Queensland Legal Service Plan 2014-17

Vulnerable client groups

How can the CLC sector increase its capacity to assist ***people experiencing homelessness?***

*Draft prepared by QPILCH Homeless Persons’ Legal Clinic*

1. ***What are the major challenges in working with this client group?***
2. The different kinds of homelessness can “hide” this client group. **Attached** are some Queensland Government statistics indicating broadly the presence and type of homelessness across Queensland.
3. Other types of “need’ such as people with a disability, experiencing domestic violence, mental illness, exiting institutions or people with an indigenous or refugee heritage are all significant “subsets” of homelessness. This has several implications but one is that a legal service addressing a domestic violence issue, for instance, may not identify or have capacity to engage with the legal needs connected to a client’s homelessness.
4. Clients are unlikely to identify themselves as homeless (especially if they are in secure housing, such as a boarding house).
5. People experiencing homelessness have the highest level of unmet need (when measured as the total number of unaddressed legal needs per person). 85% have at least one unmet need, while 50.5% have three or more unmet needs.[[1]](#footnote-1) They will mostly not identify these needs and will rarely seek the help of a lawyer.
6. Self-help legal strategies are not appropriate given the level of stress and disconnection experienced by people experiencing homelessness. Casework is essential.
7. Many mainstream systems fail to both identify a service-user’s homelessness and respond appropriately. Centrelink, SPER, Department of Housing, education providers, etc.
8. System indifference has mostly generated a culture of apathy from this client group. Effective service delivery must be persistent, personal, practical and collaborative (especially multi-disciplinary).
9. Clients are highly transient – regularly changing address/mobile phone numbers -multiple contact strategies required.
10. Clients may initially appear to have limited capacity – careful and collaborative strategies can generally overcome this.
11. The major legal needs of this group are housing (evictions, goods left behind or stored, Department of Housing decisions, tenancy disputes); debt (Centrelink, SPER, mobile phones, consumer credit, government); Family law and DV; crime and orders around mental health and guardianship. Some who are insecurely housed also face employment and training issues.
12. The non-legal needs of this group are substantial and a priority, however, support services are not always available. Sensitive and flexible service delivery is required.
13. ***What actions can be taken to build CLC capacity in working with this client group? (how can we work together for both strategic and client focused outcomes)***
14. Form strategic alignments to existing homelessness strategies/priorities in your area – eg: Homeless Hubs, Homelessness Community Action Plan (**HCAP**) or localised collaborations, such as Under1Roof, CAISO, etc.
15. Make strategic connection to homelessness service providers in order to build strong and supported referral pathways. (eg. local Homestay program administered by Red Cross, Mission Australia etc., Centrelink).
16. Provide training to local community workers, focusing on identification of legal issues and relevant process for effective referrals. Relevant resource: Legal Health Check videos at [www.qpilch.org.au/lhc](http://www.qpilch.org.au/lhc) .
17. Access the Homeless Persons’ Legal Clinic (**HPLC**) as a provider of resources (including precedent letters, on request) and information for clients, community workers and lawyers.
18. Develop a proactive service delivery model/protocol for this client group – outreach, casework, collaborative, assertive.
19. Value, train and support pro bono lawyers.
20. Connect to national strategies perhaps as a one-off, network building activity, eg: Bulk Debt negotiation project.
21. Be aware of and build relationships with in-house hardship teams – private mercantile agents and government (eg. SPER).
22. Be aware of typical, multiple legal issues facing this client group and make linkages to address these issues.
23. Explore joint-law reform opportunities.
24. Develop an active homelessness-consumer group to inform/advise sector.

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| **Action** | **Time frame** | **Responsibility** | **Resources** |
| eg. CLCs to connect to relevant HCAP strategies | 6 months | eg. HPLC to facilitate HCAP meeting with local CLCs  | HPLC’s existing connections with HCAP |
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1. ***What sort of resourcing (as a sector) would make the biggest difference in working with this client group?***
2. Collaboration: Funding; Awareness raising; Training (eg Legal Health Check videos); Method of facilitating clear lines of communication
3. Casework: Funding; Improvement of referral and information pathways (eg: use of HPLC’s existing resources and pro bono network);
4. Consumer group: Funding
5. ?????
1. Coumarelos C & People J, ‘*Home is where the heart is: a working paper on homelessness, disadvantaged housing and the experience of legal problems’* (2013) 23 Updating Justice, Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)