

July 2023



Submission

Council to Homeless
Persons submission to the
Parliamentary Inquiry into
the rental and housing
affordability crisis in Victoria

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Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, Council to Homeless Persons acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. Council to Homeless Persons is committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas, and their rich contribution to society.

Introduction

Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria. The housing crisis is the biggest issue facing our State. It will take a deliberate effort by Government to resolve. It should also be the highest priority of State and Federal Governments.

As rents skyrocket in Victoria, and vacancy rates sit at perilous lows, more and more people are pushed to the brink of homelessness. For those who were already on the brink of homelessness, the difficulties of securing private rental properties have become exponentially more difficult.

Despite recent investments, the story of the last few decades is one of underinvestment in public and community housing. Victoria now has the lowest share of social housing in the country. At this time of even greater housing exclusion, there can be no excuse not to build social housing at the scale that's needed. 6,000 new social housing properties per year are needed to bring us up to the national average, and inclusionary zoning is needed to keep us there.

It's also important that in the midst of the current housing crisis, that community services are resourced to provide preventative interventions that can keep people housed, and out of homelessness. This submission details a range of community services that should be bolstered in order to combat the homelessness that results from the housing crisis.

Victoria's housing crisis may be severe, but it shouldn't be a surprise to policy makers. Housing and homelessness advocates have been warning for years that this is the direction in which we have been heading. Now that we have arrived, it is incumbent on State and Federal Governments to recognise the scale of need. Transformative change is needed. This is the most important moment in living memory to get housing policy right.

Recommendations

The factors leading to low availability and high costs of rental properties

Recommendation 1: Build at least 6,000 new social housing properties per year for the next ten-years.

Recommendation 2: Set a target proportion of social housing for Victoria to achieve and maintain.

Recommendation 3: Support ongoing growth of the social housing stock by implementing inclusionary zoning.

Options to address insecurity, availability and affordability issues facing Victorian renters

Recommendation 4: Construct 5,000 new social housing units, encompassing a mix of accommodation types (e.g., stand alone, congregate and cluster models), to create a pool of youth targeted social housing accommodation.

Recommendation 5: Provide a rental income subsidy for social housing providers.

Recommendation 6: Invest in a continuum of support options that include family reconciliation, case management supports that focus on transition to adulthood (including building independent living skills and connection to education and employment) as well as a youth housing first support package for young people with more complex needs.

Recommendation 7: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government to increase income support payments.

Recommendation 8: Deliver at least 600 new social housing properties to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations each year and develop a plan to ensure that social housing access for Aboriginal people keeps pace with population growth.

Recommendation 9: Increase Victoria's homelessness prevention capacity with more homelessness prevention workers and brokerage at homelessness access points.

Recommendation 10: Increase the size of the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP), the Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP), and Tenancy Plus.

Recommendation 11: Provide case management to Victorians who are experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 12: Continue to grow Housing First programs in Victoria.

Recommendation 13: Improve the fidelity of Housing First programs in Victoria, including by ensuring support and participation is as ongoing for as long as is needed.

Recommendation 14: Create crisis and transitional accommodation for trans and nonbinary people, and pathways to secure housing.

The adequacy of regulation with regards to standards and conditions of rental housing

Recommendation 15: Explore reversing the onus of appeal on rent increases, such that the onus sits with the residential rental provider.

Recommendation 16: Remove the no-cause notice to vacate at the end of the first fixed-term lease.

Recommendation 17: Consider other means for preventing retaliatory evictions, including further limiting the circumstances in which notices to vacate can be issued.

The impact of short-stay accommodation

Recommendation 18: Consider means for making more vacant and short-stay properties available to renters.

The experience of, and impacts of all of the above on, renters and property owners

Recommendation 19: Consider means for addressing the cost of living crisis, the largest component of which is rents.

The factors leading to low availability and high costs of rental properties

Rental market affordability and social housing

Victoria's rental market has always been difficult for some people. Victoria's specialist homelessness services exist because at any given time, a certain portion of the population has been unable to secure reliable access to a place to live. As conditions in the private rental market are getting worse, there are grave concerns that significantly more people will be pushed into homelessness.

There are signs that homelessness is already increasing. Between Census 2016 and 2021, the amount of homelessness recorded in Victoria rose by 24 per cent. While better reporting is certainly a factor in this rise, increasingly difficult rental market conditions are also playing a role. Council to Homeless Persons' recent [analysis of Census data](#) showed that many parts of regional Victoria are facing particularly severe increases in homelessness (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Homelessness in regional Victoria¹

| Rank | Electorate | 2021 | 2016 | % change |
|------|---------------------------------|------|------|----------|
| 1 | South Barwon (Western Victoria) | 838 | 148 | 465% |
| 2 | Mildura (Northern Victoria) | 518 | 264 | 96% |
| 3 | Shepparton (Northern Victoria) | 435 | 372 | 17% |
| 4 | Melton (Western Victoria) | 398 | 170 | 134% |
| 5 | Morwell (Eastern Victoria) | 380 | 205 | 85% |
| 6 | Wendouree (Western Victoria) | 368 | 289 | 27% |
| 7 | Eureka (Western Victoria) | 354 | 166 | 113% |
| 8 | Lara (Western Victoria) | 333 | 246 | 35% |
| 9 | Geelong (Western Victoria) | 331 | 292 | 13% |

In the past year, private sector rents have increased 13.3 per cent across Victoria, with even higher rates in Metropolitan Melbourne. Vacancy rates have plummeted, down to 1.9 per cent in Melbourne and remained stubbornly low in regional Victoria at 2.4 per cent.² Other sources put vacancy rates even lower still.³

These figures tell the story of widespread hardship. For people on the lowest incomes, such as single people on the Jobseeker payment, or young people on Youth Allowance, the hardship is particularly acute. In the quarter to March 2023, just 126 properties were advertised in Victoria that were affordable to a single person on Jobseeker.⁴ A study of all of the 46,000 rental properties advertised online in Australia on one weekend in March 2023 found that not a single property in Victoria was being advertised at a price that would not put a single person on Jobseeker or Youth Allowance in rental stress.⁵

The factors leading to low availability and high costs of rental properties in Victoria are various. Some factors sit outside of the influence of State Governments. Others are directly relevant to the work of State Governments. Perhaps nowhere does the Victorian Government have greater influence than in the provision of social housing.

More people are being squeezed out of the housing market and into homelessness. But when they seek social housing, it is not available to them. Even those given the highest priority face an average wait of 16.5 months.⁶ As of March 2023, there are 58,131 households awaiting social housing on the Victorian Housing Register, including 31,158 households on the priority list.⁷

Increasing social housing will provide wide ranging benefits not just a benefit for renters who live in social housing. Over recent years, Australia's private rental market has become less affordable. Once an affordable housing option for people on low-incomes and those trying to save money for a home deposit, rental costs clustered at the affordable end of the market. Now they cluster towards the middle, resulting in fierce competition between people on low- and middle incomes.⁸ Investment in social housing will help to alleviate housing stress for people on low incomes, and reduce the competition felt by households on middle incomes seeking private rentals.

Decades of underinvestment mean that Victoria has an especially low rate of social housing, the lowest in the nation. The Victorian Government should identify a target for the proportion of Victorian housing that is socially owned, and deliver a plan to achieve this. It would take at least 6,000 social housing properties per year over ten years to bring Victoria's share of housing that is socially owned up to the national average.⁹

It is critical that Victoria sets a target for the proportion of social housing that we need, and that this is maintained. In order to ensure that Victorians' access to social housing doesn't decline over time, social housing must grow in proportion with other residential development. Inclusionary zoning should be implemented as an important safeguard against future reduction in the proportion of the stock.

Figure 2. Social housing as a share of all housing stock, by State or Territory.

| State/Territory | Social housing proportion¹⁰ |
|------------------------|---|
| NT | 14.6% |
| ACT | 6.3% |
| SA | 6.1% |
| Tasmania | 6.1% |
| NSW | 4.7% |
| Australia | 4.1% |
| WA | 3.9% |
| Queensland | 3.5% |
| Victoria | 2.9% |

Recommendation 1: Build at least 6,000 new social housing properties per year for the next ten-years.

Recommendation 2: Set a target proportion of social housing for Victoria to achieve and maintain.

Recommendation 3: Support ongoing growth of the social housing stock by implementing inclusionary zoning.

Options to address insecurity, availability and affordability issues facing Victorian renters

Social housing for young people

Most young people live with their parents. But in 2021-22, 16,267 young people aged 15 to 24 years came to Victorian homelessness services¹¹. Most did so as a result of family conflict which, while distressing enough the trauma is further compounded when young people experience homelessness. Where a family home is safe, it is usually the most positive environment for a young person. This is why we need investment in family support services.

But not every family home is safe. Some young people, like those leaving out of home care or escaping family violence, risk homelessness if they aren't able to secure a safe place to live. Young people in this position will need to find a rental home.

Securing affordable and appropriate housing for young people is challenging because they have much lower incomes than older adults, they face discrimination in the rental market, and many young people, especially those who have had inconsistent positive adult role models, may need support to both recover from their experiences and to sustain a tenancy. For some of these young people, a medium-term form of public or community housing should be made available to provide them with the security, affordability, and support linkages that they need.

The recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness found that only 541 transitional and 66 long term properties are designated for young people, and in 2021 young people were allocated 238 public housing tenancies.^{12 13} Data on community housing tenancies was not made available.

Of the young people accessing services in 2021-22, 8,027 needed medium and/or long-term accommodation, yet over half didn't receive a home or a referral to a service that could assist them with housing¹⁴. One fifth received a referral to a service that could assist with accommodation but a referral usually doesn't mean suitable accommodation is found¹⁵.

In recent years, the Victorian Government has invested in a range of options for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including Education Youth Foyers, Youth Private Rental Assistance, Home Stretch for those leaving out of home care and models such as Village 21. This includes \$50 million in youth specific capital grants out of the Victorian Government's \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build investment. However, there continues to be a significant gap in accommodation options for young people, particularly across the broader social housing system.

Young people face significant barriers to accessing the broader social housing system, beyond accommodation within the homelessness service system targeted to young people. The financial barrier young people face when compared to other people experiencing homelessness makes securing

accommodation extremely difficult. This results from the lower income levels they receive, particularly the extremely inadequate Youth Allowance and almost negligible Commonwealth Rent Assistance entitlements. On average, it also requires deeper subsidies to provide social housing models that meet the specific needs of young people relative to older adults.

To address the housing needs of young people who are still building their readiness for the private rental market, three things are required; dedicated social housing properties for young people, a subsidy to make that housing financially viable, and a youth homelessness strategy that supports those young people to recover from their experiences and gain skills they can take to the private rental market.

Recommendation 4: Construct 5,000 new social housing units, encompassing a mix of accommodation types (e.g., stand alone, congregate and cluster models), to create a pool of youth targeted social housing accommodation.

Recommendation 5: Provide a rental income subsidy for social housing providers.

Recommendation 6: Invest in a continuum of support options that include family reconciliation, case management supports that focus on transition to adulthood (including building independent living skills and connection to education and employment) as well as a youth housing first support package for young people with more complex needs.

Recommendation 7: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government to increase income support payments.

Aboriginal community controlled housing

Approximately 28.5 per cent of Victorians live in a rented home and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians, that rate is 51.3 per cent.¹⁶ This high rate of renting is reflected in the level of housing insecurity experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and last year, more than 1 in 6 experienced homelessness. By contrast, the rate was 1 in 64 for Victoria overall.¹⁷

The most effective way to reduce homelessness is to provide access to housing that people can afford. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations operate 1,562 social housing properties.¹⁸ It is positive that 1,448 of these properties have recently been transferred from the Victorian Government to Aboriginal community control.

But we need to continue to grow Aboriginal community-controlled housing options to address the very high rates of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians, and to keep pace with high rates of population growth.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people regularly make up approximately ten per cent of specialist homelessness service users each year (last financial year it was twelve per cent). A similar proportion of new social housing should be in Aboriginal community control.

Recommendation 8: Deliver at least 600 new social housing properties to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations each year and develop a plan to ensure that social housing access for Aboriginal people keeps pace with population growth.

Case management for homelessness prevention

Victoria's homelessness services are a remarkably successful intervention against insecurity in the private rental market. Almost two thirds of people who come to homelessness services do so before they become homeless, and over 87 per cent of this group are supported to remain housed.¹⁹

Interventions to save tenancies and prevent homelessness can involve workers helping to resolve conflicts with landlords, supporting people to access Centrelink entitlements, to submit rental applications, or assisting with arrears. Prevention programs might work with young people to resolve conflict at home so they can return, or assist people to navigate other services they need, such as health or mental health, the NDIS, or family violence services.

Funded programs to save tenancies in Victoria are far smaller than what is required. Victoria's major programs to support people at risk of losing their homes, the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP), the Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP), and Tenancy Plus are cumulatively funded to support a relatively small number of renters. Agencies report supporting multiple times the number of clients for which they are funded.

As renting becomes a lottery exemplified at the current moment in time by high rental costs and low vacancy rates, more support to intervene early in tenancy issues and prevent homelessness is required. Otherwise opportunities to make critical and time sensitive interventions are missed, and people lose their homes even where tenancies could be saved.

Expanding programs for homelessness prevention is early intervention at its best and is a critical step in a plan to end homelessness.

One of my closest friends is a medical receptionist, and she worked at testing sites through 2020 and COVID during all that fear, working her ass off. She was in a private rental for a couple of years, it was sold... She wasn't able to find anywhere to live in time, and now, this woman with 2 jobs, who has always held down work, is sleeping in her car. A mother of a 17 year old girl, sleeping in her car, getting help from (a specialist homelessness service), getting 2 weeks in hotels, learning that

(brokerage funding) has run out. They say we can't help you... She slept in her car outside (service 2), to be the first one there, arrived at 8.50 am, and they said we can't help you. For a month she's spent all of her savings on hotels and motels – now she's got no savings, it's all gone. .”

Joal Presincula, consumer / advocate

Recommendation 9: Increase Victoria's homelessness prevention capacity with more homelessness prevention workers and brokerage at homelessness access points.

Recommendation 10: Increase the size of the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP), the Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP), and Tenancy Plus.

Case management to resolve barriers in the private rental market

With over 100,000 different people seeking assistance from Victorian homelessness services annually, the answer to the vast majority of homelessness is likely to be the private rental market. While around two thirds of people seek assistance prior to losing their home, around 34,000 people who seek support are already homeless.

The circumstances that lead people to homelessness don't always resolve themselves when a new home is secured. Even worse, the causes of a person's homelessness can present a barrier to successfully obtaining a property in a competitive private rental market. Often, people need a brief period of support to resolve the matters that brought them to homelessness.

Currently, that case management support is unavailable to around 14,000 people who attend homelessness services without a home.

Case management should be available to help every person who has lost their home, to assist them to recover from their experiences, resolve the matters that have brought them to homelessness, and ultimately, give them a fair chance of putting their best foot forward in a competitive rental market.

Because I've experienced homelessness, and there is a housing crisis, and I know what the system is like. If I become homeless, I'm darned. I know I won't get the assistance that I need.”

Vicky Vacondios, consumer / advocate

Recommendation 11: Provide case management to Victorians who are experiencing homelessness.

Housing First

There is a small group of people who have experienced housing exclusion for whom living well in the community, outside of supported accommodation is possible, but for whom housing security relies on access to ongoing supports. For this group, international and Australian evidence shows Housing First is an impactful, cost-effective approach to addressing rough sleeping and chronic homelessness²⁰. Housing First programs have been shown to demonstrate an approximately 90 per cent housing sustainment, among a cohort for whom traditional support models see less than half retain their homes.²¹

Providing long term housing and ongoing flexible support to people who have experienced long term and recurring homelessness is more effective, and ultimately less costly, than failing to respond to their need for housing.^{22 23}

Victoria provides Housing First informed approaches to ending long term and recurring homelessness for around 1,500 people. At one site of Victoria's largest Housing First program, *From Homelessness to a Home*, 100 per cent of clients report positive outcomes around housing stability, safety, and hope for the future.²⁴

While more Housing First packages are needed to end long-term homelessness, it's also clear that programs need to be more fully empowered to closely follow the Housing First model. There are eight Housing First principles for Australia,²⁵ and while each is necessary, one especially important principle is that flexible support is provided for as long as it's needed. Instead there is an assumption in Victoria that people participating in Housing First programs will be exited from the program after three years. The experience of other Housing First programs that have taken this approach is that while some people sustain housing once support is withdrawn, many people lose their homes.²⁶ Housing First programs require greater ability to hold on to clients for as long as is needed.

Every Victorian should have a home, and those that need support to achieve housing security should have it. For some people in Victoria, this will require ongoing Housing First programs.

It's good to have a home."

Jason Russell, consumer / advocate

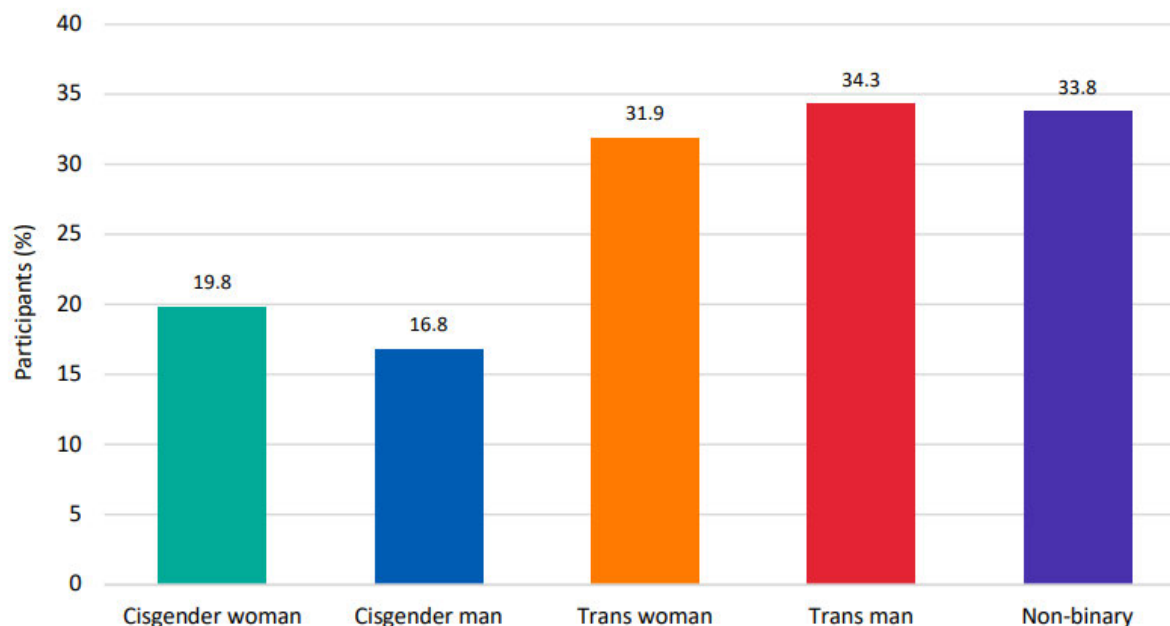
Recommendation 12: Continue to grow Housing First programs in Victoria.

Recommendation 13: Improve the fidelity of Housing First programs in Victoria, including by ensuring support and participation is as ongoing for as long as is needed.

Safe, accessible accommodation for trans and non-binary people

LGBTIQ+ Victorians experience homelessness at rates far higher than the general population. Research suggests that the incidence of at least one experience of homelessness across a lifetime in Australia is 13.4 per cent for heterosexuals, 20.8 per cent for bisexual people and 33.7 per cent for lesbian/gay people.²⁷

Figure 3. Homelessness rates among LGBTIQ+ people, by gender identity²⁸



While specific data on incidence of homelessness amongst transgender, non-binary, or gender diverse²⁹ peoples do not exist, health surveys of LGBTIQ+ people indicate trans and gender-diverse people experience higher levels of homelessness than lesbian, gay and bisexual people.³⁰

Homelessness is a deeply distressing experience for anyone, yet even more so for those who have experienced financial, employment, family, health and human service exclusions simply by living and expressing their true selves.³¹ This is why experiences of the system by trans and non-binary people must not only be, but also be perceived to be, a place where they are safe to be their true selves.

While society is changing, stigma against trans people continues to exist. In addition to high rates of being made homeless, trans people also face discrimination in the private rental market, providing an additional barrier to them exiting homelessness. Targeted crisis and transitional accommodation for trans people without homes can deliver short-term option that is not only safe, but is experienced as safe. This will begin

to address barriers that can prevent trans and non-binary people from seeking assistance from the homelessness service system. A trans and gender diverse crisis and transition accommodation facility also provides an opportunity to further develop support that specialises in meeting the unique needs of trans people, who have experienced trauma related to their specific experiences.

Recommendation 14: Create crisis and transitional accommodation for trans and nonbinary people, and pathways to secure housing.

The adequacy of regulation with regards to standards and conditions of rental housing

Regulating rents in the private rental market

Victoria's *Fairer Safer Housing* review included a great many very positive reforms to Victoria's *Residential Tenancies Act*. One such positive move was the decision to allow rent increases only once per year. The new Act also retained *Consumer Affairs Victoria's* role in conducting (on request) reviews of rent rises that tenants have experienced. Such reviews operate to determine whether a rent increase is excessive, after which a renter may apply to *VCAT* for an order that the rent is excessive, and for *VCAT* to determine a new maximum allowable rent.

Renters face significant upheaval in ending a tenancy and finding a new one, which usually incurs thousands of dollars of upfront costs. This, alongside the threat of retaliatory eviction into a tight rental market and the resultant threat of homelessness, creates a power imbalance between renters and their residential rental provider. The experience of services is that renters, especially those with low market power, are reluctant to enforce their rights. Our frontline practitioners tell us they are increasingly supporting people experiencing homelessness who have left tenancies because of significant rental increases, or are required to accept increased rental costs that they cannot afford, and who have accumulated rental arrears. CHP is also aware of anecdotal concerns that *CAV* rent reviews may not uniformly be comprehensive.

I did the whole push back of suburbs to get more affordable rent. Looking for that cheaper rent was one thing. But I was in a regional area, and it meant that moving out meant that there was a vast impact on travel expenses, so it didn't really make a difference."

Jody Letts, consumer / advocate

One alternative which should be explored by the Committee and Victorian Government is reversing the onus of appeal from the renter to the rental provider, as occurs in the ACT. Under the model operating in the ACT, rents may be raised to a certain threshold (tied in the ACT, and ideally in Victoria, to movements in the market) by a rental provider. Should a rental provider desire an increase beyond such a threshold, it is their responsibility, rather than that of the tenant, to appeal to the tribunal.

Such a reform would retain the principles of Victoria's existing rental system, maintaining that rent increases should be in-line with market movements and not excessive, while seeking to overcome the issues that currently exist around renters' hesitancy to exercise their powers for review.

Recommendation 15: Explore reversing the onus of appeal on rent increases, such that the onus sits with the residential rental provider.

Remove the no-cause eviction at the end of the first fixed-term lease

Victoria should remove the remaining 'no reason' notice to vacate at the end of the first fixed term. As discussed above, CHP understands that many renters are reluctant to exercise their rights. As discussed above, this prevents some renters from seeking rent reviews, but it affects all sorts of rights, such as making age-related disability modifications.

Anecdotal evidence tells us that this eviction notice in particular is often used in a retaliatory manner, but that the lack of a requirement for landlords to demonstrate any reason for the eviction serves to hide this motive from view.

It is important that Victoria should remove opportunities for retaliatory evictions, but especially this one for which there are no evidentiary requirements, in order to foster a culture of renters feeling more empowered to exercise the rights that the *Residential Tenancies Act* affords them.

Recommendation 16: Remove the no-cause notice to vacate at the end of the first fixed-term lease

Recommendation 17: Consider other means for preventing retaliatory evictions, including further limiting the circumstances in which notices to vacate can be issued.

The impact of short stay accommodation

Victoria's rental market is currently beset by devastatingly low vacancy rates. While the main priority for Governments must be to increase the supply of both private and social housing to alleviate these pressures, the severity of the current rental crisis demonstrates a need to make better use of existing supply in the short term. This should include regulating short stay accommodation.

Perilously low vacancy rates meant that renters who seek to move house for whatever reason, be it eviction, rent increases, employment opportunities, or the needs of family members, have severely constrained access to rental housing. In many parts of Victoria, renters, and especially renters with less market power, face a credible risk of there simply not being enough available properties to go around. The result is inevitable - homelessness.

There is significant public interest in seeing more homes made available to people who need them. It is also appropriate for State and Federal Governments to have expectations around the use of properties for which they have contributed to development infrastructure, local services infrastructure, and tax concessions, in the hopes of making those homes available for people to live in. Figure 4 (next page) demonstrates that Victoria's cities and popular holiday destinations have significant numbers of short-stay rental properties (data is from just one short-stay platform).

Why aren't we looking at solutions utilising the resources that we have, and getting a quicker impact?"

Helen Matthews, consumer / advocate

People who have been without a home will tell you that the loss of a home causes harm that extends beyond physical deprivation. Homelessness denies people a private space; a safe space; a place to recover when times are tough. It involves a shift in people's identity from being someone who is a part of their community, to someone who is pushed to the margins of that community. This presents real challenges for people's wellbeing, that grow the longer they live without a safe, secure home of their own.

In the context of such damaging social exclusion, people without homes often report feeling affronted by the knowledge that vacant properties exist, but are not made available to people who need a home. They have long called for vacant properties to be made available to renters.

There's tax breaks and investment returns to buying houses and keeping them empty. That needs to change."

Trevor Brown, consumer / advocate

Figure 4. Short stay rentals (sole short-stay platform)³²

| City | July 2022 |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Melbourne | 15,587 |
| Geelong | 1,544 |
| Greater Bendigo City | 408 |
| Ballarat City | 406 |
| Bass Coast | 2,252 |
| Surf Coast | 1,764 |
| Alpine Shire | 1,282 |
| Hepburn | 1,028 |
| Colac Otway | 952 |
| East Gippsland | 803 |

Recommendation 18: Consider means for making more vacant and short-stay properties available to renters.

The experience of, and impacts of all of the above on, renters and property owners

There are troubling signs that the large increase in rental costs over recent years is now having a serious impact. While data from Victoria's specialist homelessness services doesn't indicate an increase in service use, this is largely explained by the fact that such services are at or near capacity. Specialist homelessness services report that without additional resources, the true level of need for homelessness services will remain obscured. However, many homelessness services that also operate emergency relief programs, for example groceries, have recorded significant increases in the need for emergency relief.

With rent making up the greatest portion of most household budgets, this tells us that the rents are now so high that more families are turning to charity to keep the household running and the family fed. It is incumbent on both the Victorian and Federal Governments to address this issue.

Recommendation 19: Consider means for addressing the cost of living crisis, the largest component of which is rents.

Conclusion

There have always been Victorians for whom the private rental market did not provide reliable and secure access to a home. The private, and often the social rental market has often neglected people in poverty, women and children escaping family violence, people in the midst of a significant personal crisis, or young people. The lack of secure housing for all has always been the basis on which homelessness exists.

Today, matters are worse. Sky high rental costs, and perilously low vacancy rates mean that more people than before struggle to pay rent or secure a home. People for whom the rental market used to provide. Meanwhile, groups who have previously been vulnerable to homelessness face even worse prospects than before.

Victoria needs more housing supply, and in particular it needs more public and community housing for people at risk of homelessness. The housing crisis is the most pressing issue facing Victoria today. It must also be the number one priority of Governments.

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