

**SUBMISSION to the Australian Bureau  
of Statistics Discussion Paper:  
*Methodological Review of Counting the  
Homeless, 2006* (the Review)**

**July 2011**

## **1. Introduction**

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### **The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)**

The MYAN is a nationally recognised policy and advocacy body that represents migrant and newly arrived young people, in order to advance their rights and interests. The MYAN is comprised of representatives from each of Australia's states and territories. These representatives are involved in multicultural youth issues at the policy or program levels in their respective states and territories.

The MYAN was established in 2005 in response to an identified need for a coordinated national advisory and advocacy network for multicultural youth issues. The issues and needs of multicultural young people are often overlooked as they are a sub-group of both the broader youth and multicultural sectors and underrepresented in the policy and advocacy work of both the government and non-government sectors.

Young people from multicultural backgrounds demonstrate high levels of strength, resilience, resourcefulness and understanding. (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007:7) However, this group of young people face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities. These barriers include language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes, racism, and discrimination. These factors can place multicultural young people at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which in turn can place them at higher risk of social isolation.

The MYAN believes that a targeted response at both the policy and service delivery levels is necessary to support their sustained participation and engagement in Australian society and believes that a national Multicultural policy framework is essential to achieving this.

## **2. About this Submission**

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The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the ABS Discussion Paper: *Methodological Review of Counting the Homeless, 2006* (the Review).

This submission draws on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. One of the MYAN's policy priorities is Housing and Homelessness.

Given the focus of the MYAN, this submission is largely concerned with ensuring that the Review recognises and responds to the needs of young people from CaLD<sup>1</sup> backgrounds experiencing homelessness.

Rather than developing a distinct response to the Review, the MYAN wishes to endorse the submissions made by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and the Victorian Council to Homeless Persons (CHP).

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<sup>1</sup> This term includes young people from migrant, refugee and newly arrived backgrounds.

In particular, the MYAN endorses CMY's position on the following areas of the Review:

1. Review of CTH boarding house methodology
2. Review of CTH SAAP methodology
3. Review of CTH 'visiting friends and relatives' methodology
  - a. Travellers
  - b. New migrants
  - c. Young people
4. Review of CTH 'improvised homes, tents and sleepers out' methodology

### **CaLD young people and homelessness**

In an Australian context, it is estimated that the risk of homelessness for young people from refugee and newly arrived young people, is up to 10 times higher than for the general population (Coventry, et.al. 2002:50). Access to safe, secure and affordable housing is central to social inclusion and the ability to settle successfully in a new country. MYAN members agree that in our practice and experience, homelessness is a widespread issue for CaLD young people (particularly those from refugee or newly arrived backgrounds) and has significant ramifications for mental health, family relationships, safety, connection to community, and engagement in education and employment.

A recent report, *Finding Home in Victoria*, developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) in Victoria explored the range of factors which make young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds more vulnerable to homelessness. These include, that:

- Many young people have already been made homeless before coming to Australia due to their refugee or refugee like experiences;
- Lack of understanding of our housing system;
- Lack of adequate income;
- Larger family sizes;
- Greater likelihood of family breakdown, and experiences of trauma in the family unit; and
- Lack of connections in the community. (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2011)

This group of young people can experience particular barriers that prevent their equitable access to adequate housing and housing support, and increase their risk of homelessness. These include:

- Limited English and unfamiliarity with Australian systems – both conceptually and practically. Most young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds have no substantive knowledge of our complex housing and broader service system (e.g. advocating for housing needs, leases, tenancy rights) as there is often no equivalent in their countries of origin. This often results in an inability to navigate the housing and homelessness service system.
- Limited resources and lack of cultural competency (e.g. in assessment and support provision) within the mainstream housing sector – i.e. in identifying risk factors for this

group of young people, assessing them as homeless and; providing culturally appropriate support to negotiate the housing and homelessness system.

- Implications of current homelessness policy and practice frameworks (that shape funding guidelines and service delivery approaches) for refugee and newly arrived young people. This includes limitations of the term 'homelessness' for accurate data collection, assessment and early intervention support programs.

In order to address some of these barriers, the MYAN believes that there is a need for:

- Consistent data sets (i.e. age and gender by country of birth, language spoken, visa type and length of stay in Australia) that better capture CaLD young people's experiences of homelessness and access to the homelessness service system.
- Research to be undertaken with a focus on the extent and nature of youth homelessness for this cohort of young people.
- The monitoring and reporting against priorities in *The Road Home* to include reporting against outcomes for this cohort of young people.
- Workforce development to build the capacity of mainstream services.
- Flexible, responsive and 'family-centred' service delivery approaches.

#### **Recommendations for other areas to review**

Consistent with those recommendations made by the Centre for Multicultural Youth in their submission to the Review, the MYAN proposes a number of other important areas that should be examined as part of the ABS methodological Review. These include:

- 1) Review the definition of homelessness.
- 2) Research into the range of rooming houses that exist, and development of research methods which recognise these as inadequate housing, which may include the development of standards for marginal housing.
- 3) Specific focus on training of census collectors to educate newly arrived communities, and young people from refugee like backgrounds the need to choose the option none when asked what is their usual address.
- 4) Scope new homelessness-related Census survey questions which may allow us to more accurately capture the true nature of homelessness in migrant and refugee communities.
- 5) Identify additional sources of data to use in conjunction with the Census, like the reconnect data systems.