

Homelessness amongst Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with complex disablement

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Synapse is dedicated to improving the quality of life of people living with and affected by Neurocognitive Disabilities, including Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).

Our Research and Development focus is on marginalized people, particularly Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples with neurocognitive disability (NCD) and complex disablement.

Disability can have an enormous influence on journeys into homelessness and the capacity to move out of homelessness.

Yet the nexus between disability and homelessness is often under recognised.

(Wood et al 2017- 50 Lives 50 Homes)

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NEUROCOGNITIVE DISABILITY

Any type of brain damage or neurological disruption occurring (after birth) causing partial or functional disability or psychosocial maladjustment

- Accidents,
- Stroke
- Lack of oxygen
- Trauma
- Vascular disease
- Alzheimer's disease
- Infection
- FASD
- Korsakoff's psychosis

Impairments may be temporary or permanent

CO-MORBID PSYCHIATRIC CONDITIONS

40% of people with neurocognitive disabilities have co-morbid mental health problems (AIHW 2011b; Hibbard et al 1998).

- **Profound personality changes**
- **Depression and anxiety**
- **Neurological symptoms**
- **Panic disorder**
- **Decades-lasting vulnerability to psychiatric disability**



Schwarzbold M, Diaz A, Martins ET, et al. Psychiatric disorders & traumatic brain injury. *Neuropsychiatric Disease & Treatment*. 2008;4(4):797-816.

Synapse has been working in Cairns since 2007.

- Indigenous homelessness in Cairns = 2x Brisbane or the Gold Coast**
- 348 identified homeless Indigenous people**
- >30 have experienced long-term homelessness over decades**
- Homelessness, rough sleeping and public space drinking are ongoing issues of concern**

CAIRNS COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS 2014

- **High rates of suspected NCD and co-morbidity, including mental illness**
- **Services identified a lack in the capacity to assess NCDs**
- **Expressed a need for culturally appropriate assessment and service provision**
- **Homelessness and camp dwelling has been traditionally seen as a housing and/or policing issue**

THE GUDDI PROJECT

13 month study - commenced November 2014

Partners: Anglicare; Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services; UQ; JCU; Synapse

Participants: Homeless people who use the Quigley Street Night Shelter, Anglicare Cairns

1. Point prevalence study
2. Culturally appropriate assessments:
 - Neurocognitive
 - Medical
 - Functional
3. Qualitative interviews
 - Yarning
4. Community consultation



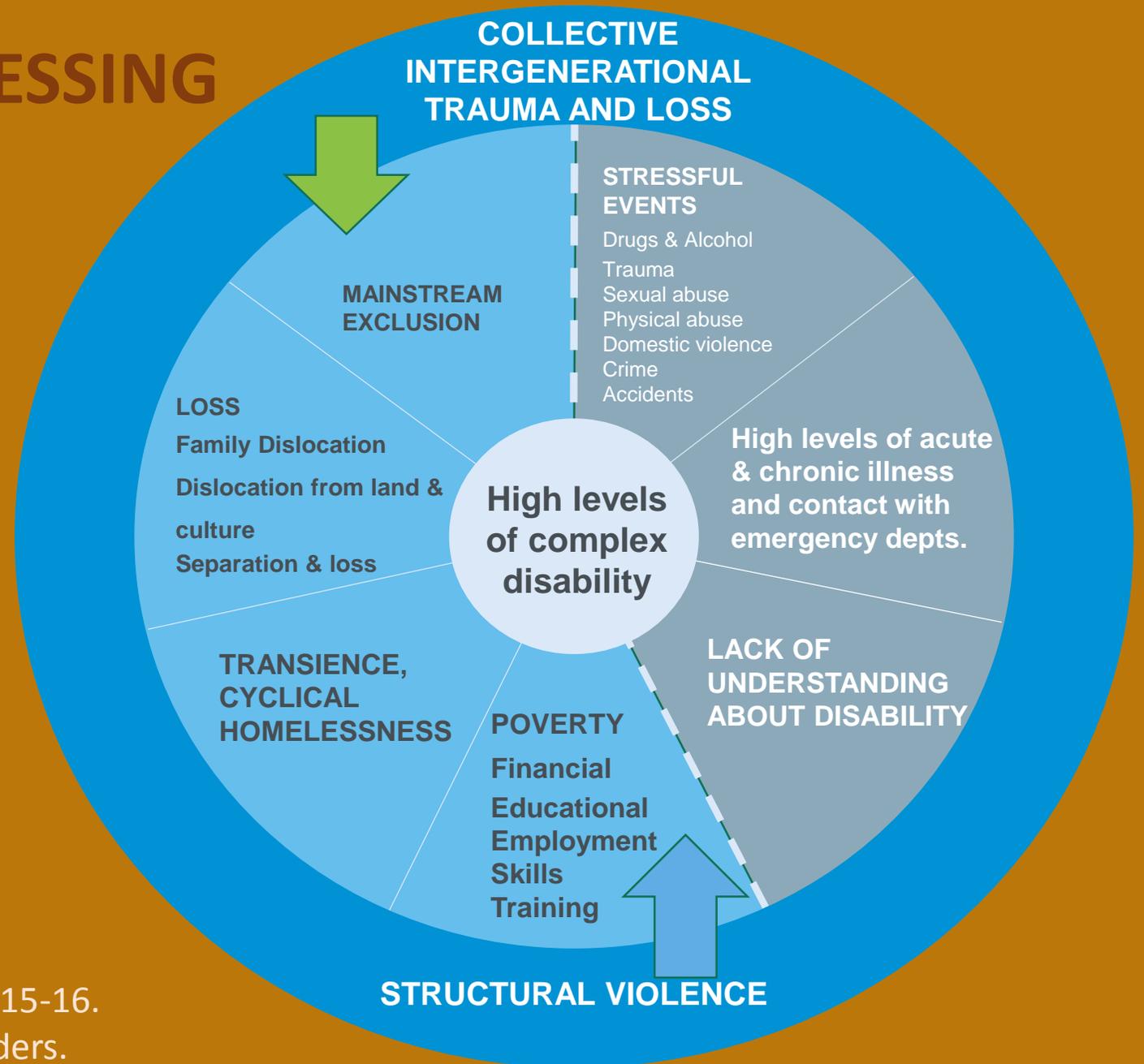
RESULTS- N=60

- High levels of co-morbidity
- 37/60 had a neurocognitive disability
- 7 acutely psychotic
- High levels of head injury
- High levels acute & chronic health conditions
- A high usage of AE
- High scores on the WHODAS (overall level of disability)
- Statistically High levels in social 'skills' deficits
- Statistically high levels of depression
- Statistically high levels of PTSD

IMPEDIMENTS TO ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness presents a complex and compounding mixture of personal, health, social and economic issues at both an individual and community level.

(Wood et al, 2017)



Guddi Homeless Project, Cairns Queensland 2015-16.
This project has the blessing of Traditional Elders.

IMPLICATIONS

Important to consider :

- The possibility of NCD when working with Indigenous Australians who are homeless
- Indigenous Australians often don't identify as having a disability
- Different understandings of disability
- Stigma and shame.



IMPLICATIONS FOR HOUSING & HOMELESS SERVICES

- Using culturally safe methodologies
- Cross-sectional collaborative partnership models
- Trauma-informed care
- Targeted, client-centred support
- Wrap-around support
- After hours care
- Flexibility in care type
- Housing that responds to vulnerabilities and disabilities



CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE METHODS

- Ensures community understanding
- Developed in collaboration with communities
- Recognises the importance of both family and community support
- Ensures culturally safe assessments and interventions
- Includes skilled Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers
- Enables flexible models of funding and services
- Privilege local problem solving