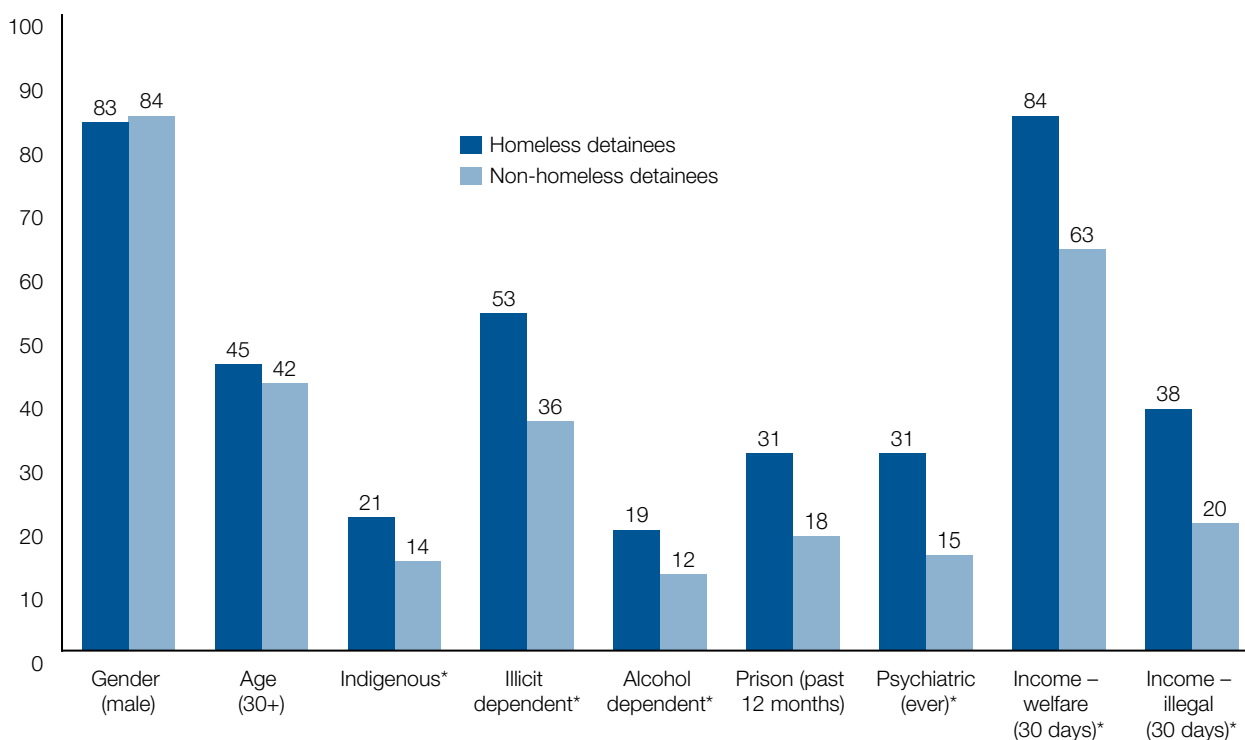


Homelessness, drug use and offending

Between 1999 and 2006, a total of 24,936 police detainees were surveyed as part of the Australian Institute of Criminology's Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program. Of these, 1,689 detainees (7%) reported living on the street, having no fixed address or living in crisis accommodation at the time of their apprehension. Although representing only a small number of the overall police detainee population, the homeless, compared with their non-homeless counterparts, were similar in gender and age, more likely to identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and more likely to report key risk factors. For example, around one in three (31%) had spent some time in prison in the 12 months prior to their arrest. This compared with only 18 percent of non-homeless detainees. Similarly, one in three (31%) reported having ever been admitted previously to a psychiatric hospital – a prevalence rate twice that reported by non-homeless detainees (15%). Homeless detainees were more likely than non-homeless detainees to report recent and frequent use, as well as dependence on either illicit drugs (53% vs 36%) or alcohol (19% vs 12%). While more than half of all police detainees sourced income from welfare payments in the 30 days preceding their arrest, homeless detainees were more likely than non-homeless detainees to do so (82%) and more likely to report generating income from illegal activities (38% vs 20%) such as property offences, prostitution and drug-related crimes. Overall, the DUMA data indicate that homeless people who come into contact with the criminal justice system have a complex set of risks and needs, many of which might underlie their current criminal offending patterns as well as their future propensity to reoffend.

Characteristics of police detainees by homelessness (percentage)



*p<0.05

Source: DUMA 1999–2006, AIC [computer file]