



# SmartCare

## Looking after our frontline homelessness workers

### JULY 2020

**STREETSMART**  
ACTION AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

# Background

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SmartCare aims to provide small community grants for grassroots homeless services to help support the mental and physical wellbeing of frontline workers.

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Homelessness barely rates a mention during elections, yet it impacted the lives of around 280,000 men, women and children last year. It is a forgotten crisis that successive governments have failed to tackle effectively.

As homelessness has increased, more and more people are seeking to access services. Workers on the front line often turn people away without proper assistance due to the lack of emergency accommodation, affordable housing or emergency relief funding. In some cases, people exiting hospital are discharged back on the street, and young people exiting state care end up homeless at alarming rates.

The economic fallout from COVID-19 is moving through the community quickly and we are seeing trends of increased demands for support services, yet staff are already weighed down with large caseloads. Many clients already experience mental illness, and COVID-19 has increased anxiety and stress which staff have to deal with daily.

# On The Frontline

Front line homelessness case work is distressing and enormously stressful, often leaving workers feeling anguish and hopelessness. Staff burnout happens regularly. More recently the term ‘moral injury’ or ‘moral distress’ has been used - *describing the challenge of simultaneously knowing what care clients need but being unable to provide it due to constraints that are beyond your control.*

Workers often suffer ‘vicarious trauma’ as a result from working with traumatised people, and being regularly exposed to distressing material or stories. They are poorly paid and often on short term contracts due to the precarious nature of Government funding.

Yet, day in day out, frontline workers are there doing their best in these challenging circumstances. It’s crucial that workers have good support for their mental and physical well-being.

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“There are so few options available to actually resolve people’s crisis. How do you solve someone’s poverty or homelessness when our social safety net is inadequate and there are no affordable homes available? You can’t, and that’s stressful.”

– Frontline Caseworker

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# Helping Through COVID-19

On top of these underlying systemic issues, and a horrific bush fire season, along came COVID-19. Workloads have increased while workers and clients have adapted to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Thousands of rough sleepers have been rapidly identified, accommodated and supported. Outreach services are helping people on the street, supporting people in boarding houses or emergency accommodation and services have also been dealing with an influx of new clients made unemployed without warning and without support.

Some healthcare is still directly provided via outreach. Food security has been a major issue for many services previously unaffected. Frontline workers have done an amazing job caring for some of our most vulnerable and marginalised people, whilst navigating complex personal lives, home schooling and often working from home.

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“...when you take distressing client calls at home it does permeate your home space, which is not ideal, but necessary in the current climate.”

– Frontline Manager

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# Support Needed

Over the past few weeks the team at StreetSmart have been reaching out to smaller homeless service providers to understand better how they are doing under the 'new normal' and how we can assist. We know it has been a very challenging time on top of an already broken system. From further research we also know that fundraising at smaller organisations has been hit hard, making future revenue uncertain, and planning difficult. Smaller organisations will struggle to prioritise and fund the support systems that staff need and organisations want to implement.

Here at StreetSmart we believe we need to support and look after our community workers better whilst building resilience and capacity in our community sector. We are perfectly placed to do this through our new SmartCare initiative through a collaboration with our public supporter base, corporate and philanthropic partners.

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“I think SmartCare is an amazing idea to look after our staff. Many are over stretched due to constantly going above and beyond. Our residential staff regularly witness and experience abuse and vicarious trauma, in a system that doesn't really function. You need to be tenacious to work here.”

– Frontline Manager

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# SmartCare Grants

## – Looking after our frontline workers

**Our SmartCare initiative** aims to help and support staff wellbeing. Example areas of impact identified through our research with organisations include;

- Psychologist sessions including critical debriefing, reflective practice and remote counseling;
- Mental health first aid courses;
- Self-care initiatives including vouchers, new staff equipment (e.g. coffee maker), fresh fruit and veg box for staff and team building sessions.

**Our SmartCare initiative** will also include advocacy, fundraising and engagement with the public, telling the story of the sector and the work that is done and how we can support workers. We will also campaign and advocate for better funding and sector support in our response to homelessness post COVID-19 and for us not to go back to the way it was. We want to say thank you and help during these challenging times.

**Our ambition is to raise \$250,000 from the public, corporate sector and philanthropic partners to fund critical staff wellbeing programs for smaller homelessness services. We are #inthistogether.**

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“SmartCare will help the wellbeing of staff. We have such a dedicated but under-funded and under-paid workforce whom hardly get any recognition for the difficult work they do. Even a small boost can help workers feel more valued. Small NFP’s do not have the resources to do these things, even though they should! I think COVID is highlighting that for all of us.”

– Frontline Manager

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# Why StreetSmart

**The team at StreetSmart believe no one should be without a safe and secure place to call home. We are expert in engaging the community, raising funds and getting help to where it is needed most to combat homelessness. To date we have raised \$6.5 million, funding 680 homeless organisations.**

We have an unrivalled seventeen year track record of raising funds and awareness through innovative fundraising models including CafeSmart, DineSmart, SleepSafe, SmartMeals and the Collective. We engage with 1000+ businesses and 100,000's of people. We then seek out, support and partner smaller, grassroots, homeless services through a unique community grants program. These smaller services are embedded and connected in their communities, often responding to gaps in service delivery with innovative programs, yet struggle for funding. That's where we step in and you can now join us.

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## **To get involved or find out more please contact**

Geoff Hills  
0428 909 097  
geoff@streetsmartaustralia.org

Adam Robinson  
0488 336 419  
adam@streetsmartaustralia.org

**[www.streetsmartaustralia.org](http://www.streetsmartaustralia.org)**

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**StreetSmart Australia has Public Benevolent Institution and DGR 1 Classification.**