

DELIVERING EFFECTIVE CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION ACCESS TO HOMELESS AND MARGINALISED PATIENTS

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Examining the journey of vulnerable members of our community through the healthcare system, will improve our understanding of its weaknesses. People experiencing homelessness face a complex set of challenges when accessing healthcare. Understanding the barriers and enablers to good sexual healthcare in this vulnerable population can lead to a better understanding of the “cracks in the system”. By improving sexual healthcare delivery for the most vulnerable people, it is improved for the whole population.

For women experiencing homelessness unintended pregnancy rates are high, contraception use is low and access to abortion is difficult.

In Australia today there are still multiple barriers faced by women when accessing abortion. These include: cost, geographical, legal and fear of persecution. Similarly barriers in accessing effective contraception exist. Women experiencing homelessness have further barriers; no safe place for a medical termination, complex health needs, low health literacy, low level of trust of mainstream services, high rates of past sexual trauma, high rates of reproductive coercion and domestic violence. Often it is not a case of a lack of existing services, but rather of difficulty in accessing the services that do exist.

In order to increase effective delivery of sexual health services and improve access to contraception and abortion an integrative approach needs to be taken. Trauma informed care, flexible service delivery, assertive outreach models, supportive services with advocacy and a continuity of care could all lead to improve reproductive health in vulnerable populations.