

New outreach service for city's homeless

August 2006 - View from the Peak

The Department of Housing (DoH) and the City of Sydney have established a homeless outreach and support service in the City of Sydney Local Government Area and surrounds. The Inner City Homelessness Outreach and Support Service (I-CHOSS) officially began operation on the 28 January 2006.

The aim of the new service is to provide outreach and support services to homeless people that will enable them to access appropriate health and welfare services as well as long term accommodation options. I-CHOSS is being provided by the Haymarket Foundation and Mission Australia.

I-CHOSS is jointly funded by the DoH and the City of Sydney. The Department of Community Services (DoCS) has contributed a brokerage fund for the service. The service has been funded for three years, with an option of two one-year extensions, pending an external evaluation.

This is not a new concept for either the City of Sydney or the DoH. The City fully funded its own Outreach service for 5 years (until December 2005). That service was provided by the Independent Community Living Association (ICLA). DoH directly provided an Outreach service (HATSOS) for 3 years until early 2006.

All parties to the new service, funding bodies and providers, acknowledge the need to provide assistance to those people in the inner city who are homeless and who have a mental illness and/or dual diagnosis. Many long term homeless people are especially vulnerable and may have several health or disability conditions. The intention is to provide effective pathways for people to exit homelessness.

The I-CHOSS service model has three components:

1. The outreach team provides services to clients who are homeless in the inner city, with a focus on 'rough sleepers'. Services provided include assessment of a client's needs, basic health care, counselling and advice, transport, and referral and advocacy to access appropriate support agencies. Outreach workers engage with people on the streets in order to build relationships that will assist homeless people in the long term.
2. The support team provides services to clients referred by the outreach team who are ready to receive ongoing support and accommodation. Services will include an assessment of client's needs, identification of sustainable accommodation options, support to maintain these accommodation options and referral and advocacy to access appropriate support agencies.
3. The specialist team provides medical and drug and alcohol services through the Haymarket Foundation, individual counseling and therapeutic and group programs. Counseling and group programs may be provided in a range of locations and by different agencies.

I-CHOSS operates 7 days a week: Monday - Friday 7.00am – 10.30pm and Saturday and Sunday 9.00am – 5.00pm. I-CHOSS can be contacted on 1800 505 501.

Many people who are homeless on the streets don't only have accommodation problems, they may experience mental illness or drug and alcohol dependence or other disability. The service works with people over time in order to build a co-operative relationship to assist them to access help for a range of problems or issues.

If any MHCC member organisation would like more information about the service, please contact I-CHOSS direct. If anyone would like more information about the City of Sydney's policy, strategy and services for homeless people please contact Felicity Reynolds, Manager Community Support and Access on 9265 9667.