

## **Inquiry into the Decriminalisation of Certain Public Offences, and Health and Welfare Responses**

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# Office of the Mayor

City of Gold Coast

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Committee Secretary  
Community Support and Services Committee  
[cssc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:cssc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary

## **City of Gold Coast submission - Inquiry into the Decriminalisation of Certain Public Offences, and Health and Welfare Responses**

I seek the Committee's forbearance in accepting this slightly late submission.

### **Executive Summary**

The City of Gold Coast (the City) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into the Decriminalisation of Certain Public Offences, and Health and Welfare Responses* conducted by the Queensland Parliament's Community Support and Services Committee (the Inquiry).

Whilst the City would not wish to see any onerous enforcement of Section 8 of the *Summary Offences Act 2005* (the Act), where the offence is not accompanied by other anti-social or threatening behaviour, the City does not support a relaxation of the Act in the specific context of the terms of reference of the Inquiry. It is anticipated that any effort to reduce police powers to remove persons that are displaying anti-social behaviours, particularly public intoxication and urination, within our City will escalate the extent of such behaviours within our community.

Furthermore, the City encourages strengthening Queensland Police Service (QPS) powers to enable the police to issue move on orders to persons demonstrating these behaviours, including escalation to temporary detention of persons for their own safety and, in turn, for the broader safety of the community.

The City also encourages an enhanced multi-faceted approach to public intoxication and begging to meet the expectations of the community and to enhance public safety. This multi-faceted approach would include enhanced programs with multi-government agencies, non-government agencies and third parties, to assist in the care and well-being of individuals who are publicly intoxicated or begging.

This submission provides details on the City's response to the four key questions that the Committee has requested input to, specifically:

1. the current impact of public intoxication, begging and public urination on your community;



2. details of what you consider would be the impact on your community of decriminalising public intoxication and begging;
3. health and welfare services that currently exist in your community and additional services that would be required to manage public intoxication and begging if they were to be decriminalised;
4. factors in your local government area that would need to be considered in the design of any health and social welfare responses.

### **An overview of current health and welfare services provided by the City of Gold Coast**

The City has taken a proactive approach in tackling welfare issues and, in particular has endorsed the City's *Homelessness Action Plan*, a copy of which is attached. Some of the initiatives identified within the Plan not only address homelessness, but rather public intoxication and other antisocial behaviours within our public spaces.

#### *Public Space Liaison Program*

In 2020, the City trialled a program consisting of engaging specialist Public Space Liaison Officers. These Liaison Officers work closely with the *Gold Coast Homeless Network* to link people who are sleeping in public spaces with appropriate support services to assist them access specialist support services and ultimately exit homelessness.

#### *Joint patrols in hotspots*

The City undertakes regular joint proactive patrols with QPS and local outreach services in homeless hotspots with the aim of linking people with relevant services.

#### *Regulatory Services*

Through the City's local laws, the City is responsible for maintaining the safety and amenity of public spaces for all residents and visitors. We actively work with people sleeping rough and local assertive outreach support services to balance the needs of individuals with the preservation of amenity and community safety.

#### *Community safety interagency collaboration*

To facilitate communication and strategic partnerships with the QPS and other key community safety stakeholders, the City leads the *Mayoral Safer Suburbs Forum*. This interagency partnership addresses current and emerging issues and determines coordinated actions, including in relation to reducing the impacts of homelessness.

#### *Safety Camera Network*

The safety camera network is a key public safety tool, funded by the City, with over 700 cameras installed in public spaces. The cameras are monitored 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Any incidents or observations of people at risk or requiring assistance is communicated directly to QPS. The safety camera network also informs hotspot trends and can support outreach responses.

#### *Domestic and family violence*

Nationally, domestic and family violence is a major cause of people becoming homeless. The City works to prevent and reduce domestic and family violence through its Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan. Key actions include promoting local support services and training for City staff to develop skills to connect people to those services.

#### *Safety Information Card*

The City produces a safety information card in multiple languages. The information on the card includes key contact details for several different support services, such as emergency accommodation and support, domestic, family and sexual violence, seniors, and youth.





#### *Crime Prevention through Environmental Design*

The City audits and improves safety in public spaces by applying internationally recognised Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles. The principles are applied to all new and upgraded parks and public spaces to enhance the safety of residents and visitors.

#### *Affordable spaces for support services*

The City's Community Centre network provides affordable and accessible spaces for organisations to utilise and from which to deliver their services. Current hirers include a wide range of support services, including food service providers, legal aid, youth services, drug and alcohol support and mental health programs.

#### *Community Group Hub ('the Hub')*

The City provides an online resource hub to build the capacity and sustainability of local community groups. The Hub connects these groups with skills development workshops, grant opportunities and other resources to assist them to help our most vulnerable residents.

#### *Gold Coast Homelessness Network ('the Homelessness Network')*

The City is an active member of the Homelessness Network. Members of the Network include specialist homelessness services, government agencies, community organisations, and local businesses working together to prevent and reduce homelessness through education, raising awareness and supporting effective service delivery. The City is a major sponsor of the annual Gold Coast Homeless Connect event hosted by the Homelessness Network. The Homeless Connect initiative was introduced in 2008 and now hosts more than 900 people each year. It provides a one stop shop for donations, health checks and an opportunity to connect with services.

In addition to the above, the Gold Coast has two Safe Night Precincts (SNPs) established under the *Liquor Act 1992*, to reduce late-night drug and alcohol related violence and promote safe drinking practices. These SNPs are in Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach and include the support service 'Chill Out Zone' which provides rest and recovery, as well as first-aid services to people in these precincts. The City also has urban villages including Palm Beach, Nobbys Beach and Burleigh Heads. The entertainment precincts and urban villages attract a high number of persons who visit late-night trading premises, where alcohol is consumed. Surfers Paradise is the major entertainment precinct for the Gold Coast, attracting the highest number of visitations over a Friday and Saturday night.

The *Chill Out Zone* is a service which is delivered by the *Gold Coast Youth Service* and funded by the Queensland Government through the Department of Communities. This service is staffed by professionals in various fields and works to minimise the harm that may come to visitors of the SNPs. The service provides immediate care and is a designated 'place of safety' for visitors to self-refer to 'time out' from the precinct. Referrals to other services such as Queensland Ambulance Service are made where necessary.

### **1. The current impact of public intoxication, begging and public urination across the City of Gold Coast**

The City acknowledges that it has an important role in the joint effort to keep our community safe. A key priority of the City is community safety and promotion of the Gold Coast as being a safe place to live, work and play. Perceptions of safety are managed through the City's *Community Safety Program* and strategic partnerships with internal and external stakeholders including the QPS.





Public intoxication and public urination tend to occur most commonly within commercial hubs such as Coolangatta, Burleigh Heads, Broadbeach, Surfers Paradise and Southport. Each of these antisocial behaviours is witnessed regularly, however public intoxication and urination more often occurs at night. It is noted that the response to each of these public antisocial matters is the responsibility of QPS, however in many of these cases, related complaints are made to the City, who then refer the matter to QPS to manage.

The City's safety camera network, located within the entertainment precincts, often captures a variety of incidents and antisocial behaviours from various members of the community. Whilst many of these incidents relate specifically to alcohol or public nuisance, City officers monitor situations to mitigate potential risk to community safety and will work with QPS and emergency services accordingly to deliver the necessary response. In the last 12 months, QPS *Online Crime Map* communicates that there were 2,400 *Good order offences* issued in the suburbs inclusive of an entertainment precinct or urban village. This included:

- 1,484 in Surfers Paradise
- 476 in Southport
- 228 in Broadbeach
- 95 in Burleigh
- 77 in Coolangatta
- 31 in Palm Beach
- 9 in Nobby's Beach

In 2021, the City conducted a community survey over three weeks with 3,316 responses. This was triple the average response seen across the past 20 citywide surveys and highlights that safety is a high priority to residents. Feedback from this survey indicated that:

- 83.6% feel safe on the Gold Coast during the day;
- 61.8% feel safe on the Gold Coast;
- 72.7% feel safe in their neighbourhood;
- 39.2% felt safe at night on the Gold Coast;
- Alcohol use is a top safety concern for respondents;
- 70% of respondents feel CCTV increased their safety;
- 750 respondents felt a visible police presence increased their feelings of safety;
- 325 respondents felt clean and well-maintained streets increased their feelings of safety;

It is evident from the survey that fewer respondents felt safe at night on the Gold Coast relative to other measures, noting that it is likely that visible public intoxication is higher during this period.

Regular complaints are received by the City about homeless persons in public spaces with antisocial public offences often cited among concerns. These behaviours include intoxication and public drinking of alcohol, urination, defecation and related odour, and littering.

As mentioned, the City has developed and implemented a permanent program offering specialist Liaison Officers who work closely with the Homelessness Network to link people who are sleeping in public spaces with appropriate support services. In the first eight months of this program, the City received 600 calls for services and connected 283 people.





## 2. The impact of decriminalising public intoxication and begging

The City appreciates the pressures on the limited resources and infrastructure of QPS and that a key driver for this Inquiry is to ease workload pressure on QPS and reduce potential risks to the individuals being brought into custody. The key issues with decriminalisation of antisocial behaviours, particularly public intoxication and urination, are as follows:

### *Potentially reduces public safety and community well being*

The City is concerned that the removal of offences for being intoxicated or urinating in a public place will reduce police powers to adequately remove persons of potential threat or risk to themselves and others within the community.

Should QPS not be afforded these powers, the City considers that more intoxicated persons will remain within public places for longer. This will likely have the effect of escalation of behaviours increasing the risks to both themselves and the community. The adverse effects of public offences and antisocial behaviours in public places are well established.

Whilst decriminalisation of begging activities, where such activity is not accompanied by threatening or anti-social behaviour, would not be opposed, the City remains concerned for community members engaging in begging. For example, previous experience with food services operating in public spaces, with increased regularity, was that it tended to result in a reduction in service users seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services as essential needs were being met via those food services. The City is similarly concerned that persons engaging in begging activities may elect not to engage with essential service providers to improve their wellbeing outcomes and therefore not achieve longer term solutions. The complexities and potential negative consequences of reforms, however well intentioned, need to be carefully thought through by Government.

### *Potentially increases pressure and risk on other services*

As outlined, the City is already exerting considerable effort to assist in combating the effects of antisocial behaviours in public places, including CCTV infrastructure, provision of public space liaison and city laws officers, active participation in support initiatives and groups, city cleaning and maintenance, and producing support materials.

The City considers that removal of such powers will lead to

- altered police processes that will leave intoxicated persons on the street for longer increasing other antisocial and undesirable behaviours, leading to an increased burden on other support agencies, including critical health services such as ambulances, and hospital emergency wards;
- increased burden on local businesses including damaged property and reduced business, less conducive environments for patrons, and damage to infrastructure through violent behaviours;
- a reduced effectiveness of collaborative responses and a further shift in responsibility and cost of interventions to local government. Refer response to Question 3 for these extended services.





### *Poor portrayal of the city's image and reputation*

The Gold Coast is a world-renowned tourist destination and is heavily dependent upon its tourism industry for the city's prosperity. Antisocial behaviours damage the city's reputation, affecting future economic benefits. Any increased presence of these behaviours will likely adversely impact our city's reputation.

### **Health and welfare services that currently exist and additional services that would be required to manage public intoxication and begging if they were to be decriminalised**

Please refer to the introductory section to this submission outlining existing health and welfare related services that currently exist in the Gold Coast community.

The Homelessness Action Plan also identifies two key priority actions which the City will support, being to:

1. create safe public spaces that are accessible to all residents, visitors and businesses; and
2. build a strong support network so that by working together we can build our capacity to respond effectively.

These actions seek to target welfare and community safety issues in locations known to be frequented by some of our most vulnerable residents. The impacts of the proposed changes to legislation are considered to have broader impacts to those affected and locations where these behaviours may take place. Additional services would need to target these areas.

Existing services such as the *Chill Out Zone* have established relationships with the local community and QPS. Data may also need to be sought from QPS in order to determine locations and needs for additional responses of this kind.

As the Gold Coast is a growing city with an estimated current population of more than 630,000 residents, consideration should be given to the need for additional services that operate outside of standard business hours to support those people who may be in need outside of these times.

Being a linear city, health and welfare services would need to be accessible in several locations to allow an appropriate response to demand.

### **3. Factors that would need to be considered in the design of any health and social welfare responses**

The factors that would need consideration in designing health and social welfare programs should the antisocial provisions be decriminalised are summarised as follows:

- the number of those seeking assistance and support from agencies for welfare related issues, or rough sleeping has increased steadily;
- the impacts which lead to public intoxication, urination or begging (from a welfare perspective) are best tackled with services to support residents on a long-term basis and such services are already at, or above, capacity, to provide assertive outreach;
- there is a shortage of facilities and support services equipped to both support the welfare needs of citizens and maintain the safety of the amenities being frequented, leading to a decreased sense of perceived safety and increased costs in keeping amenities safe and up to benchmark standards.





Along with managing public intoxication and begging, there needs to be an increase in a range of funded services to address the underlying issues as to why people are publicly intoxicated or begging including:

- current street based assertive outreach working alongside the City's Public Space Liaison Officers (such as Homeless Health Outreach teams, UnitingCare's Community Connections Outreach Program and Engagement, and the Gold Coast Youth Service *Street CRED* team);
- accommodation along the housing continuum (particularly supported and transitional accommodation);
- an expansion of safe spaces such as:
  - Gold Coast Youth Service *Chill Out Zone*;
  - after-hours drop-in centres for people experiencing homelessness;
  - more after-hours mental health safe spaces such as those delivered by primary & community care services.
- specialist inpatient withdrawal or stabilisation hospital alcohol and drug services to provide for people with alcohol and other drug dependency;
- increased and ongoing residential rehabilitation or other local mobile supports within the community - there are currently none in the city;
- extensive consultation with key Gold Coast stakeholders, including members of the Gold Coast Homelessness Network (as the primary deliverers of welfare services) to ensure new initiatives and associated resourcing is fit for purpose and integrated; and
- more investment in referral pathways/services, including education/early intervention, outreach, detox services, crisis accommodation, after hours responses etc.

In summary, the overall impacts of the proposed changes to the current legislation are likely to have broader impacts on the city's demand for services, the current supply and availability of services and current infrastructure to support additional social and welfare services.

### **Recommendation**

The City of Gold Coast does not support any easing of legislative tools or operational policing responses relating to antisocial behaviours regulated under the *Summary Offences Act 2005* without:

- suitable legislative alternatives to "move on" intoxicated persons and detain or arrest those displaying high risk antisocial behaviours to ensure community safety; and
- ensuring State government services can meet existing levels of need, including increasing policing operations and to other early intervention programs, meeting the community's social housing needs and/or affordable rental options.

The City considers that a preferred solution is to enhance joint State Government services that provide additional services to those most vulnerable in the community that are likely to experience homelessness.





On review of the proposed implications of the possible decriminalisation of certain antisocial offences currently in the *Summary Offences Act 2005*, the City urges the Committee to duly consider the matters contained in this submission.

Should you have further enquiries or require additional information, please contact Ms Brooke Denholder, Manager Safe and Liveable Communities, on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely

  
**DONNA GATES**  
**ACTING MAYOR**

Encl.



# GOLD COAST HOMELESSNESS

ACTION PLAN 2024






|                   |   |
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An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half of the image shows clear, turquoise water with visible sandbars and ripples. Below the water is a wide, white sandy beach. The bottom half of the image is dominated by a dense, lush green forest that meets the beach. The overall scene is bright and scenic.

Council of the City of Gold Coast (City) respectfully acknowledges the Yugambah (You-Gum-Bear) people, the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, work and visit. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples here today.





## Mayor's foreword

Homelessness does not discriminate.

It can impact a person at any stage of their life, with devastating consequences for the individual and their families.

It remains one of the most complex and challenging social issues globally, requiring a multi-pronged response from both governments and not-for-profit organisations.

Our city is taking a proactive approach to homelessness, bringing together all agencies to ensure we manage the challenges in the most efficient way.

This plan examines the exceptional work undertaken to date and also lays a foundation for the years ahead.

The plan follows the basic principle that we should work together to make sure any experience of homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Overall, the aim is to reduce homelessness, ensure our public spaces are safe for everyone, and identify what resources are best applied to various challenges and circumstances.

Councils can only do so much as the core service providers are at state, and federal, level.

Actions outlined in this plan try to balance the needs of the wider community while delivering on-the-ground support for those in need.

Together, we are making a difference and I'm delighted the City will support the good work of so many local support agencies through the Gold Coast Homelessness Action Plan 2024.

Tom Tate  
Mayor



# 'Homelessness can affect anyone of any age

## Acronyms

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>ABS:</b>   | Australian Bureau of Statistics                      |
| <b>CPTED:</b> | Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design        |
| <b>DCHDE:</b> | Department of Communities, Housing & Digital Economy |
| <b>DFV:</b>   | Domestic and Family Violence                         |
| <b>GCHN:</b>  | Gold Coast Homelessness Network                      |
| <b>LGA:</b>   | Local Government Area                                |
| <b>NHHA:</b>  | National Housing and Homelessness Agreement          |
| <b>PSLO:</b>  | Public Space Liaison Officer                         |
| <b>QPS:</b>   | Queensland Police Service                            |
| <b>REIQ:</b>  | Real Estate Institute of Queensland                  |
| <b>SCN:</b>   | Safety Camera Network                                |
| <b>SHS:</b>   | Specialist Homelessness Services                     |

and can be **temporary**  
or **long term.**'

## Executive Summary

### **Our vision for the Gold Coast is 'inspired by lifestyle, driven by opportunity'.**

This vision informs our strategic planning for the city with the aim of protecting our enviable lifestyle and ensuring that future generations are proud to call the Gold Coast home.

Homelessness can affect anyone of any age and can be temporary or long term. A safe and secure home is a fundamental need; people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are among our city's most vulnerable residents.

We want to make sure that any experience of homelessness on the Gold Coast is rare, brief and non-recurring. Our priorities are:

- **Safe public spaces** – create public spaces that are safe and accessible for all residents, visitors and businesses
- **Strong support network** – work together with our partners to build the capacity of local homelessness services so they can respond effectively
- **Reduce homelessness** – reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness on the Gold Coast by connecting them with services
- **Diverse housing** – advocate for and support the delivery of a diverse range of affordable housing options.

While homelessness policy in Australia is led by other levels of government, we recognise that we also have a role to play. This plan outlines the City of Gold Coast's roles, responsibilities and strategic responses to homelessness over the next three years.

The actions in this plan balance the needs of our whole community, and acknowledge that any effective response will require the continued support of our partner agencies, local service providers, and the Gold Coast Homelessness Network.



**A safe and secure home is a fundamental need. People who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are among our city's most vulnerable residents.**

# 1.0

## Introduction

**Homelessness can affect anyone of any age and can be temporary or long term. The main causes of homelessness are domestic and family violence, the lack of affordable housing, mental health issues, drug and alcohol addiction, family breakdown or unemployment.**

While homelessness policy in Australia is led by the Australian Government, and the relevant State or Territory Government, we recognise that we also have a role to play.

Gold Coast residents, local businesses and community organisations expect us to be proactive in our response to people experiencing homelessness in the city. We manage public spaces and facilities, land use planning, and community spaces used by service providers working to help people exit homelessness; we employ Public Space Liaison Officers (PSLOs) to connect with and refer homeless residents to relevant services; we actively participate in the Gold Coast Homelessness Network (GCHN); and we advocate to other levels of government for additional crisis and social housing and outreach services.

The actions in this plan support the valuable work currently being done in our community in response to homelessness and will guide our work through to 2024.

## 1.1

### What is homelessness

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), homelessness occurs when a person does not have suitable accommodation and where their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations (ABS 2012).



HOMELESSNESS





“

**The lack of sleep is hard. Even with a sleeping bag or a swag, the concrete is still cold” he says. “In the morning, everything hurts from the cold.**

”



## Meet Pete

Before he became homeless, Pete had lived in the local area for about 15 years in an apartment with his wife. He was employed and had been a business owner until his wife passed away and he lost his business.

“The lack of sleep is hard. Even with a sleeping bag or a swag, the concrete is still cold” he says. “In the morning, everything hurts from the cold”.

Pete and a couple of other guys used to find places to sleep after sunset. They would always wake early, before 4am, and tidy up so they didn't attract attention.

Pete was one of the hidden homeless. He didn't draw attention to himself, so he slipped through the cracks. Together with the City's Public Space Liaison Officers, caseworkers from UnitingCare Communities were able to engage with Pete and build a rapport with him. They were able to assist Pete to navigate the support system and advocate on his behalf.

Now Pete has accommodation and has been able to resume hobbies such as fishing, gardening, cooking, walking, and riding his bike.

Pete still knows a lot of people who are experiencing homelessness and he says the problem is bigger than many realise. He worries about his mates who are still on the street. He hopes they will follow his path out of homelessness and into sustainable housing.



HOMELESSNESS



# Types of Homelessness



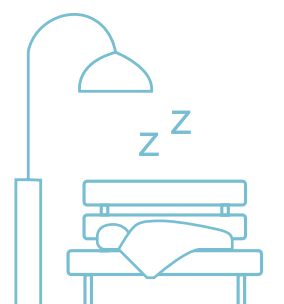
## 1.2

### Understanding homelessness

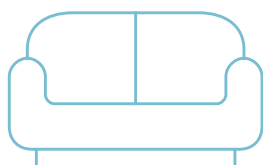
Homelessness is more than simply not having a roof overhead. People experiencing homelessness may be in situations that include:

- Rough sleepers, who are without shelter, sleeping in cars or living in improvised structures unsuitable for habitation.
- People couch surfing or staying temporarily with other households.
- People living in severely overcrowded dwellings.
- People staying in crisis or temporary accommodation such as refuges for people experiencing domestic or family violence.
- People living in boarding houses or caravan parks without security of tenure.

There can be significant implications for people who become homeless, even if a person only experiences homelessness for a short period of time. Homelessness can lead to a significant decline in an individual's physical and mental health, reduced social connection, an increased threat to personal safety, and lead to social and economic marginalisation.



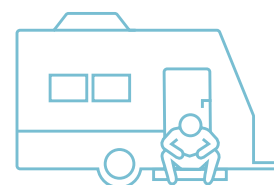
People without any housing, such as rough sleepers, living in unsuitable dwellings, or in their vehicle.



People who are between homes, staying temporarily with friends or family, or living in severely overcrowded dwellings.



People living in crisis accommodation, shelters or refuges.



People living in boarding houses or caravan parks without security of tenure.



## HOMELESSNESS

## 1.3

## Homelessness on the Gold Coast

On census night in 2016, there was an estimated 1708 people experiencing homelessness on the Gold Coast (ABS 2016b). Although statistics on homelessness from the 2021 Census are not expected to be available until late 2022, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in the number of people in the city without a home.

Local Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) report that the number of people seeking support was almost 3500 during 2019–20, with an average increase of 6.5 per cent per year since 2016–17 (AIHW 2020).

Children and young people make up 43 per cent of all people seeking support (AIHW 2020). A wide range of factors can contribute to homelessness among young people aged 12–24 including family breakdown, low income, mental illness, lack of rental history, or limited independent living skills. In addition, older people, 60 years and over, are increasingly being affected, with a growing number of women over 60 years of age engaging with SHS (AIHW 2020).

Local partners are developing ways of collecting more accurate data to better inform local responses and enable better coordination and collaboration.

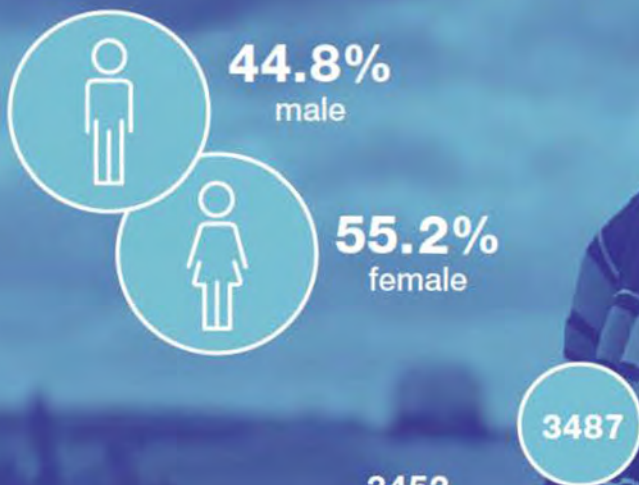
Children  
and  
young  
people  
make up  
43 per  
cent of  
all people  
seeking  
support



# 1708

people  
experienced  
homelessness  
on census  
night 2016.





Total reported Specialist Homelessness Services clients  
Gold Coast LGA, 2015-2020 (unique client count)



## HOMELESSNESS

## 1.4

## Local factors contributing to homelessness

There are many factors that can affect a person's risk of homelessness.

### 1.4.1 Housing affordability

Housing stress is defined as those occupied private dwellings with very low or low household income and who are spending more than 30 per cent of that household income on either rent or mortgage payments (AIHW 2021). House and rental prices on the Gold Coast continue to rise, with 14 per cent of all households being in housing stress, which is higher than the rate for Brisbane City, Sydney City, Queensland and Australia (ABS 2016b). Of those renting, one third of households are in housing stress.

In the last decade, rents across the Gold Coast for three bedroom houses have risen by 50 per cent to \$600 per week and two bedroom units by 47 per cent to \$500 per week (Residential Tenancies Authority 2021).

Of the rental stock available on the Gold Coast, only 0.1 per cent is affordable for people on very low incomes, and 3.2 per cent is affordable for people on low incomes (PropTrack 2021).

A low income household paying more than \$391 for rent per week will be in housing stress, and an 'entry level unit' on the Gold Coast is \$395 per week (PropTrack 2021).

### 1.4.2 Supply of social housing

Social housing, funded by the State Government, includes both direct provision of public housing and housing delivered through partnerships with community housing providers. Rents are limited to an affordable proportion of assessable income or the market rent, whichever is lower.

As at 30 June 2020, there were 4720 social housing tenancies on the Gold Coast. At the same time, 3285 people were on the waiting list for long term social housing, and 48 per cent of these were in the 'very high need' category (Queensland Government 2021a).

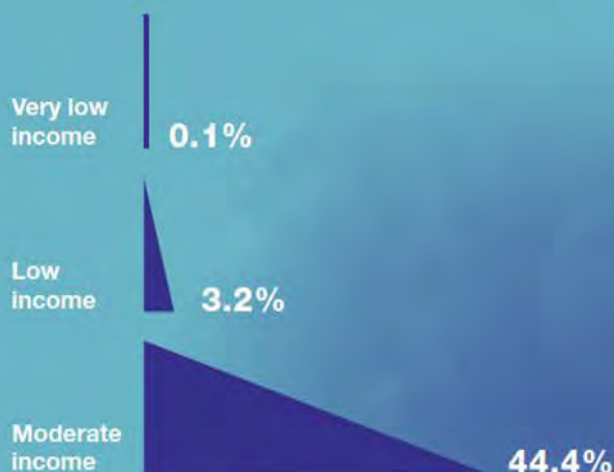


**Joan\* an older woman, was rough sleeping in public amenities for ten years.**

Following ongoing support from PSLOs she engaged with case workers for housing and mental health support and she has subsequently been approved for community housing.

\* name changed for privacy purposes

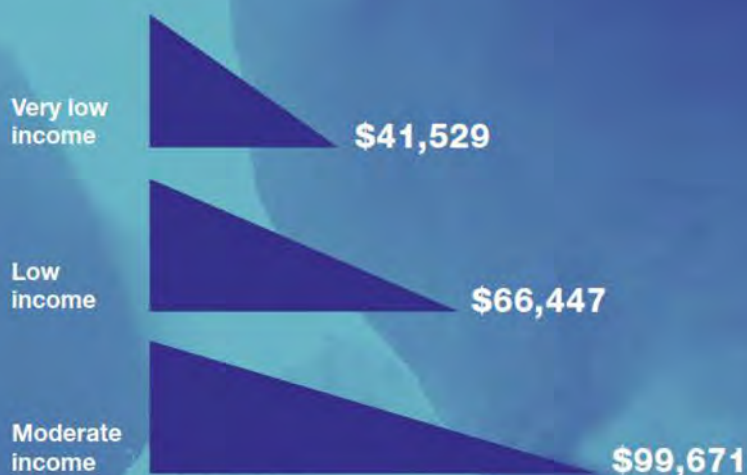
How much affordable housing is available to rent on the Gold Coast?



Affordable rental listings for the 12 months to June 2021 for average all households.

PropTrack (2021). Calculated and presented by .id (informed decisions).

Average income level of households on the Gold Coast



ABS (2016). Calculated and presented by .id (informed decisions).

1.4.3 Domestic and family violence

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Australia (AIHW 2019). People escaping an unsafe home environment can become homeless due to a lack of resources and alternative accommodation.

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is a significant concern on the Gold Coast. Between 2016–2020, Southport Magistrates Court consistently recorded the highest number of DFV protection order applications in Queensland. Last year Southport Magistrates Court recorded 2577 applications (Queensland Government 2021b).



HOMELESSNESS



# 2.0

## Policy context

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**Daz\* a single man and his pet dog had been sleeping rough in various City parks for over two years.**

His life had been characterised by experiences of homelessness, on and off, since he was a young child. His health had been impacted by a lack of shelter and he became increasingly socially isolated.

Proactive patrols by the PSLOs and specialist outreach workers connected Daz with welfare and support services. He and his dog have since transitioned into accommodation where he is supported by trained staff to maintain his tenancy. **He now has a place to call home and feel safe.**

**Homelessness policy in Australia is led by the Australian Government, and the relevant State Government or Territory Government. Both levels of government are responsible for funding and delivering homelessness services, as well as housing, health, and other associated services.**

## 2.1

### Australian Government

The Australian Government provides funding and leadership in accordance with the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). Under the NHHA, the Australian Government funds services and initiatives that contribute to a reduction in the incidence of homelessness. Funds available under the NHHA are matched by the Queensland Government.

Homelessness strategies funded through the NHHA must address a range of priority cohorts. These cohorts are women and children affected by DFV, children and young people, Indigenous Australians, people experiencing repeat homelessness, people exiting institutions and care into homelessness, and older people.

\* name changed for privacy purposes



## HOMELESSNESS

## 2.2

**Queensland Government**

In Queensland, the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE) has primary responsibility for housing and homelessness. DCHDE delivers social housing, funds SHS, and partners with other service agencies to strengthen responses to homelessness.

The Queensland Government has sought to reduce homelessness through the delivery of a more connected service system that supports people to transition from homelessness into safe, secure and affordable housing.

The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027, provides a framework that seeks to improve the pathways from homelessness to safe, secure, and affordable housing including investing in homelessness services, crisis accommodation and longer-term supportive housing.

The key priorities of the strategy include reform across the housing continuum from homelessness to home ownership:

- Homelessness – Improve the pathways from homelessness to safe and secure housing.
- Social housing – Make better use of housing assets to meet the needs of communities.
- Affordable rentals – Increase the supply of community-managed, affordable rental accommodation.
- Private market rentals – Increase the supply of affordable private market rental properties and provide greater protection and support to tenants.
- Housing supply – Create a pipeline of development; undertake urban renewal across local precincts; and encourage energy-efficient and sustainable design.

The Queensland Government Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–2025 is the second action plan developed to support the objectives of the Queensland Housing Strategy. These actions focus on increasing housing supply, reducing homelessness, supporting vulnerable people, and creating a fairer and accessible housing system which is stable and secure, providing protections and giving confidence to those who reside and invest in these housing options.

In November 2021, the Queensland Government announced plans to deliver more than 7000 new social and affordable homes for Queenslanders over the next four years through the Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative.

## 2.3

**Other policy areas affecting homelessness**

There are other areas of government that have responsibilities relating to homelessness. These include the Queensland Police Service (QPS) whose role it is to respond to criminal activity including anti-social behaviour and domestic and family violence; and Queensland Health whose role includes public health and mental health services.

We work closely with partner agencies with the aim of responding to homelessness in a coordinated and collaborative way.

Government agencies in Queensland also have a responsibility to respect, protect and promote the rights of individuals, under the Queensland Human Rights Act 2019.

The main objectives of the Act are to:

- protect and promote human rights
- help build a culture in the Queensland public sector that respects and promotes human rights
- help promote a dialogue about the nature, meaning and scope of human rights.





HOMELESSNESS

3.0

The City's response to homelessness



**Margaret\* a single woman with disability, was homeless for many years.**

She was often a victim of violence. Her physical and mental health were significantly impacted leading to regular substance misuse.

The PSLOs collaborated with local services to assist Margaret to find accommodation. She moved into a small unit where she can feel safe at night.

\* name changed for privacy purposes

# 3.1

## Current City initiatives

The City's role in responding to homelessness is through the management of public spaces and facilities, environmental health regulation, disaster management, town planning, and by supporting service providers working to help people exit homelessness and into housing. Our current initiatives include:

### Public Space Liaison Officers

In 2020, we trialed a PSLO program, with additional funding for two specialist officers. PSLOs have been working closely with the GCHN to link people who are sleeping in public spaces with appropriate support services to assist them to exit homelessness.

In the first eight months, the PSLOs received 600 calls for services and assisted 283 people. Council has since endorsed it as a permanent program.

### Joint patrols in hotspots

We undertake regular joint proactive patrols with QPS and local outreach services in homeless hotspots with the aim of linking people with relevant services.

### Regulatory Services

Through its local laws, the City is responsible for maintaining the safety and amenity of public spaces for all residents and visitors. We actively work with people sleeping rough and local assertive outreach support services to balance the needs of individuals with the preservation of amenity and community safety.

### Community safety interagency collaboration

To facilitate communication and strategic partnerships with the QPS and other key community safety stakeholders, the City leads the Mayoral Safer Suburbs Forum. This interagency partnership addresses current and emerging issues and determines coordinated actions, including in relation to reducing the impacts of homelessness.

### Safety Camera Network

The Safety Camera Network (SCN) is delivered by the City and is a key public safety tool with over 700 cameras installed in public spaces. The cameras are monitored 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Any incidents or observations of people at risk who may require assistance is communicated directly to QPS. The SCN also informs hotspot trends and can support outreach responses.

### Domestic and family violence

Nationally domestic and family violence is a major cause of people becoming homeless. We work to prevent and reduce DFV through our DFV Action Plan. Key actions include promoting local support services and training for City staff to develop skills to connect people to those services.

### Safety Information Card

We produce a safety information card in a number of languages. The information on the card includes key contact details for several different support services, such as emergency accommodation and support, domestic, family and sexual violence, seniors, and youth.

### Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

We audit and improve safety in public spaces by applying internationally recognised Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. These design principles are applied to all new and upgraded City parks and public spaces to enhance the safety of all residents and visitors.

### Affordable spaces for support services

Our Community Centre network provides affordable and accessible spaces for organisations to deliver their services from. Current hirers include a wide range of support services, including food service providers, legal aid, youth services, drug and alcohol support, and mental health programs.

### Community Group Hub

We provide an online resource hub to build the capacity and sustainability of local community groups. The Hub connects community groups with skills development workshops, grant opportunities and other resources to assist them to help our most vulnerable residents.

### Gold Coast Homelessness Network

The City is an active member of the GCHN. Members of the GCHN include SHS, government agencies, community organisations, and local businesses working together to prevent and reduce homelessness through education, raising awareness and supporting effective service delivery.

The City is a major sponsor of the annual Gold Coast Homeless Connect event hosted by the GCHN. The Homeless Connect initiative was introduced to the Gold Coast in 2008 and now hosts more than 900 people each year. It provides a one stop shop for donations, health checks and an opportunity to connect with services.



## HOMELESSNESS

By **working collaboratively** with our partners, we can ensure more effective responses to **reduce homelessness** in the city.

# James\* was rough sleeping and for many years had refused support.

PSLOs built rapport with James over time and were able to link him to specialist homelessness services. They assisted him to obtain personal identification necessary to apply for housing. He has since been accepted into supported accommodation where he can also access a range of other health and support services.

\* name changed for privacy purposes

## 3.2 The need for an action plan

The Gold Coast faces a number of challenges and opportunities in the near future.

The following key matters were raised through our consultation:

- impacts on local businesses
- perceptions of safety in public spaces
- housing affordability and supply
- rough sleepers in public spaces
- capacity of support services
- mobile meal and support services
- shortage of facilities
- need for a food distribution hub
- Olympic Games legacy.

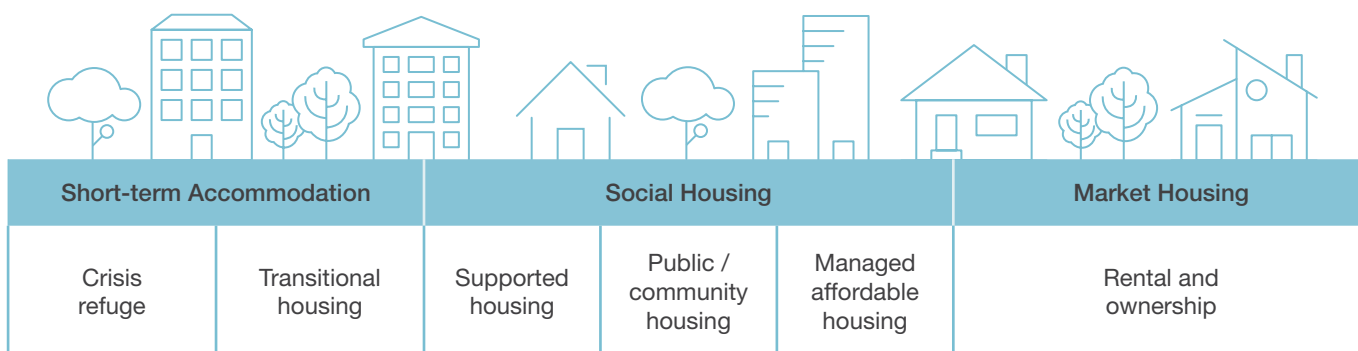
Due to its complex and varied causes, homelessness cannot be solved by any individual organisation. It requires a coordinated response from all levels of government and service providers. By working collaboratively with our partners, we can ensure more effective responses to reduce homelessness in the city.

### Housing affordability and supply

The Gold Coast housing market has experienced significant reduction in the availability of rental stock since May 2020, with an extremely limited supply of housing that is affordable for households on low incomes.

Research into the impacts of the pandemic indicate that the number of households living in a 'precarious situation' is very high with housing insecurity forecast to rise. Consultation indicated that there is also a shortage of housing options across the housing continuum from crisis refuges through to managed affordable housing.

### The housing continuum:





## HOMELESSNESS

**Rough sleepers**

Over the past five years the number of people experiencing homelessness and seeking support from SHS has increased steadily. There is a lack of emergency and transitional housing options in the city, despite the well-developed and proactive homelessness sector.

The City continues to receive a high number of enquiries from residents and businesses who are concerned about people who are homeless particularly in our public spaces.

**Capacity of support services**

Housing is one critical part of reducing homelessness. For many, transitioning into housing and successfully maintaining a tenancy requires support. For example assertive outreach, budgeting skills, drug and alcohol, mental health and DFV. Our PSLOs work alongside and refer to these services. Data shows that demand for these services continues to increase.

**Mobile meal and support services**

Mobile meal and support services play an important role in supporting vulnerable people by providing meals and other services such as free clothing and laundry services. Many mobile meal and support services operate in our City parks and community centres. Typically, these services are led and supported by volunteers.

Mobile meal and support services connect people to services and government departments. Mobile meal and support services should therefore be appropriately located, consider frequency, have adequate access to hygiene facilities, and partner with other support agencies.

Mobile meal and support services operating in community centres can hire space at a discounted rate.

City parks are also used by mobile meal and support services. Currently regular mobile meal and support services operating in City parks require a booking. This allows us to appropriately manage public space, ensure there is no conflict with other users, and maintain the amenity and safety of the park for all residents and visitors.





### Shortage of facilities

SHS have identified that there is a shortage of facilities to support the daily needs of people who are experiencing homelessness, including staffed drop-in centres, 24 hour access to public toilets, and safe storage of belongings. Any facilities need to be provided in an appropriate location and managed so that people can use them in a safe manner.

### Need for a food distribution hub

There is a current and growing need for food support on the Gold Coast. This is due to the rising cost of living, lack of affordable rental accommodation, ongoing employment uncertainty caused by the pandemic, and slow growth in wages, all placing significant financial strain on households.

Local services have identified a need for a regional food distribution hub in the city. The hub would be a facility to collect and store surplus food to provide to local community organisations such as refuges and school breakfast programs, which in turn distribute the food to their clients.

Currently, a number of local organisations travel to Brisbane several times a week to obtain food from Foodbank Queensland, the only warehousing facility of its type in South East Queensland. The number of groups they can service is capped. The regular travel from Gold Coast to Brisbane and return is costly, inefficient and takes time away from assisting those in need.

### Olympic Games 2032

Staging an Olympic Games can impact on housing affordability and homelessness in host cities. There are many examples where these events have also presented an opportunity to increase affordable housing supply and strengthen partnerships to respond to homelessness.

Building on our experience in successfully responding to homelessness during the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and proactive planning with our partners, the city will be well placed to maximise legacy opportunities from the 2032 Olympic Games.



HOMELESSNESS

# 4.0

## Action Plan

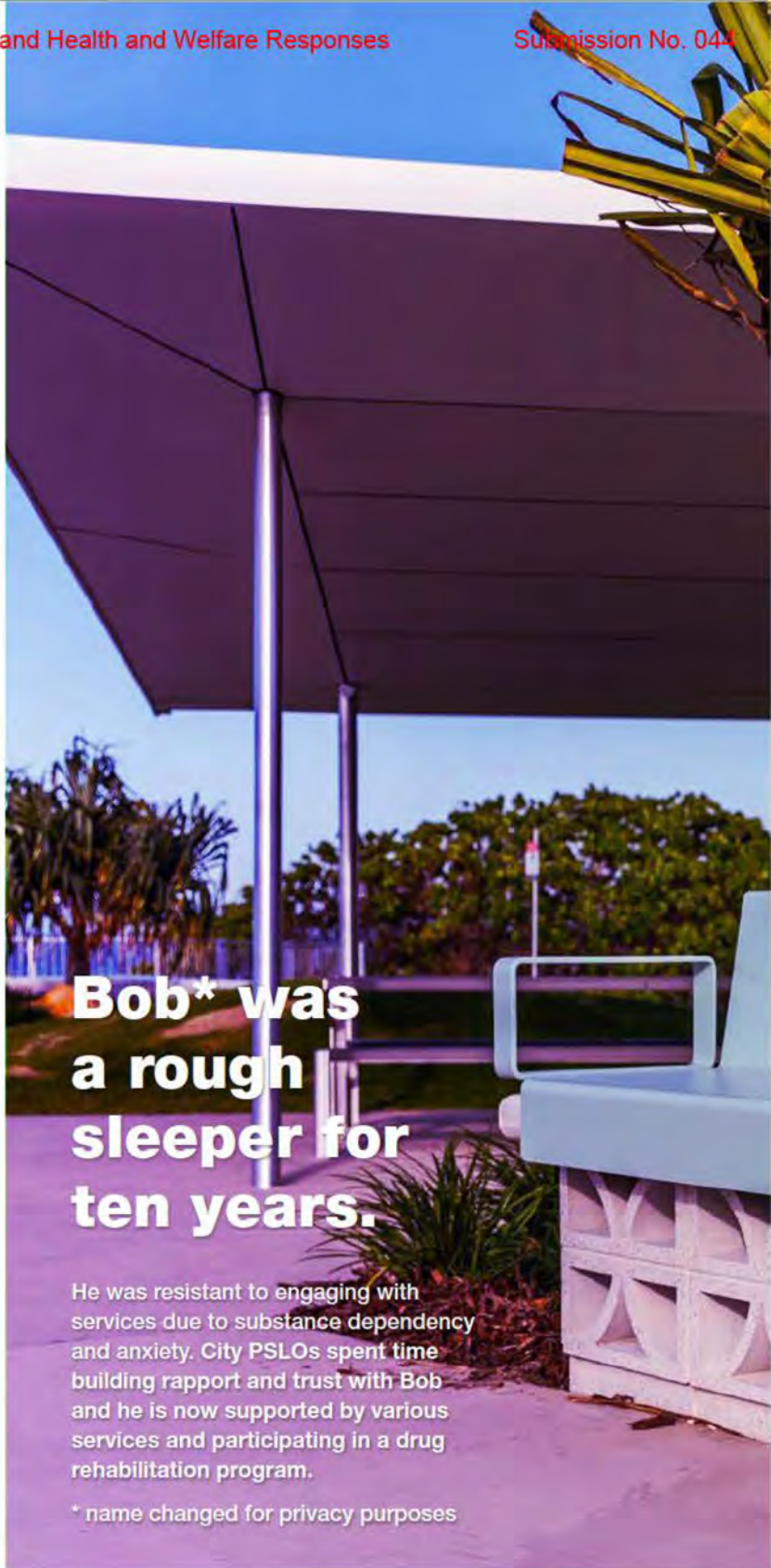
The Gold Coast Homelessness Action Plan builds on existing City of Gold Coast initiatives and will guide our work through to 2024.

We are committed to reducing homelessness. Our goal is to ensure that any experience of homelessness is:

- **Rare** – by reducing the number of people becoming homeless.
- **Brief** – so that experiences of homelessness are short in duration.
- **Non-recurring** – homelessness is not frequent or repeated, rather it is a one-off experience.

Through our Corporate Plan, the City outlines programs of work to diversify housing choice, deliver safer community spaces, reduce social isolation, and to maintain a strong sense of belonging, identity and pride in our city.

This Action Plan supports the Corporate Plan by identifying priorities and actions to support the City's commitment to reduce homelessness on the Gold Coast.



**Bob\* was a rough sleeper for ten years.**

He was resistant to engaging with services due to substance dependency and anxiety. City PSLOs spent time building rapport and trust with Bob and he is now supported by various services and participating in a drug rehabilitation program.

\* name changed for privacy purposes

## 4.1 Our priorities

This Action Plan identifies our four strategic priorities to address homelessness, aligned with our responsibilities as a local government. Under these four priorities we have identified key actions that will deliver these over the next three years.



### Safe public spaces

Create public spaces that are safe and accessible for all residents, visitors and businesses.



### Strong support network

Work together with our partners to build the capacity of local homelessness services so they can respond effectively.





## Reduce homelessness

Reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness on the Gold Coast by connecting them with services.



## Diverse housing

Advocate for and support the delivery of a diverse range of affordable housing options.





## HOMELESSNESS

## 4.2

## Our actions

**Safe public spaces**

**Create public spaces that are safe and accessible for all residents, visitors and businesses.**

| Action | What we will do   |
|--------|---|
| 1.1    | Develop a Homelessness Protocol to guide City employees and ensure consistent approaches when interacting with people experiencing homelessness in public spaces. For example, abandoned items, referral pathways, information collection and information sharing with other agencies.        |
| 1.2    | Strengthen the City's partnership with Queensland Police Service in responding to homelessness through an operational agreement, under the existing Memorandum of Understanding. This will detail how we will work together to respond to escalating anti-social behaviours in public spaces. |
| 1.3    | Participate in joint patrols with partner agencies in hot spot areas of rough sleeping to maintain the amenity and safety of public spaces for all users.   |
| 1.4    | Work with local businesses to identify hot spot areas, appropriate reporting pathways and opportunities to participate in solutions.  |
| 1.5    | Enhance communication procedures to provide timely advice to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness about disaster events; and consider any specific requirements during recovery planning.   |
| 1.6    | Review the booking process for volunteer meal services and other welfare services operating in City parks to ensure that it balances the needs of all users.  |
| 1.7    | Report on the implementation of these actions and escalate any other emerging issues, as they relate to community safety, to the Mayoral Safer Suburbs Forum.   |





HOMELESSNESS



## Strong support network

**Work together with our partners to build the capacity of local homelessness services so they can respond effectively.**

| Action | What we will do   |
|--------|---|
| 2.1    | Participate as a member of the Gold Coast Homelessness Network to ensure the delivery of City actions are part of the local coordinated approach.   |
| 2.2    | Contribute details, as appropriate, to Gold Coast Homelessness Network's initiatives including the live dashboard to better understand the extent of homelessness in the city and streamline responses for individuals.   |
| 2.3    | Assist the Gold Coast Homelessness Network to investigate the feasibility and promote the development of a Food Distribution Hub in the city.   |
| 2.4    | Create a virtual homelessness advisory panel of specialist stakeholders to consider new initiatives to address homelessness that are presented to the City.   |
| 2.5    | Build the capacity of the local homelessness sector by connecting them with the City's Volunteering Network and City Connect Program, for example online Community Group Hub, training and skills workshops, grants information, and booking affordable community spaces. |
| 2.6    | Connect individuals, groups and businesses to the Gold Coast Homelessness Network to ensure activities and donations offer meaningful support to those experiencing homelessness.   |



## HOMELESSNESS

# Reduce homelessness

**Reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness on the Gold Coast by connecting them with services.**

| Action | What we will do  |
|--------|--|
| 3.1    | Expand the City's Public Space Liaison Officer program over time to connect more people sleeping rough in public spaces with services and support their transition into sustainable housing. |
| 3.2    | Advocate to the Queensland Government for funding and resources for additional assertive outreach and specialist case management services.   |
| 3.3    | Provide timely information to people who are sleeping rough in public spaces about future City works or events that may impact them.   |
| 3.4    | Update the City's website to include information for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness about how to access support services, and how our community can donate or volunteer.     |
| 3.5    | Provide information in City community centres and libraries about assistance available for people experiencing homelessness.   |
| 3.6    | Deliver training to City officers on understanding homelessness and working with people who are homeless to ensure they can effectively respond.   |
| 3.7    | Advocate for the provision of managed after hours safe spaces for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness to access food, showers, health services and other support.         |







# Diverse housing

**Advocate for and support the delivery of a diverse range of affordable housing options.**

| Action | What we will do   |
|--------|---|
| 4.1    | Advocate for an increase in the supply of crisis, social and affordable housing: including domestic and family violence refuges; a Common Ground supported accommodation facility; and the redevelopment of appropriate social housing stock. |
| 4.2    | Undertake a Residential Land Supply Analysis and a Housing Needs Investigation to inform future City planning activities.   |
| 4.3    | Review the City Plan to support the delivery of housing choice (including affordable and adaptable housing).  |
| 4.4    | Streamline the development assessment process for community housing providers, by providing a central point of contact for applicants.  |
| 4.5    | Review the Rate Donation, Infrastructure Charges and Development Application Fee Discount Policy to investigate opportunities to provide support for not-for-profit registered community housing providers.                                   |
| 4.6    | Report to Council annually about City land or buildings that may be suitable for the delivery of innovative social and community housing.   |
| 4.7    | Investigate best practice affordable housing designs and delivery models; and leverage partnerships with universities, community housing providers and the private sector to test prototypes.   |
| 4.8    | Include affordable housing content within City Building Seminars, Urban Design Awards, GC Open House, and similar industry event programs.  |
| 4.9    | Promote mixed tenure and affordable housing options within the planning for any 2032 Olympics accommodation.  |
| 4.10   | Establish a plan to identify when and how we will deliver all advocacy actions in this plan to coordinate efforts and maximise impact.  |



## HOMELESSNESS

## 5.0

## Glossary of key terms

### Assertive outreach

Assertive outreach refers to services that engage and provide support to people who are sleeping rough to connect them to housing and may also support individuals to sustain their tenancies once housed.

### Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Designing public spaces in a way that makes it more difficult for crime and anti-social behaviour to occur. CPTED principles can include:

- Make offending riskier by making criminal behaviour more likely to be noticed, challenged and stopped.
- Promote safe pedestrian walkways in public spaces including:
  - a) clear sight lines
  - b) well defined paths of travel
  - c) eliminating potential concealment and entrapment areas.
- Promote the design of places using simple, legible signage with clear directions.
- Ensure that spaces and features are well cared for and provide street lighting and landscaping as a crime deterrent.
- Encourage people to protect the territory that they feel is their own and promote respect for the property of others.

### Community housing

Below market rental price properties managed by community housing providers. Rent for community housing is usually set as a percentage of household income. Tenants of community housing may be eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

### Couch surfers

People who stay temporarily with family or friends but are not permanent residents of any dwelling.

### Crisis accommodation

Crisis accommodation may include shelters, refuges (including for people escaping DFV) or boarding houses. These accommodation options are considered to be temporary.

## Department of Communities, Housing & Digital Economy

The Queensland Department of Communities, Housing & Digital Economy is responsible for homelessness services and managing social housing across the state.

### Homeless

A person is considered 'homeless' when they live in an inadequate dwelling and do not have suitable accommodation alternatives: or have no tenure, or tenure that is short and not extendable, or that does not allow them to control and access space.

### Housing diversity

A mix of housing types and price points that meet the needs of a diverse community.

### Housing stress

A household is considered to be in housing stress if that household is in the lowest 40 per cent of income groups and is paying more than 30 per cent of that income on their rent or mortgage (the 30/40 rule). Subcategories of this measure include mortgage stress and rental stress.

### Managed affordable housing

Below market rental properties usually managed by community housing providers. Rent for managed affordable housing is set as a percentage of the market value rent for equivalent dwellings.

### Mobile meal and support services

Mobile services, groups or programs that provide food, social contact or support to people who are experiencing homelessness as well as other people who are at risk of homelessness or are otherwise socially isolated. Typically they deliver regular services in parks or buildings (such as community centres or church halls).

### Safe spaces

Indoor spaces that offer respite from inclement weather, social stigma, victimisation, and access to essential services and resources. These spaces may operate throughout the day, late into the night or be available 24 hours.

### Sleeping rough

Sleeping rough refers to people who are sleeping in the open air such as living on the streets, sleeping in parks, or using buildings that are unsuitable such as pergolas or derelict buildings for temporary shelter.

## Public Housing

Below market rental properties managed by the Department of Communities, Housing & Digital Economy. Rent for public housing is usually set as a percentage of household income.

## Public space

For the purpose of this Homelessness Action Plan, public space is land managed by the City of Gold Coast and is usually accessible by the public.

## Public Space Liaison Officers (PSLOs)

Public Space Liaison Officers (PSLOs) engage people who are experiencing homelessness in public space (usually in parkland but can also include sleeping in cars or around City buildings) and connect them to services and support. PSLOs also engage with local residents and businesses to increase understanding and resolve problems before conflict arises.

## Severely overcrowded dwellings

A dwelling considered to be 'severely' crowded by the ABS is one which needs four or more extra bedrooms to house the people living there based on the following criteria:

- there should be no more than two persons per bedroom;
- children less than 5 years of age of different sexes may reasonably share a bedroom;
- children less than 18 years of age and of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom;
- single household members 18 and over should have a separate bedroom, as should parents or couples;
- a lone person household may reasonably occupy a bed sitter.

## Social housing

An umbrella term that describes below market rental properties either managed by the Department of Communities, Housing & Digital Economy, or community housing providers. Rent for social housing is usually set as a percentage of household income.

## Supported accommodation

An accommodation model that provides support to people in temporary accommodation or longer-term housing, for the person's duration of need. A duration of need approach means providing accommodation and/or support for as long as is required to enable the client to obtain and maintain sustainable housing. It is based on a person's assessed need rather than an arbitrary time limit.

## Vacancy rates

The Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ) calculation for residential vacancy rates is based upon all residential rentals as at the end of each quarter period, submitted by real estate agents. The REIQ classes rental markets into three categories: weak, healthy, and tight.

These rental markets are classified according to their vacancy rates: 0-2.5% = tight; 2.5-3.5% = healthy; and, 3.5% and above = weak.

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Residential Tenancies Authority (2021) Median rents quarterly data 2011–2021



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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