

# Qualitative and quantitative study of hoarding and squalor clients in the Western Region of Melbourne

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## Background:

Western Aged Care Assessment Service has collected data relating to clients presenting with issues of hoarding and squalor since approximately 2009. The aims of this project were twofold: to ensure a systematic approach to data collection and to determine the characteristics and main themes arising when working with this population group.

## Methods:

Led by a multidisciplinary advisory team comprising Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Neuropsychology, Medical and Nursing health professionals, two social work students employed a mixed methods approach. The method employed were quantitative file audits (n = 120) and qualitative semi structured interviews (n = 3) with three stakeholders experts.

## Results:

Preliminary quantitative findings were based file audits of referral source, demographics, medical and cognitive history, presenting issue and whether this client cohort experienced hearing or vision impairment. They revealed complex co-morbidities amongst a predominantly Australian-born, ageing population. Qualitative findings revealed the limits of workload capacity when working with this client group, barriers to implementing interventions, respect for client autonomy; service resistance; the need for a multi sector approach and limited community awareness.

## Discussion:

Working with hoarding and squalor clients requires dedicated clinical expertise. The work is time and resource intensive and should encompass both clinical and educational components for staff, clients, external providers and the broader community. This project has benefits for Western Health and beyond as we consider the important implications for research and practice in this evolving field.