# STUDY PROFILE
# Journeys Home: Tracking the most vulnerable

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## Abstract

In 2010 the Australian Government commissioned The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne to undertake "Journeys Home (JH): A Longitudinal Study of the Factors Affecting Housing Stability". The broad aim of JH was to improve the understanding of, and policy responses to, the diverse social, economic and personal factors related to homelessness and the risk of becoming homeless. Importantly, JH is one of the first longitudinal studies of homeless people that both draws it sample from a wide population and includes people who are vulnerable to homelessness. This paper provides a brief summary of the JH survey, discussing its aims, survey design, data collection process, and response outcomes over its six waves of data collection. It also highlights some of the initial research that has been published utilising the data since its release.

## Keywords

Australia, Journeys Home, longitudinal surveys, homelessness

## Introduction

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that on Census night in 2011 there were just over 105 000 people in Australia that were homeless, broadly defined (ABS, 2012). For many of these people the homelessness experience may have been brief, but for others it could have marked the beginning of a lifetime of housing instability and insecurity. Ultimately, homelessness is a dynamic process, the analysis of which requires examination of flows into and out of different housing states. This, in turn, requires longitudinal data tracking individuals over time. Unfortunately, while many countries, including Australia, are serviced by a suite of longitudinal survey data collections with national coverage, the homeless are usually under-represented if not excluded entirely. Household panel studies, for example, typically restrict their initial sample to residents of private households, while all longitudinal studies do a poor job of tracking the homeless who, almost by definition, are a group that will be difficult to maintain contract with. And in any case, the sample sizes in most longitudinal studies, while often large, are still not large enough to adequately cover such a specific and relatively small sub-population.

Previous studies of the homeless that have employed a longitudinal design have thus drawn their samples from specific locations or from relatively narrow groups of homeless individuals, such as those accessing shelters or those living on the streets (see Allgood, Moore & Warren, 1997; Culhane & Kuhn, 1998; Hwang et al., 2011; Wong & Piliavin, 1997). To our knowledge, no serious attempt had ever been made to follow a large sample of persons that could be described as representative of the homeless population at a

nation-wide level. But a study that began with a national representative sample of the homeless would still be far from ideal. This is because, as already noted, homelessness is a fluid state, and as result any sample restricted to homeless persons would provide very little additional insight (compared to a cross-section survey) about the processes associated with entry into homelessness.

It was against this background that the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) (formerly the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), in 2010, commissioned The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (at the University of Melbourne) to undertake *Journeys Home: A Longitudinal Study of the Factors Affecting Housing Stability*. The broad aim of *Journeys Home* (JH) was to improve the understanding of, and policy responses to, the diverse social, economic and personal factors related to homelessness and the risk of becoming homeless. A key feature of JH was the identification of a representative sample of individuals experiencing housing insecurity more broadly, rather than one restricted to persons identified as homeless at a specific point in time. To our knowledge, there have only been two other large-scale longitudinal studies that included both people at risk of homelessness and people currently experiencing homelessness (Hwang et al., 2011; Shinn et al., 1998), and even these were restricted to residents in particular cities.

This paper provides a brief summary of the JH survey, discussing its aims, survey design, data collection process, and response outcomes over its six waves of data collection. It also highlights some of the initial research that has been published utilising the data since its release.

Before proceeding, however, there is the matter of defining what is meant by 'homelessness'. This is an issue about which there has been considerable debate, both in Australia (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2014) and elsewhere (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi, 1999). Such debates, however, while highly relevant to how the data collected in JH are used, are not central to the collection process. Essentially, the approach used here is to identify a sample of highly disadvantaged people and then collect data from those people that will allow data users to apply their own definition of homelessness. Researchers will thus be able to define homelessness based on whether the respondent is roofless or houseless, on the degree of housing security, or on the adequacy of accommodation.

## Survey design

### Aims

As already noted, JH was originally conceived as a tool for enabling research that would improve understanding of the diverse social, economic and personal factors that are related to homelessness and housing insecurity. It was designed to assist policy makers, academics and service providers to understand the needs and experiences of vulnerable Australians in the field of housing and to assist with the provision of services to people who have living and housing challenges.

Particular research questions that JH was designed to address include:

- What characteristics are associated with people identified as homeless?
- What factors are associated with instability/stability in housing tenancy or occupancy?
- What are the protective factors, including familial and psychosocial, for staying out of homelessness?
- What are the key intervention points for preventing chronic homelessness?
- What are the triggers for any changes from being at-risk of homelessness to becoming homeless, including movement between levels of homelessness?
- What are the factors that are important in the road out of homelessness?
- What are the risk factors for persistent homelessness?

### Questionnaire content

The survey instrument in each wave was designed with a view to identifying the housing circumstances of sample members (defined below), measuring other outcomes associated with housing difficulties, and capturing information about factors that influence transitions between different housing situations. Table 1 summarises the topic areas that were included in each of the survey waves. Both retrospective and contemporaneous information about individuals' attributes and behaviour were collected in wave 1. Thereafter data was mainly collected on contemporaneous information.

The instrument covered the following broad topic areas in wave 1:

- Personal details: such as age, gender, Indigenous status, marital status, children, education, and geographic mobility.
- Employment and voluntary work: including work history, current employment status and working arrangements, job search behaviour, and use of employment services.
- Housing and living arrangements: including current housing and living standard situation, housing tenure and costs, accommodation standards, search for alternative accommodation, and housing history.
- Support services and networks: including information about family, friends, acquaintances, and the welfare services that respondents use, and the level of support respondents receive from these different sources.
- Health and wellbeing: including physical and mental health, usage of health services, substance use, life satisfaction, and expectations for the future.
- Family history while growing up: including questions on who sample members lived with and who cared for them during adolescence, the home environment, and experiences with institutional care.
- Contact with the justice system: including questions about periods spent in detention / prison, and more ongoing contact with police and the legal system.
- Exposure to violence: including physical violence, sexual violence and threats of violence while growing up, since turning 18, and in the last six months.
- Financial situation: including income sources and levels, debts, other indicators of financial stress, and gambling behaviours.

In designing the instrument, and especially the section on housing and living arrangements, primacy was given to the objective of collecting data that would not constrain researchers to using any one specific definition of homelessness. Thus data were collected on the type of accommodation and place in which people lived, the stability of those arrangements, the security of tenure, and the quality of accommodation.

An important feature of the design was the inclusion of a question seeking the consent of respondents to link their survey responses to administrative records on their receipt of government income support payments. Obtaining consent both obviates the need to have to ask any questions of respondents about such payments and provides highly accurate information about respondents' income support payments history (back to July 2002). In total, 98.3% of the responding sample agreed to their survey answers being linked to these records.

The instrument used in subsequent waves differs from the wave 1 instrument in its focus on changes in respondents' circumstances since the previous interview (which was, on average, a six-month period), and in the removal of all questions about the respondents' histories prior to the survey commencing. Included in this was an accommodation calendar designed to capture details of all housing transitions that occurred since the previous interview. Specifically, respondents were asked about the timing of all of their moves into and out of particular types of accommodation in 10-day blocks.

As highlighted in Table 1, additional content was included in wave 5 on personality, mobile phone use, diet and food security, and in wave 6 on cognitive ability, marital history, parental relationships, quality of sleep, and internet use.

## Sample design

A key challenge for a study of this kind is to identify a sample of people that is representative of a broader population of people vulnerable to homelessness. As explained in more detail in both the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (2012) and Wooden et al. (2012), the JH sample was drawn from the Research Evaluation Database (RED) developed by the Australian Government department responsible for employment. The RED, in turn, is drawn from the customer database of Centrelink, the government program that delivers income support payments to persons on low incomes or with other characteristics (e.g., disability, and caring responsibilities) targeted for financial assistance. It contains payment records, together with a range of personal details, for all Centrelink income support customers. Given that the large majority of homeless people in Australia receive Centrelink income support payments, it follows that this sampling frame provides much wider coverage of the homeless population than previous studies utilising other samples and sampling methods.

The main problem with this approach, however, is that the population in receipt of income support payments is very large (4.75 million at 27 May 2011), most of whom will not have experienced homelessness at any point in their life. Drawing a small random sample of this population would thus generate few insights into the homelessness experience. Fortunately, since 1 January 2010, Centrelink's customer database also identifies clients who have been flagged by Centrelink staff as being 'homeless' or 'at risk of homelessness'. This provided an initial target population of 42,336 persons.

Centrelink's internal homelessness awareness training material (which is not publicly available) defined a person as being 'homeless' if he or she:

> is without conventional accommodation (e.g., sleeping rough, squatting, or living in a car); or lives in, or moves frequently between, temporary accommodation arrangements (e.g., with friends or extended family, emergency accommodation, or youth refuges).

While a person who is 'at risk' of homelessness is one that:

> lives medium to long term in a boarding house, caravan park or hotel, where accommodation is not covered by a lease; lives in accommodation which falls below the general community standards which surround health and wellbeing, such as access to personal amenities, security against threat, privacy and autonomy; is facing eviction; or lives in accommodation not of an appropriate standard which may be detrimental to their physical and mental well-being, or where they have no sense of belonging or connection (e.g., Indigenous Australians living in crowded conditions or disconnected from their land, family/kin, spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices).

Note that in many definitions of homelessness (e.g., that embedded in the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion; Edgar & Meert, 2006), the group that Centrelink describes as 'at risk of homelessness' would in fact be defined as homeless.

As discussed in Scutella, Johnson, Moschion, Tseng and Wooden (2013), the flagging process is intended as a way of providing targeted service delivery for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It relies on customers who use Centrelink services to be prepared to disclose details of their personal situation to departmental staff. Most obviously, customers who both engage more frequently with Centrelink staff and are prepared to disclose details of their personal situation are more likely to be flagged. As a result, the non-flagged group will include some people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Centrelink homeless indicator is thus not appropriate by itself for enumerating the homeless population, nor was it ever intended for this purpose.

We therefore augmented the target population with a group of Centrelink customers selected using statistical techniques that identify income support recipients that have not been flagged as homeless (or at risk of homelessness) but nevertheless have characteristics similar to those that have been. More specifically, we estimated a logistic regression model predicting the probability of being flagged as homeless or at risk of homelessness, with the predictor variables drawn from the RED. We then, somewhat arbitrarily, defined as in-scope those persons whose predicted probability of being flagged was in the top two per cent of all income support recipients who were not already flagged (n=95,755). This group includes persons who should have been flagged as homeless or at risk of homelessness, as well as other persons who might be described, at least in a statistical sense, as vulnerable to homelessness. (Further details, including results of the logistic estimation procedure, are reported in Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2012.)

Cost constraints also dictated that the sample had to be clustered. Clusters were formed based on the geo-coded address and postcode information available in the RED, with clusters defined to have a 10km radius in the major cities and a 20km radius in regional centres. Further, to be eligible for inclusion, each cluster had to have at least 45 flagged persons if in a major city, or at least 65 flagged persons if in a regional centre or rural location. This resulted in 200 eligible clusters. These clusters were then further stratified into eight groups: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, other major cities, one regional centre in the Northern Territory, and all remaining locations. Within each strata, clusters were randomly selected with a probability proportional to their size, and within each selected cluster individuals randomly

selected from each of the three groups: (i) Centrelink customers flagged as 'homeless'; (ii) Centrelink customers flagged as 'at risk of homelessness'; and (iii) other Centrelink customers identified as being vulnerable to homelessness.

The initial selected sample comprised 4,913 persons distributed across 36 distinct locations or areas. Only 2,992 cases, however, were actually issued to field. Some cases were deemed out of scope after selection (e.g., because they had a Centrelink record that indicated they were not willing to participate in research studies), while many others were held in reserve in the event of poor response (which as discussed below, did not eventuate). Of the group issued to field, 273 were subsequently determined to be out of scope (because they had moved out of the designated survey interview area prior to fieldwork commencing, were away for the entire survey period, were in prison or another institution on a long-term basis, were young people living at home with their parents, or had died). This left us with an effective sample of 2719. A summary of the evolution of the sample is provided in Table 2.

## Data collection

### Survey mode

The principal mode of data collection was face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire delivered by a computer tablet console. The telephone was used in some cases where that was the sample member's preferred mode or the person had moved to a location outside the reach of the interviewer network. Just 1.6% (n=26) of completed interviews were undertaken by telephone in wave 1. In subsequent waves, however, this proportion was higher given sample member mobility. By wave 6, 18.9% of completed interviews had been undertaken by telephone.

### Fieldwork period and frequency

The fieldwork for wave 1 was conducted over a 12-week period from September to November 2011. Five further waves were conducted at roughly six-month intervals.

### Pilot testing

The survey instruments and fieldwork procedures were pilot tested and amended prior to the main survey commencing. Fieldwork for the pilot test took place over a five-week period in May 2011 and involved a sample drawn from six cluster areas: two in the Melbourne metropolitan area, two in the Sydney metropolitan area, and two in regional Victoria.

### Pre-field approach

Approximately two weeks prior to the beginning of fieldwork all selected sample members were sent a letter informing them of their selection into the study and encouraging them to participate. Accompanying this letter was a brochure that provided more information about the study, including how sample members came to be selected, the voluntary nature of participation, and details on confidentiality.

### Interviewers and interviewer support

All interviews were conducted by professional interviewers employed by Roy Morgan Research (RMR), the organisation sub-contracted to undertake the fieldwork. Interviewers and sample members were supported by a telephone support group, who staffed project-specific free-call telephone numbers. During fieldwork these numbers were staffed from 8 am to 10 pm, seven days a week.

### Making contact and tracking

The initial set of contact details for all sample members in wave 1 came from the information contained on the Centrelink customer database. Importantly, this information was updated at subsequent waves and assisted with tracking survey respondents. The administrative records typically included a home address (available for 89% of selected sample members), a postal address (94%), and a mobile number (80%). It sometimes also included a home (landline) phone number (just 12%) and a telephone number for an alternative contact (10%). The original sample file was provided by the relevant Australian Government department to RMR on 29 July 2011, with a further sample update provided just prior to fieldwork commencing and two more during fieldwork. This process was replicated in subsequent waves, with sample updates provided both prior to, and during, fieldwork.

A number of anchor points were collected from all survey participants at the conclusion of their wave 1 interview. This included details of the respondents' current and expected address, alternative phone numbers, and the contact details of friends and/or family. This information, in addition to updated contact information from the

Centrelink customer database, was used to locate sample members in subsequent waves.

In making contact with sample members, interviewers were expected to follow a set of protocols. These included:

- Approaching respondents who would be difficult to locate early in the fieldwork period (e.g., those with no fixed address, or known to move around).
- Making at least three face-to-face attempts for respondents with known addresses, with each attempt made at different times of the day and week.
- If the sample member does not appear to be 'home' at the time of approach, leaving a calling card with interviewer details in a place they were likely to find it.
- When arriving at a residence and it is found that the target respondent no longer lives there, make enquiries with current residents and neighbours about the sample members whereabouts.
- After three face-to-face attempts, or earlier if it becomes apparent that the respondent will not be found at the address provided, using other available contact details provided for the respondent. This may include a telephone or SMS to the target respondent or approaching an alternative contact.
- Collecting contact information from people who are most likely to know where the target respondent has moved to if they change address (for instance, neighbours).
- Approaching local service providers to see if they can assist.

### Incentives

All sample members were offered a $40 incentive each time they agreed to be interviewed. In the case of face-to-face interviews, the incentive was provided as cash and paid immediately after the sample member agreed to participate.

### Interview length

The intent was that the average interview would take 50 minutes in wave 1 and 40 minutes in subsequent waves. The actual average interview length in wave 1 was almost one hour (59.7 minutes), and ranged from a low of 24.6 minutes to a high of 166.8 minutes. In subsequent waves average interview lengths varied from 31.6 minutes in wave 3 to 40.3 minutes in wave 6.

### Ethics approval

All survey protocols, instruments and materials were approved by the University of Melbourne Behavioural and Social Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee.

## Response and sample characteristics

### Wave 1 response

Table 3 provides a breakdown of wave 1 fieldwork outcomes. Completed interviews were obtained from 1676 of the 2719 persons determined as in-scope. We also retained six of the 14 terminations in the responding sample. These were cases where the termination of interview did not result in the sample member requesting not to be reapproached in the future, where the termination was not the result of English language problems, and where a substantial amount of data was collected prior to the termination. The usable sample thus numbered 1,682 cases, giving a response rate of 61.9%.

This response rate compares favourably with both other studies that sample from seriously disadvantaged populations (O'Callaghan et al., 1996; Randall & Brown, 1996; Weitzman, Knickman, & Shinn, 1990) and with the rates reported for the initial wave of panel surveys of the general population. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, the German Socio-economic Panel study, and the UK Understanding Society study, for example, reported wave 1 household response rates of 66%, 61% and 57% respectively (Watson & Wooden, 2014).

A problem for all voluntary surveys is that non-respondents may be systematically different from respondents. To assess this we report, in Table 4, figures on the distribution of the responding sample by selected known sample member characteristics (as recorded in the RED) and how they compare with equivalent distributions for the attempted in-scope sample. In addition, we also report corresponding figures for the wider population of Centrelink clients.

It should be immediately apparent that the JH sample is markedly different from the broader income support population. In large part, this reflects the almost total absence of Age Pension recipients from the JH sample. On average, JH sample members are relatively young and are

relatively more likely to be male, single, an Indigenous Australian, to have previously spent time in prison, and to be recorded as having experienced mental illness. So not only are JH respondents a very disadvantaged cohort in comparison with the general population, they are also a particularly vulnerable cohort within the income support sub-population.

More important is the evidence of response bias presented in Table 4. Thus men, while still representing the largest fraction of the responding sample, were relatively less likely to respond than women. This is a result common to many surveys. Other statistically significant differences in wave 1 response were uncovered with respect to: age (both the very young – under 21 – and older persons – 45 to 64 – were most likely to respond); the presence of dependent children (persons with children had much higher response rates than those without children); whether an ex-offender (with ex-offenders being less likely to respond); and benefit type. Differences with respect to Indigenous status, country of birth, marital status, whether a respondent had a recorded history of psychological problems, and recent residential mobility, however, were all statistically insignificant. Furthermore, there is little evidence that the most vulnerable – those flagged by Centrelink as homeless – are any more difficult to contact than the unflagged population. Indeed, response rates are actually slightly higher for the homeless group (61.1% vs 57.1%). That said, within this homeless group there is considerable heterogeneity, and it may be that response rates are much lower for some sub-groups (e.g., the rough sleepers).

Overall, and despite the presence of a number of statistically significant differences, the characteristics of the responding sample mostly do not seem to be so different from the initial selected sample to suggest response bias is a major problem. However, weights have been constructed to enable data users to account for observable response bias.

## Response rates in follow-up waves

Attempts were made to re-approach all 1, 682 JH participants in the five follow-up waves of the study. A summary of response outcomes from waves 2 through 6 is provided in Table 5. As shown, re-interview rates were quite high and only fell slowly over the six waves. Thus by the sixth wave, two and half years later, almost 84 per cent of the initial responding sample were still being interviewed.

These follow up rates are very high compared to other Australian studies targeting disadvantaged populations. For example, the Longitudinal Study of Reconnect Clients achieved a follow-up response rate of 57.1 per cent (RPR Consulting, 2003), the Residents Outcomes Study achieved a re-interview rate of 40% (Thomson Goodall Associates, 2001), and a study of single homeless men in Sydney achieved a re-interview rate of just over 40% (Mission Australia, 2012). Indeed, JH's response rates also surpass those recorded in Australia's general population panel survey, the HILDA Survey, which two years on (i.e., in wave 3) was only able to reinterview 82% of its initial sample of respondents (Watson & Wooden, 2012, Table 1, p. 376).

The success of the fieldwork company in gaining cooperation from sample members is even more remarkable when account is taken of the number of persons that were not able to be approached due to death, imprisonment or being overseas. In wave 6, a total of 65 out of the initial 1,682 wave 1 respondents were identified as out-of-scope. This includes 25 persons known to have died, 25 persons that were in prison or some other institution, and 15 persons reported to be overseas.

As with initial response, we do not expect attrition to be random. But contrary to expectations, rates of attrition between wave 1 and wave 6 are slightly lower among the two groups initially flagged as homeless (15.9% and 15.1%) than the unflagged group (18.7%). That said, rates of sample loss were much higher among those identified as rough sleepers in wave 1 – 25.6% of this group did not participate in wave 6. More generally, regression models of the probability of responding, both in all waves and at the final wave (and reported in Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2014), reveal that cases that attrit differ in a number of significant ways from those that respond. In particular, cases of attrition were significantly more likely among Indigenous persons, ex-offenders, persons that moved off income support during the study, and (not surprisingly) persons who moved to a location outside the original interview regions. The magnitudes of such differences, however, are not very large, and as a result the demographic composition of the wave 6 responding sample looks very similar to that of the wave 1 responding

sample (compare columns 3 and 4 in Table 4). Nevertheless, longitudinal response weights have been constructed to help data users account for any potential non-response bias.

## Research

### Data access

Confidentialised unit-record data files are available to licensed data users subject to the approval of DSS. Four different data releases are available depending on user needs and their ability to meet security requirements: a general release file, an overseas release file, a limited release file, and a limited+RED release file. For domestic users, the general release file is the most commonly used, as it has the least stringent security requirements. It also includes data on income support payments (e.g., amount received per week, duration in receipt of income support, and type of income support payment) which, for those respondents that consent, come from administrative Centrelink records. This file, however, does not include individuals' detailed geographic information nor does it include any information about their income support histories. (A further additional 90 derived variables derived from the RED are provided in the limited+RED release.) Unfortunately, all of the variables derived from the linked administrative data are required to be withheld from the overseas release file.

Application forms and fact sheets detailing data access and security requirements can be downloaded from the JH website at: http://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/journeys_home/research/dataaccess.html.

### Weights

As previously mentioned, the data files include a series of weights that adjust for the differential probability of selection into the sample and the differential probability of response, both at wave 1 and in subsequent waves. Details about how these response rates are constructed can be found in Technical Reports available on the JH website (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2012, 2014).

### Research output

The JH data has already facilitated a number of research articles from both the domestic and the international research community, and has recently been reviewed by Ribar (2017). The early research utilising JH data can be separated into three strands: i) causes of homelessness and homeless experiences; ii) consequences of homelessness; and iii) other outcomes among an at-risk population.

Included in the first strand of research are studies that examine specific individual causes of homelessness, such as substance use and experiences of violence (Diette & Ribar, 2015; McVicar, Moschion, & van Ours, 2015); structural causes of homelessness, such as how local housing and labour markets affect risks of homelessness (Johnson, Scutella, Tseng, & Wood, 2015); and, general analyses of what drives homeless durations (Scutella, Johnson, Moschion, Tseng, & Wooden, 2013; Cobb-Clark, Herault, Scutella, & Tseng, 2016).

McVicar et al. (2015) and Diette and Ribar (2015) also examined substance use and exposure to violence as consequences of homelessness, and therefore are also relevant within the context of the second strand of research. In addition, Herault and Ribar (2016) investigated how homelessness may lead to food insecurity, and Cobb-Clark and Zhu (2015) the consequences of childhood experiences of homelessness for adult employment.

Finally, there are those studies that are not focused on homelessness directly but utilise JH to examine issues that are relevant to a particularly vulnerable population. These include Keane, Magee and Lee (2015) and Keane, Magee and Kelly (2016), which made use of the retrospective data in Journeys Home to examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (and, in the latter, complex childhood trauma) and adult alcohol problems, victimisation, and homelessness.

## Conclusion

This paper has summarised the design and outcomes of the Journeys Home study, a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of those vulnerable to homelessness. JH, being one of the first of its kind, was quite an ambitious study given the challenges in both identifying and tracking such a vulnerable population group. On all counts, however, it should be regarded as a success. With the aid of an administrative tool, a particularly vulnerable population was identified and a representative sample drawn. Fieldwork was an overwhelming success, with response rates consistently exceeding expectations. And initial data usage has facilitated research in a number of important areas that

improve understanding of both the causes of homelessness (and the risk of becoming homeless) and its consequences.

The success of the project can be attributed to a combination of factors including the commitment of the fieldwork company and interviewers, the provision of a cash incentive payment, and the six-month follow-up period. Primarily, however, it was the ability to link with the administrative records of participants that proved the most valuable. Not only did this ensure that much valuable information about participants was available for eligible researchers to explore, but it also enabled interviewers to receive pre-fieldwork updates on changes to the contact details of participants. As recipients of Centrelink payments have an incentive to keep their contact details current to ensure continued payment of their income support, these updates helped ensure that the most mobile and, arguably, most vulnerable participants were able to be tracked over the full survey period.

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**Table 1: Topic areas included in JH survey instrument**

| | Wave | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
| Personal details | | | | | | |
| Marital status | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Children | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Children's education and care | | | | | | X |
| Demographic background | X | | | | | |
| Education and schooling | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Marital history | | | | | | X |
| Personality | | | | | X | |
| Parent relationships | | | | | | X |
| Employment and voluntary work | | | | | | |
| Paid employment | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Job search activity | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Volunteering | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Housing and living arrangements | | | | | | |
| Current housing / living arrangements | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Accommodation standards and overcrowding | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Accommodation search | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Housing and homelessness history | X | | | | | |
| Recent accommodation changes | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Support services and networks | | | | | | |
| Friends and family | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Access and use of support services | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Difficulty accessing health care services | | | | | | X |
| Mobile phone usage | | | | | X | |
| Internet usage | | | | | | X |
| Health and wellbeing | | | | | | |
| Sexual preference | X | | | | | |
| Physical and mental health | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Substance use | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Substance use history | X | | X | | | |
| Life satisfaction | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Sleep | | | | | | X |
| Psychological resources | | | | | | |
| Personal control / Impatience impulsivity | | | | | | X |
| Risk and time preferences | | | | | | X |
| Cognitive ability | | | | | | X |
| Diet and food security | | | | | X | |
| Contact with the justice system | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Exposure to violence | | | | | | |
| Physical violence | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Sexual assault | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Threats of violence | X | | | | | |

**Table 1 (cont'd)**

| | Wave | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
| Income and financial stress | | | | | | |
| Financial stressors | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Gambling and betting | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Gambling history | | | | | | X |
| Government income support | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Other sources of income | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Debt | X | X | X | X | X | X |

**Table 2: The evolution of the JH sample (by sub-sample)**

| | Sub-sample (% distribution) | | | Total (N) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Flagged as homeless | Flagged as at risk of homelessness | Vulnerable | |
| Starting population | 19.6 | 11.1 | 69.3 | 138 091 |
| Population after clustering | 20.5 | 11.9 | 67.7 | 110 616 |
| Sample selected | 35.0 | 33.3 | 31.7 | 4 913 |
| Sample issued | 35.0 | 33.9 | 31.1 | 2 992 |
| Final in-scope sample | 34.9 | 34.5 | 30.6 | 2 719 |

**Table 3: Wave 1 call outcomes**

| Sample outcome | Number | % |
|---|---|---|
| Total sample issued | 2992 | |
| Less out-of-scope | 273 | |
| Total in-scope sample | 2719 | 100.0 |
| Completed interviews | 1676 | 61.6 |
| Terminations | 14 | 0.5 |
| Incapable | 22 | 0.8 |
| Refusal | 369 | 13.7 |
| Other non-response | | |
| Contact made[a] | 138 | 5.1 |
| Non-contact and all calls made | 316 | 11.6 |
| Moved to unknown address | 184 | 6.8 |

Note: a This group is dominated cases where interviews were unable to be scheduled or conducted within the fieldwork period. It also includes some cases that moved following the initial contact and hence with whom contact was lost.

**Table 4: Population and sample member characteristics (%)**

| Characteristic[a] | Income support population[b] (n=4,830,357) | Attempted in-scope sample (n=2719) | Respondents, w1 (n=1682) | Respondents, w6 (n=1406) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Centrelink homelessness flag | | | | |
| Homeless | 0.6 | 34.9 | 34.5 | 34.7 |
| At risk of homelessness | 0.3 | 34.5 | 37.3 | 37.8 |
| No flag (but vulnerable) | 2.0 | 30.6 | 28.2 | 27.5 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 43.1 | 58.8 | 54.6 | 53.8 |
| Female | 56.9 | 41.2 | 45.4 | 46.2 |
| Age group | | | | |
| 15-17 | 3.4 | 11.4 | 12.6 | 12.3 |
| 18-20 | 4.7 | 14.3 | 14.9 | 15.1 |
| 21-24 | 5.5 | 12.8 | 12.1 | 12.2 |
| 25-34 | 9.5 | 23.0 | 21.6 | 21.3 |
| 35-44 | 9.7 | 20.7 | 19.7 | 19.8 |
| 45-54 | 9.1 | 12.8 | 14.0 | 14.2 |
| 55-64 | 12.5 | 4.1 | 4.5 | 4.6 |
| 65+ | 45.6 | 0.9 | 0.7 | 0.5 |
| Indigenous status | | | | |
| Non-Indigenous | 95.9 | 82.3 | 82.8 | 82.7 |
| Indigenous | 4.1 | 17.7 | 17.2 | 17.3 |
| Country of birth | | | | |
| Australia | 68.4 | 87.1 | 87.3 | 87.9 |
| English speaking country | 9.6 | 5.8 | 6.1 | 6.1 |
| Non-English speaking country | 22.0 | 7.2 | 6.6 | 6.0 |
| Marital status | | | | |
| Single | 58.7 | 93.6 | 93.0 | 92.6 |
| Married | 36.4 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.6 |
| De facto | 4.3 | 5.1 | 5.7 | 6.2 |
| Unknown | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| Has dependent children | | | | |
| No | 84.7 | 86.2 | 83.6 | 82.4 |
| Yes | 15.3 | 13.8 | 16.4 | 17.6 |
| Benefit type | | | | |
| Not on income support | 1.6 | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.7 |
| Students | 7.8 | 5.8 | 6.2 | 6.3 |
| Youth Allowance (other) | 1.8 | 16.8 | 18.0 | 17.9 |
| New Start Allowance | 11.7 | 42.4 | 38.7 | 38.3 |
| Disability support Pension | 16.7 | 21.6 | 22.1 | 22.0 |
| Parenting payment | 9.2 | 8.2 | 10.0 | 10.5 |
| Other | 51.3 | 2.6 | 2.5 | 2.4 |
| Ex-offender | | | | |
| No | 98.1 | 80.6 | 82.5 | 83.4 |
| Yes | 1.9 | 19.4 | 17.5 | 16.6 |

**Table 4 (cont'd)**

| Characteristic[a] | Income support population[b] (n=4,830,357) | Attempted in-scope sample (n=2719) | Respondents, w1 (n=1682) | Respondents, w6 (n=1406) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ever recorded psychological / psychiatric problem | | | | |
| No | 89.0 | 60.5 | 60.1 | 59.4 |
| Yes | 11.0 | 39.5 | 40.0 | 40.6 |
| Numbers of recorded changes in home address in past year | | | | |
| 0 | 82.9 | 18.8 | 18.2 | 17.7 |
| 1 | 12.3 | 28.0 | 28.2 | 28.7 |
| 2 | 3.1 | 24.4 | 24.5 | 24.4 |
| 3+ | 1.7 | 28.9 | 29.1 | 29.2 |

Notes: a All characteristics are as recorded in the RED on the 27th May 2011.
b Those who were on income support at any time between 30th April 2011 and 27th May 2011.

**Table 5: Response outcomes, waves 2 to 6**

| Outcome | Wave 2 | | Wave 3 | | Wave 4 | | Wave 5 | | Wave 6 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | % | % | N | % | N | % |
| Interview[a] | 1529 | 90.9 | 1478 | 87.9 | 1456 | 86.6 | 1425 | 84.7 | 1406 | 83.6 |
| Out of scope[b] | 22 | 1.3 | 44 | 2.6 | 50 | 3.0 | 49 | 2.9 | 65 | 3.9 |
| Non-contact | 69 | 4.1 | 70 | 4.2 | 84 | 5.0 | 78 | 4.6 | 84 | 5.0 |
| Other non-response[c] | 62 | 3.7 | 90 | 5.4 | 92 | 5.5 | 130 | 7.7 | 127 | 7.6 |
| TOTAL SAMPLE (W1 respondents) | 1682 | 100.0 | 1682 | 100.0 | 1682 | 100.0 | 1682 | 100.0 | 1682 | 100.0 |

Notes: a Includes completed and terminated interviews.

b Out of scope includes persons who: have died; are overseas; are in prison; or are in some other institution.

c This category includes outcomes classified as: refusal, incapable, and contact made but no interview resulted. This includes persons who refused at previous waves and indicated they no longer wish to be approached at future waves.