

Urban Research Centre



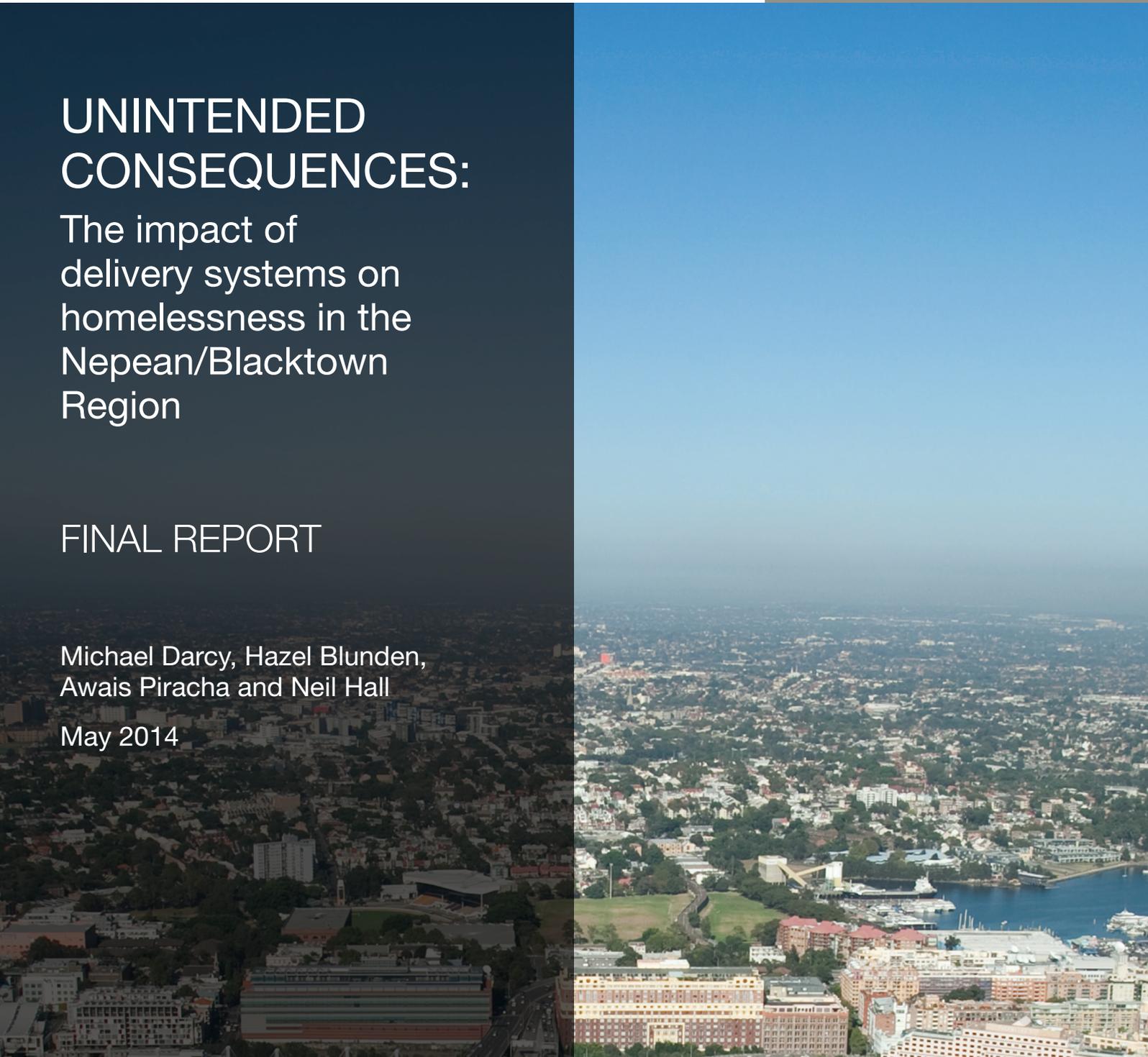
UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES:

The impact of
delivery systems on
homelessness in the
Nepean/Blacktown
Region

FINAL REPORT

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BACKGROUND

In 2010 the Federal Minister for Housing launched the Nepean Blacktown Regional Taskforce on Homelessness to develop a Regional Plan to End Homelessness by 2020. The research project is part of the Taskforce's regional plan process.

This report presents findings of a study which sought to discover the extent to which service provider practices and service delivery systems might unintentionally cause or perpetuate homelessness amongst specific cohorts: youth, women with children, and single men. Anecdotal reports suggested that maldistribution of services, gaps and waiting periods, targeting and eligibility restrictions, and conflicting agency policies and boundaries, might actually contribute to homelessness in the region.

The study, conducted in partnership with the Nepean Regional Taskforce on Homelessness, utilises administrative and 'occasion of service' data collected on homeless and at-risk people from key agencies operating in four local government areas in Western Sydney (Blacktown, Penrith, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains) together with interviews and focus groups involving agency personnel.

Until recently, Australian literature pertaining to homelessness has tended to focus on the numbers of the homeless. Studies that focuses on other aspects of homelessness such as systemic barriers to maintaining housing and the role that service provider practices might play in contributing to homelessness, rather than on the homeless themselves, have been less common.

A 2009 AHURI study found that case management works because of a relationship between the client and the case manager or case management team, with the qualities of persistence, reliability, intimacy and respect that delivers comprehensive, practical support¹.

Homelessness agencies themselves have been active in examining systemic ways of improving homelessness services. Wesley Mission's (2008) survey based report *More than a bed: Sydney's homeless speak out* identifies the underlying causes and complex needs of people who are homeless and suggests that longer term support and better integration of services for homeless people is needed to reduce the critically high rates of homelessness.

The proposed research follows on from such studies and involves developing an understanding of the systemic barriers, agency practices and policies that may cause or perpetuate homelessness, and then developing ways in which systems, practices and policies might be modified to provide enhanced services for people at risk of homelessness.

One key point of difference in this research is that we first spoke to a range of front line agency workers, including Police, Centrelink and emergency accommodation providers, then sought to test and verify their experience using actual service usage data. Finally we presented our analysis back to our service provider informants in order to verify our own findings. A second unique feature of this research was its attempt to reveal a local geography of homelessness which could assist service coordination and planning in the Nepean/Blacktown region.

It should be said that our quest to secure useable agency data which could be mapped and analysed for this study met with mixed success. Privacy considerations and some agency data collection methods meant that it was very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain consistent and comparable data from all relevant agencies, especially at the sub-regional level. This limitation, however, can be understood as itself a finding of the study – as local agencies and service planners are clearly constrained by the same issue in understanding local needs, and restrictions on data sharing may well have an unintended consequence of perpetuating homelessness for some people.

¹ Gronda, 2009.

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AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research was to examine the ways in which service provider practices and service delivery systems may have 'unintended consequences' in certain geographical areas due to mismatch between demand, homelessness cohorts and available services. A second aim was to identify ways in which service delivery systems and practices can be improved to avoid such outcomes. These aims were expressed as a series of research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Do existing service delivery systems unintentionally cause or perpetuate homelessness amongst youth, families and single men within the Blacktown and Nepean region? If so, in what way?
2. How can service delivery systems and practices be improved?
3. How do different agencies contact and identify homelessness?
4. Which people are seen by which agencies?
5. How well does service provision match regional geography of homelessness?
6. Can service data be used to improve coordination between services?

In order to answer these questions, the research sought to:

- » create overlay maps of geographic and time-series data from different administrative sets
- » identify specific sub-regional areas, and population subgroups most frequently identified as at-risk and by which agencies they are identified
- » locate where and for which groups service gaps or other institutional barriers might exacerbate risk or perpetuate homelessness.

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METHODS

Methods were quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative element involved mapping agency data from Centrelink, NSW Police, Housing NSW and Specialist Homelessness Service providers across the four LGAs of Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Blacktown. The qualitative element involved interviewing agency workers (delivering services to homeless or at risk of homelessness persons) and service users (homeless or at risk of homelessness persons) both before and after analysing the quantitative data, and finally conducting focus groups with agency personnel at a sub-regional level designed to verify the study conclusions.

3.1 PHASE 1: SCOPING STUDY

3.1.2 BACKGROUND

In September 2010 the Nepean Regional Taskforce on Homelessness (the 'Taskforce') was launched by the Federal Minister for Housing. The Taskforce's primary object is to develop a Regional Plan to end homelessness over the next decade through collaborative, practical initiatives based on grounded research. The scoping study discussed here was the first stage in developing a research project that supported the development of the Taskforce's Regional Plan.

The purpose of the scoping study was to consult with local service providers across the four LGAs (Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith), with the intention of gaining information to support the development of a research proposal suitable for submission as a UWS Partnership Research Grant.

3.1.3 SCOPING METHOD

The Scope was undertaken by a UWS team of researchers including Associate Professor Michael Darcy, Dr Neil Hall and Dr Gabrielle Gwyther, under the direction of the Nepean Regional Taskforce on Homelessness Steering Group comprising representatives of the four local government authorities and Wentworth Community Housing Ltd.

The scoping study was both qualitative and exploratory in approach and was not intended to provide a representative sample of opinion, but to explore and follow up the range of experiences and current practices of service providers in the region. Consultations focussed on service provision practices, perceptions of homelessness, vulnerabilities involving homelessness, crisis points, coping strategies and gaps in services. Interviews were undertaken face-to-face in a confidential manner, and took between 30 and 90 minutes.

The scoping study timeframe was extremely tight particularly given the number of large bureaucracies involved, including the University of Western Sydney. This timeframe was necessary however, to ensure the UWS Partnership Research Grant submission deadline was met. The study commenced on 1 March 2011, with interviews undertaken over a two week period between 21st March 2011 and 3rd April 2011. Consequently, access to service providers within the Department of Education and Department of Health was limited because institutional ethics approval was not received in time. Some service providers were also reluctant to be interviewed due to their own time constraints, suspicion about the project and not wanting to divulge agency information.

3.1.4 INTERVIEWS

Twenty-two consultations within the region were undertaken across service sectors as follows:

Figure 1: Summary of initial interviews

CLIENT/SERVICE SECTOR	SERVICE TYPE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
Centrelink	Community Engagement Officers Social Workers	3
Domestic Violence Services	Refuges Women's Resource Centres Police DVO	6
Women's Services	Broad range services	1
Youth Services	Accommodation Services Support Services Police Youth Liaison Officers High Schools	5
*Health Services	Mental Health Rehabilitation and Detox	2
Community Kitchens	Daily provision of food	1
Multicultural Services	Broad range services	2
Family Services	Broad range support services Refuges	2
Education	High Schools	0**

* Workers within the State Health System were not able to be consulted for this scope as Ethics Approval from the SWAHS Human Research Ethics Committee (Nepean Campus) was not forthcoming within the timeframe of the study.

** As with Health, formal approval from DSE was not forthcoming within the timeframe of the study, however some informal (telephone) consultations were held with school principals.

3.2 PHASE 2: COLLECTING AND MAPPING DATA

The research utilised data from key agencies showing contacts with persons identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness. By collating and comparing the geographic and time-series data from key agency sources, we expected to be able to identify specific sub-regional areas and population subgroups most frequently identified as at-risk and by which agencies they are identified, and also to locate where and for which groups service gaps or other institutional barriers might be seen as exacerbating risk or perpetuating homelessness. An example might be where police data shows a high contact rate with, for example, homeless young people, but this group is not prominent in supported accommodation statistics.

The four data sources used were:

- » Centrelink client homelessness indicators;
- » Housing NSW homelessness indicators;
- » NSW Police homelessness indicators;
- » Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) data.

Data was sought from agencies where the agency employed a file marker flagging a

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person as 'homeless', 'at risk of homelessness' or 'no fixed address'. The exact wording or file marker varied from agency to agency. Data covering a period of two years was requested so the timeframe was comparable. In order to develop overlay maps it was important to be able to analyse data on a common geographic scale. Postcode was a data point common to three of the four data bases accessed and so this was chosen as the common scale for mapping, although in the case of Police this was not a data point and so data was mapped by Local Area Command.

As mentioned above, there were limitations in accessing agency data, and therefore flaws in its utility for addressing the research questions. Some agencies' privacy rules rendered the data less useful (specifically, at such a small scale Centrelink data was heavily randomized due to privacy concerns). The Homeless Persons Information Centre agreed to provide data however due to the limitations of its database and lack of staff resources, the only data that could be provided was on an LGA basis in a pre-determined report format and as such, could not be used. However the data provided from Housing NSW, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Specialist Homelessness Services data) and the NSW Police was at unit record level and thus suitable for this form of analysis. All data was supplied as anonymised via use of alpha codes or similar.

The data was mapped at the postcode scale (or for the Police data, at the Local Area Command scale) to isolate a range of demographic and other variables.

This exercise produced a variety of maps, which focus on different cohorts. Data has also been used to highlight differences in proportionality of cohorts by area. The maps were utilized as a tool in semi-structured interviews with agency workers and service users.

3.3 PHASE 3: IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH AGENCY WORKERS AND SERVICE USERS

3.3.1 AGENCY WORKERS

Agency workers in four LGAs were interviewed. Agency workers were asked a series of general questions and also asked to specifically reflect on the spatial patterns of homelessness, and whether the data presented to them (graphs and maps) seemed valid based on their experiences and service use statistics from their service. Finally they were asked what 'gaps' they perceived in services in their areas of operation and what was required to address them (see Appendices).

Thirty-three governmental (includes Housing NSW, Centrelink, Police and Health) and NGO staff were interviewed in total. Wherever possible, staff who worked directly with homeless persons were interviewed.

Centrelink staff were interviewed in two Local Government Areas (LGAs). Police were interviewed in two LGAs. Housing NSW staff were interviewed in two LGAs. Specialist Homeless Services and other NGO workers were interviewed in all LGAs.

Figure 2: Agency workers interviewed by LGA in Phase 3

BLACKTOWN	BLUE MOUNTAINS	HAWKESBURY	PENRITH	OTHER
Government (3)	Government (2)	Government (1)	Government (3)	Peak committee (1)
NGOs (4)	NGOs (3)	NGOs (8)	NGOs (8)	
7	5	9	11	1
TOTAL: 33				

Note: Numbers refer to no. of persons interviewed.

3.3.2 SERVICE USERS

It was intended to interview a similar number of persons who are services users. Although fliers were distributed and a payment offered, there was low take up from service users. Six persons were interviewed – four in Hawkesbury and two in Penrith. All were male.

Figure 3: Service users interviewed by LGA in Phase 3

BLACKTOWN	BLUE MOUNTAINS	HAWKESBURY	PENRITH
0	0	4	2
TOTAL: 6			

3.3.3 PHASE 4: TESTING THE FINDINGS

Findings were tested in a number of ways.

Following the data mapping and completion of interviews, initial findings were presented to the Steering Committee in September 2013. The Steering Committee was invited to comment on a presentation and Initial Findings Report.

In addition, two half-day focus groups were held in October 2013 in two locations, one for Blacktown and Hawkesbury agency workers (held in Windsor), and the other for Blue Mountains and Penrith agency workers (held in Penrith). This consisted of a presentation, and group work focusing on the characterisation of homelessness and service delivery pertaining to agency worker's 'home' LGA. Agency workers were asked several specific questions about whether the tentative conclusions made were correct, and about specific findings relevant to that LGA. Agency workers who had been interviewed were the core attendees, however some other agency workers who had not been interviewed also attended and gave valuable insights. This 'reality testing' with 'on the ground' agency workers was invaluable in determining the accuracy of claims and eventual content of the final report.

Service users (homeless or formerly homeless persons) were also asked specific questions about regions they were familiar with. Service users were also invited to comment on maps and service gaps. Their insights were broadly similar to agency workers about the character of service delivery in the areas, and also highlighted different issues for example interactions between the health system and SHS services.

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FINDINGS

4.1 PHASE 1: SCOPING STUDY

The scoping study highlighted a number of factors that appeared to potentially exacerbate homelessness in Western Sydney particularly for young people, single men and women and children experiencing domestic violence. The lack of affordable housing across the public, community and private sectors was identified as a key regional issue.

4.1.1 ISSUES ARISING

Regional Issues

All service providers were concerned with local housing supply issues. Across the entire region there was a dire lack of transitional and long term affordable housing. This led to service 'blockages' all along the provision line from crisis to post-crisis services. There was also a lack of appropriate emergency accommodation, with this gap being inadequately filled by short and medium term motel and caravan accommodation that was generally of a very poor standard and may only exacerbate problems. For instance, Housing NSW will not even see a homeless person until that person has been through the HPIC Line² and refuges, and even then Housing NSW may not allocate emergency housing stock but rather place people in motels and Windsor River Caravan Park (in Wilberforce). A number of agencies provided stories of clients taking up crisis accommodation (whether in a refuge or mental health unit) on a long-term basis because secure, long-term accommodation could not be found.

The broad inference to be made from this data is that the simple lack of accommodation into which people can be moved after contacting agencies for assistance means that crisis and therapeutic intervention agency resources are increasingly operating as stop-gap accommodation, and that this makes these other services less accessible and effective for new clients.

Agency Related Issues

- » Lack of service co-ordination and development of service gap issues – most of which are made worse by the supply problem (this seems worse in Mount Druitt, although this may be due to the concentration of vulnerable cohorts and services in the area).
- » Lack of holistic service provision and long-term case management, although this did not seem to be as big a problem amongst youth and domestic violence services. For instance Centrelink officers spent a lot of time acting as a de-facto case managers, ensuring people had completed forms, had applied for waiting lists, etc.
- » Some reported government agencies to be not working well together due to client privacy and funding issues, and to the silo effect of client categories and labels.
- » This problem was also commented upon in relation to NGOs and was more apparent in Mount Druitt compared to the other areas, due to territorial, definitional and funding restrictions.

² The Homeless Person Information Centre has been replaced by the NSW Government's Link2Home program.

Cohort Specific Issues:

COHORT	ISSUES ARISING
WOMEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Safety first rather than housing first for women experiencing DV. » Police advised that police practice was to remove the perpetrator of the violence from the home, and that this solved the DV issue. However other agencies reported a different picture with many women forced into homelessness by DV (perhaps where police were not (or no longer) involved). » Due to the difficulty in women finding affordable accommodation, some were forced to return back into the original DV situation, but thought this was better than being homeless, particularly when children were involved. » 'Blockages' in moving women from DV crisis accommodation into transitional and long term affordable housing was preventing other women from accessing crisis services. » Crisis in crisis accommodation for single women and women with children who were not homeless due to DV. DV refuges only took women who were experiencing DV.
YOUTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Four types of homeless young people were identified by interviewees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. young people experiencing domestic violence, abuse and an intolerable home situation; II. young people who don't want to conform to parental discipline at home; III. young people who are homeless because their parents are homeless (this was a particular problem for schools, and the primary type of homelessness amongst young people still attending school); IV. young people dumped on relatives by police when their parent is incarcerated. This housing situation tends to break down rapidly. » Young people make decisions without being aware of the consequences. » Young people aren't aware of how to maintain a tenancy. » Socio-economic disparity between higher and lower Blue Mountains. Youth tended to move to Katoomba. » A number of organisations mentioned the high level of couch surfing amongst young people in the area. » Police Youth Liaison Officer would see at least one 13-17 year old who was homeless each week. Girls in the 13-14 year old group were a large component of this group and may have left home because they didn't like the discipline at home. » Young people, particularly females, tended to lock themselves into untenable housing/domestic situations where they were then exploited by men. » Brokerage system for youth services not well understood by Indigenous services. » Some of the accommodation services for women will not take adolescent boys.
SINGLE MALES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Two general types of homeless single men: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Those that have led a dysfunctional life since their youth II. Those that have a mid-life crisis that leads to homelessness » No male only refuge in the region, so more are likely to sleep rough. » Large users of community kitchens. » Homeless men tended not to attend Centrelink offices, particularly Indigenous males. » Men tend to 'wear out their welcome' with family and friends and were more vulnerable to homelessness.
INDIGENOUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Mismatch between demand and stock, with overcrowding a particular problem, as well as single bedroom accommodation for single people. » Alternately, when extended family departs, the entire rent must be paid by the remaining person. » Mismatch between location of stock and requirements

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COHORT	ISSUES ARISING
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Real estate agents won't lease to big families even if parents are in employment. » Family size and overcrowding: multiple generations and extended family living in one dwelling. » Service providers were trying to get local real estate agents on side, but have not been successful due to the high rental demand (landlord's market). » Inter-generational and gender conflict causes young people to leave home. » Centrelink practices – Centrelink tended to communicate with mothers (rather than the male head of family) which caused marital conflict. Young people considered their Youth Allowance to be theirs to spend as they wanted. » Housing NSW tended to provide housing for youth and family members a long way away from their extended family and supports.
FAMILIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Lack of refuges that will take a family (San Miguel recognised as being extremely valuable in the region). » Homelessness of parents means homelessness for children. » The family car is often the only place for families to sleep. » Due to a lack of rental housing in the region large families (as well as families with pets) found it difficult to find rental accommodation. At least one service provider advised families to lie to real estate agents about the number of people who will be residing in the property. » Real estate agents list people on the TICA database (a 'bad tenant' database used by real estate agents to screen potential tenants). » Some families thrust into housing crisis were not aware of the services and support available. These parents often came to the attention of schools (through students). Some schools in the region provided considerable support to these families, including referral, clothing and feeding their children.

4.1.2 POSSIBLE RESEARCH OPTIONS

Two research areas became apparent through the scoping study process as follows:

1. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of the blockages within service provision – from crisis through to post-crisis – resulting from the lack of transitional and long term secure and affordable housing. The research question here might address the ways in which the tight supply situation in the region impacts on the efficiency and effectiveness of the service system.
2. Through a process of action research develop ways of improving service co-ordination and collaboration amongst housing related service providers within the Nepean/Blacktown region.

4.2 PHASE 2 - DATA FINDINGS

The maps and graphs presented below are based on the agency data for four LGAs – Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith. Data was mapped by postcode for Centrelink, Housing NSW, and SHS data. Police data was mapped according to Local Area Command boundaries.

The data shows the predominance of certain household types seeking assistance, and distinct spatial patterns in relation to persons seeking assistance (the postcode attached to their given address).

The mapped data shows significant shared spatial patterns despite different agency data being used. Thus, it can be deduced that homeless persons are coming into contact with all four agencies (with variations) - that is, Centrelink, Housing NSW, SHS and Police - are coming into contact with the same sorts of persons from the same areas. The areas that showed the most intense contacts were low socio-economic status areas such as Mount Druitt and Blacktown as well as lower housing cost regional centres such as Katoomba, Richmond/Windsor and Penrith.

Selected graphs and maps are presented below. These are accompanied by commentary from agency workers and service users, who were questioned about the statistics and spatial patterns during interview.

Figure 4: Homeless persons by gender

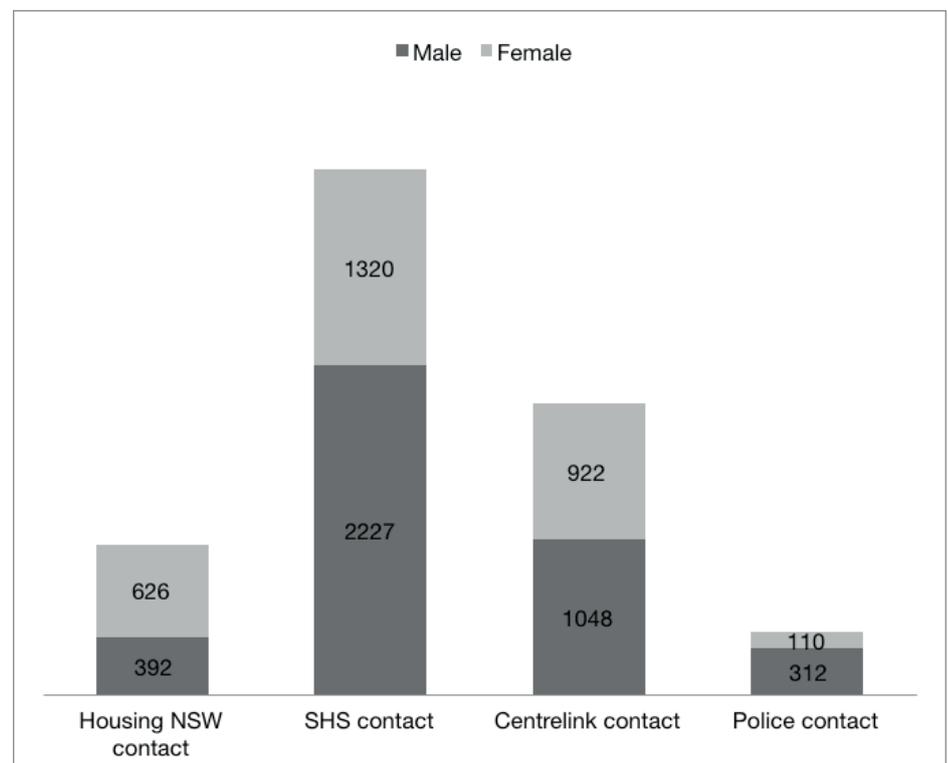


Figure 4 indicates more males than females presented as homeless to SHS, Centrelink and Police. The exception is Housing NSW, where significantly more females than males present to the agency. This may be because women (especially those with children) are more likely to be housed and women are more likely to seek assistance than men. Men may not bother applying for social housing as there is a perception that it is very difficult to access – as one homeless man put it 'I've always been told because I'm a single male I've got one chance in a million of getting a house, but I can put my name down anyway'.

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Centrelink data indicated marginally more men than women sought assistance; however the numbers were fairly even. Centrelink is a common point of contact for all homeless persons as it is an income support agency.

Police data indicated more contact with males than females.

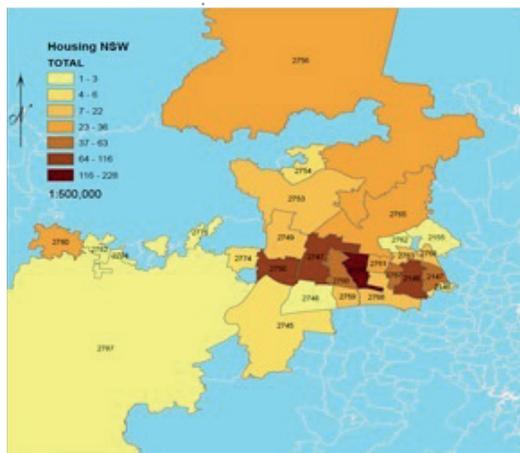
Blacktown agency workers agreed that the Specialist Homelessness Services are a key point of contact – many referrals to services come from youth refuges. Numbers were more skewed towards men – perhaps indicating a greater use of temporary accommodation.

One person in Hawkesbury disagreed with the research data and thought that Housing NSW was more likely to be the most frequent point of contact for homeless persons, rather than the SHS services (as the data showed). However low contact with Housing NSW may reflect the perception that it is very difficult to get housed via this route due to long waiting lists.

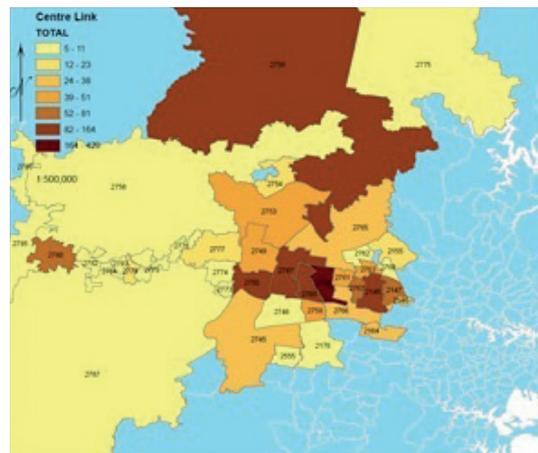
An agency worker in Penrith thought most contacts were initially with Centrelink and Housing NSW rather than SHS: ‘Most people that enter homelessness, in my opinion, are not even aware of or know how to access, you know, the SHS services.’

Figure 5: Total contacts with homeless persons - all agencies

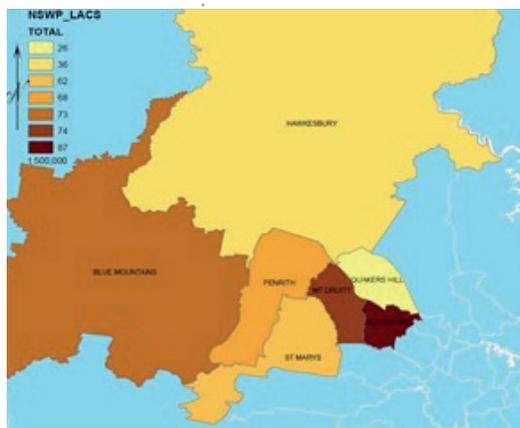
Housing NSW



Centrelink



Police



SHS

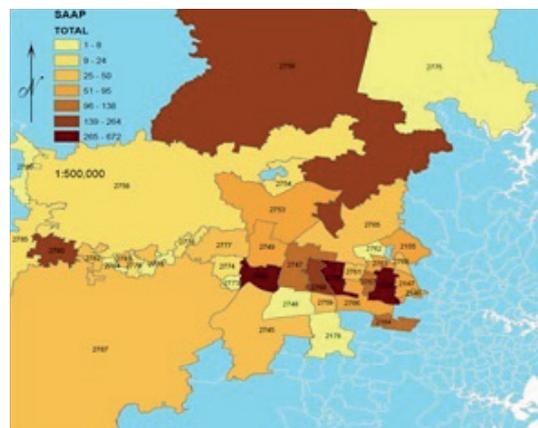


Figure 5 shows the postcode given by homeless persons when coming into contact with the four agencies. Similar pattern of concentration can be seen along the east-west axis of the Blacktown-Mount Druiitt-Penrith postcodes. Hawkesbury is also a significant area especially in relation to Centrelink contacts. SHS contacts can also be seen concentrated in the Katoomba postcode (on the far left of the SHS map).

All agency workers agreed with these spatial patterns, mentioning these areas as loci for homelessness. The Blacktown-Mount Druiitt area is characterized by high levels of social housing and ‘churn’.

Hawkesbury has its own homelessness dynamic which involves both locals and persons coming from neighbouring LGAs (and on one occasion as far away as Darwin).

Increasingly the Blue Mountains has a greater homeless population partially due to lower housing costs and places to sleep rough and partially due to the provision of temporary accommodation in motels: ‘We had imported homelessness. We had people coming here from everywhere to be placed there. And then, when that ran out, they would be here in Katoomba’ (agency worker). Police also identified a migration of persons into community housing in the Blue Mountains from Mount Druiitt and other western Sydney suburbs. The use of motels as temporary accommodation in the Blue Mountains has since reduced.

Two Lithgow based agency workers³ also identified a westward migration of persons to Lithgow as Blue Mountains rentals (traditionally affordable) become too expensive and boarding house and motel accommodation is lost

Figure 6: Homeless persons contact with NSW Police – total, 15-19 year olds, over 65 year olds

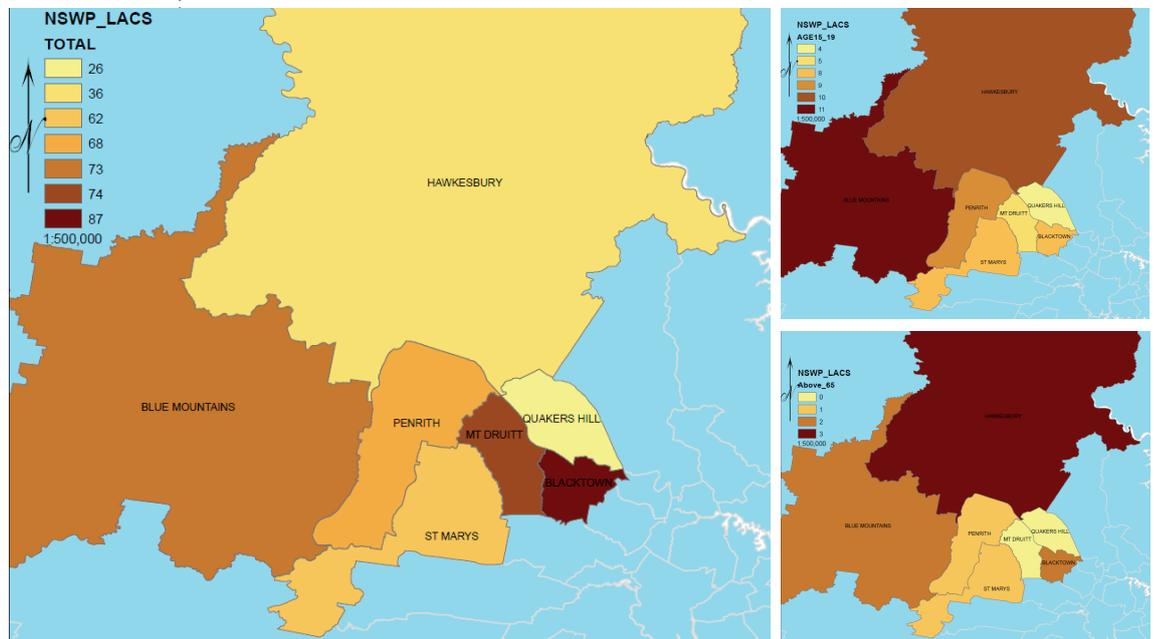


Figure 6 indicates total police contacts, and contacts with two age groups – youth (15-19 year olds) and older people (over 65 year olds). The left had map indicates a locus of homeless/no fixed address persons in Blacktown LAC. Youth are more likely to come into contact with police in the Blue Mountains LAC while older persons are more likely to come into contact with police in Hawkesbury LAC (however it should be noted for youth and older people, that the overall numbers were small).

3 Pers. comm. at a government forum.

4

Police in the Blue Mountains identified coming into contact with young people who are 'runaways' and from families committing offences (some were identified by officers as coming from 'Mount Druitt').

A young person (service user) commented that there were 'families doing it tough' and 'not a whole lot of stuff to do up there' in the Blue Mountains, so young people 'do the weed, they do the bongos, all that sort of stuff. They get in trouble, there is robberies [sic], all that sort of stuff, or they get kicked out of home and then they turn to the youth services'. A police officer disagreed with the view that there is 'nothing to do' in the Blue Mountains, referring to sport and recreational facilities, and blamed dysfunctional families as the cause of youth problems due to poor parenting (or adult criminality).

The Blacktown concentration could be influenced by policing strategies causing youth to come into contact with police in public places – for example agency workers said youth congregating around Westpoint Mall were sometimes 'up to mischief' but other times 'some of our kids do get harassed [by police] for no good reason.' Others remarked that police seemed intent on removing homeless persons from Blacktown's streets.

Agency workers reported a poor relationship between police and youth in the Hawkesbury area.

In terms of the over 65 group in the Hawkesbury, there was a concentration of contact between this cohort and police (albeit based on small numbers) perhaps reflecting older drinkers. In terms of general policing in relation to rough sleepers in the Hawkesbury, one homeless man said 'Like I said if you behave yourself they don't bother you.' The Council too has attempted to problem solve and find alternatives to enforcement.

Figure 7: Housing NSW - total contacts 2009-2011 by gender

Housing NSW – Homeless Numbers 2009-2011

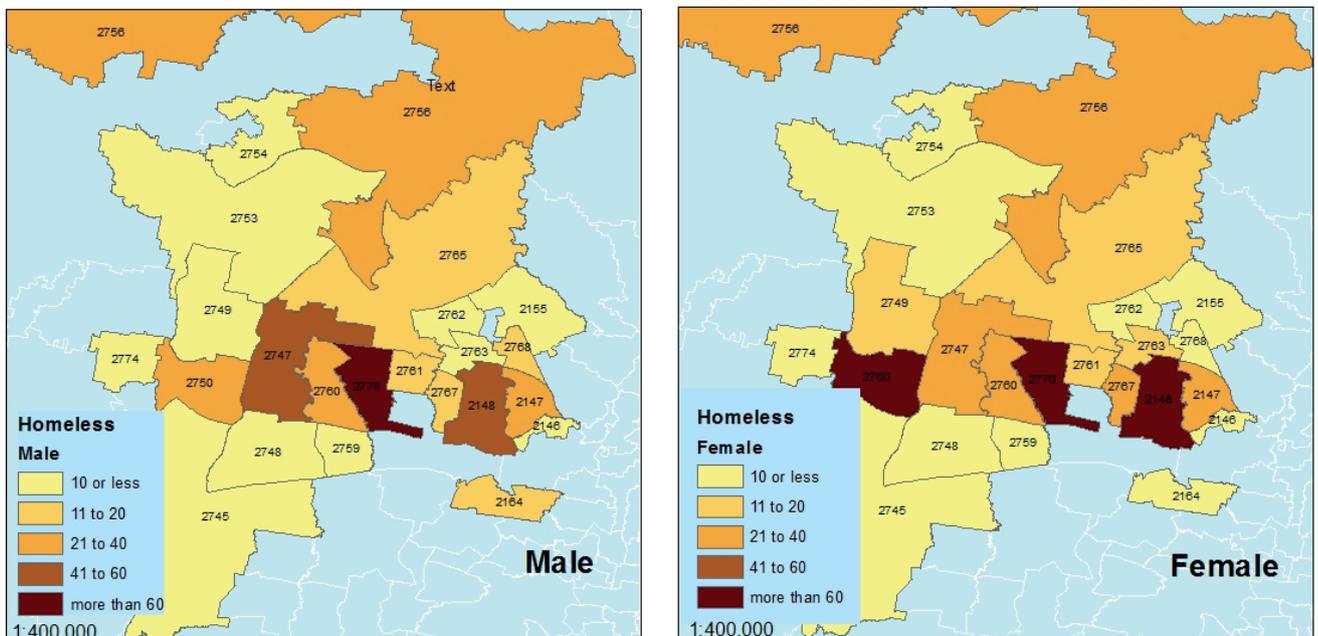


Figure 7 shows Housing NSW contacts by gender. The patterns are roughly the same, however more females than males presented from the Penrith and Blacktown postcode area. Male presentations are highest in the Mount Druitt postcode area.

Many service workers identified DV as driving women's presentations to Housing NSW.

Figure 8: Housing NSW - proportions of males and females by area

Housing NSW – Homeless Numbers 2009-2011

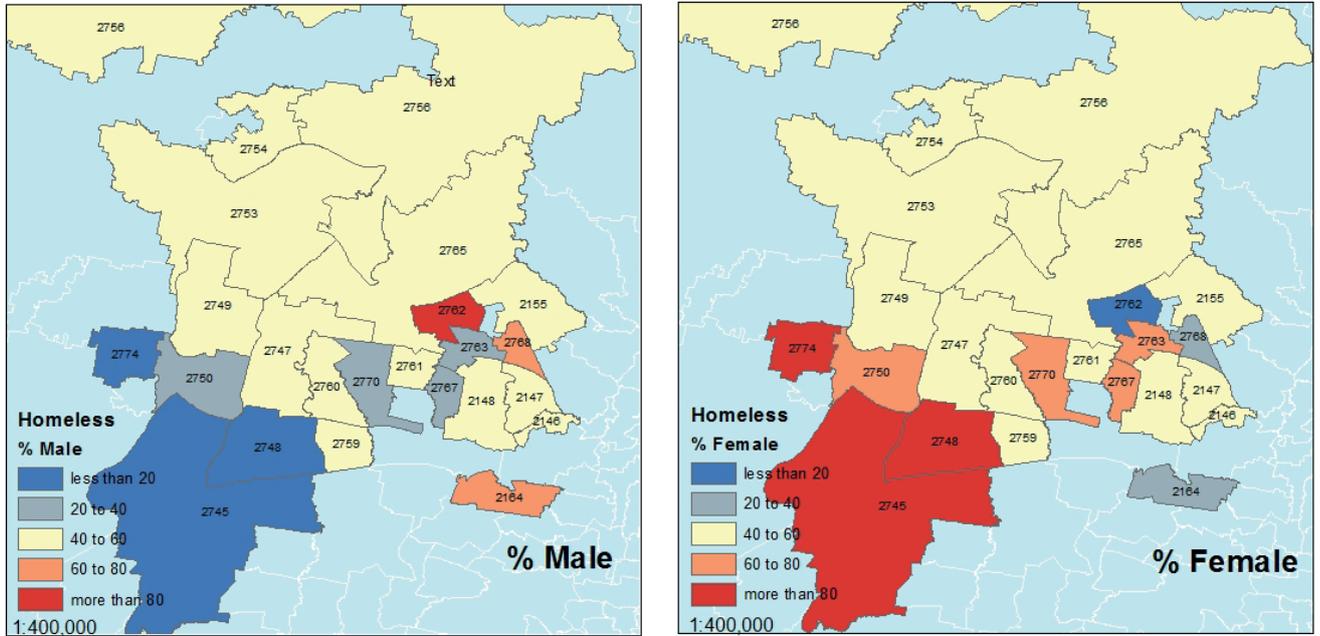


Figure 8 shows disproportionality between males and females by postcode area. The left hand map shows more than 60% of HNSW presentations are males in the orange and red shaded areas – for males, from Schofields and Glenwood/Parklea, whereas more than 60% of presentations are females in Quakers Hill, Doonside, Mount Druitt, Penrith, Blaxland, and the area south of Penrith – Glenmore Park and Orchard Hills.

Figure 9: SHS Household types

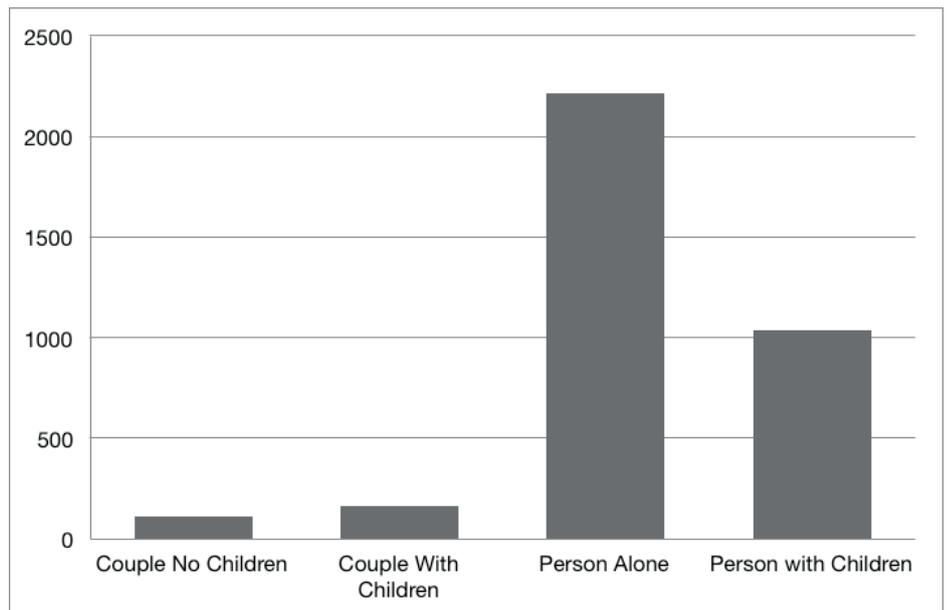


Figure 9 shows the household types presenting to SHS services. The most common household type to present was a person alone. The second was person with children (i.e. sole parents). Couples were much less likely to present as homeless.

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Household types were predominantly 'person alone'. This was certainly true of men, many of whom were single (especially rough sleeping men). However, eligibility criteria (and Centrelink rules) may skew the household data because 'if they identify as a couple, they generally won't get in.' Centrelink income rules also meant presenting as single meant higher income (especially if one partner was working).

In relation to families, 'there's just not very many family refugees around' (agency worker) which perhaps causes break up of couples with children more readily. Single parents were identified as more likely to be housed by Housing NSW but may have a partner that they keep quiet about. A government agency worker was aware of this: '[L]ike all the guys all say they're single but they often have different women and that with them all the time. I would say most are couples.'

Figure 10: Household types proportionally – Housing NSW

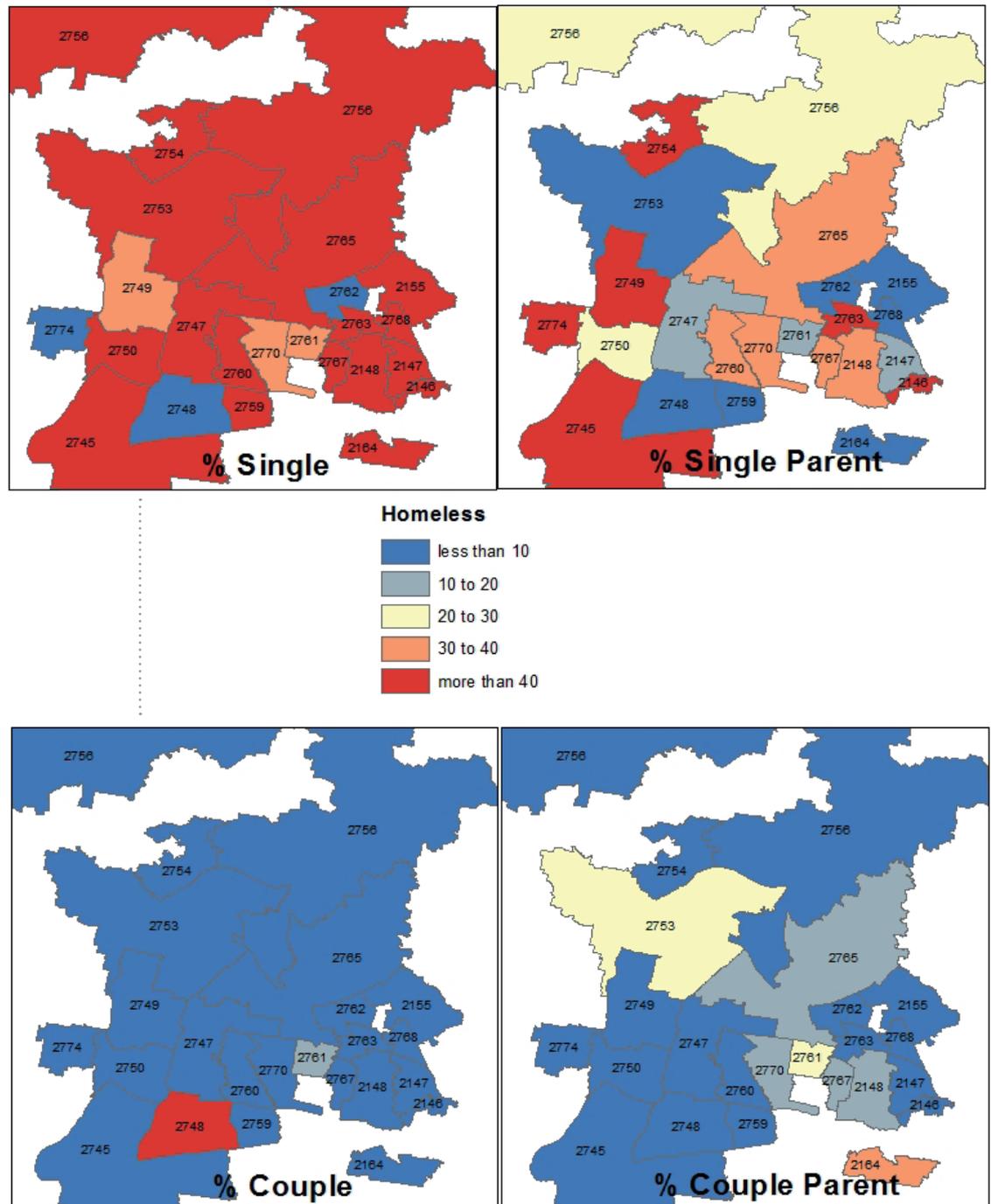


Figure 10 shows in orange and red postcodes where certain household types were 30 or more per cent of all presentations. The top left hand map shows (consistent with Figure 6) that single persons were the majority of presentations across most postcodes except for three. The top right hand map shows areas where single parents were a significant proportion - Blaxland, Cranebrook, Quakers Hill and Glenmore Park (shaded red) all stand out as 40% or more. Couples were under-represented (also consistent with Figure 6) except in Orchard Hills (and this was a very small number of presentations from this postcode overall as it is semi-rural). Likewise couple parents appeared in small proportions and numbers - 20-30 per cent in two postcodes (Richmond and Plumpton/Glendingning).

Similar issues as above pertain to this data as the previous Figure – household data is partially determined by how persons estimate the advantages of presenting in certain ways.

Most agency workers agreed that single persons are a predominant group and that there was a lack of accommodation for singles (the exception being youth refuges). Private rental was becoming harder to access and increasingly expensive.

Agency workers agreed that there were definite geographical concentrations of single women with children – ‘women with kids, yeah loads’, for example in postcode 2754 (North Richmond). There were numerous women with children in refuges especially in the Penrith area.

4.3 HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN THE FOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

A total of 33 agency workers were interviewed (see methods section for breakdown by LGA). In addition six service users were interviewed. All were specifically asked about services in the LGA(s) they worked or lived in.

There was a dynamic local geography of homelessness in each area. While there were slightly different housing conditions in each area, there was a general finding from agency workers’ interviews that social housing was hard to access, and private rental housing was generally too expensive and difficult to access for their clients. There was not enough housing stock – either social housing or private rental stock – for people to move into. This was commonly referred to as a lack of ‘exit points’ from Specialist Homelessness Services and other temporary accommodation.

Rough sleepers were reported as present in all LGAs, with a significant population reported in the Hawkesbury LGA.

Agency staff agreed that services work together effectively in all areas, some areas more close-knit than others. Agency workers showed knowledge of other services and often had formal arrangements in place (such as Memorandums of Understanding) or informal contact networks. Interagencies operated in all areas.

There were perceived service gaps in all areas – and the specific nature of these gaps differed in each LGA. Interviewees specified gaps in services and made suggestions about what was needed to improve service provision. For example, in some areas, it was suggested more youth services are required. Other areas lacked a day drop in centre. Service users emphasized requiring access to affordable housing and health services (mental health services specifically).

The following sections summarise the issues and service gaps in each LGA. The information is based on structured interviews carried out with 33 agency workers and six service users. The detailed findings by LGA are detailed below.

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4.4 BLACKTOWN

4.4.1 CLIENT GROUPS AND QUALIFICATION/ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICE

Some services are specific youth services aimed at homeless or at risk young people. A health service is aged based, catering for 12-25 year olds.

Another youth-specific service is accommodation and case management based. Younger people who did not quite fit in or were assessed as not requiring accommodation services could be assisted in other ways such as case working in private rental.

Other services are gender-specific (women) but are also generalist (being female is the only criteria). Generalist government services such as HNSW have specialist customer service officers assisting 'clients with multiple issues who are homeless'.

4.4.2 UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Various definitions were given including: '[It's in] varying degrees', 'Couch surfing, rough sleeping, or safety issues at home', 'anyone without secure and stable housing' and 'No permanent address'.

4.4.3 PRACTICES

A youth-oriented health service used outreach practices in Mount Druitt and Blacktown, and also to Penrith and the Blue Mountains. This service concentrated on health promotion and training, as well as group work and counselling. This service (as did many other services doing casework) took a 'strengths-based' approach, used cognitive behavioural therapy, practiced 'assertive case management', and advocacy. It also provided basic services like food, showers, and a washing machine.

A residential service for youth had a different demographic in each of its residential units (one is ATSI specific, another all young women, etc.) and offered cooking, living skills and weekly outings to its residents. Education and engagement were emphasised and the service has a structured system of individual case management plans that incorporated goals and 'star ratings'. However, there were not enough services catering for young people presenting with acute mental illness or alcohol and drug abuse issues.

4.4.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES/SERVICE PROVIDERS

There was interchange between services. Most participants mentioned 3-10 other services that they referred to or worked with. There is 'collaboration in this [Blacktown] area', said one worker.

Blacktown agency workers mentioned Marist Youth Care, the nurses clinics at youth refuges, school counsellors, HNSW, HPIC (for emergencies), doctors and psychiatrists from a medical team, local businesses, ADHC, PCYC, John Maroney Correctional Centre, Compulsory Drug Treatment Correctional Centre (Parklea), FACS, Mission Australia, Jobs Network, Bungarabee House at Blacktown Hospital, and education institutions such as TAFEs, Loyola School, Chifley School, and WesTec.

One service had a formal relationship with HNSW and an agency worker said 'HNSW are awesome to work with', however they also stated that there was 'less flexibility due to new rules' at the Blacktown HNSW office. Another said Blacktown HNSW was 'helpful'.

4.4.5 HOMELESS PERSONS - TOTAL CONTACT, POLICE CONTACT, HOUSING NSW CONTACT, GENDER, HOUSEHOLD TYPES

There was a perception that there had been an increase in homelessness in the past five years. Single persons were relatively disadvantaged. According to an agency worker, 'single people find it harder to get private accommodation because if you've got a disability pension or a sole parent pension you've got a better chance on renting a property than somebody that's on a Newstart payment or Youth Allowance. You just haven't got the affordability. We all believe there's a greater amount of homeless single people.'

At the time of the study, more males than females presented as homeless. However in the past there were more females (due to escaping DV, from gaol or rehab).

A lot of young people were coming from Mount Druitt/Shalvey/Bidwell/Whalan, Doonside, or south west Sydney (from Juvenile Justice); not so many were coming from Penrith. For youth services, marginally more males than females were presenting. A youth service said more females than males were presenting (but this fluctuates over time). In youth services couples without children were common.

Women fleeing DV were a common household type; men tended to go to Parramatta as there is a perception that Parramatta services are all for men.

Single parents were a key household type in the Blacktown area. Single parents congregated: 'Mount Druitt is a hotspot'. Another worker commented 'In the Mount Druitt area there seems to be, well, in my opinion anyway... is there's a fair turnover in housing... We've got lots of people going in and out of gaols... in and out of rehabs as well; relinquishing tenancies.'

There are 'some couples with kids'; another service said they saw the 'occasional couple with kids'.

4.4.6 BARRIERS

The system itself may contain barriers; 'services are bound by service agreements and can be quite specialised'.

Affordability in the private rental market has declined – those on benefits are being 'edged out'. There is stiff competition for private rental. Not enough of it is low rent. Prices are going up – a new five bedroom house recently sold for \$780,000 in Mount Druitt which is a new record for the area. Investor landlords were buying in the area and exploitative landlordism was on the rise.

There were 'waiting lists for many services. Refuges are always full'. Some people need supported accommodation and wraparound services. Only one service was coping with demand however still had to refer certain cohorts elsewhere.

Under 15 year old youth cannot get into refuges and 'unless DOCS was involved' had few options. Also, 19 and 20 year olds are problematic as they are deemed too old for youth specific services. Early morning appointments did not work for young people – they often slept in and missed appointments which could jeopardise Centrelink benefits and parole requirements.

Police contact with the homeless was not seen in a positive light – 'police are trying to rid Blacktown of homeless people'. Police targeted young people known to them or those on bail conditions who were 'loitering' around Blacktown shopping centre.

Although homeless people were referred to HNSW it was perceived that the waiting list is '6 years'. One service said they had got '1 [person] in 4 years' into HNSW accommodation. A government worker said priority wait times could be from 2 months to 2 years. HNSW in Mount Druitt is perceived to have long waiting times and the office is 'very busy'. Blacktown LGA was perceived as a high demand area. Mental illness or intellectual disability did not necessary ensure priority status for HNSW.

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Real estate agents will not rent to people with children, ATSI people, or anyone on Centrelink benefits.

Couples in general had no access to services as transitional accommodation will not accept them, and nor will single sex services – HNSW was seen as the only option if a couple wanted to be housed together.

A lack of paperwork/ID can hinder assistance. African background young people often did not have ID and nor would their parents supply this.

Centrelink had a waiting time of 6-8 weeks and going into the office could involve a 3-hour wait - 'they don't make things easy' said an NGO worker. After a client finally received benefits, they received back pay and 'then they go nuts!' This can lead to having no money if the client has poor financial management skills.

There was a lack of apprenticeships and employment opportunities. Employment agencies 'sometimes can't deliver'. Some courses require money.

While there was a specialist youth service, certain cohorts of young people were referred elsewhere and there were not enough services catering for young people presenting with acute mental illness or alcohol and drug abuse issues.

4.4.7 THREATS TO STABILITY OF HOUSING

Poverty and poor financial literacy were cited as leading to arrears and termination. HNSW had an arrears team operating in the Mount Druitt office. HNSW gives 'people lots of chances, but terminations do happen'. Tenants were aware of the process and time their payments/arrears. If there was a bad rental history, giving the option of paying rent via Centrepay was seen as a good idea.

DV perpetrators can sometimes damage property which affected the partner's future chances of securing a rental property.

Rent increases in the private rental market are a threat to stability.

Housing NSW is selling off stock.

The lack of a case plan or support after being housed can lead to the tenancy failing.

4.4.8 WHICH GROUPS MOST VULNERABLE?

Those subject to family chaos, abuse and neglect.

Those who are 'in between clients' – perhaps falling through the gaps or not finding the right service.

Those who are mentally ill, or substance abusers – paying rent may not be 'a priority'.

Women who have left a relationship and had no access to Centrelink income or services (i.e. from NZ or on certain visas)

Those listed on TICA (the 'bad tenant' database used by real estate agents to vet applicants).

Single women who have less income and are not usually interested in share housing.

Young people from CALD families – culture clashes about rules led to conflict and children leaving home at a young age.

Literacy is a big problem – it was estimated that 50% of one service's clients 'have trouble reading and writing'.

Single parents with reduced incomes (moving from Single Parenting Payment to Newstart) were seen as another vulnerable cohort.

4.4.9 LIMITATIONS IN OFFERING SUPPORT

Certain cohorts - under 15 year olds, young adults aged 19-25, and couples did not always qualify for eligibility for services. Unless under 15s are of infant age, 'DOCS [FACS] doesn't want to know' (this was a repeated theme).

There was limited brokerage money available for temporary accommodation or material aid.

'A lot of services are looking for the ideal young person' – however young people had often suffered trauma, used drugs or had behavioural issues. Some services (faith-based) require abstinence from drug use – people can get kicked out of services.

Staffing - no particular qualifications are required to work in a refuge.

Positions are subject to cuts or are frozen, or staff are part time – this cuts down on client time. There was uncertainty around funding, which is triennial. 'SHS funding is not a lot of money'.

There was a lack of counsellors (long waiting list).

There was a perceived disjunction between the work of NGOs, and some Government departments (Health and DOCS [FACS]⁴).

4.4.10 GAPS SPECIFIC TO LOCAL AREA AND CAPACITY IMPROVEMENT – THE 'WISH LIST'

Key priorities:

Accommodation is required for younger males (18+). Services are needed for young adults (18-25 year olds) as they are 'falling through the gaps'.

A tenancy support officer (for young people primarily).

A day/drop in youth services is needed in Mount Druitt.

A family service in Mount Druitt.

More accommodation for young women with children (as the service for this cohort is always full).

Better relationships with private real estate agents.

Other needs:

A local alcohol and drug treatment facility (although there is one for adolescents, Dunsmore House in Rooty Hill).

A community centre in Blacktown.

Emergency relief – more funds required. Assistance with furniture and whitegoods.

Family support services.

A tenancy support liaison officer.

More outreach.

More hotels and boarding houses (there are none in Blacktown).

Stock – more housing – Transitional Accommodation is not cost effective. Supported accommodation.

Services for single women.

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Supported housing especially for people with disabilities.

Better mental health services. Longer term counselling – the current 12 weeks ‘is not enough’.

Job placements, goal setting, career paths, education and employment.

4.5 BLUE MOUNTAINS

4.5.1 CLIENT GROUPS AND QUALIFICATION/ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICE

Centrelink as an agency for income support also offered extra support to people presenting as homeless, or at risk of homelessness via specialist officers. Anyone can see a social worker in Centrelink; homelessness is not a qualification for service provision but it was estimated that perhaps up to 30% of social worker work was related to homelessness.

A women’s accommodation service catered for women and children leaving domestic violence and also families in crisis, single women, and chronically homeless women.

A youth accommodation service that services all of Nepean area (and beyond) from its base in the Blue Mountains incorporated a multitudes of projects such as crisis accommodation, transitional housing, supported independent living and case management. Age ranges vary according to specific project (e.g. transitional housing is 15-18, other projects 13-18, and some to age 25).

4.5.2 UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Definitions given included ‘without a stable, safe or consistent place to live’, ‘someone with no fixed place of abode’, and also incorporated deeper understanding of lack of support, lack of opportunity and difficulties in overcoming barriers to housing.

A police perception was that homeless persons consisted of the long-term rough sleepers: ‘there’s long term people who live in the bush and caves and under bridges’ (and for some ‘it’s a choice’, said one police officer); and juveniles who are couch surfing or ‘runaways’: ‘there’s also people who bed hop so they might be a juvenile who’s staying with friends, different friends every night’. Conflicted or criminal family backgrounds were seen as a cause of youth homelessness by police officers.

4.5.3 PRACTICES

Centrelink’s role is to provide casework, a comprehensive assessment of someone at risk, and monitor vulnerability indicators with a view to advocating for payments to continue for homeless people without job participation requirements. Particular workers may also be involved in broader networking and interagency projects (e.g. Project 40⁵).

Women’s accommodation service took a brokerage role, providing transitional housing, maintaining partnership properties, case management, outreach and drop-in, and referred to other support services.

Youth accommodation services provided crisis accommodation, transitional housing, supported independent living and case management, intensive case planning, family restoration, as well as outreach, education support and follow-up. Practices had also changed for the better: ‘we have longer time to work with young peoples’ challenging behaviours; they’re not exited into homelessness any more’.

5 This is a Housing First style program, using outreach to attempt to transition persons experiencing homelessness into permanent housing. It is auspiced by Wentworth Community Housing Ltd.

Police did not have interaction with homeless persons unless there was an offence committed - offensive language, shoplifting (or other minor offences), or when a member of the public felt afraid based on the person's appearance or behaviour and called the police. For those homeless persons who were mentally ill and became unstable, police may transport them to a psychiatric unit seeking that they be admitted.

4.5.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES/SERVICE PROVIDERS

Many of the service providers in the Blue Mountains constantly networked and cross-referred with each other for accommodation, case management and advocacy. All workers interviewed were able to name at least five other services with which they had regular contact, but it was noted on many occasions that every service was always at capacity. Some 'partner' organisations were seen as not as helpful as they once were.

The police had an MOU with a community housing provider and liaised with them on a regular basis. Police had ad hoc interactions with services, for example, with Springwood Community Centre in relation to a food service aimed at homeless persons. Police also worked with NSW Health and DOCS [FACS] in relation to interventions.

4.5.5 HOMELESS PERSONS - TOTAL CONTACT, POLICE CONTACT, HOUSING NSW CONTACT, GENDER, HOUSEHOLD TYPES

There is a rough sleeping population in the Blue Mountains – persons are sleeping in caves, and in one instance at the back of a shop in a skip.

Agency workers agreed with the data that shows young people (young males especially) couch-surfing or sharing in overcrowded accommodation.

The lower Blue Mountains and upper Blue Mountains have different cohorts of persons experiencing homelessness. For example, single men in the upper Mountains were a higher contact cohort for Centrelink (perhaps related to the area having a long history of boarding houses and cheaper accommodation) – 'there is greater social need in Katoomba' said one person. Contacts in the lower Mountains were more likely to be family-related (where DV might be a factor).

It was also mentioned that the Blue Mountains had 'imported' homelessness, where people from anywhere had been temporarily housed in the cheap motels up and down the highway (this brokerage practice has since ceased). Some of the families who came to police attention were believed to have come from other areas ('Mount Druitt' was mentioned) and been allocated temporary or permanent housing in the Blue Mountains. However this movement has now reversed – migration is outward, towards Penrith/Kingswood, and Lithgow, partly due to the fact that temporary motel accommodation is no longer being sourced in the Blue Mountains. Women with children were more likely to go elsewhere, rather than to a motel with no cooking facilities.

The Blue Mountains police believe that homelessness has changed post- the Richmond report (deinstitutionalisation of people with mental illness) – 'once it was all alchos' but now there are others that are homeless (people with mental illness). The police believed that single males and juvenile females were the most common homeless cohorts in the Blue Mountains homeless population.

Homelessness is 'not a big problem from a crime perspective' in the Blue Mountains according to police – however there was a serious assault on a female bushwalker perpetrated by a mentally ill homeless man with a history of violent offending. Another cave-dwelling man was 'aggressive' but had not been involved in any offences. Another man sleeping in a skip was seen as a threat to himself rather than to others.

Blue Mountains police disagreed with the view stated by some NGOs that there was 'less to do' for young people in the Blue Mountains – one officer cited lack of strength in the

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family rather than having 'nothing to do' as causing youth homelessness. Another Blue Mountains police officer indicated that young people coming into contact with police were 'runaways' and/or from homes where the parents were involved in crime or drug dealing.

4.5.6 BARRIERS

The overwhelming consensus amongst agency workers was that the lack of housing stock was the biggest barrier to reducing or overcoming homelessness, i.e. there were few affordable accommodation options for service users in the Blue Mountains.

The planning rules are strictly enforced in the LGA so poor quality or less habitable dwellings cannot be used for housing. However there are plenty of properties lying empty.

Competition for affordable, suitable and permanent supported accommodation was high. Priority social housing was an 18 month wait, and if a person happened to find a short term private rental they could lose their priority status and 'go to the bottom of the list'.

There was some level of mistrust amongst NGOs of government agencies due to a reduction in assistance such as changes to policies (e.g. temporary accommodation reduced from 28 days to three, bond assistance now considered a loan). There was also a perceived lack of understanding amongst government workers about issues such as DV, and a high turnover of workforce, and a lack of commitment to follow through on issues raised.

There was a reported lack of emergency accommodation for women escaping DV in the Blue Mountains. One police officer claimed women escaping DV would not accept referrals to services outside of the Blue Mountains – 'they won't even go to Penrith'. Sometimes this was because a relative or support person was local. Real estate agents may not let rental properties to these women.

There was a perceived lack of youth services and for younger persons (under 15) who were not eligible for youth refuges; it was felt DOCS [FACS] were not assisting this group.

4.5.7 THREATS TO STABILITY OF HOUSING

Poverty was seen as a threat, as was the unwillingness of private landlords to let to homeless people. Rent increases could also lead to homelessness.

Obtaining a short term private rental meant going to the bottom of the social housing waiting list.

There was a big price gap between public housing and private market. Intermediately-priced housing is disappearing (pushing people westwards towards Lithgow).

4.5.8 WHICH GROUPS MOST VULNERABLE?

Women leaving DV situations.

Older single men and single people on Newstart Allowance (share house residents are slightly better off as they can share the cost of rent).

People with diverse/complex issues.

Teenage girls will partner with men in unsafe, unequal relationships just to have somewhere to stay.

Young people who were unsettled or in transition were more likely to take risks, and less able to negotiate when difficulties arose. Under 15 year olds.

4.5.9 LIMITATIONS IN OFFERING SUPPORT

Youth services have age restrictions. It was perceived that FACS would not follow through on anyone over 13 (FACS prioritises infants and young children).

Lack of housing stock. Short term and medium term housing is not available in the Blue Mountains and people have to go elsewhere.

The attitude amongst some decision makers in government hierarchy that if homeless persons fail to show for appointments 'they must be penalised' aggravates an already dire situation.

Even priority status for social housing entails an 18 month wait.

Police expressed dismay that mental health services are not available 24 hours a day and that hospitals will not always 'schedule' mentally ill people.

4.5.10 GAPS SPECIFIC TO LOCAL AREA AND CAPACITY IMPROVEMENT – THE 'WISH LIST'

Key priorities:

Youth services – need to expand. Also, dealing with young people with behavioural issues who find it hard to comply with rules/expectations.

Lack of services for 13-15 year olds:

- » Need adequate foster care, support for carers, support for risk-taking youth (who are getting younger), and alternatives to medication.
- » Policy changes – rigid policy on young people who 'blow it' (e.g. crime, drug and alcohol); few services will touch them.
- » Resources and accommodation for young women over 18, and women who don't seem keen to live in share houses together.
- » More opportunities for appropriate social interaction.

More housing options across the board. More exit options (i.e. options for exiting homelessness cycle).

Wraparound support for people with complex needs.

Other needs:

Raise Newstart and Rental Assistance payments.

FACS and Mental Health acute care teams need to be available 24 hours.

4.6 HAWKESBURY

4.6.1 CLIENT GROUPS AND QUALIFICATION/ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICE

Some services were targeted towards those who were homeless or at risk; others were more generalist and had no restrictions. A food-based service fed anyone who turned up – the clients are 80-90% older single males with a small minority of women, single parents and children.

A community-centre based service ran programs for a broad range of people in the community – for 'socially isolated and disadvantaged people', including homeless persons.

Other services specialized: in families (at least one parent with child/ren); women escaping DV; youths aged 15-18 who are homeless or in need of help due to family relationship breakdown.

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4.6.2 UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Definitions included: 'No stable accommodation, not safe or secure...don't have their own place'; 'if they don't have a permanent, secure, reliable place to live', 'couch surfing', 'camping', and 'no permanent place of residence'.

4.6.3 PRACTICES

Casework was a core practice and an approach described by one service was 'all round casework'. 'Solutions-based practice and strengths-based case management' was another service's stated approach. Options and referrals were based on needs. One service did not deal with drug or alcohol issues (faith-based).

There were limited outreach practices. Outreach was practiced by a government worker which meant going to places where rough sleepers congregate: 'I take Centrelink to them'. Establishing rapport and using a mobile office (laptop and phone) allowed the worker to assist rough sleepers to claim benefits.

Family services worked closely with schools.

One service ran many programs for both adults and children, including playgroups and a CBT- program using drums (Drumbeat).

A website with all the services available in the Hawkesbury has been developed and this was a useful tool for the Council and services.

4.6.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES/SERVICE PROVIDERS

Agency workers cited 5-10 other services that they worked with.

Agency workers mentioned local schools, the mental health team, Housing NSW in Penrith, the Salvation Army, churches, Centrelink, the Women's Cottage, HCOS, BEAM, the Hawkesbury City Council, Wentworth Community Housing, Police (DV Liaison Officer), Legal Aid, Family and Community Services, TAFE, the John Moroney correctional centre, Hawkesbury Community Kitchen, DV specialist service Nurreen, the rehab unit in Yarramundi, and the family service San Miguel.

One service said they mainly worked with other local services but depending on need would refer further afield.

Whilst government and funded agencies reported working well together, there was conflict between agencies and a volunteer group operating in the Hawkesbury region. This was felt to be a divisive situation and led to conflict between agencies and the volunteer organisation, and between agencies and clients.

4.6.5 HOMELESS PERSONS - TOTAL CONTACT, POLICE CONTACT, HOUSING NSW CONTACT, GENDER, HOUSEHOLD TYPES

There is a general view homelessness is on the rise in Hawkesbury. 'The homeless problem is getting bigger'. Homelessness is 'hidden', and included working families in casual employment. Services were noticing growing demand. Project 40, while successful, is not necessarily ongoing as there was uncertainty around future funding.

The rough sleeper population in the Hawkesbury was significant. People slept in McQuade Park, on the football ground, near the river, and under the bridge at Windsor. Other persons were in the bush, sleeping rough, living in cars, camping, or towed a caravan around the national park evading rangers. At Freemans Reach people were living in sheds, or squatting. Others stayed at Wilberforce Caravan Park. Others were in

Kaleidoscope Lodge (used for brokerage short-term accommodation) and other motels. Others were living in garages or paying small amounts of rent to stay in decrepit buildings on farms. Indigenous men, and one female, were living in the bush near a small town. Some were perceived to be 'hiding' – perhaps avoiding warrants, or for other reasons. It was easy to 'lose track' of people and many were not in contact with Centrelink or any other services. Mental illness is an issue for many, especially single men.

It was generally the view that Hawkesbury people stayed in the Hawkesbury area: 'a lot of locals – [they] won't go to other areas'. However outsiders were present too – on one occasion coming from as far away as Darwin. Workers thought that police attitudes and practices are 'OK' and incidences involving conflict have declined; others said the police targeted young people and searched them unnecessarily. Young people often 'jump trains' as that is the main form of transport in and out of the region and come into contact with police for fare evasion.

Young people were less likely to access services and more likely to 'couch surf'. There was no outreach worker for youth. Some young people do not contact any agencies so may not be represented in the statistics.

Older persons who were homeless are more likely to have alcohol problems.

Some estimated equal proportions of homeless men and women. One worker estimated 60% males and 40% females. Females might not access services as often as they go to motels or stay with boyfriends. Another worker estimated 80% of people presenting are males aged between 30-55 years. A youth service worker said the proportion of young people presenting is roughly equal males and females.

A new and expanding group amongst homeless persons was middle aged women, often educated, who were experiencing homelessness because of DV and/or a loss of income.

Those in couple relationships with children were presenting in smaller numbers. Some couples hide their status from Centrelink in order to maximize their benefits, due to Centrelink de facto rules.

Families presenting to family services were 90% women with children. It was estimated that about 80% of one family service's clients came from Blacktown LGA, and the other 20% came from Hawkesbury. About 50% of families were involved in the corrections system.

Hawkesbury Council appeared to be under pressure to approve (or not issue orders against) housing options with poor amenity – because of high demand, and because people needed a roof over their heads (even a poor quality one).

4.6.6 BARRIERS

Agency workers believed that there were 'heaps' of barriers to reducing homelessness. Homelessness is increasing (this was a common theme) and a worker said they 'had not seen many people housed'. Even those deemed 'at risk' and who were in the highest classification for assistance were not being housed. Strikingly, few people mentioned HNSW or Wentworth Community Housing as potential sources of housing for their clients – there was 'limited options for transitioning into social housing' and social housing was 'almost non-existent'. There was 'less [HNSW] stock' available – only South Windsor and Riverstone – 'there's nothing over the bridge'. One worker said in regards to social housing that they had 'only got 2 people in 3 years into Wentworth Housing and none into Housing NSW'.

Another issue is 'bottlenecking' – people who cannot be moved on from transitional accommodation into something more permanent, and social housing tenants who may no longer be eligible but are in social housing even though their income may have risen.

There was no crisis housing for single adults who could not access public housing, and there were many rough sleepers in the Hawkesbury region.

The requirement to show 50 rejections from the private rental market to be designated as Priority for social housing was seen as very difficult to collect. The most needy, illiterate and mentally ill homeless people could not organise this.

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There were two services for families. Both were usually full. 'In 4 years, no one has gotten in there' said one worker. One family service has a small number of units and a high turn away rate due to demand. The lack of family services in Blacktown puts pressure on the Hawkesbury-based family services – it was estimated that 80% of families seeking assistance from family services in Hawkesbury LGA come from Blacktown LGA.

Private rental was seen as 'exorbitant' or relatively unaffordable at \$240-\$260 for a 2 bedroom unit or \$350-\$380 per week for a house. Private rental properties that were potentially available were often 'of a lesser standard' or 'substandard'. There was a dearth of studio/bedsit/unit style accommodation due to predominance of the larger housing stock typical to the area. For those on Newstart, rent and cost of living 'is unaffordable'.

There was competition for private rental. Real estate agents will not rent to households with children (especially large families), single mothers or people on Centrelink. Aboriginality is a big factor in preventing access to the private rental market. If a person was listed on TICA, 'god help them' - they could not access any private rental, and 'they can't even get into the caravan parks'. People may have no bond, or have debts from the past, or have been evicted from Housing NSW. Caravan parks charged \$200-\$300 a week and some did not allow children. Once people got into a caravan park they often could 'not get out', spending most of their money on rent.

Wentworth Community Housing found it difficult to headlease properties despite the 'Tenancy Guarantee' payment.

A lack of income and employment – 'no jobs', 'the job agency has no jobs' – adds to homelessness. Sometimes people 'pretend to go to TAFE' to fulfil their Centrelink requirements. Clients become depressed due to unemployment and family problems.

There was not a lot of material aid available (e.g. furniture packages).

One service had specific rules and required active engagement, contact and casework, and did not accept drug use. Clients who did not engage had to leave the accommodation.

In terms of service funding, 'resources are dwindling...no one's got any funding'. Another said 'this limits case load and [staff have to cover] a big territory'.

Youth presenting with high and complex needs were expected to be accommodated in services with skeleton staff levels. There was 'no correlation between staff and needs'.

There was unmet need for mental health services and a lack of specialist services in the LGA.

4.6.7 THREATS TO STABILITY OF HOUSING

Affordability: private rentals have low vacancy rates. Rents are going up, as are bills.

A lack of living skills can lead to arrears.

A lack of brokerage money for financial assistance.

A lack of ongoing support or case management.

For single parents, the lack of a 'second parent' or other family member such as an aunt or grandparent could threaten a tenancy.

No movement into home ownership due to the deposit gap.

4.6.8 WHICH GROUPS MOST VULNERABLE?

Large families and ATSI families.

Single persons.

Couples 18-30.

Those with alcohol or drug addictions.

Those with a mental illness.

Youth were especially vulnerable – under 15s, also those over 18 (both age groups not eligible for youth service).

For parents, a reduction in income from Single Parenting Payment to Newstart can make them more vulnerable to homelessness.

Older women were an emerging group vulnerable to homelessness and poverty. Housing and finance problems lead to relationship problems which led to conflict or DV.

4.6.9 LIMITATIONS IN OFFERING SUPPORT

The number of services, and places in services in the Hawkesbury is 'small'.

Some services are age or gender specific. A youth service 'could not take all ages' – for example under 15s had no service. Also, over 18 young adults have few services.

Couples aged 18-30 – no services. For those that have had children removed – they cannot get a house without their children but the children won't be returned without adequate housing.

There are capacity barriers - a youth service said it had free beds sometimes, 'but not for long'.

'Capacity is the only issue' – the two family services with accommodation units are always full.

Distance was seen as taking up time in terms of outreach work.

In regards to accessing the Rentstart Bond Loan scheme: affordable rent is assessed by HNSW as being 50% of the total household weekly income (this was increased from 30% as general housing costs rose). Rents are more affordable for those on Disability Support or Aged Pension payments. However if clients are single and on Newstart or Youth Allowance it is difficult to find a rental that is less than 50% of weekly income in the four LGAs. If there are other people to be housed with them (partner/friend), then the combined weekly household income may enable them to have better rental affordability.

One service receives intermittent Federal funding from the Department of Social Services and relies on donations. A local club pays the rent on the building, and volunteers keep the service running with their labour and raffles and donations. The service needs to expand, operate out of a better-located building, and provide day services outside of meal times.

There was no psychologist or psychiatrist that was free to consult. There was a waiting list to see a counsellor. There was no health outreach service.

4.6.10 GAPS SPECIFIC TO LOCAL AREA AND CAPACITY IMPROVEMENT – THE 'WISH LIST'

Key priorities:

A day drop in centre on a main road is at the forefront of the list for several workers (both government and NGO) – a place where people could sit, 'hang out', watch TV, have access to storage lockers, have a shower and do their laundry. This should be partnered with outreach services and linked to transitioning into permanent accommodation.

More family accommodation services/places – a family service in Blacktown would take the pressure off the Hawkesbury-based family services.

Sources of affordable housing.

More accommodation for single people (males and females), and couples.

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More street workers/outreach. 'More on the ground workers' including Health outreach. Needs to be linked to actual housing outcomes.

Other needs:

More youth services. Youth-specific Turning Point was always full. Any new youth service should be located in Windsor. Places to refer people to, 'especially youth'.

There was a perception that DOCS [FACS] needed to 'pull its weight' with under 15 year olds.

Housing NSW should start a shared equity home ownership program.

Case management was needed. Material Aid.

Transport links are poor and buses stop in the evening. This causes isolation. Better public transport.

More emergency accommodation – for a few days.

Access to mental health services including acute care. Follow up post-release from hospitals.

'More staff, more funding and another building', 'increase capacity [accommodation units] and staff'. Another also said they 'could do with another building!' to run more programs and workshops.

More early intervention and follow up.

4.7 PENRITH

4.7.1 CLIENT GROUPS AND QUALIFICATION/ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICE

In 2005 Penrith was identified as a Regional City in the NSW Government's *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy*. Penrith is to play a vital role as an employment hub and service centre for Western and North Western Sydney over the next 25 years. Many services are thus geared towards Penrith, but also provide service to the Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Blacktown, and beyond. A food and accommodation service is an exception with a reported 70% of referrals from the local Penrith area.

Client groups: some services are specifically targeted towards persons who were homeless or at risk of homelessness, however there was flexibility - 'although, in saying that, we don't actually have a criteria as such'. Other services had few eligibility restrictions other than requiring assistance.

Youth services can be age-restricted i.e. cut off at 17.

Services such as Police, Housing NSW and Centrelink are generalist but have specific officers/staff who dealt with youth or vulnerable/high needs clients/homeless persons.

One service was targeted at women escaping DV.

4.7.2 UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Definitions included: 'Somebody that doesn't have a permanent place to stay, I suppose that sums it up', 'not having a stable place to live', 'not having your own defined address', 'no permanent home for themselves'. One worker used the Chamberlain and McKenzie (1992) definition, mentioning 'primary, secondary and tertiary' homelessness.

One police officer interviewed indicated that they believe homelessness was often a 'choice' and asserted that there are services and housing available for those who needed

help. They perceived those with drug and alcohol issues as choosing to spend money on this rather than housing/rent. There was not a large rough sleeping population in Penrith – fewer ‘true homeless’, as the police called them. Also seasonal factors influenced the numbers of people sleeping rough.

In contradiction to these views, a council officer took a different stance on the question of ‘choice’:

Homelessness is often caused by a complex range of circumstances and people that are homeless are one of the most vulnerable and isolated groups in the community. Homeless people are excluded from participation in social, recreational, cultural and economic life and people who are sleeping rough are often hidden from the broader community. It is evident that it takes many years of healing before some homeless people can trust other people and engage with services, this includes government departments and agencies as well as other service providers.

4.7.3 PRACTICES

Practices range from casework, family support and brokerage to providing accommodation (some transitional, some time limited). One worker estimated that ‘probably 80 per cent of our clients would have a case worker’.

A government worker said: ‘well, it’s supporting clients through their housing process on applying for housing. Also... helping them to obtain documents that would give them eligibility into public housing and linking them with support services so they’ve got supports to cope with a lot of their complex problems.’

One service has adopted a ‘Housing First’ approach. Youth services gave support and casework and worked with families, however when a young person cannot live at home, they ‘concentrate on tenancy’ – establishing, and then maintaining, tenancies. In the private rental market this involved the agency going on a lease as joint tenant with young people.

Assertive outreach was practiced by NGOs and government agencies, where resources permitted. Outreach is ‘...to get the homeless people. When I was doing the one [Homeless Hub] up at Katoomba it’s to try and get the people that are living in the caves.’

One service provided meals in three locations.

One NGO had a very structured approach in working with clients involving setting goals and a star-based rating system. Two workers spoke of a ‘strengths-based’ approach to client work. In general the NGOs approach to clients was holistic, i.e. based around the clients’ specific needs.

Material aid: Special Homelessness Service NGOs had access to brokerage money which was used for rent arrears or in other crisis situations.

The Homeless Hub was identified as a key interagency effort – this is held four times per year at various locations in Penrith. The Homeless Hub provides outreach support where agencies come together in the one place. The services provided include Centrelink advice, food, information, medical check-ups and haircuts.

4.7.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES/SERVICE PROVIDERS

There was a high level of interaction between services. One government worker said ‘I typed up a list of all the services where they can apply for, you know, like seek accommodation from. I suppose basically every service we make referrals to.’

NGO workers listed 5-10 services that they work with or refer to. Workers listed services such as family services, NSW Health, youth-specific such as NYAS/Platform, and DV-specific services. Some specific services liaised more with services that provided

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programs that match their clients' needs; others sourced services from multiple sources.

Most services in the area had a 'good' relationship and this was generally the sentiment amongst Penrith NGO workers. One NGO worker said 'Penrith is a strong region', however another identified a 'disconnect' between services, and said that interagency meeting attendance was patchy and that there is high turnover of people causing membership change in the interagencies.

4.7.5 HOMELESS PERSONS - TOTAL CONTACT, POLICE CONTACT, HOUSING NSW CONTACT, GENDER, HOUSEHOLD TYPES

Of adult service users, homeless people are more likely to be single and male, or female single parents. Police also agreed that lone males and single parents were 'typical' homeless persons.

More single parent and family households sought support service assistance in Penrith. There is a high concentration of single parents in Cranebrook and Kingswood Park. Couples rarely sought assistance from support services.

Generally, most youth services reported equal numbers of males and females seeking assistance while one reported more females than males. Participants gave varying accounts of the sometimes reported pattern of young people from the Blue Mountains moving down to Penrith (some reported that younger clients stayed in the Blue Mountains).

Family oriented services saw more women (80% was the estimate of one service). For families with two parents, refuge places for this group were always full.

Single people had more difficulty in getting accommodation according to a government worker (especially those on Newstart Allowance).

Police perceived Penrith to be 'quieter' and more homogenous in terms of class and ethnicity than other areas. An NGO worker also said that 'Penrith is not as bad' as other areas (i.e. Blacktown and Mount Druitt) for homelessness and DV.

There are few rough sleepers (this varied by season) and not as much street crime or alcohol problems as in other suburbs, according to the police. A lot of activity takes place around the train station, where police come into contact with homeless persons due to a transport policing focus.

Agency workers said that homeless persons were living in cars and couch surfing, and that families were living in overcrowded situations.

It was reported anecdotally that there was a new population of asylum seekers in the Penrith area and that some of this group did not have access to any income support or housing assistance.

In terms of gender, women were seen as more likely to ask for help. The location of DV services probably contributed to female presentations at Housing NSW: 'Here we've got the Penrith Women's refuge and we've got refuges down in the Mount Druitt area and Rooty Hill' explained one agency worker. The police reflected upon spatial patterns which show a small number of women becoming homeless in the area south of Penrith, and hypothesized that mortgage stress could lead to domestic violence in new suburbs such as Glenmore Park. NGOs generally thought that domestic violence was the major cause of homelessness for women. It was observed by an NGO worker that middle aged women are a growing client group (this was also stated by another worker in the Hawkesbury area).

Services for couples with no children were limited or non-existent. Persons may not bother presenting as a couple as they believe there are no services for couples. Clients are 'aware' of the best way to present that maximises eligibility for assistance. Centrelink rules were perceived by several NGO workers as skewing household types.

With affordable housing and support, tenancies were being maintained. For example, Project 40 (a Housing First style initiative) was showing an 88% success rate (tenancies being maintained). At the time of writing, 52 of 59 people maintained their tenancies and 27 people had successfully transitioned from supported to general community housing.

4.7.6 BARRIERS

A government worker pointed to a lack of affordable and social housing in the Penrith area. While the stimulus plan (as a response to the global financial crisis of 2008) delivered new housing – ‘it was great because... you had stuff to offer people’, this had all been used up. She continued, commenting on the waiting time for social housing: ‘I know myself they can be waiting anywhere from a couple of weeks up to two years to get a property. It’s really frustrating because we’ve got people in really horrendous situation; the domestic violence, sexual abuse, you know, all these horrible situations, and street sleeping.’

An NGO worker also pointed to an uneven spread of properties across the four LGAs. A 2-15 year wait is expected for social housing and some applicants were ‘taken off the waiting list’. Some HNSW stock is poor quality - of a unit in Kingswood: ‘windows missing, needles in floorboards’, and workers felt reluctant to advise a client to move in, especially if they had children. Also accessing support services for housed persons can sometimes be difficult when other agencies such as Health are not ‘buying in’.

The policies of Wentworth Community Housing – that persons could be housed for 12-18 months in transitional accommodation - is ‘becoming more inflexible’, according to one NGO worker. Some clients are not successfully moving out of transitional housing as there is little affordable accommodation to move into.

All NGO workers said that ‘private rental is too expensive’ for their clients, especially for young people. Young persons, especially under 18 year olds, did not apply for social housing as there was a perception that the long waiting times means there is little point, and they believe they cannot sign a lease (not the case). Some young people struggled with ‘house rules’ in youth refuges (preferring to stay elsewhere).

There was ‘not much around’ that was affordable – the quality for the price range was poor. One agency’s headleasing program had grown because of lack of social housing. Cost of living is also a factor. Access to accommodation was seen as difficult. One NGO could not find permanent accommodation for persons in transitional accommodation – resulting in those persons returning to the refuge after transitional accommodation had run out. Real estate agents ‘won’t rent’ to certain households and ‘prefer others to [the services] clients’. Cost is a factor especially for single people on Newstart Allowance - payments are not sufficient to cover private rental.

Listing on TICA (a ‘bad tenant’ database used by the real estate industry to screen applicants) is a huge barrier as this guarantees rejection.

Other barriers were financial – such as the time it takes to get someone onto Centrelink payments: ‘they can wait several weeks before they actually get on something which creates, you know, enormous problems for them.’

Some people lacked basic financial knowledge and living skills and this created chronic housing problems.

For women escaping DV, the ‘Start Safely’ program was seen as a realistic program, providing rental subsidies.

Clients can require \$100 for a key deposit to secure one night’s emergency accommodation.

There was concern about rising demand for services. One NGO said ‘demand is creeping up’ and was concerned about their service’s future ability to assist.

There was some disquiet about the NSW Government’s ‘Going Home, Staying Home’ reform process which may mean changes to funding and brokerage money. The tender process, which had just commenced at the time of this research, was designed to create a competitive environment and there were concerns that this could cause divisions within the Specialist Homelessness Services sector.

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4.7.7 THREATS TO STABILITY OF HOUSING

Most respondents were of the view that, in general, their clients were able to manage their finances but some reported that social housing rent arrears were a problem: 'a lot of clients feel because it's social housing some of them don't take it that serious [sic]'. Despite using Centrepay (direct debit of rental payments from Centrelink income), 'even the ones that pay from their bank accounts quite often... they don't have the money in there all the time'. Low income and sudden financial costs can lead to arrears. However Housing NSW has specialist officers that deal with arrears and NGOs also had access to brokerage funds which could be used to 'head off' problems.

A lack of living skills - shopping, cooking, and also financial management skills, were seen as threats to stability. Respondents also referred to issues arising from drug and alcohol problems, mental illness and financial problems coupled with a lack of affordable housing.

The conditions in the private rental market – the cost, instability (e.g. if tenancy is terminated for sale or no grounds), competition, gazumping, and lack of rental history were all seen as threats to tenancy.

The young people in refuges that were interviewed self-reported that they were 'doing well', and some were in employment. However some young people that do not meet the age eligibility requirements are excluded from emergency accommodation and refuges.

4.7.8 WHICH GROUPS MOST VULNERABLE?

Women with mental illness and women suffering in domestic violence situations.

Youth had fewer options and less money. 'You can't rent a property on Newstart or Youth Allowance. You've got no rental history...'

Older persons: 'There's a lot of homeless people that have dementia and a whole range of problems.'

Clients who were not case managed after entering housing (lack of support).

Other identified vulnerable groups were: people in a 'bad cycle', people with disabilities. Early intervention was seen as vital (especially for youth).

People with companion animals.

4.7.9 LIMITATIONS IN OFFERING SUPPORT

Housing providers complained of a lack of affordable accommodation in the area and 'there's the frustration for a lot of staff that they can't help people'.

Some client groups were missing out - one NGO worker mentioned people with severe disabilities, especially physical disabilities. Others said clients with 'extreme' alcohol/drugs or mental health issues who need 'extra' services.

There was a shortage of private rental stock in the Penrith area and severe competition for affordable housing (it was reported that 20 or 30 people attend open house inspections). Affordability was seen as a problem across the spectrum. Rents for flats range from \$280 (1 bedroom) to \$320 (2 bedrooms). The Rentstart Bond Loan was not useful for singles as rent has to be 50% or less of total gross household income to gain access to this. Rents of this level were simply not available in Penrith LGA for single person households.

A lack of enough places in programs - some services have a 6 month plus waiting list for specific client groups (e.g. young mothers aged 12-25).

Staffing levels – temporary employment, workloads, and many organisations were identified as quite small or as requiring more resources. Uncertainty of funding was also

mentioned.

If client demand keeps increasing, services may struggle to meet demand.

Others said that people were not aware of the available services.

4.7.10 GAPS SPECIFIC TO LOCAL AREA AND CAPACITY IMPROVEMENT – THE ‘WISH LIST’

Key priorities:

Combined services for people with mental health and substance abuse issues were needed. More clinical support from NSW Health is needed. Detox facilities – often a wait to get in. Mental health services and teams – 24-hour access required.

‘More [affordable] housing’.

More funding for wraparound support, and a dedicated assertive outreach team.

Other needs:

Services should be ‘more visible’.

An ATSI-specific caseworker; Aboriginal-specific counselling services.

Evening session for psychologists and counsellors would be helpful.

For those aged 18-25 (too old for youth-specific services) – there is a lack of crisis accommodation. Transition between youth and adult services needs to be improved.

Young people have to leave refuges between 10am-3pm and will hang out in public spaces near Westfield and elsewhere) or leave the area. A day drop in centre would be beneficial.

Youth homelessness services were seen by one person as ‘case work only’ - there is not enough actual accommodation.

For single women with no children there were no local services - they were referred to Jessie Street at Doonside.

Some agencies do not have brokerage funds so cited a ‘lack of emergency rent relief’.

A lack of local accommodation options and ‘localised placements’.

Services for those with diverse sexualities are lacking.

Transitional Accommodation was seen as available in Penrith. However one worker said it needed to be extended to two years and that the ‘box ticking’ approach to time limitations should cease.

High needs clients need to go to the top of the HNSW Priority list.

Better contacts within other agencies such as Centrelink, schools and Juvenile Justice.

Ideally, continued funding and more staff (mentioned twice); services ‘could do more with more funding’.

More housing, brokerage and ‘creative things’ can help maintain tenancies and prevent trade-offs between paying rent and spending on other essentials.

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CONCLUSIONS

This research found that there is a distinct local geography of homelessness in this part of Western Sydney and that the geography of homelessness varies across the LGAs studied.

In each area there are possible systemic barriers which may cause or perpetuate homelessness at the local level. This is not the result of actions or decisions by any individual agency or group of agencies, but rather the overall service system and local demand factors. A simple lack of accommodation into which people can be moved after contacting agencies for assistance means that crisis and therapeutic intervention resources are increasingly operating as stop-gap accommodation, and that this makes these other services less accessible and effective for new clients. There are service 'blockages' all along the provision line from crisis to post-crisis services. The development of service gap issues is made worse by the supply problem.

Uncertainty about funding and limited resources contribute to the lack of long term case management.

Homeless persons are not placeless so 'exporting' people to other areas/services does not always work – people like to stay in areas they know, near people they know.

Homelessness and lack of services seemed to be particularly acute on the Hawkesbury region. Rough sleeping and living in informal and substandard accommodation seemed prevalent. Single persons and families (due to too few beds in family specific services) seemed to be the most vulnerable.

Blacktown has more social housing available due to greater stock and turnover. A lot of movement in and out of social housing may be driven by domestic violence, and for men, incarceration. Youth homelessness is also a problem in the area however the key youth service was one of the few services that did not report high levels of unmet demand.

Although Penrith has a rough sleeping population, this was not reported as particularly large. Police were aware of certain persons sleeping in cars. An assertive outreach service based at Kingswood is regularly housing people. There is one residential youth service in the Blue Mountains and one in Penrith but it was reported that there is unmet demand.

The Blue Mountains has a rough sleeping population and youth homelessness. There has been migration of persons up to the Blue Mountains that are disadvantaged and prone to homelessness.

Based on the information given by agency workers, some key findings have been based on the recurring themes in the interview material.

1. **Services are at capacity.** Nearly all services, except two youth-specific services that had vacancies available for short periods, were at capacity. This was especially the case with family services. Most services indicated they would like to expand operations and do more outreach, employ more staff, offer more accommodation or other services, and required more buildings. Only one service claimed they could accommodate all eligible clients at any given time.
2. **Long waiting lists for social housing limits its availability.** In all of the LGAs this meant that social housing was not seen as a source of permanent housing by the vast majority of agency workers. Social housing in Blacktown LGA is marginally more available (due to greater Housing NSW stock in the area) but is also a source of homeless persons – youth or women leaving an unsafe environment, and as such there is churn between public housing and SHSs. Wentworth Community Housing stock is also seen as very difficult to access, except where a formal agreement was in place making units available for a specific purpose (such as transitional housing for certain cohorts) - however this is time limited. Few of the agency workers had direct experiences of actually securing an allocation of social housing for a client and if they had this was rare – one or two over a four year period. When the SAAP (now SHS) services were created there was a supply of housing to transit into – now there are no 'exit points'. Some cohorts - single parents – are perceived as more likely to be housed in social housing while single males were not.

3. **Private rental housing is expensive and difficult to access** due to low incomes amongst the homeless cohort (usually reliant on Centrelink payments), and real estate agents preferring other applicants over those on lower incomes. The Rentstart program offered by HNSW is not accessed by certain cohorts (such as single persons on Newstart or Youth Allowance) due to the criteria that the rent must be less than 50% of income. Share housing in the private rental market facilitated by services (as joint tenant) did improve access to private rental for some cohorts (youth). TICA listing (on the database used by the real estate industry to screen potential tenants) is a major barrier to accessing private rental.
4. **Primary and secondary homelessness is common.** Rough sleeping populations exist in certain areas. Specifically, in regional and semi-rural areas (Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains) there are significant numbers of people (mainly males) sleeping rough in caves, parks, on the riverbanks, and in the bush. Others are in cars, caravans, and in substandard or derelict buildings including sheds.
5. **A lack of semi-supported housing.** Some persons require extra and ongoing support to maintain a tenancy.
6. **Mental health support is required.** Services indicated 24-hour mental health teams and greater access to psychology and general counselling services would be beneficial. The Police emphasized the difficulty of gaining hospital admittance for acutely mentally ill persons.
7. **Cohorts that are excluded from services or 'fall through the gaps' include:** under 15 year olds, young adults - 18-25 year olds; couples, and families. Most services are single-sex; for singles; family services are stretched; young persons who are not in the target age for youth services can miss out.

5.1 KEY SERVICE PRIORITIES BY AREA

5.1.1 BLACKTOWN KEY PRIORITIES:

- » More services for young adults (18-25 year olds).
- » A tenancy support officer (for young people primarily).
- » A day/drop in youth service in Mount Druitt.
- » A family service in Mount Druitt.
- » More accommodation for young women with children (services at capacity)

5.1.2 BLUE MOUNTAINS KEY PRIORITIES

- » Expanded youth services.
- » More services for 13-15 year olds.
- » More housing options across the board. More exit options (i.e. options for exiting homelessness cycle).
- » Wraparound support for people with complex needs.

5.1.3 HAWKESBURY KEY PRIORITIES

- » A day drop in centre on a main road. This should be partnered with 'outreach services' and linked to transitioning into permanent accommodation.
- » More family accommodation services/places.
- » Sources of affordable housing.
- » More accommodation for single people (males and females), and couples.
- » More street workers/outreach.
- » More youth services (including in Windsor).

5.1.4 PENRITH KEY PRIORITIES

- » Combined services for people with mental health and substance abuse issues.
- » Mental health services and teams – 24 hour access required.
- » More affordable housing options.
- » More money for wraparound support, and a dedicated assertive outreach team.
- » An ATSI-specific caseworker; Aboriginal-specific counselling services.

6

REFERENCES

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7

APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW TOOL – AGENCY WORKERS

University of Western Sydney

School of Social Sciences

Locked Bag 1797

PENRITH NSW 2751

Homelessness Data Project

Survey for service provider staff

This survey is intended to explore the issues pertinent to homelessness in the Blue Mountains, Blacktown, Hawkesbury and Penrith regions. It is intended as a consultation tool with which to prompt a fuller understanding of the issues from service provider staff.

Date: __ / __ / __

Part A – Background Information (Approx 5 mins).

1. Service / Organisation Particulars:
 - a. Name of Service / Organisation
 - b. Service / Organisation Type
 - c. Local government area(s) serviced
2. Interviewee Particulars:
 - a. What position do you hold? (Position's title)
 - b. What does this position involve?
 - c. How long have you been working for this service / organisation?

Part B – Client Groups and Agency Practice (Approx 10 mins)

3. Who are the main target/client groups supported by your organisation(s)?
4. Is being homeless a qualification for service provision?
5. What is your understanding of homelessness? [Define homelessness]
6. What practices do you and your organisations use to support clients?
7. What other agencies and service providers do you work with in supporting your clients? Explain how these relationships work.

7

Part C – Looking at the Maps (Approx 15 mins)

UWS has obtained data from Centrelink, Police, SAAP services (emergency accommodation) and Housing NSW, to map interaction between homeless persons or at risk of homelessness persons and those agencies. We're going to show you some maps now and ask for comment.

(Maps shown to interviewee.)

Questions:

Slide 1: Homeless persons contacts with agencies by gender

Are SAAP services the most likely places homeless people contact first?

There are generally more men than women presenting as homeless. Is that your experience or are there geographical differences?

Slide 2: Total contacts with homeless persons - all agencies

Certain postcodes stand out – notably Mount Druitt, as areas where more homeless people are contacting agencies. Look at your area on the map. How does your area compare to others? Is the map accurate, in your experience?

Slide 3: Police contact

Overall, homeless persons are coming into contact with Police in the Blacktown area the most. Do you have any comment on that?

Homeless youth aged 15-19 are coming into contact with police in the Blue Mountains, more so than in other areas. Do you have any explanation for that?

People over 65 year olds are coming into contact with police in Hawkesbury area. Do you have any explanation for that?

Slide 4: homeless persons – Housing NSW

These slides show pretty similar patterns with males and females with a predominance of homeless persons coming into contact with Housing NSW Blacktown and Mount Druitt. There is a slight difference through – more females are coming into contact with Housing NSW in Blacktown and Mount Druitt and Penrith and Katoomba also. Do you have any comment on why there are differences?

Slide 5: Gender

This shows areas in blue and red where there are disproportionate numbers of men and women presenting as homeless. Men seem to outnumber women in Schofields and Stanhope Gardens areas; while women seem to outnumber men in Blaxland, Warrimoo, Mulgoa, Glenmore Park and Orchard Hills. Are you aware of other areas where there is a gender disparity? Any comments on this?

Slide 6 and 7: household types

This graph of all agency contacts shows lone persons are more likely to be seeking assistance than other households.

The map based on Housing NSW data shows where some households seeking

assistance are more prevalent than others – lots of single people and single parents clustering round Penrith, Mount Druitt and Blacktown. There are more couples with kids needing assistance from Housing NSW in Quakers Hill, and Toongabbie. Do you have any comments? Are there any geographical differences in households seeking assistance that you are aware of?

Slide 7 – household types by area

This map shows that

- » Penrith seems to have more couples with no children who are homeless.
- » More couples with children are presenting as homeless in Hawkesbury, Penrith, St Marys and Mount Druitt.
- » There seems to be more lone homeless persons in Penrith, Mount Druitt and Blacktown.
- » There seems to be a concentration of lone persons with children in Mount Druitt area who are homeless.

Your comments please.

Part D – Housing Stability and Instability (Approx 15 mins)

8. Have you experienced any barriers that prevent you from fully assisting clients? *[Are there situations where your organisations are not able to fully support clients with their issues?]*
9. Have you observed issues or circumstances that might impact on the stability of clients' housing or living situation, and can you describe these.
 - » *What are some of the factors that impact on housing stability amongst your clients?*
 - » *What are your organisations able to do to assist in these situations?*
10. Would you consider any particular groups or circumstances more vulnerable to homelessness?
11. Do services have any limitations to provision of support for people who are experiencing, or who are at risk of homelessness?
12. To what extent are these issues or service gaps specific to the local area and why might this be the case?
13. Are there any ways in which the capacity of your services could be improved to support people whose housing is insecure or who are currently homeless?

Thank you very much for your time today and your insights.

7

7.2 APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW TOOL – SERVICE USERS (PENRITH)

University of Western Sydney

School of Social Sciences

Locked Bag 1797

PENRITH NSW 2751

Homelessness Data Project

Interview schedule with service users – Penrith

This interview schedule is intended to explore the issues pertinent to homelessness in the Blue Mountains, Blacktown, Hawkesbury and Penrith regions. It is intended as a consultation tool with which to prompt a fuller understanding of the issues from service user representatives.

Date: __ / __ / __

Part A – Background Information (Approx 5 mins) - distribute FORM

Part B – Looking at the Maps and Data (Approx 15 mins)

1. Looking at the maps and data for PENRITH

UWS has used data from Centrelink, Police, emergency accommodation agencies and Housing NSW, to map interaction between homeless or at risk of homelessness persons and those agencies. We're going to show you some maps now and ask you to comment.

(Maps shown to interviewee.)

SAAP – 15-19 year olds

SAAP – 30-64 year olds

This map shows that

- » A lot of the people trying to get temporary accommodation in Penrith are younger homeless people 15-19 years of age AND people 30-64 years of age. Do you think that is the case? Are there enough services for youth, and adults, in this area?

SAAP – household type – couples with children

This map shows that

- » Couples with kids are more likely to be looking for temporary accommodation, in Penrith. Do you think this is true? Are there enough accommodation options for this group?

SAAP – gender – female

This map shows that

- » A lot of people seeking temporary accommodation in Penrith, Kingswood, Werrington and Llandilo areas are more likely to be female than male. Do you have any explanation for this?
- » Do you have any other comments on these maps? Have we missed anything?

Part C – Housing Stability, Instability and Services (Approx 15 mins)

Following on from the maps...

1. Housing stability and Services
 - » What are the services you are in contact with able to do to assist you if you are homeless?
 - » Have you had difficulty accessing services? Which services, and where?
 - » Have you experienced any barriers that prevent you from accessing services?
 - » Has a service referred you to another service? Do you think the services work together effectively?
 - » Are there any 'gaps' in services for homeless people you can tell us about?
 - » Are there any specific groups (e.g. women, sole parents with children, single men) that 'miss out'?
 - » Do some services cater for specific groups and exclude others?
 - » In your area, what services are lacking?
 - » Are there any ways in which the capacity of the services could be improved to support people whose housing is insecure or who are currently homeless?

Thank you very much for your time today and your insights.

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7.3 APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW TOOL – SERVICE USERS (PENRITH)

University of Western Sydney

School of Social Sciences

Locked Bag 1797

PENRITH NSW 2751

Homelessness Data Project

Interview schedule with service users – Windsor

This interview schedule is intended to explore the issues pertinent to homelessness in the Blue Mountains, Blacktown, Hawkesbury and Penrith regions. It is intended as a consultation tool with which to prompt a fuller understanding of the issues from service user representatives.

Date: __ / __ / __

Part A – Background Information (Approx 5 mins) - distribute FORM

Part B – Looking at the Maps and Data (Approx 15 mins)

2. Looking at the maps and data for WINDSOR

UWS has used data from Centrelink, Police, emergency accommodation agencies and Housing NSW, to map interaction between homeless or at risk of homelessness persons and those agencies. We're going to show you some maps now and ask you to comment.

(Maps shown to interviewee.)

SAAP – Couples with Kids

This map shows that

- » A lot of the people trying to get temporary accommodation in Windsor, Pitt Town and Colo are couples with kids. Do you think that is the case? Are there enough services for couples with kids, in this area?

SAAP – 30-64 year olds

This map shows that

- » Homeless people Windsor, Pitt Town and Colo area seem to be mainly aged 30-64, rather than younger. Also, there are more females aged 30-64 than males aged 30-64 seeking temporary accommodation. Is there enough accommodation services in Windsor for this adult group? For females?

SAAP – household type – person alone

This map shows that

- » A lot of homeless people in the Windsor area are lone persons. Is this the case?

Police – 65+ year olds

This map shows that

- » Compared to other areas, there are more older homeless people coming into contact with the police. Do you have any explanation for this?
- » Do you have any other comments on these maps? Have we missed anything?

Part C – Housing Stability, Instability and Services (Approx 15 mins)

Following on from the maps...

2. Housing stability and Services

- » What are the services you are in contact with able to do to assist you if you are homeless?
- » Have you had difficulty accessing services? Which services, and where?
- » Have you experienced any barriers that prevent you from accessing services?
- » Has a service referred you to another service? Do you think the services work together effectively?
- » Are there any 'gaps' in services for homeless people you can tell us about?
- » Are there any specific groups (e.g. women, sole parents with children, single men) that 'miss out'?
- » Do some services cater for specific groups and exclude others?
- » In your area, what services are lacking?
- » Are there any ways in which the capacity of the services could be improved to support people whose housing is insecure or who are currently homeless?

Thank you very much for your time today and your insights.

7

University of Western Sydney

School of Social Sciences

Locked Bag 1797

PENRITH NSW 2751

Homelessness Data Project

Focus Group schedule with service users – Windsor

This interview schedule is intended to explore the issues pertinent to homelessness in the Blue Mountains, Blacktown, Hawkesbury and Penrith regions. It is intended as a consultation tool with which to prompt a fuller understanding of the issues from service user representatives.

Date: __ / __ / __

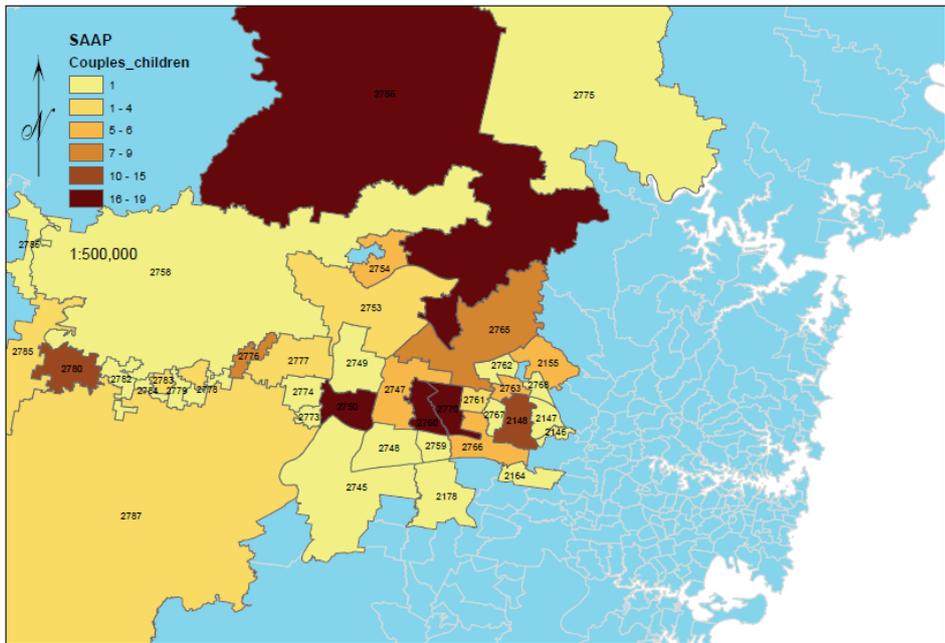
Part A – Background Information (Approx 5 mins) - distribute FORM

Part B – Looking at the Maps and Data (Approx 15 mins)

3. Looking at the maps and data for WINDSOR

UWS has used data from Centrelink, Police, emergency accommodation agencies and Housing NSW, to map interaction between homeless or at risk of homelessness persons and those agencies. We're going to show you some maps now and ask you to comment.

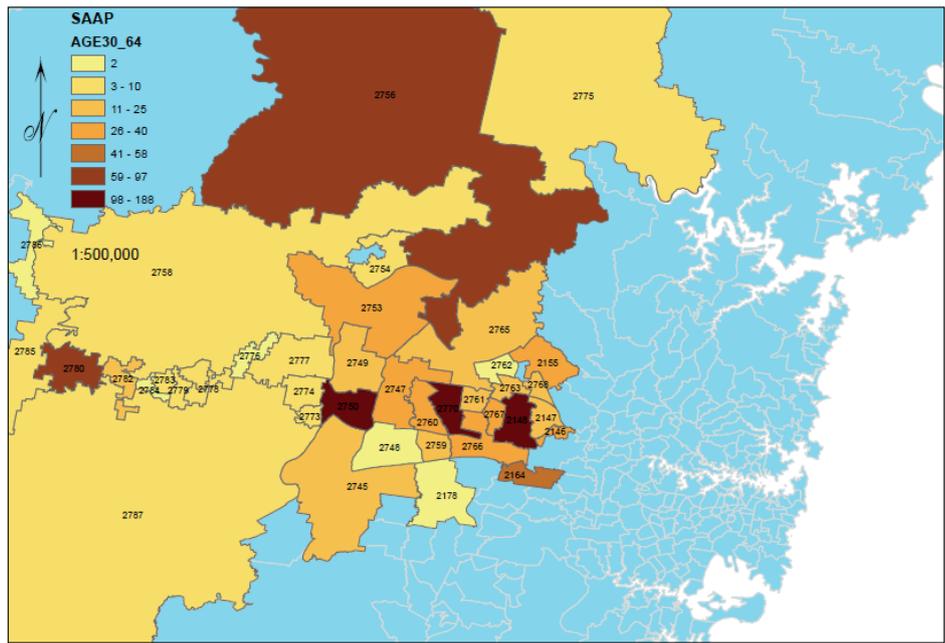
SAAP – Couples with Kids



This map shows that

- » A lot of the people trying to get temporary accommodation in Windsor, Pitt Town and Colo are couples with kids. Do you think that is the case? Are there enough services for couples with kids, in this area?

SAAP – 30-64 year olds



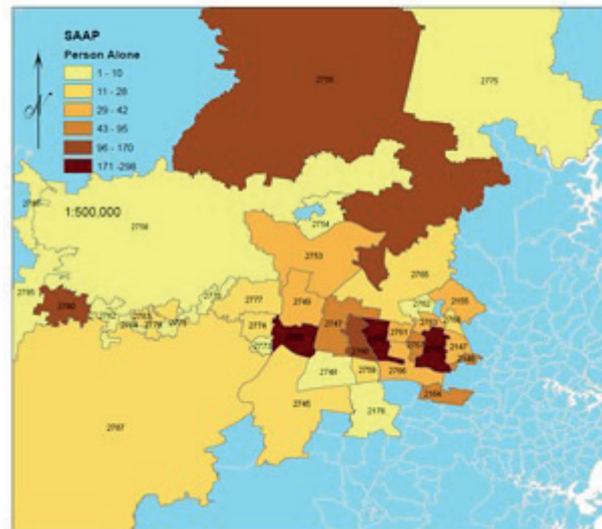
This map shows that

- » Homeless people Windsor, Pitt Town and Colo area seem to be mainly aged 30-64, rather than younger. Also, there are more females aged 30-64 than males aged 30-64 seeking temporary accommodation. Is there enough accommodation services in Windsor for this adult group? For females?

7

SAAP – household type – person alone

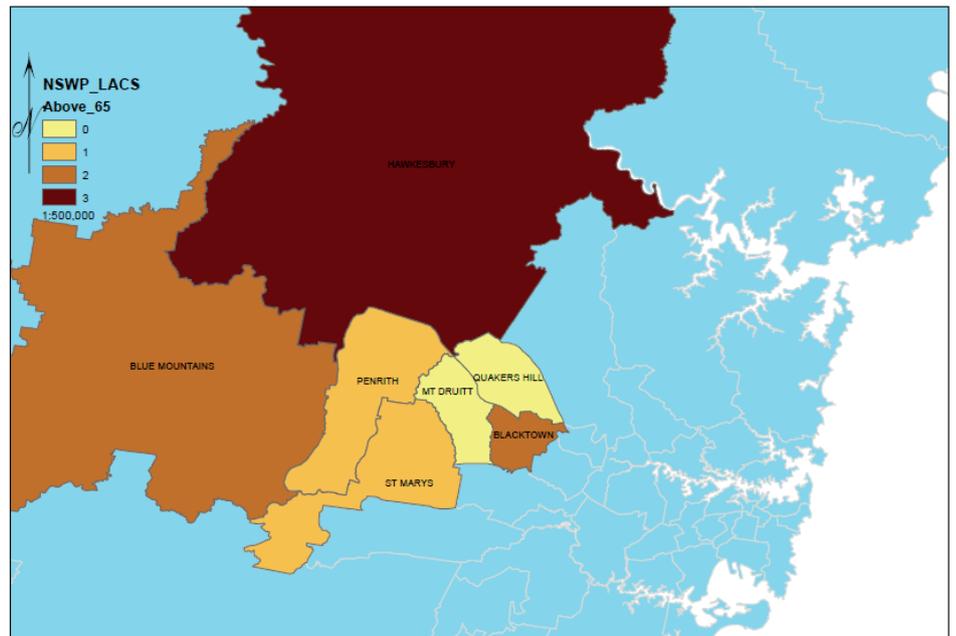
Person Alone



This map shows that

- » A lot of homeless people in the Windsor area are lone persons. Is this the case?

Police – 65+ year olds



This map shows that

- » Compared to other areas, there are more older homeless people coming into contact with the police. Do you have any explanation for this?
- » Do you have any other comments on these maps? Have we missed anything?

Part C – Housing Stability, Instability and Services (Approx 15 mins)

Following on from the maps...

3. Housing stability and Services

- » What are the services you are in contact with able to do to assist you if you are homeless?
- » Have you had difficulty accessing services? Which services, and where?
- » Have you experienced any barriers that prevent you from accessing services?
- » Has a service referred you to another service? Do you think the services work together effectively?
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- » Do some services cater for specific groups and exclude others?
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- » Are there any ways in which the capacity of the services could be improved to support people whose housing is insecure or who are currently homeless?

Thank you very much for your time today and your insights.

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