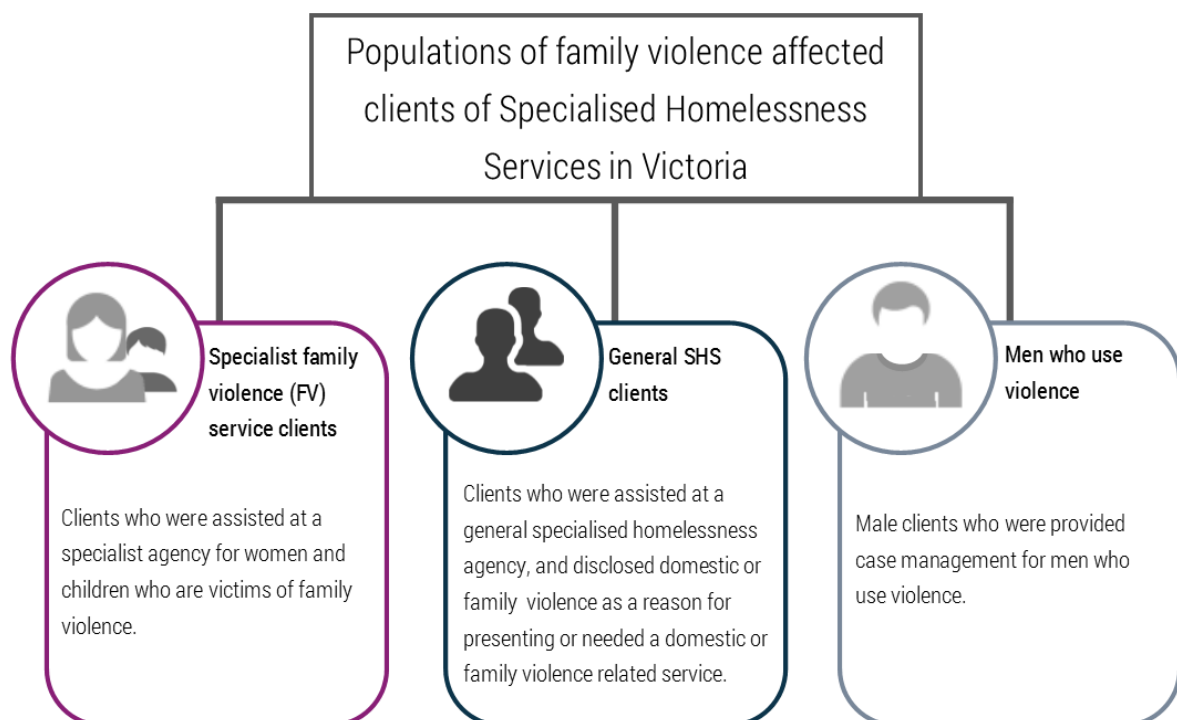# Explanatory notes – Specialist Homelessness Services

## Data source

Specialist homelessness services are services funded by the state and federal government to support people experiencing homelessness, and people who are in crisis situations or at risk of experiencing homelessness. They provide support services and help to find stable accommodation.

Data outputs pertaining to specialist homelessness services were provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) as part of Homelessness Data Collection (HDC).

The data used for analysis from this source has been collected from Victorian homelessness-funded agencies through HDC. These agencies report the same data to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC), a national collection managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The SHSC collects information about all people who are referred to or seek assistance from specialist homelessness services agencies.

The following diagram depicts the three specialist homelessness services populations examined in analysis for the FVDB.

Populations of family violence affected clients of Specialised Homelessness Services in Victoria

**Specialist family violence (FV) service clients**

Clients who were assisted at a specialist agency for women and children who are victims of family violence.

**General SHS clients**

Clients who were assisted at a general specialised homelessness agency, and disclosed domestic or family violence as a reason for presenting or needed a domestic or family violence related service.

**Men who use violence**

Male clients who were provided case management for men who use violence.

## Reference period

The data extracted from HDC covers all homelessness service periods which were active at any point in time from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023. The reference period is based on a record's date of closure (if a service period has been closed) or the last date that data was reported for that service period.

## Calculating rates per 100,000 population

The rate of clients per 100,000 population is calculated using a count of service periods by the residential Local Government Area of a client at the time of presentation, and the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) of that LGA. The rate is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Rate per 100,000} = (\text{Number of service periods}/\text{ERP count}) \times 100,000$$

ERP figures for the Local Government Areas are based on populations provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The data is extracted from the release titled Regional Population Group (3218.0).

For more information about the ABS estimated resident population, please refer to the ABS website.

ABS population data concerning the most recent financial year is not available. To calculate these numbers, the CSA uses estimates created by the Victorian Government's 'Victoria in future' report.

## Using Specialist Homelessness Services data for analysis

### Differentiating between victims and perpetrators

Specialist family violence service clients are understood to be victims of family violence, while clients with a case management for 'men who use violence' are identified as perpetrators of family violence.

Clients who make up the general specialist homelessness services population have identified that family violence is an issue relevant to their need for service, however further disaggregation cannot be made on this population to distinguish between family violence victims and perpetrators.

### Undercounts for sensitive data items

A number of variables require consent before responses are provided to the AIHW and DFFH as part of the SHSC or HDC. These variables will therefore only be counted where client consent was given, and as such numbers for these measure are likely an undercount. Variables requiring consent include:

- Is the client of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

- If the client is under the age of 18 and has a care or protection order, and/or what were their care arrangements?

- Has the client ever been diagnosed with a mental health issue by a health professional?

- What is the client's country of birth?

# Terminology and abbreviations

**Client:** A client is a person who receives a specialist homelessness service. A specialist homelessness service is assistance provided to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. A client can be of any age—children are also clients if they receive a service directly from a specialist homelessness agency.

**Families and clients:** To be a client, a person must directly receive a service and not just be a beneficiary of a service. Children can also be recorded as clients if the agency completes a needs assessment for them as an individual. This includes a service that they share with their parent or guardian, such as accommodation. Children are clients if the agency completes a needs assessment as an individual. Children who present with a parent or guardian but do not directly receive a service are not considered to be clients. This includes situations where the parent or guardian receives assistance to prevent tenancy failure or eviction.

**Periods of support:** The period of time a client receives services from an agency is referred to as a period of support. A unique client can have multiple periods of support. One period of support typically represents a single client engagement with a program. This includes but is not limited to program types such as intake, case management or refuge accommodation. Client engagement with similar program types at different agencies would be represented by a separate support period for each agency.

A period of support ends when:
- the relationship between the client and an agency ends
- the client has reached their maximum amount of support an agency can offer
- a client has not received any services from an agency for a whole calendar month and there is no ongoing relationship.

**Presenting unit head:** A person in a presenting group who is identified to represent the household in the data collection. If a person presents alone, they are the presenting unit head. If there are children under 18 in the family, the presenting unit head is general the parent or guardian representing the children, or the person with the most direct relation to any children if a parent or guardian is not present. If there are no children under 18 present, the presenting unit head could be the source/partner of another person, or related in some way to another person.