

# Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places

May 2013

## What is the Protocol?

The NSW Government introduced the Protocol to help ensure that homeless people are treated respectfully and appropriately and are not discriminated against on the basis of their homeless status. The Protocol also aims to assist homeless people to receive services if they need or request them. It is an important element in the Government's strategy for responding effectively to homelessness.

## The Protocol

A homeless person is not to be approached unless:

- they request assistance
- they appear to be distressed or in need of assistance
- an official seeks to engage with the person for the purpose of information exchange or provision of a service
- their behaviour threatens their safety or the safety and security of people around them
- their behaviour is likely to result in damage to property or have a negative impact on natural and cultural conservation of environment, including cultural heritage, water pollution and fire risks
- they are sheltering in circumstances that place their or others' health and safety at risk (for example, staying in derelict buildings, high risk areas)
- they are a child who appears to be under the age of 16
- they are a young person who appears to be 16 to 17 years old who may be at risk of significant harm
- they are a child or young person who is in the care of the Director-General of the Department of Family and Community Services or the parental responsibility of the Minister for Family and Community Services.

The Protocol does not prevent organisations from taking appropriate action where health or safety is at risk or a breach of the peace or unlawful behaviour has occurred.


If homeless people require assistance, officials can

- involve appropriate services directly
- provide advice or information on available services
- provide a contact point that the homeless person can either call or go to for further advice or help.

## Underlying principles of the Protocol

The Protocol is based on the following principles:

- Homeless people have the same entitlement as any member of the public to:
  - be in public places, at the same time respecting the right of local communities to live in a safe and peaceful environment
  - participate in public activities or events, and
  - carry with them and store their own belongings.

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- Organisations that work in areas where their responsibilities are likely to bring them into contact with homeless people will receive sufficient information to enable them to assist homeless people if required, or help homeless people make contact with appropriate services.
  - Homeless people have diverse backgrounds and needs, these should be considered in any response:
    - Cultural sensitivity and respect should be applied when engaging with Aboriginal homeless people and those from different cultural, linguistic or religious backgrounds. Officials should use interpreter services to assist with referring people to relevant services as required.
    - Many homeless people have complex needs such as mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues, or cognitive impairment. These issues may result in behaviour that is seen to be antisocial.
    - Homeless people may have experienced other issues that affect their needs. For example, they may have experienced domestic violence or left custody or statutory care, or they may be asylum seeking refugees with no contacts in the community.
    - The Protocol does not override existing laws, statutory requirements or regulations. It does not reduce the powers of organisations or their authority to enforce specific laws and regulations.
  - Homeless people have the same access to a right of reply and appeals/complaints mechanisms as all members of the public.

### **Where the Protocol applies**

The Protocol applies only to public places such as parks and outdoor spaces ordinarily accessible to the public. It does not apply to private property, or property which is not generally accessible to the public.

The following government organisations with an operational presence in public places or who provide a service to assist homeless people have endorsed the Protocol:

- Housing NSW
- Community Services
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- NSW Police Force
- Office of Environment and Heritage
- NSW Health
- RailCorp
- State Transit Authority of NSW
- Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority
- Sydney Olympic Park Authority
- Aboriginal Affairs
- Ambulance Service of NSW

Each of the above organisations will implement the Protocol within its own organisation and will determine how it should be used by all relevant staff, including contract staff such as security officers. Feedback/complaints about the application of the Protocol will be managed through existing complaints mechanisms.

Local councils have been advised of the Protocol to inform their responses.

### **Review of the Protocol**

This Protocol will be reviewed every two years from the date of its publication, October 2012.

## For further information please contact:

Manager, Homelessness Policy and Programs

Housing NSW  
Locked Bag 4001  
ASHFIELD BC 1800

or visit the Housing NSW website at [www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)

## Useful contact numbers

### Homeless Persons Information Centre

**1800 234 566** (toll free) or **02 9265 9081** (in Sydney)  
(7 days, 9am – 10pm, closed each day between 1pm – 2pm)

This is a telephone information and referral service for crisis accommodation for people aged over 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### Housing NSW After Hours Temporary Accommodation Line

**1800 152 152** (free call)  
(4.30pm – 10pm Monday to Friday, weekends and public holidays 10am – 10pm)

This state-wide telephone service provides temporary accommodation for homeless people outside normal Housing NSW office hours. Clients are offered accommodation for a limited number of nights and are asked to visit a local Housing NSW office the next working day to make arrangements for more suitable longer-term accommodation.

### LawAccess NSW

**1300 888 529**  
(9am – 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays)

This state-wide telephone service provides free legal information, referrals and, in some cases, advice to people in NSW who have a legal problem.

### Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

**02 8303 6600** (Redfern - Zone Office)  
(8.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday)

This service assists Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people with representation in court, advice and information, and referral to further support services.

### Centrelink Indigenous Phone Service

**136 380**  
(8am – 5pm Monday to Friday)

This state-wide telephone service is for Indigenous Australians living in regional and remote areas who would like advice on Centrelink payments and services.

### Centrelink Employment Services and Job Network

**132 850**  
(8am – 5pm Monday to Friday)

This state-wide telephone service assists individuals with their Centrelink payments. This line can also be used to book an appointment with the nearest Centrelink social worker.

## **State-wide services available 24 hours, 7 days**

**Child Protection Helpline** - general community **132 111**  
- mandatory reporters **133 627**

This telephone service, staffed by professionally qualified caseworkers, is available for reporting suspected abuse, neglect or risk of significant harm of children and young people.

The Mandatory Reporter Guide can be accessed via [www.sdm.community.nsw.gov.au/mrg/app/summary.page](http://www.sdm.community.nsw.gov.au/mrg/app/summary.page).

The NSW Government's Keep Them Safe: a shared approach to child and wellbeing action plan can be accessed via [www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/home](http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/home)

### **Domestic Violence Line**

**1800 656 463** (free call)  
**1800 671 442** (TTY)

This telephone service provides counselling, information and referrals for those experiencing domestic violence.

### **Lifeline**

**131 114**

This telephone counselling service takes calls from people needing emotional support and provides services in suicide prevention, crisis support and mental health support.

### **NSW Rape Crisis Centre**

**1800 424 017** (free call)

This telephone and online service provides crisis counselling, support and referral for anyone who has experienced sexual violence.

### **Salvo Care Line**

**1300 36 36 22** (Regional NSW)  
**02 8736 3292** (Sydney metropolitan)

This telephone service is staffed by trained counsellors available to listen, assist and provide referrals for people facing a crisis in their lives.

### **YConnect Line (young people)**

**1800 424 830**  
**02 9318 1531** (Sydney metropolitan)

This telephone service provides access to services, accommodation or referral for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### **Alcohol and Drug Information Service**

**02 9361 8000** (Sydney metropolitan)  
**1800 422 599** (outside Sydney)

This telephone service provides information, referral, crisis counselling and advice about alcohol and illegal drugs.

### **NSW Mental Health Line**

**1800 011 511**

This telephone service is staffed by mental health professionals and provides mental health information and referral services.