



Home Truths

Home Truths: A New Report on Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness

Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness
in Australia
March 2009

Anna Wise
Mental Health Council of Australia



Mental Health in Australia

- 45% of Australians 16-85 (7.3 million people) experienced mental or substance use disorder at some point in their lives
- 20% (3.2 million people) had experience a mental or substance use disorder in the past 12 months
- Access to services remains an issue – only 35% of those experiencing mental or substance use disorder in past 12 months accessed treatment



Homelessness in Australia

Cultural Definition of Homelessness (Chamberlain & Johnson)

<p>Culturally recognised exceptions: accommodation situations in which it is inappropriate to apply the minimum standard – e.g. jails, student residences, seminaries etc.</p>	<p>Marginally housed: people in housing situations close to the minimum standard</p>
	<p>Tertiary homelessness: people living in single rooms in private boarding houses – without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure</p>
	<p>Secondary homelessness: people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends' houses, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses</p>
	<p>Primary homelessness: people without conventional accommodation ('street homelessness' or 'rooflessness' – living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks etc.)</p>



Homelessness in Australia (cont.)

- Based on the cultural definition of homelessness, 53 out of every 10,000 people in Australia are homeless on any given night


This equates to approximately

105,000 people




Homelessness and Mental Illness

- Mental health problems are common among the homeless and those in unstable housing
- Estimates vary widely... but research indicates that homeless people have a higher prevalence of mental disorders
 - SANE – 94% of respondents with mental illness had been homeless or without suitable housing at some point
 - ABS – of those who reported having been homeless, more than half had experienced mental disorder
 - 75% of a sample of homeless people in inner Sydney had at least one mental disorder



Homelessness and Mental Illness

- People with mental illness and/or history of homelessness or unstable housing may face additional barriers in attempts to maintain stable housing
- If housing is inappropriate it can exacerbate mental illness symptoms



The 'Home Truths'

- 1. A national strategy on homelessness that includes due recognition of the relationships between mental health and homelessness must be developed and funded.**
 - Some new strategies are proposed in the new White Paper on Homelessness
 - Ongoing accountability measures need to be in place



The 'Home Truths'

- 2. Access to mental health care must be increased.**
 - If we want to see improved housing outcomes we must improve mental health services
 - Increased funding for mental health services will play a key role
 - There must also be reform in how services are delivered



The 'Home Truths'

- 3. There must be immediate investment in innovative, consumer-focused programs with an emphasis on home-based care.**
 - Treatment and support should be delivered in the home or community.
 - Services should be available close to where people live or delivered in conjunction with housing.



The 'Home Truths'

- 4. Housing must remain as one of the top priorities in the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health, but with additional funding specifically to support national coordination and action beyond a narrow focus on the existing health system**
 - There are no national initiatives in the plan that focus on housing
 - It makes good financial sense to improve housing outcomes for people with mental illness



The 'Home Truths'

- 5. Home and community must become the preferred treatment sites with the number and scope of peer, carer, allied health and community options being significantly increased.**
 - Services must be taken to the people that need them, whether they are housed or homeless – eg through assertive outreach



The 'Home Truths'

- 6. Thirty per cent of public and social housing stock must be set aside for people with a mental illness**
 - 'Catching-up' is required for people with mental illness to be housed on a comparable level with the rest of Australian society
 - Availability of suitable housing is a key issue
 - There must be some choice in housing options



The 'Home Truths'

7. Services including employment, welfare, health, alcohol and drugs and many others in the community sector must have the capacity to go beyond their specialisations to respond to issues of mental illness and homelessness

- People who are homeless and experience mental illness are likely to require many other services – often provided by different agencies
- Accessing services would be much easier if services worked together with 'no wrong door'



The 'Home Truths'

8. Properly resourced and monitored discharge planning must be implemented across Australia, with zero tolerance for discharge from hospitals to homelessness or unstable housing. This goal must be independently monitored and publicly reported

- Inadequate discharge planning can lead to homelessness or unstable housing
- There should be 'no exits into homelessness'



The 'Home Truths'

9. Programs providing housing and mental health services must be regularly, independently evaluated against common criteria to allow for program comparison, with transparent assessments and reporting.

- Currently evaluation of some programs is minimal and/or not publicly available
- Common evaluation criteria should be in place to allow for national comparisons of programs



The 'Home Truths'

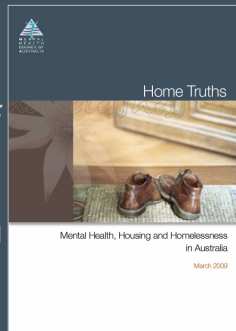
10. National research to build a greater understanding of the connections between mental illness, unstable housing and homelessness must be a priority, with appropriate funding and ongoing support for this research.

- Research should investigate areas including proportion of homeless people with mental illness, treatment rates, discharge into homelessness, pathways out of homelessness, etc.



More information...

The full report *Home Truths: Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness in Australia* can be downloaded or purchased from www.mhca.org.au



Thank you

anna.wise@mhca.org.au
(02) 6285 3100

