

Boarding House Roundtable

Meeting notes

Date: Thursday, 2 April 2020

Agenda:

- Issues for BH residents/landlords
- Agency responses
- Joint working opportunities

Liz Yeo, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

Invites specific updates from the following participants before other contributions:

- Paul Adabie from Newtown Neighbourhood Centre (Boarding House Outreach Service)
- Paul Clenaghan from Sydney Local Health District
- Peter Dormia from Property Owners Association
- Jon Atkins from Inner West Council
- Digby Hughes from Homelessness NSW

Paul Adabie, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

Overview of on-the-ground experience with boarding houses.

Identifies residents as a highly vulnerable group.

Notes they do not have full mastery of accommodation.

Notes issues related to basic hygiene including resident access to, and operator provision of, things like toilet paper and handwash, as well as older residents getting to shops.

Relays concerns from operators about not knowing how to manage infection control.

Indicates NNC are in direct contact with 30-40 operators mostly in the Inner West and has been providing 'keep safe' posters with information on prevention.

Identifies need for public health messages and infection control in event of positive diagnosis.

Paul Clenaghan, Sydney Local Health District:

Explains there is a two-week window in which to get in place a strategy for boarding houses.

Outlines guiding principles of a **draft** strategy (not yet for public distribution) including (but not limited to) protection and support for vulnerable residents, reduction and delay in transmissions,

prevention of outbreaks, access to information, facilitation of digital engagement, recognition of trauma, and guarantee of no long-term negative consequences of coming forward with symptoms.

Draft prevention and protection strategy includes access to testing, education, food and sanitary products, collaborative service development with councils and community centres, and screening and testing which will be available to all persons experiencing homelessness.

Describes proposed assertive outreach approach of Sydney LHD including a 'flying squad' of nurses, health workers and social workers that contacts boarding houses and homeless groups to perform rapid testing and screening, provide flu vaccines and conduct contact tracing.

Describes the bigger challenge of what happens while BH residents are awaiting results. Separate accommodation for this period may need to be provided depending on a risk assessment by support staff. For residents unable to fulfil isolation requirement, Sydney Local Health District has 400 beds they can use. For those able to self-isolate, they are referred to the RPA virtual hospital. Consultation with the public health unit is required about the need to screen other residents and staff.

Paul sought feedback to see if the strategy is on the right track.

The strategy will be shared with other districts and across the state once approved.

Peter Dormia, Property Owners Association:

Notes difficulty with shared bathroom facilities in particular.

Has been inundated with requests for information from operators. Operators and residents are fully aware of issues. Each building is different so it is case-by-base. Regular communication material is being sent regarding health advice. Still the major challenge is the event of an outbreak and how to manage that.

Explains that operators are increasing cleaning but there is a challenge with sterilisation as re-contamination would happen quickly. Major issue is education of residents. Information is provided about hand washing, social distancing and no-touch zones.

Digby Hughes—Homeless NSW

Raised the likely limited capacity of DCJ to provide alternative housing options for those with greatest need

Jon Atkins, Inner West council:

Explains council staff into third week of working from home but essential services still being provided on-the-ground. Council website information is being updated daily. Services helping the elderly such as Meals on Wheels have doubled the amount of assistance they are providing.

Expresses willingness to discuss how council can work Health and request information such as the strategy when it is available so that it can be accessed via website.

Liz Yeo, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

Restates that key priority of meeting is getting information shared.

Asks for additional input.

Leo Patterson Ross, Tenants Union:

Provide updates on eviction moratorium (no official details) and potential to cover Boarding Houses given risks of eviction into homelessness.

Peter Dormia, Property Owners Association:

Asks what should a boarding house operator do if one of the residents becomes violent during this 6-month period.

Leo Patterson Ross, Tenants Union:

Explains longstanding TU position that removal by police is not an eviction. Personal conflicts may require swift action. We need some check on evictions. At the moment, there is no notice or oversight.

Liz Yeo, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

Asks about next steps and value in reconvening this roundtable.

Paul Clenaghan, Sydney Local Health District:

Notes that criticality of the current 2-week window.

Seeks to reconvene another one mid-week next week for 15-30 min and keep connected if there is a major intervention. Intends to work closely with NNC and other relevant providers working in BHs in relation to development of BH strategy.

Liz Yeo, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

Notes key issues as getting right information to as many as possible, getting PPE supplies out, and health information about protocol and procedures out.

Plan is to reconvene next week or once health strategy confirmed.