

# Maroondah Hoarding and Squalor Network

In 2018, the Outer East Primary Care Partnership led the delivery of the *Sifting Through The Clutter* interactive forum which was attended by 80 or so guests from more than 25 organisations across the Eastern Metropolitan Region. Funded by the OEPCP the forum put an unprecedented spotlight on hoarding behaviours and marked the official launch of the Maroondah Hoarding and Squalor Network (MHSN).

Hoarding and squalor are often poorly understood and highly stigmatised – affected people may experience significant feelings of shame, and there is little to no open discussion in communities. People affected by hoarding and squalor can experience a higher risk of social isolation and family breakdown and often face significant challenges when navigating the service sector.

Maroondah Council's leadership emanated from the high reported rate of hoarding in the LGA, resulting in significant cost and resourcing from Council. There was also growing recognition that community members affected by hoarding and squalor were falling through

the cracks of other services, and an identified lack of coordinated care between local agencies and clarity regarding which part of the service sector is best positioned to support affected community members.

The Maroondah Hoarding and Squalor Network represents a significant cross-sector partnership. Initially a Maroondah-focused initiative, the OEPCP provided additional funding in 2019 to expand the network to the broader outer east metropolitan catchment and a further two forums were delivered to expand the reach of the network and upskill practitioners.

As the Network grew, the OEPCP engaged leading international expert Lee Shuer to deliver 'Buried in Treasures' training. This provided a unique opportunity for local organisations to develop a unified understanding of hoarding behaviours and ultimately led to the development of a local chapter of 'Buried in Treasures'. This created a space where people affected by hoarding can gather regularly in a safe and supportive environment with the opportunity to discuss their challenges and support one another.

With the support of the OEPCP, the Network has embraced a 'no wrong door' approach to work with clients, ensuring that wherever community members come into contact with the service sector they will be seamlessly linked in with the organisations who can best support their needs.

Whilst the initial focus of the network was to bring organisations together and support upskilling, it has matured to be a strong advocacy body with a desire to affect system-level change across the sector.

MHSN has significantly elevated the voices of people with lived experience who don't often have a platform to share their stories and experiences. These community members have also been significant co-contributors to the network and the resources developed, providing

feedback on elements of the strategy which have shaped its language and approach, ensuring the work is relevant and representative of their needs and those of the wider community.

The MHSN partners are recognised as a leading force in addressing hoarding and squalor, with other councils from across the state frequently approaching them for insights and guidance on how to implement similar local initiatives.

The supporting resources created by the OEPCP continue to be invaluable for understanding and addressing hoarding, as well as advocating for change across the service sector. A series of personas were developed representing two people with hoarding behaviours, an affected family member and a local sector worker. These tools play a crucial role in communication, providing a unique way to understand hoarding from a variety of perspectives and the service pathways required by community members. The personas are included in the resource *Behind the Clutter: A Client's Perspective on Hoarding*. ●

[www.oepcp.org.au/portals/hoarding/](http://www.oepcp.org.au/portals/hoarding/)  
[www.hoardingsqualormaroondah.org.au/](http://www.hoardingsqualormaroondah.org.au/)

## Project highlights

The Network has developed a website to improve community and sector knowledge around hoarding and squalor that builds awareness of support options and to improve referral pathways.

## Key outcomes

- Completion of Behind the Clutter project and set of personas representing the MHSN community
- Better understanding of challenges faced by those supporting people with hoarding behaviour
- Conducted internationally recognised 'Buried in Treasures' self-help program.