



CUMBERLAND COUNCIL

**The State of Homelessness in Cumberland
RESEARCH REPORT
October 2018**

Report prepared by the Social Research and Planning Team, Community Development and Planning, Cumberland Council 2018

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Executive summary

Homelessness is a multifaceted problem, often resulting from the interaction between a number of complex and often persistent issues¹.

This research report aims to provide a greater understanding of the state of homelessness in the Cumberland Local Government Area (LGA). This includes the causes and complexities of the issue and the challenges in responding to the needs identified. The report provides recommendations for how Council can assist to address the issue in Cumberland, in collaboration with other levels of government and community stakeholders.

Why was the research conducted?

Research into the issue of homelessness in Cumberland was prompted by a review of 2016 Census of Population and Housing data, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which indicated a high rate of people who were classified as homeless in Cumberland. In addition, Council had received anecdotal reports of increasing visible homelessness in Cumberland, that is, cases of people 'sleeping rough' in public places.

Homelessness profile in Cumberland

According to 2016 Census data there were 3,129 homeless persons living in the Cumberland LGA on census night. Cumberland has the second highest number of homeless persons by LGA in NSW after Sydney (5,601). Cumberland also has the fourth highest number of homeless persons by LGA in Australia, after Brisbane (5,813), Sydney and East Arnhem (3,833). Additional detail is provided in Chapter 3.

Definition of homelessness

The research has adopted a broader, more holistic view of homelessness, extending beyond the commonly recognised form of people 'sleeping rough'. This holistic view is aligned with the ABS statistical definition of homelessness, which identifies someone who does not have access to suitable accommodation (in terms of dwelling inadequacy and lack of secure tenure).

The ABS defines homelessness by operational groups, considered to not meet the above requirements. In line with the trend across NSW, the majority of homeless people living in the Cumberland area are classified as 'persons living in severely crowded dwellings' (2,525 people). Overcrowding can have significant impacts on a person's personal safety, health and wellbeing. This is further discussed in Chapter 2.

Research scope and methodology

To prepare this research report, Council's Social Research and Planning Team undertook consultations with Service Providers, Peak Bodies, Police and Council Staff. These consultations provided information on homelessness relevant to the

¹ Homelessness Australia (2016), Homelessness in Australia, first accessed 10 July 2018: <https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness%20in%20Australia2.pdf>

Cumberland LGA. In addition to this, the team conducted data-analysis and a literature review of research conducted by other local governments, states and countries in response to the increase in homelessness. This provided greater understanding of the issue of homelessness, as well as the various measures taken globally to address and reduce homelessness.

The core questions the research sought to answer were:

- What are the contributors to homelessness in Cumberland?
- Who are the key groups at risk of homelessness?
- What is the prevalence of people sleeping rough in Cumberland?
- What homeless support services are currently being provided and are there any gaps in service provision?
- How could the issue of homelessness be addressed and what role could Council play?

Key research findings

Consultations conducted with stakeholders identified the following factors that place a person at risk of homelessness and are contributing to homelessness in Cumberland:

- Housing unaffordability (rising house and rent prices and the specific impact this has on lower income families in Cumberland)
- Lack of social housing
- Low income and poverty
- Unemployment and barriers to employment
- Domestic and family violence
- Mental health issues
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Social isolation, instability and transience.

Key demographic groups identified to be of particular risk of homelessness in Cumberland include newly arrived people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young people, seniors (in particular women), students, people with disability and refugees. Another key group identified was people seeking asylum, recently placed at even higher risk due to changes to the Status Resolution Support Services program (which will result in support services being cut to many people seeking refugee protection).

The research identified specific gaps in relation to housing and support services to prevent and address homelessness in Cumberland. These included a significant lack of affordable housing, shortage of crisis, short, medium and long-term accommodation, lack of service funding, capacity issues and specific service gaps (including outreach, living skills programs, services for adult men, services for people seeking asylum, mental health, domestic and family violence and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services). Service providers and peak bodies also identified the need for greater sector coordination and capacity building.

Many staff across various Council teams had experienced people who were homeless in their roles. All staff expressed compassion and a willingness to assist people in need, but noted a lack of certainty of an appropriate and effective course of action.

Stakeholders consulted also provided ideas for how Council could play a role in addressing homelessness in Cumberland. Greater detail on information, feedback and ideas provided by stakeholders consulted is included in Chapter 6.

Recommendations for Council

The research has informed the development of a set of recommendations and actions for Council to address the issue of homelessness in Cumberland. These were developed with consideration of:

- Information and feedback provided by the organisations and agencies consulted
- Feedback and input provided by internal Council teams (including in relation to opportunities and challenges)
- The scope of Council's influence, capabilities, resources and opportunities
- Priorities and a suitable sequencing of actions.

The recommendations and associated actions are summarised in the table below. Detail is provided in Chapter 7.

Recommendation	Action
1: Develop policies to address housing affordability issues	1.1: Prioritise the development of the Cumberland Residential Housing Strategy.
	1.2: Explore alternative ways to incentivise affordable housing contribution schemes such as inclusionary zoning and reapplying for SEPP No. 70.
2: Assist sector coordination and capacity building	2.1: Facilitate a Homelessness Sector Forum and action planning session.
	2.2: Organise training for service providers and frontline community advocates.
	2.3: Continue to identify, support and advocate for funding opportunities and service support in the Cumberland area.
3: Engage with people experiencing homelessness	3.1: Partner with a research institute to engage with people experiencing homelessness.
	3.2: Consult with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
	3.3: Undertake a rough sleeper count.
4: Build Council's capacity to assist people experiencing homelessness	4.1: Seek funding to establish a new Homelessness Project Officer position within Council (temporary 12 month role).
	4.2: Develop and implement Council protocols and procedures for working with people who are homeless.
	4.3: Train key front-line staff in homelessness protocols and procedures.

Recommendation	Action
	4.4: Develop a centralised data collection process to identify incidents of homelessness (to capture more accurate data and enable monitoring).
5: Advocate	<p data-bbox="592 363 1133 394">5.1: Undertake focused advocacy, including:</p> <ul data-bbox="602 415 1320 856" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="602 415 1320 506">• Sign up to the 'Everybody's Home' campaign to end homelessness and provide affordable housing for all Australians; <li data-bbox="602 527 1320 617">• Sign up to the Refugee Council of Australia 'Roof Over My Head' campaign to stop funding cuts to support for people seeking asylum; and <li data-bbox="602 638 1320 856">• Request and undertake a delegation visit with The Hon Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Home Affairs and The Hon David Coleman MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Border Protection to highlight the impact of the SRSS changes on residents living in Cumberland and on the community based services supporting them. <p data-bbox="592 898 1235 1018">5.2: General ongoing advocacy to State and Federal Governments regarding issues that impact on Cumberland residents in relation to housing and homelessness.</p>

1. Introduction

This research report considers the issue of homelessness in the Cumberland Local Government Area (LGA). The report summarises the findings of research into homelessness, conducted by Council's Social Research and Planning team (within the Community Development and Planning team) and recommended actions for Council moving forward.

There is no single, agreed upon definition of homelessness. The research has adopted a broader, more holistic view of homelessness that extends beyond the commonly recognised form of people 'sleeping rough' (living on the street, in other public places or squatting in abandoned buildings). This holistic view is aligned with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical definition of homelessness. The ABS statistical definition states that when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if that persons current living arrangement:

- Is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- Has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
- Does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

The ABS defines homelessness by six operational groups, considered to not meet the above requirements:

- Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out
- Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
- Persons staying temporarily with other households
- Persons living in boarding houses
- Persons in other temporary lodgings, and
- Persons living in severely crowded dwellings.

This broader definition of homelessness is further explained in Chapter 2: *Overview of homelessness*.

Why was the research conducted?

The decision to conduct research into the issue of homelessness in the Cumberland LGA was prompted by a review of the 2016 Census of Population and Housing data, which indicated a significant rise in numbers of homeless people and a high rate of people who were classified as homeless in Cumberland.

The 2016 Census of Population and Housing, ABS, revealed a rise in the rate of homelessness in Australia by 13.7%. In New South Wales, the homelessness rate rose by 27% to 50 homeless persons per 10,000 persons, as compared to 40 homeless persons per 10,000 persons in 2011. Most of this increase in homelessness over this period was due to an increase in people living in severely crowded dwellings, from 41,370 in 2011 to 51,088 in 2016.

According to 2016 Census data, there were 3,129 homeless persons living in the Cumberland LGA on census night. Cumberland has the second highest number of homeless persons by LGA in NSW after Sydney (5,601). It also has the fourth highest number of homeless persons by LGA in Australia, after Brisbane (5,813), Sydney and East Arnhem (3, 833). Similarly to the trend across New South Wales, the significant majority of people categorised as homeless were those living in severely crowded dwellings.

In addition, Cumberland Council has received a number of anecdotal reports of visible homelessness in Cumberland, that is, cases of people 'sleeping rough' in public places.

In response to the Census data and reports of visible homelessness, Council's Community Development and Planning Team sought to understand the nature and extent of homelessness in Cumberland and to identify initial recommendations for how Council could play a role in addressing the issue.

Allowing people in the Cumberland community to remain homeless - including people sleeping rough or people living in overcrowded dwellings - opposes our community's shared values of 'welcome, belong, succeed'.

Research scope and methodology

This research is the first of its type by Cumberland Council. It involved collection and analysis of high-level primary and secondary data regarding homelessness in Cumberland.

The research approach taken was largely informed by the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). The PAR approach views individuals and affected communities as experts, promoting shared knowledge and experience as legitimate and significant. We adopted an intentionally collaborative approach to research and consultation; letting the insights gained guide further discussions and questioning. The process of research, interrogation and analysis is a community-building tool, bringing services and individuals together around a common issue.

Importantly, this research intends to result in some form of action or change to the issue being researched - namely, improving homelessness in Cumberland, and the lives it affects.

The study primarily involved:

- A review of Census of Population and Housing homelessness data (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
- Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with service providers, industry experts and peak bodies to gather qualitative data on the experience and understanding of the issue by front-line workers and advocates engaged in the Cumberland-Parramatta region.
- Telephone and face-to-face interviews with Council staff deemed likely to interact with the issue at some level, including representatives from the Development Compliance, Parks and Recreation, Environmental Protection (Rangers), Waste and Cleansing, Culture and Activation (Community Centres) and Library Services teams.

Research limitations

At commencement, it was acknowledged that this research was a starting point and there are limitations associated with the scope. Consultation with people experiencing different forms of homelessness first hand is essential in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of homelessness, including the issues that may be unique to people living in Cumberland. This consultation has therefore been included as one of the recommended next steps for Council.

Research questions

The core questions the research sought to answer were:

- What are the contributors to homelessness in Cumberland?
- Who are the key groups at risk of homelessness?
- What is the prevalence of people sleeping rough in Cumberland (including assessing the necessity and feasibility of a street count of homeless people in the Cumberland LGA)
- What homeless support services are currently being provided and are there any gaps in service provision?
- How could the issue of homelessness be addressed and what role could Council play?

2. Overview of homelessness

What is homelessness?

There is no single, agreed definition of homelessness however, it is widely accepted that 'rooflessness is not the same as 'home'lessness. The complexity of homelessness from a social policy and service delivery perspective means there are a wide range of views on what constitutes homelessness – including, but also beyond, the commonly identified form of people 'sleeping rough'.

The cultural definition of homelessness, as defined by Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) contends that 'homelessness' and 'inadequate housing' are cultural concepts, and therefore relative to a particular culture and historical point in time². The cultural definition identifies shared community standards about the minimum housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the particular housing norms of their culture. In Australia, Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) define the minimum community standard to be 'a small rental flat, with a bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom and an element of security of tenure – because that is the minimum that most people achieve in the private rental market'³. There are a number of settings where people do not meet the minimal level of accommodation identified by the community standard, and yet in cultural terms, are not considered homeless. These include elderly people in nursing homes, students living in residence and prisoners (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 1992).

While different cultural norms challenge the concepts of what constitutes minimal housing standards in Australia, the research identified that there are many people living in the Cumberland LGA in situations that are unsafe or detrimental to their health and wellbeing (refer Chapter 2, section 'The statistical definition of homelessness').

Australian Researchers Professor Chris Chamberlain and Associate Professor David MacKenzie established a world-first approach to the use of Census data in estimation of the homelessness population (based on the cultural definition of homelessness), broken down by primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness (defined below):

- **Primary homelessness** – refers to a person who lives on the street, sleeps in parks, squats in derelict buildings, or who uses cars/railway carriages for temporary shelter
- **Secondary homelessness** – describes individuals who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, including those using emergency accommodation, youth refuges or women's refuges, people residing temporarily with relatives or friends (due to no accommodation of their own) and people using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis (up to 12 weeks).
- **Tertiary homelessness** – applies to people who live in premises where they don't have the security of a lease guaranteeing them accommodation, nor access to basic private facilities (i.e. private bathroom, kitchen, living space). It includes those living in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis (more than 13 weeks) or in caravan parks.

The statistical definition of homelessness

In 2008, the ABS recognised the need to develop robust, transparent statistics on homelessness across a range of ABS datasets. Homelessness is not a characteristic that is directly measured in the

² Chamberlain C and MacKenzie D (1992) 'Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning', Australian Journal of Social Issues, 27(4), p. 274–297

³ Chamberlain C and MacKenzie D (2009). Counting the homeless 2006: Australian Capital Territory. Cat. no. HOU 207. Canberra: AIHW

Census. Instead, estimates of the homeless population are derived from the Census using analytical techniques, based on both the characteristics observed in the Census and assumptions about the way people may respond to Census questions.

The ABS statistical definition states that when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if that persons current living arrangement:

- Is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- Has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
- Does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

The ABS definition recognises the core elements of 'home' in Anglo American and European interpretations of the meaning of home⁴. These elements include; a sense of security, stability, privacy and safety, and the ability to control one's living space. Homelessness is therefore a lack of one or more of the elements that represent 'home'.

The ABS defines homelessness by six operational groups:

- Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out
- Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
- Persons staying temporarily with other households
- Persons living in boarding houses
- Persons in other temporary lodgings
- Persons living in severely crowded dwellings.

The ABS also defines three key groups of people considered to be 'marginally housed'; whose living arrangements align closely with the statistical definition of homelessness, and who may therefore be at risk of homelessness, including:

- Persons living in other crowded dwellings
- Persons in other improvised dwellings, and
- Persons who are marginally housed in caravan parks.

Crowded dwellings

Severely crowded conditions are defined by the ABS as a living in a dwelling in which four or more bedrooms are required (in order for the dwelling to be adequate for the number of people residing in it). Crowded conditions are defined as living in a dwelling in which three or more bedrooms are required. The view of an adequate number of bedrooms is that each single adult or a couple have their own bedroom. The four or more bedrooms benchmark for severe crowding is designed to prevent the misclassification of people as homeless who may choose to live together under some crowding to save money, to be close to family or for other reasons.

The ABS explains that people living in severely crowded dwellings are generally unable to pursue social relations, have personal living space, maintain privacy and/or have adequate access to kitchen and bathroom facilities. The ABS also acknowledges that in these circumstances, if these people were able to access more adequate accommodation they would. In the majority of cases, people living in severely crowded dwellings do so as they are unable to afford alternative rental accommodation or cannot access social housing. The alternative being, they would not have access to other forms of housing (and end-up in another form of homelessness).

Consultation with services providers and Council Development Compliance staff provided insight into extreme cases of people living in severely crowded dwellings and the issues involved. Council staff

⁴ Mallet. S, *Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature* (2004), *Sociological Review* 52(1), p.62-89.

spoke of incidents where apartments had been modified and temporary walls erected to create many additional bedrooms. They spoke of fire risks. Such situations also impact the health of residents due to lack of light and air flow in bedrooms. One service described situations of individuals sharing not only bedrooms, but beds through a shift system.

Limitations of the ABS statistics and definitions

While the ABS definition of homelessness offers a useful platform from which to explore the issue in Cumberland, the lives of homeless people rarely fit so neatly into carefully defined categories. The transient nature of homelessness must also be taken into account, as homelessness is experienced over time and as people move in and out of different forms of supported accommodation.

It is also highly likely the Census is unable to capture the true extent of homelessness in areas (including Cumberland). It is reasonable to assume that numbers of homeless people are in fact far greater as it is difficult to count people sleeping out. Severely crowded households are also unlikely to reveal the true numbers of residents if they do not align with rental agreements or dwellings have modified to accommodate additional people, without appropriate permits and approvals.

Causes and structural drivers of homelessness

The causes of homelessness are interrelated and complex, with no single trigger⁵.

Homelessness is often a result of a number of complex issues which can include:

- The chronic shortage of affordable and available rental housing
- Domestic and family violence
- Intergenerational poverty
- Financial crisis
- Long term unemployment
- Economic and social exclusion
- Severe and persistent mental illness and psychological distress
- Exiting state care
- Exiting prison
- Severe overcrowding/housing crisis⁶.

In the Cumberland community, as it is for communities world-wide, certain groups face barriers that prevent them from participating fully in political, economic and social life. Who gets excluded, and how, is based on a person's identity, including their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, disability status, sexual orientation, location and employment status⁷.

Social inclusion and social exclusion are commonly defined around the axis of poverty and an individual's inability therefore to fully engage in society and realise their potential. Poverty is a central narrative that informs a person's risk of homelessness, in addition to prompting several other pathways into homelessness. Homelessness, therefore, as well as unemployment and chronic poverty are common barriers that obstruct participation.

There is also an overlap between these issues and those leading to homelessness. Once someone becomes homeless, the other associated issues get worse and homelessness creates a vicious cycle for people.

On an individual level homelessness makes it difficult to maintain school or further study and leaves people vulnerable to long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health. Some health problems are a

⁵ Launch Housing 2018, *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018 Overview*, Launch Housing Victoria

⁶ Homelessness Australia (2016), *Homelessness in Australia*

⁷ World Bank (2013). *Inclusion Matters: The foundation for shared prosperity*. Washington, DC: World Bank

consequence of homelessness including depression, poor nutrition, poor dental health, substance abuse and mental health problems. Australians experiencing homelessness are often excluded from participating in social, recreational, cultural and economic opportunities in their community.⁸

Economic factors

The economic drivers of homelessness involve a person's exclusion from markets (housing and credit), services (social protection, transport, education and health) and spaces (political, physical, cultural and social), including:

- Rising cost of living
- Rising house prices and rental costs
- Insecure jobs and low wages
- Lack of inclusive economic growth and jobs
- Inadequate welfare indexation (e.g. changes to Centrelink Newstart Allowance)
- Domestic policies (e.g. changes to Status Resolution Support Services program eligibility for people seeking asylum - refer note below*)
- Low supply of low-cost, affordable public and private housing.

***A note about Status Resolution Support Services program changes**

In 2018, the Australian Government made changes to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program - a payment for people seeking asylum (on Bridging Visa E) in Australia. The payment is around 89% of the Newstart allowance (around as little as \$35 per day). The change involves the program's eligibility criteria and will leave the majority of people seeking asylum in Australia with no income, case management or allied health supports.

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) estimates approximately 3,500 people in NSW will not be able to access the program by the end of 2018 (a significant number of which reside in Cumberland – refer to Chapter 3 for additional information). Across the homelessness and housing sector, it is anticipated that cuts to SRSS funding will force people seeking refugee protection into homelessness, placing the burden of responsibility on states, councils, local communities and charities.

The changes will impact local governments and not for profit charities as they struggle to meet increasing demands for: housing, food, medical services and material aid needs.

Social factors

The social drivers of homelessness relate directly to the community itself; and the personal and interpersonal issues and disconnect that can increase a person's risk of homelessness, including:

- Addiction
- Family breakdown
- Mental illness
- Social inequality (e.g. women as earning less than men and receiving less superannuation, ethnic and racial discrimination or disadvantage)
- Limited livelihoods and opportunities for certain groups (who typically possess low levels of literacy, low education, limited transferrable skills, physical and social assets)
- Increasing social disconnect and social isolation
- Recency of arrival, residency status and settlement experiences including family and community support networks

⁸ Homelessness Australia (2016), *Homelessness in Australia*
<https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness%20in%20Australiaiv2.pdf>

Response to homelessness

While there are varying factors that contribute to homelessness, there is an agreed knowledge among governments and service providers internationally around what the most effective approaches to ending homelessness are, as underpinned by a 'Housing First Model'. This model begins with swift access to social and affordable housing, and continues to wrap a range of suitable and accessible, individualised services around vulnerable people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

3. Homelessness profile

The following section provides an overview of homelessness across Australia, in New South Wales and in Cumberland (LGA), based on Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing data.

Homelessness in Australia

According to 2016 Census data, there were 116,427 people classified as being homeless in Australia on census night (an increase from 102,439 persons in 2011). This reflects a homelessness rate of 50 persons for every 10,000 persons, an increase of 5% from 48 persons in 2011 and 45 persons in 2006.

A majority of the increase in homelessness across Australia in the five years to 2016 was reflected in people living in severely crowded dwellings, up from 41,370 in 2011 to 51,088 in 2016. This was also the case between 2006 and 2011 census data on homelessness in Australia.

The number of homeless persons aged 25-34 accounted for the largest proportion of homeless persons in NSW (23.1%), followed by 19-24 year olds (16.9%). Of these, 60.2% are male, versus 39.8% who are female.

Homelessness in NSW

New South Wales recorded the highest increase of any state or territory in the five years to 2016, with an increase of 27%. This figure is almost double the national average of 14%. There are 32.4% or 37,715 homeless persons in New South Wales, followed by 24,817 persons in Victoria and 13,717 persons in the Northern Territory.

Homelessness in Cumberland

According to 2016 census data, there were 3,129 homeless persons living in Cumberland LGA on census night. This represents the fourth highest number of homeless persons by place of enumeration across Australia, after Brisbane (5,813), Sydney (5,061) and East Arnhem (3, 833).

The following table includes the LGAs in Australia with the highest numbers of homeless persons.

All Homeless Persons, by place of enumeration, by LGA (Australia-wide)	All homeless persons
Brisbane (C)	5,813
Sydney (C)	5,061
East Arnhem (R)	3,833
Cumberland (A)	3,129
Canterbury-Bankstown (A)	2,582
Fairfield (C)	2,226
Inner West (A)	2,215
Greater Dandenong (C)	1,942
Roper Gulf (R)	1,773
Melbourne (C)	1,725

In NSW, Cumberland represents the second highest number of homeless persons by place of enumeration on census night. This is a drastic increase from 2011 census data for former LGA boundaries that recorded 804 homelessness persons in former Parramatta LGA, 628 homeless persons in former Auburn LGA (12th) and 425 persons in former Holroyd LGA (18th).

The following table includes the LGAs in NSW with the highest numbers of homeless persons.

All Homeless Persons, by place of enumeration, by LGA (NSW)	All homeless persons
Sydney (C)	5,061
Cumberland (A)	3,129
Canterbury-Bankstown (A)	2,582
Fairfield (C)	2,226
Inner West (A)	2,215
Blacktown (C)	1,534
Liverpool (C)	1,058
Central Coast (C)	1,031
Parramatta (C)	987
Campbelltown (C)	928

Homeless persons by area

A breakdown of data by Census Statistical Area 2 (SA2) indicates in 2016, the areas in the Cumberland LGA with the highest number of homeless persons were:

- Auburn - Central (661 persons)
- Auburn - North (542 persons)
- Guildford - South Granville (342 persons)
- Merrylands - Holroyd (308 persons)
- Granville - Clyde (275 persons)
- Lidcombe (234).

The data also indicates the significant increase in homeless persons between 2011 and 2016, with the following six areas experiencing increases greater than 100%:

- Auburn - Central, South and North (177% increase)
- Berala - Lidcombe - Regents Park (172% increase)
- Merrylands - Holroyd (168% increase)
- Guildford West - Merrylands West (153% increase)
- Guildford - South Granville (114% increase)
- Toongabbie - Constitution Hill (103% increase).

The following table provides a breakdown of homeless persons by SA2 for 2011 and 2016.

Homeless Persons by SA2 Area in Cumberland LGA			
SA2	All homeless persons 2016	All homeless persons 2011	% change 2011 to 2016
Rookwood Cemetery	0	0	0%
Auburn - Central	661	478	177%
Auburn - North	524		
Auburn - South	137		
Berala	125	144	172%
Lidcombe	234		
Regents Park	32		
Chester Hill - Sefton	121	139	-13%
Granville - Clyde	275	213	29%
Greystanes - Pemulwuy	47	34	38%
Guildford - South Granville	342	160	114%
Guildford West - Merrylands West	185	73	153%
Merrylands - Holroyd	308	115	168%

Homeless Persons by SA2 Area in Cumberland LGA			
SA2	All homeless persons 2016	All homeless persons 2011	% change 2011 to 2016
Smithfield Industrial	0	0	0%
Yennora Industrial	0	0	0%
Toongabbie - Constitution Hill	67	33	103%
Pendle Hill - Girraween	159	170 (Girraween - Westmead)	62%
Wentworthville - Westmead	116		

Homeless operational groups in Cumberland

The following table provides a breakdown of 2016 Census homelessness data by operational group. The data indicates the most prominent operational group was people living in severely crowded dwellings (2,525 persons, 81% of homeless persons).

In improved dwellings, tents or sleeping out	In supported accommodation for the homeless	Staying temporarily with other households	In boarding houses	In other temporary lodgings	In severely crowded dwellings	Total homeless persons
47	231	121	213	0	2,525	3,129

Census data also indicates that in 2016, there were 4,066 'marginally housed' people living in Cumberland (people not considered homeless, but at risk of homelessness). The majority of this group (4,025 persons, 99% of marginally housed persons) were people living in other crowded dwellings. A breakdown is provided in the following table:

In other crowded dwellings	In improvised dwellings	Marginally houses in caravan parks	Total marginally housed persons
4,025	41	0	4,066

The data indicates that overcrowding is a significant issue in Cumberland.

Who is living in severely crowded dwellings?

A more detailed demographic breakdown of the 2,525 people living in severely crowded dwellings, is provided in Appendix 2, to better understand the most prominent homeless operational group.

In summary the data indicates that in 2016:

- While the highest numbers of households in severely crowded dwellings were group households, there were also high numbers of one family and multiple family households
- 83% were born overseas
- 49% recently arrived in Australia (2012 or later)
- 41% were employed (full or part-time)
- 50% paid weekly rent of \$400 and over.

A table with a breakdown of the data for people living in severely crowded dwellings as well as a table with breakdown of people living in other crowded dwellings are provided in Appendix 2.

Other demographic statistics of relevance

Demographic data for the Cumberland LGA also indicates the presence of some the economic and social factors that can contribute to homelessness (refer Chapter 2: *Structural drivers of*

homelessness), that is, factors that may place people at greater risk of homelessness. These include high rates of employment, lower income levels, lower proportion of people with tertiary qualifications, households experiencing rental stress, high proportion of people that do not speak English and people with disability, and overall higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage.

Data of interest includes the following, which has been sourced from Census 2016 and Cumberland Community Profile 2016 data (.id), and compared to Greater Sydney for context:

- 47.5% of people with no tertiary qualifications (Greater Sydney = 37.7)
- 9.5% of people unemployed (Greater Sydney = 6.0%)
- 5.4% of people looking for full-time work and 4.1% of part-time work (Greater Sydney = 3.2% and 2.9%)
- Median weekly individual income of \$501 (Greater Sydney = \$719)
- Median weekly household income of \$1,379 (Greater Sydney = \$1,750)
- 18.7% of households renting their homes that are experiencing rental stress, that is, households with rent payments greater than or equal to 30% of household income (Greater Sydney = 14.2%). This is particularly significant given the high proportion (30.9%) of people renting their homes in the Cumberland LGA (Greater Sydney = 27.6%)
- 14.7% of people that speak English not well or not at all (Greater Sydney = 6.5%)
- 5.8% of people with disability (Greater Sydney = 4.9%)
- SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage score of 929, which places the Cumberland LGA as the 25th most disadvantaged LGA in NSW and the second most disadvantaged in Greater Sydney.

Refugee and asylum seeker population in Cumberland

Refugee and asylum seeking communities are particular groups at risk of homelessness. This is of particular relevance to this study as Cumberland has the highest portion of refugees per capita, with over 20,000 refugees settling in the Cumberland LGA over the past 25 years⁹. Cumberland also has the highest number of people seeking asylum of any local government area in NSW, with approximately 2,763 people on Bridging Visa E¹⁰.

People seeking asylum impacted by SRSS funding changes

The risk of homelessness to people seeking asylum has recently increased due to changes to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program in relation to eligibility.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) indicates that an estimated 3,500 people in NSW will not be able to access the SRSS Program by the end of 2018, with the majority of those affected living in Southwest and Western Sydney.

According to the Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) there are approximately 2,763 people seeking asylum living within the Cumberland area, many of whom will be affected by the changes.

⁹ Department of Social Services (July 2016), Settlement Database www.data.gov.au/dataset/settlement-reports

¹⁰ Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs

4. Roles and responsibilities

This chapter outlines the roles that the Commonwealth, State and Local Governments play in influencing homelessness at the national, state and local level.

Primarily homelessness is a result of macro-economic, housing and social policies determined by State and Commonwealth Governments. Such policies can influence the supply of affordable, accessible and appropriate housing options and can impact on the health and wellbeing of the community (including levels of advantage or disadvantage and distribution of wealth).

Commonwealth and State governments hold the statutory responsibilities and allotted funding to provide services to people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. They also influence the fundamental drivers of homelessness. This includes the supply of affordable housing and employment, as well as the provision of health and welfare services.

However, there are also important roles that Council (and also non-government organisations) play in addressing the issue of homelessness at the local level.

The following provides a summary of the roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government and the non-government sector relating to housing and homelessness.

Commonwealth Government

The following outlines the key roles or scope of influence of the Commonwealth Government. This information has been sourced from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) website¹¹.

- **Housing demand** - The Commonwealth Government's main impacts on housing demand and housing affordability stress are through the taxation benefits given to investors (i.e. negative gearing and capital gains tax reductions) and population increase (or reduction) through migration policy (whether that policy is explicit or implicit).
- **Social housing investment** – The Commonwealth Government provides funding to states and territories to increase social housing and other forms of affordable housing supply through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. The Commonwealth Government also encourages large scale investment in social housing provided by community housing providers, through an affordable housing bond aggregator (long term low cost finance) as part of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation.
- **Welfare support and Commonwealth Rent Assistance** – The Commonwealth Government provides Commonwealth Rent Assistance to households renting in the private market that are receiving welfare benefits. These payments can reduce housing affordability stress for eligible tenant households.

In addition, the Commonwealth Government funds various welfare schemes for disadvantaged groups (e.g. older people, unemployed people and people with disability). The Commonwealth Government also funds non-government organisations to deliver community support services.

¹¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), *Understanding the housing policy levers of Commonwealth, state and territory, and local government*. Last updated 27 September 2018. Website accessed 2 October 2018: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/understanding-the-housing-policy-levers-of-commonwealth,-state-and-territory,-and-local-government>

State governments

The following outlines the key roles or scope of influence of State governments.

- **Social housing** - State governments have an active role in funding and providing public housing to householders on welfare or low incomes. They also enable Community Housing Providers to manage and increase levels of social housing through transferring housing management (and sometimes ownership) to providers.
- **Land release** – State governments oversee the release into the market of non-residential land for development so as to increase housing supply, which may reduce housing affordability stress. A proportion of this increase in housing supply will become available for renting households.
- **Zoning laws** – State governments also assess the environmental impact of developments, and can overturn planning restrictions for new housing imposed by local councils, which may impact on housing supply. They may also impose inclusionary zoning rules which require developers to include affordable housing dwellings in their developments or to make payments so that affordable housing projects can be built elsewhere.
- **Stamp duty and Land Tax** – State governments set and collect any stamp duties and land taxes that are applied to property sales and transfers. Such taxes and duties increase costs for home buyers, and for investment properties they are passed on to tenants through higher rents.¹²

State governments also directly provide health, education and specific housing and homelessness support services and fund non-government organisations to deliver community support services.

Local government

The key role and sphere of influence of local governments is through zoning laws. These laws determine building types, sizes, heights and quality. Zoning can influence the amount and quality of development in an area (which can impact on housing affordability). Local government zoning laws may also include inclusionary zoning rules that serve to increase affordable housing dwellings in the local government area. (AHURI, 2018).

Local governments can also directly supply services that support more disadvantaged or higher needs groups in their communities. Such support services can play a role in minimising housing affordability stress for these groups, to varying degrees.

Specific Cumberland Council initiatives

The following provides a summary of some of the key Council services, programs and initiatives that directly or indirectly address homelessness or reduce the risk of homelessness for disadvantaged or at risk groups. While not a comprehensive list, it provides a snapshot of the broad scope of work currently being undertaken by Council.

- **Assistance to people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness** – currently this is provided in an ad hoc, as needs basis by primarily front-line staff who have come across a person needing assistance (sleeping rough or in an unstable living arrangement). Consultation with Council teams highlighted difficulties staff have faced in determining the right course of action and sourcing an appropriate service. These issues are further discussed in Chapter 6. The issue has also been addressed in the report recommendations (refer Chapter 7).

¹² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), *Understanding the housing policy levers of Commonwealth, state and territory, and local government*. Last updated 27 September 2018. Website accessed 2 October 2018: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/understanding-the-housing-policy-levers-of-commonwealth,-state-and-territory,-and-local-government>

- **Seniors housing** – Council owns and manages 76 self-care units which are tenanted to eligible residents aged 55 years and over (considered disadvantaged in the open housing market) at a subsidised rental charge.
- **Community service provision** – Council directly provides Aged and Disability, Youth and Children’s services. While available to the broader community, these services also cater to vulnerable residents within Cumberland. A number of these services also receive Commonwealth or State Government funding.
- **Grants program** – Council’s Capacity Building Grants provide funding to organisations to address disadvantage and reduce barriers to participation within the local community. The program identifies specific priority areas to address key issues or community needs such as homelessness. Council also administers the ClubGRANTS scheme which includes homelessness support as a funding priority. These grants programs can play an important role in supporting service provision in the area (including addressing any identified gaps in homelessness support services).
- **Sector networking and support** – Council works alongside funded and unfunded community organisations to support the valuable work they do and to identify and address gaps in the sector. Support includes facilitating regular Community Sector Networking Forums, providing free training workshops for workers and volunteers, grant writing and support programs, social research, community education programs and partnership development, Council works to connect and improve collaboration amongst workers, volunteer-run community organisations and agencies working in the Cumberland Local Government Area (including homeless and domestic and family violence support services).
- **Volunteer and employment support programs** – Council’s Volunteers program is open to anyone interested in contributing to Council’s initiatives and activities. The program also provides valuable work experience opportunities, work experience, employment support and other opportunities providing a pathway into employment for community members, including those that have experienced barriers.
- **Facilities** – Council provides low cost, subsidised access to facilities for organisations and groups providing community programs and services (including to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups). In addition, Council also provides libraries, community centres, open space and recreation facilities that provide high quality, safe and free public spaces that can be utilised by all sections of the community (including low income individuals and families). Council also provides free and low-cost programs and activities (including Council’s Lifelong Learning programs and Council events). These programs play a key role in ensuring disadvantaged groups can participate in community life and reduce the risk of social isolation for vulnerable individuals and groups
- **Advocacy** – Council also advocates to other levels of government regarding policies impacting the Cumberland community. Council’s Social Research and Planning Coordinator recently attended a roundtable hosted by the NSW Government’s Family and Community Services (FACS) Minister to discuss the issue of overcrowding in Greater Sydney.
- **Policy** - Council’s Interim Affordable Housing Policy aims to address the issue of housing affordability. This is further discussed in *Chapter 5: Policy and planning context*.

The role of non-government organisations

Not-for profit organisations play a significant role in supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Some of the key support functions non-government organisations provide include:

- Support and information services which provide intake and referral to homelessness people.
- Outreach services which support people sleeping rough or in other homelessness services.
- Crisis housing services, which provide short term housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- Transitional housing, which provides housing for people for a limited period of time while they seek to establish themselves in some form of secure housing and address other life issues that present a risk of ongoing homelessness.

- Specialist services meeting the needs of particular at-risk populations including women escaping domestic violence, young people, Aboriginal people, men and families with children.
- Prevention and early intervention services which assist people at risk of homelessness to sustain their existing housing.

Some of these services are funded through the state government. Unfunded volunteer-run community groups, charities, welfare and religious organisations also play a significant role in supporting those in crises of vulnerable and at risk of homelessness, many without any source of regular funding.

Not-for profit organisations also manage community housing or affordable housing (funded by state government). Community housing is managed on a similar basis to public housing. Affordable housing is partly funded by State and/or Commonwealth Governments, managed by not-for profit or for-profit providers. It is rented to low or moderate income households at a discount to market, with the primary target being low-paid workers.

5. Policy and planning context

International context

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 25)

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights identifies housing as a human right; that adequate housing is an essential component of human survival with dignity. Without housing, other rights cannot be realised, including the right to family life and privacy, the right to freedom of movement, the right to assembly and association, the right to health and the right to development.

A subsequent report made by the Special Rapporteur to promote the realisation of the right to adequate housing emphasises that public housing in particular remains one of the few effective ways of ensuring everyone, everywhere has the right to a secure place to live.

National context

HOMELESSNESS

The Road Home: The Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness

The 2008 White Paper Strategy outlines the national approach to reducing homelessness. It establishes targets to halve homelessness by 2020, and offer supported accommodation to all people sleeping rough who need it.

HOUSING

National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)

The NAHA committed the Commonwealth Government, States and Territories to ensuring all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation. Approximately \$250m was provided to state governments per year for homelessness initiatives. The agreement addressed social housing, assistance to people in the private rental market, support and accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and assistance with purchasing a home.

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH)

The NPAH, commencing in January 2009, contributed to the NAHA directive to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion. The agreement focused on prevention and early intervention to stop people becoming homeless, breaking the cycle of homelessness, and improving and expanding the service response to homelessness. The NPAH funded the implementation of several programs, including *A Place to Call Home and Street to Home*.

National Partnership on Social Housing (NPSH)

The NPAH contributed to the National Affordable Housing Agreement through the delivery of services to prevent and reduce homelessness. The Australian Government committed \$230 million for two years until 30 June 2017, with funding priority given to frontline services focusing on women and children experiencing domestic violence and homeless youth under 18 years.

Funding Agreement 2018-19 and Beyond

The 2016 COAG Report on Performance confirmed that three out of four benchmarks set by the National Affordable Housing Agreement had not been achieved. From 2009 to 2016, growth in the

size of the social housing stock had stagnated and numbers on waiting lists had increased. With this in mind, the Commonwealth Government established a new national agreement which includes dedicated homelessness funding to providers of front line homelessness services for 2018/2019 and beyond.

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)

The NHHA came into effect on 1 July 2018. It combines funding for the NAHSPP (National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment) and NPAH. The NHHA is indexed annually and will provide \$4.6 billion in Commonwealth funding to States and Territories over the next three years. Homelessness services will be given an additional \$375 million over three years from 2018-19 that States are required to match. Under this agreement, funding to state and territory governments is to be linked to specified outcomes in priority areas, including: targets for social and affordable housing; residential land planning and zoning reforms; inclusionary zoning arrangements; renewal of public housing stock and transfer of public housing to community housing providers; and homelessness services.

National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)

The NRAS which commenced in 2008 has the dual aim of reducing rental costs for low to medium income households and increasing the number of affordable rental houses. It does this by providing an annual financial incentive to housing providers to provide affordable rental dwellings at least 20% below market rates.

State context

HOMELESSNESS

New Premier and State Priorities

The Premier's priorities, announced in September 2015, include the following two priorities relevant to homelessness and housing instability:

- *Reducing Youth Homelessness* – Increase the proportion of young people who successfully move from Specialist Homelessness Services to long-term accommodation by 10 per cent.
- *Protecting the Vulnerable* – Increase the number of households successfully transitioning out of social housing by 5 per cent over three years to create sustainable social housing.

NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

The NSW Homelessness Strategy is the NSW Government's five-year plan for a new, comprehensive approach to prevent and improve the responses to homelessness. The Strategy has three areas of focus, namely: identifying people who are vulnerable early, providing better support and services, and making the system simpler, more integrated and person-centred.

Going Home Staying Home Reform Plan (GHSH)

From 2012-2014, the NSW Government developed the GHSH reform agenda for the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) program. The GHSH provided a funding package valued at \$515 million over three years from 2013-2016. GHSH formed the framework for the development of new contracts for SHS services. This framework led to the significant restructuring of SHS contracts, including changes to areas of coverage, client focus, service coordination and design, and a reduction in the number of SHS contracts from 394 to 149 across NSW.

NSW State Government Protocol for Homeless People in Public Space

This Protocol provides a framework for interaction with homeless people in public places. The aim of the Protocol is to ensure that homeless people are treated respectfully and appropriately and are not discriminated against on the basis of their homeless status. The Protocol also facilitates a homeless person's access to housing and support services if they need or request them.

HOUSING

Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW

Future Directions is the NSW Government's ten-year strategy to deliver better outcomes for social housing. It is underpinned by three strategic priorities, including: more social housing, more opportunities, support and incentives to avoid and/or leave social housing, and a better social housing experience. To transform the social housing system in NSW to 2025 are three interconnected strategies, including: significant expansion and redevelopment of stock through partnerships with private sector developers and finance; transferring significant tenancy management responsibility to non-government housing providers; and "wrap-around" services to support tenants build their capabilities and take advantage of the economic opportunities in our strengthening economy.

Local Context

Cumberland Community Strategic Plan 2017-2021

Specific areas were identified by community members as needing the support of Council, including: a sense of community and liveability of the area; equality and access to infrastructure and services; job creation; education; approach to planning and development that results in positive outcomes for the community; positive leadership based on community involvement in decision making and transparency; youth services; quality of Council programs; diverse training and employment opportunities; affordable housing and healthy lifestyles.

The results from the 2016 Community Engagement Report: Cumberland Community Strategic Plan 2017-27 reflect the key priority areas that are important to local residents. The areas Council staff identified as community priorities include: long term financial sustainability; employment; housing affordability; trust in new Council and area; engagement through a wide range of methods and input into policy and programs; social inclusion and community engagement.

Themes of employment, social inclusion, community supports, affordable housing and adequate education and training programs all fall within the role of Local Government and are positive areas that can positively work to end homelessness in Cumberland.

Cumberland Interim Affordable Housing Policy

In July 2017, Cumberland Council adopted an *Interim Affordable Housing Policy* with the following objectives:

- To ensure that the Cumberland LGA includes housing that is affordable, with a priority for housing to households on low and very low incomes
- To support the provision of housing to key workers in Cumberland LGA
- To support the achievement of affordable housing targets set by the Draft West Central District Plan
- To provide for the dedication of dwellings to Council for the purpose of affordable housing, and
- To enable Council to collect monetary contributions towards affordable housing.

The *Interim Affordable Housing Policy* refers to 22% of all households with mortgages in the Cumberland LGA as spending more than 30% of income on mortgage payments, and 35% of renting households spending more than 30% of income on rent in 2011. Information from the 2016 Census indicates that these proportions have since risen to 32% for households with mortgages and 47% for renters.

Council also resolved at its meeting on 5 April 2017 to:

Require that any new planning proposal (pre-gateway) is to be accompanied by a planning agreement which provides for at least 5% of residential to be dedicated to affordable housing.

The *Interim Affordable Housing Policy* was further amended, following a Council resolution at the Extraordinary Meeting of Council on 13 December 2017 and includes the following:

4. *As a priority these affordable housing contributions will support the achievement of the following targets:*
 - a. *The Central City District Plan target of 5 - 10% of new dwellings dedicated for very low and low income households;*
 - b. *Council's interim target for planning proposals to provide for 15% of any additional residential floor space for very low and low income households.*¹³

The *Interim Affordable Housing Policy* defines 'affordable housing' as housing that meets the needs of low to moderate income households and costs less than 30% of gross household income.

The Interim Policy is available online at <https://www.cumberland.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-06/affordable-interim-housing-policy.pdf>.

The development of a Cumberland Residential Housing Strategy will inform the preparation of a more detailed Affordable Housing Policy for Cumberland.

Council's Planning Instruments

As noted in Chapter 4: *Roles and responsibilities*, Council's planning instruments (including the Local Environmental Plans and Development Control Plans) also influence the supply of housing in Cumberland.

¹³ Low household income - has the same meaning as in the Central City District Plan; namely, 50%-80% of median Sydney income for the relevant year. Very low household income has the same meaning as in the Central City District Plan; namely, 50% (or less) of median Sydney income for the relevant year.

6. Research findings

This chapter provides an outline of findings from consultations undertaken with organisations providing services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, peak bodies, Police and Council teams. A complete list of stakeholders consulted is included in Appendix 4.

An overview of the findings is presented below by stakeholder group.

Consultation with service providers

Consultations were conducted with a broad range of organisations providing a mix of service types and to a mix of target groups. Many services interviewed were funded through FACS as a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) or by the Department of Health to deliver support to people who are homeless and to assist them into housing. There were also a number of services consulted that rely in-part or wholly on donations and volunteers.

The role of service providers

Outreach

A few select services provide outreach support. That is, the service will visit and personally assist a person who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. Outreach services play a key role in assisting people who are sleeping rough, socially isolated, do not have the means to physically access service points, are unable to navigate confusing systems to access support or have lost trust in government processes and services.

Case management

Some services provide case management. Case management may involve assisting a client into housing or support services and/or developing a case management plan that will assist the client to achieve their goals. Services reported that many client goals related to transitioning to independence.

Early intervention

Increasingly there is a focus on prevention; intervening early in order to support and reduce the risk of a person becoming homeless. Many services interviewed emphasised the value of living skills support as a means of keeping clients out of homelessness. This type of support includes assistance in securing and maintaining a tenancy, help with furnishing a home and resume writing and interview skills for job seekers.

Community advocates and educators

As well as being advocates for solutions to end homelessness, services are acting as advocates for their clients. Services reported to regularly advocate to Housing NSW and Centrelink to process and/or manage client applications. Services reported that clients are typically not aware of their rights and the services are available to them and play a key role in supporting and educating their clients on their rights and access to services.

Referral and networking

Services refer between each other, with referrals occurring between community organisations, groups, schools, Housing NSW and Centrelink, among others. Admitting their own capacity issues, many services reported to not actively promote their service, but rather rely on word of mouth. The same was true for networking groups, referenced by several service providers as a common platform for advertising and promotion.

The role of religious organisations

Religious organisations (including church groups) are playing a key role in supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Cumberland. Many groups expressed their willingness and capacity to assist, particularly with on-the-ground crisis responses like food relief, financial assistance, provision of household items and English language education.

Key groups at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Cumberland

Refugees and people seeking asylum

For those services working with refugees and people seeking refugee protection, there are multiple, interceding issues with refugee and asylum seeker clients that impact on their risk of homelessness. From backgrounds of torture and trauma, services reflected that many refugees and asylum seekers are traumatised again through the ‘mental drain’ they experience as they wait for their application to be assessed. Services reflected on the fear presented in many clients, who with little knowledge of local systems, including rental systems, and little knowledge of who they can trust, must overcome several barriers to access local systems and support services.

A significant number of services mentioned language as a common barrier to refugees and asylum seekers engaging in local systems and processes, including seeking housing and employment and accessing support. One service provider noted that the journey to full-time employment for someone who had recently arrived was inevitably a lengthy one, with clients needing to get themselves and their families settled, before considering re-training and employment.

Refugee and asylum seeker communities commonly live together in large families, with services reporting increasing rates of young people as well as seniors present. In light of challenges to accessing affordable housing in Cumberland, it is common for refugee and asylum seeker communities to live in overcrowded dwellings, with reports of multiple families living in one- or two-bedroom units that fall short of the number of beds required. Such living arrangements create and exacerbate tension for individuals and families. For people seeking asylum, homelessness and destitution has become a part of their narrative in Australia as they wait indefinitely for their applications to be processed. With no other form of support, asylum seekers, in particular single men and families, are living in unsafe housing arrangements, including situations with up to seven men to one bedroom, in subdivided rooms or garages.

Due to recent and imminent ongoing changes to Status Resolution Support Services eligibility, services must now respond to a very concentrated group of asylum seekers losing their only form of reliable income. As the changes take effect, asylum seekers will struggle to meet basic living requirements. Services expressed overwhelming concern about how the sector will meet increasing demand for financial and accommodation support, reporting to not have the funds and capacity to adequately respond.

Despite this, many services across the sector are currently funding initiatives that support asylum seekers with accommodation, basic living requirements and job seeking skills.

Newly arrived people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

For most services interviewed, it was acknowledged that many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) extended families want to live together. In the case of refugees and asylum seekers, they would prefer to stay with families who are settled and able to support them as they transition. Services reflected that CALD families likely have a different perspective on their situation, and wouldn't necessarily view themselves as “homeless” because their home is inadequately sized.

Beyond culture, however, are the inherent issues of affordability that prevent many families in Cumberland from securing appropriate and secure housing that is equally close to friends, family, community networks and employment.

Young people

The issues for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are numerous and in many cases interconnected. Many young people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness have a background of trauma and distress from an early age.

Family breakdown and domestic and family violence is one of the major contributing factors to a young person's entry into homelessness. One outreach service commented that roughly 80% of their clients who are young people report to have seen or personally experienced domestic violence between family members at home.

Mental health issues are prevalent in young people experiencing homelessness, both from the trauma they may have experienced at a young age, to the continued trauma associated with being homeless. One service reported there to be ongoing issues with young people experiencing abuse in Out Of Home Care (OOHC), despite the recent focus and attention on this issue. Constant movements from one placement to another can also impact on the ongoing mental health of young people in OOHC, impacting on their ability to access education and employment and placing them at risk of homelessness.

There were reports of young people from refugee and asylum seekers backgrounds arriving with uncles or cousins and becoming homeless quite quickly on arrival.

Another major contributor to youth homelessness reported, is the difficulty young people face in finding somewhere affordable to live. This relates both to the lack of provision of affordable, appropriate and secure housing stock for young people, as well as a need for training to equip young people with the skills to maintain their tenancy.

Seniors and people with disability

There were increasing reports from services of older people experiencing homelessness, including older women and older people living with mental health issues.

For older women in particular, generational and gender-based disadvantage has left them with little to no support or income later in life. For baby boomers in particular, services have noted that raising a family often meant having to leave the workforce, reducing the superannuation available to them. In later life, if a relationship breakdown occurs, or an elderly parent requires support and full-time care, older women are virtually left with little income or financial support. Almost all services agreed that, for women in particular, finding employment over the age of 50 was difficult if not impossible. One service reported instances of women washing dishes for \$10 an hour, eight hours a day, as the only option available to them.

Older people experiencing mental health issues often do not seek help or their conditions go unnoticed, and the supports available to assist them are few, placing them in vulnerable situations.

Key contributing factors to homelessness in Cumberland

Many services reiterated that there are many intersecting factors that place a person at risk of homelessness or contribute to homelessness in an area. There is rarely a single cause. Below are the factors identified by the services consulted.

Unaffordability of housing

The vast majority of services interviewed raised a lack of/undersupply of affordable, accessible and secure housing as the single greatest contributor to homelessness for the clients they serve. The cost of rental properties was not only an encumbrance to people in immediate need/high risk, but equally inhibited low-income earners from paying for little else once their rent and housing costs had been met.

Reflecting on the housing crisis across Sydney, one service explained how Auburn used to be the third highest settlement region for refugees and asylum seekers accessing their service. Now, Auburn is not even in the top ten, with even 20% of the value of market rent inaccessible to families on Newstart allowance.

As a direct result of rising challenges to housing affordability in the Cumberland LGA, marginal forms of housing such as overcrowded properties have emerged to meet the gap in supply.

Domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence was raised by many services is a common issue experienced by their clients. Family breakdown was described by many as synonymous with domestic violence. Incidents of family violence, including incidents of financial exploitation and controlling behaviour, are becoming increasingly common. Services are seeing more cases of family violence, including adult children perpetrating violence against their mothers, usually relating to housing affordability issues surrounding their own circumstances. For culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, domestic and family violence is a largely hidden issue. One support service commented that around 70% of their clients are from CALD backgrounds.

Sexual abuse was described as a common experience of women who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, especially women who are sleeping rough. Several services echoed stories of women and their children becoming homeless following the choice to leave a violent relationship. These women are sleeping rough out of their cars and clustering together in car parks for safety. Young pregnant mothers are also part of this narrative, with many residing in crisis accommodation until more suitable, safe and affordable accommodation can be sourced.

Mental health issues

Services reported significant increases in clients experiencing mental health issues. Some people experiencing mental health issues require life-long support. A lack of access to mental health support services may place these people in a situation of continual risk of homelessness.

Many services highlighted suicidal ideation as a common experience of many young people as well as refugees and asylum seekers. For one mental health service provider, the common denominator in clients is a history of trauma, explaining that whatever caused their mental health problems in the first place also inadvertently forced them into homelessness. For many young people living in violent or unstable environments, their first psychotic episode happens in teenage years, not only forcing them into homelessness but paving a difficult path to recovery and independence.

Several outreach workers explained that many people sleeping rough with mental health issues are non-compliant with medication, making it difficult to assess them for housing and ongoing supports, and delaying their recovery.

For those who eventually succumb to the loop of chronic homelessness; where homelessness can become a way of life for some, one service commented that severe mental health and detachment issues can result as that person becomes increasingly isolated.

Low income and poverty

A common thread to the majority of cases and contributing factors to homelessness is poverty. Many services interviewed stressed the impact that living in poverty has to the opportunities someone has available to them. The housing crisis is undoubtedly a reflection of the lack of available and affordable housing stock.

Yet it also shines a light on people's relative inability to pay, with most if not all services agreeing that "affordable is not affordable for all". For people in the Cumberland community living on low incomes, many people are relying on Centrelink payments to meet their basic needs. The reality is, however,

that most can barely cover rent, with little if any money left over to cover basic needs including food, clothing and transport.

Maintaining tenancy is a common problem associated with low-income individuals and families. Most organisations agree that maintaining tenancy is the most important thing. In several instances, religious organisations in particular are offering support to people to resolve missed rental payments through advocating to rental agents and developing a payment plan.

Unemployment and barriers to employment

Employment is often touted as the response to poverty and homelessness; if people could only “get up and get a job” they would be able to move forward. This is a common narrative that directly applies to asylum seekers in our community; with the principle behind SRSS funding cuts being that if people have the ability and option to work they should. But the situation is often far more complex than this, and people at risk of or experiencing homelessness must overcome several barriers to sourcing and sustaining paid employment.

Many refugees and people seeking asylum in the Cumberland community face a much different journey to your typical Australian resident upon arrival in Australia. One outreach worker provided some insight, stating that in the initial six to eighteen months of a person’s arrival, employment rates are less than 10%, no doubt because of the other challenges to settlement occurring at the same time. But the rate of employment increases after 2 years’ time, as people seek education and to have their skills recognised. Services identify that the gap in employment is not an unwillingness to work, but rather an acknowledgement of the fact that gaining employment takes time, especially if you lack the necessary contacts to engage in the informal job network market.

For low-income earners, finding employment can often be a ‘catch-22’. One service explained that to get employment, which is your way out, you need to be in good mental and physical shape. If you spend 60 to 70% of your income on housing, there is little left to ensure your physical appearance or health. Homelessness, and the challenges therefore to sourcing and securing affordable housing over the long-term, directly impact on a person’s ability to gain employment.

Drug and alcohol addiction

While by no means was drug and alcohol addiction or abuse seen as a leading cause of homelessness, it was raised as an intersecting and oftentimes present factor in the lives of people experiencing homelessness and poverty.

For services working with young people who are homeless, it was acknowledged that drug and alcohol was a way to cope and numb the pain of the trauma many young people had experienced earlier in life. However, drug and alcohol addiction is known to exacerbate the situation. For many young people, such abuse can trigger psychosis; the first episode of mental illness. Many services reflected that a number of their clients have a history of drug use or do use now.

Drug and alcohol abuse can become a barrier to assessing and working with people sleeping rough in particular. Many services including accommodation and rehabilitation services will not take people in if they are using drugs.

Social isolation

Many of the compounding issues that contribute to a person’s risk of homelessness also point to that person’s relative isolation from family, friends, their local community and the broader society that surrounds them. Many services emphasised the need to build relationships with people sleeping rough and people struggling more generally; championing community connection as a way to alleviate people’s isolation and disconnect and oftentimes helplessness.

People experiencing homelessness are also isolated to the degree that they lack the relevant social supports and network to ‘back them up’. As one service explained, the biggest issue for her female

clients is social isolation. This extends to women experiencing domestic and family violence, as well as also older women in financial and housing stress. Many people who are homeless have exhausted all available options, which for many, might be few.

Instability and transience

Instability is a common theme central to the notion of being homeless; whether a person is living on the streets, in marginal housing or overcrowded dwellings. The transience of a person experiencing homelessness adds stress and pressure, and makes it difficult for outreach services and case workers to build consistent, stable relationships and maintain employment or education.

Issues and gaps in service provision

Lack of funding

Services reflected on the unstable nature of funding (from Commonwealth and State Government) and therefore of the sector, with many services having changed their focus as funding is cut or reprioritised. There are many organisations who receive limited or no funding and rely on donations and volunteer support. This lack of funding then limits the services organisations can provide, for example, limited ability to support out-of-area clients, or to continue to house a client who has exceeded their maximum temporary accommodation stay period.

Capacity issues

Services are overwhelmed by demand, with many reflecting that they find it hard to say no to clients at the same time as it becoming increasingly difficult to take them on.

Specific service gaps

Several services commented that there simply are not enough services in Cumberland to meet demand and need. This includes drug and alcohol (residential programs), food relief (and culturally appropriate meals), youth-specific programs, living skills training, accommodation for people with pets, domestic and family violence supports services and mental health support. Particular gaps include the following

- **Food support** – Parramatta CBD is well known for its array of homelessness services largely based in and around Centenary Square in the Parramatta CBD. Trying to compile a calendar of fresh, free or discounted food services in Cumberland has proved difficult, namely because there are only a handful, but also because many are not advertised and known only through local community networks and so difficult to find and promote.
- **Living skills programs** – These services are increasingly a component of early intervention to support people at risk of homelessness. Services emphasised working with women to increase skills to gain employment, educating clients on rental laws and processes and how to secure and maintain a private rental tenancy as areas to be addressed.
- **Domestic and family violence services** – Services across the sector felt there need to be more support for people escaping domestic and family violence, in terms of case management and service supports. In line with the trends in homelessness, increasingly there are gaps in support services for older people escaping domestic and family violence; supports for people experiencing elder abuse, particularly in nursing homes; and to a lesser extent, for men and their children escaping violence.
- **Mental health services** – Mental health services were repeatedly raised as a large gap in the sector, especially as a key issue that not only increases a person's risk of homelessness, but is aggravated and enlarged by the experience of homelessness. One of the biggest challenges expressed by several services interviewed is in accessing mental health support and mental health assessments for their clients.

- **Drug and alcohol rehabilitation services** – A similar service gap exists for drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. The dilemma for people with drug and alcohol addiction issues is that many services will not take them if they are homeless, as they have nowhere to discharge them to. These people are falling through the gaps, unable to secure housing that would provide them with a stable platform for services to be able to come in and support them over the medium to long-term.
- **Outreach services** – There are a very limited number of services that provide outreach services to people in Cumberland (that is, a service that provide workers that will attend to a person in need where they reside or in the community).
- **Accommodation for people with pets** – Many services described the increasing trend of homeless people who have dogs with them, both as protection on the streets and as company to soften the blow of isolation. These people are further disadvantaged as there are few, if any, accommodation services that allow pets. Several services would like to see more being done to accommodate homeless people with pets, especially for the positive impacts these animals can have on recovery.
- **Services for adult men** – There does appear to be a more support available for young people in need including accommodation and housing as well as mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, family breakdown and domestic and family violence support services. After the age of 25, services stated it becomes a lot harder, with people over the age of 25 struggling to find accommodation. A particular gap are support services and accommodation for adult males.
- **Services for people seeking asylum** – With the recent changes to the Status Resolution Support Services program for people seeking refugee protection, there is a present and increasing gap for services to support asylum seekers. This includes basic living supports, including food, accommodation, healthcare, transport and education.

Significant lack of affordable housing

Similar to the key causes of homelessness in Cumberland and beyond, services identified the lack of social and affordable housing as the most obvious resource gap for the sector as a whole. Many services agreed that you cannot fix homelessness without first fixing Australia's housing system, which is illustrated through the drastic increase in rental prices. Auburn was specifically mentioned as a suburb where the increase in housing and rental prices has impacted on low-income earners and young people in particular.

While the majority of services interviewed felt that services were at capacity and required more support, one organisation felt there was too much emphasis on supports and not enough emphasis on housing outcomes as the antidote to homelessness. A person should not necessarily require a case manager and around the clock support to access crisis accommodation, but rather just somewhere to stay until they are back on their feet.

One service described the present bottlenecks of people staying in crisis accommodation, with no affordable, sustainable form of housing to exit into. Services are seeing people becoming institutionalised as they lose basic living skills the longer they stay in supported accommodation.

Shortage of crisis, short, medium and long-term accommodation

There is a similar lack of interim, crisis and transitional accommodation for people with immediate housing needs. Service providers are seeing a need for more accommodation across the board, including temporary, short-term, medium-term and long-term social and community housing options in Cumberland. Many services are at or exceeding their capacity to meet the level of demand for accommodation. Service providers are increasingly having to react to last-minute requests for

housing. Despite the efforts of services, many reflected that the chances of sourcing same-day accommodation are fairly low.

For women escaping violence, the same is true, with many services working in the crisis space reporting there to be a specific lack of women's refuges to support demand. One service provider noted of the increasing closure of women's refuges, and suggested this could be in-part due to the high operating costs.

People leaving prison were also referenced as a group with a high-need for crisis accommodation. Many young people leaving jail often end up homeless as a result of having no home or family to safely return to. One service stated, that because of their criminal history is difficult to find an accommodation provider that will accept them. This cycle of disadvantage is what serves to keep these young people in a cycle of trauma, uncertainty and hopelessness.

Many services described the cycle of homelessness, with people moving between living on the streets, crisis and marginal accommodation, never able to settle in one place for long.

Services are seeing an increase in length of stay in temporary accommodation

Several services interviewed provided crisis or transitional accommodation in the Cumberland or Parramatta area. These services were largely reactive and under resourced, often being given short notice before a person needs a place to stay. The focus for accommodation services is to manage any immediate risks first, before working with clients to explore their housing options. Despite this, services reported seeing an increase in the (average) length of stay in temporary accommodation. This is primarily due to the lack of medium and long-term housing supply and the services needed to support a person with complex needs to settle in longer term accommodation.

Barriers to accessing services

For many services, there are multiple barriers to accessing basic support services that are actually more about gaps in transport, communications and knowledge. Services reiterated problems with clients being able to access transport to get to and from various hospitals, dental clinics and service appointments. This is particularly difficult in suburban environments where public buses are inconsistent, leading to services additionally having to ensure buses are available, that bus routes link to trains, and that they have enough money to pay for public transport fares to get where they need to go. For low-income individuals or families in particular, public transport fares can represent a large portion of their weekly income after rent.

In a similar vein, digital and online communications are increasingly the norm, meaning that a homeless person must have regular phone credit, charge, internet access and data to receive notifications from services. This is especially true for navigating the Housing NSW system, which is primarily online.

Several services commented that for clients in which English is a second language, service supports including Centrelink and the Department of Housing frequently do not engage an interpreter when required, relying instead on the inaccurate translation of a friend or relative to communicate information to clients.

Another gap for people experiencing homelessness is knowledge, particularly about the support services available to them (which is a key benefit of having access to a case worker).

Sector fragmentation

There were varied instances of services reflecting on gaps in sector knowledge, sector-wide collaboration and standards (with different standards being upheld by different services). Some services felt that other services did not have enough knowledge of the Housing NSW system and what is needed to successfully manage client applications, from reminding clients to charge their phone and be attentive to any updates from Housing NSW, to educating Housing NSW of a client's

living situation and needs. One service described a situation where a client's application was closed by Housing NSW because the person was believed to be housed, when in fact they had only found temporary accommodation.

Between services, there were requests to assist Specialist Homelessness Services and transitional housing services to collaborate better. One service felt there was little knowledge across many services of what is available to their organisation and their clients.

The prevalence of people sleeping rough in Cumberland

Visible homelessness in Cumberland

There were mixed reports given of visible homelessness or people sleeping rough in Cumberland. Auburn and Merrylands were referenced several times by services.

Specific to Merrylands, one service was confident they had seen a dramatic increase of people on the streets in the last two years. Several other services echoed this, stating there has been a minor but noticeable increase over the last few years of people sleeping rough.

Women, including single women and their children, and elderly women, were observed to be on the increase, with women sleeping in their cars in groups. More generally, services noted a particular increase in Cumberland of elderly people sleeping rough.

While many services identified key areas for people sleeping rough in Cumberland, there were some who did not consider it as a key issue in the area. Many services instead listed Sydney and Parramatta CBDs as key areas for visible homelessness, due to the concentration of accommodation services, supports and networks there to assist people sleeping rough.

The reliability of mapping specific locations for people sleeping rough becomes difficult due to transient nature of this group. Many services commented that people sleeping rough move frequently for safety reasons, not wanting to be in the same place for too long in case they become noticed. When asked about the safety of men versus women sleeping rough, one service emphasised just how unsafe the streets are; most women they encounter are frequently sexually assaulted by other homeless people, drunk people and passers-by. This transience might also account for the differing perceptions of services in relation to the extent of people sleeping rough in Cumberland.

Invisible homelessness in Cumberland

One service reflected that it would be difficult to assess the extent of homelessness in Cumberland because you cannot just go around and count people experiencing homelessness. Services confirmed Census data in relation to people living in overcrowded dwellings, noting Auburn as a particular suburb where this issue exists.

How Council and the community can assist to address key issues?

Further research and consultation

Many services interviewed were very encouraged by Council's inquiry into homelessness and they welcomed and supported the research effort. One service commented that an ongoing commitment to understanding the issue would be useful, while several services expressed a desire to understand more of the gaps that they themselves do not have the capacity to investigate. In any ongoing commitment to address the issue, service providers emphasised the importance of speaking with people with a lived experience of homelessness (either present or in the past) and including their insights into any resulting actions or plans.

Develop policies and procedures

Services were consulted about the value of policy documents, specifically affordable housing policies and homelessness policies. In either instance, services agreed developing the necessary policy documents would be useful. Services agreed that Council has a role to play in approving and encouraging more affordable housing through an Affordable Housing Policy and mandatory planning agreements.

Similarly, in terms of influencing internal behaviour, services emphasised the need for a consistent homelessness protocol and policy across Cumberland, to ensure the protection of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including not moving people sleeping rough on, a referral protocol and services contact sheet.

Link services together

Services agreed that Council is in a strong position to identify the available services and facilitate connections between them. Services were keen to see Council more engaged in bringing services together, both through service mapping, linking clients to the most relevant services, increasing connections between services and encouraging more collective action-planning for shared activity.

Several services mentioned the Parramatta Homelessness Interagency and expressed a desire for Cumberland Council to host a similar network for the area that could bring services together. One service saw the Cumberland and Parramatta areas as serving the same audience and felt Council should be mirroring or complementing the efforts of the City of Parramatta to co-deliver networking groups and projects.

Promote and support the work of services

Services expressed a desire for Council to advertise and promote their offerings. One service suggested Council place noticeboards in public places to advertise homelessness services, while another would like to see their flyers displayed at Council. For some services, it is Council's presence that is important, which signals to clients and services alike that Council is supportive and engaged.

Rough sleeper count

The majority of services interviewed supported a proposal for Cumberland Council to undertake a street count of people sleeping rough in Cumberland. Service providers were interested in a rough sleeper count not only as a means of counting numbers, but for the opportunity it provides to conduct assertive outreach and raise awareness of service supports available to those in need.

Some services questioned the validity of a street count because they had not seen any people sleeping rough or because they questioned the accuracy of a street count. One service commented on the difficulty of accurately counting (or accounting for) people sleeping rough because of the sheer size of the Cumberland area. They suggested dividing the area into suburbs as a start. Another service felt it would be difficult because homelessness is not limited to people sleeping rough. This included how you might account for other forms of homelessness in the count, such as couch surfing. Another service felt that you would have to triple the result of any count, because it is likely the result would be significantly lower than the true number.

Community education

Council often serves as community educator; informing and educating residents about key social issues. For issues relating to domestic and family violence in particular, services would like the community educated on what's acceptable; raising awareness about our collective responsibility to one another and promoting a positive community perception.

One service requested Council assist getting information out to people about their rights; both as it relates to matters of domestic and family violence, but also as it extends to a person's rights if they are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including their legal and rental rights and where they can

go for help. Services also stressed the importance of raising awareness about the imminent funding cuts to asylum seekers to the community, who may not be aware of the issue or realise its urgency and impact.

Advocate to State and Federal Government

Services emphasised the importance of Council advocating for the Cumberland community. Services would like to see Council putting pressure on the Commonwealth and State Governments, in particular around increasing the supply of affordable and social housing.

Services would like to see Council advocate for an increase to the Newstart Allowance to reflect present-day costs and budgeting. Advocacy to increase the provision of mental health support services, support for people escaping domestic and family violence and drug & alcohol rehabilitation services, was also identified.

Grants and funding

For those services reliant on funding, Council's Grants Program provided a welcome source of additional funding and were identified as a key way in which Council can assist to address the service gaps identified. One service would ideally like Council to link services to businesses. This service believed that local businesses are starting to express their support for the work being done by community organisations and many would potentially be willing to contribute funding to service delivery.

Increase affordable housing stock

Affordable Housing is a key issue for all services interviewed, who would like to see Council assist in the planning for and provision of affordable housing stock both now and in future. While many services did not have tangible solutions, many asked about Council's role in assisting services to access to affordable housing.

Two creative options were identified to redevelop existing or future vacant or underutilised Council-owned spaces for use by community housing providers, and/or to lease spaces to community services, referencing Housing First models where housing is the first step to overcoming homelessness.

Increase employment pathways for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness

Many services emphasised the need to create employment opportunities for people experiencing homelessness; to give them opportunities to develop skills and receive an income. Services emphasised the need for assistance with resume writing, organising a licence, and other activities that help a person to move out of homelessness.

Provide a drop-in centre ('one-stop shop')

Several services discussed the concept of a one-stop-shop model, where services can be accommodated under one roof, through shared contributions. This was a suggested model to overcome some of the barriers and delays to effective service coordination and collaboration by having all vital points of contact available in one space, including Centrelink and Housing NSW. This would also be an effective model, one service suggested, because it eases the burden on clients in relation to access.

Public space provisions

One service referenced efforts made by Blue Mountains Council and City of Sydney to reconsider public space for people sleeping rough who might be living there. This includes considering public toilet design for safer access and public lighting to make shelter points safer.

Consultation with Peak Bodies

The following provides a summary of the key points raised in consultation with key peak bodies for homelessness (or relating issues/groups) in Cumberland.

Understanding the issue

Ideology

A major challenge to ending homelessness in Australia is overcoming the stigma that 'it's their fault'. One peak body explained that the ideological views of homelessness in Australia is one reason why homelessness persists. People think that homelessness is the result of an individual's choices or situation and do not understand the broader societal causes. Similarly, another reason for the persistence of homelessness in Australian society is the mentality that these individuals are 'bad'. There needs to be a greater commitment to educating people on the multiple, unforeseen causes of homelessness to raise awareness and dispel myths.

Domestic and family violence

Similarly to service providers, all three the peak bodies recognised domestic and family violence as a pathway to homelessness, particularly for young people and women. One representative referenced the work of Angela Spiney and the *Staying Home, Leaving Violence* campaign. This body of research shows perpetrators who are also housed in suitable accommodation are less likely to recommit the offence and are more likely to rebuild a new life.

Peak body representatives highlighted the importance of providing safe accommodation for people escaping domestic and family violence. They reported of situations where woman and their children have been placed in hotels and other temporary forms of accommodation where there are safety risks (from other people accommodated there). If accommodation is offered in a community setting where the woman feels unsafe, this can push the woman back into the home of the perpetrator. One representative told of a women escaping violence who was temporarily housed in a Caravan Park, while the perpetrator was also housed in the caravan next door. This issue also applies to young people who have fled violent situations.

Women on temporary visas

Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) emphasised the rising trend of women on temporary visas who have little to no income to support themselves. For these women, their lack of citizenship limits or prohibits access to basic social supports such as Medicare and Centrelink. The lack of income support places these women at greater risk of homelessness. If these women are also experiencing violence and need to stay in refuge accommodation, they often have limited options to exit out of temporary accommodation due to their lack of income. Refuges have similarly commented on the pressure they are under to find accommodation for women on temporary visas who are unable to pay.

Lack of affordable housing

Through consultation with peak bodies, there is an agreed disconnect between what the Australian government funds to alleviate homelessness, and what is generally known to work in the plight to end homelessness. One representative commented on the money, time and resources spent on people sleeping rough, supporting them to live on the streets, when funding should instead be invested in getting people into housing. "We are spending a lot of time keeping people homeless", one representative commented.

Homelessness peak bodies consistently noted the lack of affordable housing, and in particular reduced government funding for public, social and affordable housing, as the primary cause of homelessness in NSW. Governments are choosing to invest in crisis and temporary forms of accommodation that fail to assist people to exit out of homelessness.

Overcrowding

Representatives acknowledged the issue of overcrowding in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, and more generally as it applies to individuals and families from CALD backgrounds. International students who may want or are required to live close to campus are known to engage in various cost-cutting exercises, including 'hot bunking'. This involves a person sharing a bed in a shift arrangement. Such arrangements compound the issues of overcrowding, couch-surfing and boarding houses.

Couch surfing

Many couch surfers are young people. This can place them into unknown situations where issues such as violence, drug and alcohol use, mental illness and being victimised are all in the realm of uncertainty and possibility. Peak bodies also reported an increase in the number of homeless older women who are couch surfing, and exchanging for sex for a place to stay. Similarly to service providers, peak bodies also noted the vulnerability of older women (due to limited income later in life resulting from generational and gender-based disadvantage).

Boarding houses

Peak body representatives explained that boarding houses are a separate part of homelessness data, as they are neither legal nor illegal; they are simply registered or unregistered as per the Boarding House Act 2012. All boarding houses are meant to be registered with the Department of Fair Trading, and yet, despite this, registrations rates are estimated to be between 10-20%. If a boarding house is not registered and refuses to, they can be fined up to \$5,000. The payment is made to the State Government so the reporting rates are suggested by one Peak Body to be very low. It was suggested this revenue be split between State and local government as incentive for local governments to monitor and report on boarding houses.

Gig economy

Homelessness NSW commented on the impact of the 'Gig Economy' on income levels and disadvantage (and therefore the risk of homelessness) with reports of people being paid well beyond the minimum wage.

What can Council do?

Engage with the issue

All peak bodies acknowledged there was a lack of engagement from local governments across NSW. Local governments are seen to have an advantageous position, as they interact with homelessness at several touch-points and are the first point of contact with individuals in their LGAs. Peak bodies believe there is a lot more that could be done to address homelessness and the surrounding issues such as domestic and family violence.

Policy and planning

Peak bodies view some form of consistent homelessness policy and protocol as a priority. But homelessness should not be viewed or responded to in isolation. Any policy response to homelessness should be considered in relation to the intersecting issues involved. This includes key issues such as affordable housing and domestic and family violence.

Affordable housing stock

Specific to affordable housing, peak bodies would like to see Council create a strong affordable housing policy. Peak bodies are eager to see Council making provisions for affordable housing stock in future, including through inclusionary zoning and advocating for a larger supply of public and social housing.

Training

All representatives acknowledged frontline training as a necessary step in addressing homelessness. This extends to services, who many felt require basic training in domestic and family violence, as well as training frontline Council staff to identify and respond to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. There was an overwhelming consensus that even within services, there is a huge lack of educational knowledge particularly surrounding the intersection of various factors and causes of homelessness.

Networking

Representatives emphasised the value of sharing information across the sector and discussing challenges, ideas and learnings with Council, other local governments and service providers.

Funding

Supporting local services at a grassroots level will help to connect individuals affected with local service providers. Homelessness NSW suggested funding for internal resourcing.

Advocacy

Peak body representatives suggested supporting various campaigns, including Housing NSW's *Everybody's Home* Campaign.

Consultation with Police Area Commands

The following provides a summary of the key points raised in consultation with Crime Prevention Officers from Auburn and Cumberland Police Area Commands.

Visible homelessness

Officers were able to readily provide recent examples of homelessness and people sleeping rough within their Police Area Command (PAC) jurisdictions. Police are also relatively aware of rough sleeper locations. Officers agreed that people sleeping rough are not on the whole impacting on crime levels in any areas.

Trends in homeless people

Drug use and mental health were the most common issues in people sleeping rough Officers had been exposed to. Though the issue of domestic and family violence was also raised, it was acknowledged to be underreported within the area.

From their first-hand experience of visible homelessness, the Officers agreed there had been an increase of people sleeping rough in the area and agreed a rough sleeper count would be helpful to monitor this. There was an acknowledgement that domestic and family violence has always been there; but it is now getting reported and more people are aware that it is an offence.

Police homelessness protocol

Officers admitted they were unaware of a Police Homelessness Protocol. They commented on the apparent helplessness of the Police in general to engage with homeless individuals unless they are committing an offence. The only time police are able to 'move on' people who are homeless is if there is a breach of safety, either to themselves or others. The responsibility is given to the individual Officer to respond in the most appropriate way. It also means there is no form of referral, monitoring or assessment for these individuals.

Officers interviewed agreed additional training would assist Police in addressing homelessness (as well as domestic and family violence, and drug and alcohol addiction).

Invisible homelessness/overcrowding

The Officers were questioned about their daily interaction with temporary accommodation and overcrowded homes. Officers reported that Police often discover overcrowded dwellings from a callout to the property through a report of an offence, such as domestic and family violence. Police also reported being called out to inspect a garage, from a homeowner or neighbour who fears a stranger is living there.

One Officer detailed various incidents of overcrowding witnessed throughout the Cumberland LGA, in particular in boarding houses in Auburn. Officers acknowledged that there is nothing illegal about housing additional people in your home and therefore, they are legally unable to do anything, unless there is a breach of safety to the person or others. Officers reflected they often find themselves relaying incidents of severe overcrowding to Cumberland Council's Compliance team.

As was true for visible forms of homelessness, it was noted that Police Officer's must respond to a "breach of the peace" and therefore they are limited in what they can do to alleviate or end homelessness.

Service provision

Officers noted that relationships between the Police and services are dependent on how proactive their PAC is at building relationships and creating opportunities for collaboration. One Officer detailed his own use of service providers to assist individuals, as well as using the Police Chaplin to provide emergency housing for young women on the streets.

Consultation with Council Staff

The following provides a summary of the key findings from consultations with Council teams with staff that interact with the issue of homelessness at some level. Teams included Development Compliance, Parks and Recreation, Environmental Protection (Rangers), Waste and Cleansing, Community and Culture (Community Centres) and Library Services teams.

Experiences with people sleeping rough in Cumberland

All Council staff interviewed noted observing, or having direct experiences with people sleeping rough in Cumberland. There were varying views on whether numbers of people sleeping rough had increased. One team manager believed there was an increase around two years ago, but believed numbers of people sleeping rough had since remained steady. Staff from another team thought there was definitely an increase in visual homelessness, particularly in Merrylands, and an increase in the number of people asking for money.

One Council Community Centre staff member reported many experiences with people who are homeless visiting the centre. The staff member expressed willingness to better assist people in need of support, but also concern about being ill-equipped to do so. They also reported lack of response from services when they had attempted to assist a people in the past. The staff member also reported safety issues that have been exposed to by people entering the centre affected by drugs or alcohol or with mental health issues. The personal experiences of this staff member and feedback from other staff highlight the need for formalised, Council-wide process or protocols to guide staff through the steps they should take when engaging with or attempting to assist a person experiencing homelessness.

Experiences with other forms of homelessness in Cumberland

Council's Development Compliance Manager spoke of common occurrences of people living in illegal or non-complying dwellings including:

- Modified units with partitioning to create additional rooms
- People living in converted garages and illegal granny flats

- Illegal boarding houses.

The Manager also reported to be very familiar with the issue of people living in overcrowded situations and discussed the health and safety related issues associated (in particular the fire risk posed by modified dwellings and non-compliant partitioning). Not only are such dwellings unsafe due to their modified designs, but there are difficulties in evacuating high numbers of people from a large unit block in the case of a fire. The Manager noted that it was also not only single persons living in these situations, but many instances of families with children (including living together in single rooms in illegal boarding houses with shared facilities). Specific areas mentioned where overcrowding had been identified included Auburn (in apartment buildings), Pendle Hill and Toongabbie (older houses).

The Manager also confirmed assumptions in relation to the extent of overcrowding likely being underestimated. They noted that people are unlikely to report such situations and they only come to Council's attention when a neighbour or disgruntled ex-tenant lodges a complaint.

Lack of affordable alternative housing options as well as profiteering landlords (taking 'cash-in-hand' rental payments) were identified as factors contributing to the issue. It was also noted that, while people in these situations may be paying lower rent than they would be in a more legitimate private rental situation, rental rates are still reasonably high, suggesting cases of significant exploitation of vulnerable community members.

Difficulties were also faced by Council in addressing non-compliant dwellings when discovered. Staff noted that it is not as simple as shutting down a situation and moving people out. In many cases the residents have nowhere to go and therefore Council would be forcing them into (primary) homelessness. The team also reported to be effectively undertaking case work in situations where there is a significant safety risk posed, with staff ringing housing providers to find alternative accommodation for displaced people.

Trends in people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Cumberland

Council staff identified mental health and drug and alcohol as an increasing trend amongst the homeless population in Cumberland and issues that can pose risks to Council staff, other community members and the individual themselves.

One staff member identified an increase in single women, particularly single mums, experiencing homelessness and reiterated contributing factors to homelessness identified by other stakeholders (including domestic and family violence, unemployment and low levels of education). Poverty was also a cause of homelessness identified by a staff member working at one of Council's community centres.

Staff attitudes and behaviours

Overwhelmingly, staff expressed compassion towards people who are experiencing homelessness and a desire to be better equipped to assist.

Council's Library Services Manager spoke of the important role that libraries play as free public spaces, and spaces that are accessible later at night and on weekends. This includes the regular use of Council's libraries by people experiencing homelessness and the commitment of library staff to provide a welcoming and safe environment, and support accessing library services. Library staff noted some challenges in relation to hygiene and minimising the impact of people (particularly those sleeping rough) who are unwell or unwashed, on other library users.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Council's Environmental Protection Manager, who noted that:

- Council Rangers are briefed to be compassionate and mindful of the vulnerability and difficulties faced by people who are sleeping rough. It was noted that the team "do not take a 'heavy-handed' approach".

- The team have had to call the Police on a limited number of occasions when a person has posed a threat to the safety of Council staff or other community members and have had to move people on or refer them to services when they have posed a safety risk to themselves or other community members, or there are hygiene issues (e.g. toileting in parks).

Staff from Council's Waste and Cleansing team had a similar compassionate approach and noted that if there is a particular safety or hygiene issue, they contact Council's Rangers for assistance.

Staff protocols, training and support

All Council staff acknowledged there is no Council-wide training, protocol, policy or guidelines on how to deal with people experiencing homelessness. There is a lack of knowledge regarding services in this area and a concern for the safety of individual staff members. Knowing who they can call and when, especially if the police are able to provide limited assistance or intervention, is necessary for staff to feel secure in frontline roles.

Staff also mentioned additional suggestions for what Council could be doing to address the issue, such as providing programs throughout the day for disengaged youth, or the availability of travel and food cards which provide people some form of temporary assistance.

Referrals to services

Council staff commented that it is difficult to get hold of, or know whether services have in fact followed up with a homeless person they referred. Council staff feel it would be good to monitor individuals to know they received assistance and did not end back up where they started. Staff would also like to know there are reliable services they can call on in the event of a situation identified with a homeless person, and know they will respond and assist to the best of their ability.

Council's Community Development and Planning team experienced the difficulties in accessing services first hand, when attempting to source a service to support a person sleeping rough in the area in July-August 2018. The team experienced long delays on-hold when calling the homelessness hotline (Link2home), with the response provided unsuitable for the individual's needs. The service advised for the individual to travel to the Parramatta service centre, however this would have been extremely difficult for this person who did not speak English, needed one-on-one support and did not have an Opal travel card. Council spent a significant amount of time calling services in the area and found it difficult to source a service that would provide outreach to a single adult male. The service specifically funded by government to provide outreach services reported to be unable to respond, as their waiting list was too long and they were understaffed. Council eventually were able to secure assistance from a small, volunteer resourced, non-funded service that attended to the person and organised temporary, then secure longer-term accommodation. This organisation continues to provide ongoing casework for this person.

The above case study highlights the need for Council to develop standardised, streamline protocols, improve relationships and connections to service providers and focus on supporting particular gaps in service provision in the area (e.g. outreach services). The case study also highlights the benefits of providing individualised support and casework to people experiencing homelessness.

7. Recommendations

This chapter outlines recommendations for Council to address the issue of homelessness in Cumberland. The recommendations were developed with consideration of:

- Information and feedback provided by the organisations and agencies consulted
- Feedback and input provided by internal Council teams
- The scope of Council's influence, capabilities, resources and opportunities
- Priorities and a suitable sequencing of actions.

The proposed recommendations and associated actions are presented below.

Recommendation 1: Develop policies

Action 1.1: Prioritise the development of the Cumberland Residential Housing Strategy.

Council's Strategic Planning team is preparing a new Residential Housing Strategy which will consider Cumberland as a whole, and will include sections on housing diversity, current housing stock, local housing demand, housing market analysis, housing affordability (including affordable housing), new housing being delivered under current plans, and provision of housing within Cumberland in the future including research undertaken on affordable housing. The strategy will draw together inputs and background data from a wide ranges of sources. Community engagement will be undertaken, as well as targeted engagement with affordable and community housing providers. Collaboration and input from across Council and with Councillors will also be undertaken. Work on the strategy is proposed to commence in November.

Action 1.2: Explore alternative ways to incentivise affordable housing contribution schemes such as reapplying for SEPP No. 70.

SEPP No. 70 - Affordable Housing (Revised Schemes) is a mechanism that allows specified councils to prepare an affordable housing contribution scheme for certain precincts, areas or developments within their local government area.

In 2016, Cumberland Council submitted an application for SEPP No. 70 which was not successful. It is recommended Council reapply and include the findings of this research project to strengthen the submission.

It is noted that while an application for inclusion in SEPP No. 70 is one mechanism, there are alternative ways to incentivise affordable housing contribution schemes. These will be explored as part of the Cumberland Residential Housing Strategy.

Recommendation 2: Assist sector coordination and capacity building

Action 2.1: Facilitate a homelessness sector forum and action planning session

Many services were encouraged by Council's commitment to researching the issue of homelessness in Cumberland and enthusiastic about working with Council in the future to address the issue. Consultations also identified opportunities for improved outcomes through connection and collaboration amongst agencies and not for profit community groups operating in the Cumberland area.

It is recommended that Council organise a forum with representatives from the sector, to report back on research findings and facilitate an action planning session. It is envisaged the actions resulting will include actions for Council as well as sector actions.

Council could partner with relevant peak bodies (e.g. Shelter NSW, Western Sydney Community Forum) and local key stakeholders to deliver the forum.

Action 2.2: Organise training for service providers

In addition to training for Council staff, it is recommended Council assist in providing training for service sector workers. While all organisations could participate, and would benefit, training would be particularly beneficial for volunteers and frontline community advocates. This could include training in approaching and assisting people experiencing and at risk of homelessness, providing referrals as well as training in relation to specific issues such as mental health and domestic and family violence.

Training needs for the sector could be workshopped and identified at the proposed sector forum.

Action 2.3: Continue to identify, support and advocate for funding opportunities and service provision in the Cumberland area

As noted in this report, Council administers two community grants programs and provides a range of support programs to assist local organisations seek funding. This includes a regular Grants Bulletin identifying available funding opportunities, providing grant writing workshops, 1;1 advice and grant support, networking opportunities and skill development training which assists organisations to access a range of funding opportunities available. This funding can play an important role in supporting service provision in the area including addressing any identified gaps in homelessness support services.

Council also provides access to a range of community facilities for services to deliver outreach programs and provide support services for local residents on a range of issues related to the causes and drivers of homelessness.

It is recommended Council use the findings of this research project to advocate to other levels of government and key stakeholders for more funding investment for services covering the Cumberland area as well as support local organisations to attract more funding to support service provision.

Recommendation 3: Engage with people who are experiencing homelessness

Action 3.1: Partner with a research institute

Council's responsibilities and duty of care must be carefully considered if any engagement with people who are homeless is to be undertaken. People who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are likely to be vulnerable and may require immediate assistance.

It is suggested Council partner with an experienced research institute (e.g. associated with a university) to develop an ethical approach to engaging with people experiencing homelessness, including providing an ethics committee to review and approve the proposed project. This approach will assist to minimise potential risk and harm to individuals or Council (staff and reputation). Built into the approach would be a process for offering and providing assistance to people in need.

It is proposed the project would involve the following components.

Action 3.2: Consultation with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness

As noted, it was viewed from the outset that research that this research project should be considered as phase 1. Research into the issue of homelessness in Cumberland cannot be complete without consultation with people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Insights, information and input from people with direct, lived experience is crucial to gain a complete and detailed understanding of the issue and essential to developing a relevant and effective response.

Services interviewed also emphasised the importance of consulting with people who are themselves at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, looping them in and informing them of the current work of Council and in any recommended actions that result.

Action 3.3: Undertake a rough sleeper count

To develop a better understanding of the extent of people sleeping rough in Cumberland it is recommended that a rough sleeper count be undertaken. The count would serve multiple purposes, including:

- Count people sleeping rough in Cumberland and provide a baseline in which the extent of the issue can be measured and monitored over future years
- Bring services together around a shared project and increase knowledge of, and collaboration between, homelessness service providers in the area
- Spark tangible action to advocate on behalf of people sleeping rough in the area and source affordable, suitable and sustainable housing for those who request assistance.

Assertive outreach will likely be required prior to the count in order to develop relationships and trust with people sleeping rough in Cumberland, undertake face-to-face consultations and build an understanding of the personal backgrounds and lives of people sleeping rough, direct people to support and assistance and inform them of the rough sleeper count.

A similar research project was undertaken in 2010 by City of Parramatta. Refer to *Homelessness in Parramatta*, A Research Partnership between Parramatta City Council and the University of Western Sydney (2010):

<https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A27995/datastream/PDF/view>.

Recommendation 4: Build Council's capacity to assist people experiencing homelessness

Action 4.1: Seek funding to establish a new Homelessness Project Officer position (temporary 12 month role)

To continue to build on work completed to date, it is recommended a dedicated Homelessness Project Officer is established within Council. Council will seek external funds to fund this position in the first instance.

This dedicated position will provide focused attention on the significant issue of homelessness in Cumberland and ensure all agreed actions are implemented in a timely manner. Following the forum, the Homelessness Project Officer would be responsible for implementing the arising actions for Council and the other recommended actions.

Action 4.2: Develop and implement Council protocols and procedures

There are a number of Council teams that interact with the issue of homelessness to varying degrees (including Library Services, Parks and Recreation, Facilities, Development Compliance, Waste and Cleansing, Community Development and Planning, Culture and Activation, and Environmental Protection teams).

Common to staff across the teams was a desire to assist people in need, but a lack of consistency as well as a lack of certainty and confidence around the appropriate response and course of action. It is therefore recommended that clear, agreed protocols and procedures for working with people who are homeless are developed to assist Council staff to address issues when they arise. The protocols would guide staff in relation to when and how to engage a person in need, how to respond and when and who to call when assistance is required.

Examples of homelessness protocols from other local governments and agencies are included in Appendix 5.

Action 4.3: Train key front-line staff

It is recommended that key Council staff receive training in the implementation of the protocols and procedures and in general awareness of the issue of homelessness in Cumberland.

Homelessness NSW advised of training they can provide that explores the common types of homelessness, the common reasons why a person becomes homeless, and how best to assist a person at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Action 4.4: Develop a centralised data collection process

As noted in this report, it is unlikely Census data captures the true number of homeless people in Cumberland. With the majority of people sleeping rough not captured and people likely to not disclose acute numbers of people living in illegal or modified dwellings, it is reasonable to assume the extent of the real issue is far greater.

To assist in capturing evidence and developing a better understanding of the extent of the issue, it is recommended Council establish and maintain a centralised data collection process to capture instances where Council staff observe and interact with people who are homeless (that is, people experiencing all forms of homelessness, including those living in crowded dwellings).

Recommendation 5: Advocate

Action 5.1: Focused advocacy

It is recommended Council undertake focused advocacy, including:

1. Sign up to the 'Everybody's Home' campaign to end homelessness and provide affordable housing for all Australians. The campaign calls for government to undertake five key actions to "fix Australia's housing system so that it works for everyone". The five actions are:
 - Support first home buyers
 - Develop a National Housing Strategy
 - Ensure a better deal for renters
 - Provide immediate relief for Australians in chronic rental stress
 - Develop a plan to end homelessness by 2030.

More information can be found at: <http://everybodyshome.com.au/>

2. Sign up to the Refugee Council of Australia 'Roof Over My Head' campaign to stop funding cuts to support for people seeking asylum;

More information can be found at: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/takeaction/roof-over-my-head/

3. Request and undertake a delegation visit with The Hon Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Home Affairs and The Hon David Coleman MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Border Protection to highlight the impact of the SRSS changes on residents living in Cumberland and on the community based services supporting them.

Action 5.2: General ongoing advocacy

It is recommended, as an ongoing action, that Council advocates to State and Federal Government regarding policy in relation to the research findings, with the aim to reduce the risk and incidences of homelessness in Cumberland. This would include advocacy in relation to general housing affordability, the supply of affordable and social housing and welfare and income support (including

in particular, reversing recent changes in relation to eligibility for the Status Resolution Support Services program).

It is recommended Council partner with other local governments or relevant organisations, peak bodies and service providers when advocating to other levels of government to strengthen the case and potential effectiveness.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Definitions

Primary Homelessness

Refers to a person who lives on the street, sleeps in parks, squats in derelict buildings, or who uses cars/railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary Homelessness

Describes individuals who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, including those using emergency accommodation, youth refuges or women's refuges, people residing temporarily with relatives or friends (due to no accommodation of their own) and people using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis (up to 12 weeks).

Tertiary Homelessness

Applies to people who live in premises where they don't have the security of a lease guaranteeing them accommodation, nor access to basic private facilities (i.e. private bathroom, kitchen, living space). It includes those living in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis (more than 13 weeks) or in caravan parks.

Affordable Housing

The national definition of affordable housing is: 'housing that is appropriate for the needs of a range of very low, low and moderate-income household, priced to ensure households are able to meet other essential basic living costs'.¹⁴ As a rule of thumb, housing is usually considered affordable if it costs less than 30% of gross household income.

Census

The Census of Population and Housing conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is a descriptive count of everyone who is in Australia on one night and of their dwellings.

Common Ground (Model)

The 'Common Ground' model, founded in the US, is underpinned by private, public and community sector partnership arrangements to provide supportive housing and other practices that end homelessness. Common Ground methodology is recognised internationally for its effectiveness in housing people who have been chronically homeless, including people who have been sleeping rough long-term. Common Ground's strategy has three components:

- Affordable Housing
- Outreach
- Prevention.

Community Housing

Provides affordable rental housing to people on low to moderate incomes, and includes a range of housing options, including housing for people with very high needs (usually in partnership with a specialised support provider). Increasingly, Community Housing providers operate in partnership with support providers, local government, public housing providers, and private sector partners.

¹⁴ Housing NSW (2013)

Housing First (Model)

The 'Housing First' model, founded in the US in the 1990s, is a service model that provides permanent, stable and affordable housing to people experiencing homelessness as a first priority. Once housing is secured, supportive services can be provided, tailored to meet their particular needs, including assisting that person to sustain their housing. The development of Housing First in Australia to date has been constrained by the lack of secure, sustainable housing supply needed to quickly house those experiencing homelessness¹⁵. The dominant approach to homelessness delivered in Australia to date has been the provision of time-limited accommodation, from crisis housing, medium and long-term and eventually 'permanent' housing.

Rental Stress

Those households in the lowest 40% of national equivalised (weighted) incomes paying more than 30% of their gross income on rent.

Mortgage Stress

Those households in the lowest 40% of national equivalised (weighted) incomes paying more than 30% of their gross income on mortgage payments.

People sleeping rough

The term 'rough sleeper' relates to people sleeping without shelter, who sleep outside in places not intended for human residence.¹⁶ People sleeping rough were previously defined by the ABS under the category of Primary Homelessness.

Social Housing

Housing provided by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) for those most in need who are unable to access suitable accommodation in the private rental market. Social housing includes Public, Aboriginal and Community Housing, as well as other housing assistance products such as bond loans.

¹⁵ Johnson, G., Parkinson, S. and Parsell, C. (2012) *Policy shift or program drift? Implementing Housing First in Australia*, AHURI Final Report No. 184, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Ltd, Melbourne

¹⁶ Villis et al (2010)

Appendix 2: Data for people living in severely crowded and crowded dwellings in Cumberland

Data – people living in severely crowded dwellings in Cumberland

Selected characteristics	Persons living in severely crowded dwellings					Other homeless operational groups	Total homeless persons
	Born overseas arrived before 2012	Born overseas arrived 2012 or later	Born overseas Total	Born in Australia	Total	Total	Total
	Persons	Persons	Persons	Persons	Persons	Persons	Persons
Household Composition							
One family household	273	363	660	177	841	170	1,013
Multiple family household	312	147	471	214	694	9	705
Group household	202	744	966	6	982	202	1,189
Other households						177	177
Not applicable						54	54
Age range (years)							
12-24	193	374	581	122	706	118	826
55 and over	84	28	124	3	124	95	219
Other	512	847	1,402	271	1,693	392	2,085
Labour force status							
Employed, worked full-time	258	310	581	28	607	68	677
Employed, worked part-time	113	277	396	17	417	37	450
Employed, away from work	23	21	54	14	67	17	82
Unemployed	52	187	239	11	249	74	327
Not in the labour force	301	401	727	74	807	195	1,006
Not stated	3	10	23	6	45	140	184
Not applicable	35	48	85	244	334	80	410

Selected characteristics	Persons living in severely crowded dwellings					Other homeless operational groups	Total homeless persons
	Born overseas arrived before 2012	Born overseas arrived 2012 or later	Born overseas Total	Born in Australia	Total		
	Persons	Persons	Persons	Persons	Persons		
Household income ranges (weekly)							
Under \$650	28	40	70	14	86	170	252
\$650 - \$799	26	36	63	16	72	32	106
\$800 - \$999	12	19	25	3	27	27	60
\$1,000 and over	611	981	1,633	290	1,938	129	2,071
All or partial incomes not stated	111	179	308	77	399	149	543
Not applicable						105	105
Household rent ranges (weekly)							
Under \$100	28	55	78	9	92	17	114
\$100-\$199	13	37	47	3	49	98	149
\$200-\$299	29	36	65	16	88	38	122
\$300-\$399	95	117	215	46	263	40	298
\$400 and over	341	790	1,154	99	1,269	74	1,340
Not stated	30	36	71	22	109	19	127
Not applicable	255	186	457	191	657	315	972
Total	786	1,247	2,097	394	2,525	610	3,129

Data – people living in other crowded dwellings in Cumberland

Selected characteristics	Persons living in other crowded dwellings					Other not homeless persons	TOTAL POPULATION
	Born overseas, arrived before 2012	Born overseas, arrived 2012 or later	Born overseas, Total	Born in Australia	Total	Total	Total
	Person	Person	Person	Person	Person	Persons	Persons
Household Composition							
One family household	793	604	1,447	598	2,088	158,176	161,271
Multiple family household	395	198	616	324	954	17,943	19,605
Group household	165	764	953	3	983	8,457	10,625
Other households						21,379	21,558
Not applicable						1,940	1,994
Age range (years)							
12-24	288	576	901	322	1,234	34,687	36,745
55 and over	155	26	201	5	206	43,835	44,265
Other	909	968	1,928	603	2,584	129,373	134,041
Labour force status							
Employed, worked full-time	385	312	715	108	828	52,931	54,444
Employed, worked part-time	202	425	641	63	704	26,180	27,330
Employed, away from work	40	38	80	11	89	4,718	4,889
Unemployed	92	181	292	26	320	8,465	9,106
Not in the labour force	559	494	1,102	171	1,291	62,637	64,934
Not stated	8	22	33	13	66	9,826	10,078
Not applicable	56	100	169	538	727	43,142	44,274
Household income ranges (weekly)							

Selected characteristics	Persons living in other crowded dwellings					Other not homeless persons	TOTAL POPULATION
	Born overseas, arrived before 2012	Born overseas, arrived later or	Born overseas, Total	Born in Australia	Total	Total	Total
	Person	Person	Person	Person	Person	Persons	Persons
Under \$650	70	79	167	65	230	25,183	25,670
\$650 - \$799	32	59	87	20	109	11,702	11,914
\$800 - \$999	37	46	91	25	124	12,702	12,881
\$1,000 and over	1,043	1,237	2,336	679	3,046	127,169	132,282
All or partial incomes not stated	170	153	338	147	522	20,717	21,777
Not applicable						10,424	10,531
Household rent ranges (weekly)							
Under \$100	8	15	25	9	29	2,396	2,535
\$100-\$199	31	25	60	17	73	5,284	5,516
\$200-\$299	41	41	86	33	119	4,876	5,126
\$300-\$399	130	256	393	62	460	15,626	16,390
\$400 and over	610	958	1,626	334	1,987	47,253	50,585
Not stated	47	45	93	17	126	2,561	2,815
Not applicable	488	232	749	457	1,222	129,897	132,091
Total	1,353	1,570	3,023	927	4,025	207,897	215,055

Appendix 3: Interview guide for service providers

Cumberland Council is in the process of writing a Homelessness Research Briefing Paper. This paper will outline the nature and extent of homelessness in Cumberland, the role of service providers, and offer a series of recommendations for how Council can assist to address the key issues moving forward.

We are interested in service provider feedback and information on priority homelessness issues and ideas for actions for Council and the community to take to address these issues.

Key questions:

- What type of service do you provide?
- Where are you located and/or where do you operate?
- Do you have a specific group you provide services to i.e. youth, women, seniors, people with disability?
- How do you staff your organisation i.e. paid/casual/volunteers?
- How is your organisation funded i.e. do you rely on sponsorship or donations?
- How do you advertise and promote your services?
- Are your services in high-demand?
- Have you noticed an increase or decrease in demand in the last 1-3 years?
- Are there any trends you can identify in the clients you serve i.e. mental health, domestic and family violence, low income, drug/alcohol, family background, seasonal issues?
- Are there any gaps in particular services in Cumberland?
- What are the most common 'types' of homelessness you are aware of in Cumberland (e.g. overcrowding, couch surfing, people sleeping rough?)
- What has been your experience of homeless people "sleeping rough" in Cumberland?
- Do you know of any homelessness hot-spots or problem areas for people sleeping rough?
- Do you think there would be value in Council organising a rough sleeper count in Cumberland (like City of Parramatta and City of Sydney)?
- What actions do you think Council should take to address the issue?
- How can Council support services in the area?
- What else should be done to address homelessness and who should be involved (e.g. other government agencies or organisations)?
- Would you be happy to be listed on a Council Homelessness Service Provider contact sheet?
- Do you have any final suggestions for things we haven't considered?
- Who else should we talk to?

Appendix 4: Stakeholders consulted

Service providers

Anglicare Community Pantry
Auburn Diversity Services (ADSi)
Barnardos Australia
Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC)
Evolve Housing
Evolve Housing for Youth
Granville Multicultural Community Centre
Housing NSW (FACS)
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
Mercy Foundation
Merrylands Community Centre
Mission Australia
Mission Beat Granville
Neami National Merrylands
Noni and the SPA Tongan Project
NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARRTS)
Parramatta Mission
Parramatta Mission Wiyana House Youth Hub
Pendle Hill Crisis Centre
Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS)
Relationships Australia (ARC)
Salvation Army Auburn
Settlement Services International (SSI)
St Vincent de Paul
Western Sydney High Street Youth Health Centre (WSLHD)
Youth off the Streets (YOTS)

Peak Bodies

Domestic Violence NSW
Homelessness NSW
YFoundations

Police

Cumberland Police Area Command
Auburn Police Area Command

Council teams

Development Compliance
Parks and Recreation
Environmental Protection (Rangers)
Waste and Cleansing
Culture and Activation (Community Centres)
Pools
Library Services

Appendix 5: Homelessness protocols

Examples of homelessness protocols from other local governments and agencies.

Source	Document	Link
City of Ballarat	Homelessness Protocol	http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/media/4450522/homelessness_protocol.pdf
FACS	Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places	https://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/326046/ImplementationGuidelines.pdf
Homelessness NSW	Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places	https://www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/sites/homelessnessnsw/files/2016-12/TheProtocol_Factsheet.PDF
City of Melbourne	Homelessness Operating Protocol	https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/homelessness-operating-protocol.pdf
City of Parramatta	Protocol for Working with Homeless People	https://businesspapers.parracity.nsw.gov.au/oldbusinesspapers/Papers/2004/04%2011%2015%20-%2015%20November%202004%20%20COUNCIL%20MEETING/15%20COMMUNITY%20CARE/B6D5E%200%20Protocol%20For%20Working%20With%20People%20Experiencing%20Homelessness.doc
Northern Beaches Council	Homeless Persons Protocol	https://www.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/homeless-persons-protocol.pdf



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