



**Family &  
Community Services**  
Housing NSW

# Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

Facilitator Guide

October 2012



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## Preparing to Facilitate the Program

This guide is to support the facilitator to implement a brief education/awareness program on the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places (the Protocol).

As the facilitator you may want to use additional materials to enhance your education session. To do this you can access social media (video) relating to the experience of homeless people from YouTube, produced by the Homeless Persons Legal Service. These videos will be available from November 2012.

Use the following checklist when preparing to facilitate the program, and tick off as completed.

Tasks	Tick ✓
1. Participant profile completed (I know who will be attending and their work roles).	
2. I have the PowerPoint slides.	
3. I have read the Participant Guide, Facilitator Guide, Guidelines for Implementation, the Protocol and other relevant supporting materials.	
4. I have prepared examples relevant to the participants to use in illustrating the content.	
5. I have prepared relevant scenarios for the activities to supplement those provided by participants.	
6. I have checked the room layout, equipment and stationery supplies needed (e.g. projector, screen, whiteboard/flipchart, pens, paper, etc).	
7. I have identified the appropriate contact officer details for this group of participants to refer any questions arising after today's session.	
8. I understand, and can explain, the correct answers to the questions in the Quiz.	

### Session Plan – Duration 1 hour

# Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

What does the Protocol  
mean for me?



## Slide 1

### Introduction: Duration 5 mins

It is likely participants will be able to contribute greatly to the content of this session from their experience. A facilitative approach is suggested in order to draw on participant experience, i.e. the session can be approached as a conversation between participants and the facilitator rather than as a presentation. This will contribute to ensuring the content is appropriately customised for the variety of target audiences. The questions provided in the session plan are designed to begin this process of two-way communication.

# Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

## Program aim

This short program is designed to introduce  
the Protocol to you and help you  
understand how it affects you



## Slide 2

### Introduction (cont)

This guide is designed to introduce the NSW Government *Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places*.

The guide includes information about:

- what the Protocol is, why it was developed and who it is for,
- how to identify homelessness,
- what you should do to implement the Protocol,
- assistance available to homeless people (including children and young people), and to you in assisting them, and
- principles underlying the Protocol.

This information is intended for new and existing staff of NSW Government organisations who work with or come into contact with homeless people.

It is also useful for non-employees of these organisations (e.g. contractors, security staff) who come into contact with homeless people in the course of their work.

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

This program will help you understand:

- What the Protocol is
- Why it was developed
- Who it is for
- Principles underlying the Protocol
- How to identify homelessness
- What you should do to implement the Protocol
- Assistance available to you and the homeless



### Slide 3

#### Introduction (cont)

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>1. What does the term ‘protocol’ mean to you?</b> (e.g. convention, agreement, standard for behaviour)</p> <p><b>2. How is a <i>Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places</i> relevant to your work?</b></p> <p><b>3. What do you hope to learn from this session?</b></p> <p>Introduce Participant Guide – to be used during session and as a reference afterwards so add to content with own notes as needed.</p>	<p>Ask/discuss questions (or explain points if preferred).</p> <p>Record answers to Q.3 on whiteboard/flipchart if desired – confirm what will and won’t be covered in the session and summarise.</p> <p><b>Participant Guide</b></p>

# Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

The Protocol was developed to  
set out how NSW Government organisations  
should relate to homeless people  
in public places



## Slide 4

### Background to Protocol: Duration 10 mins

The Protocol is a short statement which sets out how NSW Government organisations should relate to homeless people in a public place. It applies to a range of NSW State Government organisations including Housing NSW.

The aim of the Protocol is to provide a framework for interactions between staff members and homeless people in public places. It applies only to public places such as parks and other open spaces ordinarily accessible to the public. It does not apply to private property or property which is not accessible to the general public.

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<b>Background to Protocol</b> <b>1. What is a 'public place'?</b> (e.g. does not include private homes, gardens, etc. Does include public parks, buildings and gardens).	If time allows, brainstorm two whiteboard/flipchart lists of examples of public places and private places.

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

### What is a public place?

Common property of a  
body corporate is private property

A public place is that which  
is not private property



### Slide 5

#### Background to Protocol (cont)

On this basis, public waiting rooms and forecourts of buildings, doorways or recesses in buildings would typically be part of a body corporate, government building or private company.

Public parks and gardens, managed by local government, and streets and laneways are typically public space.

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

The Protocol applies to staff of  
NSW Government organisations  
who come into contact with  
homeless people in  
the course of their work



### Slide 6

#### Background to Protocol (cont)

##### Who is the Protocol for?

The Protocol has been developed for use throughout NSW by the following organisations:

- Housing NSW
- Community Services
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- NSW Police Force
- Office of Environment and Heritage
- NSW Health
- RailCorp
- State Transit Authority of NSW
- Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority
- Sydney Olympic Park Authority
- Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- Ambulance Service of NSW

(Participant's Guide page 6)

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

Principles underlying the Protocol seek to establish:

- the rights of individuals
- the role of NSW Government staff
- appropriate and inappropriate responses in relation to homeless people



### Slide 7

#### Principles underlying the Protocol: Duration 15 mins

The Protocol is based on the following principles.

- Homeless people have the same entitlement as any member of the public to:
  - be in public places, at the same time respecting the right of local communities,
  - participate in public activities or events, and
  - carry with them and store their own belongings.
- Organisations that work in areas where their responsibilities are likely to bring them into contact with homeless people will receive sufficient information to enable them to assist homeless people if required, or help homeless people to make contact with appropriate services.
- The Protocol does not override existing laws, statutory requirements or regulations. It does not reduce the powers of organisations or their authority to enforce specific laws and regulations.
- Homeless people have the same right to reply and appeals/complaints mechanisms as all members of the public.

**(Participant's Guide page 7)**

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

Homeless people have diverse backgrounds and needs



### Slide 8

#### Principles underlying the Protocol (cont)

Homeless people have diverse backgrounds and needs; these should be considered in any response:

- Cultural sensitivity and respect should be applied when engaging with Aboriginal homeless people and those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background;
- Many homeless people have complex needs such as mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues, or cognitive impairment. These issues may result in behaviour that is seen to be antisocial; and
- Homeless people may have experienced other issues that affect their needs. For example, they may have experienced domestic violence or left custody or statutory care, or they may be asylum seeking refugees with no contacts in the community.

(Participant's Guidel page 7)

## Activity: Participant's Guide page 8

### Discuss

- What do these principles mean for you in your role as a staff member of a NSW Government organisation?
- Identify appropriate and inappropriate responses to homeless people.

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>Principles underlying Protocol (cont)</b></p> <p><b>1. Based on the principles, what are examples of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' responses in relation to homeless people?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– <b>Appropriate</b> - leave the person alone, offer assistance if needed, respond to requests for assistance, follow mandatory reporting guidelines.</li><li>– <b>Inappropriate</b> - to harass, move on without reason, force unwanted help on people, etc.</li></ul>	<p>If desired, participants can work in pairs or small groups to answer the question then feed back their responses to the larger group and for collection on whiteboard/flipchart.</p> <p>Discussion will be needed – the group as a whole can be asked to consider the appropriateness, or otherwise, of all suggestions made.</p>

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

The Protocol defines homelessness as:

- anyone who is or appears to be homeless
- anyone who identifies themselves as homeless



### Slide 9

#### Identifying Homelessness: Duration 5 mins

The most common homelessness definition identifies three types of homelessness: primary, secondary and tertiary. For the purpose of the Protocol, the primary homelessness definition is most relevant, whereby *'a person lives on the street, sleeps in parks, squats in derelict buildings, or uses cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter'*.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>1</sup> recently reviewed the above definition of homelessness to create a new broader definition that identifies a homeless person as someone who does not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate (e.g. improvised dwellings)
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable (e.g. boarding houses)
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations (including overcrowding)

Government organisations should use their own discretion to identify whether a person may be homeless or not.

**(Participant's Guide page 9)**

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1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) *A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, no 4922.0, Canberra.

## Activity: Participant's Manual page 10

### Discuss

- How does a person appear to be homeless?
- How, or when, might a person identify themselves as homeless to you?
- How, or when, might a concerned member of the public identify someone else as homeless to you?

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>Identifying homelessness (cont)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. How do you know if someone is homeless?</b> (Slide 9 – but discuss broader definitions as groundwork for the types of assistance which can be offered).</li><li><b>2. How does a person appear to be homeless?</b></li><li><b>3. How or when might a person identify themselves as homeless to you?</b></li><li><b>4. How or when might a concerned member of the public identify someone else as homeless to you?</b></li></ol>	<p><b>Participant Guide p 10</b></p> <p>Discuss the questions, making notes on the whiteboard/flipchart as appropriate – answers may vary depending upon participants' work roles.</p>

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

### What should you do?

Remember that a homeless person has a right to be in a public place, providing they are behaving lawfully



### Slide 10

#### Providing Assistance to Homeless Persons: Duration 15 mins

If staff from a NSW Government organisation encounter homeless people in public places such as parks, they should not be approached unless;

- the person requests assistance,
- they appear to be distressed or in need of assistance,
- the staff member seeks to engage with the person for the purpose of information exchange or provision of a service,
- their behaviour threatens their safety or the safety and security of people around them,
- their behaviour is likely to result in damage to property or have a negative impact on natural and cultural conservation of environment, including cultural heritage, water pollution and fire risks,
- they are sheltering in circumstances that place their or others' health and safety at risk (e.g. staying in derelict buildings, high risk areas),
- they are a child who appears to be under the age of 16,
- they are a young person who appears to be 16 to 17 year old who may be at risk of significant harm, or
- they are a child or young person who is in the care of the Director-General of the Department of Family and Community Services or the parental responsibility of the Minister for Family and Community Services.

**(Participant's Guide page 11)**

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

### What should you do if assistance is needed or requested?

- Provide the service where appropriate
- Arrange an appointment at the local Housing NSW Office
- Refer the person to information or support services
- Make a report to the Child Protection Helpline where a child or young person may be at risk of significant harm



### Slide 11

#### Providing Assistance to Homeless Persons (cont)

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>Providing assistance to homeless persons</b></p> <p>Lead discussion, showing slides and explain services available to homeless persons.</p>	<p><b>PowerPoint Slides 11 - 13</b></p>

If assistance is requested or needed you may:

- directly provide the service requested if it is within your area of responsibility, or
- arrange an appointment at the local Housing NSW office, or
- refer the person to the Homeless Persons' Information Centre, or
- give the homeless person information or contact numbers for appropriate services, or
- make a report to the Child Protection Helpline where the child or young people may be at risk of significant harm.

**(Participant's Guide page 11)**

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

Refer to the  
Homeless Persons' Information Centre for:

- immediate advice and information
- referral to crisis accommodation
- referral to support services



### Slide 12

#### Providing Assistance to Homeless Persons (cont)

The following contact numbers may be useful for homeless people seeking information about services.

##### *The Homeless Persons' Information Centre*

- **1800 234 566 toll free**
- **9265 9081** (metropolitan Sydney only)

The service provides:

- immediate advice and information
- referral to crisis accommodation
- referral to support services

(Participant's Guide page 12)

## Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

Refer as appropriate to:

- Domestic Violence Line
- Aboriginal Homeless Persons Helpline
- Child Protection Helpline
- Lifeline
- Salvo Crisis Centre
- Youth Emergency Accommodation Line
- Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line
- Other local services for homeless persons



### Slide 13

#### Providing Assistance to Homeless Persons (cont)

- Child Protection Helpline 132 111
- Child Protection Helpline – Mandatory Reporters 133 627
- Domestic Violence Line (Statewide) 1800 656 463
- Lifeline 131 114
- NSW Rape Crisis Centre 1800 424 017
- Salvo Care Line 02 8736 3292
- YConnect Line (young people) 02 9318 1531

Officers from other organisations can also be given the contact number for Housing NSW **Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line** (1800 152 152) when appropriate.

What other local services can be of assistance to homeless people?

*Detailed information on local community based service providers and other agency contacts (e.g. NSW Police, Community Services).*

**(Participants Guide page 12)**

### Activity: Participant's Guide page 13

- Working with a partner, or in a small group, identify a scenario in which a homeless person (or concerned member of the public) might request or need assistance from you.
- Explain your scenario to the larger group (or to another small group/pair), and ask them to identify what action should be taken, if any.

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>Providing assistance to homeless persons (Cont)</b></p> <p>Ask participants to complete activity on page 13 of the Participant Guide, working in pairs or small groups. Request that one group works on a scenario involving a child or young person.</p> <p>Have some extra scenarios prepared, relevant to the specific participant group, to assist less experienced participants who may have difficulty identifying scenarios for themselves.</p>	<p><b>Additional Scenarios</b></p> <p>Discuss outcomes, mediate disagreements about appropriate actions to take.</p>

## Activity: Participant's Guide page 14

- Review Quiz

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>Review Quiz</b></p> <p>Quiz can be completed individually, in pairs/ small groups or by the whole group aloud, as preferred.</p>	<p>Answers as follows - some questions may require further discussion.</p>

## Self-Check Quiz – Suggested Answers

Are the following statements True or False? Circle **T** for True and **F** for False:

1. When a homeless person is seen in a park, police should be called to remove them.	T / <input checked="" type="radio"/> F
2. If a homeless person wishes to occupy your garden shed, the Protocol prevents you from removing them.	T / <input checked="" type="radio"/> F
3. The Protocol is designed to clarify how you should respond to homeless people in public places.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> T / F
4. If a member of the public telephones Housing NSW to report a distressed homeless person, you should refer them to the police.	T / <input checked="" type="radio"/> F *
5. Homeless people seeking information can be referred to the Homeless Persons' Information Centre.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> T / F
6. Homeless children and young people require different responses to adults. The appropriate response will depend upon their age and other factors and may include a report to the Child Protection Helpline.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> T / F
7. The Protocol increases your work responsibilities and authority to take action about homelessness.	T / <input checked="" type="radio"/> F
8. The Protocol defines a homeless person as anyone who identifies themselves as homeless.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> T / F
9. The Protocol applies to homelessness wherever it might occur.	T / <input checked="" type="radio"/> F **
10. If you see a homeless person in a public place endangering the safety of others, you should call the police.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> T / F
11. Homeless people have all the same legal rights and responsibilities as any other member of the community.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> T / F

\* Referring to the police may be appropriate – discuss circumstances. Discuss whether other options may be needed, e.g. ambulance.

\*\* The Protocol applies to homelessness in public places only.

## Protocol for Homeless Persons Conclusion: Duration 5 mins

Content/Steps	Method/Activities
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>Summarise key points</p> <p><b>1. What are the main messages you will take away from today's session?</b></p> <p>Provide details of contact person for questions arising after the session.</p> <p>Thank participants for their time and attention.</p>	<p>Review <b>PowerPoint Slide 3</b> if you wish, or review participant list of expected learning outcomes developed during the Introduction.</p> <p><b>Contact Officer details:</b></p>

## Further Reading / Reference

**Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs website:**

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/homelessness>

Provides details of:

1. Research into homelessness, including statistics about homelessness and contributing reasons for homelessness
2. Commonwealth programs and support for the homeless
3. The National Homelessness Strategy
4. Links to Housing and Homelessness related websites
5. Links to special interest groups and welfare organisations

- **Homelessness Australia**

Homelessness Australia promotes national policy and action to reduce homelessness and its impact on the diverse range of people it affects. Visit website: <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/index.php>

- **Homelessness NSW**

Homelessness NSW plays a coordination, advocacy, policy development, leadership and information dissemination role for the homelessness sector in NSW. Visit website: <http://www.homelessnessnsw.org.au>



Department of Family & Community Services  
**Housing NSW**

Locked Bag 4001  
Ashfield BC 1800  
[www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)