

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Organisation: Penrith City Council

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NSW Parliamentary inquiry into housing options

Penrith City Council submission on behalf of local communities and homelessness services

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Housing. We appreciate this is an important and complex matter.

Homelessness in Penrith City

The most recent homelessness estimates available are from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing by the ABS. In 2016, there were an estimated 890 people who were homeless in Penrith LGA, representing 6% of the homeless population in Greater Western Sydney. The number of homeless people in Penrith LGA increased by 283 people or 46.6% since 2011 figures.

As a rate, the number of homeless people in Penrith LGA increased from 34.0 people per 10,000 in 2011 to 45.4 people per 10,000 in 2016. The number of homeless people in Penrith LGA is not as high as other LGAs within Greater Western Sydney, however Penrith did record the third largest homelessness growth rate in the region between 2011 and 2016 (behind Canterbury-Bankstown and Fairfield LGAs). The ABS homelessness estimates for Penrith on a finer geographical level shows the variation in the homeless population within the LGA. Notable concentrations of homeless people in 2016 were found in St Marys/North St Marys, Penrith, and Castlereagh/Cranebrook.ⁱ

Homelessness has been on the increase in our City, with the added impact of the outbreak of COVID-19, community lockdown and the proximity of hotspots and LGAs of concern there are increased challenges and complexities to the housing sector locally.

The matters raised in this submission are on behalf of local organisations and homelessness services in Penrith. Feedback was sought from the Penrith Homelessness Interagency, Penrith Youth Interagency, and Penrith Multicultural Interagency; we have also added an Individual service response as Appendix 1, and information from the Penrith Youth Actionⁱⁱ Plan and the Disability Snapshot 2021ⁱⁱⁱ.

Issues identified

The issues listed below are matters raised in the context of the latest COVID-19 outbreak, community lockdown and the proximity of hotspots and LGAs of concern. There has been an increase of challenges and complexities for the housing sector locally and although there will be a time when COVID-19 will be under control, it won't be in the immediate future and therefore any measures need to carefully consider the impact of major shocks like COVID-19, floods and fires to plan for those most vulnerable.

There were significant risks that contributed to residents experiencing housing insecurity and this number has increased during COVID. The main contributors were identified as low income, loss of income and employment, relationship/family, health/mental health issues and domestic and family violence.

- Issue 1: Lack of availability of emergency accommodation either through Temporary Accommodation (TA), crisis beds, and medium supported accommodation for singles and

families. This includes couch surfers and people moving from home to home with family and friends. The 28-day clause for TA has been identified as a barrier.

- Solution 1: A roof over people heads is critical but it is paramount to consider wrap-around services: support is required in the way of financial and material assistance, counselling and casework, so people can return to or find stable and secure home. Early intervention support services for residents at risk can prevent crisis.

- Issue 2: Residents who experience medium to long-term homelessness have significant challenges finding accommodation.
- Solution 2: Rough sleepers need assertive and targeted assistance and emergency support. Emergency accommodation, TA, supported health services, financial and material support can be identified with a designated caseworker. Long term social housing or low rental properties with support are key to tackle medium to long-term homelessness.

- Issue 3: Lack of availability of crisis/supported housing provision for a range of age groups and diverse needs
- Solution 3: People experiencing emergency homelessness from evictions, violence, and other crises require immediate and round-the-clock support (24 hours, seven days a week. This group can have intersecting elements of vulnerability like disability, being culturally and linguistically diverse, child protection matters, sexual and gender diversity, refugee status, dual diagnosis, and chronic health problems.
It is important that emergency crisis accommodation and TA supports consider working alongside NDIS, interpreters, youth workers, LGBTIQ+ inclusive services, and multicultural services among others, so there is ongoing and relevant support for a return to a stable home.

- Issue 4: Lack of affordable housing; private rental access for low-income earners
- Solution 4: Affordable housing is an ongoing issue for the community. Access to affordable low-income private rentals that are not subject to market demand can assist with residents having a stable home. The local services identified the impact of mortgage stress and mortgagee foreclosure as part of the issues with affordable housing. Strategies for affordable housing need to be developed with the private rental market. Ongoing efforts to identify early intervention and prevention strategies for residents are necessary, these need to include sharing information about local services with residents so they know where to go for help.

- Issue 5: Increase access to material needs including emergency food, utility payment assistance, and IT equipment. The need for practical assistance has been identified as fundamental to having a stable home. The lockdown has impacted families significantly: home learning, loss of employment, and income. This has put pressure on families that may have already been experiencing hardship, however, it has also been identified that there are some residents experiencing hardship for the first time due to COVID, including the need to self-isolate.
- Solution 5: Funding for services to expand their current work to meet emerging needs would assist residents to manage new challenges. More flexible housing options and brokerage funds to set up a home with essential goods, financial and material assistance, and community and youth services.

- Issue 6: Having pets, leaving pets or surrendering pets is an issue that people with unstable housing face.

- Solution 6: Consider support for accommodating pets in short term pet boarding if pets cannot be accommodated in emergency housing.

Conclusion

The number of homeless people in Penrith LGA is not as high as other LGAs within Greater Western Sydney, however Penrith did record the third largest homelessness growth rate in the region between 2011 and 2016 (behind Canterbury-Bankstown and Fairfield LGAs). The concentration of homeless people according to the 2016 census is in some of the most disadvantaged areas of our community making it critical to consider wrap around services that considers intersecting layers of disadvantage, stable, permanent and safe housing.

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Appendix 1 – Homelessness Interagency – individual service submission

Dear Sir/Madam

I am contacting you on behalf of Paying It Forward Homeless Services Incorporated (PIF)

Who Are PIF?

PIF is a small registered Not for Profit charity that operates in Jamison Park Penrith on a Sunday evening at 5.30pm every week, providing a hot meal, refreshments and dessert for the vulnerable. When donations and funds are available, we provide patrons with warm jackets, sleeping bags, hats, gloves, hygiene products and PIF have a small food pantry. Food is distributed at dinner service when possible and on request, which in recent times has become more frequent. We also provide information on other services available to clients on request. This information is provided to PIF through Penrith City Council.

PIF is a team of 28 Volunteers who are all like-minded and do a fantastic job. No one is paid. PIF has been running for 8 years.

PIF Mission Statement:

Our aim is to restore dignity and comfort to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the community. We do this by providing not only a mobile meal service, but other essentials such as toiletries, bedding and clothing. In addition to this, we have a strong focus on social engagement with our patrons, providing them fun, laughter, a sense of community and confidence in themselves to be a part of a community that they may feel left out of.

Who does PIF care for?

PIF serves victims of domestic violence, families effected by COVID (unemployed, underemployed), patrons with mental health issues, depression, anxiety and the homeless in our local area.

PIF is not supported or aligned by any church or political party. It has been the only food service open during COVID, with permission being granted by Penrith City Council.

PIF have a Facebook page to raise awareness of our charity and use it to promote and thank the businesses, organisations and the public who choose to support us. Regular supporters are also advertised at any event we go to - this is our way of supporting those who support us.

We would like to take the opportunity to put forward things that have become evident to us in the years where we have been in touch with those in need in our local community

- Unstable housing and risk of homelessness

Some of the patrons that attend PIF service mention that they are in unstable housing and do not know where they will go, they are told very little and often feel despondent because they are kept in the dark while others are making decisions regarding their lives and futures.

- Homelessness

Some of our Patrons are homeless, while some may choose this, others certainly don't; mental health plays a major role for many so these needs addressing but help seems extremely limited and many of the services are not open in the hours where they are needed.

- Crisis/ supported housing provision for a range of age groups and diverse needs

This seems limited and scarce in the local area...or is full and often overcrowded

- Social housing access and shortage
- Private rental access for low-income earners

While private rentals seem a good idea, this issue must be addressed by government, many private property owners are weary of renting to low-income families as there is little or no support regarding the collection of rent and care for their properties

- Access to temporary emergency accommodation
- Supported accommodation
- Emergency accommodation for women and children in a DV environment
- Dual diagnosis accommodation options including detox

Accommodation is one of the key areas that need to be overhauled, the Penrith area has grown exponentially and infrastructure to assist in the is lacking in many areas. and is Emergency accommodation needs to be available 24/7 not 9 to 5 Monday to Friday – there needs to be an emergency contact with accommodation that is available on the spot, there is plenty of accommodation in the local area in the form of hotels/motels and perhaps consideration should be given to using these in times of crisis. While the numbers of mature woman living in cars and/or seeking emergency accommodation is on the rise men must also be considered in DV and emergency accommodation situations. There are also men with children living in nightmare situations.

- Access to material needs including emergency food, utility payment assistance etc

There is nothing in the local area that is available 24/7, there are various services that are available and are dependent on having someone "in the know" to be able to assist. With the current situation growing as fast as it is, it is time for the government to step up and start supporting those who are looking after those in the community who are in desperate need of assistance. PIF are not financially supported by government we fund raise (no not able to do so because of COVID) and rely heavily on donations to remain viable to assist patrons in desperate times. PIF apply for grants however there are no grants available that cater to consumables, they are all for non-consumables which knocks us out of the arena. There are also various charities that give utility assistance...perhaps a central point would be better to manage.

In an ideal world, it would be good to have 1 point of contact with a small team of people (with a shared phone for contact) who could shoulder the job together thus being available 24/7. Perhaps there could be an area (a locked cupboard with touchpad entry) that they could access for emergency food?? An example could be a dry parcel of UHT milk, cereal, plastic bowl and spoon, serviettes, small cheese and biscuit packs, muesli bars with small motel size shampoo conditioner and body wash and ladies' sanitary items etc.

It should not be left to the community and church groups to solely provide for the less fortunate in our society, while they are happy to step and this may be their role for existence the Government, should also play a part in support.

- Access to IT equipment
- A local hub/Library that is open longer hours to accommodate all ages, genders and the varying needs of people. Perhaps a secure room with safe access, a few computers and printers supervised by someone who has IT/Microsoft knowledge to assist with applications, communication etc these could be maned government staff or volunteers.
- Funding for services to continue current work and expand to meet emerging needs
- Brokerage funds to set up a home with essential goods

There should be a fund that is accessible in emergency situations.... perhaps an “agreement” with a local Kmart etc where things can be purchased 24/7 at reasonable rates and reasonable quality?? A basic home package at an agreed price??

- Other gaps as identified

There is definitely a lack of support and housing, while public housing may not be ideal perhaps utilizing some unused factories or army spaces etc, may be a better idea. Maybe ensuring that rents and utilities for the low-income earners are affordable and giving them opportunities to perhaps work off their debts.... Working to assist the elderly etc? Council grounds care?? so many different ideas come to mind and not one size would fit all.

Support of charities who assist those in need is also something that needs consideration. Perhaps a regular donation to those charities who consistently provide a service and at present have no means of fundraising.

It would be good to have a specific collective of people (team) in charge of looking after this area... you know the saying “too many cooks spoil the broth”, it’s difficult when there is no one specific to manage so many different areas.

Many of the disadvantaged and homeless have no trust in the government or authorities and are afraid of losing the little they have, a specific team of people who can empathise, respect and treat these people with compassion is essential.

ⁱ Penrith Community Profile 2018 [penrithcommprofile 2018 final web.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱ [Youth Action Plan \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Penrith Disability Snapshot 2021 \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)