31	24
30 – 34 yrs	16	16
35 – 39yrs	9	11
40 – 44 yrs	11	7
45 – 49 yrs	3	5
50 – 60yrs	2	3

Source: Interview responses and NDCA SAAP Data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Table 3. SAAP support periods for clients receiving Newstart allowance: age by gender, Victoria, support beginning between 1 January 2001 - 30 June 2001(%)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>
Under 21 years	8.0	3.6	5.2	200
21 - 24 years	26.4	29.0	28.1	1,200
25 - 29 years	24.1	23.8	23.9	1,050
30 - 34 years	17.1	15.3	15.9	700
35 - 39 years	10.2	12.2	11.5	500
40 - 44 years	6.7	7.9	7.4	300
45 - 49 years	3.4	4.8	4.3	200
50 - 60 years	4.1	3.4	3.7	150
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	-
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>	-
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>1,550</b>	<b>2,800</b>	-	<b>4,350</b>

Source: NDCA SAAP Data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Table 4. SAAP support periods for clients receiving Newstart allowance: age by gender, Australia, support beginning between 1 January 2001 - 30 June 2001(%)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>
Under 21 years	6.6	2.9	4.0	800
21 - 24 years	21.3	17.3	18.4	3,900
25 - 29 years	19.5	19.8	19.7	4,200
30 - 34 years	20.2	18.8	19.2	4,100
35 - 39 years	14.4	15.6	15.3	3,200
40 - 44 years	10.7	14.0	13.0	2,800
45 - 49 years	3.8	5.4	5.0	1,100
50 - 60 years	3.4	6.2	5.4	1,100
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	-
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>71.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	-
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>6,000</b>	<b>15,200</b>	-	<b>21,200</b>

Source: NDCA SAAP Data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Table 5 .SAAP support periods for clients receiving Newstart allowance:  
cultural background by target group, Victoria, support beginning between 1  
January 2001 - 30 June 2001(%)**

Cultural background	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping domestic violence	Cross target/ multiple / general	Total (%)	Total (N)
Australia, Indigenous	3.2	1.9	3.8	6.2	8.8	3.7	4.0	150
Australia, non-Indigenous	82.1	83.9	74.1	68.1	67.9	85.0	81.4	3,500
Oceania and Antarctica (excluding Australia)	1.5	2.3	5.9	4.4	2.8	2.0	2.3	100.0
UK, Ireland and associated islands	1.3	3.1	2.3	-	1.4	1.2	1.4	50.0
Other Europe and the Former USSR	4.7	2.9	5.9	3.1	6.6	2.8	3.7	150
The Middle East and North Africa	0.8	2.5	1.2	3.1	3.5	1.5	1.7	50.0
Southeast Asia	3.9	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.4	0.8	2.0	100.0
Northeast Asia	0.4	0	-	-	1.3	0.2	0.3	0
Southern Asia	0.4	0.6	1.2	0.5	1.0	0.5	0.5	0
Northern America	0.2	-	-	-	0.7	0.2	0.2	0
South and Central America and Caribbean	-	-	2.3	1.6	0.3	0.9	0.6	50.0
Africa (excluding North Africa)	1.5	0.4	1.1	10.5	3.4	1.2	1.9	100.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	-
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>50.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>	-
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>2,200</b>	-	<b>4,300</b>

Source: NDCA SAAP Data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Table 6. SAAP support periods for clients receiving Newstart allowance:  
cultural background by target group, Australia, support beginning between 1  
January 2001 - 30 June 2001(%)**

Cultural background	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping domestic violence	Cross target/multiple /general	Total (%)	Total (N)
Australia, Indigenous	11.9	10.5	29.2	14.0	49.1	34.1	26.2	5,500
Australia, non-Indigenous	75.9	75.7	55.9	67.0	40.1	59.7	63.9	13,500
Oceania and Antarctica (excluding Australia)	2.2	4.3	3.6	3.9	2.5	1.8	2.7	600
UK, Ireland and associated islands	1.0	3.7	1.7	1.8	1.3	1.3	2.0	400
Other Europe and the Former USSR	2.9	2.2	4.2	2.1	2.3	1.3	1.9	400
The Middle East and North Africa	0.6	0.9	1.2	2.8	0.8	0.4	0.7	100.0
Southeast Asia	3.4	1.1	1.3	1.9	1.6	0.4	1.0	200
Northeast Asia	0.2	0.1	-	-	0.5	0.1	0.1	0
Southern Asia	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3	100.0
Northern America	0.2	0.2	-	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0
South and Central America and Caribbean	0.1	0.2	1.6	0.9	0.2	0.2	0.3	100.0
Africa (excluding North Africa)	1.2	0.6	0.9	5.4	1.1	0.4	0.7	200
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	-
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>	-
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>6,300</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>10,000</b>	-	<b>21,200</b>

Source: NDCA SAAP Data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Table 7. Accommodation type immediately before using service**

Accommodation Type	Hanover Southbank		Hanover Housing		Loddon Mallee Housing		Quantum CGASS		SCAAB		Total Number	Percent age %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Private Rental	4	8	6	29	20	51	7	35	1	16.5	38	29
Car/tent/park/street/squat	17	35	1	5	4	10	2	10	0	0	24	19
Staying with Friends	8	17	3	14	2	5	1	5	3	49.5	17	13
SAAP/Crisis	7	15	4	19	0	0	2	10	0	0	10	10
Living with parents/other family members	3	6	0	0	2	7	3	15	0	0	8	8
Institution/Prison	1	2	2	9.5	0	0	0	0	1	16.5	4	3
Caravan Park	0	0	1	5	4	10	0	0	0	0	4	3
Public Housing	0	0	0	0	2	5	2	10	0	0	2	1.5
Owner-Occupied	0	0	1	0	2	5	1	5	0	0	2	1.5
Boarding house	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	16.5	2	1.5
Hotel	6	12.5	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	6.5
Other	2	4	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	5	4
<b>Total</b>											<b>129</b>	

\* Missing values = 6 Source Interview Responses

**Table 8. SAAP support periods for clients receiving Newstart allowance: type of housing before support by type of housing after support, Victoria, support beginning between 1 January 2001 - 30 June 2001(%)**

Type of housing before support	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total (%)	Total (N)
A: SAAP emergency and long-term housing	33.8	10.1	9.2	7.5	10.5	7.7	9.4	11.9	3.4	29.7	17.3	14.2	200
B: Non-SAAP emergency housing	0.5	14.2	1.0	0.9	0.9	1.1	-	-	2.0	-	-	1.0	0
C: Living rent-free in house or flat	10.9	16.9	61.5	9.2	8.7	3.4	1.9	-	1.7	5.2	-	11.3	150
D: Private rental	5.9	5.3	7.4	57.2	5.9	2.9	8.4	-	-	-	7.8	15.2	250
E: Public or Community housing	3.7	-	2.0	2.1	47.2	0.5	0.7	-	-	-	-	5.6	100.0
F: Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	7.7	14.1	5.8	8.3	4.6	44.2	5.1	-	1.7	8.2	5.1	12.7	200
G: Boarding in a private home	12.9	17.9	1.8	6.3	13.7	9.6	66.2	-	-	12.4	15.0	16.8	250
H: Own home	1.6	-	-	0.8	-	0.5	0.6	82.4	-	-	-	1.8	50.0
I: Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	19.3	14.3	6.4	6.0	6.7	25.6	4.3	5.7	89.1	19.9	10.4	16.3	250
J: Institutional	2.5	-	4.9	0.8	0.9	3.0	2.3	-	2.0	24.6	6.3	3.0	50.0
K: Other	1.4	7.1	-	0.9	0.9	1.5	1.2	-	-	-	38.1	2.3	50.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>-</i>
<b>Total (percent)</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,550</b>

Source: NDCA SAAP Data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

**Table 9. Number of Reported Moves compared with Centrelink Addresses in the past two years from August 1999 – October 2001**

Reported Moves	Centrelink Addresses	
	N	%
1-2	15	11
3-5	51	38
6-10	43	32
11-14	11	8
15+	15	11

Source: Interview responses and study participant Centrelink files



**Table 10. Length of Unemployment by Participating Service**

	Hanover Southbank		Hanover Housing		Loddon Mallee Housing		Quantum CGASS		SCAAB		Total Number	Percentage %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>2 wks	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<month	1	2	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
1-3 months	2	4	1	5	2	5	0	0	0	0	5	4
>3-6months	4	8.5	2	9	5	13	1	5	1	16.6	13	10
>6-9months	3	6	0	0	3	8	1	5	1	16.6	8	6
>9-12 months	4	8.5	1	5	5	13	3	14	0	0	13	10
>12-18months	2	4	3	14	2	5	4	19	1	16.6	12	8
>18-24 months	7	15	2	9	2	5	3	14	1	16.6	15	11
>24-36 months	10	21	5	24	3	8	5	24	0	0	23	17
>36-48 months	3	6	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	16.6	6	4
>48-60 months	2	4	1	5	3	7	0	0	1	16.6	7	5
>60 months	10	21	3	14	14	36	3	14	0	0	30	22

Total

Source: Interview Responses

**Table 11. Last living in independent and stable accommodation**

Length of time	Number	%
Same day	1	1
< week	4	3
< month	2	2
1 –3 months	12	9
> 3 – 6 months	9	7
>6 – 9 months	17	13
> 9 –12 months	10	8
> 12 –18 months	16	12
> 18 – 24 months	13	10
> 24 – 36 months	19	14
> 36 – 48 months	11	8
> 48 – 60 months	5	4
60 months +	8	6
Never	3	2
At risk of homelessness	1	1

Source: Interview responses

Missing values 4

**Table 12. Education Attainment by Service Type**

	Hanover Southbank		Hanover Housing		Loddon Mallee Housing		Quantum CGASS		SCAAB		Total Number	Percentage %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Special School Attendance	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	17	2	1
Less than Year 10	16	34	1	5.5	12	27.5	8	38	0	0	37	28
Year 10 Completed	13	28	4	21	11	31	5	23.5	2	33	35	27
Year 11 Completed	5	11	5	26	6	17	3	14	1	17	20	15
Secondary Schooling	7	15	6	31	5	14	2	10	2	33	22	17
Trade/TAFE Qual	3	6	2	11	3	8	1	5	0	0	9	7
Associate Diploma	1	2	1	5.5	0	0	1	5	0	0	3	2.5
Degree	2	4	0	0	1	3.5	0	0	0	0	3	2.5
											131	

Missing Values = 2

Source: Study participant Centrelink files

**Table 13. Current Centrelink activity type at time of file retrieval by service type**

	Hanover Southbank		Hanover Housing		Loddon Mallee Housing		Quantum CGASS		SCAAB		Total Number	Percentage %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Jobsearch	23	48	8	40	18	47	8	38	2	33	59	43
Incapacitated	14	29	3	15	6	16	5	24	1	17	29	22
Community Support Programme	7	15	4	20	4	10	3	14	0	0	18	15
Intensive Assistance	1	2	2	10	7	19	0	0	2	33	15	13
Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service	0	0	3	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Work for the Dole	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9.5	1	17	3	2
Major Personal Crisis	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Short Course	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	0	0	0	2	1
Expectant Mother	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Claiming DSP*	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
											133	

\*DSP approved during time elapsed from interview and file retrieval

Source: Study participant Centrelink file

Missing = 2

**Table 14. Study participant Centrelink Activity over the duration of receiving Newstart**

Centrelink Activities	Participants		Number of times in activity			Length of days in activity		
	Number	%	Average	Median	Range	Average	Median	Range
Incapacitated	95	71	3	3	1-11	309	174	2 - 1950
Intensive Assistance	79	59	2	1	1-4	308	259	1 - 846
Community Support Programme	27	22	1	1	1-3	230	152	2 - 773
Major Personal Crisis	10	7.5	1	1	1			

Source: Study Participant Centrelink File  
Multiple responses

**Table 15. Comparison of factors affecting study participants ability to work shown on Centrelink file and disclosed during study interview period for those with an active JSCI**

JSCI Factors	JSCI Record for those with active file		Interviewee responses for those with active JSCI	
	Number*	%	Number	%
Instability of Residence	22	22	102	100
Personal Factors affecting ability to seek work+	14	14	72*	71
Disability/Medical Condition++	28	27	56	55

Source: Study participant interview responses and Centrelink files

\* Multiple responses from a total sample of 102 participants

\*\* 2 participants did not want to say

+ Personal factors include disability and medical condition

+ +Disability/ medical condition included drug dependency, depression and other medical conditions

**Table 16. Comparison of factors affecting study participants ability to work shown on Centrelink file and disclosed during study interview period for those with an active JSCI staying or using homeless service for 2months or longer**

JSCI Factors	JSCI Record for those with active file		Interviewee Responses for Active JSCI	
	Number	%	Number	%
Instability of Residence	5	18.5	27	100
Personal Factors affecting ability to seek work	6	22	24	89
Disability/Medical Condition+	6	22	21	78

Source: Study participant interview responses and Centrelink files  
Multiple responses from n=27

**Table 17. Reported reasons for non-disclosing homelessness at the time of application or review of income support**

Reasons for non disclosure	Number*	%
Did not think there was any benefit or relevance	10	34
Rent assistance and payments without an address	9	31
Was not aware of what is available	6	21
Too embarrassed to say	3	10
Was not asked about homelessness	2	7
They do not care about your housing situation	2	7
Other	1	3

Source: Interview responses

\*Note multiple responses, n=29

**Table 18. Reported reasons for non disclosing homelessness after applying or being reviewed for income support**

Reasons for non disclosure	Number	%
Did not think there was any benefit or relevance	22	46
Thought rent assistance and payments will be cut without an address	14	29
Was not asked about homelessness	4	8
Was not aware of what is available	3	6
Too embarrassed to say	3	6
Other	11	22

Source: Interview responses

Multiple responses, n = 49

**Table 19. Reasons for non disclosure of personal factors affecting ability to work**

Reasons for non disclosure	Number	%
Did not think that it was important or relevant to reason for applying.	8	26
Thought it would affect payments	6	19
Did not feel comfortable disclosing personal issues to Centrelink.	9	29
Centrelink do not listen and care	9	29
Other	5	16

Source: Interview responses

Multiple responses, n = 31

**Table 20. Centrelink reasons for Breach**

Reasons for Breach	Number	%
<b>Activity Breaches</b>		
Did not attend interview with JNM	103	25
Failed to contact JNM	8	2
Failed Activity Test result of JSD	7	2
Failed to attend initial MO interview	14	3
Failed to declare earning from employment	28	7
Not complying with terms of activity agreement	19	5
Failed to comply with JNM activity	1	.2
Failed to attend preparing for work agreement meeting	18	4
Delay in entering into activity agreement	16	4
Failed to return JSD for PFWA	4	1
Failed to attend comp wfd interview	32	8
Failed Activity Test	8	2
Dismissed from employment for misconduct	2	.5
Failed to attend IRM/DPR interview for PFWA	11	3
Failed to attend wfd product	6	1.5
Failed to attend for job/course interview	3	1
Voluntarily unemployed – left employment without good reason	4	1
Failed to return ECCS	5	1
Failed to attend Newstart interview	1	.3
Failed to attend on expected date	2	.5
Did not start a job/course as planned	1	.3
<b>Administration Breaches</b>		
Failed to attend MO completion interview	1	.3
Failed to attend information session	35	8
Failed to attend agency office interview	24	6
Failed to attend wfd	4	1
Failed to attend wfd seminar	4	1
Failed to reply to letters from the agency	23	6
Failed to attend 9 month review	1	.3
Failed to attend 12 week/ 9 month interview	7	2
Failed to return JSD	1	.3

Reasons for Breach	Number	%
Failed to notify change of circumstance	1	.3
Failed to attend MO seminar	2	.5
Failed to reply to MO interview request	1	.3
Entered area of reduced employment	1	.03
No reason	18	4.3

Source: Study participant Centrelink file

**Table 21. Suggested Improvements from Interview Responses**

Suggested Improvements	Number	%
Staff training to increase awareness and understanding of needs	56	42
Changes to Network providers	22	16
Increase amount of income support	20	15
Changes relating to breaching	19	14
More personalised one to one support	19	14
Education and Training	13	10
Increased access to education and training programs	13	10
Additional support to cover the costs for participating in employment and education programs	12	9
Improvements to interviews and appointments	11	8
Better assistance for those with medical conditions	9	7
Call Centres	7	6
Improve communication between Centrelink and other support services	7	6
Changes to forms	6	4
Increase awareness of what support is available to those who experience homelessness	5	4
Keeping track of changes to customer information	5	4
Increase access to social workers	4	3
Changes to facilities	4	3
More support for long term unemployed	4	3

Suggested Improvements	Number	%
Updating jobs more regularly	4	3
Accommodation Assistance	3	2
Other	19	15

Source: Interview responses

Other includes Weekly payments, Centrepay, Loans, not expecting customers to take on unreasonable work, updating jobs more regularly, more support for long term unemployed

## **Appendix Five: Workshop Attendees**

### **Morwell**

- Steven Koszwara Quantum Support Service
- Chris King, Bairnsdale Koori Women's Shelter
- Jan Garood, Centrelink Morwell
- Rosemary Langmore, Centrelink Morwell
- Peter Nicholas, Centrelink Morwell
- Debra Boyd, Centrelink Morwell
- Carmel Arber, Quantum Support Service
- Robin Sadedin, Quantum Support Service
- Kerry Huenan, Quantum Support Service

### **Bendigo**

- Mark Elliott, St Lukes Bendigo
- Rachael Skipper, Tenancy Support and Consultancy Services
- Annie Sherwood, Centrelink Bendigo
- Simon Fitzpatrick, Centrelink Bendigo
- Moyra Cradock, Centrelink Bendigo
- Elaine Seppings, Centrelink Bendigo
- Peter McLean, Loddon Mallee Housing Services
- John Murphy, Centrelink Bendigo
- Steve James, Loddon Mallee Housing Service
- Ken Marchingo, Loddon Mallee Housing Service

### **Melbourne**

- Vanessa Collins, Melbourne Youth Support
- Marian Pettit, Department Employment Work Relations Small Business
- Liz Hefren- Webb, Department of Family and Community Services
- Chris Black, Department of Family and Community Services
- Robin Bedford, Department of Family and Community Services
- Chris Redmond, Centrelink Canberra
- Fran Collison, Department of Family and Community Services
- Scott McNaughten, Department of Family and Community Services
- Louise McKenzie, Hanover Southbank
- Julie Carr, Hanover Southbank
- Patricia Magliolo, Centrelink Wantirna



- Jose Abolo, Centrelink Dandenong
- Anna Hughes, Centrelink Windsor
- Leng Liu, Centrelink Richmond, Fitzroy
- Mandy Falkingham, Hanover Women's Service
- Kym Arthur, Department of Human Services Office of Housing
- Meg Carter, Department of Family and Community Services
- Joan Fitzpatrick, Centrelink Mornington
- Lyn Moran, Centrelink

# Appendix Six: Diagram of Streaming Pathways for Homeless Job Seekers

