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Tackling homelessness in Sydney

Did you know that more than 130 people sleep rough across Sydney Local Health District each night, while another 520 stay in boarding houses.

The figures are no surprise to Community Mental Health Service Manager Paul Clenaghan, given Sydney's inner west housing prices and the average tenant being driven to spend close to 40 per cent of their income on rent.

“For us, it is about bringing services to where people are. Before discharging a vulnerable patient, we line them up with shelters and boarding houses to stop them from sleeping rough.”

Homelessness Week (August 7-13) shines the spotlight on those sleeping rough but Mr Clenaghan said it also took into consideration those living with a mental illness, substance dependency and those forced to couch surf, sleep in cars or turn to crisis accommodation.

“We were involved in the consultation design of the Camperdown Common Ground Project and currently assist in the referral pathways and treatment for residents with mental health needs. We provide access to two psychiatrists through weekly clinics and our clinicians coordinate pathways to mental health care in conjunction with the Way2Home Team who care for about 15 residents,” he said.

As part of the week, staff are being urged to donate ring-pulled cans of food to the Exodus Foundation with a number of donation boxes set up in wards and RPA's main foyer.

The Exodus Foundation's Bill Crews says homelessness has increased steadily due to poverty, substance abuse and mental health.

“Homelessness in Sydney has exploded from when we first opened the doors of our church in 1989 to serve people food at about 80 meals a day to 1000 meals a day this year,” Rev Crews said.

Almost 40 per cent of the state's boarding houses are in Sydney Local Health District and are filled to capacity nightly, which is why the District works with the Department of Family and Community



Lorraine Garry, Jacqui Moustakas and Dr Adrian Gillin collect food for Homelessness Week.

Services, Exodus Foundation, the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Mission Australia and many more.

“Many people who come to us have mental health issues and we work with SLHD to provide non-judgemental sessions with doctors,” Rev Crews said.

“I’m really looking forward to building a strong relationship because most homeless people we see suffer from high blood pressure, depression, diabetes and cancers so there is a need for the connection between us and the medical fraternity,” he said.

This Friday, people affected by homelessness will speak at RPA’s Grand Rounds in the Kerry Packer auditorium from 1pm.