

A new approach to squalor

Through its Severe Domestic Squalor Program and advisory service, Catholic Community Services (CCS) and has been supporting people who live in squalor and investigating further ways to best support them.

People who live in squalor come from all backgrounds and are of all ages. They can reside in their own homes, rental accommodation or public housing.

They may have a mental illness, memory loss or confusion associated with dementia or a disability. They may live alone or with someone who, through their own ill-health or disability, requires support to maintain a clean and safe environment. They are often among the most marginalised and disadvantaged.

Recognising the need to provide comprehensive support for people living in squalor, and others affected by it, the NSW Government

Service model core elements

- an advisory service – a 1800 phone number as a single point of access for advice
- early identification – training for community service providers
- comprehensive assessment
- to ensure any intervention is sustainable
- case coordination leading to a collaborative response from all community agencies
- squalor clean-up
- ongoing support

through the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care in 2008 provided CCS with funding to develop, implement and evaluate a service model for squalor.

A service model was developed after researching best practice nationally and internationally.

The level of demand for the service since it started 12 months ago has been overwhelming, with over 225 referrals and 206 assessments.

In addition, over 740 practitioners have attended training and information sessions on squalor resulting in increased awareness

and opportunities for early intervention. Further sessions are planned each month.

The project is in the demonstration phase. Clients in 19 local government areas have been directly supported. However, with the advisory service, a much broader client base has supported, with calls coming in from all over Sydney.

Referrers range from those affected by squalor to neighbours, aged-care services, councils, and health and housing providers.

Organisations in other states have contacted CCS for support in developing effective service models for clients living in severe domestic squalor, including those hoarding. ■

CCS is hosting the **National Squalor Conference: Pathway through the Maze** in Sydney, 5-6 November 2009. For more information, see www.nationalsqualorconference.com.au or call the Squalor Hotline.

Contact the **Squalor Hotline** on **1800 225 474**.



Photo: Catholic Community Services