

Homelessness, Housing & Local Government

Homelessness within our local areas

As part of the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW's Housing Policy:

Local Government recognises that all Australians have a right to live in housing that is affordable, secure and appropriate to their needs. Local Government is committed to working co-operatively with their communities, other councils and the State and Commonwealth to ensure that this right is protected.

Councils in NSW are increasingly aware and concerned that many of their local residents are unable to access the type of housing they need and that homelessness is increasing.

This broadsheet aims to provide councils with information about homelessness patterns in NSW, in particular within the Sydney Metropolitan area, and profile some of the local efforts/contributions Local Government is undertaking to address these needs.

The Council to Homeless Persons, the peak body of services that assist homeless people in Victoria, has identified the following factors as contributing to the initiation and perpetuation of homelessness in Australia:

"Within society:

- ▶ discrimination
- ▶ unemployment
- ▶ economic decline in rural industries
- ▶ level of unemployment benefits for those under 18 years
- ▶ shortage of accommodation for those with special needs
- ▶ deinstitutionalisation and/or failure to provide community support services
- ▶ urban planning policies
- ▶ ...inaccessible or inappropriate services and service withdrawal
- ▶ lack of financial resources for support services
- ▶ public apathy
- ▶ hostility towards homeless people

Within Family and Social Networks:

- ▶ lack of social support
- ▶ ineffectual parenting
- ▶ reconstituted families
- ▶ divorce rates
- ▶ child abuse
- ▶ domestic violence

Individual:

- ▶ impairments/disabilities"

These issues have been reflected more recently in the Inner Metropolitan Regional Organisation of Councils (IMROC) report "Housing Affordability and Choice in the IMROC Region" (1996):

Homelessness is a significant issue in the region. The main factors contributing to homelessness in the region are domestic violence, crisis, interpersonal conflict and family breakdown....The study identified a number of groups with special housing needs. These include the aged, women escaping domestic violence, youth and people with psychiatric and other disabilities. These groups, along with the high and increasing proportion of renters and low income earners, are likely to experience significant housing stress before, during and after the Olympic Games.

IMROC comprises 10 councils: Ashfield, Auburn, Burwood, Concord, Drummoyne, Lane Cove, Leichhardt, Marrickville, Strathfield and City of Sydney.

A homeless person is without a conventional home and lacks most of the economic and social supports that a home normally affords. She/he is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, she/he has few independent resources and often has no immediate means and in some cases little prospect of self support. She/he is in danger of falling below the poverty line, at least from time to time.

"Homelessness in Australia" broadsheet produced by the Council to Homeless Persons

The Council of the City of Sydney initiatives

Homeless Persons Information Centre

In response to the increased homelessness experienced within the City of Sydney, the council of the City of Sydney made a commitment in 1984 to establish the Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC). The centre established a telephone information and referral service for people in the community who are homeless.

This service is available to and accessed by people throughout NSW. The project is jointly funded by the council and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

Since June 1995 the service has developed a more sophisticated data collection system to better monitor eviction rates in the lead up to the Olympics.

The centre employs a team of approximately six telephone operators/referral workers to operate the service Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 10.00pm and during the daytime on weekends.

What relevance does this data base have to councils?

The centre is now producing data that is showing some vivid trends of homelessness in the Sydney metropolitan area and illustrates many of the issues faced by homeless people.

The information collected by the centre differs from that collected by the National Data Collection Agency. (The National Data Collection Agency, funded by both Commonwealth and State Governments through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, collects data on the usage of supported accommodation services.) The centre collates comprehensive information on a large sample of homeless people requesting help.

The data system indicated that in 1996 the centre was unable to provide any accommodation assistance to over 560 homeless people.

In particular, the data illustrates trends across sub regions, suburbs and postcodes within the Sydney metropolitan area and the broader regions of NSW outside metropolitan Sydney.

As councils have become more committed to undertaking social planning in their local areas, data such as this is proving valuable in gathering a picture of a section of our community that is very disadvantaged and often hard to access and assist. (It should be recognised, however, that the statistics are based on calls received and can only be used as a guide.)

Some of the major findings from the service in 1996 were:

- ▶ 49% of inquiries are from homeless people in the outer Metropolitan area of Sydney, while less than one in five people are from the inner Sydney area.

- ▶ there has been a consistent increase in the number of people seeking assistance to find accommodation. The centre assisted 8,898 people in 1992.

This increased to assisting 16,802 in 1996 and within the first six months of 1997 the centre has assisted 9,934. The homelessness situation has been compounded by the loss of crisis beds between 1991 and 1997.

- ▶ 62% of people presented with children under 18 years of age, while 49% were single parent households.
- ▶ 30% of people were single.
- ▶ 62% were either single females or women with children.
- ▶ 520 women that contacted the service were pregnant (5%).
- ▶ 67% of people had not used refuges before.
- ▶ 10% of people that presented to the service had some form of psychiatric disability. This figure has increased fivefold since 1992.

HOSTELS TURN MEN AWAY

...the number of homeless men being turned away by Sydney's crisis accommodation centres has increased dramatically, with some refuges having to reject as many as 15 men a night.

Sydney Morning Herald, 20 June 1997

- the survey is able to establish a person's last night of abode - 40% of people had been living rent free or boarding with parents, relatives or friends, while over 11% had been living in a car, tent, park, the street or a squat. This indicates that many people have exhausted their internal networks and now have no other options than those offered by supported accommodation services.
- only 1.3% of people were chronically homeless (such as people without permanent accommodation over the last two years, who had not found stable accommodation for any longer than a three month period).

The most frequent Local Government areas from where people requested assistance in 1996 (source: HPIC)

Local Government area	No of people requesting assistance	% of all people requesting assistance	LGA population % of Sydney Statistical Division total
Blacktown	1743	10.4	6.2
South Sydney	1453	8.6	2.1
Campbelltown	1182	7.0	3.8
Liverpool	1119	6.7	3.2
Parramatta	996	5.7	3.7
Fairfield	898	5.3	4.9
Sydney City	870	5.2	.03
Penrith	784	4.7	4.3
Marrickville	536	3.2	2.1
Holroyd	502	3.0	2.2
Canterbury	429	2.8	3.6
Bankstown	411	2.4	4.2
Leichhardt	354	2.1	1.6

Youth homelessness is also a significant local problem. The HPIC refers calls from young people to the Youth Accommodation Association.

The City of Sydney Council may be able to assist councils with further statistics in relation to homelessness in their local area.

For further information contact Steve Coles, Co-ordinator, Homeless Persons Information Centre, on phone (02) 9265 9087.

Community Strategic Partnerships Program

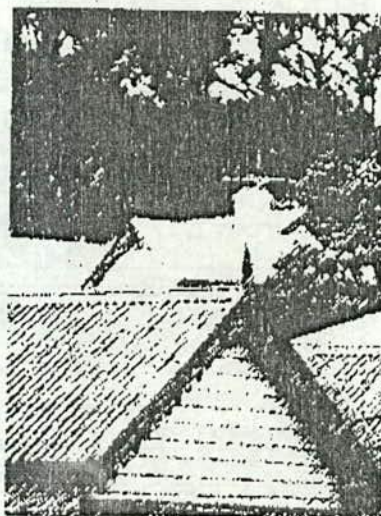
In 1997 the Council of the City of Sydney implemented the Community Strategic Partnerships Program. This three-year pilot program is designed to increase access to crisis accommodation and support services for homeless people. The program has been developed as a partnership between the council, the State Government and the community sector and it is jointly funded by the council and the NSW Department of Housing.

The program provides funding to four community-based organisations to undertake casework support and an accommodation brokerage service for homeless people in genuine housing need to obtain crisis accommodation. (Accommodation brokerage is generally provided within the private accommodation market.)

The service is only provided when it can be demonstrated that no other emergency accommodation options exist, such as supported accommodation or hostel services. The HPIC is integral to the operation of the program, providing the "check" on crisis beds available on any given night across the metropolitan area.

The Community Strategic Partnerships Program is intended to provide a "safety net" under the existing "safety net" for those who would otherwise be sleeping on the streets.

For further information contact Mandy Moore, Policy Officer, City of Sydney Council, on phone (02) 9265 9078.



Other council initiatives

Parramatta City Council

Parramatta City Council provides assistance to homeless young people. Through the council's Youth Homeless Welfare Grants Program, established in 1993, funds are distributed annually to local youth accommodation services to provide young people with manchester, toiletries and stationary school needs. In 1996 the council provided \$5,700 to the program.

This financial assistance is complemented by the council providing youth housing support services with free tickets for young homeless people in Parramatta to access the council's swimming centres.

For further information contact Robert Kenk, Youth Development Officer, on phone (02) 9806 5000.

Bathurst City Council

Bathurst City Council provides \$3,800 annually to Solo House which provides emergency housing for homeless people. This donation helps to cover maintenance costs of the building. The council has made this financial contribution to the service for five years.

For further information contact Mark Stocks, Manager Administration, on phone (02) 6331 1622.

Queanbeyan City Council

Queanbeyan City Council auspices the Family Accommodation and Support Service. Funded by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, this 25-hour week service provides homeless families or families at risk of homelessness with crisis accommodation and support, with the aim of working with them towards accessing independent, long term housing. The project, established in 1991, currently manages three properties. The council provides the project with subsidised office rental, administration and managerial support.

For further information, contact Peta Arthur, Family Accommodation and Support Service Worker, on phone (02) 6298 0112.

Waverley Council

In 1992 the council purchased a building, Norman Andrew's House, to be used as a drop-in centre providing general support and facilities for homeless people. The council partly funds a support worker position. As part of the Bondi Beach Community Street Project, the council also funds a position for someone to patrol the beach areas and provide assistance to people at risk.

Financial assistance is also provided to boarding houses in the local area in the form of a rate rebate. Boarding houses provide an important form of accommodation for the most vulnerable people in the community who have the fewest housing options.

For further information contact Meryl Bishop, Housing Planner, Planning and Environmental Services, on phone (02) 9369 8051.

Boarding House Survey

A survey of boarding houses is to be undertaken in the Local Government areas of North Sydney, South Sydney, Leichhardt and Burwood.

Funded through the Local Government Housing Initiative Program, the survey aims to gather information about the use of boarding house stock in inner Sydney to develop appropriate strategies to seek the retention of this form of affordable accommodation.

The project is managed by North Sydney Council.

For further information contact Lesley Hall, Housing Officer, North Sydney Council, on phone (02) 9936 8191.

Other forms of assistance given by councils have included financial contributions, through annual community grants programs to local support housing services, leasing of council properties to community housing schemes and the provision of long term sites for people on low incomes at council owned caravan parks.

THE INCIDENCE OF HOMELESSNESS WILL WORSEN OVER THE COMING DECADE...

From 'Homelessness in Australia. Casual Factors Report' (1994), prepared for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Evaluation Steering Committee.

State Environmental Planning Policy Number 10: Retention of Low Cost Rental accommodation

This policy, introduced in 1984, aims to minimise the loss of low cost housing at the local level. It requires that there be council consent for any development activity relating to boarding houses, including demolition, alterations to the structure or change of use of the building and the strata subdivision of residential flat buildings.

Boarding houses and residential flat buildings, available at low price rental rates, are often subject to the greatest pressure for redevelopment to higher value residential stock or commercial activities.

The impact of the loss of this low cost housing stock on residents can be devastating. An eviction can often lead to a person on a low income being removed from their local area, friends, family and support services. Finding comparable accommodation can be very difficult and in some instances people become homeless.

The policy applies to the Local Government areas of Canterbury, Drummoyne, Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Leichhardt, Manly, Marrickville, Mosman, Newcastle, North Sydney, Randwick, South Sydney, Sydney City, Waverley, Willoughby, Woollahra and Wollongong.

Unfortunately, the policy has been considered relatively ineffectual in retaining low cost housing as councils have experienced a range of difficulties in its implementation. These relate to the need for clearer definitions, obtaining relevant information from the developer, applying the provisions and ensuring consistency in its application.

The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning is presently undertaking a review of the Policy.

For further information contact Philippa Davis, Senior Policy Analyst, Housing Markets Team, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, on phone (02) 9391 2132.



Amendments to the Local Government Act

The Local Government Act was amended in June 1997. Significant changes were made in relation to Local Government and its role in housing. The State Government has introduced these changes in an effort to protect affordable housing and to provide some assistance to people that may be at risk of homelessness. Councils need to be aware of these changes.

Rates, Charges and Fees - Section 516: Definition of boarding houses

The Local Government (Boarding and Lodging Houses) Amendment Act 1994 changed the categorisation of boarding and lodging houses from business to residential to ensure that this form of affordable housing did not attract higher business rates.

The recent amendment of the Act provides a definition of a boarding and lodging house.

A boarding or lodging house is defined as "residential" if the building is wholly or partly let as lodgings in which each letting provides the tariff-paying occupant with a principle place of residence and the tariff does not exceed that determined by the minister and there are at least three tariff-paying occupants who have resided there for the last three consecutive months or any period totalling three months during the last year.

A building that is vacant but which fulfilled the requirement immediately before becoming vacant is within the definition. A residential flat building, licensed premises, a private hotel, a building containing serviced apartments, a backpacker hostel or other tourist establishment is not within the definition.

The Minister is to set the tariff at the same rate as that of the Office of State Revenue:

- ▶ full board and lodging (per week): \$184 single and \$307 family or shared
- ▶ less than full board and lodging (per week): \$123 single and \$205 family or shared.

For further information contact the Department of Local Government on phone (02) 9793 0793.

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Regulatory Functions - Section 131A: Orders Likely to Evict Residents

A council which intends to issue an order that would have the effect of making residents homeless must consider whether the residents can arrange satisfactory alternative accommodation in the locality. If they are not able to do this, councils must provide information about the availability of alternative accommodation and other assistance as the council considers appropriate.

The Department of Local Government is presently developing guidelines to assist councils with this responsibility.

The Olympics

The Olympics Social Impacts Advisory Committee

Cr Helen Westwood, Bankstown City Council, is the Local Government Association's representative on the Olympics Social Impacts Advisory Committee.

This committee, established in April 1996, aims to provide the Olympic Co-ordination Authority with advice on assessing and managing the social impacts arising from the staging of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In an endeavour to ensure current issues of concern of Local Government are examined Cr Westwood is keen to maintain contact with councils and can be contacted on phone (02) 9644 7266 or mobile 0411 607581.

Olympics seminar: Living in the Olympic State

NCOSS (NSW Council of Social Services), in conjunction with WSROC (Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils) and IMROC (Inner Metropolitan Regional Organisation of Councils), is organising a conference on 13 and 14 November that will examine the social impact of the Olympics.

It will provide the first opportunity for public discussion of progress towards maximising the positive socio-economic opportunities and managing the negative social impacts associated with the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Housing will feature prominently, examining the pressure of the events on housing affordability and the reduction of low cost accommodation.

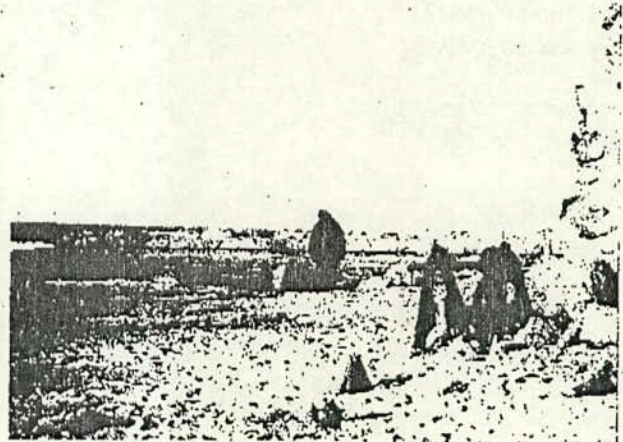
For further information phone NCOSS on (02) 9211 2599.

The Council of the City of Sydney Olympics Homelessness Strategy

The Council of the City of Sydney is currently developing a strategy to address the impact of the Olympic Games upon the homeless. A considerable amount of research will contribute to the planning of the strategy, notably in defining the "current characteristics" of homelessness in the city.

The Council of the City of Sydney would be interested to hear from any councils who are undertaking similar initiatives in preparation for the Olympics.

Please contact Mandy Moore, Services Planning and Policy Unit, on phone (02) 9265 9078.



This document was produced by the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW:

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NO OF PAGES (includes this)	7	SUBJECT	Broadsheet on Homelessness
DATE	30/3/98	REFERENCE	

Message follows

Peter

As discussed, attached is a copy of the broadsheet prepared by the Association on Homelessness, Housing and Local Government.

Stephanie Smith

What is this?