

Registry Weeks: Collecting and Using Local Data to End Street Homelessness

Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

A Seven Year History of Registry Weeks in Australia
Since 2010, there have been sixteen 'Registry Weeks' across Australia, in Brisbane, Melbourne, Hobart, Sydney and Perth. These have included both city and regional areas and suburban communities that have also taken up the methodology. Australia owes a great debt of gratitude to Micah Projects in Brisbane who originally adapted the American methodology and tool for use in Australia. Registry Weeks are now also being effectively used in Canada and parts of Europe.

VI-SPDAT

The first registry weeks used the Vulnerability Index, but since 2014 the Vulnerability Index Service Prioritisation Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) has been used. It works effectively as a 'triage' tool to understand who is homeless and what their health and housing needs are so that the right type of housing and support (if support is also needed) can be sourced. Crucially, when doing a local registry week and training people to interview people using the VI-SPDAT — the tool can then later be used as an ongoing tool for the community. Once people are housed, they come off the register and if someone newly homeless is identified they can do a VI-SPDAT and be added. It is an effective methodology for keeping track of homelessness in a community as well as keeping track of housing outcomes.

Local Understanding — Local Response

Essentially 'Registry Weeks' harness resources from the community to identify by name every individual and family requiring safe, permanent and sustainable housing. It is through knowing everyone by name that the work of permanently housing and appropriately

supporting each person can truly begin. Understanding the real-time demand for housing and support services in each community also assists local organisations and agencies to understand the level of housing and support supply that their community requires to end street and episodic homelessness. It also focusses communities on ending homelessness rather than simply managing and inadvertently continuing to service homelessness (food vans, showers etc). Once each community sees that the problem is a solvable number, resources can be directed into actions that can assist people into permanent housing.

The Australian experience to date has shown that applying the Registry Week process shifts a 'guesstimate' of homelessness numbers formed from anecdotal impressions to an objective and actionable assessment of the problem as directly informed by people requiring housing. People who are housed and living on income support will sometimes attend local 'soup kitchens' and food vans to help stretch their food budget and for companionship. Attendance at these services can sometimes be mistaken for homelessness. Understanding exactly who is homeless and what they need to move into permanent and sustainable housing is a primary value-add that sets a Registry Week apart from a generic and anonymous street count.

What a Registry Week is Not

It's also important to understand what registry weeks are not. They are not 'research' projects or census collection exercises. Whilst understanding the demographic profile as well as health, housing and other needs of

people experiencing homelessness allows each community to better understand the quantum of people requiring housing and support, the primary purpose is to gather this information in order to prioritise people into housing. De-identified data is reported back to the community and can be a very useful tool for advocacy and for building community momentum and political will — for the ultimate purpose of rallying a community of people and services to move people into housing and not simply for a group of people to know another statistic about their town or city.

Housing First

Registry weeks are based on 'Housing First' principles and in bringing communities together to better understand the extent of their street homelessness problem; it can also sometimes serve to create better co-ordination. Importantly, they also bring local organisations together to source additional housing supply.

This can be the hardest part of the project or campaign although not impossible. For example, a regional city in New South Wales (NSW) undertook a Registry Week in late 2016. The community came together and through the Registry Week methodology found and interviewed 41 people experiencing homelessness.

Since their Registry Week, they have identified and done a VI-SPDAT with 16 additional people — bringing the total on the register to 57. However, at the same time, all the co-operating services worked hard to get accommodation results for those whose names and needs were now known. In a few short months they have housed 28 people. They have

halved street homelessness in their city. This is a great example of how most of the work for registry weeks actually begins after the registry week has been done.

Local Campaigns

Micah Projects provides a great example of an effective community campaign using the registry week methodology in Australia. In 2014 they launched '500 Lives 500 Homes' with the intent to ensure that at least 500 individuals and families were housed. This was very much a partnership project, with multiple agencies in Brisbane participating.

They started with a Registry Week and have ended the campaign in 2017 with more than 500 people permanently housed. RUAH, a homelessness organisation in Perth also launched a campaign in 2015; the '50 Lives 50 Homes' and the results from that campaign have seen 50 people housed at the completion of the first year of the campaign. People who had experienced long-term homelessness have been housed and supported. Work continues in many communities to ensure that people are followed up and where and when possible provided with the right housing and support.

Registry Week Kit

In NSW, the Mercy Foundation has been actively seeking out communities who want to use the methodology and advising on the process, the training and the use of the tool. In partnership with Micah Projects and the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH), the Mercy Foundation has also recently finalised a 'Registry Week' kit that will help communities undertake the project and ensure fidelity to the model and methodology.

The AAEH and its partners hope to be able to support a national campaign in the future. One that will support all communities to better understand the extent of homelessness in their community and work together to solve it by collecting and effectively using good local data.

For more information or for access to the Registry Week kit contact Felicity Reynolds, CEO of the Mercy Foundation on 02 9911 7390.

