



## **Assertive Outreach Community of Practice (CoP)**

Assertive outreach involves workers actively approaching people on the streets who are sleeping rough to offer them accommodation and service supports. During 2018, Homelessness NSW established a CoP to enable SHS workers, who provide assertive outreach services, to share information and expertise. Three meetings of this CoP have, so far, been held.

One of the key achievements of the Assertive Outreach CoP is that it has developed a list of advocacy and support goals, related to assertive outreach, for the sector to pursue. These goals are:

1. **access to more accurate local data on rough sleeping to assist with planning and developing services for people who are rough sleeping** – Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) currently have difficulty obtaining accurate, local data regarding rough sleeping. SHS data reflects those who are rough sleeping who become SHS clients. This is an incomplete picture because some people who are rough sleeping do not approach SHSs for housing assistance and services and others may not become clients of SHS services until after they have ceased rough sleeping. The Assertive Outreach CoP identified that it would be useful for SHSs to be able to access data on rough sleeping held by other local services and agencies. This would help with getting a more complete picture of the needs of the cohort of people rough sleeping, capturing the full range of the work done to assist them and mobilising other services to become involved in a shared response.
2. **responsibility for addressing rough sleeping to be shared between SHSs and local, mainstream services and agencies** – Research shows that assertive outreach requires a collaborative approach between different services. The CoP identified that SHSs are currently shouldering the sole responsibility for tackling rough sleeping but a move to a shared approach is required to ensure that people sleeping rough have access to all necessary services. These services include health services (given that people sleeping rough often present with physical health problems, mental illness and/or drug and alcohol dependencies) and post-crisis support to sustain housing once it has been secured. Homelessness NSW is in a position to support the development of a shared approach to rough sleeping through facilitating local forums for relevant stakeholders.
3. **training specific to the needs of assertive outreach, for individual services and workers** – The CoP noted that, currently, no specific training on providing assertive outreach to people who are rough sleeping seems to be available, even though this type of homelessness is complex to address and often requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Drawing on the research regarding assertive outreach, the CoP compiled a list of topics that could be used to develop appropriate assertive outreach training for individual services and workers.
4. **implementing the good practice guidelines on assertive outreach** – The Industry Partnership published Assertive Outreach Guidelines in late 2017 and the CoP identified that the focus now needs to be on assisting the sector to implement these guidelines.

Another achievement of the CoP is that it has developed a video to support the Assertive Outreach Guidelines (this ties in with goal four above). The video addresses how to engage people who are rough sleeping in a way that is trauma-informed and reflects good practice. The video was funded by Homelessness NSW and will be available on its website.