

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Evaluating homeless healthcare programs

Dr Elizabeth Conroy from the Centre for Health Research and an investigative team* have received funding to evaluate the current health services provided to homeless people through St Vincent's Hospital in NSW. The study aims to document the health needs of homeless individuals who use the services, analyse how well those needs are being met, whether the inter-agency referral processes are appropriate, and measure the impact of the programs for the health of this highly marginalised population.

'Homeless people are often at high risk of medical complications and chronic conditions due to their precarious living state', Dr Conroy explains. 'St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney is a public health centre that caters to the needs of marginalised and homeless patients through several key programs, such as their "Community Outreach Medical Emergency Team" service (COMET) and Tierney House accommodation.' These two programs sit within the Homeless Health Service at St Vincent's Hospital. To ensure that the COMET and Tierney House programs are functioning well for both clients and community stakeholders, a comprehensive evaluation of their performance is required.

The project will be divided into four sub-studies. The first will use administrative data from both the COMET and Tierney House databases to create a profile of homeless patients. For sub-study two, a cross-sectional survey of staff from agencies that support the COMET program, especially those involved in outreach activities, will be conducted to identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing protocols. The third sub-study will consist of three case studies of clients and their support workers from Tierney House; while the fourth study will be a cost-effectiveness analysis of both COMET and Tierney House service provision. Interviews with clients and stakeholders, analysis of patient



admission and discharge rates, and cost comparison techniques will all be used at various stages of the investigation.

The evaluation of these Homeless Health Service programs will provide much needed data on the health of homeless people in NSW, and identify areas for improvement. This may allow more homeless people to access these services and inform future government policy in this area.

Project Title: Evaluation of St Vincent's hospital homeless health services

Funding has been set at: \$100,000

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