The homeless population in Australia is extremely diverse, comprising of people of all ages, genders and backgrounds. Homeless individuals may share some qualities, experiences and characteristics, however, they also possess a variety of unique needs. Consequently, they will face different challenges and barriers when it comes to accessing services.

Let's look at age as a characteristic
Homelessness can occur at any age and is an important consideration when designing and providing services for homeless people. According to Homelessness Australia, over a quarter (approximately 27%) of the homeless population are believed to be 18 years old or younger. In 2014-2015, 70,000 of the people who accessed and benefited from services for the homeless were aged between 0-17 years.

Children and young adults are typically homeless as part of a family group, but some are estranged from their relatives or runaways, feeling from domestic violence and other abuse. As a result, many children may be unaware of the services available or fearful of seeking support because of concerns they may be forced to return to an abusive household.

Older people who experience homelessness are also vulnerable due to ailing health or other medical conditions, which may prevent them from accessing services.

Now let's look at gender
Many homeless services offer support exclusively to women and children in an effort to provide much needed support and respite to families fleeing domestic violence. Women also face social discrimination and disadvantage with greater care responsibilities, lower incomes and reduced access to finances in many homes.

Next is the level of education
Education levels tend to be lower for people who are homeless and there are many programs aimed at increasing the literacy and numeracy of individuals in this group. In addition to these initiatives, there are many services aimed towards informing and teaching people employment and social skills.

There are also programs designed to raise awareness and understanding of the types of welfare, accommodation and financial support services homeless individuals have access to. Increasing the
profile of these schemes is particularly important because there may be many people who are unaware of the options available or feel undeserving of assistance.

Now we have health
Homelessness may be caused, or the result of, poor mental or physical health. People who suffer from health conditions experience a number of barriers to service access. For example, they may not possess:

- Knowledge about health resources
- Ability to communicate their needs
- Adequate opportunity or ability to schedule appointments
- Access to transportation

Homeless persons suffering from poor mental health also face additional challenges and discrimination caused by the social stigma surrounding mental illness.

Now we look at culture
The cultural attitudes and beliefs of homeless people may affect their willingness and ability to access health services. Welfare and government agencies can appear threatening to some cultural groups and the services they offer may contradict cultural values. For example, food trucks may not prepare foods in culturally acceptable ways.

Next is language
People who are homeless come from a wide variety of backgrounds and speak many different languages. Homeless individuals who speak English as a second language may struggle to access services or translate information resources in Australia. Language barriers can discourage people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, especially if there are no interpreters available to help them communicate with service staff.

And finally we have socioeconomic status
Homeless people typically have a low socioeconomic status, meaning they have limited access to adequate access to food, shelter, clothing and financial resources. This can have a number of related impacts on an individual's ability to benefit from healthcare services.

People with low socioeconomic status may experience feelings of poor self-esteem and low levels of self confidence, causing them to become socially withdrawn. Many homeless individuals also lack the funds or valid identification necessary to take full advantage of government support services like Medicare and welfare payments.

Now we look at the next dash point which is resources
People who are homeless can access a range of services designed to help them meet their basic needs. However, in order to benefit from these services individuals must rely on a variety of human
and non-human resources. Without adequate income, motivation and self-esteem, homeless people may struggle to seek help from government, NGO and other agencies.

In order to successfully access and use the services available, homeless people must have sufficient levels of time, money, energy and knowledge.

Time: People who are homeless often keep irregular hours and lack the ability to manage their time successfully. As a result, they may not be willing or able to access services during regular opening hours.

Money: There are a variety of factors impacting the monetary resources of homeless groups including insufficient opportunities for unemployment, fear of theft and limited access to financial systems. As a result, homeless people often lack funds and are unlikely to access paid-for services due to feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem.

Energy: People need energy and motivation before they can seek out help. Homeless people often suffer from low energy levels, insufficient physical stamina and poor health as a result of inadequate nutrition.

Knowledge: Children and young adults who are homeless typically find it difficult to attend school. Likewise, adults have few opportunities to increase their knowledge and learn new skills. Consequently, they may not possess the capabilities required to find and access information or fill out forms.

Now let's look at the aspects of the service.

The first aspect is opening hours
Homeless people can find it challenging, or even distressing, to access healthcare services during regular opening hours. Sleeping at night can be dangerous, so many people who are homeless sleep and look for food during the day. Large crowds, loud noises and official environments can cause anxiety or discomfort, especially for homeless individuals who suffer from mental illness.

Offering after-hours or mobile options can help ensure that healthcare services are more easily accessible to homeless people.

Next we have confidentiality
Confidentiality is an extremely important consideration for many homeless individuals. Some people may feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or anxious about their situation and, therefore, less likely to disclose private details about their health and wellbeing staff or volunteers.
People who left home to escape domestic violence and abuse may also be reluctant to share personal information, due to fears about their safety. Mental illness can increase these feelings of anxiety and fear, providing additional barriers to service access.

To encourage homeless people to access healthcare services, staff and volunteers need to be discrete, empathetic and patient so that homeless individuals are more likely to trust them and communicate any health problems.

Now we will look at location
Travelling long distances is a problem for a majority of homeless people as they do not have access to private or public transportation. Individuals battling mental illness may also struggle to enter or remain in cramped office spaces in busy locations.

And finally we have staffing
When homeless individuals are able to physically access services they are not always treated with respect or empathy. Staff and volunteers who provide healthcare support must be adequately trained to recognise, acknowledge and understand a broad range of cultural, social and economic determinants. A bad experience with a staff member who is unsympathetic, indiscrete, poorly trained or hostile can discourage homeless people from asking for assistance in the future.