

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

People currently experiencing homelessness or who had previously experienced long-term chronic homelessness – through a range of interviews, focus groups and surveys

Date of consultation:	28 August – 1 September 2017
Group consulted with:	People currently experiencing homelessness or who had previously experienced long-term chronic homelessness – through a range of interviews, focus groups and surveys
Number of attendees:	38
Name of organisations:	Not applicable

Key themes arising from the consultation

- While there are services that are working well for people who have or are experiencing homelessness (Early Morning Centre, Oz Harvest, Orange Sky Laundry, Northside Community Services, Safe Shelter, Vinnies Night Van, the Roadhouse, Common Ground), there is a need to improve access to many of these services by opening on the weekend or during the day.
- More face-to-face contact with services to help people develop skills and address loneliness, including with Housing ACT – posting a Housing ACT officer in group centres around Canberra (not just Belconnen) or having an officer come to the Early Morning Centre once a week.
- More services in the city: public showers, a place to charge phones, a drop in centre that is open during the day to assist with skills development, and a permanent, secure emergency shelter where you can get a bed and a bathroom for a night, with some support on site.
- Many people experiencing homelessness also need assistance with doctors/health care, drug and alcohol addiction, depression and mental health. These services are key.
- Investigate innovations like a home ownership scheme for people with disability or a tiny house community to help people rough sleeping to get housed. Often larger houses are too hard for someone who has been living on the street to maintain, and high density isn't always appropriate

Key quotes

- “Homelessness is getting hard. Loss of sleep, loss of energy, no one to talk to, no-one that hears. I’m feeling hopeless, cold, alone, like you just want to die. I dream of having a home every night. Please help us.”
- “Being homeless is lonely – sometimes I just want someone to talk to”.
- “You should open the showers at the Civic Pool so people can use them – sometimes after a cold night the only thing you want is to have a warm shower to warm up.”
- “When I first came to Canberra I slept in my truck for 12 months in Fyshwick. It was very cold, no privacy, and the police used to come and harass me. It was too small.”
- “For people living on the street, depression is a big issue – they find it hard to do paperwork and navigate bureaucracy because of depression.”
- “Mental health services are really poor. Everyone on the street has depression and poor self-esteem because of their situation but they can’t get help because of a lack of services.”
- “For some people their pet is their companion, so like a blind person they can’t live without it.”
- “A lot of people won’t use Safe Shelter because you are locked in, you’re not allowed to leave, you’ve got to be in there by 7pm and once you’re in, they lock the doors. You can’t go out for a smoke or take your pet. People would use Safe Shelter more if there were less restrictive rules.”
- “Housing ACT thinks that I am not high priority. I am in pain and waiting for an operation, but can’t get into housing in the meantime.”
- “Buying properties in private complexes is better than large public housing complexes which result in negative experiences.”
- “The key points for me that show what needs to improve is the delay in getting into accommodation, the mixed messages and lack of clear advice on what to do.”

What is working well?

- Safe Shelter – it is the only place for men to go.
- Early Morning Centre is good to get breakfast and see the doctor.
- Early Morning Centre is great. There are showers and it's a clean nice place to spend a few hours.
- Oz Harvest and Yellow Van are great.
- Orange Sky Laundry, especially if they expand to have showers in the future – when you have clean clothes it makes you feel like you are human. You are more respected when you are clean.
- Free off peak travel on buses.
- Places which have power points to charge phones and other devices, like Jolimont Centre, but there you might get asked to move on.
- Men's Shed – it's good because they let you stay there all day and hang out. You can do things or just chat.
- Northside Community Services were great, they listened and were outstanding, really trying to help.
- CatholicCare were really good –very understanding and empathetic, I didn't feel like I was a number.

What could be improved?

- More services on the weekend. There is currently nothing on the weekend not even the churches.
- More 24 hour support– this extends to doctors, transport, opportunities for casual work, somewhere to wash and feel human and somewhere to gather to watch TV and play cards in the day.
- More services for women, they are often 'invisible' because they are sleeping in their cars, not on the street.
- More places like Common Ground – a place to live, with the support.
- Safe Shelter – the rules are too strict.
- Allow pets in services.
- More group houses, where people can share a kitchen and look after each other.
- More access to doctors/health care – the doctor at EMC is only on Wednesday and there is nothing available if you are sick on another day. More bulk billing doctors in the city.
- Individual trust and relationships with support workers so that you can speak to the same person every time.
- Skills development –even teaching people how to use computers, having this during the day would really help, it would give us something to do.

- More face to face services – everyone is being pushed to use the phone or the internet but some people don't know how to use those things and give up because it's too hard.
- Make sure that you are talking to the same person each time because it's hard to have to tell your story over and over. If you are talking to the same person then they get to know you and they are more likely to help.

New ideas

- There needs to be a more permanent overnight shelter (like Wesley House or Foster House in Sydney), which provides living skills training, recreational pursuits, case management, a medical centre and detoxification unit. It should be located in the city where people can come for a night, and have a secure room with a bathroom, and not so strict rules (e.g. allow people to come and go if they need to have a smoke, don't lock them in).
- More showers – open a public facility with showers that anyone can use or open the public pool so the homeless can use the showers before the people come in to swim.
- There needs to be more realistic and accessible options for contacting Housing ACT. A Housing ACT officer could come to the EMC once a week to talk to people.
- A 'homeless person' ID. The need for identification is a big problem especially for people coming out of prison.
- Re zone an area of land near Ainslie Village to allow camping so that people can camp out in an area that is safe and protected and has access to services at Ainslie Village. Some people don't want to be in a house but they need a safe place to camp where tents are allowed to be permanently erected. People can't afford to pay campground fees and they are not allowed to stay long term.
- More 1 bedroom places/townhouses, so that people can have pets and not have to live in high density – tiny houses could be a good idea.
- A home ownership scheme for people with disability.