

Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 13: People who are Homeless or at Risk of Homelessness

The Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of homelessness includes people who do not have suitable accommodation options because they are staying in an inadequate dwelling; have no, short or unextendable tenure; or do not have access to or control of their living space for social interactions. They may be sleeping rough or in an improvised dwelling (primary homelessness), moving frequently from one temporary shelter to another (secondary) or staying in accommodation that falls under minimum standards like dilapidated caravans and boarding houses (tertiary).

The 2016 Australian Census recorded more than 100,000 homeless people. Of these, one in six was a person aged over 55 with 10% of this group sleeping rough, 17%

in supported accommodation for the homeless, 24% in temporary accommodation, 27% in boarding houses and 20% in severely overcrowded premises. In NSW, the older homeless population in 2016 represented a 43% increase since the 2011 Census with 63% male and 37% female.

This diverse group also includes older people at risk of homelessness. Their tenancies and accommodation may be at risk due to inability to afford rising rents, hoarding and squalor issues, complaints by neighbours and behaviours that are judged unacceptable.

Many factors contribute to homelessness. While poverty is the root cause in the vast majority of situations, other factors can be the unavailability of affordable rental options,

relationship breakdowns, family and domestic violence, elder abuse, alcohol and other drug abuse, mental illness, gambling, financial difficulties, leaving institutions like gaol. The cumulative effect of these factors often leads to physical health issues and premature ageing. For these reasons, homeless people aged over 55 are considered eligible older people for aged care.

There are considerable access barriers to aged care for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. Service provision in the homelessness sector, provided by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs), is disconnected from the aged care sector.

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Homeless older people often present with complex health and psychosocial issues, a lack of medical records and a history of poor interaction with the health system. Many have learnt only to rely on themselves, fear being judged and lack trust in government and welfare agencies. They may lack sufficient living skills to sustain a tenancy.

The Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) sub-program within the CHSP targets prematurely aged people over 50, Aboriginal people over 55 and frail aged over 65 on a low income who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. ACH does not provide direct care services. It uses a case management approach to assist clients to access My Aged Care, CHSP and housing, financial and legal services.

General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Take time to develop the necessary trust to accept care and support services.
- Know, create partnerships with and link eligible clients to local ACH providers.
- Understand the underlying issues contributing to the client's risk of homelessness and assist the person to access relevant health, housing, advocacy, legal and financial services.

For further information, see **Sheet 17: Resources – Resource Nos. 4, 7, 24, 31, 39**