

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY LOWER HUTT



WORKING TOGETHER TO END HOMELESSNESS

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Owner	John Pritchard (Principal Policy Advisor)
Approved by	Wendy Moore (Head of Strategy and Planning)

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INTRODUCTION

Homelessness means people are living in insecure and often unsafe circumstances. For some people, homelessness means sleeping rough, or living in cars or vans. For others, it means sofa-surfing or temporarily sharing housing with friends, family, or acquaintances. Many people experience a number of these living situations.¹

The Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness is: *‘Living situations where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing: are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household or living in uninhabitable housing.’*

Homelessness has a detrimental effect on people’s health and wellbeing, education, employment opportunities and income, as well as family relationships.² The long-term social and economic costs of the issues are borne by society generally as well as the individuals affected.

Homelessness is caused by a combination of structural and individual factors. The structural factors include poverty, inequality, lack of affordable housing supply, and social security and income policies. The individual level circumstances that can make people more vulnerable to homelessness include poor physical or mental health, alcohol and drugs issues, age, bereavement, financial problems, and relationship breakdown.

As the housing market has become more unaffordable, homelessness in Lower Hutt has been increasing, people and families are homeless for long periods of time, there are gaps in services and there is a lack of capacity to meet people’s needs.³ The indications are that this situation is likely to continue, and increase, in the short and possibly medium term. There is a limited supply of affordable homes and making a considerable difference on this aspect is expected to take around up to five years. Pressure on rented housing is therefore likely to continue. As well as increasing housing supply, actions are required to improve the response to immediate needs during this period.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

We believe that everyone has the right to a safe, suitable, and secure home and that by working together we can ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. We need to both focus on people with the greatest need and develop an approach that prevents homelessness, as opposed to crisis intervention and managing problems.

Preventing homelessness is more cost-effective for individuals and society than trying to deal with its effects. Poor services or disjointed processes, cultural barriers and discrimination,

¹ Pritchard, J W., & Miller, O. (2018) Homelessness in Lower Hutt, Hutt City Council

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

cause and perpetuate homelessness. We can take action to address some structural factors such as lack of affordable homes by actively working on delivering housing supply. We can also support central government work to reduce poverty, improve the security and conditions in the private rented to reduce the insecurity and risk of homelessness.

VISION

Working together to end homelessness

Ending homelessness doesn't mean that no-one will lose their home again. It means that we have a response in-place to prevent homelessness whenever possible and that if homelessness occurs, **it is rare, brief, and non-recurring.**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following four principles guide the approach to responding to homelessness in Lower Hutt.

Housing is basic human right: everyone has the right to housing that is habitable, affordable, suitable, and secure. Homelessness is the clearest manifestation of the failure to provide adequate housing and the unambiguous right of everyone to have a safe place to live underpins our response.⁴ At a local and practical level this means working with our partners to address homelessness effectively and prioritise the delivery of suitable housing.

Person-centred: to give people control and enable them to set their own aims and goals for the future. The individual or family should be at the centre of the services and support provided, and services should work with people to help them make decisions and set their own goals.

Culturally appropriate: an approach and service delivery that meet the needs of all our people. This means supporting people in-line with their values and worldview. For Māori, understanding tiro ā-Māori ki tōna ake ao is needed to help respond effectively to homelessness.

Collaborative action: working together and taking action. The issues of housing hardship and homelessness intersect with the responsibilities of a range of organisations e.g. Health, Education, Criminal Justice, and Housing, non-governmental organisation, and local government. Responding effectively to homelessness requires organisations to work closely together to reduce system barriers and find effective solutions.

⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations 1948, article 25
http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf
https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/9214/2388/0508/HRNZ_10_right_to_housing.pdf

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Preventing homelessness
2. Improving the supply of suitable accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness
3. End rough sleeping - help people who are street homeless or living in cars move into and retain settled accommodation
4. Increasing the supply of affordable homes to rent and buy
5. Improving the understanding of homelessness in Lower Hutt

PRIORITIES

Preventing homelessness

This includes providing people who are at risk of homelessness with the support to retain homes and includes working effectively to prevent homelessness from happening through some of the major system routes such as when people are discharged from hospital/health care, released from prison, or preparing to leave other services. It also means improving the services and processes when people approach organisations.

Improving the supply of suitable accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness.

This includes emergency and transitional housing.

End rough sleeping.

Rough sleeping is the most dangerous form of homelessness and we should not accept anyone sleeping on the streets, vehicles, under buildings, or in improvised shelters.

One of the key approaches in ending rough sleeping is Housing First. Housing First is an outreach intervention programme focussing on people with complex needs to provide housing as quickly as possible along with tailored support.⁵ The approach recognises that having settled housing makes it easier for people to address problems with their health and wellbeing, addictions, and other needs. Wrap-around support is provided to the individual to help them retain their home and address issues that led to or contributed to them becoming homeless. The intervention focusses on breaking the cycle of repeat homelessness.

Housing First Principles

- **Immediate access to housing with no housing readiness conditions**
- **Personal choice and self-determination**
- **A harm reduction and recovery-orientation approach**
- **Individual and person-driven support**
- **Social and community integration**

Housing First is delivered by a partnership of organisations with expertise in supporting people and helping them retain housing. Two government funded Housing First programmes will deliver services in Wellington and the Hutt Valley from 2019. One programme will be

⁵ Pleace et. al. There are other interventions. Housing First is supported by evidence from several countries as well as from cities in New Zealand where it is already being implemented.

delivered by a collective of organisations led by Downtown Community Ministry and the other will be delivered by Kahungunu Ki Poneke Community Services.

Other people may need short-term assistance and practical support, such as help with deposit payments and so forth to access housing.

Increase the supply of affordable homes to rent and buy

Council needs to explore how it can do this both individually and with partners. A housing needs assessment as part of developing a housing strategy will help determine the type of housing required, affordability for different households, and how to deliver on the needs identified. A focus on the building of a range of homes to rent or buy and including market and non-market housing should be explored.

Improve the understanding of homelessness in Lower Hutt

Good data is needed to assess needs for services, identify trends over time, and help indicate the impact of changes. Although our research has identified increasing homelessness and housing hardship in Lower Hutt, data on needs is fragmented and often difficult to access easily.

GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Given the multi-agency response required to address homelessness in the city and neighbouring areas, effective oversight and coordination of the work is needed.