

Homelessness in City of Parramatta

City of Parramatta Local Government Area (LGA) is home to a number of people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Ensuring access to safe, suitable and affordable housing is a basic requirement for all individuals. Supporting people with lived experience of homelessness and working to minimise the risk of homelessness fosters a more socially sustainable city and improves the well-being of our entire community, including residents, businesses and visitors.

What types of homelessness are experienced in our local area?

While primary homelessness is the most visible, far greater numbers of people experience secondary and tertiary homelessness in our local area. The 2016 Census by the Australian Bureau of Statistics identified 926 people experiencing homelessness in the Parramatta area. Of these, 98% were experiencing secondary or tertiary homelessness.

As Council has the responsibility of managing public space and works closely with the local homelessness sector, addressing primary homelessness tends to be the area in which local government can have greatest, immediate impact. However, our policy responses consider all forms of homelessness.

Primary homelessness – people without conventional accommodation (who sleep rough in the street or in parks, squat in derelict buildings, or use cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter).

Secondary homelessness – people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. Examples include emergency or temporary accommodation, youth refuges or women's shelters, living temporarily with relatives or friends (known as 'couch surfing') because they have no accommodation of their own.

Tertiary homelessness – people who live in premises that fall below minimum community standards or where they don't have the security of lease guaranteeing them accommodation or access to basic private facilities. Examples include living in boarding houses and caravan parks or living in severely crowded dwellings.

What causes homelessness?

Homelessness is a complex issue. There are numerous drivers, causes and triggers of homelessness or homelessness risk. Some factors are related to socio-economic or political factors, while others are specific to an individual or household's personal experience.

Factors and/or triggers contributing to homelessness include but are not limited to:

- Poverty or financial difficulty
- Unemployment and/or unstable income
- Insecurity of tenure
- A critical shortage of affordable housing
- Eligibility of some groups to access basic services
- Sexual abuse and assault
- Domestic and family violence
- Family breakdown
- Social isolation
- Mental illness
- Addiction such as gambling

Why is homelessness a concern?

For individuals and families?

People's ability to fulfil their basic rights are compromised: homelessness can affect people's rights to be safe and have a home, as well as rights to health, to work, and to maintain privacy and freedom of movement.

Social isolation: experiencing homelessness may cause a person to become isolated from family, friends and community, and may perpetuate disadvantage.

Social costs: these may include physical and mental health problems, family breakdown, lost education opportunities, lost earning potential and intergenerational disadvantage.

For the community and Council?

A challenge to enabling our community to thrive and prosper: the exclusion of some members of our community from accessing basic rights reduces the ability of our whole community to thrive and prosper together.

Ensuring inclusive public places and public amenity: public spaces need to be inclusive, safe, accessible and welcoming to everyone. This means carefully balancing the rights and needs of people sleeping rough with the City's priority of attracting visitors, businesses and investment.



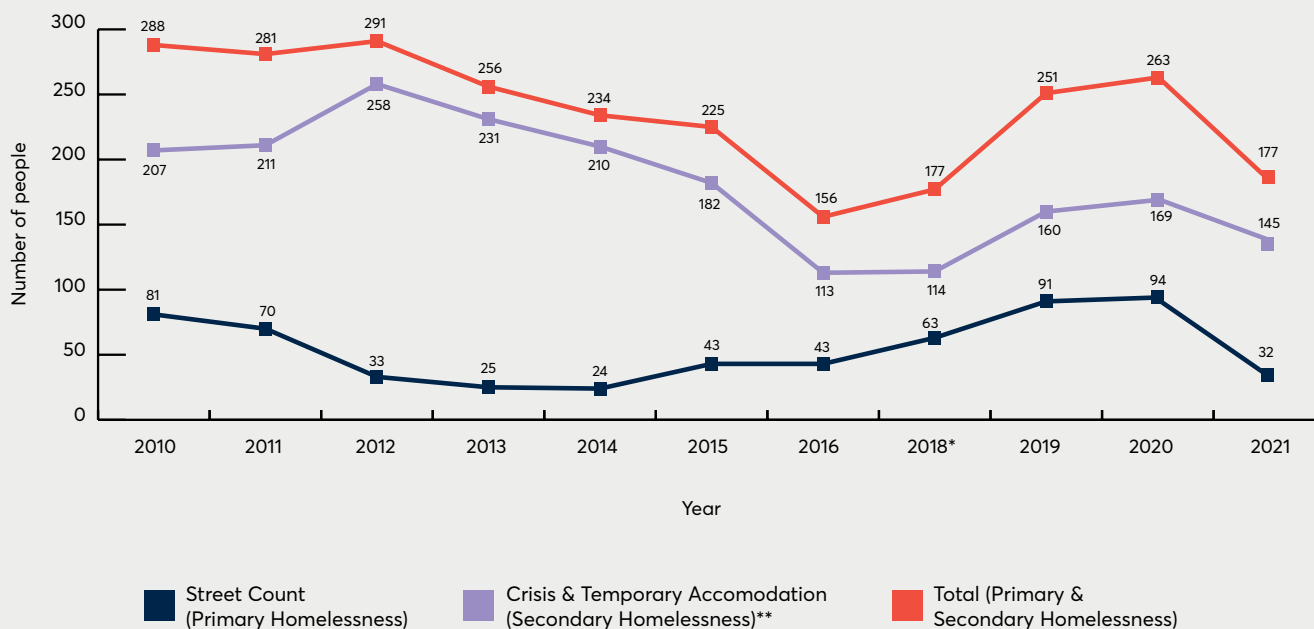
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The picture of homelessness in Parramatta

The first NSW State Wide Street Count conducted counted 1,314 people experiencing street homelessness across 65 LGAs between February to April 2020.

Council conducts an annual Homelessness Street Count in the Parramatta CBD to better understand the situation of homelessness within our LGA. The following table shows the results of the 2021 Homelessness Street Count compared to previous years.

City of Parramatta Council Street and Secondary Count Results 2010-2021



*Council amalgamations occurred in May 2016 and as a result Council boundaries changed. Granville Town Centre is no longer within City of Parramatta LGA. The Count was not performed in 2017 and the 2018 Homelessness Street Count does not include parts of Granville located in Cumberland Council. These were areas previously identified with numbers of persons experiencing homelessness. **Secondary count numbers are not exact.

The overall decrease in the number of people sleeping rough during the 2021 street count could be attributed to a variety of factors, including:

Improved effectiveness of local homelessness response through:

- Introduction of active local housing and mental health assertive outreach services, and Council's recruitment of a Public Space Liaison Officer.
- A more flexible, agile response to homelessness adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Renewed NSW Government support for the housing first approach (Together Home program).
- More effective collaboration between service providers, NSW government departments, and councils.

Contextual and social factors such as:

- Large scale construction within the Parramatta CBD causing people sleeping rough to move elsewhere.
- Fear of COVID-19 making people more cautious and more likely to 'couch surf' where possible.
- A higher number of deaths of people who were sleeping rough recorded than in previous years.

What is Council's role in addressing homelessness?

Management of public space

Council is responsible for maintaining public amenity to promote the use of public space by our community. Our Public Space Liaison Officer works collaboratively and compassionately with the service sector to connect people experiencing homelessness to relevant services, and to negotiate solutions where safety or public amenity may be impacted by homelessness.

Research and needs analysis

Council conducts research and needs analysis and shares this data with services to support local responses that meet the needs of vulnerable people. For example, Council undertakes an annual homelessness street count and works with our local community service providers to better understand the extent of homelessness in our local area.

Policy development

Council develops policy to address homelessness, housing needs, and the provision of diverse housing options to support and strengthen the capacity of our community. Examples include: Council's Homelessness Policy and Action Plan, Affordable Housing Policy and Socially Sustainable Parramatta Framework.

Partnerships and Service Coordination

Council is committed to working in partnership to address homelessness with a range of stakeholders across the government and non-government sectors, and with the local community.

Council convenes the Parramatta Region Homelessness Interagency and works within a Western Sydney perspective. The pursuit of new partnerships and innovative responses to addressing homelessness is ongoing.

Advocacy

Council recognises its responsibility to advocate on behalf of all members of its community to other levels of government to reduce the incidence and impact of homelessness within our local area. Through communication and partnerships with the local homelessness sector and relevant State and Federal Government agencies, Council advocates for the development of effective policies and provision of appropriate services in housing, employment and social services.

Assertive Outreach

Council supports the adoption of a housing first approach to address chronic homelessness. This approach prioritises access to safe and affordable housing, followed by provision of support services to address an individual or family's complex needs. This can be initiated through 'assertive outreach', where outreach workers approach people sleeping rough (it often takes multiple approaches and persistence) with offers of temporary

accommodation, case management and access to housing.

Locally, a Department of Communities and Justice Housing Mobile Outreach team services the Parramatta area. The Western Sydney Local Health District also conducts homelessness outreach as a specialist mental health service in Parramatta.



Case Study

City of Parramatta staff first noticed Peter's sleeping bag left outside a community centre premises over a period of several mornings. They contacted Council's Public Space Liaison Officer (PSLO) who, after several site visits, was eventually able to make contact with Peter. They chatted, and the PSLO was able to gain an understanding of his situation. Peter was an international student who had lost

work during the pandemic and slipped into homelessness as a result. He was sleeping rough in the suburb he had previously lived, which explained why he had turned up in an unlikely location.

After this initial conversation, Peter again became difficult to locate. The PSLO was concerned that he had scared Peter off after their first interaction. But despite nearly 20 visits to the site, the

PSLO maintained a hunch that Peter could be assisted. He approached a community organisation who was able to visit late at night and speak with Peter. Fortunately, on this occasion Peter accepted temporary accommodation and the ongoing assistance of that organisation.

Frequently asked questions

If I come into contact with a person sleeping rough, how should I act?

If you come into contact with a person who is sleeping rough, be kind and respect their space and privacy. Give them a smile. Homelessness can be an isolating experience, so small gestures and friendly interactions can remind individuals that they are valued members of our community.

Why aren't people who are sleeping rough being moved on?

All people have a right to be in public places. People will not be harassed or moved on from public places unless there is a threat to public safety, their personal safety, or if they are causing a disturbance that constitutes a breach of the peace.

Why do I see so many people sleeping rough in our local area?

Individuals who are sleeping rough often seek out a safe place with access to services. The presence of people sleeping rough suggests that people can access the support and connections they need in our local area.

What can I do to help?

If you have concerns about the welfare of someone who may be sleeping rough, be respectful of them and their space, and notify Council's Customer Contact Centre. Our Public Space Liaison Officer will attend or contact an appropriate local service provider.

To learn more about homelessness, visit the Homelessness Australia and Homelessness NSW websites.

If you are interested in volunteering, Council recommends finding a local organisation that aligns with your personal values. Start by looking at the Parramatta Region Homelessness Interagency (www.parrarhi.org).

What is the Parramatta Region Homelessness Interagency?

Parramatta Region Homelessness Interagency is a network of services and agencies who work to address the challenge of homelessness. It aims to facilitate partnerships within the City of Parramatta community to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and improve their quality of life.

What homelessness resources does Council make available?

Council provides the community with access to resources regarding homelessness in our LGA:

- **Council's 2019 Homelessness Policy**, which identifies Council's approach to addressing homelessness in the City of Parramatta.
- **Parramatta Assistance Card**, which provides contact details for a range of relevant services, including emergency relief, legal information, medical services and accommodation.

Links to these documents are available below.

Who can I contact for assistance?

If you are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, Link2Home provides information, conducts assessments and makes referrals to homelessness services across NSW. Anyone experiencing domestic violence, anywhere in NSW, can call the Domestic Violence Help Line toll free. Contact details below.

Find out more

The following resources provide more information on homelessness in our LGA and available services:

Council website

www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/homelessness

Council's 2019 Homelessness Policy

(www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/sites/council/files/2020-03/Homelessness%20Policy.pdf)

Parramatta Assistance Card

(www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/sites/council/files/2021-03/Parramatta-assistance-card-2018.pdf)

City of Parramatta Customer Contact Centre

Email: council@cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au
Phone: (02) 9806 5050

Parramatta Region Homelessness Interagency

(www.parrarhi.org/)

Link2Home

24/7 information line: 1800 152 152

Domestic Violence Line

24/7 assistance: 1800 656 463
(www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/)

Homelessness NSW

(www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/)

Homelessness Australia

(www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/)

Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) National

For non-English speakers, phone interpretation services are available by TIS National on 131 450.



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