

**Precarious belonging:  
Chronic homelessness and people with  
impaired decision-making capacity**

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Chenoweth, L., Clapton, J., Clements, N., McAuliffe, D. & Perry, C. (2012). *Final report: Precarious Social Inclusion: Chronic Homelessness and Impaired Decision-Making Capacity*

[http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au/files/2013/05Precarious-Social-Inclusion\\_Final-Report\\_2012.pdf](http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au/files/2013/05Precarious-Social-Inclusion_Final-Report_2012.pdf)

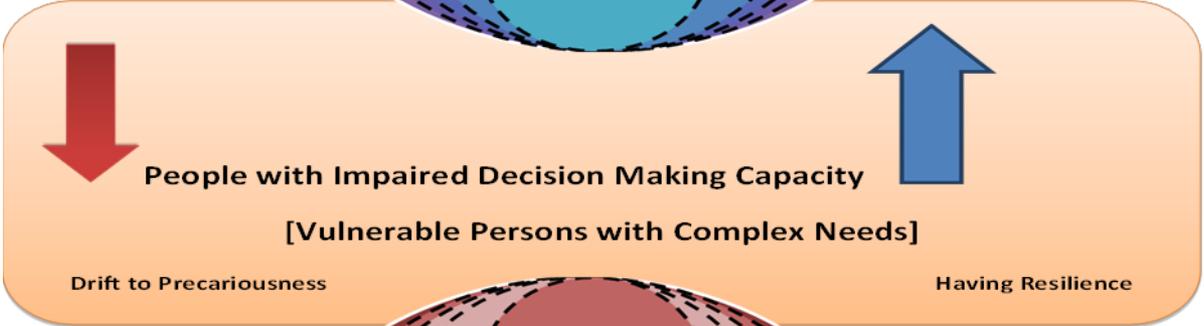
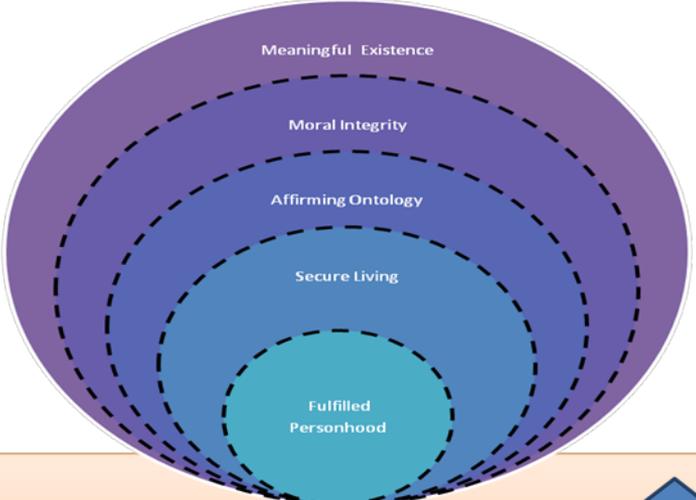
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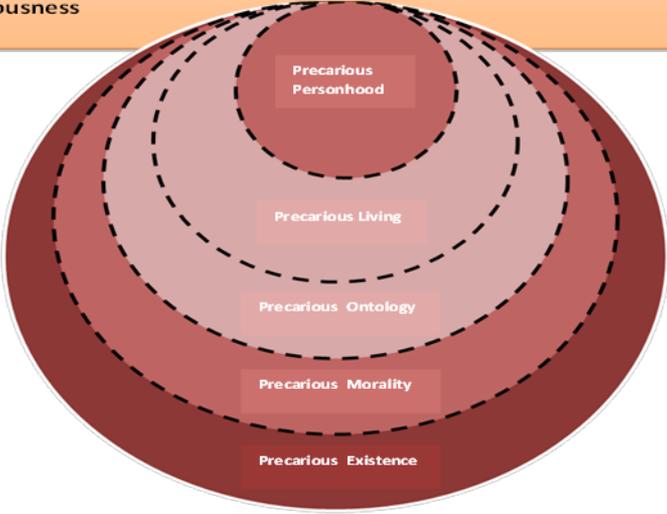
## Background

**This Australian research was based on the premise that people with cognitive impairment who have impaired decision making capacity (IDMC), and who experience chronic homelessness, constitute a vulnerable group of people who, through ineffective responses, drift into states of precariousness that deeply affect their chances of belonging and a meaningful existence and ‘an enviable life’.**

**Figure 1**  
**Dimensions of a Meaningful Existence**



**Figure 2**  
**Dimensions of a Precarious Existence**



## Background

The nature of the three states of **Precarious**  
**Belonging**:

**Precarious Living**

**Precarious Ontology**

**Precarious Morality**

## Precarious belonging

- **Precarious Living** [from various pathways to homelessness] refers to the links between homelessness, housing insecurity and identifying the challenges in establishing a home;
- **Precarious Ontology** considers problematic constructions of humanity, personhood and citizenship which threaten ontological security of this group; and
- **Precarious Morality** explores how inadequate ethical frameworks of practitioners may contribute to lessened moral protection and experiences of ongoing moral exclusion.

## **Precarious belonging**

**This new conceptual framework may be useful in enabling future research and policy development such as analysis of different service responses including the principle-led models underpinning effective programs of housing and support that have been utilized overseas and in other Australian states.**

## Six Research Questions

1. What are the driving forces which underlie current policy frameworks and service options, that contribute to continued social exclusion for the target group? What policy interventions can enhance the target groups' capacity, and service responses, to maintain accommodation? What is the nature of the gaps that the target groups seem to fall through?
2. What is the nature of precarious living, precarious ontology and precarious morality in the lives of people with impaired capacity who experience chronic homelessness?

## Research Questions

- 3. What are the predominant concerns, themes, conclusions and recommendations for practice from international and national research findings in regard to this target group over the past decade? What factors impact positively and what factors impact negatively on the delivery of housing and support to people within the target group; and do these differ in different types of communities?**
- 4. How do policy makers, practitioners of support agencies, and other significant stakeholders perceive and understand the implicit states of precariousness and their implications?**

## Research Questions

5. To what degree do agency workers feel educationally equipped or adequately resourced to work with this target group, and what are the workforce implications?
  
6. What conceptual frameworks and practices can lead to transformative practices whereby the threat of precarious social inclusion is somewhat reduced, and sustainable outcomes enhanced?

## Study description

Four phases were undertaken:

1. An in-depth literature review and conceptualisation of the three aspects of precariousness;
2. Environmental scan of the existing national and international social policy and legislative frameworks;
3. Online surveys of approximately 100 frontline workers in agencies relevant to housing and homelessness; and
4. Focus groups with practitioners and key stakeholders.

## Results

People with impaired capacity (including people with intellectual disability) who experience chronic homelessness often have complex and chaotic lives, and our society's capacity to support these people to have improved lives and experience belonging and a meaningful existence are restricted.

Support services can serve to exclude rather than include people with complex needs – *contribute to cumulative disadvantage.*

## **Results**

**Analysis of the data highlighted:**

- 1. The extreme complexity of the population and individual risk factors for precariousness**
- 2. The significance of service systems gaps**
- 3. The implications for practitioners**

## Results – quotes from focus groups

- *Recently we had two attempted suicides in one of our boarding houses and they were released a few days later from hospital back into the same situation that precipitated them taking that action.*
- The police indicated the challenges they are faced with after hours:
  - ...we don't finish at 5pm and a lot of agencies do. They don't have the funding to continue (after hours). And we came across a client on the footpath –a chronic alcoholic and other issues, mental health issues, we tried to locate somewhere for him other than the watch house. But we didn't have any other options.*

## Results – quotes from focus groups

- *This is the end product- they are not needing a homelessness focus –they are needing a focus way back down here around their health and that so they do not end up homeless, because homeless is pretty much not a service that you try and fix homeless issues as such –you try and fix all these other issues- homelessness is the end result.'*
- *...for these really extreme individual cases- you have to have somebody who is prepared to take them by the hand and lead them through the bureaucracy. They just cannot cope by themselves. And then the bureaucracy is not helpful.' Well 'you don't fill this and you don't fill that, well we can't help you.' That is not the way it should be.'*

## **Results 1 - [But these should not be the only focus of service responses]**

- ***Personal difficulties*** In such areas as self-regulation and decision-making in regard to: Finances, Hygiene, Health, Employment and Tenancy.
- ***Personal socio-economic impact*** Overwhelmingly, they:
  - Live in poverty,
  - May lack insight,
  - Have poor relationship skills,
  - Be impulsive and/or anxious, and
  - Suffer memory loss.

## **Results 2 - Structural Results**

- **Identified many factors that contribute to the drift to precariousness for people with impaired capacity – individual characteristics, systems failures ( with a significant lack of political, social and moral accountability).**
- **Guidelines for support services are restrictive and can serve to exclude rather than include people with complex needs.**
- **Predominance of exclusive practices were identified and these included eligibility criteria, denied or conditional access to services, a lack of respect for privacy and self-determination, and treating people as objects rather than subjects with complex needs and chaotic life histories.**

## Structural Results Cont.

- **Precarious Ontology affects more groups than others, eg people with intellectual disability, Acquired Brain Injury in Rural & Remote areas.**
- **Apparent that Precarious Ontology issues also encompass a Precarious Morality towards people with impaired capacity, and the protection of human rights should underpin practice**

## People with intellectual disability

- **The lack of informed, wrap around services, especially for people with intellectual disability and acquired brain injury, was consistently reported; with positive outcomes more dependent on the skills of exceptional staff rather than intentional, multi-sectorial strategies.**
- **Respondents also consistently thought Guardianship and Administration statutory bodies are difficult to deal with, citing issues about poor accessibility and flexibility, restricted opening hours, being frustrating to deal with, being legally complex, and not culturally aware.**

## People with intellectual disability

- **Even though intellectual disability was one of the many conditions that practitioners came across in practice, responding to people with intellectual disability who are chronically homeless was particularly challenging for practitioners. Services lack sophistication with regard to this particular group of people; and staff felt particularly ill equipped.**

## **Conclusions**

**Three significant conclusions were drawn from this research:**

- (1) the conceptual framework of Precariousness provided a useful platform; important to consider together**
- (2) Housing First strategies and practices were shown to have positive effects;**
- (3) it was recommended that practices that have taken on various aspects to redress precariousness be recognised and further developed**

## Conclusions from this Paper

A range of significant measures need priority attention, such as:

- a nuanced understanding about issues in regard to impaired capacity and the impact on people
- beneficence for people with impaired capacity needs to be prioritised; and insidious systemic malevolence addressed
- policies and practices reflecting appropriate political justice frameworks that support capabilities, rights, access to resources supporting ‘no-exclusion’ expectations and creating support practices that can accommodate unconditional, flexible and wrap around support

## Conclusions from this Paper

- case management practices reviewed for appropriateness and effectiveness
- flexible funding processes that account for how the three states of precariousness are addressed, and how people's rights and dignity are respected, and
- sectorial silos addressed and a common philosophical position established for collaborative and intra / inter-sectorial practices for people with impaired capacity who experience chronic homelessness. This needs to also include different levels of government.

# Inclusion and Belonging

Swinton (2012, p.184) states that:

*To be included you just need to be present. To belong you need to be missed.*

**Homelessness also confronts people's capacity to be 'missed' even though many are 'missing persons'.**

**Homelessness = Precarious Belonging**

*How do we respond?*

# Contact details

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