



NORTH SYDNEY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategy



2013 - 2016

INDEX

Introduction	1
Part 1: Definitions and Principles that guide the Strategy	2
Role of Local Government	3
People with a particular vulnerability to homelessness	3
Key Principles	4
Part 2: Partners, Strategies and Actions	6
Important information	7
North Sydney Council strategies for working with people who are homeless and in housing need	8
Appendix	9



INTRODUCTION

The Homelessness strategy 2013 -2016 is a statement of North Sydney Councils commitment to assisting people who are homeless and in housing need. In the last five years numbers of people requesting assistance have increased in the LGA. In 2011/12 seventy two people from North Sydney asked council for assistance with housing or were homeless compared to forty two in 2010/11. At the same time housing affordability has decreased. According to NSW Housing in March 2012 the percentage of affordable housing for people on moderate incomes in North Sydney had fallen below 30% compared to the NSW figure of 62%. In same period in 2010 the figures were 38% for North Sydney and 68% for the NSW. (Family and Community Services NSW 2012)

It is also important to note that many homeless people have other important needs besides housing (Kaybill, 2011). Many older people who are homeless have very limited access to health services such as dentists, dieticians and podiatry. For people recovering from mental illness there is the issue of ongoing support to maintain accommodation. The North Sydney Strategy is designed to guide a practical response to homeless and housing need from Council and local community organisations.

PART 1: Definitions and Principles that guide the Strategy

The term homelessness broadly refers to people without conventional accommodation. There are a number of ways of defining 'homelessness'. A common definition (developed by Australian researchers, Chamberlain and McKenzie) divides it into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. These definitions are based on the complete lack of or type of inadequate accommodation.

Primary homelessness - people who have no shelter (egg. living in cars, sleeping rough);

Secondary homelessness - people who move between various forms of temporary shelter (egg crisis accommodation or staying with friends or relatives); and

Tertiary homelessness - people who live in accommodation which is without security of tenure, unsafe or inappropriate to their needs.

An alternative definition (taken from Kraybill 2002-2011) provides a more existential look at homelessness by first describing home and leaving it to the imagination of all to think about what it would be like to be without any one of these things.

The First Home: the self. The characteristics of this home are physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual in nature. This home needs to be nurtured, rested, nourished and emotionally supported.

The second home: might cover any of the descriptions provided under the primary, secondary and tertiary definitions of homelessness. It is the place where we live, and it refers not only to the physical structure but to the living environment within which it is located. This home is where we sleep, where we begin and end every day, where we store our belongings, it may be where we socialise and interact with others.

The third home: is the larger community within which our first and second homes are located. It provides context to the lives that are lived within it and how that is realised at an individual level. Here the connectivity between individuals, multiple communities, the residential, business and visitors all meet in the same place. The quality of that home is defined by the relationships of all groups within it.

Homelessness may be:

- **Short term** and caused by a crisis;
- **Longer term** (chronic), where a person may experience multiple health or other problems and may adapt to a life of being homeless.
- **Ongoing**, where a person at risk of homelessness moves through different forms of insecure accommodation.

The circumstances and experiences of homeless people are different from each other and responses to homelessness must be flexible enough to meet diverse and complex needs.

However, many homeless people share:

- Poverty and a history of social exclusion;
- A greater likelihood of multiple disadvantage, such as mental illness, substance or gambling addiction, disability and a history of trauma and abuse;
- A lack of belonging and community connectedness
- Lack of control over the space where they live;
- Stigma and a sense of not being accepted by the broader community.

Role of Local Government

The Commonwealth and State Governments have the primary role of funding and providing services to assist people who are homeless, people with mental health and/or drug and alcohol problems, people with disabilities and all other disadvantaged groups who are over-represented in the homeless population. Communities expect their Councils to also

be involved, preventing, reducing, and managing homelessness.

The key actions identified in this strategy are:

1. Provision of Homelessness Services;
2. Service Co-ordination
3. Research, Advocacy,

These are specific actions that the Council can undertake or influence. Other actions and in homelessness, health and welfare services remain the primary responsibility of other levels of government.

People with particular vulnerability of homelessness

Although all of us may be at risk of experiencing an episode (or episodes) of homelessness during our lifetimes, some people and cultural groups have been shown to have a higher risk of experiencing homelessness.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people
- People with a mental illness
- People with Alcohol and other drug misuse problems or addictions

- People with disability
- People living with HIV/AIDS
- Ex-prisoners
- Women leaving domestic violence situations
- Sole parents

Key principles

The Council recognises the right of everyone in the community to use public spaces. It also recognises the right of all people to have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. The Council acknowledges that some people may need assistance to achieve appropriate accommodation and in some instances may also require ongoing support to maintain this.

Right to shelter

Council recognises that access to affordable, secure, appropriate and accessible housing is a basic requirement for all people and an essential ingredient of a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable community. Council is committed to formulating policies and strategies to address homelessness, housing need and the provision of diverse housing options.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups

Council recognises that people who are homeless are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our

community. Council further acknowledges that the population who are homeless have higher rates of trauma, mental and physical illnesses, substance dependence, gambling addictions, intellectual disability, and are more likely to be victims of violence.

Commitment to assisting people who are homeless

Council is committed to cooperation with other government and non-government service providers, to assisting people exit homelessness.

Use of public spaces

Council recognises the NSW State Government Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places. Council acknowledges the rights of all members of the community to use public spaces, whilst also recognising their responsibility towards other members of the community who have the right to live in a safe and peaceful environment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Council recognises the special relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with public space and that they may also have specific cultural needs in accessing a range of appropriate accommodation and support options.

Privacy considerations

Whilst maintaining the integrity of personal information and the confidentiality of individuals, aggregated data is used to inform the Council's policy development and direct service provision.

Advocacy

Council acknowledges its responsibility to advocate on behalf of all members of its community. Specifically, it recognises the need to advocate to other levels of government to reduce the incidence of homelessness within the community through the provision of appropriate State Government provided or funded services.

Right to participate

Council recognises and encourages all members of the community to participate in cultural and community activities and events. Council also realises that some vulnerable and socially excluded people within its population may need special assistance to enable them to participate and experience greater social inclusion.

Council commits to working closely with people who have experience of homelessness in order to ensure that service and policy responses adequately reflect the needs of this group.

Key roles of other levels of Government

Council recognises the key roles of other levels of Government in addressing the needs of people who are homeless through:

- social housing
- emergency, short and medium term accommodation
- income support
- employment and training assistance
- health and mental health services
- services for people with a substance or gambling dependency
- services for people with a disability
- children's, youth and other community services

In most instances, trying to assist the person to access appropriate services is the best course of action. Most chronically homeless people have experienced significant trauma in their lives and simply moving people from one area to another, if they are not behaving illegally, can be counter-productive and cause further psychological trauma and disconnectedness from our community.

PART 2: Partners, Strategies and Actions

This section outlines specific strategies actions that the Council will continue to implement or new projects it will establish during the term of this Strategy. First, is a summary of assistance currently available to people who are homeless in the North Sydney LGA or for people who are concerned about someone who appears to be homeless.

Housing Assistance available in North Sydney LGA

Council understands that the provision of services and empowerment of the homeless and socially disadvantaged is best provided when people who are homeless, workers and agencies act co-operatively.

Organisation	Address/contact	Services available
St Vincent De Paul	60 Alexander St Crows Nest 2065 Telephone 94360725	Financial assistance food and counselling
Church at the Bridge	Corner of Broughton and Bligh Street	Food and advocacy
Crows Nest Centre	2 Ernest Place Crows Nest 2065 telephone 94395122	Shower towels food and information
Link Housing	Level 12 815 Pacific Highway Chatswood 2067 Telephone 94125111	Pathway Applications and community housing
NSW Housing	Unit 17a/18 Ground floor Pittwater road Dee Why Telephone 99713600	Pathway Applications and public housing
North Sydney Council	99368195	Assistance with Housing Applications At KNC on a Friday. Follow up of people who homeless.

Important Information

Young people (under 18) can be assisted by the Youth Emergency Accommodation Line on 9318 1531 or 1800 424 830 (outside Sydney Metropolitan Area). Y Connect 1800424830 assist young people who are in need of assistance and support. Street work provides support and assistance to young people at risk of violence and homelessness.

If a child or young person (16 or under) who appears to be homeless, the police or the NSW Department of Community Services Helpline can be contacted on 132 111. Children or young people who are homeless are at significant risk and require protection.

Council will ensure that people who are homeless in a public place are offered assistance by appropriate services in the first instance. As long as people are not acting criminally, illegally or anti-socially this will be the first course of action.

Local police should be contacted if a homeless person or group is behaving

illegally, criminally or anti-socially. If there is immediate danger, contact 000. If a homeless person appears to be experiencing a medical emergency, an ambulance should be called by calling 000.

If someone appears to be experiencing a significant mental health problem, local mental health services can be contacted for their advice. In some instances, if there is a genuine belief that a person is at immediate risk or putting others at risk, the police should be contacted. They may be able to transport the person to a mental health facility for assessment and/or treatment.

If a homeless person or group is blocking a fire exit from a building or causing some other similar safety risk, the Council Rangers can be contacted on 9265 9333 or phone the local police.

It is important to note that most people who are homeless in public places are vulnerable themselves and do not usually pose a significant safety risk to other members of the community.

North Sydney Council strategies for working with people who are homeless and in housing need

Strategy	Action Required	Organisations	Timeframes
1. Continue to provide Housing information and assistance to people in housing need.	Council Officer to be available on Friday mornings.	Council Community Development Library services Customer services.	Review annually
2. Promote access to health and well being services for people who are homeless or in housing need.	Liaise with NSW Health and HACC funded services to promote access to health and services for people who homeless and in housing need.	Council Community Development. NSW Health Community based HACC funded services.	Review annually
3. Ensure high priority for people living in public open space	Two contact visits per week and assistance offered.	Council Community Development. Council Rangers	
4. Provide Council and Community Centre staff training on working with and supporting homeless people.	Annual training for volunteers and community centre staff on housing issues	Council Community Development	Annually ongoing
5. Design and adopt protocols for managing Homelessness in North Sydney	Revise existing protocols between agencies. Identify new partners. Council host an annual meeting /forum between organisations involved with assisting people in housing need in North Sydney Lower North Shore	Coordinated by Council Community Development. Could involve Community centres Mental Health services HACC Services Link Housing	New memorandum of agreement By the end 2013
6. Provide advocacy and information for people in housing need.	Assist people with housing issues and applications to tribunal	Council	ongoing
7. Maintain and update an Affordable housing policy	Revise and update affordable housing policy	Council Community Development Strategic Planning	Review annually

Appendix

Housing need in North Sydney LGA

In between May 2011 and May 2012 206 Community services requests were received 2 more than the previous year. Housing assistance requests made over a third of all requests received 70. This represents a

significant increase on last year (42). There were 19 reported situations involving Poor Living conditions a significant increase on last year when (9) access were recorded There were 17 requests concerning access to services and facilities 7 less than year (24).

Chart 2: Most frequent community service requests between May 2011 and May 2012

