

**Submission  
No 23**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE PROTOCOL FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE IN PUBLIC PLACES**

**Organisation:** End Street Sleeping Collaboration

**Date Received:** 28 February 2020

**27 March 2019**

Ms Wendy Lindsay MP  
Chair  
Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Lindsay

**Re: Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places**

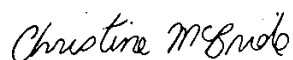
Thank you for the opportunity for End Street Sleeping Collaboration to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places (attached).

I am forwarding this submission on behalf of the End Street Sleeping Collaboration Board.

I note that prior to the preparation of the submission two Board members declared a conflict of interest. With the agreement of the Board these two Directors were not involved in preparation of the submission.

Should you wish to find out more about the work of the End Street Sleeping Collaboration we would be pleased to provide the Committee with further information.

Yours sincerely,



Christine McBride  
Chief Executive Officer

## About End Street Sleeping Collaboration

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) is the global movement aiming to support 150 cities to end street homelessness by 2030. The foundation for this effort will be the pioneering work of a small group of Vanguard Cities who will set and work towards goals that put them on a path to ending street homelessness by 2030.

On 13 February 2019, the Premier of NSW signed a joint commitment with the Institute of Global Homelessness to join the IGH's Vanguard Cities movement, accompanied by the City of Sydney, and leaders of Australia's largest homelessness sector non-government organisations.

Collectively, these organisations committed to reducing street sleeping across NSW by 50% by 2025. The achievement of this commitment is one of the Premier's priority projects.

End Street Sleeping Collaboration Limited is the entity that has been established at the 'backbone' organisation to coordinate implementation of the IGH approach in Sydney and across NSW.

The End Street Sleeping Collaboration will be working with communities across NSW, starting in the City of Sydney, to introduce a new methodology and collaborative effort to reduce street sleeping.

At the heart of this project is a belief that no one in our communities should sleep rough.

For this to be achieved, the firm focus of government, social and human services, the corporate sector and the community must be in making a joint commitment to collaboration, and systemic change.

## The By-Name List

A cornerstone of our methodology is knowing every person sleeping on the streets by name. Creating a 'By-Name List' of people who are street sleeping is an innovation that aims to assist individuals, and provide evidence that informs policy innovation and systems change that enables services to intervene and prevent people from having to sleep on the streets.

The By Name List records information about each person who has recently experienced, or is experiencing street homelessness. This allows for more effective coordination of support for each individual. Maintaining this list in real time will provide a continuous and current understanding of the number of people who are entering or leaving homelessness, and the drivers of their situation. Real time responses allow a continuous improvement environment.

The End Street Sleeping Collaboration is not a specialist homelessness service provider. However, in order to create a by-name list it is essential to proactively engage with people in public spaces to gather information that forms the By-Name List.

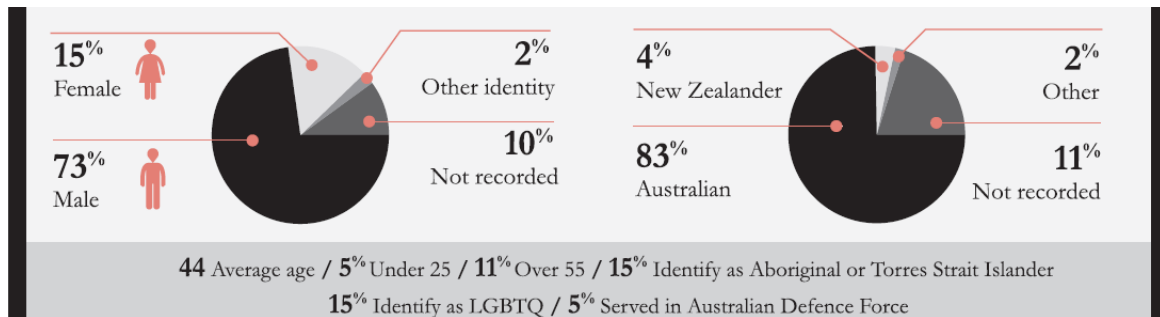
## People who are street sleeping

In November 2019, service providers and volunteers came together to conduct surveys with people experiencing homelessness in the City of Sydney Local Government Area. The data gathered during 'Connections Week' forms the start of a By-Name List for the City of Sydney community.

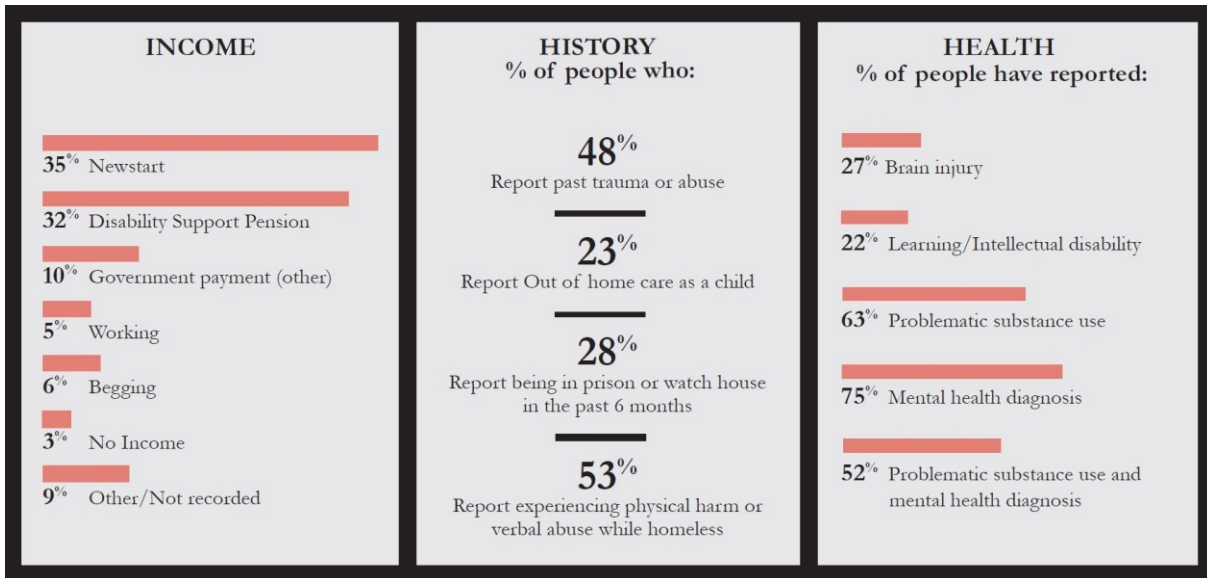
390 people who were street sleeping or staying in crisis accommodation were engaged, and 363 of those participated in a survey called the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation and Decision Assistance Tool).

The internationally used VI-SPDAT survey asks about each person’s history, wellbeing and needs. It is designed to assist service providers to understand who experiences homelessness, the risks and vulnerabilities people face and give initial insights into the types of supports people may require.

It also paints a picture of the experiences of people who homeless.



Aggregated data from the week confirms that poverty, traumatic history and health issues are the predominant experiences of those who are homeless in Sydney.



It also reinforces the need for people to have access to affordable housing in conjunction with support services in order to successfully exit homelessness:

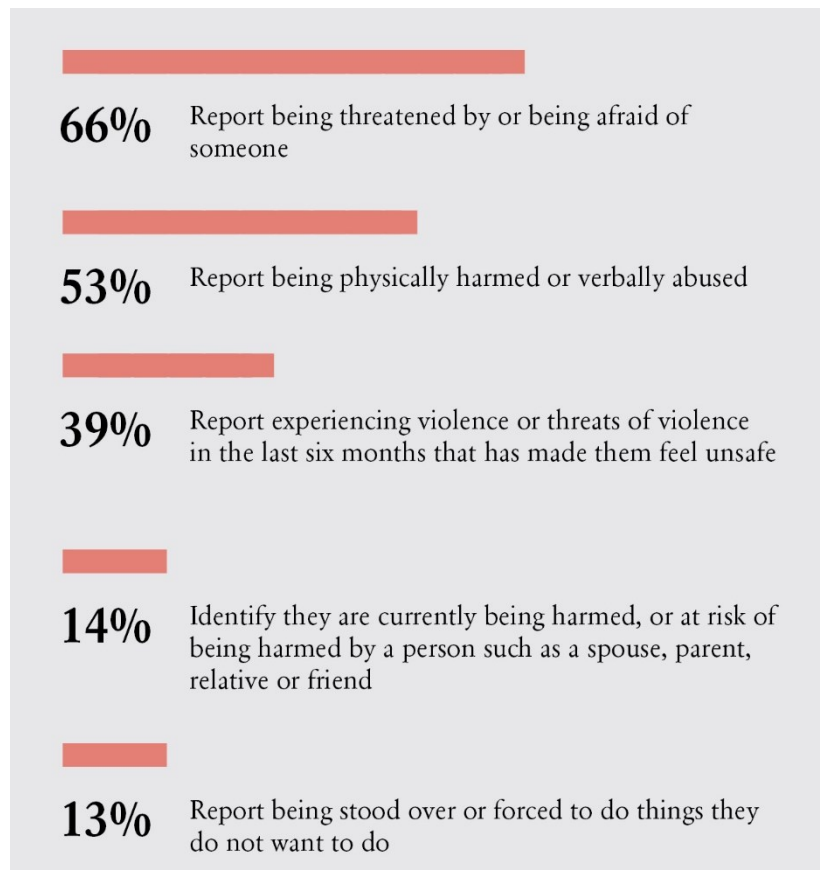


The history and experiences of people who were surveyed in 2019 are broadly consistent with those reported during a similar survey event (Registry Week) in the City of Sydney in 2015. This is a clear indication that new approaches are needed to successfully prevent and reduce homelessness.

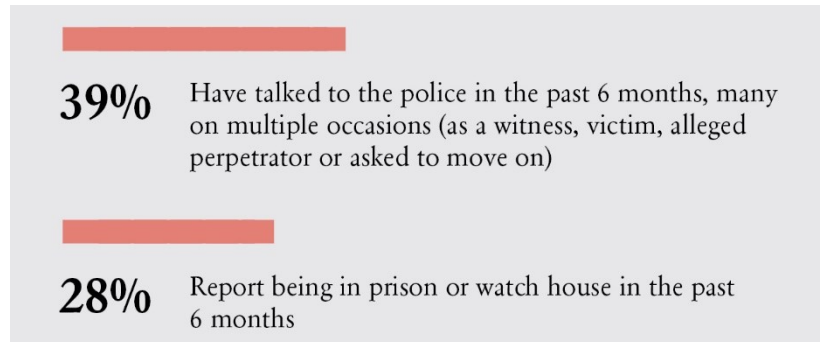
## The Street Sleeping Experience

On average, people participating in the Connections Week survey were homeless for approximately 5 ½ years, many cycling in and out of homelessness over many years. The survey results provide some insights into the experiences of people during their time living in public places.

Experiences of fear and violence are commonplace:



People who are homeless report frequent engagement with police and criminal justice:



People overwhelmingly report they are unable to take care of basic daily needs - 88% report they are unable to take care of their basic needs for things such as food, bathing, changing clothes, toilet, clean water.

A life of homelessness and street sleeping is also a life that risks isolation and disconnection from the roles and engagement in meaningful work or activities that most take for granted. 53% of people identify that they are usually bored or lacking things to do on most days.

## The Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

The Protocol can be a useful guidance tool where individuals and organisations are aware of it, and where this guidance is provided in the context of understanding the experiences of people who are street sleeping. The information above provides insights into the safety, wellbeing and experiences of people who are street sleeping and it can be used to inform the requirements for a Protocol for Homeless People in Public Spaces.

### *Safety and vulnerability*

The current protocol speaks to the right of local communities to live in a safe and peaceful environment. However, the protocol does not adequately acknowledge the risks to safety experienced by people who are street sleeping. In addition, the End Street Sleeping Collaboration feel that the experiences of poverty, trauma and poor physical and mental health of people who are street sleeping could be more adequately addressed in the protocol.

The experiences of people who are street sleeping are commonly associated with fear, and harm and an inability to meet basic daily needs. In order to minimise additional trauma caused by homelessness itself, it must be a priority to find stable and supportive homes for people who are street sleeping, as quickly as possible.

The protocol should recognise and provide guidance on how to address the vulnerability and safety concerns for those who are street sleeping. The inquiry should further consider whether a protocol is an appropriate instrument for addressing the right to live in a safe and peaceful environment for those who are street sleeping.

### *Engagement with people who are street sleeping*

The protocol recognises the often complex circumstances of people who are street sleeping and recognises that factors such as health, mental health, and cultural background should be considered.

Some key factors, such as the over representation of people from the LGBTIQ community, older people and young people are not addressed. In addition, it is important to consider the vulnerabilities and complexities for different groups, for example women experiencing homelessness, and people with multiple risk factors and complex needs and co-morbidity. It is also important for agencies to understand the various pathways which may result in people becoming homeless, such as domestic violence, discharge from hospital, release from prison, family breakdown, or financial crisis for example.

To acknowledge these experiences, the protocol itself should also be framed using language that is person centred and trauma informed. It could also provide additional guidance about how people can seek advice and training on positive ways to engage with people who have such complex and diverse histories, particularly including training and information on trauma informed care and person-centred practice.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be significantly over-represented among people who are homeless. The protocol notes the need to take a culturally respectful approach, however, it would be beneficial to provide guidance about what it means to be culturally respectful and how agencies can engage in a respectful way.

Often, people who are street sleeping have pets with them, the protocol should also consider providing advice on safety considerations when engaging people who have animals and the considerations that may be required for supporting people with pets to access temporary and permanent housing. With the total length of time people have been sleeping on the street during their lives averaging over 5 years the protocol should take a broader view of connection and wellbeing for people who are street sleeping. Connection and wellbeing are considerations that extend beyond a person's right to be left alone in public places, unless there is a reason to engage for the purposes of safety or service delivery.

Assertive outreach services are critical. The protocol should support the positive and proactive engagement of people who are homelessness, with their consent, in order to build relationships that work to identify appropriate and supportive pathways into housing, and ongoing supports once housed.

The protocol's underlying principle of people who are street sleeping being left alone, perhaps unintentionally, assumes that people who are experiencing homelessness are in some way separate from the broader community, and do not have the same desire to build relationships and social connections, to have a home and to participate in work or meaningful activities as the rest of the community.

There is room in the protocol for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges:

- the right of people who are street sleeping to feel safe and unthreatened in public space,
- that people who are street sleeping may choose to engage and participate at the same time as respecting that no one should be coerced or forced to do so, harassed or discriminated against,
- the opportunity for people who are street sleeping, with their informed consent, to be engaged and involved in activities that assist them to exit homelessness,
- that in many circumstances a public place may be the most appropriate location for engagement with services to occur,
- the importance of a rapid exit from homelessness to a stable and supported home.

*Scope of the protocol*

The protocol is targeted to government services and their role and engagement with people who are street sleeping. This does not recognise the broad range of people, organisations, businesses and others who also come in to contact with people who are street sleeping.

There are many parts of the community that have a desire to see homelessness effectively addressed. And many who would like to understand more about how they can contribute.

The protocol, or another suitable strategy or activity could work proactively with the broader community to combat the many myths about homelessness, improve understanding of the drivers of homelessness, and promote ways that communities can work together to create long term solutions that work to end street sleeping.

It is only with this kind of joint commitment from all parts of the community that we can effectively address and eliminate homelessness.