



SLEEPING ROUGH IN SYDNEY

DIGNITY FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



**BUSINESS
SYDNEY**



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A message from

Paul Nicolaou

Business Sydney doesn't pretend to be an expert on homelessness or how to solve it. We admire the work of charities and government agencies as they try to alleviate the crisis.

However, like the wider community, we wonder why it is that in a prosperous city such as Sydney, hundreds of people can be sleeping rough each night. Or that so many of them have serious mental health issues and at a time when mental health services are stretched beyond breaking point.

We find it amazing that there are people living under the steps of Sydney Town Hall, under the light rail viaduct at Wentworth Park, at Circular Quay and at numerous other locations.

So, it is a breath of fresh air to know that organisations involved in Sydney Zero are collaborating to address the issue. Sydney Zero's objectives are that rough sleeping in Sydney should be rare, of limited duration and, when it does happen, a person is housed with no need to return to the streets.

This paper articulates a six-point action plan, which we believe can make a significant difference to homelessness, specifically in relation to rough sleeping in our city.

Included in the list of action steps is Business Sydney's call for the NSW Government to appoint a Homelessness Advocate with power to speak for the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

We commend this paper to everyone involved in this important work and to everyone in the community who simply wants the homeless to have dignity and, most importantly, a future which involves being accepted as members of our community.



Paul Nicolaou
Executive Director
Business Sydney

A message from

Dr Gregory Smith OAM

Today, I live a contented and peaceful life with my family and friends. This was not always the case. I have experienced many years of homelessness and all that goes with it, including rough sleeping.

Still today, the thought of being homeless and having to sleep rough really frightens me. In my mind, the first place I go is to all the emotions connected with my previous experience. The feeling of “I’m all alone and no one cares”; no sense of belonging or connection; the self-loathing and non-existent self-worth; the dread of having to find a safe place to sleep and to walk the streets in shame; and feeling the stigma associated with having no place to live and be safe.

Shame is especially apparent when I need to tell someone my story so I can get some food or other support. To approach Centrelink, another government department or a non-government support agency while feelings of vulnerability are so fresh and painful is one of the most difficult things to do.

Telling the story of why I am in this situation over and over again is traumatising. You are always watching the person on the other side and trying to guess what they are thinking of you.

I have been advocating for homeless people and especially rough sleepers for many years. I am privileged to participate in a project such as Sydney Zero via my role as Co-chair of the End Street Sleeping Collaboration.

Sydney Zero, through the collaboration of government and non-government services and the use of the By-Name List, can make a significant difference in how rough sleepers are approached and supported.

The By-Name List, as a tool for collaboration, has an informed consent process for the collection and sharing of an individual’s information relevant to their situation. This assists in the development of better outcomes for people and better systems and processes generally.

I commend to you the objectives of Sydney Zero and the power of the six-point action plan for addressing homelessness outlined in this paper.

Dr Gregory P. Smith OAM

Dr Gregory Smith OAM
Sydney Zero

SYDNEY ZERO

The purpose of Sydney Zero is to make rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurring.

Sydney Zero's success is underpinned by the adoption of collaborative practices amongst organisations supporting people who are rough sleeping. This collaboration is facilitated by the use of a shared register of information — the By-Name List.





The scope of the project is the Sydney local government area, and it is focussed on all people aged 18 years and older who are sleeping on the streets or in crisis accommodation, as well as people in temporary accommodation who have a history of sleeping rough or are at risk of doing so.

Participants in Sydney Zero are the City of Sydney, the Department of Communities and Justice, Homes NSW, the three Local Health Districts in Sydney and more than 15 homelessness and housing services that are active in our city.

The By-Name List facilitates the provision of coordinated care and support to those experiencing homelessness.

Subject to the consent of the person sleeping rough, the By-Name List captures key information related to that person. Information collected in the By-Name List falls into four categories:

- Biographical information — basic demographic information, location, vulnerability indicators, reasons for homelessness and engagement tips and risks.
- Housing needs — current housing status, housing goal, how the person is navigating the social housing application process and their history of housing and homelessness.
- Support needs — details of the supports a person requires and the support network in place to address these needs.
- Health needs — restricted details for use by clinicians including shared care plans, diagnoses and discharge summaries.

This information is updated whenever changes occur and provides a map of the person's journey through the system and tracks whether outcomes are being delivered. Access to this information facilitates speedier and more effective decision-making by participating organisations by allowing on-the-spot understanding of:

- A person's history of homelessness;
- Their care and engagement preferences;
- The current barriers preventing stable, permanent accommodation; and
- Who is or was in their care network to meet their housing and support needs.

The By-Name List removes the need for people experiencing homelessness to keep re-telling their story to different organisations. This reduces the possibility of trauma and disengagement, which can be unfortunate side-effects of a disconnected system.

Why the **By-Name List** is ground-breaking

For the first time, the By-Name List provides a pathway to making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

Until the By-Name List became available, there was no systematic way for service providers to share information about individuals experiencing homelessness, nor to collect and collate information about a person's journey before, during and after homelessness.

This included, for example, not collecting accurate information about how long a person had been homeless, whether a person was receiving the support they needed, the sustainability of any housing outcomes, and deaths and sickness among those experiencing homelessness.

This lack of shared information acted as a block to the provision of coordinated and holistic care and support to individuals. The By-Name List provides key information on the person experiencing homelessness in real time and facilitates the sharing of this information across different organisations, time periods and geographic locations.

The By-Name List also helps place-based efforts by providing communities, such as Sydney Zero, with decision-making insights to better understand what homelessness looks like in their area, and how they can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their service network.

This facilitates the development of new insights of what homelessness looks like at a person, place and systems level, helping everyone involved to make evidence-informed decisions. It can help identify systems barriers, areas of high impact and other patterns that can inform policy, practice and resource decisions.

The information on the BNL can be thought of as providing the voice of lived experience at scale!

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SLEEPING ROUGH IN OUR CITY

For a person sleeping rough in Sydney, it can take five years or more to be provided with social housing. Some people remain on the streets for more than 20 years.

Even after being housed, a large percentage of people return to sleeping on the streets. This can be because the person feels no connection with community in their new location or because they do not receive the support and services they need to stay successfully in housing.

The average life expectancy for a person who has spent any significant time rough sleeping is up to 30 years below that of the average Australian. The biggest issues for people sleeping rough are loneliness and disconnection from society with a loss of

dignity and personal respect, which can lead to lifelong feelings of trauma.

In the absence of a By-Name List and connected care and support, the homelessness, housing and health systems are confusing and complicated for people to navigate. Many people sleeping rough are left to navigate these systems alone adding to their feelings of despair.

The length of time it can take to be housed and the need to keep re-telling their story can lead many people experiencing homelessness to “give up” and disengage from the system. That is, they elect to reject assistance from the system and to make their own way in life, remaining on the streets.



SARAH'S HOMELESSNESS JOURNEY

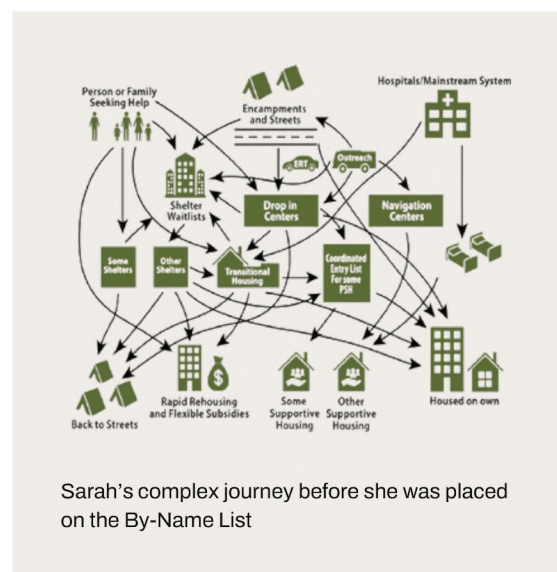
Sarah provides a vivid case study of the homelessness journey and how the By-Name List made a positive difference.

Prior to being on the By-Name List

Sarah (not her real name) first came to the attention of agencies and community organisations while she was staying in government-funded temporary housing in Wollongong. Sarah displayed signs of paranoia and refused to provide the sort of information needed for her temporary housing to be extended and returned to rough sleeping.

For the next nine months, Sarah was trying alone to navigate the complexities of the system whilst experiencing complex mental health and trauma.

In this phase, Sarah spent more than a year sleeping on the streets or in crisis accommodation, with no connection to health or other supports.



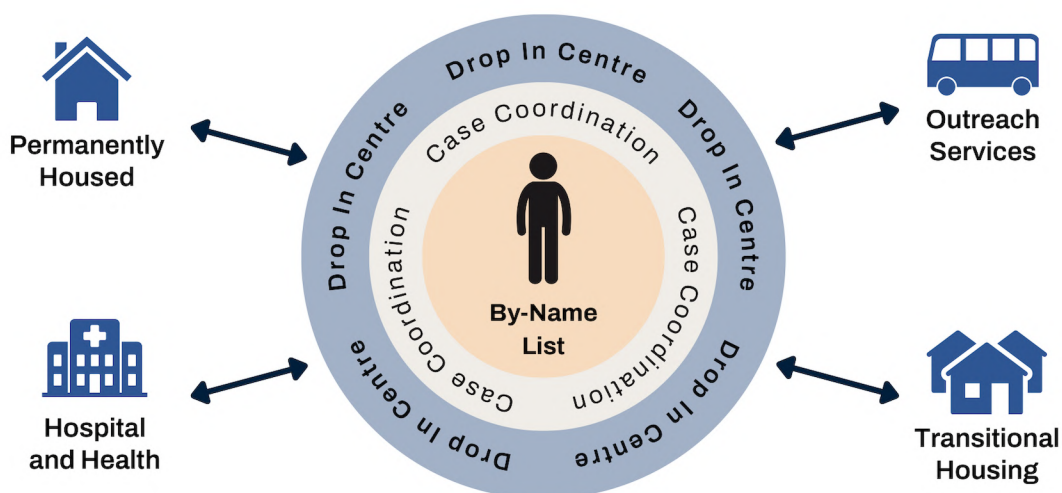
After being added to the By-Name List

Sarah began engaging with services again in Wollongong and, for the first time, her information was added to the By-Name List. Sarah was referred to five different housing, homelessness and health services in Wollongong. This identified the health supports that she required.

After only two months, and whilst still sleeping rough, Sarah moved from Wollongong to Sydney and presented at a homelessness service in Newtown. Sarah's information and history of homelessness could be identified quickly from the By-Name List.

A collaboration of services combined to provide Sarah with temporary accommodation and case management support. She was also admitted to hospital for mental health treatment and was then supported by a mental health outreach program.

Once Sarah's mental health was stabilised, the case management team supporting Sarah found that she had family and her own home on the NSW North Coast. She was assisted to return home and was reconnected with her family after six months. In all, ten services across two districts supported Sarah over a period of eight months.



By having her information on the BNL – and despite moving locations – Sarah's support needs were provided, creating conditions for the best outcome to be identified and fulfilled for her in a timely way.

Collaborative coordinated care using the BNL approach was instrumental in improving the outlook on Sarah's journey from sleeping rough on the streets to returning home.

SIX ACTION STEPS

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO ELIMINATE ROUGH SLEEPING

We have a rare opportunity to address the plight of the hundreds of people sleeping rough in our streets.

Sydney Zero and the By-Name List offer the prospect of giving these homeless people both dignity and a future. Here are six action steps that Business Sydney and Sydney Zero believe can make a positive difference.

1

Appoint a Homelessness Advocate inside the NSW Government to give voice to the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

The role of the homelessness advocate would be to:

- Ensure that efforts to address homelessness are person-centred and evidence-informed.
- Promote the concept that safe and appropriate housing is a human right.
- Ensure that the different parts of Government that play a role in addressing homelessness are coordinated in their efforts.

2

Promote the expansion of local collaborations in the delivery of homelessness services, which are supported by a By-Name List to be person-centred, evidence-informed and outcome-focussed.

Sydney Zero is an example of such a local collaboration. The dynamics of homelessness and the structure and composition of homelessness, housing and health services can differ across different communities. Thus, responses will be more effective and more person-centred if adapted to local conditions.

Coordinating services across organisations, time and place facilitates continuity of support, holistic care and speedier and more enduring outcomes, with less trauma and disengagement for individuals.

3

Develop pathways for the implementation of systems changes to overcome common blockages to providing everyone with an effective housing solution.

Systems change will only occur in a timely way if there are reliable pathways for:

- Identifying possible changes to system practices and policies;
- Implementing recommended changes and evaluating their impact; and
- Amending, continuing or stopping them as appropriate.

4

Develop innovative approaches to creating more social housing.

The rising cost of home construction, planning constraints and the general shortage of housing of all types have all combined to create a perfect storm for the availability of sufficient social housing. Innovative solutions to this urgent challenge are needed. The NSW Government should bring together the major stakeholders in the social housing space to rapidly develop innovative solutions to creating more housing.

5

Provide more resources to support people experiencing homelessness who have complex mental health needs, alcohol and other drug dependencies or chronic health conditions.

As Sarah's "journey" shows, the provision of needed supports is essential to moving people out of homelessness. Less than one-in-five of the people experiencing homelessness that need these supports are currently receiving them to an adequate level.

If needed support is not provided, people may be blocked from being offered housing. Even if they are housed, without the right supports in place, there is every chance that this housing placement will break down and the person will return to living on the streets.

6

Develop plans to "turn off the taps" of new people becoming homeless.

Housing people more quickly and more sustainably will not end rough sleeping if we do not also go upstream to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place.

This can include place-based interventions, supporting those in the justice or health systems at risk of being homeless upon exit. It can also include risk-based interventions, providing targeted support to youth in the out-of-home-care system or in school settings who are identified as being at risk of becoming homeless.

What does a better world for those sleeping rough look like?

It is possible to end rough sleeping in Sydney. That is, we can make it rare, brief if it does occur and non-recurring after a person is housed.

Experience internationally has shown that, with everyone working together, this is possible. But it needs commitment; it needs all of us to take an interest and to contribute to the solution.

Having access to safe and appropriate housing is a basic human need and a city such as Sydney should not have large numbers of people sleeping on its streets. We cannot accept this number of people becoming permanently disconnected from society, and dying at a young age and without dignity.

The six-point action plan outlined here will help create a system that is truly person-centred and evidence-informed, and, therefore, effective in delivering solutions. In this system, people will be required to tell their story once to receive connected and holistic care from a system that is joined-up, not fragmented and bewildering to navigate.

This will also be a system that provides the services that people need to reconnect with society and to have a future in which they can thrive. It will also be a system that is looking for continuous improvement to address all the new challenges and roadblocks that will emerge.

We will also have the evidence and the pathways to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place – to “turn off the taps” of people flowing into homelessness.

We can stop rough sleeping happening in Sydney. Let us all contribute to making this longed for outcome happen.



BUSINESS SYDNEY

Business Sydney is the voice for business in Sydney. We advocate, influence and deliver policies and outcomes to drive economic growth and create opportunities to invest, work, live and visit our city. For nearly two hundred years, we have worked to advance Sydney as a global, competitive and liveable city.

Acknowledgement

This paper has been prepared by Business Sydney, in conjunction with Sydney Zero. June 2024.

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Sydney Zero is a collaboration of over 20 homelessness, housing and health organisations, both government and non-government, that has come together with the goal of ending rough sleeping in Sydney by 2030.



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