

**Submission
No 5**

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN
COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

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a) The extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of clients and providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside of their particular area of responsibility.

Domestic Squalor and Hoarding – Local Government Council officers generally become involved with hoarding and squalor matters when the condition of the premises is considered to pose a risk to public health or safety. Unfortunately, the ability or capacity for owners or occupiers to comply with a clean-up direction is limited when hoarding behaviours or squalor is a factor.

A specific process for responding to Hoarding and Squalor including a multi-agency approach to individual case management is required. Some regions have already established groups to bring key agencies together to try and resolve such cases however results are hindered by protection of privacy, lack of resources, lack of a lead agency and lack of support where mental health issues may exist. Mental health services are typically the responsibility of state government and Councils officers are generally not equipped to respond to such issues.

The challenge for Council officers is even if assistance is offered the services generally cannot be provided unless the property owner or occupier requests or agrees to the assistance.

Council officers are generally not equipped to assist with matters relating to hoarding behaviours and the state government is often best placed to take a leading role in these matters. The identified ageing of the community means the number of these cases is likely to increase dramatically and their complex nature often means they do not get resolved rather that the crisis is dealt with until another one arises. These cases typically involve multiple NSW government and other agencies including Police, Family & Community Services, Community Allied and Mental Health, Housing, the RSPCA, Emergency, non-government community services as well as Council.

b) Barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law

The powers of entry and inspection under Section 200 of the Local Government Act 1993 are not sufficient to allow access to the residential portion of premises to enable officers to determine the extent of the hoarding/squalor, gather evidence and bring effect to an Order if not complied with. This results in a high resource impost in terms of staff time and costs on local government in responding to cases of hoarding and squalor.

Please refer to the outcomes of then NSW Parliamentary Committee on Environment and Regulation Inquiry into the Management and Disposal of Waste on Private Lands and the issues paper 'Beyond Overwhelmed' produced by the NSW Squalor and Hoarding Taskforce.