

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Legal and Social Issues Committee



Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

Final report

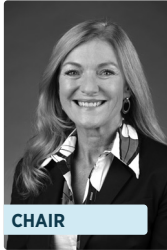
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About the Committee

Functions

The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's functions are to inquire into and report on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with community services, education, gaming, health, and law and justice.

As a Standing Committee, it may inquire into, hold public hearings, consider and report on any Bills or draft Bills, annual reports, estimates of expenditure or other documents laid before the Legislative Council in accordance with an Act, provided these are relevant to its functions.

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This report is available on the Committee's website.

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Terms of reference

Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

On 7 June 2019, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That this House requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, within 12 months, on the state of homelessness in Victoria, and in particular, the Committee should—

- a. provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria;
- b. investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and
- c. identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

Chair's foreword

Homelessness is the deepest expression of social exclusion in our society, a growing and seemingly intractable problem.

We can never give up on our attempts at ending homelessness. Many dedicated individuals and organisations working with people experiencing homelessness share my view and are determined to realise this goal. This inquiry received detailed and robust submissions from organisations working in the sector and from individuals in the community who care deeply about this issue and wish to see it addressed. I thank them all wholeheartedly.

Crucially, we also benefitted from receiving submissions and hearing directly from individuals experiencing homelessness or sleeping rough. At all times, we kept their experiences front of mind. These are some of the most vulnerable people in Victoria, and their contributions informed our report and recommendations.

Thank you to everyone who contributed, those who made submissions and those who appeared at public hearings to provide evidence, as well as those that welcomed us into their organisations and homes on site visits. We met amazing, dedicated and inspiring people during this inquiry. The multi-faceted nature of homelessness and the depth of issues relating to its prevention and treatment led the Committee to hold more than the usual number of public hearings. We also benefitted from hearings with overseas jurisdictions that are successfully responding to homelessness.

The Committee began this inquiry before the devastating 2019/2020 bushfires in Victoria and prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Homelessness was already a challenge for so many in Victoria, and these events exacerbated these difficulties for both those experiencing homelessness and those providing homelessness support. Measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic saw many people previously sleeping rough placed in emergency accommodation, with plans for this to transition into long-term housing. This event showed that with sufficient will on the part of the Victorian Government, it is possible to end homelessness for many people experiencing it. Whether that will remain the case is yet to be seen.

Insufficient Commonwealth income support (such as JobSeeker or Youth allowance) is clearly one of the leading issues preventing individuals from sustaining long-term housing. My colleagues and I believe it is critical for the Victorian Government to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for a permanent increased rate of JobSeeker as well as other relevant income support payments such as Youth Allowance.

In the Committee's interim report for this Inquiry we acknowledged that the overwhelming number of contributors believe that providing housing for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness should be the Committee's number one

recommendation and its first priority. We took this message on board and agree with stakeholders that effective housing policies and funding are essential in both the prevention and eradication of homelessness.

I acknowledge the Victorian Government's landmark Big Housing Build, which was announced in November 2020, towards the end of the Inquiry. The Big Housing Build will see 9,300 new social housing dwellings built, which represents an impressive 10% increase in Victoria's social housing stock. However, despite the unprecedented size of the program, this will still not ensure that Victoria will meet the national average of social housing as a percentage of total dwellings, at 4.5%.

In order to increase long-term housing options, in this report we suggest the Government looks at, among other measures, implementing mandatory inclusionary zoning in all new major housing developments across the state.

We also heard from many committed individuals, businesses and organisations about innovative housing models that could significantly change how we deliver housing in this state. We urge the Government to consider supporting their ideas and their work.

I believe that another crucial part of our approach to homelessness should be to intervene early in order to prevent homelessness before it occurs, and the Committee was in firm agreement on this. Whenever I have looked in depth at disadvantage in our society it has been evident that an early intervention approach is essential. This can get to the very cause of disadvantage and turn people's lives around.

Early intervention means identifying those at risk of homelessness and stepping in to provide support before they reach a crisis point. It also means a focus on education. There are many skilled and passionate people in the homelessness sector who have the capacity to do this crucial work and who should be supported to do so. Government should prioritise implementing diverse, forward-thinking early intervention strategies. We identify a number of those in this report.

I was impressed by the work underway in regional and rural areas, where communities are working together to find solutions to homelessness based on local circumstances and the strength of their communities. Some programs are focused on supporting people experiencing particular issues, such as family violence, while others, like the Geelong Project, are multidisciplinary and provide a wide range of services. The Youth Foyer program is another initiative that stood out with its approach towards building young people's capacity to create and lead productive, meaningful lives.

Evidence provided to the Committee by Associate Professor David Mackenzie, cited his study that found national spending on health and justice services for young people experiencing homelessness each year was more than the total cost spent on homelessness accommodation and support for all ages. This emphasises that the financial cost of prevention and targeted support is far less than the cost of supporting those in crisis. For me, it's a no-brainer in terms of where we should be directing our resources.

One of the crucial areas we looked at in the report relates to the often tragic transition from institutional settings into homelessness. This includes health, mental health, care and custodial settings. Too often, people at risk of homelessness are discharged or released into the community without sufficient planning or support to find and keep accommodation. Without a home, these individuals may soon end up back in hospital or in the justice system. For those leaving incarceration, being released into homelessness inhibits their chances at successful re-integration into the community. These types of justice issues are ones which I hope we will have an opportunity to look at more closely during a forthcoming inquiry by this Committee.

Currently in Victoria, we have a homelessness sector that is overwhelmed with the need to respond to people in crisis. I urge the Government to implement the suggestions in this report so that we can develop a more adaptable and flexible system of support and so that the sector can focus more on early intervention rather than crisis responses.

The recommendations in this report reflect over a year of dedicated bipartisan work by the Committee which, if implemented, would go a long way towards solving homelessness. I thank my colleagues on the Committee for their commitment to this report and their dedication to solving this issue. I particularly acknowledge my crossbench colleague, Mr Rod Barton, for initiating this inquiry.

Thank you also to the Committee Secretariat that ably supported the work of the Committee. Like most workplaces we faced a number of challenges in 2020 and many operational changes were required to continue our work. I particularly thank Kieran Crowe, Inquiry Officer; Alice Petrie, Inquiry Officer; Caitlin Connally, Research Assistant; Justine Donohue, Administrative Officer; and Lilian Topic, Senior Committee Manager.

We all want to see an end to homelessness in Victoria. We have work to do, and this report's recommendations are a crucial first step.

I commend the report to the House.



Fiona Patten
Chair

Key messages from the Committee

Homelessness is one of the most complex and distressing expressions of disadvantage and social exclusion in our society and requires immediate attention by government.

Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

This section condenses the findings and recommendations from the Committee's final report for the *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*. It outlines the key messages which the Committee wishes to deliver to the government, the homelessness service sector and the community about what must be done in this crucial area.

Those from disadvantaged or marginalised groups are more at risk of experiencing homelessness; however, it is often an accumulation of multiple risk factors and adverse economic, social and personal circumstances that cause an individual to become homeless. It is these structural and personal drivers which need to be the focus of an early intervention strategy for homelessness which focuses on prevention rather than cure. Homelessness cannot be remediated with any single measure—it is complex and multidimensional. Instead, it requires a variety of approaches addressing key risk factors, that can help an individual avoid homelessness. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government's homelessness response requires the development of clear guiding principles to support an effective whole-of-government approach to the issue.

In this report the Committee recommends a wide-ranging suite of measures aimed at achieving outcomes through an extensive effort towards early intervention to assist in the prevention of homelessness. At the heart of the Committee's final report is the belief that we need a two-pronged approach in order to remediate homelessness in Victoria:

- We need to strengthen early intervention measures to identify individuals at risk and to prevent them from becoming homeless.
- We must provide more long-term housing for the homeless.

These should be the core aims of the Victorian Government.

Notwithstanding these goals, improvements are also needed around the use and management of short- and medium-term accommodation options—specifically, crisis and transitional housing.

The Committee believes that the homelessness crisis in Victoria demands immediate and ongoing attention from the Victorian Government. The complexity of the issue cannot be understated, with a myriad of often overlapping risk factors that make people vulnerable during unexpected crisis points. Without appropriate support people can find themselves homeless. To address the varying causes and manifestations of

homelessness a wide range of solutions are required. The Committee believes that implementation of the broad-ranging and complementary suite of recommendations made in our Final Report will significantly improve the Victorian Government's response to homelessness across the state.

During the course of this inquiry, we saw how emergencies such as bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic can have a devastating effect on the most vulnerable in our community. The Committee urges the government to monitor outcomes for disadvantaged sectors over the next few years as we determine what the long-term effects of these crises will be.

Homelessness is a complex issue

There are just as many causes of homelessness as there are different faces. Homelessness can affect anyone; however, some people are more at risk of experiencing episodic or recurring homelessness due to personal and structural risk factors. Personal risk factors may include, for example, mental health issues or experiencing family violence. Structural risk factors are social factors that can lead to disadvantage and increased vulnerability to homelessness, for example housing affordability or unemployment rates.

In 2018–19, **one in 57 Victorians** accessed a government-funded homelessness service, a high figure but one which is likely to underestimate the extent of the issue. This problem of understanding who and how many people are homeless is compounded further by the transitory nature of homelessness, where the total number of people experiencing homelessness can change on any given day. The Committee believes that more work needs to be done to improve reporting strategies for recording Victoria's homeless population.

The median duration of an experience of homelessness in Australia is 4.5 months, with approximately 20% of experiences lasting longer than 12 months. For many people recurring homelessness can be addressed and prevented through access to immediate, appropriate and ongoing support which addresses personal and structural risk factors.

Homelessness is a much larger and more complex issue than the very visible and confronting issue of individuals living and sleeping in public places (rough sleeping). In the Committee's view, a person is homeless when they are sleeping rough or reside in a dwelling that is inadequate, has no tenure or does not provide agency for a person to control the space for their own social relations. A person is homeless if they are living in short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options; this includes refuges, crisis accommodation, couch surfing, living temporarily with friends and relatives, insecure accommodation on a short-term basis, or emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency (for example, in hotels, motels and so forth).

However, the Committee notes there is no universal definition of homelessness.

The homelessness sector in Victoria is overwhelmed

Victoria's homelessness system is overwhelmed with those in need, making it increasingly difficult for service providers to adequately respond to the complex and varying problems a person faces. There is significant risk in treating immediate problems in isolation. This increases the likelihood of fragmented systems of delivery of services. Fragmented service delivery can undermine efforts to prevent episodes of homelessness, increasing the risk that a person may experience homelessness for longer and longer periods.

People at risk of homelessness or who find themselves homeless rarely end up there because of one factor. There are many factors which render an individual vulnerable to crisis. Therefore, it is important that the sector seek to provide wrap-around support services tailored to individual need.

Homelessness can have a lasting and traumatic effect

Homelessness is not just a statistic. It is an event in a person's life, often recurring, that can have a lasting and traumatic effect. Homelessness can result in a variety of physical deprivations relating to a lack of or inadequate shelter, physical safety or access to suitable hygiene and health services. Pre-existing health issues can be exacerbated in situations of homelessness, where individuals are unable to access or afford essential services.

Furthermore, homelessness is more than just a lack of housing. Not having a space to call one's own can have significant impacts on a person's agency, resilience and sense of security. This can have acute and lasting effects on a person's mental health and their connection to community and public life; becoming exacerbated where the conditions of a person's homelessness are ongoing.

Demand for services exceeds the availability of support

The Committee was concerned to find that demand for homelessness services significantly exceeds the availability of support. In 2018–19, 112,919 Victorians sought assistance from homelessness services, a 22% increase since 2012–13.¹ The majority of people presenting to homelessness services are seeking short-, medium- or long-term accommodation. Unfortunately, many people could not be supported or referred to accommodation:

- 76% could not be provided long-term housing
- 62% could not be provided transitional accommodation

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, p. 4.

- 32% could not be provided crisis accommodation.²

Others presenting to homelessness agencies are seeking financial support, to retain housing or other related support.

As a consequence of the overwhelming demand for homelessness and related services, agencies are struggling to keep up and assist everyone in need of support. The housing resources to accommodate every person in need simply do not exist. The lack of accommodation options for Victorians has been exacerbated by the growing bottleneck from short- and medium-term accommodation into long-term housing. The inability of people to move into long-term housing means added strain on crisis and transitional accommodation providers. This can have a further flow on-effect to other support services, especially ones where accommodation might be a condition or requirement of receiving support (e.g. a condition of leaving institutional care).

Gaps in the sector are of considerable concern to the Committee.

Another consequence of unmet demand for homelessness services is client ‘spill over’ from metropolitan areas into rural and regional Victoria. In order to access much needed homelessness services, particularly accommodation, some people are moving into less populated areas in the hope that they can get the support they desperately need. This puts increased pressure on the already limited resources of regional organisations. Many Victorians across the state are not receiving critical support.

The Committee heard that because of the way that homelessness services work some people have been forced to ‘re-present’ to a service once a previous engagement with the service has come to an end, because their needs remain unmet. Unmet demand for services is compounded by gaps across the sector, which can mean that a person is unable to access the right services for their individual circumstances, whether they require support or accommodation.

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government needs to promote and develop more robust mechanisms for coordination, facilitation and accountability between service providers to ensure that an individual is receiving support for all existing risk factors, increasing their chances for a stronger and longer-lasting outcome. This could be achieved through the provision of more long-term and supported accommodation, which would ease pressure on crisis and transitional accommodation providers. This would allow the sector to reorient away from a crisis response towards a greater focus on early intervention programs.

The sector is crisis-oriented

The lack of long-term accommodation and early intervention programs in Victoria has led to an increasingly crisis-oriented sector. Due to demand exceeding the services available, particularly for accommodation, the sector is forced to focus more on the

2 Ibid.

short-term and immediate needs of people who are homeless. In particular, attention is increasingly focused toward procuring sufficient accommodation, mostly in crisis or transitional housing. This can come at the expense of homelessness prevention through the provision of long-term housing and support.

The Victorian Government has developed fixed service lengths to guide service providers. This is what the Committee believes is part of a crisis-oriented response. Fixed service lengths have resulted in people having to re-present to a homelessness service at the end of a previous service cycle because their needs were still unmet.

Every individual's experience of homelessness is unique and is influenced by personal or structural risk factors. Some individuals require longer support periods than can be provided by an agency. Being required to re-present to a service provider numerous times can stall an individual's progress and may further entrench them in a cycle of homelessness.

A more adaptable and flexible system is needed

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government needs to embed more flexibility into its approach to the funding of homelessness programs. This flexibility should extend to the amount of time an individual receives services and the services they are eligible to receive.

To reorient away from a crisis response system, the homelessness sector should be supported to focus on the continuous improvement of cooperation between providers. In particular, the Victorian Government should endeavour to foster cooperation between early intervention service providers. Information should be shared to assist individuals and an approach taken that means that individuals can receive support in relation to the varying risks they face.

A focus on continuously improving cooperation amongst services can ensure better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and cut down on service duplication.

The Committee believes that multi-disciplinary services can ensure better outcomes and provide services for people with complex needs. This is particularly the case in regional areas where there are less services in some areas and more agility is needed to address the needs of clients.

The Committee believes that Victoria's current approach, which emphasises crisis response, should be evaluated. This evaluation should be the beginning of a process to move the sector toward outcomes-based services. A gradual approach will allow the sector sufficient time to adapt and re-orient their services towards a more flexible and integrated approach that supports clients to live independently.

Early intervention is crucial to ending homelessness

Early intervention involves the homelessness sector and other related sectors intervening as early as possible to prevent people becoming homeless. This is achieved through addressing risk factors which may cause a person to become homeless and to give a person the opportunity to build personal, social and economic resilience.

Early intervention services address issues such as financial instability, mental health, trauma, employment difficulty and alcohol and drug misuse. Early intervention is considered highly cost-effective and can prevent ongoing interactions with the justice, health and care systems. By reorienting Victoria's homelessness strategy towards early intervention, this would ease pressure on other parts of the service system, such as crisis response.

Early intervention is particularly critical for those who first experienced homelessness at a young age. Prevention of homelessness amongst young people or intervening early is important to ensure that experiences of homelessness and disadvantage at a young age do not affect the life chances of an individual and increase the likelihood of ongoing homelessness into adulthood.

Victorian Housing Access Points are based at designated service providers across Victoria and operate as an initial entrance point for people who need to access homelessness services. Most people access homelessness services through an access point in their area. It is vital that homelessness access points are adequately resourced to provide critical assessment and support. The Committee believes that homelessness entry points are a key resource for a future state-wide homelessness strategy which focuses on early intervention. Entry points should provide early intervention services as well as crisis services. Greater provision of early intervention services would ease pressure on other elements of the homelessness system. Homelessness access points are targeted at those actively seeking services for homelessness.

Alongside entry points, other services and institutions which often interact with people before they reach a crisis point—such as real estate agencies, schools, and healthcare facilities—could play a greater role in early intervention and prevention of homelessness. These institutions should be equipped to refer individuals they have assessed as at risk of homelessness to appropriate services before they reach a crisis point. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should fund programs that provide information to institutions who often have contact with people at risk of homelessness that assists them to meaningfully engage with and refer people to other services.

Ending homelessness in Victoria requires a whole of government approach

A focus on early intervention as a primary strategy for addressing homelessness will need to explore opportunities and programs which assist people in need to find stable and ongoing employment. Whilst having a job is not a catch-all solution to preventing

homelessness, it is an incredibly important factor, particularly for developing the personal agency and resilience needed to avoid homelessness.

The Committee believes the Victorian Government should explore opportunities to give more support to programs and social enterprises that work with people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness to assist them to find employment. These programs should include a work readiness component to help ensure that participants are able to maintain employment and have the best chance to find and keep a home.

Family violence is a leading cause of homelessness in Victoria, particularly for women and young people.

There are complex factors which mean that safety is often the greatest priority and means that too often, those experiencing family violence are displaced from their home and possessions. This can be a disempowering and traumatising experience and can have significant impacts on the agency and resilience of a victim as they try to rebuild their lives. The Committee believes where possible and appropriate, victims and their children should be supported to stay in their home.

Flexible support packages are an important part of the Victorian Government's response to family violence. They play a key role in assisting people who experience violence to safely remain in their own home or rapidly find other accommodation. The Committee supports funding for programs that ensure that persons experiencing family violence receive the help they need to avoid homelessness.

Research and trials into the provision of alternative accommodation for perpetrators of family violence which is linked to behavioural change programs may be an answer to the complexities of this issue. The Committee believes that more work should be done to assess the success of such programs.

Mental health issues are also linked to episodic and chronic homelessness and can be exacerbated by that experience. The Committee identified two key areas of early intervention support that could assist people with mental health issues avoid homelessness or protect them from chronic housing precariousness:

- Improvement of cooperation between mental health and homelessness services so that the system is easier to navigate and individuals at risk of homelessness are identified earlier.
- Tenancy support programs for people experiencing mental health issues who are at risk of homelessness.

Justice system issues are a structural risk factor that can lead to homelessness. The inquiry received evidence from stakeholders about the experiences of people who come into contact with justice, health, mental health and care settings who are discharged into homelessness. The Committee heard that this is common across different institutional settings and can contribute to recurrent contact with institutional care. The Committee believes that this is not only detrimental to the individuals discharged

with nowhere to go but is also a missed opportunity to provide crucial services to help them avoid further experiences of homelessness. As soon as someone comes into contact with the criminal justice system they should be targeted for assistance.

As outlined above dealing with homelessness means dealing with many intersecting issues, whilst recognising that at the core of any response to homelessness is the need to ensure that there are adequate accommodation options for people in need. Provision of long-term housing, such as public and community housing, is a protective factor against homelessness that we know works. In social housing, there is more security of tenure for low-income residents compared to the private market because a person's rent is tied to their income rather than being based on market prices. By securing more long-term and affordable housing options across Victoria, there would be less pressure on crisis and transitional services to fill this gap and more people would be prevented from becoming homeless.

To reflect the importance of housing in addressing homelessness and recognising that homelessness impacts on the enjoyment of other fundamental rights and freedoms, the Committee believes that the right to housing should be included in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). This would assist in ensuring the Victorian Government takes the right to housing into consideration in future policy and legislative decision-making.

Furthermore, the Committee considers that community housing providers should be recognised as public authorities for the purpose of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). This will assist community housing tenants to have their rights under the Charter taken into consideration in tenancy matters. In addition, the Committee believes that VCAT should also have the jurisdiction to take into consideration whether eviction decisions for tenants in social housing comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). This would ensure that social housing providers give due consideration to the human rights compatibility of eviction decisions.

There are a lack of exit points from crisis and transitional accommodation

Crisis accommodation is a type of short-term accommodation which seeks to house people who are at high risk of homelessness. The aim of crisis accommodation is to remove people from a harmful environment or crisis situation by providing temporary accommodation. Some crisis accommodation services in Victoria seek to alleviate situations which commonly force people into a cycle of homelessness, such as family violence.

Transitional accommodation is medium-term, subsidised accommodation for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness which also provides support programs and assistance appropriate to their circumstances. Typically, a person will spend up to two

years in transitional accommodation before moving into long-term housing. A person in transitional housing can move into public or community housing after their stay or move into the private rental market, depending on their situation.

Transitional accommodation providers play an important role in helping residents to prepare for independent living. However, this work can be undermined if residents have no choice but to exit into unsuitable accommodation or homelessness.

A lack of long-term housing has led to increased demand for crisis and transitional accommodation. In the case of crisis accommodation, this has led to a reliance on unsustainable, unsuitable, and in some cases dangerous, motels and rooming houses. In the case of transitional housing, it has similarly led to a chronic shortage of available places across Victoria. There are alternative forms of privately-run accommodation but these rarely meet the needs of the client and can in many circumstances exacerbate the problems they may be experiencing.

A key theme presented to the Committee throughout this inquiry is that a lack of long-term housing has created a blockage in the service pathway of Victoria's homelessness system with individuals unable to move into long-term housing. The result is that people spend many more weeks, months and sometimes years in accommodation which is designed to be short term and those who are newly homeless are unable to secure places in crisis and transitional accommodation when they are in immediate need.

The growing bottleneck, or blockage, out of crisis and transitional accommodation is putting increased pressure on short- and medium-term accommodation support providers, who are forced to procure alternative types of accommodation to service all the people in need. This has diverted resources and attention away from early intervention strategies which seek to avoid homelessness. The Committee believes that this is one of the reasons why the homelessness service sector is increasingly crisis-oriented.

More funding is needed for the provision of purpose-built crisis accommodation, and where possible, with appropriate onsite support so that wrap-around services are available for people who need them. This is needed across Victoria, but particularly in Melbourne growth areas and regional and rural Victoria. Such an investment in crisis accommodation is not intended to increase the emphasis on the provision of these options in Victoria's homelessness system. The aim is instead to ensure that such accommodation is located where it is needed, and to provide more purpose-built crisis accommodation to alleviate the need for individuals to reside in hotels, motels, caravan parks and rooming houses because there is no other option.

The Committee had the opportunity to speak to many stakeholders about potential solutions to shrinking Victoria's crisis and transitional housing bottleneck through the provision of more long-term housing options. The 'Housing First' approach was consistently brought up by various stakeholders as a potential solution.

The 'Housing First' approach emphasises that the priority in assisting persons experiencing homelessness is stable, ongoing housing. Once a person has permanent accommodation, support services may then be engaged to help address the root causes of homelessness. The Committee is concerned that a lack of long-term housing options makes Housing First strategies difficult to implement.

Provision of more long-term housing is key to reducing homelessness

The provision of affordable, stable, long-term housing is key to reducing the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in Victoria. The delivery of additional social housing is key to addressing homelessness by ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing across the state. This includes measures in the private rental market, inclusionary zoning and government financing initiatives.

Accommodation is not a catch-all solution for all the complex factors which put a person at risk of housing precariousness or homelessness, but it is a crucial part of any solution. It is also a preventative measure; it becomes increasingly difficult to address risk factors and other support needs when a person is cycling through crisis and short-term accommodation. For example, it is difficult to look for and sustain employment, deal with legal issues or recover from complex traumatic episodes without stable, ongoing housing.

Both public and community housing play important roles in housing Victorians in need who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Community housing is an important resource for disadvantaged Victorians who are not able to participate in the private housing market. It is able to assist people with a diverse range of complex needs and often includes wrap-around support alongside accommodation. Continued supply of sustainable public housing is necessary to complement the diverse types of community housing available to those on the Victorian Housing Register.

As at 30 June 2019, there were 42,723 new applicants on the Victorian Housing Register. This includes 22,624 on the priority access stream and 20,099 applicants on the general register. In addition, there were 7,307 applicants on the waiting list to transfer from a social housing dwelling to another property. These applications are made up of approximately 80,000 individuals.³

In Victoria, there seems to be an increasing reliance on community housing as a source of long-term housing for persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness while slowly decreasing the reliance on public housing. There has been limited construction or acquisition of new public housing in recent years. There have also been commitments to increase transfers of public housing to community housing providers.

3 Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021.

The Committee heard from stakeholders about innovative housing models or mechanisms that could help to increase the supply of both short- and long-term housing, many of which have been led by the private sector. These include, for example, pop-up housing in underutilised buildings, transportable housing, and the use of surplus government land (through leases or sale) to create social housing. These models should be further explored by government to support a diverse range of housing options.

Commonwealth income support is not adequate

Insufficient Commonwealth income support (such as JobSeeker or Youth allowance) was regularly cited as one of the leading issues preventing individuals from sustaining long-term housing. There is a strong correlation between those experiencing unemployment and those accessing homelessness services; therefore, there need to be appropriate rates of income support for people to stay in housing whilst they look for employment. The Committee agrees that the rate of JobSeeker and other crucial income support payments are too low. There are very few properties available to rent in Victoria that are affordable to a single person whose main source of income is JobSeeker. This low rate of payment could push households that rely upon them towards a crisis point. The Committee believes it is critical for the Victorian Government to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for a permanent increased rate of Jobseeker as well as other relevant income support payments such as the Youth Allowance.

People accessing Commonwealth income support, homelessness services or other kinds of support service often experience stigma from real estate agencies when applying for properties. This stigma can be exacerbated by other factors such as a lack of rental history (a particular problem for young people trying to enter the rental market) or individuals exiting institutional settings. Certain groups, such as Aboriginal Victorians or culturally and linguistically diverse communities, also face stigma and discrimination which can impede their chances of finding a home. The Committee believes that there should be education and training for real estate agency staff in order to address the need to ensure equal access to the private rental market for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Victoria's social housing stock is insufficient

Victoria's social housing stock has been steadily declining for several years and is well below the national average. The proportion of Victorian social housing stock versus total dwellings has dropped from 3.85% in 2010–11 to 3.42% in 2019–20. Victoria has the lowest social housing stock in Australia and is significantly below the national average of 4.5% of total housing stock. The lack of available social housing has meant that too many Victorians are having significant trouble accessing much needed housing and support.

In November 2020, the Victorian Government announced that it would undertake what it has described as ‘the largest social housing building program in the state’s history’. The building program, the *Big Housing Build*, allocates more than \$5.3 billion to build over 12,000 new dwellings across Victoria. Over 9,300 of these new homes will be social housing properties and 2,900 will be affordable and market-priced homes for first home buyers and renters. The 9,300 new social housing dwellings represents a 10% increase in Victoria’s social housing stock. However, despite the unprecedented size of the program, this will still not ensure that Victoria will meet the national average of social housing as a percentage of total dwellings, at 4.5%. In addition, it remains to be seen what proportion of the over 80,000 individuals on the Victorian Housing Register will be housed in the new dwellings.⁴

Another potential solution to increase long-term housing options for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness is the introduction of mandatory inclusionary zoning. A mandatory model of inclusionary zoning would ensure that the private market takes partial responsibility, alongside government, for the provision of housing that meets the needs of all Victorians.

There are concerns regarding the specific structure of a mandatory scheme, such as the potential for it to constrain financial returns of property developers. These could be considered in the model’s development and incentives could be built in to ameliorate the effects of any requirement. Such incentives could be provided in return for a guarantee that the cost of other dwellings in a development will not be driven up due to the inclusion of affordable housing.

The Committee heard from many committed individuals, businesses and organisations about innovative ways that we might achieve better outcomes for the homeless and we urge the government to consider supporting their ideas and their work.

The government must develop clear guiding principles for addressing homelessness in Victoria

Homelessness and related support services assist with issues far wider than simply finding someone suitable accommodation. Accommodation is one component of a much larger puzzle. The unique social and structural risk factors which put an individual in danger of becoming homeless need to be addressed with a holistic and coordinated approach. The Committee’s final report covers a range of factors that contribute to Victoria’s homelessness response and growing crisis.

Developing a clear approach to addressing and preventing homelessness is a daunting task. The development of guiding principles that can be used to foster a whole-of-government approach to homelessness is needed.

⁴ Victorian Government, *Victoria’s big housing build*, Online, November 2020.

There could be significant benefit in developing a national policy framework which looks at the structural drivers of homelessness. However, it is important to acknowledge that the experience and response to homelessness is driven by local contexts. Victoria should retain its primary responsibility in responding to homelessness and in developing outcome measures based on the experiences of Victoria's homeless.

In the Committee's view, Victoria's homelessness strategy must be reoriented away from crisis management to focus on a dual approach:

1. The promotion of early intervention programs.
2. The procurement of sufficient long-term housing.

Findings and recommendations

1 Introduction

FINDING 1: The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the vulnerabilities and difficulties people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness face and has created increased demand on the homelessness sector to provide adequate housing, health and other support services. 14

FINDING 2: Victoria's homelessness system is crisis-oriented, a factor which is compounded by the lack of long-term housing options for people in need. 26

2 Homelessness in Victoria

FINDING 3: It is difficult to provide an accurate figure for the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria and it is likely the figures captured in the Census and other sources are an underestimate. 35

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government, in collaboration with the housing and homelessness sector, explore ways to improve the accurate recording of the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria, particularly in relation to transitory or recurring cases of homelessness. 35

FINDING 4: Severe overcrowding is a serious and increasing manifestation of homelessness in Victoria. However, there are complexities around the reasons for overcrowding and the level of need for homelessness services in some cases. 42

FINDING 5: People under 35 are the largest age group of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. 54

FINDING 6: Experiencing prolonged youth homelessness is a strong predictor of experiencing homelessness later in life. 54

FINDING 7: Older women are a fast-growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. 56

FINDING 8: People who experience homelessness are more likely to access Commonwealth income support as their primary source of income. 58

FINDING 9: Homelessness in Melbourne is geographically concentrated in inner Melbourne and outer suburban Melbourne. 62

FINDING 10: Homelessness in regional and rural Victoria is concentrated in major population centres, however, there are diverse needs across these regions that are exacerbated by a lack of services. 64

FINDING 11: Family violence is the main reason individuals accessing homelessness services seek assistance in Victoria. 69

FINDING 12: Housing affordability is a key factor in homelessness in Victoria. 74

3 The homelessness sector

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government undertake comprehensive mapping of services to ascertain gaps and overlaps in service delivery across Victoria. 96

FINDING 13: Due to growing numbers of clients seeking support from homelessness services, particularly for accommodation, Victoria’s housing and homelessness sector is struggling to cope with demand. 101

FINDING 14: There is not enough available short-, medium- or long-term accommodation available in Victoria to support the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. 101

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government embed flexibility into its approach to the funding of homelessness programs. This flexibility should extend to the amount of time an individual receives support and the services they are eligible to receive. 106

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government have regard for services that are multi-disciplinary when commissioning homelessness services, particularly in regional areas. 109

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government support more coordination, collaboration and integration between homelessness services. **109**

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government build on its policy of considering outcome-based service goals when commissioning, or re-commissioning, homelessness services. These service goals should include the provision of additional subsidies for individuals with more complex needs. **113**

4 Early intervention

FINDING 15: Investment in homelessness early intervention services clearly benefits individuals and can produce financial savings for the Victorian Government by preventing homelessness or treating it at an early stage before individuals require more intensive support. **120**

FINDING 16: Early intervention services currently in place in Victoria are successful at keeping people housed, where individuals are able to access them. **122**

FINDING 17: There are insufficient Initial Assessment and Planning workers at homelessness entry points to meet demand. **125**

FINDING 18: Provision of homelessness services at homelessness access points is necessarily weighted toward those with the greatest need. **125**

FINDING 19: Because homelessness services at homelessness entry points are oriented to assist people in the greatest need, individuals requiring early intervention services do not have their needs fully met. **125**

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government prioritise early intervention activities at the first point of contact with the homelessness system in recognition of the need to shift away from a crisis-oriented response, and assist at-risk persons to avoid entering homelessness, including by:

- providing further resources to entry points for additional Initial Assessment and Planning workers
- ensuring that early intervention programs receive further resourcing to meet demand from people attending entry points.

125

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government implement measures to prioritise outreach to other institutions outside the homelessness sector for the purposes of early intervention, including by:

- engaging with bodies and institutions that are the first to know when individuals are at risk of homelessness to assist them to identify and respond to risk factors for homelessness, including through education and training
- supporting homelessness services to build strong relationships and referral pathways with institutions that are the first to know when individuals are at risk of homelessness.

129

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding for the family violence Flexible Support Packages program.

133

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government:

- fund research into the incidence of homelessness amongst perpetrators of family violence in Victoria
- increase funding for family violence programs that focus on perpetrator interventions
- trial and evaluate the effectiveness of programs that provide supported accommodation for perpetrators of family violence, linked to compulsory behavioural change programs, including in regional areas.

135

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government ensure ongoing funding for the Private Rental Assistance Program in recognition of its key role in preventing entry into homelessness and that the funding grows to meet demand.

139

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government consider the barriers faced by young people, persons experiencing family violence and other groups in relation to difficulties entering or remaining in the private rental market in continued development of the Private Rental Assistance Program, with a view to making the service more accessible for these cohorts.

139

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government provide additional and ongoing funding for the Private Rental Assistance Program Plus to ensure the program can continue to grow to meet demand.

139

FINDING 20: Poor mental health is a risk factor for homelessness and homelessness can cause a deterioration in an individual's mental health.

141

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government promote collaborative practice arrangements between mental health and homelessness services, in order to:

- make the homelessness and mental health systems easier for individuals to navigate
- ensure early identification of individuals experiencing mental illness who need support.

144

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government investigate methods to tailor the Private Rental Assistance Program Plus to provide appropriate and effective services to people experiencing diverse mental health issues.

146

FINDING 21: Misuse of alcohol and drugs are more likely to occur after an individual becomes homeless because of the traumatising nature of homelessness.

148

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government investigate and provide additional funding for homelessness early intervention services for young people that seek to address family conflict issues.

150

FINDING 22: Education First Youth Foyers may not be suitable for all cohorts of young people experiencing homelessness, particularly those with complex needs. However, they are beneficial for many disadvantaged young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

156

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government conduct an assessment of suitability for additional Education First Youth Foyer sites in metropolitan and regional areas, with a view to providing funding for additional facilities.

156

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government provide additional funding to organisations that provide innovative accommodation for young people at their family home, such as Kids Under Cover.

158

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government provide funding and support for the expansion of initiatives linked to the Community of Schools and Services model, with a minimum expansion to seven pilot sites that will include four metropolitan sites and three regional sites.

166

FINDING 23: The provision of adequate social housing is a protective factor against homelessness, particularly for people with complex needs.

169

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government commit funding for programs that assist young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness to receive job readiness training and connect them with employment opportunities. 172

RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Victorian Government explore opportunities to include more social enterprises that work with people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in their social procurement policy. Such social enterprises should include a work readiness component in their employment programs. 174

RECOMMENDATION 22: That the Victorian Government provide additional transitional housing for people leaving custodial settings. In addition, that the Victorian Government ensure access to housing support workers and integrated legal support both before and after release to assist persons to access and maintain stable, long-term housing. 180

RECOMMENDATION 23: That the Victorian Government investigate whether greater access to supported accommodation is required for people seeking bail and whether this would lead to a reduction of individuals on remand. 181

RECOMMENDATION 24: That the Victorian Government pursue a ‘no exits into homelessness’ policy to improve discharge practices at mental health, hospital, rehabilitation, aged care and other institutional settings. To improve discharge planning, the following measures should be put in place:

- development of partnerships and pathways with housing and homelessness services, including early referrals prior to discharge
- collection of discharge data and reporting against targets aiming for a reduction of discharges into homelessness
- training for staff in institutional settings, particularly in areas with high homeless populations, to better identify and respond to the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness, including—
 - training staff to record housing status as part of admission to prevent or identify risks of discharging individuals into homelessness.

184

RECOMMENDATION 25: That the Victorian Government introduce legislative provisions for Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal compliance orders in respect of residential tenancies to be time limited where appropriate. 186

RECOMMENDATION 26: That the Victorian Government amend the content of the Notice to Vacate form for tenants of rented premises to provide information about legal rights and details of legal assistance services within the notice. **187**

RECOMMENDATION 27: That the Victorian Government provide additional funding with a view to expanding the provision of tenancy-focused legal supports for tenants involved in residential tenancy proceedings at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. **187**

RECOMMENDATION 28: That the Victorian Government review the merits of an internal appeals process at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for residential tenancy matters. Such a review should have regard for whether an internal appeals process would result in cost savings for the Government and parties by reducing the need to appeal to the Supreme Court. **189**

RECOMMENDATION 29: That the Victorian Government develop and implement a Protocol for Victoria Police and other enforcement agencies to use in responding to people experiencing homelessness, which would:

- avoid unnecessary, enforcement-based interactions with people experiencing homelessness
- ensure that where interactions do occur, they are appropriate and respectful
- support enforcement officers to use their discretion and consider alternative options to fines and charges when interacting with people experiencing homelessness
- train and equip enforcement officers to make referrals to appropriate services as an alternative to fines and charges. **191**

RECOMMENDATION 30: That in repealing the offence of public drunkenness from the *Summary Offences Act 1966* (Vic), the Victorian Government create an appropriate public health response model in consultation with relevant stakeholders in the homelessness sector. **192**

RECOMMENDATION 31: That the Magistrates Court consider investigating the need for retention of the Special Circumstances list or establishment of a Homelessness list. **194**

RECOMMENDATION 32: That the Victorian Government ensure community housing providers are recognised as public authorities for the purposes of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). **199**

RECOMMENDATION 33: That the Victorian Government amend the *Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* (Vic) to provide the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal with jurisdiction to consider whether eviction decisions for tenants in social housing comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). **200**

RECOMMENDATION 34: That the Victorian Government include the right to housing in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). **200**

5 Crisis and transitional accommodation

RECOMMENDATION 35: That the Victorian Government improve access to specialist family violence crisis accommodation facilities, including by:

- conducting demand modelling for family violence crisis accommodation across the state in order to ascertain need
- providing additional funding for accommodation facilities, including for core and cluster models of accommodation
- ensuring regional areas have access to family violence crisis accommodation to allow persons experiencing violence to remain in or close to their communities. **216**

RECOMMENDATION 36: That the Victorian Government investigate mechanisms to address the use by homelessness services of Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) funding to place persons in inappropriate forms of private accommodation such as unsafe hotels, motels and caravan parks due to the lack of any alternative housing options. **221**

RECOMMENDATION 37: That the Victorian Government support homelessness service agencies to broaden the availability of emergency crisis accommodation, therefore limiting the number of people in need of crisis accommodation being put into unsuitable hotels, motels and caravan parks. **221**

RECOMMENDATION 38: That the Victorian Government improve monitoring and compliance actions in relation to rooming houses, and in particular:

- ensure Consumer Affairs Victoria is adequately resourced to monitor and inspect registered rooming houses to ensure the prescribed standards are met and to investigate and respond to reports of unregistered rooming houses
- promote information-sharing and collaborative responses between Consumer Affairs Victoria and local councils in order to target unregistered rooming houses
- investigate the potential for development of a standardised accommodation ratings system for private rooming houses
- review planning scheme provisions in relation to rooming houses to prevent a concentration in particular areas and to ensure they have connectivity to services. **228**

RECOMMENDATION 39: That the Victorian Government provide funding for an increase in both general and specialised forms of crisis accommodation, with a focus on provision of appropriate forms of onsite support, including in Melbourne's growth areas and parts of regional Victoria where crisis accommodation is currently lacking. **229**

RECOMMENDATION 40: That the Victorian Government ensure that those who transition from emergency accommodation under the *From Homelessness to a Home* program are transferred to stable, secure, long-term housing, rather than crisis accommodation. **235**

RECOMMENDATION 41: That the Victorian Government provide funding to homelessness services operating within the *From Homelessness to a Home* program so that they can continue to support clients for an extended period after they have been placed in long-term housing, with a view to assisting participants to maintain their housing. **235**

FINDING 24: A lack of affordable long-term housing has led to difficulty for residents to move out of transitional housing. This has resulted in a decrease in the availability of transitional housing across Victoria. **238**

RECOMMENDATION 42: That the Victorian Government investigate options for the prioritisation of the housing portfolio in processes for the sale of surplus government land. **246**

RECOMMENDATION 43: That the Victorian Government engage with relevant stakeholder groups to assess how pop-up housing proposals could contribute to transitional housing options in Victoria. In conducting such an assessment, the Victorian Government should consider whether these proposals meet appropriate governance standards and the appropriateness of offering support in the form of temporary land tax concessions for organisations participating in the scheme. **250**

FINDING 25: Victoria’s Housing First programs are significantly handicapped by a lack of affordable long-term accommodation to house participants. **260**

RECOMMENDATION 44: That the Victorian Government ensure there is long-term housing stock available from Victoria’s Big Housing Build for participants of Housing First programs operating in metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria. **260**

RECOMMENDATION 45: That the Victorian Government expand Housing First programs throughout metropolitan, regional and rural areas to include further cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, in addition to rough sleepers. **260**

6 Long-term accommodation

FINDING 26: For Victoria to reach the national social housing average (4.5% of total housing stock), it would need to build up to 3,400 new social housing dwellings per year until 2036. This is double the amount noted to be needed just to keep pace with overall housing growth in the Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. **283**

RECOMMENDATION 46: That the Victorian Government, in alignment with its own findings, ensure that social housing dwellings are reflective of the current and projected needs of applicants on the Victorian Housing Register, including by ensuring an adequate proportion of dwellings are 1- and 2-bedroom properties. **287**

RECOMMENDATION 47: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to permanently increase the rate of JobSeeker payments. The Victorian Government should further advocate for reconsideration of the indexation of this payment to CPI and to also urgently consider the many barriers to income support accessibility. **302**

RECOMMENDATION 48: That the Victorian Government provide additional funding to homelessness services to commission and expand head leasing programs to ensure people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, in appropriate circumstances, can be assisted into private residential tenancies and be given the support to maintain them. **307**

RECOMMENDATION 49: That the Victorian Government work with the Real Estate Institute of Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to develop and roll out mandatory education to real estate agents regarding their obligations to ensure that people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness are afforded equal opportunity to access private rental tenancies. This should address intersectional discrimination towards persons on the basis of various attributes including race, age, prior criminal convictions or lack of rental history. **310**

RECOMMENDATION 50: That the Victorian Government investigate implementing a mandatory inclusionary zoning mechanism that would require a portion of any new major housing development be allocated to social or affordable housing. In designing such a model, the Government should consider making specific incentives available to developers to ameliorate the costs involved and ensure that the cost of other dwellings in the development are not increased as a result of the requirement. **319**

RECOMMENDATION 51: That the Victorian Government further investigate the use of the Permanent Rental Affordability Development Solution to ascertain whether it is a practical and appropriate mechanism for increasing provision of affordable housing in Victoria. **321**

What happens next?

There are several stages to a parliamentary inquiry.

The Committee conducts the Inquiry

This report on the Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria is the result of extensive research and community consultation by the Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues at the Parliament of Victoria.

We received written submissions, spoke with people at public hearings, reviewed research evidence and deliberated over a number of meetings. Experts, organisations and other stakeholders expressed their views directly to us as Members of Parliament.

A parliamentary committee is not part of the Government. Our Committee is a group of members of different political parties. Parliament has asked us to look closely at an issue and report back. This process helps Parliament do its work by encouraging public debate and involvement on issues. We also examine government policies and the actions of the public service.

This report is presented to Parliament

This report was presented to Parliament and can be found on the Committee's website at: <https://parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc-lc/inquiry/976>.

A response from the Government

The Government has six months to respond in writing to any recommendations we have made. The response is public and put on the inquiry page of Parliament's website when it is received at: <https://parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc-lc/article/4288>.

In its response, the Government indicates whether it supports the Committee's recommendations. It can also outline actions it may take.

1.1 The inquiry process

This Chapter introduces the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. It is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the Inquiry Terms of Reference and evidence-gathering process. The second outlines significant events which occurred while the Committee was undertaking the Inquiry, and which had an impact on homelessness and housing in Victoria: the 2019–20 Victorian Bushfires, the COVID-19 pandemic and the restructure of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The final part of this Chapter provides an overview of the homelessness service pathway—from early intervention and prevention to crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation and support. The section describes how the structure of this report will follow the service pathway and provides a roadmap for subsequent chapters.

1.1.1 Terms of Reference

On 7 June 2019, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That this House requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, within 12 months, on the state of homelessness in Victoria, and in particular, the Committee should—

- a. provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria;
- b. investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and
- c. identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

On 13 November 2019, the Legislative Council agreed to a motion to extend the reporting date to 17 November 2020.

On 16 June 2020, the Committee agreed to a motion extending the report date until 26 February 2021, under its temporary powers to extend inquiry reporting dates by agreement of the Committee rather than by motion in the Legislative Council.¹ This provisional arrangement was put in place as part of the temporary orders of the Legislative Council in relation to COVID-19.

¹ This power lapsed on 02 June 2020.

1.1.2 Submissions

The Committee advertised the Inquiry and called for submissions through its News Alert service, the Parliament of Victoria website and print, online and social media. The Committee sent out over 260 letters to stakeholders inviting them to make a submission to the Inquiry. Stakeholders included government departments, homelessness and other service providers, academics, law enforcement, and advocacy and charity organisations. An important focus for the Committee was hearing from people with lived experiences of homelessness.

For the first time, the Committee requested that submissions be provided through an online submission portal, which included survey questions relevant to the Committee's terms of reference. This survey and its results were discussed in significant detail in the Committee's interim report for this inquiry which was tabled on 4 August 2020. The interim report can be accessed here: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc-lc/article/4287>.

The Committee received and accepted a total of 452 submissions, with 64 submissions granted confidentiality by the Committee. The identities of these confidential submitters and the content of their submissions were not made public on the Committee's website. Confidential submissions inform the Committee's understanding but are not used substantively in this report. A list of submissions is included in Appendix A.

1.1.3 Public hearings and site visits

At the beginning of the Inquiry, the Committee held in-person public hearings in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. Due to restrictions put in place in response to COVID-19 the Committee transitioned to holding public hearings via videoconference from May 2020. Public hearings were held on the following dates:

- 22 November 2019 (Melbourne)
- 2 December 2019 (Bairnsdale)
- 3 December 2019 (Morwell)
- 12 February 2020 (Melbourne)
- 27 February 2020 (Whittlesea)
- 11 March 2020 (Shepparton)
- 12 March 2020 (Wangaratta)
- 20 May 2020 (via videoconference)
- 23 June 2020 (via videoconference)—for witnesses based in Dandenong and Mornington Peninsula

2 AV link undertaken via Zoom.

- 1 July 2020 (via videoconference)—for witnesses based in Footscray
- 2 July 2020 (via videoconference)
- 13 July 2020 (via videoconference)—for witnesses based in Geelong and Warrnambool
- 14 July 2020 (via videoconference)
- 27 July 2020 (via videoconference)—for witnesses based in Finland
- 12 August 2020 (via videoconference)
- 13 August 2020 (via videoconference)—for witnesses based in Swan Hill and Mildura
- 9 September 2020 (via videoconference)
- 10 September 2020 (via videoconference)—for witnesses based in Maryborough and Bendigo.

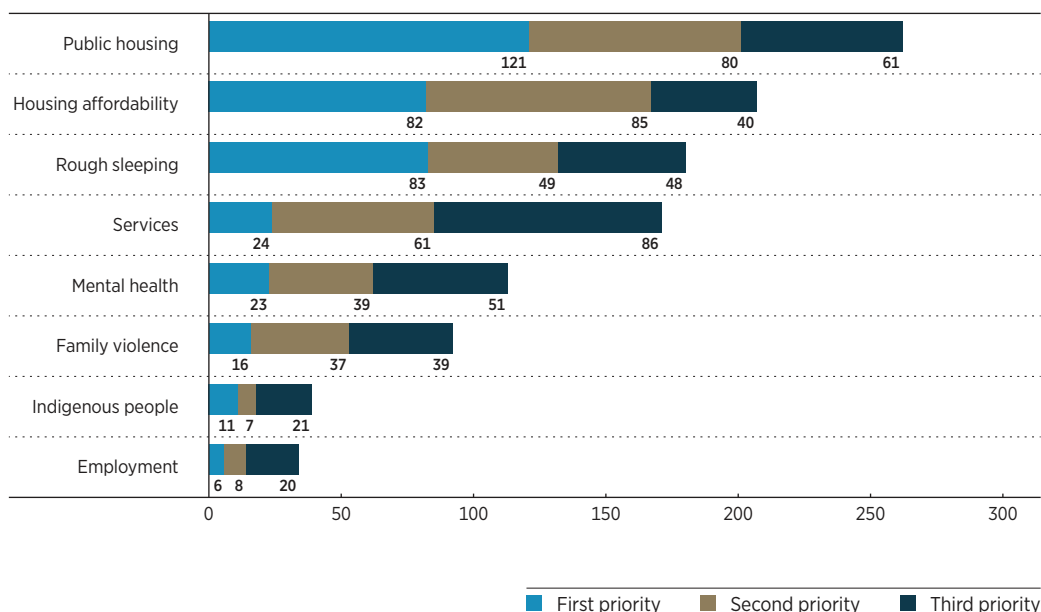
In the early stages of the Inquiry, before COVID-19 necessitated the need for strict travel restrictions around Victoria, the Committee also went on two site visits. On 2 December 2019, the Committee visited Nungarra Youth Accommodation Service in Bairnsdale. The Committee was shown around by staff from the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative Ltd. The Nungarra Youth Accommodation Service is a crisis accommodation service for young Aboriginal people aged between 16–21. It aims to provide a caring environment to assist young people in developing personal, education and work skills for independent living.

On 10 March 2020, the Committee visited the Education First Youth Foyer in Shepparton. The Committee received a tour of the facility from Foyer staff and residents. The Education First Youth Foyer in Shepparton is a facility that provides housing for young people aged 16–24. The Foyer assists young people at risk of homelessness by providing stable accommodation for two years. The Foyer is adjacent to the Goulburn-Ovens TAFE allowing residents to focus on their studies.

1.1.4 The interim report

On 4 August 2020, the Committee tabled its interim report for the inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. The interim report focused on the data the Committee received from the survey published alongside the submission form. The interim report discussed the results and findings of the survey data collected with a view to determining respondents' interests and policy priorities.

The resounding message from respondents was that our inquiry should focus on housing, particularly public housing and housing affordability. Based on the survey results this was considered the most important policy priority to respondents, followed by the issue of rough sleeping. Figure 1.1 taken from the interim report shows the top three policy priorities of survey respondents by priority allocation.

Figure 1.1 Top homelessness policy priorities for survey respondents

Source: Parliament of Victoria, Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria: interim report*, August 2020, p. 11.

In response to the strong message sent by respondents, the Committee has similarly prioritised the issue of housing in its approach to this final report. The report focuses on housing alongside other important issues raised by stakeholders such as early intervention, rough sleeping, and homelessness services. The importance of housing is reflected in the dedicated chapters on crisis accommodation and transitional accommodation (Chapter 5) and long-term housing (Chapter 6).

1.1.5 Questionnaire

On 5 May 2020, the Committee advised the Hon Richard Wynne MP, Minister for Housing, that it had resolved to seek information from the then Department of Health and Human Services and the Director of Housing on a number of matters relating to housing and homelessness policy in Victoria. This information was sought through a written questionnaire provided to the Minister, the Department and the Director of Housing. The Committee requested a response by 31 July 2020 and noted its expectation that broader input would be required across government, including from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Treasury and Finance.

The questionnaire included 44 questions which sought information on:

- the type and condition of public and community housing stock in Victoria
- long-term strategies for developing and effectively managing social housing stock
- current and projected demand for service and asset demand in social housing.

The Committee requested this information in order to assist it to make recommendations to the Victorian Government in its final report.

On 21 July 2020, the Department requested an extension of time to provide a response to the questionnaire to 6 September 2020, due to the Department's involvement in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This request was approved by the Committee. Further informal requests were received for extensions of time.

The Committee received the Department's response to the questionnaire on 27 January 2021, 9 months after the initial request and more than four months after the last formal extension request. The response to the questionnaire was received after the Committee had completed a draft of its final report and was ready to deliberate.

The Committee is disappointed that the Victorian Government's response to the questionnaire was received so late that not all information could be taken into consideration in this report. Parliamentary committees perform important public scrutiny, oversight and accountability functions and meaningful government engagement with committee processes is crucial in ensuring that this mandate can be fulfilled. The Committee has included the questionnaire and full response from the Department in Appendix B and Appendix C.

1.2 Significant events since the Committee received its Terms of Reference

As briefly discussed in the Committee's interim report, there have been several notable events since the Committee received its terms of reference that have had a significant impact on issues relating to homelessness and housing precariousness:³ the 2019–20 Victorian bushfires, the COVID-19 pandemic and the restructure of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Committee received evidence that the bushfires and COVID19 exacerbated individual, social and economic factors which can lead people into homelessness or housing instability. The following sub-sections discuss some of the additional homelessness and housing challenges caused by each event, and in particular, the ways that people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness have been affected.

1.2.1 The 2019–20 Victorian bushfires

On 24 November 2019, 60 fires broke out in Victoria after lightning strikes in East Gippsland. These followed other fires burning across Australia, beginning with fires that broke out in New South Wales and Queensland in early September 2019. A State of Disaster was first declared in Victoria on 2 January 2020, the first time this power had been used since its introduction in the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires.⁴ The total death toll of the 2019–20 Australian bushfire season was 33 people, including 5 Victorians.

³ Housing precariousness refers to housing or housing tenure which is unaffordable, unsuitable or insecure. People often experience these concurrently and housing precariousness frequently precedes an individual's entry into homelessness.

⁴ Premier of Victoria, *Victorian Government declares a State of Disaster*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2 January 2020.

The Victorian bushfires caused significant property and land damage, exceeding the damage caused in many previous bushfires including the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. The Victorian Parliamentary Library's research paper, *2019–20 Bushfires: Quick Guide*, included figures on the extent of the damage caused by the bushfires. For example:

- over 300 Victorian homes were destroyed
- over 1.2 million hectares of land were burnt.⁵

The Committee received submissions and heard evidence at public hearings on the impact of the 2019–20 Victorian bushfire season both as the bushfires were still burning across the state and in the immediate aftermath. The impacts of the fires for persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness varied significantly depending on contextual factors, such as geographical location and available service capacity. However, some of the broad impacts include increased difficulty accessing stable accommodation, increased demand for access to homelessness and related services, and wide-ranging physical and mental health impacts.

In its submission, the Council on the Ageing (Victoria) discussed the pressing need to support people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness as a consequence of the bushfires. The submission stated:

During these times, residents have been advised to stay inside with their windows and doors shut. For the homeless population, however, this may not be an option. Those without safe and secure housing are therefore most at risk of experiencing respiratory problems, dehydration and other health complications associated with prolonged exposure to smoke.⁶

The Council on the Ageing (Victoria) argued that the effectiveness of 'positive efforts' by the Victorian Government to implement urgent relief measures for homeless people affected by the bushfires, such as provision of free access to swimming pools and direction to access libraries or shopping centres for shelter, needs to be assessed:

These positive efforts now require assessment and evaluation as to their effectiveness as an intervention. An evaluation process could result in improving those relief measures used and identifying new measures.⁷

⁵ Ben Huf and Holly Mclean, *2019–20 Bushfires: Quick guide*, research paper, no. 1, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, February 2020.

⁶ Council on the Ageing (Victoria), *Submission 235*, p. 14.

⁷ Ibid.

The main reason I was left without rental accommodation was because of the 2009 bushfires. Rental accommodation became scarce and prices went up as a result of demand created in the area by those who had lost their homes. Also, we moved in a hurry before the following fire season because I no longer felt safe where we were living. This may be happening for some people again now.

Source: Council on the Ageing (Victoria), *Submission 235*, p 15.

Mr David Spriggs, Chief Executive Officer, Infoxchange told the Committee that at the time of the Victorian bushfires there was an immediate peak in people accessing the Ask Izzy application, an online tool that helps people in crisis find homelessness and other services:

and most recently we have seen a huge spike in the last month or so of people looking for services in response to the bushfires.

...

We saw a peak immediately at the time of the bushfires, particularly here in Victoria and New South Wales, of people getting access to services. Our team swung into action and added a bushfire support category as well, but even before that we saw the increase in usage.⁸

Ms Katharine Hodgens, Senior Manager, Junction Support Services, explained that some housing properties were directed to those displaced from the bushfires and away from people already homeless:

So with the bushfires, because they hit Corryong, we actually had to put all of our office of housing properties on hold so people that were displaced could move into the office of housing properties until they were able to rebuild.

...

They stay homeless because people who lost their homes in bushfires get priority.⁹

Mr Lenny Jenner, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Towong Shire Council, discussed the impact the 2019–20 bushfires had in North-East Victoria, in particular the number of residents living in precarious situations or in uninhabitable properties:

there are 49 families that are in some form of temporary accommodation at this point in time, but that is in caravans, that is in tents. We have no evidence of anybody sleeping rough, so to speak, at this point in time, but there are certainly people living

⁸ Mr David Spriggs, Chief Executive Officer, Infoxchange, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

⁹ Ms Katharine Hodgens, Senior Manager, Junction Support Services, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

on uninhabitable properties, and what length of time it takes to be able to be in a circumstance that is far safer and more secure and meets their needs remain to be seen.

I have mentioned a little bit of this: Towong is the smallest rural council in Victoria in terms of budget and staff resources. Approximately 40 per cent of council's workforce live in the fire-impacted area. Many of their homes have been directly impacted. They have continued to provide essential services, and I have talked about the impact of fear, fatigue, grief, anger and the stress of supporting others through their experience.¹⁰

The Committee was told that major emergency events, like bushfires, can lead to decreased capacity within the sector because new clients are entering the system, affecting funding and resources for services. Despite the redirection and reprioritisation of funding and services to address the 2019–20 bushfires, services are required to support pre-existing cohorts of clients under the new conditions of increased demand.

Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Director of Upstream Australia, argued that emergency responses to incidences such as bushfires often involve quick solutions for temporary housing. Professor MacKenzie pointed out that this has not been the case when addressing homelessness as a result of personal crisis:

You know, when we have bushfires and emergencies like that we somehow manage to provide housing for people—temporary housing—very, very quickly, but we have not done that so successfully with people becoming homeless.¹¹

The Committee heard that as part of recovery efforts and funding there could be opportunities to implement positive outcomes beyond bushfire recovery into the housing and homelessness sector more generally. Ms Amanda Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Health Goulburn Valley North East described a coordinated response and how that benefits a region by establishing goals and outcomes understood by all stakeholders. At a Public Hearing Ms Kelly stated that:

One of the things that is happening right now—it is a little bit of a side note, but it is a fantastic example—is we are moving to the recovery after the bushfires. I have been part of a working group of different services in the alpine region who are meeting on a regular basis to talk about what services are available, who is doing what, how do we refer. This is a great model, and it is being done because some—not all of them—of the services are being funded to do extra work. Some are not, but everybody is stepping in and saying, 'How do we work together to do this?'. So that is a model that is great. I do not know what is going to happen when the funding runs out for those extra services. We are hoping to embed some things into the system to help with that on an ongoing basis, but I think that way of working shows that people are willing to work that way and that they want to do it, and we need to enable them to do it. So I think that is a really great approach.¹²

¹⁰ Mr Lenny Jenner, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Towong Shire Council, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

¹¹ Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Director, Upstream Australia, Associate Professor, University of South Australia, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

¹² Ms Amanda Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Health Goulburn Valley North East, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

In the Committee's view, public and major emergencies like the 2019–20 Victorian bushfires compound issues related to homelessness and housing. There is increased pressure on the housing sector to support those immediately affected as a result of a disastrous event which could result in the re-direction of funds, services and accommodation away from people who had been waiting for services prior to the event. The Committee believes that there are opportunities for both the Victorian Government and the housing sector to reflect on its bushfire response and recovery efforts to assess which responses were most effective for the homelessness and housing sector. The Committee notes that on 14 January 2020 the Victorian Government announced the Inspector-General for Emergency Management would conduct an independent inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian Fire Season. As part of Phase 2 of the Inquiry, the Inspector-General has been asked to investigate the effectiveness of immediate relief and recovery work and arrangements. The Committee hopes that part of this will include considering the effectiveness of housing and accommodation efforts in response to the bushfires.

1.2.2 The COVID-19 pandemic

Victoria declared a State of Emergency on 16 March 2020 as a result of the global spread of the COVID-19 virus. Under the State of Emergency¹³ and State of Disaster¹⁴ declared in Victoria, various restrictions were introduced aimed at slowing the spread of the virus, including banning mass gatherings, 14-day isolation requirements, 'stay at home' directives, mandatory wearing of masks in public spaces and the closure of non-essential businesses and services.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a number of issues for those experiencing homelessness and housing precariousness and particularly those sleeping rough. It is difficult to comply with directives to stay at home without secure, safe and adequate housing or accommodation. Isolation and social distancing measures introduced as part of Victoria's public health response highlighted the complexities and dangers that the homeless experience, particularly rough sleepers who have nowhere to isolate or recover. People living in overcrowded dwellings also experience unique challenges in maintaining social distance and complying with isolation requirements. Furthermore, the economic and social impacts of the virus increased the demand for homelessness services, with evidence suggesting that more people are at risk of homelessness due to a loss of income resulting from the response to the pandemic.¹⁵

The Committee notes that as part of its pandemic response the Victorian Government has provided funding to the homelessness sector to facilitate placement of rough sleepers and those in insecure housing in emergency accommodation. In March 2020, the Minister for Housing announced a near \$6 million increase in funding to the

¹³ A State of Emergency was first declared by the Premier on 16 March 2020. At the time of writing, the State of Emergency was ongoing.

¹⁴ A State of Disaster was first declared by the Premier on 02 August 2020, following a second wave of infections. It lapsed on 8 November 2020.

¹⁵ For example see, Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission 355*, p. 5.

homelessness service sector for the provision of temporary housing for Victorians without homes.¹⁶ The Committee heard that this funding has placed 4,500 Victorians without homes into motels and hotels, which resulted in temporary accommodation for nearly all rough sleepers in Melbourne's CBD.¹⁷ In July 2020, the Victorian Government announced a \$150 million *From Homelessness to a Home* package.¹⁸ The package involves:

- Extension of the hotel accommodation program by accommodating 2,000 Victorians until April 2021.
- Leasing 1,100 properties from the private rental market, providing permanent accommodation for people leaving emergency accommodation.
- Flexible support packages for Victorians in crisis accommodation, such as mental health, drug and alcohol and family violence support.
- Building on previous investments from the Victorian Government, such as \$25 million investment in emergency housing, isolation and recovery facilities for homeless people and \$500 million investment in community and public housing across Victoria.¹⁹

It must be noted that the Committee cannot confirm whether the proposed outcomes of this package were achieved. However, the Victorian Government advised in its response to the Committee's questionnaire that between 16 March and 9 August 2020, nearly 20,000 clients were assisted with the Housing Establishment Fund funding and over 4,500 were assisted with the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP).²⁰

Funding was also allocated to establish pop-up accommodation for people without secure accommodation who are required to self-isolate, who have contracted COVID-19, who are awaiting test results, or who are recovering from the virus. This was intended to be a preventative measure to mitigate against clusters emerging within the rough sleeping population and potentially spreading further within the State. In April 2020, the Minister for Housing announced \$8.8 million in funding to establish four pop-up isolation facilities in inner Melbourne for people without homes.²¹ At the time of writing, there have been no reported COVID-19 clusters within Victoria's rough sleeping population. The Committee notes that it did not receive any specific information on the number of COVID19 cases within this population. For further discussion on Victoria's response to COVID-19 and homelessness please refer to Chapter 5.

¹⁶ The Hon. Richard Wynne MP, *More Homelessness and Public Housing Support in COVID-19 Fight*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 18 March 2020.

¹⁷ Ms Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Premier of Victoria, *Homes for homeless Victorians during pandemic and beyond*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 28 July 2020.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 63.

²¹ The Hon. Richard Wynne MP, *Safe places for the homeless to recover and isolate*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 10 April 2020.

The Committee is very concerned about the intersections between COVID-19 and homelessness and the potential ramifications of the pandemic not only on the existing population of those experiencing homelessness, but also those at risk of homelessness due to related economic challenges. On 20 May 2020, the Committee held a public hearing—the first of many that took place via videoconference—which investigated the issue of COVID-19 and homelessness. Witnesses discussed the importance of providing safe and secure housing to vulnerable people, a need which has been compounded by the pandemic and related factors. The vulnerabilities of rough sleepers and persons in insecure accommodation, as well as marginalised people more broadly, during public health crises was also discussed.

Ms Margaret Stewart, Executive Director Mission, St Vincent’s Hospital, expressed the view that the public health response to COVID-19 has improved overall healthcare responses for people experiencing homelessness that were lacking prior to the pandemic:

In respect of health care for homeless persons, few mainstream health services in Australia are configured to meet the needs of the homeless. The complexities that contribute to their ill health are often not picked up through siloed screening and admission processes within and between Melbourne’s acute public hospitals...

It is estimated over 500 people each year in Victoria are discharged from acute mental health care into rooming houses, motels and other tertiary homeless situations. The issue of hospitals discharging people into homelessness or into unsafe housing continues despite all of our best efforts. All of these present a massive challenge for the traditional health system response. The beauty, for want of a better term, of COVID-19 from a systems point of view is that the urgency for us to be responsive so as to stop the spread, reduce infection rates and save lives—all of this—has empowered our partnerships in a housing-led healthcare response.²²

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 crisis has significantly increased demand for support and services, with individuals and families experiencing homelessness or housing precariousness for the first time because of the pandemic. This has put the housing and homelessness sector under strain as it works to ensure vulnerable Victorians have access to safe accommodation and appropriate support to mitigate risks from the pandemic. In addition, the sector is forced to identify potential solutions for their clients in dealing with life after the pandemic.²³

Ms Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons explained to the Committee that services are currently seeing clients who are unlikely to have presented had it not been for the pandemic. On the other hand, recent income support and other economic stimulus initiatives linked to COVID-19 have likely reduced the number of people who need to access support services:

²² Ms Margaret Stewart, Executive Director Mission, St Vincent’s Hospital, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

²³ Mr Shane Austin, Victorian State Manager, The Salvation Army, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

Now we have the challenge of supporting these vulnerable people who are in these hotels, and with the support of Government we are working locally to reprioritise our services—but, gee, we need help. Our services were already turning away 105 people a day prior to the advent of COVID-19, and we are still flat out at the front door of our access points while simultaneously managing this herculean job of placing people in hotels.

...

Our services are seeing people who we otherwise would not have seen pre COVID-19—people at risk of homelessness who have lost their incomes in this crisis. But do not underestimate how much greater the demand would be that we would be seeing without the doubling of JobSeeker, without the advent of JobKeeper and without the introduction of the range of protections and supports that we have seen in relation to tenancies. And do not underestimate how great this demand will be if JobSeeker is returned to its pre COVID-19 level, JobKeeper is turned off and the tenancy supports and protections that we have seen put into place are ended. But we can now plan for economic recovery, and it would seem very likely that Victoria will need economic stimulus to support that recovery.²⁴

There was agreement amongst stakeholders that the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the need to ensure there is secure, stable and safe housing for Victorians experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. There was a general consensus that a sudden removal of the temporary accommodation for rough sleepers along with other support and services that were introduced because of the pandemic would be detrimental to those in need.²⁵ Furthermore, the heightened focus on housing support for vulnerable Victorians provides opportunity to increase permanent support housing or social housing stock beyond current Government commitments.²⁶

At a public hearing, Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing stated that:

Just as we have flattened the COVID curve, so then we should be aiming to flatten the curve of homelessness. Melbourne has an inglorious track record of a rising rate of homelessness set against a long period of underinvestment in social housing.

As we move towards stimulus we should be ensuring our building-led economic recovery produces enduring social outcomes, and we should be aiming for an increase in permanent supportive housing stock now and supports into the places where people are currently living to make sure that they get the support they need and their circumstances do not deteriorate and that they do not slip back where they came from.²⁷

²⁴ Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

²⁵ Stewart, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

²⁶ Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

Catholic Social Services Victoria said that the pandemic has ‘inflamm[e]d the preconditions for homelessness for many vulnerable people in society and for many it will be their first experience of homelessness.’²⁸ It further contended that:

Homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis raises the bar not only on the provision of social housing and public housing, but also the resourcing of triage services and adequate support to ensure that people experiencing homelessness for the first time have an experience of homelessness that is temporary and does not become their entrenched way of living.²⁹

Catholic Social Services Victoria concluded that without ongoing support the COVID-19 pandemic has the ‘potential to significantly contribute to homelessness in our society.’³⁰

Several stakeholders recommended that the Victorian Government provide long-term housing for people who were housed in hotels and other temporary accommodation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹ Many stakeholders also advocated for ongoing income support for people who experienced financial or employment difficulties because of the pandemic. In its submission, the Victorian Council of Social Service advocated that the increase in income supports introduced because of the economic fallout of COVID-19 should remain in place for a longer period of time to protect people from poverty or becoming homeless:

VCOSS [Victorian Council of Social Service] welcomes the increases to income support included in the COVID-19 stimulus packages. These long overdue increases will provide relief for people who have lost their incomes as a consequence of the pandemic. VCOSS believes that maintaining higher levels of income support in the aftermath of the pandemic is essential to protecting people from poverty and homelessness in the long-term.³²

The submission went on to discuss that major recent events, like COVID-19 and the 2019–20 Victorian bushfires, show the need to prepare and develop strategies which specifically assist those experiencing homelessness or housing precariousness. The submission highlighted some of the shortcomings of the COVID-19 response which it suggested occurred because of lack of homelessness-specific emergency preparedness:

The public health strategies underway to contain COVID-19, particularly self-isolating in your own home, are not effective for people without a home or living in marginal housing. Further, many people experiencing homelessness also have underlying health conditions and may not have ready access to health services, which places them at significant risk of the worst effects of the virus.³³

²⁸ Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission 391*, p. 10.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Stakeholders who supported this recommendation include Council to Homeless Persons, Launch Housing, City of Casey and Triggs Advocacy Group.

³² Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 341*, p. 24.

³³ Ibid., pp. 40–1.

The Victorian Council of Social Service recommended that the Victorian Government ‘advocate to the Commonwealth Government to maintain increased income support post COVID-19 pandemic.’³⁴

For a more detailed discussion of COVID-19 and social housing, refer to Chapter 5.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the complexities of the issues faced by the vulnerable rough sleeping cohort and those at risk of homelessness. On the other hand, it has also shown the immediate relief that appropriate and accessible accommodation and funding support can provide to this cohort. The Committee acknowledges that the pandemic has had, and will continue to have, significant and wide-reaching economic impacts, particularly in the wake of the second lockdown announced in August 2020. These impacts have affected areas such as employment, wage growth and service industry growth. The Committee heard that one consequence of the economic downturn wrought by the pandemic was the increased demand for housing and social support. As a consequence of COVID-19, reductions in employment opportunities and job losses has resulted in people who previously did not require support now accessing homelessness services.

In response to the increased demand and compounded complexities faced by the homeless cohort, the Victorian Government introduced several measures aimed at providing relief and ensuring vulnerable people were protected from the health fallout of the pandemic as much as reasonably possible. The Victorian Government’s COVID-19-related housing and homelessness response is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

FINDING 1: The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the vulnerabilities and difficulties people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness face and has created increased demand on the homelessness sector to provide adequate housing, health and other support services.

1.2.3 Department of Health and Human Services restructure

On 30 November 2020, the Victorian Government announced a restructure of the Department of Health and Human Services. Its functions have been split into two new departments:

- Department of Health
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The Department of Health has assumed responsibility for the Health, Ambulance Services, Mental Health and Ageing portfolios as well as the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Minister for Health, Equality, and Ambulance Services is the coordinating Minister.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁵ Premier of Victoria, *New Departments to deliver a healthier, fairer Victoria*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 30 November 2020.

The new Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has assumed responsibility for the portfolios of Child Protection, Prevention of Family Violence, Housing and Disability. In addition, the portfolios of Multicultural Affairs, LGBTQI+ Equality, Veterans, and the offices for Women and Youth have been transferred to the new Department from the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The Minister for Planning and Housing is the coordinating Minister.³⁶

A media release from the Premier said that some of the Government’s key policy areas following the COVID-19 pandemic align with the responsibilities of the new department:

The Government’s significant reform agenda in housing, child protection and family violence mean this is the right time to provide a dedicated focus to that work.³⁷

The two Departments commenced operation on 1 February 2021.

In addition, a new government agency, Homes Victoria, has been established to manage public housing assets and work across government to deliver the Big Housing Build. Victoria’s Big Housing Build is discussed in detail in section 6.3.1.

The former Department of Health and Human Services was a key stakeholder in this Inquiry and references to the former Department are included throughout the report. Where appropriate, an acknowledgement that the Department no longer exists has been included in the text. At the time of writing, the Department of Health and Human Services (often referred to as ‘the Department’ or DHHS) was responsible for the homelessness and housing portfolio and this is who the Committee refers to throughout the report. The new Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing were not operational at the time of writing.

1.3 The structure of this report: following the service pathway

This report has been structured to first provide an overview of homelessness in Victoria and then follow the service pathway of the homelessness sector from early intervention and prevention to crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation and support. Chapter 1 provides information about the inquiry. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the current picture of homelessness in Victoria and Chapter 3 gives an overview of the governance structure of the housing and homelessness portfolio as well as of the homelessness sector.

Subsequently, Chapters 4 to 6 follow the homelessness service pathway. There are many intersecting issues across the pathway and not all people will enter at the same point. However, following the pathway from its earliest point (early intervention) towards longer term outcomes demonstrates that the ideal pathway is one from early intervention directly into long-term, secure housing—but that the reality facing

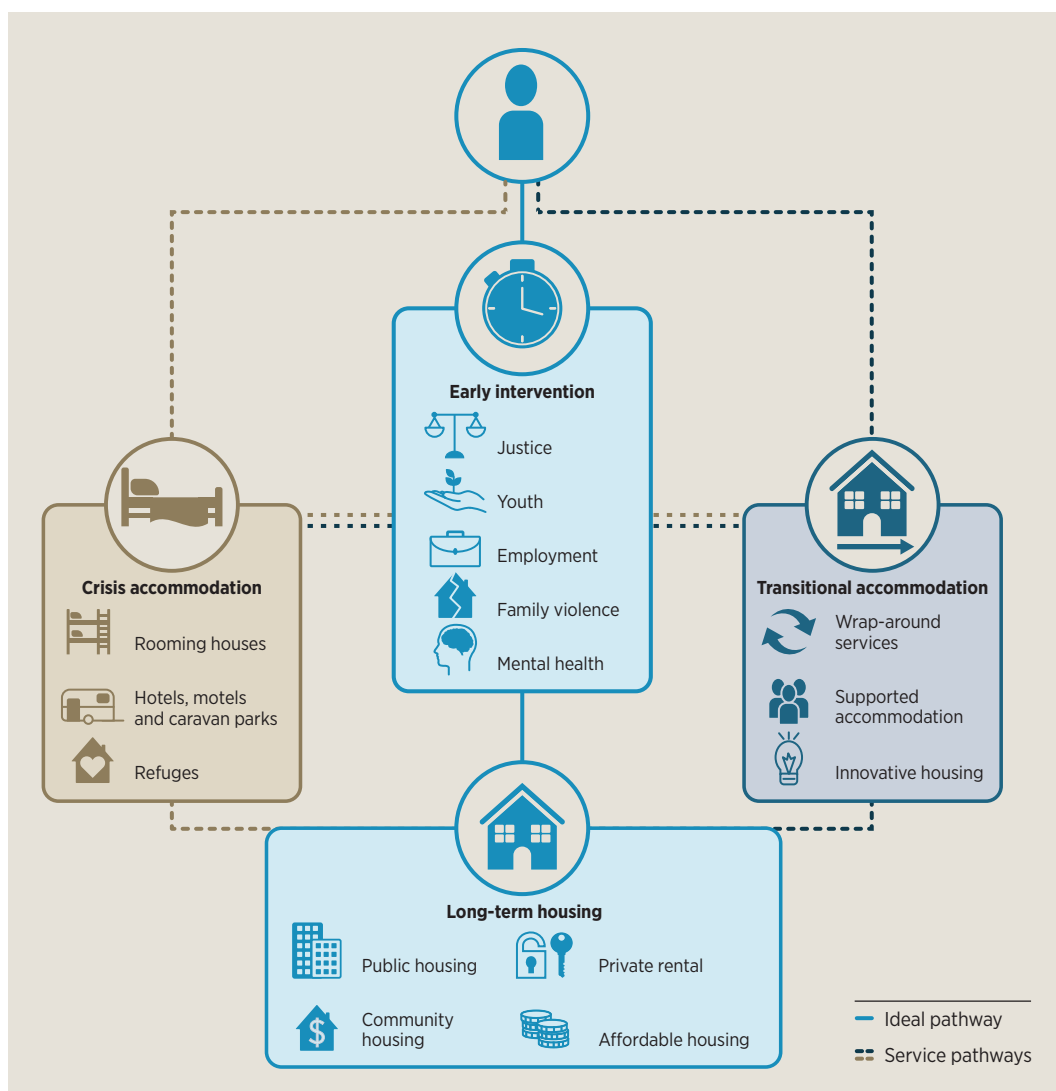
³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

vulnerable Victorians does not always match this linear pathway. Instead, people accessing housing and homelessness services very rarely move through it in a linear fashion. Rather, they enter, exit and sometimes re-enter at different points and for different periods of time. In the Committee’s view this speaks to the complexity of homelessness and housing precariousness faced by thousands of Victorians.

The Committee has developed the following infographic which explains the overall service pathway. This infographic will also be used as a visual representation of the report throughout the text in Chapters 4 to 6. The reader will be able to navigate their way through the report from this infographic and different sections will be highlighted when they are relevant.

Figure 1.2 Homelessness service pathway



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

Alongside this infographic the Committee has developed a case study (see section 2.4 case study—‘John Smith’) which seeks to highlight some of the effects each point in the service pathway can have on an individual. This case study has been drawn from a multitude of real stories the Committee heard throughout the course of the inquiry, however, the case study developed by the Committee does not represent any one story or person. In addition, real case studies gathered from the evidence presented to the Committee will also be included throughout the report and where possible will be in the words of the individual who told us their story. The Committee hopes that by contextualising issues in Victoria’s homelessness and housing sector through the lived experience of real Victorians it will emphasise the very real consequences and outcomes faced by this vulnerable cohort.

The following sections provide a brief overview of the key steps along the service pathway: early intervention, crisis accommodation, transitional accommodation and long-term accommodation.

In its relevant chapter, each of these steps is discussed in detail and includes in-depth consideration of the relevant issues, the views of stakeholders, the Committee’s view and any associated findings or recommendations. The following sections seek to lay the foundation of the report by providing a base-level framework to understand the terminology used by the sector and the role of each step on the service pathway.

1.3.1 Early intervention

Early intervention is a form of secondary prevention strategy,³⁸ with roots in healthcare and early childhood practice, which seeks to prevent homelessness from becoming ‘entrenched or chronic’ for an individual or family.³⁹ It involves the homelessness sector and other related sectors intervening as early as possible to prevent people from entering the ‘cycle’ of homelessness, with a significant focus on early intervention for children and young people. It works to prevent problems from occurring, to tackle them head on when they do and by preparing vulnerable children for adult life. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness in its report, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*, defined ‘early intervention’ as strategies which:

are designed to work quickly to support individuals and families to either retain their housing, or if that is not possible, to use rapid rehousing strategies to ensure people move into permanent and stable accommodation that is affordable, safe, appropriate, along with the supports that they need.⁴⁰

³⁸ In contrast, ‘primary prevention’ refers to strategies targeting risk factors and addressing problems which may increase the likelihood of homelessness. Primary prevention often involves whole-of-community initiatives or targeting a cohort of people who could be more at risk, such as migrants or older people. See, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, *Homeless Hub, Primary Prevention*, 2019, <<https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention/primary-prevention>> accessed 7 October 2020.

³⁹ Travis Gilbert, *Prevention or cure?*, policy paper, Homelessness Australia, online, May 2012, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Stephen Gaetz and Erin Dej, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Online, 2017, pp. 36–7.

Stakeholders told the Committee that early intervention and prevention activities are crucial to prevent people from entering the ‘cycle’ of homelessness. This reflects that once a person enters the homelessness system, it is much harder to exit.

There are two types of risk factors that lead to homelessness:

- individual factors—personal circumstances that can lead to homelessness, such as family violence or mental health
- structural risk factors—societal factors that can lead to disadvantage and increased vulnerability to homelessness, such as housing affordability or the employment market.

In order to be effective, early intervention and prevention must work in collaboration with the multiple sectors that commonly intersect with homelessness, such as the justice system or youth services, with the aim of preventing people from exiting these systems into homelessness.⁴¹

Early intervention and prevention are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this report. The Chapter includes discussion on targeted early intervention in relation to specific risks factors, such as for people experiencing housing stress, youth, people with mental health issues and persons experiencing family violence.

1.3.2 Crisis accommodation

Crisis accommodation is a type of short-term accommodation which seeks to house people who are at a crisis point and are at high-risk of tipping into, or have tipped into, homelessness. The aim of crisis accommodation is to remove people from a harmful environment or crisis situation by providing temporary accommodation. Some crisis accommodation services in Victoria seek to alleviate situations which commonly force people into the cycle of homelessness, such as family violence.

The types of crisis accommodation available in Victoria include:

- ‘crisis beds’ or refuges for the general population, as well as specialist facilities for particular cohorts including family violence and young people
- emergency accommodation in hotels, motels, caravan parks or similar properties
- rooming houses.

Many crisis accommodation service providers have purchased dedicated emergency accommodation properties. However, the overwhelming demand on the system has meant that these providers also need to regularly book or rent properties in the private market (including hotels, motels or caravan parks) for clients.

⁴¹ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, *Systems prevention*, 2019, <<https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention/systems-prevention>> accessed 5 October 2020.

The Committee heard that the availability and effectiveness of crisis accommodation was dependent on the availability of long-term housing options for people to exit into, and that the current lack of long-term accommodation has meant that services are spending significant portions of their funding on the provision of more crisis accommodation. Further, the Committee heard that due to these budgetary restraints, services may only be able to provide clients with access to a limited number of 'nights' of crisis accommodation, after which clients often needed to find their own accommodation while waiting for longer term options.

The Committee discusses the availability of crisis accommodation versus service demand and the interaction between family violence and crisis support in more detail in Chapter 5.

Many stakeholders spoke to the Committee about their concerns with the conditions, standards and safety of some crisis accommodation available in Victoria, particularly in relation to the quality of rooming houses. A concern raised was the growing number of unregistered rooming houses around Victoria, and the unsafe and inappropriate conditions many of these properties exhibit. Several stakeholders acknowledged that due to the lack of other accommodation options service providers are sometimes forced to place clients in these buildings. Consequentially, the profit being made by the operators of the rooming houses creates an incentive both to continue operations and to increase tenancy numbers.⁴² This is causing overcrowding in some of these dwellings which makes them even more unsafe to reside in, particularly for single people and women. The conditions, safety and affordability of rooming houses is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

1.3.3 Transitional accommodation

Transitional accommodation is short-term, subsidised accommodation for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness which also provides support programs and assistance appropriate to their circumstances. Typically, a person will spend up to two years in transitional accommodation before moving into long-term housing. A person in transitional housing can move into public or community housing after their stay or move into the private rental market, depending on their situation.

The goal of transitional accommodation is to provide wrap-around support to a person to ensure they are stable, secure and safe and are able to manage and maintain long-term housing. The type of support offered to a person depends on the programs linked with the accommodation, but can include education, rental, personal and psychological support to address issues which might increase the likelihood of homelessness.

⁴² See for example, Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South, Haven; Home, Safe, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47; Mr Paul Turton, General Manager, Homelessness Services, VincentCare Northern Community Hub, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

Types of transitional accommodation can include:

- Supported accommodation services for alcohol and drug rehabilitation, family violence, disability, and specific accommodation for Aboriginal clients.
- Innovative housing options like tiny houses, demountables, and the repurposing of empty buildings for short-term stays.

The various types of transitional accommodation are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Like with crisis accommodation, many stakeholders told the Committee that because of a low vacancy rate of public or community housing, the number of clients transitioning from transitional accommodation into long-term accommodation has stagnated. This means this part of the sector is servicing individuals and families for longer periods than the service intends. The purpose of transitional housing is to support people until they build the necessary stability and security needed to minimise future risks of falling into housing crisis or homelessness and then supporting their move into longer-term housing. However, the Committee heard that in Victoria for many transitional accommodation providers this has not been the case and that across the sector, ‘transitional is not transitional’.⁴³

The housing bottleneck is discussed in more detail in section 1.3.5.

1.3.4 Long-term accommodation

The provision of long-term accommodation, which is safe, stable, secure and affordable is the ideal outcome of the homelessness and housing sector. While accommodation is not a catch-all solution for all the complex factors which put a person at risk of housing precariousness or homelessness, it is an especially important part of any solution. It is also a preventative measure—the Committee was told that it becomes increasingly difficult to address risk factors and other support needs when a person is cycling through crisis and short-term accommodation. For example, it is difficult to look for and sustain employment, deal with legal issues or recover from complex traumatic episodes without stable, ongoing housing. However, these support needs often also contribute to a person’s housing precariousness or loss of housing leading to homelessness. This cycle of homelessness becomes incredibly difficult to exit if there are no long-term accommodation options.

In Chapter 6 of this report long-term accommodation is discussed in greater detail, including the three types of long-term housing most raised by stakeholders to this inquiry: public housing, community housing and private rental accommodation. The following sections define and provide an overview of each of these long-term housing options.

⁴³ Ms Jo Doherty, Practice Lead, Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women’s Services, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

Social housing

Social housing is short- and long-term housing which is owned and managed by the Victorian Government or not-for-profit agencies. There are two broad types of social housing: public housing and community housing. Both accommodation types are sources of long-term housing for people in need who are on a low income including those who have recently experienced homelessness, are fleeing family violence or have special needs.⁴⁴ Public housing is owned and managed by the Victorian Government through the Office of Housing and is intended for persons on low incomes that are most in need. Community housing is owned by either the Office of Housing or community housing providers and managed by community housing providers who are regulated by the Victorian Government. Community housing provides diverse types of housing and sometimes for particular groups, such as older women or people with a disability. Individuals can apply for both public and community housing through one coordinated mechanism, the Victorian Housing Register.

There are a number of eligibility requirements for social housing. Broadly, these are:

- Victorian residency
- Australian citizenship or permanent residency
- Income eligibility: an applicant must be within certain income limits based on their circumstances. Applicants may be considered for the priority waiting list if their income is below a certain threshold.
- Asset eligibility: an applicant must not exceed set asset limits based on their circumstances. Applicants may be considered for the priority waiting list if the value of their assets are below a certain threshold.⁴⁵

The Victorian Government also sets out priority access categories, these are for people:

- Who are homeless and receiving support
- Who are escaping or have escaped family violence
- With a disability or significant support needs
- Who need to move for health reasons
- Who are considered a priority transfer due to a current social housing property being unsuitable, unsafe or untenable.⁴⁶

Applications made for social housing are managed through the Victorian Housing Register. At 30 June 2019, there are approximately 42,723 new applications on the Victorian Housing Register which comprise of 78,690 individuals, noting that a

⁴⁴ Housing Vic, *Social housing*, 2019, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing#:~:text=Social%20housing%20is%20short%20and,public%20housing%20and%20community%20housing>> accessed 13 October 2020.

⁴⁵ Housing Vic, *Social housing eligibility*, 2019, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility#eligibility-criteria>> accessed 14 October 2020.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

single application can refer to households of varying size, including single people.⁴⁷ The Victorian Housing Register is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Public housing

Public housing, or properties owned and managed by the Office of Housing, are long-term tenancies available to eligible people who are in need. Victorians eligible for public housing include the unemployed, low-income earners, persons with disability or mental health or those at risk of homelessness.⁴⁸ Public housing is the most common form of social housing, comprising 76% of social housing dwellings in Victoria.⁴⁹ Tenants in public housing do not pay rent that exceeds 25% of the total household income. Public housing tenancies are managed through the Victorian Government by the Director of Housing who also manages the provision of public housing to prospective tenants on the waiting list.

As of November 2020, the management of public housing assets was transferred to Homes Victoria.

Public housing is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Community housing

Community housing is long-term, secure, affordable rental housing for people on low incomes or with special needs which is owned and/or managed by not-for-profit organisations. Community housing providers are registered and regulated by the Victorian Government. Some providers offer specialised community housing for specific issues such as for people with disabilities, women, elderly people and single people.⁵⁰ Community housing makes up 22% of social housing in Victoria.⁵¹

The rent charged for community housing can be up to 30% of an individual's income.⁵² Unlike in public housing, community housing tenants are eligible to receive Commonwealth Rental Assistance to assist with rent payments.

Community housing is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Private rental accommodation

Private rental is housing available in the private market with potential tenants being able to choose from a range of accommodation options, such as houses, apartments, and caravan parks. Private rental refers to any private tenancy agreement under

⁴⁷ Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Housing Vic, *Community housing*, 2018, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/community-housing>> accessed 13 October 2020.

⁵¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 20.

⁵² Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 11.

the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic). Any person is able to enter the private rental market, however, a consistent barrier for Victorians is rental affordability. The Committee was also made aware of other barriers to entering the private rental market, including stigma within the rental sector against people experiencing issues such as homelessness, family violence, mental ill health, having a criminal record and young people with no rental history on lower incomes; as well as discrimination towards certain groups such as Aboriginal Victorians and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

One of the key measures to support Victorians who may be affected by high rental prices and at increased risk of homelessness, is PRAP. The purpose of the program is to provide support and preventative intervention to households in private rental dwellings experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. PRAP delivers flexible and tailored support to households through its three core elements:

- Private rental brokers: the generation and maintenance of access opportunities in the private rental market through building links between early intervention agencies and at-risk households.
- Private rental assistance brokerage: a flexible fund designed to tailor to the specific needs of a household; use of the fund includes for rental subsidies or to pay rent in advance or in arrears.
- Private Rental Assistance Program Plus (support program): an outreach intervention program for households in the private rental market which require additional practice support to establish or maintain a tenancy.⁵³

For more discussion on the PRAP, including its operation and benefits, refer to section 4.4.2. The strengths, limitations and suggested areas of improvement for private rental support offered by the housing and homelessness sector is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

1.3.5 Fixing the bottleneck

The Committee heard that one of the problems with the current homelessness service system is that it is crisis-oriented. It focuses on providing for the short-term and immediate needs for people who are homeless. This can come at the expense of homelessness prevention or keeping people from relapsing into homelessness through the provision of long-term housing and support.⁵⁴

⁵³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) guidelines*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2019.

⁵⁴ Associate Professor David Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 25.

Associate Professor David MacKenzie likened homelessness prevention to road safety policy. He noted that in road safety, the priority is on preventing crashes rather than providing sufficient hospital beds for the injured. He argued homelessness policy should follow a similar preventative approach:

it is a bit like the road toll. If all we did was invest in emergency beds and trauma beds in hospitals, we might save a few more lives, but we would not reduce the road toll in the way that we have with cameras and improvements on cars and roads et cetera. That is the general argument of why early intervention is so important. And it is really one of our big policy failures that we have not invested to the extent that we need to in early intervention to actually reduce people going into this terrible experience of homelessness.⁵⁵

Once people do become homeless, they seek to access crisis or transitional accommodation. However, as noted, the lack of available crisis and transitional housing is partly due to a shortage of affordable long-term housing options, both in the private rental market or in social housing. This means that a bottleneck is created where crisis and transitional accommodation is utilised by clients who are unable to move into long-term housing. People who are newly homeless can therefore be forced into inappropriate and occasionally unsafe options such as motels and rooming houses due to the lack of safe crisis and transitional accommodation options. Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons explained this issue at a public hearing:

You have got all these extra people who are experiencing homelessness because of the rental market coming into the homeless service system, and they come in and they go to crisis accommodation, but the thing is if they cannot get out of crisis accommodation, they cannot leave because there is no housing for them to leave into. So they end up staying in crisis accommodation that is intended for just a week or two weeks or six weeks—they stay for months. Sometimes they stay for a year, or in transitional housing that is intended for three months, and they end up staying for two years. That means that the next person who comes through the door whose housing situation has fallen apart, they have got nowhere to stay, they cannot go into crisis accommodation because it is full of all the people who cannot leave into long-term housing. Perhaps then they are put in motel accommodation, which has some of the problems that I described before, and the cycle goes on.⁵⁶

Ms Colvin further explained that the solution is not to add more crisis accommodation to cope with the demand, but to provide more long-term housing so that people can move on from crisis and transitional accommodation:

Often I think when we look at this problem superficially we think, 'What we need to do is build more crisis accommodation', but the way the maths works is that that really does not stack up. It is like you are making the body of the bottle wider, but you are doing nothing about the neck. What we are trying to communicate—and often I think it is misunderstood—is you think we are the homeless service system delivering

⁵⁵ MacKenzie, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 13–4.

crisis accommodation, and why don't we just say, 'You should have more crisis accommodation'. It is because, as Guy said in his presentation, it is not about making the homeless service system bigger; it is about making the solutions work, and the solution is making the neck of the bottle bigger and making more housing that people can move into.⁵⁷

One benefit of relieving the pressure on the system is that it may provide more opportunity for more people to access transitional housing and wraparound support. At the moment, too many individuals are forced into substandard short-term emergency accommodation such as motels and rooming houses. These options often do not offer support services. Transitional accommodation typically offers specialised support programmes for individuals over a longer period of time. This includes help with mental health, drug and alcohol or family violence issues. This support puts people in a better position to sustain long-term tenancies once they are ready to leave.

Another approach that has been introduced to the Committee is the concept of Housing First, whereby people experiencing homelessness are given long-term accommodation with support straight away. The Department of Health and Human Services contended that this approach is more suited to a smaller cohort of people with complex needs and/or experiencing chronic homelessness.⁵⁸

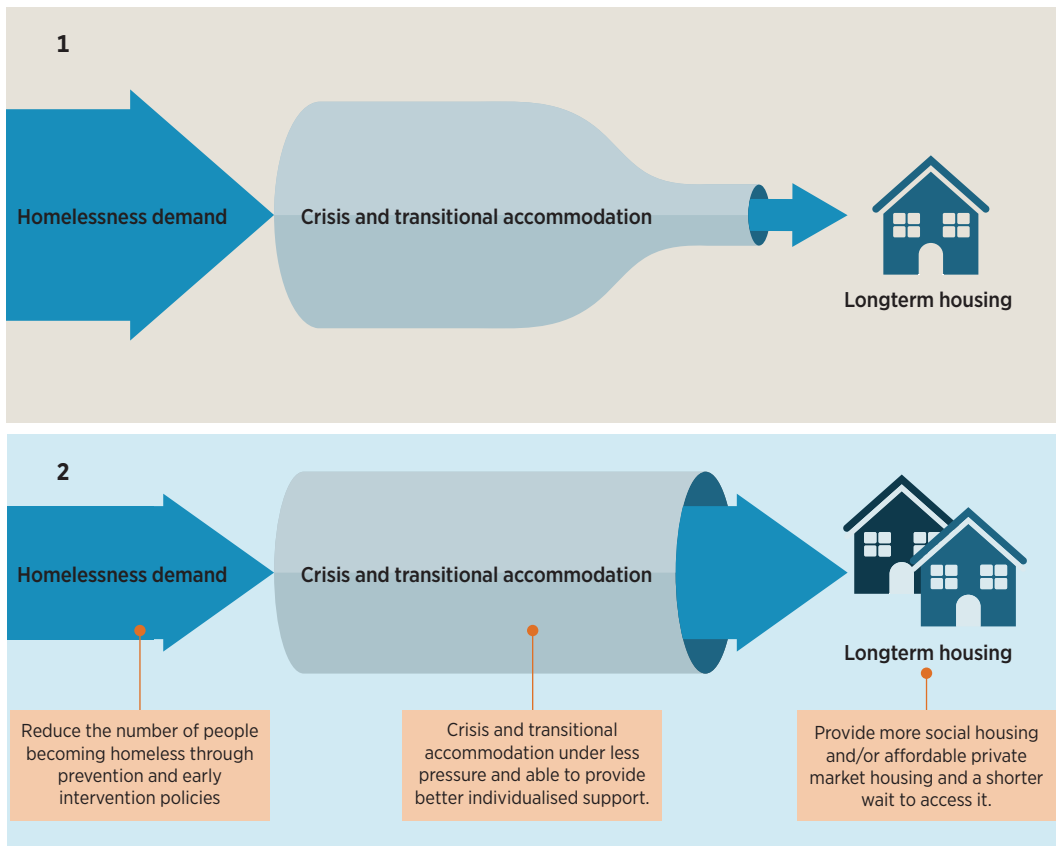
The Committee believes an approach that focuses on the need for homelessness prevention and early intervention policies, as well as increased provision of long-term housing, is crucial. Such an approach reduces the demand for homelessness services, allowing people to access much-needed crisis and transitional accommodation that is able to provide individualised support services.

Figure 1.3 depicts this change in approach. It shows the system as it is now, identifies the areas the Committee believes need more emphasis and then shows what the system may look like if suggested changes were made.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 29.

Figure 1.3 Changes in policy focus in Victoria’s homelessness system



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

FINDING 2: Victoria’s homelessness system is crisis-oriented, a factor which is compounded by the lack of long-term housing options for people in need.

2 Homelessness in Victoria

2.1 Introduction

Terms of reference (1) ask the Committee to provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria.

In undertaking this analysis, the Committee has primarily used information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which collects information through the Census of Population and Housing (Census), and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), which collects information about people who access services from homelessness service agencies. The Committee also spoke with many homelessness service organisations throughout Victoria about the level of demand for services, people who access services and the circumstances which led them there.

In addition, as noted in Chapter 1, the Committee felt it was crucial to seek information and input from people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Their views and knowledge are vital to understanding the changing scale and nature of homelessness in Victoria, as well as the policies and practices needed to prevent and end homelessness. These responses will be discussed in Chapters 4 to 6.

2.1.1 What is homelessness?

There is no universally accepted definition of homelessness. The agencies that collect homelessness data in Australia use different definitions. The ABS definition uses an understanding of a home as a place that provides a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space.¹ It considers a person is homeless when they face a lack of suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable
- does not allow them to have control of and access to space for social relations.²

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Factsheet: Homelessness - in concept and in some measurement contexts*, 2012, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features32012>> accessed 16 September 2020.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features22012>> accessed 16 September 2020; Grattan Institute, *A place to call home: housing vulnerable Victorians*, supplementary evidence received 9 September 2020, p. 6.

The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare collects information from homelessness agencies according to the following definition for who is considered ‘homeless’:

- People in non-conventional accommodation or ‘sleeping rough’—defined as living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting, staying in cars or railway carriages, living in improvised dwellings or living in the long grass.
- People in short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options, including refuges, crisis shelters, couch surfing, living temporarily with friends and relatives, insecure accommodation on a short-term basis, emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency (for example, in hotels, motels and so forth).³

Stakeholders have differing views on these definitions of homelessness. The Committee received evidence from Professors Guy Johnson and Chris Chamberlain from RMIT University, that they believed the definition used by the ABS is problematic because it includes people in severely overcrowded accommodation. They argue that overcrowding does not conform to cultural understandings of homelessness⁴ and that the number of people recorded in the Census as experiencing homelessness is inflated by the inclusion of people in severely overcrowded accommodation.⁵ The number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria is discussed further in section 2.2.

Although they have some differences, the definitions used by the ABS and the AIHW are a useful guide to defining what is meant by homelessness. The evidence received by the Committee from homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness indicated that their understandings and experiences fit in with the definitions used by these agencies. This report accepts and uses both the definitions of homelessness provided by the ABS and the AIHW, although care is taken when considering overcrowded dwellings. The report also distinguishes between rough sleeping and homelessness where necessary.

2.1.2 The impacts of homelessness

This Chapter provides information about the number of people experiencing homelessness, as well as an analysis of the different manifestations of homelessness and the demographics of those experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

The Committee considers it important to acknowledge that homelessness is not just a statistic. It is an event in a person’s life, often recurring, that can have a lasting and traumatic effect. Homelessness can result in a variety of physical deprivations relating to a lack of or inadequate shelter, physical safety or access to suitable hygiene and health services. However, often the more acute and lasting impacts are on a person’s

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Sleeping rough: a profile of Specialist Homelessness Services clients*, AIHW, Canberra, 2018, p. 1.

⁴ Professor Chris Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, RMIT University, *Submission 178*, p. 2.

⁵ Although some categories were undercounted. This includes rough sleepers and long-term residents of boarding houses. See Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 11.

mental health and their connection to the community, which can compound and further deteriorate over time where the conditions of a person's homelessness are ongoing.⁶ This was illustrated to the Committee many times during the course of this Inquiry. For example, Junction Support Services in Wodonga shared a story of one of their young clients. This young person bore the physical scars of homelessness but childhood trauma, his dislocation from society and the lack of safety he experienced also had a lasting impact:

We had a young person who came in seeking support about three years ago, and he was an 18-year-old. He had been homeless since he was about 14 years old. So he had never had child protection intervention; he just kind of slipped through the gaps. He somehow slipped through the gaps with education. He had not been seeking health support, so he had lots of broken bones that had never healed correctly, and his teeth required surgery because they were so damaged and because he had never looked after them either and had no access to toothpaste or dental care. So we worked really hard with this young person and got him transitional housing, which was the short-term housing. That was great, but we could not get him to actually move into the property, so it was about three months to actually get him to feel safe and stable enough to go into the home. And then for him it was about sleeping in the lounge room because he did not feel safe in his bedroom.⁷

Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons described the physical and mental tolls of homelessness as well as the impacts of being marginalised or cut off from society:

When I started at Council to Homeless Persons I knew that homelessness was a real problem and I knew people found it a really devastating experience, but I think in my understanding I really concentrated on the physical deprivation that people might experience: the experience of being cold if you have to sleep outside or you do not have a warm bed, the difficulty of keeping clean and being comfortable if you cannot access a shower, cooking a decent meal if you cannot access a kitchen. But I think after having listened to a lot of people with lived experience of homelessness speak about the problem, I understand better now that those physical deprivations, whilst they are really hard for people, often they are not the worst part of the problem. The difficulty is that homelessness is a really profound feeling of dislocation from that private space, from that safe space that we call our home, from that place where we have time to recover from times that are difficult. It involves a loss of status in the community and that can be really devastating. It involves a shift in people's identity from being someone who is a worker, a homeowner, a part of that community, to someone who is pushed to the margins of that community. Those more psychological problems cause massive stress and anxiety for people. They can also cause a lot of shame and self-doubt, even at times self-loathing, and all of those feelings are really corrosive for people's mental health.⁸

⁶ Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 11–2.

⁷ Ms Katharine Hodgins, Senior Manager, Junction Support Services, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

⁸ Colvin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

The Committee heard from several people with lived experiences of homelessness about the lack of safety and security that accompanies homelessness and the impact this can have:

[Homelessness] doesn't just rip away material things it rips your heart inside-out. It tears you so far down till you feel like you're worthless and nothing. It has cost me my friends, some of my family, all because of how this mentally affects my life and still does. It is extremely hard to rebuild a life, not to mention the financial downfall it comes with as well.⁹

While this Chapter and the Final Report more broadly deals with statistics and policies at a statewide level, the Committee has kept front of mind the profound individual traumas and the human impact of homelessness throughout.

2.2 The number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria

The latest Census in 2016 showed that 24,817 people were experiencing homelessness in Victoria.¹⁰

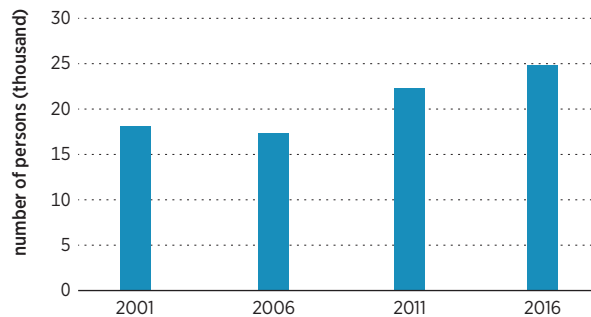
The Census is an important demographic tool and provides one of the most reliable methods for determining the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. However, as noted earlier in this Chapter, it is not the only source of data available. There are other datasets which can give an indication of the number of people experiencing homelessness, most notably from the AIHW.

The ABS has provided figures for the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria since 2001, in accordance with their definition quoted above in section 2.1.1. This number decreased slightly in the period between 2001 and 2006, and then increased from 17,410 in 2006 to 24,817 in 2016. Figure 2.1 shows this change.

⁹ Shelley Bowman, *Submission 227*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness*, 2016, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

Figure 2.1 The number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria between 2001 and 2016

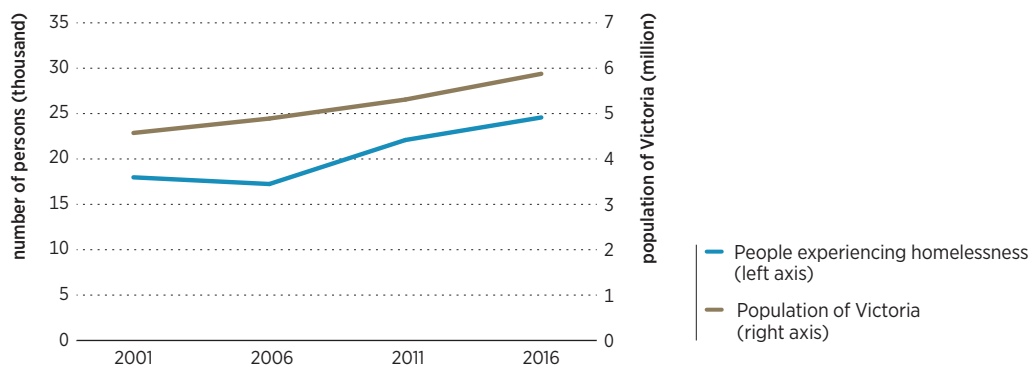


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, table 1.1, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2016*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

This figure shows that there has been an overall growth in the number of Victorians experiencing homelessness between 2001 and 2016. There has also been a corresponding growth in Victoria's population, although it should be noted that the population has not increased at the same rate as people experiencing homelessness. The number of Victorians experiencing homelessness increased by 36.7% in the period from 2001 to 2016 (from 18,154 to 24,817 persons).¹¹ During the same period, the population of Victoria grew by 28.5% (from 4,612,097 in 2001 to 5,926,624 in 2016).¹²

Figure 2.2 compares the growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness and the growth of Victoria's population.

Figure 2.2 Comparison of the growth in Victoria's population and the growth in homelessness between 2001 and 2016



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 1.1, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2016*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 Census QuickStats, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census>> accessed 30 September 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 Census QuickStats*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/quickstats>> accessed 30 September 2020.

As noted in Chapter 1, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. The pandemic and the resultant economic effects are likely to influence the number of people experiencing homelessness in the years to come.

2.2.1 The number of people accessing homelessness services

Along with Census figures, the number of people presenting to homelessness services is an important indicator of the number of people experiencing homelessness.

The AIHW collects information from homelessness service agencies about people who access their services. The AIHW began collecting data on all specialist homelessness services¹³ (referred to in this report as ‘homelessness services’) in 2011–12 following the implementation of the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.¹⁴ Prior to this, the agency kept separate datasets on different housing and homelessness support services. The AIHW has noted that its data ‘cannot be used to estimate the prevalence of homelessness in Victoria, [however] it does provide valuable insights into people seeking and receiving support, including changes over time.’¹⁵

In 2011–12, the number of people accessing homelessness services in Victoria was 76,950.¹⁶ By 2018–19, this had risen to 113,000, an increase of 31%.¹⁷ The Department of Health and Human Services’ submission noted that, based on this figure, one in 57 Victorians accessed a government-funded homelessness service in 2018–19.¹⁸

This means that one in every 57 Victorians presented to a homelessness service in 2018–19.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p 11.

The Department’s submission adds that the number of Victorians experiencing homelessness could be higher than the figures related to accessing homelessness services suggest: ‘The Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey suggests that up to two-thirds of those who experience homelessness do not seek assistance from service organisations.’¹⁹

¹³ See Glossary for a definition of Specialist homelessness service.

¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Government-funded specialist homelessness services, SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2008–09*, AIHW, Canberra, 2010, p. v.

¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2011–12*, AIHW, Canberra, 2012, p. 9.

¹⁷ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Committee also received evidence from Infoxchange, the organisation that powers the online homelessness service search tool, Ask Izzy. Ask Izzy releases the data it collects anonymously on an open platform. The platform reported that in 2019, there were 58,650 incidences of searches for housing services alone on the platform. This does not include searches for other related services such as family violence support, food banks or legal services.²⁰

2.2.2 Counting Victoria's homeless population: gaps in recording the data

Counting Victoria's homeless population is an important part of the response to homelessness as it can provide insight into the level of service need across the state and inform funding and policy decisions for the sector. However, some people experiencing homelessness live a transitory lifestyle which makes it difficult for them to be properly counted in a Census or StreetCount.²¹ Most population counts, whether it be general or focused on a particular cohort, occur on a single day or specific time meaning data collectors rely on people being in the right place at the right time. The Committee heard from stakeholders who expressed concern that some cohorts of the homeless population were being undercounted and that current figures were not an accurate reflection of the true number of Victorians experiencing homelessness.

Chris Chamberlain and Guy Johnson identified three groups which they believed were undercounted in the 2016 Census data:

- persons staying with other households
- rough sleepers
- people living in rooming houses.²²

Their submission went on to discuss the gaps in the data evident in the 2016 Census and the problems with counting homeless populations:

In the case of people living in boarding houses, the evidence indicated that about 7,300 were missed by the Census. In the case of rough sleepers, the undercount was probably at least 1,100. However, it was not possible to estimate the undercount for those staying temporarily with friends or relatives. Overall, the evidence indicates that the homeless figure was at least 24,300.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the Census count is an estimate of the homeless population on one night. It is not the case, as Mission Australia (2018) claims, that: 'That there are 116,427 people homeless in Australia on any given night' (Mission Australia, 2018, p. 1). On the contrary, the number of homeless people goes up and down as people move in and out of homelessness.²³

²⁰ Infoxchange, *Ask Izzy*, <<https://opendata.askizzy.org.au/data.html>> accessed 2 October 2020.

²¹ StreetCount is an annual homelessness street count that takes place on one night; volunteers collect information about people sleeping rough in parks, on streets and other locations.

²² Chamberlain and Johnson, *Submission 178*, p. 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Mr Brook Quinn, Social Policy Officer, Community Planning and Advocacy at Brimbank City Council, told the Committee that the Census lacks qualitative data and likely undercounts those sleeping rough:

The census provides some useful information, but it lacks qualitative detail and is more than likely an undercount. So, for example, the census recorded nobody to be sleeping rough in Brimbank at the time of the census, but based on observation in the municipality and also our research, which estimated that anywhere between 40 and 80 people may be sleeping rough in Brimbank on any given night, we know that that is almost certainly an undercount. So council is looking forward to the 2021 census and also future street counts as opportunities to improve the local evidence base around rough sleeping and homelessness more generally.²⁴

Another difficulty in accurately counting the homeless population is that for some people homelessness or housing precariousness is episodic, rather than chronic, meaning that the number of people experiencing some form of homelessness can change on any given night. This point was raised by Mornington Community Information and Support in the context of couch-surfing by young people. Their submission stated that:

research dictates that couch surfing among youth is more episodic than chronic and would therefore result in a difference in the number of homeless youth counted on a single night as opposed to counting the number of youth experiencing homelessness over a longer period.²⁵

The ABS acknowledged the limitations in capturing homeless people using the Census in its 2011 discussion paper on the *Methodological Review of Counting the Homeless, 2006*. The paper identified two reasons why Census data may not be useful in reporting on the number of homeless people:

there are two major reasons why, historically, the Census may not have been as useful as first thought for reporting on the number of homeless people in Australia. First, while the measured Census undercount is very small overall, it is possible, indeed likely, that some homeless people are more likely, on average, to be missed on Census night than other people. Second, while many (indeed most) homeless people would be counted on Census night, they may not be easily discernible in the Census data as being homeless. The Census does not collect a classification of homeless, and a variety of assumptions are necessary to develop estimates of those that may be reasonably classified as homeless.²⁶

²⁴ Mr Brook Quinn, Social Policy Officer, Community Planning and Advocacy, Brimbank City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

²⁵ Mornington Community Information and Support, *Submission 75*, pp. 23–4.

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Methodological review of counting the homeless*, 2006, <[https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/C255AA8D9A430DAFCA257863000EEE6B/\\$File/2050055001_2011.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/C255AA8D9A430DAFCA257863000EEE6B/$File/2050055001_2011.pdf)> accessed 1 February 2021.

Evidence suggests that the increasing rates of homelessness in Victoria might still be only a conservative estimate of the total cohort due to undercounts in the Census and other data sources. Homeless people are the most likely cohort to be undercounted in a population count because surveys, like the Census, do not collect data in a way that people may be easily identifiable as homeless. The Committee believes more work is needed by the Victorian Government and the homelessness sector to explore opportunities to improve homeless population counts.

FINDING 3: It is difficult to provide an accurate figure for the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria and it is likely the figures captured in the Census and other sources are an underestimate.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government, in collaboration with the housing and homelessness sector, explore ways to improve the accurate recording of the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria, particularly in relation to transitory or recurring cases of homelessness.

2.3 Manifestations of homelessness

One of the key issues that has been stressed to the Committee throughout the inquiry is that homelessness is a much larger and more complex issue than solely those that live and sleep in public places (known as rough sleeping). Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, but according to the ABS, only 4.5% of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria are sleeping rough.²⁷ As noted above, homelessness can be experienced in a number of other ways, including through temporary stays with other households (such as couch surfing) and supported accommodation (such as shelters).

To illustrate the different manifestations and the relative proportions of people experiencing homelessness, the Council to Homeless Persons provided the following table showing the 'Dwelling type of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria', based on data from the 2016 Census. The table shows that the highest proportion of people experiencing homelessness are those in severely overcrowded dwellings and those in supported accommodation for the homeless.

²⁷ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 11.

Table 2.1 Dwelling type of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria in 2016

Dwelling type	Number	Percentage of total
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	1, 123	4.5
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	7, 157	28.8
Persons staying temporarily with other households	3,091	12.5
Persons living in boarding houses	4,406	17.8
Persons in other temporary lodgings	108	0.4
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	8,930	36
All homeless persons	24,817	100

Source: Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 11.

The AIHW also provides information about the housing situations of people when they access homelessness services in Victoria. The data shows the kinds of living situations experienced by people who are already homeless and those who have a dwelling but are at risk of homelessness. Again, this information shows that only a small percentage of people accessing services are rough sleepers.

Table 2.2 Persons accessing homelessness services in Victoria by housing situation at beginning of support in 2019–20

	Dwelling type	Percentage of total
Homeless when accessing services	No shelter/improvised dwelling	8.2
	Short-term temporary accommodation	11
	House, townhouse or flat (couch surfer with no tenure)	12.1
	Other	0.5
At risk of homelessness when accessing services	Public or community housing—renter or rent free	8.3
	Private or other housing - renter, rent free or owner	36.6
	Institutional settings	4.3
	Other	8.4
	Not Stated	10.6

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.11, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, cat. no. HOU 322, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/9e4e2ff0-d30c-419d-abe6-1bb648fc43dd/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report.pdf.aspx>> accessed 4 February 2021.

The data from the ABS and the AIHW is in line with the evidence provided to the Committee about the many manifestations of homelessness. Those in short term accommodation and severely overcrowded accommodation make up a large proportion of the overall homeless population. This was articulated to the Committee by Emma King, CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service:

In Victoria the most visible form of homelessness, rough sleeping, is just the very tip of the iceberg. Much more common in Victoria is what we call 'hidden homelessness'. This is where people may have a roof over their head but have no security and no private

or social space. These are the elements of what makes a house a home. They may be in registered or unregistered rooming houses, be living in severely overcrowded dwellings, couch surfing, staying in a motel or sleeping in their car.²⁸

As noted in Chapter 1, the Committee conducted public hearings across the state to hear from regional Victorians about what homelessness looks like in their communities. The Mayor of Greater Shepparton, Councillor Seema Abdullah, told the Committee about the many manifestations of homelessness in Shepparton:

The Committee will have heard so many statistics around homelessness of course. Community consultation and personal experiences have also provided these examples. In Greater Shepparton I will tell you what homelessness looks like. Homelessness looks like families sleeping in tents on the riverbanks in winters. Homelessness looks like people sleeping in council-owned bike lockers. Homelessness looks like kids dropping out of school, living with unknown and unsafe people, not having enough food and developing mental health conditions. Homelessness also looks like women staying in situations of domestic violence because they have no alternative. Homelessness looks like grandmothers with walkers sleeping in cars. Homelessness looks like futility after having more than 20 rental applications knocked back despite having a good rental history interstate. Also homelessness looks like fear, violence and discrimination for too many of our residents.²⁹

There are many different types of homelessness and they may be influenced by the length of time a person has been homeless and the kinds of services they require. A person who is sleeping rough is likely to have been homeless for longer and may have more complex needs than someone who is recently homeless in crisis accommodation.³⁰ This should be taken into account when considering the costs of treating homelessness—it is less complex and more cost-effective to stabilise and provide support for people who are newly homeless.³¹ Examining the issue through an economic lens shows that it is more cost-effective to prevent homelessness in the first place. These issues will be discussed in depth in Chapters 4 to 6.

²⁸ Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

²⁹ Councillor Seema Abdullah, Councillor, Greater Shepparton City Council, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

³⁰ Professor Guy Johnson, Inaugural Unison Chair of Urban Housing and Homelessness, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

³¹ See for example Mr Paul Turton, General Manager, Homelessness Services, VincentCare Northern Community Hub, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

2.3.1 Trends in the manifestations of homelessness

The different manifestations of homelessness captured by the ABS in the past four Census cycles show there has been a notable rise in the number of people living in severely overcrowded dwellings. People living in severely overcrowded dwellings rose by 174% over the period, from 3,257 in 2001 to 8,930 in 2016.³²

The other significant increase was for persons in supported homelessness accommodation, which rose by 39%, from 5,146 persons in 2001 to 7,157 in 2016.

Other categories, particularly persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out (rough sleepers) and people staying temporarily with other households either increased negligibly or decreased over the period. Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out increased only slightly from 1,018 in 2001 to 1,123 in 2016. Persons staying temporarily with other households decreased from 3,546 in 2001 to 3,091 in 2016.³³ These statistics from the ABS are in line with evidence provided by Professor Guy Johnson from RMIT, who noted that the majority of people experiencing long-term homelessness were in some form of unstable temporary accommodation:

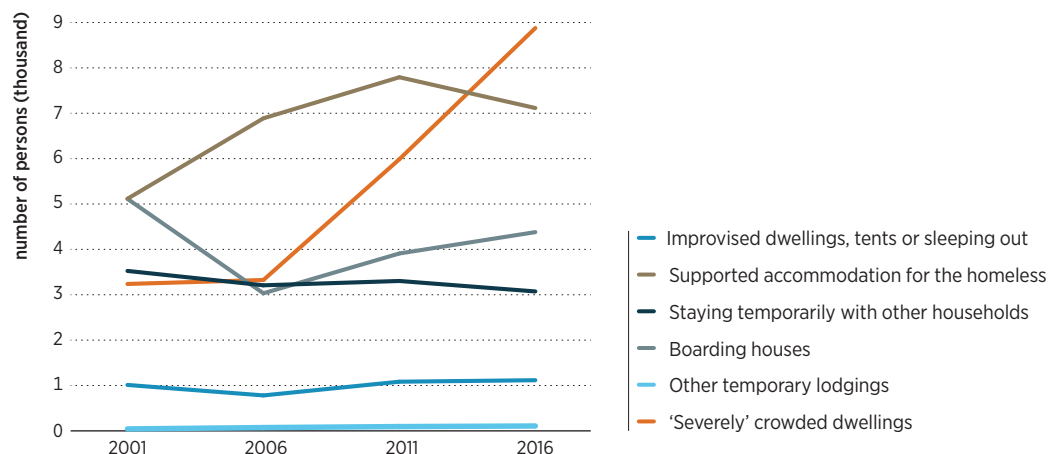
We know that many people who experience homelessness will sleep rough, but only a few do on a more or less permanent basis. The most common pattern is one of residential instability where people move from one form of temporary accommodation to another. This shatters connections to place and to people. We know that the long-term homeless often travel an institutional circuit which involves repeated spells in crisis facilities, boarding houses, emergency and psych wards, and the justice system. The cost is very high.³⁴

Figure 2.3 shows the trends in the manifestations of homelessness between 2001 and 2016.

³² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 1.3, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness*, cat. no. 2049.0, 2016, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

Figure 2.3 Trends in the manifestations of homelessness in Victoria between 2001 and 2016

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 1.3, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2016*, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020

Severe overcrowding

Overcrowding is a serious and increasing problem. People in severely overcrowded dwellings were the largest cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria in 2016. The evidence provided to the Committee suggests there are two broad categories of people residing in severely overcrowded accommodation:

- The first group may be residing in overcrowded accommodation by choice or because of cultural norms. Although there is an element of economic necessity in many cases. This group may be in less distress than other cohorts of people experiencing homelessness. Some of this group are from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and cultural factors as well as financial considerations lead them to reside in overcrowded dwellings.
- The second group is more likely to reside in severely overcrowded dwellings out of desperation. This may be due to financial considerations or they may be fleeing family violence. This group has less agency about their living arrangements and may face significant hardships and risks in line with other forms of homelessness.

In discussing the first group, a submission to the inquiry prepared by Professors Guy Johnson and Chris Chamberlain outlined the view that people in severely overcrowded dwellings may not be considered homeless as they have long-term accommodation. The submission states that this group have often lived or intend to live in the dwelling for 6 months or longer. They also note that many in this group were living in a house that was rented in the private market.³⁵ They conclude 'the problem identified by the ABS is not homelessness. The problem identified by the ABS is overcrowding.'³⁶

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness*; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Factsheet: Overcrowding*, 2012, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/2049.0Main%20Features602006>> accessed 29 September 2020.

³⁶ Chamberlain and Johnson, *Submission 178*, p. 7.

This issue was expanded on by the Director of AHURI (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute), Dr Michael Fotheringham, who said that the definition of an overcrowded dwelling was based on western standards of habitation and some members of CALD communities may choose to live in dwellings that the ABS would categorise as severely overcrowded:

The definition of overcrowding is based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard system, which is about the number of bedrooms in relation to the number of people and the age of children within that. It is very much based on a Western nuclear family model, whereas for many CALD communities that is not the bottle they have come from; multi-generational housing is more common and so some of that is by choice. Now the economic dimension that you have mentioned is absolutely right, and I am not meaning to ignore that, but there are also complexities to what we understand a household to be, the Western assumptions are not always appropriate...³⁷

The North-East Multicultural Association's submission supported the view that members of CALD communities may reside in overcrowded dwellings, although they illustrated that financial considerations are a key reason for this:

Overcrowding- Multicultural families have moved to the LGA's covered by NEMA [North East Multicultural Association]. Most families will reside with other family members already living in the Hume region, this usually remains the circumstance until finding employment & housing. This is resulting in overcrowding where there may be 10 people living in 1-2-bedroom units. Seasonal workers are living in accommodation where 7-10 people may be sharing a hotel room or cabin. Larger families are living in smaller dwellings due to the inability of achieving adequate income and employment therefore unable to afford the rent for a bigger house. Most families are of 4 or more people living in a 1-2-bedroom unit.³⁸

The Committee also heard that overcrowding can occur in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households. A paper provided to the Committee by Jo Doherty from Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service stated that '7.6% of Indigenous households were considered to be overcrowded' and that the 'lack of accessible, affordable and appropriate accommodation often results in individuals and families forced to rely on extended family to accommodate them for an unknown period of time.'³⁹ The paper further stated that overcrowding can in some circumstances result in health problems, relationship breakdowns and family violence.⁴⁰

³⁷ Dr Michael Fotheringham, Executive Director, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), public hearing, Melbourne, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 4-5.

³⁸ North East Multicultural Association, *Submission 371*, p. 3.

³⁹ Jo Doherty and Sarah McPherson, 'The impacts of overcrowding on Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and adults', *Parity*, vol. 32, no. 5, 2019, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

A major driver of overcrowding is financial considerations. Dr Fotheringham attributed a lack of affordable housing to the rise in overcrowding, using the example of housing costs in Sydney:

There is a simple reality that the more unaffordable housing becomes, the more creative people have to be in finding ways through. Now for some that means packing into houses that are not designed for them or apartments that are designed for less people than are in it and just accepting a more cramped existence, whether that is multigenerational or cramped share houses or emerging versions of rooming houses that often operate on the fringes of regulation and legality. So people are crowding in more because they cannot afford not to.⁴¹

Housing affordability as a cause of homelessness is discussed further in section 2.5.2.

The Committee heard that another group of people are in severely overcrowded accommodation simply out of desperation. The ABS regards people in severely overcrowded dwellings as homeless because they do not have control of or access to space for social relations.⁴² Mr Bevan Warner, CEO of Launch Housing, went further, stating that people living in severely overcrowded dwellings could face significant hardships and risks in line with other forms of homelessness such as rough sleeping:

In inner Melbourne we have got rough sleeping; in Dandenong we have got very severe overcrowding. To suggest that severe overcrowding, because there is a roof over someone's head, is not as bad as someone who is sleeping rough on the streets is incorrect. There are very severe risks in severe overcrowding for sexual exploitation and for serious assault and for harm to befall people. It is not something where we can say one is worse than the other: they are both bad. People do not have the safety and security to get about their daily life or to plan for the future when they are in precarious housing, and that includes severe overcrowding.⁴³

The Committee is concerned about the rise in the number of people in overcrowded accommodation. While there may be cultural aspects to overcrowding in some CALD or indigenous communities, the Committee believes it is likely that financial considerations and a lack of affordable housing play a larger role. Severely overcrowded housing can have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of those who reside in such dwellings.

Housing affordability, and in particular, in the private rental market, will be discussed in Chapter 6. Innovative housing options for those in overcrowded accommodation are discussed in Chapter 4.

⁴¹ Fotheringham, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

⁴² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Factsheet: Overcrowding*.

⁴³ Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

FINDING 4: Severe overcrowding is a serious and increasing manifestation of homelessness in Victoria. However, there are complexities around the reasons for overcrowding and the level of need for homelessness services in some cases.

2.3.2 Supported accommodation for the homeless

The ABS defines supported accommodation as including hostels for the homeless, night shelters and refuges. This also includes crisis accommodation and some forms of transitional accommodation.⁴⁴

According to Census data, the cohort of people in supported accommodation has risen significantly since 2001.⁴⁵ The Committee received evidence that this increase may be partially attributable to people staying in crisis accommodation for longer because there is a lack of long-term accommodation options. Ms Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons described how people who become homeless are ideally placed in crisis or transitional accommodation until a long-term housing option becomes available. However, there are a lack of affordable long-term housing options, and in particular social housing for people to move into from supported accommodation:

You have got all these extra people who are experiencing homelessness because of the rental market coming into the homeless service system, and they come in and they go to crisis accommodation, but the thing is if they cannot get out of crisis accommodation, they cannot leave because there is no housing for them to leave into. So they end up staying in crisis accommodation that is intended for just a week or two weeks or six weeks—they stay for months. Sometimes they stay for a year, or in transitional housing that is intended for three months, and they end up staying for two years. That means that the next person who comes through the door whose housing situation has fallen apart, they have got nowhere to stay, they cannot go into crisis accommodation because it is full of all the people who cannot leave into long-term housing. Perhaps then they are put in motel accommodation, which has some of the problems that I described before, and the cycle goes on.⁴⁶

Ms Jo Smith from housing support provider Haven; Home, Safe also described how the lack of long-term housing options had kept people in transitional housing⁴⁷ for longer periods:

Haven also is a provider of transitional housing, but the ‘transit’ has kind of vanished from transitional for the moment because there is so little movement in public housing. Five years ago, when I was first working at Haven, there were maybe eight to 10 transitional properties a month to be allocated to people who would move on within a year or two, usually to public housing, sometimes to private rentals, sometimes to

⁴⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

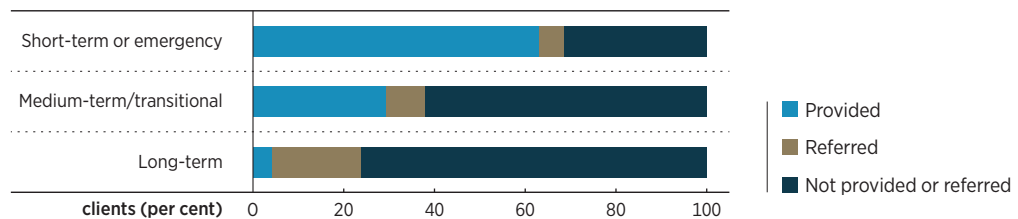
⁴⁶ Colvin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Please see Chapter 1 for a definition of transitional housing.

ownership—usually to public or community housing. We are down to an average of less than two a month at the moment because there is so little movement in public housing.⁴⁸

This evidence is supported by the data from AIHW, which shows the number of clients in Victoria who are provided with short-term emergency and medium-term transitional accommodation is far higher than those provided with long-term accommodation. Figure 2.4 shows the relative proportions in 2018–19.

Figure 2.4 The provision of accommodation for people experiencing homelessness by type in Victoria, 2018–19



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 10.

The Committee is aware there are many other intersecting issues which contribute to the increase in the number of people in supported accommodation for the homeless. Nevertheless, it believes the lack of long-term housing for people experiencing homelessness to move into is a key factor keeping people in shorter-term supported accommodation.

The lack of affordable, long-term housing is one of the key themes presented to the Committee throughout this inquiry and is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Crisis and transitional accommodation will be discussed in Chapter 5.

2.3.3 Rough sleeping

There has been a recent rise in people sleeping rough in Victoria, although as discussed, this figure is comparatively low. Due to the transient nature of rough sleeping it can be difficult to provide an accurate estimate of the number of rough sleepers and the figure varies between the Census and the AIHW.

Census figures estimate the number rose from 1,018 people in 2001 to 1,123 people in 2016.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South, Haven; Home, Safe, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

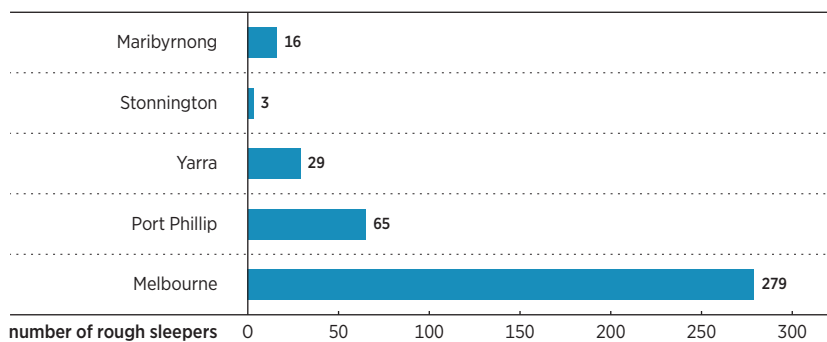
⁴⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 1.3.

Data from the AIHW about the housing circumstances of people when accessing homelessness services shows that the number of people sleeping rough when accessing services increased from 1,770 in 2011–12 to 4,134 in 2019–20.⁵⁰

There are other sources of data regarding rough sleeping. The City of Melbourne, the LGA with the highest proportion of rough sleepers in Victoria,⁵¹ conducts an annual homelessness street count. Volunteers walk the streets of Melbourne in one night to collect information about people sleeping rough in parks, on streets and other locations.⁵² Based on this count, the number of people sleeping rough in the City of Melbourne has risen from 142 in 2014 to 279 in 2019.⁵³

StreetCount 2018 surveyed a larger area compared to the previous count conducted in 2016 and was the first joint StreetCount undertaken across the City of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Yarra, Stonnington, and Maribyrnong. Figure 2.5 shows the number of rough sleepers recorded in each area.

Figure 2.5 Number of rough sleepers recorded in StreetCount 2018, by area



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee. Data extracted from City of Melbourne, *StreetCount*, 2020, <<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support-services/social-support/what-we-are-doing/Pages/streetcount.aspx>> accessed 28 October 2020.

The Victorian Government's Rough Sleeping Action Plan identified that the trend of increasing numbers of rough sleepers is 'consistent with a wider increase in homelessness – both in Victoria and nationally – and an associated increase in demand for help'.⁵⁴ It states that the causes of the increase are in line with the causes of homelessness more broadly:

Escalating issues have driven the increase in rough sleeping in Victoria, including increasing housing costs, lack of affordable housing, the inadequacy of Centrelink income support, and family violence. Service systems trying to respond to this crisis

⁵⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, SHSC Housing situation, *AIHW Cubes*, <<https://reporting.aihw.gov.au/Reports/openRVUrl.do>> accessed 21 January 2021.

⁵¹ City of Melbourne, *StreetCount*, 2020, <<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support-services/social-support/what-we-are-doing/Pages/streetcount.aspx>> accessed 8 October 2020.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2018, p. 7.

often don't have capacity to successfully resolve chronic homelessness or intervene earlier and prevent people from sleeping rough in the first place.⁵⁵

The causes of homelessness are discussed in section 2.5. The number of rough sleepers in Victoria is low in comparison to other manifestations of homelessness, however, the number of rough sleepers in Victoria has been rising in recent years.

2.3.4 The duration and recurrence of homelessness

The Melbourne Institute provided the Committee with a submission regarding their work on the Journeys Home Survey. The Journeys Home Survey was a major national longitudinal survey of 1,682 disadvantaged Australians, conducted from 2011 to 2014, and commissioned by the Commonwealth Government.⁵⁶ Of those interviewed, the median duration of an episode of homelessness was 4.5 months and 20% of the homeless episodes lasted for longer than 12 months.⁵⁷

The AIHW also records information about the duration of support for people accessing homelessness services. The support periods do not always correspond to an episode of homelessness, because some people seek help before they become homeless. The main reason support periods end is because the client's immediate needs were met, or case management goals were achieved.⁵⁸ The Committee notes however that a client's ongoing needs may lead to them presenting again shortly after a support period ends. This is discussed further in section 2.3.6.

In 2019–20, the AIHW reported that the median length of support was 43 days.⁵⁹ This period is shorter than the length of time clients reported a period of homelessness in the Journeys Home Survey. It suggests that people do not access services for the entire duration of their episode of homelessness, or that they access services before they become homeless. Like the Journeys Home Survey, the AIHW reports that there is a cohort of people that require support for longer durations, and in particular, that 17% received over 180 days of support, and 16% received support for 91–180 days.⁶⁰ However, most clients did not require extended periods of support and had their needs met after a period of up to 45 days:

The needs of some clients can be met relatively quickly but clients with more complex needs received more support. Three in 10 clients (30% or about 85,600) received between 6 and 45 days of support during 2019–20, while 22% received support for up to 5 days.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Melbourne Institute, *Submission 99*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, AIHW, Canberra, 2020, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Professor Chris Johnson's evidence to the Committee similarly reflected the above data regarding short periods of support. He said that while some people required ongoing support, the majority of people accessing homelessness services had less complex needs:

We know that some people's circumstances are extremely complex but most peoples are not. We know that a small number of people spend a lot of time in the homeless population but most people do not, and we find this sort of variation across every group, be it by age, by gender or by household type.⁶²

The other factor put forward by Professor Johnson is the amount of time spent homeless, which can have a compounding effect on the issues that cause homelessness. He said:

duration matters: the longer people are homeless, the more complex and costly it is to resolve their situation.⁶³

This statement reflects evidence received from the Department of Health and Human Services about three broad groups of people experiencing homelessness based on the time spent homeless and the complexity of their needs. The groups are:

- people at risk of homelessness or recently homeless
- people who are experiencing homelessness who have increased support needs
- people who have experienced chronic homelessness and rough sleeping who often have multiple support needs, such as mental or physical health, alcohol or drug use or other trauma.⁶⁴

The first group has fewer complex needs and generally responds to early intervention services or requires a shorter period of support to get back on their feet. The second category has more complex needs and generally requires a higher level of support for a longer period to exit homelessness and are likely to need more intensive support, including a 'Housing First' approach (this approach is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).⁶⁵ These groups are summarised in Table 2.3 below.

⁶² Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, supplementary evidence received 9 September 2020.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Table 2.3 Categories of people experiencing homelessness based on the length of homelessness and their support needs

	People at risk of homelessness or recently homeless	People who are experiencing homelessness who have increased support needs	People who have experienced chronic homelessness and rough sleeping and have multiple support needs
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less complex needs • Responds to prevention or early intervention programmes, and typically needs a shorter period of support to get back on their feet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More complex needs • Higher level of support for a longer period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple and complex needs • Intensive support for a longer period. May respond better to a housing first approach.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, supplementary evidence received 9 September 2020.

2.3.5 The recurrence of homelessness

The Journeys Home Survey concluded that a significant number of people experiencing homelessness faced more than one episode:

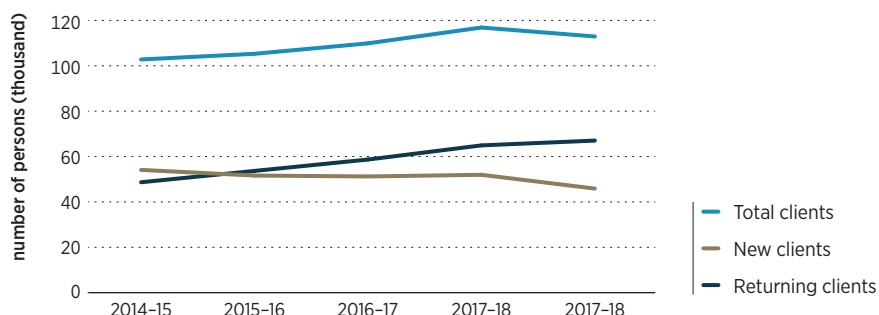
Among Journeys Home Survey respondents who were homeless at the initial interview, 65% had multiple episodes of homelessness prior to the survey and 39% had spent a total of four years or more without a decent place to live.⁶⁶

The AIHW's submission to the Committee showed that the number of clients returning to homelessness services has been increasing between 2014–15 and 2018–19, and has been accompanied by a decline in new clients. This illustrates to the Committee the importance of providing intensive and ongoing support to ensure people do not fall back into homelessness once a period of support ends.

Figure 2.6 shows the trends in people accessing homelessness services between 2014–15 and 2018–19. It highlights the growing number of people who are returning clients.

⁶⁶ Melbourne Institute, *Submission 99*, p. 5.

Figure 2.6 Trends in the number of people accessing homelessness services between 2014-15 and 2018-19



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 10.

The AIHW data about the recurrence of homelessness is in line with evidence received throughout the inquiry from homelessness service agencies. For example, Mr Gary Simpson, CEO of Mallee Accommodation and Support Program talked about the challenges his organisation faces with clients cycling in and out of homelessness:

Through my organisation we do see people who are in an unfortunate cycle of going in and out of homelessness. They are homeless, they are housed, they are homeless, they are housed and so it goes. And the reason that those people are on that cycle is because their barriers to [housing] are not being addressed.⁶⁷

The recurrence of homelessness can in many circumstances be addressed by providing ongoing support for individuals to address the personal and structural issues that caused them to become homeless. The Committee heard evidence that such support should not be time limited. The causes of homelessness are discussed in section 2.5, and support services for people experiencing homelessness are discussed in Chapter 3.

2.4 Who is homeless?

Homelessness can happen to anyone regardless of demographics such as age, gender, background, race or relationship status. While there is no typical person experiencing homelessness, there are groups that experience homelessness at higher rates than others:

- Men experience homelessness at a higher rate than women, although women are more likely to access homelessness services.⁶⁸
- Younger people under 35 are more likely to experience homelessness than other age groups.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Mr Gary Simpson, Chief Executive Officer, Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, pp. 9-11; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Grattan Institute, *A place to call home*, p. 6.

- People who experience homelessness are more likely to be single (including single parents), born in Australia and out of the workforce.⁷⁰
- People who are homeless are more likely to be in metropolitan Melbourne than in regional areas.⁷¹
- People accessing homelessness services are likely to be receiving income support.⁷²

BOX 2.1: Case Study—John Smith (introducing the Committee’s case study)

This report will use the example of a fictional person, John Smith, to illustrate the pathways a person may take when navigating Victoria’s homelessness services.

The fictional case study example has the characteristics described in this section as most common to those experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

John Smith is a male in his 20s, born in Australia and single. He is living in Melbourne and is receiving Commonwealth income support while looking for a job.

Further case study examples will appear in Chapters 4 and 5 to explain the help available to individuals as they navigate the homelessness service system.

Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

While these groups generally experience higher rates of homelessness, the Department of Health and Human Services provided the following information about the cohorts of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria which are growing. They noted that from 2011–12 to 2018–19 there has been:

- A growing proportion of people who are older - those aged 55 years and over now represent 1 in 10 people – a doubling over the last decade
- More families are presenting for assistance – 63 per cent of clients are families, (up from 53 per cent over the decade).
- Greater diversity in client cohorts - ten per cent of clients are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (up from 6 per cent over the decade); 14 per cent are people from Non-MESC [Main English-Speaking Countries] backgrounds and 3 per cent have a disability
- Rising homelessness in regional Victoria - around one in four clients engaged in services are located in regional Victoria
- Growth in demand from people leaving the criminal justice system – approximately one in two people leaving the criminal justice system seek specialist homelessness assistance.⁷³

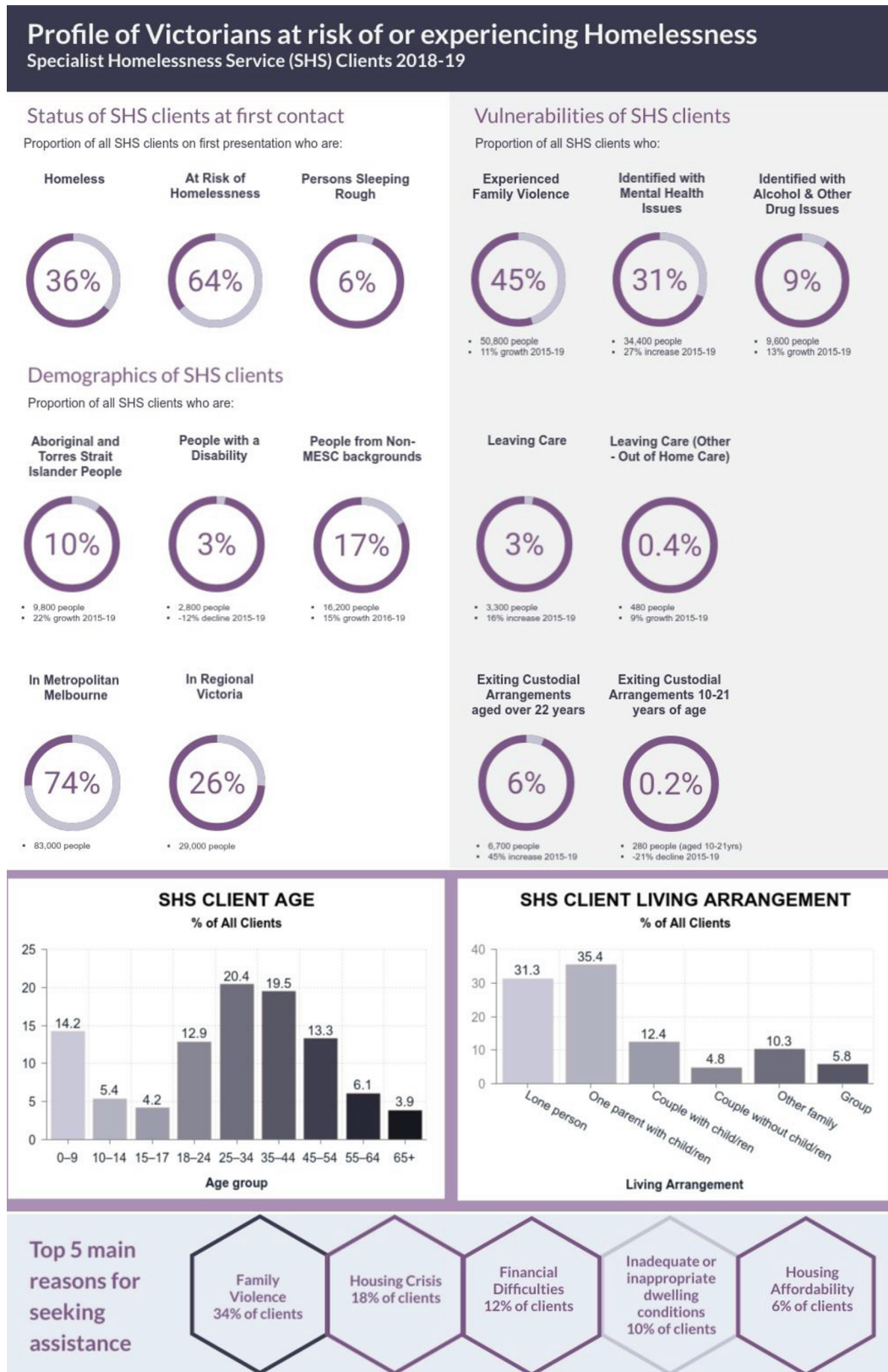
⁷⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, pp. 9–10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁷³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 12.

Figure 2.7 Profile of Victorians at risk of or experiencing homelessness



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p.13.

2.4.1 By age and sex

According to the most recent Census, the most common age group of people experiencing homelessness is younger people under the age of 35. This demographic makes up over 60% of the Victorian homelessness cohort.⁷⁴ However, a proportion of that group are children accompanying parents.

60% of Victorians experiencing homelessness are under the age of 35.

Source: Grattan Institute, *A place to call home: housing vulnerable Victorians*, supplementary evidence received 9 September 2020, p. 6.

The Council to Homeless Persons told the Committee that ‘more younger people experience homelessness than many in the community would anticipate’ and that ‘this reflects the vulnerability of these age groups to the primary causes of homelessness; poverty, accommodation issues and family violence.’⁷⁵

The second largest age cohort are those in the 35–54 category, while older Victorians aged 55 and over make up the smallest proportion of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria.⁷⁶

While younger people make up the majority of those experiencing homelessness, older Victorians and older women in particular are a fast-growing cohort. In 2006, there were 2,098 people over 55 experiencing homelessness, or 12% of the homeless population. By 2016, this number had increased by 58% to a total of 3,316 people: accounting for 13.3% of the homeless cohort.⁷⁷

The Council to Homeless Persons provided the Committee with a breakdown of the age profile of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria, based on data from the 2016 Census.

⁷⁴ Grattan Institute, *A place to call home*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 1.3.

Table 2.4 The age profile of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria

Age	Number of persons	Percentage of total
Under 12	3372	13.6
12-18	2010	8.1
19-24	4360	17.6
25-34	5502	22.2
35-44	3387	13.6
45-54	2876	11.6
55-64	1,818	7.3
65-74	980	3.9
75 and over	518	2.1

Source: Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 10.

Young people

Experiences of homelessness as a young person can have prolonged harmful effects, including diminished education, physical and mental health, and employment outcomes as well as a heightened risk of recurring homelessness.⁷⁸ The term ‘young people’ was used in evidence to describe people up to the age of 35 in some cases and early to mid-twenties in others. The Committee has chosen to define ‘young people’ using the former age group, of people up to 35 years old.

Mr Sebastian Antoine, Policy and Research Officer, Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVIC) gave evidence to the Committee about the rate of young people experiencing homelessness:

The stats show that at least 6000 young people are experiencing homelessness on any night, which means that they are over-represented in statistics. Young people are only 16 per cent of the population in Victoria but 26 per cent of the homeless population in Victoria, which means they are nearly twice as likely to experience homelessness than anyone else.⁷⁹

According to YACVIC only 2% of young people sleep rough. Young people are more likely to ‘couch surf’ with friends or family, stay in severely overcrowded accommodation or supported accommodation.⁸⁰ YACVIC told the Committee about consultations they had undertaken with young people in Melbourne, Warrnambool and Mildura for their report *Ending Youth Homelessness: Solutions from Young People*. The report illustrated the kinds of homelessness young people experience:

What we heard was a few of the young people we talked to had slept rough, but the vast majority had done other kinds of things in their experience of homelessness.

⁷⁸ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Mr Sebastian Antoine, Policy and Research Officer, Youth Affairs Council Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 14 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ Youth Affairs Council Victoria, *Submission 352*, p. 7.

They were bouncing between different places of accommodation, they were couch surfing at friends' and strangers' houses, they were sleeping in cars, or they were in insecure tenancies or living in overcrowded accommodation or unsafe or unsanitary accommodation. They variously described feeling abandoned, uncertain, institutionalised, anxious and neglected, and they described their situation as being 'in-between housing', being 'housing insecure' or being 'houseless'.⁸¹

A report provided to the Committee by WEstjustice, a community legal centre in Melbourne's west, described couch surfing as one of the most prevalent forms of homelessness amongst young people:

Couch surfing is accepted as a 'norm' in outer metropolitan areas such as Wyndham. It is widespread and an early indicator of longer-term homelessness, however, it is hidden. The experiences of these young people are not visible to the general public, to the local community, to the schools and sometimes to the places they stay.

Furthermore, in a 2006 national census of homeless secondary students, 84 percent of homeless adolescents reported being in couch surfing situations. During the 2015/2016 financial year, Uniting Care Werribee Support and Housing Youth Housing Program assisted 122 clients in Wyndham. Services also reported that there is a significant number of young people couch surfing who may not be captured by the data.⁸²

The submission from Melbourne City Mission said the causes of homelessness amongst young people are primarily to do with family breakdown, relationship breakdown and family violence:

The breakdown of family relationships is at the centre of most cases of youth homelessness; however, the underlying causes of family conflict can be driven by a wide range of intersecting issues. Family violence, families being unable to cope with a young person's mental health or behavioural issues, conflict over a young person's identity including sexual preferences or gender identity, parental mental health or substance abuse issues, abuse or neglect that leads to a young person being in Out of Home Care are all contributing issues.⁸³

According to the Council to Homeless Persons, children who experience homelessness with their families often have disrupted schooling, which can have long term impacts: 'Too many of these children never successfully re-engage, setting them on a path towards lifelong economic exclusion and poor health.'⁸⁴

Young people who become homeless and do not receive timely support face damaging long term outcomes as they get older:

Once they are homeless, young people are more susceptible to a range of negative outcomes including mental health issues, substance misuse, criminal involvement,

⁸¹ Antoine, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

⁸² WEstjustice, *Submission 189a*, pp. 23–4.

⁸³ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 217*, pp. 4–5.

⁸⁴ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 40.

violence and victimisation. Prolonged youth homelessness is also a powerful predictor of a lifetime of episodic homelessness.⁸⁵

Young people from CALD backgrounds are a cohort that are over-represented in the statistics for homelessness amongst young people. Mr Jemal Ahmet, Executive Manager, Programs and Services, Centre for Multicultural Youth, explained the high representation of multicultural young people, particularly those in severely overcrowded accommodation:

The majority of homeless people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia are young—79 per cent of the CALD homeless population were aged between 12 and 34. Overcrowding is one of the increasing forms of homelessness for young people born overseas, and more than three-quarters of the rise in homelessness in the 19 to 24 age bracket consists of overseas-born young people in severely overcrowded accommodation. CMY’s experience is that couch surfing and overcrowding is one of the most common forms of homelessness experienced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and this is supported by groups like WEstjustice, who report young refugees as overrepresented at their youth couch surfing clinic and our own data in our Reconnect program, our Le Mana Pasifika program and our South Sudanese community support group programs.⁸⁶

Strategies for early intervention to prevent homelessness are discussed in Chapter 4, supported accommodation for young people is discussed in Chapter 5, and the provision of long-term appropriate housing is discussed in Chapter 6.

FINDING 5: People under 35 are the largest age group of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

FINDING 6: Experiencing prolonged youth homelessness is a strong predictor of experiencing homelessness later in life.

By sex

In the 2016 census, 58% of Victorians experiencing homelessness were male and 42% were female.⁸⁷

However, women are much more likely to access homelessness services. According to the AIHW, in 2018–19, men made up only 39% of people accessing homelessness services and women made up 61%.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁶ Mr Jemal Ahmet, Executive Manager, Programs and Services, Centre for Multicultural Youth, public hearing, via videoconference, 14 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 9.

The Committee heard that one of the reasons for this large discrepancy in who accesses homelessness services may be family violence. In 2018–19, family violence was the most common reason for accessing homelessness services. Approximately one in three people who accessed services cited family violence as the main reason for presenting. Family violence is most often perpetrated by men. This means that women, often with children, are more likely to leave the family home and seek support from specialist services. This was explained to the Committee by Ms Alison Macdonald, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Domestic Violence Victoria:

the capacity to leave family violence and re-establish a life free from fear remains intimately connected to having a safe, secure and affordable home...

too many women and children and the most marginalised members of our community become homeless due to the choice of a partner, parent or other family member to use violence against them.⁸⁹

Family violence is discussed further in section 2.5.1 and Chapter 4.

Older women

Older women are a fast-growing cohort experiencing homelessness in Victoria. Older women more often experience financial disadvantage compared to men of the same age, due to lower wages and time out of the workforce.⁹⁰ This can make them more vulnerable to homelessness. The Council on the Ageing Victoria's submission highlighted the growth in older women experiencing homelessness and accessing homelessness services between 2011 and 2016 across Australia:

- A 70.8% increase in the number of women between 65 and 74 who reported being homeless.
- A 61% increase in women aged 75 years and over who reported being homeless.
- A 30% increase in the number of women aged between 65 and 74 years who had accessed homeless services.
- A 75% increase in older women sleeping in their cars.⁹¹

However, the Committee notes that homelessness amongst older women has come from a relatively low base. Women aged 65 and older make up 6% of Victoria's homeless cohort, according to ABS figures from 2016.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ms Alison Macdonald, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Domestic Violence Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

⁹⁰ The Salvation Army, *Submission 207*, p. 14.

⁹¹ Council on the Ageing (Victoria), *Submission 235*, p. 9.

⁹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 4.3, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, cat. no. 2049.0, 2016, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

Family violence against older people, commonly referred to as elder abuse, is one of the key causes of homelessness for older women. A total of 46.9% of women over the age of 55 who access specialist homelessness services reported family violence as their primary reason for seeking support.⁹³

Once older women find themselves homeless, their ability to get back on their feet is significantly hampered by a lifetime of structural societal disadvantages. These disadvantages include time out of the workforce and lower wages that leave many older women in a financially weaker position compared to men. This was explained in the Salvation Army's submission to the inquiry:

Women in this older age group today did not benefit from compulsory superannuation at the beginning of their working lives, they were more likely to have been paid at a lower rate than their male counterparts and were likely to have taken time out of paid workforce to have children and fulfil caring roles. In 1950 the basic wage for females was set at 75% of the basic wage for males. Additionally, a significant number of women in the cohort currently aged over 70 were required to resign their paid employment upon marriage. Many women now aged over 60 were also either required or expected to leave paid work when they became pregnant.⁹⁴

The Council on the Ageing also add that employment discrimination against older Victorians is a contributing factor in disadvantage amongst that group. They note an increase of 55,000 people aged 55–64 on Newstart (now Jobseeker) over the past five years.⁹⁵ A lack of employment is a key risk factor for homelessness.

FINDING 7: Older women are a fast-growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

2.4.2 By employment

There is a strong correlation between accessing homelessness services in Victoria and a reliance on Commonwealth income support as a main source of income.

The submission from AIHW showed that 45% of people accessing homelessness services were not in the work force,⁹⁶ 40% were unemployed and 15% were in employment. Data from the AIHW shows that of those who are employed, three in five (67%) were employed on a part-time basis.⁹⁷

⁹³ Council on the Ageing (Victoria), *Submission 235*, p. 23.

⁹⁴ The Salvation Army, *Submission 207*, p. 14.

⁹⁵ Council on the Ageing (Victoria), *Submission 235*, p. 15.

⁹⁶ 'Not in the workforce' refers to people are unable to work because they are too young, too old or have an injury or disability which precludes them from finding employment.

⁹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, p. 19.

As a result, the majority of people accessing homelessness services rely on Commonwealth income support as their main source of income. AIHW's data from 2019–20 shows that:

- 30% of people accessing homelessness services reported Newstart Allowance (now JobSeeker)
- 17% reported the Parenting Payment as their main source
- 15% said the Disability Support Pension was their main source of income
- A total of 9% of clients reported employee earnings as their main source of income, while 10% of clients reported having no income at all.⁹⁸

This reliance on Commonwealth income support was noted in evidence provided to the Committee by Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, Department of Health and Human Services:

If you look at the drivers of demand for homelessness services, the first and obvious point is that roughly half of people seeking homelessness services report commonwealth income support as their main income.⁹⁹

The high incidence of people on Commonwealth income support is an important consideration because the level of income support can be insufficient to secure and maintain housing in many parts of Victoria. This was noted by Mr Rimmer, who said:

clearly the adequacy of commonwealth income support payments is a very critical issue when it comes to people's ability to get into a sustainable housing situation and to sustain that sustainable housing situation.¹⁰⁰

The private rental market and the rate of Commonwealth income support are discussed in Chapter 6.

Evidence to the Committee suggests that the proportion of people receiving Commonwealth income support as their primary source of income was consistent across metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Ms Teresa Jayet, CEO of Mallee Family Care, a community health service in Mildura told the Committee that most people who accessed Mallee Family Care's services were on income support:

Three in four people accessing our people were on a government income support, with 67 per cent of those on JobSeeker, 24 per cent on a parenting payment and 9 per cent on youth allowance. And alarmingly, 29.5 per cent of those were on a disability support pension.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹⁹ Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ms Teresa Jayet, Chief Executive Officer, Mallee Family Care, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

The high incidence of people accessing homelessness services who rely on Commonwealth income support as their main source of income is striking. Efforts to provide support and help people to address the intersecting health, mental health, education and training issues to move them in a direction toward employment are discussed in Chapter 4.

FINDING 8: People who experience homelessness are more likely to access Commonwealth income support as their primary source of income.

2.4.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians make up 3.2% of Victoria's homeless population, despite making up less than 1% of Victoria's total population.¹⁰² Ms Vickianne Purcell from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency told the Committee that 17% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians accessed homelessness services in Victoria in 2019, compared to only 2% of the general population.¹⁰³

Ms PURCELL: Aboriginal people, as you would be aware, are very over-represented in the homelessness sector. In 2019, 17 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians received homelessness services, and in general it was 2 per cent—

The CHAIR: Sorry, could you just say that again?

Ms PURCELL: Seventeen per cent.

Mr ONDARCHIE: Nearly one in five.

Ms PURCELL: Yes, one in five received homelessness services in comparison with 2 per cent of all Victorians. ...I think Aboriginal people make up 1 per cent of the Victorian population, so that is a massive amount of people.

Source: Purcell, *Transcript of Evidence*, p.72.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians can face widespread racial discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage which stretches back through generations, beginning with the forced dispossession of land and continuing beyond the Stolen Generations. These factors contribute to higher levels of disadvantage on a range of socio-economic metrics, including homelessness. Ms Hazel Hudson from the Njernda

¹⁰² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 2.3, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, cat. no. 2049.0, 2016, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

¹⁰³ Ms Vickianne Purcell, Program Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 72.

Aboriginal Corporation explained to the Committee the impact past Government policies have had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how it relates to homelessness:

I have been in this position for three years, and what I have found since working in Njernda's family services is that homelessness has been impacted by the continual government interference going back to First Australia, where your statutory policies have had major impacts on how Aboriginal people live their lives, back to the removal of children, the stolen generation. All those have impeded the ability of Aboriginal people to actually create sufficient wealth to maintain their own home.¹⁰⁴

The work of Aboriginal housing associations is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.4.4 By region

Data from AIHW regarding people accessing homelessness services suggests that homelessness in Victoria is largely concentrated in Melbourne, with 74% of people accessing services from 'major cities'. People from inner regional areas made up 22% of people who access services and 4% of people were from outer regional areas.¹⁰⁵

Melbourne

The ABS data shows that in Melbourne the populations of people experiencing homelessness tend to be concentrated in two areas:

- the CBD and inner suburbs
- outer suburban growth areas such as Dandenong, Brimbank and Casey.¹⁰⁶

Melbourne's 'middle-ring' local government areas did not feature as strongly. This suggests to the Committee that people experiencing homelessness are concentrated in the CBD and inner suburbs, where homelessness services are predominantly located, as well as in the outer suburbs, where there is more economic disadvantage.

Table 2.5 shows the top 10 Local Government Areas for people experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

¹⁰⁴ Ms Hazel Hudson, Family Services Manager, Njernda Aboriginal Corporation, public hearing, via videoconference, 10 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 6.1, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, cat. no. 2049.0, 2016, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

Table 2.5 The top 10 Local Government Areas by number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria in 2016

Local Government Area	Number of people experiencing homelessness
Greater Dandenong	1,942
Melbourne	1,725
Brimbank	1,477
Casey	1,280
Port Phillip	1,127
Darebin	972
Hume	916
Monash	842
Yarra	838
Moreland	771

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 6.1, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, cat. 2049.0, 2016, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016#data-download>> accessed 30 September 2020.

The data from the ABS correlates with the information provided in Ask Izzy's open data platform. It shows that Melbourne CBD is the area with the most searches for housing services and that of the next top 9 postcodes, 7 are located in outer suburban Melbourne.

Table 2.6 Ask Izzy's top 10 postcodes where people sought housing services in 2019

Area	Number of searches on the Ask Izzy platform
Melbourne CBD	3116
Dandenong	212
Frankston	202
Cocoroc	160
Hoppers crossing	128
Craigieburn	126
Geelong	123
Broadmeadows	121
Reservoir	97
St Kilda	93

Source: Infoxchange, *Ask Izzy: open data platform*, <<https://opendata.askizzy.org.au/data.html>> accessed 2 October 2020.

The Melbourne CBD has long had a higher concentration of people experiencing homelessness. Part of the reason for this is that many homelessness services are located there. The submission from the City of Melbourne said that people experiencing homelessness have tended to gravitate to central Melbourne from other areas:

Research suggests that people sleeping rough and unable to resolve their homelessness gravitate to central Melbourne over time from suburban and non-metropolitan locations. Data from the City of Melbourne-funded Night Time Safe Space Program supports this research. People attending the program have identified as coming from mostly inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne and also some regional areas.¹⁰⁷

Dr Michael Fotheringham from AHURI addressed the high incidence of people experiencing homelessness in outer-suburban Melbourne. He told the Committee that it may be connected to the inclusion of severe overcrowding in homelessness statistics:

as much as Melbourne has the greatest amount of homelessness within Victoria, it is not just within the Melbourne City Council area—not just in the CBD. It is spread across the suburbs, and increasingly across the suburbs. Again part of that is due to overcrowding and part of that is also connected to the cultural diversity of communities, so where there are large migrant communities there is often more overcrowding, lower income levels, and through that higher rates of homelessness or inadequate housing. That is a continuing effect.¹⁰⁸

The increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in outer suburban areas does not just relate to severe overcrowding. AHURI's submission also quotes its recent study which found that a lack of affordable rental properties in these areas coupled with fewer employment opportunities plays a role:

A recent AHURI study (using spatial Census data on homelessness) found that homelessness was significantly more concentrated in urban areas, especially in Sydney and Melbourne – with this linked to rough sleepers and the severely overcrowded, but homelessness was becoming more dispersed over time including moving from inner to outer urban areas. The study found it was associated with regions where:

- there is a shortage of affordable private rental housing as measured by the match between supply and demand of low cost housing and median rents
- in locations with weaker labour markets.¹⁰⁹

The lack of affordable housing in outer-suburban Melbourne was also discussed by local councils. The City of Dandenong's submission stated that the municipality had the lowest median individual weekly gross income level in Melbourne, and in 2018, the highest unemployment rate in Victoria.¹¹⁰ Despite this, house prices and rent have increased significantly in recent decades, and the number of properties affordable to people on income support have plummeted:

In the past two decades, the cost of housing for local residents has surpassed growth in incomes. The median cost of houses in Greater Dandenong rose from 3.2 years of average median household income in 1996, to 8.1 years in 2016. Meantime, the

¹⁰⁷ City of Melbourne, *Submission 296*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Fotheringham, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 24.

¹¹⁰ City of Greater Dandenong, *Submission 199*, p. 8.

proportion of rental properties affordable to Centrelink recipients in Greater Dandenong has plunged from 83 per cent in 2001, to 4.9 per cent by 2019.¹¹¹

Housing affordability is addressed in section 2.5.2 of this report.

FINDING 9: Homelessness in Melbourne is geographically concentrated in inner Melbourne and outer suburban Melbourne.

Regional and rural Victoria

Homelessness is no less of a problem in regional and rural Victoria. Like Melbourne, housing affordability, family violence and socio-economic disadvantage are key causes of homelessness in regional and rural areas. However, these issues can be compounded because of weaker or seasonal employment, a significant lack of homelessness services, and in some areas fewer rental vacancies.

The data from the 2016 Census shows that in regional Victoria, the top five LGAs by prevalence of homelessness were Greater Geelong, Ballarat, Greater Shepparton, Greater Bendigo and Latrobe.¹¹² This order generally correlates with the population of these LGAs, however, Shepparton had a higher proportion relative to its population than others.

The Committee received evidence at a public hearing from Councillor Seema Abdullah, Mayor of the City of Greater Shepparton. She outlined some of the complex social and economic factors that may be behind the higher rates of homelessness in Shepparton:

In Greater Shepparton there is an unemployment rate of 4.7 per cent, youth disengagement of 30 per cent and almost twice the number of young people leaving school before year 11—that is, 20 per cent—compared to the Victorian average of 10 per cent. That is part of our story. We also have one of the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations outside metropolitan Melbourne, who are twice as likely to be renting and half as likely to own their homes. We also have the largest multicultural population in regional Victoria. New arrivals have significant difficulty in acquiring and maintaining secure housing, though evidence is anecdotal. We also have an above-state-average rate of family violence. Family violence, according to the commission's report, is the number one reason for women to become homeless. The fastest growing group of homeless people are older women, who may have raised families, completed tertiary education, held well-paid jobs but who retire with less superannuation.¹¹³

The Committee also travelled to Bairnsdale, Morwell and Wangaratta to hold public hearings. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it spoke to witnesses via videolink in Geelong, Warrnambool, Mildura, Swan Hill, Bendigo and Ballarat.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 6.1.

¹¹³ Abdullah, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

Some of the factors largely unique to regional areas that cause or exacerbate homelessness include:

- Crisis accommodation in the form of caravan parks and motels being unavailable during tourist season or at harvest times due to an influx of tourists and seasonal workers.¹¹⁴
- A lack of homelessness support services, often requiring travel to different cities to access services or find accommodation, which is not always possible due to few accessible transport options.
- Low rental vacancy and a lack of social housing, particularly 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings.¹¹⁵

The submission from the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) outlined the lack of availability of rental properties in regional areas. They wrote:

Regional Victoria is experiencing declining vacancy rates in rental properties when compared to other parts of Victoria. Tight rental markets place even further pressure on lower income households by adding to the existing challenges for renters. Such housing vulnerability and lack of secure tenure is often the first step on the pathway into homelessness.¹¹⁶

While some factors relating to homelessness were unique to regional Victoria, many were in line with the issues experienced in Melbourne. Family violence, housing affordability and disadvantage were common examples of causes of homelessness across the state. For example, Ms Marie Murfet from VincentCare in Shepparton said:

The two largest causes, of course, of homelessness are the accommodation needs and domestic and family violence. Just these two causes alone average 76 per cent of all presentations that we know of, particularly across our program field.¹¹⁷

This was echoed by Ms Chris McNamara, Coordinator of the Gippsland Homelessness Network who also cited family violence and 'housing crisis', which can relate to housing affordability, as amongst the most common reasons for accessing services:

As you will know, the causes of homelessness are complex and there is no single trigger for homelessness. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a part in homelessness, and the five most common reasons why people seek homelessness assistance in Gippsland are: housing crisis, 27 per cent; family violence, 23 per cent; financial difficulties, 13 per cent; inadequate and inappropriate dwellings, 10 per cent; and transition from custody with Fulham prison...¹¹⁸

The causes of homelessness in Victoria are discussed in section 2.5.

¹¹⁴ See for example Jayet, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 63.

¹¹⁶ Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 142*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ Ms Marie Murfet, Hub Manager, Hume Community Hub, VincentCare, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹¹⁸ Ms Chris McNamara, Coordinator, Gippsland Homelessness Network, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

FINDING 10: Homelessness in regional and rural Victoria is concentrated in major population centres, however, there are diverse needs across these regions that are exacerbated by a lack of services.

2.5 Why are Victorians becoming homeless?

Homelessness is more likely to occur amongst disadvantaged groups who face an accumulation of adverse economic, social and personal circumstances. It often arrives via a shock or an event for these individuals that is the last straw.¹¹⁹ Professor Guy Johnson told the Committee about how homelessness can be brought on by a sudden unexpected change in circumstances for people already at risk:

We have clear evidence that poverty is the common denominator. We are not all one pay cheque away from homelessness—homelessness typically affects those in the community with the least social, economic and cultural capital. For disadvantaged households, homelessness is often precipitated by a shock, a sudden, unexpected change in circumstances. These include financial shocks, relationship shocks, housing shocks and health shocks. The key point here is shocks are unpredictable; we cannot predict when someone will experience a shock. We have some evidence that issues thought to be a precursor to homelessness, such as mental illness and substance abuse, often emerge afterwards.¹²⁰

In their submission, AHURI told the Committee that there are various risk factors that lead to disadvantage and vulnerability to homelessness. They characterised them as individual risk factors and structural risk factors.

The individual factors, which relate to the personal circumstances of an individual, may include:

- **Family violence**—In 2016–17, 40 per cent of all clients of specialist homelessness services were seeking assistance due to family violence.
- **Intergenerational homelessness**—An AHURI study found almost half of all respondents experiencing homelessness (48.5%) indicated their parents were also homeless at some point in their lives.
- **Mental illness**—In 2016–17, about a quarter of people who sought assistance from homelessness services indicated that they had a mental health issue. In addition, the isolation and trauma of being homeless can lead to the onset of mental illness.
- **Loss of a partner or relationship breakdown**—Death of a partner and relationship breakdown are key factors for entering homelessness among older Australians.

¹¹⁹ Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

- **People leaving institutional settings**—Individuals exiting places such as hospitals, mental health facilities, the military, prisons and out of home care are at greater risk of homelessness than the general population.
- **Unemployment**—Unemployment (and more significantly, an absence of any employment history) is an indicator of risk for homelessness. In many instances, sustaining employment is not necessarily enough to prevent homelessness, such as in the case of low-paid apprentices and trainees.¹²¹

The structural risk factors, which are societal factors that can lead to disadvantage amongst vulnerable groups, include:

- **Housing markets**—in particular, rental markets affect the rate of homelessness. Increases in median market rents have been shown to increase the risk of entry into homelessness.
- **Labour and employment markets**—are significant causes of entry into homelessness. A one percentage point increase in the unemployment rate raises the likelihood of homelessness entry by one percentage point.
- **Neighbourhood**—also known as area level factors, these include areas with higher income inequality and high-density dwellings. Some areas may have inadequate homelessness service provision, and this can be a factor for entry into, or worsening of, homelessness.¹²²

These risk factors were echoed in the data collected by the AIHW as the main reason people sought support from homelessness services in 2019–20. The most common reason was family and domestic violence and the second most common was ‘housing crisis’ (pending evictions/foreclosures, rental and/or mortgage arrears)¹²³ which may relate to housing affordability. These reflect the same reasons as those in the 2018–19 data.

Table 2.7 outlines the main reasons for seeking assistance from services in Victoria in 2019–20.

¹²¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, pp. 11–2 and 21.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Homelessness services: Glossary*, 2018, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/glossary>> accessed 12 October 2020.

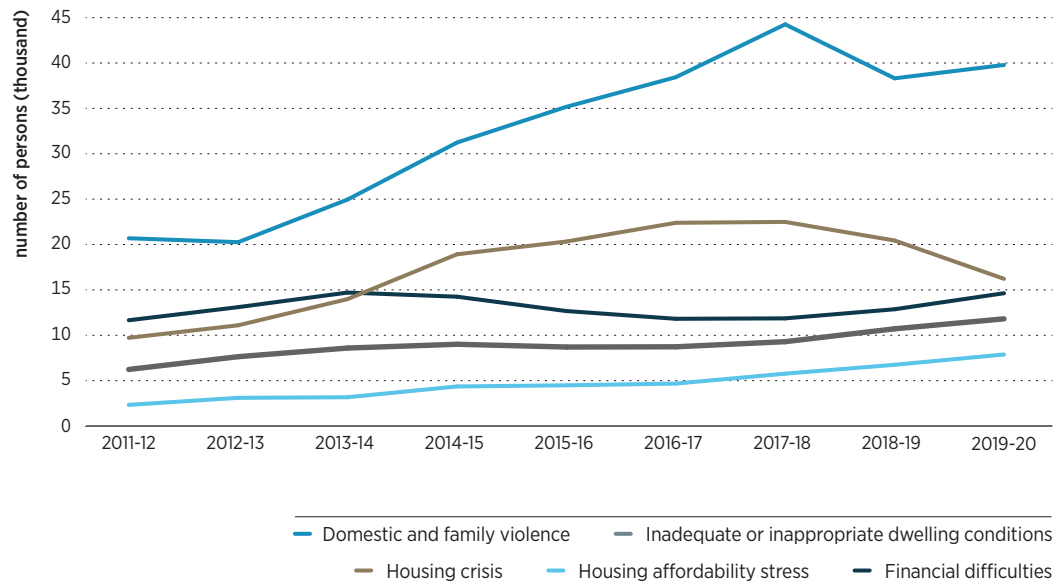
Table 2.7 Main reason for seeking assistance—Victoria, 2019–20

Group	Main reason for seeking assistance—first reported	Total clients (number)	Total clients (%)
Financial	Financial difficulties	14,719	12.8
	Housing affordability stress	7,929	6.9
	Employment difficulties	231	0.2
	Unemployment	279	0.2
	Problematic gambling	16	0.0
	Financial group total	23,174	20.2
Accommodation	Housing crisis	16,316	14.2
	Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions	11,880	10.4
	Previous accommodation ended	4,154	3.6
	Accommodation group total	32,350	28.2
Interpersonal relationships	Time out from family/other situation	872	0.8
	Relationship/family breakdown	3,420	3.0
	Sexual abuse	74	0.1
	Family and domestic violence	40,021	34.9
	Non-family violence	504	0.4
	Interpersonal relationships group total	44,891	39.2
Health	Mental health issues	1,320	1.2
	Medical issues	748	0.7
	Problematic drug or substance use	372	0.3
	Problematic alcohol use	98	0.1
	Health group total	2,538	2.2
Other	Transition from custodial arrangements	3,802	3.3
	Transition from foster care and child safety residential placements	190	0.2
	Transition from other care arrangements	276	0.2
	Discrimination including racial discrimination	25	0.0
	Itinerant	1,285	1.1
	Unable to return home due to environmental reasons	505	0.4
	Disengagement with school or other education and training	177	0.2
	Lack of family and/or community support	1,100	1.0
	Other	4,265	3.7
	Other group total	11,625	10.1
Not stated	Not stated group total	728	-

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.21, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/9e4e2ff0-d30c-419d-abe6-1bb648fc43dd/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report.pdf.aspx>> accessed 30 September 2020.

Figure 2.8 shows the changes in the top five reasons for seeking assistance from homelessness services in Victoria between 2011–12 and 2019–20.

Figure 2.8 The top 5 main reasons for seeking assistance from homelessness services in Victoria between 2011–12 and 2019–20



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) data cubes*, SHSC demographics data cube, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shsc-data-cubes/contents/specialist-homelessness-services-collection-shsc-data-cubes>> accessed 21 January 2021.

When considering the relative changes in the reasons people seek homelessness services between the years 2011–12 and 2018–19, family violence is an issue that has had an alarming rise in precedence. It has grown from 20,813 in 2011–12 to 38,540 in 2018–19, a rise of 81.5%.

Housing crisis is the other area that has seen a significant increase in this time. The AIHW defines housing crisis as ‘pending evictions/foreclosures, rental and/or mortgage arrears.’ This issue is linked to the cost of housing and the means to pay for it.

Family violence and housing affordability are discussed in the following sections.

2.5.1 Family violence

The Victorian public has rightly become more aware of family violence and its traumatic, complex, and multiple harms in recent years. This has occurred through the advocacy of many, including Rosie Batty, and the work of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Alison McDonald from Domestic Violence Victoria described how homelessness occurs amongst women experiencing family violence because they are forced to leave their home, often with children, to flee their perpetrator. These episodes of homelessness can have lasting effects on these women and their children:

Historically the way our service system was oriented was that when victim-survivors, usually women and their children, experienced family violence, the onus was on them to flee the violence, leave their homes, uproot their lives, leave their local communities, their schools and often their jobs and their livelihoods to seek safety away from the threat of the perpetrators' violence and abuse. We know that having one's housing, education, employment and social connections so significantly disrupted very often leads to a lifetime of disadvantage that can endure long beyond the end of a violent relationship. This impact is really significant on children in particular, with research demonstrating that many people who experience homelessness in childhood go on to experience precarious housing in adulthood, along with other associated measures of poverty and disadvantage.¹²⁴

The work of many advocates and the evidence from the Royal Commission has brought the issue of family violence into the open where once it was not talked about. There has been a cultural shift and all Victorians are more likely to speak up against abusive treatment of women (both verbal and physical) and women are less likely to suffer in silence. This may have resulted in more people seeking support services to escape dangerous situations and work towards a safe and stable life away from their abusers.

Ms Jeanette Large, CEO, Women's Property Institute, was asked by the Committee why there had been an increase in the number of family violence cases reported to the police following the Royal Commission. She told the Committee she believed that women felt more able and supported to come forward:

Women have become much more aware of the fact that it is not okay and that there is a whole range of violence, that it is not just physical violence. There is emotional abuse and economic abuse as well that is not okay to tolerate. I think the Royal Commission into Family Violence did make many women believe, 'Well maybe now something is going to happen, so, yes, I will report it'...¹²⁵

The Royal Commission into Family Violence noted that it was not clear whether there is a higher prevalence of family violence, however, there has been a greater reporting of family violence:

Although it is not clear whether the prevalence of family violence (that is, the proportion of the population who have experienced such violence at least once) is increasing, we do know that there has been greater reporting of family violence, leading to an increase in incidents being recognised. In Victoria this has been evident in the increased number of reports to police and the number of family violence intervention orders being issued.

The increase in incidents is also placing enormous pressure on family violence specialist services, family services, crisis accommodation and housing services, and legal and health services.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Macdonald, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 37–8.

¹²⁵ Ms Jeanette Large, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Property Initiatives, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

¹²⁶ State of Victoria, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and Recommendation*, Melbourne, 2016, p. 18.

The increasing rates of family violence as a cause of homelessness are tragic. As discussed in Chapter 5, there is not enough crisis and transitional accommodation for women and children fleeing violence. While some policies exist to promote victims of family violence to be able to stay in their own homes, the Committee heard that stronger implementation strategies are required.

FINDING 11: Family violence is the main reason individuals accessing homelessness services seek assistance in Victoria.

2.5.2 Housing affordability

Like family violence, the cost of housing was cited repeatedly by stakeholders as one of the key causes of homelessness. Simply put, housing costs too much for people on low incomes. The majority of people seeking homelessness services in Victoria are on fixed Commonwealth income support such as Jobseeker (formerly Newstart) or the Disability support pension. The most common housing situation for people at risk of homelessness is the private rental market. However, Commonwealth income supports have not risen as much as the cost of rent in recent years. This has caused severe housing stress amongst low income households and left them vulnerable to homelessness.

Most people accessing homelessness services in Victoria do so while renting. AIHW's submission showed that 47.5% of people at risk of homelessness when accessing homelessness services were in 'private or other housing (renter, rent free or owner)'.¹²⁷ Furthermore, evidence from the Grattan Institute shows that low-income households are more likely to rent than own property.¹²⁸

People who are experiencing homelessness are more likely to want one and two bedroom houses. This was explained by Carmen Faelis, Team Leader, Social Policy and Planning, City of Whittlesea, who said:

There is a lack of housing diversity... particularly a lack of one- and two-bedroom dwellings. Currently available and affordable rental properties mostly comprise three-plus bedrooms that do not fit the majority of the increasing cohort around lone households, and this will more than double.¹²⁹

The submission from the Department of Health and Human Services outlines the severity of the lack of affordable housing. The proportion of rental properties affordable for people on income support in Melbourne has diminished to extremely low levels of 2%. This accompanies low proportions for other lower income households:

Currently, two per cent of properties are affordable for households living on income support. While 28 per cent of properties are affordable for households living on the

¹²⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*.

¹²⁸ Grattan Institute, *Submission 307*.

¹²⁹ Ms Carmen Faelis, Team Leader, Social Policy and Planning, City of Whittlesea, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

minimum wage. In regional Victoria, 11 per cent of all new lettings were affordable to lower income households receiving income support payments.¹³⁰

When considering 1- and 2-bedroom rentals, the scarcity of properties is even greater. The DHHS Rental Report for June 2020 showed that in metropolitan Melbourne for people on income support only 0.3% of 1-bedroom rentals were affordable and 1.4% of 2-bedroom rentals were affordable.¹³¹

In areas of outer suburban Melbourne like the City of Whittlesea, which once had high levels of affordable homes, it has become increasingly difficult for people on low incomes to find a place to rent. Ms Jo Smith from Haven; Home, Safe outlined the change in affordability over the past 20 years:

I completely agree that we need much more social housing, but we also need access to affordable housing. It was really interesting to me to look at some of these statistics... As you can see, 20 years ago nearly half the houses in Whittlesea—in fact 15 years or 16 years ago more than half the houses—were deemed affordable by the Government's own figures. Now it is at 12.7. It has been down to as low as 7 or 8 per cent as property prices rise.¹³²

The submission from DHHS added that competition for affordable housing is likely to continue due to an increase in the number of low-income households in Victoria:

Low incomes combined with a lack of secure, affordable housing options has also driven the increase in homelessness. Between 2007–08 and 2017–18, the total number of households in Victoria grew by 21.9 per cent, while the total number of low-income households renting in the private rental sector increased by 28.2 per cent (to 332,391 households). Over the same time period, the number of lower income rental households in housing affordability stress (paying more than 30% of household income in housing costs) grew by 63.2 per cent (to 145,770 households).¹³³

Because there are very few affordable dwellings to rent, people on low incomes have to pay a higher portion of their income to afford the rent. This places households in housing stress, which occurs when households spend over 30% of their income on rent. The submission from the Grattan institute outlined the proportion of low income-households that are in housing stress:

Many low-income Victorian renters are struggling: almost 44 per cent of them are suffering rental stress. The share of low-income Victorian renters in rental stress has increased, up from 34.5 per cent in 2007–08 to 43.9 per cent in 2017–18.¹³⁴

For low income households in housing stress, an unexpected shock such as loss of income or health issues is more likely to leave them at risk of homelessness.

¹³⁰ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 15.

¹³¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Rental Report June quarter 2020*, Victorian Government, online, 2020, p. 20.

¹³² Ms Jo Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 46–7.

¹³³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 13.

¹³⁴ Grattan Institute, *Submission 307*, p. 6.

Why is the private rental market unaffordable to people on income support?

Evidence to the Committee suggests that the factors contributing to the price of rent are multifaceted. However, three key issues were presented to the Committee that may have a bearing on why there are so few properties affordable for people on income support:

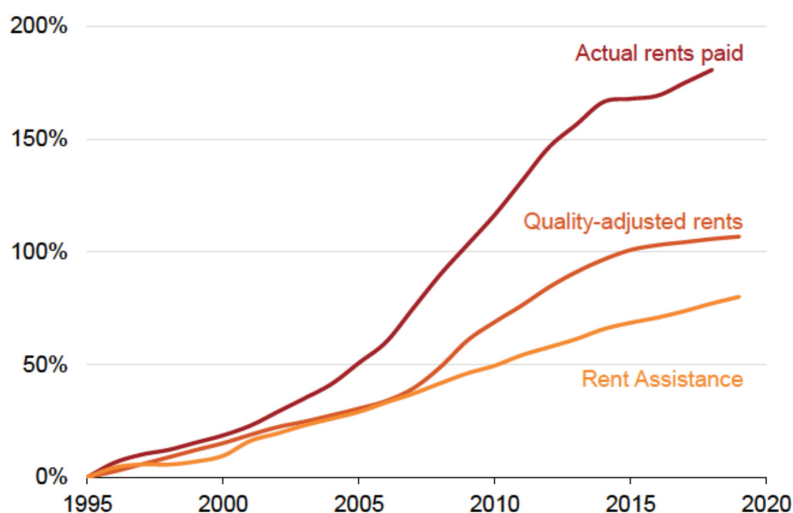
- the relatively low amount of income support, which has been rising far more slowly than rental costs
- limited supply of affordable housing, particularly 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings that are in high demand for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness
- property price increases.

Individuals on Commonwealth income support have seen payments reduce relative to the cost of rent for many years. The resultant gap between income support and the cost of rent has caused significant financial hardship for many. The Department of Health and Human Service's submission outlined:

Lack of income is a major driver of homelessness. The failure of the Commonwealth Government to adequately index income supports is making an already difficult situation worse. The base rate of Newstart has not increased in real terms since 1994 and is well-below standard benchmarks for income adequacy and poverty. Unemployment payments in Australia are the lowest in the OECD and nationally we have the second highest rate of poverty among the unemployed across all OECD nations. There is also a large and growing gap between Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) payments (that is linked to the consumer price index) and market rental prices.¹³⁵

Figure 2.9, provided by the Grattan Institute, illustrates the growth of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (one stream of Commonwealth income support) versus growth in rental prices from 1995.

¹³⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 14.

Figure 2.9 Commonwealth Rent Assistance in comparison to the rise in rent between 1995 and 2020

Source: Grattan Institute, *Submission 307*, p. 8.

As well as Rent Assistance, most Commonwealth allowances (including Jobseeker) are indexed to the CPI.¹³⁶ This puts people reliant on Commonwealth income support at a disadvantage when competing for rental properties with people in employment, with wages typically rising faster than the CPI.

Ms Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons stated that because of the scarcity of affordable rental properties, people on income support typically face competition from people who have employment on higher incomes:

The problem that we have is that in the private rental market, in cities in particular, there is a lot of pressure, particularly on low-cost rental stock, and so rents are going up higher than low wages and higher than Centrelink payments—actually even higher for lower income rents relative to wages than for all rents. What that is about is when there is pressure on the rental market—remember it is a competitive process—every individual rental opportunity has its own sort of mini-competition for it and the landlord will pick the best, probably the highest income household for that property.¹³⁷

The supply of affordable properties for rent, particularly 1- and 2-bedroom properties, is another factor that was highlighted to the Committee. Low supply of properties appropriate to the needs of people at risk of homelessness may be contributing to higher rental prices. Ms Carmen Faelis from the City of Whittlesea outlined the lack of supply of affordable rental properties in the municipality:

In December 2018 there were only 10 one-bedroom units and 59 two-bedroom units available for rent in Whittlesea, although we know there is a growing proportion of lone-person households. If you have got a two-bedroom place, you cannot afford that; you need accommodation that will really fit your needs...

¹³⁶ Michael Klappdor, *Adequacy of income support payments*, briefing paper, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 2013.

¹³⁷ Colvin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

In terms of housing diversity there is no surprise. There is a lack of housing diversity—you have heard that before from the previous speakers—particularly a lack of one- and two-bedroom dwellings. Currently available and affordable rental properties mostly comprise three-plus bedrooms that do not fit the majority of the increasing cohort around lone households, and this will more than double. You are hearing the same sort of story: out there it seems like it is a great place that is affordable but in reality it is not. As we know, it just takes one or two things to go wrong and you will not be able to live in that house, even if you currently can afford it at the moment.¹³⁸

Part of the reason for the dwindling supply of rental properties may be to do with population growth and the rate of construction of new housing, both in new developments and in established suburbs.

The Committee heard that property price rises may be a contributing cause. Bevan Warner from Launch Housing said:

Causes of homelessness: it has its roots, unquestionably, in a flawed housing market and inadequate incomes. As a community we continue to prioritise property price speculation as a means to private wealth creation, through people owning more than one home, ahead of our fellow citizens' basic needs. We are stretching inequality further, and this will be a threat to social cohesion and a problem handballed to future generations. This housing system crisis has been unfolding for 30 years and we need to act now to reverse it.¹⁰⁸

This was also mentioned by Venita Mackinnon from Frankston City Council:

We are an established residential municipality, with a lot of older style 1960s and 1970s suburban estates of three-bedroom homes on large suburban blocks. As you can imagine, they are subject to increasing developer interest in recent years, which is particularly responsible for pushing up the property prices in our area and impacting on our homelessness rates.¹³⁹

The private rental market is not providing housing for people at risk of homelessness and people who are homeless. This leaves an increasing number of low-income Victorians at risk of long-term homelessness. The evidence presented to the Committee suggests that to remedy the situation, the Victorian Government could intervene in one or more of the following ways:

- provide more social housing with subsidised rent that matches the ability of the resident to pay
- advocate to the Commonwealth Government to increase income support payments so that recipients can afford the increased costs of housing
- encourage a reduction in the cost of housing through changes to planning and tax policies.

¹³⁸ Faelis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹³⁹ Ms Venita Mackinnon, Social and Community Planner, Frankston City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

These strategies to increase supply of long-term housing and reduce incidences of homelessness are considered in detail in Chapter 6.

FINDING 12: Housing affordability is a key factor in homelessness in Victoria.

2.5.3 Other groups at risk

The Victorian Government provided the Committee with a comprehensive overview of the cohorts at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. This 'Summary of Cohorts' is included in the Department of Health and Human Service's submission (Submission 423).

These at-risk groups are addressed more fully elsewhere in this report, particularly in Chapter 4 relating to early intervention and Chapter 5 regarding crisis and transitional accommodation.

A summary of the cohorts at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness as identified by the DHHS submission, are:

- Family violence
 - Survivors
 - Pregnant women
 - Adolescents who use violence
 - Perpetrators of family violence
- People experiencing mental ill health
- Older Victorians
 - Older Victorians who rent
 - Older women
- People with a disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with drug and alcohol issues
- CALD communities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people
- Children and Young People
 - Young people transitioning from out of home care
 - Young People involved with the criminal justice system

- People Leaving Care
- Adults involved with the criminal justice system
- Regional and rural communities.

3 The homelessness sector

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the governance structure for the homelessness sector in Victoria. It describes the key agencies and their roles and responsibilities, as well as funding agreements with the Commonwealth Government. The Chapter then details how the complex homelessness sector is structured and funded as well as examples of joint initiatives between the Commonwealth and Victorian governments.

The Committee heard from stakeholders that improvements could be made to system-wide issues including outcome-based support, time-limited support, service coordination and integration as well as service overlap.

This Chapter also analyses whether homelessness services are coping with the considerable demand placed on them and presents the Committee's view in relation to areas where systemic change is needed.

3.2 Governance structure

In Victoria, social housing is governed under the *Housing Act 1983* (Vic). The key objective of the Act is to 'ensure that every person in Victoria has adequate and appropriate housing at a price within his or her means'.¹ The Act aims to achieve this by encouraging:

- provision of well-maintained public housing
- participation of non-profit bodies in the provision of affordable rental housing
- distribution of housing financial assistance according to need
- promotion of orderly planning, assembly and development of land.²

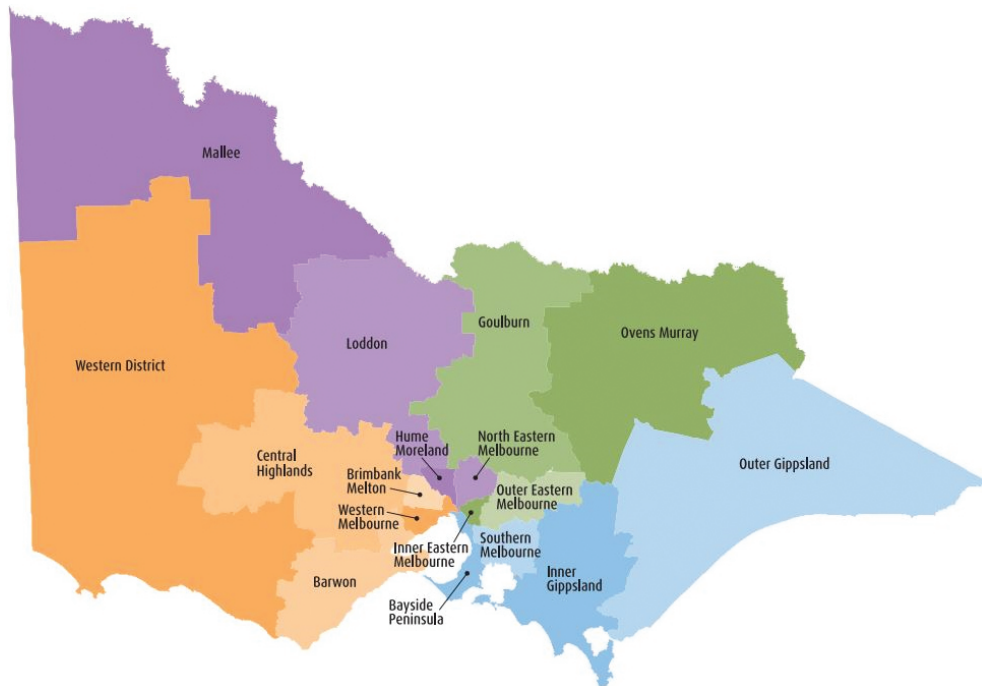
The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is responsible for administering the Housing Act. DHHS has several responsibilities and functions under the Act, such as managing public housing applications, overseeing housing programs, managing the Victorian Government's homelessness and social housing initiatives, and developing social housing policy.

DHHS is operationally split into four divisions: northern, southern, eastern and western. Each division corresponds to regional areas and sections of the Melbourne metropolitan area. These divisions are shown in Figure 3.1.

¹ *Housing Act 1983* (Vic) s 6(1)(a).

² *Ibid.*

Figure 3.1 Operational divisions of the Department of Health and Human Services



Key:
 Purple—North division (Loddon Area; Mallee Area; Hume Moreland Area; North Eastern Melbourne Area)
 Green—East Division (Goulburn Area; Ovens Murray Area; Outer Eastern Melbourne Area; Inner Eastern Melbourne Area)
 Orange—West Division (Western District Area; Central Highlands Area; Barwon Area; Western Melbourne Area; Brimbank Melton Area)
 Blue—South Division (Outer Gippsland Area; Inner Gippsland Area; Southern Melbourne Area; Bayside Peninsula Area)

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Our organisation*, <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/our-organisation>> accessed 10 January 2021.

Corresponding to these regions are Local Area Service Networks. These networks are made up of homelessness service agencies that work together in a cooperative arrangement under the ‘opening doors’ policy framework.³

The Local Area Service Networks work together to coordinate front line service issues and develop solutions to address gaps and barriers in their service area.

The Department of Health and Human Services has been restructured to form two new departments: the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. However, the Committee will continue to refer to DHHS throughout this report as they were the responsible Department at the time the Committee received its evidence for this inquiry.

³ Council to Homeless Persons, *The Opening Doors Framework*, <<https://chp.org.au/homelessness/the-opening-doors-framework>> accessed 10 January 2021.

3.2.1 Director of Housing

The Director of Housing is a senior official at DHHS that is responsible for purchasing, acquiring and generally controlling social housing properties. The Director of Housing is established under s 9 of the *Housing Act 1983* (Vic).

All of Victoria's public housing stock is owned by the Director of Housing. In addition to public housing, the Director is also able to own community housing properties; however, these are managed by not-for-profit organisations which are regulated by the Victorian Housing Registrar. Community housing organisations are also able to purchase properties directly.

The Director of Housing's powers include the ability to:

- Purchase or compulsorily acquire any land for public housing.⁴
- Develop, manage and generally control land used for public housing.⁵

The Director of Housing sits within DHHS (now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing) and is required to report to the Department's Secretary.

3.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians have access to culturally appropriate, aboriginal-led social housing.

The largest provider of such culturally appropriate housing is Aboriginal Housing Victoria, which owns and manages over 1,500 community housing dwellings, which house over 4,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians.⁶

In addition to Aboriginal Victoria's role as Victoria's largest provider of culturally appropriate social housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians, it is the lead agency for the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness policy. In 2020, the agency released *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home*, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework.

At a public hearing Ms Jenny Samms, Special Adviser at Aboriginal Housing Victoria explained the key approach of the framework:

Our approach is to move the demand curve so that people become independent so that, firstly, they can get crisis and transitional housing. That is absolutely critical. Some people can go from homelessness to private rental, with support. The private rental market opens up. Some people come out of social housing into private rental. Some people go into private ownership. We are trying to move to independence, and

⁴ *Housing Act 1983* (Vic) s 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶ CHiMES Housing Registrar, *Aboriginal Housing Victoria Limited*, 2009, <<https://chimes.force.com/registeredhousingdetail>> accessed 11 January 2021.

our concept of private ownership is not just a family or an individual owning a house—it is that, and that builds intergenerational wealth—but it is something more. It is also about the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal community organisations owning the properties and making them work for community. And that is important too. So that is where we are coming from. It is about that shift.⁷

3.2.3 Funding arrangements

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) was introduced in July 2018 and is due to expire in June 2023. This agreement replaced the National Affordable Housing Agreement which was supported by the National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment. The NHHA replaced the funding provided by its predecessor agreement and maintains the funding associated with the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

The NHHA was negotiated as a multilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, and also includes individual bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth Government and each of the states and territories. Victoria's bilateral agreement under the NHHA outlines Victoria's homelessness strategy and articulates desired outcomes from the funding received. According to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, funding from the NHHA is 'contingent upon jurisdictions having publicly available housing and homelessness strategies, improving data and transparent reporting, and matching homelessness funding in line with previous agreements.'⁸

As at 2019, the NHHA had allocated \$4.6 billion over three years towards housing and homelessness, including \$375 million for homelessness services.

Victoria's bilateral arrangement under NHHA:

- Commonwealth will provide Victoria \$2 billion over a five-year period, beginning with \$395.5 million in 2018-19.
- Victoria is required to match the Commonwealth's homelessness funding, estimated at \$122.8 million over a five-year period.
- Victoria's outcomes should aim to achieve its state specific measures.
- Victoria is required to publicly report on its progress against its targets for social housing and homelessness measures.

Reporting and outcome requirements of the NHHA are discussed in more detail in section 3.3.2.

⁷ Ms Jenny Samms, Special Adviser, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71.

⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 27.

3.3 The homelessness sector

In Victoria, the primary provider of homelessness services is the non-government sector. At the time of writing, the homelessness sector received approximately \$300 million in annual funding from both the Victorian and Commonwealth governments, including funding received from the NHHA.⁹ This funding is used to provide services and assistance to over 100,000 Victorians who access homelessness services across Victoria.¹⁰ Services are delivered by over 130 agencies which administer around 80 different projects (or services). People experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness are able to access services through 75 entry points which are set up across Victoria.¹¹ Figure 3.2 shows the location of entry points across Victoria and Figure 3.3 shows a close-up of entry points across metropolitan Melbourne.

Figure 3.2 Entry points for homelessness services across Victoria



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee. Data taken from Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing: Getting Help*, November 2019, <<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/getting-help>> accessed 29 October 2020.

⁹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, supplementary evidence received 9 September 2020, p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ms Sherri Bruinhout, Deputy Commander, COVID-19 Public Housing Response and Executive Director, Housing Pathways and Outcomes, Housing Division, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

Figure 3.3 Entry points for homelessness services in metropolitan Melbourne



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee. Data taken from Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing: Getting Help*.

Across Victoria there are a range of agencies which include large and small organisations in both regional and metropolitan locations, as well as services which focus on specific cohorts.¹²

In Victoria, the homelessness service system is broadly structured into three types of responses:

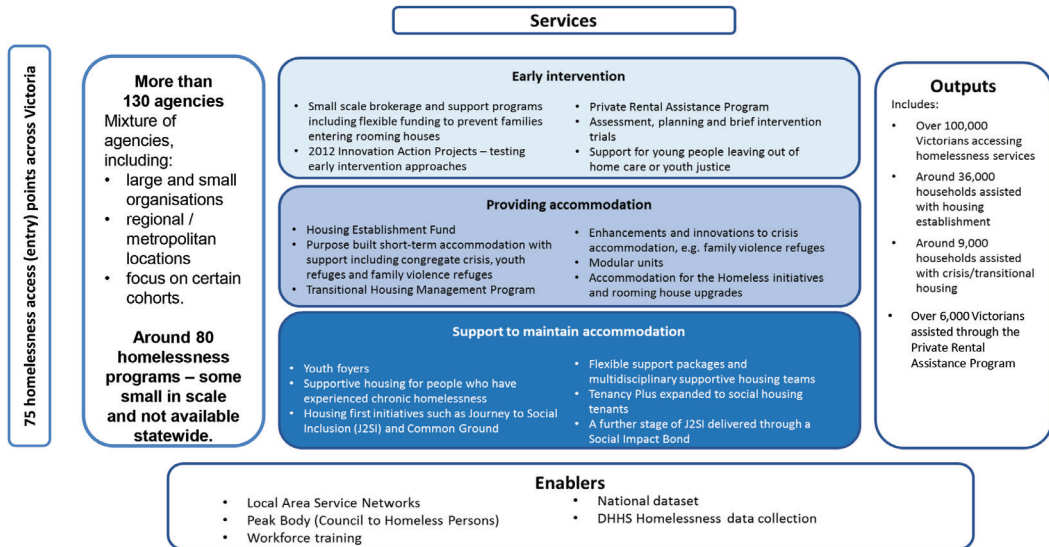
- **Early intervention:** helping people maintain accommodation and focusing on preventing homelessness.
- **Providing accommodation:** finding accommodation for people who have reached a crisis point and focusing on getting people into long-term housing.
- **Support to maintain accommodation:** focusing on supporting people to maintain housing.¹³

Figure 3.4, provided by DHHS at a public hearing, provides an overview of the homelessness service structure in Victoria.

¹² Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, p. 5.

¹³ Bruinhout, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 35–6.

Figure 3.4 Victorian homelessness service system



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, p. 5.

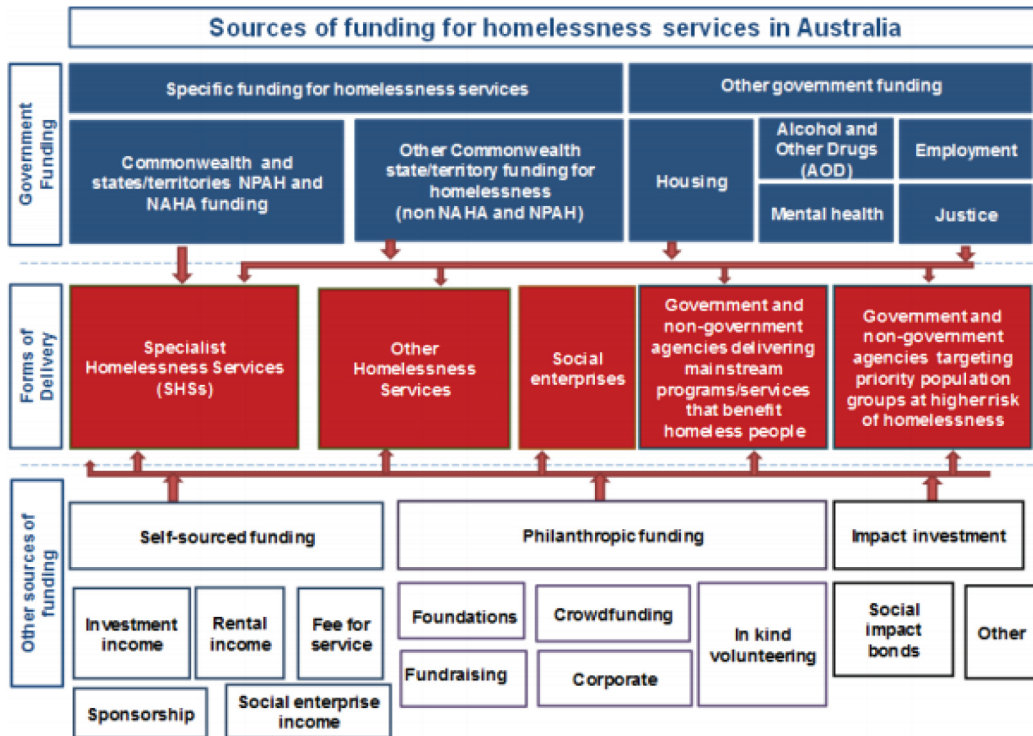
The following sections set out some of the issues raised with the Committee throughout the inquiry with regard to the homelessness sector. These include funding structures and availability; sector accountability; service overlap and gaps; and the ability of the sector to cope with demand.

3.3.1 Funding structures

The housing and homelessness sector receives the majority of its funding from government sources with the remaining funding coming from private investment. According to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's submission, approximately 85% of funding received by homelessness services is from government sources and the remainder from a mix of philanthropy, impact investment and self-sourced funding (e.g. rent).¹⁴ Figure 3.5 shows the sources of funding for organisations delivering services to homeless people in Australia.

14 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 27.

Figure 3.5 Sources of funding for organisations delivering services to homeless people in Australia



Source: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 27.

There are several funding pathways across the federal and state level for the homelessness sector, with the key pathway being the NHA.

The Committee has produced the following table (Table 3.1) which provides an overview of some of the key policies and programs which fund the homelessness sector, including an overview of Victoria’s bilateral agreement under the NHA.

Table 3.1 Overview of policies and funding for Victoria's housing and homelessness sector

	Description	Relevant legislation
Joint initiatives		
Housing Establishment Fund (HEF)	<p>HEF is jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments. It is available to transitional housing management and homelessness support program agencies to assist eligible clients to access overnight accommodation or private rental accommodation.</p> <p>It also provides brokerage funding to homelessness services to purchase products for people experiencing homelessness, including emergency accommodation, private rent in advance, removals, storage and essential furniture.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional Housing Management Program—provides transitional accommodation for up to 12 months (18 months for young people) to people who are homeless or at risk. • Homelessness Support program—provides funding to specific organisations linked with the Transitional Housing Management program to deliver homelessness services through established entry points. Formerly the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. • Crisis supported accommodation—immediate support in the form of women's and youth refuges and major inner city crisis supported accommodation services. From one night up to six weeks. 	
Commonwealth		
National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)	<p>A Commonwealth initiative introduced in 2008, the NRAS aims to increase the supply of new and affordable rental dwellings by providing an annual financial incentive for up to ten years. This incentive is issued to housing providers ('approved participants') to provide affordable rental dwellings at least 20 per cent below market rates.</p> <p>The NRAS aims to encourage medium to large-scale investment in affordable housing (usually 100 or more houses). This means it is not generally available to small-scale, private, individual investors in the rental property market.</p> <p>The NRAS offers an annual incentive to investors with combined contributions from the Commonwealth and state/ territory governments. The Commonwealth offers an annual refundable tax offset (or a cash payment for endorsed charitable institutions) for up to 10 years. States and territories can also make a direct payment or pay-in-kind (such as reduced stamp duty or land tax) contribution.</p> <p>2019/2020 NRAS Year (Incentive Values, per dwelling) Commonwealth = \$8,436.07 State/Territory = \$2,812.02</p>	<p><i>National Rental Affordability Scheme Act 2008</i> (Cth)</p> <p><i>National Rental Affordability Scheme Regulations 2008</i> (Cth)</p>
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	<p>Rent Assistance is a non-taxable income supplement payable to eligible people who rent in the private rental market or community housing.</p> <p>Rent Assistance is payable at the rate of 75 cents for every dollar of rent payable above the rent threshold until the maximum rate of payment is reached. Rent thresholds and maximum rates vary according to a client's family situation and the number of children they have.</p> <p>The Australian Government's real expenditure on Commonwealth Rent Assistance was \$4.4 billion in 2018–19.</p>	

Description		Relevant legislation
Commonwealth Rent Assistance (continued)	Year	Expenditure (Vic), millions of dollars
	2018-19	970.9
	2017-18	999.7
	2016-17	1,017.9
	2015-16	1,026.3
	2014-15	998.9
Victoria		
Victoria's big social housing build	<p>The big social housing build is part of Victoria's economic recovery strategy from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020/21 Victorian budget, the Government announced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$5.3 billion to build 12,000 social housing properties, including— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9,300 new social housing properties • Replacement of 1,100 properties • Nearly 2,900 properties built to assist low-to-moderate income earners live closer to work • 2,000 of the new properties will be for Victorians living with mental illness. • The build will support over 10,000 jobs per year over a four-year period; peaking at 18,000 jobs. • The build will increase Victoria's social housing stock by 10% over a four-year period. • 25% of funding is allocated to regional Victoria. 	
Homes for Victorians	<p>Homes for Victorians is Victoria's overarching policy framework on public and affordable housing. The policy aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist first-home buyers to enter the market • Increase supply of housing through faster planning • Promote stability and affordability for renters • Increase and renew social housing stock • Improve housing services for Victorians in need. <p>Programs overseen by Homes for Victorians include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Housing Renewal Program: aims to improve standards of living and create more housing properties through the redevelopment of ageing public housing estates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redeveloped properties must consist of at least 10% more public housing than were present before redevelopment. • Victorian Social Housing Growth Fund: \$1 billion capital fund for building new social housing. • HomesVic: co-purchasing of properties with first home buyers. • Social Housing Pipeline: \$120 million fund to increase social housing through development, rapid purchasing and renewal— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$60 million to increase number of social housing properties on vacant or under-used land owned by the Director of Housing • \$30 million for Flemington renewal program—first stage renewal of Flemington public housing estate • \$23 million to increase supply of short and long term housing for homelessness (expecting to purchase 60 homes and lease up to 70) • \$5 million to purchase and upgrade City Gate apartments in St Kilda. 	<p><i>Housing Act 1983 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Housing Amendment (Victorian Housing Register and Other Matters) Act 2016 (Vic)</i></p>

	Description	Relevant legislation
Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan (HRSAP)	<p>The HRSAP launched in 2018 and provides a comprehensive plan to support three priority rough sleeping cohorts: those recently homeless and rough sleeping; people who have been rough sleeping for an extended period of time; and people chronically rough sleeping.</p> <p>The investment outlined in the plan builds on the investment from the Homes for Victorians initiative.</p> <p>Key initiatives under HRSAP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$4.8 million for additional one-bedroom modular homes in hot spot locations. • \$9 million to establish six supportive housing teams to deliver individualised support to vulnerable and complex clients once they are housed. • \$8.2 million to fund three community-sector projects that will build long-term housing options for vulnerable client groups, including women and children escaping family violence and young people leaving out-of-home care. 	

Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

Table 3.1 is by no means an exhaustive list of all the funding and policy programs available to the housing and homelessness sector. There are many other programs at the federal and state level which also contribute to funding available to the sector. Other such initiatives include, for example:

- tax or other incentives for public housing investment
- social security payments and assistance
- packages and programmes specifically focused on prevention
- funding for pilot programs or innovative models, for example, the Inclusionary Housing Pilot
- funding for specific accommodation types (such as rooming houses)
- funding for specific risk factors or issues connected to homelessness (such as family violence and mental health).

A list of the homelessness policies, programs and initiatives put in place by the Victorian Government can be found in Appendix 3 and 4 of the Department of Health and Human Services' submission, which can be found on the Committee's website.¹⁵

Despite the plethora of funding and policy programs existing at the national level, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's submission contended that homelessness national funding frameworks do not 'provide an overarching vision, and there is no national plan to address homelessness that takes into account structural drivers'.¹⁶ The submission went on to state that, 'one cannot speak of an 'Australian

¹⁵ Victorian Government submission can be accessed at: <[https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry_into_Homelessness_in_Victoria/Submissions/S423 - Department of Health and Human Services - Director of Housing_Redacted.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry_into_Homelessness_in_Victoria/Submissions/S423_-_Department_of_Health_and_Human_Services_-_Director_of_Housing_Redacted.pdf)>

¹⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 26.

homelessness system'. Rather each state and territory has their own independent homelessness system.¹⁷ The Committee believes there could be substantial benefit in developing a national policy framework which looks at the structural drivers of homelessness. However, it is important to acknowledge that the experience and response to homelessness is driven by local contexts and therefore Victoria should retain its primary responsibility in responding to homelessness and developing outcome measures based on the experiences of Victoria's homeless cohort.

Ms Nada Nasser, State Director, Mission Australia contended that because funding for a single client often intersects across various organisations and sectors, depending on their individual needs, it makes it difficult to coordinate resources for more effective case management. At a public hearing, Ms Nasser argued:

As we said, the problem of homelessness is a complex one, and it does require a range of different interventions. If a homeless young person has a key worker or a key support worker, that that worker is the person that helps them to navigate the system I think would be a great start.

The challenge with funding, then, is that often the work could be in schools. It could be through the mental health system. It could be through the AOD system. It could be through the child protection system. It could be through housing. So because it intersects with a number of the program areas, the challenge from a funding perspective is who funds that all, and for that reason we do not end up with that level of coordination from a consumer and from a client perspective.

...

So there is already a willingness and a level of practise of collaboration. I think the challenge is that bit: if you can get some joined-up funding to allow a consumer or a person like Kea to have someone who is a support person who can work with them along the journey through their journey of recovery until they achieve independence and until they can thrive.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ms Nada Nasser, State Director, Mission Australia, public hearing, via videoconference, 14 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

BOX 3.1: Kea

Kea is a young Yorta Yorta Wurundjeri woman and mother of three young children. She currently resides at Bunjilwarra youth healing centre where she is recovering from trauma and drug addiction.

Kea was first put on the priority housing list when she was pregnant with her first child, as she and her partner were unable to find affordable private accommodation. While she waited for public housing, she lived with her mother in her mother's small two-bedroom unit. After four and a half years Kea moved into transitional housing for 18 months until she was eventually offered permanent housing.

After moving into permanent housing, Kea and her partner had two more children. Life became reasonably stable for a period, until Kea lost her sister to suicide, and 'that is when the drug use and family violence started'. Kea's partner became violent and it was no longer safe for Kea and her three children to be around him. Although Kea separated from her partner, she says he continued to show up at the family home, prompting Kea to alert the police. The police contacted Child Protection, which Kea told the Committee resulted in her children being removed and placed in care.

With her children gone, Kea could not bear to stay in the house, finding that it triggered memories of the violence she had experienced and left her feeling unsafe. This took its toll on her mental health and hindered her recovery from substance abuse. Unable to live in the house, Kea nonetheless continued to pay the rent and bills, while also paying money to the family and friends she stayed with. She requested a priority transfer with the Department of Health and Human Services as well as a reduction in rent, given she had not lived at the house for nine months. At the time of writing, Kea was waiting for a response from the Department.

In order to be reunited with her children, Kea needs safe housing. However, as a single mother on a low income, Kea believes she may struggle to afford even public housing. Kea has seen other families in similar situations, who after paying rent struggle to support themselves and their children and end up being evicted for owing rent in arrears.

Kea explained to the Committee the importance of having a safe place to live for her and her children:

Having a safe home for my children is a big part of my recovery, and without that I feel it may jeopardise all that I am working so hard to overcome. I read a quote every day from a past resident, a young person, and it says, 'You cannot heal in a place that helps make you sick.'

Source: Ms Kea Bamblett-Edwards, Mission Australia, public hearing, via videoconference, 14 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p 15.

Ms Nasser further explained that funding structures are often siloed and are unable to cover the varying and complex needs a single person can experience:

One of the barriers to collaboration – sometimes it is the funding structures where you have got different funding programs that are siloed. It is very rare that you see holistic programs where there is funding that is provided to cover the gamut of support that a person might need. I think that looking at holistic supports, particularly place-based, where it is locational—you know, you have a community and the focus is on that community and the needs of that community and partnerships across the spectrum. There are some really great models—you know, collective impact and those sorts of models where the focus is on a community working together to support disadvantaged people within the community. I think there is already a lot of collaboration that we can build on, but certainly if some of our funding programs became less siloed, that would be a great help.¹⁹

Coordination of funding to better provide holistic services to clients who have multiple needs was also raised by the City of Greater Geelong. Ms Robyn Stevens, Director, City of Greater Geelong, discussed the need to link services so a person has access to a wider range of support:

We also think there is a real opportunity to improve service coordination between mainstream services and organisations as well as specialist services. So it is not just about funding to create specialist service models for people who are experiencing homelessness. It is about better linking health care, employment, education, income support and other mainstream services in with homelessness services so that there is a range of care options that are available for people to be able to access, depending on where they are in their journey towards improving their participation as a member of the community.²⁰

3.3.2 Data and reporting requirements for services

Homelessness services are required to collect and report data about their services so that there is a record of information for:

- types of clients presenting at an agency
- number of clients who received assistance and the type of assistance received
- individuals or families who requested services but did not receive it
- trends in client characteristics, services provided and the outcomes at the end of the support period.²¹

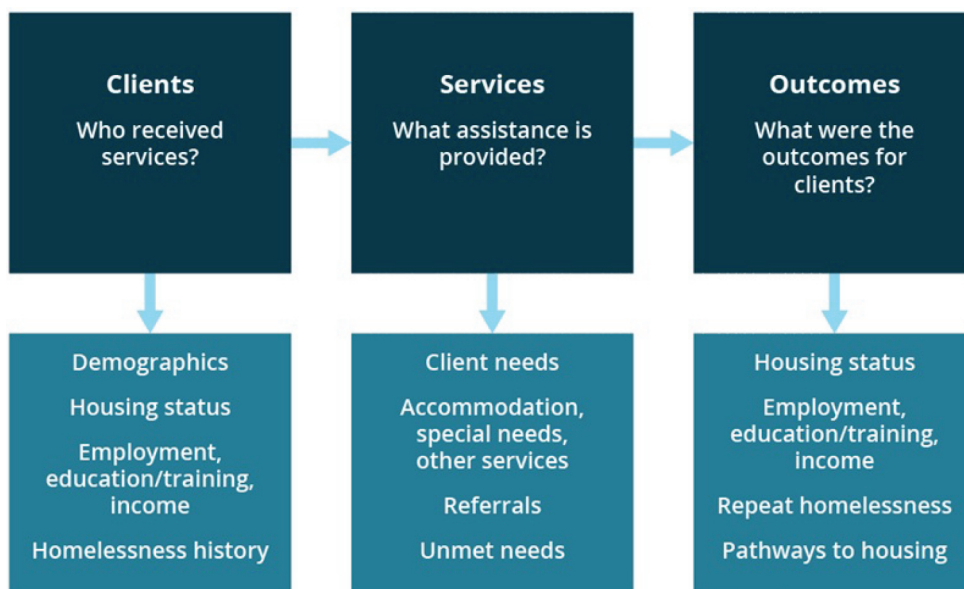
¹⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰ Ms Robyn Stevens, Director, Community Life, City of Greater Geelong, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

²¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Homelessness services: About*, 2017, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/about>> accessed 30 October 2020.

In July 2011 the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection commenced, which is the main source of data for homelessness services for Australian jurisdictions. The data is provided to, and maintained by, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which produces an annual report on the findings. The annual report provides details on all the information described above for the previous financial year. Service providers funded under the NHHA are required to provide data to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, with agencies who are expected to participate identified by the relevant state or territory department. For Victoria, the Department of Health and Human Services is required to identify Victorian agencies who need to report data to the AIHW. Agencies provide monthly standardised data about their clients according to the Specialist Homelessness Services Minimum Dataset. This dataset seeks to capture information about the characteristics and circumstances of people presenting to homelessness services. According to AIHW, the data supplied by agencies 'builds a comprehensive picture of clients, the specialist homelessness services that were provided to them and the outcomes achieved for those clients'.²² Figure 3.6 shows the framework for the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection.

Figure 3.6 Conceptual framework of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2019-20, 2020*, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary>> accessed 21 January 2021.

Along with the standardised client data required for the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, Victoria is also required to report on its progress for the social housing and homelessness measures outlined in its bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth Government under the NHHA. Part 6 of the Agreement requires Victoria to publicly report on its progress on the targets described in Victoria's

²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20*, AIHW, Canberra, 2020, p. 6.

Homelessness Strategy outlined in pts 2 and 3.²³ Part 2 provides an overview of demand for housing and state initiatives implemented to address this demand.²⁴ Part 3 provides details about Victoria's core service delivery and priority action items to support specific cohorts (e.g. family violence survivors, young people).²⁵ The information reported is made available as an update to Victoria's annual NHHA statement of assurance.²⁶ Therefore, agencies receiving funding through the Agreement are required to collect and provide data to assist the Victorian Government to fulfil its reporting obligations.²⁷

In 2014, DHHS introduced an online service delivery tracking process to assist agencies required to provide monthly service delivery data which can be accounted against their service agreement targets. Both agencies and the Department are able to access the information allowing services to manage their progress and assist the Victorian Government in its reporting obligations.²⁸ Nine activities are reported via the service delivery tracking process:

- Crisis supported accommodation
- Transitional support
- Homelessness Persons Support Services
- Telephone Information and Referral
- Tenancy Plus – Tenancy Support Program—Advocacy
- Tenancy Plus – Tenancy Support Program—Establishment and intervention
- Housing Establishment Fund
- Tenancy Administration—Crisis
- Tenancy Administration—Transitional
- Housing Information and Referral
- Private Rental Assistance
- Homeless Grant Funding—Leasing (Head Leasing).²⁹

DHHS has produced publicly available guidance for agencies which explains performance measures and counting rules for each activity.³⁰

²³ Commonwealth and Victorian Governments, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement 2019–20*, sch E2 pt 6, <https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/other/other/NHHA_VIC_BILAT.pdf> accessed 30 September 2020.

²⁴ Ibid., sch E2.

²⁵ Ibid., sch E2 pt 3.

²⁶ A 'statement of assurance', under the NHHA, is annual statement provided by each state and territory to the Commonwealth Government assuring that a state or territory has satisfied its requirements under the Agreement.

²⁷ Commonwealth and Victorian Governments, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement 2019–20*, sch E2 pt 6.

²⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, *Homelessness activities performance and reporting*, (n.d.), <<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/homelessness-activities-performance-and-reporting>> accessed 2 November 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

The Committee heard that improvements to reporting strategies and increased collaboration has improved the accuracy of the sector’s reporting. Some stakeholders contended that this might explain the increased number of homeless people recorded in Victoria. Improvements in data collection were not only mentioned in relation to homelessness but similarly in closely related areas, such as family violence.

Ms Melanie Brown, Principal Strategic Advisor, Family Violence, Gippsland Women’s Health Service, told the Committee that previously inconsistent reporting practices have improved following the Royal Commission into Family Violence:

I think there were inconsistent processes, people not having the confidence to report—a lot has come out since the royal commission about raising women’s confidence to actually speak out—and people understanding the many intricacies of family violence that sit outside of physical violence, so being able to identify it much more readily. In terms of numbers, I think our numbers have always been very, very high. What we are getting now is accurate reporting. Police have put a significant investment in working with their staff, with the community, to get that reporting accurate.³¹

However, some stakeholders expressed the view that there was not enough data being collected across the sector and that the picture currently being drawn of Victoria’s homelessness issue is not entirely accurate.

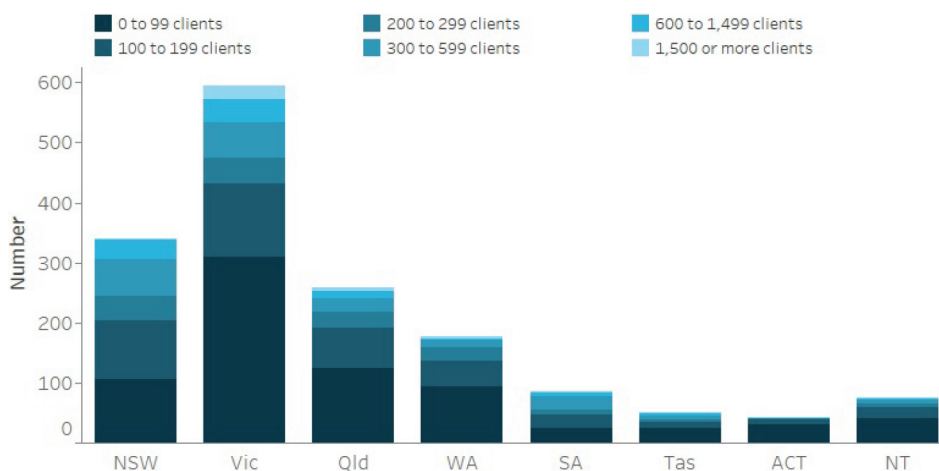
3.3.3 Overlap and gaps in service delivery

Victoria’s homelessness sector is diverse and there are a large number of organisations dedicated to assisting those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Some specialise in assisting particular cohorts, such as youth or family violence, while others provide generalist services to the community. Data from the AIHW shows that in comparison to other states, Victoria has a far larger number of organisations that provide homelessness services. Of these, a large proportion are small agencies that provide services to less than 99 clients.³²

Figure 3.7 shows the number of clients assisted by specialist homelessness agencies, by state and territory in 2019–20.

³¹ Ms Melanie Brown, Principal Strategic Advisor, Family Violence, Gippsland Women’s Health Service, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19*, AIHW, Canberra, 2019, p. 6.

Figure 3.7 Specialist homelessness agencies, by number of clients assisted and state and territory, 2019–20

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2019-20, 2020*, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary>> accessed 21 January 2021.

At public hearings, stakeholders were asked whether the large number of agencies in Victoria has resulted in an overlap or duplication of service provision.

Mr John Baker, Chief Executive Officer of Mornington Peninsula Shire Council argued that in his council area there were a number of agencies that provided similar services:

The first for me is duplication. There seems to be a range of agencies doing the same thing on the ground at the moment, and I believe that to be a significant issue. Do not get me wrong, there are examples of superb work and fantastic coordination going on, on the ground—I do not want to say that that is not the case—but there is most certainly in the way that these services are commissioned at the moment a lot of duplication going on at the moment and fragmentation.³³

Mr Max Broadley, Executive Director at Barwon Child, Youth and Family also described a multitude of services in inner metropolitan areas that he considered did not cooperate effectively. However, he said the lower concentration of services in regional areas fostered cooperation between providers:

I used to work in Melbourne; I worked in Fitzroy, in youth drug and alcohol. I used to manage a youth residential withdrawal unit there. If anybody knows that area, you will know that it is packed with youth services, absolutely packed—and none of them collaborate at all. So actually when you come out to the regional areas, because there are just many less services you are required to collaborate more. So maybe it is the case that actually the metro areas need a model like this more than anybody else because they need something to bind the partnership together. In the metro regions you are just

³³ Mr John Baker, Chief Executive Officer, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

very, very busy and there are a million services around you, and no-one is really doing any significant long-term partnerships.³⁴

Ms Sherri Bruinhout, Executive Director, Housing Pathways and Outcomes, Housing Division, DHHS commented on the number of agencies in Victoria that the State Government funds, noting that while there are a large number, they are able to deliver localised support for communities:

I would also say though that one of the challenges of the homelessness services system is a large amount of services—so 130 different services. I know it sounds like a lot. It certainly is from our end in terms of managing contracts. But I think we should also acknowledge that one of the strengths of the homelessness services system is that with that diversity it can deliver a very localised response to communities that have a deep connection to local communities, particularly in regional areas of Victoria. And while it does seem like a lot of agencies, I think there is a great strength that can come with having that diversity of agencies delivering homelessness programs as well.³⁵

Others in the sector disagreed with the proposition that there were too many separate service agencies or that there was overlap or duplication in the sector. Ms Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator, Southern Region, Southern Homelessness Services Network, told the Committee that:

The way the system is pretty much set up is that we have our entry points. It is spaced out. There is not overlapping of the services, there is not duplication. There are more gaps than anything, than duplication or overlapping. There will be gaps, for example, because as you can see from my submission we have had growth in the outer suburbs in homelessness and the services are not there to meet that demand. Say, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula seem to have less services than other areas. They do not have any crisis accommodation for any groups, so there are, I would say, more gaps rather than overlapping.³⁶

Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communication, Council to Homeless Persons, believed that it would be ‘very rare’ for a single person to have multiple case workers across the sector because ‘casework is a very scarce resource.’³⁷ At a public hearing, Ms Colvin stated that ‘there are a lot more people who miss out on access to casework than are able to get it, particularly longer term casework.’³⁸ Furthermore, Ms Colvin contended that the sector is set up to facilitate coordination of services across a single client:

There are also already a number of processes in the sector that facilitate coordination. Each local area of service providers—I think there are eight in the state—have a

³⁴ Mr Max Broadley, Executive Director, Client Services, Barwon Child, Youth & Family, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

³⁵ Bruinhout, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

³⁶ Ms Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator, Southern Homelessness Services Network, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

³⁷ Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

³⁸ Ibid.

coordinating point. They meet together as a network, work through those coordination issues and tend to know each other quite well. Then there are also particular initiatives of coordination, say, particularly around rough sleeping.³⁹

There was general consensus amongst stakeholders to the inquiry that it was unlikely there was service overlap, particularly in case work, because the sector is set up to facilitate coordination. Instead, there was concern that a larger problem for the sector was gaps in the availability of services, both in terms of location and types of service. Gaps across the sector can mean that a person is unable to access the right services for their individual circumstances, affecting the likelihood of a suitable and long-lasting outcome which interrupts and prevents cycling through homelessness. Homeless people or people at risk of homelessness have individual, complex and varying needs which cannot be addressed by a one-size-fits-all approach to case management. Gaps in the sector are therefore of considerable concern to the Committee because it can mean that people fall through the cracks of the system and do not receive the necessary support they need to end the cycle of homelessness.

The significant overlap between homelessness and other issues, such as alcohol and drug misuse, means that these problems cannot be addressed in isolation. The risk of treating an individual's issues in isolation increases the likelihood of 'fragmented systems of delivery'.⁴⁰ People at risk of homelessness or who fall into homelessness do not end up there because of one factor but rather a number of factors which make them vulnerable and lead them towards a crisis point. Therefore, as was told to the Committee frequently and by many stakeholders, it is important that the sector seek to provide wrap-around support services. This involves proper coordination, facilitation and accountability between service providers to ensure that an individual is receiving support for all existing risk factors, increasing their chances for a stronger and longer-lasting outcome.

Measures to ensure more efficient flexibility and coordination in the homelessness sector will be discussed in section 3.3.5.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government undertake comprehensive mapping of services to ascertain gaps and overlaps in service delivery across Victoria.

3.3.4 Is the sector coping with demand?

In 2018–19, 112,919 Victorians sought assistance from homelessness services, a 22% increase since 2012–13 (Figure 3.8). Around 50% (55,000 people) of people presenting to homelessness services had a need for short-, medium- or long-term

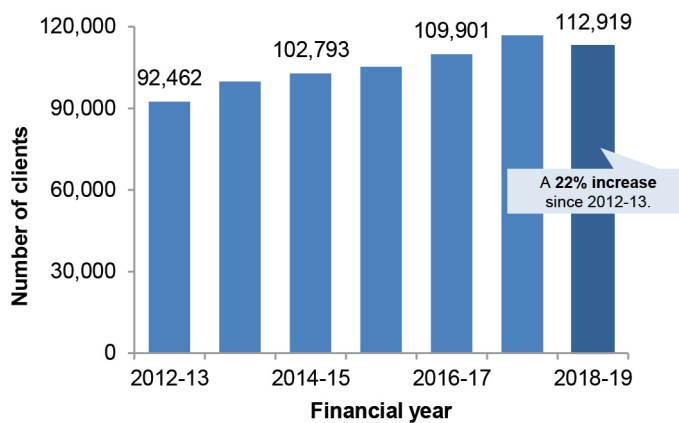
³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, *Submission 204*, p. 12.

housing.⁴¹ Unfortunately many of these people could not be provided or referred to accommodation:

- 76% could not be provided or referred to long-term housing
- 62% could not be provided or referred to (medium-term) transitional housing
- 32% could not be provided or referred to (short-term) crisis accommodation.⁴²

Figure 3.8 Number of clients provided assistance from homelessness services, 2012–13 to 2018–19



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, 9 September 2020, p. 4.

As mentioned in section 3.3.2, specialist homelessness services are required to collect and report data about the number of clients that present, receive services and the type of services given. The scale and scope of individual service agencies varies considerably, with some agencies having capacity for less than 100 clients per year and others assisting over 1,000. Agency size and capacity is influenced by several factors, including the service delivery model in the agency's jurisdiction as well as:

- type and complexity of offered services
- differing state and territory service delivery models.⁴³

In its annual report on *Specialist Homelessness Services*, the AIHW examined the number of clients specialist homelessness agencies assisted in the 2019–20 financial year. The annual report showed that Victoria had both the most specialist homelessness agencies overall and the most agencies assisting more than 1,500 people.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness service system: Presentation to the Legal and Social Issues Committee*, p. 4.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The Committee discussed with many stakeholders across the sector that agencies are struggling to keep up with the growing demand for support and services, particularly agencies which assist people in need of accommodation. There was general consensus from stakeholders that demand for housing and homelessness services is significantly larger than supply. Some stakeholders also emphasised that this issue is likely to continue to grow because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen people enter into homelessness or housing precariousness as a result of the public health response.

Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service, explained to the Committee that an overwhelming number of services have been unable to meet demand. Ms King noted that a ‘chronic underfunding’ has contributed to the difficulties faced by agencies in meeting demand:

I think the example we gave of the member who Karen met with a couple of weeks ago who said, ‘Well, gee, 90 people turned away a day. Our service would do that alone’. That means there is not even time to speak, if you like, to those 90 people; they just cannot meet demand. ACOSS did a survey a couple of years ago now where they were able to show that more than 80 per cent of services currently cannot meet the demand that is coming their way. So we know that in fact there is chronic underfunding in terms of services. I think we all know in walking around this is not a party-political comment; it is just the reality. We talk about rough sleepers as being the tip of the iceberg. I think for any of us who walk around this area we are seeing it become more and more pronounced in terms of the number of people who are homeless.⁴⁵

A large portion of inquiry stakeholders expressed to the Committee that much of the unmet demand for support services is focused on the need for accommodation and that agencies often struggle to find suitable short-, medium- or long-term housing options for their clients. Lack of accommodation options for Victorians in need is significantly exacerbated because of the growing bottleneck from short- and medium-term (i.e. crisis or transitional housing) to long-term accommodation. The inability of people to move into long-term housing places added strain on crisis and transitional accommodation providers which can have a flow on-effect to other support services, especially ones where accommodation might be a condition or requirement of service (for example, support services and programs for people exiting the justice system, which is discussed in Chapter 4).

Mr Peter Jones, Senior Policy Officer, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, told the Committee that the highest levels of unmet services for Aboriginal Victorians are in housing, although other services, such as alcohol and drug services, are also underfunded. Mr Jones stated that available data showed that persons in need are not able to access supports that would assist them to remain out of the homelessness system:

Our sense is that they are not accessing the services that they need to, and I guess the evidence of that is in the unmet demand for services that we are seeing coming through the data—the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data. The levels of unmet need

⁴⁵ Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 60.

in those systems are really high, and they are highest in the housing space, so if you look at things like the national data for Indigenous people on emergency housing, it is running at about 25 per cent, so only 75 per cent are even accessing emergency housing. If you move to transitional, it is about 50 per cent. Then if you move to long-term, it is only about 30 per cent who are being housed in the long-term. There are similar numbers around other things like access to alcohol and drug services, which is a real gap.

We know that there is an unmet need that continues to rise around access to alcohol and drug services, which is now at around 40 per cent. Certainly in relation to people who need services through the prison system you would have heard about the process of people not being able to access housing in order to get parole in order to get bail and those sorts of things. There is just a general sense that... the range of assistance that some families need just is not there, and it is not there in a case-managed way. The data is showing that as well, and the levels of people reappearing in the system, in the homeless support system, suggests that they are just not accessing the support that they need in the long term. People are turning up in the system at a really high rate again and again and again, which just means that their issue is not being resolved.⁴⁶

The limited accommodation options for people to exit into was also discussed by Ms Chris McNamara, Homelessness Network Coordinator, Gippsland Homelessness Network:

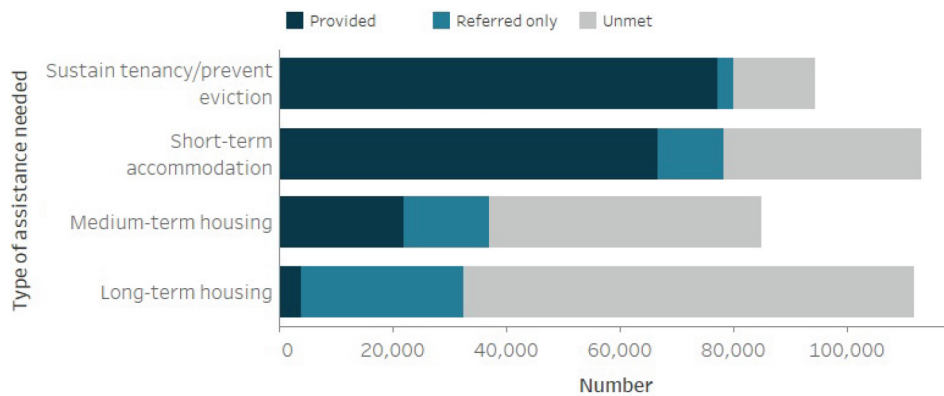
One in five, 20 per cent of under-18s, present to Gippsland homelessness services. Youth refuges in Morwell and Bairnsdale have a limited capacity to meet the demand for service. With stays of only six weeks, young people have none or very limited accommodation options or means to exit the refuges... the services basically get bogged up because there are kids that are ready to go but we have nowhere to send them...⁴⁷

The AIHW 2019–20 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report provided statistics on the level of unmet needs for accommodation assistance or specialist services across Australia. Figure 3.9 shows the number of clients with unmet needs for accommodation and housing assistance services; and Figure 3.10 shows the number of clients with unmet needs for specialised services.

⁴⁶ Mr Peter Jones, Senior Policy Officer, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 75.

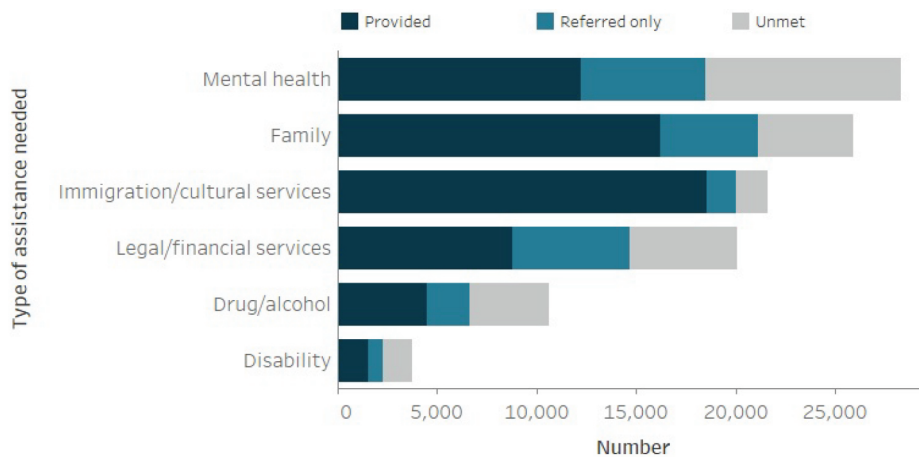
⁴⁷ Ms Chris McNamara, Coordinator, Gippsland Homelessness Network, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

Figure 3.9 Clients with unmet needs for accommodation and housing assistance services, Australia, 2019–20



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee. Adapted from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20 – Unmet demand for specialist homelessness services*, December 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/unmet-demand-for-specialist-homelessness-services>> accessed 15 January 2021.

Figure 3.10 Clients with unmet needs for specialised services (grouped), Australia, 2019–20



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019-20 – Unmet demand for specialist homelessness services*.

Population growth has also contributed to growing demand for accommodation and homelessness services. In particular, metropolitan areas are seeing an increasing number of people experiencing homelessness or facing housing precariousness, putting substantial pressure on local support providers. The unmet demand for support in metropolitan areas has led to a client spillover into regional and rural Victoria, with vulnerable people moving to less populated areas in the hope to find accommodation or receive much needed support. This in turn puts increased pressure on the limited resources of regional organisations and the sector as a whole, meaning too many Victorians are not receiving critical support.

Demand for housing or accommodation is not the only area of support the sector is struggling to keep up with. The Committee heard that many support agencies are finding it increasingly difficult to find the resources to offer critical assistance to

every person in need who comes through their doors. The issue of demand is further complicated because of the growing prevalence of people re-presenting for support at the end of a previous service period because their needs went unmet.

At a public hearing, Mr Darran Stonehouse, Lecturer, Social Work, La Trobe University, explained to the Committee that increasingly, services are engaging with a client for longer periods to obtain better outcomes. Short service periods were found to be unsuitable for people who had varying and complex needs, which is common for many people accessing services:

Substantial demand on homelessness services: part of what we found looking at the agency data and looking across different agencies was not so much the number of overall clients going up but certainly an increase in the number of repeating clients—so people who were obviously struggling to sustain an outcome in terms of secure housing—and also increased client complexity, so we were seeing services having to engage for much longer and in a much more intensive way with individual clients in order to get outcomes for them. That obviously has an impact on the service’s capacity.⁴⁸

Experiencing homelessness is not just about an inability to procure affordable, secure and stable accommodation but also about a person’s capacity to sustain long-term accommodation. The Committee has emphasised throughout this report that people presenting at homelessness support services experience myriad complex and often competing needs which are better managed as a whole rather than addressed one at a time. This may mean people need longer support periods than can be provided by an agency and could need to re-present numerous times. Furthermore, the growing bottleneck in crisis and transitional accommodation because of a lack of long-term housing options has left many Victorians in limbo with limited opportunities to progress into stable, secure and suitable long-term housing. All of these factors have similarly affected the capacity of Victoria’s homelessness sector to respond.

The Committee considers that the demand for services is exceeding the current supply and resources available, particularly in the provision of accommodation. Recommissioning in the sector may alleviate these problems and should be considered.

FINDING 13: Due to growing numbers of clients seeking support from homelessness services, particularly for accommodation, Victoria’s housing and homelessness sector is struggling to cope with demand.

FINDING 14: There is not enough available short-, medium- or long-term accommodation available in Victoria to support the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

⁴⁸ Mr Darran Stonehouse, Lecturer, Social Work, La Trobe University, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

3.3.5 Improving the delivery of homelessness services

Some stakeholders in the homelessness service sector advocated to change aspects of the commissioning, funding and design of services to improve the outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. These aspects related to:

- the provision of flexible support, both in the length of time the service is provided and in the services an individual can receive
- service coordination and integration
- outcome-based support.⁴⁹

These suggestions for improvement are discussed in the following sections.

Flexible support

In Victoria, DHHS has developed guidelines and industry standards for homelessness services, compliance with which is a condition of funding. This includes setting out annual throughput measures which outline the average duration of support a person accessing specialist homelessness services receives.

DHHS has outlined these standards in the Homelessness Services Guidelines and Conditions of Funding policy. Section 2.2 of the policy describes the homelessness service performance measures which are used to measure outcomes and activities funded by the Victorian Government. The following guidelines have been put in place by the Department for clients accessing transitional and crisis support services:

- Each full-time funded position in transitional support is required to operate on a staff:client ratio of 1:12 or 1:6 for a position in crisis support.
- Average duration of support for temporary crisis accommodation is six weeks.
- Average duration of support for transitional support is 13 weeks.⁵⁰

The staff:client ratio and average duration of support are used to measure annual throughput for transitional and crisis support services. The Department has established the following calculation to measure throughput:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Key Output Measure} &= a \times (52/b) \\ a &= \text{client capacity (staff:client ratio)} \\ b &= \text{Average duration of support}^{51} \end{aligned}$$

⁴⁹ See for example, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 38.

⁵⁰ Department of Human Services, *Homelessness services guidelines and conditions of funding*, policy paper, no. 2.0, Victorian Government, Melbourne, May 2014.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Using crisis support as the example model, if a full-time crisis support worker is operating on a staff:client ratio of 1:6 and the average duration of support is six weeks, their estimated annual throughput is 52 clients. If the organisation they work for has five full-time funded positions, the throughput is 260 clients.

At a public hearing, Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons, explained how the sector reached the six-week and 13-week average duration of support:

the homelessness service system was built at a time when it was a transition support. So if you have a lot of affordable housing out there in the rental market and someone experiences a period of homelessness because their tenancy falls apart for some reason, then they come to a homeless service. They have six weeks of support to help resolve what perhaps those financial drivers and those financial issues were, they get help to secure a new tenancy, they move into the new tenancy, they get a little bit of support to settle in, and then the staff move on to the next person.⁵²

Ms Colvin further explained that people often require support for longer periods than those in the guidelines because of the shortfall of accommodation available for people to move into:

But what happens now is that people come to a homeless service, that support period starts and they try to find them a housing situation. There is no housing situation to be found. By the end of six weeks there is still no housing situation that has been found, they are still in perhaps emergency or crisis accommodation, and there are still more people coming through the door needing support.

...

So some services have been able to restructure that support to provide longer periods of support where it is more intensively needed, but you have to keep in mind that every time that happens, if there are 20 places funded for the short period of support and 20 places funded for the long period of support and you use a quarter of those on a small number of people requiring long support, then there are always going to be 100 people coming through the door for those 40 support places anyway, so you will be seeing less people. Either way you cut it there is not enough.⁵³

Every person's circumstances are entirely unique, with no one person experiencing homelessness the same way. Every person has their own risk factors and experiences which has led them to being in a position of requiring help. Not only is the story which led them to requiring support unique to them, but their experiences and effectiveness of the sector's response to their case is also unique. Therefore, fixed durations of support can only have limited success, as the length of time someone needs to remain in the system depends on their individual factors. Implementing fixed periods of support for every person risks someone cycling through the system seeking renewed support and further entrenching them in the cycle of homelessness.

⁵² Colvin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 16–17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Ms Cathy Humphrey, Chief Executive Officer, Sacred Heart Mission, argued that the duration of support depends on the factors which contribute to a person being homeless or at risk of homelessness:

If someone is first-time homeless or at risk of homelessness, the length of time that someone needs to be supported is not going to be two or three years. You know, it might be six to 13 weeks, but it might be six months. That depends on a range of other factors that are contributing to their being either at risk of homelessness or first-time homeless.

What we know is everyone's story is different, and not everyone turns up with the same set of circumstances, so we talk about a vulnerability index being the way in which to measure the types of needs people have and then therefore the types of support and the duration of support people might need. Then the support is tailored to an outcome, not tailored to, 'This support will finish in six weeks or 13 weeks or in six months or in three years', so that it works in a very deliberate way to provide a response to that person that delivers two outcomes. One is to get housing and the second is to sustain housing. And thirdly it is to become independent of the service system, because what we do not want to see is people continuing to re-present to the service system.⁵⁴

The guidelines around duration support for crisis and transitional services can only work if there are sufficient exit points for people to move into once they are ready, especially long-term housing. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Victoria's homelessness sector is experiencing a bottleneck because of a lack of long-term housing options and exit points out of the system. This has put added strain on crisis and transitional service providers who need to keep people in short-term accommodation for increasingly longer periods of time until a long-term option becomes available. This has various flow-on effects for clients due to the transitory nature of their accommodation and the inability to settle into a home.

Chris McNamara from the Gippsland Homelessness Network told the Committee that transitional accommodation is not working in its intended manner because of a lack of long-term housing for people to exit into:

Transitional accommodation is not working in the manner that it is intended when there are no exit points. With stays in transitional housing around 13 weeks, it is impossible for people to be housed in public or community housing given the waitlist. And private rental is either unavailable, unacceptable or unaffordable for people on low incomes... Consequently, people stay in transitional housing longer than is intended and we do not get the throughput that we would hope we would from a transitional property.⁵⁵

In addition, the Committee was told that individuals can only receive support if they are placed in a certain type of accommodation. Ms Jade Blakkarly, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North, argued the homelessness

⁵⁴ Ms Cathy Humphrey, Chief Executive Officer, Sacred Heart Mission, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ McNamara, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

system did not allow the flexibility to provide support services to clients in private rental accommodation, even if they were placed there due to a lack of availability in supported accommodation. She said:

The system was designed on an assumption that people who are most vulnerable are going to be linked in with transitional housing or with crisis accommodation, and that is who we are funded to support. The world has changed radically since that has happened, and lots and lots of people, more people, are going into social housing. More people are going into private rental. People who would never have been put into private rental before because they would not be able to manage it are now moving into private rental, but the way the homelessness system is funded is that once they move into private rental, we are not supposed to work with them anymore. So what happens is the way that we are funded is that you get support depending upon where you are accommodated, not what your need is. If you are a highly complex person who has ended up in private rental because that is the only option for you, homelessness services are not funded to work with you anymore.⁵⁶

DHHS recognised these issues in their submission:

Homelessness services remain constrained in the level of flexibility of services provided...

...

Homelessness is complex and often intertwined with a range of other issues. Different cohorts have distinctive needs, with some requiring short-term assistance, while others require more intensive and long-term support to address various social and health vulnerabilities.⁵⁷

At a public hearing, Sherri Bruinhout, Executive Director at DHHS told the Committee that the Government is working with the homelessness sector to ensure more flexible support periods:

Certainly the sector is very interested in being able to be more creative with the durations of support, and indeed the more recent funding that the government has announced and that the department has administered has really been much more tailored to durations of support than it has been in the past. That is a legacy issue that has come from commonwealth-state housing agreements that had very defined periods of support in the establishment of the supported accommodation assistance program.

I think we are getting to the point now where the service system is a much more sophisticated and complex service system, and the ability to be thinking about our funding and service agreements that reflect that sophistication is certainly the conversations that we as a department are having with the sector. Obviously it is a complex issue because there is \$300 million worth of funding and service agreements that we are talking about, but certainly the ability to tailor the response to meet people's needs really does need to go very fundamentally to that question of durations

⁵⁶ Ms Jade Blakkarly, Chief Executive Officer, WISHIN (Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North), public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 24.

of support. So I think the conversations that we are having with the sector are certainly leading us to land that.⁵⁸

Developing fixed service lengths into the standards guiding the sector has resulted in people re-presenting at the end of a service cycle. This can be damaging to a person's stability and progress, potentially preventing them from making in-roads to exiting the homelessness system or moving out of housing precariousness. Furthermore, the support provided to individuals should be based on their needs, not the type of accommodation available to house them in.

The Committee acknowledges the Government's work in this area and urges them to continue to seek engagement with the homelessness sector to ensure more flexible provision of services and models of support. The evidence presented to the inquiry indicates that the current case management model, of six weeks for crisis support and 13 weeks for transitional support, does not provide sufficient time for support workers to assist a person in need. Many Victorians accessing homelessness support services often require longer periods of support and therefore need to re-present to a service at the end of a support cycle.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government embed flexibility into its approach to the funding of homelessness programs. This flexibility should extend to the amount of time an individual receives support and the services they are eligible to receive.

Service coordination and integration

A number of stakeholders told the Committee that homelessness services need to be better connected because some clients, especially those with complex needs, require support for a number of different issues. The submission from DHHS acknowledged that services needed to be better coordinated and integrated with elements from the health, community and justice sectors to get better outcomes:

As the proportion of people seeking support from SHS [specialist homelessness services] with complex needs grows, coordination and service integration between health, community and justice services may facilitate greater outcomes for clients. Fragmentation, disconnected services and high levels of demand however has made it hard for people to get the help they need based on their specific circumstances, particularly clients with multiple vulnerabilities, including those clients transitioning from care settings.

Fragmented and inflexible policy and funding structures prohibit person-centred service delivery, and innovation. Service design and delivery within the human services context has been largely unchanged for 30 years. Greater flexibility attached to outcomes rather than outputs is required.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ms Sherri Bruinhout, Deputy Commander, COVID-19 Public Housing Response and Executive Director, Housing Pathways and Outcomes, Housing Division, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 40–1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The submission from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute also noted the importance of integrated services:

people who become homeless will often need a range of services (these typically include support and accommodation but also ancillary services like alcohol and drug treatment and mental health services). Agencies providing these services may work independently from each other so policy and service delivery contexts can promote integrated arrangements to meet the needs of homeless people. Available evidence about integration from the United States and Queensland suggests achieving integration requires time, technical assistance and resourcing, but does yield benefits for clients ... There is a need in Australia to better integrate homelessness services with other services like health/mental health, drug and alcohol, and DFV sectors...⁶⁰

The Committee heard from Ms Theresa Jayet, Chief Executive Officer of Mallee Family Care, a human services organisation in the north-west of the state that provides services across a range of areas including mental health, disability, financial counselling, community legal services and homelessness services. Ms Jayet explained to the Committee that Mallee Family Care's approach is multi-disciplinary because homelessness is often the result of a number of compounding issues:

I think part of looking at what the solution could be also needs to be a consideration of how we are delivering homelessness services, and the reason we take an early intervention prevention approach with everything we do at Mallee Family Care is a philosophy that you cannot do this work in isolation of one issue. You actually have to look at the whole of the systems, and so when we look at a social issue of homelessness we know that there are other issues that compound it. We know that when we look at the out-of-home care system and supporting kids exiting home-placed services we factor in policy change and raising the age of kids leaving care from 18 to 21 to give them a better start. When we look at families who are experiencing family violence we do not look at family violence in isolation—we look at all of the other social issues.⁶¹

The Committee believes that it is important for services to be able to address multiple needs when a client engages with them, as these are often intersecting. This is particularly important in regional areas where there can be a lack of different services in close proximity to cater to the needs of clients.

The submission from DHHS noted that people with complex needs requiring a number of services can find themselves falling through the gaps. It said that fragmentation in service provision and limited connectivity in the service system meant that clients with complex needs were missing out:

the current capacity of the service system to respond to the [drivers] and dynamic needs of SHS clients is mixed. People with complex needs can be at a serious risk of falling [through] the cracks when fragmentation in the service system exists. A 'lack of fit' for clients experiencing or at risk of homelessness can be particularly acute for

⁶⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 70.

⁶¹ Ms Teresa Jayet, Chief Executive Officer, Mallee Family Care, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

services working with more complex and vulnerable clients, with a limited connectivity across services that can have a direct impact for clients, with complex service needs unmet.⁶²

In its submission, Mission Australia discussed the need for a ‘multipronged, long-term and sustainable strategy’ to solving the issue of homelessness, which is coordinated at all levels of government, as there is significant responsibility and policy overlap:

Often the drivers of homelessness are interconnected and therefore, require complex and multipronged responses. SHS community housing and other forms of housing supports are only a part of the solution to address homelessness. The Victorian Government should also increase support for emergency relief, access to foodbanks, financial literacy support, community mental health services and funding for other services such as community advocacy and support services.⁶³

Ms Melissa Hardham, Chief Executive Officer, WEstjustice, suggested that funding for services could be re-oriented to encourage collaboration:

One of my observations—and I have worked both in Victoria and in Far North Queensland for six years with Indigenous communities—is that one of the biggest challenges is to avoid siloing issues and services. There needs to be greater regional and statewide coordination of services, to encourage these multidisciplinary models that are fully integrated, so not just co-locating but still operating under the same silos. My suggestion would be a lot of the funding structures and the funding models should encourage this type of collaboration that you see with McAuley and WEstjustice and all the other services that McAuley engages with.⁶⁴

This was also echoed by Ms Bronwyn Pike, Chief Executive Officer, Uniting Vic.Tas, who argued that the sector should be funded and supported to meet measurable targets that run across service streams.⁶⁵

The Committee acknowledges that there is already a focus in the homelessness sector on cooperation and integration of services. Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons said that the structure of the local area networks was designed to encourage cooperation amongst service providers:

There are also already a number of processes in the sector that facilitate coordination. Each local area of service providers—I think there are eight in the state—have a coordinating point. They meet together as a network, work through those coordination issues and tend to know each other quite well.⁶⁶

⁶² Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 26.

⁶³ Mission Australia, *Submission 370*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Ms Melissa Hardham, Chief Executive Officer, WEstjustice, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Ms Bronwyn Pike, Chief Executive Officer, Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania), public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

⁶⁶ Colvin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

The homelessness sector also has information sharing software called the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform. The system captures information about the reasons why individuals present to services and means that people do not have to repeat their story to new services or case workers.⁶⁷ This system produces efficiencies in the homelessness sector and its use should be continued.

The Committee urges the Victorian Government to continue to encourage cooperation between services in the homelessness sector. A focus on continuous improvement in cooperation can ensure better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and reduce service duplication. Multi-disciplinary services can also ensure better outcomes and provide services for people with complex needs. This is particularly the case in regional areas where services may be limited and more agility is needed to address the needs of clients.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government have regard for services that are multi-disciplinary when commissioning homelessness services, particularly in regional areas.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government support more coordination, collaboration and integration between homelessness services.

Outcome-based support

The Committee heard a further area of improvement is through greater focus on measuring against outcomes for people accessing services, and in particular, measuring the level of stability a person experiences once they exit the sector. This is in contrast to the current arrangement whereby services are funded and assessed based on the number of periods of support provided to individuals.

Cathy Humphrey from Sacred Heart Mission believed the sector should focus on outcome measures instead of throughputs. This was discussed in relation to overhauling the sector's funding structure:

In terms of that issue of being funded for outcomes, what I would say is let us start with measuring outcomes—that instead of driving inputs and support episodes, we drive an outcome for the individual. Maybe one day we can progress to outcomes-based funding. I think we are a long way from that, but I think if we can move to thinking about outcomes and therefore impacts... we will come a long way.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ms Laura Harris, Business Development Manager, BeyondHousing, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ Humphrey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

To achieve a focus on outcomes, it is necessary for services to provide flexible, integrated and multidisciplinary support. Bronwyn Pike from Uniting Vic.Tas illustrated this point:

We really would like the opportunity at some stage to sit down with government and say, 'Given that there's such an overlap with these groups—families experiencing family violence, often with mental health issues there, maybe some substance abuse issues, and, by the way, they're homeless as well', and really try to, in a sense, get some targets that can run across the different service stream areas so that you measure outcomes not as much in episodes of care but what is the target. The target is long-term stability and then you are able to bring the other inputs into that as a kind of measure that you are doing the job that you are funded for. I think it is a journey that we are all on.⁶⁹

When asked about how homelessness support could be re-configured toward outcome-based services, Ms Erin Price, Manager of Homelessness for the Salvation Army in Eastern Victoria recommended a focus on what individuals receiving services want to achieve:

So, I think we need to focus on the social determinants as a whole—so education and training; we need to focus on mental health. So it is more of a strength-based focus. What does an individual want to achieve throughout their support period—so stable housing, education and training, mental health support, disengagement from child protection or any of those DHHS services. I think there needs to be, rather than the throughput and having X amount of assistance, a focus on a more long-term, sustainable outcomes for individuals so that they do not re-enter the homelessness service system.⁷⁰

Mr Gary Simpson, Chief Executive Officer, Mallee Accommodation and Support Service, told the Committee that measurable outcomes were needed to reflect the various supports that individuals needed to remain out of homelessness:

There is not a lot of data in our sector. There is plenty of data on the availability of housing supply and demand—there is heaps on that—but there is very little on measuring and reporting against outcomes for people who are experiencing homelessness. Getting them into a house, that is great—no argument there. We tick that box, yes. But that is only part of the equation, because as the Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan mentions, one of the key functions of the service system is to give support to maintain stable accommodation. Through my organisation we do see people who are in an unfortunate cycle of going in and out of homelessness. They are homeless, they are housed, they are homeless, they are housed and so it goes. And the reason that those people are on that cycle is because their barriers to homelessness are not being addressed.

⁶⁹ Pike, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

⁷⁰ Ms Erin Price, Manager, Eastern Victoria, Homelessness, Salvation Army, public hearing, Morwell, 3 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

I am talking about consistent, across-the-board, driven by the state 'Here are the outcomes in homelessness'. There is nothing like that that exists other than get a roof over their head. But it needs to go further...⁷¹

The Committee agrees that homelessness services should be evaluated based on outcomes for individuals, rather than periods of support provided. Such evaluations should include whether an individual remains housed in the long term.

The Committee put to witnesses the suggestion of re-commissioning homelessness services in Victoria so that their funding is tied to outcomes for clients, rather than periods of service. The suggestion received a mixed response from service organisations. Ms Amanda Kelly, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Health Goulburn North East was supportive of outcome-based services. She said:

Please fund for outcomes; that would be great. Without throwing the baby out with the bathwater I think that we should review how we are funding all of our services around this. It is not through unwillingness that people do not collaborate; it is that they are overstretched and, yes, they are being funded for throughput so, 'We've just got to get these people through and we've got to do this'.⁷²

One aspect of outcome-based services could be to provide additional subsidies for clients with more complex needs. Such a system would incentivise homelessness services to work with those with complex needs first, which may prevent chronic homelessness and ongoing interactions with homelessness services. Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer of Launch Housing discussed the value of introducing higher subsidies:

one of the cleanest options for that sort of outcome-based incentive funding would be very deep subsidies—or a deep subsidy—to enable community housing providers like mine to take cheap debt and build more stock off our own balance sheet, accepting that we are only charging 30 per cent of someone's income as a social rent. So 30 per cent of Newstart is not enough to leverage the balance sheet, service the debt—even at very cheap debt rates—and look after the life cycle of the asset, so we need a subsidy for the high-acuity client, the client with complex needs. The commonwealth and the state governments should sort out their differences, resolve what that subsidy is and reinstitute a deep subsidy, because it is a very efficient, direct way to prioritise the outcome. We want more homes for people with acute needs, and we are prepared to pay a direct subsidy to supplement that person's rent to ensure that we can then pay the bills to build the stock.⁷³

71 Mr Gary Simpson, Chief Executive Officer, Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

72 Ms Amanda Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Health Goulburn Valley North East, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

73 Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

Sherri Bruinhout from DHHS said that the Government is working with the sector to move existing programs towards outcome-based goals:

Certainly we have heard very loudly in the department that the current front-end structure of being able to respond to crises for short periods of time really is getting outputs, but really is not getting the deep and enduring outcomes that people may require when we look at wanting to resolve their issue of homelessness and to get them off that revolving door back into services after a period of time. So being able to—where we can tailor a program—really start to bring in those multidisciplinary teams and address the underlying driving causes that keep that crisis behaviour continuing. We are very alive to that. So being able to work with our services to take existing programs and invest in them with evidence to be able to give a different type of approach to how we might be doing that.⁷⁴

The submission from DHHS stated that an evaluation of whether some of the programs funded by the Department can be delivered in an outcome-focused manner is underway:

An outcomes-focussed evaluation will ensure the effectiveness of these new investments and will identify ways in which the homelessness system can more effectively intervene early, provide stable accommodation, and support people to maintain that accommodation. The impact of these programs will be assessed at a client level and will also identify outcomes at both service delivery and systems levels in order to produce a robust outcomes-focussed evaluation. Selected programs across the Victorian homelessness system included in the evaluation are:

- Accommodation for the homeless phase 1&2
- Accommodation options for young people leaving care and criminal justice
- Assertive outreach – CBD; & outer suburbs and rural
- Brief intervention workers (Launch Site)
- Dedicated [Transitional Housing Management] Properties
- Flexible support packages (rough sleepers)
- H3 Alliance Wyndham and other capital projects
- Headleasing
- Housing pathways and support for people exiting prison (Launch Site)
- Landlord incentives (Launch Site).⁷⁵

The Committee supports the review underway by the Victorian Government to re-orient some of the programs it funds towards an outcome-based approach. The Committee believes this evaluation should be the beginning of a process to move the sector toward

⁷⁴ Bruinhout, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

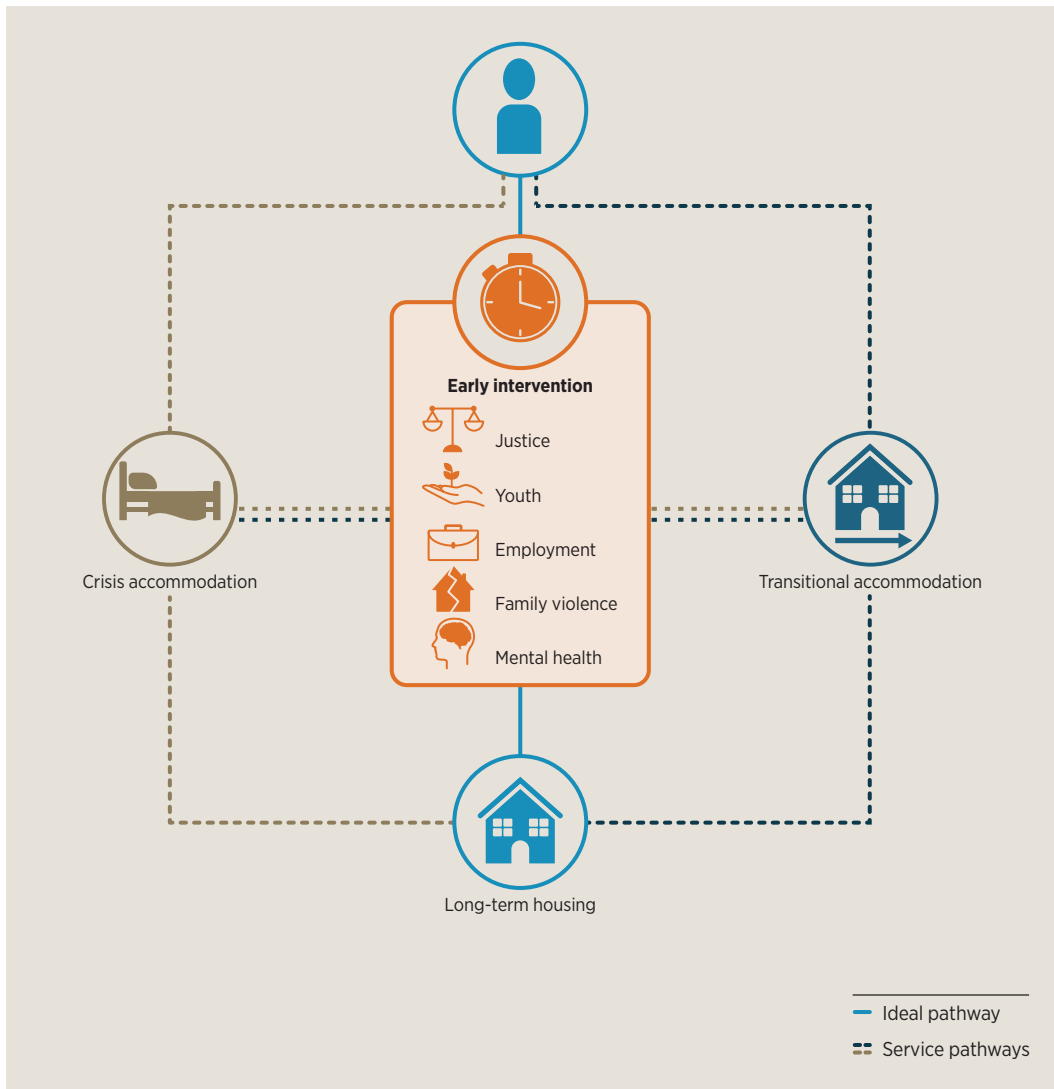
⁷⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 30.

outcome-based services. A gradual approach will allow the sector sufficient time to adapt and re-orient their services towards a more flexible and integrated approach that supports clients to live independently.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government build on its policy of considering outcome-based service goals when commissioning, or re-commissioning, homelessness services. These service goals should include the provision of additional subsidies for individuals with more complex needs.

4 Early intervention

4.1 Introduction



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

The Committee heard loud and clear from stakeholders to the inquiry that there needs to be more focus on early intervention programs to prevent homelessness or to address it as soon as possible to prevent long-term homelessness.

Early intervention and prevention of homelessness helps to avoid the high costs to individuals and the community. It prevents individuals from suffering the long-term disadvantage and trauma associated with chronic homelessness and helps them lead happier, more stable and productive lives. However, early intervention is exceedingly complex as homelessness intersects with a variety of other issues, such as mental

health, family violence and the justice system. Ms Heidi Hunter, Practice Leader, Client Services at Uniting Gippsland, told the Committee that early intervention strategies must therefore intersect with many other sectors in order to be effective:

I also think that we need early intervention into lots of other sectors, which would then reduce the amount of people that are coming into the homelessness sector. I quite often feel like the homelessness sector is the one that picks up everyone that fell through the cracks of all the other sectors.¹

This Chapter will address issues that apply broadly to homelessness early intervention services, including how people access early intervention programs, the way the programs cooperate with each other and their flexibility to deal with individuals until their needs are met.

If you think you can end homelessness by tinkering with our homeless service system, thereby increasing funding or refocusing on some new priority, you will be disappointed with the results. So this logically leads to the question: how do we end homelessness? You can only end homelessness by preventing it, so let me start with prevention.

Source: Professor Guy Johnson, Inaugural Unison Chair of Urban Housing and Homelessness, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p 3.

Early intervention programs aimed at addressing different causes of homelessness and risk factors will also be discussed. These areas include:

- family violence
- private rental tenancies
- mental health
- supports for individuals exiting institutional systems, such as the justice and child protection systems.

4.1.1 Early intervention or prevention?

The terms ‘early intervention’ and ‘prevention’ were used interchangeably in evidence to the Committee about strategies to prevent homelessness.

As noted in Chapter 2, the risk factors that lead to homelessness can be divided into two categories:

- Individual risk factors—which are factors relating to the personal circumstances of an individual that can lead to homelessness, such as family violence or mental health.

¹ Ms Heidi Hunter, Practice Leader, Client Services, Uniting Gippsland, public hearing, Morwell, 3 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 53.

- Structural risk factors—societal factors that can lead to disadvantage and increased vulnerability to homelessness, such as housing affordability or the employment market.

This Chapter will use the term early intervention to refer to strategies that address the individual factors that lead to homelessness.² Such programs identify and provide support to individuals who may be at risk of homelessness. Some of the programs also assist individuals who are newly homeless to exit from homelessness as quickly as possible. Some early intervention programs provide services that address only one of these risk factors. For example, some programs address family violence only. Others, such as the Geelong Project (which will be discussed in section 4.4.6) are multi-disciplinary and provide services for a range of social issues.

Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service gave examples of what early intervention programs look like and emphasised the importance of supporting people as soon as they come under housing stress, or addressing issues which may compound their risks of homelessness before it escalates to a crisis situation:

Early intervention services include legal assistance, advocacy, financial counselling and emergency financial relief, flexible funding packages, negotiations with landlords and real estate agents and more. When people have housing, the easiest thing we can do is to support people to actually hang onto it...

We can prevent people from being turned away from homelessness services if we fortify the safety net in other parts of the service system.³

The Committee will use the term prevention to refer to structural issues that can be applied to the wider population.⁴ Such issues include social housing, employment and assistance for those leaving institutional settings. Some preventative issues, including social housing, Commonwealth income support and housing affordability, will be also discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

4.2 Cost savings and societal benefits of prevention and early intervention

As noted at the conclusion of Chapter 1, the Committee believes the current homelessness system is too crisis-oriented. More focus needs to be put into intervening before people reach a crisis point and find themselves homeless. This lessens the significant psychosocial and other widespread impacts stemming from homelessness. Further, early intervention activities have been shown to be significantly more cost

² Stephen Gaetz and Erin Dej, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Online, 2017, p. 9.

³ Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

⁴ Gaetz and Dej, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*, p. 9.

effective than measures that intervene at later stages. The submission from the Salvation Army discussed these benefits:

The cost of homelessness to homeless persons, our community and economy is enormous, and increases the longer the individual remains homeless. A number of studies have consistently indicated that the savings from reduced public health and criminal justice costs achievable by programs that effectively reduce homelessness can far outweigh their expense...

...

While there is minimal empirical research in Australia examining the life course institutional costs associated with vulnerable people who are homeless, costs to the person and the community are estimated to be very high. Research conducted by Baldry et al. in 2012 for the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs highlights the existence of significant disadvantage, vulnerability and risk factors from early adolescence in almost every case discussed in their paper. A lack of adequate services is associated with costly criminal justice, health and homelessness interactions and interventions later in their lives. Early and well-timed interventions, the provision of secure housing and support for an individual to maintain a tenancy could significantly reduce the need (and cost) for the future years of crisis or criminal justice interventions. According to recent research, commissioned by the University of Melbourne, it is significantly cheaper for governments to provide last-resort housing than to have people continuing to sleep on the streets. The fact that 7,600 Victorians were living on the streets in 2017 represents an annual cost of \$194 million.⁵

The submission from Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Director of the Geelong Project, which is discussed in section 4.4.6, discussed a study he authored on the costs of youth homelessness. The study found that annual spending on health and justice costs alone for young people experiencing homelessness was more than the total cost spent on homelessness accommodation and support for all ages:

A study by MacKenzie, Flatau et al. (2016) *the Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia*, followed some 400 homeless and unemployed young people over three years to determine which health and justice services they used over that time. The average costs per person per year due to homelessness was \$14,986 in health and justice costs alone—which amounted to an annual cost to the community of \$626m, which was more than the \$619m spent each year on providing homeless services in Australia for all people using these services. These costs are apart from the cost of providing support and accommodation through the SHS system.⁶

Stakeholders to the inquiry stressed that avoiding homelessness significantly increased the likelihood of better outcomes and avoiding lasting negative effects. Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, from the Council to Homeless Persons said that avoiding homelessness for children can help avoid various lifelong negative effects:

⁵ The Salvation Army, *Submission 207*, pp. 24–5.

⁶ Associate Professor David Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 23.

Another reason that we want to do that and do it quickly is that homelessness, I think, is always a bad experience, but if it is a short experience, it is a lot less bad than if it is a long experience. So if someone has a short experience of homelessness and they are quickly rehoused, I particularly think about this given that the most common clients are women and children, so you think a child has an experience of losing their home. Yes, that is traumatic. If they can be quickly rehoused and hopefully stay at the same school, then the level of disruption in their lives is minimised. If they are homeless for a year and are moved around through multiple different emergency responses, think about what that does to their education. Think about what that does to their connection with friends. Think about what that does dragging around after a mum who is that stressed moving through all those situations. That will probably have lifelong impacts on their health.

In its submission, the Council to Homeless Persons explained the importance of successful early intervention for preventing people entering the cycle of homelessness. The view expressed below by the Council and shared widely across the sector is that it becomes significantly harder to exit the system and end the cycle of homelessness once underlying issues become entrenched:

Homelessness doesn't just happen. It is usually the result of an underlying problem escalating to the point where a person can no longer sustain housing. People have an incredible capacity to overcome hardship, but when people do lose their homes, the need for safe and stable housing becomes all-encompassing, and resolving the issues that led to their homelessness becomes more difficult. The longer individuals or households experience homelessness, the harder it is to end their homelessness, as existing health and financial conditions worsen and the connections and supports that help people sustain housing typically fall away.⁷

This was corroborated by the submission from the Department of Health and Human Services which showed that the needs of people accessing homelessness services become more acute the longer they are at risk of homelessness or are experiencing homelessness. Using the example of mental health, the submission noted:

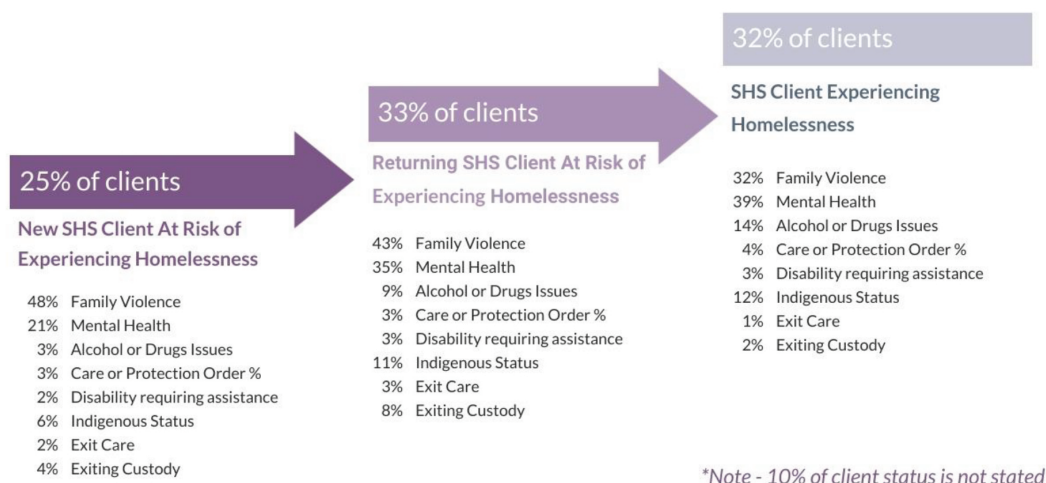
- 21% of people presenting for the first time to a homelessness service identified as having mental health issues
- 35% of people returning to homelessness services identified as having mental health issues
- 39% of people who had become homeless identified as having mental health issues.

This pattern of increasing complexity was similarly evident across other issues including alcohol and drugs (Figure 4.1).⁸

⁷ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 328.

⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 23.

Figure 4.1 Client needs following homelessness service contact 2018-19



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 23

Similarly, Ms Cathy Humphrey, Chief Executive Officer of Sacred Heart Mission contended that it is easier to assist someone to maintain housing than to help them to regain long-term housing once lost:

I think that concept around capturing people when they are at risk of losing housing is fundamental, because once people lose their housing it is harder to get housing again. Whether that is in the private market or in public housing or community housing, I think that is really critical... We need something that works with the public housing system to kind of intervene when tenancies are at risk there and in the community housing system as well.⁹

The evidence to the Committee clearly shows the benefits of investing in early intervention services. These services prevent individuals from experiencing a range of ongoing negative personal impacts by addressing issues such as mental health, trauma, employment difficulty and alcohol and drug misuse. Further, early intervention is cost-effective and can prevent ongoing interactions with the justice, health and care systems.

The Committee believes that early intervention is the key to tackling the issue of homelessness.

FINDING 15: Investment in homelessness early intervention services clearly benefits individuals and can produce financial savings for the Victorian Government by preventing homelessness or treating it at an early stage before individuals require more intensive support.

⁹ Ms Cathy Humphrey, Chief Executive Officer, Sacred Heart Mission, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

4.3 System-wide considerations for early intervention services

As well as the systemic homelessness sector issues discussed in Chapter 3, including time-limited support and outcomes-based services, the Committee heard there are additional areas where early intervention services can be improved. These areas include:

- resourcing at homelessness entry points to make sure that everyone who presents can access services
- improved cooperation with institutions that are the first to know when someone is at risk of homelessness.

The submissions from the AIHW and DHHS suggest that once people access early intervention services, they have a high likelihood of staying housed and avoiding homelessness.¹⁰ Data from the AIHW shows that when people first access homelessness services in Victoria, the majority have not yet lost their home. In 2019–20, 64.4% of people accessing services for the first time were at risk of homelessness and 35.6% were already homeless.¹¹

The submission from the AIHW showed that the vast majority of people in Victoria who were at risk of homelessness in 2018–19 when they began their support were assisted to stay in their home:

Of the more than 41,900 clients who began support housed but at risk of homelessness, 9 in 10 (91% or 38,000) were assisted to maintain housing. Of these clients at risk:

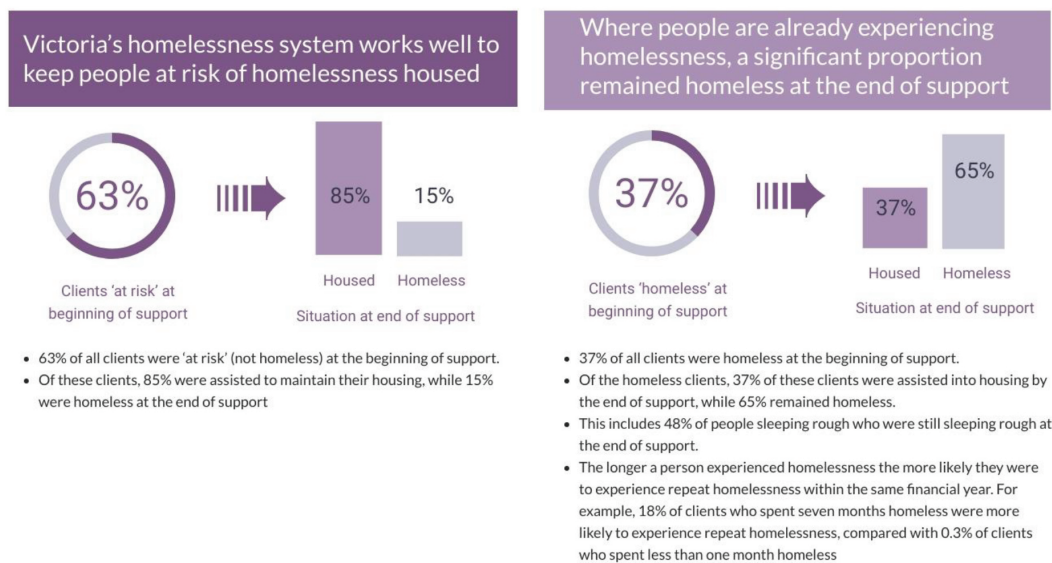
- 9 in 10 (86% or 5,700) of those in public or community housing were assisted to remain in their tenancy and a further 6% (around 400) were assisted into private or other housing.
- 9 in 10 (89% or 28,000) of those in private or other housing were assisted to remain in their tenancy and a further 3% (more than 800) were assisted into public or community housing.¹²

These encouraging figures were reiterated in the DHHS submission, which noted that most clients accessing homelessness services were able to keep their housing following their engagement with the system. Figure 4.2 shows the outcomes for people at risk of homelessness who accessed homelessness services in Victoria in 2018–19.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*; Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*.

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.11, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, cat. no. HOU 322, 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/9e4e2ff0-d30c-419d-abe6-1bb648fc43dd/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report.pdf.aspx>> accessed 4 February 2021.

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 9.

Figure 4.2 Housing outcomes for people at risk of homelessness who accessed homelessness services in Victoria in 2018–19

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p.22.

The evidence provided by the AIHW and the Victorian Government suggests that there are successful outcomes for many that are able to access services during the period where they are at risk of becoming homeless.

However, the Committee was told that there are not enough resources to meet the demand for early intervention services where people access them at homelessness entry points.

FINDING 16: Early intervention services currently in place in Victoria are successful at keeping people housed, where individuals are able to access them.

4.3.1 Homelessness entry points

As noted in Chapter 3, most people requiring homelessness services access them through homelessness entry points, also known as access points, front doors or open doors. This system, which is officially called 'Opening Doors', consists of a number of physical access points across Victoria that people attend in person to discuss their needs with an Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) worker. Homelessness services within a local area network (a specific geographic area) are located near, and accessible to, the homelessness entry point. This is aimed at giving people attending entry points access to a range of services without having to travel or be referred to multiple dispersed services.¹³ The Opening Doors model, which has operated since 2008, has improved service coordination and made it easier for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness to get the help they need.

¹³ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 33; Department of Human Services, *Opening Doors: Better access for homeless people to social housing and support services in Victoria: Framework*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2008, p. 1.

An AHURI report provided to the Committee as part of the submission from Associate Professor David MacKenzie outlined the functions of entry points in Victoria:

At entry points, initial assessment and planning (IAP) workers make an assessment of housing and support needs. IAP workers have the capacity to:

- pay for emergency accommodation
- pay rent arrears
- make a referral to the most appropriate or available SHS in the area.

IAP workers are also able to:

- provide advice on housing options
- provide assistance to material aid
- help with applications for private rental or public housing
- generally advocate on behalf of homeless and at-risk individuals with real-estate agencies or government agencies—for example, Centrelink, Department of Human Services—to assist them overcome barriers they may face accessing housing with support and other services as required.¹⁴

The report added that ‘There is some variation in how Opening Doors works across the regions, but the access system is generally accepted and well established’.¹⁵

While the Opening Doors system has worked to ensure individuals are more easily able to navigate homelessness services, and reduce some of the complexity and confusion involved, the Committee heard that in some areas there can be inadequate resourcing. The submission from the Council to Homeless Persons said:

a lack of funding for demand growth over many years means many entry points don’t have enough staff to see every person that arrives at their doors. Every day 105 people are turned away from even being assessed for their eligibility for housing and support, let alone being matched with services to meet their needs.¹⁶

Because of the volume of people seeking help, services must prioritise those with the most need. Those who are already homeless are prioritised over those who are housed, and families with children are given priority over singles.¹⁷ The Committee was told by Mr Richard Evans from Gippsland Lakes Health Service that families with children are likely to be housed quicker to keep children safe:

The single people are coming up against single mothers with three kids. When we talk about that short-term temporary housing, the single people—it does not matter what

¹⁴ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 115.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 33.

¹⁷ Mr Richard Evans, Manager, Homelessness Support Program, and Family, Youth and Children’s Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64; Ms Jo Doherty, Practice Lead, Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women’s Services, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*.

gender they are—are just simply not going to get over the line. The priority is to keep the children safe and housed.¹⁸

The Committee agrees that it is important to prioritise assisting people in particularly vulnerable or urgent situations. However, in order for early intervention to be effective in easing pressure on the homelessness system, the Committee believes there needs to be adequate resourcing to provide for people in crisis as well as people who are at risk of becoming homeless. Sadly, in some areas, this is not the case. Ms Jo Doherty from Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women’s Services told the Committee that if a person seeks assistance before they become homeless they may be asked to wait until their situation becomes more critical:

If you know on Tuesday that your accommodation is ending on Friday, if you present at an access point, they will say to you, ‘We can’t see you until Friday’. So you know you are going to be homeless but no-one will help you plan until the day, and then when you go there on the Friday they will say, ‘Sorry. There’s no appointments available for you’....

...

They are trying to manage demands, so they are every day too busy with people who are homeless that night.¹⁹

This point was reiterated by Ms Emma King from the Victorian Council of Social Services, who likened the situation to a hospital refusing patients treatment until their injuries were more severe:

This is a bit like walking into a hospital emergency department with a gash in your arm and a nurse saying, ‘We can’t help you now; come back when it’s infected’. Thirty-seven per cent of people who presented to a homelessness service were already homeless when they sought support. This is just one example of how our current system is set up for crisis. Waiting until people are in crisis is the same as a nurse saying, ‘Come back when you’ve got an infection’.²⁰

The Council to Homeless Persons believed that the reason every person is unable to be assisted is because there are not enough IAP workers:

Entry points are now able to accomplish less than they were established and funded to do in the past. Growth in demand relative to staff levels has reduced the capacity for IAP workers to provide effective immediate interventions.²¹

This was echoed by Shane Austin from the Salvation Army—which runs 19 out of 70 homelessness entry points in Victoria—who stated that along with a lack of accommodation, insufficient staff to carry out assessments was the key reason they could not support everyone at their entry points:

¹⁸ Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

¹⁹ Doherty, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

²⁰ King, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

²¹ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 33.

There are those who come to our service and we just cannot support them, and there is one of two key reasons. Not the only reasons but the two key reasons are: we have no accommodation option to offer you—if you come to the service and would like accommodation and we cannot provide it for you, we have not been able to help you—and secondly, that we have insufficient staff to assist at the time of presentation. Can I just explain what that means? What it means is when you come to a service we cannot allocate you a time to make a genuine assessment. So for us it is not about saying, ‘What do you need? Here you go’, it is to sit with that person, and we do not have the adequate time.²²

The Committee believes it is vital that homelessness entry points are adequately resourced to provide early intervention services as well as crisis services. The evidence presented shows that this will, in turn, ease pressure on other elements of the homelessness system. The Committee considers that additional funding should therefore be made available to increase the number of IAP workers at homelessness entry points. In addition, the Government should consider additional funding of programs to ensure that people attending homelessness entry points are able to access early intervention programs and that no one is turned away.

FINDING 17: There are insufficient Initial Assessment and Planning workers at homelessness entry points to meet demand.

FINDING 18: Provision of homelessness services at homelessness access points is necessarily weighted toward those with the greatest need.

FINDING 19: Because homelessness services at homelessness entry points are oriented to assist people in the greatest need, individuals requiring early intervention services do not have their needs fully met.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government prioritise early intervention activities at the first point of contact with the homelessness system in recognition of the need to shift away from a crisis-oriented response, and assist at-risk persons to avoid entering homelessness, including by:

- providing further resources to entry points for additional Initial Assessment and Planning workers
- ensuring that early intervention programs receive further resourcing to meet demand from people attending entry points.

²² Mr Shane Austin, Victorian State Manager, The Salvation Army, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

4.3.2 Identifying persons at risk

People who access homelessness services at entry points have self-identified that they require support. In doing so, they may have already reached a level of crisis that could have been averted if services were provided earlier. The Committee heard that certain agencies or organisations that have regular contact with people at risk of homelessness can take action to refer them to homelessness services before their situation reaches a critical stage. Such organisations may include real estate agents, schools, and mental health and health agencies.

The AIHW provides data about the referral sources of people accessing homelessness services in Victoria. The data shows that the top referral agency is other homelessness agencies, followed by the police, and then other government and non-government support agencies. The data also shows that the majority of individuals who use homelessness services (37.2%) were not formally referred by an agency.²³

Table 4.1 Referral source of people in Victoria in 2019–20 at the beginning of their support

Formal Referral Source	Clients (number)	Clients (%)
Specialist Homelessness Agency/outreach worker	16,207	14.2
Telephone/crisis referral agency	2,552	2.2
Centrelink or employment service case worker	555	0.5
Child protection agency	1,392	1.2
Family and child support agency	1,720	1.5
Hospital	1,200	1.0
Mental health service	1,332	1.2
Disability support service	204	0.2
Drug and alcohol service	443	0.4
Aged care service	75	0.1
Social housing	1,318	1.2
Youth/juvenile justice correctional centre	97	0.1
Adult correctional facility	3,220	2.8
Legal unit (including legal aid)	369	0.3
School/other education institution	788	0.7
Police	13,563	11.9
Courts	1,050	0.9
Immigration department or asylum seeker/refugee support service	538	0.5

²³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.15, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, cat. no. HOU 322, 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/data>> accessed 4 February 2021.

Formal Referral Source	Clients (number)	Clients (%)
Other agency (government or non-government)	12,641	11.1
Family and/or friends	2,911	2.5
Other	6,776	5.9
Family and domestic violence service (non SHS)	2,860	2.5
No formal referral	42,535	37.2
Not stated	960	-
Total	115,306	100.0

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.15, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, cat. no. HOU 322, 2020, accessed 4 February 2021.

The fact that the police are the second most common source of referrals to homelessness services suggests that many referrals to services are happening once individuals are in crisis.

The Victorian Council of Social Service told the Committee that more needs to be done by mainstream institutions to identify individuals at risk of homelessness. These institutions include general practices, schools or maternal and child health services.²⁴ Their submission gave examples of how these agencies can identify people at risk of homelessness:

They can be the ‘canary in the coalmine’—they have line of sight to emerging risk factors for homelessness. Some examples are:

- Financial counsellors or emergency relief providers can identify a family at risk of rental stress;
- School and youth services can be the first point of contact for young people having trouble living in the family home;
- Community health agencies support their clients with the many personal factors that may make maintaining a home difficult, such as chronic disease, drug and alcohol use, and mental illness.²⁵

The Committee was given some examples of programs that include input from ‘first to know’ stakeholders. One example is the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP). In some areas where this program operates, real estate agents contact homelessness services to let them know when a tenant is at risk of losing their tenancy. Ms Sue Grigg from Unison Housing in Melbourne’s West discussed the referral role real estate agents have in the organisation:

I think in our region—because of our private rental access program and how we have gone about developing that; we actually employ real estate agents to work in that

²⁴ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 341*, p. 44.

²⁵ Ibid.

program—we are quite well connected to the private rental market, and real estate agents often refer families who are at risk to us. Because they always know; the real estate agent is always aware when there are problems.²⁶

PRAP will be discussed further in section 4.4.2.

Similarly, the Committee heard about a program run by BeyondHousing in the Goulburn-Murray region called Supporting Tenancies at Risk (STAR). The program also fosters relationships with real estate agents, who approach the organisation before the client is evicted.²⁷ Ms Laura Harris, Business Development Manager at BeyondHousing described the program:

It is really a program that focuses on when people are in a private rental and things start putting that tenancy at risk. We provide support—as well as brokerage, but it is not only that—to keep that person in the private rental. It stops them coming through our entry point as a homeless client.²⁸

She said that in one year the program had a 98% success rate in assisting clients to keep their tenancy.²⁹

Ms Ruth Gordon from the Southern Homelessness Network gave evidence to the Committee about the proactive nature of the STAR program and whether there were any other proactive early intervention programs in Melbourne's south. She noted that there were similar programs, but they were funded on a pilot basis and only operated in one location:

Look, I did work on one of the projects at HomeConnect, the VincentCare project, at one stage and did some evaluation of that in my previous role. They are fantastic programs. The only one that I think we have in our region is the Detour youth coaching model through Melbourne City Mission. The problem is, like I said, they are really good programs, we know they work, they have been well evaluated, well documented, but then they just stick in those areas. So if we had Detour across the region or if we had HomeConnect—they are needed not everywhere but they are needed in lots of places rather than just in the places where they happen to get funded at that time. This is what I am talking about—that we do have the evidence of programs that work and that do deter people from the service system as those two programs do. But we have got Detour down in Frankston, and that is it, that I am aware of, from that round of projects and innovation.³⁰

²⁶ Ms Sue Grigg, Director, Housing and Homelessness, Unison Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

²⁷ Ms Laura Harris, Business Development Manager, BeyondHousing, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ms Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator, Southern Homelessness Services Network, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

The Committee believes it is important to fund programs that have components that communicate with stakeholders and institutions who often have contact with people at risk of homelessness. There should be an increased focus on referrals from these institutions before individuals reach a crisis point.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government implement measures to prioritise outreach to other institutions outside the homelessness sector for the purposes of early intervention, including by:

- engaging with bodies and institutions that are the first to know when individuals are at risk of homelessness to assist them to identify and respond to risk factors for homelessness, including through education and training
- supporting homelessness services to build strong relationships and referral pathways with institutions that are the first to know when individuals are at risk of homelessness.

4.4 Early intervention—individual risk factors

4.4.1 Family violence

Family violence prevention

As discussed in Chapter 2, family violence is the most common reason people access homelessness services. Data from the AIHW shows that nationally, 32.5% of people at risk of homelessness access services due to family violence.³¹

One of the key outcomes of the Royal Commission into Family Violence has been increased awareness of the incidence of family violence and a push for cultural and behavioural change throughout the community. A number of family violence programs aimed at cultural and behavioural change have been put in place. For example, programs that focus on educating children about respectful relationships. These types of education programs may assist in the prevention of homelessness associated with family violence.

Mr Paul McDonald, CEO of Anglicare told the Committee about the changed attitude towards family violence:

I think since the royal commission we have learned more about changing men's behaviour. I certainly think the community conversation about domestic violence is getting more men—not all, but more men—reflecting on their position.³²

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.22, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, cat. no. HOU 322, 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/data>> accessed 4 February 2021.

³² Mr Paul McDonald, Chief Executive Officer, Anglicare Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

Mr McDonald went on to explain Anglicare's 'Caring Dads' program which is aimed at creating behavioural change among perpetrators of family violence:

We run 16-week groups. There can be up to 12, 14, 16, 18 men at a time in these groups. Prior to COVID we had them in a room, then between lockdown one and lockdown two we started to run the groups again socially distanced, about 10 in a room at a time, and we are now doing some on Zoom. It is more labour intensive, but it is still working. So what happens is we run these groups in which we allow the group milieu as well as our two presenters to start to confront some of these behaviours about what is stemming, what is making them angry? What is the violence? And Caring Dads is about men perpetrating violence towards a partner, but we approach this group of men as, 'You are fathers. Your children are watching this. What's that?'. So we find that there are a lot of men wanting to be better dads coming along who are perpetrators.³³

At a public hearing, Ms Ruth Isbel, Executive Officer at Emma House Domestic Violence Service described the positive outcomes of the Victorian statewide school-based program, Respectful Relationships, which aims to promote respect, positive attitudes and behaviours in students. She stated:

The Respectful Relationships program has been, from my understanding, extremely successful, and recently we have noticed an increase in young women—so women under the age of 25—accessing our services with young perpetrators. I have no causal link, but I think this may be an outcome of some of those projects. I think if children are exposed to family violence then our best early intervention is to get in there as fast as we can and work in evidence-informed ways that actually attempt to reduce the impact of the family violence, because we know it will impact them for the rest of their lives.³⁴

Alongside programs focusing on preventing family violence through behavioural and cultural change are programs which aim to improve the ability of the victim to better support children in family violence situations to ensure they do not suffer adverse outcomes. Ms Jocelyn Bignold, CEO of McAuley Women's Services told the Committee about programs to assist mother-child bonding following family violence:

Our preventative approach is very, very deliberate. Again, we can only support a fraction of the need, so we need to build prevention into everything that we do. So some of the examples are infant-led practice, strengthening the mother-child bond, because we know that in the family violence sector we are at risk of losing adolescents from the age of 12, and we know that there are 12- to 14- and 15-year-olds that are couch surfing in an effort to stay connected to school.³⁵

Paul McDonald, from Anglicare, also told the Committee about a program aimed at young adolescent men who perpetrate family violence against their parents or siblings:

We have got things like rapid response. We are in the family home 15 hours a week for four weeks. Now, think about that: 15 hours a week for four weeks—that is a long time to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ms Ruth Isbel, Executive Officer, Emma House Domestic Violence Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

³⁵ Ms Jocelyn Bignold, Chief Executive Officer, McAuley Community Services for Women, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

be in a family home with mum dealing with what is happening in the dynamic. But what we do know is once we put that intensive investment in, just for four weeks, they are not re-reporting back to child protection, they are not asking police to come in. Intensive investment inside the home for a short period of time can help and assist in the thinking of violent young men, because they end up on the homeless circuit. They are probably down on themselves for being angry in the family home, angry at mum. Mum is down. I think the reconciliation between those partners is something that is sort of like men's behaviour change we have had on the fringe. We need to get some of these programs as mainstream intervention before all of this happens...³⁶

The Committee recognises the crucial need for programs that seek to address the causes of family violence, including programs aimed at behavioural change and those that work with the perpetrator following an episode of family violence. In the context of homelessness, these programs can help to prevent future incidences of family violence which could lead to housing crisis and homelessness.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended a number of measures to prevent family violence that have since been implemented by the Victorian Government. The evidence received by the Committee did not suggest that further preventative programs need to be put in place at this time.

Safe at home response—Flexible support packages

In many cases, victims of family violence may flee their home to escape their abuser. However, several stakeholders believed that the best outcomes for survivors and their children is to stay in their own home and to remove the perpetrator.

Helping a person experiencing family violence stay in their home where it is safe to do so is a far better option to being forced into homelessness and attempting to access already overcrowded crisis and transitional accommodation. Crisis accommodation for families leaving a violent household can be unsafe, especially at some motels and rooming houses.³⁷ The need to leave the home in this context, including in urgent or emergency situations, can have significant and wide-ranging psychosocial and other impacts. Ms Rebecca Lorains, CEO of Primary Care Connect Shepparton, described the poorer outcomes of families who are forced to leave their homes and end up in unsuitable crisis accommodation:

They lose connection to their community. Kids are taken out of school. So again, it is caravan parks and it is hotels, which are really inappropriate for women and children to be living in....

...

We want them to remain in school; we want them connected to their community. Some of the reforms in family violence have been around being able to keep women safe at

³⁶ McDonald, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

³⁷ State of Victoria, *Royal Commission into Family Violence Vol II: Report and Recommendations*, Victorian Government Printer, Victoria, 2016, p. 22.

home and in place and remove the perpetrator rather than women always having to leave their housing.³⁸

Family violence crisis and transitional accommodation is discussed in Chapter 5.

To prevent homelessness for persons who have experienced violence and their families, the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended a substantial expansion of 'safe at home' responses.³⁹ According to Domestic Violence Victoria, safe at home: 'refers to a variety of interventions that enable victim-survivors to remain in their home, while the perpetrator of the family violence leaves, often with an intervention order that includes exclusion provisions.'⁴⁰

One such intervention is the provision of flexible support packages. Flexible support packages provide funding for victims and their children to meet the unique needs they may have upon fleeing their perpetrator. This could be for mental health support, school supplies or replacement of essential items,⁴¹ although it's estimated approximately 60% of the funding is spent on accommodation costs.⁴² The ability to choose where the funding is spent recognises that the person who has experienced violence is best placed to determine their needs. This was noted by Domestic Violence Victoria:

The inherently flexible nature of the packages mean that support can be tailored in a more responsive and agile way that addresses the unique risks, needs and impacts of family violence on each individual victim-survivor, including children.⁴³

Part of the flexible support packages program is the personal safety initiative. This initiative provides funding for victims to upgrade the safety features of their home, including installing CCTV, personal alarms and security doors.⁴⁴ This ensures additional safety at home and helps to prevent victims from fleeing into crisis accommodation.⁴⁵

The Committee was initially told by the Council to Homeless Persons, Domestic Violence Victoria and others that funding for flexible support packages were due to expire in July 2020.⁴⁶ However, funding for the program for an additional four years was announced in the 2020–21 State Budget.⁴⁷

The evidence received by the Committee suggests that flexible support packages are an important part of the Victorian Government's response to family violence and play a key role in keeping people who experience violence in their own home or to rapidly

38 Ms Rebecca Lorains, Chief Executive Officer, Primary Care Connect, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

39 State of Victoria, *Royal Commission into Family Violence Vol II*, p. 22.

40 Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 198*, p. 7.

41 Ibid.

42 Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 27.

43 Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 198*, p. 7.

44 Premier of Victoria, *Keeping women and children safe*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 29 April 2017.

45 Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 198*, p. 7.

46 Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 31.

47 Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2030: Working towards a Victoria free from family violence*, 2020, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-reform-rolling-action-plan-2020-2023>> accessed 13 January 2021.

find other accommodation. The Committee believes that funding needs to be made available on an ongoing basis to ensure that persons experiencing family violence can have the help they need to avoid homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding for the family violence Flexible Support Packages program.

Accommodation for perpetrators

A key goal of the safe at home response is the removal of the perpetrator so that those who experience violence do not have to leave the family home into an uncertain housing situation or homelessness. However, this can leave the perpetrator without accommodation. Domestic Violence Victoria told the Committee that if the person who perpetrates violence becomes homeless, they are more likely to harass the victim and less likely to engage in family violence remediation programs:

If a perpetrator is removed from the family home and becomes homeless as a result, it makes them more likely to try to return home or harass victim-survivors to take them back. It is also harder to engage perpetrators in services when they are homeless. It is much safer for victim-survivors to have perpetrators monitored and engaged in programs than being displaced into dangerous rooming houses or sleeping in their cars. It is also common for perpetrators who are excluded from the home to stay with relatives, most frequently elderly parents. This can place other family members at risk of other forms of family violence, such as elder abuse.⁴⁸

This was similarly emphasised by Mr Cameron Lavery, Manager and Principal Lawyer, Homeless Law, Justice Connect, who stated that the Homeless Law program had seen that a lack of affordable housing options can ‘make perpetrators more isolated and increases the risk of repeated or escalated violence’.⁴⁹

Ms Bernadette McCartney, Executive Manager, Access, Support and Family Services, Bethany Community Support noted that it is a controversial issue to provide accommodation for people that have broken the law but that it is important so that victims do not need to flee the family home:

Finally, and somewhat controversially, housing options for perpetrators that hold the potential to remove them from the home as opposed to always removing women and children. This should be strongly considered. This is something that our specialist men’s family violence service has been recommending for some time now...⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 198*, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁹ Mr Cameron Lavery, Manager and Principal Lawyer, Justice Connect, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Ms Bernadette McCartney, Executive Manager, Access, Support and Family Services, Bethany Community Support, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

The Committee heard that there is a particular absence of housing options for perpetrators in regional areas. Ms Kathy Woods, Housing Support Worker at Orbst Regional Health, told the Committee that their organisation is often unable to find accommodation for persons who have perpetrated family violence following an incident, noting that 'There is just nothing available to us except perhaps a hotel, and once again that is not really a very good option.'⁵¹

Domestic Violence Victoria also acknowledged the difficulty of the issue, particularly in light of the lack of crisis and transitional accommodation available for the general population.⁵² However, it said that such accommodation was necessary for the safety of victims and that supported accommodation could be provided to deliver behavioural change education while the perpetrators are there:

given that housing perpetrators has significant bearing on victim-survivors' safety, DV Vic advocates for the Victorian Government to take urgent action on making accommodation available to perpetrators of family violence when they are excluded from the family home. These accommodation options should not come at the expense of housing for victim-survivors but needs to complement housing for victim-survivors. Accommodation for perpetrators could include a range of accommodation options including short-term residential programs as well as long-term housing to suit a variety of perpetrator needs and circumstances. It should be accessible at short notice and should be attached to case management and men's behavioural change programs to ensure that men are held accountable for their behaviour and risk to victim-survivors is managed and minimised.⁵³

The Committee believes that, where possible and appropriate, victims and their children should be supported to stay in their home. The high rate of homelessness as a result of family violence means that if the safe at home strategy becomes the primary response to family violence, then many family violence perpetrators will become homeless as a result. This can have impacts for the safety of victims and their families. The Committee heard that supported accommodation for perpetrators, providing behavioural change and other education programs, is needed.

In its submission to the inquiry, DHHS provided:

There is only limited data on the number of perpetrators of family violence (particularly those subject to family violence intervention orders excluding them from the home) who subsequently seek support from homelessness services. It is expected that a proportion of the single homeless population would be subject to these orders as a consequence of their violence in the home. Exploring options to earlier identify and rehouse these men would contribute to reducing recurrent family violence, reduce the incidence of victim survivors' homelessness and support safer outcomes for families.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ms Kathy Woods, Housing Support Worker, Orbst Regional Health, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

⁵² Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 198*, p. 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 34.

The Committee considers that it is important to understand the incidence of perpetrators experiencing homelessness in Victoria in order to develop appropriate policy responses. In addition, Domestic Violence Victoria recommended that the Government invest in a trial of accommodation for persons who perpetrate family violence with linked behavioural change programs and assess whether it resulted in reduced risk of ongoing or renewed abuse towards victims. The Committee believes this is a sensible approach that recognises accommodation should be provided if it improves the safety of victims.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government:

- fund research into the incidence of homelessness amongst perpetrators of family violence in Victoria
- increase funding for family violence programs that focus on perpetrator interventions
- trial and evaluate the effectiveness of programs that provide supported accommodation for perpetrators of family violence, linked to compulsory behavioural change programs, including in regional areas.

4.4.2 Housing crisis

Private Rental Assistance Program

National data from the AIHW shows that in 2018–19, the second most common reason people at risk of homelessness accessed services was ‘housing crisis’ (14.2%). A related response of ‘financial difficulties’ was the third most common, with 12.8% of people at risk of homelessness accessing services for this reason.⁵⁵ This suggests to the Committee that financial issues, culminating in a crisis to afford housing, is one of the leading contributors to homelessness in Victoria.

As noted in Chapter 2, a large proportion of people experiencing homelessness enter from the private rental market. Chris McNamara from the Gippsland Homelessness Network said that based on data from the AIHW, evictions from private rental properties contribute to approximately 40% of homelessness in Victoria.⁵⁶

The Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) addresses the substantial need for financial assistance to maintain a tenancy and help people at risk of homelessness to avoid eviction. It also assists people who are newly homeless to find new properties as quickly as possible.

⁵⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.21, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, cat. no. HOU 322, 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/data>> accessed 4 February 2021.

⁵⁶ Ms Chris McNamara, Coordinator, Gippsland Homelessness Network, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

The Committee is also aware of other rental brokerage or head leasing programs. These will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

The PRAP initiatives were established in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence to support the 'safe at home' response. They have since been expanded to include all clients accessing homelessness services.

Many stakeholders in the homelessness sector considered private rental assistance as being a highly successful part of early intervention and homelessness prevention. Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons, explained the benefit of rental assistance as an early intervention measure for women leaving family violence situations:

There has been one program funded which has been extraordinarily successful, actually, called the Private Rental Assistance Program... So whilst the rental market is unaffordable for many people who come through homeless services, it is not unaffordable for all, particularly in some rural locations where there is still affordable housing or other parts of Melbourne where there is still affordable housing, particularly for larger family groups or for a woman and children coming through family violence where there is a reasonable prospect that after a period she will be able to get back into employment. So in those circumstances the Private Rental Assistance Program offers a subsidy into private rental and assistance to secure a rental property. So effectively it works how a homelessness system is supposed to work: a woman presents, she needs to be rehoused, the private rental assistance worker rehouses her, that housing is secured with a subsidy so it is affordable during the period when her income is not high and then that situation is effectively ended. So that is a fantastic early intervention, and it was continued on in the last budget.⁵⁷

The Committee heard that PRAP can be used for a larger range of individuals compared to the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) which is funding used by homelessness services to pay for accommodation for clients. Ms Paula Healey, Private Rental Assistance Program Worker from Community Housing Ltd said that PRAP is more widely accessible because it has less strict criteria. She said that this has led to more people keeping their tenancies and prevented from entering homelessness:

The Private Rental Assistance Program is an initiative by the Government to, I guess, reduce or eliminate homelessness by early intervention. It is working with the real estate and the local support agencies to pinpoint problems before they get too big—before it ends in eviction. I think it is a wonderful program which has saved a lot of tenancies, especially for people who have not been able to access support through HEF, which is the Housing Establishment Fund. We see lots of singles that we are able to support, lots of families—it is a vast array of people—and also people that maybe go above the income threshold a little bit, so that is little bit more lenient so that we can provide some assistance to people that otherwise would have missed out.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Ms Paula Healey, Private Rental Assistance Program Worker, Community Housing (Vic) Ltd, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

Mr James King, CEO of Unison Housing, said that an evaluation of the PRAP program in Melbourne's west found that nearly 80% of people who received assistance were still in their accommodation after two years:

It is an extremely successful program, as confirmed last week when Unison and RMIT University launched an evaluation of the service. The evaluation found that after two years nearly 80 per cent of people assisted had sustained their housing. In the last three months the Unison PRAP assisted 186 households to move into private rental and just over 100 households to maintain their private rental tenancy.⁵⁹

While the Committee heard that PRAP has been successful, there are barriers for people experiencing homelessness to use it successfully. Mr Ashish Sitoula, Team Leader of Community Advocacy at Greater Dandenong City Council, said that family violence victims were being turned away in Dandenong because they did not have a rental history:

Over 500 women and children are turned away every year by the crisis access point. Right? There are opportunities to house these women and children before it hits crisis stage, but these women and children do not have a rental history and the private rental market will never entertain them. But the homelessness entry points do not have the funding to activate the private rentals. There was funding that the state government put in for transitional accommodation as part of the family violence refuge program.⁶⁰

Hope Street Youth Services suggested there were also barriers preventing some young people accessing PRAP. They wrote in their submission:

Young people and their support workers tell us that there are barriers to them accessing the PRAP program. These include the need to have an existing support worker to advocate for their access to the program; the reliance on them reporting to PRAP access points in order to request above the standard levels of support; the fact that PRAP support is not localised or place-based; and the short-term limit (six to 12 weeks) of case worker support as part of PRAP Plus. Young people who are not yet within the homelessness sector and are therefore without a case worker, those who don't have enough money to access public transport to attend PRAP access point appointments, and those whose mental health that further limits their ability to conceptualize and navigate service systems, are falling through the gaps. Young people, particularly those who have experienced trauma and who lack support systems as a result of their experience with homelessness, need specialist youth-focused support and interventions rather than generalist approaches.⁶¹

Given the high proportion of young people experiencing homelessness, the Committee believes the Victorian Government should consider the barriers young people face in accessing PRAP with a view to making the services more accessible. In addition, the

⁵⁹ Mr James King, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Unison Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Mr Ashish Sitoula, Team Leader, Community Advocacy, Greater Dandenong City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 30–40.

⁶¹ Hope Street Youth and Family Services, *Submission 209*, p. 12.

Government should consider the needs of persons experiencing family violence with particular barriers to utilising PRAP funding, such as a lack of rental history.

The Council to Homeless Person's submission stated that funding for the PRAP initiative is currently available until July 2021.

The Committee believes PRAP is exactly the kind of homelessness early intervention program that needs ongoing funding. PRAP avoids the costs of crisis accommodation and the trauma of eviction for those who access it. The program has already shown it can be applied on a statewide scale to a number of different cohorts. The Committee believes PRAP should continue to grow to become a key part of the homelessness services system.

BOX 4.1: John Smith

Since childhood John has experienced poverty and disadvantage; and has struggled to find stable employment. His search for full-time work has been difficult because he left school early and does not have a Year 12 certificate or other higher education qualifications. As a result, John is receiving Commonwealth income support whilst he looks for a job.

Recently, John experienced increased financial difficulties and has been late with rental payments multiple times. Because he was in arrears on multiple occasions, John was evicted from his private rental property.

Prior to his eviction, John reached out to financial service providers in an attempt to get financial counselling which would assist him in managing his budget and financial obligations. Despite speaking about his difficulties in paying rent John was not identified as being at risk of homelessness and was not referred to any housing or homelessness services.

The significant personal and economic shock of eviction meant John was not able to afford another private rental. Therefore, John presented at his local entry point seeking crisis accommodation (continued in Chapter 5).

What options were available to John that may have prevented his entry into homelessness?

John made the right decision in seeking financial counselling to help with the financial difficulties he was experiencing. He was exhibiting warning signs that he was at risk of homelessness, namely, his late rental payments. John could have been referred to a rental assistance program, such as the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP). PRAP has been successful at assisting people in avoiding homelessness and may have also been able to help John keep his property or find another one following his eviction.

If the services John was accessing had identified the risk factors before it reached a crisis point, John may have been able to avoid entering into homelessness.

Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government ensure ongoing funding for the Private Rental Assistance Program in recognition of its key role in preventing entry into homelessness and that the funding grows to meet demand.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government consider the barriers faced by young people, persons experiencing family violence and other groups in relation to difficulties entering or remaining in the private rental market in continued development of the Private Rental Assistance Program, with a view to making the service more accessible for these cohorts.

PRAP Plus

PRAP Plus expands on PRAP by offering extra support to people to address the underlying issues that can lead to losing their tenancy. This is an outreach program that aims to promote successful, sustainable tenancies and reduce preventable exits from private rental properties. This includes the development of tenancy support plans and assisting clients to effectively engage with real estate agents and other relevant organisations. Ms Paula Healey from Community Housing Ltd said that PRAP Plus is successful because it addresses the causes rather than the symptoms of homelessness:

with the new reform and the PRAP Plus that is coming out that has been changed, so that will be a little bit more lenient. My other issue with PRAP was that I often felt like we were bandaiding a solution and we could not work to address the issues that led to the presenting problem...

...

However, with PRAP Plus we will now address that. It is a support program to work with people after they have had assistance, so that you can identify the areas that need more work, so they will be case managed for a short period of time to work with that.⁶²

Through providing expanded services which address the causes of homelessness, PRAP Plus will assist in preventing ongoing use of PRAP by individuals. The Committee believes PRAP Plus is a necessary addition that will achieve long-term savings.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government provide additional and ongoing funding for the Private Rental Assistance Program Plus to ensure the program can continue to grow to meet demand.

⁶² Healey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

4.4.3 Mental health

Mental health and homelessness are intersecting issues. Poor mental health is a risk factor for homelessness; and homelessness can cause deterioration in an individual's mental health. The DHHS submission to the inquiry stated:

Victorians with severe and persistent mental illness are overrepresented in people experiencing long term homelessness and sleeping rough. They are eight times more likely to access homelessness services and five times more likely to be in social housing than other Victorians.

a Melbourne study of 4,300 homelessness case histories ... found 31 per cent of people reported a mental health problem. Of these, about half (47 per cent) had a mental health issue prior to becoming homeless and the remainder developed mental health issues after becoming homeless. This data illustrated the complex, bi-directional relationship between mental illness and homelessness.⁶³

Investing in early intervention programs that support those experiencing mental health issues can prevent a deterioration of mental health and help to prevent homelessness.

BOX 4.2: Adam and Wally

Adam had lived with his father Wally, a disability support pensioner, from the age of 11. In 2016 Adam turned 18 and applied for the Youth allowance and then the NewStart allowance. His applications were rejected by Centrelink and continued to be rejected for the next 18 months. Due to an administrative failure, Adam had to provide evidence to Centrelink that he was Wally's son and that he had turned 18. According to Wally, Centrelink refused to accept a statutory declaration and stated Adam needed to provide a learner driver permit as proof before he could access payments.

During this time the Department of Housing stated that Adam was not permitted to live with his father unless he contributed to rent payments. As Adam had no income and was unable to pay rent, he began to couch surf and drifted into a life of homelessness and mental ill-health. Adam eventually moved in with his mother, who lived in a women's refuge, where he remained until early 2020.

Wally contends that the enormous stress and anxiety Adam has experienced as a result of not receiving welfare support, combined with the isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated Adam's declining mental health. He has experienced several psychotic episodes resulting in hospital admission. During one such episode, he caused extensive property damage to his father's home, forcing Wally to apply for an interim intervention order against Adam.

While Adam now receives Centrelink payments, his homelessness issues have not been resolved and, his father says, are unlikely to be until his health issues are addressed.

Source: Wally Edwards, *Submission 447*, pp. 1-3.

⁶³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 36.

Mind Australia, a community mental health service provider, gave an overview of the likelihood of financial hardship and forced housing moves that those experiencing mental illness are at risk of:

People who experienced severe psychological distress had an 89 per cent increased likelihood of financial hardship in the following year and a 96 per cent increased likelihood of experiencing financial hardship within two years. They also had a 28 per cent increased likelihood of experiencing a forced move in the following year and a 26 per cent increased likelihood of experiencing a forced move in the following two years. Similarly, people with a diagnosed mental health condition had a 44 per cent increased likelihood of financial hardship within one year and a 46 per cent increased likelihood of financial hardship within two years. They also had a 39 per cent increased likelihood of a forced move within one year and a 32 per cent increased likelihood of a forced move within two years.⁶⁴

The Council to Homeless Persons also outlined that people experiencing mental health issues often face discrimination in the rental market, reduced employment opportunities and are more likely to access Commonwealth income support:

A survey of people experiencing a range of mental illnesses found that 90 per cent believed that they had experienced discrimination in the private rental market. Mental illness also results in poverty for many people, with poor mental health strongly associated with reduced employment, and 34 per cent of those receiving the Disability Support Pension doing so due to mental illness. ...many other people experiencing significant mental illness receive the lower Newstart Allowance.⁶⁵

FINDING 20: Poor mental health is a risk factor for homelessness and homelessness can cause a deterioration in an individual's mental health.

The Committee was told about two key areas of early intervention support that can be provided to people with mental health issues to prevent homelessness:

Improvement of cooperation between mental health and homelessness services so that the system is easier to navigate and individuals at risk of homelessness are identified earlier.

Tenancy support programs for people experiencing mental health issues who are at risk of homelessness.

These key areas are discussed in detail below. In addition, the Committee notes that at the time of writing, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was yet to release its final report. However, noting that similar findings regarding the correlation between mental health and homelessness were made in its interim report, the Committee hopes that the Victorian Government will ensure implementation of the comprehensive suite of recommendations stemming from the Royal Commission's final report.

⁶⁴ Mind Australia, *Submission 349*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 28.

Improvements to collaboration with mental health services

Orygen, a youth mental health research and service provider, said that severe episodes of mental health issues and particularly episodes of trauma led to an increased likelihood of homelessness. Their submission outlined how trauma can increase the risk of homelessness:

Trauma has often been found to be a key part of an individual's pathway to homelessness. International studies have found that between half to three-quarters of young persons who have experienced homelessness have experienced physical abuse and approximately a third will have experienced sexual abuse. The trauma experienced prior to homelessness increases the challenge in coping with the obstacles faced whilst endeavouring to exit homelessness. Experiences of trauma in an individual's childhood and adolescence has been found to increase the likelihood that that person will experience repeated episodes of homelessness.⁶⁶

Dr Sarah Pollock from Mind Australia agreed that support for those who had experienced trauma was important. She stated that people experiencing mental health issues needed assistance to navigate the mental health system to find the help they need:

connection to a trusted worker—it does not matter where the worker came from but it is someone who can help you when things start to go wrong, someone who can help you actually navigate the system and find the help you need. To some extent that addresses what we found, quite poor service system literacy in the people we were talking to—help to manage mental health beyond the provision of medication and short-term or limited term therapies and help to deal with trauma. I will say that again—help to deal with trauma. And for a third time—help to deal with trauma. I was staggered by the extent of trauma and the very limited opportunities that people had to really get decent trauma counselling—not just trauma-informed practice but actually assistance to resolve their trauma issues.⁶⁷

The Committee agrees that homelessness services can be difficult to navigate for a range of stakeholders. Given that mental health issues, including trauma, are one of the key risk factors for homelessness it is important that people experiencing mental illness are provided support to navigate mental health and homelessness services. The Committee believes this can be achieved through more integration and cooperation between mental health and homelessness services. The submission from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Victoria Branch suggested that improved policy integration could lead to better outcomes:

The Victorian Government has several strategies and policies relating to housing and homelessness, as well as mental health. However, there is little integration across strategies and policies meaning there is no clear, interconnected action to resolve issues relating to housing, homelessness and mental health. Improved policy integration between housing, homelessness and mental health has been recommended as a

⁶⁶ Orygen, *Submission 332*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Dr Sarah Pollock, Executive Director of Research and Advocacy, Mind Australia, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 1–2.

system change which could have the potential to contribute to better housing and health outcomes for people with lived experience of mental ill health (AHURI, 2018). This is relevant for state-level policies, as well as between state and federal policies and governments.⁶⁸

The Northern Homelessness Network told the Committee that it had worked on a collaborative practice guide to provide agencies with an agreed approach to collaborative practice. Their submission to the inquiry stated that this guide had been completed but needed to be taken up by DHHS and associated services providers, which would require resourcing beyond current sector capacity.⁶⁹

The evidence provided to the inquiry suggests that more needs to be done to support collaboration between the homelessness and mental health sectors. The Victorian Government should investigate models such as the Northern Homelessness Network's *Making Links Collaborative Practice Guide* with a view to strengthening collaboration between mental health and homelessness services statewide. This cooperation should include data sharing and aim to make it easier for individuals to navigate both systems.

Collaboration between the mental health and homelessness sectors can also help to ensure individuals at risk of homelessness are identified early and provided the support they need.

Dr Kerryn Rubin, Chair of the RANZCP Victoria Branch said that it was important for mental health services to be proactive and offer ongoing support to people at risk. Such support could be tapered up or down depending on the circumstances of the individual:

The whole concept of early intervention for me is a tricky one because we understand far better these days than we ever have before the relationship between traumas and the development of mental illness, poor mental health. In a sense, there is not a diagnosis you can pick that does not have a significant relationship to trauma because early adverse life experiences actually shape brain development. They change the way your brain functions and make you much more vulnerable to developing various conditions later in life. So, for me, early intervention actually starts before people are born. It is about recognising at-risk families and starting work with them early. We know that the same people who are in at-risk families are going to be at risk of homelessness. This is where I come back to agreeing completely with Dr Pollock. It is about providing these things in an integrated sense but also in a connected and ongoing sense, where they can step up and step down as needed in the home environment. One way to argue it is if you were supporting somebody with mental illness who was living for a number of years in a house and the level of supports may have dropped, but they were then about to become a parent, you may look at some specific—there are some very good, evidence-based interventions.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Submission 121*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Northern Homelessness Network, *Submission 177*, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Dr Kerryn Rubin, Chair, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Victorian Branch, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

Mental health services should be supported to identify people at risk of homelessness and liaise with homelessness services to ensure they do not lose their accommodation and suffer further adverse mental health outcomes. In addition, it may be beneficial for mental health services to proactively monitor and provide support to individuals they engage with and who are at risk of homelessness. Such support could be stepped up or down at periods of crisis.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government promote collaborative practice arrangements between mental health and homelessness services, in order to:

- make the homelessness and mental health systems easier for individuals to navigate
- ensure early identification of individuals experiencing mental illness who need support.

Tenancy support arrangements for people experiencing mental illness

Several stakeholders advocated to the Committee for an expansion in tenancy support arrangements for people with a mental illness. Dr Sarah Pollock from Mind Australia, said at a public hearing that people experiencing mental health issues needed support to maintain their tenancies:

When people become unwell and experience an episode of mental ill-health, it can often impact their ability to maintain their tenancy. As quantitative data from the research shows, people are much more likely to experience a forced move if they have a mental health condition or experience psychological distress than others. Reasons for forced moves include eviction, the property becoming unavailable, problematic drug or substance use, housing stress, health problems, relationship breakdown, unemployment, or being required to move between public housing properties. Tenancy support should include help maintaining a tenancy, such as budgeting, tenancy advice, resolving rent arrears and assistance to improve a person's financial situation such as help to find employment.⁷¹

A submission to the inquiry from Dr Duncan Rouch advocated for programs to assist real estate agents and others to respond appropriately in a mental health crisis:

Existing tenancy sustainment programs have been shown to be a cost-effective way of sustaining tenancies. Building the capacity of social housing providers, tenancy managers and real estate agents to respond appropriately to a mental health crisis is another key measure.⁷²

The Committee spoke to Wellways, a mental health and disability support organisation that runs a program called Doorway. Doorway is a tenancy support program that helps people experiencing mental illness and homelessness to find and keep a private rental tenancy. According to the Wellways website, the program provides:

- support to find a home and sign a lease

⁷¹ Pollock, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁷² Dr Duncan Rouch, *Submission 73*, p. 14.

- weekly support in your home
- help with looking for work or starting study
- support with building life skills and relationships
- assistance to buy essential items to establish your home if needed
- support to manage your rent and utility payments and to maintain your property
- help to transition out of the Doorway program into sustainable permanent housing.⁷³

Ms Rosalie Frankish from Wellways explained the success of the program at a public hearing:

Doorway has worked alongside 70 real estate agents to house 143 people who were homeless with mental health issues in the private rental market across Victoria. It is not just positive housing outcomes that this program has evidenced, it is also economically viable. An economic evaluation of Doorway indicated governmental cost savings of \$133 per person, per day for people engaged in private rental through the Doorway program when compared to surface utilisation costs of others experiencing homelessness in the community. This type of model evidences faster housing outcomes for people experiencing secondary homelessness, improved health and cost-effectiveness for government.⁷⁴

An economic evaluation of Doorway indicated governmental cost savings of \$133 per person, per day for people engaged in private rental through the Doorway program when compared to surface utilisation costs of others experiencing homelessness in the community.

Source: Ms Rosalie Frankish, Housing Programs Coordinator, Victoria, Wellways, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p 44.

Given the high proportion of people experiencing a mental illness that are also homeless or at risk of homelessness, the Committee believes it is important that private tenancy sustainment programs provide mental health services for those who require it.

The Committee supports the Doorway program and the services it provides for people experiencing mental illness who are at risk of homelessness. However, it notes the limited scale of the program, which as of July 2020 had kept 143 people in housing.⁷⁵ The Committee expects there may be many more people at risk of homelessness and in need of mental health support to help maintain their tenancy.

⁷³ Wellways, *Our services: Doorway*, <<https://www.wellways.org/our-services/doorway>> accessed 12 November 2020.

⁷⁴ Ms Rosalie Frankish, Housing Programs Coordinator, Wellways, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

As discussed above, PRAP Plus is a more established tenancy support program that has a statewide reach and provides effective support to those with tenancies at risk. PRAP Plus provides services that ‘address issues which are contributing to the risk of tenancy breakdown’, which includes helping participants to ‘actively engage with appropriate organisations to address the underlying issues that are causing the tenancy to be at risk.’⁷⁶ The Committee believes that, if it does not already, such support should include mental health services in line with those provided by Doorway.

Given the smaller scale of the Doorway program and the existing reach of PRAP Plus the Committee recommends that the Government should investigate methods to tailor PRAP Plus to provide services to people experiencing mental health issues.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government investigate methods to tailor the Private Rental Assistance Program Plus to provide appropriate and effective services to people experiencing diverse mental health issues.

4.4.4 Gambling

The Committee received evidence from Dr Brian Vandenberg from Monash University at a public hearing on the link between gambling and homelessness amongst older people.

Dr Vandenberg’s research found that there was a low incidence of gambling addiction among people experiencing homelessness. However, he said that the rate of persons with harmful gambling issues amongst the homeless population was higher than the general population. Harmful gamblers number between 10–30% amongst people experiencing homelessness and 1% in the general population.⁷⁷

Dr Vandenberg’s research included interviews with homelessness service workers. He said the interviews brought out four main themes:

- Gambling among older people experiencing long-term homelessness is often hidden and overlooked by workers, particularly in homelessness services.
- Gambling can be a cause of homelessness amongst older people, particularly in cases of first-time homelessness later in life.
- There are multiple and complex factors that usually play a role in the link between gambling and homelessness. These include individual factors, interpersonal factors and structural factors.
- There is the need for additional recognition of, and responses to, gambling and homelessness in the service system.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) guidelines*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2019.

⁷⁷ Dr Brian Vandenberg, Health Economist, School of Social Sciences, Monash University, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Dr Vandenberg recommended the following steps to address the incidence of gambling and homelessness:

First and foremost, there is a need to expand screening and early detection of gambling issues in the homeless population. In order to facilitate this, some increase in the capacity of statewide gamblers help services to reach homeless persons could be considered. Second, there is a need for greater access to financial counselling services for those who are homeless. We found this seems to be an effective way not only of assisting people with financial issues but also of uncovering gambling issues that may be hidden. Thirdly there is a need for more education and training for the workforce within housing and homelessness services to increase their confidence and their capacity to recognise and respond and refer to gambling issues among people experiencing homelessness that they support. And fourth and finally, there is still a lot we do not know about the extent and magnitude of gambling and homelessness in Victoria, so better research and surveillance of this issue is needed to help better inform policy and program decisions.⁷⁹

The Committee encourages the work of Dr Vandenberg and recognises that more research needs to be done in this area to better inform policy decisions. The hidden nature of gambling amongst people experiencing homelessness makes it difficult for homelessness services to identify. More awareness and education in this area will help service providers to more readily identify problem gambling and treat it earlier.

4.4.5 Alcohol and other drugs

Problematic alcohol and other drug (AOD) use is a risk factor for homelessness. Yet, data from the AIHW shows that only a small percentage of clients accessing homelessness services cited drug and alcohol issues as the main reason for accessing services. In 2019–20 in Victoria, 0.3% of clients accessed services because of problematic drug or substance use and 0.1% of clients accessed services because of problematic alcohol use.⁸⁰

The submission to the inquiry from the Victorian Alcohol and Other Drugs Association (VAADA) noted that it is often assumed that alcohol and drug misuse is a key cause of homelessness. However, such misuse is more likely to occur after individuals become homeless because of the traumatising nature of homelessness.⁸¹

VAADA's submission discussed the importance of multi-disciplinary services to treat clients with multiple needs.⁸² They recommended an increase in the provision of homelessness services that could also provide AOD support:

the costs —economic, personal and social— of homelessness and AOD are significant. To begin reigning its share of these costs in, Victoria must significantly increase

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 13–4.

⁸⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Table CLIENTS.21.

⁸¹ Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, *Submission 204*, p. 7.

⁸² Ibid.

investment in services responding to housing and AOD issues, including increasing the availability of AOD treatment, homelessness and dual-diagnosis services.⁸³

The Committee agrees that alcohol and other drug issues are an important area for early intervention. These issues can lead to negative financial, social and mental health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. As noted in section 3.3.5, the Committee has made recommendations that services should be more integrated and multidisciplinary. Provision of AOD services should be included as part of any multidisciplinary homelessness service approach.

FINDING 21: Misuse of alcohol and drugs are more likely to occur after an individual becomes homeless because of the traumatising nature of homelessness.

4.4.6 Risks for youth

Prevention of homelessness amongst young people or intervening early is important to ensure that experiences of homelessness and disadvantage at a young age do not impact the life chances of an individual and increase the likelihood of ongoing homelessness in adulthood. Melbourne City Mission outlined the risk factors associated with homelessness in adolescence:

Homelessness during adolescence means disconnection from supportive and nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers that enable young people to build the confidence and capability to transition to adulthood. The absence of these supports in early adulthood creates a high-pressure environment in which young people are forced into survival mode, and don't have the luxury of years to develop coping strategies, emotional regulation and problem solving skills. These challenges are further compounded by barriers to accessing mental health and wellbeing supports, education, training and stable incomes once they enter homelessness.⁸⁴

The following sections will discuss some of the key risks for youth, including family conflict and school disengagement, as well as some initiatives working to prevent homelessness among young people. This includes Kids Under Cover and the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) early intervention model.

Family conflict

As noted in Chapter 2, family conflict is one of the primary reasons young people become homeless. Early intervention programs that reconcile young people with their families can help them to stay in the family home and avoid harmful episodes of homelessness.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 217*, p. 4.

At its public hearings in Gippsland, the Committee was provided information about a family conflict program called Reconnect that helps young people reconcile with their families. Mr Richard Evans from Gippsland Lakes Community Health advised that while the program was successful, their share of funding was decreasing and its clients were presenting with increasingly complex issues:

Reconnect has been going for a long time. It is a 20-year program. The funding for CPI has not increased in 20 years. With government efficiency dividends and so forth we have got efficiency dividends we have got to keep reducing. What we are finding is that we are working longer with more complex clients that are at a higher risk of homelessness because they are disconnected from family. They are certainly not attending school; they are refusing to go to school. That is the early prevention model that we would like to do more of. The age range for Reconnect is 12 to 18. We try and concentrate on the 11-, 12- and 13-year-olds for that reason.⁸⁵

The Committee also spoke to Leanne Roberts from Berry Street, a child and family services organisation at its public hearing in Whittlesea. When asked about how to prevent homelessness amongst young people, she replied that family therapy programs were successful in addressing the causes that may lead to children becoming homeless or disengaged from education. She said:

So a range of evidence-based programs such as multisystemic therapy and also functional family therapy, as I said, work with the family. Something like multisystemic therapy with 24/7 on-call support for the family looks at the behaviours and the ways in which the family interacts that drives that disengagement, and it starts to coach them in a different way. What is very outstanding about these programs is that they start to empower families who generally feel disengaged from the service system—they feel as though they have got no other options—and then empower the children who also figure that they have got no other options. It starts by looking at the strengths of those families and then looks at the patterns of behaviour that lead to disengagement.⁸⁶

She added that if the program was scaled up, it could save the State \$1.2 billion over 10 years in costs to the child protection system:

We did some work with Social Ventures Australia last year which modelled what the impact would be if we were to invest. We could see around 1200 children diverted from out-of-home care every year and that another 7000 children and their families could be worked with through an investment of around \$150 million a year. SVA's work has indicated that that could save Victoria \$1.2 billion over 10 years in costs—just to the child protection system, let alone to homelessness—.⁸⁷

Evidence from AHURI and others suggests that strong family relationships are an important protective factor in preventing homelessness. Services that can reconcile family relationships and keep young people connected to their communities play a

⁸⁵ Evans, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 65.

⁸⁶ Ms Leanne Roberts, Head of Public Policy and Media, Berry Street (Northern Region), Eaglemont Office, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

valuable role in preventing homelessness amongst young people. The Committee notes, however, family reconciliation programs are not appropriate in all circumstances and should be considered with the wishes of the young person in mind.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government investigate and provide additional funding for homelessness early intervention services for young people that seek to address family conflict issues.

Disengagement from education

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard about the high correlation between youth homelessness and disengagement from education. In its submission, Youthlaw described the significant proportion of homeless youth that are outside the school system, often from a young age:

In Australia approximately two-thirds of the homeless young people aged 12–18 years are outside the education system despite being of school age. Youth services are observing significant numbers of young people disengaging from school some as early as 10 years of age.⁸⁸

In a 2017 report on young people and couch surfing in Victoria, WEStjustice provided findings based on analysis of case studies from its Couch Surfing Clinic, a service providing legal advice and assistance to young people at targeted outreach locations, including schools and welfare agencies.⁸⁹ The report stated that, ‘When young people needed to stay away from home, couch surfing was often considered the better of the few options available to them.’⁹⁰ In these scenarios, there are various challenges around schooling:

Many reported that their school performance and grades declined dramatically as a result of being unable to complete homework or study for exams as they needed to spend most of their energy looking for a safe place to sleep for the night.

Attending school in these circumstances takes commitment, but paradoxically, many needed to couch surf precisely because they did not want to leave the local area until they finished secondary school. Others remained engaged with their school in order to find their ‘next place to stay’ or to be fed. In both cases, the longer a young person couch surfed the more likely they disengaged from their education.⁹¹

The Committee was told that during experiences of homelessness, school attendance and engagement become harder to maintain, and young people may seek to avoid school settings where they feel disconnected and isolated. This compounds in situations where there are multiple or complex reasons for a young person’s homelessness, such as in situations of trauma.

⁸⁸ Youthlaw, *Submission 113*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ WEStjustice, *Submission 189a*, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 28.

Youthlaw stated that in regional areas there are often few alternative options to mainstream schooling, meaning that students ‘who are suspended or expelled from schools may be ‘blacklisted’ and unable to find a school willing to accept them’.⁹² This can leave them in a particularly vulnerable position, often without support to access services that can assist them.

Crucially, disengagement from school and broader education systems can have both short-term and long-term impacts, such as increased risk of contact with the criminal justice system and development of mental health issues, as well as risk of ongoing homelessness throughout adulthood. As noted by Melbourne City Mission in its submission, ‘Childhood homelessness significantly increases the likelihood of unemployment in adulthood, and disruption to education is the primary driver of this’.⁹³

Recognising these lifelong impacts, Youthlaw recommended that early intervention strategies be employed to support young people to remain engaged at school, and to re-engage young people who have left school into appropriate and ongoing education or employment pathways.⁹⁴

There are a number of organisations, programs and initiatives that seek to keep youth engaged in education and aim to avoid the life cycle of homelessness. Education First youth foyers—supported accommodation facilities which aim to help young people to continue their education and build critical life skills—are discussed below. The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model, an initiative seeking to engage schools and community services to act early to prevent young people from becoming homeless, is discussed at the end of this section.

Education First Youth Foyers

Education First Youth Foyers are for young people, aged 16–24, who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The foyers in Victoria are designed to provide accommodation co-located with a TAFE to facilitate study for the residents of the foyer. While there are other types of youth foyers, the Education First model emphasises a focus on education.⁹⁵

Youth foyers are intended to be an early intervention measure aimed at assisting young people to avoid entering the cycle of homelessness and its potential lifelong impacts.

Young people at Education First Youth Foyers are expected to sign up to a mutual agreement which requires them to remain in education, training or employment throughout their two-year stay. They are also asked to maintain their accommodation and take up activities and opportunities that the foyer has to offer. In return, staff take on responsibility for finding various types of education, employment, training

⁹² Youthlaw, *Submission 113*, p. 9.

⁹³ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 217*, p. 34.

⁹⁴ Youthlaw, *Submission 113*, p. 9.

⁹⁵ See for example an overview of the Uniting’s Karrung Foyer in Ballarat, as described by Bronwyn Pike, CEO, Uniting Vic.Tas (Ms Bronwyn Pike, Chief Executive Officer, Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania), public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.)

and other opportunities and experiences for students and assist them to develop independent living skills.⁹⁶ This includes through completion of the Certificate I in Developing Independence, which includes components on recognising personal skills and capabilities; building personal confidence; creating personal vision; developing and applying an education and career plan; dealing with conflict and stress; and developing social competence.⁹⁷ Onsite support services are provided and include career guidance, employment assistance, mentoring, mental and physical health support, life skill development and involvement with volunteer and community activities. These support services help young people to develop career aspirations, gain work experience, and ultimately gain employment and independence.⁹⁸

To be eligible for an Education First Youth Foyer, young people must be:

- aged 16 to 24 years
- unable to live at home
- interested in undertaking education and training
- willing to make a commitment to stay in education and training.⁹⁹

At the time of publication there were three Education First Youth Foyers in Victoria, located in:

- Glen Waverley, attached to the Holmesglen Institute
- Broadmeadows, attached to the Kangan Institute
- Shepparton, attached to Goulburn Ovens TAFE.¹⁰⁰

Each foyer houses 40 young people in studio-style accommodation with shared communal areas. They are supervised by trained staff.¹⁰¹

The Committee travelled to Shepparton to meet young people and staff at the Education First Youth Foyer in Shepparton and to have a tour of the accommodation. The Committee also conducted a public hearing in Shepparton and spoke to representatives from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, who designed the operating model for the Education First Youth Foyers in Victoria, and Berry Street, who operate the youth foyer in Shepparton. Mr Mark Cox, Practice Manager, Youth Programs at the Brotherhood of St Laurence described how the foyers include a reciprocal arrangement informally known as ‘the deal’ whereby young people are required to study or maintain employment and take up other opportunities that staff find for them:

⁹⁶ Education First Youth Foyer, *About EFY Foyers*, <<https://www.efyfoyers.org.au/background>> accessed 30 November 2020.

⁹⁷ GOTAFE, *Certificate I in Developing Independence 22333VIC: Course overview*, 2021, <<https://www.gotafe.vic.edu.au/study/education/general-education/certificate-i-in-developing-independence>> accessed 8 February 2021.

⁹⁸ Education First Youth Foyer, *About EFY Foyers*.

⁹⁹ Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Education First Youth Foyers*, 2020, <<https://www.bsl.org.au/services/youth/education-youth-foyers>> accessed 2 December 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Mr Mark Cox, Practice Manager, Youth Programs, Brotherhood of St Laurence, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Education First Youth Foyers*.

We enter into what we call a deal, and this outlines a ‘mutual investment for mutual gain’ kind of approach that we like to work with each young person around. Young people as part of this deal commit to setting and working on their education and wider life goals, to paying rent, to living there and to giving the opportunities brokered for them a go. In return the foyer and our staff commit to offering stable accommodation, 24/7 staffing and support, and linking young people in with opportunities in connection with their skills and talents—and these opportunities exist locally around the foyer. We see this reciprocal way of working with young people as respectful, something that prepares young people for the real world and really reduces their dependence on services.¹⁰²

In describing the volunteering and community participation opportunities offered through the foyer, Mr Cox said that the aim is to develop talents and create high achievement expectations in-line with young people from more stable circumstances:

We prioritise linking our young people with inspiration opportunities, whether they be mentors, sporting clubs, volunteering, and really replicating the same activities that we would expect of our own children and making sure that the young people we are working with have the same opportunities that those who grow up in more stable circumstances are encouraged and expected to pursue. All our model is about is having high expectations of our young people and ensuring they have the opportunity to show off the skills and talents we know they have.¹⁰³

Ms Emma Cull, Senior Manager from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, expanded on the social connection aspect of Education First youth foyers. She explained that the program allowed young people to acquire social capital and learn life skills that will assist them to live independently in the future:

Young people who are part of well-connected families have a whole lot of opportunities through their extended social networks to get work experience, to try something and fail, to start again, to be connected to a whole range of things that they might not ever have thought of or known of before. And really for foyers and that model, it is really about providing those social connections, expanding people’s social capital and connecting them in so that they are able to do those things themselves in the future. So it is not just about doing that at this time but also teaching them how you do that—teaching them to plan an ongoing engagement with education, teaching them how to use the mainstream health and education services in a community, because we know that people are going to need to continue to use those things throughout their lifetime. It is not sort of, ‘We’ll fix all your problems, and then you’re fine’. Everyone—all of us—will have different stages in our lives that we go through when we will need to re-engage with employment or education or make connections, whether that is with friendships, family groups or those sorts of things. So it is teaching young people those skills and how to make those ongoing connections. And we talk about that sort of connected independence. You want to build people’s independence, but you will always be connected to the communities in which you live. For young people who have

¹⁰² Mr Mark Cox, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

experienced homelessness, they often have not had an experience of how to navigate that, so it is putting those supports in place that family-connected young people get through their family.¹⁰⁴

Ms Cull also discussed the benefits of the education component of the foyers. She stated that study and qualifications are an important factor in the life chances of young people:

I think particularly for young people we know that education is one of those key things—education as a means to future employment and the ability to maintain and sustain a future livelihood. So if you do not complete year 12 or you do not go on to further study, your chances of employment are much reduced, and there are a whole lot of studies to back that up. So for young people particularly it is about that pathway, and housing is the means of providing stability so that young people can engage and finish these things. But I think that is true of many different life stages.¹⁰⁵

Dr Joseph Borlagdan, Principal Research Fellow, Research and Policy Centre at the Brotherhood of St Laurence, conducted an evaluation into the outcomes of the youth foyer model in Victoria. The evaluation followed participants at the foyer at the beginning of their stay and conducted follow-up interviews six and 12 months after they left. The evaluation found that participants had very high rates of engagement with work or education in the year after leaving the foyer. Dr Borlagdan said:

The key takeaway from our research is that the Education First Youth Foyer model works. Eighty-five per cent of students were in work or education in the year after leaving the Education First Youth Foyer. Just breaking that number down a little bit, what this chart shows are sustained improvements in education, housing and employment. In education we see some big gains here: 75 per cent, so about three-quarters, of young people held a year 12 or equivalent qualification a year after foyer. That was up from 42 per cent at entry. This is really significant when we consider that really the minimum requirement to gain access to decent work is that year 12 qualification. And this figure, although it can be a little bit difficult to compare, surpasses all previous foyer studies to date. When we look at those moving into employment, the rate has pretty much doubled. So it was 19 per cent at entry and up to 36 per cent a year after foyer.¹⁰⁶

Dr Borlagdan said that in relation to housing outcomes after their stay in the foyer, half of the participants were able to find their own housing in the private rental market, and the other half were being assisted by the foyer to find accommodation or were living back with their families.¹⁰⁷ Dr Borlagdan also said that only 2% of young people were residing in crisis accommodation, treatment centres or detention centres after

¹⁰⁴ Ms Emma Cull, Senior Manager, Service Development and Strategy, Youth, Brotherhood of St Laurence, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Dr Joseph Borlagdan, Principal Research Fellow, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

completing their time at a foyer, as opposed to one third of young people who came to the foyer from crisis accommodation.¹⁰⁸

An economic assessment of the Education First Youth Foyers by KPMG was commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The assessment found that while the program had upfront costs in terms of service and education delivery, it delivered a net financial benefit due to an increase in employment prospects, avoided income and housing support, reduced hospital and emergency presentations and reduced interaction with police. The overall cost to benefit ratio was 1.6, which compared favourably with traditional transitional housing which had a negative cost to benefit ratio of 0.97.¹⁰⁹

The Committee heard that there are also critiques of Education First Youth Foyers. The first is that they do not limit their intake of young people to those who are already homeless and in crisis accommodation, as they also take young people who are disadvantaged and at risk of homelessness. An AHURI report provided as part of the submission from Associate Professor David Mackenzie discussed the intake of young people into the foyer in Shepparton. It noted that it may not cater as much to the cohorts who are experiencing homelessness in crisis and transitional accommodation, and instead, young people at risk of homelessness have been diverted to the foyer:

the local expectation was that a 40-bed foyer in Shepparton would impact the number of young people in the crisis refuge and the transitional housing properties—but that has not been the case. Instead, the impact has been evident in a program supporting at-risk tenancies where the number in that program has dropped. One worker interviewed for this research expressed the view that ‘they are not the same cohort’, and explained that this was the perception among other workers as well. If true, then it appears that the foyer has not provided pathways for a significant number of young people exiting SHS as was expected, although it may provide opportunities for other disadvantaged young people.¹¹⁰

Because the foyers can work with different cohorts to traditional transitional accommodation, Associate Professor Mackenzie argued caution should be taken when comparing outcomes with transitional accommodation.¹¹¹

In addition, it is important to note that foyers are not suitable for every young person who is at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Some young people with more complex needs may encounter difficulties with aspects of the program. Associate Professor Mackenzie stated at a public hearing:

My only qualified caveat on foyers, to be honest, is that they need to be connected, because it is a homelessness response in Australia, the development of foyers. They

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ KPMG, *Education First Youth Foyers, Economic evaluation: Brotherhood of St Laurence*, report prepared by KPMG, report for Brotherhood of St Laurence, online, 2019, p. 21.

¹¹⁰ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 135. (The AHURI report mentioned in the text is: David Mackenzie, et al., *Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, 2020.)

¹¹¹ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 27.

need to take young people out of the homelessness services—not any old young person but those young people who can engage with education and training, and not all young people exiting a homeless service can.¹¹²

The Committee believes Education First Youth Foyers are a promising model for many young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. However, there are a cohort of young people with higher support needs for whom this model may not be suitable. This means the Education First Youth Foyer model is not suitable for application as a standard youth homelessness response across the state. However, the Committee believes that foyers can play an important role in assisting many disadvantaged young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness to reach their full potential and live independently. The young people the Committee met at the Shepparton Education First Youth Foyer expressed how the foyer has provided much-needed stability and has set them on the path to future success.

FINDING 22: Education First Youth Foyers may not be suitable for all cohorts of young people experiencing homelessness, particularly those with complex needs. However, they are beneficial for many disadvantaged young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government conduct an assessment of suitability for additional Education First Youth Foyer sites in metropolitan and regional areas, with a view to providing funding for additional facilities.

Kids Under Cover

Kids Under Cover is an organisation that prevents homelessness amongst children and young people by assisting them to stay in the family home. In situations of family conflict or overcrowding, Kids Under Cover provides demountable studio accommodation in the yard of the family home, or wherever space permits. Ms Jo Swift, CEO of Kids Under Cover, explained to the Committee how the program works:

We do that with the provision of what we call studio accommodation. It is essentially a one- or two-bedroom apartment with a bathroom that gets built in the rear yard of a family or a carer's home. We know that for young people who are at risk of homelessness the triggers that cause that are generally overcrowding and conflict. The additional space that the studio provides alleviates that and keeps the young person at home so that the caseworker can work with the family in a holistic approach.¹¹³

Crucially, the young person is supported by the program to stay engaged in education. A small amount of funding is provided in the form of a scholarship to ensure they have the means for basic transport and equipment to attend school. The program reported

¹¹² Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Director, Upstream Australia, Associate Professor, University of South Australia, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

¹¹³ Ms Jo Swift, Chief Executive Officer, Kids Under Cover, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

positive outcomes due to the ability of young people to stay at home and connected to their families, their school and their communities.¹¹⁴ Ms Swift outlined some of the successes of the program:

The decline in young people being away from the property for a lot or a fair amount of the time reduced from 35 per cent to 6 per cent. The decline in incidents of frequent or occasional risk-taking behaviours was from 31 per cent to 4 per cent. Evidence of a young person being usually or always happy increased from 18 per cent to 94 per cent and, finally, young people doing quite or very well educationally increased from 44 per cent to 89 per cent.¹¹⁵

Ms Brittanie Stock-Lopez, a graduate of the Kids Under Cover support program also provided evidence at a public hearing. Her evidence to the Committee highlighted the transformative impact early intervention services can have on young people.

BOX 4.3: Brittanie

Due to her mother's complex physical and health issues, Brittanie was the primary carer for her younger brother, Jesse, from a very young age. Jesse has cerebral palsy and is developmentally delayed. Jesse requires 24-hour care. Brittanie's mother's issues with substance abuse eventually led the Department of Human Services to remove Brittanie and Jesse from their mother's care and place them in the care of their grandmother, Ruth, and their aunt Sarah, who lived in a small two-bedroom house in Melton.

While this afforded Brittanie and her brother the stability and care they needed, there was simply not enough space in the house. Brittanie and Jesse shared a room with their grandmother. The cramped conditions, combined with Jesse's high needs, caused the household stress and led to tension between family members. When speaking to the Committee at a public hearing, Brittanie explained the impact of her living conditions on her wellbeing, she said 'I felt I had no other choice at times but to just pack my bag and go. It did not matter to me at the time where - anywhere to escape the chaos that was my home before Kids Under Cover.'

At the age of 14, Brittanie was the recipient of an outdoor studio, supplied by Kids Under Cover. This gave the family desperately needed space and provided Brittanie with a 'sanctuary' where she could retreat when tensions arose within the family. Brittanie believes that without the studio, she would have had no choice but to leave home 'to escape the chaos', despite having no other home to go to.

The family was under considerable financial stress, as Sarah was the only person earning an income. There were weeks when the family relied on the foodbank as there was not enough money for food.

(continued)

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

BOX 4.3: Brittnie (continued)

At the beginning of her final years of high school, Brittnie received a Kids Under Cover scholarship to assist with expenses for her VCE, which her family could not afford. Without this support, Brittnie believes it is unlikely she would have completed her VCE.

Brittnie completed high school and completed Year 12. She went on to university and a diploma of nursing. She now works as a nurse in the aged-care sector, caring for people with advanced dementia. Brittnie loves her job and the difference it makes in people's lives.

Brittnie believes that the early intervention support she and her family received was integral to her success:

I guess I am just a prime example of early intervention and the outcome of that it can have at the end. If there was no early intervention for me and my family, the outcomes could have been potentially catastrophic.

Source: Ms Brittnie Stock-Lopez, former client, Kids Under Cover, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 54.

The Committee acknowledges there are limitations to the Kids Under Cover approach because not every family home has space for studio accommodation, and there may be circumstances where it is in the best interests of the young person to leave the family home and seek care elsewhere.

Nevertheless, evidence to the Committee suggests that Kids Under Cover is a successful model that has the potential to prevent more young people from becoming homeless. It allows services to intervene before a young person becomes homeless and helps them to stay connected to their family, their community and education; reducing the likelihood of future homelessness. The Committee believes the Victorian Government should support the state wide expansion of organisations such as Kids Under Cover, which provide innovative models of accommodation that allow youth to stay connected to their communities.

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government provide additional funding to organisations that provide innovative accommodation for young people at their family home, such as Kids Under Cover.

Community of Schools and Services model (The Geelong Project)

The Geelong Project is a homelessness prevention program that seeks to identify young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who may be at risk of homelessness in later life. The Geelong Project works with these young people to keep them in the family

home, participating in school, and linked to the community.¹¹⁶ Its services are proactive, delivered flexibly throughout secondary school and beyond, and are instigated before situations reach crisis point.¹¹⁷ The model which underpins the Geelong Project is called the ‘community of schools and services’ (COSS) model.

At a public hearing the Committee spoke to Associate Professor David MacKenzie, an academic researcher who led the development of the COSS model, along with homelessness service organisations who work together to deliver the Geelong Project. These service providers included the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network; Barwon Child, Youth & Family; and Geelong High School.

Mr Max Broadley from Barwon Child, Youth & Family provided an overview of how the Geelong Project works and the outcomes it can achieve:

The way that it works is that community services professionals like ourselves work with education professionals like Ken here and academic professionals like David, and we go to school-based populations and use some screening tools to be able to identify who are these families that are at risk of their young people fleeing and falling into homelessness. We identify the families before the family has broken up. And then we have adapted our youth homelessness model to become a youth for family model. So we intervene in the young person’s life and we intervene in their family life and we remediate what is going on for them in their family life. It is that kind of intervention that turns out to be preventative. It turns out to work. It means that families are functioning better, young people feel safer and securer, young people are reconnected back into education, they are part of that education system, they stay in education years longer and actually they do not leave the family home. So they do not become unemployed, they get a better education, and they are the kind of foundations that we need for young people for them to have good adult wellbeing.¹¹⁸

Associate Professor Mackenzie’s submission, provided by a coalition of organisations working on homelessness sector reform, provided an overview of how the COSS model works. It detailed the following four steps to establish a COSS model:

1. Establish a collaborative group of schools and services.
2. Identify young people at risk.
3. Practice flexible and tiered support.
4. Evaluate outcomes.

This process is detailed in Figure 4.3 below.

¹¹⁶ The Geelong Project, *Home*, <<http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au>> accessed 19 October 2020.

¹¹⁷ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 37.

¹¹⁸ Mr Max Broadley, Executive Director, Client Services, Barwon Child, Youth & Family, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 7–8.

Figure 4.3 A diagram of the Community of Schools and Services model



- The COSS Model builds a community collective of schools and services;
- There is an innovative methodology for identifying risk and incipient issues;
- The practice framework is flexible and tiered so that what support is delivered is both an effective use of resources and more efficient;
- There is an embedded strong component of data monitoring within the collective and an embedded evaluation of outcomes.

Source: Associate Professor David Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p.9.

The following section will use the framework of the COSS model to explain the development, and success, of the Geelong Project so far.

Establish a collaborative group of schools and services

Associate Professor MacKenzie stated in his submission that one of the key aspects of the COSS model is that it is a 'place-based' model. This means that it is unique to a particular geographic area and the community in that area. It is adapted to local circumstances and built by people who understand local needs. It can be seen as different to programs implemented from outside a community that do not take local differences into account.¹¹⁹

At the public hearing, Associate Professor MacKenzie talked about the elements needed to implement a place-based model:

the developmental approach means that it takes a couple of years to get going. And if we take the bottom-up approach seriously, there has got to be some community interest to begin with. There has got to be the seed that will start to flower. You put in a project coordinator to start with. You do not roll out things willy-nilly. You do not impose it top-down...

...

One of the good things, I think, about the model is that it is a community-focused model. Where communities are interested in doing it and want to do it—and they

¹¹⁹ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 31.

are popping up all over the place—they are the places to start. And then you can go community by community while the rest of the system continues on pretty much as it is.¹²⁰

Once a collaborative group of services involving secondary schools and local family and community agencies in an area is formed, the relationship is formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding and a Terms of Reference to structure collaboration.¹²¹ In the case of the Geelong Project, one of the schools involved is Geelong High School. Mr Ken Stewart, the Vice Principal of the school, told the Committee that schools are connected to the community and trusted by parents and students, which makes them a beneficial environment to provide services to children and families that may be at risk of homelessness:

I guess the thing about schools is that community is still connected to schools and schools are trusted as a place to assist with families and assist with students. We have built up that trust over a period of time, and generally I would say that students and their families trust schools... we already have the existing relationship with the family and with the student, so when we do a referral to The Geelong Project the parents trust that what we are doing is something that is in their interest and of benefit to them and their family. They also trust that we are not there to break up families; we are actually there to support the family, and we are there to support the young person to have a positive relationship in the family and stay in the family. So I think that is a key element as well. In the past schools have tended to work a bit in isolation from families. I guess one of the things we have learned very strongly from this is that every student in the school is well supported by the families. I have never met a parent who has bad intentions about their children. Some of them struggle a bit and, I guess, do not necessarily have the skills, but I have never met a parent who does not care about their child. So working with the children and their families I think is critical to this project and the success of the project.¹²²

Identify young people at risk

Once a collaborative group is established, it can seek to identify individuals at risk of homelessness. The Geelong Project identifies students at risk using a tool called the Australian Index of Adolescent Development, which is used as part of a screening survey and interviews conducted at schools.¹²³

Mr Ken Stewart from Geelong High School described how the survey, which is conducted every year at his school, identifies students who may be suitable to participate in the program:

Each year our students do a survey. Every student in the school sits down. The survey takes about 20 minutes and measures a whole range of things, including psychological distress, potential for homelessness and any other presenting issues which may cause

¹²⁰ MacKenzie, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

¹²¹ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 55.

¹²² Mr Ken Stewart, Assistant Principal, Geelong High School, Student Wellbeing, The Geelong Project, public hearing, Melbourne, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

¹²³ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 128.

homelessness. I think this year we had 26 students identified through that survey who were quite highly at risk, and of that 26 there were probably six of those—and this has happened in each of the years we have done this since 2015—we had no idea about. They are young people who manage to, I guess, hide their distress and are not comfortable about talking about their family situation, and that is quite often because they are protective of their families as well, so we certainly identify through that survey students who we were not aware of.¹²⁴

He said that those students who are identified in the survey as being at risk of homelessness then have further interviews and the families of the students are also engaged for support:

Following the survey we then do a screening interview with the young person. So the first step is just to try and confirm that the information we have got from the survey reflects what the situation is with that young person. So we have that discussion with them initially, and that is with parent permission. So once we have done the survey and have done that initial screening, the parent is aware that we are going to provide some support so it does not come as a surprise if we decide then to make that a situation where we engage with the young person and their families.¹²⁵

It should be noted that the Committee has heard conflicting evidence about the ability to accurately predict individuals who will become homeless. Most notably, Professor Guy Johnson stated that:

We can identify populations, but we cannot identify individuals. No-one can. No-one ever will. If anyone comes in here talking about the capacity to predict anything, they are telling you chook feed.¹²⁶

The Committee recognises the inherent difficulties of trying to predict homelessness. However, it notes that the Geelong Project's screening efforts have shown success in identifying a population of students at risk of homelessness that may not otherwise have been identified. The consequential success in the reduction of youth experiencing homelessness in Geelong is discussed further below.

Flexible and tiered support

Associate Professor Mackenzie, as part of his submission, provided a report from AHURI titled *Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people*. The report explains how the Geelong Project works to provide services. It stated that linked agencies hold regular meetings to share information and collectively discuss how best to support young people and their families:

The two main entities within TGP hold Executive Group meetings—for senior school and agency representatives—about four times a year to make overarching policy decisions

¹²⁴ Stewart, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Professor Guy Johnson, Inaugural Unison Chair of Urban Housing and Homelessness, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

for the collective. Operational Group meetings are held more regularly so that workers and welfare/wellbeing staff from the participating schools can discuss matters related to the work with vulnerable young people and their families.¹²⁷

The collaborative aspect of the model means that students and families are able to access multiple services through a single entry point and don't have to re-tell their story to multiple service providers. Ken Stuart described the benefits of this approach:

The other advantage is that for young people to tell their story once is a big thing, and if they are required to then go and connect with, say, three other different agencies and retell their story, after a while it is very difficult for them to share that story with so many people. It takes a lot of courage to do that in the first place and be open and aware and honest. For them to be able to tell that story once and then that story is taken seriously by the TGP worker and then that person can tell the story to others they might wrap around in terms of supporting that family. The young person does not have to retell the story, and I think that is a critical advantage to this project: one person looks after that young person and looks after that young person's family.

The services provided to the students and their families are delivered flexibly with support being scaled up or down as necessary, for as long as the student and family need it. Associate Professor Mackenzie said that:

The effectiveness and efficiency of the actual support work with vulnerable young people is what ultimately achieves the outcomes possible under the COSS Model. Family dysfunction, which can cover a wide range of complex issues, means that working with a young person also involves working with their family members. When case work is required, it is a youth-focused and family-centred case management approach for those who need major support involving the young person, their family, schools, and agencies working together from the same care plan. The capacity of a COSS early intervention platform to operate flexibly and longitudinally is a key to achieving service delivery efficiencies as well as improved outcomes.¹²⁸

This is illustrated by the workforce transition that occurred at Barwon Child Youth and Family, who have transitioned from specialised roles to multidisciplinary youth and family workers:

In 2015, the youth team at the lead agency—Barwon Child Youth & Family—consisted of housing workers, a Reconnect worker, counsellors and so on, but all workers were upgraded to 'youth and family workers'. This workforce development was accompanied by an ongoing program of professional development.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 128.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Outcome measurement

A key aspect of the COSS Model is the collection of data for evaluation and measuring outcomes. The submission from Associate Professor Mackenzie stated that one key component of the model is longitudinal outcomes monitoring and measurement.¹³⁰

The Committee was told that the Geelong Project has been successful in reducing the rate of youth homelessness in the City of Geelong by 40%. Max Broadley gave an overview of the accomplishments so far:

The Geelong Project has demonstrated there is about a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in presentations to youth homelessness and a corresponding 20 per cent improvement in school retention for the school-aged population. So that is pretty remarkable in terms of both a social return on investment and a financial return on investment. So that has been articulated as well through research, where Deakin indicated that for every dollar you spend in early intervention in homelessness you save about \$20 later on in child and family, justice, leaving care services et cetera.¹³¹

Associate Professor Mackenzie stated that in terms of the social return on investment, evaluation of the Project found that ‘for every one dollar spent on the program there was a net benefit of about \$5.00’.¹³²

Expansion of the COSS model

The COSS model has already shown it can be rolled out in other areas. Albury-Wodonga has its own ‘Albury Project’ which is in its early stages. The Albury Project has followed the COSS model, including creation of a collaborative group, identifying young people at risk and providing flexible support. The Albury Project also receives support from Upstream Australia for data management. Ms Rebecca Glen, Project Coordinator for the Albury Project, told the Committee that the project has recently progressed to its operational stage, having conducted its second student survey this year.¹³³

Associate Professor Mackenzie explained that the COSS model can be adapted to suit local circumstances in different communities, while still retaining its key foundational elements:

I think one of the salutary features of the COSS architecture is that while there are some things that are not really negotiable—you do not get to define risk in any old way that you want to, you do not get to make up your own outcomes measures to suit yourselves—the communities are different, so the process might be a bit different. There is a little bit of a difference in terms of how the two communities have organised their institutional structures. There is adaptability that is allowable and in fact necessary in the

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

¹³¹ Broadley, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

¹³² Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 23.

¹³³ Ms Rebecca Glen, Project Coordinator, The Albury Project, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

architecture, and I think that whichever the community is, there is scope to adapt and own it. What I have heard from a number of different communities both overseas and here is they say, 'What I really love about this is that we own this, this is ours'.¹³⁴

He added that the model can be applied to metropolitan areas as well as regional areas, as long as there is community will to tackle youth homelessness:

So the two most developed communities, Albury and Geelong, are regional communities, and I think the reason for that is that regional communities do have a sense of being a community because they are a place that is regional. That has been something I have been aware of for a long time. But, you know, the model is not only regional. Mount Druitt, that is a metropolitan area, things are happening there. That is the second site in New South Wales. There is a site in Seattle and Minnesota. So there is absolutely no reason to believe that it is only going to work in a regional centre and not in a metropolitan.¹³⁵

Associate Professor MacKenzie's submission included an estimate of the funding required to introduce a COSS program at an additional four metropolitan sites and three regional sites in Victoria. The submission said that there are sites that have already begun to build collaborative connections and are 'shovel ready'.

Table 4.2 gives an estimated cost for a hypothetical seven-site expansion.

Table 4.2 Estimated costs of a pilot initiative of additional community early intervention sites.

	Total schools	Years 1-2	Years 3-4	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)	Year 4 (\$)
Metro A	9	3	6	210,876	1,029,702	1,724,200	1,707,700
Metro B	14	3	7	210,876	1,029,702	1,888,367	1,904,867
Metro C	20	3	6	210,876	1,029,702	1,724,200	1,707,700
Metro D	16	3	6	210,876	1,029,702	1,724,200	1,707,700
Regional E	8	3	7	210,876	1,029,702	1,888,367	1,904,867
Regional F	8	1	3	114,292	396,800	1,018,702	998,902
Regional G	3	1	3	114,292	396,800	1,018,702	998,902
Total	78	17	38	1,282,964	5,942,110	10,986,738	10,930,638

Source: Associate Professor David Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, pp. 40-41.

¹³⁴ MacKenzie, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Associate Professor Mackenzie explained the projected costs of the expanded number of COSS sites in comparison to other government funded services which deal with youth disadvantage in Geelong:

This amounts to approximately \$29m over four years for nine [this includes pilot sites and those already established] communities and a total of the most disadvantaged schools in those nine communities. This estimated figure needs to be contextualised. One way is to do a comparison with what has been spent on other youth programs. Some of these programs promised but perhaps did not or do not deliver seriously significant social and educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people. The Better Youth Services Pilot (BYSP) program supported projects in first three and then seven community sites where a local project consortium was allowed to decide what they would do. Geelong was one of the additional four to be supported. The successor to the BYSP was the Partnerships program costing about \$11m over four years, and at the close of this program, no report was produced on the outcomes achieved (?). An Innovation Action Projects (IAP) program supported eleven projects over several years for a total expenditure of \$25m. The Geelong project was one of these projects. The School Focused Youth Services program costs \$8m annually and supports some 40 workers around the state and questions have been raised as to what outcomes are accomplished as a result of this program. In Victorian schools, there are school nurses at an annual cost of \$25m, although there has been expressed concern that school nurses are not really authorised to provide much in the way of medical support to students in schools. There is now a Doctors in Secondary Schools program deploying, where possible, a doctor one day a week in schools that costs \$25.8m over five years, with an additional \$18m expended for fit-for-purpose consulting rooms on school premises.¹³⁶

The outcomes achieved by the COSS model in reducing youth homelessness in Geelong by 40% and reducing school leaving by 20% show that it can achieve significant success. The COSS model has components which evidence to the inquiry suggests are needed to achieve greater success. These components include working with 'first to know' institutions (schools), coordinated and integrated services, and flexible and outcome-based services.

The Committee believes the COSS model should be expanded to other parts of the state. The evidence presented suggests that it will have substantial benefits, including reducing the incidence of youth homelessness and providing overall cost savings.

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government provide funding and support for the expansion of initiatives linked to the Community of Schools and Services model, with a minimum expansion to seven pilot sites that will include four metropolitan sites and three regional sites.

¹³⁶ Mackenzie, *Submission 394*, p. 41.

4.5 Prevention—structural risk factors

According to AHURI, there are a number of structural risk factors that can lead to homelessness, including housing affordability, employment markets and neighbourhood factors. Professor Johnson, who worked on the *Journeys Home* Survey of 1,700 people over a period of five years, noted that the study similarly found that employment and social housing were included among structural risk factors.

This section will discuss prevention-focused services that address societal issues that can lead to homelessness, including social housing and employment programs. It will also consider measures to reduce homelessness amongst people leaving government institutions such as out of home care, prison and hospitals.

4.5.1 Effectively targeting assistance to address societal risk factors

In discussing structural risk factors, the Committee acknowledges evidence it received regarding the difficulty in effectively targeting individuals that may be at risk of homelessness. Professor Johnson gave evidence that preventative programs could be targeted at sections of the population that are disadvantaged or at risk, but this can result in potentially costly support to large numbers of people:

One of the things that we know about prevention is that it is potentially very costly because you have to go broad. Even in those high-risk groups—state care—which you target, some of the people who are going to get services were never going to become homeless anyway. We can identify populations, but we cannot identify individuals...

...

That is the challenge that we have. That means that from a policy perspective you have got to be careful because it potentially is very, very costly. But clearly having some of those broader, how shall I say, structural drivers—having more sensitivity to the issues that people at the bottom end of the ladder face around affordability and around having a lack of income—they are really important. They are the things that seem to matter.¹³⁷

In addition, Professor Johnson said that it can be difficult to measure the success of providing support to groups at risk of homelessness because it is difficult to know how many of that group would have eventually become homeless:

Understanding prevention is hard because how can you tell you have prevented something that does not happen? It is one of those metalogical challenges that really means, 'Okay, we're going to say we're going to prevent homelessness for this group. None of them became homeless'. But how many of them would have become homeless anyway? That makes it very hard.¹³⁸

The Committee recognises these issues and supports evidence-based prevention programs that target groups who are at risk of homelessness.

¹³⁷ Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

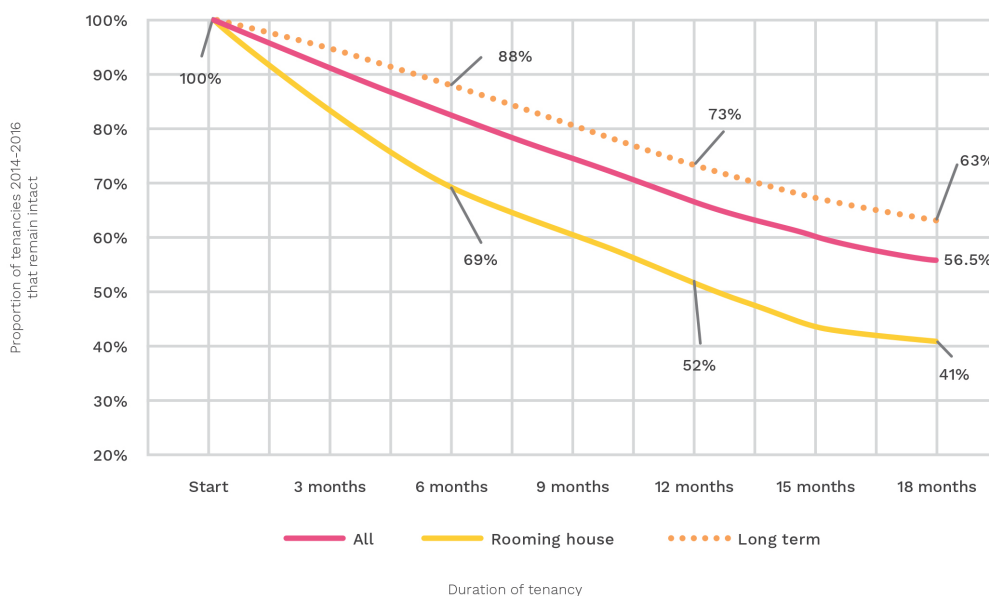
¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

4.5.2 Social housing

The Committee was told that social housing (both public and community housing) is a protective factor against homelessness. This is largely because the rent is tied to a resident's income, not market prices, and there is more security of tenure for residents than can be found in the private rental market.

A report authored by Professor Johnson and published by the Unison Housing Research Lab found that people who were housed in long-term accommodation (in this case community housing) were more likely to sustain their housing for a longer period without leaving. Figure 4.4 below shows a comparison between the rate at which persons in rooming houses and long-term accommodation remain in their accommodation.

Figure 4.4 A comparison between the loss of tenure in rooming houses and long-term accommodation



Source: Guy Johnson, Susan McCallum and Juliet Watson, *Who stays, who leaves and why? Occupancy patterns at Unison Housing between 2014 and 2016*, Research Report No. 2, February 2019, p. 21.

The Melbourne Institute also said that public housing could be a protective measure against homelessness as it can protect residents against shocks such as a sudden drop in income. This is because the rent charged in social housing is proportionate to a person's income:

The supply of social housing can also be critical to reducing the risk of entering homelessness by providing a secure, long-term housing option for those at the 'bottom' of the housing market. Social housing protects residents against sudden reductions in income as the rent charged corresponds to a maximum percentage of their income (25% for public housing and 25% or 30% for community housing depending on providers).¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Melbourne Institute, *Submission 99*, p. 9.

This was echoed by Mr Juha Kaakinen, Chief Executive Officer of the Y-Foundation, a housing provider in Finland, who discussed how social housing is one of the structural pillars of homelessness prevention in Finland:

But of course solving homelessness very much depends also on the prevention side. If you only provide services for people who drop into homelessness without doing prevention, it will not work, or it will take a very long time. On the prevention side I think there are ... critical elements in the Finnish system: affordable social housing, public housing... It is the structural element.¹⁴⁰

Dr Sarah Pollock from Mind Australia also described social housing as a protective element against homelessness. When discussing people who chronically experience homelessness, she said:

This is a cohort of people who need social housing. Private rental—not at first; maybe down the track, maybe in five years, maybe in 10 years, but at first private rental is not going to work for them. The Trajectories research indicated quite clearly that there are protective features of public housing ... which is not the home ownership group. This is a group that does need social housing, and our underinvestment has contributed to this persistently homeless problem.¹⁴¹

The Committee agrees that social housing can play a positive role in keeping people from recurrent homelessness, particularly for those with complex needs. Part of the reason for this is because housing costs are linked to income, rather than market prices. This can protect people from unexpected shocks or income reductions that often accompany homelessness.

The provision of social housing is discussed further in Chapter 6.

FINDING 23: The provision of adequate social housing is a protective factor against homelessness, particularly for people with complex needs.

4.5.3 Employment

Stakeholders to the inquiry reported that employment, and a person's employment history, was a preventative factor against homelessness. As noted in Chapter 2, the incidence of people accessing homelessness services who are employed is relatively low. Only 15% of people who accessed services were employed, with the remainder either not in the workforce (45%) or unemployed (40%).¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Mr Juha Kaakinen, Chief Executive Officer, Y-Foundation (Y-Säätiö), public hearing, via videoconference, 27 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ Pollock, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁴² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 175*, p. 10.

The submission from AHURI explained that having strong employment history can prevent entry into homelessness, and that individuals at risk of homelessness are more likely to become homeless during periods of higher unemployment:

Being employed and having a good employment history helps prevent entry into homelessness, however it is less significant for exits from homelessness (Johnson et al. 2015). Analysis of [Journeys Home] data shows a complex relationship between employment status and homelessness. Individuals who are presently vulnerable to homelessness but have no chronic health risks and are not involved in regular drug use (or other risky behaviours) are more likely to fall into homelessness in periods of rising unemployment. Additionally, having no employment history after leaving full-time education was found to be a risk factor for homelessness...¹⁴³

They added that labour markets are a structural issue that can impact the rate of homelessness. There is an association between the rate of unemployment and the rate of homelessness, which is more pronounced in men:

Labour market conditions are a significant factor for entries to homelessness. An increase in the unemployment rate of one percentage point increases the likelihood of homelessness entry by one percentage point (Johnson et al. 2015). This inverse association between paid employment and homelessness is most pronounced for men; the casual and fixed-term contract employment more common among women is associated with a higher risk of homelessness compared to more permanent employment...¹⁴⁴

While the relationship between homelessness and lack of employment is strong, the Committee understands that there are many barriers to address for people experiencing homelessness to find and sustain employment. These barriers include social and economic disadvantage, mental health, AOD and family violence issues.

The Committee heard about programs to assist young people experiencing homelessness to gain employment before issues associated with homelessness become more complex. One of these programs is run by a social enterprise called HoMie, which works with youth homelessness services to provide young people with employment opportunities. Mr Nicholas Pearce, Director of HoMie, explained the program to the Committee at a public hearing:

Essentially our program itself is really a prevention-based program, so working with at-risk young people, collaborating with local youth homelessness services and also some big retail partners, and I will explain the logic behind that as well, to provide employment opportunities that are meaningful and empathetic as well. So that is kind of us. Obviously we are an organisation that essentially has a streetwear clothing store, so we are a social enterprise. We are based in Fitzroy. We sell clothing; we are wearing some of it right now. It is also made here in Melbourne. We use the profits to provide a couple of things, but essentially we are providing, I guess, for young people affected by

¹⁴³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 340*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

homelessness or hardship—that is the language that we have adopted—the ability to obtain life skills; confidence is a really big thing and obviously the provision of income et cetera to provide that pathway out of homelessness for them.¹⁴⁵

One aspect of HoMie’s work is a program called the HoMie Pathway Alliance, which helps young people experiencing homelessness to find employment in the retail sector. The program connects young people with jobs at large retail companies but also provides them with the support and skills needed to help them begin and maintain their employment, including study towards vocational qualifications at TAFE. Ms Danielle Howe, Evaluations Manager at HoMie described the journey for a young person applying for a position in the HoMie Pathway Alliance and the outcomes that can be achieved:

So this young person will apply through the HoMie Pathway Alliance through the [homelessness] support services that we are connected with. They come to an info session at our store. They hear all about it. They meet us. They interview for a position.

When they are offered a position we have realised that they immediately experience increased support and an increased sense of direction, so those are two outcomes that come before the program begins. At the start of the program we have a transition in month. So this is every Monday: the young person begins the program before they are placed into their work placement and we focus on the usual barriers to employment—so time management, presentation. We take the young people out and give them their vouchers, which are already provided by most of the employers, to get their new clothing, their new outfit. We provide them with things that they might not have. Some young people do not have proper shoes and things like that. That is a really, really big community build-up and confidence building before sending them into the workforce.

Along the way we have a lot of focused areas that we have specific activities for, not only within the workplace but also during the professional development Mondays. They experience improved confidence, improved financial position, improved aspiration, improved resilience, improved professional networks, improved skills and improved belonging and acceptance. On the day of graduation the big outcomes that they have are increased work readiness, improved engagement with education, improved financial position, increased capacity to maintain secure housing and improved wellbeing, so ultimately they are more work ready and better prepared for their future.

We really do start seeing these outcomes happen at the eight-month point. One of our young people last year was offered a senior role and actually offered to move stores within her Hanes location. She was considered an asset to the team and was making decisions, and that is not an uncommon outcome to happen.¹⁴⁶

HoMie is currently a relatively small organisation with limited scale, yet have a key focus on ensuring high quality outcomes. For this reason there is only a small intake of participants each year, with a total of 12 young people participating. However, the

¹⁴⁵ Mr Nicholas Pearce, Director, HoMie, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Ms Danielle Howe, Evaluations Manager, HoMie, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 6–7.

graduates of the program so far have experienced significant social and professional successes:

HoMie has graduated 19 young people. At 12 months since graduating from the program 92 per cent of these young people are meaningfully employed or in further education. If they were living in supported accommodation prior to being at HoMie, at 12 months 100 per cent of them have transitioned into private rentals. At two years since graduating the program 100 per cent remain meaningfully employed and 83 per cent are in full-time senior or management roles and are assets to their team. These are the same young people who were not given an opportunity prior to HoMie to even work in entry-level positions at these stores.¹⁴⁷

The Committee strongly supports programs that assist young people to develop crucial life skills and experience, such as the HoMie Pathway Alliance. Their work in supporting young people to prepare for and maintain employment helps them to develop a diverse set of skills, both professional and social, that will significantly reduce the likelihood of homelessness throughout their lives.

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government commit funding for programs that assist young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness to receive job readiness training and connect them with employment opportunities.

The Committee is aware that there are many other social enterprises in Victoria that work with people experiencing homelessness to help them find and keep employment. The Honourable Wade Noonan, who appeared before the Committee, as Chair of Jobs Bank and other organisations, provided an overview of some of the other social enterprises in this area:

there are a number of other really significant social enterprises that focus either directly or indirectly on homelessness in Victoria. The Big Issue is one that people clearly recognise out on the streets, but there are other great ones. It is probably unfair to list a few, but the Brotherhood of St Laurence have the Given the Chance program that is about labour hire and traineeships, apprenticeships and the like. There is Fruit2Work. There is Streat, who provide cafe and hospitality services. There are many that do really good work, and they are usually very small enterprises as well.¹⁴⁸

He said that Victoria is home to ‘about 3,500 social enterprises, and they employ about 60,000 people and contribute about \$5.2 billion to the Victorian economy’.¹⁴⁹

The Victorian Government introduced its social procurement framework in 2018. The framework ensures that when the Government procures goods and services over the amount of \$20 million, the contract must have regard for tenders that produce positive

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Hon. Wade Noonan, Executive Director, WoMEDA; Associate Director of Social Enterprise and Investment, RMIT University, Chair, JobsBank, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

social and sustainable outcomes.¹⁵⁰ At a public hearing, Mr Noonan explained that this could include social outcomes such as employing disadvantaged young people or asylum seekers through social enterprises. There are also targets for engagement with social enterprises.¹⁵¹

Mr Noonan gave examples of some of the projects that have engaged with social enterprises:

The major road and rail projects spent \$8.4 million with social enterprises in 2018–19; Victorian Government departments spent \$7.3 million with 70 certified social enterprises; Rail Projects Victoria recorded more than 15,000 employment hours for refugees; and Rail Projects Victoria and North East Link Project recorded more than 36,000 hours for long-term unemployed and more than 6,000 hours for disengaged young people.¹⁵²

The framework establishes a number of objectives, including seeking job readiness and employment opportunities for disadvantaged Victorians, such as long-term unemployed people; disengaged youth; single parents; migrants and refugees, and workers in transition.¹⁵³ However, as explained by Mr Noonan, the social procurement framework does not include targets or objectives for engagement with people experiencing homelessness.¹⁵⁴ He advocated for the Committee to ‘recommend to the Government to consider increasing the opportunities for people experiencing homelessness or who are homeless to engage in more meaningful work and training through the social procurement framework.’¹⁵⁵

Such a proposal may have merit in providing employment opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. However, the Committee is mindful that in some cases people experiencing homelessness may have many barriers to participating in and maintaining long-term employment. This can include mental health and AOD issues, as well as education and training needs. A Victorian Parliamentary Library Fellowship paper titled, *The promise of social procurement: Leveraging purchasing power to create inclusive employment opportunities*, discussed the issue of employee readiness in social procurement programs. It stated:

Mandating an employer to take on an individual with complex needs without adequately preparing the employer for that placement can result in unnecessary risk for the participant and future resistance from the employer. Jobseekers who rely on income support are especially vulnerable. If they are not supported to succeed on a placement and end up losing the job, they may face long wait periods before getting their income support payments reinstated.

¹⁵⁰ Department of Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victoria’s social procurement framework: Building a fair, inclusive and sustainable Victoria through procurement*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2018, p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Noonan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵³ Department of Jobs, *Victoria’s social procurement framework*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ Noonan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Policy instruments and approaches need to reflect such nuances and, where jobseeker cohorts require different activation approaches or extra support, these should be pursued and/or provided.¹⁵⁶

The work readiness component of HoMie's Pathways Alliance provides an example of how a social enterprise can assist people experiencing homelessness to successfully prepare for and sustain employment. However, HoMie's experience suggests that these types of comprehensive programs can be resource-intensive.¹⁵⁷

The Committee believes the Victorian Government should explore opportunities to give more support to social enterprises that work with people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These programs should include a work readiness component to help to ensure that participants are able to maintain employment and have the best chance to find and keep a home.

RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Victorian Government explore opportunities to include more social enterprises that work with people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in their social procurement policy. Such social enterprises should include a work readiness component in their employment programs.

4.5.4 Leaving institutional settings

The inquiry received widespread evidence from stakeholders about the experiences of people who have come into contact with justice, health, mental health and care settings who are discharged into homelessness. The Committee heard that this is common across different institutional settings and can contribute to recurrent contact with institutional care. The Committee was further told this is not only detrimental to the individuals discharged with nowhere to go, but is also a missed opportunity to provide crucial services to assist their needs and prevent further incidences of homelessness.

Out of home care, foster care and other child protection settings

When a child is taken into the child protection system the State owes a duty to the child to provide a protective and supportive environment until they are old enough to live independently. However, the Committee was informed that the support provided to young people in state care, both foster care and out of home care, finishes at the age of 18. This relatively young age means that many do not yet have the skills to live without support, and can lead to disadvantage and homelessness. A high proportion of young people experiencing homelessness are care leavers.

¹⁵⁶ Maria Mupanemunda, *The promise of social procurement: Leveraging purchasing power to create inclusive employment opportunities*, research paper, no. 3, Work & Economic Security, Research & Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, November 2020.

¹⁵⁷ Howe, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

Paul McDonald, CEO of Anglicare, compared this situation with what he considered to be the large majority of the general population, who are not independent from their parents by the age of 18:

all formal care for a child in care terminates not on their circumstances, not on their abilities or inabilities; it is based solely on their birthday.

...

That is quite a remarkable position for Australia to be in given that 85 per cent of 18- to 21-year-olds here in this country are with either one or both parents, so we all know that the maturity, the ability for independent living, the emotional capability of an 18-year-old is not there to live independently.¹⁵⁸

In 2018 the Victorian Government introduced a program called Home Stretch which commits to extending care to the age of 21 for 250 young people over a five-year period.¹⁵⁹ However, this is a relatively small proportion of the approximately 600 young people between 15–18 years who leave state care each year.¹⁶⁰

The submission from DHHS gave an overview of the challenges faced by young people leaving care, noting that these can often lead to homelessness:

Key reasons for the high level of homelessness for young care leavers:

- Post-care supports for young people 18 years and over are discretionary, not mandatory.
- Many care leavers are not developmentally ready at 18 years to live independently.
- There is no guarantee of housing support so that many care leavers exit directly into homelessness, and others endure ongoing housing instability.
- Young people may be discouraged by the long wait times for public housing and the complicated application process, and could be removed from public housing waiting lists due to their high mobility and loss of contact with the appropriate housing office.
- Young people can feel discriminated against in the private rental sector because of their age and a prevailing view that young people were irresponsible tenants. They also lacked rental references.
- Private rental was not affordable for many young care leavers, and they may not have the resources to secure and maintain housing even if it were available.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ McDonald, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁹ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 45.

¹⁶⁰ Home Stretch, *Submission 304*, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 55.

These issues contribute to a very high percentage of care leavers amongst young people experiencing homelessness. Paul McDonald said that research had shown as much as 63% of the proportion of homeless young people were care leavers:

David MacKenzie's report, which surveyed 400 young people nationally through the Swinburne University, found that 63 per cent of the youth homeless he surveyed nationally were care leavers— 63 per cent, nearly over two-thirds. We know that in the care system 35 per cent just within their first 12 months of leaving care will have five or more places of abode. We also do know that 50 per cent of young people leaving the care system will either be homeless, in prison, a new parent or unemployed, again within their first 12 months.¹⁶²

In response to this figure, a number of stakeholders to the inquiry advocated for support to be extended to all young people in state care until the age of 21. Home Stretch, an organisation that advocates on behalf of care leavers, explained that 'international evidence shows that extending the leaving care age to 21 will reduce the number of homeless young people.'¹⁶³ Home Stretch provided that analysis by Deloitte Access Economics determined that implementing this measure would create a cost saving of \$2.4 billion over a 10-year period. In addition, there are likely to be a number of other positive social outcomes:

Deloitte found that the social benefits for both young people in OOHC and state governments are as follows:

- Homelessness halved from 39% to 19.5%;
- Educational engagement increased from 4.5% to 10.4%, for non-parents;
- Hospitalisation rates reduced from 29.2% to 19.2%;
- Rate of mental illness reduced from 54.4% to 30.8%;
- Rate of teen pregnancy reduced from 16.6% to 10.2%;
- Rate of smoking reduced from 56.8% to 24.5%;
- Interaction with the criminal justice system reduced from 16.3% to 10.4%; and There are also benefits across a number of other domains; including improved mental health, and physical health outcomes; reduced intergenerational disadvantage; and an increase in social connectedness.¹⁶⁴

Paul McDonald, who conducted research on the benefits of extending support to young people in care to the age of 21 based on evidence from international jurisdictions, similarly described various positive social and financial outcomes:

We said to the Victorian government, 'If you actually extended care through to 21, you would halve the homeless rates. You would also drop arrests by a third and you would do a number of other things that were reflected in the UK and the US jurisdictions.'

¹⁶² McDonald, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

¹⁶³ Home Stretch, *Submission 304*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

But not only that, from an economic point of view for every one dollar you spend on extending care you will receive up to \$2.50 return back into the state coffers on the reductions in relation to needs on homelessness'.¹⁶⁵

The Committee agrees that young people leaving care require support beyond the age of 18. The fact that care leavers make up such a large proportion of young people experiencing homelessness suggests that some require support for longer to develop crucial independent living skills.

In November 2020, the Victorian Government pledged to extend the provision of the Home Stretch program to include every Victorian in out-of-home care and allocated \$64.7 million in the 2020/21 budget to make the program universal.¹⁶⁶ In addition, extra funding has been provided to ensure care leavers are prepared for independent living, and significant extra investments were provided to build additional residential care facilities.

The Committee welcomes this investment and, in particular, supports the extension of the Home Stretch program to all those who need it. The evidence to the Committee suggests that this policy could prevent significant disadvantage and homelessness amongst care leavers while also delivering significant cost benefits over time.

Leaving custodial settings

Like care leavers, people leaving custodial settings may need support to re-adjust to a non-institutional setting. Failure to do so can result in former offenders experiencing homelessness, difficulty reintegrating into the community and higher risk of reoffending. The submission from the Council to Homeless Persons explained that 50% of prison leavers use a homelessness service in the year following their release:

As Victoria's incarceration rate has rapidly grown in recent years, the number of prisoner exits directly into homelessness has also grown; increasing by 317 per cent since 2011–12. Now 50 per cent of prison leavers use a homelessness service in the year following their release.¹⁶⁷

The Committee heard evidence from the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), who are Victoria's only specialist criminal justice reintegration service.¹⁶⁸ Mr Marius Smith, CEO of VACRO described the organisation's ReConnect program, which assists disadvantaged people leaving prison in Western Victoria. He said that in the last financial year, 30% of participants were released into primary homelessness (without conventional housing, such as those sleeping rough) and 54% into secondary homelessness (living in temporary housing, such as shelters).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ McDonald, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁶ The Hon. Luke Donnellan, *Supporting young Victorians - and their future*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 24 November 2020.

¹⁶⁷ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁸ VACRO, *Our history*, <<https://www.vacro.org.au/our-history-final>> accessed 11 November 2020.

¹⁶⁹ Mr Marius Smith, Chief Executive Officer, VACRO, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

Once participants are released into homelessness, Mr Smith explained that a lack of long-term housing options often results in extended stays in crisis and transitional accommodation:

ReConnect participants are automatically eligible for priority application for public housing; however, because of the stress on public housing very few of our participants will secure a place before the end of their ReConnect package. When a person is exiting a prison into primary homelessness, our first step is to take them to the housing entry point in their area. At this point we normally arrange for initial accommodation in a motel by combining funds from ReConnect and the housing entry point, and this buys us some time to start a participant's search for appropriate accommodation. Ideally we would place the participant into time-limited crisis accommodation. They should then move on to a transitional housing property for up to 12 months, by which time they should have moved into public housing. However, the lack of public housing means that no-one is moving on from transitional housing and no-one is moving on from crisis housing, so the entire system is blocked up.¹⁷⁰

He gave an example of the difference in the positive outcomes that can be achieved when offenders are able to access stable long-term housing:

The harm caused by this problem can be illustrated by the case of two people we work with. We will call them 'Keith' and 'Mark'. We applied to put both men into the same crisis accommodation. Keith received a place, which set him on a path to a prosocial life and reunification with his children, while Mark did not. After a month in hotel accommodation Mark moved back in with a partner with whom he had a history of antisocial behaviour, and soon after he returned to custody. Now, these stories are not as simple as whether housing was available or not, but the availability of housing played a considerable role in their different fates.¹⁷¹

The Council to Homeless Persons also stated that homelessness could lead to significant negative outcomes for people leaving prison, including a higher risk of recidivism. They provided: 'the evidence shows that people exiting prison into homelessness are more likely to reoffend.'¹⁷²

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 27.

BOX 4.4: Brett

Brett grew up in a violent household with an abusive, alcoholic father. He believes that had there been some form of intervention by the government in his early home life or ‘guidance of some sort for children that had been through hell’, his life possibly ‘could’ve been different, if not better’.

Brett spent time in prison and after his release from prison was not successful in finding work. The only accommodation he could afford was a room in a rooming house. Brett said the atmosphere of rooming houses ‘never got me anywhere but back in trouble and back on drugs’.

Brett faces prejudice from employment and real estate agents because of his record and feels his past makes renting and employment impossible, as ‘most people class [him] as a second-rate citizen’. He believes there should be more opportunities for people leaving prison and less judgement from employment agencies, as he believes that all people want is the chance to ‘better themselves and their lives’.

Source: Mr Brett Berry, *Submission 223*, pp. 1–2.

According to Mr Smith, the cost of imprisoning someone for a year is high, at approximately \$100,000. The provision of adequate housing support is likely to reduce reoffending and the likelihood that offenders will return to prison:

The benefit of housing support is that, to put it perhaps into just a bit more context, it is a sort of foundation on which you can build. It is really kind of one of the most important factors for reintegration. It allows you to then address the other physical needs and, you know, factors that affect your reoffending, allowing you to then build your life and to desist from crime, which then has an effect of reducing recidivism rates, which has the effect of reducing future victims of crime and improving community safety.¹⁷³

Mr Smith noted that Corrections Victoria has a small stock of housing.¹⁷⁴ The Council to Homeless Persons recommended that the Victorian Government invest in a larger dedicated pool of housing to ensure that people exiting prison had somewhere to live:

A pool of dedicated housing is required to ensure that the justice outcomes that the Victorian Government invests in so heavily at the crisis end, are not undercut upon release. Such housing should be a widespread feature of post-release care.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁷⁵ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 27.

Professor Guy Johnson noted in his evidence that while it is important to house people immediately after exiting prison, there are high rates of this population losing their housing between 6 and 18 months after their release. As a result, people exiting prison also need other types of ongoing support:

Existing programs focus on discharge, and that makes sense. Our data showed that the risk level on discharge was moderately significant. But we found that when people do leave prison and get housing, the honeymoon period often ends after six months. Then the risk of homelessness emerges and remains for another 12 months—that is, we found a delayed and extended period of risk. Existing programs by and large do not go long enough or deep enough to mitigate this risk fully.¹⁷⁶

The Committee agrees that resources should be put toward supporting offenders leaving prison to access appropriate accommodation and to help break the cycle of entrenched disadvantage. The evidence suggests that stable accommodation can help to prevent re-offending and will also provide significant cost benefits in the long term

RECOMMENDATION 22: That the Victorian Government provide additional transitional housing for people leaving custodial settings. In addition, that the Victorian Government ensure access to housing support workers and integrated legal support both before and after release to assist persons to access and maintain stable, long-term housing.

The submission from DHHS noted that nationally, about 33% of people are homeless when they enter prison.¹⁷⁷ A number of submitters to the inquiry expressed concern that this group were less likely to have bail granted because they have no accommodation to be released to. The submission from Inner Melbourne Community Legal explained:

Current bail laws and practices also discriminate against people experiencing homelessness. The lack of secure and stable accommodation is a major factor that directly prevents individuals from being granted bail as they are unable to provide an address to which to be bailed.¹⁷⁸

This can result in an increase of offenders on remand because they cannot be bailed into homelessness. The Committee notes that crisis accommodation is available through the Court Integrated Services Program (CISP). However, according to the Law Institute of Victoria, this accommodation is often unsatisfactory private rooming houses, which are 'reported to be riddled with bed bugs, [and] exposure to drugs and alcohol and violence'.¹⁷⁹ The Law Institute of Victoria recommended that people on bail should have access to supported accommodation and recommended expanding the number of dwellings exclusively for bail accommodation.

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁸ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 202*, p. 30.

¹⁷⁹ Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 331*, p. 15.

The Committee agrees that specific supported accommodation would assist people to access bail and reduce the number of people on remand. Further, it would allow persons leaving custodial settings support to reintegrate into the community and reduce the risk of recidivism.

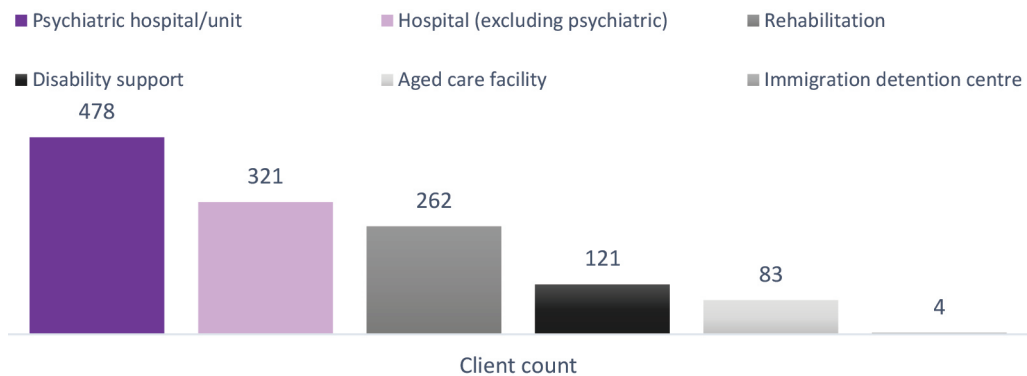
RECOMMENDATION 23: That the Victorian Government investigate whether greater access to supported accommodation is required for people seeking bail and whether this would lead to a reduction of individuals on remand.

Other institutional settings

People leaving other institutional settings such as hospitals and mental health care, disability support, aged care and rehabilitation can suffer the same abrupt ending of support and discharge into homelessness as the justice system and out-of-home care system.

As outlined in Figure 4.5 provided by DHHS the groups most likely to access services after leaving institutional settings are people exiting mental health care and hospitals.

Figure 4.5 People leaving institutional settings and accessing homelessness services in Victoria in 2018-19



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p.59.

A number of submitters and witnesses informed the Committee about inappropriate discharge measures for people leaving hospitals and mental health facilities. For example, Ms Renée Ficarra from Mildura Rural City Council said that people leaving mental health facilities in her region were discharged into inappropriate accommodation, which increased the likelihood of recurrence of homelessness:

There is a lack of supported accommodation to transition people to with a mental health condition after they leave the hospital. They leave the hospital, and they are often taken to a caravan park 30 minutes out of town where a lack of transport, isolation and the

potential grouping of clients and tenants with various issues is not a therapeutic environment. Supported accommodation is the key to address the cause of homelessness.¹⁸⁰

Dr Colleen Pearce, the Victorian Public Advocate, said that hospitals face pressure to free up beds and were discharging people with an intellectual disability into inappropriate accommodation:

some hospitals face such high pressures to free up beds, they discharge patients to homelessness or to temporary settings like a motel or an Airbnb, and also of course to supported residential services. At times guardians are faced with the difficult decision to consent to a patient being discharged to a less than ideal placement because there are so few options for them to choose from.¹⁸¹

Evidence to the Committee suggests that there are two key reasons for the discharge of people in these institutional settings into homelessness:

- a lack of crisis, transitional and affordable long-term housing for people leaving institutions to move into
- incomplete or inadequate discharge planning.

Dr Kerry Rubin from RANZCP Victorian Branch believed that the lack of appropriate housing was a key reason for discharge into homelessness:

Those of us working in the public mental health system are all too familiar with people being discharged from public mental health inpatient units into homelessness or inadequate or unstable housing. The decline in available and appropriate housing stock and services has a traumatising effect both on the consumers we see and on those who work in the system. When you have spent weeks working with someone and providing them with the treatment and care needed to support them in recovering from a severe episode of mental illness, it can be awful and sometimes quite soul destroying for them and for you to discharge them into homelessness, knowing that this will start up a new cycle of problems for them—but the hospital bed is needed for someone else more unwell, often already waiting in the emergency department, and the cycle continues.¹⁸²

Regarding discharge planning, Ms Mary-Anne Rashford, Manager of the Homeless Person Program at Bolton Clarke, stated that there could be a lack of understanding amongst hospital staff about the measures required to secure temporary housing for people experiencing homelessness exiting hospitals, resulting in incomplete discharge planning:

It is a real lack of understanding within the sector about what actually is available. I think we have all experienced that in the office taking referrals from hospitals—there is just a lack of understanding I guess and not a lot of discharge planning or thought going

¹⁸⁰ Ms Renée Ficarra, Community Development Officer, Mildura Rural City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

¹⁸¹ Dr Colleen Pearce, Public Advocate, Office of the Public Advocate, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

¹⁸² Rubin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 3–4.

into it. They will often be saying to us, 'Oh, but the doctor says they're ready to go, they can be discharged today'. I took a referral recently from a Melbourne hospital actually, where they were saying, 'This person's ready to leave the hospital. What are you going to do about it?'. I had to sort of say, 'Well, I think actually the question is really: what are you going to do about it?', that they have that duty of care to try and find some accommodation.¹⁸³

Tenants Victoria, in discussing people who were being discharged from the Sunshine Acute Psychiatric Unit into homelessness, suggested that supported accommodation should be provided, and that hospital staff should introduce procedures during the admission process to ensure tenancies were not lost during hospital stays:

We are aware that Sunshine Adult Acute Psychiatric Unit has been monitoring clients exiting into homelessness, including rooming houses. This has shown that approximately one in three are leaving treatment to enter homelessness. Longer term supported accommodation options for those leaving treatment should be a priority to support these vulnerable individuals to return to the community. If admission staff asked the housing status of the patient, and asked if the patient had advised their landlord of absence and offered to send an email on behalf of the patient, this could avoid abandonment claims terminating tenancy. Hospital admission processes should include referrals to support services to ensure tenancies are not disadvantaged by a hospital stay.¹⁸⁴

The provision of supported accommodation for people experiencing mental illness is discussed in section 4.4.3.

The Committee supports stronger measures to ensure individuals are not discharged from any institutional setting into homelessness. This includes better discharge planning that involves collaboration with housing and homelessness services ahead of time to secure accommodation, targets for institutions to reduce discharge into homelessness and training for staff to better identify and respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

¹⁸³ Ms Mary-Anne Rushford, Manager, Homeless Persons Program, Bolton Clarke, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

¹⁸⁴ Tenants Victoria, *Submission 176*, p. 11.

RECOMMENDATION 24: That the Victorian Government pursue a ‘no exits into homelessness’ policy to improve discharge practices at mental health, hospital, rehabilitation, aged care and other institutional settings. To improve discharge planning, the following measures should be put in place:

- development of partnerships and pathways with housing and homelessness services, including early referrals prior to discharge
- collection of discharge data and reporting against targets aiming for a reduction of discharges into homelessness
- training for staff in institutional settings, particularly in areas with high homeless populations, to better identify and respond to the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness, including—
 - training staff to record housing status as part of admission to prevent or identify risks of discharging individuals into homelessness.

4.6 Justice issues

Justice system issues are a structural risk factor of homelessness. Measures can be taken through the legal system to intervene early in homelessness and actions can be taken to prevent interactions with the judicial system for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

People at risk of or experiencing homelessness are more likely to have involvements with the justice system. They can also face barriers to accessing legal services due to the issues associated with socio economic disadvantage, mental health and the high cost of legal assistance.

The Committee heard there are several key areas where change can be made in relation to the justice system and homelessness:

- provision of legal support to assist people at risk of homelessness to keep their accommodation and prevent evictions into homelessness
- address the laws, policies and practices that disproportionately impact people experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers
- consideration of human rights matters.

4.6.1 Private rental advocacy

Breach notices and evictions

According to Justice Connect, tenants can be given a notice to vacate their property for breaching a duty provision of the *Rental Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)* (the Residential Tenancies Act) if they have failed to comply with the duty twice.¹⁸⁵ The submission stated the most common breach notices issued by landlords were for violations of the following provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act:

- a tenant must not cause nuisance or interference
- a tenant must keep rented premises clean.¹⁸⁶

Justice Connect provided that breaches of these requirements by tenants can often be linked to ‘a person’s vulnerabilities, including mental ill health, disability, their experience of family violence or fraught relationships within neighbourhoods and rooming houses.’¹⁸⁷

Justice Connect recommended abolishing the ability to evict tenants based on two breaches. Instead they recommended that breaches of compliance orders should be referred to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) if the tenant does not comply. VCAT would have the power to order compliance or compensation:

To improve housing security in Victoria, notices to vacate for successive breaches of duty should be abolished. Under this approach, each instance of breach would require the landlord to issue a breach of duty notice and, if the notice is not complied with within the required time, the landlord could apply for a compliance order or compensation order from VCAT.¹⁸⁸

In addition to evictions based on non-compliance for two breaches, Justice Connect said that landlords can apply to VCAT for a compliance order if their breach notice is not complied with. However, their submission explained that it is common for VCAT compliance orders to not have a time limit attached to them. This means that tenants could face the imminent threat of eviction for a particular matter for the duration of their tenancy.

The submission recommended that such VCAT compliance orders be limited to a maximum of six months before lapsing:

The ability to evict based on an alleged breach of a broad and indefinite compliance order facilitates housing insecurity and imposes unnecessary stress due to the indefinite risk of homelessness. To minimise the risk of arbitrary, unreasonable and avoidable

¹⁸⁵ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, p. 21.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

evictions, compliance orders must be worded as specifically as possible, and be limited to a period of six months before lapsing.¹⁸⁹

This proposal was similarly supported by the Federation of Community Legal Centres:

People should not be evicted from their homes for trivial behaviour. Under the current system, landlords can go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and get a compliance order against a tenant that requires them to fix an issue and never commit a similar breach at any time in the future. These compliance orders never expire, which means that a tenant who played music too loudly just once could be evicted for breaching an order that was issued many years earlier. Compliance orders should be fair and reasonable and have a set time limit. Evicting a person from their home should always be the last resort.¹⁹⁰

The Committee agrees it is unreasonable for compliance orders to be indefinite and encourages VCAT to amend its practices to include time limits on compliance orders.

RECOMMENDATION 25: That the Victorian Government introduce legislative provisions for Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal compliance orders in respect of residential tenancies to be time limited where appropriate.

Improving notice to vacate forms and increasing tenancy focused legal support

Justice Connect suggested that notice to vacate forms could be improved by including information about how to access legal support. Their submission stated:

The NTV [Notice to Vacate] form should also include referral information about specialist legal help for tenants to encourage them to engage with their rights and subsequent VCAT processes.

...

These changes would increase the ability of tenants to understand their options and to obtain legal assistance further upstream in the eviction process.¹⁹¹

The Committee considers that providing details about access to legal support on the Notice to Vacate form could be a simple, low cost measure that may encourage more people to seek legal assistance and engage with the VCAT process.

With regard to access to legal support, the Council to Homeless Persons said that tenants in residential tenancy matters are often poorly represented which can lead to adverse outcomes overall:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁹⁰ Federation of Community Legal Centres, *Submission 362*, p. 13.

¹⁹¹ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, p. 23.

Tenants are notoriously poorly represented at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

...

As a result, landlords initiate 95 per cent of applications to the VCAT Residential Tenancies List. Of these, 80 per cent go undefended, with the tenant failing to appear at the hearing. In 95 per cent of applications initiated by private landlords, landlords are represented by their agent or property manager.¹⁹²

The submission added that if legal support were more readily accessible to tenants this would likely improve the outcomes for this group.

Our consultations with homelessness services across Victoria identified that where tenants attend VCAT hearings, the result is typically a less punitive outcome for that tenant, including a significantly reduced incidence of eviction. With landlords typically represented by professional real estate agents, many tenants require additional support in understanding and pursuing their rights under the Residential Tenancies Act.¹⁹³

The Committee supports the proposed changes to the Notice To Vacate forms with the purpose of raising awareness of the availability of free legal services for tenants to advocate for them and assist them to navigate the VCAT process. The Committee considers that this should be done in conjunction with an increase in resources to tenancy-focused homelessness legal services to ensure they can meet the demand of tenants seeking their assistance.

RECOMMENDATION 26: That the Victorian Government amend the content of the Notice to Vacate form for tenants of rented premises to provide information about legal rights and details of legal assistance services within the notice.

RECOMMENDATION 27: That the Victorian Government provide additional funding with a view to expanding the provision of tenancy-focused legal supports for tenants involved in residential tenancy proceedings at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

4.6.2 VCAT appeals

With regards to the appeals process for tenancy decisions, Justice Connect told the Committee that the current VCAT process provides tenants with limited rights of appeal if they are unhappy with the result of VCAT orders. Ms Samantha Sowerwine, Principal Lawyer, Homeless Law at Justice Connect, explained that tenants who are evicted from a property by means of a possession order at VCAT are restricted to appealing

¹⁹² Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 27.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

the decision in the Supreme Court of Victoria, which carries a risk of adverse costs and protracted proceedings¹⁹⁴ for people at risk of homelessness:

I think it is important to note—because a lot of people do not understand this—that if you go to VCAT as a tenant and you get an unfavourable result, which can often be the case, the only option you have is to go to the Supreme Court to appeal that decision.

...

You can imagine that most people are not going to take that option, so I think that there are a lot of preventable evictions that happen because people just cannot appeal a decision from VCAT.¹⁹⁵

Mr Cameron Lavery, Manager and Principal Lawyer at Justice Connect, argued the need for an internal appeals mechanism at a public hearing:

To make sure that Victorian renters can have trust and confidence in VCAT's decision-making we need an internal appeals mechanism for decisions made in VCAT's residential tenancies list. This would bring Victoria into line with many other Australian states and territories which already have civil tribunals that have in-built internal appeal mechanisms.¹⁹⁶

Appeals from VCAT to the Supreme Court can only be made if the appellant believes the law was applied incorrectly in their VCAT decision.¹⁹⁷ This limits the grounds for which tenants can appeal. While VCAT allows for reviews and re-hearings in certain matters, an application can only be made on the grounds that a party did not appear and was not represented at the hearing.

A briefing paper provided by Justice Connect states that the introduction of an internal appeals process may save the cost of appeals in the Supreme Court and would not add excessive delays in attending to residential tenancy matters. It provides:

The cost of such a division would be minimal (having regard to the experiences of other jurisdictions) and the benefits would be extensive. While an internal appeals division may cause delay for a small number of matters, the associated benefits of having an accessible means of ensuring fair and just decisions are important. The cost to the State and to parties of taking an appeal to the Supreme Court is much higher than an internal appeals process at VCAT would be. An internal appeals division could be developed with limits on the type of cases that can be appealed (such as requiring leave to appeal) which would limit unnecessary appeals and the associated delays.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁵ Ms Samantha Sowerwine, Principal Lawyer, Homeless Law, Justice Connect, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 52–3.

¹⁹⁶ Lavery, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁹⁷ Sowerwine, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 52–3.

¹⁹⁸ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, p. 67.

The Committee did not receive sufficient evidence to fully consider the introduction of an internal appeals process for residential tenancy matters at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. However, it considers that the Victorian Government should conduct a review of the merits of introducing such a process and the potential impacts this would have for tenants in terms of the accessibility of appeals processes.

RECOMMENDATION 28: That the Victorian Government review the merits of an internal appeals process at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for residential tenancy matters. Such a review should have regard for whether an internal appeals process would result in cost savings for the Government and parties by reducing the need to appeal to the Supreme Court.

4.6.3 Rough sleepers and the justice system

The Committee heard from a number of stakeholders that people experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers, are more likely to receive certain fines and charges relating to what are known as ‘public order offences’. These are offences that occur in public spaces for which people experiencing homelessness may have a greater risk of infringing, and include begging, public drunkenness and public transport offences.¹⁹⁹ The Council to Homeless Persons stated that these offences contribute to the over-incarceration of people experiencing homelessness:

People without a home, who are sleeping rough, are also subject to a far higher level of public scrutiny than others, with many activities that are legal within the home, subject to criminal sanctions when performed in public. Termed ‘public order offences’, these laws contribute to the over-incarceration of people without private spaces to call home.²⁰⁰

In its submission, Justice Connect outlined several impacts these types of offences can have on people experiencing homelessness:

Financial impacts: those experiencing homelessness accrue excessive infringement notices, fines and charges for minor, poverty-related criminal offences, placing them under additional financial strain.

Practical exclusion impacts: Targeted enforcement approaches in response to community pressure on the visibility of poverty can result in people experiencing homelessness being ‘moved on’ or excluded from certain areas, forcing them into more isolated and dangerous areas where access to homelessness services are limited.

Personal impacts: enforcement-based measures disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness. This can lead to changes in the attitudes of people experiencing homelessness towards police, the justice system and their own self-worth, with individuals feeling targeted, harassed and discriminated against.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁰⁰ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 25.

Impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are impacted by enforcement-based laws to a significantly higher degree than other social groups.²⁰¹

A protocol for Victoria Police

To reduce the interactions between people experiencing homelessness and the justice system, Justice Connect recommended the development and implementation of a protocol that would act as a guidance document for Victoria Police and other agencies to assist them to apply discretion when it comes to public order offences in relation to people experiencing homelessness.

The Committee notes that this type of protocol is already in operation in the City of Melbourne and other local government areas.²⁰² The City of Melbourne protocol is implemented jointly by the City of Melbourne and Victoria Police. As part of the Protocol, the City of Melbourne has undertakings which include connecting people experiencing homelessness to local services, and Victoria Police has a guidance document that recommends using discretion in applying public order offences.²⁰³

In their evidence to the inquiry, Victoria Police described the Protocol as a success. Assistant Commissioner Timothy Hansen, Service Delivery Transformation Command, Victoria Police, said:

I would like just to outline quickly, if I may, Operation Protocol, which is effectively our number one, I am going to call it, enforcement approach across the CBD. Obviously when it comes to issues of public safety a regulatory or enforcement element needs to be present from a policing perspective, and whilst it is not our number one focus—as I said, our focus in respect of persons experiencing homelessness is to work with services and to make sure people are connected and their vulnerability is reduced—we do have another element of that, which is the enforcement element as well, because we do see a connection to crime and we need to prevent that crime. Operation Protocol has provided us a really strong balance around referring people into drug and alcohol counselling and getting them crisis support for mental health and other health concerns. We operate joint outreach teams with both the Salvation Army and City of Melbourne staff and ourselves where we go out on active patrols and we take a joint enforcement but services-connected approach as well.²⁰⁴

The Committee supports the creation of a statewide operating protocol between the Victorian Government and Victoria Police on the application of public order offences to people experiencing homelessness. Such a protocol would build on the template set by the City of Melbourne and Victoria Police.

²⁰¹ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, pp. 11–2.

²⁰² For example, *Submission 135*, p. 4.

²⁰³ City of Melbourne and Victoria Police, *Operating Protocol/Policy operating statement*, (n.d.), <<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/homelessness-operating-protocol.pdf>> accessed 30 September 2020.

²⁰⁴ Assistant Commissioner Timothy Hansen, Assistant Commissioner, Service Delivery Transformation Command, Victoria Police, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

RECOMMENDATION 29: That the Victorian Government develop and implement a Protocol for Victoria Police and other enforcement agencies to use in responding to people experiencing homelessness, which would:

- avoid unnecessary, enforcement-based interactions with people experiencing homelessness
- ensure that where interactions do occur, they are appropriate and respectful
- support enforcement officers to use their discretion and consider alternative options to fines and charges when interacting with people experiencing homelessness
- train and equip enforcement officers to make referrals to appropriate services as an alternative to fines and charges.

Begging offences

Some stakeholders in the community legal sector advocated for a repeal of begging offences under the *Summary Offences Act 1966* (Vic) (Summary Offences Act), on the basis that such offences are not in the public interest. The submission from Inner Melbourne Community Legal stated that begging offences cause vulnerable people to be caught up in the justice system:

Actively prosecuting begging offences is ineffective and fails to achieve any public interest objectives. An enforcement based approach to this offending fails to address the systemic underlying reasons for begging, such as homelessness. It also places further stress and financial hardship on our communities' most vulnerable.²⁰⁵

Inner Melbourne Community Legal, Justice Connect and others recommended that the offence of begging for alms be repealed.²⁰⁶

However, Assistant Commissioner Hansen told the Committee that Victoria Police have concerns about professional begging, which could not be sufficiently regulated if the offence was repealed. He said:

I spoke about the emergence in recent years of what I am going to call 'professional beggars'. Certainly there is no doubt that people were masquerading across Melbourne's CBD, and I think it was about July 2019 where seven people actually were flown in from overseas to execute this function. And that is something that we see happen from time to time: the professional nature of begging. Not from time to time, to be honest with you—it happens quite regularly. So I think there is some cross-pollination or some infiltration there, if you like. There are certainly those that, if I could use the term, hang out in the CBD with the homeless. There is certainly an element of that that have a place to go back to. Their housing may not necessarily be secure, but they certainly have a house to go back to.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 202*, p. 24.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5; Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, pp. 41–3.

²⁰⁷ Hansen, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 23–4.

It is regrettable that people experiencing homelessness are charged for begging for alms under the Summary Offences Act. The Committee heard advice from Victoria Police that there is an element of ‘professional begging’ which may be difficult to regulate if the alms offence was repealed. In the Committee’s view, the Government should consider whether to amend the *Summary Offences Act 1966* to remove begging as an offence.

Public drunkenness offences

A number of stakeholders to the inquiry also advocated for a repeal of the offence of being drunk in public under the Summary Offences Act. Inner Melbourne Community Legal told the Committee that Victoria is the only state that still prohibits public drunkenness. Their submission states that people who experience homelessness are criminalised in this regard because they do not have the option to conduct their lives in a private space.²⁰⁸

The Committee notes that the Victorian Government had set up an expert reference group to provide advice on the efficacy of the public drunkenness laws. The report of the reference group recommended decriminalising public drunkenness and the implementation of a public health response. The Government announced in November 2020 that it will take up the recommendation of the report and repeal public drunkenness laws. In the 2020–21 State budget, the Government allocated \$16 million to promote a new public health response in conjunction with the repeal of the laws to ensure a therapeutic response to help people who are intoxicated on the streets.²⁰⁹

The Committee welcomes these measures and encourages the Government to work with the homelessness sector to ensure the public health response meets the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION 30: That in repealing the offence of public drunkenness from the *Summary Offences Act 1966* (Vic), the Victorian Government create an appropriate public health response model in consultation with relevant stakeholders in the homelessness sector.

4.6.4 Specialist court programs

The Committee was told about court diversion programs for people experiencing disadvantage. One such program is the Special Circumstances list at the Victorian Magistrates’ Court. The Special Circumstances list provided people experiencing family violence, drug and alcohol dependence, homelessness, mental health issues and intellectual impairment an avenue for their circumstances to be considered in a therapeutic setting when determining sentencing.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 202*, p. 26.

²⁰⁹ Premier of Victoria, *Victoria poised to abolish the crime of public drunkenness*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 28 November 2020.

²¹⁰ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, p. 50.

However, the Committee heard that the Magistrates' Court had ceased adding new matters to the Special Circumstances list in 2019. In their submission, Justice Connect stated that they were concerned about the following possible ramifications:

- The risk of vulnerable Victorians' matters proceeding to prosecution;
- The inconvenience and complexity of consolidating matters listed in open court; and
- Negative resourcing implications for the courts, government and the community-service sector.²¹¹

Justice Connect viewed the Special Circumstances list as 'essential for the most marginalised people with infringement matters, as it helps Victorians to exit the justice system with long-term, therapeutic outcomes'.²¹²

The Federation of Community Legal Centres similarly considered that the List provided a critical alternative pathway within the justice system for extremely disadvantaged Victorians:

A person living in their car because they are experiencing homelessness often receives thousands of dollars in parking fines, but has no real alternative other than to sleep on the street. Similarly, a person riding a train at night to stay warm in winter may receive a fine for not having a valid ticket, and then also receive several further financial penalties for not being able to pay the initial fare. The Special Circumstances List of the Magistrates' Court has provided an essential pathway for people experiencing these issues to deal with their fines, and allowed Magistrates the discretion they need to waive or significantly reduce the penalties they faced.

...

The Special Circumstances List functioned effectively for over a decade to provide fair, efficient and rehabilitative sentencing outcomes. Despite the essential role that the Special Circumstances List played in making the infringements system fairer for vulnerable people, it is being disbanded and these cases are instead simply being listed in the Magistrates' Court where they do not have the support they need. Not only does this greatly increase the risk of people being forced to pay thousands of dollars in fines incurred in times of crisis, it also makes it likely that they will have to attend multiple court dates in locations scattered across the state and receive a conviction. This is simply unfair and the Victorian Government should ensure that the Special Circumstances List remains operational and fully funded to ensure disadvantaged people receive justice and access to the support services they need.²¹³

The Committee is cautious about intervening in operational matters with the Magistrates' Court. However, it shares Justice Connect's concerns about the cessation of new matters on the Special Circumstances list. In the absence of further evidence received, the Committee hopes the Magistrates' Court will consider continuing the Special Circumstances list to provide support to disadvantaged persons.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Federation of Community Legal Centres, *Submission 362*, pp. 28–9.

RECOMMENDATION 31: That the Magistrates Court consider investigating the need for retention of the Special Circumstances list or establishment of a Homelessness list.

A specialist homelessness court

A number of stakeholders to the inquiry, including the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV), advocated for the creation of a specialist homelessness court. They noted that homelessness courts operate in some US states and that they take a therapeutic approach:

These courts take the approach of intervention, whereby homeless defendants can resolve their misdemeanour criminal matters through a local homeless service agency, rather than through law enforcement.²¹⁴

The Committee spoke to Magistrate Pauline Spencer, Head, Specialist Courts Division at the Magistrates' Court of Victoria. When asked about the LIV's proposal to create a specialist homelessness court, she stated that it was important to get the mainstream court working to meet peoples' needs and that the creation of too many specialist courts could lead to a disjointed system:

It is interesting, because I am kind of new in this position, and in thinking about where we go from here in terms of our courts, the challenge is, I think, that sometimes we design the court and then we put the people in. Then if there are a lot of people, you have delays. So there is a need for specialist work and specialist lists at times in terms of how we organise our work, but there is also a lot we need to do in the mainstream court, where people are coming in. So I am kind of thinking along the lines that we design the system around the person's needs rather than creating a whole lot of lists. I think about a third of the people in our CISP program are experiencing homelessness, and that is across the state. So then you start to create separate courts. Or do you actually improve what you do in mainstream court or do you do a bit of both? I think there is a role for specialisation, particularly with people with more complex needs. But if you think about it, a lot of people come into the court and they can be given a service and then diverted out, and then they are gone and on their way and operating safely. Then you have other people who need a little bit more support, and in the mainstream court we can provide that little bit more support. And then you have people with more complex needs who really need that more intensive, really highly skilled work. So that is the way I am kind of thinking about it. I think traditionally we think, 'Oh, let's make a court'. But we just end up with a whole lot of courts and not thinking about how it all works together as a whole.²¹⁵

The Committee agrees that it is important to ensure that people experiencing homelessness have their needs addressed in mainstream courts in a way that recognises their circumstances and is focused on preventing their continued interaction with the

²¹⁴ Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 331*, p. 10.

²¹⁵ Magistrate Pauline Spencer, Head, Specialist Courts Division, Magistrates Court of Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

justice system. It is the view of Magistrate Spencer that the addition of a specialist homeless court may not contribute to improvements to the mainstream court.

The Committee does not have sufficient evidence to make a recommendation in this area, however, the Committee believes it is important that the courts should be able to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness and that their approach should include therapeutic elements where appropriate.

4.6.5 Human rights and homelessness

Finally, a number of stakeholders to the inquiry advocated a human rights approach to ending homelessness. The Committee received a submission from the Castan Centre for Human Rights, which is based at Monash University. The submission puts forward that homelessness leads to the violation of a number of human rights, including rights contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Australia is a party.²¹⁶

The Castan Centre argued in its submission that homelessness is likely to limit a number of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights:

- Violations of economic, social and cultural rights include the violation of the right to adequate housing and the right to health. Examples include:
 - Right to Adequate Housing—lack of housing affordability and continued forced evictions without reason lead already vulnerable persons into homelessness. Further, the inadequate availability of services, materials, and facilities for people experiencing homelessness (including public housing) undermines the right to adequate housing.
 - Right to Health—homelessness impacts on both the availability and accessibility of the right to health, including through the absence of general conditions conducive to good health, and the barriers to accessing healthcare.
- Violations of civil and political rights include the rights to life, liberty and security and the right to privacy.
 - Right to Life, Liberty and Security—the living conditions and ongoing threats to safety and security experienced by homeless persons (particularly rough sleepers), as well as the criminalisation of low-level offences that disproportionately impact homeless persons undermine the right to life, liberty and security.
 - Right to Privacy—the practice of blacklisting and existence of residential tenancies databases that can impact on the ability to obtain adequate housing, the inability of homeless persons to carry out personal activities in private, and the extensive surveillance of streets impact upon the right to privacy.

²¹⁶ NOTE: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966), entry into force 3 January 1976 in accordance with article 27.

- Violations of cross-cutting rights to equality and non-discrimination are also violated by homelessness.
 - Equality and Non-Discrimination—forced evictions leading to discrimination in obtaining adequate housing, discrimination in access to services, the prevalence of gender-based violence leading to homelessness and the lack of protections against direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of homelessness or low-income status amount to violations of the rights to equality and non-discrimination.²¹⁷

In addition to the international obligations owed by Australia under the ICCPR and ICESCR, Victoria has also enshrined a number of civil and political rights in its *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) (Charter). The Charter establishes 20 human rights that are protected at the state level and with which state and local government bodies must act consistently in decision-making processes.²¹⁸ Draft legislation introduced into the Victorian Parliament must include a statement of compatibility of the proposed laws with human rights,²¹⁹ and courts and tribunals are required to seek to interpret laws consistently with the Charter rights.²²⁰ The Charter rights are derived from the ICCPR and can be subject to reasonable limitations. However, the Charter does not include a specific right to housing or, as provided for under ICESCR, the right to an adequate standard of living (which includes the provision of adequate housing).²²¹

At a public hearing, Professor the Hon Kevin H Bell AM QC, Director of the Castan Centre, advocated for the inclusion of the right to housing in the Charter:

I want to invite the committee therefore to consider the question of whether the legal framework within which we approach human rights in this state is adequate. We do not yet have the right to housing enshrined in either the Victorian charter or elsewhere. We do not find an explicit obligation to end homelessness in any legal statute, of which incidentally the right to housing would in any event encompass. We do not see the right to health stipulated in the Victorian charter or anywhere else in its full amplitude, though there is a right to receive certain services under the Mental Health Act, by way of example, but we do not have a right to health stipulated as such and certainly not in the human rights context, the most obvious place for that being the Victorian charter.

It would make, I want to say to you, a big difference and not just a symbolic difference for that right to be recognised through the Victorian Parliament. It would be a means by which we would say through the Parliament as a people that the right is so important that it ought to be enshrined in law and not just in international law through treaties to which Australia is a party but in Victorian law through statutes that we make ourselves.²²²

²¹⁷ Castan Centre for Human Rights, *Submission 429*, p. 6.

²¹⁸ *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic), pt 3 div 4.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pt 3 div 1.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pt 3 div 3.

²²¹ See art 11, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

²²² Professor the Hon. Kevin Bell, Director, Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 26–7.

Professor Bell stated that the inclusion of a right to housing in the Charter would compel the Government to take it into consideration when formulating policy and legislation:

When government was formulating policy, when government was exercising discretion, when government was enacting law, then it would be necessary as a result of that for the government to take into account that right in doing so. If the government were to introduce a law, unthinkable though it may be, which was incompatible with the right to housing— something which I think would be untenable, whatever the shape of the Victorian Parliament—then it would need to be expressly stated in the enacting law that it was intended to do so.²²³

In considering the power of the Charter to compel the Government to make policy and legislation in a way that is consistent with the human rights set out in the Charter, Professor Bell said:

No, it does not have teeth—that is another question. We are not here to talk about the enforceability mechanism of the charter or the adequacy of our human rights framework, but we can hitch for a ride housing onto the existing mechanism, which I do not consider to be meaningless. I have administered this system for some 15 years as a judge. I think judgements of mine and other judges have established that it can in circumstances work very well, and I can see the right to housing falling into that category.²²⁴

The Committee believes the addition of the right to housing to the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) would contribute to the consideration of the right to housing in future policy and legislative decisions.

In addition to the proposed inclusion of the right to housing, a number of stakeholders advocated for additional amendments to provisions in the Charter. One such recommendation is that any community housing providers registered under s 84 of the *Housing Act 1983* (Vic) be expressly included as ‘public authorities’ for the purposes of the Charter. This would ensure that community housing providers take into consideration Charter rights in eviction processes in the same way that public housing providers are currently required to do so. The Federation of Community Legal Centres explained in its submission:

Community housing tenants often experience vulnerability and have complex needs, and it is vital that decisions made about their housing are compatible with human rights. Although the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) plays a critical role in the protection of tenants, there is no certainty about whether community housing providers are ‘public authorities’ and have to comply with the Charter’s human rights obligations.

²²³ Ibid., p. 30.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

The Charter provides a helpful framework for negotiating with public and community housing providers that are making difficult decisions because it encourages proper consideration of a tenant's individual circumstances and alternatives to eviction. This means that a tenant's risk of homelessness, their family and any health problems have to be taken into account, which is particularly important for people needing community housing.²²⁵

Justice Connect noted in its submission that some jurisdictions, such as Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, have made this clarification under their laws.²²⁶ As public housing stock is being transferred to community housing in Victoria, this amendment would ensure that all social housing residents would have their rights under the Charter taken into consideration in tenancy matters regardless of which type of social housing they reside in.

The Law Institute of Victoria stated that this inclusion would codify the findings of VCAT in *Goode v Common Equity Housing Limited* [2016] ('Goode'):

Goode is the authority for the proposition that the social housing sector are considered 'public authorities' and are required to give proper consideration to, and act in accordance with, human rights protected by the Charter. In Goode, it was held that because a registered housing provider is a public authority, they are required to give proper consideration to a tenant's human rights. These considerations include the tenant's individual circumstances, their risk of homelessness due to a lack of alternative accommodation, an appropriate balance of competing obligations such as the safety of tenants and the reliance on rental revenue, and proper consideration of the alternatives to eviction.

Consistent policies and practices for Victorian tenants across all public and community housing providers will help ensure that evictions resulting in homelessness are a last resort.²²⁷

Some stakeholders also advocated for VCAT to be provided with jurisdiction to consider the human rights compatibility of eviction decisions by public and community housing landlords. In its submission to the inquiry, Justice Connect explained:

For clients living in public or community housing, Justice Connect frequently engages in negotiations based on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) (Charter) with public and community housing landlords to prevent the eviction of disadvantaged community members into homelessness. This is often on the basis that, in taking steps to evict the tenant, the public or community housing landlord has not properly considered, or acted compatibly with, the tenant's rights under the Charter.

...

²²⁵ Federation of Community Legal Centres, *Submission 362*, p. 12.

²²⁶ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, p. 34.

²²⁷ Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 331*, p. 8.

A number of Supreme Court cases have now limited the ability for VCAT to consider Charter compliance and also the timeframes in which a tenant can seek judicial review of a decision by public and community housing landlords.

It is our strong view that VCAT must have jurisdiction to consider the human rights compatibility of eviction decisions by public and community housing landlords under the Charter (recommendation 3b). The Charter encourages consideration of a tenant's individual circumstances and allows these considerations to be balanced against the competing obligations of social housing landlords. Legislative amendments to give VCAT jurisdiction to consider Charter compliance in eviction proceedings brought by public and community housing landlords would work towards reducing the harmful consequences of housing insecurity.²²⁸

The Law Institute of Victoria supported this proposition and explained that the means of appealing against a decision by a public housing landlord in relation to human rights matters through the Supreme Court of Victoria can be complex and costly, discouraging individuals from pursuing the matter:

Whilst Goode requires 'public authorities' to consider the human rights compatibility of their decisions under s38 of the Charter, the matter of *Director of Housing v Sudi* [2011], held that VCAT does not have jurisdiction to consider whether social housing landlords (i.e. public authorities), have given due consideration to the human rights compatibility of their decisions. The alternative appeals mechanism against decisions of a social housing landlord rests solely with the Supreme Court, which is highly onerous and costly. In practice, this means there is little incentive for public authorities to act in accordance with obligations under the Charter.²²⁹

This recommendation was similarly supported by Victoria Legal Aid.²³⁰

The Committee considers that community housing providers should be recognised as public authorities for the purpose of *the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). This will assist community housing tenants to have their rights under the Charter taken into consideration in tenancy matters.

In addition, the Committee believes that VCAT should also have the jurisdiction to take into consideration whether eviction decisions for tenants in social housing comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic). This would ensure that social housing providers give due consideration to the human rights compatibility of eviction decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 32: That the Victorian Government ensure community housing providers are recognised as public authorities for the purposes of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

²²⁸ Justice Connect, *Submission 375*, pp. 25–6.

²²⁹ Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 331*, p. 9.

²³⁰ Victoria Legal Aid, *Submission 367*, pp. 26–7.

RECOMMENDATION 33: That the Victorian Government amend the *Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* (Vic) to provide the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal with jurisdiction to consider whether eviction decisions for tenants in social housing comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

RECOMMENDATION 34: That the Victorian Government include the right to housing in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

5 Crisis and transitional accommodation

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides analysis of Victoria's crisis and transitional housing arrangements. Evidence to show that a lack of available long-term housing has led to increased demand for crisis and transitional accommodation is presented. In the case of crisis accommodation, this has led to a reliance on unsustainable, unsuitable, and in some cases dangerous, motels and rooming houses. In the case of transitional housing, it has also led to a chronic shortage of available places across Victoria. Despite these issues, the Committee was presented with successful examples of crisis and transitional accommodation programs that support individuals in crisis and assist others to prepare for and sustain independent living.

Examples and suggestions for innovative housing options are also discussed. This includes redirecting surplus government land to the housing portfolio and repurposing vacant buildings to accommodate people experiencing homelessness.

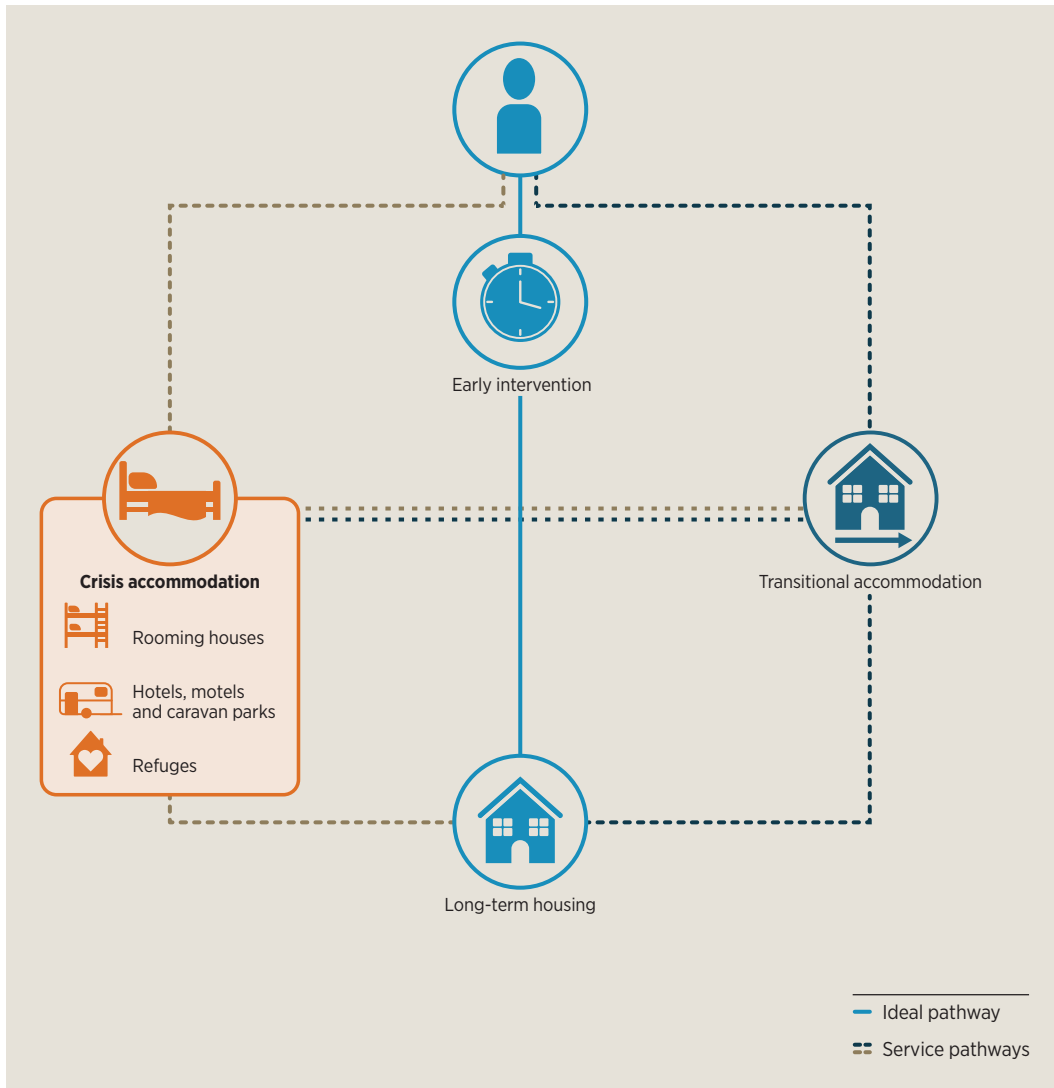
This Chapter also addresses some of the systemic issues regarding crisis and transitional accommodation. It further discusses 'housing first' approaches, which emphasise the provision of stable, long-term housing with support to assist individuals to then address the causes of their homelessness.

In its questionnaire to the Victorian Government, the Committee requested information on a number of matters relating to crisis and transitional accommodation in Victoria to assist its consideration of these issues, including:

- details of the current capacity and dwelling type of crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation
- details of planned construction or acquisition of new crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation across the forward estimates
- information on how the Victorian Government is supporting asylum seekers and refugees on temporary visas to access housing where they are ineligible for other forms of support.

As noted in Chapter 1, the Committee did not receive a response to this questionnaire from the Victorian Government until after it had drafted the final report. Nevertheless, information from the Questionnaire has been included in this report.

5.2 Crisis accommodation



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

As discussed in Chapter 1, crisis accommodation is a type of short-term accommodation which seeks to house people who are newly homeless. It is designed as temporary emergency accommodation to assist people in crisis until longer-term accommodation can be secured, or until their housing situation is resolved and they are diverted away from homelessness. The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks in their report, *A Crisis in Crisis: The appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west* explained the importance of crisis accommodation in providing important bridging housing for people who reach crisis point and do not have the immediate resources or time to seek long-term housing:

When people have nowhere to live, they often present to the access point services that provide entry to the homelessness service system. As there is a severe shortage of

affordable housing and long term accommodation, the homelessness sector seeks to find short term emergency accommodation options for those presenting.¹

However, there are not enough crisis accommodation facilities to meet demand and there are a lack of options for people experiencing homelessness to move out of crisis accommodation into long-term housing. Ms Naomi Webb, Practice Leader, Advocacy and Support at Quantum Support Services told the Committee that crisis service providers were struggling to effectively manage the provision of crisis accommodation due to these two concurrent factors:

In relation to crisis accommodation, we must stop people being moved from one crisis accommodation to another crisis accommodation, and instead look at providing them with some type of long-term accommodation and providing appropriate support services that help them maintain a tenancy... Crisis accommodation can only be effectively managed when there are appropriate, affordable and accessible exit options. From the statistics and the evidence that I have given, clearly that is not the case across Gippsland. We are regularly seeing families of upwards of six members in motel rooms. Recently we had one family of 11 people in a motel room, and obviously this is not appropriate, nor is it sustainable... Currently Quantum's crisis-funded programs—we do have a number of them—are spending a significant portion of their allocated brokerage on crisis accommodation in local motels and boarding houses.²

The demand for emergency housing and the lack of options to move into following a stay in these types of accommodation is discussed in detail throughout this Chapter. The lack of crisis accommodation availability has resulted in homelessness services resorting to placing clients in unsustainable and often inappropriate accommodation such as hotels, motels, caravan parks and rooming houses. The standards of these emergency options are discussed in section 5.2.3 and 5.2.4.

This section will provide an overview of the different types of crisis accommodation and discuss the evidence the Inquiry received about the availability and standards for each.

The types of crisis accommodation include:

- purpose-built crisis accommodation or refuges for the general population as well as specialist accommodation for cohorts such as young people, family violence survivors and Aboriginal clients
- alternative emergency accommodation in hotels, motels, caravan parks or similar properties
- rooming houses.

1 Northern and Western Homelessness Networks, *A Crisis in Crisis: The appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west*, (n.d.), <http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/A%20crisis%20in%20crisis%20doc%20final%20040219_1550142202053.pdf> accessed 9 October 2020, p. 3.

2 Ms Naomi Webb, Practice Leader, Advocacy and Support, Quantum Support Services, public hearing, Morwell, 3 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

5.2.1 General and specialised crisis accommodation

Purpose-built crisis accommodation facilities and refuges run by homelessness service organisations provide much needed support for people seeking urgent temporary accommodation. This includes specialist facilities for family violence, young people, Aboriginal Victorians and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities. There are also crisis accommodation services provided broadly for the general homeless population.

BOX 5.1: John Smith

Following his eviction, John presented at his local homelessness entry point needing crisis accommodation. John was referred to a local homelessness service provider. Because of a lack of purpose-built crisis accommodation in the area, they paid for John to spend six weeks in a motel room.

John did not feel safe in his crisis accommodation and the lack of security and stability had a significant impact on his mental health and wellbeing. This was compounded when, at the end of his six-week support period, John had to move out of his crisis accommodation and re-present for accommodation support. John was again placed in a motel where he did not feel safe.

The stress of being in what he felt was an unsafe environment and the need to re-present at homelessness services at the end of his support periods was a distraction for John. It meant he was unable to focus on finding secure employment and addressing the risk factors in his life which led him into homelessness.

After some time in crisis accommodation John was eventually moved into transitional accommodation (continued in section 5.4).

How could John's situation be improved?

If there were purpose-built crisis accommodation available for John, he may have felt safe and secure and significantly less stressed. Subsequently he may have been able to focus on addressing the risk factors which led him to his crisis point.

Furthermore, purpose-built crisis accommodation can also include support services aimed at addressing causes of homelessness. This may have meant John was supported to build resilience and the independent living skills he needed to move into long-term housing more quickly.

Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

The Committee heard that one of the features of purpose-built crisis accommodation in Victoria (as opposed to motels and rooming houses) is that in most cases it is intended to be more than just a roof over the head of people experiencing homelessness. Some facilities provide additional support services which are aimed at addressing the

causes of homelessness and assisting individuals to live independently (supported crisis accommodation). Often, individuals are also assisted to move into longer-term accommodation.

Crisis and transitional accommodation are most helpful for those with less complex needs. This group is more likely to be able to transition to living independently in a shorter amount of time.

Dr Michael Fotheringham, Executive Director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) said that Victoria's emphasis on providing support to people in crisis accommodation with the intention to assist them to transition to longer-term accommodation is favourable in comparison to models of crisis accommodation in other countries:

One of the strengths of both the Victorian system and most systems across Australia is the de-emphasis of crisis accommodation. Crisis accommodation is a useful component, but we see in other countries the overuse of crisis accommodation—literally warehouses of homeless people. Sometimes we see literally thousands of people housed night by night in large warehouses with very little privacy, no security of tenure and no plan to transition from that into better housing. North America typically has a lot of that sort of system, and other parts of the world. It would be very disappointing if Australia moved in that direction, because it does not lead to good outcomes. It is warehousing of homelessness, not solving the crisis.³

The Committee was provided with a number of examples of supported crisis accommodation where individuals receive additional resources and support aimed at helping them address the issues that may be contributing to their homelessness. Ryan Hedley, Manager at Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd, described the work of Nungurra, a crisis accommodation facility in Bairnsdale that equips young Aboriginal Victorians who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness with life skills to help them live independently:

Nungurra is a crisis accommodation facility for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 years old. Our role at the refuge is to invite young people in that are at risk of homelessness or that are deemed as homeless to provide a detailed intake and assessment for the young people that enter our service. We identify any areas that might need a referral for the young people, but our core business is housing.

A lot of the young people that come into our refuge do not have independent living skills, so a part of our role is to teach these young people their independent living skills, to prepare them for living solo in their own property, so supporting themselves. What we will do is we will teach these young people to cook, to clean, to be able to do their own washing and to support themselves. They might have found coming from the environment that they were living in prior to Nungurra that that might have been done for them. This is just to sustain their skills to be able to survive independently.

³ Dr Michael Fotheringham, Executive Director, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), public hearing, Melbourne, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

They have six weeks crisis accommodation with us, and if they are sticking to our program, what is provided, engaging with us, there are options to move into transitional housing.⁴

Another example provided to the Committee of purpose-built crisis accommodation is Safe Steps, a family violence service that operates a secure safehouse for women escaping family violence. In their submission, Safe Steps provided an overview of this facility:

The safe steps Safehouse provides supported, communal living accommodation for women escaping family violence and can accommodate up to three families at a time on a short-term basis, for a period of five to 10 days while they are awaiting refuge or if they are unable to be accommodated elsewhere. The Safehouse provides intensive, face-to-face transitional case management and is well-equipped to support women with complex case management needs, including women without permanent residency.⁵

At a public hearing, Vicki Sutton, Chief Executive Officer of Melbourne City Mission, provided an overview of a youth crisis accommodation facility it operates in the Melbourne CBD called Frontyard:

Just over a year ago we relaunched Frontyard as a redevelopment and incorporated into it an innovative crisis accommodation service for 18 young people, and it is targeting young people with the most complex needs who were typically not able to be supported by the traditional youth refuge. Those young people have access to 24-hour, seven-day-a-week support that includes mental health and drug and alcohol support. They can stay as long as they need rather than the typical six- to eight-week refuge stay, and there is longer term case management support that follows them when they do leave to help them sustain the housing.⁶

In its response to the questionnaire, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provided an overview of the current capacity and dwelling type of crisis and other forms of temporary accommodation in Victoria, including specialised crisis accommodation such as family violence or youth refuges (Table 5.1). It should be noted that some of the accommodation types included in the table are transitional accommodation facilities; transitional accommodation is discussed in section 5.4.

4 Mr Ryan Hedley, Manager, Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

5 Safe Steps, *Submission 206*, p. 17.

6 Ms Vicki Sutton, Chief Executive Officer, Melbourne City Mission, public hearing, via videoconference, 14 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

Table 5.1 Types of crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation in Victoria

Type of accommodation	Number of facilities	Region—Number of facilities	Total number of beds available	Average length of stay
Family violence refuges	31	North Division—10 East Division—6 South Division—7 West Division—8	131 households	Five facilities are 'short term crisis' models of 7–10 days. All other facilities are average 6 weeks.
Youth refuges	21	North Division—7 East Division—4 South Division—5 West Division—1	183 beds	50 nights
Youth foyers	12	North Division—4 East Division—3 South Division—1 West Division—4	229 beds	239 nights
Youth housing 247 change program	1	West Division	16	6 months
Kid under cover studios	122	Statewide	166 beds	Indefinite
Motel style accommodation for ex-offenders at risk of homelessness	2	North Division	14 bedrooms	4.5 months
Self-contained units for older women experiencing violence	1	East Division	12 bedrooms	3 months
Major crisis supported accommodation	11	East Division—1 South Division—4 West Division—6	402 beds	80.5 nights
Head leasing	267	North Division—74 East Division—27 South Division—81 West Division—85	626 bedrooms	12 months
Modular units	45	North Division—1 East Division—2 South Division—3 West Division—2	50	2 years
Asylum seeker accommodation	This funding has been allocated and managed by Participation and Inclusion Branch - Diversity unit. ASRC target: 290 people assisted per month (3,500 across the year) to not become homeless. Services targeted in Brimbank, Wyndham, Melton, Maribyrnong and Hobson's Bay, Dandenong and Casey, Hume, Whittlesea, Moreland and Darebin		NA	NA

Type of accommodation	Number of facilities	Region—Number of facilities	Total number of beds available	Average length of stay
Transitional housing management accommodation—general	3,232	North Division—786 East Division—602 South Division—884 West Division—962	7,378 bedrooms	51 weeks
Transitional housing management accommodation—crisis	193	North Division—44 East Division—30 South Division—69 West Division—50	492 bedrooms	5 weeks
Transition housing management—rooming house	147	North Division—9 East Division—59 South Division—42 West Division—37	395 rooms	–

Note: The data for transitional housing is derived from a sample taken from service delivery data that may include some other types of accommodation. This data is indicative and has been provided in order to assist the committee with their analysis and understanding of this aspect of the homelessness service system.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, pp. 27–30.

These services provide valuable assistance to people in need of emergency accommodation. However, the Committee heard there are issues with the provision of crisis accommodation throughout Victoria relating to its availability and the duration of support provided.

Issues regarding the provision of purpose-built crisis accommodation

This section will discuss problems regarding crisis accommodation and will outline some of the issues with specialist crisis accommodation for youth, family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians.

Some of the problems relating to crisis accommodation are:

- a shortage of beds, including none in some parts of the state
- a lack of transitional and long-term housing for individuals to move into from crisis accommodation
- short, inflexible periods of support.

The Committee heard from stakeholders that there are not enough crisis accommodation places to meet demand. The Committee was told that there are only 423 Government-funded crisis accommodation beds across Victoria. A report provided to the Committee from the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks titled *A Crisis in Crisis: The appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west*, described the relatively small percentage of people in need who were able to be placed in crisis accommodation:

In an average week the five generalist access point services across Melbourne's north and west are funding 170 households in emergency accommodation... Once these

households are assisted to access emergency accommodation, only a small percentage are able to access support for further assistance, due to high demand and long waiting lists. For example, on average Unison reports five support vacancies for adult clients per month. The result is that many households are not provided with a service beyond being placed in emergency accommodation. The lack of follow up support means that many households remain homeless for long periods of time with little or no help to exit.⁷

Mr Paul Turton, General Manager, Homelessness Services, VincentCare Northern Community Hub contended that the increased demand for crisis accommodation is not being met by increased provision or construction of properties:

We are seeing that the demand is increasing. Just an interesting stat is that the 423 Government-funded crisis accommodation beds across Victoria are what was available to 3000 people who needed to use those beds. So clearly the supply is well below what is required. In our region alone – it is hard to find – we had to find 9000 instances of accommodation in 2018 for those who could not access these Government-funded beds. So it is alternative accommodation. There is accommodation of last resort, we call it – so that is places like motel rooms, rooming houses and in some cases people are in unregistered rooming houses.⁸

The shortages of crisis accommodation beds exists in both mainstream services and specialist cohorts. For example, Donna Bennett, CEO of Hope Street Youth and Family Services said: ‘6000 young people in Victoria are homeless—6000. We have 127 refuge beds [for young people] in Victoria.’⁹ Similarly, the submission from Domestic Violence Victoria stated that there were only approximately 100 family violence crisis beds across the state.¹⁰ In light of family violence being the most common reason individuals seek assistance from homelessness services in Victoria, this is drastically inadequate.

The shortage of crisis accommodation is more acute in regional Victoria. Mr Darran Stonehouse, a lecturer at La Trobe University outlined an overall lack of crisis accommodation in North East Victoria across all client cohorts. He said:

I wanted to begin with a few key points that I think are particularly relevant to understanding homelessness in this region, so particularly the lack of crisis accommodation options in this region—I am sure others presenting to the Inquiry have made similar, or will make similar, points—and that is particularly the case outside of Wodonga and Shepparton. That is across all client groups or population groups, but there are also particular population groups which are even more poorly serviced in terms of crisis accommodation.¹¹

7 Northern and Western Homelessness Networks’ Consumer Participation Working Group, *Submission 290*, p. 34.

8 Mr Paul Turton, General Manager, Homelessness Services, VincentCare Northern Community Hub, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

9 Ms Donna Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Hope Street Youth and Family Services, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

10 Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 198*, p. 12.

11 Mr Darran Stonehouse, Lecturer, Social Work, La Trobe University, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

Stakeholders told the Committee there are areas in regional Victoria with no crisis accommodation available at all. At the Committee's hearing in Morwell, Erin Price, Manager, Eastern Victoria at the Salvation Army said: 'There are no refuges in South Gippsland-Bass Coast, there are no supported accommodation options that are run by any sort of government organisation or not-for-profit organisation.'¹²

A factor that compounds the scarcity of crisis accommodation is a lack of long-term housing for people to move into once their crisis accommodation period has ended. This means that limited crisis accommodation beds are unable to be made available for new clients. Jo Doherty, Practice Lead at Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services explained this issue to the Committee:

As I said, we have the only Aboriginal refuge in Melbourne. Last year we had a family in our refuge for 13 months because we could not exit them to transitional housing. She could not go into a private rental. She did not have the living skills; she had a slight intellectual disability. It was not sustainable. She needs social housing. She was in our refuge for 13 months. Now, what that meant was that that unit could not assist any other families. We are seeing our families in our refuge for months, so for four months, five months in our refuge. We need our targets back, so that we can exit them into transitional housing, so that we can then take another family from Safe Steps or wherever they are being referred to us from, so that we can keep them safe. We are a high-security refuge staffed 24 hours a day. We should not be accommodating low-need families because we cannot exit them.¹³

The lack of long-term options for people to move into was also noted by Chris McNamara from the Gippsland Homeless Network:

Youth refuges in Morwell and Bairnsdale have a limited capacity to meet the demand for service. With stays of only six weeks, young people have none or very limited accommodation options or means to exit the refuges, and I think you would have heard this this morning: that the services basically get bogged up because there are kids that are ready to go but we have nowhere to send them, and at some of the places that you do send them there are concerns about them being preyed on by other people who might wish to take advantage.¹⁴

While some individuals are able to stay in crisis accommodation if no long-term housing is available, in other settings, inflexible funding arrangements can mean that clients are asked to leave once their allocated funding period lapses. Mission Australia said the homelessness system requires some young people to leave crisis once their support period finishes:

Most Youth Refuge programs provide young people with support for 6-8 weeks, at which point the homelessness system requires that they leave even if they haven't

¹² Ms Erin Price, Manager, Eastern Victoria, Homelessness, Salvation Army, public hearing, Morwell, 3 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

¹³ Ms Jo Doherty, Practice Lead, Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 35-6.

¹⁴ Ms Chris McNamara, Coordinator, Gippsland Homelessness Network, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

progressed with finding housing. This results in persistent cycling through different Youth Refuges and forms of crisis accommodation such as short stays in motels, which can lead to further trauma for young people.¹⁵

Youth-focused crisis accommodation

The Committee was informed in the submission by Melbourne City Mission that there are youth specific homelessness entry points and a youth crisis accommodation system that runs in parallel with the mainstream entry points.¹⁶ In its submission, Melbourne City Mission explained that:

Young people can access the system at any of the Access Points, but traditionally a separate youth system runs parallel to the mainstream system, with a youth specific Access Point operating from Frontyard in Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD), as well as separate youth specific responses being offered at different Access Points. There is a network of crisis accommodation facilities or Youth Refuge programs, that are located across Victoria providing 184 crisis beds for young people aged 16-24 years. There is also a specific allocation of transitional support resources for young people. In addition to this, young people also have access to Youth Foyer programs, which are located in select areas across the state.¹⁷

Melbourne City Mission believed that there is not enough youth-focused crisis accommodation and advocated for more accommodation options in areas where services are lacking:

Regional areas and growth corridors are even less well-served, with few crisis accommodation options available to young people. For instance, in 2016-17 in the Bayside-Peninsula region, 4,060 young people aged 15-24 years requested assistance from specialist homelessness services (AIHW 2017). However, there is no crisis accommodation option for young people in the Frankston or Mornington Peninsula region. The closest crisis accommodation is in Dandenong, which caters to singles and families over the age of 18, but is not youth specific. The next closest Youth Refuge is in Moorabbin, with one other 'low needs' medium term youth accommodation option in the surrounding region. There are long waiting periods for all of these beds.¹⁸

Youth-specific crisis accommodation is a better option for young people because it is specifically designed to tailor to the unique needs of this cohort. Several stakeholders believed it was better for young people to spend time in youth-specific crisis accommodation compared to all-ages facilities, where possible. Hope Street, a youth homelessness services and crisis accommodation provider, explained that young people need specialist youth-focused services because they are still developing and have different needs to adults. Ms Donna Bennett, CEO, Hope Street Youth and Family Services discussed:

¹⁵ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 217*, p. 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Why youth focused? Youth focus is a specialist area of practice—an absolutely specialist area. I have been at Hope Street for 20 years. I am very clear about that. Why is it youth focused? Because young people are still in their developmental stages, so neurologically in terms of the brain developing and physiologically in terms of their body growth they require a very different response to adults. So we have to really tailor our services to young people, not expect young people to fit in with our service and the way we design our model—not at all.¹⁹

The Committee believes that youth-focused accommodation options are an important tool in helping young people overcome periods of homelessness or housing insecurity. Young people have unique needs and risk factors which are better addressed with programs or accommodation-options tailored for them. The Committee supports the ongoing use of youth-focused crisis accommodation and believes further provision of these facilities should be considered in areas where it is currently lacking.

Family violence

Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) and the Safe at Home response discussed in Chapter 4 have assisted many people experiencing violence to stay in their own homes or find a suitable private rental property. However, as noted by Alison McDonald from Domestic Violence Victoria, these measures will not be safe or appropriate for everyone, and there needs to be secure crisis accommodation available for victims and their children:

it is important to note that while safe at home and private rental brokerage programs have been remarkably successful they are not appropriate for all victim survivors. Some victim survivors are at such high risk of death or severe injury that it is not possible for them to remain safely in their home, and others still may be unable to afford to stay in their home in the long term despite initial brokerage responses. Once subsidies end many victim survivors are unable to maintain mortgage or rental repayments in the private market on single incomes and are forced to give up that housing, so many of these people do remain vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness in the long term.²⁰

Like other forms of crisis accommodation, the Committee heard that there is not enough supply to meet the demand. Jocelyn Bignold from McAuley Community Services for Women, described how her organisation is only able to help a small proportion of the clients they meet:

I will just note that we said that for 1000 women and children a year we have 93 beds, and yet we are considered one of the biggest providers of women's housing, which really tells us something about the size of the women's housing sector and the need, I think.²¹

¹⁹ Bennett, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 53.

²⁰ Ms Alison Macdonald, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Domestic Violence Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

²¹ Ms Jocelyn Bignold, Chief Executive Officer, McAuley Community Services for Women, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

Jade Blakkarly, CEO of Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North (WISHIN), described the impacts of the significant shortage of supported accommodation in the north for persons experiencing family violence:

across the state there is very little crisis accommodation for women unless it is a high security refuge. We do not have enough crisis accommodation for men, but we certainly do not have enough for women. In the north there are no beds available for a woman with a child unless it is a high-security refuge... There is no supported, staffed crisis accommodation in the north for women who are homeless unless you are in a family violence immediate crisis. We have got so many women who are homeless because of family violence but maybe they are not at that extreme threat of death end.²²

Similarly, Mr Ashish Sitoula from the Greater Dandenong City Council described the lack of crisis accommodation for victims of family violence in the south-east:

There are just not enough crisis accommodation facilities for women and children escaping domestic violence. Every year the crisis access points in Greater Dandenong, Casey, Cardinia, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula turn away over 500 women or victims of family violence because there is inadequate crisis accommodation. Options for the women to continue living in their homes are also fraught with challenges, and what happens then? They become faceless statistics, either in a mortuary or in a number of advocacy papers.²³

Submissions to the Committee noted that the amount of crisis accommodation available for persons fleeing family violence was so inadequate that an alliance of organisations working in the family violence sector has formed to lobby for additional crisis accommodation and other forms of housing. The submission from Safe Steps provided further information on this group, formed as the Women's Housing Alliance:

The need for increased stock of crisis accommodation for all victim-survivors of family violence is urgent and immediate. That's why Safe Steps has joined a new Women's Housing Alliance to work with the Government to help address the chronic housing shortage for women and children in Victoria who are escaping family violence. The Alliance is made up of 8 organisations specialising in family violence, gender equity and housing for women including YWCA Housing, Women's Housing Ltd., Women's Health Victoria, McAuley Community Services for Women, Good Samaritan Inn, WISHIN and Women's Property Initiatives.²⁴

The Committee was informed that some additional funding has been made available to the family violence sector for crisis accommodation following the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Part of this is to re-fit crisis accommodation to a 'core and cluster' model. The Royal Commission described this model:

²² Ms Jade Blakkarly, Chief Executive Officer, WISHIN (Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North), public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

²³ Mr Ashish Sitoula, Team Leader, Community Advocacy, Greater Dandenong City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

²⁴ Safe Steps, *Submission 206*, p. 18.

A core and cluster is a set of individual units on a piece of land, together with office space or workers' space and communal activities areas for residents. The site allows for independent living while also providing comprehensive support services for women and children. The model offers families privacy while allowing them to connect and be supported as they wish. Families effectively have their own home.²⁵

Alison McDonald explained, however, that despite this investment, the time spent by victims in family violence crisis accommodation had not decreased and there remained a significant lack of available exits into long-term housing:

The royal commission [into family violence] made several recommendations aimed specifically at reducing the amount of time that victim survivors are forced to remain in family violence crisis accommodation while they wait to access longer term affordable housing. A substantial investment—I think nearly \$70 million—has been invested in redeveloping family violence refuges to a core and cluster model, and significant money goes into HEF, the housing establishment fund, each year to house victim survivors in short-term motel accommodation. Unfortunately despite this investment the number of victim survivors in motels and the time spent in family violence crisis accommodation have not significantly decreased. Some victim survivors can spend months in refuge because of the lack of exit options, and this in turn creates a bottleneck in the system.²⁶

25 State of Victoria, *Royal Commission into Family Violence Vol II: Report and Recommendations*, Victorian Government Printer, Victoria, 2016, p. 57.

26 Macdonald, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 38–9.

BOX 5.2: Jane

In 2018, Jane and her children were forced to leave their home because of a violent and abusive relationship. They stayed with friends for a while. Jane struggled to continue caring for her children because of physical and mental health issues and was admitted to hospital to receive treatment. After leaving hospital Jane found it difficult to find stable accommodation. Jane ended up moving to another town because of ongoing harassment from her ex-partner. During this time her children were removed from her care.

In mid-2019 Jane began seeking assistance from services she was referred to by Women's Health Goulburn North East. Jane needed employment, accommodation, family violence support and wanted to be reunited with her children. However, by Christmas 2019 Jane had to reach out again to Women's Health Goulburn North East for crisis accommodation support because she did not fit the criteria to get support from the services she was referred to.

Unfortunately, as Jane and her children were not classified as being in immediate danger, and she was receiving Centrelink benefits, services were unable to offer any further support.

In relation to Jane's case Women's Health Goulburn North East said:

no matter what she did, she did not quite fit the criteria that the overstretched services could offer. She was not in immediate danger from her ex-husband, her children were in care and she was on Centrelink benefits, so it was not as bad as others. Like those other services, we were not able to offer any more help to Jane, and we have not heard from her since. She did the best she could, but that is a year of homelessness after fleeing an abusive relationship, and with no children.

Source: Ms Amanda Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Health Goulburn North, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p 11.

In its questionnaire response, DHHS indicated that the Victorian Government is planning to construct or acquire 9 new family violence refuge facilities with an estimated capacity of 114 independent living or cluster units. The estimated cost of these facilities is approximately \$71.5 million. Currently in Victoria, there are 31 family violence refuge facilities which accommodate up to 131 households; the addition of nine new facilities will nearly double the current total stock available. The Committee commends the Victorian Government on a positive step towards supporting persons experiencing family violence to find suitable and safe accommodation for themselves and their children. However, the Committee notes that this still does not properly meet demand for these facilities.

Table 5.2 Planned construction or acquisition of family violence refuges

Region	Estimated capacity	Estimated cost (\$ million)
North Division—5 new core and cluster facilities	32 independent living or 'cluster' units	18.815
East Division—4 new core and cluster facilities	22 independent living or 'cluster' units	15.052
South Division—4 new core and cluster facilities	24 independent living or 'cluster' units	15.052
West Division—6 new core and cluster facilities	36 independent living or 'cluster' units	22.578

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 31.

The Committee heard that the move toward provision of core and cluster models of family violence crisis accommodation is beneficial for the safety, privacy and wellbeing of people escaping family violence and their families. However, the Committee is concerned that only a small portion of those for whom this model of housing is appropriate are able to access it. The Committee believes more funding needs to be delivered to family violence specialist crisis accommodation to meet this need.

RECOMMENDATION 35: That the Victorian Government improve access to specialist family violence crisis accommodation facilities, including by:

- conducting demand modelling for family violence crisis accommodation across the state in order to ascertain need
- providing additional funding for accommodation facilities, including for core and cluster models of accommodation
- ensuring regional areas have access to family violence crisis accommodation to allow persons experiencing violence to remain in or close to their communities.

5.2.2 Hotels, motels, caravan parks and other temporary accommodation

When there is no availability of purpose-built crisis accommodation, which is often the case, homelessness service providers can use funding allocated through the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) to pay for individuals to stay in hotels, motels, caravan parks and other temporary forms of accommodation for a short period.

While this short-term solution means that people in need are provided with a roof over their head for the night, the Committee was told many times that often this accommodation was inappropriate and/or unsafe. This is partly due to a lack of options.

The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks said that the number of hotels and motels accepting people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne has declined significantly in recent years:

in the past four years, two large hotels that were primarily used for families and single women in crisis have closed - City Gate Apartments and Bethel Hotel. Both these hotels, whilst not ideal, provided a relatively safe option, and importantly, charged weekly rates that were significantly cheaper than nightly rates. For singles there has been a significant reduction in rooming house stock over the past 10 years with the closure of places like the Hub in Fitzroy, Fawkner Mansions in South Yarra, the Eildon in St Kilda and the Gatwick in St Kilda, to name only a few. Whilst some of these options, the Gatwick in particular, were substandard and sometimes unsafe, they have left a noticeable gap in the system. It is also the case that many hotel providers will not accept referrals from welfare agencies; either after having had a poor experience, or believing that the clientele will cause trouble. In Melbourne's west, there are currently only two hotels that will accept referrals from homelessness agencies.²⁷

This situation is also evident in regional Victoria. At its hearings in Gippsland, the Committee was told about the closure of the Miners Rest Caravan Park and the Capital Motel, both in Wonthaggi, leaving 60 people without accommodation and significantly limiting the options for crisis accommodation in the Bass Coast region.²⁸ Witnesses also spoke of accommodation shortages during the summer months due to tourists and seasonal workers in the Gippsland region.²⁹

The submission from the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks said that the number of hotels or motels now accepting clients referred by homelessness services has become increasingly concentrated, with one hotel accounting for 20% of clients in the Northern and Western Metro areas. This suggests that at hotels where people experiencing homelessness are accepted, there may be a relatively high concentration of people experiencing homelessness, some with complex needs, living without support. The submission said clients have reported 'bed bugs, stabbings and assaults in some of the most frequently used emergency accommodation'.³⁰ The report provided a case study of one client's distressing experience at a hotel used for emergency accommodation. They wrote:

It was at this time we were placed in the hotel – initially for one night. The room was in appalling condition. No bedding. No pillows. Nothing. The first night the police visited the premises 6 times through the night in relation to physical assaults, domestic violence and damage to property. Every night there were things going on. The service had only paid for one night. We had to go back to the access point service the following day. We begged to not be placed back at the Hotel as it felt so unsafe but the access point service advised us that they had no other options.³¹

²⁷ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, pp. 32–3.

²⁸ Mr Chris Wightman, Coordinator, Social and Community Planning, Bass Coast Shire Council, public hearing, Morwell, 3 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

²⁹ Ms Heidi Hunter, Practice Leader, Client Services, Uniting Gippsland, public hearing, Morwell, 3 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

³⁰ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, p. 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

The Committee heard that for women, and in particular, those with children, the situation could be particularly unsafe. Jade Blakkarly from WISHIN explained how some options could be an extremely threatening environment:

What we find is because we do not have any options for them, it is one of those terrible, unstable, unsafe, horrific motels, and that is the only option for them. Those motels are bad for everyone, but they are particularly bad for women. There are stories of threats of sexual assault, of having four kids in one room with no cooking facilities, of locks that do not work on the doors—it is horrific.³²

As noted in section 3.3.1, the HEF is jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments and can be used for homelessness services to pay for emergency accommodation at hotels and motels where no crisis accommodation is available. However, these hotels and motels charge market rates which can be expensive, and significantly impact the availability of funding that services have to use for their clients. For example, Robert Ashton, an Initial Assessment and Planning Officer at Community Housing Ltd described how limited HEF funding was being increasingly allocated to pay for emergency accommodation:

Look, we certainly need more HEF resources. The issue with HEF is that it is not as flexible as it needs to be, and that is where I guess PRAP has been providing better outcomes, but the limits are lower. The other issue that we have at the moment because of the lack of short-term accommodation options is that we are having to put people into motels longer, and that chews up HEF. We would love to spend our HEF on rent in advance or rent arrears, but increasingly we are finding we are spending it more on crisis accommodation, which is a waste of money really.³³

The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks described the nightly cost of rooms in their area and the proportion of allocated funding that was being provided to particular establishments:

For example, one of the most frequently used providers, the **[redacted]** in Footscray, charges up to \$160 per night per room. The rooms have no cooking facilities and a very low standard of amenity. The **[redacted]** accounted for nearly \$500k (20%) of the \$2.5m spend on emergency accommodation. Similar hotels, such as the **[redacted]**, **[redacted]** and the **[redacted]**, are regularly used by services, and accounted for 25% of the total spend.³⁴

³² Ms Jade Blakkarly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

³³ Mr Robert Ashton, Initial Assessment and Planning Officer and Fulham Correctional Centre Outreach Officer, Community Housing (Vic) Ltd, public hearing, Bairnsdale, 2 December 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

³⁴ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, p. 34.

BOX 5.3: Kelly

Kelly is a 50-year-old woman who lives in Shepparton on a disability support pension. She has mental health issues and is currently homeless.

Until March 2019, Kelly lived and worked in Mooroopna, managing a hostel. She was contacted by DHHS Child Protection services and asked if she would take care of her four grandchildren. Kelly's daughter was struggling with addiction and about to enter a rehabilitation facility. Kelly could not accommodate her grandchildren in her own home so she made the decision to leave her job and move into her daughter's home to look after them. In August 2019, Kelly's daughter left rehabilitation before she had completed the program and returned home. Kelly has a difficult relationship with her daughter and found it a struggle to live with her.

Kelly became homeless in December 2019. Eventually she found emergency accommodation in a motel set up for emergency accommodation at a cost of \$350 per week. Kelly is studying for a diploma in nursing because she wants to work and doesn't want to find herself facing homelessness again. However, the instability and strain of her current living situation has exacerbated her mental health issues and made it difficult to focus on her studies. Other residents in emergency accommodation at the motel are victims of domestic violence and some have drug addiction issues. Kelly has lived in the motel for eight weeks. Kelly feels like she is getting nowhere and that her age and mental health struggles are holding her back from achieving her goals.

Kelly has applied for public housing but has been advised that even for emergency priority cases the waiting period is seven years. Kelly says that she has been forced into the private housing market and as a consequence has lost her place on the public housing waiting list.

Source: Ms Kelly James, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 69–70.

The submission also stated that there had been an increase in the number of people that had to be housed in emergency accommodation (including rooming houses), which has led to a very large increase in the proportion of HEF funding spent on alternative forms of crisis accommodation:

This changing environment resulted in the six homelessness access point services in Melbourne's north and west, spending \$2.5 million of Housing Establishment Fund and other brokerage funds on purchasing emergency accommodation in 2017. This is a 500% increase since 2011.³⁵

35 Ibid., p. 30.

The Committee understands that not all hotels, motels and caravan parks provide inappropriate or unsafe environments for people experiencing homelessness. At its public hearing with witnesses from the Mallee region, the Committee was provided with an example from Mallee Haven, Home, Safe, a homelessness service provider who worked closely with emergency accommodation providers to improve outcomes. They said that by working directly with accommodation providers they have expanded the number of establishments willing to take in people experiencing homelessness:

We had a number of issues with caravan parks and motels and being able to get people in there, but I think it was a misunderstanding between organisations and the accommodation providers around what they could support. If they know you are behind them and supporting them, they will give our clients a go. There were too many times where I think there might have been damage done or no supports put in, and they just had to wear the cost and the burden of anything that happened. So we have reassured them, we give them support, we give them financial backing if something happens and it is on behalf of the client or involved with the client. That has turned things around a lot. It all comes back to working with your community and supporting each other and everybody being on the same page. We have gone from only having one or two crisis emergency accommodation providers to probably 10 just by doing that.³⁶

Hotels, motels and caravan parks are not designed to act as emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. People in crisis or who are newly homeless may have complex needs including issues relating to mental health or family violence. The evidence from the Northern and Metropolitan Homelessness Networks suggests there are some hotels with relatively high concentrations of people experiencing homelessness who are living without onsite support. Under such constraints, these places may not be able to provide the secure and supportive environment needed to address the causes of their homelessness.

³⁶ Mr Trevor Gibbs, General Manager, Mallee, Haven; Home, Safe, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

BOX 5.4: Paul

Paul is in his forties and lives in a caravan park in the outer suburbs. In his teens, Paul was involved in a car accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. Throughout his adult life, Paul has lived in rooming houses and caravan parks and experienced periods of rough sleeping. Paul experiences depression and uses alcohol and other drugs regularly.

A community health nurse from the Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program (HPP) was able to engage with Paul and support him to address some of his longstanding health issues, including undertaking a considerable amount of advocacy and referring him for an updated neuropsychological assessment of his brain injury so that he could start to access support services.

Paul was hospitalised after being seriously assaulted at the caravan park where he was living. Bolton Clarke worked with the hospital social worker to move Paul to safer accommodation at another caravan park and they continue to advocate on Paul's behalf for permanent and affordable supported housing and other services. Paul is still on the waiting list for accommodation. Those attempting to help him are concerned that he could slip through the cracks of the system without continual engagement.

Source: Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 269*, pp. 5–6.

Where possible, homelessness service providers should seek to work directly with a broad spectrum of private accommodation providers in their area to ensure that clients are not concentrated in unsuitable accommodation. Ongoing communication with accommodation providers and clients, such as was exemplified by Mallee Haven, Home, Safe, may be part of this response as well as outreach services where possible.

In addition, the Committee believes the Victorian Government should investigate mechanisms to address the use by services of Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) funding to place persons in unsafe or inappropriate forms of private accommodation such as motels and hostels due to the lack of any alternative housing options.

RECOMMENDATION 36: That the Victorian Government investigate mechanisms to address the use by homelessness services of Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) funding to place persons in inappropriate forms of private accommodation such as unsafe hotels, motels and caravan parks due to the lack of any alternative housing options.

RECOMMENDATION 37: That the Victorian Government support homelessness service agencies to broaden the availability of emergency crisis accommodation, therefore limiting the number of people in need of crisis accommodation being put into unsuitable hotels, motels and caravan parks.

5.2.3 Rooming houses

Rooming houses are dwellings that typically house a number of people who rent separate private rooms and have access to shared facilities. A 2009 report by the Rooming Standards Taskforce provided the following description of rooming houses:

There is no one model of rooming house. Nevertheless, a rooming house, which is sometimes referred to as a 'boarding house', usually has some of the following characteristics:

- Primarily single room accommodation
- Shared access to common facilities, such as bathrooms, kitchens, laundries and living areas
- No formal supports are present on the premises
- The owner and their family generally do not live on the premises
- Increasingly used by long term homeless people or those in housing crisis.

Leasing arrangements distinguish rooming or boarding houses from shared houses. Residents of a share house have exclusive possession of the entire rented premises, whereas residents of a rooming or boarding house only have exclusive possession to their room. They exercise no control over who else lives in the premises with them.³⁷

There are a number of regulatory controls that govern the operation of registered rooming houses. In 2017 a requirement was introduced for rooming house operators to hold a valid license and ensure their facilities follow standards of hygiene, safety and security under the *Rooming House Operators Act 2016* (Vic). The Business Licensing Authority (BLA) within the Department of Justice and Community Safety has responsibility for granting licenses to applicants who are 'fit and proper persons'.³⁸ A public register of licensed rooming house operators is available through Consumer Affairs Victoria.³⁹

The *Residential Tenancies (Rooming House Standards) Regulations 2012* (Vic) prescribe certain standards and facilities that must be available in rooming houses. These include lockable doors, kitchen, bathroom, dining and laundry facilities as well as fire, electrical and gas safety standards.⁴⁰ Residents can make complaints to Consumer Affairs Victoria where they consider that these standards are not being met.

Rooming houses are required to be registered with the relevant local council, who can inspect the property to ensure it complies with the public health and wellbeing standards under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009* (Vic). All registered

³⁷ Rooming House Standards Taskforce, *Chairperson's report*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2009, p. 5.

³⁸ Consumer Affairs Victoria, *Rooming house operators licensing scheme*, 2019, <<https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/licensing-and-registration/rooming-house-operators/licensing/rooming-house-operators-licensing-scheme>> accessed 5 February 2021.

³⁹ Consumer Affairs Victoria, *Public register - rooming house operators 2020*, <<https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/licensing-and-registration/rooming-house-operators/public-register>> accessed 5 February 2021.

⁴⁰ *Residential Tenancies (Rooming House Standards) Regulations 2012* (Vic) ss 2 1-3.

rooming houses are listed on Consumer Affairs Victoria's website to provide assurance to residents.⁴¹

In recent years the Victorian Government allocated funding through the Community Sector Rooming House Upgrades program to renovate and upgrade rooming houses owned by the Director of Housing as well as community-operated rooming houses. This included \$10 million allocated in August 2016 and a further \$20 million allocated in March 2017.⁴²

However, despite these regulatory controls, stakeholders to the inquiry told the Committee that rooming houses often provide inappropriate and unsafe environments for people experiencing homelessness. Kate Colvin from the Council to Homeless Persons said:

People who have lived in rooming houses, sometimes people have a good experience but often what we very commonly hear is that people find that experience frightening. Often in bed at night they can hear other people fighting, screaming at each other, hurting each other. They might be threatened or even hurt themselves, and they are very likely to be around people who are using illicit drugs.⁴³

Robert Ashton from Community Housing Ltd said that some of their clients who are released from detention facilities in Gippsland would rather sleep rough than stay at rooming houses:

Rooming houses are just not a good option, and there are many prisoners who will state, 'I'd rather live on the streets than go to a rooming house'. And the thing is that when they go to the rooming houses there are many people with similar issues to what they have, and it tends to be a very bad situation for them, especially if they are trying to break away from drug use, when they go to a rooming house and they are faced with it.⁴⁴

41 Consumer Affairs Victoria, *Search registered rooming house*, <<https://registers.consumer.vic.gov.au/rhrsearch>> accessed 5 February 2021.

42 See, Martin Foley MP, *Rooming houses to get \$10 million facelift*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 4 August 2016; Martin Foley MP, *\$20 million to upgrade more of Victoria's rooming houses*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 6 March 2017.

43 Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

44 Ashton, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

BOX 5.5: Andrew

Andrew spent a few weeks sleeping rough in front of shopfronts before purchasing a van, which he now resides in. Andrew is concerned that accommodation like a boarding or rooming house is not suitable for him because of the prevalence of substance abuse and crime in many of those facilities.

Andrew said that it was important that people recovering from trauma deserve safe, secure and affordable housing options. He says it is dangerous and stressful being homeless, and that could prevent trauma recovery. Andrew said that the problem for him is that suitable 'affordable' housing is not affordable for anyone living on welfare payments such as the NewStart allowance.

Source: Mr Andrew Withall, *Submission 76*, p 2.

Paul Turton from VincentCare said that private rooming houses are exploiting a gap in the market and are using the lack of motels, hotels and caravan parks who are willing to house people experiencing homelessness as an opportunity for financial gain:

Once upon a time it used to be caravan parks. They have been sold and so we are even losing these accommodation options of last resort. We are left with, since 2014—so between 2014 and 2019—over 500 private housing of last resort stock being lost. This is like the improvised dwellings of caravan parks and all those. That has gone as well. What I mentioned earlier is exploitative housing forms similar to rooming houses are now popping up all over Victoria because there is an opportunity to make a load of money.⁴⁵

Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South at Haven; Home, Safe said that some private operators were financially benefiting from public money while clients were receiving little benefit:

You throw a lot of money at people you do not want to give money to, the people who operate the rooming houses, for example, who are certainly laughing all the way to the bank on public money, for no improved outcome.⁴⁶

She added that the cost to individuals living in the houses was proportionately expensive:

It is frustrating because of the amount of money to be made from rooming houses. In a house, say, with four people, they will all be paying about \$220 to \$250 a week. The provider may be paying \$300 for that property. Most of them are rented by the providers. They may be paying \$200, maybe \$300 now, for that property. So they are raking in up to \$1000 a week, which even when you allow for the fact that bills are covered, there is still a lot of money to be made from it. You would hope that the least people could do is provide somewhere that is decent, say, and upholds human dignity,

⁴⁵ Turton, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South, Haven; Home, Safe, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

but there are plenty of horror stories about rooming houses, and of course you are sharing randomly.⁴⁷

The Northern and Western Homelessness networks stated that workers are sometimes aware that by providing access to accommodation in certain rooming houses they may in fact be putting those clients at risk of harm:

it also takes a toll on the frontline workforce, who enter this work with the intention of helping people, and who are aware that they are potentially contributing to harm. This dilemma was noted in the Rooming Housing Taskforce report in 2009, and the situation has not changed: “This has created moral, ethical and legal dilemmas for crisis workers who are aware that the conditions in many rooming houses present risks to resident’s safety and welfare. These dilemmas are shared by government whose funding for crisis housing responses is increasingly being directed to sub-standard premises as demand on existing crisis and transitional housing grows”⁴⁸

BOX 5.6: Angelo

Angelo is a young man who lives in a privately owned, outer-suburban rooming house. Angelo has a hearing impairment and mental health issues. He has a history of childhood trauma and substance abuse.

The rooming house offers Angelo no security or support. While living in the rooming house he has been assaulted, robbed and had his room damaged by other residents. The landlord insists that Angelo pay for the repairs to his room and told Angelo he will not fix his broken door until he does so. Without a functioning door Angelo has no security at his accommodation. Angelo believes that if he contacts the police, tenancy or legal services, he will either lose his accommodation or face further attacks. He cannot afford to pay for private accommodation on his Newstart allowance, and housing services have been unable to provide any other options.

Angelo is vulnerable and has few social contacts. He is reliant on charitable food services, as he often cannot afford food, and sometimes cannot afford to pay for his mental health medication. He cannot afford to replace a hearing aid which was lost, and the level of his hearing disability does not meet the threshold for financial assistance through the NDIS.

Angelo has participated in programs to address his alcohol and drug dependency in the past. But the constant exposure to alcohol and drug abuse by other residents and the general living conditions have led him further into depression.

His hearing impairment, mental health issues and substance use have made it very difficult to sustain employment despite numerous attempts. Angelo feels incapable of changing his situation and escaping homelessness.

Source: Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 269*, p 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, p. 34.

However, Sean Quigley, Manager of Dandenong Homelessness Services at Waysss said that he believed rooming houses, if properly regulated and well-designed, could have an important role in the suite of accommodation options available to people experiencing homelessness:

However, purpose-built, regulated, well-designed rooming houses with support do have a vital role to play in accommodating people, especially those people who are priced out of the private rental market and are going to be on a long wait list for public housing. Predominantly we are talking about probably recurring homeless single males—40-plus, multiple complex needs, very challenging behaviours at times—and their access to the service system has been restrictive over many years. They fall through the gaps, and there are a raft of reasons around that. It is around alcohol and drugs, mental health and antisocial behaviour. So we need to acknowledge that, and they do require referrals for those wraparound support services.

However, you know, we believe that there is an opportunity with support—as long as they are purpose built. In their current form, you know, there are 89 rooming houses roughly in the City of Greater Dandenong and less than 10 per cent are purpose built. They are usually converted existing dwellings, which are not ideal. There are shared bathroom facilities and laundry facilities. Everything is shared, which is not ideal. You know, ideally we would want to build something that is purpose built with an ensuite, your bedroom, and possibly the only shared facilities would be the main living areas.⁴⁹

The Committee heard from a panel of local councils in the south east of Melbourne at a public hearing. Nick Grant-Collins, Acting Coordinator of Inclusion and Wellbeing at Casey City Council, stated that increased planning controls needed to be put in place to prevent the establishment of rooming houses in inappropriate areas:

planning controls to prevent the development of rooming houses in areas away from services would improve the standard of living, particularly in service-poor areas such as Casey.⁵⁰

Venita MacKinnon from Frankston City Council agreed that planning controls needed to be improved to prevent concentration of rooming houses in inappropriate areas:

We are also seeing deficits in the planning scheme which have allowed the Frankston city municipality to go from 52 rooming houses to 71 in the last 12 months. We have got three rooming houses in one street, and that is just really not a good recipe for anything. So we would really like to encourage one of the key recommendations of this inquiry to be a further in-depth inquiry into the rooming house space. There are several loopholes that are currently being exploited, and we would like for those to be closed and we would like for increased communication across the state government and between the state, federal and local government sectors to help really nip this in the bud.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Mr Sean Quigley, Manager, Dandenong Homelessness Services, Waysss, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

⁵⁰ Mr Nick Grant-Collins, Acting Coordinator, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Connected Communities, Casey City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Ms Venita MacKinnon, Social and Community Planner, Frankston City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

The Committee agrees that planning controls need to be reviewed to ensure rooming houses are placed in appropriate areas and are not concentrated in pockets of disadvantage.

Despite the regulatory amendments in recent years to ensure rooming house operators hold a valid licence and premises meet certain standards, the Committee was told of the existence of a number of unregistered rooming houses. These are dwellings where rooms are available for rent but they are not registered as prescribed accommodation in accordance with the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (Vic).⁵² Section 142D of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) imposes an obligation on the owner of a building to report to the local council if the building is being used as a rooming house and is not prescribed accommodation.⁵³

Paul Turton, General Manager, Homelessness Services at VincentCare described how these types of unlicensed rooming houses operated:

in some cases people are in unregistered rooming houses. So there is an opportunity for certain providers to set up unregistered or to purchase a five-bedroom house, divide it into seven rooms as an unregistered house and run it and basically use people's Centrelink income to derive a huge income out of that house.⁵⁴

Unregistered rooming houses pose a serious threat to the welfare of their residents. Without regulatory protection, residents can face unliveable and unsafe environments. Vulnerable clients may be susceptible to financial exploitation from unlicensed rooming house operators with little recourse for action.

The Committee heard that monitoring and compliance needs to be improved to enforce the regulations in both registered and unregistered rooming houses and to ensure operators hold a valid license. On ensuring appropriate standards of rooming houses, Karren Walker, Group Manager, Entry Points at Launch Housing said: 'We certainly have the regulatory frameworks to enable that; we just need the ability to monitor and drive compliance.'⁵⁵

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government needs to improve compliance and monitoring operations to ensure a safer and more dignified environment for residents of rooming houses.

⁵² *Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (Vic), pt 6, div 4.

⁵³ *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) s 142D.

⁵⁴ Turton, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

⁵⁵ Ms Karren Walker, Group Manager, Entry Points, Launch Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

RECOMMENDATION 38: That the Victorian Government improve monitoring and compliance actions in relation to rooming houses, and in particular:

- ensure Consumer Affairs Victoria is adequately resourced to monitor and inspect registered rooming houses to ensure the prescribed standards are met and to investigate and respond to reports of unregistered rooming houses
- promote information-sharing and collaborative responses between Consumer Affairs Victoria and local councils in order to target unregistered rooming houses
- investigate the potential for development of a standardised accommodation ratings system for private rooming houses
- review planning scheme provisions in relation to rooming houses to prevent a concentration in particular areas and to ensure they have connectivity to services.

5.2.4 Committee view on crisis accommodation

Where there is a sufficient supply of crisis accommodation to meet demand, the Committee heard it can play a vital role in assisting people in their time of need. Examples of supported crisis accommodation have illustrated to the Committee that these settings can assist many individuals to deal with the causes of homelessness, and in some cases be diverted from requiring longer-term support.

However, the overall limited supply of crisis accommodation across the state has meant that homelessness services are forced to house clients in alternative privately-run accommodation, such as motels, hotels, caravan parks and rooming houses. These forms of accommodation rarely meet the needs of the client and can in many circumstances exacerbate the problems they may be experiencing. In the case of rooming houses, evidence was provided that some are unsafe, do not meet prescribed minimum standards and should not be in operation.

The costs of accommodation in these unsatisfactory environments is another factor that makes them wholly unsuitable as a common form of crisis accommodation. Many stakeholders talked about the unease they felt of paying a minimum of \$300⁵⁶ a week in HEF funding for accommodation in hotels and motels that were likely to only make matters worse for their client.

The Committee is mindful that, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, key stakeholders argue that Victoria's homelessness system is already too crisis-focused. As noted in Chapter 3, the Victorian Government has announced funding for a significant increase in the provision of social housing in Victoria by committing to an additional 12,000 dwellings.⁵⁷ It is hoped that this investment will relieve the pressure on crisis accommodation

⁵⁶ Ms Renae Ford, Program Manager, Youth and Family Support, The Bridge Youth Services, Shepparton, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Homes Victoria, *What is the Big Housing Build?*, 2020, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/homes-victoria>> accessed 24 November 2020.

by providing more long-term options for people to move into. This report discusses long-term accommodation in more detail in Chapter 6.

Despite this projected increase in social housing dwellings, the evidence presented to the Committee shows that there are not enough purpose-built crisis accommodation facilities to meet demand. This results in significant sums of money, usually HEF funding, being spent on unsuitable accommodation to meet the shortfall. The Committee believes that more funding needs to be allocated to provide purpose-built crisis accommodation, and where possible, with appropriate onsite support. A focus of this should be in growth areas of Melbourne, where there is a lack of crisis accommodation, as well as in regional Victoria.

The Committee was disappointed to learn that the Victorian Government has no planned construction or acquisition of more major crisis accommodation.⁵⁸

Such an investment in crisis accommodation is not intended to increase the emphasis on the provision of crisis accommodation in Victoria's homelessness system. The aim is instead to stem some of the number of individuals forced to reside in unsuitable accommodation because there is no other option.

RECOMMENDATION 39: That the Victorian Government provide funding for an increase in both general and specialised forms of crisis accommodation, with a focus on provision of appropriate forms of onsite support, including in Melbourne's growth areas and parts of regional Victoria where crisis accommodation is currently lacking.

5.3 Crisis accommodation and the COVID-19 response

As noted in Chapter 1, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 saw a spectacular effort on the part of homelessness services, accommodation providers, local government and the Victorian Government to rapidly provide emergency accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness as part of the public health response to the pandemic. This effort, aided by additional funding from the Government, placed a large proportion of the total number of people experiencing homelessness at that time in emergency and crisis accommodation, or helped them to keep or find private rental accommodation through the PRAP program.

Jenny Smith, CEO of the Council for Homeless Persons, said that the effort to place people experiencing homelessness in emergency accommodation at the outset of the pandemic saw 4,500 people placed in hotel and motel accommodation.⁵⁹ This included a large proportion of Victoria's population of rough sleepers. As noted in Chapter 1, it is difficult to estimate the number of people sleeping rough in Victoria. However, data

⁵⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 31.

⁵⁹ Ms Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that 4,134 people reported they were sleeping rough when they accessed homelessness services in 2019-20, and the 2016 Census reported 1,100 people were sleeping rough in Victoria in 2016.⁶⁰ As such, it is possible that the 4,500 people accommodated may have included much of Victoria's population of rough sleepers.

This event was potentially transformational not only for those experiencing homelessness, but also for the homelessness sector and the Government. It demonstrated that it is possible to eliminate homelessness if there is sufficient will on the part of the Government, homelessness services and accommodation providers.

As noted in Chapter 1, the Committee held a public hearing with key representatives of the homelessness sector regarding the response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 20 May 2020. At the hearing, the Committee heard that one of the positive outcomes of the effort was to foster a level of cooperation between DHHS and homelessness agencies that had not been evident before the COVID-19 Pandemic. Shane Austin, State Manager of Homelessness Services at the Salvation Army, said:

regarding service coordination. That has been quite positive. You could say it has been forced upon us in the short term, to very rapidly work closer together than we have ever done before, and I think that will be reflected in comments from others as well as it has been from Jenny. The coordination has created an expectation amongst the providers for us to be more agile and flexible. Also importantly I think that coordination piece ensures that there is greater accountability and the demonstration of our services working together and being people-centred and responsive. I think that also has been in part with collaboration with the department and Government as well. So the response from DHHS and the leadership in terms of assisting us in the coordination through doing public forums, webinars and looking at guidelines that we have been able to adapt cannot be underestimated. I think what is important is that within the department and within senior leadership there are people who have been practitioners in the field, so they bring that expertise along together with a public policy approach.⁶¹

The other key factor regarding the assistance provided to people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic was that homelessness agencies had contact with a large cohort of people experiencing homelessness and an opportunity to give them the support they needed and assistance to find and sustain long-term housing. Mr Austin said:

The COVID-19 and the special homeless services response to housing rough sleepers has presented the sector with quite an interesting opportunity to get something more than a single street count. The organisations represented here and our other peers in the sector have had an opportunity over six to eight weeks to really get detailed information regarding who we are housing and what the needs are in terms of short-, medium- and long-term accommodation, and I think that has been a positive in that.⁶²

⁶⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, SHSC Housing situation, *AIHWCubes*, <<https://reporting.aihw.gov.au/Reports/openRVUrl.do>> accessed 21 January 2021.

⁶¹ Mr Shane Austin, Victorian State Manager, The Salvation Army, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Bevan Warner, CEO of Launch Housing, expanded on the opportunity provided to the sector to assist a previously dispersed population of people experiencing homelessness, many of whom were disenfranchised with services or were in contact with services for the first time. He explained that it was important to grasp the opportunity to provide support to ensure those in crisis accommodation were assisted into long-term, stable accommodation:

So we have essentially got a system here where we have collected a dispersed population, often hidden, into a concentrated population where we are coming into direct contact with their personal vulnerabilities and needs. We know who they are, we know where they are and we need to work with them to help them to get their lives back on track. Helping them to get their lives back on track inevitably requires some form of multidisciplinary in-reach support to the locations where they are currently living to engage them in services that they have previously given up on or may never have accessed before.

...

we have collected another happy problem, which is a group of people that we have always wanted to gather into a position of safety and to work with intensively. Well, we now have those people within our grasp, but we need to work with a similar level of cooperation and a similar sense of purpose to grasp this opportunity and to put all the people that we have currently got in a safe place into a safe and secure setting into the long term.

...

the real challenge is: what do we do now to convert this opportunity into something that is truly a remarkable result where we make a permanent dent in rough sleeping in the city of Melbourne and turn the tide? Just as we have flattened the COVID curve, so then we should be aiming to flatten the curve of homelessness.⁶³

On 9 September 2020, some months after the initial placement of individuals in emergency accommodation, the Committee heard evidence from DHHS about an update on the progress of providing services to those individuals and finding appropriate long-term accommodation. Sherri Bruinhout from DHHS said that supports had been provided to individuals while they were residing in the emergency accommodation: 'We have also been able to incorporate support services and local responses to be able to support people who are receiving emergency accommodation...'⁶⁴

⁶³ Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Ms Sherri Bruinhout, Deputy Commander, COVID-19 Public Housing Response and Executive Director, Housing Pathways and Outcomes, Housing Division, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

The Committee was also informed of efforts to provide long-term housing for individuals in temporary emergency accommodation. Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, explained that extra funding had been provided to reach this aim under the 'From Homelessness to a Home' initiative:

From Homelessness to a Home \$150 million investment package. Some of that money is for additional Housing Establishment Fund funding, which effectively extends emergency accommodation until April for those who need it. Some of that money is to procure 1,100 leased properties from the private rental market in order to really jump-start our ability to provide a housing outcome for these people. Some funding is allocated to boost the Private Rental Assistance Program. There are a number of people in hotel accommodation who we think could sustain a private rental with a little bit of support to start, so there is funding there for up to 150 households.⁶⁵

He added that, crucially, much of the funding was available for support needs so that those in temporary accommodation could receive assistance to address the issues that led to their homelessness, alongside assistance to maintain long-term housing:

Probably most importantly, a significant component of this funding is in the form of support packages—really flexible, client-centred, client-specific support packages to assist people with complex needs. The cohort that ended up in emergency accommodation during this crisis do have a large number of complex needs. They are, as a group, a group of people who have engaged with multiple service systems across government. Obviously everyone's individual circumstances are different, but as a group there is a need for significant support, so there is a sizeable funding allocation on a kind of a per person funding approach to provide that flexible and tailored support.⁶⁶

In addition, Mr Rimmer said that the individuals in emergency accommodation have been placed on the priority list for social housing.⁶⁷

Ms Bruinhout gave the Committee an update of the progress the program had made toward finding long-term accommodation for these individuals as at 9 September 2020:

You can see that there have been a number of investments in temporary accommodation, the Housing Establishment Fund and the Private Rental Assistance Program, so during that time over 6,000 households have benefited from those programs since March. As of last night, there were 2,253 Victorians receiving emergency accommodation—purchased accommodation—to help them stay at home and shelter in place so that they can abide by our public health requirements. The sector has done a pretty terrific job in responding very quickly to a large demand. However, what continues to be a challenge for our sector is exit options for those people to come out of emergency accommodation. Pleasingly 566 households have exited emergency accommodation into private rental.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁸ Bruinhout, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

The Committee commends the work of the Victorian Government, local governments, homelessness service agencies and accommodation providers for their success in housing people experiencing homelessness at the outset of the pandemic. The Victorian Government should also be commended for providing additional funding to ensure that this group, once in touch with services, is able to continue to receive assistance and look towards the prospect of long-term housing.

However, the Committee has some concerns about aspects of the program. They are:

- a number of individuals have left emergency accommodation
- people in emergency accommodation are being transferred into crisis accommodation, rather than long-term accommodation due to a lack of long-term dwellings
- individuals may not receive ongoing support to ensure they can keep their accommodation in the long term.

Ms Bruinhout discussed the challenges regarding people who chose to leave the emergency accommodation. She said that 635 individuals had left the hotel accommodation into homelessness and 403 people left into couch surfing.⁶⁹ The Committee notes that these figures together are approximately 22% of the total number of people assisted into emergency accommodation, based on the number provided by the Council to Homeless Persons of 4,500 people.

Ms Linda Weatherson, General Manager, Community and City Services at City of Melbourne gave insight at a public hearing about why some individuals had decided to leave hotel accommodation:

Our understanding is that some people have had enough of the hotel accommodation. This goes back to the point of needing to find the appropriate sustainable long-term solution for each and every individual, and for some it has worked really, really well, and they are ready to move on into something more permanent. For others, they just want to get back on the streets.⁷⁰

The difficulty in keeping individuals engaged in support speaks to the complex issues faced by some people experiencing homelessness and the significant task ahead for service agencies and the Victorian Government in eliminating homelessness.

The Committee is concerned that there is not enough long-term housing for individuals in emergency hotel accommodation to move into. The Committee notes reports in the media published in November 2020 that suggested some residents in emergency

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ms Linda Weatherson, General Manager, Community and City Services, City of Melbourne, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

accommodation are moving into crisis accommodation or rooming houses.⁷¹ Such a situation may impact the stability enjoyed by individuals in the hotels during the emergency relief program and increase the likelihood of re-entering homelessness.

Evidence to the Committee regarding the *From Homelessness to a Home* program encouraged continuation of support services to people once they had found long-term housing. This ongoing support is important to ensure that individuals can maintain their housing. Dr Sarah Pollock, Executive Director of Research and Advocacy at Mind Australia, addressed this point:

I think when we look at the current Homelessness to Home initiative that is underway in Victoria, there are some interesting things that come out of that. It says clearly that with the will and the investment, this is a cohort who can be housed, but they need substantial support once they are housed in order to remain on that positive trajectory to recovery and wellbeing. What we see is that if the supports are not sufficient enough or for a long enough duration, things go bad pretty quickly and their housing breaks down.⁷²

At a public hearing, Mr Rimmer told the Committee that support will be provided on an ongoing basis for those who need it:

From Homelessness to a Home, which has very flexible funding that will continue for some time into the future—that is not predicated on the idea that someone will need 12 weeks or 24 weeks of service before exiting but is really predicated on the idea that for some people Housing First is a support journey that will last for a number of years. Particularly given the number of chronic rough sleepers in the community today, some of whom have been rough sleeping for 10 years or more, the support needs for those people are going to be significant and last well beyond a kind of traditional crisis episode.⁷³

The Committee commends the approach by the Victorian Government to ensure those in the *From Homelessness to a Home* program will have ongoing funding available to meet their needs. All efforts should be taken to make sure that once individuals have long-term housing, they are able to stay in it. The Committee believes that homelessness agencies should be meaningfully engaged with participants in the *From Homelessness to a Home* program for an extended period to ensure they continue to stay housed.

71 Jewel Topsfield, 'I want to be safe': Angst as homeless told to exit hotels', *The Age*, 30 November 2020, <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/i-want-to-be-safe-angst-as-homeless-told-to-exit-hotels-20201130-p56j6m.html>> accessed 1 December 2020.

72 Dr Sarah Pollock, Executive Director of Research and Advocacy, Mind Australia, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

73 Rimmer, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

In its response to the questionnaire, DHHS explained that the Victorian Government is acquiring 1,440 dwellings in the 2020–21 financial year through spot purchases and lease programs. This will include 1,350 short-term leases to enable:

- the relocation of people who were placed in emergency hotel accommodation as part of the *From Homelessness to a Home* package
- the relocation of high-rise estate tenants who are at greater risk of COVID-19 exposure as part of the *Tower Relocation* program.⁷⁴

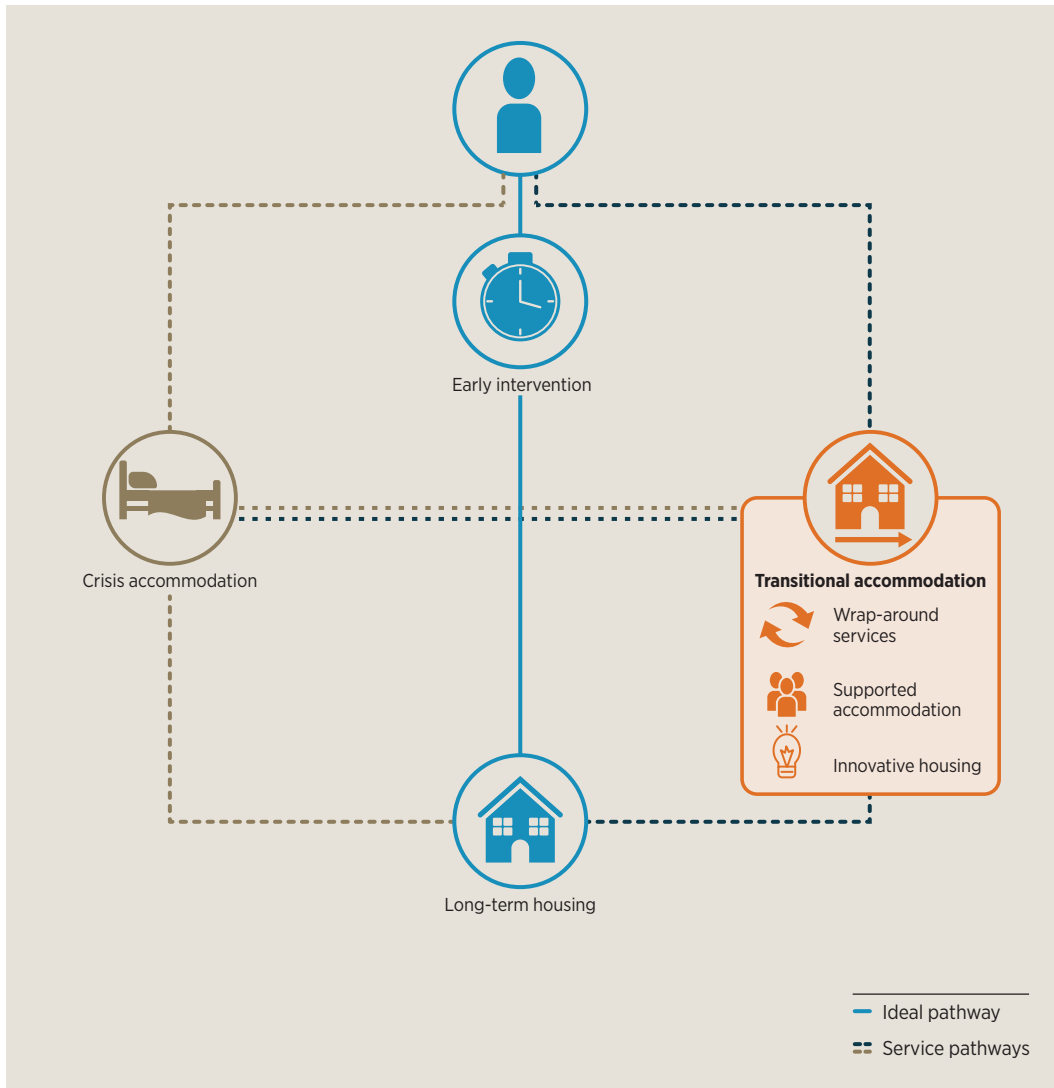
Whilst the Committee acknowledges some effort from the Victorian Government to house people after COVID-19-related crisis placement, it notes that these initiatives only provide short-term leases for people in need. The Committee believes there should be a renewed effort to provide stable and long-term housing to people, such as those placed in emergency hotel accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION 40: That the Victorian Government ensure that those who transition from emergency accommodation under the *From Homelessness to a Home* program are transferred to stable, secure, long-term housing, rather than crisis accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION 41: That the Victorian Government provide funding to homelessness services operating within the *From Homelessness to a Home* program so that they can continue to support clients for an extended period after they have been placed in long-term housing, with a view to assisting participants to maintain their housing.

⁷⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 11.

5.4 Transitional accommodation



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

As discussed in Chapter 1, transitional accommodation is short- to medium-term accommodation for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness which also provides support programs and assistance appropriate to their circumstances. Transitional housing is often the next step for people in crisis accommodation to move in to, although people may be placed directly into transitional housing without first staying in crisis accommodation.⁷⁵

Transitional accommodation is intended to house individuals for up to two years while receiving support services. At the end of this period, depending on the circumstances of the individual, they may be assisted to live independently in the private rental market or be assisted into social housing.

⁷⁵ Ms Gerda Zimmerman, Senior Housing Case Manager, DPV Health Whittlesea, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

The Committee was given a number of examples of transitional housing. They include:

- generalist transitional housing with support services
- specialist transitional housing for particular cohorts such as young people, persons experiencing family violence or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients
- innovative housing options like tiny houses, demountables and the repurposing of empty buildings for short-term stays.

This section will provide a detailed overview of one example of generalist transitional accommodation, the Sidney Myer Haven, a discussion of the use of surplus government land, and a summary of some of the proposals and examples for innovative housing options received by the Committee.

As with crisis accommodation, the key theme presented to the Committee regarding transitional accommodation is that there is not enough available to meet demand, and the stock that is available is occupied by people who are unable to leave due to a lack of long-term housing.

Jo Smith from Haven; Home, Safe, explained to the Committee that the limited movement out of transitional accommodation into public housing has significantly impacted the ability of providers to secure accommodation for other clients in need.⁷⁶ Ms Smith described the ‘bottleneck’ that is occurring in the space between transitional and long-term housing where clients’ transit into the latter has slowed. As stated previously in the report but which is also relevant to consider here, Ms Smith explained that:

the ‘transit’ has kind of vanished from transitional for the moment because there is so little movement in public housing. Five years ago, when I was working at Haven, there were maybe eight to 10 transitional properties a month to be allocated to people who would move on within a year or two, usually to public housing, sometimes private rental, sometimes to ownership – usually to public or community housing. We are down to an average of less than two a month at the moment because there is so little movement in public housing.⁷⁷

At a public hearing, Ms Kate Colvin, Council to Homeless Persons, described the knock-on effect this bottleneck can have on the entire housing and homelessness sector and its many clients:

they end up staying in crisis accommodation that is intended for just a week or two weeks or six weeks – they stay for months. Sometimes they stay for a year, or in transitional housing that is intended for three months, and they end up staying for two years. That means that the next person coming through the door whose housing situation has fallen apart, they have got nowhere to stay, they cannot go into crisis accommodation because it is full of all the people who cannot leave into long-term housing.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ms Jo Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

⁷⁷ Ibid. See also Zimmerman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

⁷⁸ Colvin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 13–14. See also McNamara, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

Ms Gerda Zimmermann, Senior Housing Case Manager at DPV Health Whittlesea similarly provided an example of the decrease in availability of transitional accommodation:

Back in the day ... transitional public housing used to really cycle. You would get a new client, they would move through transitional housing for six to 12 months, they would get a public housing property and off they would go. It was a really smooth transition. But now there are blockages everywhere...⁷⁹

Ms Jade Blakkarly from WISHIN and Jo Doherty, Practice Lead at Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services, said that the clients with the longest stays in their transitional housing facilities were 8 and 7 years respectively. This is due to limited opportunities to transition into affordable long-term housing.⁸⁰

As noted elsewhere in this report, the Committee is concerned about the diverse and wide-ranging personal and sector-wide impacts the housing bottleneck is having. In particular, the bottleneck has significant effects upon vulnerable Victorians who may be unable to get the support they need due to a lack of accommodation or delayed access to the right service providers.

FINDING 24: A lack of affordable long-term housing has led to difficulty for residents to move out of transitional housing. This has resulted in a decrease in the availability of transitional housing across Victoria.

5.4.1 Sidney Myer Haven

The Committee spoke to a number of generalist transitional housing providers throughout the inquiry. Many of these provide support to residents for up to two years to address the issues that lead to homelessness and prepare residents for independent living.

One example is the Sidney Myer Haven (SMH), which is a transitional housing facility that provides supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness with the goal of assisting them to transition from homelessness to independent living. Located in Bendigo, SMH was developed by Haven; Home, Safe. It comprises 19 one- and two-bedroom units and features an education hub, recreational spaces, secure children's play areas and community gardens.

SMH's clients are experiencing homelessness or are at high risk of homelessness. The majority are women, many of whom are escaping family violence (70%). Often residents arrive with young children or babies (69%) and are experiencing financial stress (60%),

⁷⁹ Zimmerman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

⁸⁰ Ms Jade Blakkarly, *Transcript of evidence*; Doherty, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

are unemployed (55%) or have a history of drug and alcohol use (54%).⁸¹ In addition, a majority of the residents have a mental health diagnosis (80%), including depression, anxiety and bi-polar disorder.⁸²

The SMH offers residents affordable accommodation for up to two years. It provides wraparound support to assist residents to address the issues that have caused their homelessness, including therapeutic support and promoting social development. Residents have access to onsite staff and counselling services. Residents also commit to participate in the program's social curriculum.

One aspect of the services offered is support for new parents and their young children. These children may be at risk of harm, neglect or abuse when entering SMH. Children residing at SMH attend day care, kindergarten or school when appropriate and are kept up-to-date with immunisations and health checks. In addition, the security of the complex protects persons who are experiencing family violence and their children from those perpetrating violence against them. Rachel Gellatly, Executive General Manager Operations, North, at Haven; Home, Safe described the goal of the wrap-around services:

It is more than just safe and affordable housing; it is a trusting, learning and healing living environment which is non-judgemental, caring and safe and in which participants can realise long-term positive change for themselves and their families.⁸³

The learning program at SMH offers a 'social curriculum' to promote independent living skills, as well as vocational education to provide residents with employable skills. The social curriculum is developed in partnership with participants and is premised on a two-way agreement between residents and the SMH. Residents commit to engage in the learning program as part of their agreement to participate in the SMH package. The program aims to prepare participants for independent living by building their skills in areas such as financial management, maintaining healthy lives, developing support networks, and participating in community and civic life—all of which lead to an increased ability to sustain tenancies. The units are delivered with a trauma-informed practice to ensure those who have experienced trauma and mental illness have the highest possible chance of success.⁸⁴ Ms Gellatly said the learning program addresses the disadvantages faced by participants:

Nothing solves homelessness like housing, but housing on its own is sometimes not enough. We must also provide targeted, customised support, life skills and education programs at the exact moment of need and for a period that ensures that changes are made and the disadvantages faced by people are able to be effectively addressed.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Suzi Young and Anna Donaldson, *From Surviving to Thriving: A Model Breaking Negative Cycles - A Social Return on Investment evaluation of the Sidney Myer Haven Program*, ThinkImpact, online, 2019.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ms Rachel Gellatly, Executive General Manager, Operations, North, Haven; Home, Safe, Sidney Myer Haven, public hearing, via videoconference, 10 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Young and Donaldson, *From Surviving to Thriving*.

⁸⁵ Gellatly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

Participants also undertake vocational training. This includes in relation to foundational literacy and numeracy skills, as well as short accredited courses in areas such as food handling, administration, aged care, disability or trade preparation.

Outcomes

An evaluation of the SMH by Think Impact titled: *From Surviving to Thriving: A Model Breaking Negative Cycles – A Social Return on Investment evaluation of the Sidney Myer Haven Program*, found that of the 10 residents who have successfully completed the SMH program, all have moved onto sustainable housing in the private rental or affordable housing sector. Many participants were unemployed at the commencement of the program but were supported to find employment. In addition, while 6% of SMH residents were engaged in formal education at the time of their entry, 53% have since returned to school to complete year 12 or to undertake equivalent certificates, apprenticeships, diplomas and tertiary degrees.⁸⁶

The evaluation found that for every dollar of investment, a social and economic value of up to \$12 is returned to stakeholders, including significant value to the Victorian Government in avoided costs.⁸⁷ More than half of the value created is experienced by residents in terms of better mental and physical health, expanded and healthy social networks, and, for those fleeing family violence, a greater sense of personal safety and confidence as a parent.

The Committee considers the Sidney Myer Haven program to be a positive example of supported transitional accommodation. The support provided by the program helps individuals experiencing homelessness to break patterns of disadvantage and move on to independent living. Although this particular program is relatively small in scope, the evidence provided by the evaluation suggests that the value created by these types of programs could represent significant value for the Victorian Government.

5.4.2 Surplus land and assets

Surplus land refers to land owned by government agencies that has been identified as no longer being needed for public purposes and is available for leasing or sale. This includes, for example, land with vacant properties or assets that are no longer being used. The sale of surplus land generates substantial revenue—the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) reported in 2018 that over the past ten years, over 695 government properties have been sold, for a total sales revenue of over \$928.7 million.⁸⁸

The *Victorian Government Landholding Policy and Guidelines 2017* provide information on how government agencies can purchase and retain land. The Guidelines require agencies to review their land assets each year in order to identify any assets that no

⁸⁶ Young and Donaldson, *From Surviving to Thriving*.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Managing Surplus Government Land*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 2018, p. 7.

longer contribute to their needs and are therefore ‘surplus’ to their requirements.⁸⁹ Once identified, the land is assessed to determine whether there is public value in it being retained. If no public values are identified, the land is referred to the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) to undertake a ‘first right of refusal’ process. During this process, DTF notifies Victorian Government agencies, as well as local government and the Commonwealth Government, of the land asset, and these agencies have 60 days to submit their interest in acquiring the land ‘for a public or community purpose’.⁹⁰ If no interest is received, DTF may proceed to public sale of the land.

In its questionnaire, the Committee asked the Victorian Government how it prioritises expressions of interest by the Director of Housing for the purpose of acquiring social housing during the first right of refusal process. However, the Victorian Government did not give a clear response but stated:

The Department regularly reviews surplus government land and where it is deemed suitable for social housing, it can be purchased at the value set by the Valuer General Victoria.⁹¹

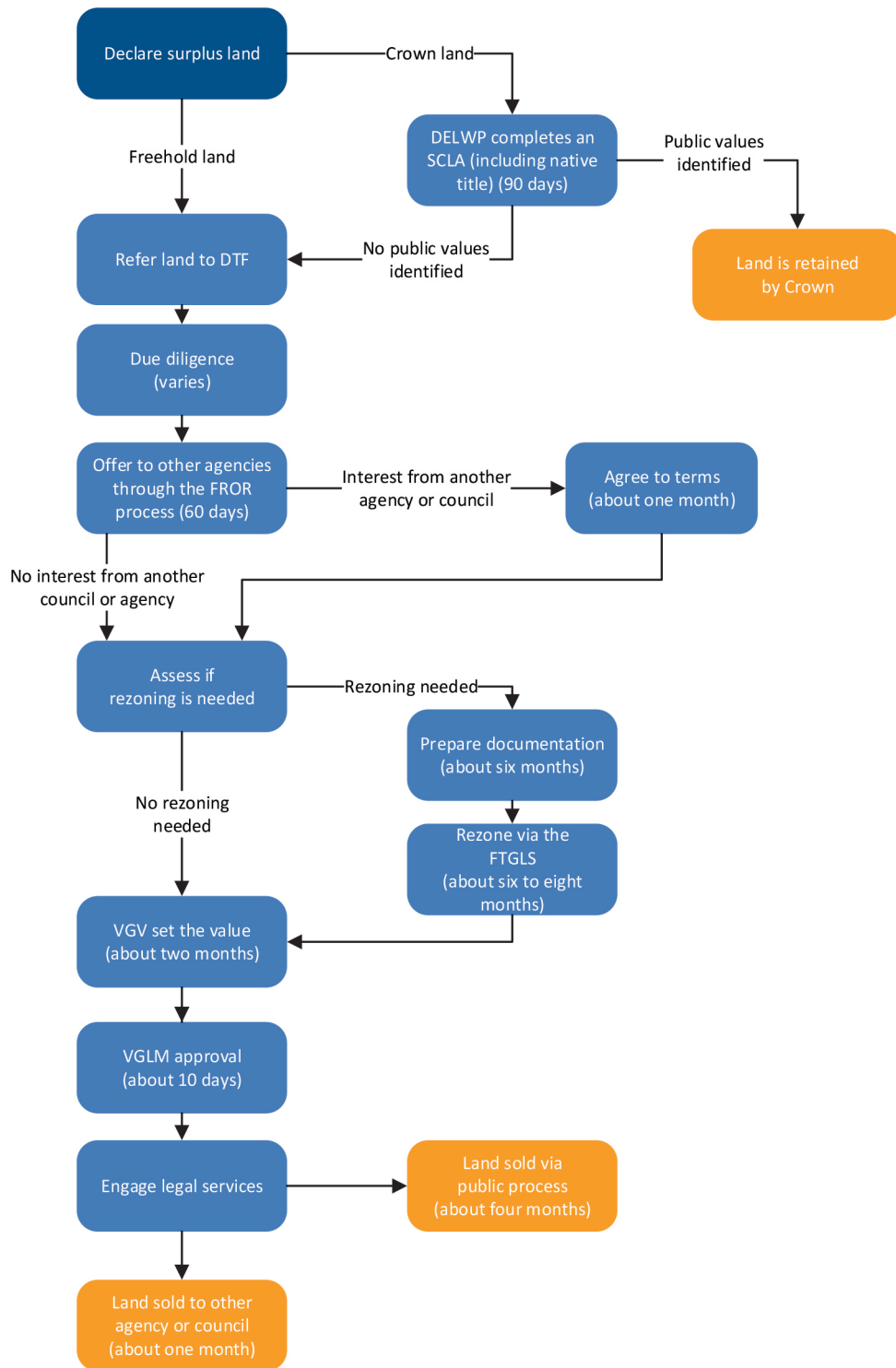
The process for the sale of surplus government land is complex and can be lengthy. Figure 5.1 shows the steps in this process, which differ depending on the type of land and whether rezoning is required.

⁸⁹ Department of Treasury and Finance, *Victorian Government landholding policy and guidelines*, policy paper, Victorian Government, Melbourne, September 2017.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 34.

Figure 5.1 The process for the sale of surplus government land



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, (2018), *Managing Surplus Government Land*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 2018 p. 21.

According to DTF, the proceeds from the sale of surplus land is used to fund ‘infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and public transport’.⁹² However, the Director of Housing conducts its own land sales and the proceeds of these are reinvested back into the public housing portfolio. The Director is also exempt from land sale targets that apply to other agencies, and its residential properties are exempt from the first right of refusal process provided they meet certain requirements.⁹³

There are a number of publicly available resources relating to the transfer of surplus government land and property assets, including the Landholding Policy and Guidelines; Land Transactions Policy and Guidelines; Land Use Policy and Guidelines; Strategic Assessment Policy and Guidelines and the online land search tool GovMap.

In March 2018, VAGO published the report of its audit of *Managing Surplus Government Land*. The report concluded that existing government processes ‘do not support a strategic whole-of-government approach to making the best use of surplus government land’.⁹⁴ It further stated that while the ongoing use of land sale targets for government agencies have produced some positive outcomes, they have also driven agencies to ‘prioritise the sale of surplus land rather than considering whether another option would achieve best value, such as a commercial lease or retaining a site for community use’.⁹⁵ These types of alternative uses could include the leasing of the land or property to provide additional social housing or innovative transitional housing options. However, consideration should be taken to ensure that land for such use has appropriate access to services and amenities.

In late 2018, the Victorian Government announced that the Fast Track Government Land Service, now the Government Land Planning Service, would help to ensure that rezoning and development proposals ‘lead to good levels of social housing’.⁹⁶ Further, *Homes for Victorians* provides information on one initiative aimed at increasing social housing growth, the Inclusionary Housing pilot program. The policy states:

Surplus government land is often located in areas with good access to jobs and transport. But as this land is no longer required for government needs, it can be put to market for housing.

To make sure Victorians in need aren’t being left behind, the Government is prepared to discount the price of this land, in return for a proportion of social housing.

Facilitated through the Fast Track Government Land Service, the focus will be on delivering planning certainty including rezoning and development potential, and establishing partnerships with private sector developers to deliver new social housing.

⁹² Department of Treasury and Finance, *Government land sales*, 2018, <<https://www.dtfvic.gov.au/funds-programs-and-policies/government-land-sales>> accessed 30 September 2020.

⁹³ Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, *Managing Surplus Government Land*, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Victorian Government, *Our plan to create more social and community housing*, 2018, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/our-plan-create-more-social-and-community-housing>> accessed 30 September 2020.

Proposals will be evaluated to make sure they deliver best value for money, and the best options for social housing.

In return, developers will get an appropriate discount on the purchase price of the land.⁹⁷

Despite the Victorian Government's acknowledgement that surplus land could be a useful resource to develop social housing and is often located in areas with access to jobs and transport, in its questionnaire response, it argued that there are several reasons surplus government land is not suitable for social housing:

Surplus government land is not always in locations of high demand for social housing, nor is it of the right size – being too large or too small to support sustainable communities and is often not zoned for residential development. Land in the inner and middle ring of Melbourne is expensive to purchase at valuation price.⁹⁸

The Committee notes that no information is provided on how surplus government land may be retained within the housing portfolio as public housing as an alternative to providing discounted land to developers who will be mandated to provide some level of social housing on the site. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) website states that the Inclusionary Housing pilot program will provide 'a minimum of 100 new social housing homes' across six sites in Boronia, Broadmeadows, Parkville, Wodonga, Noble Park and Reservoir. In addition, affordable housing is encouraged, but not required, on these sites:

The Pilot does not include requirements for social housing that is provided by or on behalf of the Government (Public Housing).

The Pilot also encourages the provision of affordable housing on each of the sites but does not set a minimum requirement. The remaining dwellings on each site can be made available to the private market.⁹⁹

In its questionnaire to the Victorian Government, the Committee requested information on a number of matters relating to surplus land and assets to assist its consideration of these issues, including:

- how existing government strategies or policies ensure that surplus government land and/or property assets are redirected to the Director of Housing where they could be repurposed as part of the public housing portfolio, either through sale or leasing, including in relation to the first right of refusal process
- information on any recent asset transfers from government agencies to the Director of Housing and related cost to the housing portfolio, as well as any recent leases from government agencies to the Director of Housing

⁹⁷ Victorian Government, *Homes for Victorians: Affordability, access and choice*, Melbourne, 2017, p. 23.

⁹⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 34.

⁹⁹ Land Department of Environment, Water and Planning, *Inclusionary Housing pilot*, 2019, <<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/housing-strategy/inclusionary-housing-pilot>> accessed 5 February 2021.

- information on any significant challenges in repurposing surplus government land and property assets for housing as part of the public housing portfolio.

The Committee also requested an update on the implementation of the commitment made by DTF and the DELWP to develop a policy relating to the leasing of surplus government land and other interim land use opportunities in their response to the Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Managing Surplus Government Land*. The questionnaire further requested information on what consideration was given to the current and projected demands for social housing in Victoria in the development of such a policy. The DHHS response to the questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee received evidence from various stakeholders regarding the potential for using surplus government land to support innovative, often transitional, community housing options. This includes, for example, pop-up housing and peppercorn leases, which are discussed further at 5.4.4 below. Interface Councils stated in their submission that 'Victoria's housing strategies require more innovative approaches to make use of surplus government land'.¹⁰⁰ Hobsons Bay City Council recommended that surplus land management should 'prioritise its use for public and social housing'.¹⁰¹ Further, Housing All Australians advocated for surplus government land to be leased to private developers at a 'peppercorn rent' in order to promote affordable housing supply.¹⁰²

Jade Blakkarly, CEO of WISHIN, proposed the use of leases for government-owned property in order to increase the supply of social housing:

You know, the other thing that we have been really looking at in terms of sort of short- and medium-term solutions is the amount of properties that have been acquired by the State Government—usually not through housing; through VicRoads, through land, rail—and that are being leased out on the private market at the moment. So they are Government-owned properties that are being leased privately at market rent while at the same time we have got thousands of people desperate for housing outcomes. We understand they are not a permanent outcome, whether that is a five-year lease or a 10-year lease, and it obviously would be a slight reduction in income, but it would be a cost saving on paying for motels and things. Instead of renting them privately, give them to social housing providers so that they can actually be rented out to homeless people at affordable rates. We have had a bit of a look, and VicRoads have got over 300—they have got about 330 or something.¹⁰³

DELWP is currently piloting a Land Utilisation Assessment Program (LUAP) which includes leasing opportunities for surplus land and noted, in its response to the questionnaire, that several sites had been identified as potentially useful for social

¹⁰⁰ Interface Councils, *Submission 102*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Hobsons Bay City Council, *Submission 183*, p. 2.

¹⁰² Housing All Australians Ltd, *Submission 170*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Ms Jade Blakkarly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

housing. DELWP explained to the Committee the work it is undertaking as part of the Land Utilisation Assessment Program:

As part of the LUAP, DELWP is undertaking extensive engagement across government, including with the Director of Housing, to ensure that assessments and recommendations respond to service delivery demands. This has included specific assessments targeting high demand social housing areas across Victoria to identify government land that may support social housing, including new public housing and relocatable housing to support the homeless. This work is ongoing, and it remains a commitment of DELWP to identify government land with potential to support social housing growth in Victoria.¹⁰⁴

DELWP's pilot program is due to finish in early 2021. The Committee considers that this is an important land utilisation initiative, with potential leasing and interim use opportunities which could increase Victoria's social housing stock. The Committee is hopeful that the program is continued and that it continues to prioritise social housing.

The Committee agrees that there is value in ensuring that, where possible and appropriate, the housing portfolio is given priority during the surplus land sale process. In particular, the Committee considers that leasing surplus land for social housing purposes (such as innovative models of transitional housing) while lengthy sales processes take place could be further explored in conjunction with relevant stakeholders. However, in the absence of further information regarding whether and how this type of prioritisation currently takes place, or the development of any relevant policies to promote this type of use of surplus land, the Committee recommends that the Victorian Government should investigate these proposals further.

RECOMMENDATION 42: That the Victorian Government investigate options for the prioritisation of the housing portfolio in processes for the sale of surplus government land.

5.4.3 Innovative housing options

As noted above, various inquiry stakeholders raised ideas to implement innovative housing options, including on surplus government land. This includes suggestions for tiny houses or demountable houses on disused land and pop-up shelters in empty buildings.

Pop-up housing

The Committee received evidence from Housing All Australians (HAA), a registered charity developed to provide a private sector-led response to solving homelessness. Robert Pradolín, the Founding Board Member of HAA, explained the organisation's approach:

¹⁰⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 35.

So as the private sector, when we see a problem we develop a strategy, and we keep the strategy very, very simple. So we have developed our strategy; that is actually one page. I want to bring you through that strategy ... as part of setting the framework of what we are actually doing. But we need to do this at scale, because if you look inside the box and stay within the box you will get the same answers. We have to have a paradigm shift of quantum of housing numbers. Unless we pick a number that we want to target, we will never solve this issue of homelessness.

HAA's key measure is 'pop up housing'. The submission explains the proposal to re-purpose vacant buildings to house people experiencing homelessness while these properties are idle pending the outcome of a planning permit for redevelopment.¹⁰⁵

Under this proposal, the owner of a vacant building leases the property to a homelessness service agency for a negligible rent. This agency maintains the property as a form of transitional accommodation for persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness and pays all related utility costs. The homelessness service agency also determines the resident cohort and provides support services to them, including case management and wrap-around services.¹⁰⁶

In addition, similar to other forms of transitional accommodation, residents are prepared for exit into other forms of accommodation. Any necessary building works to modify the building and fit it out to be suitable for use as a facility to house people experiencing homelessness are provided pro-bono by private sector organisations sourced by HAA.¹⁰⁷

HAA's submission gave an example of this proposal in action. In partnership with YWCA, a homelessness service provider, HAA delivered a pop-up housing shelter in a former aged care facility for women over the age of 55 experiencing homelessness in South Melbourne:

The Lakehouse was an aged care facility owned by CaSPA Care. It had been vacant for over 2 years as CaSPA Care had built a new facility close by and the existing property was earmarked for redevelopment. A commercial lease was negotiated at a peppercorn rent and the YWCA identified as the preferred social services provider with women over 55 years identified as the best suitable cohort. The building needed an extensive makeover to make it habitable for residents and a central kitchen was created to allow the women to prepare their own meals.

Based on an existing relationship, HAA approached Metricon to assist with the building works and they were happy to get on board. Drawings were prepared, suppliers were contacted, subcontractors arrived and the works began. Metricon encouraged their staff to participate, where possible, which included a helping hand with the landscaping. While there were a number of businesses that contributed to the setup of the Lakehouse, Crowne Plaza, part of the Intercontinental Hotel Group, donated all of the bedroom furniture from their hotel which was undergoing refurbishment. Guest

¹⁰⁵ Housing All Australians Ltd, *Submission 170*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Furniture provided new lounge settings valued at over \$40,000, making the rundown aged care facility look like a new motel and the Rotary Club of Albert Park donated the bed linen and made welcome packs for the women. This culminated in the launch of Melbourne's first "pop up shelter" in July 2018 by the Minister for Housing and the Governor of Victoria. The Lakehouse is now housing over 30 women over 55 years of age, some of which were previously sleeping in cars or couch surfing.

Other than "doing the right thing", one of the unintended benefits for CaSPA Care was that their insurance costs for the building reduced as the insurance companies charge a higher premium when buildings are left empty. It ended up being a win for all parties.¹⁰⁸

HAA's submission detailed the outcomes of the Lakehouse project after one year of operation. Of the 51 women housed at the facility, 36% had secured public or community housing, 8% had secured private rentals, 33% returned to live with family or friends and 8% moved interstate or overseas.

Mr Pradolin noted that there are risks with this type of model where, for example, residents do not wish to move out when the property's lease expires or if accommodation has not been found for them:

The people that own the buildings have all sort of got the right intention, but the biggest concern is, 'How do we get people out? Our brand risk'. We have mitigating strategies, but you can never mitigate 100 per cent if someone wants to be recalcitrant and go to the papers because papers sell from sensationalism.¹⁰⁹

In addition, HAA's submission notes possible local resistance to pop-up housing proposals, but suggests that effective communication strategies can be developed as well as prioritisation of housing low-risk cohorts.¹¹⁰

Mr Pradolin told the Committee that the pop-up housing concept would benefit from various forms of government support, including financial concessions through a temporary removal of land tax for buildings that are being re-purposed. He stated:

A recommendation for the government—two recommendations: one, it does not cost you a cent. Stand next to us and say, 'What a great private sector initiative'. Look at the players that are actually helping us to achieve this. Private sector—support these guys. It costs you nothing. If you want to really incentivise some of these reluctant building owners, you can also say, 'For buildings that are available to be repurposed'—and they must be repurposed—'we will forgo land tax for the period they are occupied'.¹¹¹

Bevan Warner, the CEO of Launch Housing, was supportive of the intentions of the pop-up housing initiative, but noted some concerns with the level of support provided to residents at the facilities:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ Mr Robert Pradolin, Founding Board Member, Housing All Australians, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

¹¹⁰ Housing All Australians Ltd, *Submission 170*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ Pradolin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

I think re-using vacant buildings and floors of buildings with donated goods and services from the private sector has its place, but it is not a permanent supportive housing option. It can be part of the crisis response. We have a whole lot of unsafe, damaging rooming house, hotel and motel accommodation that we are using because there is nothing else. If we thoughtfully refurbished and staffed—so it is not just the roof alone; it is—

Who is paying for the staff to actually provide the case-management support and clinical type of support for people? And then we have to resolve service models. Is it bunk in, bunk out every night? That is pretty distressing. Is it a six-week stay? Well, what model is that? So the idea of using buildings that are not being used well and involving the generous contributions of people who want to help is good, but the question is—

What is the service model and is the Government going to pay for the services into those buildings? They should, because one of the problems with the unsafe motel and rooming house accommodation is they are high-needs people without any services. It takes a net addition of investment to make the unused buildings work.¹¹²

The Committee notes these concerns but considers that some of these issues could be managed as part of individual proposals. For example, details regarding the duration, funding and level of service provision in any pop-up housing arrangement should be as comprehensive as possible and specific to the particular cohort being housed, and there should be appropriate governance and oversight arrangements in place.

In addition, the Committee notes that the HAA's submission acknowledges that pop-up housing is not a long-term solution to homelessness. The submission states: 'Pop Up Shelters alone are not a solution. They are purely a short-term response, by the private sector, to a country with a housing crisis. We must build more housing.'¹¹³

The Committee is supportive of private sector efforts, such as the pop-up housing initiative, that seek to respond to the homelessness crisis. The re-purposing of vacant buildings for use by people experiencing homelessness, even temporarily, is a far more socially beneficial use for real estate assets that stand empty. The willingness of the private sector to provide pro bono assistance as part of the scheme should also be applauded.

The Committee is not equipped to determine whether the governance, consultation, risk management, service agreements and reporting aspects of the proposal are sufficient for the Victorian Government to offer its support. The Committee considers that the Government should engage with relevant stakeholders, such as HAA, to explore the proposal further with a view to providing its support, should the proposal meet appropriate governance requirements.

112 Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

113 Pradolín, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

RECOMMENDATION 43: That the Victorian Government engage with relevant stakeholder groups to assess how pop-up housing proposals could contribute to transitional housing options in Victoria. In conducting such an assessment, the Victorian Government should consider whether these proposals meet appropriate governance standards and the appropriateness of offering support in the form of temporary land tax concessions for organisations participating in the scheme.

Other innovative transitional housing solutions

The Committee was provided with a number of other suggestions from stakeholders regarding innovative housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness.

One such example is an initiative called Harris Transportable Housing. The project was developed by Launch Housing in collaboration with philanthropic support from Harris Capital. It involves the use of nine parcels of vacant VicRoads land in Footscray and Maidstone which have been used to place 57 transportable dwellings to house people experiencing homelessness. The project had its first tenants move in at the start of 2019.¹¹⁴

Mr Malcolm Roberts-Palmer, Senior Social Policy and Research Officer from Maribyrnong City Council discussed the Council's support for the initiative and noted its success so far:

Launch Housing developed 57 tiny houses on a VicTrack [VicRoads] land reservation in Footscray and Maidstone. That has been a success in and of itself. That was funded philanthropically, but council was able to facilitate that. So we are looking for those opportunities of where we can help and what assistance we can provide, and I think that is the same for a majority of municipalities across Melbourne.¹¹⁵

The Western Homelessness Network also supported the Harris Transportable Housing project and emphasised the importance of clients having access to their own lockable space and access to facilities.¹¹⁶

In its submission, Quantum Support Services contended that 'tiny houses' could also provide an alternative model of transitional housing. It stated:

Internationally, 'tiny home villages' have proven to be an effective response to homelessness. These tiny houses provide a transitional option for those who are experiencing or are at-risk of homelessness, and with the right support, can help them reach independence and long-term sustainable housing.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Launch Housing, *Harris transportable housing*, 2020, <<https://www.launchhousing.org.au/housingsupport/harris-transportable-housing-project>> accessed 3 December 2020.

¹¹⁵ Mr Malcolm Roberts-Palmer, Senior Social Policy and Research Officer, Maribyrnong City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ Quantum Support Services, *Submission 302*, p. 4.

The Western Homelessness Network suggested that more funding should be made available for movable units such as demountables and granny flats that would allow friends or family members of a person experiencing homelessness to accommodate the unit on their property, where there is space to do so.¹¹⁸ Such a scheme would be similar to the Kids Under Cover model discussed in section 4.4.6. Relatedly, a number of stakeholders recommended that planning scheme clauses should be amended to remove the requirement for persons living in Dependent Persons Units (DPUs), also known as secondary dwellings and which include granny flats, to be related to the occupant of the primary residence.¹¹⁹

Wombat Housing Support Services advocated for the Victorian Government to invest in diverse types of innovative housing responses, including the transportable properties discussed above, as well as tiny houses, granny flats and relocatable units for young people.¹²⁰

The Committee received a wide variety of evidence regarding innovative responses to homelessness. The Committee notes that the Victorian Government's Social Housing Growth Fund program will conduct competitive funding rounds to provide funding for some innovative housing models. The Committee considers that it is important that this funding is provided on an ongoing basis and that the Fund supports a diverse range of proposals where appropriate that will provide housing options for diverse cohorts.

5.4.4 Committee view on transitional housing

The key theme presented to the Committee throughout this inquiry is that a lack of long-term housing has created a blockage in the service pathway of Victoria's homelessness system because individuals are unable to move into long-term housing. The result is that people who are newly homeless are unable to secure places in crisis and transitional accommodation when they are in need.¹²¹

Transitional accommodation providers play an important role in helping residents to prepare for independent living. However, this work can be undermined if residents have no choice but to exit into unsuitable accommodation or homelessness. These concerns were put forward by Professor Johnson, who said:

What is most concerning to me is that here in Victoria there has never been a rigorous evaluation of our flagship programs, the transitional housing management program or the crisis accommodation program. This means that even after decades of operation we have no reliable data on the efficacy of these systems or whether they represent good value for money. What we do know about the specialist homeless service system

¹¹⁸ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ See for example, *ibid.*; Frankston City Council, *Submission 122*; City of Greater Dandenong, *Submission 199*; Safe Place, *Submission 301*; Louise Kelly, *Submission 337*; City of Casey, *Submission 410*; Seaford Housing Action Coalition, *Submission 425*.

¹²⁰ Wombat Housing Support Services, *Submission 172*, p. 9.

¹²¹ Ms Janelle Graham, Lived Experience Consultant, Berry Street Childhood Institute, public hearing, Shepparton, 11 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

is disconcerting. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that across the country six out of every 10 people experiencing homelessness that are supported by specialist homeless services are still homeless when that support ends.¹²²

Professor Johnson went on to argue that without growing the supply of affordable housing, the inflow of new people who need temporary and supported forms of transitional accommodation will exceed the number of people exiting:

With no housing for people to exit to, they stay in our system for longer or they are exited into inappropriate housing or homelessness in order for agencies to meet dubious performance indicators. Remember, this was a system designed when housing market conditions were much more benign. Over the years various governments have tried to reform the homeless service system but without growing the supply of affordable housing stock, the inflows into the system continue to exceed the outflows. This is why the numbers continue to rise and why the homeless service system remains blocked, broken and dysfunctional. In short, ending homelessness by definition requires that the outflows from homelessness exceed inflows for a period long enough to reduce the pool of currently homeless people to zero. You cannot achieve this by funding more support programs but you can by increasing the supply of affordable housing.¹²³

The solution that has been presented to the Committee is two-fold:

- To advocate for policies that lead to an increase in the availability of affordable long-term housing, including both social housing and private rental market dwellings.
- To focus on early intervention and prevention efforts to stem the number of people falling into homelessness in the first place.

As part of this solution it is hoped that a renewed focus on early intervention measures, as discussed in Chapter 4, will decrease the number of people falling into homelessness and ensure places in crisis and transitional accommodation are more readily available. While this may help to ease pressure on existing facilities, the Committee is aware that there are many cohorts with complex needs that benefit from the crucial support that transitional accommodation provides. These cohorts, once supported through transitional accommodation, have greater outcomes in terms of maintaining long-term housing and engaging in education and employment, and are less likely to re-engage with the homelessness system. It is therefore crucial to continue support for diverse forms of transitional accommodation in order to ensure that complex or high-risk cohorts can access the support they need, and to ensure that these types of facilities are responsive to emerging best practice models of care for their cohorts.

¹²² Professor Guy Johnson, Inaugural Unison Chair of Urban Housing and Homelessness, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

The Committee was told by stakeholders that the Department of Health and Human Services has engaged in a review of transitional housing in Victoria.¹²⁴ The Committee welcomes this action and considers that the Victorian Government should ensure that modelling is undertaken as part of any such review to ensure that available transitional housing is responsive to the needs of specialised cohorts that require further assistance, including in regional areas. These cohorts include, for example, Aboriginal Victorians and persons leaving institutional care.

5.5 Housing First approaches

Crisis and transitional accommodation is important, but it is not suitable for everyone. As has been discussed, crisis accommodation is first and foremost an emergency relief for people in need. It is designed to be short-term and works best where there are services to assist people to address the causes of their homelessness so they can resume independent living as quickly as possible. Similarly, transitional accommodation is time limited. It is designed to provide support to individuals so they may be able to transition to live independently in longer-term accommodation in the private rental market, or in social housing (where it is available).

The ‘Housing First’ approach emphasises that the priority in assisting persons experiencing homelessness is to first provide them with stable, ongoing housing. Once a person has permanent accommodation, support services can then be engaged to help address the root causes of homelessness. Engagement with support services is not a condition for retaining the housing. The Housing First approach differs in implementation in different jurisdictions. In some countries, such as Finland, it represents a whole of -government commitment towards ending homelessness; whereas in Australia, the approach is predominantly used as a model for particular projects or programs.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women’s Services, *Submission 278*, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?: The benefits of prioritising housing for those experiencing homelessness*, briefing paper, AHURI, Melbourne, May 2018.

BOX 5.7: John Smith

After living in different types of crisis accommodation for a few months, John was moved into transitional accommodation. John finds he feels more stability and security now and begins to focus on addressing the risk factors which made him homeless by seeking financial counselling, receiving mental health support and looking into education opportunities which could help him find suitable employment.

However, despite his increased personal security, John was unable to move into long-term housing even though he had been in transitional accommodation for more than 13 weeks. This is because no long-term housing was available for John. John is on the social housing waiting list as he does not have enough financial security to afford a property in the private rental market without additional support.

As John is not on the priority waiting list, John spends a considerable amount of time in transitional housing before long-term housing is available.

It is unclear how long John will have to wait before public housing becomes available.

How could John's situation be improved?

John would have benefited from a Housing First approach. During his time in transitional accommodation, John built the resiliency and independent living skills he needed to prevent homelessness in the future. However, his progress was stalled because of the growing bottleneck out of temporary accommodation into long-term housing.

This meant John spent longer in transitional accommodation than he should have and, without stable and ongoing housing, was restricted in moving forward with his life.

Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

The Committee heard that the Housing First model is successful for people sleeping rough and cohorts with more complex needs. These groups may need longer-term accommodation and support than can be offered in short-term crisis and transitional accommodation. This was noted by Sherri Bruinhout from DHHS:

people who have what are often persistent and enduring episodes of homelessness, who have other associated issues that drive their ability to either obtain housing or maintain that housing. Generally the people who fall into this category do really well with the Housing First approach.¹²⁶

The Committee conducted a remote public hearing in July 2020 with representatives from Finnish housing organisations to discuss the implementation of Housing First as the national homelessness policy in Finland. At this hearing, Juha Kaakinen, Chief

¹²⁶ Bruinhout, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

Executive Officer of Y-Foundation (Y-Säätiö), a large not-for-profit housing provider in Finland, explained how crisis and transitional accommodation had been dismantled in Finland:

We started to implement our understanding of Housing First, and also we started the process to change the system completely so that we would get rid of temporary accommodation in shelters and hostels as much as possible, and these things have been done. For us, Housing First means that you have your own independent rental apartment with your own rental contract and support, and these are the basic elements of Housing First. But we understood also that temporary accommodation is a rapid solution to homelessness, but it is not actually a solution to homelessness, because in our statistics people living in shelters and hostels, they are still homeless.¹²⁷

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard about some of the Housing First initiatives underway in Victoria. They are:

- the Melbourne Street to Home initiative
- Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan, which is based on a Housing First approach.

5.5.1 The Melbourne Street to Home initiative

The Melbourne Street to Home initiative was funded for three years as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. It began in 2010, with 50 participants in Melbourne, and now operates in other states and territories across Australia.¹²⁸ In an evaluation of the program, Professor Guy Johnson described how the initiative works:

The Melbourne Street to Home model is based on the Housing First approach developed in the United States, but it has some distinctive characteristics of its own. First, it explicitly targets the most vulnerable rough sleepers which means those 'at risk of premature death'. Second, it uses an assertive outreach approach to engage with rough sleepers. Third, like all Housing First approaches it focuses on the provision of permanent housing. However, some Housing First services favour congregate living arrangements, whereas Melbourne Street to Home uses a range of housing options dispersed across the community. Finally, the Melbourne Street to Home model provides clients with intensive support before they access housing and for up to 12 months after permanent housing has been secured.¹²⁹

The evaluation showed that after two years, 70% of Street to Home clients were housed and 80% of them had been housed for one year or longer. It also showed improvements in physical and mental health, with the number of participants using an emergency room falling from 42% to 18% at the end of the evaluation period. There was also a

¹²⁷ Mr Juha Kaakinen, Chief Executive Officer, Y-Foundation (Y-Säätiö), public hearing, via videoconference, 27 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Guy Johnson and Chris Chamberlain, *Evaluation of the Melbourne Street to Home Program: Final Report*, RMIT University, 2015, pp. 3, 7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

drop in the use of homelessness services with 59% of participants accessing them at the beginning of the evaluation period and only 7% accessing them by the end of the two-year period. While the evaluation did not see a significant drop in the proportion of participants using alcohol and drugs, the level of harmful use dropped.¹³⁰

The evaluation found that one of the key strengths of the program is the support provided to people experiencing homelessness. Interviews with participants showed that intensive support before and after participants secured housing was an important factor in keeping them housed over a longer period.¹³¹

The key challenge faced by the program and one that prevents it being scaled up is the lack of available long-term housing for participants to occupy. This was noted by the evaluation, which stated:

finding suitable housing for the clients is the most pressing problem. Housing options in the inner city are limited and the failure to integrate the provision of housing into the model is a major policy oversight.¹³²

5.5.2 Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

The Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan (the action plan) is aimed at assisting Victoria's rough sleepers. The action plan, which began in 2018, uses Housing First approaches to assist rough sleepers.¹³³ As noted in Chapter 2, rough sleepers are a cohort which can have complex needs and include a larger proportion of people experiencing long-term homelessness than other manifestations of homelessness.¹³⁴ For these reasons they may benefit from a Housing First approach.¹³⁵

The action plan provides a Housing First approach to assisting rough sleepers through:

- intervening early to prevent homelessness (including outreach)
- providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible
- support to maintain stable accommodation
- effective and responsive homelessness services.¹³⁶

The action plan is tailored to assist those who are recently homeless and sleeping rough, those who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time and those at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping.¹³⁷ For rough sleepers who are provided assistance through the program, the priority is a Housing First approach of rapid

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 69.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2018.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Bruinhout, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹³⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*, p. 11.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

rehousing, with flexible support to keep them in their accommodation. Figure 5.2 below outlines the levels of support provided for different cohorts of rough sleepers, based on their needs.

Figure 5.2 Services provided to rough sleepers under the Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2018, p. 12.

The Committee supports the work undertaken by the Victorian Government in relation to the action plan. The structure of the support provided to rough sleepers is in line with the evidence received about best practice responses and Housing First approaches. For example, Naomi Webb from Quantum Support Services said:

Quantum advocates for an increase in Housing First programs: moving people with really complex needs experiencing homelessness into permanent housing with flexible

and individual support for as long as needed. There is Australian and international evidence that supports this and that it can be a positive move going forward.¹³⁸

Darran Stonehouse, a lecturer from La Trobe University, explained some of the benefits of this approach:

Certainly a lot of the evidence, for example, around Housing First models is that what makes them work, particularly internationally, is that flexibility of support and also the voluntariness of that support so that people are not feeling that they are compelled to engage. Generally what the research shows is that over time, once their stability and security is established through housing, they are much more likely to actually voluntarily choose to engage and to engage in ways that work for them and are of benefit to them.¹³⁹

An audit of the action plan by the Auditor General in September 2020, titled *Victoria's Homelessness Response*, determined that the plan was failing on the key measure of provision of long-term housing. The Audit stated in the period between 1 March and 31 December, the program provided long-term accommodation to only 31 of the 429 participants.¹⁴⁰ The report noted that the lack of available long-term accommodation meant that participants were instead placed in crisis or transitional accommodation:

The audited entities report that the lack of housing options available has made it hard to apply 'housing first' principles, which are central to HRSAP. Most housing outcomes achieved for clients are transitional housing and crisis accommodation, which provides short-term respite for people who are rough sleeping.¹⁴¹

The audit also noted key failures in performance measurement, including that DHHS had not established the number of rough sleepers in the locations the program operated in. It stated that for this reason, the Department could not assess whether it was reducing incidences of rough sleeping. The audit also said the performance measures that were established were poorly defined:

DHHS did not clearly define performance standards and deliverables for HRSAP from the outset of the program. It listed inconsistent performance measures in documents that sit alongside service agreements, such as funding submission documents and activity descriptions. These inconsistencies create confusion about the level of services the agencies are funded to provide and make it hard for DHHS to conduct performance monitoring and management.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Webb, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹³⁹ Stonehouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Victoria's Homelessness Response*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 2020, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

VAGO noted that in response to the audit, DHHS has developed 'new business rules for contract management, which attempt to ensure that funded entities can understand exactly what they must deliver and is streamlining activity codes to ensure they are consistent and clear.'¹⁴³

The Victorian Government indicated to the Committee that it is undergoing a detailed evaluation of the program, which was commissioned in mid-2018 by then DHHS Secretary Kym Peake. In its questionnaire response, DHHS explained the intent of the evaluation:

an outcomes-focused evaluation of selected new homelessness programs implemented since June 2016. Three of the Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan's initiatives are in scope: assertive outreach (including flexible packages), supportive housing, and modular units.¹⁴⁴

In addition, the Committee is concerned that the action plan, the largest Housing First program in the state, is limited to rough sleepers only and not available to other cohorts with high needs. This was raised by the submission from the Council to Homeless Persons, which stated:

Research also shows that frequent service users share with people who are sleeping rough an extreme vulnerability to health, mental health, and justice interactions. These service users would benefit from the Housing First / Permanent Supportive Housing approaches for those who experience long term and recurring homelessness.¹⁴⁵

The Council to Homeless Persons recommended expanding Housing First programs to invest in additional capacity in order to support high frequency service users as well as rough sleepers.

5.5.3 Committee view on Housing First

The Committee is concerned that a lack of long-term housing options make Victoria's Housing First strategies difficult to implement. The evidence presented to the Committee shows that the model has been successful in other jurisdictions, particularly for people with complex needs. However, in Victoria, the programs that have been undertaken in recent years have struggled because of a lack of long-term housing and, in the case of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan, poorly defined goals and outcome measurement. In addition, the Committee believes that the evidence presented to the inquiry supports the need for Housing First programs to be rolled out to additional cohorts as a best practice approach to ending homelessness for these groups. Housing First programs should be rolled out across metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁵ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 37.

The importance of having long-term housing available to support Housing First approaches was discussed by Juha Kaakinen at a public hearing. Mr Kaakinen said that systemic changes were needed, and every avenue to provide long-term housing should be explored by the Government:

I think that experts around the world agree that Housing First as an individual approach is certainly the best one. But if you try to change the system by simply multiplying the individual successes, it will take a very long time. So you need to have a think about what systemic elements are needed. And I have said several times that Housing First in capital letters is not possible without having housing first in small letters. So you need to have the housing, and this seems to be the problem in many places—that people are very eager to pursue Housing First and then they realise that they do not have enough housing available. And for that reason we have used several sources to provide the housing. We have established plenty of affordable social housing, which is probably the most important. Then we have been buying flats in the private market, and then we have also built new housing. So all possible channels should be used; there is not only one source of housing that could be—if that is the issue, which seems to be—purchased depending on providing the housing.¹⁴⁶

The provision of long-term housing is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

The Committee notes the new social and affordable housing commitment of 12,000 dwellings as part of the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build will go some way to addressing the chronic shortfall of properties available for Housing First programs. The Committee believes the Government should endeavour to ensure that some of the properties are available for participants in Housing First programs, including the Melbourne Street to Home initiative and under the action plan.

FINDING 25: Victoria's Housing First programs are significantly handicapped by a lack of affordable long-term accommodation to house participants.

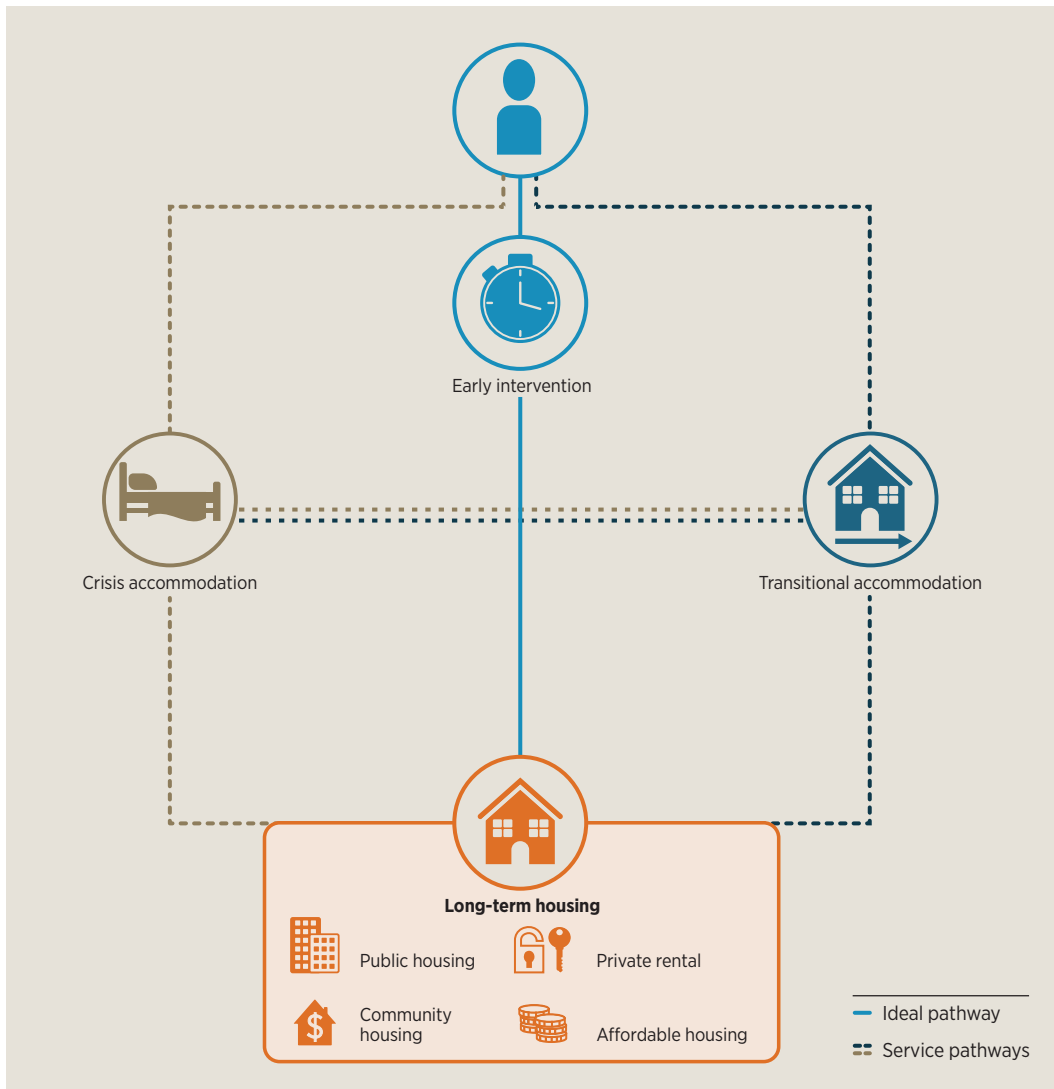
RECOMMENDATION 44: That the Victorian Government ensure there is long-term housing stock available from Victoria's Big Housing Build for participants of Housing First programs operating in metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION 45: That the Victorian Government expand Housing First programs throughout metropolitan, regional and rural areas to include further cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, in addition to rough sleepers.

¹⁴⁶ Kaakinen, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

6 Long-term accommodation

6.1 Introduction



Source: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

The provision of affordable, stable, long-term housing is key to reducing the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in Victoria.

Victoria's Big Housing Build, a social housing program discussed in section 6.3.1, is expected to produce the largest addition to social housing stock in Victoria's history. This will bring with it the opportunity to secure long-term accommodation for many disadvantaged Victorians who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. However, despite its scope, the Big Housing Build will not provide enough dwellings to meet

Victoria's social housing needs into the future, nor will it provide enough social housing to meet the continually increasing demand of those currently waiting on the Victorian Housing Register.

It is clear to the Committee that while the delivery of additional social housing is key to addressing homelessness, complementary strategies to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing across the state are required. This includes measures in the private rental market, inclusionary zoning and government financing initiatives.

In addition, the Committee believes that a long-term increase to Commonwealth income support is needed to help disadvantaged Victorians stay in the private housing market, preventing homelessness and reducing the demand for social housing.

6.1.1 Terminology

This Chapter refers to social housing, public housing and community housing. Social housing is an umbrella term used to refer to public housing and community housing, which are the two main types of social housing. Social housing is long-term rental housing for eligible Victorians on low incomes, and in particular, for certain groups such as those who have experienced family violence. Social housing is subsidised so that the amount of rent that residents pay is a proportion of their income, rather than the market price.¹

Public housing is owned and managed by the Victorian Government. It is owned by the Director of Housing and managed through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).²

Community housing is provided by non-government, not for profit providers. Community housing may be owned and managed directly by the community housing provider, or it may be owned by the Director of Housing and managed by a community housing provider.

There are a number of differences between public and community housing, including security of tenure, rent amounts and the management of tenants. These issues are discussed further in section 6.2.

1 Housing Vic, *Social housing*, 2019, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing#:~:text=Social%20housing%20is%20short%20and,public%20housing%20and%20community%20housing>> accessed 13 October 2020.

2 Ibid.

6.2 Social housing in Victoria

I am one of many “invisible” older women living in a tin shed with no facilities, because renting a home is beyond my capabilities. I get by and there are many others who do it even tougher than I do. So I consider myself lucky to have even this basic roof over my head, particularly coming into Winter. But life is still tough, and climbing out of the hole is tougher.

Source: Ms Ann Jeffree, *Submission 400*, p. 1.

The provision of social housing assists those experiencing or at risk of homelessness by providing safe, secure and affordable long-term accommodation. As discussed in Chapter 4, social housing also acts as a preventative factor against homelessness because the rent is linked to a person’s income, not the market price. This protects individuals against financial or other shocks that can lead to homelessness.

The Committee was told by many stakeholders that public housing is a fundamental component of addressing homelessness and housing insecurity in Victoria, alongside the provision of community housing. It was contended by stakeholders that both forms of social housing—public and community—need to be increased across the state. Ms Kirsty Waller, Manager, Housing Justice, a tenancy-support advocacy organisation located in the Loddon Campaspe region, discussed the importance of social housing in responding to homelessness:

Public housing is one of the most secure and supported housing options for all of the most vulnerable individuals and families in our community. Community and affordable housing are also a critical part of this mix, but community housing may not be suitable for everyone and affordable housing is in short supply and not accessible to all. We need further investment in public housing alongside community and affordable housing options in order to meet the needs of people in our community with different levels of vulnerability, support needs and personal and financial capacity.³

In its submission, the Victorian Government gave an overview of those who are likely to access social housing:

Social housing is provided for people on low or fixed incomes who need housing, especially those who have recently experienced homelessness, family violence or have other needs such as mental health, a disability or ageing. In Victoria, social housing is managed by a combination of government (public housing) and not-for-profit organisations, some of whom are specialist providers that focus on particular groups

³ Ms Kirsty Waller, Manager, Housing Justice, public hearing, via videoconference, 10 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

such as women, Aboriginal people, people with a disability, singles, or older people (community housing).⁴

Social housing is offered to individuals as a long-term, secure rental property. Unlike the private rental market, the rent is charged based on a percentage of an individual's income, which can include Commonwealth income support.⁵ The Department of Health and Human Service's *Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2019–20* describes the rental arrangement for people accessing social housing:

Rental general housing [social housing] ... includes separate houses and medium- to high-density dwellings and flats. It does not include movable units and other direct tenure stock. Eligible households may receive a rental rebate according to household income. The main client groups assisted by rental general housing are low income families, older people, single people, youth and people with disabilities.⁶

In its questionnaire to the Victorian Government, the Committee requested information on a number of matters relating to social housing in Victoria to assist its consideration of these issues. These are referenced throughout the chapter.

6.2.1 Victoria's social housing stock

As at 30 June 2020, there were 85,111 social housing dwellings in Victoria. DHHS includes some crisis and transitional accommodation in this figure, as well as Indigenous community housing.⁷

Of the 85,111 social housing dwellings in Victoria in 2020, 64,359 were public housing dwellings and 18,738 were community housing dwellings.⁸ Table 6.1 gives a breakdown of the different kinds of social housing stock.

Table 6.1 Social housing stock in Victoria in 2019–20, as at 30 June 2020

Program	2019	2020
Public housing		
Rental general stock (including leases)	63,245	62,959
Movable units	1,183	1,113
Other direct tenure ^a	411	287
Total public housing	64,839	64,359

⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 20.

⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, *Public housing*, 2020, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/public-housing>> accessed 22 December 2020; Department of Health and Human Services, *Community housing*, 2020, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/community-housing>> accessed 22 December 2020.

⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2019–20*, Victorian Government, online, 2020, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Program	2019	2020
Community housing		
Crisis supported accommodation—short term	313	316
Transitional Housing Management Program (including leases)— short term	3,605	3,609
Long-term community rental housing	14,853	14,813
Total community housing	18,771	18,738
Total Indigenous community housing^b	2,016	2,014
Total social housing	85,626	85,111

a. Other direct tenure stock may include 'crisis other' (stock awaiting demolition or sale, being temporarily used as crisis housing), community facilities, commercial tenancies, sundry rentals, rental various, rental pensioner trust fund and rental to government departments.

b. Including Director owned stock.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2019–20*, p. 10.

The Victorian Government, in its questionnaire response, provided the Committee a five-year breakdown of Victoria's housing stock as at 30 June 2019, by property type and the corresponding value (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Victoria's housing portfolio, by property type and corresponding value, June 2015–June 2019

	Director owned and managed (public housing)	Director owned, community managed	Community owned and managed	Aboriginal owned and managed	Total
As at June 2015					
Number of properties	64,811	8,910	11,123	542	85,386
Value (\$ million)	17,824	2,285	2,710	23	22,841
As at 30 June 2016					
Number of properties	64,633	8,967	12,078	558	86,236
Value (\$ million)	19,686	2,297	2,795	24	24,802
As at June 2017					
Number of properties	64,650	8,363	12,426	1,069	86,418
Value (\$ million)	20,567	2,391	2,768	232	25,958
As at June 2018					
Number of properties	64,725	7,938	12,602	1,548	86,813
Value (\$ million)	20,493	2,289	2,978	322	26,082
As at June 2019					
Number of properties	64,839	7,449	11,350	1,988	85,626
Value (\$ million)	23,442	1,176	2,917	483	28,018

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, pp. 5–6.

The above table indicates that between 2015–2019 public housing only increased by a total of 28 properties, well below the project requirements of 4500 new properties per year to keep up with the national average.

Aboriginal housing has increased by approximately 400% since 2015; a more detailed discussion on Aboriginal housing can be found in section 6.3.

In its response to the Committee’s questionnaire, DHHS provided a five-year breakdown of the change in the total amount of Director of Housing-owned housing stock. The figures showed that stock has decreased between 2001 and 2019, with consistent reductions from 2011 onwards. The Committee also requested information on reasons for significant fluctuations in housing stock but this was not provided as part of DHHS’ response to the questionnaire. Table 6.3 shows a breakdown (in five-year increments) of the change in the total amounts of Director of Housing owned stock.

Table 6.3 Total amount of Director-owned housing stock, 2001–2019 (in five-year increments)

Year	Director owned stock ^a
2001	72,509
2006	73,919
2011	74,017
2016	73,630
2019	72,288

a. Including leases and community managed annual report data.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 9.

An important component of adequate social housing stock is to ensure that a proportion of this stock is accessible for people with disability, mobility or other related issues. The Victorian Government, in its response to the Committee’s questionnaire, indicated that ‘the exact number of accessible public housing dwellings is unknown’.⁹ However, DHHS explained that:

Dwellings constructed by the department since 2000 have been designed to be accessible under its housing construction standards. It can be estimated to be a minimum of 5990 dwellings constructed since this time are accessible, while the actual number of accessible providers is likely to be higher due to on demand conversion and other works.¹⁰

⁹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Victoria's social housing is geographically spread across the state. Properties are grouped into categories of preferred areas which are established based on public transport linkages between neighbouring towns and suburbs. While a prospective tenant is unable to choose their specific property or suburb, they can nominate their preferred areas.

A breakdown of the different types of social housing dwellings in each DHHS division (Table 6.4) shows that the majority of social housing dwellings in Victoria are stand-alone houses or medium density attached dwellings.¹¹

Table 6.4 Total social housing dwellings, as at 30 June 2020

	Division				State total
	North	South	East	West	
House	5,687	5,874	4,465	6,889	22,915
Medium density attached	7,310	7,369	4,927	7,128	26,734
Medium density detached	874	569	456	695	2,594
Low-rise flat	2,191	2,314	512	1,741	6,758
High-rise flat	2,850	1,690	0	2,949	7,489
Movable unit	290	333	253	291	1,167
Multiple unit facility unit	6	92	34	14	146
Other	108	92	70	211	481
Community owned	4,348	4,436	2,601	5,442	16,827
Total dwellings	23,664	22,769	13,318	25,360	85,111

Note: Total Director owned units (including leases and other Director managed units) by dwelling type and community owned units by division.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2019–20*, pp. 21–25.

In relation to the number of rooms in each social housing dwelling, DHHS provides a breakdown as at 30 June 2020. The majority of social housing dwellings in Victoria are two- and three-bedroom properties. An analysis of the needs of applicants regarding dwelling types by bedroom is contained in section 6.2.7.

¹¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2019–20*, pp. 21–5.

Table 6.5 Director-owned units by number of bedrooms, as at 30 June 2020

	Division				State total
	North	South	East	West	
One bedroom	5,020	5,385	2,812	5,156	18,373
Two bedrooms	13,012	11,276	6,412	13,360	44,060
Three bedrooms	19,152	18,291	11,667	20,553	69,663
Four bedrooms	4,816	4,112	2,728	4,356	16,012
Five bedrooms	850	870	555	605	2,880
Six bedrooms or more	199	73	106	131	509
Total bedrooms	43,049	40,007	24,280	44,161	151,497
Total units	19,884	19,568	11,203	21,060	71,715

Note: Total Director owned units (including leases and other director-managed units) by number of bedrooms by division.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2019–20*, pp. 21–25.

The Committee discussed the importance of further investment in and commitment, constructing more social housing, -with many stakeholders. The Committee is in agreement that a fundamental component of ending the cycle of homelessness is the provision of safe, secure, stable and affordable accommodation.

I owe the housing security that I have to a ministry of housing initiative. My late partner and I had some ability and determination to take advantage of it. With greater support and backup more people could be helped through public housing programs with rent or ownership schemes. There's a need for practical advice and normal social work assistance.

Source: Ms Jillian Fryer, *Submission 261*, p. 1.

6.2.2 The Victorian Housing Register

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are eligibility requirements to apply for social housing. Applicants are placed on the Victorian Housing Register, which acts as a waiting list for both public and community housing. There are two categories:

- Priority access—for applicants with urgent housing needs who fall into one of the six specified categories.
- Register of Interest—for all other applicants that meet the eligibility criteria.

The Victorian Housing Register was introduced in 2016 to replace the Public Housing Waiting List. It aims to simplify the application process for social housing by allowing applicants to apply for both public and community housing at the same time, where

previously applicants had to make separate applications for each type of housing. Applicants often had to make different applications to different community housing organisations.¹²

The Victorian Housing Register was completed on 25 October 2019.¹³

Not all community housing providers are included in the Register. As this is a voluntary process, organisations wishing to be included must be approved by the Director of Housing and then migrate their own waiting lists onto the Register.

The Committee heard from various stakeholders that the time it takes to be allocated housing through the Victorian Housing Register continues to grow, and that applicants that are not considered a priority can spend many years waiting for housing.

BOX 6.1: Jacqueline

Jacqueline lives with her two adult children. She and one of her children have complex mental health issues which means they receive a disability pension and her son receives support through the NDIS. Jacqueline and her children have been unable to find suitable housing which properly supports their needs. Jacqueline and her children have been forced to move a significant distance away from their family and medical specialists, all of which provide important support to the family. Jacqueline and her son are unable to work, and employment for her son is unlikely to occur while they are still in the process of finding suitable accommodation because of the upheaval caused by constantly moving.

Jacqueline has been waiting for public housing for eight years but is not considered a priority applicant despite her and her son's disabilities. While they have been on the waiting list, the family has had to move six times. In her submission she described the stress and difficulties regularly moving has caused: 'Six times we have had to find the money for furniture removal and all the other costs of moving a house. Six times we have faced possible homelessness and the stress that entails until we found another place to live.'

Source: Ms Jacqueline Whittaker, *Submission 153*, p. 1.

Register of Interest

All applicants for social housing must have Australian citizenship or permanent residency as well as Victorian residency. There are also key eligibility criteria relating to a person's income and assets.

¹² Parliament of Victoria, Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the public housing renewal program*, June 2018, p. 22.

¹³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 52.

To meet the income eligibility requirements, an applicant must earn below a certain income threshold, based on their circumstances (whether the application is on behalf of an individual or family). Table 6.6 shows the income limits for the Register of Interest for different circumstances as at 1 October 2020.

Table 6.6 Income eligibility for the Register of Interest

Household type	Weekly income limit (\$)
Single person	1,048
Couple, no dependants	1,603
Family (one or two parents) with up to two dependent children	2,162
Each additional dependant	351

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Social housing eligibility*, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility>> accessed 20 December 2020.

There are also requirements regarding asset eligibility. As at October 2020, the asset limit for the Register of Interest is \$33,844.¹⁴

Priority access

There are currently six categories of eligibility for the priority access list:

- Emergency management housing—for people whose housing is no longer safe or habitable, due to an emergency.
- Priority transfers—for current social housing tenants who are at risk of homelessness because their current tenancy is no longer available and therefore require urgent relocation.
- Homeless with support—for people who are homeless or experiencing family violence and are receiving support from services.
- Supported housing—for people currently residing in unsuitable housing which requires major structural modifications or personal support to live independently because of disability or long-term health issues, or for aged care.
- Special housing needs—for people whose housing is unsuitable, and they have no other options.
- Special housing needs aged 55 years or over—people eligible for social housing who are 55 years or older and not eligible for another priority category.¹⁵

¹⁴ Housing Vic, *Social housing eligibility*, 2019, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility#eligibility-criteria>> accessed 14 October 2020.

¹⁵ Ibid.

In its questionnaire response DHHS explained that, following the implementation of the Victorian Housing Register in 2016:

tenants living in public housing that have demonstrated an urgent need for transfer to a more suitable property are prioritised, ahead of those yet to be housed in public housing, when a property becomes vacant.¹⁶

Table 6.7 outlines the income limits for the priority access categories at 1 October 2020.

Table 6.7 Income eligibility for Priority Access housing

Household type	Weekly income limit (\$)
Single person	586
Couple, no dependants	1,013
Family (one or two parents) with up to two dependent children	1,050
Each additional dependant	37

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Social housing eligibility*, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility>> accessed 20 December 2020.

The asset limit to be eligible for Priority Access housing is significantly lower than the Register of Interest, at \$13,378.¹⁷ For households that need major or full disability modifications, a higher asset limit of \$112,814 applies for both the Register of Interest and Priority Access categories.¹⁸

The Victorian Government, in its response to the Committee's questionnaire, provided information on the number of tenants relocating from public housing to other forms of housing and the reasons for the relocation (Table 6.8). Over the past 10 years the number of tenants relocating out of public housing has remained relatively static but did decrease to the lowest point in 2018–19. This suggests that pressure on the Victorian Housing Register is likely to grow due to the limited construction of new properties over the past 20 years combined with limited movement of tenants out of public housing. The Committee is hopeful that the Victorian Government's commitment to building more public housing through its Big Housing Build will ease some of this pressure but acknowledges that even this social housing commitment will not be enough to solve the issue.

¹⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Housing Vic, *Social housing eligibility*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Table 6.8 Reasons for tenants relocating from public housing into other forms of housing, 2009–10 to 2018–19

	Caravan Park	Housing association /housing provider	Relocation reason						Total
			Interstate	Nursing home	Overseas	Private rental	Property sold to tenant	Purchased own home	
2009–10	4	–	135	531	48	962	47	120	1,847
2010–11	10	–	109	541	41	861	23	91	1,676
2011–12	2	1	122	503	45	979	10	84	1,746
2012–13	8	80	139	542	46	933	8	87	1,843
2013–14	5	29	153	619	59	956	10	92	1,923
2014–15	4	17	113	562	48	957	14	111	1,846
2015–16	9	37	135	587	37	993	15	101	1,914
2016–17	5	23	124	572	43	881	4	101	1,753
2017–18	5	14	139	514	35	690	8	110	1,515
2018–19	4	21	119	553	31	604	1	84	1,417

Note: DHHS has only provided data for relocation where a reason for moving has been given, tenants who have left public housing without giving reason are not included in this table.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2012, p. 11.

Demographics of Victorian Housing Register applicants

Through its questionnaire the Committee enquired into the total number of applications on the Victorian Housing Register, including the total number of applications by category and other demographic information (i.e. number of Aboriginal Victorian applicants, age of applicants, etc.). The following section provides the data the Committee received from DHHS in its response to the questionnaire.

Table 6.9 shows the number of new Victorian Housing Register applicants for public housing, community housing or both, as at 30 June 2019.

Table 6.9 Victorian Housing Register applicants (new applications only), as at 30 June 2019

Housing provider	Number of applications	Number of household members
Public housing only	11,346	21,884
Community or public housing	30,411	55,110
Community housing only	966	1,696
Total	42,723	78,690

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 47.

Most applications on the Victorian Housing Register will be included in the Register of Interest. At 30 June 2019 20,000 applications were made for the Register of Interest, accounting for 41,853 household individuals.¹⁹ However, as discussed above, many people require immediate or special support and are instead classified as eligible for priority access. Information supplied to the Committee from DHHS showed that nearly half of all priority access applications fell under the ‘Homeless with support’ category. This was followed by those who required ‘Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over’ or ‘Special Housing Needs’. Table 6.10 shows the breakdown of applications on the Victorian Housing Register by priority application category.

Table 6.10 Victorian Housing Register applications, by application type, as at 30 June 2019

Priority category—new applications	Number of applications	Percentage
Emergency Management	2	0.0
Homeless with support	10,328	45.5
Priority Transfers	99	0.4
Priority Transfers—Property Management/Redevelopment	36	0.2
Special Housing Needs	5,420	23.9
Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over	5,888	25.9
Supported Housing	950	4.2
Total	22,723	100.0

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 50.

DHHS also provided information on the number of applicants that identified as Indigenous or where a Department of Veteran’s Affairs number was recorded on an application. At 30 June 2019, there were 3,623 Victorian Housing Register applications where the primary applicant identified as Indigenous; these applications accounted for a total of 7,421 household members.²⁰ There were 125 Victorian Housing Register applications where the primary applicant had a Department of Veteran’s Affairs number recorded; these applications accounted for a total of 167 household members.²¹

A fast-growing cohort on the Victorian Housing Register is single women aged 55 or older. At 30 June 2019, there were 4,525 new applications from single women aged 55 or older. This makes up approximately 35% of the total cohort (12,644) of applicants aged 55 or older.

The most common age bracket for applications was those aged 34–45, with 9,263 applications. Table 6.11 shows the age ranges of primary applicants to the Victorian Housing Register.

¹⁹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 47.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 48.

Table 6.11 Age range of Victorian Housing Register applicants, as at 30 June 2019

Age	Number of applicants
85 years or older	379
75<85 years	1,823
65<75 years	4,303
55<65 years	6,139
45<55 years	8,292
35<45 years	9,263
25<35 years	8,838
15<25 years	3,686
Total	42,723

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 48.

The Committee also sought information from DHHS about the preferred locations (by region) of Victorian Housing Register applicants. In its response to the Committee's questionnaire, DHHS provided a detailed breakdown of preferred locations (by region) of applications, including total number of household members per region (Table 6.12).

Table 6.12 Preferred locations (by region) of Victorian Housing Register applications, at 30 June 2019

Region	Number of applications	Number of household members
East		
Goulburn	1,619	3,199
Inner Eastern Melbourne	1,971	3,418
Outer Eastern Melbourne	1,714	3,185
Ovens Murray	1,305	2,307
North		
Hume Moreland	3,331	7,578
Loddon	1,809	3,156
Mallee	857	1,647
North Eastern Melbourne	4,074	7,642
South		
Bayside-Peninsula	5,367	8,055
Inner Gippsland	1,633	2,914
Outer Gippsland	997	1,580
Southern Melbourne	4,471	9,193

Region	Number of applications	Number of household members
West		
Barwon	2,895	4,679
Brimbank Melton	3,370	7,301
Central Highlands	1,845	2,952
Western Melbourne	4,380	7,898
Wimmera South West	1,082	1,983
Head Office	3	3
Total	42,723	78,690

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 49.

As well as taking all new applications for public or eligible community housing, the Victorian Housing Register also deals with transfer requests from current public housing or eligible community housing tenants. In its questionnaire response, DHHS provided figures on the number of transfer applications and reasons given up until 30 June 2019 (Table 6.13).

Table 6.13 Primary reasons for transfer requests on the Victorian Housing Register

Transfer applications—reason	Number of applications
Unsuitable Housing	2,185
Safety	950
Stock Utilisation	233
Property Redevelopment	208
Family Reunification	34
Uninhabitable Housing	9
Other	144
Register of Interest	3,544
Total	7,307

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 51.

6.2.3 Public housing

Public housing in Victoria is governed under the *Housing Act 1983* (Vic), which includes in its objectives, ‘to ensure that every person in Victoria has adequate and appropriate housing at a price within his or her means’, which can be achieved in part by ‘the provision of well maintained public housing of suitable quality and location’.²²

²² *Housing Act 1983* (Vic) s 6.

Public housing is the most common form of social housing in Victoria. In 2018–19, public housing made up 76% of the total number of approximately 85,000 social housing properties.²³ The rent charged for public housing is no more than 25% of an individual's income. This is generally a lower proportion of income than in community housing, which is usually between 25% to 30% of a family's combined gross income.²⁴ In addition, there is generally stronger security of tenure for those in public housing.²⁵ Residents of public housing enter into a lease with the Director of Housing as their landlord under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic), which outlines the means by which they may be given a notice to vacate. Such reasons include drug use or committing a prescribed indictable offence.²⁶

Ms Katelyn Butterss, Manager, Policy and Communications at the Victorian Public Tenants Association, described the importance of public housing as a means to provide secure long-term accommodation for those with the greatest need:

public housing is the form of tenure that is best suited to addressing homelessness, and this is largely due to differences in allocation rules and around setting policies. Public housing allocations must always be made to the person highest on the priority list that has the greatest need for whom the property is suitable. If that applicant for whatever reason does not accept the property or cannot be contacted, the property would then be offered to the person with the next greatest need for whom the property is suitable. This ensures that those with the most urgent of needs are placed as soon as possible.²⁷

This differs from community housing in that community housing providers are not always required to prioritise applicants with the greatest need.

BOX 6.2: Sian

Sian lives in public housing in Victoria. When she was 62, her son was diagnosed with terminal cancer and she moved from her home in northern NSW to Melbourne to care for him. After her son passed away, Sian faced the issues of finding housing. She was permitted to stay in her son's public housing property which was then transferred to her. Sian states, 'If not for that I could easily have become homeless myself, just an additional statistic in the growing number of homeless elderly women.'

Sian would like to see increased access to safe, secure housing: 'From my own experience I can tell you of the enormous sense of relief it brings.'

Source: Sian Priya Woolston, *Submission 406*, p. 1.

²³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 20.

²⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Community housing*.

²⁵ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 3.

²⁶ *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) s 250A and B.

²⁷ Ms Katelyn Butterss, Manager, Policy and Communications, Victorian Public Tenants Association, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

6.2.4 Community housing

Unlike in public housing, community housing tenants are eligible to receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance to assist with rental payments.²⁸ Public housing tenants are not eligible because they already receive rental subsidies from Commonwealth funding.²⁹

Community housing is managed by not-for profit organisations, who are regulated by the Victorian Housing Registrar.³⁰ However, the Victorian Government does regulate long term community housing stock which has been leased to agencies. At the time of writing, there were 20,787 dwellings managed by the community housing sector.³¹

Community housing providers may include specialist providers that focus on particular groups such as women, Aboriginal Victorians, people with a disability, singles or older people.³² The cost of rent as a proportion of the tenant's income may sometimes be higher in community housing, at up to 30% of a family's combined gross income.³³

Community housing providers also have more agency in how they choose their tenants, although this has changed in recent years.³⁴ Under the Victorian Government's housing policy, *Homes for Victorians*, community housing providers that 'opt in' to inclusion on the Victorian Housing Register are required to prioritise high-needs applicants for a proportion of their housing stock. The policy states:

participating organisations will need to allocate at least 75 per cent of their social housing vacancies to priority applicants on the register, noting this will be a condition of eligibility for participation in the new social housing funding initiatives outlined in *Homes for Victorians*.³⁵

In its response to the questionnaire, DHHS explained that 34 community housing organisations so far have been approved as Participating Registered Agencies. To ensure that these agencies' existing waiting lists were suitable to the eligibility requirements of the Victorian Housing Register, DHHS 'reviewed to ensure that all applications were current, eligible and were not duplicates of existing applications on the Register'.³⁶

28 Services Australia, *Rent assistance: Who can get it*, 2020, <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/rent-assistance/who-can-get-it>> accessed 14 January 2020.

29 Housing Vic, *Commonwealth Rent Assistance*, 2018, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/commonwealth-rent-assistance>> accessed 18 January 2021.

30 Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 3.

31 Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 18.

32 Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 16.

33 Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 3.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

35 Victorian Government, *Homes for Victorians: Affordability, access and choice*, Melbourne, 2017, p. 35.

36 Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 52.

6.2.5 Increased reliance on community housing

The Committee received evidence on various challenges around the current management and operation of social housing in Victoria. One key theme is that there has been limited construction or acquisition of new public housing in recent years alongside increased transfers of public housing to community housing providers. This is increasing the reliance on community housing as a source of long-term housing for persons at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness while slowly decreasing the reliance on public housing.

Community housing is widely used across Victoria to accommodate disadvantaged Victorians who are not able to participate in the private housing market. As discussed above, it plays a critical role in supporting the diverse needs of Victorians and often includes forms of wrap-around support. However, some stakeholders questioned the ability of community housing to act as a broad-based solution to housing those with complex needs in the same way as public housing. For example, the Victorian Public Tenants Association stated that the financial and regulatory model of community housing means they need to ensure they remain financially viable, and may therefore be less able to take on tenants on very low incomes:

The financial and regulatory model of the community housing sector renders it fundamentally incapable of addressing homelessness.

The Victorian Housing Registrar requires that community housing providers remain financially viable. In order to maintain financial viability, community housing providers are limited in the amount of people they can house who receive an Allowance payment as their main source of income – such as; Sickness Allowance, Youth Allowance (either Student or Other), Special Benefit or Newstart.

This is because rent is usually charged as a proportion of household income, and the low level of these payments do not generate sufficiently high enough rents for the provider to balance their books sustainably.³⁷

The submission added that these regulatory requirements can result in evictions for those who are in rent arrears and that such evictions may be more common than those in public housing:

Most community housing providers do not have the same financial capacity as the State Government and rely much more directly on rental income for their operations. As a result, they cannot afford to be as tolerant landlords as the Government. This means that when a person who lives in community housing falls in to rent arrears, their landlord is less able to work with them in order to re-establish payment and may need to move through the evictions process significantly quicker.³⁸

³⁷ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

A number of stakeholders raised concerns about the increase in sales or transfers of public housing dwellings to community housing in recent years. The Save Public Housing Collective stated that ‘Victoria has engaged in a sustained process of public housing stock and management transfer to the community housing sector and has been actively privatising public housing for a number of years’. They noted that since 2016–17, the state has transferred more public housing dwellings to the community housing sector than any other Australian jurisdiction, other than South Australia.³⁹ Jeremy Dixon and Fiona Ross, in their joint submission to the inquiry, contended that public housing is a ‘healthy restraint on the cost of the high private rental market’ and that the process of transferring properties to community housing has had ‘little to no public discussion’.⁴⁰ Fair Go for Pensioners (FGFP) Coalition Victoria Incorporated stated that Victorian public housing ‘has been in decline for years as governments ‘wriggle out of their responsibility’ supporting the growth of community housing rather than public housing’.⁴¹

A 2017 audit of the management of Victoria’s public housing by the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) noted that a key focus of *Homes for Victorians* is ‘growing the community housing sector’, including by transferring 4,000 public housing properties to the community housing sector.⁴² The report considered that while the requirement for community housing providers to prioritise 75% of available stock to applicants with the highest needs could be beneficial, it ‘could potentially constrain rental revenues and put the sector’s financial viability at risk’.⁴³

However, in its questionnaire response, DHHS indicated that community housing agencies only manage approximately 3,500 Director of Housing dwellings under five-year lease arrangements. Furthermore, DHHS stated that ‘the quantity of properties managed under this arrangement has not changed over the past five years’.⁴⁴ It is unclear whether the Victorian Government is still intending to transfer 4,000 public housing properties to the community housing sector on a long-term basis as outlined in its *Homes for Victorians* policy.

The Committee sought further information from the Victorian Government in its questionnaire on the findings of any recent modelling undertaken regarding the financial implications for community housing organisations of the 75% allocation requirement. In response, DHHS explained that:

Analysis of this nature has not yet been completed. Many registered housing agencies opted in to the VHR during 2019, and as such the end of 2019/20 marks the first full year of participating agencies using the VHR to housing allocations to vacant dwellings.⁴⁵

³⁹ Save Public Housing Collective, *Submission 91*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Mr Jeremy Dixon and Ms Fiona Ross, Friends of Public Housing Victoria, *Submission 244*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Fair Go for Pensioners Coalition Victoria Incorporated, *Submission 277*, p. 3.

⁴² Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, *Managing Victoria’s Public Housing*, VAGO, Melbourne, 2017, p. 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Appendix C includes the Victorian Government's entire response to the Committee's questionnaire.

In its submission, the Southern Homelessness Services Network stated that the community housing funding model is not currently able to sustain housing people on very low incomes without additional support:

Community housing providers often have very strong relationships with local support agencies and work to strengthen local communities and are required to take 75% of their tenants from the Victorian Housing Register. However, the community housing funding model is not sustainable for housing people on very low incomes and requires subsidies to ensure it can house larger numbers of people on the lowest incomes. Increasing the amount of community housing and subsidising community housing providers to meet the housing needs of the lowest income groups would go some way towards ameliorating the homelessness situation.⁴⁶

The Committee is aware that both public and community housing play important roles in housing Victorians who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. However, continued supply of sustainable public housing is necessary to complement the diverse types of community housing available to those on the Victorian Housing Register. While the Big Housing Build, discussed in detail at 6.3.1, will see a significant and much-needed increase in social housing across the state, there is little available information on the breakdown of new public housing in comparison with new community housing. The policy document, *Victoria's Big Housing Build*, provides that \$498 million will be used to maintain, refurbish, repair and build new public housing,⁴⁷ with \$300 million of this new funding.⁴⁸ However, it is unclear as to how many of the 12,000 projected new social housing dwellings, from the total \$5.3 billion fund, will be public housing dwellings.

6.2.6 Demand for social housing

The Victorian Housing Register is a key measure of the demand for social housing in Victoria. As at September 2020, there were 48,529 applicants on the Register. This includes 25,827 on the priority access stream and 22,702 applicants in the general register.⁴⁹ In addition, there were 7,931 applicants on the waiting list to transfer their social housing dwelling to another property.⁵⁰

Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, noted that applications are not reflective of the total number of persons on the waiting list as many applications may include families.

⁴⁶ Southern Homelessness Services Network, *Submission 136*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Homes Victoria, *Victoria's Big Housing Build*, 2020, <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/hv_more_homes_for_more_Victorians_0.pdf> accessed 12 February 2021.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victorian Housing Register and transfer list: Total number of social housing applicants on the Victorian Housing Register - September 2020*, 2020, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register>> accessed 18 December 2020.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

He estimated that the total number of current applications amounted to around 80,000 individuals.⁵¹ Table 6.14 provides an overview.

Table 6.14 Total number of social housing applications on the Victorian Housing Register, as at December 2020

	Number of applications
Priority access	26,562
Register of interest	23,082
Total	49,644

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Victorian Housing Register and transfer list, Total number of social housing applicants on the Victorian Housing Register - December 2020*, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register>> accessed 17 February 2021.

The Victorian Public Tenants Association's submission states that the register typically sees growth of about 500 applicants per month.⁵² However, the total number of applications increased from 45,698 applications in the June quarter to 49,644 applicants in the December quarter 2020 which represents approximately double the average figure provided by the Association.⁵³

The Victorian Public Tenants Association wrote in their submission that the Victorian Housing Register may underestimate the actual demand for social housing in the community. They noted that many who are eligible do not apply due to community understanding of how long it would likely take to be housed:

The Victorian Housing Register in and of itself, however, is not a reliable indicator of the actual demand for subsidised housing in the State. It is simply an organised list of the individuals and families that have applied. Many more who are eligible, have not applied. Often this is due to a belief that the chances of being housed are so remote, completing the application is wasted effort, or a wish to avoid the stigma associated with living in a social housing property.⁵⁴

The proportion of social housing in Victoria as a percentage of total dwellings has been declining for a number of years. The submission from the Municipal Association of Victoria stated that it had dropped from 3.85% in 2010–11 to 3.42% in 2019–20.⁵⁵

This proportion of social housing is currently the lowest as a proportion of total housing in Australia, with the national average at approximately 4.5%. This was illustrated in the submission from the Grattan Institute, which showed that in 2016, Victoria's share of social housing stock as a percentage of total housing stock was the lowest in the country.

⁵¹ Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, Department of Health and Human Services, public hearing, via videoconference, 9 September 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

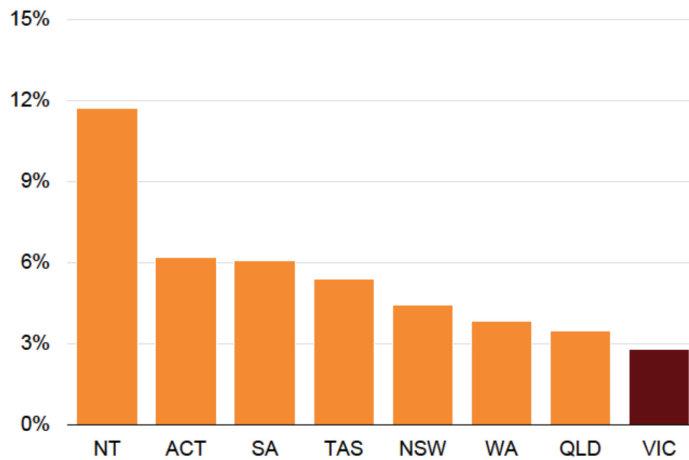
⁵² Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 8.

⁵³ Department of Health and Human Services, *Victorian Housing Register and transfer list*.

⁵⁴ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 142*, p. 13.

Figure 6.1 Victoria’s share of social housing stock as a percentage of total housing stock, 2016



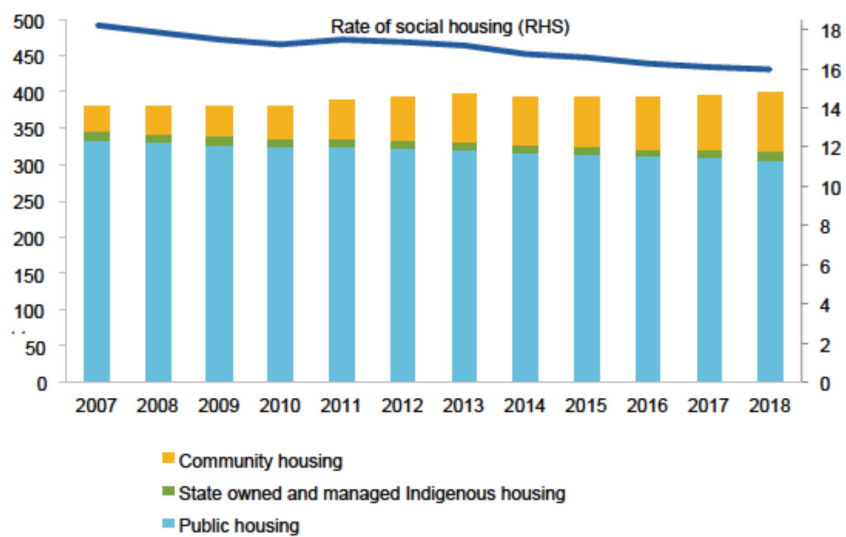
Notes: Social housing dwellings are those dwellings rented from a 'state or territory housing authority' or a 'housing co-operative, community or church group'. The total housing stock is defined as the number of occupied private dwellings.

Source: Grattan analysis of ABS (2016).

Source: Grattan Institute, *Submission 307*, p. 10.

The submission from DHHS acknowledged Victoria’s low proportion of social housing in comparison to other Australian jurisdictions. It stated that while there has been overall growth in the amount of social housing in Victoria, population growth has outstripped it, leading to a relative decline.⁵⁶ The submission provided a graph, displayed at Figure 6.2, which showed that there has been overall national decline in the proportion of social housing dwellings relative to the population.

Figure 6.2 National households in social housing: number and rate per 1000 of the population, 2007–2018



Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p.15.

⁵⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 15.

Having the lowest proportion of public and community housing in the nation, means that Victorians excluded from the private market have significant trouble accessing social housing. The Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement notes that ‘Approximately 1,700 additional social housing dwellings will be required in Victoria each year for the next two decades, if social housing levels are to keep pace with overall housing growth’.⁵⁷ If Victoria were to reach the social housing national average of 4.5% of total housing, VAGO noted in its 2017 audit, *Managing Victoria’s Public Housing*, that a 2016 report commissioned by the Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Taskforce estimated that this would require ‘up to 3,400 new social housing dwellings per year until 2036’.⁵⁸

FINDING 26: For Victoria to reach the national social housing average (4.5% of total housing stock), it would need to build up to 3,400 new social housing dwellings per year until 2036. This is double the amount noted to be needed just to keep pace with overall housing growth in the Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

6.2.7 Stock requirements

The Committee heard that much of Victoria’s existing stock of public housing was built in the decades following World War II, at which time the average cohort of people accessing it tended to be families. As a result, most of the current dwellings are two- and three-bedroom properties. The Council to Homeless Persons stated in their submission:

Approximately 60 per cent of Victoria’s public housing was built prior to 1990, with much of it built prior to 1960. This stock was built to match the housing needs of public housing applicants at the time; predominantly low- and middle- income families and returned servicemen. These families typically required large family homes, and two and three bedroom homes remain the predominant built form of Victoria’s public housing stock.⁵⁹

A policy brief by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), *Public Housing Renewal and Social Mix*, which addresses social housing nationally, noted the historic origins of much of the existing social housing stock. It stated that myriad social and economic changes since this time mean that a new approach is needed to ensure social housing stock is fit for purpose for today’s tenants:

Under a rallying cry of ‘homes fit for heroes’, government building of public housing accelerated after the Second World War. This met multiple objectives of stimulating

⁵⁷ Council on Federal Financial Relations, National Housing and Homelessness Agreement: Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria, <https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/housing_homelessness_agreement.aspx> accessed 12 February 2021, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, *Managing Victoria’s Public Housing*, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 19.

housing supply, alleviating inner urban slums, housing a growing migrant population and providing a workforce for growing manufacturing industries on the urban fringe. Much public housing stock, built in the 1950s and 1960s, was designed to accommodate working families in three bedroom houses (56% of the public housing stock was three bedroom houses in 1981). By 2017, this stock is reaching the end of its asset life as maintenance costs become excessive. Expenditure on maintenance rose by 30 per cent in the period 2001 to 2006, double the rate of the previous 5 years. As well, with public housing now focussed on housing those with the greatest needs rather than low-income working families, the stock is not fit for today's tenants who are more likely to be single person households (57% of public housing households). Consequently, 16 per cent of public housing dwellings were underutilized in 2016, that is, there were two or more bedrooms than there were residents.⁶⁰

Mr Darran Stonehouse, a Lecturer in Social Work at La Trobe University, similarly noted that the public housing stock in North East Victoria was designed for families, and that individuals wishing to access housing have difficulty accessing properties that suit their needs. He said, 'The option of public and social housing is very limited because most of the properties in this region are geared towards families—so they are three-bedroom properties.'⁶¹

The changing needs of those seeking support in accessing housing were captured in a Victorian context in the submission from DHHS, which stated that the vast majority of people on the Victorian Housing Register (over 80%) are applicants for 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings, but that less than 60% of existing stock is suitable for their needs. This includes applicants in regional and rural Victoria:

Reflecting trends in the wider community, demand for social housing has also shifted towards smaller households, requiring smaller homes. Approximately 80 per cent of applicants on the Victorian Housing Register need one- or two-bedroom properties, which make up less than 60 per cent of existing public housing stock.⁶²

In its response to the Committee's questionnaire, DHHS provided a profile of Victorian public housing stock, including the number of properties per bedroom number and dwelling type. The Department's data showed that 1- and 2-bedroom properties make up a smaller portion of public housing stock comparatively to larger properties (i.e. dwellings with three or more bedrooms). Table 6.15 has been taken from DHHS' questionnaire response.

⁶⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Public housing renewal and social mix*, policy brief, AHURI, Melbourne, August 2020.

⁶¹ Mr Darran Stonehouse, Lecturer, Social Work, La Trobe University, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

⁶² Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 15.

Table 6.15 Stock profile for Victorian public housing, number of properties per bedroom number and dwelling type

Dwelling	Number of bedrooms								Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Dwelling attached to a shop	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
High-rise flat	247	1,803	3,409	1,985	18	1	9	-	7,472
House	5	93	1,966	16,557	2,662	344	115	15	21,757
Low-rise flat	313	2,602	2,781	1,032	9	-	1	-	6,738
Medium density attached	107	10,814	10,536	3,097	221	10	1	-	24,786
Medium density detached	6	600	1,330	436	20	-	-	-	2,392
Movable Unit	-	1,108	77	-	-	-	-	-	1,185
Other	46	154	122	49	87	37	12	1	508
Total	724	17,174	20,222	23,156	3,017	392	138	16	64,836

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 7.

It is clear to the Committee that more 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings need to be added to Victoria's social housing stock to reflect modern needs. The addition of these size dwellings will help to ensure that stock is appropriately allocated and individuals or couples do not inefficiently occupy 3- or 4-bedroom dwellings that they may not need.

In addition, the construction of much of Victoria's public housing stock prior to the 1990s means that it is rapidly ageing and accruing increasing maintenance costs. In its 2017 audit of the management of public housing in Victoria, VAGO concluded:

the average age of Victoria's public housing stock is 35 years. In total, 60 per cent of public housing stock is now over 30 years old, compared to 42 per cent at the time of the 2012 audit. While it is clear that Victoria's public housing stock is ageing, DHHS lacks data to reliably assess the condition of its stock, and consequently whether it is deteriorating at a rate faster than it is ageing.⁶³

The Committee notes VAGO's finding that the Victorian Government lacks data to enable it to reliably assess the condition of housing stock.

DHHS' questionnaire response also provided a breakdown of the age of public housing dwellings by number of bedrooms (Table 6.16). The information provided shows that there has been a slow shift towards smaller properties to reflect the growing demand for 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings. However, in the last 20 years there has been a decrease in housing stock growth with less properties being procured. The Committee has highlighted the most predominant dwelling size for each 10-year increment.

⁶³ Victorian Auditor General's Office, *Managing Victoria's Public Housing*, p. ix.

Table 6.16 Age of public housing dwellings (in 10-year increments), by number of bedrooms

Age of Dwelling	Number of bedrooms								Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
0-10 years	5	1,141	2,077	527	289	119	12	1	4,171
11-20 years	8	1,449	1,980	771	781	139	80	10	5,218
21-30 years	52	5,698	4,540	2,657	498	59	21	3	13,528
31-40 years	127	4,005	3,581	9,361	881	42	7	-	18,004
41-50 years	254	2,650	2,889	4,481	330	17	4	-	10,625
51-60 years	266	1,520	1,768	2,554	86	5	11	-	6,210
61-70 years	8	511	2,830	2,249	42	4	2	-	5,646
over 70 years	4	153	374	522	79	7	1	1	1,141
Unknown— leased property	-	47	183	34	31	-	-	1	296
Total	724	17,174	20,222	23,156	3,017	392	138	16	64,839

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, supplementary evidence received 27 January 2021, p. 9.

Victoria's Big Housing Build presents an opportunity to ensure that social housing stock more appropriately meets demand, including through the addition of further 1- and 2-bedroom properties. The Committee considers that in the planning of the Big Housing Build, the Victorian Government must conduct comprehensive modelling regarding the current and projected number of dwellings of this size needed to meet the needs of applicants on the Victorian Housing Register.

The Victorian Government has acknowledged the need for 1- and 2-bedroom properties. In its response to the questionnaire, DHHS explained that the Department's Strategic Asset Planning unit has identified key supply directions for Victoria's social housing stock, including a need for 'significant growth in 1- and 2- bedroom dwellings':

The unit has identified four key supply directions to reshape the current social housing asset portfolio to that required now and into the future. These are:

- Significant growth in 1- and 2- bedroom dwellings
- Reduce under-utilisation of 3+ bedroom dwellings
- Renewal of 3-bedroom dwellings. This can be on site or in an Area of higher demand for larger homes
- Increase the supply of 4+ bedroom dwellings in locations where large households are growing and waiting times are above the state average.

The analysis undertaken by the Department provides the basis for investment decisions and provisioning of social housing across Victoria to ensure the portfolio is reshaped to meet the demand profile of Victorians in need of social housing.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Response to Questionnaire*, p. 15.

RECOMMENDATION 46: That the Victorian Government, in alignment with its own findings, ensure that social housing dwellings are reflective of the current and projected needs of applicants on the Victorian Housing Register, including by ensuring an adequate proportion of dwellings are 1- and 2-bedroom properties.

6.3 Government funding initiatives

There are a broad range of programs aimed at increasing the provision of long-term housing in Victoria, including both social and affordable housing. Many of these initiatives fall under *Homes for Victorians*, Victoria's statewide housing policy that commenced in 2017.

More recently, the Big Housing Build, which was announced in late 2020, is predicted to increase Victoria's total housing stock by 10% over the next four years. This will deliver a much-needed addition to the total number of social housing dwellings in Victoria. However, this unprecedented building program will still not meet the current or projected demand for social housing in Victoria.

The following sections provide an overview of the Big Housing Build and selected initiatives established by *Homes for Victorians*: the Social Housing Growth Fund and financing for the community housing sector. Information about other smaller programs to fund long-term housing can be found on the HousingVic or DHHS websites.

6.3.1 Victoria's Big Housing Build

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of stakeholders argued that the Victorian Government should invest in social housing to stimulate the economy and provide housing for disadvantaged Victorians. Ms Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons, argued that the pandemic could lead to increased levels of homelessness and that the Government has been presented with a uniquely important opportunity to re-examine Victoria's social housing commitments:

This dearth of social housing combined with the pre COVID-19 level of the JobSeeker payment and combined with reduced protection for renters means homelessness. That is the recipe for homelessness. So I think we are at a crossroads in our community. When this health crisis is over, or starts to taper off, are we going to turf these people back into our winter streets? We have a choice. Housing construction is a well-understood economic stimulus. We have seen the Government's announcement this week in relation to repairs and maintenance funding. That is a fabulous start, but as we begin to look at Victoria's economic recovery I urge every Victorian parliamentarian to act. Now is the time to renovate, now is the time to repurpose, now is the time to build the social housing stock that more than ever we so desperately need.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ms Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

This case was similarly argued by others, including a coalition of Victoria's key homelessness stakeholders called the Housing Peaks Alliance.⁶⁶ A paper by the organisation titled, *Make Social Housing Work: A Framework for Victoria's Public and Community Housing 2020 – 2030*, put forward the case for the construction of 6,000 social housing dwellings every year for the next 10 years to achieve the national average of social housing of 4.5% of total dwellings.⁶⁷ In addition, a survey of 49 leading Australian economists by the Economic Society of Australia in October 2020 called for investment in social housing in order to boost the economy over the next two years.⁶⁸

In November 2020, the Victorian Government announced that it would undertake what it has described as 'the largest social housing building program in the state's history'. The building program, the Big Housing Build, allocates more than \$5.3 billion to build over 12,000 new dwellings across Victoria. Over 9,300 of these new homes will be social housing properties and 2,900 will be affordable and market-priced homes for first home buyers and renters. The 9,300 new social housing dwellings represents a 10% increase in Victoria's social housing stock. To oversee the build, a new agency, Homes Victoria, has been established.⁶⁹

The Committee welcomes this exceptional commitment to increase Victoria's social housing stock. The overwhelming weight of evidence received by the Committee is that more long-term affordable housing is needed to tackle homelessness and the Big Housing Build will go towards responding to this issue. However, despite the unprecedented size of the program, this will still not ensure that Victoria will meet the national average of social housing as a percentage of total dwellings, at 4.5%. In addition, it remains to be seen what proportion of the over 80,000⁷⁰ individuals on the social housing waiting list will be housed in the new dwellings.

The Victorian Government has outlined the following features of the program.

New social housing dwellings on existing public housing sites

The program will allocate \$532 million to build 500 new social housing dwellings through public housing renewal projects. There will also be 540 new affordable and market properties built at these sites.⁷¹ There are a number of projects already underway:

- Markham Avenue, Ashburton
- Dunlop Avenue, Ascot Vale

⁶⁶ The Housing Peaks Alliance is comprised of Aboriginal Housing Victoria, the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, the Council to Homeless Persons, Domestic Violence Victoria, Justice Connect, Tenants Victoria, the Victorian Public Tenants Association and the Victorian Council of Social Service (Source: Housing Peaks Alliance, *Make Social Housing Work: A framework for Victoria's public and community housing 2020–2030*, Online, 2020, p. 8.)

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Peter Martin, 'October Budget 2020 - preferred four programs: Top Economists Back Boosts to Jobseeker And Social Housing Over Tax Cuts In Pre-Budget Poll', *The Economic Society of Australia*, 27 September 2020, <<https://esacentral.org.au/latest-news-item/40761/october-budget-2020-preferred-four-programs>> accessed 16 January 2020.

⁶⁹ Victorian Government, *Victoria's big housing build*, Online, November 2020, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Mr Ben Rimmer, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

⁷¹ Victorian Government, *Victoria's big housing build*, p. 6.

- Bills Street, Hawthorn
- Tarakan Street, West Heidelberg
- Victoria Street, Flemington
- Elizabeth Street, North Richmond.⁷²

The Committee notes that the renewal sites in Hawthorn, Ascot Vale and West Heidelberg commenced in 2017 as part of the Victorian Government's Public Housing Renewal Program. This program was the subject of a report of this Committee in the 58th Parliament.⁷³ These sites have now been repackaged as 'fast start projects' as part of the Big Housing Build, and the new project websites make no mention of the previous development work and timeline that took place under the Public Housing Renewal Program. It is unclear whether the Public Housing Renewal Program is now obsolete.

Other construction initiatives and purchase of existing residential properties

The Victorian Government have identified local government areas which require more housing to cope with demand. Policy documents indicate that these local councils will be approached for information about projects that are construction ready or underway. Once assessed, funding may be provided for these projects. These municipalities have been identified as priority local government areas:

- Ballarat
- Boroondara
- Brimbank
- Bendigo
- Cardinia
- Casey
- Darebin
- Greater Geelong
- Hume
- Macedon Ranges
- Maribyrnong
- Maroondah
- Melton

⁷² Ibid., p. 10.

⁷³ Parliament of Victoria, Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the public housing renewal program*, p. 4.

- Mitchell
- Moorabool
- Moreland
- Port Phillip
- Shepparton
- Whitehorse
- Whittlesea
- Wyndham.⁷⁴

In addition to the construction of new dwellings, purchases of existing residential properties across Victoria will be made. This will provide 1,200 new social housing properties and 200 new affordable properties at a total cost of \$948 million.⁷⁵

Partnerships with the community housing sector and the private sector

The Victorian Government will enter into partnerships with the community housing sector and private sector to provide new social housing and affordable dwellings.

Part of this will involve the use of an Expanded Social Housing Growth Fund, which is discussed further in section 6.3.2. The Fund will make available \$1.38 billion in funding rounds for housing projects led by community housing providers. This initiative is expected to deliver up to 4,200 new dwellings.⁷⁶

The Victorian Government will explore opportunities to build social and affordable housing on surplus government land, in partnership with the private sector, community housing organisations, local government and institutional investors. A total of \$2.14 billion has been allocated to this initiative and it is expected to deliver up to 5,200 new dwellings.⁷⁷

Outcomes of the Big Housing Build

Starting in 2020–21, an estimated 12,000 dwellings will be built by 2023–24.

This includes:

- 1,100 dwellings in 2020–21
- 5,000 dwellings in 2021–22
- 5,000 dwellings in 2022–23
- 1,200 dwellings in 2023–24.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Victorian Government, *Victoria's big housing build*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

The Victorian Government estimates that the initiative will create approximately 40,000 jobs over the next four years across Victoria. Commencement of particular projects and job creation will be dependent on the construction market conditions and private demand for housing.⁷⁹

A proportion of the new dwellings will be prioritised for particular groups who are in need of social housing. This includes specific housing for:

- 2,000 people experiencing mental illness
- 1,000 people experiencing family violence
- Aboriginal Victorians, with 10% of the total new social housing properties available through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as well as mainstream housing providers.⁸⁰

In addition, \$498 million has been earmarked to maintain, refurbish, repair and rebuild public housing in Victoria.

Funding for the Big Housing Build includes guaranteed minimum investment for regional Victoria, with 25% (\$1.25 billion) of the funding for the program being invested into regional areas. The roll out of the Big Housing Build into regional Victoria provides a Minimum Investment Commitment to regional local government areas that include a significant city or town or have high population growth.⁸¹

At the time of writing, 18 regional local government areas were identified for the Minimum Investment Guarantee (Table 6.17). \$765 million has been committed across these areas, with a further \$485 million not yet committed.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁸¹ Victorian Government, *Regional Investment: Guaranteed minimum investment for regional Victoria*, 2020, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/regional-investment>> accessed 27 January 2021.

⁸² Ibid.

Table 6.17 Guaranteed minimum investment for regional local government areas, Big Housing Build

Local government area	Guaranteed minimum investment (\$ million)
Ballarat	80
Bass Coast	25
Baw Baw	35
Horsham	15
Golden Plains	15
Greater Bendigo	85
Greater Geelong	180
Greater Shepparton	45
Latrobe	60
Macedon Ranges	30
Mildura	40
Mitchell	25
Moorabool	20
Surf Coast	20
Swan Hill	15
Wangaratta	20
Warrnambool	25
Wodonga	30
Total	765

Source: Victorian Government, *Regional Investment: Guaranteed minimum investment for regional Victoria*, 2020, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/regional-investment>> accessed 27 January 2021.

How the Big Housing Build will impact the social housing waiting list

The creation of 9,300 new dwellings will increase Victoria's current social housing stock of 85,111 by less than 10%.

The Committee notes that if the additional 9,300 dwellings were built today, it would still only reduce Victoria's current social housing waiting list from 48,529 applications to 39,229 applications (dependent on dwelling size and applicant requirements). Evidence to the Committee from the Victorian Public Tenants Association estimated that the number of people on the list grows by 500 applicants per month.⁸³ This could mean that the additional 9,300 dwellings will have even less impact on the social housing waiting list by the time of their completion in 2024.⁸⁴

⁸³ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 168*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ Victorian Government, *Victoria's big housing build*, p. 3.

6.3.2 Homes for Victorians

Homes for Victorians is the Victorian Government's statewide housing policy, which was introduced in 2017. It aims to provide a whole-of-government response to 'give every Victorian every opportunity to find a home' in partnership with Commonwealth and local governments, as well as the community social housing sector, and the development and construction industries.⁸⁵

Homes for Victorians has five key initiatives with particular programs and funds included:

- supporting people to buy their own home
- increasing the supply of housing through faster planning
- promoting stability and affordability for renters
- increasing and renewing social housing stock
- improving housing services for Victorians in need.⁸⁶

In order to increase and renew social housing stock, *Homes for Victorians* specifies a number of initiatives:

- Victorian Social Housing Growth Fund—\$1 billion capital fund for social housing development.
- Building more social housing and redeveloping ageing supply—redeveloping public housing through the Public Housing Renewal Program and creating new social housing through the social housing pipeline.
- Increasing the capacity of the community housing sector—transferral of the management of 4,000 public housing dwellings to community housing providers alongside funding for establishing services and business support systems.
- Victorian Housing Register—development and roll-out of the Register.
- Financial backing for the community housing sector—financing for community housing providers through a \$100 million revolving loan facility and \$1 billion loan guarantee program to help housing associations access finance at affordable interest rates and conduct research into new funding mechanisms.

Some of these initiatives are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Social Housing Growth Fund

The Social Housing Growth Fund is an initiative established by the Victorian Government to fund the building of social housing. It began in 2017 with an initial investment of \$1 billion into a fund managed by the Victorian Investment Corporation.

⁸⁵ Victorian Government, *Homes for Victorians*, pp. 2, 43.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The fund value is maintained over time and the ongoing investment returns are used to provide funding for social housing construction and the lease of private rental properties for people experiencing homelessness.

A media release regarding the fund by the then-Acting Minister for Housing, Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio noted how the initial capital investment in the Social Housing Growth Fund is preserved:

Instead of drawing down on the \$1 billion fund, the investment returns will be used to underpin funding agreements for projects, which will put a roof over the heads of more vulnerable Victorians and create local jobs

Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, told the Committee at a public hearing that while the fund was relatively new, it has delivered enough returns to ensure the construction of 800 dwellings by 2022:

the Social Housing Growth Fund—that is now a few years old, but it is really starting to produce significant ongoing outcomes: 116 new leases through community housing associations over the last couple of years and commitments in place to build nearly 800 new homes by 2022, so that will make a significant impact.⁸⁷

The 2020–21 Victorian Budget included provision for an 'Expanded Social Housing Growth Fund' that will provide for \$1.38 billion in 2021 and 2022 as a means of financing Victoria's Big Housing Build. The Victorian Government has outlined how this fund will be used for community housing projects:

The Victorian Government's Social Housing Growth Fund, jointly administered by the Treasurer and Minister for Housing, is launching a range of funding rounds – starting this year and continuing through 2021 – for housing projects led by community housing providers.⁸⁸

The Big Housing Build policy paper states that up to 4,200 new homes will be delivered with funding from the Expanded Social Housing Growth Fund.⁸⁹

The Committee supports the Social Housing Growth Fund as a means of generating ongoing revenue to provide for the construction of social housing. It is important that the value of the fund is maintained or added to over time, to ensure this funding source can continue to provide social housing to meet Victoria's needs into the future.

It is unclear whether the fund capital of \$1.38 billion invested by the Victorian Government as part of the Expanded Social Housing Growth Fund will be preserved in the way that the value of the Social Housing Growth Fund has been. The Committee urges the Government to ensure that the value of the expanded fund is also preserved.

⁸⁷ Mr Ben Rimmer, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

⁸⁸ Victorian Government, *Strategic partnership projects*, 15 November 2020, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/strategic-partnership-projects>> accessed 12 February 2021.

⁸⁹ Homes Victoria, *Victoria's Big Housing Build*.

It is also not clear whether this fund is being used for the Big Housing Build or whether separate funding support is being provided for that new building program.

Government-backed financing for community housing

Another key component of the *Homes for Victorians* package is to build the financial capacity of community housing agencies. The *Homes for Victorians* policy document provides an overview of these initiatives:

- a \$100 million revolving loan facility providing low-cost, long-term subordinate loans to Housing Associations;
- up to \$1 billion available as a loan guarantee program, to help housing associations access finance at affordable interest rates. These guarantees will be issued over six years as economic projects and partnerships are developed.⁹⁰

DHHS' website provides further information on the structure of the revolving loan facility:

The revolving loan facility will increase the pool of capital available to registered housing associations by supplementing existing private sector finance. It aims to reduce the cost of borrowing by allowing registered housing associations to access loans at lower rates than what is currently being offered by the private sector.⁹¹

The website also provides further explanation regarding the loan guarantee program:

A government backed loan guarantee program will reduce risks for lenders as the government will provide guarantees on the repayment of loans (this could be full or partial cover of the outstanding amounts borrowed).

The guarantees will have the advantage of lowering the overall perceived and actual risk of loans to housing associations as the government is essentially guaranteeing repayment of the loans on their behalf, which should result in an uplift in the size and duration of finance, whilst simultaneously lowering the overall cost of borrowing on improved terms.⁹²

As noted in Chapter 5, the Committee held a remote public hearing with representatives from Finland, who discussed mechanisms for providing support to housing organisations to build new social housing. This support includes:

- the provision of government-owned land at a subsidised price to construct new social housing
- the provision of government-subsidised loans to social housing providers to construct social housing.

⁹⁰ Victorian Government, *Homes for Victorians*, p. 34.

⁹¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Support for registered housing associations*, 2017, <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-registered-housing-associations>> accessed 17 January 2021.

⁹² Ibid.

Mr Jarmo Lindén, Director at the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, told the Committee that one of the key factors that aided the construction of social housing in Finland is the provision of subsidised government land:

The private construction companies are working on the market principles. The most important is government subsidies and the municipalities giving the building sites for these projects at a cheaper price.⁹³

He said that in Helsinki, the mandated target for the provision of social housing is 30% of total housing. To assist this aim, local municipalities provide land to social housing providers:

In Helsinki, for instance, the municipality owns most of the land for new developments, and it gives out these building sites for providers of social housing. As I said, 30 per cent should be given to them, and they build one house, and it is totally for social housing or combines normal social housing and these special groups.⁹⁴

In addition to land, subsidies are also provided for construction costs. Mr Lindén explained:

The affordability is based on many things. The running time of these government loans—or not government loans but subsidised loans—is 40 years, so the amortisations are divided over 40 years. And these subsidised loans cover usually 95 per cent of the actual price of construction, so there is no need for a lot of money off the provider—5 per cent maximum—and in many cases there is no need at all, because there are direct grants we can combine with these interest subsidy loans. And there is a government guarantee, so that makes the price of the money lower.⁹⁵

Mr Juha Kakkinen from the Y-Foundation added that the low cost of the loans meant that the income from rent went towards paying off the loans:

in our system it would be wise to provide and build more affordable social housing because actually the loan money comes from the financial institutions and the tenants actually pay it back in their rents during the 40 years. So this is a very sustainable system also in economic terms.⁹⁶

The Committee understands there are many economic, social and institutional differences between Finland and Victoria. However, the Committee considers that if it has not occurred already, the Victorian Government should investigate whether and what elements of Finland's funding mechanisms for social housing could assist the further development of existing strategies for financing the community housing sector in Victoria.

⁹³ Mr Jarmo Lindén, Director, Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, public hearing, via videoconference, 27 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Mr Juha Kaakinen, Chief Executive Officer, Y-Foundation (Y-Säätiö), public hearing, via videoconference, 27 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

6.4 Commonwealth income support

One of the most often-cited issues regarding homelessness and the ability of individuals to sustain long-term housing relates to levels of Commonwealth income support, and in particular, rates of the Jobseeker allowance (previously the Newstart Allowance).⁹⁷ As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a strong correlation between unemployment and accessing homelessness services. According to the AIHW, 84.7% of people accessing homelessness services were either unemployed (38.9%) or not in the workforce (42.6%).⁹⁸

As a result, the majority of people accessing homelessness services rely on Commonwealth income support as their main source of income. The submission from the Victorian Government stated that:

Over 50,000 people seeking homelessness services in Victoria ... report that Commonwealth income support is their main income source. Of those people whose main income is Commonwealth income support, nearly 80 per cent are on one of:

- Newstart Allowance - 35 per cent
- Disability Support Pension - 23 per cent
- Parenting payment - 21 percent.⁹⁹

The level of support provided by these payments, primarily Jobseeker, was raised consistently throughout the inquiry as a key factor contributing to financial precarity which leads to homelessness. The Council to Homeless Persons said many Commonwealth income support benefits are not at a level which is able to assist recipients to avoid poverty:

Australia's social security system is a critical part of the safety net intended to support people who are not employed, or who have intermittent or very low incomes. Yet currently many benefits are not adequate to avert poverty for recipients; 55 per cent of households that are headed by a Newstart recipient are living in poverty, and 64 per cent of Youth Allowance recipient headed households are in poverty.¹⁰⁰

The submission from the Grattan Institute shared these concerns regarding the adequacy of income support, and the current indexation of the payment to inflation:

People living in poverty are at particularly high risk of becoming homeless. The income support system plays an important role in alleviating financial stress and poverty for low-income Australians. Yet while the Age Pension, Parenting Payment, Carer Payment, and Disability Support Pension are indexed to wages, Newstart only increases with inflation. Newstart has therefore become woefully inadequate as a safety net for

⁹⁷ Services Australia, *Newstart Allowance*, 2020, <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/newstart-allowance>> accessed 14 December 2020.

⁹⁸ AIHW, Data tables: Specialist homelessness services 2019–20, 'Table CLIENTS.19: Clients aged 15 or over, by labour force status, 2019–20'.

⁹⁹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 25.

unemployed Australians. Unlike wages or pensions, Newstart has not increased in real terms in more than 20 years.

This has 'squeezed' the living standards of people living on Newstart relative to the rest of the population. Households of working age receiving Newstart are under much more financial stress than households receiving other welfare payments.¹⁰¹

DHHS echoed these concerns regarding the rate of Newstart, which it said 'has not increased in real terms since 1994 and is well below the standard benchmarks for income adequacy and poverty'.¹⁰²

As noted in Chapter 2, one of the key issues with reliance on these types of payments is that they increase vulnerability to the shocks that often precede homelessness. These shocks can include financial, relationship, housing and health shocks. A sudden, unexpected change in circumstances in one of these areas can push already disadvantaged households towards crisis.¹⁰³

One of the key contributors of financial precarity for people whose main source of income is Commonwealth income support, is the lack of affordable private rental properties. The Victorian Government's submission states that only 2% of properties in Melbourne are affordable for people on income support and 11% of properties in regional Victoria are affordable.¹⁰⁴

As has been discussed earlier in this Chapter, many people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are in need of 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings.¹⁰⁵ However, DHHS' Rental Report for June 2020 showed that in Melbourne, only 0.3% of 1-bedroom rentals were considered to be affordable for households on Centrelink incomes, which increased to only 1.4% for 2-bedroom rentals.¹⁰⁶ According to the Council for Homeless Persons, this lack of affordable housing for people on Commonwealth income support 'means that many people on benefits pay more for their housing than they can afford, putting them on the brink of homelessness, or being simply unable to secure a tenancy'.¹⁰⁷

6.4.1 Difficulties in accessing income support

Stakeholders to the inquiry also noted various difficulties in accessing income support. Ben Rimmer, Victoria's Director of Housing, provided:

There has been a lot of debate about the adequacy of Newstart. A significant component of people are on disability support and a significant component of people are on a parenting payment. Obviously all three of those payments have been subject

¹⁰¹ Grattan Institute, *Submission 307*, p. 7.

¹⁰² Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 14.

¹⁰³ Professor Guy Johnson, Inaugural Unison Chair of Urban Housing and Homelessness, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Stonehouse, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, *Rental Report June quarter 2020*, Victorian Government, online, 2020, p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 25.

to significant change in policy settings at the Commonwealth level over the last decade or longer, with the increase of mutual obligations. One of the consequences of these things is that the process of getting onto payment and remaining on payment is incredibly important for people who are vulnerable in the housing market. There is a lot of emerging evidence about the difficulty of proving identity, meeting various administrative hurdles and staying on payment for people who are perhaps experiencing some other challenges in their life.¹⁰⁸

This was also discussed by the Council to Homeless Persons, who said the compliance regime to access Newstart has led to people experiencing homelessness having their payments suspended. It also noted the difficulty in accessing the Disability Support Pension:

The problem of the inadequacy of social security benefits is exacerbated by the jobactive compliance regime, which makes people's incomes insecure. The compliance regime has seen at least 55,000 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across the nation 'breached' and having their payments suspended.

Increasingly tough eligibility requirements for the Disability Support Pension have meant that many people with a disability, whose disabilities make it very difficult for them to meet the compliance requirements, are on the lower Newstart payment and subject to the activity tests.¹⁰⁹

Mr Rimmer said that one of the outcomes of the difficulties in accessing income support has been a rise in the number of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness with no income at all:

One example of this is that about 10 per cent of homelessness clients who are over 15 reported that they had no income—zero income—from any source. These are people who are seeking homelessness services who are not in paid employment but who are not in receipt of commonwealth income support. That amount doubled between 2012 and 2018, so in those six years the number of people who reported zero income when they approached homelessness services doubled.¹¹⁰

The Committee was also told of particular issues for refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom (depending on relevant visa types) are ineligible for Commonwealth support payments, which can be exacerbated by limited practical access to employment. The Western Homelessness Network noted that this, combined with limited work rights, 'severely hinders the capacity of refugees and asylum seekers to source housing'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Mr Ben Rimmer, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 34–5.

¹⁰⁹ Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*, p. 25.

¹¹⁰ Mr Ben Rimmer, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

¹¹¹ Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*, p. 19.

6.4.2 Changes to Commonwealth income support payments arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

One of the key Commonwealth Government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic has been the implementation of higher rates of certain income support. In March 2020, a number of measures were announced:

- Introduction of Coronavirus Supplement payments of \$550 per fortnight for those accessing the JobSeeker payment, Youth Allowance for Jobseekers payment, Parenting Payment, Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefit.
- Two rounds of economic support payments of \$750 for social security, veteran and other income support recipients and eligible concession card holders.¹¹²

Under these changes, the rate of assistance to a single person on JobSeeker with the Coronavirus Supplement increased to over \$1100 per fortnight.¹¹³ However, the rate of the Coronavirus Supplement has since reduced. It dropped from \$550 to \$250 per fortnight in September 2020,¹¹⁴ and on 31 December 2020 it dropped to \$150 per fortnight. At the time of writing, the Coronavirus Supplement was scheduled to be phased out entirely by 31 March 2021.¹¹⁵ This means that after this time, a single person with no dependents would receive a JobSeeker payment of \$565.70 per fortnight.¹¹⁶

Stakeholders to the inquiry widely supported permanent increases to the rates of Jobseeker and other income support payments following the supplement being abolished. Of the submissions received, 48 specifically recommended or considered that the Victorian Government should advocate to the Commonwealth Government to increase the rate of social security payments including Jobseeker and Youth Allowance. Many stakeholders further called for these payments to be indexed to wages. Ms Karren Walker, Group Manager, Entry Points at Launch Housing said:

The inadequacy of Newstart payments was the major factor contributing to Launch Housing's clients' difficulties in obtaining and maintaining housing. We implore the federal government to sustain the increased level of JobSeeker payments in order that households do not revert back to crushing levels of poverty and can find a foothold in the housing market.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Prime Minister and Treasurer, *Supporting Australian workers and business*, media release, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 22 March 2020.

¹¹³ The Hon. Josh Frydenberg, 'Interview', interview by Karl Stefanovic and Allison Langdon, *The Today Show*, television, Channel 9, 23 March 2020.

¹¹⁴ Matt Grudnoff, *Poverty and a reduced Coronavirus Supplement*, discussion paper, The Australia Institute, online, 18 November 2020, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Services Australia, *Important information about your income support payments*, 2020, <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/news/important-information-about-your-income-support-payments#:~:text=We've%20increased%20the%20income.about%20the%20income%20free%20area>> accessed 14 December 2020.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ms Karren Walker, Group Manager, Entry Points, Launch Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

Similarly, Mr Malcolm Roberts-Palmer, Senior Social Policy and Research Officer at Maribyrnong City Council stated that the rate of Jobseeker was a contributor to homelessness in the municipality:

One of the things that we found in our research previously is that the Newstart allowance was a significant factor in contributing to homelessness, as was the Youth allowance. So the new JobSeeker allowance has been anecdotally quite significantly beneficial to people living in the community. And I should add that our council has previously written to the federal minister for social services in regard to supporting the ACOSS Raise the Rate campaign, and I think we would support maintaining or at least increasing the rate from the previous Newstart into the longer term.¹¹⁸

Dr Michael Fotheringham, Executive Director of AHURI, told the Committee he was concerned about the financial impact of the withdrawal of the Coronavirus Supplement when the scheme ends:¹¹⁹

So for someone who is just hanging on at the moment, who is in a private rental they can barely afford but have got some consideration from their landlord, whose wages are down because either they are unemployed now or underemployed now or they have had to take a wage cut to try and hang on, all of the supports drop away—all of the key supports drop away in September. We could well see a huge wave of increased unemployment and homelessness or precarious housing. That in fact then has reverberations for the landlords who suddenly have to face evicting someone and having a loss of income there—admittedly the tax settings will help them—but there is a second generation impact for them as well. If we do not address this properly, we will have waves of impact of the economic consequences of not addressing this problem.¹²⁰

The Committee agrees that the rate of JobSeeker and other crucial income support payments are too low. There are exceedingly few properties available to rent in Victoria that are affordable to a single person whose main source of income is JobSeeker. The Committee shares the concerns of Dr Fotheringham regarding the potential for financial precarity amongst a larger proportion of the population who are on JobSeeker due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These low rates of payments could push households that rely upon them towards a crisis point. The Committee believes it is critical for the Victorian Government to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for a permanent increased rate of JobSeeker as well as other relevant income support payments such as Youth Allowance. In doing so, the Victorian Government should advocate for review of the indexation of the Jobseeker payment to CPI (and the appropriateness of this instead being indexed to wages) and to urgently consider and rectify the many barriers to income support accessibility.

The Committee acknowledges that addressing the current scale of homelessness requires a joint response from the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments.

¹¹⁸ Mr Malcolm Roberts-Palmer, Senior Social Policy and Research Officer, Maribyrnong City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

¹¹⁹ Dr Fotheringham was quoting the previous expiry date of September 2020, which was subsequently moved to March 2021. See, Services Australia, *Important information about your income support payments*.

¹²⁰ Dr Michael Fotheringham, Executive Director, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), public hearing, Melbourne, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

RECOMMENDATION 47: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to permanently increase the rate of JobSeeker payments. The Victorian Government should further advocate for reconsideration of the indexation of this payment to CPI and to also urgently consider the many barriers to income support accessibility.

6.5 Private rentals

The evidence received by the Committee shows that the provision of social housing is one of the key tools to alleviate homelessness in Victoria. However, the Committee recognises that diverse responses are needed. For many people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, provision of support to find and maintain housing in the private rental market can be critical to re-establishing long-term housing stability. The Committee was given examples from various stakeholders of how assistance from homelessness services has helped people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness to stay in the private rental market, while also lessening pressure on the social housing system.

Professor Guy Johnson, Professor of Urban Housing and Homelessness at RMIT University, described to the Committee that intervention in the private market was necessary to assist those on low incomes who may struggle to find tenancies. He said:

We are privileged: the private market is a solution in terms of housing. It works very well for most of the population. There is no issues with that at all. But the private market does not want to go in the lower end of the market—the yield is too small. There is a role for the state, and if we push too far and forget the state has a role, then we get these problems. Now I am not saying that we are going to shift back and become 40 per cent social housing like some countries, but we need to recognise the limitations of the market. We have either got to encourage them in some ways, through some sort of incentivisation, to get involved or take a direct role ourselves in the market. There is no doubt about that at all.¹²¹

Another option discussed by stakeholders to support low income earners in the private rental market was to increase the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance. Commonwealth Rent Assistance is a non-taxable income supplement for eligible people who rent in the private market or community housing (see Table 3.1 for an overview). The Grattan Institute advocated for a 40% increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance so that a much larger cohort of low income earners struggling with housing costs would be eligible. The Grattan Institute said:

Boosting Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 40 per cent would be a fairer and more cost-effective way to help the much larger number of lower-income earners struggling with housing costs. Rents won't increase much, because only some of the extra income will be spent on housing, but it would substantially reduce financial stress and poverty among poorer renters.¹²²

¹²¹ Johnson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

¹²² Grattan Institute, *Submission 307*, p. 3..

Stakeholders also suggested various ways to facilitate access to private rentals include working with real estate agents, head leasing and addressing stigma regarding people experiencing homelessness. These are discussed in the following sections.

6.5.1 Working with real estate agents

As outlined in Chapter 4, there are a number of early intervention programs to work with real estate agents as part of which the goal is to identify where tenants are at risk of homelessness, such as the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP). In addition to this, the Committee was told about initiatives whereby homelessness services work with real estate agencies to find people tenancies. This can involve homelessness services working with clients to assist them to build the skills to gain a private rental tenancy and to support them once they achieve a tenancy. This is often achieved with funding from PRAP.

Ms Sue Grigg, Director, Housing and Homelessness, Unison Housing described how their organisation had built a relationship with real estate agents:

In our area real estate agents often call us before they advertise a property, and then we fill it. I have had examples where the team can ring an agent and get a property within 24 hours because the department needs a property, or something like that. So it definitely works very well in our region, and in my experience in other regions real estate agents are really receptive to programs like this.¹²³

She added that it was important to find clients who have the skills to maintain a tenancy:

So absolutely, real estate agents are really receptive, but it is about trust. You have got to have that trust. I keep saying to the PRAP team, 'Don't refer families where it's not going to work', because the temptation is— because there is no social housing—to try to force it, but then we will damage the relationship with the agents and that will be the end of it. So we have to really target it right, but I do not think it is unique to our area at all. I think across the whole of Victoria real estate agents would love to work more closely with us.¹²⁴

Mr Marius Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), described the work his organisation does with persons exiting detention to build relationships with real estate agents to secure tenancies in the private rental market, often with the support of PRAP:

our case managers create relationships with some real estate agents, because many ReConnect participants are capable of holding down private rentals, often with the support of the private rental assistance program. Many agents do have stock available

¹²³ Ms Sue Grigg, Director, Housing and Homelessness, Unison Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

for low-income tenants, but our participants carry a significant stigma, so we need to build strong relationships with agents.¹²⁵

The Committee considers that effective relationship-building and collaboration between homelessness services and real estate agents is an important component of establishing long-term housing in the private rental market for persons at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. As noted in Chapter 4, the Committee is very supportive of the use of PRAP and encourages its ongoing use to help individuals to secure tenancies in the private market.

6.5.2 Head leases

Another means of securing private rental accommodation is an arrangement whereby homelessness services or government agencies take out a lease on behalf of a client to rent a property, known as head leasing. The benefit to landlords is that the agency taking the lease is responsible for the payment of rent and ensuring the condition of the property.¹²⁶

An example of this mechanism in practice was provided by Ms Elizabeth Thomas, Chief Executive Officer of Wayss, who described how their head leasing program assists people experiencing homelessness to access the private rental market:

The other partnership we have recently had a lot of success with is the head leasing with private landlords. We have achieved significant success with over 30 headleases and strongly support their continued expansion as a means of supporting vulnerable people to access the private rental market. Under a headlease, tenants who may struggle to even get an interview with a real estate agent have under the banner of Wayss been able to access that private rental property market with a staged rental. It starts at 33 per cent, it moves to 66 per cent and ultimately, at the end of the 12-month lease, to the full rent, and the tenant is encouraged and supported to take over the rental lease in their own name. It is an access to independence that simply has not been available, and we do not believe that public housing is the only option that should be available for people in need of housing.¹²⁷

Another example was provided by Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South at Haven; Home, Safe, at a public hearing in Epping. Ms Smith gave an overview of the Moving On program:

[the program] has just been re-funded for another 50 properties, which is wonderful. It is a program where we lease a property and then headlease it to the tenant and they pay an increasing amount of the rent over the years. So they start out only paying a third of it, then 60 per cent, then up to the full amount. The vast majority of these have been

¹²⁵ Mr Marius Smith, Chief Executive Officer, VACRO, public hearing, via videoconference, 12 August 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

¹²⁶ Australian housing and Urban Research Institute, *What is head leasing?*, 2019, <<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/ahuri-briefs/what-is-head-leasing>> accessed 15 December 2020.

¹²⁷ Ms Elizabeth Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, Wayss, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

completely successful. I think there has been one failed tenancy and a couple where it was rolled forward for another year of subsidy. It is an empowering model because with the one we use people go and find a house they like, we do the application and rent it. Landlords love it because they get a year's rent up-front, but we want landlords who are going to roll it forward, who are not just going to say, 'Bye, see you later', at the end of the year. That has been quite a successful model.¹²⁸

Head leasing programs have particular value for cohorts who have difficulties or barriers to entering the private rental market, such as young people. Ms Donna Bennett, Chief Executive Officer of Hope Street Youth and Family Services, a specialist youth homelessness service servicing the northern and western regions of Victoria, described to the Committee the head lease component of their Hope to Home program:

A big part of it are the relationships that we have with real estate agents. How we came about that model was that we found that young people were not accessing private rental; real estate agents were not giving them a go. Melton was one of the poorest areas. The statistics were terrible. So we thought, 'Okay, we need to do something about this because we cannot get young people into social housing. Where else can we get them in?'. So we thought, 'Private rental'. Part of the model is about building that one-to-one relationship with the real estate agent: 'Okay, what security would they like?', because they are not just going to take our word that our young people are fantastic and fabulous and going to be amazing tenants. Hope Street decided to be a co-lessee, so we signed the lease with them. No other organisation will do that. No other organisation—I say that with confidence. They will headlease a property and sublet it, but we sign our name on that contract with the young person, and that is our tick of confidence to the real estate agent to say, 'Give this a go'.¹²⁹

She added that they have had additional success due to the outreach services they provide:

And apparently—because it has been a long time since I rented when I was a student—these days it takes six months before you can get a rental history. So we said, 'We'll be on the lease for six months, and then you can transfer the lease into your name'. That has worked well. So out of the number of tenancies that we have had—so 31–21 were sustainable beyond the six months. Twenty-one—how fantastic is that? How fantastic is that of young people? Because we do not make that happen; young people make that happen. But a part of the service that we provide, of course, because often it is their first experience, is that we have to have as part of our model that the worker can go and visit them on a regular basis. They can contact the worker. If something happens on a weekend, they have got someone to contact and speak to. We have flexible brokerage, where we are saying, 'The first thing you need to do is pay your rent, but if you need money for food, we'll give you some brokerage for food; we'll give you some brokerage to help get your electricity connected; we'll give you some brokerage for getting the lawns mowed so you pass the condition report'. You know, things like that.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South, Haven; Home, Safe, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 48.

¹²⁹ Ms Donna Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Hope Street Youth and Family Services, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

However, the Committee heard that head leasing may not be appropriate for all people experiencing homelessness. Elizabeth Thomas from Wayss pointed out that caution should be taken in placing clients in leases who may require extra support or who are not rental-ready:

We had one tenancy that did not go so well. We were more focused on: what could we have done differently? And from that one, just for your interest, what we observed was it is really important to fully explain to the tenant the purpose of the headlease program. It is not public housing. And so what we saw in some cases was people would want to break the lease fairly quickly, so it is explaining those concepts. I think we can do a lot more in education at the front end because all of us need to embrace new ways of viewing permanent housing options. So helping people understand there are more options than public housing, I think, is part of the puzzle.¹³¹

Mr James King, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Unison Housing, similarly stated that private rental may not be the best option for people with complex needs or who have very low incomes:

But private rental will not work for everyone. Some families are assessed as having complex needs that would make sustaining private rental impossible. For some it is also too expensive. There is not a single one-bedroom private rental property in the whole of metropolitan Melbourne that is affordable for a single person on a Centrelink benefit.¹³²

The Committee understands that head leasing may not be appropriate for all groups, and that people with complex needs may require intensive forms of complementary support, as has been achieved in some Housing First settings. However, the evidence received by the Committee suggests that head leasing is likely to be suitable for cohorts with less complex needs that need short-term assistance to gain access to the private rental market.

The Committee is supportive of head leases as a tool to unlock private rental stock for people experiencing homelessness. Programs where homelessness services take on the responsibility of the lease, and in some cases subsidise rental costs, can be beneficial to both landlords and clients. The use of head leasing may also provide public financial benefits as it eases pressure on the social housing system.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a significant opportunity for the Victorian Government to directly undertake head leasing opportunities or support homelessness services to do so. Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer of Launch Housing urged the Government to consider assisting homelessness services to secure properties that may be vacant due to the pandemic:

I would say that the Government should be acting now to directly headlease or to support community housing organisations like Launch Housing to directly headlease the many hundreds of rooms in vacant student accommodation that will not be utilised

¹³¹ Ms Elizabeth Thomas, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

¹³² Mr James King, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Unison Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 1 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

in the foreseeable future. We could headlease those premises for an extended period of time, perhaps two years, whilst new social housing is built and whilst we go into the market for distressed developer assets, unsold units in development projects. So we need to add quickly to the social housing estate. Whether it is owned by the director of public housing or whether it is owned by community housing organisations, I do not particularly care, but without more homes we cannot end homelessness and without more homes we cannot move the people we have got in our grasp through to a more secure and sustainable future where we are spending less of the taxpayers resources on health care in the criminal justice system, in the homelessness service system. So if you followed the evidence and everyone was exclusively rational, we would be doing that yesterday.¹³³

The Committee notes that the Victorian Government has put significant effort into head leasing as part of the response to house people experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. A target of 1,100 leases has been set to house people in emergency hotel accommodation as part of the *From Homelessness to a Home* initiative.¹³⁴ The Committee urges the Victorian Government and homelessness services to build on this work and make available more head leasing opportunities for persons with less complex needs. Support should also be available where needed to ensure clients can maintain their tenancy.

RECOMMENDATION 48: That the Victorian Government provide additional funding to homelessness services to commission and expand head leasing programs to ensure people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, in appropriate circumstances, can be assisted into private residential tenancies and be given the support to maintain them.

6.5.3 Addressing stigma amongst real estate agencies

The Committee heard that people on income support payments or people at risk of homelessness can face stigma amongst real estate agents when applying for properties. This can be exacerbated by other factors or for certain groups, such as young people without rental histories or persons exiting institutional settings. There are also structural factors, including widespread discrimination towards Aboriginal Victorians and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The submission from DHHS acknowledged that homelessness experienced by Aboriginal Victorians is compounded by ‘racism and discrimination, particularly in private rental markets’ and that culturally and linguistically diverse communities ‘often experience discrimination and hardship in the private rental market.’¹³⁵

¹³³ Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, via videoconference, 20 May 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹³⁴ Premier of Victoria, *Homes for homeless Victorians during pandemic and beyond*, media release, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 28 July 2020.

¹³⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, *Submission 423*, pp. 44, 8, 55.

Ms Belinda Leon, Manager, Community Support at Whittlesea Community Connections discussed the difficulties faced by her agency when trying to assist clients on income support or recovering from family violence. She said:

We have gone in and we have tried to work with real estate agents to provide some education around family violence and the value for women and what it means in the recovery from the trauma of family violence to be able to obtain suitable and safe housing, and we are getting knockbacks from real estate agents saying, 'We're not keen. We're not interested. We don't care. It's about pleasing the landlord and finding the best applicant'. Again it goes back to Centrelink benefits and the cost of rent. Even though we are cold-calling real estate agents and saying, 'Have you got any properties at the moment that are vacant that you've struggled to lease?', we are coming across these real barriers.

Ms Gerda Zimmermann, Senior Housing Case Manager at DPV Health Whittlesea also described difficulty in assisting her clients to access private rental properties:

We have had a lot of pushback from agents. I guess that we are trying to get a message across to agents, because we do go out with clients, we do outreach, so we go out with clients to house inspections and make sure that they have got their packs ready with their information and those sorts of things. It is about educating people as well as building that capacity. It is really hard to change the mindset of an agent who thinks that a working person has a more secure income than a person on a disability support pension. It is actually not true. A person with a disability support pension is not going to lose their money. I could lose my job next week with a funding cut.¹³⁶

Ms Leon suggested that more engagement and education amongst real estate agents about the issues faced by people at risk of homelessness may be beneficial. She said:

Ms LEON: I do not know the private real estate industry that well, but I do not know if it should be part of their licence that they receive some education around housing and the need for housing and just the benefits that it has to the wider community and to people if they do have access to long-term, suitable accommodation. Then maybe if there can be some incentives, something that would—

The CHAIR: If that person is linked to a support service like yours, then there should be greater trust from the agency.

Ms LEON: Yes.¹³⁷

Ms Zimmerman also suggested education for real estate agents regarding support for people at risk of homelessness may be beneficial. She said:

So I do think it is just around education. Maybe they do not see that they are actually seen as being in positions of power to these people—to the clients that we support—because they are going to say yes or no, 'You can have this house'. To those people that

¹³⁶ Ms Gerda Zimmerman, Senior Housing Case Manager, DPV Health Whittlesea, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 66.

¹³⁷ Ms Belinda Leon, Manager, Community Support, Whittlesea Community Connections, public hearing, via videoconference, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

means having a roof or not. So there is a real sense of authority put into a real estate agent from our clients' perspective. So maybe it is a little bit about educating them. It is just people. It does not matter where your money comes from. If you can pay the rent, who cares?¹³⁸

The Committee acknowledges there may be commercial barriers regarding the placement of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in private rental tenancies. Real estate agencies have an obligation to ensure that landlords are satisfied they have shortlisted the most suitable candidates. This was discussed by Ms Jeanette Large, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Property Initiatives, who said that landlords could seek to take their business elsewhere if they are not satisfied with the tenants:

It was quite some time ago that I went with the CEO of [Women's Information and Referral Exchange Inc.] at the time to the [Real Estate Institute of Victoria] to talk to property managers about how they did view people who were from more vulnerable backgrounds. It was interesting that all of those that were there just said, 'No, we don't discriminate', and 'We don't say that we can't house them', or 'It's up to the landlord', or whatever. After that time—it was interesting—a few of the women property managers who were part of that meeting followed up with us and said that they were very happy to try and negotiate and work things through. But it is a very difficult one I think for the property managers. To get the money for the landlord is what they are looking at doing. If they do not get the money for the landlord, the landlord is likely to just go, 'We'll go to another real estate agent, because you haven't managed to get our rental income in or you haven't managed the property well'.¹³⁹

While acknowledging there may be commercial barriers to placing people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in private rental tenancies, the Committee also believes that there is often stigma against these cohorts amongst real estate agents, which can intersect with other forms of discrimination or disadvantage. This urgently needs to be addressed. This includes in circumstances where homelessness services are engaged with a client and providing support.

In a 2012 review of discrimination in Victoria's private rental market, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission surveyed a range of groups who can be vulnerable to discrimination on their experiences with the rental market. It included among its findings:

Some respondents from different backgrounds reported that rental agents and landlords made decisions about their suitability as tenants based on myths and stereotypes... Rental agents and landlords have a legitimate interest in finding tenants who will not damage the property and can pay the rent. However, they can do so without engaging in unlawful discrimination or allowing irrelevant personal characteristics to influence their decisions.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Zimmerman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 66.

¹³⁹ Ms Jeanette Large, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Property Initiatives, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁰ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Locked out: Discrimination in Victoria's private rental market*, Melbourne, 2012, p. 16.

The report also acknowledged that ‘proving discrimination is difficult as rental agents usually give other reasons for the refusal relating to capacity to pay the rent or the large number of applicants who applied for the same property’.¹⁴¹

Ms Alison McDonald, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Domestic Violence Victoria described the work that had taken place with the real estate industry in partnership with the Real Estate Institute of Victoria to address stigma around victims of family violence:

I remember that when the family violence housing assistance task force was established after the royal commission, the [Real Estate Institute of Victoria] was a member of that task force. There were some approaches into looking at professional development for property managers around family violence, which I think were really positive initiatives. I do not know the status of that work now, but I know that through the private rental brokerage pilot as part of the family violence housing blitz there were some fantastic examples of innovation there where local services were working in really close partnership with their local real estate agencies and property managers there. Taboos were broken down, myths were busted, and actually you had property managers who really became champions of that program, and Jeanette is right—there was money attached to it, and it was secure money, so that was the incentive there.¹⁴²

The Committee supports a similar initiative of education and training for real estate agencies in order to address the need to ensure equal access to the private rental market for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION 49: That the Victorian Government work with the Real Estate Institute of Victoria and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to develop and roll out mandatory education to real estate agents regarding their obligations to ensure that people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness are afforded equal opportunity to access private rental tenancies. This should address intersectional discrimination towards persons on the basis of various attributes including race, age, prior criminal convictions or lack of rental history.

6.6 Inclusionary zoning

Inclusionary zoning refers to schemes that provide for the inclusion of a proportion of affordable dwellings, including social housing dwellings, in new housing developments alongside market-priced properties. The proportion of affordable properties in such developments may vary, but the Committee was given examples of between 2% and

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ms Alison Macdonald, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Domestic Violence Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

30% in different developments. Inclusionary zoning is widely used in other Australian jurisdictions, most notably South Australia, as well as internationally.¹⁴³

There are two ways that inclusionary zoning can contribute to the delivery of affordable housing through the planning process:

- Mandatory model—a certain number or proportion of affordable dwellings are included in new developments as a condition of planning approval.
- Voluntary incentive model—affordable housing is encouraged, rather than required, by reducing costs for developers through mechanisms such as modifying planning standards, fast tracking approvals or waiving fees and/or rates.¹⁴⁴

The following sections provide an overview of current policy, discussion of the mandatory model of inclusionary zoning and potential incentives for developers. The Committee notes there is an inclusionary zoning pilot program underway in Victoria, but that it is restricted to surplus government land, where conditions relating to the sale of the land to developers can more easily be made.¹⁴⁵ This discussion focuses on inclusionary zoning in developments in the private market.

Current policy

The Committee was informed that inclusionary zoning can be pursued in private developments through a mechanism in the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic), which was introduced in 2018 and establishes a framework through which councils can enter into agreements with developers to provide a certain amount of affordable housing in new developments.¹⁴⁶ Specifically, s 173(1A) of the Act provides that ‘a responsible authority may enter into an agreement with an owner of land for the development or provision of land in relation to affordable housing’. These arrangements are known as ‘section 173’ agreements.

However, the Committee heard that there has been limited use of section 173 agreements in practice. The submission from Interface Councils stated that the impact on the number of affordable houses in Victoria through use of these agreements has been negligible:

The reliance on voluntary S173 agreements between developers and Councils to include social and affordable housing in new developments is problematic. This only delivers a very small number of dwellings, if any, and is costly to all involved.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Nicole Gurran, et al., *Supporting affordable housing supply: inclusionary planning in new and renewing communities: Inquiry into increasing affordable housing supply: evidencebased principles and strategies for Australian policy and practice*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, 2018, pp. 12–23.

¹⁴⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Understanding inclusionary zoning: Utilising land use planning systems to deliver affordable housing*, briefing paper, AHURI, Melbourne, March 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Brimbank City Council, *Submission 166*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ City of Melbourne, *Affordable Housing Strategy 2020–2030*, City of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2020, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Interface Councils, *Submission 102*, p. 20.

Stakeholders told the Committee there are two issues that are a barrier to more widespread use of section 173 agreements. They are:

- The voluntary nature of the agreements. A developer does not have to enter into an agreement and may choose not to because of financial considerations, namely that affordable or social housing properties have less commercial value than dwellings to be sold in the private market.¹⁴⁸
- That individual agreement negotiations for developments are costly for councils who may be impacted by resource constraints.¹⁴⁹

Regarding the voluntary nature of planning developments, the City of Melbourne's *Affordable Housing Strategy 2020–2030* explains that developers have little financial incentive to voluntarily enter into inclusionary zoning agreements. It adds that even if the planning permit requires inclusionary zoning, developers may opt to take the issue to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), which can be a costly process for all involved:

The success of securing affordable housing through section 173 agreements is dependent on Council being able to negotiate with developers at the planning permit stage. To date, these negotiations have had limited success. The main reason is that the agreements are voluntary and there is little to motivate the contribution by developers. Outcomes are also limited by the lack of clarity on preferred outcomes for affordable housing arrangements.

The requirement to enter a section 173 agreement may be required by Council as a condition of a planning permit but if the developer does not agree, the condition is likely to be challenged at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

...

Ultimately, these agreements rely on section 173 agreements and are still entirely voluntary. A likely and undesired outcome of this approach is that proponents may consider it financially preferable to argue against provision at VCAT – a time and resource intensive process for all parties which may not result in the desired affordable housing outcomes. A mandatory tool, such as inclusionary zoning, would resolve this problem.¹⁵⁰

The voluntary nature of the agreements was also discussed by Ms Carmen Faelis, Team Leader of Social Policy and Planning at the City of Whittlesea, who said that local councils rely on the goodwill of developers to enter into the agreements:

We are not able to negotiate sufficient requirements by private developers to ensure that they have affordable and social housing as part of their developments. We can enter into agreements; they are voluntary. That is on the goodwill of those developers wanting to enter into those voluntary agreements.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ms Carmen Faelis, Team Leader, Social Policy and Planning, City of Whittlesea, public hearing, Epping, 27 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 142*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ City of Melbourne, *Affordable Housing Strategy 2020–2030*, p. 30.

¹⁵¹ Faelis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

Councils may also lack necessary resources to negotiate individual agreements for each development. The Municipal Association of Victoria advocated in their submission for the Victorian Government to develop a blanket mechanism that would apply to all developments:

The Victorian Government has also provided guidance to local councils regarding how to enact voluntary 'Section 173' agreements for inclusion of affordable housing with developers (DEWLP, 2018). However, there is considerable difficulty in negotiating an affordable housing contribution, requiring resources from council, developers, and often from community housing organisations, with no guarantee that there will actually be an increase in the affordable housing stock. The efforts of councils and community housing organisations could be better spent assisting DELWP to develop a robust, transparent, and consistent mechanism and process to apply, rather than negotiating for each individual development as it arises.¹⁵²

Mandatory model

In response to the challenges around use of voluntary section 173 agreements, a number of councils and other stakeholders advocated for a legislated mandatory requirement for inclusionary zoning in new developments. A total of 40 submissions specifically recommended introducing a mandatory inclusionary zoning mechanism for all new private residential developments, with the recommended proportion of affordable dwellings between 5–30% of total dwellings.¹⁵³ Councillor Seema Abdullah, Mayor of the City of Greater Shepparton, explained that 'it needs to be mandatory because that is what is going to make developers do it' and that at present, 'despite all our efforts and incentives and motivations, we are not getting that result'.¹⁵⁴ Ms Venita Mackinnon, Social and Community Planner at Frankston City Council, who was presenting alongside Dandenong City, Mornington Peninsula Shire and Casey City councils, said:

I am happy to jump in and start by mentioning that Frankston City Council, along with the other councils present here today at the panel, is part of a broader regional council local government forum group, and the group has put together a regional charter which sets out our call to action and our key advocacy asks for the state government, and mandatory inclusionary zoning is among those key asks.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 142*, p. 15.

¹⁵³ Kieran Prescott, *Submission 63*; Save Public Housing Collective, *Submission 91*; Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission 97*; Interface Councils, *Submission 102*; Western Homelessness Network, *Submission 103*; Frankston Council, *Submission 122*; HAAG, *Submission 130*; CISVIC, *Submission 131*; SHSN, *Submission 136*; Nightingale Housing, *Submission 147*; Per Capita, *Submission 149*; Wayss, *Submission 150*; Port Phillip Council, *Submission 154*; Victorian Public Tenants' Association, *Submission 168*; Wombat Housing, *Submission 172*; Maroondah Winter Shelter, *Submission 174*; Tenants Victoria, *Submission 176*; Greater Dandenong Council, *Submission 199*; Jan Lacey, *Submission 212*; Councillor Tim Singh Laurence, *Submission 214*; Uniting Vic.Tas, *Submission 216*; Darebin Council, *Submission 219*; Greater Geelong Council, *Submission 292*; Barwon South West Homelessness Network, *Submission 294*; City of Melbourne, *Submission 296*; Boroondara and Manningham Homelessness Network, *Submission 316*; City of Whittlesea, *Submission 318*; Council to Homeless Persons, *Submission 328*; VCROSS, *Submission 341*; City of Kingston, *Submission 345*; Bethany Community Support, *Submission 353*; Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission 355*; Constellation Project, *Submission 359*; Mission Australia, *Submission 370*; Janet Graham, *Submission 376*; Mercy Foundation, *Submission 385*; Salvatore Furfaro, *Submission 369*; Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission 391*; City of Casey, *Submission 410*; Gippsland Homelessness Network, *Submission 417*.

¹⁵⁴ Councillor Seema Abdullah, Councillor, Greater Shepparton City Council, public hearing, Wangaratta, 12 March 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 26–7.

¹⁵⁵ Ms Venita Mackinnon, Social and Community Planner, Frankston City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

Darebin City Council gave an overview in their submission of the mandatory model and its success in other jurisdictions:

The term ... refers to approaches where a portion of dwellings within a development (for example, 20 per cent) are required to be affordable. Such approaches have been implemented successfully in other jurisdictions, most notably the United Kingdom, but also in other States and Territories in Australia. A key part of this success is that the requirements are applied consistently across all development. This provides a 'level playing field' and ensures that affordable housing is considered by all developers in determining site feasibility.¹⁵⁶

One housing provider and social enterprise that has implemented a voluntary form of inclusionary zoning in its residential developments is Nightingale Housing. Dwellings constructed by Nightingale are delivered without profit, at cost price, and are made accessible to certain cohorts, such as persons with a disability and essential workers, through a 'Priority Ballot' system. Importantly, 20% of the total dwellings are preallocated as affordable housing through their voluntary inclusionary zoning mechanism, which are provided directly to community housing providers. However, in its submission to the inquiry, Nightingale Housing advocated for implementation of a mandatory model of inclusionary zoning as the only way to ensure housing developers prioritise affordable housing:

While many Nightingale principles have been adopted by profit-driven residential developers (such as high thermal ratings and carbon neutrality), including affordable housing is not one of them. Housing in Australian cities remains the domain of speculative investment, with disastrous consequences for our urban fabric, housing affordability and families seeking safe and healthy environments to live in. It is our experience that those who want to take advantage of these conditions should be incentivised to address the growing homelessness crisis.

As such, we recommend a legislated Inclusionary Zoning scheme that would mandate 20% Affordable Housing in all new multi-residential development, in both capital and regional cities.¹⁵⁷

However, the Committee heard that there is potential for a mandatory scheme to have the unintended consequence of increasing the cost of the other properties in a development. This is because developers may charge more for the proportion of market cost dwellings to make up for the profit lost on the affordable dwellings. This risk was explained by Ms Venita Mackinnon from Frankston City Council, who noted that this would need to be carefully considered in the development of a potential mandatory model:

I would like to make a suggestion or recommendation to include within the inquiry recommendations that the priority task force of the state government look further into inclusionary zoning to look at what the proportion of properties might need to be to

¹⁵⁶ Darebin City Council, *Submission 219*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ Nightingale Housing, *Submission 147*, pp. 1-2.

enable inclusionary zoning overlays in such a way that it will not run that unintended risk of driving up the property prices associated with the development.¹⁵⁸

Mr Llewellyn Reynders, Manager of Strategy and Policy at Infrastructure Victoria, similarly told the Committee that any model implementing mandatory zoning would need to be carefully considered so as not to unreasonably constrain the housing industry:

there are a lot of different models about how you might do it. Do you have a blanket rule for everyone? Do you look at particular places where that works better? Do you do it as a part of rezoning or is it something you put on top of existing zonings? There are a whole lot of questions that go to the kind of commercial viability of those kinds of inclusionary zoning schemes that need to be carefully thought through in order to ensure that they actually produce social housing or affordable housing and do not prevent the housing industry generally from functioning properly.¹⁵⁹

Bevan Warner from Launch Housing contended that the Victorian Government has a crucial role in producing an ongoing supply of social housing, and that this can occur by ensuring that private developers contribute to this supply. He succinctly describes the benefits of property development:

I should begin by saying property development is a noble profession. It is how we have built and expanded and enhanced our communities. But as private capital speculates on the fringes of capital cities and waits for the metropolis to catch up and then decides to convert a rural property to a suburban subdivision, they make economic decisions about the cost of capital, the cost of holding onto that land and the cost of subdividing it and selling it, and they do that in a capitalist frame, which is totally fine. And governments, representing all citizens, make rules, and say, 'Well, we want you to provide a certain amount of public open space, and we actually want to do a contra with you on who is going to bear the cost of deep sewage', all as we get to the house and land package.¹⁶⁰

Mr Warner then defines what he believes is the next logical step in this process:

Why isn't it a simple extra next step to say, 'And for that 250-house and land package release that we're approving, we want 5 or 10 or 15 per cent of that locked away for a secure and affordable housing strategy'? That is government acting by the people for the people. It is an alternative to traditional tax and spend and moving the money back through the budget process to build more public housing or deliver incentives to organisations like mine. It is one way, and we should do that, but there is also a very direct and simple way, which is to get serious about inclusionary zoning. If property developers had enough lead time, they would accept that new economic reality and they would reprofile their investment decisions and we would start to get a stream of social and affordable housing out of the market. If you think about what has been happening over the last 30 years as government has reduced its investment in public

¹⁵⁸ Mackinnon, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁹ Mr Llewellyn Reynders, Manager, Strategy and Policy, Infrastructure Victoria, public hearing, via videoconference, 2 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁰ Mr Bevan Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 22 November 2019, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

housing, it is because there is a belief that somehow the market is going to provide for these things. Well, the trigger to make the market provide these things is inclusionary zoning, so let us do it.¹⁶¹

The Committee heard that a further challenge is that the effect of the provision of affordable housing through a mandatory mechanism would take a significant amount of time to be felt, when there is an urgent need for housing now. Mr Ashish Sitoula, Team Leader, Community Advocacy, Greater Dandenong City Council said that it could take 15–20 years for an impact from inclusionary zoning to be felt in some areas, and that affordable housing was needed much sooner:

With inclusionary zoning and the debate that is going on, even if it comes into force, these are homes that will be delivered after 10 years, 15 years. The need is now. I mean, this is legislation that can run its cycle either earlier or later, but the need for homes is already there today, so that is where I think the focus should be. Fifty thousand homes are built in Victoria every year. If 15 per cent went to social housing, that is 7500 homes; that is only half. That is not enough to fulfil the current gap. In Greater Dandenong alone 5000 people are on the housing register waiting list. If you combine all over Victoria, that number goes way higher. The number of homes through inclusionary zoning today is not enough to cater to current demand, and if you look at it, some of the ways this zoning mechanism has worked is to deliver homes through a development after 15 years or 20 years.¹⁶²

The Committee considers that any potential mandatory model of inclusionary zoning would need to take these concerns into consideration during its development stages. In relation to concerns that it could potentially inflate the cost of market-priced properties in a development, the Committee was provided suggestions where the Government could help to offset profit loss for developers.

Developer incentives

The Committee was provided suggestions of incentives for developers to offset losses they may sustain from the inclusion of affordable housing in new developments. They are:

- tax or rate concessions
- additional density allowances (density bonus)
- fast-track planning approval.

The aim of these incentives is to ensure that the cost of market-priced dwellings are not inflated as a means of recovering any financial shortfall due to the inclusion of affordable housing.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Mr Ashish Sitoula, Team Leader, Community Advocacy, Greater Dandenong City Council, public hearing, via videoconference, 23 June 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

Tax concessions for developments subject to inclusionary zoning may include discounts on land tax or other rebates. Bevan Warner from Launch Housing gave an overview of the tools the Government has to offset the cost of affordable housing in new developments:

Well, look I do not think we should be shy about recognising the three principal levers that government has. Parliaments pass laws and governments produce taxes and they produce incentives. Governments might prioritise energy efficiency and offer a whole lot of incentives for solar abatement or the installation of solar panels. Governments do that. Governments might tax and do incentives to send signals to the market, and in fact governments do that all the time. In trying to achieve this outcome, which is repricing the value in the developer's mind about what the cost of capital is going to realise for them when it is developed, and bear in mind that there is no automatic right to develop—it has got to comply with land use arrangements, it has got to comply with local council regulations, there are issues there about scale and intensity. Government could choose to reduce the economic cost to the developer who has got a model in their mind about what this tract of land is worth by giving rebates or incentives to reduce land tax for that proportion of the development that is going directly to social or affordable housing.

Government can play with its tax and incentive levers, but the basic idea is you do not have to tax and bring it through the budget process and then have it dealt with through a government department in a grant system. You can just create the lever for the market to produce the stock that we recognise we need.¹⁶³

Elizabeth Thomas from Wayss, who supports a voluntary model of inclusionary zoning, described developer incentives in the form of a reduction in council rates in return for a proportion of affordable housing:

We support incentive-based inclusion rezoning rather than mandatory inclusion rezoning. Because I do not want to have unwilling partners at the table, but if it is in the developer's best interest to come to Wayss and say, 'Listen, I can get a rate reduction if I get 20 per cent and the higher the number—what do I need to do?'. And we actually do have a developer, a local developer, Sienna Homes, who actively reaches out to us often to say, 'Tell us about Housing First. Tell us about wraparound support'. That is the way of the future.¹⁶⁴

The Government may also have additional planning tools available to help new developments, with a certain proportion of affordable housing, remain financially viable. One such tool is to provide a density bonus. Under this concession, developers would be allowed to include more market-value dwellings in a block or add more floors in a tower in return for provision of a proportion of affordable dwellings. Mr Ross Hamilton, Partner at PwC Australia, discussed the applicability of this tool:

As you increase the density, the value of the land will increase. So if a decision was made to use planning instruments to increase density and enhance the underlying value and if the view of Government was to then transact land, there is inherent uplift there in a

¹⁶³ Warner, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁴ Ms Elizabeth Thomas, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

capital sense. If it was about a supply-led solution that Government actually wanted to initiate, they could pump that back in and achieve a supply solution that way. I think it is eminently achievable.¹⁶⁵

Finally, another planning tool is to fast-track planning approval for developments with affordable housing quotas. This measure can provide financial benefit and provide certainty around timelines. The Committee was provided an example by the City of Whittlesea:

the City of Whittlesea has developed a social and affordable housing toolkit for internal staff, particularly around the planners, and part of that is also looking at a fast-tracking process but also to keep in people's front of mind that if you are dealing with a developer you look at social and affordable housing and opportunities there for them to enter, at the moment, voluntary—but hopefully in the future that will not be voluntary—agreements.¹⁶⁶

The Committee was told that a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy has been in place in South Australia since 2005. Ms Rebecca Callahan, Homelessness Network Coordinator, Barwon South West Homelessness Network, explained the success of that program:

In 2005 South Australia mandated that 15 per cent of significant new housing builds are for affordable housing, with a provision that 5 per cent of these were for high needs groups. At June 2014 the scheme had delivered 1489 affordable homes, with another 3000 committed.¹⁶⁷

The South Australian model uses incentives such as density bonuses or the sale of surplus government land with land use provisions to secure affordable housing. According to an AHURI report, between 2005 and 2015:

Around 3,685 or 63 per cent of the total 5,485 affordable homes/sites delivered to date have been on government land, and/or supported by other government incentive or subsidy (e.g. the former [National Rental Affordability Scheme] scheme).¹⁶⁸

Committee view

The Committee notes the failure so far of section 173 agreements to secure any meaningful creation of affordable housing in Victoria. Resourcing constraints may also limit the ability of local councils to negotiate individual agreements for each development. At a public hearing, Ms Kaye Thompson, Director, Community and Councillor Seema Abdullah, Mayor of Greater Shepparton City Council, acknowledged that it may be possible to include affordable or social housing requirements within

¹⁶⁵ Mr Ross Hamilton, Partner, PwC Australia, public hearing, Melbourne, 12 February 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁶ Faelis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁷ Ms Rebecca Callahan, Homelessness Network Coordinator, Barwon South West Homelessness Network, public hearing, via videoconference, 13 July 2020, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ Gurran, et al., *Supporting affordable housing supply: inclusionary planning in new and renewing communities*, pp. 12–23.

Darebin City Council, *Submission 219*.

local planning schemes.¹⁶⁹ However, the Committee recognises that many local councils consider that the current regulatory framework is inadequate for ensuring meaningful growth in social and affordable housing in their municipalities.

The Committee received widespread support from stakeholders for the Victorian Government to act in relation to inclusionary zoning. Of the submissions to the inquiry that discussed this mechanism, the large majority supported introduction of a mandatory model.

The Committee considers that the growing need for affordable and social housing across the state, and the current inability of social housing construction and acquisition to keep up with demand, necessitates bold action. A mandatory model of inclusionary zoning would ensure that the private market takes partial responsibility, alongside government, for provision of housing that meets the needs of all Victorians. While there are existing concerns regarding the specific structure of a mandatory scheme, such as the potential for it to constrain financial returns of property developers, these could be considered in the model's development and incentives could be made available to ameliorate the effects of any requirement. Such incentives could be provided in return for a guarantee that the cost of other dwellings in the development will not be driven up due to the inclusion of affordable housing. In addition, a model could be developed that would be broad enough to take into consideration local context in implementation.

Further, the Committee notes advice from Bevan Warner from Launch Housing, that given enough lead time, developers could 'accept that new economic reality and... reprofile their investment decisions' in order to increase the supply of social and affordable housing.¹⁷⁰

RECOMMENDATION 50: That the Victorian Government investigate implementing a mandatory inclusionary zoning mechanism that would require a portion of any new major housing development be allocated to social or affordable housing. In designing such a model, the Government should consider making specific incentives available to developers to ameliorate the costs involved and ensure that the cost of other dwellings in the development are not increased as a result of the requirement.

Permanent Rental Affordability Development Solution

The organisation Housing all Australians presented to the Committee at a public hearing. Housing all Australians shared a voluntary inclusionary zoning proposal for the development of affordable private rental dwellings, called the Permanent Rental Affordability Development Solution (PRADS).

This proposal involves a framework for facilitating agreements between a developer and a local council to provide a proportion of affordable or below-market cost rental dwellings in a housing development. The dwellings would be rented at 80% of

¹⁶⁹ Kaye Thompson, Director, Community and Abdullah, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

¹⁷⁰ Warner, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

market value to low-income tenants (as defined in section 3AB of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic)).¹⁷¹ This obligation would exist on title for the life of the dwelling.¹⁷² The arrangement would be secured via a section 173 agreement, which acts as a binding safeguard that the agreed provision of affordable housing will be provided.¹⁷³

The developer would sell the dwelling to investors in the private market with the obligation to rent the property at below market cost to a low-income household. The value of the property would be reduced because of the obligation to charge below market rent. In return, the submission from Housing All Australians suggests that a proportionate reduction in market rent should be applied to ‘all property outgoings such as owner’s corporation fees, council and water taxes, land tax etc’.¹⁷⁴

The submission suggested that among other additional incentives for developers and private interests, ‘A greater speed for processing development permit approval’¹⁷⁵ could be put in place to limit development costs. Ross Hamilton, Partner at PwC Australia, explained this element of the proposal to the Committee at a public hearing:

What that means in a practical sense is, if you think about it from a developer’s perspective, a developer will approach undertaking a development project, they will think about the revenues they are going to get, they will think about their costs and they will think about the risk they are taking. But one of the biggest burdens that they carry which impacts them is time. So what we did as part of our work was model a couple of different scenarios, and this is really, really important because it just shows how something like the PRADS model could bite and make a tangible difference. We looked at a particular project in Fishermans Bend. It is soon to be constructed—a 300-apartment development. We had actual costs. We had actual revenues. They were not made-up numbers; they were very accurate. We looked at the time frames that were associated with that development and the two-year window that that particular developer had assumed it would take for that project to get approved, whether it was through council and the journey through that pathway or through VCAT et cetera and third party appeal.

What we then did simplistically was say, ‘Just imagine if we lived in a different world and we could compress that time frame and be really smart about how we did it and compress it to three months’. The implication of compressing that time frame from two years to three months is profound. In essence what we were able to show through modelling is that I could leave the developer whole—completely not disadvantaged at all—and there was the ability to provide in that particular project 10 per cent of those dwellings at 80 per cent of market rent in perpetuity.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic) s 3AB.

¹⁷² Housing All Australians Ltd, *Submission 170*, p. 28.

¹⁷³ *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic) s 173; Housing All Australians Ltd, *Submission 170*, p. 28.

¹⁷⁴ Housing All Australians Ltd, *Submission 170*, p. 31.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Hamilton, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

The Committee has concerns regarding fast-tracking the traditional planning process to secure affordable housing. Such an arrangement may leave insufficient time for community consultation, objections and scrutiny by local councils. However, as has been noted above, this already occurs with at least one local council in Victoria.¹⁷⁷ The Committee believes that should any such arrangement take place, appropriate safeguards must be introduced to ensure that a fast-tracked planning decision does not lead to poorer outcomes for the community.

The Committee is supportive of proposals to ensure more affordable housing in arrangements led by the private market. The Committee considers that the Victorian Government should engage further with Housing all Australians to determine whether the concessions outlined in the PRADS model would be practical or desirable for use in Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION 51: That the Victorian Government further investigate the use of the Permanent Rental Affordability Development Solution to ascertain whether it is a practical and appropriate mechanism for increasing provision of affordable housing in Victoria.

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**Adopted by the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne
15 February 2021**

¹⁷⁷ Faellis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

Appendix A

About the Inquiry

A.1 Submissions

1	Marypatricia Percy
2	Heidi Tobin
3	Phillippa Phillips
4	Annabel Susan Warner
5	Kristine Shephard
6	Jeffrey Anderson
7	Anne Laver
8	Peter Gell
9	Clyde Roberts
10	Ingrid Pezzoni
11	Lucy Kennedy
12	Confidential
13	Confidential
14	Milton Wilde
15	John Sharpe
16	Anne Peters
17	Confidential
18	Confidential
19	Sally Heggen
20	Confidential
21	Confidential
22	Igor Rogov
23	Confidential
24	Je Rose
25	Confidential
26	Confidential
27	Violet Browne
28	Sandra Lucas
29	Confidential
30	Confidential
31	Confidential
32	Confidential
33	Anne Gostelow
34	Confidential
35	Confidential
36	Tamara Boyd
37	Kate Incerti
38	Ross Mogridge
39	Jude Power
40	Alison Palmer
41	Danny Kooyong
42	Leah Gordon
43	Maryse Usher
44	Cathy Fischer
45	Fiona Huang
46	Diannah Paramour
47	Minnie Perry
48	Confidential
49	Bill Richardson
50	Donna Brond
51	Rebecca Bowles
52	Dora Paras
53	Paul Ross
54	Margaret Byron
55	Confidential
56	John O'Callaghan
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64	Debra Barry	101	Maroondah City Council
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67	Diane Ewin	104	Backpack Bed for Homeless
68	Trudy Hairs	105	Ambulance Victoria
69	Anna Ferrari	106	Don Stokes
70	Grace McCaughey	107	Name Withheld
71	Ellie O'Connor	108	Women and Mentoring
72	Joanne Colcott	109	Aaron Booth
73	Dr Duncan Rouch	110	Stewart Enpersby
74	Michelle Welsh	111	Confidential
75	Mornington Community Information and Support	112	Tammy Davern
76	Andrew Withall	113	Tiffany Overall
77	Joanne Nolan	114	Malcolm Roberts-Palmer
78	Alan Coe	115	Warren Tu
79	Phillip Wohlers	116	Kenneth McLeod
80	University of Melbourne	117	Nikita Guest
81	ANONYMOUS	118	John
82	Merryn Stevenson	119	Belinda Robbie
83	Mr Patrick Mount	120	Commissioner for Residential Tenancies
84	Bridget Koc	121	The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
85	Paula Westhead	122	Frankston City Council
86	Confidential	123	Howard Marosi
87	Shanae Elizabeth Best	124	NESAY Inc
88	Jacinta Heffernan	125	Beryl Jarrett
89	Confidential	126	Marlise Brenner
90	Hannah Bloxidge	127	Committee for Echuca Moama
91	Professor Libby Porter	128	Confidential
92	Bendigo Winter Night Shelter	129	Jane McCracken
93	Jane Brownrigg	130	Housing for the Aged Action Group
94	Catherine Brown	131	Community Information & Support Victoria
95	Confidential	132	Benjamin Cronshaw
96	Confidential	133	Hands Up Mallee
97	Glenelg Shire Council		

134	Whitelion Youth Agency	170	Housing all Australians
135	City of Boroondara	171	Mr Ange Kenos
136	Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN)	172	Wombat Housing & Support Services Inc
137	Monash Council	173	CASA Forum
138	Infrastructure Victoria	174	Maroondah Winter Shelter Homelessness Advocacy Group
139	Confidential	175	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
140	Confidential	176	Tenants Victoria
141	City of Stonnington	177	Northern Homelessness Network
142	The Municipal Association of Victoria	178	Professor Chris Chamberlain
143	Joseph Edmonds	179	Elaine Carbines
144	Mildura Rural City Council	180	Eastern Homelessness Service System Alliance
145	Mornington Peninsula Shire	181	Confidential
146	Barbara Hall	182	Geoffrey Constable
147	Nightingale Housing	183	Hobsons Bay City Council
148	Food Access Network (FAN) and Ballarat Community Health (BCH)	184	Confidential
149	Per Capita	185	Wyndham H3 Alliance
150	Wayss	186	Dementia Australia
151	Greater Shepparton City Council	187	Dr Andrew Hollows
152	Australian Psychological Society	188	Zoe Hunter
153	Jacqueline Whittaker	189	WEstjustice (Western Community Legal Centre)
154	City of Port Phillip	190	City Partnering Legal & Consulting
155	Homes for Homes	191	Women's Property Initiatives
156	Dr Bruce Watson	192	Windana Drug and Alcohol Recovery Ltd
157	OAM Property Industry Foundation	193	Sialas Butic
158	Mr Gabriel Waldron	194	Anonymous
159	Confidential	195	Pedro
160	Mr David Bath	196	Alicia Farrugia
161	Allison Millward	197	Youth Projects
162	Mr Peter Maher	198	Domestic Violence Victoria
163	Mr Peter May	199	City of Greater Dandenong
164	Confidential	200	Bayside City Council
165	Susanne Birks	201	Isocracy Network
166	Brimbank City Council	202	Inner Melbourne Community Legal
167	Bass Coast Shire Council	203	SANE Australia
168	Victorian Public Tenants Association	204	Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association
169	Seniors Rights Victoria	205	Haven; Home, Safe

206	Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre	242	Darren Browning
207	The Salvation Army	243	Liz Aird
208	Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic)	244	Friends of Public Housing Victoria
209	Hope Street Youth and Family Services	245	Yarra City Council
210	Helen Dawson	246	Junction Support Services
211	Michael McMahon	247	Confidential
212	Jan Lacey	248	Jesuit Social Services
213	Mr Robert Heron	249	Unison Housing Research Lab (RMIT University) and Unison Housing
214	Tim Singh Laurence	250	Paul Reiner
215	Russell Northe MLA	251	Knox City Council
216	Uniting Vic.Tas	252	David Hollis
217	Melbourne City Mission	253	Confidential
218	Shadac Inc (The Cottage Shepparton)	254	Central Highlands Creating Connections Youth Homeless Practitioners Hub
219	Darebin City Council	255	Melton City Council
220	Confidential	256	Confidential
221	Jennifer Mockett	257	Jim McInerney
222	Abrehet Taye	258	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
223	Brett Berry	259	Elizabeth Silke
224	Andrew McVeigh	260	Public Housing - Everybody's Business
225	Christine Kinman	261	Jillian Fryer
226	McAuley Community Services for Women	262	Family Access Network
227	Shelley Bowman	263	Confidential
228	Confidential	264	Women's Health West
229	St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria	265	Gigi Weiss
230	Yarra Ranges Housing Action Group	266	Marion Harper
231	Rhonda Pryor	267	Loddon Mallee Homelessness Network
232	Jody Letts	268	Kay White
233	Robyn Evans	269	Bolton Clarke
234	Rhys Green	270	Confidential
235	Council of the Ageing	271	Deborah Moore
236	Kids Under Cover	272	Sushma Shrestha
237	Sex Work Law Reform	273	Phillip Kelly
238	Confidential	274	We Are Here
239	Office of the Public Advocate of Victoria	275	Manningham Inclusive Community Housing
240	Brian Woods	276	David Evans
241	Susan Sherbak	277	Fair Go for Pensioners (FGFP) Coalition Victoria Incorporated

278	Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services	312	Pamela Byron
279	Kate Hamilton	313	Confidential
280	Ross Findlay	314	Lucy Skelton
281	Nolan Tyrell	315	Deborah Moore
282	Amanda Penno	316	Access Health and Community
283	Lighthouse Foundation	317	St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne
284	Annie Rivera	318	City of Whittlesea
285	Wayne Davis	319	School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University
286	Confidential	320	Pride Foundation Australian
287	Confidential	321	South Port Community Housing Group
288	Women's Health Victoria	322	Anchor Inc - Rapid Response Pilot Project
289	Ballarat Community Health	323	Confidential
290	Northern and Western Homelessness Network's Consumer Participation Working Group	324	Blessing Bags Melbourne
291	Susan Carew	325	Action for More Independence & Dignity in Accommodation (AMIDA)
292	City of Greater Geelong	326	Amber May
293	Bethaliah Ambrym	327	Ross Proud
294	Barwon South West Homelessness	328	Council to Homeless Persons
295	Council of Single Mothers and their Children	329	VACRO
296	City of Melbourne	330	Centre for Multicultural Youth
297	Sacred Heart Mission	331	Law Institute of Victoria
298	David Henderson	332	Orygen
299	Confidential	333	Dr Beryl Langer
299	EACH	334	Berry Street
300	Seamas McCarthy	335	Fitzroy Legal Service
301	Safe Place	336	Wellways Australia
302	Quantum Support Services	337	Louise Kelly
303	Magistrates' Court of Victoria	338	Moreland City Council
304	Home Stretch	339	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
305	Statewide Children's Resource Program	340	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)
306	Alliance for Gambling Reform	341	Victorian Council of Social Service
307	Grattan Institute	342	The Royal Women's Hospital
308	Colac Area Health	343	RMIT University Centre for Innovative Justice & Law and Advocacy Centre for Women joint submission
309	Julie O'Connor	344	Children's Court of Victoria
310	Confidential	345	City of Kingston
311	Confidential	346	St Vincent de Paul Conference Foster

347	Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA)	382	Australian Association of Social Workers
348	inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	383	Jack Verdins
349	Mind Australia Limited	384	Mental Health Legal Centre
350	Victorian Trades Hall Council	385	Mercy Foundation
351	Colin Smith	386	Flat Out
352	Youth Affairs Council VIC	387	Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby
353	Bethany Community Support	388	Northern Community Legal Centre
354	Victorian Electoral Commission	390	Confidential
355	Brotherhood of St Laurence	391	Catholic Social Services Victoria
356	Emerging Minds Australia	392	CoHealth
357	WISHIN	393	Anne Heyes
358	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare	394	Associate Professor David Mackenzie
359	The Constellation Project	395	Alcohol and Drug Foundation
360	Penington Institute	396	Angela Zhang
361	Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand	397	Ahmad Masri
362	Federation of Community Legal Centres	398	Nanci Moore
363	Star Health	399	Pam Lynch
364	PriceWaterhouseCoopers	400	Ann Jeffree
365	Shai Diner	401	Christine Elder
366	YWCA Australia	402	Spencer Cameron
367	Victoria Legal Aid	403	Kathy Gibbs
368	National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW)	404	Confidential
369	Salvatore Furfaro	405	Frank Haddy
370	Mission Australia	406	Sian Priya Woolston
371	North East Multicultural Association	407	Ezilia Dring
372	The Barnett Foundation	408	Confidential
373	Probus Women's Housing Association of Victoria Inc.	409	Kerrie Byrne
374	Anglicare Victoria	410	City of Casey
375	Justice Connect	411	Confidential
376	Janet Graham	412	Confidential
377	Confidential	413	Confidential
378	VincentCare Victoria	414	Give Me A Room Project
379	Carers Victoria	415	Confidential
380	Project Respect	416	Philip Mendes and Robyn Martin
381	Wintringham	417	Gippsland Homelessness Network
		418	Property Owners' Association of Victoria
		419	Triggs Advocacy Group

420	The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists	436	Martina Marcey
421	Mallee Family Care	437	Brittany
422	Launch Housing	438	Confidential
423	Department of Health and Human Services	439	Anonymous
424	Holly Marchioni	440	Confidential
425	Seaford Housing Action Coalition (SHAC)	441	Summa Tarlian Simons
426	Confidential	442	Tina Van Nispen
427	Confidential	443	Commission for Children and Young People
428	University of Melbourne	444	The Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health Ltd
429	Castan Centre of Human Rights Law	445	Victoria Police
430	Monash University	446	Australian Services Union
431	Angus Atkinson	447	Wally Edwards
432	John Bellerby	448	Meret-Field Sally-Brown
433	Diane Holroyd	449	Youth2 Alliance
434	Lee Wenning	450	Victorian Women Lawyers
435	Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) joint submission	451	Prosper Australia
		452	Name Withheld

A.2 Public hearings

Friday, 22 November 2019

Legislative Council Committee Room, Parliament House
Spring Street, East Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Guy Johnson	Professor	RMIT University Inaugural Unison Chair of Urban Housing and Homelessness
Kate Colvin	Manager, Policy and Communications	Council to Homeless Persons
Cathy Humphrey	CEO Chair, Council to Homeless Persons Board	Sacred Heart Mission
Bevan Warner	CEO	Launch Housing
Karren Walker	Manager, Entry Points	HomeGround Real Estate
Major Jenny Begent	National Head of Social Mission	The Salvation Army
Livia Carusi	General Manager, Homelessness Australia	
Shane Austin	General Manager, Homelessness Victoria; Social Mission Coordinator Victoria	
Samantha Sowerwine	Principal Lawyer, Homeless Law	Justice Connect
Cameron Lavery	Manager and Principal Lawyer, Homeless Law	
Emma King	CEO	Victorian Council of Social Service
Karen Taranto	Policy Advisor	
Darren Smith	CEO	Aboriginal Housing Victoria
Jenny Samms	Special Adviser	
Peter Jones	Senior Policy Officer	

Monday, 2 December 2019

Lakes Room, Bairnsdale RSL
2 Bairnsdale-Forge Creek Road, Bairnsdale

Name	Title	Organisation
Ryan Hedley	Manager	Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
Jamie Williamson	CEO	
Christofer Beal	Operations Manager	
Robert Ashton	Initial Assessment and Planning Officer; Outreach Officer, Fulham Correctional Centre, Sale	Community Housing (VIC) Limited
Paula Healey	Private Rental Assistance Program Worker	
Jane Ponting	Executive Officer	Gippsland East Local Learning and Employment Network Inc.
Allan T Coe	Elder	Wiradjuri, Eora, Yorta Yorta
Melanie Brown	Principal Strategic Advisor, Family Violence	Gippsland Women's Health Service
Chris McNamara	Gippsland Homelessness Network Coordinator	
Chris McNamara	Gippsland Homelessness Network Coordinator	Gippsland Homelessness Network
Captains David and Claire Jones	-	Salvation Army
Louise McCarthy	Director, Primary and Community Services	Orbost Regional Health
Kathy Woods	Housing Support Worker	
Richard Evans	Family, Youth and Children's Services Manager	Gippsland Lakes Community Health
Donna Pendergast	Homelessness Support Program Case Manager	

Tuesday, 3 December 2019

Conference Room, Morwell Club
136 Helen Street, Morwell

Name	Title	Organisation
Chris Wightman	Coordinator, Social and Community Planning	Bass Coast Shire Council
Nina Barry-Macaulay	Senior Advocacy Officer	
Emma Dobson	Project Coordinator, Anglicare Victoria	The Orange Door
Amelia Vincent	Advanced Family Violence Practice Leader, Quantum Support Services	
Alicia Hudson	RAMP Coordinator, Quantum Support Services	
Teresa Watt	Team Leader, Latrobe Community Health	
Naomi Webb	Practice Leader, Advocacy and Support	Quantum Support Services
Cheryl Barnes	Manager, Homelessness Services	
Nicole Larkin	Practice Leader, Homelessness and Support	
Courtney Eacott	Coordinator, Homelessness Services, Gippsland	Community Housing (VIC) Limited
Aleisha Olivier	Brief Intervention Worker	
Erin Price	State Manager, East Victoria Homelessness	Salvation Army
Heidi Hunter	Practice Leader, Client Services	Uniting Gippsland
Corey Harrison	Executive Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Navinda Wickramasinghe	Team Leader, Youth Services	

Wednesday, 12 February 2020

Federation Room, Parliament House
Spring Street, East Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Nicholas Pearce	Director	The HoMie Store
Danielle Howe	Evaluations Manager	
Hon. Wade Noonan	Executive Director, WoMEDA Associate Director of Social Enterprise and Investment, RMIT University Chair, JobsBank	-
John O'Callaghan	-	-
Nick Jahnecke	Teaching Scholar, School of Architecture and Built Environment	Deakin University
Robert Pradolin	Founding Board Member	Housing All Australians
Louise Rutten	Chair	
David Mansfield	Chief Operations Officer	Quest Apartment Hotels
Ross Hamilton	Partner	PwC Australia
Sam Gribble	General Manager, Alternative Housing	Metricon
Jim Hardy	Senior Manager	Community Sector Banking
Kelvin Ryan	Manager Director	Simonds Group
Brad Paddon	Director	APD Projects
David Spriggs	CEO	Infoxchange
Sarah Davies	Board Member CEO of Philanthropy Australia	Kids Under Cover
Jo Swift	CEO	
Brittnie Stock-Lopez	Former Kids Under Cover client	
Peter Danks	Advisor	Homes for Homes/The Big Issue
Tracy Longo	National Operations Manager, Homes for Home	
Dr Catherine Brown	CEO Expert Panel Member, Social Impact Investment Taskforce, Department of Premier and Cabinet	Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
Erin Dolan	Program Manager, Affordable Housing and Homelessness	

Thursday, 27 February 2020

Galada Community Centre
10A Forum Way, Epping

Name	Title	Organisation
Belinda Leon	Manager, Community Support	Whittlesea Community Connections
Emma Antonetti	Equity and Impact Manager	
Carmen Faelis	Team Leader, Social Policy and Planning	City of Whittlesea
Jo Wilson	Manager, Community Strengthening	Mitchell Shire Council
Leanne Roberts	Head of Public Policy and Media	Berry Street (Northern Region), Eaglemont Office
Jade Blakkarly	CEO	WISHIN (Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North)
Jo Doherty	Practice Lead	Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service
Jo Smith	General Manager, Support Services South	Haven; Home, Safe
Quinn Pawson	CEO	VincentCare Northern Community Hub
Paul Turton	General Manager, Homelessness Services	
Tony Clarke	Hub Manager, Northern Community Hub, Glenroy	
Grace Hyde	Manager, Initial Assessment and Planning Team	
Donna Bennett	CEO	Hope Street Youth and Family Services
Jennifer McAughtrie	Operations Manager	
Gerda Zimmerman	Senior Housing Case Manager	DPV Health Whittlesea
Julie Bamblett	Case Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd
Karin Williams	Manager, Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Services	
Vickianne Purcell	Program Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
Tracey Brown	Senior Case Worker, Wilam Support Service	

Wednesday, 11 March 2020

The Connection, Shepparton
7287 Midland Highway, Shepparton

Name	Title	Organisation
Anita McCurdy	Education First Youth Foyer Manager, Shepparton	Berry Street, Shepparton Youth Foyer
Mark Cox	Foyer Practice	Brotherhood of St Laurence
Dr Joseph Borlagdan	Foyer Research and Evaluation	
Maria Hutchison	Director	Shadac Inc (The Cottage Shepparton)
Rob Bryant	Founder	
Timothy Ridgeway	Support Worker	
Melinda Lawley	CEO	The Bridge Youth Services, Shepparton
Renaë Ford	Program Manager, Youth and Family Support	
Cr Seema Abdullah	Mayor	Greater Shepparton City Council
Kaye Thompson	Director, Community	
Rebecca Lorains	CEO	Primary Care Connect, Shepparton
Bryan Lipmann	CEO	Wintringham Specialist Aged Care
Jane Barnes	Chief of Staff	
Gayle Reece	Regional Community Care and Outreach Manager, Cresswick, Shepparton and Geelong	
Marie Murfet	Hub Manager, Hume Community Hub, Shepparton	VincentCare
Janelle Graham	Lived Experience Consultant	Berry Street Childhood Institute
Catherine Jeffries	Client Services Manager	Beyond Housing
Laura Harris	Business Development Manager	
Ms Suzanna Sheed MP	Independent Member for Shepparton	Community Comment
Myles Peterson	Advisor to Ms Suzanna Sheed MP	
Father Simon Robinson	-	
Chris Blizzard	-	
Allan Mitchell	-	
Kim O'Keefe	-	
Patricia Moran	-	
Brendan Keenan	-	
Kelly James	-	
Aaron Gilhooley	-	
Vicki Scott	-	
Zafer Coskun	-	

Thursday, 12 March 2020

The Ovens Room, The Quality Hotel Gateway Wangaratta
29–37 Ryley Street, Wangaratta

Name	Title	Organisation
Jamie Chubb	Director, Community Wellbeing	Rural City of Wangaratta
Amanda Kelly	CEO	Women's Health, Goulburn North East
Darran Stonehouse	Lecturer, Social Work	La Trobe University
Leah Waring	CEO	NESAY (North East Support & Action For Youth Inc.)
Claire Anderson	Community Services Manager	
Georgie Gray	Youth and Family Services Manager	
Michelle Fell	Client Services Manager	Junction Support Services
Katharine Hodgins	Senior Manager	
Lenny Jenner	Acting CEO	Towong Shire Council
Michelle Hamer	-	Community Comment
Cassandra Pollock	-	
Sue Ingleton	-	
Leah Khoo	-	
Kristin Seaver	-	

Wednesday, 20 May 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Shane Austin	Victorian State Manager	The Salvation Army
Jenny Smith	CEO	Council to Homeless Persons
Bevan Warner	CEO	Launch Housing
Margaret Stewart	Executive Director, Mission	St Vincent's Hospital

Tuesday, 23 June 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Ruth Gordon	Homelessness Network Coordinator, Southern Region	Southern Homelessness Services Network
Mary-Anne Rushford	Manager, Homeless Persons Program	Bolton Clarke
Julie Fry	Team Coordinator	
Karyn Gellie	Team Coordinator	
Amanda Williams	Service Manager, Towards Home+ Frankston, Neami National	Towards Home+ Frankston Rough Sleeper Initiative
Karren Walker	Group Manager, Entry Points, Launch Housing	
Lauren Crawford	Assertive Outreach, Program Manager, Getting Housing, Launch Housing	
Ashish Sitoula	Team Leader, Community Advocacy	Greater Dandenong City Council
Venita McKinnon	Social and Community Planner	Frankston City Council
John Baker	CEO	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
Nick Grant-Collins	Acting Coordinator, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Connected Communities	Casey City Council
Elizabeth Thomas	CEO	WAYSS
Sean Quigley	Manager, Dandenong Homelessness Services	
Professor Shelly Mallet	Director, Research and Policy Centre	Brotherhood of St Laurence
Emma Cull	Senior Manager Youth, Service Development	

Wednesday, 1 July 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Sarah Langmore	Coordinator	Western Homelessness Network
Zoe Vale	Chair	
Jocelyn Bignold	CEO	McAuley Community Services for Women
Megan	-	
Mr Malcolm Roberts-Palmer	Senior Social Policy and Research Officer	Maribyrnong City Council
Brook Quinn	Social Policy Officer Community Planning and Advocacy	Brimbank City Council
James King	Acting CEO	Unison Housing
Sue Grigg	Director, Housing	
Melissa Hardman	CEO	WEstjustice
Emma Dawson	Executive Director	Per Capita
Abigail Lewis	Research Associate	

Thursday, 2 July 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Dr Michael Fotheringham	Executive Director	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)
Dr Jonathan Spear	Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer	Infrastructure Victoria
Llewellyn Reynders	Team Leader, Policy and Strategy	
Tina Hogarth-Clarke	CEO	COTA VIC
Fiona York	CEO	Housing for the Aged Action Group
Mel Walker	Criminal Law Section Co-chair	Law Institute of Victoria (LIV)
Professor the Hon Kevin H Bell AM QC	Director	Castan Centre for Human Rights Law
Alison MacDonald	Acting CEO	Domestic Violence Victoria
Alison Birchall	Acting Manager, Policy Unit	
Jeanette Large	CEO	Women's Property Initiatives
Bronwyn Pike	CEO	Uniting Vic.Tas
Jenny Smith	Senior Manager, Homelessness Services	

Monday, 13 July 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Rebecca Callahan	Homelessness Network Coordinator	Barwon South West Homelessness Network
Ruth Isbel	Executive Officer	Emma House Domestic Violence Services
Mary Clapham	Manager	South Western Centre Against Sexual Assault
Betti Chapelle	Manager	Bethany Community Support
Bernadette McCartney	Executive Manager	
Associate Professor David Mackenzie	Director	The Geelong Project
Anne-Marie Ryan	Executive Officer	
Max Broadley	Executive Director	
Ken Stewart	Geelong High School	
Bec Glen	Project Coordinator, The Albury Project	
Kate Higgins	Regional Manager, Western Victoria	Wellways
Rosalie Frankish	Housing Programs Coordinator, Victoria	
Robyn Stevens	Director	City of Greater Geelong
Janica Lane	Manager	

Tuesday 14 July 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Jemal Ahmet	Executive Manager Programs and Services	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Bec Lean	Program Manager – South East	
Melanie Raymond	Chair	Youth Projects
Vicki Sutton	CEO	Melbourne City Mission
Nada Nasser	State Director	Mission Australia
Troy Crellin	Manager of Social Enterprises	
Kea Bamblett-Edwards	-	
Sebastian Antoine	Policy and Research Officer	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Cassandra Prigg	-	

Monday, 27 July 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Juha Kaakinen	CEO	Y Foundation (Y-Säätiö)
Jarmo Linden	Director	Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland

Wednesday, 12 August 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Dr Sarah Pollock	Executive Director of Research and Advocacy	Mind Australia
Dr Kerryn Rubin	Chair	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Victorian Branch
Dr Brian Vandenberg	Health Economist, School of Social Sciences	Monash University
Paul McDonald	CEO	Anglicare Victoria
Colleen Pearce	Public Advocate	Office of the Public Advocate
Magistrate Pauline Spencer	Head, Specialist Courts Division	Magistrates' Court of Victoria
Marius Smith	CEO	Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO)
Sarah Hughes	Program Manager, ReConnect	

Thursday, 13 August 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Mellissa Edwards	Network Coordinator	Loddon Mallee Homelessness Network
Mark Jenkins	Manager Community Futures	Mildura Rural City Council
Renée Ficarra	Community Development Officer	
Gary Simpson	CEO	Mallee Accommodation and Support Service (MASP)
Trevor Gibbs	General Manager	Mallee Haven; Home, Safe
Teresa Jayet	CEO	Mallee Family Care

Wednesday, 9 September 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Katelyn Butterss	Manager, Policy and Communications	Victorian Public Tenants Association
Linda Weatherson	General Manager, Community and City Services	City of Melbourne
Graham Porteous	Director, Strategic Projects	
Barney Wilson	Acting Team Leader City People, Executive Services	
Assoc. Professor Tony Walker	CEO	Ambulance Victoria
Assistant Commissioner Timothy Hansen	Service Delivery Transformation Command	Victoria Police
Brendan Coates	Program Director, Household Finance	Grattan Institute
Ben Rimmer	Director of Housing	Victorian Department of Health and Human Services
Sherri Bruinhout	Deputy Commander, COVID-19 Public Housing Response and Executive Director, Housing Pathways and Outcomes Housing Division	

Thursday, 10 September 2020

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Cr Margaret O'Rourke	Mayor	City of Greater Bendigo
Vicky Mason	Director, Health and Wellbeing	
Martin Collins	General Manager, Community Wellbeing	Central Goldfields Shire Council
Kirsty Waller	Manager	Housing Justice
Jane Measday	General Manager, Social Support,	Ballarat Community Health
Katrina Leehane	Manager, Youth, Family and Community Support	
Warrick Davison	Assistant Senior Manager, Housing and Homelessness (Uniting)	
Rodney Carter	Group CEO	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
Hazel Hudson	Family Services Manager	Njernda Aboriginal Corporation
Rachel Gellatly	Executive General Manager Operations, North Haven; Home, Safe	Sidney Myer Haven
Donna Gillard	General Manager Support Services North, Haven; Home, Safe	HeyVan
Terry Westaway	Chair	Bendigo Winter Night Shelter
Matthew Parkinson		

Appendix B
**Questionnaire to Department
of Health and Human Services
and Director of Housing**

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee



Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

Questionnaire

Department of Health and Human
Services and the Director of Housing

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Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

Questionnaire

The inquiry

The Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee is conducting an inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. The terms of reference for the inquiry, as agreed by the Legislative Council on 7 June 2019, include that the Committee should:

- provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria;
- investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and
- identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

The Committee is currently due to report to the Parliament by 17 November 2020. However, please note that this date is likely to be extended due to the impact of COVID-19 on parliamentary committee work. The date by which a response is requested below takes into consideration the predicted extended reporting date.

Guidance for questionnaire

This questionnaire seeks information on:

- the type and condition of public and community housing stock in Victoria
- long-term strategies for developing and effectively managing social housing stock
- current and projected demand for service and asset demand in social housing.

This information is necessary to assist the Committee to make recommendations to the Victorian Government in its final report.

When completing this questionnaire, please ensure that all relevant Government departments and agencies assist in the provision of information as appropriate. While this questionnaire is primarily addressed to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Director of Housing, the Committee expects that broader input will be required across Government. This includes input from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Treasury and Finance in relation to their membership of the Interdepartmental Housing Project Steering Committee.

Please note that both the questionnaire, and the Government's response, will be attached as an appendix to the Committee's final report.

Response

Please provide a response to the questionnaire by **5.00pm on Friday 31 July 2020**.

It is important that this information be provided in a timely manner in order to allow the Committee sufficient time to consider the response alongside other evidence received as part of the inquiry ahead of the reporting date.

The completed questionnaire should be sent (in the format received and with any supporting documentation) to: homelessnessinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au.

Asset base

Question 1

For the past five years, please provide a breakdown of the dwellings that make up the Victorian housing portfolio by quantity of property type and corresponding value.

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Property type	As at 30 June 2015	As at 30 June 2016	As at 30 June 2017	As at 30 June 2018	As at 30 June 2019
	No. of properties	No. of properties	No. of properties	No. of properties	No. of properties
	\$million	\$million	\$million	\$million	\$million
Director owned and managed (public housing)					
Director owned, community managed					
Community owned and managed					

Aboriginal owned and managed																				
Total Victorian housing portfolio																				

Public housing

The following questions relate generally to public housing in Victoria. This refers to Director-owned and operated housing stock.

Question 2

Please provide details of current public housing stock in Victoria, including the following:

- a. Total number and capacity of public housing units, including information by dwelling type and local government area
- b. A stock profile, including the number of properties per bedroom number and dwelling type
- c. Capacity and dwelling type of youth-specific accommodation (transitional and long-term)
- d. Capacity and dwelling type of accessible housing units
- e. A breakdown of the current status of all stock, including those occupied, vacant, under repair, under redevelopment, under construction, scheduled for demolition, or any other status
- f. A breakdown (in five-year increments) of the change in the total amounts of stock (indicating reasons for significant fluctuations)
- g. A breakdown of the age of dwellings (in 10-year increments, e.g. 0-10, 11-20 years) by number of bedrooms

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 3

Please provide details of planned construction of housing stock across the forward estimates, including dwelling type and local government area.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 4

Please provide details of planned acquisition of housing stock across the forward estimates.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 5

Please provide a year by year breakdown on the number of tenants relocating from public housing into other forms of housing over the previous ten-year period, as well as:

- a. Information on the Department's approach to relocating tenants where they are no longer in need of public housing support
- b. The number of tenants paying market rent by local government area.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 6

With regard to allocation of available housing, please provide information on:

- a. How the Department is ensuring that housing stock meets the demand profile of those in priority need (for example, increased demand for one-bedroom properties)
- b. How the Department is ensuring that tenants live in housing that most appropriately fits their needs where their circumstances change
- c. The number of vacant bedrooms in public housing units (for example, single persons living in a three-bedroom property)
- d. The average turnaround time between tenants.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 7

Please provide an age profile of total public housing stock.

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Property age range	Number of properties	Proportion of total stock (%)	Estimated maintenance liability (\$ million)	Number of properties per condition rating
0-10				
11-20				
21-30				
31-40				
41-50				
51-60				
61-70				
71 and older				

Community housing

The following questions relate generally to community housing in Victoria. This refers to housing that is managed by community organisations, including both Director-owned and community-owned stock.

Question 8

Please provide details of current community housing stock in Victoria (as regulated by the Department), including a breakdown of property types as per Question 2(a)-(g) above.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 9

Please provide a year by year breakdown (for the past five years, per financial year) of the housing stock transferred to community housing organisations, using the below table.

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Year	Recipient organisation	Number of properties	Type of transfer (Management or title)	Reasons for transfer
2020				
2019				
2018				
2017				

2016							

- a. Please provide information about the method of assessing appropriate community housing providers when transferring public housing stock to community housing organisations.
- b. Please provide information on projected future transfers, including the number of properties and the type of transfer (management or title).

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Question 10

Please provide details on the findings of any recent modelling undertaken on the financial implications for community housing organisations of:

- a. Public housing stock transfers to community housing, such as in relation to increased maintenance liabilities on ageing stock
- b. Requirements under Homes for Victorians for community housing organisations that have opted in to the Victorian Housing Register to allocate 75 per cent of housing allocations to critical needs applicants.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Transitional and crisis accommodation

Question 11

Please provide details of the current capacity and dwelling type of crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation, including a breakdown of types of accommodation and total number of beds for each (for example, family violence refuges, youth crisis accommodation).

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Type of accommodation	Number of facilities	Region	Total number of available beds	Average length of stay
Family violence refuges				
Youth refuges				
Major crisis supported accommodation				
Asylum seeker accommodation				
Other (please provide details)				

Question 12

Please provide details of planned construction or acquisition of new crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation across the forward estimates, including accommodation type and anticipated capacity.

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Type of accommodation	Region	Estimated capacity	Estimated cost
Family violence refuges			
Youth refuges			
Major crisis supported accommodation			
Asylum seeker accommodation			
Other (please provide details)			

Question 13

Please provide information on how the Victorian Government is supporting asylum seekers and refugees on temporary visas to access housing where they are ineligible for other forms of support.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Surplus land and assets

The Victorian Government has a number of publicly available resources relating to the transfer of surplus government land and property assets, including the Landholding Policy and Guidelines; Land Transactions Policy and Guidelines; Land Use Policy and Guidelines; Strategic Assessment Policy and Guidelines and the online land search tool GovMap. When responding to the following questions, please include references to the relevant sections of these documents as appropriate.

Question 14

How do existing government strategies or policies ensure that surplus government land and/or property assets are redirected to the Director of Housing where they could be repurposed as part of the public housing portfolio, either through sale or leasing?

- a. In carrying out the first right of refusal process for government agencies to submit expressions of interest for notified surplus land, how are expressions of interest by the Director of Housing prioritised for the purpose of acquiring new social housing?
- b. Please identify any asset transfers from government agencies to the Director of Housing, and the related cost to the housing portfolio, over the previous five-year period.
- c. Please identify any leases from government agencies to the Director of Housing over the previous five-year period.
- d. Please identify any significant challenges in repurposing surplus government land and property assets for housing as part of the public housing portfolio.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 15

Please provide an update on implementation of the commitment made by the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to develop a policy relating to the leasing of surplus government land and other interim land use opportunities in their response to the Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Managing Surplus Government Land*. Please also provide a copy of this policy if complete.

- a. In development of such a policy, what consideration was given to the current and projected demands for social housing in Victoria?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Audits and strategy

Question 16

Please provide an update on implementation of the consolidated action plan provided by the Interdepartmental Housing Project Steering Committee in response to recommendations made by the Auditor-General in the 2017 report, Managing Victoria's public housing. Please provide copies of relevant supporting documents where available.

Response

Please provide response using the table below (and/or attach Excel worksheets as required).

Recommendation	Department's proposed action	Department's proposed end date	Update on implementation
1. Agree on a long-term strategic direction for public housing that sets targets for growth, sustainability and meeting demand.	Set parameters for growth in the Asset Strategy.	December 2017	
	Define performance commitments in relation to demand in the bilateral performance regime with the Commonwealth under the proposed National Affordable Housing and Homelessness Agreement (subsequently agreed as the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement).	June 2018	
	Identify measures for achieving and demonstrating the financial sustainability of public housing provision in an agreed budget strategy.	June 2018	

<p>2. Monitor, evaluate and report on the delivery of measures related to public housing in Homes for Victorians, including their impacts on social housing growth, sustainability and demand.</p>	<p>Complete a Strategic Outcomes Framework.</p>	<p>September 2017</p>	
	<p>Implement a reporting framework for Homes for Victorians measures to support regular reporting to the Interdepartmental Committee.</p>	<p>September 2017</p>	
	<p>Complete an overarching assessment of delivery of strategic outcomes as at June 2019 for the consideration of the Interdepartmental committee.</p>	<p>December 2019</p>	
<p>3. Assess the financial and operational impacts of changes to the community housing sector's role arising from Homes for Victorians, including new housing allocation requirements.</p>	<p>Provide analysis on potential impact of Homes for Victorians on the community housing sector for the consideration of the Interdepartmental Committee.</p>	<p>December 2018</p>	
	<p>Assess impacts on the community sector against Dec 2018 baseline and expectations for the consideration of the Interdepartmental committee.</p>	<p>December 2019</p>	
<p>4. Identify and implement strategies to improve the financial sustainability of the public housing rental operating model over the long term.</p>	<p>As above proposed action: Identify measures for achieving and demonstrating the financial sustainability of public housing provision in an agreed budget strategy.</p>	<p>June 2018</p>	

<p>5. Develop and implement an asset strategy for public housing that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflects a comprehensive understanding of service supply and demand over the short, medium and long term • establishes outcome-focused performance standards for asset management that adhere to the benefit-mapping principles contained in Department of Treasury and Finance's Investment Management Standard • establishes a holistic and transparent life cycle approach to asset planning decisions that captures regional input • establishes governance arrangements that clearly communicate roles and responsibilities and provide for sustained oversight of asset management performance • is reviewed and updated so that it remains current. 	<p>Complete the Asset Strategy.</p>	<p>December 2017</p>	
	<p>Develop and implement new governance arrangements</p>	<p>July 2018</p>	
	<p>Include explicit processes for regular review and update in the Asset Strategy.</p>	<p>December 2017</p>	

<p>6. Through its asset strategy, develop and implement plans to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overcome identified shortcomings with property condition assessments to support evidence-based asset planning decisions • optimally balance expenditure on all maintenance types. 	<p>As above proposed actions:</p> <p>Complete the Asset Strategy.</p> <p>Identify measures for achieving and demonstrating the financial sustainability of public housing provision in an agreed budget strategy.</p>	<p>June 2018</p>	
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Question 17

Please provide a copy of the most recent:

- a. Audit of public housing stock
- b. Asset Strategy for public housing.

Response

Please attach these documents alongside your response.

Question 18

How often do audits of public housing stock occur and on what basis do these occur?

- a. How do audits contribute to the 2016 Asset Intent Framework that is used to assess future paths for public housing stock?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 19

How does the Asset Intent Framework work together with the Asset Strategy, noting that the Asset Strategy was expected to be completed in December 2017?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 20

How do asset plans incorporate regional views and requirements?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 21

How do asset management strategy documents forecast service and asset demand in social housing?

- a. What is the forecast demand over the forward estimates?
- b. How does the forecast inform funding allocations?
- c. What is the estimated cost to meet the forecast demand?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 22

Is the Department now fully compliant with the Asset Management Accountability Framework, noting that it has reported only partial compliance since the framework's introduction?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 23

How often do property condition assessments of public housing stock occur and on what basis do these occur?

- a. How do property condition assessments inform maintenance plans and strategies?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 24

How does the Department intend to measure the effectiveness of Victoria's *Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan*, noting that recommendation 11 of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into the 2019-20 Budget Estimates recommended development of budget paper performance measures and targets for this purpose?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Victorian Housing Register

Question 25

Please provide information on the current total number of applications on the Victorian Housing Register, as well as the total number of persons these applications represent, and a breakdown of:

- a. Applications for public housing; applications for community housing; and applications for both public and community housing
- b. Applicants per application type (including per Priority Access segment)
- c. Applications for Aboriginal housing
- d. Applications with a Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) number
- e. Applications from women over the age of 55
- f. Age ranges of applications
- g. Requested dwelling size (e.g. one bedroom, two bedroom)
- h. Preferred locations (by region)

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 26

What is the total estimated cost to house every applicant on the Victorian Housing Register?

- a. What is the total estimated cost to house every applicant seeking priority access?

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 27

For priority access applicants, please provide a breakdown of applications between priority segment types, including, for the most recent reporting period:

- a. Proportion of applications per segment
- b. Proportion of allocations per segment
- c. Average wait time for each segment.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 28

Please provide a breakdown in numbers of the primary reasons for transfer requests on the Victorian Housing Register.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 29

Please provide an update on progress of Stage two rollout of the Victorian Housing Register, including the migration of community housing waiting lists. In particular:

- a. When will Stage two be complete, noting that the Department previously indicated to the Committee that they expected to complete the transition process in 2019?
- b. How many community housing organisations have chosen to be incorporated onto the Register and how many community housing organisations have chosen not to be incorporated?
- c. Please provide information on why community housing organisations may choose not to opt in to the Register, and what the impacts of this may be, including for social housing data reporting.
- d. Please provide details on how staff have worked to transition applications onto the Victorian Housing Register in order to minimise duplicate or multiple applications and ensure that applications meet all relevant criteria.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Housing budget

Question 30

For the previous financial year (2018-19), please provide a detailed breakdown of the income received by the Director of Housing from:

- a. Total rent received
- b. Australian Government grants
- c. State Government contribution from consolidated revenue
- d. Revenue from sale of properties, including number of properties sold
- e. Other (please specify).

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 31

For the last financial year, please provide a detailed breakdown of the expenditure of the housing budget in relation to:

- a. Staff salaries
- b. Other administration costs
- c. Total property maintenance cost
- d. Land acquisition cost
- e. Construction cost of new stock
- f. Demolition cost
- g. Rent lost due to vacancy
- h. Grants to housing associations
- i. Grants to homelessness organisations
- j. Other (please specify).

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 32

When was the last review of expenditure undertaken and what were the results of this review? Please include any relevant information on recommissioning of homelessness sector grants.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 33

Please provide the average income/cost per Director-owned property for the following. Please calculate the average by using data for the past two financial years:

- a. Average rent per week per property
- b. Average sale price per property
- c. Average construction cost per property
- d. Average demolition cost per property
- e. Average maintenance cost per property.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 34

With regard to surplus housing assets, please identify where the revenue from sales of housing stock is directed (for example, to the Director of Housing).

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Question 35

In relation to the deed of agreement regarding the debt originally owed by the Director of Housing to the Australian Government, now owed to the State Department of Treasury and Finance, please provide the remaining amount owed, and a breakdown of future payments.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

COVID-19

Question 36

The Committee acknowledges the early nature of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty in anticipating future events and policy responses. However, please provide an overview of available information relating to the Victorian Government's plan for supporting persons at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness throughout the pandemic, including:

- a. How the crisis response is being coordinated and who is informing its development
- b. Details of additional support for services assisting persons at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness
- c. Details of additional direct government support for persons at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness
- d. Predicted impacts of redirecting funds from any long-term policy initiatives towards the immediate crisis response
- e. How the Victorian Government will monitor and evaluate the crisis response
- f. Whether the Department of Health and Human Services has updated its pandemic preparedness policies following the COVID-19 outbreak.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

Appendix C
**Department of Health and
Human Services response
to questionnaire**

C

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee



Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

Questionnaire

Department of Health and Human
Services and the Director of Housing

OFFICIAL

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Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

Questionnaire

The inquiry

The Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee is conducting an inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. The terms of reference for the inquiry, as agreed by the Legislative Council on 7 June 2019, include that the Committee should:

- provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria.
- investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and
- identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

The Committee is currently due to report to the Parliament by 17 November 2020. However, please note that this date is likely to be extended due to the impact of COVID-19 on parliamentary committee work. The date by which a response is requested below takes into consideration the predicted extended reporting date.

Guidance for questionnaire

This questionnaire seeks information on:

- the type and condition of public and community housing stock in Victoria
- long-term strategies for developing and effectively managing social housing stock
- current and projected demand for service and asset demand in social housing.

This information is necessary to assist the Committee to make recommendations to the Victorian Government in its final report.

When completing this questionnaire, please ensure that all relevant Government departments and agencies assist in the provision of information as appropriate. While this questionnaire is primarily addressed to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Director of Housing, the Committee expects that broader input will be required across Government. This includes input from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Treasury and Finance in relation to their membership of the interdepartmental Housing Project Steering Committee.

Please note that both the questionnaire, and the Government's response, will be attached as an appendix to the Committee's final report.

Response

Please provide a response to the questionnaire by **5.00pm on Friday 31 July 2020**.

It is important that this information be provided in a timely manner in order to allow the Committee sufficient time to consider the response alongside other evidence received as part of the inquiry ahead of the reporting date.

The completed questionnaire should be sent (in the format received and with any supporting documentation) to: homelessnessinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au.

Asset base

Question 1

For the past five years, please provide a breakdown of the dwellings that make up the Victorian housing portfolio by quantity of property type and corresponding value.

Response

Data source: Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshots as at 30 June 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Value of Community Housing owned dwellings was obtained from Housing Registrar and AHV Annual Reports.

Property type	As at 30 June 2015		As at 30 June 2016		As at 30 June 2017		As at 30 June 2018		As at 30 June 2019	
	No. of properties	\$million	No. of properties	\$million	No. of properties	\$million	No. of properties	\$million	No. of properties	\$million
Director owned and managed (public housing)	64811	\$17,824	64633	\$19,686	64560	\$20,567	64,725	\$20,493	64,839	\$23,442
Director owned, community managed	8910	\$2,285	8967	\$2,297	8363	\$2,391	7,938	\$2,289	7449	\$1,176

Community owned and managed	11,123	2,710	12,078	2,795	12,426	2,768	12,602	2,978	11,350	\$2917
Aboriginal owned and managed	542	23	558	24	1069	232	1,548	322	1,988	\$483
Total Victorian housing portfolio	85,386	\$22,841	86,236	\$24,802	86,418	\$25,958	86,813	\$26,082	85,626	\$28,018

Public housing

The following questions relate generally to public housing in Victoria. This refers to Director-owned and operated housing stock.

Question 2

Please provide details of current public housing stock in Victoria, including the following:

- Total number and capacity of public housing units, including information by dwelling type and local government area
- A stock profile, including the number of properties per bedroom number and dwelling type
- Capacity and dwelling type of youth-specific accommodation (transitional and long-term)
- Capacity and dwelling type of accessible housing units
- A breakdown of the current status of all stock, including those occupied, vacant, under repair, under redevelopment, under construction, scheduled for demolition, or any other status
- A breakdown (in five-year increments) of the change in the total amounts of stock (indicating reasons for significant fluctuations)
- A breakdown of the age of dwellings (in 10-year increments, e.g. 0-10, 11-20 years) by number of bedrooms

Response

Data source: Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019.

- See attached spreadsheet
-

No. Dwellings	Bedrooms								Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Dwelling attached to a shop			1						1
High-rise flat	247	1,803	3,409	1,985	18	1	9		7,472
House	5	93	1,966	16,557	2,662	344	115	15	21,757
Low-rise flat	313	2,602	2,781	1,032	9		1		6,738
Medium Density Attached	107	10,814	10,536	3,097	221	10	1		24,786
Medium Density Detached	6	600	1,330	436	20				2,392
Movable unit		1,108	77						1,185
Other (Dwelling)	46	154	122	49	87	37	12	1	508
Grand Total	724	17,174	20,222	23,156	3,017	392	138	16	64,839

- c) In addition to the youth-specific accommodation listed below there are an additional 238 Public Housing dwellings not specifically targeted to single youth where the primary tenant is under 25 years of age

No. Dwellings	Bedrooms							
dwelling type	0	1	2	3	4	5	NULL	Total
Singles Youth		49	17					66
House		3						3
Low-rise flat			2					2
Medium Density Attached		36	15					51
Medium Density Detached		10						10
THM Target Group - Young leaving juvenile services		8	21	3				32
House		1	9	3				13
Low-rise flat			2					2
Medium Density Attached		4	9					13
Other (Dwelling)		3	1					4
THM Target Group - Young people leaving care		7	31	10	1	1		50
House			4	4	1	1		10
Medium Density Attached		7	24	4				35
Medium Density Detached			2	1				3
Other (Dwelling)			1	1				2
THM Target Group - Youth	1	37	326	79	6	8	2	459
House		2	41	48	5	8		104
Low-rise flat		12	2					14
Medium Density Attached	1	23	270	31	1			326
Medium Density Detached			9					9
Other (Dwelling)			4				2	6
Grand Total	1	101	395	92	7	9	2	607

- d) The Department's systems provide general indications of a property's accessibility and suitability for major or minor disability modifications, however, due to the individual nature of tenants' accessibility requirements and the way home modifications are undertaken the exact number of accessible public housing dwellings is unknown.

Dwellings constructed by the department since 2000 have been designed to be accessible under its housing construction standards. It can be estimated to be a minimum of 5990 dwellings constructed since this time are accessible, while the actual number of accessible providers is likely to be higher due to on demand conversion and other works.

- e)

Status	Dwellings
Occupied	62,214
Awaiting Demolition	982

Awaiting Sale (including tenant sale)	33
Vacant under upgrade	280
Vacant being held for asset management relocations	295
Vacant (undergoing vacated maintenance)	794
Vacant under review (sale, redevelopment, or major repair)	88
Squatted/Illegal Occupants	41
Recently Acquired or upgraded and not yet tenanted	112
Total	64,839

- f) A breakdown (in five-year increments) of the change in the total amounts of stock (indicating reasons for significant fluctuations)

Year	Director owned stock*
2001	72,509
2006	73,919
2011	74,017
2016	73,630
2019	72,288

*including leases and community managed, annual report data.

- g) A breakdown of the age of dwellings (in 10-year increments, e.g. 0-10, 11-20 years) by number of bedrooms

No. dwellings	Bedrooms								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Age									
0-10 years	5	1,141	2,077	527	289	119	12	1	4,171
11-20 years	8	1,449	1,980	771	781	139	80	10	5,218
21-30 years	52	5,698	4,540	2,657	498	59	21	3	13,528
31-40 years	127	4,005	3,581	9,361	881	42	7		18,004
41-50 years	254	2,650	2,889	4,481	330	17	4		10,625
51-60 years	266	1,520	1,768	2,554	86	5	11		6,210
61-70 years	8	511	2,830	2,249	42	4	2		5,646
over 70 years	4	153	374	522	79	7	1	1	1,141
unknown - Leased Property		47	183	34	31			1	296
Grand Total	724	17,174	20,222	23,156	3,017	392	138	16	64,839

Question 3

Please provide details of planned construction of housing stock across the forward estimates, including dwelling type and local government area.

Response

Big Housing Build

The State Government has committed an unprecedented \$5.3 billion to grow social and affordable housing through the Big Housing Build, which will also support economic recovery from Covid-19 through the creation of an average of over 10,000 jobs each year over the next 4 years.

This commitment will result in the delivery of 12,200 dwellings, including 9,300 new social housing dwellings. Construction will commence on dwellings delivered through the Big Housing Build over the next four years.

Construction has commenced on six sites which will deliver 500 new social housing dwellings and 540 new affordable and market homes. These projects will be delivered in local government areas of Boroondara, Moonee Valley, Yarra and Banyule, and will be mainly apartment dwellings.

A wide range of sites are currently being assessed for social and affordable housing growth that will be delivered through the Big Housing Build. Additional processes are underway to consider projects put forward by the Community Housing Sector, and to work with the private sector to bring forward large residential developments ready to start construction.

The Big Housing Build will provide a Minimum Investment Commitment to regional local government areas that have a significant regional town or city or have high population growth. 18 local government areas have been identified for the Minimum Investment Guarantee, with \$765 million committed across these local government areas.

Other initiatives

A range of other initiatives will result in the construction of new social housing over the forward estimates, including the:

- Public Housing Renewal Program, with tenders being assessed for three sites, which will be in addition to the over 450 new social housing dwellings that will be delivered over the next three years in the Local Government Areas of Melbourne, Darebin and Moreland
- Building New Homes to Fight Homelessness, which will deliver 1,000 additional social housing dwellings across Victoria
- Social Housing Growth Fund (Round One), which will deliver 782 new social housing dwellings, 575 over the forward estimates
- Director of Housing base program, with between 80 and 120 new dwellings to be constructed each year of the forward estimates
- Upgrade and maintenance stimulus package, which will fund 168 new dwellings over the forward estimates.

Through these other initiatives and additional community housing grants, 844 social housing dwellings will be constructed in the 2020-21 financial year.

Question 4

Please provide details of planned acquisition of housing stock across the forward estimates.

Response

Social housing will be acquired over the forward estimates through spot purchase and lease programs. In the 2020-21 financial year 1440 dwellings will be acquired (60 spot purchase by the Director of Housing and 1380 leased), inclusive of 1,350 short term leases to enable the relocation of people who have been staying in emergency hotel accommodation transition out of homelessness (From Homelessness to a Home package), and for high-rise estate tenants at greater risk due to coronavirus (Tower Relocation Program).

No new additional leased properties are forecast over the forward estimates. Spot purchase estimates are developed on an annual basis.

Question 5

Please provide a year by year breakdown on the number of tenants relocating from public housing into other forms of housing over the previous ten-year period, as well as:

- a. Information on the Department's approach to relocating tenants where they are no longer in need of public housing support
- b. The number of tenants paying market rent by local government area.

Response

Reasons, where given, for tenants relocating from public housing into other forms of housing:

Relocation reason	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Caravan park	4	10	2	8	5	4	9	5	5	4
Housing association / housing provider			1	80	29	17	37	23	14	21
Interstate	135	109	122	139	153	113	135	124	139	119
Nursing home	531	541	503	542	619	562	587	572	514	553
Overseas	48	41	45	46	59	48	37	43	35	31
Private rental	962	861	979	933	956	957	993	881	690	604
Property sold to tenant	47	23	10	8	10	14	15	4	8	1
Purchased own home	120	91	84	87	92	111	101	101	110	84
Grand Total	1,847	1,676	1,746	1,843	1,923	1,826	1,914	1,753	1,515	1,417

- a. Under current policy settings, unless a tenant is found to own residential property, tenants living in public housing are able to do so as long as they meet their obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Where the market rent for a property is lower than 25 per cent of the household income, that household is charged the full market rent, rather than the discounted rent that applies to most tenants on lower incomes, whose rental charge is capped at 25 per cent.

The department provides rent references on request for those seeking to move into private rental and these tenants, dependent on the size of their income, are also eligible for a RentAssist Bond Loan.

Where a tenant is found to own their own house, the Department will initiate legal action to terminate the tenancy.

- b. The following provides the number of tenants paying market rent by local government area as at 30 June 2019.

Data source: Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshots as at 30 June 2019.

Division and LGA	Total Tenancies	Tenancies on Market Rent	% paying market rent	Average Market Rent
East Division Total	9710	1098	11%	\$283
ALPINE	80	12	15%	\$186
BENALLA	295	28	9%	\$226
BOROONDARA	482	19	4%	\$347
GREATER SHEPPARTON	964	209	22%	\$199
INDIGO	102	16	16%	\$160
KNOX	1130	108	10%	\$320
MANNINGHAM	179	11	6%	\$334
MANSFIELD	74	14	19%	\$194
MAROONDAH	880	66	8%	\$320
MITCHELL	397	85	21%	\$200
MOIRA	341	83	24%	\$179
MONASH	1308	65	5%	\$367
MURRINDINDI	69	17	25%	\$187
STRATHBOGIE	70	11	16%	\$189
TOWONG	21	7	33%	\$144
WANGARATTA	457	63	14%	\$228
WHITEHORSE	1243	70	6%	\$345
WODONGA	1082	156	14%	\$219
YARRA RANGES	536	58	11%	\$283
North Division Total	17644	2043	12%	\$308
BANYULE	1763	155	9%	\$348
BULOKE	62	47	76%	\$102
CAMPASPE	606	82	14%	\$210
CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS	220	42	19%	\$184
DAREBIN	2781	180	6%	\$328
GANNAWARRA	142	59	42%	\$158
GREATER BENDIGO	1706	325	19%	\$198
HUME	1940	271	14%	\$321
LODDON	49	42	86%	\$96
MACEDON RANGES	183	28	15%	\$258
MILDURA	949	213	22%	\$194
MORELAND	1682	93	6%	\$340
MOUNT ALEXANDER	193	20	10%	\$183
NILLUMBIK	120	9	8%	\$275
SWAN HILL	408	128	31%	\$185
WHITTLESEA	640	80	13%	\$358
YARRA	4200	269	6%	\$375

South Division Total	16547	2265	14%	\$289
BASS COAST	268	26	10%	\$196
BAW BAW	377	52	14%	\$214
BAYSIDE	978	54	6%	\$356
CARDINIA	305	38	12%	\$266
CASEY	1806	329	18%	\$290
EAST GIPPSLAND	501	118	24%	\$185
FRANKSTON	1479	191	13%	\$286
GLEN EIRA	423	17	4%	\$350
GREATER DANDENONG	2020	257	13%	\$291
KINGSTON	1059	84	8%	\$310
LATROBE	1626	688	42%	\$159
MORNINGTON PENINSULA	1171	105	9%	\$276
PORT PHILLIP	2384	30	1%	\$390
SOUTH GIPPSLAND	180	76	42%	\$167
STONNINGTON	1432	45	3%	\$334
WELLINGTON	538	155	29%	\$168
West Division Total	18196	2175	12%	\$283
ARARAT	134	29	22%	\$199
BALLARAT	1768	253	14%	\$219
BRIMBANK	1374	141	10%	\$318
COLAC OTWAY	277	59	21%	\$203
CORANGAMITE	153	71	46%	\$161
GLENELG	309	77	25%	\$190
GOLDEN PLAINS	2		0%	\$150
GREATER GEELONG	3228	382	12%	\$260
HEPBURN	115	22	19%	\$198
HINDMARSH	24	12	50%	\$130
HOBSONS BAY	968	46	5%	\$341
HORSHAM	332	128	39%	\$180
MARIBYRNONG	1789	98	5%	\$338
MELBOURNE	2674	192	7%	\$346
MELTON	397	48	12%	\$255
MOONEE VALLEY	2359	254	11%	\$303
MOORABOOL	292	46	16%	\$234
MOYNE	73	9	12%	\$224
NORTHERN GRAMPIANS	142	41	29%	\$191
PYRENEES	21	5	24%	\$149
QUEENSCLIFFE	12		0%	\$415
SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS	221	26	12%	\$217
SURF COAST	67	6	9%	\$277
WARRNAMBOOL	718	118	16%	\$212
WEST WIMMERA	10	10	100%	\$86
WYNDHAM	693	71	10%	\$309
YARRIAMBIACK	44	31	70%	\$129

Grand Total	62097	7581	12%	\$292
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Note: As public housing tenant weekly amount payable is based on a percentage of income – up to the market rent, households on market rent can a result of any of the following:

1. Higher household income (including larger households, particularly where there are a higher number of adults receiving Centrelink payments), or
2. Lower market rents. For example, the average market rent for the 10 dwellings in West Wimmera LGA is \$85.80 (lower than the average weekly amount payable for a single person household in receipt of Centrelink payments).

Question 6

With regard to allocation of available housing, please provide information on:

- a. How the Department is ensuring that housing stock meets the demand profile of those in priority need (for example, increased demand for one-bedroom properties)
- b. How the Department is ensuring that tenants live in housing that most appropriately fits their needs where their circumstances change
- c. The number of vacant bedrooms in public housing units (for example, single persons living in a three-bedroom property)
- d. The average turnaround time between tenants.

Response

- a. The Department's Strategic Asset Planning unit is responsible for examining supply and demand dynamics for social housing in Victoria. It interrogates current social housing supply, current demand as expressed by the Victorian Housing Register and forecasts the relative priority for social housing based on future population projections.

The unit has identified four key supply directions to reshape the current social housing asset portfolio to that required now and into the future. These are:

- Significant growth in 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings
- Reduce under-utilisation of 3+ bedroom dwellings
- Renewal of 3-bedroom dwellings. This can be on site or in an Area of higher demand for larger homes
- Increase the supply of 4+ bedroom dwellings in locations where large households are growing and waiting times are above the state average.

The analysis undertaken by the Department provides the basis for investment decisions and provisioning of social housing across Victoria to ensure the portfolio is reshaped to meet the demand profile of Victorians in need of social housing.

- b. The Department seeks to be as responsive as possible to tenants as their needs change over time.

With the implementation of the Victorian Housing Register in 2016, tenants living in public housing that have demonstrated an urgent need for transfer to a more suitable property are prioritised, ahead of those yet to be housed in public housing, when a property becomes vacant.

It is important to note that the transfer of that tenant will result in a vacant property that can be allocated to those yet to be housed in public housing.

The key priority transfer reasons include safety issues, such as family violence; manifestly unsuitable housing, such as the requirement for a property that meets their accessibility needs; and request to move to smaller dwellings where their current housing is underutilised.

- c. The Department's policy on underutilisation defines a property as being underutilised if two or more bedrooms are not required for the current tenancy. For example, a two-bedroom home occupied by a single tenant is considered to be appropriately utilised whereas a three-bedroom home is occupied by a single tenant is considered to have one vacant bedroom.

Using this definition to identify vacant bedrooms, at 30 June 2019, there were 8730 vacant bedrooms across 8275 dwellings. The vast majority (7834 dwellings) of these have only one vacant bedroom.

- d. The average vacancy turnaround time between tenants was 29 days for 2018-19.

Question 7

Please provide an age profile of total public housing stock.

Response

Data source: Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019

Property age range	Number of properties	Proportion of total stock (%)	Estimated maintenance liability (\$ million)
0-10	4,171	6.4%	10.825
11-20	5,218	8.0%	45.721
21-30	13,528	20.9%	130.215
31-40	18,004	27.8%	264.397
41-50	10,625	16.4%	131.492
51-60	6,210	9.6%	61.418
61-70	5,646	8.7%	93.083
71 and older	1,141	1.8%	18.035
Leased Dwellings	296	0.5%	n/a

Community housing

The following questions relate generally to community housing in Victoria. This refers to housing that is managed by community organisations, including both Director-owned and community-owned stock.

Question 8

Please provide details of current community housing stock in Victoria (as regulated by the Department), including a breakdown of property types as per Question 2(a)-(g) above.

Response

Whilst there are 20,787 dwellings managed by the community housing sector, most of them are regulated by the Housing Registrar.

The Department only regulates Long Term Community Housing stock leased to agencies.

Data source: Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019

No. Dwellings	Bedrooms							Grand Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
LGA/Dwelling Type								
ARARAT							3	3
House							3	3
BALLARAT	3	53	21	9				86
House			2	7				9
Medium Density Attached	3	11	19	2				35
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		42						42
BANYULE		9	18	21	5		2	55
House			4	14	5		2	25
Low-rise flat			10					10
Medium Density Attached		9	4	7				20
BASS COAST		11	2	2				15
House				1				1
Medium Density Attached			2					2
Medium Density Detached				1				1
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		11						11
BAW BAW		2	10					12
Medium Density Attached		2	6					8
Medium Density Detached			4					4
BAYSIDE			4				3	7
House							3	3
Low-rise flat			2					2
Medium Density Attached			2					2
BOROONDARA		100	7	1	1			109
House			1	1	1			3
Medium Density Attached			6					6

Multiple Unit Facility Unit		100						100
BRIMBANK		155	15	65	4		1	240
House			3	59	4		1	67
Medium Density Attached		124	12	6				142
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		31						31
CAMPASPE			2					2
Medium Density Attached			2					2
CASEY		38	6	4				48
House			1	3				4
Medium Density Attached			5					5
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		38		1				39
CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS			10	2				12
House			1					1
Medium Density Attached			9	1				10
Medium Density Detached				1				1
COLAC OTWAY					1			1
House					1			1
CORANGAMITE			1					1
Medium Density Attached			1					1
DAREBIN		40	32	26	2		1	101
House		1	5	21	2		1	30
Medium Density Attached		33	27	5				65
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		6						6
EAST GIPPSLAND			7	18	4			29
House			1	18	4			23
Medium Density Attached			6					6
FRANKSTON		48	5	29	6	1		89
House			1	29	6	1		37
Medium Density Attached		27	4					31
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		21						21
GLEN EIRA	19	20	10	13	7		2	71
House			2	11	6		2	21
Low-rise flat	19							19
Medium Density Attached		1	8	2	1			12
Medium Density Detached		19						19
GREATER BENDIGO		15	10	7				32
House				4				4
Medium Density Attached		15	10	3				28
GREATER DANDENONG		45	17	2	3		2	69
House					3		2	5
Medium Density Attached		23	16	2				41
Medium Density Detached			1					1
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		22						22
GREATER GEELONG		24	26	54	5	1		110
House			3	48	5	1		57

Low-rise flat		20					20
Medium Density Attached		3	19	6			28
Medium Density Detached		1	4				5
GREATER SHEPPARTON		64	21	1			86
Low-rise flat		24	19	1			44
Medium Density Attached			2				2
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		40					40
HINDMARSH				1			1
House				1			1
HOBSONS BAY		139	23	28	7	2	199
House			9	26	7	2	44
Low-rise flat		69					69
Medium Density Attached		14	13	2			29
Medium Density Detached		56					56
Other (Dwelling)			1				1
HORSHAM		2	7	1			10
House			1				1
Medium Density Attached		2	6	1			9
HUME		62		3	1		66
House				3	1		4
Low-rise flat		40					40
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		22					22
KINGSTON	28		29	48	11	5	121
House			2	39	11	5	57
Medium Density Attached			25	7			32
Medium Density Detached			2	1			3
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	28			1			29
KNOX		30	49	9	1	1	90
House				1	1	1	3
Low-rise flat		30	37	2			69
Medium Density Attached			12	6			18
LATROBE		3	39	42	5		89
House			4	41	5		50
Medium Density Attached		3	35	1			39
MACEDON RANGES				1			1
House				1			1
MANNINGHAM					1		1
House					1		1
MARIBYRNONG		37	37	26	1	2	103
House			14	20	1	2	37
Low-rise flat		10	3				13
Medium Density Attached		27	18	6			51
Medium Density Detached			2				2
MAROONDAH		3	17	11	3	4	38
House				9	1	4	14

Low-rise flat		2					2
Medium Density Attached		1	16	2	2		21
Medium Density Detached			1				1
MELBOURNE	25	117	68	10	11	3	234
House				1			1
Low-rise flat		61	67	8	10		146
Medium Density Attached		5	1	1	1	3	11
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	25	51					76
MELTON		1	1	1		1	4
House				1			1
Medium Density Attached		1	1			1	3
MILDURA		16	12	1			29
House			1	1			2
Low-rise flat		14	8				22
Medium Density Attached		2	3				5
MITCHELL					1		1
Multiple Unit Facility Unit					1		1
MOIRA						1	1
House						1	1
MONASH		50	7	19	5		81
House			3	14	4		21
Low-rise flat		40					40
Medium Density Attached			4	5	1		10
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		10					10
MOONEE VALLEY	9	47	19	25	9	1	110
House			4	17	9		30
Low-rise flat		9	3				12
Medium Density Attached		2	11	8		1	22
Medium Density Detached			1				1
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	9	35					44
Other (Dwelling)		1					1
MOORABOOL		2	3				5
Medium Density Attached		2	3				5
MORELAND	9	47	13	1		2	72
House			1			2	3
Low-rise flat		1	1				2
Medium Density Attached		9	11	1			21
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	9	37					46
MORNINGTON PENINSULA		45	2	1			48
Medium Density Attached			2				2
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		45		1			46
MOUNT ALEXANDER			1				1
House			1				1
NILLUMBIK				1			1
House				1			1

NORTHERN GRAMPIANS		7	5	1			1	14
House				1			1	2
Medium Density Attached		7	5					12
PORT PHILLIP	119	417	14	6				556
House		1	2	3				6
Low-rise flat	53	42	4					99
Medium Density Attached		31	5	3				39
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	66	343	3					412
SOUTH GIPPSLAND	1	1	1	2				5
House				2				2
Medium Density Attached	1	1	1					3
SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS			2					2
Medium Density Attached			2					2
STONNINGTON	11	64	9				1	85
House							1	1
Low-rise flat		1	3					4
Medium Density Attached		22	5					27
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	11	41	1					53
SURF COAST		3	1					4
Medium Density Attached		3	1					4
WANGARATTA		6			1	1		8
House					1	1		2
Medium Density Attached		2						2
Medium Density Detached		4						4
WARRNAMBOOL		16	6	2	1		1	26
House				2	1			3
Medium Density Attached		13	6				1	20
Other (Dwelling)		3						3
WELLINGTON	1	4	2	4				11
House				4				4
Medium Density Attached	1	4	2					7
WHITEHORSE	6	17	18	21	6	1	5	74
House			6	15	5	1	5	32
Medium Density Attached			9	2				11
Medium Density Detached		2	3	4	1			10
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	6	15						21
WHITTLESEA		2	5					7
House			1					1
Medium Density Attached		2	4					6
WODONGA			2				1	3
House							1	1
Medium Density Attached			2					2
WYNDHAM			2					2
Medium Density Attached			2					2
YARRA		134	86	8			1	229

High-rise flat		76	76					152
House		1	5	3				9
Low-rise flat			1					1
Medium Density Attached		3	4	5			1	13
Medium Density Detached		1						1
Multiple Unit Facility Unit		53						53
YARRA RANGES		2	3	7	3		6	21
House			1	7	3		6	17
Medium Density Attached		1	2					3
Medium Density Detached		1						1
Grand Total	231	1898	707	534	105	5	51	3531

b)

No. Dwellings	Bedrooms							Grand Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
High-rise flat		76	76					152
House		3	79	429	88	4	45	648
Low-rise flat	72	363	158	11	10			614
Medium Density Attached	5	405	371	84	5	1	6	877
Medium Density Detached		84	18	7	1			110
Multiple Unit Facility Unit	154	963	4	3	1			1,125
Other (Dwelling)		4	1					5
Grand Total	231	1,898	707	534	105	5	51	3,531

c) – f) are not relevant to this question.

g)

No. dwellings	Bedrooms							Grand Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	
Age cohort								
0-10 years	73	577	220	19	1		2	892
11-20 years	1	337	44	14		1	9	406
21-30 years	10	289	138	79	13		32	561
31-40 years	34	272	149	266	41	3	1	766
41-50 years		165	82	54	27	1	3	332
51-60 years		25	23	40	8		3	99
61-70 years	14	21	30	39	13			117
Over 70 years	99	211	12	14	1		1	338
Unknown – leased property		1	9	9	1			20
Grand Total	231	1,898	707	534	105	5	51	3,531

Question 9

Please provide a year by year breakdown (for the past five years, per financial year) of the housing stock transferred to community housing organisations, using the below table.

- Please provide information about the method of assessing appropriate community housing providers when transferring public housing stock to community housing organisations.
- Please provide information on projected future transfers, including the number of properties and the type of transfer (management or title).

Response

Data source: Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshots as at 30 June, annual data changes.

Year	Recipient organisation	Number of properties	Type of transfer (Management or title)	Reasons for transfer
2020				
2019	Aboriginal Housing Victoria	462	Title	To enable self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians.
2018	Aboriginal Housing Victoria	475	Title	To enable self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians.
2017	Aboriginal Housing Victoria	511	Title	To enable self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians.

- Commencing in 2008, tenants residing in public housing – Indigenous housing program properties were provided with the choice of transferring management of their tenancy to Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) as part of the government’s commitment to self-determination. Following AHV attaining Registered Housing Association status, the title of these properties was transferred from the Director of Housing to AHV between 2017 and 2019 as per the above table.

In addition, community housing agencies, as registered under the Housing Act 1983, at any time manage approximately 3,500 Director of Housing dwellings under five-year lease arrangements. The quantity of properties managed under this arrangement has not changed over the past five years.

b. The Big Housing Build will deliver a mix of housing owned and managed by both Homes Victoria and the community housing sector. Homes Victoria is expected to own the majority of the housing built in this package.

Overall, in this package Homes Victoria is expected to own at least 6,800 additional homes, representing around 55 per cent of all dwellings built.

- Homes Victoria will own and oversee the operation of the 2,900 affordable housing dwellings in this package.
- Homes Victoria is also expected to own 2,800 additional social housing units that will be managed by the community housing sector.
- In addition, 1,100 of the dwellings in this package are replacements of existing public housing units that are no longer suitable. Homes Victoria will own and manage as public housing 1,100 additional dwellings equivalent to this replaced stock.

In addition to these 6,800 new dwellings expected to be owned by Homes Victoria, the Homes Victoria reforms also includes an ongoing boost to public housing of \$300 million over the next four years, and then \$75 million per annum ongoing. This additional funding will be used to accelerate capital upgrades to modernise the public housing portfolio.

Up to 4,200 new homes will be owned and managed by community housing providers through a \$1.38 billion investment in the Social Housing Growth Fund. Community housing providers will also manage a further 1,200 dwellings that are owned by either community housing providers or Homes Victoria.

Question 10

Please provide details on the findings of any recent modelling undertaken on the financial implications for community housing organisations of:

- a. Public housing stock transfers to community housing, such as in relation to increased maintenance liabilities on ageing stock
- b. Requirements under Homes for Victorians for community housing organisations that have opted into the Victorian Housing Register to allocate 75 per cent of housing allocations to critical needs applicants.

Response

- a. Property maintenance costs vary significantly according to the size, type and location and upgrade history of dwellings, in addition to their age. Specific packages for stock transfers to community housing providers have not been proposed and specific cost estimates or assessments of financial impact have not been developed.
- b. Analysis of this nature has not yet been completed. Many registered housing agencies opted in to the VHR during 2019, and as such the end of 2019/20 marks the first full year of participating agencies using the VHR to housing allocations to vacant dwellings.

Transitional and crisis accommodation

Question 11

Please provide details of the current capacity and dwelling type of crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation, including a breakdown of types of accommodation and total number of beds for each (for example, family violence refuges, youth crisis accommodation).

Response

Source - Homelessness Information Tool. Extracted 24/6/20

Type of accommodation	Number of facilities	Region	Total number of available beds	Average length of stay
Family violence refuges	31	North Division – 10 facilities East Division – 6 Facilities South Division – 7 Facilities West Division – 8 Facilities	131 Households	5 Facilities are 'short term crisis' models of 7-10 days All other facilities are average 6 weeks
Youth refuges	21	North Division - 7 Facilities East Division – 4 Facilities South Division – 5 Facilities West Division – 1 Facilities	183 beds	50 nights
Youth Foyers	12	North Division - 4 Facilities East Division – 3 Facilities South Division – 1 Facilities West Division – 4 Facilities	229 beds	239 nights

Youth Housing 247 Change Program	1	West Division	16	6 months
Kid under cover studios	122	Statewide	166 beds	Indefinitely
Motel Style Accommodation for Ex-offenders at risk of homelessness	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Division 	14 bedrooms	4.5 months
Self-contained units for older woman experiencing violence	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East Division 	12 bedrooms	3 months
Major crisis supported accommodation	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East Division – 1 Facilities South Division – 4 Facilities West Division – 6 Facilities 	402 beds	80.5 night
Heading Leasing	267 properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Division – 81 properties East Division – 27 properties North Division – 74 properties West Division – 85 properties 	626 bedrooms	12 months
Modular Units	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Division – 3 Sites East Division – 2 Sites North Division – 1 Sites West Division – 2 Sites 	50	2 years

Asylum seeker accommodation	This funding has been allocated and managed by Participation and Inclusion Branch -Diversity unit. ASRC target: 290 people assisted per month (3500 across the year) to not become homeless.	Services targeted in Brimbank, Wyndham, Melton, Maribyrnong and Hobson’s Bay, Dandenong and Casey, Hume, Whittlesea, Moreland and Darebin	NA	NA
Transitional Housing Management Accommodation - General	3232 properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Division – 884 • East Division – 602 • North Division – 786 • West Division – 962 	7378 bedrooms	51 weeks (see below for further detail)
Transitional Housing Management Accommodation - Crisis	193 properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Division – 69 • East Division – 30 • North Division – 44 • West Division – 50 	492 bedrooms	5 weeks (see below for further detail)
Transition Housing Management – Rooming House	147 properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Division – 42 • East Division – 59 • North Division – 9 • West Division – 37 	395 rooms	

Transitional Housing (excludes Crisis Transitional Housing)

- From a sample of 39 transitional support providers, there were 2,329 identified household stays in Transitional Housing in the two years from 2017-18 and 2018-19. These identified stays would likely represent more than half of all transitional stays based on housing stock available to the program.

- The average stay for the sample was 51 weeks. However, the average stay for tenancies that had ended during the reporting period was 37 weeks (accounting for 80 per cent of the household stays). The stay for tenancies that were still open at the end of the reporting period was 108 weeks (accounting for only 20 per cent of stays), with the eventual length of these stays yet undetermined.

Crisis Transitional Housing

- For the Crisis component of the Transitional Housing Program, only a smaller valid sample could be captured of all potential household stays in Crisis Transitional Housing over 2017-18 and 2018-19. There were 341 identified household stays with 98 per cent of stays closed by the end of the two-year reporting period. The average length of stay for closed accommodation periods was five weeks and the average stay for open accommodation periods was one week.

Caveats:

The data for transitional housing is derived from a sample of service delivery data that may include some other types of accommodation. This data is indicative and has been provided in order to assist the committee with their analysis and understanding of this aspect of the homelessness service system.

Question 12

Please provide details of planned construction or acquisition of new crisis and other temporary forms of accommodation across the forward estimates, including accommodation type and anticipated capacity.

Response Data source:

Type of accommodation	Region	Estimated capacity	Estimated cost
Family violence refuges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Division - 5 new core and cluster facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Division – 32 independent living or ‘cluster’ units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$18.815m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East Division - 4 new core and cluster facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East Division – 22 independent living or ‘cluster’ units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$15.052m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Division - 4 new core and cluster facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Division - 24 independent living or ‘cluster’ units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$15.052m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Division - 6 new core and cluster facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Division – 36 independent living or ‘cluster’ units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$22.578m
Youth refuges			
Iramoo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$5.4 million total cost \$3.35 million DHHS contribution
Hope Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$3.5 million total cost \$2.69 million DHHS contribution
Major crisis supported accommodation	No planned construction or acquisition		

Asylum seeker accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No planned construction or acquisition	
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Question 13

Please provide information on how the Victorian Government is supporting asylum seekers and refugees on temporary visas to access housing where they are ineligible for other forms of support.

Response

- Asylum seekers and refugees on temporary visas have the same eligibility for support from specialist homelessness services as the general community. This includes financial support to access or maintain accommodation, temporary and transitional housing, and social and public housing.
- In 2019-20 the government provided \$3 million for the Stepping in to support asylum seekers initiative, which included targeted financial assistance to support asylum seekers to access housing.
- Asylum seekers and refugees are also eligible for a range of supports in response to Covid-19, including rent relief grants, \$3 million in specialist mental health supports, basic needs assistance and homelessness assistance, and \$2.25 million in hardship support for multicultural communities. This project is being managed by the Participation and Inclusion Branch- Diversity Unit.

Surplus land and assets

The Victorian Government has a number of publicly available resources relating to the transfer of surplus government land and property assets, including the Landholding Policy and Guidelines; Land Transactions Policy and Guidelines; Land Use Policy and Guidelines; Strategic Assessment Policy and Guidelines and the online land search tool GovMap. When responding to the following questions, please include references to the relevant sections of these documents as appropriate.

Question 14

How do existing government strategies or policies ensure that surplus government land and/or property assets are redirected to the Director of Housing where they could be repurposed as part of the public housing portfolio, either through sale or leasing?

- a. In carrying out the first right of refusal process for government agencies to submit expressions of interest for notified surplus land, how are expressions of interest by the Director of Housing prioritised for the purpose of acquiring new social housing?
- b. Please identify any asset transfers from government agencies to the Director of Housing, and the related cost to the housing portfolio, over the previous five-year period.
- c. Please identify any leases from government agencies to the Director of Housing over the previous five-year period.
- d. Please identify any significant challenges in repurposing surplus government land and property assets for housing as part of the public housing portfolio.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

- a. The Department regularly reviews surplus government land and where it is deemed suitable for social housing, it can be purchased at the value set by the Valuer General Victoria.
- b. there have been no such asset purchases in the past five years.
- c. In the past five years the Department has leased
 - A parcel of crown land from the Secretary in Hyde Park Rd, Traralgon
 - 19 Dwellings from the Department of Transport
- d. Surplus government land is not always in locations of high demand for social housing, nor is it of the right size – being too large or too small to support sustainable communities and is often not zoned for residential development. Land in the inner and middle ring of Melbourne is expensive to purchase at valuation price.

Question 15

Please provide an update on implementation of the commitment made by the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to develop a policy relating to the leasing of surplus government land and other interim land use opportunities in their response to the Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Managing Surplus Government Land*. Please also provide a copy of this policy if complete.

- a. In development of such a policy, what consideration was given to the current and projected demands for social housing in Victoria?

Response

Source: Land Use Victoria, DELWP (contact Manager: Kara O'Donnell, Director: Dom Passaportis)

- a. DELWP is delivering a Land Utilisation Assessment Program (LUAP), as directed by government in October 2019. The program requires DELWP to assess the utilisation of government land and identify opportunities to improve utilisation, including through leases and interim uses. DELWP has developed a structured methodology to identify these opportunities and is working with landholding agencies to implement the program. In implementing this program to date, several sites have been identified as potential opportunities for interim uses and for new social housing. The LUAP is currently being piloted for an 18-month period (to early 2021), after which an evaluation will be undertaken to determine effectiveness and whether to continue the program. If the LUAP is to become an ongoing assessment program, formal guidance will be incorporated into government land policies and issued across government.

As part of the LUAP, DELWP is undertaking extensive engagement across government, including with the Director of Housing, to ensure that assessments and recommendations respond to service delivery demands. This has included specific assessments targeting high demand social housing areas across Victoria to identify government land that may support social housing, including new public housing and relocatable housing to support the homeless. This work is ongoing, and it remains a commitment of DELWP to identify government land with potential to support social housing growth in Victoria.

Audits and strategy

Question 16

Please provide an update on implementation of the consolidated action plan provided by the Interdepartmental Housing Project Steering Committee in response to recommendations made by the Auditor-General in the 2017 report, Managing Victoria's public housing. Please provide copies of relevant supporting documents where available.

Response

Source: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/responses-performance-audit-recommendations-2015-16-2017-18?section=33523---appendix-c-agency-responses-to-assurance-review> Updates provided at November 20 2019

Recommendation	Department's proposed action	Department's proposed end date	Update on implementation
<p>1. Agree on a long-term strategic direction for public housing that sets targets for growth, sustainability, and meeting demand.</p>	<p>Set parameters for growth in the Asset Strategy. Define appropriate performance commitments in relation to demand in the bilateral performance regime with the Commonwealth under the proposed National Affordable Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Identify measures for achieving and demonstrating the financial sustainability of public housing provision in an agreed budget strategy.</p>	<p>June 2020</p>	<p>The DHHS Executive Board approved a proposal for the scope of an agreed budget strategy in April 2018. A detailed workplan was endorsed by the DHHS Finance and Budget Committee in May 2018 and is now being progressed. In March 2018, the Treasurer wrote to the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing requesting a plan for ensuring that the Director of Housing maintains adequate cash reserves. This request extended the scope of the budget strategy to funded services and the capital program. Bilateral performance targets in relation to the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement are also under negotiation.</p>
<p>2. Monitor, evaluate and report on the delivery of measures related to public housing in Homes for Victorians, including their impacts on social housing growth, sustainability, and demand.</p>	<p>Complete a Strategic Outcomes Framework. Implement a reporting framework for Homes for Victorians measures to support regular reporting to the Interdepartmental Committee. Complete an overarching 2019 assessment of delivery of strategic outcomes as at June 2019 for the consideration of the Interdepartmental committee.</p>	<p>March 2020</p>	<p>A Strategic Outcomes Framework has been developed to support reporting on Homes for Victorians' measures and the completion of the June 2019 assessment of the delivery of strategic outcomes.</p>

<p>3. Assess the financial and operational impacts of changes to the community housing sector's role arising from Homes for Victorians, including new housing allocation requirements.</p>	<p>Provide analysis on potential impact of 'Homes for Victorians' on the community housing sector for the consideration of the Interdepartmental committee. Assess impacts on the community sector against Dec 2018 baseline and expectations for the consideration of the Interdepartmental committee.</p>	<p>December 2020</p> <p>DHHS has developed an industry compact which has been signed by the majority of housing agencies which establishes a set of principles that will guide interaction. DHHS is currently conducting a procurement process as part of the Homes for Victorians' initiatives to grow the community sector. This work will be discussed by the Interdepartmental Committee in February.</p>
<p>4. Identify and implement strategies to improve the financial sustainability of the public housing rental operating model over the long term.</p>	<p>Identify measures for achieving and demonstrating the financial sustainability of public housing provision in an agreed budget strategy.</p>	<p>June 2020</p> <p>The DHHS Executive Board approved a proposal for the scope of an agreed budget strategy in April 2018. A detailed workplan was endorsed by the DHHS Finance and Budget Committee in May 2018 and is now being progressed. In March 2018, the Treasurer wrote to the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing requesting a plan for ensuring that the Director of Housing maintains adequate cash reserves which extended the scope of the budget strategy to funded services and the capital program.</p>
<p>5. Develop and implement an asset strategy for public housing that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflects a comprehensive understanding of service supply and demand over 	<p>Complete the Asset Strategy, noting that the revised asset strategy is well advanced. Develop and implement new governance arrangements. Include explicit</p>	<p>June 2019</p> <p>The Asset Strategy was completed in March 2018 and commits to annual updates and a full review every five years. A lifecycle approach to asset planning,</p>

<p>the short, medium, and long term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishes outcome-focused performance standards for asset management that adhere to the benefit-mapping principles contained in Department of Treasury and Finance’s Investment Management Standard establishes a holistic and transparent life cycle approach to asset planning decisions that captures regional input establishes governance arrangements that clearly communicate roles and responsibilities and provide for sustained oversight of asset management performance is reviewed and updated so that it remains current. 	<p>processes for regular review and update in the Asset Strategy.</p>	<p>governance arrangements and roles and responsibilities has been embodied in the implementation during 2017-18 of the whole-of-Government Asset Management Accountability Framework for the Director of Housing which took place over 2017 and 2018.</p>
<p>6. Through its asset strategy, develop and implement plans to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overcome identified shortcomings with property condition assessments to support evidence-based asset planning decisions 	<p>Complete the Asset Strategy, noting that this work is well advanced. Identify measures for achieving and demonstrating the financial sustainability of public housing provision in an agreed budget strategy.</p>	<p>June 2020</p> <p>New contracts for property condition audits have been executed and have commenced. Condition data will be updated in corporate systems to enable more informed decisions to be made based on updated and accurate asset data.</p>

optimally balance expenditure on all maintenance types.				

Question 17

Please provide a copy of the most recent:

- a. Audit of public housing stock
- b. Asset Strategy for public housing.

Response

The most recent audit of public housing stock and the housing asset strategy are operational documents. As these inform operational decisioning making and the need to balance client needs, appropriate asset responses and the financial sustainability of the housing system, they are regularly reviewed and updated. The audit of stock includes detailed information about public housing properties that cannot be published in order to maintain the privacy of tenants.

Question 18

How often do audits of public housing stock occur and on what basis do these occur?

- a. How do audits contribute to the 2016 Asset Intent Framework that is used to assess future paths for public housing stock?

Response

- a. 2016 Asset Intent Framework was updated in 2018 to reflect the Asset Strategy, operational input and lifecycle considerations including the Asset Management Accountability Framework.

The annual audit of public Housing Stock and changes to social housing stock in Victoria will alter the supply and demand dynamics analyzed in the Asset Strategy which is refreshed annually.

Question 19

How does the Asset Intent Framework work together with the Asset Strategy, noting that the Asset Strategy was expected to be completed in December 2017?

Response

- When looking at the Asset Intent of individual properties, the Asset Strategy is one of the key drivers to determine whether dwellings of that type are required in that location. The Asset Intent Framework will look at the characteristics of individual dwellings including location, neighbourhood characteristics, size, cladding, condition, and a range of other factors to determine the future of that dwelling.

Question 20

How do asset plans incorporate regional views and requirements?

Response

- In developing the Housing Asset Strategy, many operational stakeholders were consulted to ensure that regional views and requirements are reflected from a strategic basis.
- Regional Area Plans are also developed in consultation with staff from operational areas and incorporate views, requirements, and priorities. These plans provide more detailed information about specific assets and neighborhoods and client outcomes, to implement the Asset Strategy.

Question 21

How do asset management strategy documents forecast service and asset demand in social housing?

- a. What is the forecast demand over the forward estimates?
- b. How does the forecast inform funding allocations?
- c. What is the estimated cost to meet the forecast demand?

Response

- a. The department's strategic asset planning does not quantitatively forecast demand for social housing.
- b. The Housing Asset Strategy, provides information on what types of social housing are required by location. It is the basis for investment decision making.
- c. The department's strategic asset planning does not quantitatively forecast demand.

Question 22

Is the Department now fully compliant with the Asset Management Accountability Framework, noting that it has reported only partial compliance since the framework's introduction?

Response

- Whilst some parts of the Department are not fully compliant with the Asset Management Accountability Framework and there is a plan to become fully compliant, the parts of the Department that are responsible for public housing and assets owned or managed by the Director of Housing are now fully compliant.

Question 23

How often do property condition assessments of public housing stock occur and on what basis do these occur?

- a. How do property condition assessments inform maintenance plans and strategies?

Response

Source: Asset Management Branch, Manager Property Assurance and Compliance.

Properties are assessed every five years.

- Property Condition Assessments (PCA) assists the department in formulating long term asset management and portfolio strategies.
- The PCA highlights the life-cycle stage of the asset and drives asset decision-making in relation to portfolio maintenance, redevelopment, stock configuration, asset recycling, housing ownership and assessment and implementation of future procurement options
- The basis for selecting properties for assessment in 2020/2021 is;
 - Director of Housing owned properties
 - All properties upgraded in the last financial year.
 - 2019-20
 - Properties upgraded but not inspected within the 2012-2019 financial years
 - All properties acquired in the last financial year as a result of spot purchases or construction
 - 2019-20
 - Spot purchased or constructed properties not inspected within the 2012-19 financial years
 - All properties not visited during the course of the previous property condition audit program
 - All properties that have undergone fire reinstatement or a disability modification upgrade
 - 2019-20
 - Fire reinstatement or disability modification upgrade properties not inspected within the 2012-19 financial years
 - Exclude properties planned for upgrade in the 2020-21 financial year
 - Properties not inspected outside the above criteria from the oldest last inspection date to most recent inspection date

Question 24

How does the Department intend to measure the effectiveness of Victoria's *Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan*, noting that recommendation 11 of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into the 2019-20 Budget Estimates recommended development of budget paper performance measures and targets for this purpose?

Response

- In mid-2018 the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Kym Peake, commissioned an outcomes-focused evaluation of selected new homelessness programs implemented since June 2016. Three of the Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan's initiatives are in scope: assertive outreach (including flexible packages), supportive housing, and modular units.
- A bespoke data collection and impact evaluation strategy has been designed, and a systemic approach was chosen to assess the initiatives. This will ensure programs are considered not only individually, but also as part of a pathway to better understand:
 - if services are providing benefit to clients: how much benefit and for which clients.
 - the combination and sequence of services which provide most benefit (and for which cohort); and
 - indication of models which are most beneficial to different client groups (based on the specific features of the services provided by each agency).
- The evaluation has been detailing the program's progress towards objectives to date, and their alignment with overall government priorities. The evaluation will consider opportunities and challenges identified during implementation, in order to analyse if and how each program contributed to an improvement in outcomes for clients and the overall homelessness system.
- The evaluators will conduct a mix of primary and secondary research using administrative and monitoring data, and input from providers. Information collected may include initiative's milestones, type and size of target cohorts, and specificities of the service model implemented. Data sources for the evaluation should include (but will not be limited to) the 'Homelessness Data Collection' (HDC), the 'Homelessness Information Tool' (HIT), and the manual data collection reported by providers to the Department of Health and Human Services from program commencement to April 2020. Client voice will be present in the form of unidentifiable case studies of clients' experiences accessing individual initiatives (and their interactions with homelessness and other support services as a whole).
- The team responsible for the internal homelessness evaluation has also been tasked with conducting the lapsing program evaluations. This means the data collected since the Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan's commencement, and results and recommendations for their evaluations will contribute towards program improvement and funding decisions.
- Regarding the development of budget paper performance (BP3) measures and targets, as the initiatives were only funded for a two-year period (lapsing in July 2021), it was not advisable to create a new measure specific to the Plan.

- BP3 measures are useful for quantifying change over several years, and not applicable for measuring quarterly changes, as these may be a consequence of seasonal fluctuations and not related to the intervention and its service model. Introducing BP3 measures for short-term programs may also lead to double counting across quarters.
- Additionally, clients engaged via the Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan represent only a portion of all clients who have been sleeping rough and engaged with homelessness services. Creating an administrative definition based on a funding stream can misrepresent what is occurring on the ground.

Victorian Housing Register

Question 25

Please provide information on the current total number of applications on the Victorian Housing Register, as well as the total number of persons these applications represent, and a breakdown of:

- a. Applications for public housing; applications for community housing; and applications for both public and community housing
- b. Applicants per application type (including per Priority Access segment)
- c. Applications for Aboriginal housing
- d. Applications with a Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) number
- e. Applications from women over the age of 55
- f. Age ranges of applications
- g. Requested dwelling size (e.g. one bedroom, two bedroom)
- h. Preferred locations (by region)

Response

The data in the following tables reflects applications for public and community housing for new applicants only. It excludes applications for moveable units (115).

Data source: Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019

- a. Applications for housing (new applications only).

Housing provider	No. of applications	No. of household members
Public Housing only	11,346	21,884
Community or Public Housing	30,411	55,110
Community Housing only	966	1,696
Total	42,723	78,690

- b.

Category of Application	No. of Applications	No. of household members
Emergency Management	2	7
Homeless with support	10,328	16,633
Other – pending category update	135	310
Special Housing Needs	5,418	11,292
Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over	5,888	6,826
Supported Housing	950	1,767
Temporary Absence	2	2
Register of Interest	20,000	41,853
Grand Total	42,723	78,690

- c. At 30 June 2019 there were 3,623 applications on the VHR where the primary applicant identified as indigenous and a total of 7,421 household members.

- d. At 30 June 2019 there were 125 applications on the VHR where the primary applicant had a Department of Veteran’s Affairs (DVA) number recorded, and a total of 167 household members.
- e. There are 4,525 applications from single women aged 55 or older.
- f. Age ranges of applications

The follow provides that age of the primary applicant.

Age	No. of applicants
85 years or older	379
75 < 85 years	1,823
65 < 75 years	4,303
55 < 65 years	6,139
45 < 55 years	8,292
35 < 45 years	9,263
25 < 35 years	8,838
15 < 25 years	3,686
Grand Total	42,723

- g. Applications by bedroom size

No. of bedrooms	No. of applications	No. of household members
1	26,647	28,759
2	8,711	19,383
3	5,438	19,675
4	1,500	7,836
5	337	2,291
6	74	589
7	14	132
8	1	12
10	1	13
10	42,723	78,690

Applicants are able to nominate up to five waiting list areas, and these are not ranked by ‘preference’. As multiple preferences can cover a range of locations, the data in the table below reflects the region (area) where the applicant lodged their application.

h.

Region	No. of applications	No. of household members
East		
Goulburn	1619	3199
Inner Eastern Melbourne	1971	3418
Outer Eastern Melbourne	1714	3185
Ovens Murray	1305	2307
North		
Hume Moreland	3331	7578
Loddon	1809	3156
Mallee	857	1647
North Eastern Melbourne	4074	7642
South		
Bayside-Peninsula	5367	8055
Inner Gippsland	1633	2914
Outer Gippsland	997	1580
Southern Melbourne	4471	9193
West		
Barwon	2895	4679
Brimbank Melton	3370	7301
Central Highlands	1845	2952
Western Melbourne	4380	7898
Wimmera South West	1082	1983
Head Office	3	3
Grand Total	42723	78690

Question 26

What is the total estimated cost to house every applicant on the Victorian Housing Register?

- a. What is the total estimated cost to house every applicant seeking priority access?

Response

- a. The complexity of client need and the ability for applicants to select multiple preferred locations for housing make this calculation impracticable. The department has not undertaken such a calculation as it would be inaccurate.

Question 27

For priority access applicants, please provide a breakdown of applications between priority segment types, including, for the most recent reporting period:

- Proportion of applications per segment
- Proportion of allocations per segment
- Average wait time for each segment.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

- The following tables provide a breakdown of the number of new applications, by priority category (segment) as at 30 June 2019.

Data source: Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019

Priority Category – New Applications	No. of Applications	Percentage
Emergency Management	2	0.0%
Homeless with support	10328	45.5%
Priority Transfers	99	0.4%
Priority Transfers – Property Management/Redevelopment	36	0.2%
Special Housing Needs	5420	23.9%
Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over	5888	25.9%
Supported Housing	950	4.2%
Grand Total	22723	100%

- The following tables provide a breakdown of the number of allocations, by priority category (segment) for allocations made to new and transfer households in 2019/20. Note: the priority categories for new and transfer differ.

Data source: Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019

Category – New Applicants	No. of Households
Homeless with support	1809
Special Housing Needs	428
Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over	178
Supported Housing	58
Other	21
Total	2494

- We do not calculate wait time by category (segment).

Question 28

Please provide a breakdown in numbers of the primary reasons for transfer requests on the Victorian Housing Register.

Response

Data source: Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019

Transfer Applications – Reason	No. of Applications
Unsuitable Housing	2185
Safety	950
Stock Utilisation	233
Property Redevelopment	208
Family Reunification	34
Uninhabitable Housing	9
Other	144
Register of Interest	3544
Total	7307

Question 29

Please provide an update on progress of Stage two rollout of the Victorian Housing Register, including the migration of community housing waiting lists. In particular:

- a. When will Stage two be complete, noting that the Department previously indicated to the Committee that they expected to complete the transition process in 2019?
- b. How many community housing organisations have chosen to be incorporated onto the Register and how many community housing organisations have chosen not to be incorporated?
- c. Please provide information on why community housing organisations may choose not to opt into the Register, and what the impacts of this may be, including for social housing data reporting.
- d. Please provide details on how staff have worked to transition applications onto the Victorian Housing Register in order to minimise duplicate or multiple applications and ensure that applications meet all relevant criteria.

Response

- a. A single waiting list for social housing was completed on 25 October 2019.
- b. 34 community housing organisations have been approved as Participating Registered Agencies with their approval published on the Housing Vic website.
- c. Three community housing organisations are yet to join the Register, none have a waiting list. These organisations are:
 - BAYSA (a youth Transitional Housing provider)
 - West Turk
 - YWCA Housing (in negotiation with the Director of Housing)
- d. As stated above. These organisations do not have waiting lists and there will be no impact on social housing reporting data.
- e. As registered housing agencies opted into the Register, their waiting lists were reviewed to ensure that all applications were current, eligible and were not duplicates of existing applications on the Register. Relevant applications were then added to the Register or updated as required.

The process involved the following:

- The merging of applications into the Register was undertaken jointly with the VHR team and nominated authorised users of the Register from each agency. The process involved resolving placement on the Register according to relative housing need for each application from the agency's waiting list.
- The decision-making relating to the merging of waiting lists and determining applicants' place on the register was made jointly by the agency and VHR team Senior Housing Service Officers (i.e. agreeing on the category of the register and effective date).
- Community housing organisations (CHO) provided the department with the minimum data required to create an application in the Register which included personal and contact information for the primary applicant and personal information for each of the household

members. Applications were then created in the Register for people who were not matched against existing applications on the Register.

- At a minimum, to allow for data matching, the CHO provided the following applicant information (if available):
 - family name
 - first name
 - date of birth
 - gender
 - Centrelink Reference Number (CRN)
 - VHR application number (if there is one).

Items automatically merged if present in both systems, in favour of the applicant if data differed:

- lodgement date of application
- an indication of whether the applicant had an urgent housing need (if this information is available).

Data matching

- The department's VHR Team compared the CHO client information with the information in the Register to determine whether (a) the individual clients already exist in HiiP and (b) the clients have existing applications on the Register.
- The end of this process produced a list of CHO applications to be merged, indicating if they already have applications on the Register and (if applicable) the urgency of the applicants needs for housing.
- Creation of application in HiiP (where there is no existing application)

Register of interest applications:

- Using the data file provided by the CHO, applications that were not considered urgent by the CHO were created in the Register and approved to the Register of Interest.

Priority categories

- Where the CHO already made an assessment or had knowledge of the applicant's housing circumstances applicants were placed on the Register based on the CHO's determination of the urgency of their housing need. The descriptions of the register categories were used as a guide.
- Applicants are not eligible for a priority access category on the register when one organisation's records show that an applicant has recently moved into appropriate long-term housing (which can include private rental).
- The most recent information was used to determine which category (if any) an applicant should be approved to.
- If the CHO has no information about the urgency of an applicant's need for housing (i.e. their current housing circumstances) then the applicant was placed onto the Register of Interest and the applicant would be able to apply for a Priority Housing category if they wish to do so.

Housing budget

Question 30

For the previous financial year (2018-19), please provide a detailed breakdown of the income received by the Director of Housing from:

- a. Total rent received
- b. Australian Government grants
- c. State Government contribution from consolidated revenue
- d. Revenue from sale of properties, including number of properties sold
- e. Other (please specify).

Response

Breakdown of Income Received	2018-19 \$'million	Notes
a. Total rent received	491.1	Annual Report 2018-19, p.277, Rental income and income from services
b. Australian Government grants	395.3	https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/other/other/VIC-soa_2018-19.pdf , p.1
c. State Government contribution from consolidated revenue	223.5	Difference between Annual Report 2018-19, p.277, Grant from the Department of Health and Human Services and the figure at Q30(a).
d. Revenue from sale of properties, including number of properties sold	n/a	Not separately published
e. Other (please specify)	35.6	See note (1)
Total Income	\$1,145.5	Annual Report 2018-19, p. 277, Total income from transactions

Note:

(1) - Other includes interest income, grants and other income transfers and fair value of assets and services received free of charge or for nominal consideration and other income.

Question 31

For the last financial year, please provide a detailed breakdown of the expenditure of the housing budget in relation to:

- a. Staff salaries
- b. Other administration costs
- c. Total property maintenance cost
- d. Land acquisition cost
- e. Construction cost of new stock
- f. Demolition cost

- g. Rent lost due to vacancy
- h. Grants to housing associations
- i. Grants to homelessness organisations
- j. Other (please specify).

Response

Breakdown of Expenditure	2018-19 \$ million	Notes
a. Staff salaries	114.6	Annual Report 2018-19, p.277, Employee expenses
b. Other administration costs	45.8	Annual Report 2018-19, p.277, Other operating expenses
c. Total property maintenance cost	212.7	Annual Report 2018-19, p.277, Maintenance
d. Land acquisition cost	n/a	Not separately published
e. Construction cost of new stock	n/a	Not separately published
f. Demolition cost	n/a	Not separately published
g. Rent lost due to vacancy	n/a	Reflected (as an offset) at Q30(a), not as expenditure
h. Grants to housing associations	n/a	Not separately published
i. Grants to homelessness organisations	n/a	Not separately published
j. Other (please specify).	1031.9	see note (2)
Total Expenses	\$1405.00	Annual Report 2018-19, p. 277, Total expenses from transactions

Note:

(2) - Other includes depreciation and amortisation, grant and other expense transfers, fair value of assets and services provided free of charge or for nominal consideration and other property management expenses.

Question 32

When was the last review of expenditure undertaken and what were the results of this review? Please include any relevant information on recommissioning of homelessness sector grants.

Response

Housing expenditure is audited and budgets subject to annual review, resulting in amendments to reflect cost pressures, initiative funding, statutory and Residential Tenancies Act requirements and performance obligations against the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Homelessness services have not been recommissioned.

Question 33

Please provide the average income/cost per Director-owned property for the following. Please calculate the average by using data for the past two financial years:

- a. Average rent per week per property
- b. Average sale price per property
- c. Average construction cost per property
- d. Average demolition cost per property
- e. Average maintenance cost per property.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

- a. The average rent charged per week per Director-managed property over the financial years 2017-18 to 2018-19 was property was \$144.10
- b. The average sale price per Director-owned property over the financial years 2017-18 to 2018-19 was \$410,000.
- c. This figure cannot readily be derived by financial year as construction periods and costs cross years.
- d. The department does not calculate the average demolition cost per property.
- e. Average maintenance expenditure per Director-managed property over the financial years 2017-18 to 2018-19 was \$2,754.

Question 34

Regarding surplus housing assets, please identify where the revenue from sales of housing stock is directed (for example, to the Director of Housing).

Response

Revenue from sales of Director owned stock is retained by the Director of Housing.

Question 35

In relation to the deed of agreement regarding the debt originally owed by the Director of Housing to the Australian Government, now owed to the State Department of Treasury and Finance, please provide the remaining amount owed, and a breakdown of future payments.

Response

Please insert response here (and/or attach Excel worksheets or other documents as required).

The loan between the Director of Housing and the government was extinguished for administrative simplicity in 2016 and no payments are currently scheduled. (Department of Health and Human Services annual report 2016–17, p. 218)

COVID-19

Question 36

The Committee acknowledges the early nature of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty in anticipating future events and policy responses. However, please provide an overview of available information relating to the Victorian Government's plan for supporting persons at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness throughout the pandemic, including:

- a. How the crisis response is being coordinated and who is informing its development
- b. Details of additional support for services assisting persons at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness
- c. Details of additional direct government support for persons at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness
- d. Predicted impacts of redirecting funds from any long-term policy initiatives towards the immediate crisis response
- e. How the Victorian Government will monitor and evaluate the crisis response
- f. Whether the Department of Health and Human Services has updated its pandemic preparedness policies following the COVID-19 outbreak.

Response

- a. The homelessness response to the COVID-19 pandemic is being coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services (the department). The department is also leading the broader public health response to the pandemic.
In developing the homelessness response, the department has worked closely with its partners in the sector, including homelessness service providers and peak bodies (such as the Council to Homeless Persons) to develop and implement service responses to support people at risk of or experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. The department has also engaged with other service sectors, such as mental health services, in developing service responses, and with other agencies such as Consumer Affairs Victoria within the Department of Justice and Community Safety.
- b. Please refer to table one below.

Table one: Additional support for services assisting persons at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness

Date	Initiative	Description
March 2020	Additional Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) and Private Rental Assistance Program funds (HEF)	<p>The government announced almost \$6 million of funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help find temporary accommodation for people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness (HEF) • private rental brokerage to help people access and sustain private rental tenancies (PRAP).
March 2020 onwards	COVID-19 guidelines for homelessness service providers	<p>The department has developed guidelines for funded homelessness service providers to help them respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These guidelines have been updated as broader public health restrictions have changed.</p> <p>The department has supported these efforts through with frequent webinars for homelessness service providers and crisis accommodation providers.</p>
April 2020	Establishment of COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Facilities (CIRFs)	<p>The government committed \$8.8 million to establish four facilities to help people experiencing homelessness recover from COVID-19 or avoid infection in the first place.</p> <p>The service is a collaboration between a major hospital and homelessness service providers, which includes an embedded mobile fever clinic.</p>
June 2020	Additional HEF funding	<p>The government announced a \$11.8 million package which includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional HEF for homelessness service providers to continue placing clients in temporary accommodation • create nine data roles to work within newly created Homelessness Emergency Accommodation Response Teams (HEART) throughout Victoria, to build a greater understanding of the housing and support needs of people in temporary accommodation • nine extra Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) workers in areas of highest demand • An Alcohol and Other Drug worker has also been funded

Date	Initiative	Description
July 2020	From Homelessness to a Home	<p>The government announced its \$150 million package which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional funding to sustain emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. The funding includes extra homelessness workers and specialist Alcohol and Other Drugs supports. • securing 1,100 head-leased properties to rapidly provide medium-term housing for people exiting emergency accommodation and take advantage of vacancies in the rental market • enabling appropriate prioritisation of people in emergency accommodation for longer term social housing; • providing additional flexible support packages to ensure clients can be supported to remain safely in emergency accommodation and sustain their housing tenancy upon transition to other accommodation. • funding for the Private Rental Assistance Program to enable people to enter and sustain a tenancy in the private rental market.
July 2020	Operation Benessere	Operation Benessere outbreak prevention expanded to include high-risk accommodation with shared facilities such as Supported Residential Services and rooming houses.
July 2020	Working for Victoria	This initiative is part of Economic Survival Package, with \$7.1million funding allocated by Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions (DJPR) to the department. Funding will be allocated to Specialist Homelessness Services to assist private and Community Service Organisation to employ people to quickly respond to community needs arising from COVID-19, where additional demands placed on staffs and organisations.
August 2020	Additional HEF funding	<p>The government announced a \$13.69 million package which includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional HEF for homelessness service providers to continue placing clients in temporary hotel accommodation • Extension of nine extra Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) workers in areas of highest demand for August and September 2020.

Date	Initiative	Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extension of an Alcohol and Other Drug worker for August and September 2020.
August 2020	Homelessness Emergency Hotel Response	<p>The department announced a \$2.1million for Homelessness Hotels Emergency Response to operate from 17 July 2020 for six weeks. Further \$10.9mil is being sought to extent the program until 31 December 2020. This program includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support 24 hotel sites. 24/7 security, a health concierge and a community support worker on site 9am to 5pm 7 days per week offer health information and support residents, connection to a range of other services attending the site (specialist health care, mental health, AOD and homelessness support).

c. Please refer to table two below.

Table two: Direct support to persons at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness

Date	Initiative	Description
April 2020	Rental relief grants for people experiencing financial hardship	<p>The government announced the COVID-19 rental relief grants for Victorians experiencing rental hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The value of each grant is up to \$2,000 and has been designed to reduce rental stress for up to 6 months for applicants.</p>
September 2020	Extension of rental relief grants	<p>Grants increased from \$2,000 to \$3,000 and extended until 28 March.</p> <p>Grant eligibility expanded, with the asset threshold increasing from \$5,000 to \$10,000 – ensuring tenants aren't being asked to draw down on their savings before accessing support.</p>

d. The funding of the crisis response is not anticipated to impact longer term policy initiatives. Key elements of the crisis response have been designed to align with the department's broader work to develop more flexible and tailored and flexible responses for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Specifically, the introduction of the Homelessness Emergency Assistance Teams (HEARTs) across Victoria were a key component of the department's COVID-19 guidelines to homelessness service providers. HEARTs have been established in each local homelessness network area and will enable the coordination of housing and support resources at a local level to

provide an effective response for people experiencing homelessness.

- e. The department is monitoring the number of clients being assisted by the homelessness services system and evaluating the impact of the crisis response. The additional financial support for emergency accommodation (HEF) and tenancy sustainment (PRAP) is being monitored by the department through weekly reporting from agencies. Between 16 March and 9 August 2020, nearly 20,000 clients have been assisted with HEF and over 4,500 have been assisted with PRAP.

With respect to CIRFs a data collection strategy has been developed to better monitor the initiative and inform decisions made by the CIRF's Executive Committee.

The data collection is designed to support implementation and management of CIRFs, in order to maximise their utilisation and positively assist clients to achieve health and housing outcomes. The monitoring comprises quantitative data being collected by St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and participant homelessness agencies and also qualitative data in the form of anecdotal information and de-identified case studies.

- f. The department has taken a range of steps in updating its pandemic response. This includes:
- Recruiting and deploying departmental staff during the health emergency – highlighting rapid sourcing and deployment of staff to maintain delivery of critical services.
 - Providing and updating guidelines to funded homelessness service providers on how to help maintain business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, including maintaining critical services with appropriate safe practice and social distancing.
 - Establishing HEARTs at a local level to provide more targeted and effective responses for people experiencing homelessness.
 - Additional webinars hosted by the department for homelessness service providers.

Data source reference table

Question	Source
1	Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshots as at 30 June 2019
2	Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019.
3	
4	
5	Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshots as at 30 June 2019.
6	Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, Key Performance Reporting as at 30 June 2019.
7	Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019
8	Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019
9	Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshots as at 30 June, annual data changes.
10	Not applicable
11	Homelessness Information Tool. Extracted 24/6/20
12	
13	Not applicable
14	Not applicable
15	Land Use Victoria, DELWP (contact Manager: Kara O'Donnell, Director: Dom Passaportis)
16	https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/responses-performance-audit-recommendations-2015-16-2017-18?section=33523--appendix-c-agency-responses-to-assurance-review
17	Not applicable
18	Not applicable
19	Not applicable
20	Not applicable
21	Housing Asset Strategy – Growth and Demand
22	Not applicable

23	Asset Management Branch, Manager Property Assurance and Compliance
24	Not applicable
25	Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019
26	Not applicable
27	Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019
28	Unpublished, Operational Performance and Quality Group, raw data for annual report snapshot as at 30 June 2019
29	Not applicable
30	Attachments to the Treasurer's Letter FY2019-20 and attachments including Operating Statement, Balance Sheet and Cashflow Statement.
31	The Attachments to the Treasurer's Letter FY2019-20 and attachments including Operating Statement, Balance Sheet and Cashflow Statement; Finance payment data extracted from the department's general ledger.
32	Not applicable
33	Not applicable
34	Not applicable
35	DHHS annual report FY2015-16.
36	Not applicable

LGA/Dwelling Type	Bedrooms							Total	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6		7
ALPINE		27	8	44	3				82
House			1	42	3				46
Medium Density Attached		26	1	2					29
Medium Density Detached			6						6
Movable unit		1							1
ARARAT		42	32	61	4		1		140
House			13	60	4		1		78
Medium Density Attached		38	16	1					55
Medium Density Detached			3						3
Movable unit		4							4
BALLARAT	2	443	391	858	101	5	1	2	1,803
House			64	826	97	5	1	2	995
Low-rise flat	1								1
Medium Density Attached	1	426	283	25					735
Medium Density Detached		2	37	7					46
Movable unit		15	5						20
Other (Dwelling)			2		4				6
BANYULE	16	454	742	517	127	37	8		1,901
House			75	305	112	30	6		528
Low-rise flat		46	238	9					293
Medium Density Attached	16	361	298	173	8	3			859
Medium Density Detached		20	128	29	1				178
Movable unit		22	2						24
Other (Dwelling)		5	1	1	6	4	2		19
BASS COAST	2	155	50	58	9				274
House			7	55	8				70
Medium Density Attached	1	146	42	3					192
Medium Density Detached			1						1
Movable unit		6							6
Other (Dwelling)	1	3			1				5
BAW BAW		94	140	140	12		1		387
House		2	35	137	10				184
Low-rise flat		23	8						31
Medium Density Attached		62	76	3					141
Medium Density Detached		1	19						20
Movable unit		6							6
Other (Dwelling)			2		2		1		5
BAYSIDE	18	287	470	334	10	6	2		1,127
House			23	122	9	6	2		162
Low-rise flat	16	69	250	87					422
Medium Density Attached	1	213	191	124					529
Medium Density Detached			4	1					5
Movable unit		5							5
Other (Dwelling)	1		2		1				4
BENALLA		59	71	163	14		1		308
House		2	24	162	14		1		203
Medium Density Attached		52	33	1					86
Medium Density Detached		1	14						15
Movable unit		4							4
BOROONDARA	1	222	235	68	10	4	2		542
House			22	60	9	2	2		95
Low-rise flat		91	61						152
Medium Density Attached		123	144	7					274
Medium Density Detached		5	7	1					13
Movable unit		3	1						4
Other (Dwelling)	1				1	2			4
BRIMBANK		149	329	793	116	11	10	1	1,409
House			29	717	112	8	10	1	877
Low-rise flat		2	3						5
Medium Density Attached		106	258	72	3				439
Medium Density Detached		5	35	1					41
Movable unit		35	1						36
Other (Dwelling)		1	3	3	1	3			11
BULOKE	2	51		17	1				71
House				17	1				18
Low-rise flat		4							4
Medium Density Attached	2	46							48
Movable unit		1							1

CAMPASPE	7	164	157	270	16	1	1		616
House			21	250	16	1	1		289
Low-rise flat	6	2							8
Medium Density Attached	1	154	109	20					284
Medium Density Detached			18						18
Movable unit		8							8
Other (Dwelling)			9						9
CARDINIA		75	79	117	34	4	1		310
House			11	110	32	4	1		158
Medium Density Attached		65	64	5					134
Medium Density Detached			4						4
Movable unit		10							10
Other (Dwelling)				2	2				4
CASEY	1	282	426	835	216	64	4		1,828
House			30	775	214	60	3		1,082
Medium Density Attached		179	367	44					590
Medium Density Detached			18	7	1				26
Movable unit		103	9						112
Other (Dwelling)	1		2	9	1	4	1		18
CENTRAL GOLDFIELDS	10	80	30	101	3				224
House			5	101	3				109
Medium Density Attached	10	72	21						103
Medium Density Detached			2						2
Movable unit		8	2						10
COLAC OTWAY		66	75	127	10	2	2		282
House			28	126	9	2	2		167
Medium Density Attached		60	46	1					107
Movable unit		5	1						6
Other (Dwelling)		1			1				2
CORANGAMITE	1	88	19	51	1				160
House			4	51	1				56
Low-rise flat		1							1
Medium Density Attached	1	84	10						95
Medium Density Detached			5						5
Movable unit		3							3
DAREBIN	38	1,128	897	800	87	26	10	2	2,988
Dwelling attached to a shop			1						1
High-rise flat	21	97	2						120
House		6	144	401	62	23	7	2	645
Low-rise flat	13	344	205	53					615
Medium Density Attached	1	512	505	331	23	1			1,373
Medium Density Detached	1	124	32	15					172
Movable unit		40	1						41
Other (Dwelling)	2	5	7		2	2	3		21
EAST GIPPSLAND	1	127	150	225	20	1			524
House		1	9	220	20	1			251
Low-rise flat		20	2						22
Medium Density Attached		98	122	4					224
Medium Density Detached		1	14						15
Movable unit		7	3						10
Other (Dwelling)	1			1					2
FRANKSTON	12	323	409	643	104	13	3		1,507
House			30	583	100	12	3		728
Low-rise flat	11	30	1						42
Medium Density Attached	1	235	310	41	1				588
Medium Density Detached		8	65	17					90
Movable unit		45							45
Other (Dwelling)		5	3	2	3	1			14
GANNAWARRA		49	11	81	4				145
House			5	81	4				90
Medium Density Attached		41	5						46
Medium Density Detached		5							5
Movable unit		3	1						4
GLEN EIRA		186	181	52	5	2	1		427
House			5	7	5	2			19
Low-rise flat		31	33	1					65
Medium Density Attached		150	138	41					329
Medium Density Detached			4	3					7
Movable unit		5	1						6
Other (Dwelling)							1		1

GLENELG		76	68	168	6				318
House			4	162	6				172
Medium Density Attached		66	64	6					136
Medium Density Detached		3							3
Movable unit		7							7
GOLDEN PLAINS		3							3
Movable unit		3							3
GREATER BENDIGO	3	390	518	725	88	6	3	1	1,734
House		2	73	660	81	4	3	1	824
Low-rise flat	1	2							3
Medium Density Attached	2	344	380	42	3				771
Medium Density Detached		5	59	22	2				88
Movable unit		37	6						43
Other (Dwelling)				1	2	2			5
GREATER DANDENONG	8	554	699	620	160	16	3	1	2,061
House		2	33	490	147	13	3	1	689
Low-rise flat	6	20	8						34
Medium Density Attached	1	479	606	98	4				1,188
Medium Density Detached		4	48	28	2				82
Movable unit		34	1						35
Other (Dwelling)	1	15	3	4	7	3			33
GREATER GEELONG	5	752	1,080	1,280	166	13		2	3,298
House		18	224	1,201	158	12		2	1,615
Low-rise flat		75	2						77
Medium Density Attached	5	552	661	59	1				1,278
Medium Density Detached		39	168	16					223
Movable unit		60	4						64
Other (Dwelling)		8	21	4	7	1			41
GREATER SHEPPARTON	2	186	274	452	71	7	2		994
House		6	47	432	64	6	2		557
Low-rise flat		2							2
Medium Density Attached	2	169	198	10	4				383
Medium Density Detached			26	8					34
Movable unit		9							9
Other (Dwelling)			3	2	3	1			9
HEPBURN	1	61	12	45	2				121
House				42	2				44
Low-rise flat	1								1
Medium Density Attached		58	12	3					73
Movable unit		3							3
HINDMARSH		9	5	10					24
House				9					9
Medium Density Attached		8	5	1					14
Movable unit		1							1
HOBSONS BAY	16	314	298	306	44	11			989
High-rise flat	5	81	73	24					183
House			16	139	37	8			200
Low-rise flat	8	13	20	15					56
Medium Density Attached	1	200	158	113	7				479
Medium Density Detached		7	30	15					52
Movable unit		13	1						14
Other (Dwelling)	2					3			5
HORSHAM	1	123	70	131	14	1	2		342
House		1	6	130	13	1	1		152
Medium Density Attached		114	48	1					163
Medium Density Detached		1	7						8
Movable unit		7	1						8
Other (Dwelling)	1		8		1		1		11
HUME	2	364	337	1,007	225	29	5		1,969
House		5	45	794	203	27	4		1,078
Low-rise flat		27	21	5					53
Medium Density Attached		226	249	202	8				685
Medium Density Detached		21	19	1	2				43
Movable unit		78	3						81
Other (Dwelling)	2	7		5	12	2	1		29
INDIGO		50	22	30	1				103
House			7	26	1				34
Medium Density Attached		49	11	3					63
Medium Density Detached			4	1					5
Movable unit		1							1

KINGSTON	2	369	406	273	34	2	5	1	1,092
House		1	24	198	33		5		261
Low-rise flat		64	8						72
Medium Density Attached		286	356	69	1	1			713
Medium Density Detached			16	6					22
Movable unit		18	2						20
Other (Dwelling)	2					1		1	4
KNOX	7	304	275	494	67	9	5		1,161
House			14	434	67	9	5		529
Low-rise flat	1	89	4						94
Medium Density Attached	2	169	242	59					472
Medium Density Detached	1	1	11	1					14
Movable unit		41	4						45
Other (Dwelling)	3	4							7
LATROBE	5	468	438	710	44	8	3		1,676
House	1		135	689	42	7	3		877
Low-rise flat		22	24						46
Medium Density Attached	1	386	185	19					591
Medium Density Detached	1	36	90	1					128
Movable unit		20	2						22
Other (Dwelling)	2	4	2	1	2	1			12
LODDON	8	38	3	6					55
House			1	6					7
Low-rise flat	8	7							15
Medium Density Attached		26	2						28
Medium Density Detached		2							2
Movable unit		3							3
MACEDON RANGES		48	28	97	10	1			184
House			5	96	10	1			112
Medium Density Attached		32	18	1					51
Medium Density Detached		1	4						5
Movable unit		14	1						15
Other (Dwelling)		1							1
MANNINGHAM		51	75	40	12	2	3		183
House			3	29	12	2	3		49
Low-rise flat		7							7
Medium Density Attached		36	70	7					113
Medium Density Detached			1	4					5
Movable unit		8	1						9
MANSFIELD		14	21	37	2				74
House			17	37	2				56
Medium Density Attached		14	2						16
Medium Density Detached			2						2
MARIBYRNONG	23	659	611	420	91	25	2		1,831
High-rise flat	20	92	1						113
House	1	1	111	211	69	20	1		414
Low-rise flat		12	12						24
Medium Density Attached	1	506	458	196	11				1,172
Medium Density Detached	1	40	26	11					78
Movable unit		6							6
Other (Dwelling)		2	3	2	11	5	1		24
MAROONDAH	2	225	343	267	52	4	7		900
House			8	171	45	4	7		235
Low-rise flat			11						11
Medium Density Attached	1	201	289	65	6				562
Medium Density Detached	1		33	30	1				65
Movable unit		24	2						26
Other (Dwelling)				1					1
MELBOURNE	63	899	1,144	775	61	2	9	1	2,954
High-rise flat	55	520	746	499	15		9		1,844
House		13	27	46	12	1		1	100
Low-rise flat	4	129	218	69	9				429
Medium Density Attached	2	152	115	108	20	1			398
Medium Density Detached		11	10	53	3				77
Other (Dwelling)	2	74	28		2				106
MELTON		59	131	165	41	6	2		404
House		1	2	148	40	6	2		199
Medium Density Attached		38	120	17					175
Medium Density Detached			8						8
Movable unit		20	1						21

Other (Dwelling)					1				1
MILDURA	1	230	300	376	53	1			961
House			22	360	52	1			435
Medium Density Attached	1	169	235	15					420
Medium Density Detached		56	38						94
Movable unit		5	1						6
Other (Dwelling)			4	1	1				6
MITCHELL	1	103	76	218	11				409
House	1		19	216	11				247
Medium Density Attached		78	51	2					131
Medium Density Detached		6	5						11
Movable unit		19							19
Other (Dwelling)			1						1
MOIRA		94	78	163	15	3			353
House			20	158	15	3			196
Medium Density Attached		84	54	5					143
Medium Density Detached		1	4						5
Movable unit		9							9
MONASH	4	404	448	382	82	21	3		1,344
House		1	52	260	78	19	3		413
Low-rise flat	1	51	66	10					128
Medium Density Attached	1	297	307	105	1				711
Medium Density Detached		22	23	7					52
Movable unit		33							33
Other (Dwelling)	2				3	2			7
MOONEE VALLEY	119	539	1,430	489	36	2	1		2,616
High-rise flat	15	90	475	219	2				801
House			24	33	16	1	1		75
Low-rise flat	97	243	739	105					1,184
Medium Density Attached	4	190	178	119	13	1			505
Medium Density Detached		8	14	12	4				38
Movable unit		8							8
Other (Dwelling)	3			1	1				5
MOORABOOL	1	82	48	152	14	2	1		300
House	1	1	5	148	13	2	1		171
Low-rise flat		26	4						30
Medium Density Attached		12	36	4					52
Medium Density Detached		23							23
Movable unit		20	3						23
Other (Dwelling)					1				1
MORELAND	25	639	590	475	59	9	3	1	1,801
High-rise flat	23	97	1						121
House			93	241	42	9	3	1	389
Low-rise flat		139	90	23					252
Medium Density Attached		337	362	179	14				892
Medium Density Detached		47	42	32	2				123
Movable unit		19	2						21
Other (Dwelling)	2				1				3
MORNINGTON PENINSULA	2	345	222	546	69	8	5		1,197
House			30	524	64	8	5		631
Low-rise flat		60							60
Medium Density Attached	2	230	186	20	3				441
Medium Density Detached		10	4						14
Movable unit		45	2						47
Other (Dwelling)				2	2				4
MOUNT ALEXANDER	16	96	37	43	4				196
House			2	40	4				46
Low-rise flat	8								8
Medium Density Attached	8	92	18	3					121
Medium Density Detached			17						17
Movable unit		4							4
MOYNE		30	16	25	2				73
House			1	25	2				28
Medium Density Attached		28	11						39
Medium Density Detached			2						2
Movable unit		2	2						4
MURRINDINDI		41	8	20	2				71
House				20	2				22
Medium Density Attached		22							22
Medium Density Detached		14	2						16

Movable unit		5						5
Other (Dwelling)			6					6
NILLUMBIK	7	55	24	29	6		2	123
House			1	28	6		2	37
Low-rise flat	3	1						4
Medium Density Attached	4	49	21	1				75
Movable unit		5	2					7
NORTHERN GRAMPIANS		30	42	70	3		4	153
House			2	67	3		4	80
Medium Density Attached		29	40	3				72
Movable unit		1						1
PORT PHILLIP	105	885	849	562	41	1	1	2,444
High-rise flat	36	402	324	60				822
House		8	17	26	4			55
Low-rise flat	52	307	234	277				870
Medium Density Attached	17	164	232	163	36	1	1	614
Medium Density Detached		1	42	36	1			80
Movable unit		2						2
Other (Dwelling)		1						1
PYRENEES		17	1	3				21
House				3				3
Medium Density Attached		16	1					17
Movable unit		1						1
QUEENSCLIFFE		6	4	2				12
House				1				1
Medium Density Attached		6	4	1				11
SOUTH GIPPSLAND	1	63	41	72	5			182
House		2	7	71	4			84
Medium Density Attached		53	33	1				87
Medium Density Detached			1					1
Movable unit		8						8
Other (Dwelling)	1				1			2
SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS	1	59	32	125	9			226
House			14	125	9			148
Medium Density Attached	1	54	18					73
Movable unit		5						5
STONNINGTON	130	571	335	554	5			1,595
High-rise flat	56	326	198	288				868
House			4	5				9
Low-rise flat	73	181	62	205				521
Medium Density Attached		63	71	54	5			193
Movable unit		1						1
Other (Dwelling)	1			2				3
STRATHBOGIE		30	8	30	4			72
House			3	30	4			37
Medium Density Attached		29	5					34
Movable unit		1						1
SURF COAST	2	18	9	40				69
House			5	40				45
Medium Density Attached	2	18	4					24
SWAN HILL		103	92	194	35		2	426
House			5	192	35		2	234
Medium Density Attached		67	72					139
Medium Density Detached		17	15					32
Movable unit		14						14
Other (Dwelling)		5		2				7
TOWONG		8	3	10	1			22
House				10	1			11
Medium Density Attached		8	3					11
WANGARATTA	1	102	141	201	20	1	1	467
House			43	195	19	1	1	259
Low-rise flat	1							1
Medium Density Attached		100	73	2	1			176
Medium Density Detached			21	4				25
Movable unit		2						2
Other (Dwelling)			4					4
WARRNAMBOOL	3	159	186	347	32	4		731
House			30	339	32	4		405
Medium Density Attached	1	144	150	8				303
Medium Density Detached		7	6					13

Movable unit		8							8
Other (Dwelling)	2								2
WELLINGTON		115	121	300	14		1		551
House			17	280	14		1		312
Low-rise flat		16	28	6					50
Medium Density Attached		83	50	14					147
Medium Density Detached		10	25						35
Movable unit		6	1						7
WEST WIMMERA		12		1					13
House				1					1
Medium Density Attached		12							12
WHITEHORSE	10	434	426	354	43	4	6		1,277
House		5	56	252	40	4	5		362
Low-rise flat		62	1						63
Medium Density Attached	7	343	345	93	1				789
Medium Density Detached	1	9	21	8	1				40
Movable unit		15	2						17
Other (Dwelling)	2		1	1	1		1		6
WHITTLESEA		82	120	364	82	3	2		653
House		1	17	336	77	3	2		436
Medium Density Attached		54	98	24	4				180
Medium Density Detached		1	3	4					8
Movable unit		24	2						26
Other (Dwelling)		2			1				3
WODONGA	3	186	258	568	97	2			1,114
House			32	513	97	2			644
Medium Density Attached	2	162	168	7					339
Medium Density Detached		12	56	48					116
Movable unit		12							12
Other (Dwelling)	1		2						3
WYNDHAM		81	142	386	87	7	2		705
House			6	374	86	7	2		475
Medium Density Attached		48	132	10					190
Medium Density Detached			2						2
Movable unit		33	2						35
Other (Dwelling)				2	1				3
YARRA	31	767	2,274	1,412	53	1	2		4,540
High-rise flat	16	98	1,589	895	1	1			2,600
House		14	40	75	12		1		142
Low-rise flat	1	340	427	167			1		936
Medium Density Attached	4	307	217	274	40				842
Medium Density Detached		8	1	1					10
Other (Dwelling)	10								10
YARRA RANGES	2	194	98	215	35	5	3		552
House	1		9	196	31	3	3		243
Low-rise flat	1	44	1						46
Medium Density Attached		82	73	13	3	2			173
Medium Density Detached		5	8	6					19
Movable unit		52	2						54
Other (Dwelling)		11	5		1				17
YARRIAMIACK		27	3	15					45
House			3	15					18
Medium Density Attached		24							24
Movable unit		3							3
Grand Total	724	17,174	20,222	23,156	3,017	392	138	16	64,839

