



CITY OF BOROONDARA HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL

**Supporting people who are homeless or at
risk of homelessness**

November 2020

Background

Homelessness is a growing national problem and the increase in homelessness is being seen in Boroondara. People are considered homeless when they do not have accommodation that is safe, secure and appropriate.

The Boroondara Homelessness Protocol has been developed to help ensure that homeless people are treated appropriately and are offered relevant support services.

Increasingly, Council staff are contacted by residents and local businesses to respond to cases of homelessness in the City. The Protocol provides Council and Council officers with a framework for how to respond appropriately in these situations.

The Protocol was developed in 2009 with the support of housing and social support agencies based in Boroondara. These agencies also contributed information on the nature and extent of homelessness in Boroondara. The Protocol was reviewed and updated in 2020 to ensure that it was in line with best practice.

What is homelessness?

The accepted definitions of homelessness within Australia were developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001). They define homeless people as follows:

Primary homeless: People without conventional accommodation – living on the streets, in deserted buildings, in cars, under bridges, and in improvised dwellings.

Secondary homeless: People with no secure accommodation moving between various forms of temporary shelter, including friends, relatives, emergency accommodation and boarding houses.

Tertiary homeless: People living in single rooms in private boarding houses on a long-term basis – without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure, and people living as ‘marginal residents’ in caravan parks where no person in the household is in full-time employment.

Where the Protocol applies

The Protocol only applies to the City of Boroondara municipal district.

The Protocol applies to public places such as parks, open spaces and community facilities, which are accessible to the public and are Council owned, controlled or managed. It does not apply to private property.

When will the Protocol be applied?

The Protocol will be applied when:

- Council officers come into contact with a person who is homeless or refer a person who may be homelessness.
- a person experiencing homelessness requests information from Council about where they can go for assistance
- Council receives information from members of the public about a person they believe is experiencing homelessness
- Council receives information about belongings or items that may belong to a person who is homeless.

Council's approach

Council's approach to homelessness within Boroondara will be to:

- connect people who are homeless with local services that can assist in supporting their needs
- ensure that people needing assistance are referred to appropriate service providers as soon as possible
- monitor and report on the extent of homelessness in Boroondara
- educate the community about the causes of homelessness and local support services.

There is no enforcement requirement with respect to homelessness. Enforcement will only apply where a law has been or is being breached and it becomes a policing issue.

If a Council officer has any difficulty in applying the processes in this Protocol, they should notify the Project Officer, Homelessness in the Community Planning and Development Department to gain support and advice.

Principles and actions

The following principles and actions were developed in consultation with service providers and Council officers. They have been established to provide the basis for how Council responds to homelessness in public places.

PRINCIPLE 1

People who are experiencing homelessness have the right to be in public spaces and will be treated as any other member of the public.

- Action** Council staff must not require a person to move on because that person is homeless. Council staff will respond to a person who is, or appears to be homeless if:
- they request assistance
 - they appear distressed or in need of assistance
 - they are sheltering in circumstances that threaten the health and safety of themselves and/or others (e.g. in derelict buildings)
 - their behaviour threatens their own safety or the safety of others
 - their behaviour is likely to result in damage to property or to the environment
 - their safety is threatened by others
 - they appear to be under the age of 18.
- Action** If emergency assistance is required or a person is suspected of committing an offence or is engaged in any illegal activity, the matter should immediately be reported to the Victoria Police on 000.
- Action** If a person is requiring assistance after-hours or on the weekend, The Salvation Army Crisis Centre can be phoned on 1800 825 955. This is not an outreach service, but the Centre can provide advice over the phone 24 hours a day 7 days a week or in person from 9am to 11pm at 29 Grey Street, St Kilda.
- Action** The belongings of a person who is homeless must be respected and must not be interfered with. Where a homeless person's belongings impact on public access or cause a threat to public health and safety, Council staff will attend the location, pick up the belongings and store them for up to one week, as instructed in the Standard Operating Procedures. If belongings have not been retrieved after the one week period, Council will determine what should be done with the items. Council will notify applicable support agency when belongings are collected and stored.

PRINCIPLE 2

Council will ensure that a person who is homeless has access to service information if requested.

- Action** Staff will be provided with mental health services and crisis support cards that can be given to a homeless person or to members of the public who are concerned about a homeless person's welfare. (These cards will also be distributed to traders, transport providers and agencies that operate in public places out of normal working hours and on weekends).
- Action** If it is suspected that a young person under the age of 18 is sleeping rough, Council's Project Officer, Homelessness will notify Council's Child Safety Officer and Boroondara Youth Services to determine appropriate action.
- Action** Council's Project Officer, Homelessness will contact The Salvation Army directly if they believe an adult is sleeping rough. The Salvation Army's outreach team will visit this person to make an assessment about their welfare and will then update the Project Officer, Homelessness of the outcome.
- Action** If this person does not need or request assistance, they will be left undisturbed. If the situation changes, however, staff will alert The Salvation Army (during business hours) or Salvation Army Crisis Service (after business hours).

PRINCIPLE 3

Council staff working in areas that bring them in contact with people experiencing homelessness should have sufficient information to assist with a referral to appropriate services if needed.

- Action** Training and education around homelessness will be provided in partnership with local service providers. Training will be offered to relevant Council staff and to community centre and neighbourhood house coordinators in Boroondara.
- Action** Managers of departments whose staff may come into contact with homeless people must ensure all new staff are made aware of the Protocol and should regularly update existing staff of the Protocol.

PRINCIPLE 4

Documenting and sharing aggregated data about the level of primary homelessness in Boroondara will enable Council and the community to advocate more successfully for adequate social housing provision.

- Action** Council staff will forward information about requests for homelessness assistance through to homelessness@boroondara.vic.gov.au . Out of respect for privacy, no surnames or other personal information or unique identifiers will be recorded in the database.

PRINCIPLE 5

Strong collaborative partnerships between Council, housing providers and community agencies will improve outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Action The Community Planning and Development Department will maintain relationships with organisations in Boroondara that provide homelessness assistance and support services.

Action Council will endeavour to advocate for and support agencies that deliver services for homeless and vulnerable residents.

Action Council will provide links to local services on its webpage about homelessness.

PRINCIPLE 6

Improve understanding within the community about the causes of homelessness, to ensure people are treated with care, dignity, safety and respect.

Action Council will promote community awareness of the issues that contribute to homelessness through broader community education.

Action Council will maintain information about the Homelessness Protocol on its website, which will include contact details of support services.

PRINCIPLE 7

All people, including homeless people have a right to benefit from Council services and participate in public activities and events.

Action Council will ensure that its programs and services are welcoming and inclusive of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.