

We want to END HOMELESSNESS

in Penrith, Blue Mountains
and the Hawkesbury



HEADING *home* ENDING HOMELESSNESS HERE

In Australia, homelessness is a vexed and intractable problem. Every night there are over 100,000 people experiencing homelessness (2011 ABS Census) in a first world country where everyone should have safe, comfortable and affordable accommodation. Simple to say, but difficult to achieve. Over the years, there have been many attempts to respond to the problem but it remains persistent and unresolved.

In outer Western Sydney, there is a bold and ambitious initiative to address this overwhelming community concern. *Heading Home* is a collaboration of community organisations, businesses and individuals who are working towards ending homelessness in the Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains and Nepean communities. In 2016, the project put these representatives around a table to see what could be achieved working together to sort this problem. It is a multilayered, across district project. There was considerable planning with working groups supporting different aspects to ensure its success.

Who is involved in the project?

Wentworth Community Housing is leading *Heading Home* with a project group of community leaders from community organisations, local business, real estate agents, volunteer groups and local government are working together to make lasting change, including:

- Platform Youth Services
- Mission Australia (Nepean)
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Hawkesbury City Council
- Penrith City Council
- Mountains Community Resource Network
- Stanton and Taylor Real Estate
- Donley Real Estate
- Rachael Goldsworthy Realty
- Theo Poulos Real Estate
- Family and Children's Services
- Mortgage Choice Blaxland
- Mercy Foundation

<https://www.facebook.com/headinghomeendinghomelessnesshere/>

March 2018

STAGE 1 – Registry Week

In 2016 – 17, *Heading Home*:

- Identified people who were homeless through a “Registry Week” to capture a picture of people who were sleeping rough or couch surfing in the district.
- Engaged and trained 75 volunteer surveyors in each of the three local government areas to work as teams and go out in the early hours of the morning and during the day to interview homeless people on the streets, bushland and in some services and temporary accommodation.
- Asked tailored questions of the people who were identified, using an interview tool called the VI-SPDAT (see below) to triage their housing and support needs.
- Sought accommodation for each person where possible, using Housing First principles.
- Supported them to sustain their tenancy.
- Raised awareness through a media campaign.
- Mobilised the community through a pledge campaign. 75 people committed to raise awareness of homelessness and donated time, services and products.
- Reported back to the community on the local homelessness profile and explored local housing solutions.

During Registry Week, in the Hawkesbury, Nepean and Blue Mountains Local Government Areas, 91 individuals and families who were homeless or vulnerably accommodated were surveyed using the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT).

The availability of suitable homes remains elusive. This has led to the next stage of the project.

What is the VI-SPDAT?

The Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) is an evidence informed tool used to prioritise people for housing based on acuity. Acuity refers to the level and severity of issues that impact on someone’s ability to access stable housing and maintain tenancies.

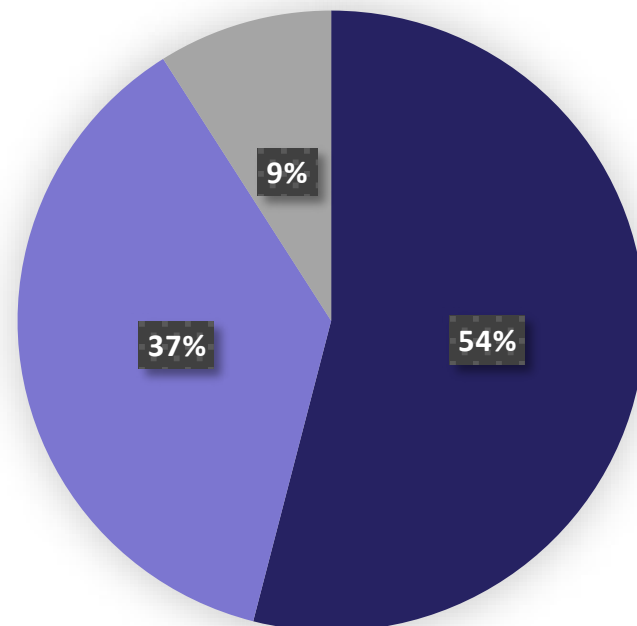
91 people surveyed

66% male **34%** female

Average time homeless
2 years 6 months

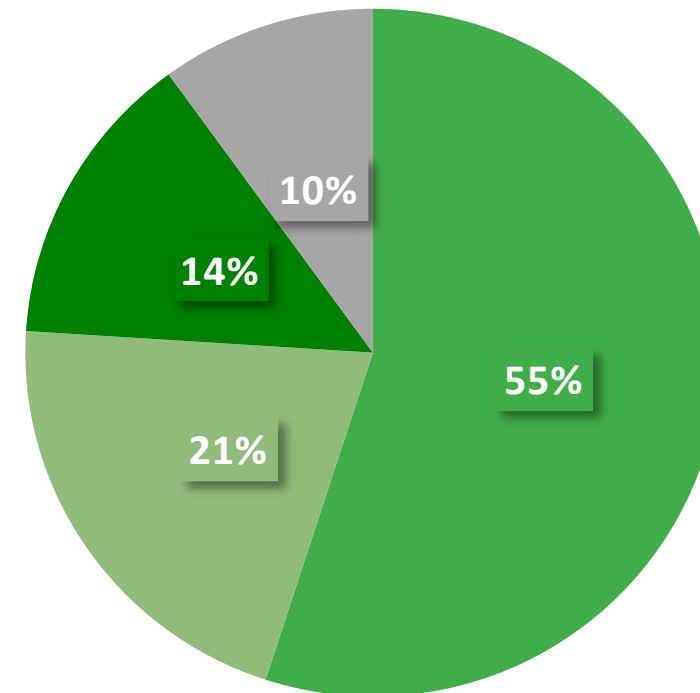
28% under 24
13% over 55

Housing Support



- need housing and short-term support
- need housing and long-term support
- need affordable housing only

Sleep location



- rough sleepers
- temporary or crisis accommodation
- staying with friends
- other

Cultural Identity

68% Australian
23% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
5% New Zealander
4% Other

25% were removed from their family as a child

Health

64% mental health problems
60% dental issues
59% substance abuse issues
41% asthma
23% physical disability

Cost to the health system for acute services over the previous 6 months

\$299,159*

100% of people experiencing homelessness in the region live below the poverty line (<\$400 per week)

8% have no income at all

* Costs for inpatient hospitalisation and A&E visits from the Productivity Commission report on Government Services, 2015 (NSW costs). Costs for ambulance transport taken from average transportation cost NIB January, 2015 (ex Tas & Qld).

STAGE 2 : Housing Solutions - Plans for 2018 and beyond

We need to work on the supply end as well as the demand end. Ending homelessness means finding homes. We can no longer look to social housing to provide the solution to homelessness. The wait times are 10+ years and government is not increasing its property portfolio. Each community has to look within its own resources to solve this problem.

That's why the *Heading Home* project is working with real estate agents, mainstream and homelessness services, local and state government to generate innovative housing solutions. The group started with blue sky thinking for housing solutions that are low cost and don't take years to get off the ground – we want to be nimble and take advantage of community assets.

Together we're working on innovative solutions such as a pilot tiny homes project and an Expo in the Blue Mountains to encourage home owners to build secondary dwellings or garden flats.

It will take the will and enduring community commitment for these solutions to be realised, so that homelessness in the region can not just be managed but it can end!

Tiny Homes Pilot

Currently looking for a suitable block of land
Plan for a minivillage of 4 - 10 dwellings with common areas

Secondary Dwellings Expo

Promote secondary dwellings for private landowners - profit with a purpose
Expo provides a one-stop shop for interested consumers from zoning requirements to fire regulations to finance options to a range of products

Housing Locator Position

Experts at identifying properties in the housing market.
Includes informal or secondary housing market – poor performing properties, granny flats, share houses, holiday rental properties and informal lettings.
Submitted an application to a philanthropic fund in late 2017

Release of Registry Week Report Evaluation & HH Stage 1 Evaluation

Includes data from a pre and post survey of Registry Week participants to understand changes in their well-being (Australia Unity Personal Well-being Index)

Other Opportunities

Heading Home takes an adaptive approach.
We will respond to any opportunities that emerge to create new housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness.