

Understanding Our Clients

Homeless people

What do I need to understand to work more effectively with homeless clients?

- A person experiencing homelessness is someone who lacks a home. A home is not about a roof. A home is about safety, security, and control over your space, without the fear that might be taken away from you.
- Being at risk of homelessness may mean a tenant who is at risk of eviction, or someone who is in a home that isn't safe for them and who at any moment might need to leave.
- Legal Aid NSW has an important role to play for people who are experiencing homelessness because their access is even more compromised. Often, they don't have easy access to the phone or ways for us to be able to communicate with them like mail.
- Issues such as homelessness can feed into why people are in prison and find it difficult to get out of custody again. If somebody doesn't have stable housing when they are ready to be released from custody, their release date can often be delayed so that housing can be found for them.
- Homeless people may have multiple vulnerabilities that centre around the experience of trauma, addiction, mental health, and poverty. It's very hard to separate these vulnerabilities or compartmentalise them because they tend to feed off each other.
- Once you've experienced trauma you are more likely to experience it again, and it has a cumulative effect.

Support services for non-legal issues – referral options

Online referral databases

These online databases may also assist you to find appropriate non-legal services for your client.

- [WayAhead Directory](#) – online database used to find local services, to make referrals and access mental health information and resources.
- [Ask Izzy](#) – search over 350,000 services to find housing, meals, healthcare, counselling, legal advice, addiction treatment and more.

- [Data Diction LINCS](#) – LINCS is used by almost all councils in the Sydney area and lists community services
- [My Community Directory](#) – directory of health and community services in NSW and other states.
- [Infoxchange](#) – national database of community support services.

Action learning activities

- Reflect on the points raised in the [Understanding Our Clients video](#) and consider if there are aspects you could improve on in the way you work with clients who are homeless. Take action to make changes where appropriate.
- Learn more about the barriers and challenges that homeless people experience when trying to access legal services and consider how you might minimise these when working with homeless clients.
- Think about how you might develop a rapport with your client and put this into action when you meet. Consider what worked well and what you would do differently next time.
- Discuss support services for non-legal issues with your client and help your client access these services if required.
- Review one or more of the resources below and consider how you can apply any insights to your practice.

Useful Resources

- [The Legal Aid NSW Podcast Channel](#) that you can access via our Podbean account or wherever you get your podcasts. The series covers a variety of topics. Use the search function or topic list to find podcasts that may be relevant.
- [The Bugmy Bar Book](#) summarises key research relating to social disadvantage and deprivation. It is hosted on the Public Defenders Website and is designed to equip lawyers with a sophisticated, accurate understanding of the impacts adverse experiences can have upon individuals.
- The [Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute \(AHURI\)](#) undertakes research to inform and influence policy in areas such as housing and homelessness. Their [AHURI Research Library](#) contains reports on a diverse range of issues, including the nature and causes of homelessness.
- [Legal Aid NSW Quality Standards Manual](#) – this document outlines the practice standards, client service standards, panel requirements and law practice requirements that apply to your role.