

**Homelessness NSW**



## **HOMELESSNESS NSW CONSULTATION PAPER:**

### **REVIEW OF THE HOST AND HART MODELS FOR ADDRESSING ROUGH SLEEPING IN INNER-CITY SYDNEY**



## Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1. THE HOST .....	6
1.2. THE HART .....	6
1.3. REASONS FOR THIS CONSULTATION.....	7
1.4. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS .....	7
1.5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHS PROVIDERS AND THE HOST/HART .....	8
<b>2. THE HOST .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 BENEFITS.....	9
2.2 EARLY ISSUES.....	12
2.3 LIMITATIONS – SYSTEMIC ISSUES .....	14
2.4 LIMITATIONS – OTHER ISSUES .....	21
<b>3. THE HART .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 BENEFITS.....	24
3.2 LIMITATIONS.....	26

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the past few years, the Homelessness Outreach Support Team (HOST) and Homelessness Assertive Response Team (HART) have become key elements of the assertive outreach (AO) response to people sleeping rough in inner-city Sydney. Some Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) are involved in this response while others have been impacted by its operations. From May to July 2019, Homelessness NSW, the peak body for SHSs across NSW, consulted with SHSs in the inner-city Sydney area to elicit their views on the effectiveness and impacts of the HOST and HART models. We also consulted with other services that assist people experiencing homelessness in inner-city Sydney – for example, agencies funded by NSW Health and a community housing provider. This paper is the outcome of our consultation process and summarises the views of the services consulted.<sup>1</sup>

The following are the key findings of our consultation.

The HOST has these advantages:

- People sleeping rough are being housed much more quickly because, if they are HOST clients, they can access temporary accommodation (TA) almost immediately and many are being fast-tracked from TA into more long-term social housing.
- The HOST's AO approach is more appropriate to the client cohort it supports than the previous approach of expecting people sleeping rough to seek assistance from a Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) office.
- It has dismantled many of the bureaucratic barriers that made it challenging for people sleeping rough to access TA and other Housing NSW services.
- Extensions to standard TA time limits provide clients with valuable respite from sleeping rough that relieves their anxiety about where they will be sleeping. This enables clients to connect with relevant support services and complete applications. It also gives services a more realistic time period in which to assess a client's needs.
- It provides ways of advocating for very vulnerable clients, with complex health needs, to ensure they receive accommodation as soon as possible.
- The establishment of NEAMI's STEP program, with the capacity to refer HOST clients directly into the STEP B program, is important given the shortage of post-crisis support services in the homelessness sector.
- It has resulted in better, and more responsive, communication between DCJ and the homelessness sector services that interact with DCJ through HART meetings, Collaborative Support Initiative (CSI) meetings and/or monthly 'hubs'.
- It has led to DCJ developing a better understanding of difficulties and gaps in the homelessness service sector.
- The HOST has a more trauma-informed and client-centred way of working than DCJ Housing had in the past and it is, therefore, contributing to a positive, cultural shift within DCJ.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) recently became the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (following a merger with the Department of Justice). For consistency throughout this paper, its findings and recommendations, we refer to this department as DCJ. However, we acknowledge that the departmental activity referred to was mostly undertaken during the period when this department operated as FACS.

With respect to how the HOST model fits within the broader, homelessness service system, it has these limitations:

- It has not led to a sustainable decrease in the number of people rough sleeping or experiencing homelessness because it does not address pressing systemic issues, such as exits into homelessness and the shortage of social housing and post-crisis support services.
- In prioritising people sleeping rough over other cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, it may result in inequity in housing allocations. Social housing stock may be being diverted to people sleeping rough and away from people with equally complex needs, who are in crisis accommodation or boarding houses, and women and children escaping domestic violence. While a proportion of people sleeping rough with complex health needs are extremely vulnerable, it does not necessarily follow that all people sleeping rough are more vulnerable than people experiencing homelessness in other circumstances.
- It is only available in inner-city Sydney, which creates inequity in the geographic spread of services and may encourage a drift of people sleeping rough from other areas into the inner city.
- It results in different cohorts of people sleeping rough receiving varying levels of support, when there is no policy rationale for this differential treatment. HOST clients may receive a greater level of support than HART clients or other people who are sleeping rough.
- Insufficient post-crisis support services mean that, while people sleeping rough are being housed more quickly, some may not be receiving enough support to sustain their tenancies. Services providing post-crisis support are all at capacity and some SHSs are doing this work unfunded to help clients sustain their tenancies.
- A lack of warm referrals, or other adequate referrals, from post-crisis supports to long-term supports means that HOST clients' support drops off at the three-month, post-crisis mark.
- The influx of HOST clients, with complex needs and challenging behaviours, into certain social housing communities may have made those communities unsafe or uncomfortable for some of their existing residents.
- Funding is going to clients spending lengthy periods in TA, when it is likely these resources may be better directed to social housing, other more permanent forms of accommodation and post-crisis support.
- Those services in the broader homelessness sector (that is, services that do not interact directly with the HOST through the HART, the CSI or monthly 'hubs') have not been given sufficient information about the HOST model and how it operates.
- The most vulnerable clients with complex needs, who often have difficulties in interpersonal behavior and communication, are required to interact with HOST staff, rather than staff from other services with whom they might feel more comfortable, to receive TA. This means that the HOST model, although it is more flexible and appropriate than previous models, still falls short in servicing this particularly vulnerable cohort.

With respect to how the HOST model itself operates, it also has the following limitations:

- It uses TA as the primary means of moving people sleeping rough out of primary homelessness and can place people there for fairly lengthy periods, even though TA – unless it is supported TA, which is in very short supply – is unsuitable for anything but very short-term accommodation.
- In an environment where post-crisis support is in short supply, people sleeping rough with very complex needs are likely to fare better if they are put in crisis accommodation, where they will receive intensive support over a longer time period, than if they are placed in TA and transferred to social housing with inadequate supports.

- It lacks transparency in some key areas. These include: the location of HOST patrols, the eligibility guidelines for HOST clients, the process by which HOST clients are fast-tracked into social housing and data tracking how many HOST clients are accommodated but then return to rough sleeping.
- It may be unsustainable over the longer-term. Reasons for this include: the budget for TA is finite, it will become increasingly difficult to transfer HOST clients from TA into social housing because of the social housing shortage and services providing case management support to HOST clients are at capacity.
- The HOST does not include any Aboriginal workers, in either managerial or frontline positions, which is necessary to interact with Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in a culturally aware and safe way.
- It does not prioritise young people experiencing homelessness for assistance, despite evidence about the importance of early intervention.
- There is scope for improved communication with HART members regarding priority housing application approvals and housing offers to clients, as well as securing case management support for clients.
- There is no referral pathway, for services outside the HART or Collaborative Support Initiative (CSI) group, to refer clients to the HOST, unless the HOST has previously encountered the client through a patrol. This is the case even where the client meets the eligibility requirements for the HOST service.

The HART has these advantages:

- It has greatly increased collaboration among the services involved.
- It has improved service co-ordination among AO services, so they do not use up time and resources duplicating each other's work.
- It has improved communication and information-sharing both between the various HART member agencies and between HART members and DCJ.
- Its multi-disciplinary AO patrols are very effective because they provide the full range of services people sleeping rough require, including an accommodation provider, generalist homelessness services, a health service, an Aboriginal service and a youth service.
- It enables AO patrols to be more directed, since it directs these patrols to particularly vulnerable people sleeping rough who have been flagged as requiring assistance.
- Through coordinating the AO patrols conducted by the various HART members, it enables these patrols to cover a wider geographic area and to assist more people sleeping rough.
- Through the involvement of St Vincent's Hospital Homeless Health Service (SVHH), it provides an effective avenue for addressing client health concerns.

Areas of potential improvement for the HART model are:

- Meetings could potentially be less frequent now that services have developed strong enough relationships to communicate outside of HART meetings. Patrols could also potentially be less frequent given that multiple AO patrols seem to be conducted daily.
- There is scope for even greater coordination of AO patrols by HART members to avoid duplication.
- The NSW Police could be invited to join the HART and the Woolloomooloo Case Co-ordination Group could be disbanded, since there may be unnecessary duplication between the HART and the Woolloomooloo group.
- There could be greater relationship-building between SHS providers, HART and the NSW Police to notify the police of people sleeping rough and their existing connections with support services. Without this, people sleeping rough could be subject to police attention, arbitrary policing and/or criminal penalties due to their visibility and difficulties with self-management.

- There could be more consistent efforts to ‘flag’ vulnerable people sleeping rough for assistance during patrols.
- A lead agency (both service and key contact) could be recorded on the Housing Pathways database to enable community housing providers to identify the best point of contact for a client.
- There could be a referral mechanism established to enable agencies outside the HART to refer eligible clients to the HART for assistance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the key findings of our consultation, this report has the following recommendations.

### **1. Social housing and post-crisis support**

More social housing and post-crisis support services, including basic living skills supports, are urgently required to address the shortage in these areas. Without these, people placed in TA may return to rough sleeping and it will not be possible to sustainably reduce either rough sleeping or homelessness more generally.

### **2. Development of, and broader focus for, an inner-city Sydney homelessness strategy**

The DCJ inner-city homelessness strategy should be developed and broaden its focus to ensure it:

- responds to all people experiencing homelessness, rather than focusing predominantly on the cohort of people who are sleeping rough
- is appropriately tailored and resourced to meet the needs of specific populations, including Aboriginal people and youth experiencing homelessness
- prioritises a flexible and person-centred approach that tailors appropriate supports to meet an individual’s support needs and that ensures all individuals sleeping rough, even those with the most complex and high needs, receive adequate supports.

### **3. Priority support for particularly vulnerable and at-risk people experiencing homelessness**

Providing avenues for particularly vulnerable and at-risk people experiencing homelessness to receive priority housing support before those who are not as severely at risk is important. However, any exceptions to the Housing Pathways system for allocating TA and social housing should have a robust evidence base and be developed in consultation with the homelessness sector and community housing providers.

### **4. Review of use of TA**

DCJ should review its use of TA as the main form of accommodation used to move people sleeping rough out of primary homelessness, given both the level of funding required to secure this TA and its limitations as a form of accommodation for people with complex needs. This review should examine the strategic value and long-term viability of the current use of TA.

### **5. Consultation, communication and transparency**

The DCJ inner-city Sydney homelessness strategy should be developed through collaboration and consultation with the homelessness sector and community housing providers. There should be a communications plan to ensure the strategy is communicated to the homelessness sector, in a coordinated way, and that all key elements of the strategy are transparent to the sector.

# 1. Background

To understand the views of the services we consulted, regarding the HOST and HART models, some background information is necessary. For this reason, the initial section of this paper outlines how the HOST and HART operate, the reasons for this consultation and how we conducted the consultation process.

## 1.1. The HOST

The HOST is a team of DCJ workers responsible for AO to people sleeping rough in the inner-city Sydney area. The HOST conducts AO patrols on its own, in multi-agency groups with other HART agencies and on trains with the NSW Police. The HOST also runs monthly ‘intensive outreaches’ – also known as ‘hubs’ – which involve other inner-city homelessness services. These involve establishing a presence in a particular location and offering information and assistance to people sleeping rough from that location.

The HOST was a NSW Government response to growing communities of people sleeping rough that formed in Martin Place in 2017. DCJ established the HOST with the aim of housing the people living in these encampments as rapidly as possible. The HOST started operating in June 2017.

## 1.2. The HART

The HART is a coalition of inner-city Sydney services that support people sleeping rough to access and sustain housing. Since all these services work with the same client cohort, the HART was formed to enable them to work together in a more coordinated way. The City of Sydney Council and DCJ are the backbone organisations for the HART, which is based on a ‘collective impact’ model that has a growing, international evidence base. The HART was established in 2015, as a response to growing communities of people sleeping rough in Wentworth Park and then Belmore Park, and predates the HOST.

Membership of the HART includes SHS providers, as well as DCJ and council representatives. The current members are:

• City of Sydney Council	• Missionbeat Outreach
• The HOST	• Neami National (Way2Home and STEP)
• Aboriginal Corporation for Homeless and Rehabilitation	• St Vincent’s Hospital Homeless Health Service (SVHH)
• Innari Inc.	• The Station
• Launchpad Youth Community	• Wayside Chapel

The HART operates through fortnightly case coordination meetings and weekly AO patrols. These patrols involve multiple HART agencies providing support to address homelessness, with SVHH participating to provide health assessments and support.

There is some overlap between the HART and other case coordination groups that operate in the inner city. These groups are the Collaborative Support Initiative (CSI), which deals with the case management of clients with very complex needs, and the Woolloomooloo Case Coordination Group. However, membership of the CSI and Woolloomooloo groups is not the same as the HART. The CSI includes SHS providers that are not involved in AO but which provide crisis accommodation and Woolloomooloo includes the NSW Police. In addition, not all HART members attend the CSI or Woolloomooloo groups.

### 1.3. Reasons for this consultation

Although DCJ introduced the HOST model in 2017, as at May 2019, when we started this consultation, it had not conducted a review or an evaluation of this model. Homelessness NSW, therefore, determined it would be useful to consult with SHSs and other organisations, in the geographic area covered by the HOST, to obtain feedback on the effectiveness and impacts of the model. Since the HOST model operates in close collaboration with the HART, we decided to also obtain feedback concerning the HART model.

Homelessness NSW considered this consultation was required to respond to DCJ's AO initiatives in a way that accurately captures the views expressed by the homelessness sector. In particular, DCJ recently announced funding of \$3.8 million over 3 years (2019-2022) to expand AO in the Newcastle and Tweed areas. DCJ has incorporated elements of the HOST and HART models into the AO response in these areas.

In June 2019, after this consultation was underway, DCJ commissioned ARTD Consultants to review the current AO response to people sleeping rough in inner-city Sydney. The DCJ review was intended outline existing AO services and initiatives – including the HOST and HART – and to identify aspects of these that are working well and that could be incorporated into the Newcastle and Tweed assertive outreach expansions. However, Homelessness NSW considers that, since the primary purpose of this DCJ review was to inform the expansion of AO in other geographic areas, it does not provide a comprehensive review or evaluation of the HOST and HART models as they currently operate.

### 1.4. The consultation process

The consultation process involved interviewing AO managers and frontline staff in organisations providing homelessness services in the inner-city Sydney district. We interviewed frontline staff separately from managers to obtain the perspectives of both groups.

Most of the organisations that participated in the consultation process are SHS providers but not all. Two NSW Health-funded services (these operate from a different funding pool to SHS providers, who receive DCJ funding), a community housing provider and the City of Sydney Council were also consulted.

We consulted with HART members because, since these services collaborate the most closely with the HOST through HART meetings and multi-agency AO patrols, they have a thorough understanding of how the HOST model operates. They are also the services capable of giving an 'insider' perspective on the HART's operations. The following HART members participated in our consultation:

- |                             |                        |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| • City of Sydney Council    | • Missionbeat Outreach |
| • Launchpad Youth Community | • SVHHS                |
| • NEAMI Way2Home            | • The Station          |
| • NEAMI STEP                | • Wayside Chapel       |

We also considered it important to consult with organisations providing homelessness services in inner-city Sydney, which do not work closely with the HOST/HART. These organisations were able to provide valuable feedback regarding the impact the HOST/HART models have had on their services and on the



broader homelessness sector beyond those services focused principally on AO responses. The following organisations, outside the HART, participated in our consultation:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bridge Housing</li><li>• Kirketon Road Centre</li><li>• Foster House</li><li>• Matthew Talbot Hostel</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public Interest Advocacy Centre</li><li>• Women’s and Girl’s Emergency Centre (WAGEC)</li><li>• Youth Off the Streets</li></ul> |
|--|---|

We consulted with peer workers, from two, separate organisations, to enable the perspectives of people with lived experience of homelessness to be included in this paper.

We also consulted with a range of Aboriginal homelessness specialists to obtain their views on the effectiveness of the HOST/HART for Aboriginal service users.

We advised consultation participants that their input would be de-identified in the consultation paper. Therefore, the issues raised in this paper have not been attributed to specific services or their staff members.

### 1.5. Relationship between SHS providers and the HOST/HART

Through consulting with SHS providers in the inner city, we determined that they have varying degrees of contact with the operations of the HOST/HART. SHS relationships with the HOST/HART fall into the following categories:

- **Contact through HART membership** – HART members are the SHSs which have the most contact with the HOST. As mentioned above, this occurs through fortnightly HART case co-ordination meetings and HART AO multi-agency patrols in which the HOST participates.
- **Contact through participating in some ‘hub’ outreaches** – DCJ has invited some SHSs to participate in one or more hubs, even though they are not HART members. The SHSs concerned believed they were invited to contribute their engagement skills and expertise in dealing with certain client groups.
- **Contact through CSI case coordination group** – HOST is a member of the CSI group. Some SHSs not involved in AO (and, therefore, not HART members or hub participants) have developed a relationship with the HOST through this group.
- **Minimal contact with the HOST/HART** – Those SHSs not in the above three categories did not have contact with the HOST. They had less understanding of how the HOST/HART operate.

There has been no targeted communication to the homelessness sector about how the HOST/HART operate (see section 2.3.7 ‘Communication with the broader homelessness sector’ below). In the absence of this, knowledge of the HOST and HART was correlated with the level of engagement the SHS had with them through the above avenues. Those services that have minimal contact with the HOST/HART considered that they did not have sufficient knowledge of these models to give detailed comment on their operations. However, these services did provide some valuable input concerning how these models interact with, and impact on, the broader homelessness sector service system that deals with clients other than those who are sleeping rough.

## 2. The HOST

This section of the report presents stakeholder views on the HOST model. Stakeholders were asked for their views on both the benefits and the limitations of the model.

### 2.1 Benefits

Services identified that the HOST, as it currently functions, has a range of important benefits. These benefits are outlined below.

#### 2.1.1 People sleeping rough are being housed much more quickly

Stakeholders stated that the HOST is moving people who are rough sleeping into accommodation much more quickly than was the case before the HOST was established. Once they become HOST clients, people sleeping rough can access temporary accommodation (TA) almost immediately. While TA is not a permanent housing solution, many HOST clients are also fast-tracked from TA into more long-term social housing.

Services noted that the addition of HOST AO patrols to the patrols conducted by other services means patrols are occurring over a wider geographical area and at a range of different times during the day. This has resulted in more people sleeping rough receiving support to stop living on the streets.

Youth services commented that the HOST moving youth off the streets more quickly has been important in deterring more young people from sleeping rough. Before the HOST, a large influx of youth used to start sleeping rough after every school holiday, especially in Belmore Park. They were able to join a community of youth already rough sleeping and it appealed to them to be with their peers. However, once the HOST began operating, there was no build-up of a community of young people on the streets that could attract other youth to join in.

#### 2.1.2 Outreach approach

Stakeholders regarded the HOST's approach of going out on the streets and actively finding people to support, rather than expecting people sleeping rough to go to a DCJ office for assistance, as very important for the client cohort concerned. Services noted the following positive aspects of this AO approach:

- It is an acknowledgement of the intense difficulties of interacting with bureaucratic processes – for instance, DCJ and Centrelink appointments and applications – for many people sleeping rough.
- It breaks down resistance to interacting with DCJ workers. Some people sleeping rough have had past, negative experiences of interacting with DCJ, or other government departments – they may, for example, have lost their social housing or been involved in child protection matters. Services find it very difficult to persuade this cohort of people to enter a DCJ Housing office. However, HOST AO patrols ensure these clients are still able to access DCJ housing assistance without attending an office. When other services introduce the HOST to clients (for instance, during HART AO patrols), this also breaks down resistance to dealing with DCJ.
- Some clients with resistance to interacting with DCJ Housing could exhibit aggression or other challenging behaviours when expected to attend a DCJ office. However, since the HOST goes to clients in their own 'comfort zone' and speaks to them in their own terms, clients are less likely to

respond with these types of behaviours. Even if a client does engage in challenging behaviours, HOST AO workers, through their training and experience in AO work, have better skills to deal with this than most office workers.

- It is far more realistic because it does not expect clients to be contactable at a specific address or to have phones and receive phone messages. Services commented that, previously, clients would make TA or housing applications but be taken off the list when they did not have an address or phone number where they could be contacted. Now drop-in services are used as a point-of-contact for clients with no phone or services simply advise the HOST of the client's location and HOST staff meet them there.
- Strong rapport with clients is established through offering tangible assistance (TA) immediately.

### **2.1.3 Accessibility of TA and other Housing NSW Services**

Stakeholders noted that the HOST has dismantled many of the bureaucratic barriers that made it challenging for people sleeping rough to access TA and other Housing NSW Services. For example:

- The HOST offers TA to people sleeping rough straight away during its AO patrols, rather than expecting these people to attend a DCJ office to apply for TA. This considerably reduces the wait time for TA. It also waives the paperwork requirements normally associated with TA applications.
- HART members can access TA for their clients more quickly, even if the HOST is not present on an AO patrol to offer it immediately. It now usually takes them only a day to access TA for a client. HART members do not have to spend lengthy periods on the phone to DCJ Housing to arrange this, as previously.
- The HOST will re-engage with clients with a poor DCJ Housing record, rather than disqualifying them from assistance.
- People sleeping rough are not expected to go through a priority housing interview for social housing, which was previously a major bureaucratic hurdle.
- HOST clients do not have to pay rent for the first two weeks of a tenancy, while they are getting settled. However, stakeholders raised that this has not been uniformly applied to all HOST clients. Some have been required to meet the additional requirement of demonstrating their ability to sustain a tenancy for six months, in either an SHS or in private rental, to be offered permanent housing through DCJ. For those clients of the HOST who are highly vulnerable and have complex needs, this is a further barrier to social housing.

### **2.1.4 Extended time in TA**

Stakeholders commented that flexible use of TA is one of the HOST model's key advantages. They stated that this is of "immeasurable benefit" and makes a "massive impact" for some people.

DCJ TA guidelines specify that TA is, ordinarily, only provided for three days. However, the HOST have flexibility to extend this time limit for as long as is required to address a client's needs. Stakeholders noted that these time limit extensions to TA are invaluable because they enable:

- clients to complete applications for social housing
- clients to connect to healthcare providers
- SHSs to assess the client's housing needs and living skills

- clients to feel a bit more emotionally stable due to having relief from sleeping rough – peer workers considered that a ‘huge weight’ has been lifted off clients because they are not continually worried that ‘I don’t know where I’ll be in three days’
- clients with complex needs to have a break from continually dealing with bureaucracy, which, since it is not particularly trauma-informed or client-centred, is a stressor that may have a detrimental impact on their mental health.

### **2.1.5 Better avenues to advocate for those clients who are the most vulnerable**

Some stakeholders commented that, before the HOST was introduced, DCJ Housing gave no priority to people sleeping rough over others who were experiencing homelessness but had some form of accommodation. They considered this problematic because, since a subset of people sleeping rough have complex health issues, sleeping rough poses serious risks to their health and even their life. The stakeholders who raised this issue noted that the HOST model provides clearer and easier ways of advocating for vulnerable clients, with complex health needs, to ensure they receive accommodation as soon as possible and before people who are not as severely at risk. The HOST will generally be responsive to requests to escalate the priority of these particularly vulnerable clients and services are feeling more heard when they advocate for these clients.

Aboriginal workers noted the HOST has been important in providing assistance to vulnerable Aboriginal clients with complex needs who would have fallen through service gaps if they had to go through the usual DCJ Housing system. This was particularly the case in relation to the influx of Aboriginal people sleeping in Belmore Park who had little support until the HOST was introduced.

Stakeholders involved in the CSI case collaboration group highlighted that the HOST’s membership of this group has led to better housing outcomes for the extremely vulnerable clients the CSI was formed to assist (the CSI deals with those clients with the most complex needs, including people who are sleeping rough with life-threatening health conditions but who have been banned from social housing). Stakeholders stated that the CSI had been operating for a long time without results but, once the HOST joined, CSI clients began to be housed. They noted that the HOST is willing to apply guidelines flexibly for CSI clients and this has been important in removing barriers to assistance for these clients.

### **2.1.6 NEAMI’s STEP program**

Services regarded DCJ’s establishment of NEAMI’s STEP program, which offers post-crisis support to HOST clients, as very important. There are two branches of the STEP program – STEP A and STEP B. STEP A provides 18 months of post-crisis support to clients living in private rental accommodation managed by a community housing provider. STEP B provides three to six months of post-crisis support to clients living in public housing. The HOST refers clients directly into STEP B, which stakeholders considered positive in terms of service co-ordination. The HART refers clients into STEP A via NEAMI, which is a HART member.

Stakeholders highlighted that post-crisis supports are severely lacking across the homelessness sector and, given this, the establishment of the STEP program was encouraging.

### **2.1.7 Better, and more responsive, communication with DCJ**

Stakeholders noted that communication between the HOST and the other HART agencies is quick and responsive. HART members stated that they particularly appreciate the following aspects of their communication with the HOST:

- Before the HOST was established, they had to spend long periods on the phone trying to contact an appropriate person in DCJ Housing. Now they can avoid this and get information, or responses to queries, very quickly by communicating directly with the HOST staff.
- Services know which HOST staff to contact and appreciate that they are not passed around between several staff members each time they have a query.
- Where there are barriers to a client's housing application, such as rental debt or not having a doctor's support letter, the HOST will provide information about these barriers that enables them to be addressed.
- There is an email address that allows them to contact the HOST, along with every, other HART member. This facilitates quick communication and information sharing.
- There has been a focus on building positive relationships, and partnerships, with SHS providers. Some services commented that, before the HOST, they experienced DCJ Housing as being more at odds with them, whereas the HOST makes an effort to be onside and work towards positive outcomes jointly with SHS providers.

### **2.1.8 DCJ has developed a first-hand understanding of difficulties in the service sector**

Some stakeholders stated that the HOST's direct involvement in AO has given DCJ a better understanding of homelessness sector issues and where the service gaps are. These stakeholders commented that DCJ previously seemed to regard some of these gaps as the result of poor service delivery. However, with the advent of the HOST, DCJ is better able to recognise systemic issues, such as a lack of the post-crisis support services required to help people sustain their tenancies.

### **2.1.9 Positive cultural change within DCJ**

Stakeholders noted that the HOST is a respected team within DCJ with sound skills. They praised HOST staff as 'dedicated', 'hard-working', 'committed', 'positive', 'responsive' and 'efficient'. Services felt that the HOST's first-hand understanding of working with people experiencing homelessness is being conveyed to other team's within DCJ, resulting in other teams also increasing their understanding.

Many stakeholders commented that, before the HOST, DCJ Housing sometimes dealt with people sleeping rough in a way that was not particularly appropriate. Descriptions of this treatment included: 'unsupportive', 'uncaring', 'unfriendly', 'insensitive', 'too time-pressed' 'dismissive' 'punitive' and 'culturally inappropriate'. Stakeholders considered this changed, with the establishment of the HOST, because the HOST has developed a more trauma-informed and person-centred way of working. Stakeholders who noticed this positive cultural shift hoped that it would be integrated through DCJ Housing as a whole.

## **2.2 Early issues**

Stakeholders drew a distinction between how the HOST operated in its first year and its subsequent operations. They noted that the benefits outlined above were not necessarily apparent in the model's

first year of operating, when it had a range of problems. However, they considered that DCJ has mostly been able to address and overcome these early issues to enable the HOST to function in its present, and more effective, form.

The following table lists the early limitations of the HOST, identified by stakeholders, and how these have been addressed.

ISSUE	ACTION TAKEN
<p><b>HOST frontline workers did not have AO skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some HOST staff had been moved into frontline roles from office jobs and had no frontline experience.</li> <li>• HOST staff had not received training in areas crucial to AO work such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ trauma-informed practice</li> <li>○ mental health</li> <li>○ drug and alcohol</li> <li>○ Aboriginal cultural awareness and safety</li> <li>○ safety – HOST staff were going into dangerous situations because they had no training on how to keep themselves safe while doing AO.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Interaction with clients was not trauma-informed. For example, HOST staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ tended to regard people sleeping rough as frightening and dangerous and would not interact with them without the police present</li> <li>○ did not have engagement skills appropriate to people sleeping rough and communicated with them in an overly-bureaucratic way</li> <li>○ lacked an understanding of the predicament of people sleeping rough and would ask them questions about why they did not have ID or could not afford a private rental property.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training is now provided to ensure HOST frontline staff have AO skills. These staff have now developed trauma-informed and client-centred ways of working.</li> <li>• HOST frontline staff learned AO skills on the job through exposure to the work of the other HART agencies, which had staff who were skilled and experienced at AO.</li> </ul>
<p><b>People were housed in TA without appropriate checks and assessments</b></p> <p>Examples given include neglecting to conduct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child sex offender register check</li> <li>• citizenship check (TA was still being given to non-residents during 2018)</li> <li>• medical / mental health assessments</li> <li>• due diligence to ensure clients met criteria qualifying them for social housing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate checks are now conducted as part of standard HOST procedures.</li> </ul>

**People were housed in TA without any post-crisis support**

- Many of the tenancies established in the first year of the HOST failed due to a lack of post-crisis support.
- Tenancies tended to fail after about seven days without these supports.

- The NEAMI STEP B program, which provides post-crisis support and takes referrals directly from the HOST, was established.

Services considered that these early issues with the HOST arose because DCJ was directed to implement high-level, political decisions made about addressing rough sleeping with little lead-time. They noted that more consultation and preparation time would have been required to ensure the HOST model was effective from the outset.

### 2.3 Limitations – systemic issues

When asked about what they regarded as the limitations of the HOST model, stakeholders identified a range of limitations related to how the HOST model fits within the broader homelessness service system. These systems issues are outlined below.

#### 2.3.1 No sustainable decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness

Stakeholders noted that perhaps the biggest limitation of the HOST model is that, while it has made the process of moving people sleeping rough out of primary homelessness and into TA much quicker and easier, it has not sustainably reduced the number of people who are rough sleeping. Stakeholders identified that there has been no sustainable decrease in rough sleeping because the HOST model does not address the most pressing systemic problems in the homelessness sector. These systemic issues are insufficient social and affordable housing, along with insufficient post-crisis support. Stakeholders noted that moving clients off the streets and into TA will not lead to good long-term outcomes if the lack of social housing means clients cannot be transferred into permanent housing or if the lack of post-crisis supports means they do not have the support necessary to sustain a tenancy.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

##### **Social housing and post-crisis support**

More social housing and post-crisis support services, including basic living skills supports, are urgently required to address the shortage in these areas. Without these, people placed in TA may return to rough sleeping and it will not be possible to sustainably reduce either rough sleeping or homelessness more generally.

#### 2.3.2 Equity

Many stakeholders commented that the HOST model raises equity concerns because it prioritises and supports people sleeping rough over other cohorts of people experiencing homelessness. More specifically, stakeholders noted the following:

- HOST clients are prioritised over other clients experiencing homelessness in the following ways:
  - They have access to extended TA that is not provided other cohorts.

- A proportion of social housing is ring fenced for them, which means that they are fast tracked into social housing over other clients who have been approved as a priority for social housing but are not sleeping rough.
- DCJ may override a client's poor tenancy history to offer them social housing if they are a HOST client, when this is not an option for other priority social housing applicants.
- Prioritising HOST clients assumes that people sleeping rough are more vulnerable or at-risk than the rest of the population experiencing homelessness. Without wanting to minimise the very real risks of rough sleeping, this assumption of greater vulnerability has not been tested through consulting with the sector and may not be entirely valid. While a proportion of people sleeping rough with complex health needs are extremely vulnerable, it does not follow that all people sleeping rough are more vulnerable than people experiencing homelessness in other circumstances. Any exceptions to the Housing Pathways system for allocating social housing should have robust support because, otherwise, they could be seen to undermine the fairness of this entire system.
- Prioritising people sleeping rough over others experiencing homelessness results in gender inequity in housing allocations. People sleeping rough are a small proportion of the homeless population and women and children escaping domestic and family violence do not generally sleep rough. Domestic and family violence is one of the main causes of homelessness and these women and children may be at risk of assault and even death from the domestic violence perpetrator, making them extremely vulnerable.
- Prioritising people sleeping rough over others experiencing homelessness does not necessarily recognise that there are people sleeping in crisis accommodation with extremely complex needs, whose needs are just as complex as some of the people sleeping on the streets and who may also be at risk. It also does not address the problem of 'hidden homelessness' (for example, people couch surfing or living with friends because they have no other alternative). People in these other cohorts may have a priority housing application active for years while social housing stock is diverted to people who became clients while sleeping rough.
- Many services have had contact with clients experiencing homelessness who have sought assistance from HOST patrols even though they were not sleeping rough. These clients present themselves to HOST as rough sleeping to secure housing because they know that, otherwise, they could remain in the queue for housing for months or years.
- The benefits that people sleeping rough receive, through the HOST model operating in inner-city Sydney, are not offered to in other regions of Sydney or throughout NSW. This raises an equity issue regarding the services offered in different geographic areas. It also creates a systemic problem for inner-city services as it encourages the drift of people sleeping rough from other areas into the inner city.
- Since the homelessness sector has insufficient resources to go around, some services are dissatisfied that people sleeping rough are receiving the largest share of the attention and resourcing available. This situation results in services competing to prove they deal with the most vulnerable cohort of clients and the cohort most deserving of receiving resources and support.
- It is arguable that the HOST duplicates other inner-city AO services that were already funded by DCJ. This is not an equitable use of resources when feedback from people experiencing homelessness suggests that DCJ has huge backlogs in processing housing applications for those clients not captured by the HOST.



Some services suggested that, if the HOST model is used, this model should also be extended to cohorts of clients experiencing secondary homelessness, such as those in crisis accommodation or who have moved into boarding houses. They noted that there are, currently, people who have lived in unsuitable, boarding house accommodation for 10 to 20 years. Other services stated that the HOST model should be extended to people leaving hospital or custody because of the ongoing issue of these people being discharged into homelessness.

The services that advocated for an expansion to the scope of the HOST model regarded this as the only way to address the inequities between HOST clients and others experiencing homelessness. Resourcing would very likely be an obstacle to this type of expansion.

Other stakeholders suggested that DCJ could put more funding into non-government-organisation (NGO) service providers supporting cohorts of people experiencing homelessness who are not sleeping rough. They maintained that this would reduce the duplication of effort that occurs because both the HOST and NGO service providers are focused on people sleeping rough. It would also reduce inequities in service provision by supporting a broader range of target groups.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

### **Development of, and broader focus for, an inner-city Sydney homelessness strategy**

The DCJ inner-city homelessness strategy should be developed and broaden its focus to ensure it:

- responds to all people experiencing homelessness, rather than focusing predominantly on the cohort of people who are sleeping rough
- is appropriately tailored and resourced to meet the needs of specific populations, such as Aboriginal people and youth experiencing homelessness
- prioritises a flexible and person-centred approach that tailors appropriate supports to meet an individual's support needs and that ensures all individuals sleeping rough, even those with the most complex and high needs, receive adequate supports.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

### **Priority support for particularly vulnerable and at-risk people experiencing homelessness**

Providing avenues for particularly vulnerable and at-risk people experiencing homelessness to receive priority housing support before those who are not as severely at risk is important. However, any exceptions to the Housing Pathways system for allocating TA and social housing should have a robust evidence base and be developed in consultation with the homelessness sector and community housing providers.

### **2.3.3 Differential treatment of people sleeping rough**

Services that conduct AO patrols pointed out that the HOST model provides a greater level of support to HOST clients than it does to HART clients or other people who are sleeping rough. They considered that perhaps this was another systemic inequity created by the HOST model that does not have a clear policy rationale. The services raising this issue commented:

- Out of the large numbers of people rough sleeping, it is unclear why the HOST chooses some people as clients and not others.
- Those clients that miss out on getting TA through the HOST now have greater difficulty accessing TA. Services have stopped calling Link2Home to obtain access to TA for non-HOST clients because it has become very difficult to obtain. Further, while paperwork requirements are waived for HOST clients, these are not waived for non-HOST clients.
- The HOST may be choosing the most 'visible' people sleeping rough as its clients, since they are aware of people who have been sleeping rough for 10 years who have not received assistance through the HOST. Clients may have lived on the streets for years without necessarily looking like a 'typical' rough sleeper. The fact that some clients have a more visible presence does not necessarily mean that they should be the ones who receive priority assistance.
- There is a group of clients with very complex needs and co-morbidities, often including an acquired brain injury, who are very challenging to work with and are a risk to staff. These clients often get timed out of or barred from services. It does not appear that the HOST is taking these clients, either. A peer worker mentioned an example where the HOST was no longer willing to have contact with a particular client, who exhibited threatening and aggressive behaviours, even though there were certain strategies that had been shown to be effective in managing the client's behaviours. These clients, with very challenging behaviours, seem to have been put into the 'too hard' basket.
- The HOST very strictly applies the guidelines that people need to be currently sleeping rough, or need to be in TA rather than crisis accommodation, to become HOST clients. This is the case even where the person may have been sleeping rough for some time. A stakeholder gave an example of a client who had been on and off the streets for years, and had chronic alcohol misuse issues. This client was in a hospital facility, for severe medical issues, at the time he was referred to the HOST. However, the HOST insisted that he be placed in TA – where he received less supports – before he could become a HOST client. Another example given was that it proved impossible to refer a client, who was in a detoxification facility, to the HOST.
- The HOST can source TA for a client virtually immediately while other HART services require a day to arrange it. Stakeholders considered that there is no policy rationale for these two groups of clients receiving a different standard of service. Rather, this is likely to be related to the level of resourcing the HOST receives, which will not extend to supporting all HART clients to the same degree as HOST clients.

#### **2.3.4 Post-crisis support**

Many stakeholders commented that a major systemic issue is the insufficient post-crisis support available across the homelessness sector as a whole. This detrimentally affects not only HOST clients but all homelessness sector clients.

In relation to post-crisis supports for HOST clients, services noted:

- One of the main sources of post-crisis support for these clients is NEAMI's STEP B program, which takes referrals directly from the HOST. However, STEP B is generally completely at capacity (some services stated that they had never been successful at obtaining any support for clients through STEP B). Similarly, SHSs that offer post-crisis support all have long waiting lists or are at capacity. This means that some clients are being put into TA with no follow-up.

- Some HOST clients' tenancies are failing due to a lack of post-crisis supports. There is little point in putting a HOST client into TA very quickly if the client is not given the supports necessary to maintain this accommodation. Some SHSs identified that there were clients who were put into housing without post-crisis supports who returned to the SHS seeking assistance a few months later. These clients may have returned to homelessness, or have hoarding, squalor or arrears issues, or issues with independent living skills or isolation from community. Workers noted that people experiencing long-term, chronic homelessness do not have the living skills to sustain housing without wrap-around supports. The Common Ground model, which provides these supports, is unavailable to HOST clients. One stakeholder commented that the HOST response is very quick in the initial phase until the person is housed but, afterwards, support wanes.
- Although STEP B provides HOST clients with three to six months of support, many clients require a lengthier period. STEP B also provides only about an hour a week of support. There is a need for post-crisis support that is more in-depth and that is offered over a longer time period. It takes time to stabilise clients and to help them develop the living skills they need to maintain their housing. Stakeholders commented that the HOST model does not ensure warm referrals, or other adequate referrals, from post-crisis support to long-term supports, meaning that HOST clients' post-crisis support drops off at the three-month mark.
- In contrast to STEP B, the STEP A program provides 18 months of post-crisis support, which is a far longer period of support. However, the client cohort for STEP A is very similar to STEP B – it includes people who have been sleeping rough and people with complex needs who have been living in crisis accommodation. The difference between the two programs is the type of property allocated to the client, as STEP A applies to private rentals managed by a community housing provider, while STEP B applies to public housing. This raises an equity issue since the same cohort of clients should not be receiving such differential treatment.
- Aboriginal clients tend to want to stay with the AO worker, who engaged with them when they were sleeping rough, and have trouble engaging with a new Aboriginal worker at STEP B for post-crisis support. They also often go back to their original Aboriginal AO worker for support once the STEP B post-crisis support period ends. As there is only one, full-time Aboriginal AO worker involved in the HART, this puts a great deal of pressure on that worker. Since Aboriginal clients do not like being passed between services, a different model where they are able to work with a single case worker for as long as possible may be more appropriate for them. Three months post-crisis support through STEP B is also not usually long enough for this group, as connecting them to culturally safe and appropriate supports, when there are so few of these and when the person is more used to connecting with their rough sleeping community, generally takes a longer time.
- Youth are often deemed ineligible for post-crisis support on the basis that they have not been sleeping rough long-term. Given their age, it is impossible for them to have a long-term history of sleeping rough. Further, what we know about early intervention is that youth who get assistance as early as possible are less likely to become homeless for the long-term. The lack of post-housing support available to youth is particularly problematic for this reason. Youth services also raised that the STEP B team does not have a youth-specific worker.
- The HOST may need to stop looking to SHS providers as the main source of post-crisis support because they are already stretched to their limits at their current resourcing levels. Either funding to these SHS providers needs to be increased, or other types of services should also be involved in

providing post-crisis support. Stakeholders suggested that, in relation to youth, youth services not funded through the SHS program could be involved in providing post-crisis support.

In relation to post-crisis supports for homelessness sector clients more generally, stakeholders noted:

- Some highly vulnerable clients require permanent supported accommodation along the lines of the Common Ground model. However, Common Ground in Sydney is at capacity.
- While NSW Health's Housing and Support Initiative (HASI) program can provide effective post-crisis supports to people with severe mental illness, its availability is limited. Clients generally also must have a community case manager to access HASI and some cohorts of clients (for example, people sleeping rough) are very unlikely to have one.
- The roll-out of the NDIS has impacted on the post-crisis support available. Commonwealth-funded disability programs, such as Partners in Recovery (PIR) and the Personal Helpers and Mentors Service (PHaMS), are ending in NSW. Not all clients who would have been eligible for PIR or PHaMS supports will be eligible for the NDIS, which means that a lack of services available to people with mental health issues is becoming increasingly apparent. A significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness have problems with drug and alcohol misuse which result in the NDIA deeming them ineligible to receive an NDIS package.
- Due to insufficient funded post-crisis supports, some SHSs are doing this support work unfunded to help clients sustain their tenancies. Services funded to provide post-housing support for up to three months noted they would often end up providing this support for longer. One service noted that it provided help with food, cleaning and paying bills up to twice a month but had very limited referral options for those clients who require more intensive supports.
- There should be more funding for culturally safe and appropriate post-crisis supports for Aboriginal people. A high proportion of people experiencing homelessness are Aboriginal people but there is a lack of post-crisis supports specifically tailored to the needs of this cohort.

### **2.3.5 Placement of clients in social housing**

Several stakeholders raised that the influx of HOST clients into certain social housing communities may be creating challenges for the people already living there. People sleeping rough often have very complex needs. Stakeholders considered that respecting the needs of an existing social housing community entails not placing large numbers of people with very complex needs into that community, as this simply will not work. Services noted they have come across women with young children leaving their social housing and resorting to couch surfing, instead, because their social housing has become unsafe. They have also encountered social housing tenants applying for re-allocation, due to neighbours with challenging behaviours, even though they were previously satisfied with their properties and had lived there for over a decade. Stakeholders considered that most of these issues have arisen in the Redfern and Waterloo social housing communities because these communities received many people who had previously been sleeping rough in Martin Place and Belmore Park.

### **2.3.6 Funding for extended TA for HOST clients**

Many stakeholders questioned whether the large amount of funding the HOST model allocates to extended TA is an effective use of finite homelessness sector resources, especially since TA provides a stopgap, rather than long-term accommodation. They suggested, to address the key systemic issues in the homelessness sector, these resources would be better directed to:

- prevention and early intervention
- social housing or some other form of permanent accommodation (for example, a private rental subsidy product for the HOST cohort of clients)
- post-crisis support.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

##### **Review of use of TA**

DCJ should review its use of TA as the main form of accommodation used to move people sleeping rough out of primary homelessness, given both the level of funding required to secure this TA and its limitations as a form of accommodation for people with complex needs. This review should examine the strategic value and long-term viability of the current use of TA.

#### **2.3.7 Communication with the broader homelessness sector**

Services that have had minimal contact with the HOST, since they are not HART agencies and are not in contact with the HOST through other meetings or initiatives, had received very limited communication from DCJ about the what the HOST does and how it fits within the homelessness sector as a whole.

These services highlighted:

- There is no website for the HOST. There are no contact details available for members of the HOST and services do not know whom to contact to reach HOST.
- It is difficult for them to assess the impacts and opportunities of the HOST given that they have been given so little information about its operations. As a result, services may be making assumptions about these impacts/opportunities that are incorrect.
- They do not know how to make referrals to the HOST because of the lack of publicly-available information concerning any referral pathway or key contacts. They are not sure where the monthly 'hubs' will be held, to enable them to refer clients there. Some services considered that perhaps this lack of information is strategic to avoid the HOST receiving a large number of referrals and these becoming overwhelming.
- Even if they could make a referral to the HOST, they do not know what guidelines a client would need to meet to be eligible.
- Several services had received information about the HOST through arranging for HOST representatives to attend one of their staff meetings. Other services were interested in this occurring but had not managed to arrange it. Where information was obtained at staff meetings, this was at the service's request and not part of any coordinated communications plan aimed at explaining the operations of the HOST to the sector.
- What they know about the HOST was randomly gleaned from collaborative practice meetings, through other services that have more contact with the HOST and/or through their clients.
- They do not necessarily understand the DCJ's rationale for going into direct service delivery to people sleeping rough. This seems at odds with the DCJ's approach to other service areas, where it has focused on strategic and governance functions but contracted out service delivery to NGOs.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5**

### **Consultation, communication and transparency**

The DCJ inner-city Sydney homelessness strategy should be developed through collaboration and consultation with the homelessness sector and community housing providers. There should be a communications plan to ensure the strategy is communicated to the homelessness sector, in a coordinated way, and that all key elements of the strategy are transparent to the sector.

## **2.4 Limitations – other issues**

Besides the systemic issues outlined above, which relate to how the HOST model fits within the homelessness service system as a whole, stakeholders identified some limitations more focused on how the model itself operates. These issues are set out below.

### **2.4.1 TA has deficiencies as accommodation for people who have been sleeping rough**

Placing people sleeping rough in TA gives them respite and services the opportunity to put supports in place for them. However, stakeholders highlighted that TA has deficiencies as accommodation for this cohort (unless it is supported TA, which is in very short supply). They noted:

- Since the HOST model allows extensions to the standard period of TA offered, and longer-term social housing may not yet be available to the client, they may end up in TA for a lengthy period. Most TA is unsuitable as anything other than very short-term accommodation.
- The TA provided is generally in low-budget hotels. The staff at these hotels have little understanding of how to interact with people who have been sleeping rough. Clients often get spoken down to or evicted. The staff at the hotels also encounter challenging behaviours from consumers and do not have the skills to handle these behaviours.
- The hotels used for TA often do not have any fridges or cooking facilities, which means clients cannot buy and store food. They still have to go out every day and use food vans.

### **2.4.2 Housing readiness**

To have the capacity to sustain a tenancy, people who have been sleeping rough with very complex needs require wrap-around supports. Stakeholders noted that, without wrap around supports, these people may not be 'housing ready' because they may have such huge gaps in their independent living skills that it is inappropriate to put them into unsupported accommodation straight away.

Unfortunately, wrap around supports will often be unavailable due to the current shortage of post-crisis support services. Stakeholders commented that there is a particular shortage of general living skills supports, such as supports to care for a property and understand tenancy obligations. Even if a client is accepted into the NEAMI STEP program, STEP staff often spend much of their time resolving a client's immediate health issues, which means living skills may remain unaddressed. However, a lack of living skills supports can place a person's tenancy at risk over the longer term. Stakeholders raised that another major gap is psycho-social supports, given the high rate of mental health issues in the client cohort.

Several stakeholders commented that the HOST does not always do sufficient checking of a client's housing readiness before placing them in TA and then potentially more long-term housing without

adequate supports. They noted that, even for those clients with post-crisis support through NEAMI's STEP B program, participating in STEP B is voluntary and clients with very complex needs may disengage.

Stakeholders pointed out that this client cohort requires triaging and appropriate placement. Where wrap around supports are unavailable, it may be better to put these clients into crisis accommodation than into unsupported TA. In crisis accommodation, the client will receive more intensive support over a longer time period and, upon leaving, may have developed more independent living skills that will assist them to sustain a tenancy.

### **2.4.3 Transparency**

Several stakeholders commented that the way the HOST functions lacks transparency in certain, key areas. The specific areas raised were:

- When the HOST does AO patrols on its own, it does not advise HART members of the location of the patrols in advance. However, services need to know where patrols are occurring because they allocate workers based on patrol locations.
- The guidelines that clients need to meet to qualify as HOST clients are in a DCJ internal policy. These have not been circulated to all HART members or, more widely, to the broader homelessness sector. Stakeholders considered that these criteria should be more transparent and DCJ should be accountable for explaining them to the sector.
- HOST clients are clearly being fast-tracked over some other clients when it comes to access to long-term social housing. However, this process of prioritising HOST clients is not transparent.
- DCJ has not supplied any data on how many clients placed in either TA or longer-term housing, through the HOST, have returned to rough sleeping. This is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the HOST model.

### **2.4.4 Sustainability**

Services raised concerns about whether the HOST model would be sustainable going forward. Some of the issues raised were:

- HOST frontline staff have a large workload that may be unsustainable over the longer term. HOST only has eight frontline staff doing 16 AO patrols a week, over a fairly large geographical area. This team also does overnight and train patrols, which no other services are doing. In comparison, the NEAMI Way2Home service has around double the staff but conducts less AO patrols (14 per week). Stakeholders commented that there has been frequent turnover in HOST staff and considered that the large workload may be contributing to this high attrition rate.
- The guidelines for people sleeping rough to access TA, through the HOST, are tightening over time. This seems to be because the amount of TA, as well as the budget for TA, is finite, which will make it unsustainable to continue to offer the same amount of TA into the future.
- The number of people who have been placed in TA is greater than the amount of longer-term, social housing available for them. The HOST model will be unsustainable if clients cannot be transferred out of TA into more permanent accommodation.
- For the HOST model to work, people placed in TA need to be linked into a service that can provide case management support. However, all these services are now reaching capacity and also have a backlog of non-HOST clients.

- The HOST model has received funding for four years but there is no guarantee of funding for it beyond that time.

#### **2.4.5 Cultural safety for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness**

Several SHS providers noted that, currently, the HOST does not include any Aboriginal workers, in either managerial or frontline positions. However, a high proportion of people sleeping rough are Aboriginal. Data from the *Inner City Sydney Registry Week: 2015 Report*<sup>2</sup> showed that 28 per cent of the people sleeping rough in inner-city Sydney, at the time this registry week survey was conducted (between 30 November and 2 December 2015), were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

HOST workers need to interact with Aboriginal people sleeping rough in a culturally aware and safe way. When the HOST conducts AO patrols with HART agencies, it relies on Aboriginal workers from those agencies. However, the HOST also conducts AO patrols independently and should include Aboriginal workers to ensure its services are culturally safe.

Relying on Aboriginal workers from other services is problematic in an environment where those services receive limited funding and are already stretched. As there is currently only one, full-time AO worker in an Aboriginal-identified position involved in the HART, this puts a great deal of pressure on that worker.

#### **2.4.6 Support for youth**

Services raised that most HOST clients, under 25, are being referred to the one youth service. However, this service is not resourced to deal with such a volume of clients and the skills needed to work with the under-25s are not especially different to those who are older than this cohort.

Stakeholders also pointed out that using a vulnerability index, such as the VI-SPDAT, to assess whether young people sleeping rough should be eligible for assistance, through the HOST, is problematic. Young people do not generally have the type of chronic health problems that would result in them being classified as particularly vulnerable, when a vulnerability index is applied, because they have not been sleeping rough for long enough to have developed these problems. However, this does not necessarily mean that young people should not be prioritised for assistance, given what we know about the importance of early intervention.

#### **2.4.7 Communication between the HOST and other HART members**

HART members raised that, although, overall, communication is quite good, there are areas where there is scope for improved communication between the HOST and other HART services. The areas mentioned were instances where:

- The HOST has offered clients housing without informing the service case managing the client about this. Clients in this situation may turn down the housing because they are anxious and do not have a case worker to support them. If the client accepts the housing, the service case managing the client does not know what has happened to the client and is concerned they have gone missing. Sometimes the HOST has offered clients social housing when, as far as the service case managing the client is aware, the client is still in TA.

---

<sup>2</sup> Homelessness NSW, *Inner City Sydney Registry Week: 2015 Report*, Sydney, February 2016.



- The HOST has placed clients in TA without supports and then contacted an SHS provider shortly afterwards expecting they will provide all the necessary supports. In this situation, the SHS provider may be at capacity and, therefore, may not have the resources to provide supports.
- Communications about whether or when clients have been approved as a priority for social housing have not always been timely or consistent. One service was not advised that a client had been approved as a priority for social housing until around a month after this had occurred. On another occasion, two services were given conflicting information about whether the same client had received a priority social housing approval. Services noted that a client only receives two offers of social housing before they are disqualified and, therefore, it is important that the relevant clients/services are aware of any such offer. In addition, very sensitive clients, or those with complex needs, may become desperate and give up when, in fact, their application for social housing has already been approved.
- Clients often have to fill out a form for NEAMI Way2Home and then another form with the same details for the HOST. This could be streamlined so that only one form is required, which would provide a more trauma-informed service.

Services noted that communication lapses between the HOST and HART members were most likely to occur when the HOST did assertive outreach patrols alone, rather than in conjunction with other HART agencies. When HART agencies were present on patrols, relevant communications were likely to occur at the time of the patrol.

#### **2.4.8 Requirement that clients interact with DCJ to obtain TA**

Stakeholders pointed out that the most vulnerable clients with complex needs, who often have difficulties in interpersonal behavior and communication, are still required to interact with HOST staff to obtain TA. These clients may have resistance to dealing with DCJ and may feel more comfortable interacting with staff from other services. The requirement to deal with the HOST may, therefore, impede their access to TA and it is not a person-centred approach to servicing these clients. The stakeholders raising this issue commented that the HOST is more flexible and appropriate than previous models but that this requirement to deal with DCJ workers means that it falls short when it comes to servicing the most vulnerable people sleeping rough with complex needs.

### **3. The HART**

Stakeholders noted that the HART was established because of a lack of service co-ordination among AO services. Multiple AO services were working with the same client cohort without an awareness of what the other services were doing. Although the HART predates the HOST, DCJ was involved in the HART before the HOST was established.

This section of the report presents stakeholder views on the effectiveness and impacts of the HART model. Stakeholders were asked for their views on both the benefits and the limitations of the model.

#### **3.1 Benefits**

HART members were the stakeholders with the greatest understanding of the HART's operations because of their participation in it. Their views on the HART were overwhelmingly positive. They highlighted that it has the following benefits.

### **3.1.1 Increased collaboration**

Stakeholders commented that the HART has greatly improved collaboration among the services involved. Personal interaction between the staff of the various services, at HART meetings and patrols, has greatly helped to build their contacts at, and relationships with, other services. This means they work together more effectively both on HART initiatives and outside of the HART.

Services commented that, before the HART, they felt isolated and as though they were trying to solve problems alone. The HART enables them to feel more supported because they are working collaboratively with other services to solve problems. HART agencies help each other out in a range of ways – for example, some have offered to cover another service’s staff during periods of staff leave.

### **3.1.2 Service co-ordination**

Stakeholders noted that the HART co-ordinates the activities of the various services involved, so they do not use up time and resources duplicating each other’s work. For example, the HART allocates individual consumers to a specific service for support to prevent multiple services offering similar supports to a single consumer. In making these allocations, the HART considers which service is the most suitable to address the consumer’s needs. This results in better supports for the consumer and gives HART members a sound understanding of the types of services offered by each member of the group.

Stakeholders noted that community housing providers also benefit from the service co-ordination provided by the HART. If they are unable to contact a client, they know which SHS and/or DCJ worker is a contact for the client, which means clients are less likely to miss out on the opportunity to be allocated a property due to being uncontactable.

### **3.1.3 Improved communication and information sharing**

Stakeholders stated that, through the HART, they have improved communication and information-sharing both with each other and with DCJ. Stakeholders gave the following examples of how this communication is beneficial:

- At HART meetings, services identify and discuss the most complex and vulnerable clients to ensure they are known about and do not fall through service gaps.
- If a service has lost contact with a client, another HART member is often able to provide details of that client’s whereabouts.
- HART meetings enable services to refer clients to other, more suitable services more easily.
- Communication with the HOST, at HART meetings and AO patrols, means services do not have to spend lengthy periods on the phone to DCJ Housing.
- Advocating for a client face-to-face with the HOST, at HART meetings, is more effective than on the phone, especially where the client does not easily fit within a bureaucratic category.

### **3.1.4 Multi-disciplinary AO patrols**

Clients with complex needs require support from a range of services. Stakeholders noted that HART multi-agency patrols include all the services required, including a TA provider (the HOST), generalist homelessness services (NEAMI Way2Home and Missionbeat Outreach), a health service (SVHH), an

Aboriginal service (Innari Inc.) and a youth service (Launchpad Youth Community). SHS providers stated that the presence of the HOST, to provide immediate access to TA, and SVHHS, to attend to the health needs of clients, is particularly beneficial when compared with AO patrols they conduct on their own without access to these resources. Multi-disciplinary patrols also have advantages in terms of trauma-informed practice, since the client tells their story only once to all the relevant services, rather than meeting with the different services individually and repeating their story each time.

### **3.1.5 AO patrols are more directed and cover a wider geographical area**

Before the HART, inner-city AO patrols only targeted certain areas, such as Belmore Park, Wentworth Park and Martin Place. Initially, the HART expanded the geographical area covered by dividing the inner city into four different regions and allocating patrols to each region. The approach to patrolling was then further improved to ensure it is directed at particularly vulnerable people who are sleeping rough. HART meetings now flag the location of specific people sleeping rough and HART AO patrols are directed to those locations, to assist the people who have been flagged. The areas identified for HART patrols are those where the people sleeping rough require a HART, multi-agency response.

### **3.1.6 Better avenues for addressing client health concerns**

Stakeholders noted that the involvement of SVHH in HART is very valuable. It enables other HART members to refer clients to SVHH to address physical and mental health issues and to obtain health assessments. Although HART members had other, pre-existing referral pathways through which they could obtain medical assessments, obtaining them through SVHH has made this process easier.

## **3.2 Limitations**

Stakeholders did not regard the HART model as having any serious limitations but did suggest that some of the following areas might be improved.

### **3.2.1 Frequency of meetings**

Some services considered that HART case co-ordination meetings do not need to be held every fortnight but could be held monthly, like the Inner West Homelessness AO and Eastern Suburbs Homelessness AO case collaboration groups. They noted that, as HART members have now established good, collaborative relationships, services know who to contact between HART meetings and frequent meetings are not particularly necessary. However, certain stakeholders suggested that monthly meetings would work only if the HOST model is retained and, if it is not, fortnightly meetings should continue.

One stakeholder noted that case collaboration meetings, such as the HART, operate well when services attend consistency and regularly. At present, this can be a resourcing challenge because the HART meeting takes two to three hours each fortnight.

However, one stakeholder, interviewed towards the end of the consultation process, stated there had been a recent push to reduce the frequency of meetings to fortnightly, which services resisted because they considered that less frequent meetings would allow vulnerable people to fall through service gaps.

### **3.2.2 Staff attending HART meetings**

One service raised that the HART works more effectively if the services attending send managers with decision-making authority. However, this does not always occur.

### **3.2.3 Frequency of patrols**

Some stakeholders commented that the number of AO patrols being conducted by the HOST and HART services combined should be reduced. It seems that multiple AO patrols are conducted daily even though many of the HART services are at capacity in terms of providing any case management support. The stakeholders who raised this issue noted that AO patrols to locate more people sleeping rough are not very useful if no services are available to offer these people, or the people located are not highly vulnerable people requiring urgent support. They also suggested that an unnecessary duplication of services, and use of resources, is occurring because of the multiple services doing similar AO patrols.

Peer workers, however, commented that frequency of engagement with people sleeping rough helps to build trust with these people. They felt that frequent patrols may help to demonstrate consistency and give reassurance that someone will come along every few hours. The issue may be determining what frequency is required to build trust without expending unnecessary resources.

### **3.2.4 Co-ordination of patrols**

Stakeholders raised that, although the HART has improved service co-ordination, there is still scope for AO patrols, conducted by HART members, to be better coordinated. They noted that they require a clearer idea of when and where all AO patrols will occur, and which services will be conducting them, to avoid duplication. Stakeholders also pointed out that duplication is confusing for consumers, who think they have already talked to a service when they are actually being asked similar questions by a different service. One stakeholder suggested having a map available that shows relevant details about all AO patrols.

### **3.2.5 Overlap with other case collaboration groups**

Some stakeholders asserted that there is an unnecessary overlap between the HART and the Woolloomooloo case collaboration group and that, as a result, the Woolloomooloo group should be disbanded. They noted that the Woolloomooloo group was established, by the NSW Police Kings Cross Local Area Command, before the HART and the HOST. However, since HART AO patrols now cover the Kings Cross and Woolloomooloo area, the Woolloomooloo group has lost its main purpose.

The stakeholders who favoured disbanding the Woolloomooloo group suggested that the NSW Police should be included in the HART, to maintain NSW Police support and input regarding people sleeping rough in the inner-city area. Some stakeholders suggested that there was a need for greater relationship-building between SHS providers, HART and the NSW Police to notify the police of people sleeping rough and their existing connections with support services attempting to resolve their situation. They noted that this would help to avoid people sleeping rough being subject to police attention, arbitrary policing and/or criminal penalties due to their visibility and difficulties with self-management.

### **3.2.6 Different agendas among HART members**

Stakeholders pointed out that some HART agencies are principally focused on ensuring public amenity while others are more concerned with client-centred and culturally-sensitive practice. This can lead to tensions among HART agencies, although this was identified as more of an issue earlier in the history of the HART (for example, when responding to people sleeping rough in Martin Place in 2016).

Two stakeholders suggested that HART agencies used to feel like they were all on an equal footing, and that the HART empowered the full range of services involved, but that this has changed. They stated that the HART is becoming increasingly dominated by the agendas of the HOST and the City of Sydney.

### **3.2.7 Referral system**

The HART referral system operates through 'flagging' specific people who are sleeping rough for assistance. However, one stakeholder noted that this referral system could be improved since less flags are being used than previously and some services are not flagging people at all. The flagging system is important in terms of locating the most vulnerable people sleeping rough.

In terms of referrals of HART agency clients to community housing providers, stakeholders noted that it would help if a lead case manager (both service and key contact) was recorded in the Housing Pathways database. Currently, every HART agency involved with the client, in some capacity, is recorded, which may make it confusing for a community housing provider to identify the best point of contact.

Stakeholders outside the HART suggested that it would be helpful to have a referral mechanism to enable non-HART services to refer eligible clients to the HART.

### **3.2.8 The need to change and adapt**

Services noted a need for the HART to change and adapt as circumstances change. Some suggested that, while the HART is still effective, it has phases where it works very well and phases where it works less well. Currently, they considered that the HART needs to be reinvigorated. However, this process may be underway since the terms of reference of the HART now include a requirement to review its operations with the aim of making it more purposeful.

### **3.2.9 Inner-city AO services excluded from the HART**

When the interviews for this consultation paper were conducted, the Kirketon Road Centre (KRC) and Youth off the Streets were not members of the HART. These services conduct AO with people sleeping rough in the inner city but, since they are not in the HART, they do not have access to the communication and information-sharing that occurs within that group. Both services noted their willingness to join the HART.

The HART requires its members to contribute their resources to morning AO patrols and KRC and Youth off the Streets seem to have been excluded from the HART because their patrols do not occur in the mornings. However, since these organisations are patrolling in a similar area and are capable of providing information that would help to support vulnerable clients in that area, perhaps their membership of the HART should be reconsidered.