



Conference Report

Pathway through the Maze
National Squalor Conference
5-6 November 2009

Catholic Community Services hosted the inaugural National Squalor Conference – Pathway through the Maze in Sydney on 5-6 November 2009.

1. Conference objectives

The purpose of the Conference was to raise the profile of severe domestic squalor and hoarding, generate discussion and develop agreed priorities for future action in the area.

(a) Planning

The Conference planning process was guided by the Steering Committee, made up of:

- Carlene Albronda, Senior Project Officer, Catholic Community Services
- Wendy Gillett, Director Sydney Region, Catholic Community Services
- Susan Graham, Severe Domestic Squalor Project, Catholic Community Services
- Emma Knowles, Service Manager Homelessness & Housing, Catholic Community Services
- Dr Shannon McDermott, Social Policy Research Centre UNSW
- Leonie Miller, Service Manager Northern Region, Catholic Community Services
- Professor John Snowdon, Psycho-geriatrician

(b) Target groups

The groups targeted for attendance at the Conference included:

- Community Services
- Health
- Aged Care
- Mental Health
- Housing providers
- Clinicians
- Social Work
- Animal Welfare
- Emergency Services
- Local, State and Federal Government
- Academia
- Consumers and Carers

(c) Participation

The conference was promoted Australia-wide and to New Zealand, via email alerts, online promotion, industry and mainstream media, and through other industry events and conferences.

Participation in the conference was encouraged via the following methods:

- Expression of interest
- Abstracts
- Poster presentations
- Involvement in panels – consumer/carer, open mic sessions
- Feedback / suggestions for program content
- Exhibition or Sponsorship

2. Conference Program

(a) Plenary Sessions

The Conference Program featured high profile and respected speakers from around Australia, as well as Ireland and New Zealand.

(i) Keynote Speakers

- Professor John Snowdon, Psycho-geriatrician
Explaining Severe Domestic Squalor
- Susan Graham, Severe Domestic Squalor Project, Catholic Community Services
Solution-Focused Interventions for Squalor and Hoarding
- Assoc Professor Jill Gordon, Sydney University
On the Ethics of Intervention
- Dr Shannon McDermott, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW
Sifting through the evidence

(ii) Plenary Speakers

- Angela Catterns was the MC
- Father Bob Maguire presented a session titled 'Beauty in Squalor'
- Paul Lynch, Minister for Ageing, Disability Services and Aboriginal Affairs, officially opened the Conference

(iii) Hypothetical

A Hypothetical entitled "What a Load of Rubbish" explored the complexities around each case of severe domestic squalor and hoarding. The Hypothetical Panellists were:

- Richard Aedy, ABC Life Matters (Moderator)
- Kathy Roil, Housing NSW
- Penny Holloway, North Sydney Council
- Dr Simon Longstaff, St James Ethics Centre
- Susan Graham, Catholic Community Services
- Dr Kristine Klugman, Civil Liberties Australia
- Prof Graeme Halliday, Psycho-geriatrician
- Steve Coleman, RSPCA NSW
- The Hon Jeff Shaw, The People's Solicitors

(iv) Hoarding Panel

An expert panel discussed the issues specifically relating to hoarding cases:

- Steve Coleman, RSPCA NSW
- Julie Harris, Metropolitan Fire Brigade VIC
- Michele Slatter, Flinders University SA
- Professor Michael Kyrios, Swinburne University VIC

(v) Consumer Panel

A call for consumers and carers to become involved with the Conference was distributed via email networks and advertised online.

A panel of 6 x Consumers and Carers spoke at the Conference about their personal experiences with squalor and hoarding:

- Michael Appleton
- Simon Guppy
- Eileen McDonald
- Daniel Martin
- Judy Nicholas
- Sue Treweek

(vi) Open Mic session

An 'open mic' session on Day 2 of the Conference enabled delegates to all provide their own input into the issues that required further discussion and focus.

(vii) Summary Panel

A group of delegates from different backgrounds took part in the closing panel on Day 2, to provide a representative view of delegates as to the Conference outcomes. The Panel was made up of:

- Chris Bath, Waverley Council
- Eda Devoti, Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service
- Robert Bosi, City of Sydney
- Frances Rush, Office of the Public Guardian
- Gerald de Gabriele, Rural Geriatrician
- Wendy Gillett, Catholic Community Services

(b) Concurrent Sessions

31 abstracts were received from across Australia and 3 internationally, and 15 were selected for Concurrent session presentations, within five themes.

The selected abstracts are available at www.nationalsqualorconference.com.au

(i) Socio-legal perspectives

- a. Squalor as a Legal Concept,
Jeni Lee, Seniors Rights VIC
- b. The role of the Medical Health Officer under s126 of the NZ Health Act 1956,
Dr John Holmes, Otago District Health Board, NZ
- c. Chicken or the egg? Mental illness or squalor?
Simon Tatz, Mental Health Council of Australia, ACT

(ii) Hoarding 1

- a. The Psychology of Compulsive Hoarding,
Dr Christopher Mogan, The Anxiety Clinic, VIC
- b. Everything you ever wanted to know about compulsive hoarding but were afraid to ask: A Psychological Perspective,
Prof Michael Kyrios, Swinburne University of Technology, VIC
- c. A foot in the door: A guidance document to assist in the management of cases of Compulsive Hoarding & Domestic Squalor,
Andrew Brown & Michaela Hobby, SA Dept of Health, SA

(iii) Hoarding 2: Community Impact

- a. Working Model for Hoarding in Victoria,

Sook Meng Lee, Western Health, VIC

- b. Hoarding – a Fire Services perspective,
Julie Harris, Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board VIC and
Melanie Rabane, NSW Fire Brigades
- c. Animal Hoarding – Human or Animal Welfare?
Karen Thorne and Matt French, RSPCA NSW

(iv) Ethics & Decision Making

- a. Perceptions & Views of Self-Neglect: A client-centred perspective,
Mary Rose Day, University College Cork, Ireland
- b. Assessment and decision making processes community nurses use to care for
clients living in domestic squalor,
Dr Debbie Kralik, Royal District Nursing Service, SA
- c. Everyone deserves a chance,
Margaret Pitcher & Kitty Gilchrist, Domiciliary Care SA

(v) Promoting Good Practice

- a. Illawarra Good Living Conditions Project,
Verica Sajdovska and Sue Evans, UnitingCare Ageing, NSW
- b. Public places, private issues: Helping rough sleepers in squalor,
Mike Fish and Dan Byrne, City of Sydney Homelessness Unit, NSW
- c. SHINE – A spotlight on integrating community services in Rural NSW,
June Price, ACAT GSAHS, NSW

(c) Poster Presentations

Abstracts not selected for Concurrent Sessions were offered a Poster presentation, and 8 organisations made poster presentations for the conference:

- (i) Western Aged Care Assessment Service, VIC
- (ii) The Salvation Army Aged Care Plus, NSW
- (iii) Caulfield Hospital, VIC
- (iv) Inner South Community Health Service, VIC
- (v) Hastings Macleay General Practice Network, NSW
- (vi) CatholicCare, NSW
- (vii) Loddon Mallee Housing Services, VIC
- (viii) David Foxley, PhD Student, NSW

3. Conference Results

(a) Delegates

The total attendance at the conference was 390 people, drawn from around Australia and a few internationally.

The Geographic breakdown of delegates was:

NSW	69.2%
VIC	12.5%
SA	6%
QLD	5.5%
ACT	4.5%
NT	.8%
Overseas	.8%
WA	.5%
TAS	.2%

When asked how they heard about the Conference, delegates advised the following:

Word of Mouth	42%
Email	33%
Advertisement	3%
Internet	18%
Publication	4%

(b) Evaluation

The feedback received from delegates has been overwhelmingly positive, with 87% of participants saying the conference was good or excellent.

The most relevant sections of the program identified by delegates were the Plenary sessions by Catholic Community Services Severe Domestic Squalor Senior Coordinator Susan Graham 89% and Psycho-geriatrician Professor John Snowdon 88%. The other plenary sessions on Day 2 also were considered highly relevant Doctor Shannon McDermott 86% and Associate Professor Jill Gordon 85%.

In terms of both presentation and relevance the Consumer panel ranked the highest with delegates with over 80% ranking both the topic and the presentation as excellent. It is intended to get the consumer panel together again and produce a DVD.

The least relevant sessions were the Beauty in Squalor presentation by Father Bob Maguire and the Hypothetical, though the response to both was mixed. The hypothetical was considered relevant though the response from panellists too measured. In general participants questioned the relevance of Father Maguire's presentation though found it entertaining.

Overall the conference as rated highly by delegates with strong support for the MC Angela Catterns 89%, the venue 85%, the mix of presenters 84%, catering 77%, posters 71% time allocated to sessions 70% and exhibitions 65%.

3. Conference Outcomes

(a) Wishing Line

A 'Wishing Line' was set up for the two days of the Conference, to allow delegates to write down their wish for the future of squalor and hoarding.

The notes from the Wishing Line are included in **Attachment A** to this Report.

(b) Survey

A survey was distributed to all delegates, to assess priority of changes needed to find long-term, sustainable solutions to squalor.

175 Surveys were returned, and results indicated the following order of priority:

- (i) Multi-Service responses and collaboration (99% agreed of whom 86% strongly agreed)
- (ii) Education to all services on how to intervene (99% agreed of whom 85% strongly agreed)
- (iii) Recognition of squalor as a complex clinical issue (96% agreed of whom 77% strongly agreed)
- (iv) Common assessment tools (98% agreed of whom 67% strongly agreed)
- (v) Specialist intervention teams (95% agreed of whom 66% strongly agreed)
- (vi) State-wide coordination of services (94% agreed of whom 61% strongly agreed)
- (vii) Mandatory reporting (77% agreed of whom 33% strongly agreed)

The results from this Survey provide valuable data in directing the way forward needed to improve service delivery going forward. There was very strong support for a national rather than just statewide approach.

(c) Educational Content

Two DVDs were developed for the Conference, which will be useful tools going forward in education and training sessions on severe domestic squalor:

- (i) 'Pathway through the Maze' – provides an introduction to the issues faced by clients and service providers.
- (ii) 'Squalor in the Media' – provides an overview of how squalor is represented in the media, and how the media can be used as leverage to create positive outcomes for clients.

(d) Media Coverage

Significant media interest was generated by the Conference in the lead up to the event, allowing this hidden issue to be given a much greater profile with the general community.

The following media outlets attended the Conference:

- ABC TV News
- Channel 7 News
- Channel 10 News
- ABC Radio National News
- Sydney Morning Herald
- The Australian
- AAP
- The Sunday Telegraph
- Catholic Weekly

The following radio interviews were done from the Conference:

- ABC 720 Perth
- ABC North Queensland
- 2GB afternoon show
- 2CH
- ABC 702 Drive
- ABC Illawarra

- ABC Canberra
- ABC Tasmania

Television coverage received in the week of the Conference included:

- ABC News
- Channel 10 News
- Lateline
- Stateline

A full list of known Media coverage secured in the lead-up to the Conference is included at **Attachment B**.

4. Next Steps

Initiatives currently under development include the establishment of a National Website and possibly a National Consortium or Clearinghouse on squalor. This will be established in consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders that attended the Conference. The data gathered during the Conference, utilising the Survey, Wishing Line, and Open Mic session, will provide valuable direction in paving the way forward.

The next National Squalor Conference is planned for 2011.

Notes from the Wishing Line National Squalor Conference 2009

- Catholic Health Service Pilot to be extended to the Sutherland Shire. (Nil coordinated response to squalor currently exists in this area)
- Ongoing funding to support programs
- I wish that my plan to move to another house will come to fruition so my husband and I can start a fresh and use this to deal with our hoarding
- Consideration needs to be given to some type of mandatory reporting and placing responsibility of key services for following through rather than accepting "it's too hard and there is nothing they can do"
- Public housing – needs to ensure more tenant support services with flexibility to support people with complex needs
- I wish for there to be more support for people who have mental disabilities and living in squalor
- Local government to have an inter connected response to link squalor residents to services / response team
- Mental Health Teams to commit in on-going way to clients demonstrating squalor issues.
- That organisations work together rather than as individuals for the common cause
- For Federal and State govt to fund legislation change and implement specifically funded programs and support systems for hoarders, their families and organisations
- Increases in Case Management Services to co-ordinate HACC services especially re squalor.
- Mavis Symonds Mid North Coast Regional Council for Social Development – Would like to see our social housing communities and broader community access to resources enabling rubbish to be dumped at tip
- Squalor needs to be recognised as an issue in its own right
- There needs to be legislative review and reform exploring the right to intervene and the risks
- I wish that Catholic Community Services can get more funding to continue providing service
- LCP to be in the western Sydney LGA's
- I wish we could have a state government that governs
- Why not just offer free rubbish removal – hard rubbish
- I wish that people living in squalor or experiencing difficulties in maintaining their property to be linked to quality case management services to enable them to manage better with a possibility they will be linked to their communities. I have the hope that they are treated with respect and that it is not presumed their things have no meaning or importance to them
- There should be more specialised services addressing squalor
- That funding is provided to develop a comprehensive and robust common assessment tool for incidents of squalor to be assessed and that this enables agency cooperation
- Legislation to be reviewed to allow appropriate intervention to take place. Seems our hands are tied. Change needs to happen from the top. Then we can all move on and provide the intervention / support that is so desperately needed.
- More help for families who care
- That all who work with clients who hoard or live in squalor take a collaborative approach social workers health care professionals local governments professional organisers and emergency services working in conjunction to deliver the best outcome for our clients and the community
- Long term funding for and ongoing high quality service for all NSW not just a city issue
- The development of a coordinated response to the issue of squalor; one that involves all stakeholders and dignity hope and future.
- On going funding from combined government departments to provide coordinated services for people living in squalor or are potentially going to be living in squalor across all of NSW especially and then form a national service spear headed by CCS
- Earlier referrals by DOCS, DOH etc to family support services

- We need assistance on the other side of the great dividing range. No funding, no information, no contact. We have squalor too and would like some funding to have a small, local conference.
- A national consortium of people interested and working in squalor.
- Care for staff/workers. Assistance to deal with trauma connected to dealing with hoarding and squalor.
- I would like to see more funding going into the sector so that people with innovation can develop useable solutions.
- I wish for COURAGE so that together directs, community members, organisations, agencies, departments, politician and policy makers deals with the complex, uncomfortable confronting and ugly issues associated with squalor. "Fearlessness may be a gift, but perhaps more precious is the courage acquired through endeavour, courage that comes from cultivating the habit of refusing to let fear dictate ones actions, courage that could be described as "grace under pressure" – grace that is renewed repeatedly in the face of harsh, unremitting pressure" AUNG SAN SUU KYI
- A centrally coordinated effort is required by all services in order to make a difference to individuals AND the communities affected by this problem. Thank you for getting this started.
- Greater community understanding.
- We wish we can get more funding and help from other organisations
- We may never achieve perfection but remember – there is always great beauty in things that are flawed.
- For DOC'S workers to intervene earlier and to be more empathetic to people in those living conditions to help parents and not remove children straight away.
- A greater understanding by others in community services that living in squalor is not a choice. Having 'capacity' does not necessarily mean CHOICE to live in squalor.
- We wish for lost of Squalor funding to help our tenants on the Central Coast
- Some strategy to deal with families with young children living in squalor.
- Research or methods on how to reach people who exhibit apathy, laziness and disinterest in providing a healthy, hygiene environment for their children
- Longitudinal study into long term effects on children who grew up in squalor
- I wish for state/nation wide legislation to be enacted to enable Council – in tandem with community support services – to enter and remove rubbish, and for systems to be set up for mandatory assessment orders, subsequent regular review orders, and discrete funding set up for payment of cleaning costs. This is when the degree of hoarding and or squalor has been assessed at dangerous and or offensive to self and or others (i.e. neighbours.
- Recurrent funding for research into squalor and for programmes to assist those living with squalor, with designated teams who have expertise in this area.
- That funding and policy decisions would reflect an understanding of the complexity of the issues involved and the fact that people will need people for LONG periods of time and maybe episodically
- Hospital staff need more appropriate guidelines for people living in squalor. Out Current policies mandate we discharge patients to a safe and appropriate environment. It is a real dilemma
- Housing SA – We provide support, early intervention to housing SA tenants. General support, advice, info
- I wish agencies stopped saying "We Should Do This and we should do that" lets just do.
- Earlier referrals by Department of Community Services, Department of Housing etc to family support services.
- Mandatory training for property managers in real estate agent, Housing NSW, and Community Housing provides staff, and more and all members of the consumer trader and tenancy tribunal on squalor and hoarding to raise their awareness. But preferably increase their knowledge and skills.

Media Summary – National Squalor Conference

TV

Channel 10 News
ABC News
Stateline
Lateline
Today Tonight

RADIO

ABC 720 Perth
ABC North Queensland
2GB afternoon show
2CH
ABC 702 Drive Richard Glover
ABC Life Matters
ABC Illawarra
ABC Canberra
ABC Tasmania

PRESS

AAPO News
AASW Bulletin
ACATS Chat
ACWA News
ACTCOSS Newsletter
Ageing Research News
ALGA News
ANGOA News NZ
Ausienet Mental Health Bulletin
Australian Ageing Agenda
Australian Society Psychiatry Research Bulletin
C Mag Case Management
Cathnews
Catholic Outlook
Catholic Voice
Catholic Weekly
Local Council WA Bulletin
CWLA News
Community Housing Council news
CommunityNet Newsletter
Daily Telegraph
Disability Connections News
E-Rural Nurses
Factsline
Fire Australia magazine
Government news
Health Matters
Health Promotion News TAS
Housing Matters
Housing NSW news
Illawarra Mercury
Inform – Homelessness
Infoxchange Community News
Insite
LGAT News
Local Government Weekly
Manly Daily
Mental Health Community Coalition ACT News

Mental Health Coordinating Council e-fax
Mosman Daily
Nambucca Shire News
NCOSS News
Network News
Northside Community Forum
Noticeboard
OCVS News NZ
Parity
Sunday Herald Sun
Sunday Mail SA
The Senior
Shelter WA Update
SJ Around the Bay News
Sunday Herald Sun
Sunday Mail SA
Tenant News
View from the Peak
Warringah Disability Newsletter
Western Sydney Community Forum
Yarra Drug & Health Forum News

ONLINE

www.acoss.org.au
www.acys.info
www.agedcare.com.au
www.agedcare.org.au
www.aifs.gov.au
www.alga.asn.au
www.anzmf.asn.au
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www.mentalhealth.org.au
www.mentalhealth.org.nz
www.mhcc.org.au
www.nrsdc.org.au
www.ntcoss.org.au
www.psychology.org.au

ACOSS
Youth Studies
Aged Care site
ACSA
Inst of Family Studies
ALGA
A&NZ Mental Health Assn
Ageing Research Online
Mental Health website
Carers Australia
Catholic Social Services
Canberra-Goulburn
City of Sydney
Community Net NZ
Community Builders
Community News
Conference Alerts
Dept of Human Services VIC
Dept of Health & Human Services Tas
E-Conference
Fire Protection Assoc
Going to Meet
DoHA
NSW Health
VIC Health
WA Health
Health News
Homelessness
LCSA
LGA of SA
LG of NZ
LGSA
Municipal Assoc of VIC
Mental Health Association
Mental Health NZ
Mental Health Council
NRSDC
NTCOSS
Aust. Psychological Society

www.qldalliance.org.au
www.rcna.org.au
www.respitenorthandwest.org.au
www.thesenior.com.au
www.wotnews.com.au
www.yacsa.com.au

Qld Mental Health Alliance
Royal College of Nursing
North West region
The Senior
News site
Youth Affairs Council