

COMMON GROUND SYDNEY – SUMMARY INFORMATION

Although chronic homelessness represents a small share of the overall homeless population, chronically homeless people use up more than 50 percent of the services (for single homeless adults). The most successful model for housing people who experience chronic homelessness is permanent supportive housing using a housing first approach.¹

1. Chronic homelessness is solvable

Evidence from the UK, USA and Canada indicates you can aim to end chronic homelessness, with some success – through improved housing options and better support. Wealthy societies such as ours need not have a population of chronically homeless people. In fact, it is a disgrace that we do.

2. It is solvable through permanent supportive housing (PSH)

One of the best ways to solve people's homelessness is by ensuring they have access to appropriate, affordable and safe permanent housing, with the appropriate support to help them sustain that housing. Evidence from elsewhere indicates that even people who have experienced chronic homelessness can be assisted through 'housing first'. This means people access permanent housing and then receive the supports to deal with and manage any ongoing problems, such as mental illness.

A 2006 survey from Toronto in Canada found that almost 90% of all street homeless people interviewed said what they wanted was 'permanent housing'

3. Common Ground is a good model of permanent supportive housing

Common Ground was founded in New York in the early 1990s by Rosanne Haggerty. Although Common Ground has gone on to do other things, such as street outreach and homeless prevention programs, it is best known for its re-development of buildings for permanent housing in conjunction with business, government and the philanthropic sectors.

The Common Ground Housing model has the following characteristics:

- Provides a mixture of permanent housing for adults who were formerly homeless as well as for other people on low incomes.
- Ensures good safety and security for all tenants, using a concierge service and other security measures.
- Provides ongoing support services to assist people to sustain their tenancies. This support is available to all people who live in Common Ground buildings, not just those who were previously homeless.

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, Washington DC.

- Ensures that the tenancy management and the support services are provided by two different organisations.

4. Common Ground has successfully ended homelessness for many people

High numbers of formerly homeless people have sustained tenancies through Common Ground. This has ended their homelessness permanently and resulted in better cost effectiveness because these people no longer require access to a range of services (crisis shelter services, emergency departments etc) to have their needs met. Permanent housing also means that they have been in a better position to access further education, local community activities and work etc.

Permanent supportive housing that re-connects people to local communities is about 'social inclusion'.

5. Permanent supportive housing such as Common Ground is cost effective

It can cost significant amounts to sustain someone in a state of chronic homelessness. Use of crisis services, emergency departments, acute hospital admissions, mental health assessments, detoxification centres as well as police responses, ambulances, court and prison costs all add to the total cost and tragedy of chronic homelessness.

Research has shown that it can cost the same amount or less to provide people with suitable housing and good support to sustain that housing as it does to provide crisis services

6. We need this model in Sydney

Sydney is not an affordable city in which to live, we need more low cost and affordable housing stock. We have a population of homeless people who require access to good quality permanent housing and support. Common Ground is a model that can help to add to that stock, through non-government, government, business and philanthropic collaboration.

Common Ground Sydney was officially launched on 9 September 2008. At present an advisory group made up of representatives from the Mercy Foundation, City of Sydney, BCS Life Care and other individuals are working to progress this project. At the 9 September event the NSW Premier indicated his government's support for the project, making a commitment to investigate suitable sites for CG Sydney. The construction company Grocon made an offer at that time to build CG Sydney 'at cost'.

AUGUST 2009 UP-DATE

On 3 August 2009 the NSW Premier and the Minister for Housing formally announced a site for the first Common Ground in Sydney. Housing NSW has recently advertised the EOI for a builder/developer. An EOI process for a Community Housing provider is expected to be announced soon.

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