



## **YARRA CITY COUNCIL**

### **HOW TO RESPOND TO ROUGH SLEEPING and SQUATTING IN YARRA**

Last updated 2017

#### **ISSUE AND RESPONSE**

Homelessness and insecure housing are on the rise in large cities all around the world as housing affordability and other forces impact on the ability of people to get and keep their housing.

Over recent years Yarra has seen a rise in the number of people who are sleeping rough (for example on the streets, in parks, and in vehicles) and who are squatting in disused buildings. At the same time there has been a net loss of public housing and in the number of rooming house beds available to people who traditionally used rooming houses rather than slept rough.

You may come into contact with people who are experiencing homelessness and who may need help from homelessness services. Many residents and traders who come into contact with people sleeping rough call Council seeking ways to get them help.

This protocol aims to help staff respond effectively to homelessness by raising awareness of our homelessness referral procedures.

#### **REFERRALS**

We have an ongoing agreement with Launch Housing assertive outreach program to give us the resources to respond in a timely and effective way to rough sleeping. This agreement means Launch Housing will respond to our referrals within 48 hours, provide feedback, advice and other information on rough sleeping in the City of Yarra. They will also liaise with us on any actions we need to take that affect people sleeping rough.

#### **How to make a referral:**

- Use [yarraroughsleepers.com.au](http://yarraroughsleepers.com.au) to make a referral online,
- Email [roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au](mailto:roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au) or phone Council on **9205 5555** to advise officers of the location, description, duration of stay, any access points or information related to the health and wellbeing of the person/s sleeping rough or squatting.

All referrals, feedback and follow up information about rough sleeping in Yarra are collated at [roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au](mailto:roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au)

#### **ROUGH SLEEPING**

According to Homelessness Australia, around 6% of people experiencing homelessness sleep rough. Most people who are homeless are in overcrowded, insecure and inappropriate housing, such as staying with relatives, couch surfing, in rooming houses, or in unsafe and temporary dwellings. Most rough sleepers choose places that are as safe as possible, well lit, around people, and close to services.

If you have any concerns about safety, please ring police on **000**. If the situation is not urgent or unsafe, working collaboratively with the outreach team may be an option. In this case call Council on **9205 5555** or email [roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au](mailto:roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au)

## **SLEEPING IN VEHICLES, TENTS**

Our local laws acknowledge homelessness as special circumstances. Wherever possible, homeless people sleeping in tents and in vehicles should be referred for contact by the outreach team before our officers take action.

## **SQUATTING**

If there are any concerns about safety of squatters, call the police on **000**. On private (including statutory authorities) premises, our Building Services team need to be informed to ensure premises are made safe. On council premises Building Maintenance needs to be informed.

## **HOMELESSNESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

All Victorians have a right to be in public spaces, and generally staff should only approach a person sleeping rough if:

- They appear distressed and/or in need of assistance.
- They are sheltering in circumstances that threaten the health and safety of themselves and/or others.
- They are accompanied by children who appear to be under 15 or appear to be under 17 themselves.
- Their behaviour threatens the safety and security of people around them or could result in damage to property or to the environment.
- Their safety is threatened by others.

We need to consider whether our decisions and actions are compatible with human rights under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, which obliges Council to ensure people's rights are respected.

## **HOMELESS PEOPLE USING COUNCIL SERVICES**

All people have a right to equal standards of service irrespective of their social status. Should staff have any concerns about safety around people using our services, call the police on **000**. For issues around behaviour that may relate to homelessness, you can seek advice from local homelessness agencies. Our Policy Advisor Housing and Homelessness **x5094** may assist in liaising with an appropriate service.

Or check out services on Ask Izzy [www.infoxchange.org/au/communityprograms/homeless-help](http://www.infoxchange.org/au/communityprograms/homeless-help)

Ask Izzy is a mobile website that connects people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with essential services such as shelter, food, clothing and health care.

## **ILLEGAL ACTIVITY**

If you are witness to or have concerns about illegal activity call the police on 000 immediately. Our officers have no authority to act on issues that are police matters, including begging.

## **YARRA SYRINGE DISPOSAL HOTLINE**

If you find needles or syringes in a public place or on private or council premises, call 9417 5125 or email [yarrasyringe.disposal@cohealth.org.au](mailto:yarrasyringe.disposal@cohealth.org.au)

Your request will be acted on within 24 hours.

## **TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE AND COORDINATED RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS RELATED TO HOMELESSNESS BY COUNCIL OFFICERS**

The protocol is produced in accordance with Yarra Council's obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006.

### **AFTER HOURS OPTIONS**

The Crisis Contact Centre (CCC) is a generalist service which provides a 24/7, 365 days of the year, statewide and local crisis response to people of all ages. It is a high volume service and responds to the diverse needs of over 8000 households each year. CCC also links people with other support providers to address post-crisis needs.

**Free call 24/7: 1800 627 727 Phone: 9536 7777**