

# Overcome Barriers in Healthcare Equity & Accessibility For the Homeless

Practical Strategies Addressing Each



(2)

## Data/Statistics on Homelessness:

THERE ARE OVER 122,000 PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT  
OVER 17,600 CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 12 YEARS ARE HOMELESS (1)

IN SYDNEY, 63.4 PER CENT OF PEOPLE IDENTIFIED HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS AS AN ISSUE IN THE COMMUNITY AND 42.9 PER CENT IDENTIFIED IT AS AN ISSUE FOR THEMSELVES. (3)

### MONETARY PROBLEMS (TIMELY)

- Root cause of homelessness often arises from a lack of financial stability.
- Substance use issues can contribute to financial hardship and housing loss.
- Domestic or family violence may force individuals to leave their homes suddenly.
- Mental or physical health problems can limit a person's ability to work or maintain stable housing.
- These factors often interact increasing risk of homelessness.
- Finances could cause treatment to be delayed in a healthcare situation



### TAILORED JOB TRAINING + EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES → EMPOWERMENT

- TAFE NSW – Skills for Education and Employment (SEE):** Free training in reading, writing, English, maths, and digital skills to improve job readiness
- The Salvation Army – Employment Plus:** Free job training, career counselling, and job search support for people experiencing or exiting homelessness.
- Smart & Skilled / NSW Fee Free Training** - Provides subsidised or fee-free vocational education & training courses (traineeships, apprenticeships, certificates) for eligible individuals (4,5)

### EDUCATION + PARTNERSHIPS WITH HOSPITALS + LOCAL COMMUNITY



**South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) – Homelessness Health Program & Workforce Training:** Offers training for clinicians/frontline staff on working with people experiencing homelessness and develops district-wide strategies with community agency collaboration (6).

**City of Sydney – “Responding to Homelessness” Unit:** Works in partnership with hospitals, homelessness services and NGOs to coordinate community responses and reduce rough sleeping, sharing skills and resources with local health & community agencies (7).



### SOCIAL STIGMA + LACK OF SUPPORT (EQUITABLE)

- Homelessness is often wrongly linked to laziness, addiction, or personal failure, overlooking structural causes like poverty, housing costs, or trauma.
- People without lived experience of homelessness may underestimate its complexity, leading to blame rather than empathy.
- Access to support is limited by underfunded services, complex systems, and long waiting lists.
- Stigma and social isolation can prevent individuals from seeking help and accessing resources.

### HEAVY PSYCHOLOGICAL/ MENTAL BURDENS (PEOPLE-CENTERED CARE)



- People experiencing homelessness may struggle to engage with services due to distrust or prioritising survival needs over care
- Being homeless often leads to social exclusion, loss of social networks, and feelings of shame or hopelessness.
- Stigma from society can worsen self-esteem and mental health.
- Limited access to mental health services due to cost, transport, or lack of awareness.
- Constant uncertainty about food, shelter, and safety causes chronic stress.
- Exposure to violence, abuse, or social exclusion can create long-lasting trauma, affecting emotional regulation and decision-making.



### INTEGRATING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT WITH MENTAL HEALTH

- Homes NSW – “Assertive Outreach”**
- Engages people sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness, meeting them where they are.
  - Tailored care plans address emotional wellbeing, trauma, and social support needs (8).
- Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI)**
- Further supports people with severe mental illness who are homeless or at risk.
  - Provides on-site, coordinated access to psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health nurses, including medication management, therapy, and crisis intervention.
  - Case managers assist with daily living skills, routines, coping strategies, and social engagement to promote emotional wellbeing (9).

### HAVING PEER SUPPORT, INTERPRETERS + OUTREACH VANS



**St Vincent de Paul Society NSW – “Vinnies Vans”:** Outreach vans across NSW providing meals, basic supplies and referrals to people who are homeless or at risk (11).

**CALD Assist:** A free app to help clinicians communicate with people of limited English proficiency in health settings (useful for homeless people with language barriers) (10).

**St Vincent’s Hospital Sydney – Homeless Health Service:** Free GP, nurse, peer support, and street outreach for people experiencing homelessness.

**Health on the Streets:** Mobile clinic providing health checks, vaccinations, sexual and mental health assessments, referrals, and housing/NDIS support (15).



### CULTURAL + LANGUAGE BARRIERS , GEOGRAPHIC INCONVENIENCE (EQUITABLE)

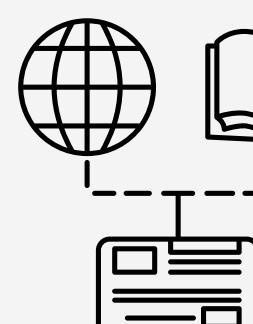
- Homeless individuals encounter multiple healthcare barriers, including cultural differences, language difficulties, and mistrust of the system.
- These barriers often result in delayed care and reduced adherence to treatment plans.
- Limited English proficiency can make it challenging to communicate symptoms, understand medical instructions, and complete necessary forms or appointments.
- Geographic obstacles, such as long distances to clinics, lack of transportation, and competing survival needs, further hinder access to consistent and timely healthcare

### LIMITED AWARENESS OF AVAILABLE SERVICES + TIMELINESS



- People experiencing homelessness often struggle to access healthcare due to:
- Limited knowledge of available services
- Rigid + traditional appointment systems
- Immediate survival needs, such as food, shelter, or safety, often take priority over healthcare.
- These factors cause delays in care and contribute to worsening health outcomes.
- Highlights the need for flexible, accessible, and timely healthcare approaches tailored to the unique circumstances of this population.

### HOTLINE + RESOURCES → REFERRALS



#### ASK Izzy

- Free search tool (Service Locator)
- Helps find shelter, food, health, and essential services in their area

#### Link2home

- NSW statewide helpline
- Provides information, assessments, and referrals for homelessness support and accommodation
- Educes callers on their options and the services available to them (16).

**Healthdirect Helpline** - Many homeless people cannot attend clinics during standard hours due to survival priorities (food, shelter, safety). The helpline links them to after-hours GP services, avoiding harmful delays (17).

→ ROUGH SLEEPERS REPORT VERY LOW SATISFACTION WITH HEALTHCARE (~ 38.9/100) DUE TO LACK OF ACCESS, STIGMA, OR UNSTABLE LIVING CONDITIONS.  
→ HOMELESS CLIENTS ARE 56 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO PRESENT AT AN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT FOR MENTAL-HEALTH REASONS.

IN 2025, APPROXIMATELY 2,192 PEOPLE WERE SLEEPING ROUGH IN NSW, AN 8% INCREASE FROM 2024.

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