

## **An Exploration of the Occupational Therapy Role in the Homeless Health Outreach Team**

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### **Introduction**

Every night 100,000 Australians, including 10,000 children under the age of 12, are homeless. In Queensland, the Homeless Initiative was established to expand mental health and drug & alcohol services to this population.

As part of this initiative five multidisciplinary 'Homeless Health Outreach Teams' (HHOT) were established across Queensland. Homeless individuals seen by the Brisbane team experience a myriad of occupational performance issues, complicated by systemic and political factors, which impact on their social participation.

### **Objectives**

1. To identify the current and future role of occupational therapists in HHOT.
2. To identify how the unique skills of occupational therapists can be applied using the assertive outreach model with the homeless population.

### **Description/Report**

After a structured literature review, which looked at the role of occupational therapy with the homeless population, qualitative observations and responses of occupational therapists were collated. Occupational therapy assessment and treatment of homeless clients was analysed and coded using categories in the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure. Data obtained from the routinely collected outcome measurement tools – the Life Skills Profile-16 (LSP-16) and the Health of the Nation Outcome Scale (HoNOS) – were also utilised.

### **Results/Discussion**

The LSP-16 and HoNOS data from populations of housed and homeless mental health clients were compared, focusing on the level of a client's everyday functioning. Preliminary data analysis indicates trends that substantiate the need for occupational therapy within this population. The literature review and data have guided the development and provision of assertive community based occupational therapy, with the aim to limit functional impairment and support independence.

### **Conclusion and Contribution to the practice/Evidence Base of Occupational Therapy**

Our findings advocate the need for occupational therapy, given the evidence of occupational performance difficulties faced by the homeless population. This presentation highlights the need for further research in order to provide an evidence base for practice. It outlines the emerging role of occupational therapy in the homelessness sector within a government service and addresses ways to continue to develop this role.