

Appendix P – Supporting people carrying personal belongings



📌 Jules writes poetry and had more than 30 notebooks of poetry in a suitcase, as well as two blankets. Jules had a health emergency and was taken to hospital by ambulance. Jules tried to ask the ambulance officers to bring the suitcase, but nobody listened. When Jules was finally able to return to try and find the suitcase it was gone. Jules was devastated and has sworn never to go to hospital again. 📌

Each person has their own unique experience and needs. It is important to understand the intersectionality between a person's gender, race, sexual identity, culture, experiences and circumstances. Workers may refer to multiple appendices to assist their understanding, engagement and support for each person they engage.

Overview

People that experience homelessness have the same right as anyone else to carry and manage their personal belongings in public places. However, people experiencing homelessness may not have a safe place to store personal items and may need to carry them for extended periods or leave them in public places. Personal belongings may include things like food, water, mattresses, blankets, identification, medication and photos. According to the 2022 NSW Street Count, 212 public locations were reported to have unattended belongingsⁱ.

People may leave their belongings in public places where they reside or frequent for a range of reasons including avoiding carrying heavy loads, or to claim a location. When belongings are left in public places, they can often get damaged, stolen or thrown away. The loss or destruction of personal belongings can increase trauma for people experiencing homelessness. A loss of identification can make it harder for people to access essential services. The loss of medication, food, dry bedding or clothes can negatively affect a person's health and wellbeing.

A lack of storage for belongings can negatively impact a person's ability to exit homelessness. Difficulties retaining necessary identification documents needed to apply for housing; limited mobility and challenges such as attending appointments, court or job interviews with luggage in addition to the high cost of replacing lost, removed or stolen items, and the visible stigma associated with homelessness can pose serious challenges to securing a homeⁱⁱ.

During any engagement it is important that the worker maintain an appropriate distance from a person and their belongings. Personal belongings should only be touched if the person asks for assistance or there is a reason to do so under legislation - for example where items pose a risk to public health and safety. NSW Police under the [Law Enforcement \(Powers and Responsibilities\) Act 2002](#) have the right to search and seize belongings if a risk to safety is identified.

The [Public Spaces \(Unattended Property\) Act 2021](#) allows for authorised officers to remove unattended property for specific reasons, including where it:

- obstructs public access,
- poses risk to people or the environment,
- interferes with an amenity, or
- has been in the same place for a certain period of time.

In these cases, attempts should be made to identify the owner, and provide clear and simple information about the need to remove the items. It is important that a worker acknowledges the trauma that may result from removing personal belongings and uses discretion when implementing policies.

Engagement strategy

Things to consider before engaging:

- Workers should withhold their own judgements when assessing or engaging with a person's personal belongings as they may be of significant value to the person.
- People who have had personal belongings damaged or taken previously may feel threatened or experience trauma when approached.
- Storage facilities can help keep belongings safe and secure while allowing people to focus on everyday activities. Workers should be familiar with local councils, services, or businesses that offer storage and share this information with the person, noting that affordable storage options may not be available in all areas.

Strategies for engagement:

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner, stating your name and the agency/organisation you work for.
- Maintain a reasonable distance between yourself and the person's belongings.
- Outline the intention of the engagement and where safe to do so, accept a person's refusal to engage.
- Provide information on available storage facilities nearby.
- Only handle the person's belongings where they give their consent, require assistance, and there are no safety concerns.
- Where possible provide assistance or referrals to services to replace needed items (e.g. identification, sleeping equipment, water, etc) if the person requests it.
- Where possible, avoid focusing on valuable possessions that may have been lost, stolen, or damaged so you do not re-traumatise the person.
- Where appropriate, consider leaving a note with a worker/service's contact details to discuss the person's belongings or the removal of belongings to work through alternative solutions.

RESOURCES

CRISIS SUPPORT

Name	Service	Contact Details
Ask Izzy	A website directory that connects people who are in need with nearby services such as housing, food, health care and legal services in their local area.	Website: https://askizzy.org.au
Link2Home	A statewide telephone service providing information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness services, temporary accommodation and other appropriate services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week every day of the year.	Phone: 1800 152 152 Website: https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless

i Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), [NSW Statewide Street Count 2022 Technical Paper](#), DCJ, NSW Government, 2022.

ii Port Philip Community Group, [Storage Lockers for People Experiencing Homelessness Feasibility Study 2019](#), Port Philip Community Group, 2019.