

# National Homelessness Research Network

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**UNSW**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

**Arts and  
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# Reconceptualising Homelessness

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# Presentation

- A network whose time has come
- Reflections on key conceptualisations of homelessness and implications for research
- Conclusion



# Time for a network

- Good moment in Australia's political and social policy landscape
- Need a vehicle for transdisciplinary, multi-method research
- Benefit of brainstorming/reconceptualising/thinking laterally, with everyone with an interest – persons in poor housing or homeless, communities, NGOs Gov agencies & researchers – move to next level



# Some observations

- What is the body of homelessness and other relevant research over the past 20 years suggesting?
- What is the aim of homelessness research?
- Should we still be talking about/terming it *homelessness* research?



# Some key concepts

- Values, rights and responsibilities
- Evidence based & best practice
- Public Housing as an institution



# Values Rights and responsibilities

- Right to Housing not sufficient i.e. HR framework has not been successful vehicle for addressing homelessness
- Reconceptualise the values framework
- See Wilkinson & Pickett 2009 *The Spirit Level*
- The greater inequality in a society, the more things like homeless, imprisonment etc
- So must embed social justice (i.e. equity and fairness)



# Values framework

- Social justice/human rights/social development approach
- Addresses **homelessness as institutionally and policy driven but also as lived reality**
- Move into homelessness result of series of, or concurrent institutional / social processes interacting with individual/family disadvantage and life problems



# Evidence based; best practice

- Benefits and disbenefits of being wedded to these
  - Problems with importing Nth American & UK evidence based & best practice programs
  - Need contextualised evidence
  - Evaluations appropriate to problems & circumstances
  - From the ground up



# Public Housing as an Institution

- Institutions are socially created, longstanding means by which to organise & control, groupings of individuals (Deleuze; Berger & Luckman) spatially &/or socially
- In the wake of deinstitutionalisation PH and prisons evolved last major public service institutions addressing disadvantaged persons with complex needs. i.e. residualised



# PH as Institution

- ‘good’, ‘not so good’, ‘terrible’ institutions
- PH still major houser for homeless. Meaning for persons experiencing homelessness and governments and agencies to reframe PH as a ‘good’ institution?
- Human services eg health, housing, education, training disability at the centre of housing provision. Would change radically relationship between PH & homeless persons, persons with complex needs



# Rise & Rise of Community Housing

- In NSW at least significant transfer of PH stock to CH – CH as saviour for PH dealing with high support needs
- Given the previous argument about PH institution, what does this mean?
- CH doesn't have same imperative to house
- CH can borrow against stock so has risk



# Support

- In the light of PH as institution, is there a different way of understanding support?
- Are new / different forms of support needed?



# Methods

- Mixed & multi-method approaches bringing transdisciplinary & collaborative work to the tasks.
- Come full circle to recognising the benefit of network and new cross sector partnerships