



rebuild • reconnect • rediscover life

# Compulsive Hoarding

## A growing social issue requiring a more integrated policy response

Gerry Naughtin  
Chief Executive

Supporting recovery from mental illness  
Breaking the cycle of homelessness

[www.mindaustralia.org.au](http://www.mindaustralia.org.au)

Formerly Richmond Fellowship Victoria & South Australia



# Focus on Presentation

- Animal hoarding must be considered within a broader context of developing more effective public responses to hoarding behaviours
- Victoria needs a more concerted response to the financial and social costs of hoarding behaviours

# Definition of compulsive hoarding

- Widely used definition of hoarding behaviours by (Frost and Hartl, 1996)

“The acquisition of and failure to discard possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value, accompanied by living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed and significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding”

# Challenges of compulsive hoarding

- Compulsive nature of hoarding and cluttering makes it challenging to address
- A one-time “clean-out” is not sufficient; rather, recurrent behaviours must be addressed
- This increasingly recognised problem can lead to eviction and homelessness
- Often a feature of several psychiatric disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder, and major depression, and can be cause or aggravated by problems associated with increasing age or physical disabilities.

***Compulsive hoarding poses an ongoing challenge to safety and well-being.***



Supporting recovery from mental illness  
Breaking the cycle of homelessness

[www.mindaustralia.org.au](http://www.mindaustralia.org.au)

The logo for Mind Australia, featuring a stylized 'm' made of two curved lines (one blue, one green) above the word 'mind' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font.

rebuild · reconnect · rediscover life

# Scale of the problem

- Estimates of the prevalence of hoarding among adults place it at between 2% and 4% of the population (Samuels, Bienvenu, Grados, Cullen, Riddle, Liang, , et al. (2008).
- A recent study in Masssachusetts 26.3 hoarding-related complaints over a five-year period per 100,000 residents (Frost, Steketee, & Williams, 2000)

# Individuals impact of compulsive hoarding

## **Social and Emotional Impacts**

- caused them to feel isolated
- impeded the development of relationships
- led to concerns for safety in their homes
- caused them to fear eviction
- led to health problems including falls, injuries, and losing track of medications in their belongings
- caused problems in their family relationships,

## **Legal and Financial Impacts**

- incur financial costs that might include renting storage units, cleaning services, fees resulting from an inability to find bills and challenges in holding a job.

# Impacts for Landlords

- Pest infestations
- the need for heavy cleaning
- the need to involve RSPCA
- Injuries
- Increased fire threats
- Nuisance value
- Loss of property attractiveness and property value
- Recent study in San Francisco identified the cost to landlords as \$6 million per annum.

# Issues for regulatory and human service organisations

- Costs of preparing and processing legal and eviction orders
- Nuisance value
- Concern that problem is growing but not being well managed
- Increasing costs
- A view that they are not able to respond to the mental illness nature of the problem
- Need for multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach
- Staff reluctance to work with clients with hoarding behaviours.

# Public Approaches to Hoarding Behaviours

APPROACH	CHARACTERISTICS
Public Health	Inspection and public health and nuisance management
Law Enforcement	Legal proceedings through the Residential Tenancies Tribunal, VCAT and Magistrates Court
Mental Health	Classification of the behaviour as obsessive compulsive disorder and treatment in accordance with clinical guidelines
Guardianship	Taking control through appointment of a guardian, associated with people with cognitive decline
Social	Focus on behavioural change, earlier intervention, engagement with the person, community education and engagement

# Features of good practice responses

- Need for a multi-agency and co-ordinated response
- Health, local government, fire, human service, police, mental health, housing services and landlords working collaboratively
- Stronger focus on treatment and intervention services
- City Taskforces

# Co-ordinated inter-agency responses

- 34 City Taskforces in the US
- Taskforce with representation from major government agencies, housing and service providers which develops a strategy on how to facilitate collaboration among service systems and agencies

# Objectives - San Francisco Taskforce on compulsive hoarding

- Identify what is needed to reduce evictions
- Improve the quality of life for compulsive hoarders
- Facilitate information exchange among various service providers so as to improve service linkages and coordination.
- Develop a mechanism for continually coordinating available services, identifying ways to use existing resources to prevent eviction for compulsive hoarders, and identifying gaps in services and needs.

# Public Policy Strategies -

- Develop an assessment/crisis team to respond to referrals and coordinate interventions for the individual.
- Increase access to treatment for hoarding including initial assessment, treatment and long term case management services
- Develop support groups and behavioural change programs for hoarders to assist them to change their behaviours
- Create a services roadmap for people with hoarding behaviours and their families, service providers and landlords so that people know what agencies to contact in different situations and have a way to identify and seek assistance.
- Establish a single point of entry into the system of supports and resources that uses a single form for referrals follows the services roadmap, and engages the assessment team.
- Develop evaluation guidelines for landlords that are coordinated with fire department and health regulations.
- Offer training for staff
- A co-ordinated inter-agency response which monitors progress

# References

- Frost, R. O., & Hartl, T. L. (1996). A cognitive-behavioural model of compulsive hoarding. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 34, 341-350.
- Coles, M. E., Frost, R. O., Heimberg, R. G., & Steketee, G. (2003). Hoarding behaviours in a large college sample. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 41(2), 179-194.
- Samuels, J. F., Bienvenu, O. J., Grados, M. A., Cullen, B., Riddle, M. A., Liang, K. Y., et al. (2008). Prevalence and correlates of hoarding behavior in a community-based sample. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 46, 836-844.
- Tolin, D. F., Frost, R. O., Steketee, G., Gray, K. D., & Fitch, K. E. (2008) The economic and social burden of compulsive hoarding. *Psychiatry Research*, 160 (2), 200-211.
- Personal communication, Steketee, G. to Eckfield, M. 11/1/05.
- 4 National Institute on Aging, "Multi-Infarct Dementia Fact Sheet" Updated
- Frost, R. O., Steketee, G., & Williams, L. (2000). Hoarding: a community health problem. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 8, 229-234.