MISSION AUSTRALIA

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria 2020

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria 2020
(Legal and Social Issues Committee)

Introduction

Mission Australia is a national, non-denominational Christian charity that has been helping vulnerable people move towards independence for more than 160 years. In the 2018-19 financial year, we supported over 160,000 individuals through 519 programs and services across Australia.[1] In Victoria, we supported over 8,000 people through 43 services in the 2018-19 financial year.[2]

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. This submission is based on a combination of research and insights from our service provision across Victoria and other states. It includes testimony from some of our practitioners and the participants they work with.

Recommendations

The Victorian Government should:

- Dedicate funding to build 6,000 new social housing properties each year over the next 10 years.

- Make long-term investments to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness by 10% per annum compounding for ten years.

- Invest in targeted strategies to address the emerging needs of various groups of people, particularly mature aged people.

- Advocate to the Commonwealth Government to immediately increase the social security allowances including Newstart and Commonwealth Rent Assistance to provide financial relief to people who are experiencing significant financial and rental stress which increases their risk of homelessness.

- Fund models and strategies to increase better collaboration between housing, mental health, domestic and family violence, alcohol and drug withdrawal and rehabilitation and other services are readily available to ensure people experiencing or at risk of homelessness have access to holistic, wraparound and sustainable supports.

- Extend the Home Stretch program to all young people in out of home care so they have access to support until they are 21 years old and beyond if the circumstances warrant the support.

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[1] Mission Australia, Annual Report, 2019, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2019/1320-annual-report-2019/file
[2] Mission Australia, Service Delivery Census FY 2017/18.

- Increase funding for evidence based services that address youth homelessness such as the Youth Foyer or the Community of Schools and youth Services (COSS) model.

- Integrate affordable housing into the planning systems, including through inclusionary zoning and value capture mechanisms.

- Provide funding certainty to community services to ensure that complementary supports to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are available.

- Ensure that services are equipped to provide services that are sensitive, trauma informed, safe and offer confidential supports to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTI people, people with disabilities and mental health issues.

Changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria

According to the 2016 census, almost 25,000 people in Victoria were experiencing homelessness.[3] This is a rise of 43% in the rate of homelessness between 2006 and 2016.[4] Available data demonstrate that 37% of the nearly 117,000 people in Victoria who sought support from specialist homelessness services (SHS) were experiencing homelessness on presentation and on average, 90 requests for SHS assistance went unmet each day.[5]

Furthermore, there are over 82,000 Victorians on the waiting list for public housing.[6] Between 2006 and 2016, Melbourne renters have seen a significant increase in rents (75%) but a smaller increase in incomes (43%), which contributes to the increasing rental stress.[7] For the June 2019 quarter, the median weekly rent in Victoria was $400 a week.[8]

Over the years, government investment in social and affordable housing in Victoria has not increased to meet the demand. In order to effectively address housing and homelessness related issues in Victoria,

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[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, accessible at: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0

[4] Homelessness in Victoria, Fact Sheet: Homelessness, 2018, accessible at: https://www.kuc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2016-Census-data-Homelessness-in-Victoria.pdf

[5] Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, Specialist homelessness services 2017–18: Victoria, 2019, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/46473685-40d3-471b-b28d-ae6aaac81e84/aihw-hou-299-vic.pdf.aspx

[6] Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program, 2018, p.23.

[7] M. Kennedy, The Affordable Housing Income Gap: a new way to measure housing affordability, 2018, p 14, accessible at: https://www.compasshousing.org/sites/default/files/Compass%20AHIG%20Index%202018%20Report%20FINAL%20SPREADS.pdf

[8] Department of Health and Human Services Victoria, Rental report, accessible at: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report

there needs to be an increase in investment in social[9] and affordable[10] housing. People must feel safe, secure and connected and this requires stable, adequate and appropriate housing. This includes housing which is safe, not overcrowded, in a suitable condition to live, close to infrastructure, meets any cultural needs and has secure tenure. Housing must also be sustainable in terms of both affordability and maintenance.

Considering the increasing housing stress and growing rates of homelessness, the community sector has been calling for at least 6,000 new social housing dwellings to be built each year for the next 10 years.[11] This should include building over 5,000 social housing properties by 2036 clearly demarcated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families by constructing 300 houses per year to meet future demand.[12]

The Productivity Commission has noted that the provision of social housing has lagged population growth, while Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) for those in the private rental market has not kept pace with rental prices over the past two decades.[13] The State Government should advocate to the Commonwealth government to immediately increase the social security allowances including Newstart and Commonwealth Rent Assistance to provide financial relief to people who are experiencing significant financial and rental stress which increases their risk of homelessness.

In a survey undertaken for the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, 68% of Victorians agreed that no one deserves to be homeless.[14] More action and investment is needed to ensure that everybody in Victoria has a home.

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[9] Social housing is defined as rental housing that is fully funded or partly funded by government, and that is owned or managed by the government or a community organisation and let to eligible persons. This includes public rental housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing, mainstream and Indigenous community housing and housing provided under the Crisis Accommodation Program. Social housing rents are generally set below market levels and are influenced by the income of the household.

[10] Affordable housing is housing that is appropriate for the needs of a range of very low to moderate income households and priced so that these households are also able to meet other basic living costs such as food, clothing, transport, medical care and education.

[11] VCOSS, A State of Wellbeing: Victorian Pre-budget Submission 2020-2021, 2019, p.14, accessible at: https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/VCOSS-2020-21-SBS.pdf

[12] Victorian Aboriginal Housing, Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort: Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, 2020, accessible at: https://www.vahhf.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/victorian-aboriginal-housing-and-homelessness-framework_overview_26_02_20.pdf

[13] Productivity Commission, Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options, Commission Research Paper, 2019, accessible at: https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/renters/private-renters.pdf

[14] Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. 2018, Hearts and Homes: public perceptions of homelessness summary report. Available from: https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/reports-reviews-data

Social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness

There are numerous structural, social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness. There should be a clear policy and strategic recognition that the people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are not a homogenous group.

Support services should be flexible to meet the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness. In order to achieve positive, long-term outcomes, services should be able to provide holistic wrap around supports for people to address the multitude of challenges they are experiencing. Responses to homelessness should ensure the equitable treatment of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including those with particularly complex needs who are hardest to reach and who require more intensive support over longer periods of time.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

As a consequence of colonialism, racism, impact of stolen generations, dispossession from land, culture and traditional social structures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience disproportionately high levels of homelessness, contributed by social stressors such as poor housing or overcrowding, poverty and unemployment.[15] Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples accounted for 20% (23,437 persons) of all persons who were homeless on Census night in 2016 and experienced much higher rates of overcrowding.[16]

In 2018, 17% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sought assistance from a homeless service.[17] Approximately 44% of the Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were experiencing homelessness when they sought help from SHS services.[18] In private rental housing, rental stress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households increased similarly in both urban and rural areas over this period (from 34% to 43% in urban areas and 29% to 38% in rural areas between 2001 and 2016).[19]

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[15] See further: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness, Cat. no. HOU 301, 2019, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/1654e011-dccb-49d4-bf5b-09c4607eecc8/aihw-hou-301.pdf.aspx?inline=true

[16] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, accessible at: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0

[17] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Housing Assistance in Australia, 2019, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2019/contents/housing-and-housing-assistance-in-australia

[18] Victorian Aboriginal Housing, Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort: Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, 2020, p.65, accessible at: https://www.vahhf.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/victorian-aboriginal-housing-and-homelessness-framework_overview_26_02_20.pdf

[19] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness, Cat. no. HOU 301, 2019, p.1, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/1654e011-dccb-49d4-bf5b-09c4607eecc8/aihw-hou-301.pdf.aspx?inline=true

The transfer of approximately 1,500 properties from Director of Housing to Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) is a welcome development.[20] It is important that adequate funding is also provided for the upkeep and maintenance of these properties.

Despite the transfers, there remains a limited number of social and affordable housing dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, contributing to the risks of homelessness. Considering the increasing need for social and affordable housing to address the housing issues in Aboriginal communities, the Government needs to identify multiple approaches to increase funding and housing stock through a long-term, sustainable framework.

Mission Australia's Charcoal Lane program provides support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with work readiness skills through educational and training opportunities. These young people are supported to address a range of issues including homelessness, mental health, justice and other life challenges they may experience.

> "Charcoal Lane employs 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people a year into our traineeship program. Across our 2019 intake every student experienced what we would define as homelessness including overcrowding, rough sleeping or couch surfing … 19 of the 30 students were directly supported with housing support ranging from, more appropriate housing services, rent support, maintaining tenancy, and budgeting support to pay rent and bills."
>
> Mission Australia, Program Manager Social Enterprises, Victoria

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Case study

Anna* is an Aboriginal woman aged 25 who first engaged with Mission Australia's Charcoal Lane traineeship program in 2011 when she was 16 years old. Upon completing Certificate III training in 2012, she left the program as she was pregnant with her first child. Anna then reconnected with the service in August 2019 and indicated that she was interested in reengaging with the program to complete her training.

During the intake process, Anna indicated that she has three young children and was experiencing significant challenges to engaging with the training due to family violence. Her children had been in out-of-home-care since January 2019. Anna's ex-partner was in a motorcycle accident in January 2019 and suffered an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). Since then, Anna had realised that her life had been controlled by her ex-partner and that he restricted her movements significantly until he suffered the ABI.

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[20] Victorian Aboriginal Housing, Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort: Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, 2020, p. 24, accessible at: https://www.vahhf.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/victorian-aboriginal-housing-and-homelessness-framework_complete_26_02_20.pdf

Anna also realised that living at home triggered anxiety and paranoia. She informed her case coordinator that she was not feeling safe living in the house with her ex-partner during the intake process.

Due to years of experiencing domestic violence at the hands of her ex-partner, Anna's mental health deteriorated which resulted in her sleeping rough and becoming dependent on drugs. In July 2019 Anna was arrested for walking around the house with a box cutter.

When Anna described her situation, it was evident that she needed to leave the environment in order for her to recover from her mental health and drug issues and apply for reunification with her children. Anna's Charcoal Lane case coordinator worked with her to address a range of challenges during this time.

Given her precarious housing situation, Anna was supported to obtain separate letters from Djirra (Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service), Department of Human and Health Services (DHHS) Child Protection, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Charcoal Lane requesting a public housing transfer. When there was no response to the letters, her Charcoal Lane case coordinator followed up to find out about the progress of the request. The case coordinator was informed that there were no properties available for Anna.

Anna entered a culturally appropriate Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) rehabilitation facility and is continuing to work with her Charcoal Lane case coordinator to find her more suitable accommodation. Anna has indicated that she hopes to move into a new house and regain custody of her young children to start a new life. However, so far she has not been able to find an appropriate housing option.

*name has been changed for privacy

Housing and homelessness services designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be co-designed and implemented with community members, Elders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure they are culturally adapted and appropriate. Relationships with the local community and having a strong understanding of local cultures are critical to developing the necessary trust for community members.

The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework provides strategic and systemic solutions to address these issues experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and was co-developed with Aboriginal community organisations including Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association among others. We support the full implementation of the Framework as a good starting point for addressing the housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It will take ongoing engagement, investment and policy change to prevent and address homelessness and

address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness.

Young people

A supportive and stable home environment is important for young people. It is essential for good physical and mental health and has positive impacts on educational and employment outcomes. Stable housing also provides a platform for access to other supports in the community, such as schooling or neighbours.

As young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood, strong family connections are critical for support, providing freedom to seek out independence. When young people are estranged from family networks, exposed to unsafe environments or experience abusive relationships, they risk falling further into crisis, which can have a detrimental impact on their transition to adulthood.

Mission Australia's *Young People's Experiences of Homelessness* report found that 12.8% of Victorian young people responding to Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2017 experienced homelessness.[21] For the first time Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2018 asked young people whether they felt there were any barriers which may impact upon them moving out of home in the future. Of those responding, seven in ten (70.1%) indicated that *housing costs* (e.g. rent, utilities) would be a future barrier to moving out of home, followed by *financial stability* (62.8%) and *availability of housing* (41.7%).[22] This demonstrates that housing affordability is a significant issue for young people, coupled with issues of financial stability.

Services that provide holistic, wrap around supports are vital in assisting young people who at risk of homelessness. These services need to have an environment that encourage young people to participate and continue to engage with the service until the challenges they are experiencing are resolved.

Experiencing homelessness as a teenager is indicative of a higher risk of becoming homeless or as an adult in the future. While it is not possible for all young people to reunite with family, programs that draw on extended family networks to support people post-crisis have shown great progress in reducing rates of repeat homelessness and have been key to reducing rates of recidivism amongst young people in the justice system.[23] Appropriate services and supports that are catered to the young person's needs provide them with an opportunity to address these challenges.

Case Study

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[21] Mission Australia, Young People's Experiences of Homelessness, 2017, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/780-young-people-s-experience-of-homelessness-findings-from-the-youth-survey-2017/file
[22] Mission Australia, Youth Survey Report 2018, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/823-mission-australia-youth-survey-report-2018/file
[23] Mission Australia, Home & Away: Child and youth homelessness report, 2016, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/homelessness/doc_download/460-home-and-away-child-and-youth-homelessness-report-2016

Jim* is a 17-year-old young person who was voluntarily referred to Mission Australia's Disability Employment Services (DES) program. He was accompanied by his parents for his first appointment. Jim was diagnosed with Autism and had 2 separate youth justice related matters pending at the time. Jim indicated that he was interested in working in the brick laying industry. His DES employment consultant was able to link him with Youth Learning Pathway, an education and training service co-located in the same building as Mission Australia's services in Dandenong.

Youth Learning Pathway supported Jim to access the '5 days taste trader' program, and supported him to obtain his white card and first aid certification. Unfortunately, Jim was unable to participate in the program on the 5th day due to a family relationship breakdown. Mission Australia services immediately informed Youth Learning Pathway of the change in circumstances.

On the following day Jim contacted the employment consultant and informed them that he has a court appearance and that his parents were not supporting him to attend the appointment. The employment consultant accompanied him to the court hearing to provide support.

Jim was in contact with the police as he was sleeping rough near a train station. The police, together with a case worker form Embedded Youth Outreach Project (EYOP) took Jim back to his parent's place as it was too late in the day to find appropriate accommodation.

When Jim came to meet the employment consultant the next day, it was evident that he had not had a proper meal. He was taken to a restaurant and was also provided with food vouchers. When the employment consultant took him home, Jim was confronted by his father who stated that he was not welcome. With intervention from the employment consultant, EYOP staff and the police, it was agreed Jim would be allowed to spend the night at his family home and leave next morning.

Jim was linked with a youth housing service, provided with a phone and transport card top-ups and more food vouchers. He was also accompanied to Centrelink to apply for financial support and to the bank to update his information. He was assisted to set up his myGov account. The employment consultant also made arrangements for the Magistrate Court Diversion Officer to meet with Jim at the Mission Australia office along with Youth Learning Pathway staff.

After spending a considerable amount of time reaching out to a range of services, the services were able to support Jim to find accommodation for a week. While he was in temporary accommodation, Jim was fortunately supported to secure long-term youth accommodation through another youth homelessness service. In addition to learning brick laying, he is currently participating in the Changing Gear program to obtain his Learner Permit. He has also updated his resume and received coaching on interview techniques. The employment consultant is currently working with Jim to obtain employment in his chosen field. He would not have been able to progress with his employment pathways if he was not successful in securing accommodation.

* Name has been changed for privacy

Mission Australia's *Youth mental health and homelessness report* findings revealed that psychological distress increased the likelihood that a young person had spent time away from home.[24] Young people with psychosocial distress were 3.5 times more likely than young people without psychosocial distress to have spent time away from home. Those with psychosocial distress were likely to have experienced more than 10 occasions of time spent away from home compared to those who were not experiencing psychosocial distress.[25] Considering the close nexus between experiencing homelessness and mental health, it is imperative that there is sustainable investment in a diverse range of early intervention programs.

Certain models of supported accommodation coupled with intensive case management and coordinated supports including educational supports, such as the Youth Foyer or Community of Schools and youth Services (COSS) models, will contribute towards preventing homelessness and increase community participation of young people. The Geelong Project[26] that is based on the COSS model, aims to reduce youth homelessness and educational disengagement by building capacity and resilience, ensuring safe and supportive environments, maintaining positive engagement with education, and connecting young people and families to their community. This is achieved through the universal screening of young people and the provision of support to schools, young people, and their families through a collaborative network of the partners. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of adolescents entering the SHS system in Geelong declined by 40%.[27]

The Youth Foyer model assists young people, usually aged 16-24 years, to engage in education and employment, and gradually to reduce their dependence on social services. Youth Foyers generally have self-contained accommodation, on-site support workers, education programs, variable levels of support where a young person can progress to more independent living, onsite facilities and employment supports. Participation in education, training and employment is a condition of the accommodation. In

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[24] Mission Australia, Youth mental health and homelessness report, 2017, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/720-mission-australia-youth-mental-health-and-homelessness-report/file

[25] Mission Australia, Youth mental health and homelessness report, 2017, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/720-mission-australia-youth-mental-health-and-homelessness-report/file

[26] The Geelong Project has modelled a 'community of schools and youth services' approach to early intervention by using population screening, a flexible practice framework and youth-focused, family-centred case management as well as a collective impact approach. The model builds-in longitudinal follow-up and support to reduce homelessness, and achieve sustainable education and lifetime outcomes. See further: D. Mackenzie, M. Thieking, *The Geelong Project: A community of schools and youth services model for early intervention*, 2013, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University, accessible at: http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/The-Geelong-Project-FAHCSIA1.pdf

[27] D. McKenzie, Interim Report The Geelong Project 2016 – 2017, 2018, accessible at: http://www.grllen.com.au/static/uploads/files/tgp-interim-report-2018-final-wfbsibseebhq.pdf

these ways and because of their focus on independence, Foyers are different from traditional supported accommodation models.[28]

An evaluation conducted on the Youth Foyer model found significantly improved outcomes for young people. For example, Foyer enabled participants to pursue the education qualifications necessary to sustain employment. The percentage who had completed at least Year 12 or a Certificate III increased from 42% at entry to 67% at exit and to 75% a year after exit. By exit, about 30% of participants had completed an education qualification higher than at entry, and a year later about 46% had done so. [29] Further funding is required for services such as these that can offer a range of early intervention supports for young people at risk of homeless, in areas of their access to education and their wellbeing.

Women and children affected by family and domestic violence

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children. In Victoria, the main reason cited for accessing Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) was domestic and family violence (44%, compared with 38% nationally).[30]

Lack of availability of appropriate accommodation is likely to prevent people from leaving abusive relationships. Therefore, housing assistance measures, particularly for women affected by DFV need to include options that allow women to remain safely housed or to find affordable, stable and suitable accommodation within a short timeframe.[31]

It is encouraging that in responding to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, Victoria is leading the way in early intervention. Women will often cycle in and out of homelessness as they try to rebuild their relationship with their abusive partner.[32] Safe accommodation is therefore a vital part of the service landscape.

Community sector organisations have recently encouraged the Victorian Government to take immediate measures to implement a number of key recommendations from the Victorian Royal

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[28] M. O'Shaughnessy, Somewhere to stay: models addressing youth homelessness, 2014, accessible at: https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/OShaughnessy_Molly_2014_Somewhere_to_stay.pdf
[29] M. Coddou, et al, Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers, Brotherhood of St Laurence & Launch Housing, Melbourne, 2019, accessible at: http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11369/1/Coddou_etal_Starting_a_future_Education_First_Youth_Foyers_outcomes_2019.pdf
[30] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist homelessness services 2018–19: Victoria, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/0a8aef41-9185-4395-9c7e-e312b7f850a0/VIC_factsheet.pdf.aspx
[31] Mission Australia, Out of the Shadows: Domestic and family violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia, 2019, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/Out-of-the-shadows
[32] C. Chamberlain and D. Mackenzie, Counting the homeless 2001, Australian Census Analytic Program, Canberra, 2003.

Commission into Domestic and Family Violence, namely, give priority to victims gaining stable housing as quickly as possible and establish a Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Task Force.[33]

The exposure of children to domestic and family violence has a range of negative effects, including poor mental wellbeing, educational outcomes, a range of behavioural issues and trauma. Children who are exposed to domestic and family violence often also suffer other forms of child abuse or neglect, and are more likely to become caught in cycles of intergenerational violence (whether as a repeat victim or future perpetrator).[34]

Considering the entrenched nature of these issues, universal prevention initiatives that address structural issues including gender inequality should be prioritised to address homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence.

People with disability and mental health issues

It is estimated that there are close to 1.1 million people with disability in Victoria.[35] People with disability have a greater exposure to the risk of homelessness than the general population and different disabilities predispose individuals to different levels of homelessness risk.[36]

People with disability are vulnerable to homelessness due to low income, increased medical costs, limited employment options, and particularly, limited accessible and appropriate housing options. Other structural factors that impact on this cohort include poverty and lack of paid work.

Accessible housing is limited in supply and there are significant waiting times for public and social housing in Victoria. These factors add further pressure on people with disabilities as they are unable to find appropriate, accessible and affordable housing. The Government should adopt measures to increase social and affordable housing in Victoria and ensure that all new constructions at minimum adhere to universal accessibility principles. In addition to increasing the accessible housing stock, the government must also ensure that appropriate measures are in place so that people with disability are provided with supports to be active and participating members of the community.

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[33] Domestic Violence Victoria and Council to the Homeless Persons, Social housing is unfinished business on International Women's Day, 2020, accessible at: https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/200303-Letter-to-Premier-on-letterhead-final.pdf

[34] Mission Australia, Out of the Shadows, Domestic and family Violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia, 2019, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/Out-of-the-shadows

[35] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015, accessible at: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02015?OpenDocument

[36] Mission Australia, Mission Australia's review of homelessness, 2015, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/mission-australia-s-review-of-homelessness-2015

It is estimated that nationally 6% of the NDIS participants, or 28,000 individuals need access to Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).[37] When the Scheme is fully implemented, the SDA is expected to account for NDIS spending of $700 million a year.[38] It is also expected that the NDIS will contribute to create a $5 billion disability housing market over the next five years.[39] This investment into disability accommodation is vital considering the acute shortage of affordable and accessible housing in the private rental market.[40]

People with mental health issues are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, and can be isolated, have disrupted family and social networks and sometimes suffer poor physical health, all of which impacts their capacity to find and maintain adequate housing.[41] Several studies suggest that when people with mental health issues are supported by homelessness agencies, they are more likely to remain housed rather than return to homelessness.[42]

Of over 288,000 people accessing Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) nationally last financial year, over 81,000 indicated that they were experiencing mental health issues.[43] Mental health services, including psychological, psychiatric and mental health services, were one of the most common specialised services identified as needed by clients accessing SHS services, however, these needs were frequently unmet with around 3 in 10 clients (32%) neither provided nor referred to these services. Thus, as part of holistic measures to address housing and homelessness issues, there should be an increase in access to mental health services within local communities.

In addition to tenancy support, supports for mental health and other issues may be required and these should be integrated with housing supports. One model for such support is the Housing Accommodation and Support Initiative in NSW for which Mission Australia is a provider. Service models such as these can be replicated in Victoria.

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[37] National Disability Insurance Scheme, *Specialist Disability Accommodation Provider and Investor Brief,* April 2018, p.5, accessible at: https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/essentials-providers-working-ndia/specialist-disability-accommodation

[38] D. Winkler, G. Taleporos and L. Bo'sher, *How the NDIS is using the market to create housing for people with disability,* The Conversation, accessible at: https://theconversation.com/how-the-ndis-is-using-the-market-to-create-housing-for-people-with-disability-83144

[39] Summer Foundation and PwC, *NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation Pathway to a mature market,* August 2017, p.5 accessible at: https://www.summerfoundation.org.au/resources/ndis-specialist-disability-accommodation-pathway-to-a-mature-market/

[40] Anglicare Australia, Rental Affordability Snapshot, 2018, accessible at: https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final---rental-affordability-snapshotb811d9309d6962baacc1ff0000899bca.pdf?sfvrsn=4

[41] See further: Homelessness Australia, States of being: Exploring the links between homelessness, mental illness and psychological distress: an evidence based policy paper, 2011.

[42] NSW Mental Health Commission, Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW. Sydney, NSW Mental Health Commission, 2014

[43] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2017-18, 2019, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2017-18/contents/contents

Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Plus NSW

HASI Plus is a supported accommodation program providing housing, daily living support and clinical care for people with lived experience of mental illness.

HASI Plus is a program specifically for people with severe and persistent mental illness who are ready to transition back to community living after long periods of stay in psychiatric facilities or similar institutions. HASI Plus provides 24/7 support to people who would otherwise be unable to live independently.

HASI Plus is strongly based upon the principles of recovery in which we foster hope, empowerment and self-determination in all aspects of our work. Day to day we provide hands on support and structure to teach wellbeing in daily living skills such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting; mental and physical health; community engagement and the ultimate recovery goal of one day all of our consumers being able to return to independent living.

A growing number of older people are experiencing homelessness

Across the country, one seventh of all homelessness is experienced by those over the age of 55 and there are new and emerging groups of older people at risk of homelessness, such as older women with limited retirement savings.[44] For a group of older people who do not own their own home and are reliant on social security payments, rental stress is a significant concern. In 2017–18, there were over 24,100 older clients (55 years and over) who received services from SHS agencies.[45] Of the 24,100 older people, 12,000 were from Victoria.

Appropriate and affordable housing is a key part of the solution for all older people experiencing, and at risk of homelessness. A range of housing options is required to cater for a broad spectrum of circumstances including supports to age in place, an increased supply of social and affordable housing for older people, supported accommodation models for older people with more complex needs and specific residential aged care facilities that can provide intensive supports to those who have previously experienced homelessness.

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[44]Mission Australia, Ageing and Homelessness: Solutions to a growing problem, 2017, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/ageing-and-homelessness-solutions-to-a-growing-problem
[45] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Older clients of specialist homelessness services, 2019, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/older-clients-of-specialist-homelessness-services/contents/summary

Supports to ensure older people can stay in their homes as long as possible are needed, including tenancy support services and upgrading or renovating current social and affordable housing to meet accessibility and living needs.[46]

Home at Last Service in Victoria

The Home at Last service in Victoria operates as a central referral point providing integrated assistance for older people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including free and confidential advice, support and advocacy. The service supports older people who are in the process of planning for their housing future or seeking retirement housing advice, provides outreach support to help with relocation, provides brokerage funds to ensure older people have essential amenities such as fridges and bedding, links older people into the local community, and provides any other ongoing supports needed.

An evaluation of the this service found the approach is cost-effective, helping clients to gain secure housing and diverting demand from specialist homelessness services and that it had a cost saving of $220.81 per client compared to Specialist Homelessness Services.[47]

This service is based in Melbourne with funding for a few outreach workers. Considering the positive outcomes it has achieved, it can be replicated across the state with necessary modifications to suit the needs of the local communities.

There is a high demand for residential aged care facilities that provide 24 hour care dedicated to older people who have a history of homelessness or are at risk of homelessness and are unable to live independently.[48] Often premature ageing as a result of sleeping rough or experiencing intermittent homelessness[49] means that people need constant nursing (and/or medical care) at an earlier age. They may also require psychological or psychiatric support due to their chronic, severe and enduring mental health issues.

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[46] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Older clients of specialist homelessness services, 2019, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/older-clients-of-specialist-homelessness-services/contents/summary

[47] KPMG, *Evaluation of the homelessness IAPs, summative evaluation report*, 2015, accessible at: http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content101/c6/Evaluation-of-homelessness-innovation-action-projects-executive-summary-0115.pdf

[48] Mission Australia, Ageing and homelessness: solutions to a growing problem, 2017, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/ageing-and-homelessness-solutions-to-a-growing-problem

[49] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Older Australia at a glance, 2018, accessible at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/web/194/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/diversity/people-at-risk-ofhomelessness

Considering the increase in the number of older people requiring holistic 24 hour care, the Victorian Government should consider providing capital funding for the construction of these facilities.

Residential aged care for vulnerable people

Mission Australia operates 192 beds within three aged care facilities in NSW for people who have experienced homelessness, Charles Chamber Court, Benjamin Short Grove and Annie Green Court. All these services offer a permanent response to the needs of older people who would otherwise be experiencing homelessness or living in sub-standard accommodation.

In these facilities, all residents have security of tenure by way of a Resident Agreement which provides a sustainable housing solution. As these services are operated and regulated under aged care legislation, they work under a highly specialised model that is distinct from other homelessness services. Currently Mission Australia is able to increase the services provided as the person's needs increase over time, enabling the aged care residents to remain in these facilities long-term. This is essential as these services are the last home for the majority of the tenants who live there, many of whom are estranged from family.

People in rural, remote and regional areas

People living in regional, rural and remote communities who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness have specific challenges to seeking support including social and geographic isolation and a scarcity of housing and other services.[50] In these areas, lack of appropriate resourcing for vital services usually means that efforts are focused on crisis response and risk management at the expense of outreach work.[51]

More remote and regional areas are witnessing a decrease in rental housing which adds further challenges for people on low incomes. For example, in areas such as Sale in Victoria, the vacant rental properties are close to 1.5%.[52]

> "We have supported families with children living in cars because they were unable to access appropriate housing. There is a clear need for short term accommodation but what we also need is investment in social and affordable housing in rural and remote areas including funding for repairs and other upkeep of the existing social and affordable housing stock."

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[50] R. Holder, J. Putt and C. O'Leary, Women's specialist domestic and family violence services: Tehri responses and practices with and for Aboriginal women: Key findings and future directions, Sydney: ANROWS, 2017.
[51] S. Wendt, et al, Seeking help for domestic and family violence: Exploring regional, rural, and remote women's coping experiences: Key findings and future directions, Sydney: ANROWS, 2017.
[52] Gippsland Times, Shortage of rental properties in Sale presents challenges for people with low incomes by Liam Durkin, 4 November 2019, accessible at: https://www.gippslandtimes.com.au/story/6473185/rental-situation-is-dire/

Mission Australia, Area Manager Victoria

Having to travel significant distances to access crisis accommodation is not a viable option for many people, particularly those with school-aged children. Therefore, supports should be made available in local communities to ensure that there is minimal disruption to life, particularly for families with young children.

People with alcohol and drug related issues

There is a clear correlation between alcohol and drug use and homelessness or increasing risk of homelessness.[53] Homelessness, and alcohol and drugs have a bidirectional relationship. One study found that an estimated 17% of the national homeless population became homeless because of substance dependence.[54] Another study found that people experiencing homelessness were six times more likely to have a drug-use disorder and 33 times more likely to have an opiate use disorder than the Australian general population.[55]

Where individuals are treated for their substance use related issues in an institution such as a hospital, prison or residential program, they must have a carefully planned transition into the community, ensuring that their housing needs are addressed whether they were homeless prior to treatment or at-risk of homelessness. Access to treatment when needed is also crucial and this includes age and culturally appropriate detoxification and rehabilitation options close to the person's community. Youth specific detoxification and rehabilitation is particularly important to ensure early intervention and to increase the prospects of recovery for young people and provide integrated care.

A challenge with people experiencing homelessness and alcohol and drug dependence is the limited availability of appropriate crisis accommodation. For example, the domestic and family violence crisis accommodation services that support parents with young children are often unable to provide accommodation to people who are currently using or dependent on substances due to safety reasons. These people who may also have children, may return to their abusive partners as there are no safe and affordable accommodation options.[56]

Additional accommodation support services are required for people with substance dependence issues. A Housing First approach with wrap around supports is an evidence-based approach and earlier access to detoxification and rehabilitation closer to communities is also required.

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[53] P. Flatau, et al, How integrated are homelessness, mental health and drug and alcohol services in Australia? AHURI Final Report No.206, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2003.
[54] G. Johnson and C. Chamberlain, Are the homeless mentally ill? Australian Journal of Social Issues, 46(1), 2011, pp 29-48.
[55] L. Kaleveld, et al, Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence, 2018, p. 60.
[56] Mission Australia, Out of the Shadows: Domestic and family violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia, 2019, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/Out-of-the-shadows

Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people

LGBTI people are over-represented in homeless populations due to both the complexity of their experiences and difficulty accessing services. Rejection by family and the community is a main driver of homelessness among LGBTI young people. A study found that Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual respondents were at least twice as likely as heterosexuals to have ever experienced homelessness.[57] Lesbian and gay people were also found to be twice as likely to stay in crisis accommodation or sleep rough.

Research has found that older LGBTI people have higher levels of some health and mental health problems and increased social isolation, compared to their non-LGBTI counterparts.[58] Many older LGBTI people refrain from divulging their sexuality when accessing services due to fears of discrimination and/or abuse. The lack of understanding of, and respect for, LGBTI people is a broader systemic social issue that needs wider social awareness.

Service responses should be improved to ensure that the information, services and other agencies are provided with access to specific training on the trauma informed, non-discriminatory services, particularly to safely and confidentially support LGBTI older people.

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Refugees and asylum seekers have been an under-reported group at risk of homelessness. Young people from refugee backgrounds are six to ten times more likely to be at-risk of homelessness than Australian-born young people.[59] It is estimated that between 500 and 800 young refugees are homeless Australia-wide and this number is growing.[60] Couch surfing is common for young refugees and may not be reported as homelessness, resulting in underestimates. There is a clear need for housing support for people on temporary visas who may not be eligible for federally funded housing services.

Challenges refugees and migrants face include adjustments to language, culture and education when settling into Australia.[61] Family relationships may be more complex amongst refugees with added burdens of trauma, overcrowding, high expectations and differing acculturation.[62] Disconnection from family, school and community are major precursors to homelessness for young refugees, and family reconfiguration and overcrowding contribute to this.

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may experience violence from their intimate partner, extended family or adult children. The experience of migration itself can lead to women becoming

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[57] GALFA LGBTQ Homelessness Research Project: LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria, 2017, accessible at: http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/LGBTQ-Homelessness-project-Final-report-September-2017-Final_.pdf

[58] ACON, (2013), Love: Living Older Visibly and Engaged, NSW, p.2.

[59] Centre for Multicultural Youth, Finding Home in Victoria, Melbourne, 2010.

[60] J. Couch, 'A new way home - Refugee young people and homelessness in Australia' in Journal of Social Inclusion 2(1) 2011.

[61] J. Couch, 'A new way home - Refugee young people and homelessness in Australia' in Journal of Social Inclusion 2(1) 2011.

[62] Centre for Multicultural Youth, Finding Home in Victoria, Melbourne, 2010.

socially isolated, and therefore beholden to a partner and possibly his family.[63] Stigma and shame associated with domestic and family violence can result in women from migrant and refugee backgrounds being less willing to speak out or seek assistance and remain in abusive relationships.[64] Therefore, targeted culturally appropriate services are required to support these individuals.

With the Federal government changes to Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) payments, more people seeking asylum are experiencing additional financial pressure which can contribute to increased stress, risk of homelessness and other challenges. Some local governments in Victoria are providing additional supports. However, the significant reduction in income and the length of time it is likely to take for people seeking asylum to obtain sustainable employment, has increased the demand for services such as emergency relief, demand for foodbanks and other community services.

> "We know that people seeking asylum who were transitioned out of SRSS payments are sleeping in cars and relying entirely on food donations from Oz Harvest and such."

> Mission Australia, Program Manager Victoria

Communication challenges, lack of understanding about services and limited community support that migrant and refugee families experience can be addressed through promoting culturally sensitive and appropriate service provision.

Policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to people experiencing homelessness

Housing policy has overlaps between Commonwealth, State and Local Government roles and responsibilities. Therefore, a coordinated approach is needed to ensure that the solutions to addressing housing and homelessness related issues are resolved through a multipronged, long-term and sustainable strategy.

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.

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[63] Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Intimate partner violence in Australian refugee communities Scoping review of issues and service responses*, CFCA paper no. 50, p.2, AIFS, 2018.
[64] Australian Institute of Family Studies: Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, (2011), *Supporting women from CALD backgrounds who are victims/survivors of sexual violence Challenges and opportunities for practitioners,* No 9, p. 9-10, Melbourne, AIFS.

Inadequacy of social security payments

It is widely accepted that social security payments are far too low and are increasing the risk of homelessness.[65] These factors contribute to people experiencing significant housing stress and homelessness.

Mission Australia has been collecting outcomes data across a range of services to support continuous service improvement. One of the key sets of questions in the Client Wellbeing Survey is a validated measure of subjective wellbeing, the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI).[66] This index is designed to be sensitive to fluctuations in a person's circumstances and encompasses the constructs of satisfaction with the following domains: standard of living, health, achieving, relationships, safety, community, and future security.

People supported by Mission Australia on Newstart Allowance reported notably lower levels of satisfaction with all life domains than the general population. Their overall personal wellbeing score was 54.6 (in the challenged range) compared to a general population score of 75.1.[67] The National Housing Supply Council calculated that 60% of people who are on low incomes in the rental market are in housing stress[68] and therefore at risk of homelessness. Even for those receiving CRA, 39.5% of people in Victoria are still living in rental stress after the payment.[69] Without access to adequate social security allowances, people will continue to experience housing stress and increased risk of homelessness.

In particular, there is an urgent need for the Commonwealth to increase Newstart and Commonwealth Rental Assistance to reduce the risk of homelessness. The Victorian government can help to advocate for these changes.

Case study

David* is a 41 year old Newstart Allowance recipient who was referred to Disability Employment Services (DES) in Victoria. After a relationship breakdown, David moved out of the family home. He had mental health related issues and had attempted suicide in the past.

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[65] See further: Mission Australia, Adequacy of Newstart and other allowances 2019, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/submissions-and-reports/welfare-reform and Business Council of Australia, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Allowance Payment System for Jobseekers and Others, accessible at: http://www.bca.com.au/publications/submission-to-the-senate-inquiry-into-the-adequacy-of-the-allowance-payment-system-for-jobseekers-and-others

[66] S. Rowley, et al, Modelling housing need in Australia to 2025, AHURI Final Report No. 287, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2017, accessible at: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/287

[67] Mission Australia, Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia, 2019, accessible at: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/submissions-and-reports/welfare-reform

[68] National Housing Supply Council, Housing Supply and Affordability Key Indicators, 2012, accessible at: https://treasury.gov.au/publication/housing-supply-and-affordability-key-indicators-2012

[69] Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services, 2020, accessible at: https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2020/housing-and-homelessness

David currently lives in a substandard, self-contained flat. His flat has a leaky roof, mould issues due to poor ventilation and a range of other issues that can have adverse health impacts. He is unable to save sufficient funds for the bond for a new place with the limited amount he receives from Newstart, and therefore, he is unable to move out.

He cannot afford to buy healthy food and relies on food items that he can buy in bulk. He informed his caseworker that he '*has to rely on cheap options like 24 dim sims for $4 or 6 pies for $5*'. David has a car but he cannot afford to pay for insurance and this adds to his stress. He feels isolated from family and friends, which has caused huge issues as he cannot pay for fuel to drive to family gatherings.

David has not had a relationship for several years due to his restricted financial capacity and the poor quality of his accommodation which also adds to his loneliness. The caseworker has noticed that the prolonged social isolation and financial pressure has had a severe impact on David's confidence and his mental health.

* Name has been changed for privacy

Housing and homelessness related issues aggravated by natural disasters

The current bushfires have destroyed hundreds of homes in Victoria.[70] The *Easing the crisis: Reducing risks for people experiencing homelessness in disasters and emergency events* report identifies that the existing lack of affordable and temporary housing puts increasing pressure on people already at risk, and can force people, including families, into homelessness. This issue only becomes worse after a disaster.[71] As well as supply issues for affordable housing, it causes sharp increase in demand for social housing and exacerbates already long waiting lists.[72]

The experience of the recent fires demonstrate the level of disruption to families including people being forced to live in cars and other forms of temporary dwellings. The effects of the fire are already demonstrated in areas where there were a very small proportion of rental properties. For example, in Bairnsdale, Victoria (one of the close hubs to fire ravaged Gippsland), less than 1% or about 20 properties were available to rent.[73] The real estate industry is flagging the added pressure as a 'housing

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[70] See further: ABC News, Fires in Victoria destroy estimated 300 homes, former police chief to lead Bushfire Recovery Victoria, 7 January 2020, accessible at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-06/bushfires-in-victoria-destroy-at-least-200-homes/11844292
[71] VCOSS, Easing the crisis: Reducing risks for people experiencing homelessness in disasters and emergency events, 2016, accessible at: https://vcoss.org.au/policy/homelessness-in-disasters-and-emergency-events/
[72] VCOSS, Easing the crisis: Reducing risks for people experiencing homelessness in disasters and emergency events, 2016, accessible at: https://vcoss.org.au/policy/homelessness-in-disasters-and-emergency-events/
[73] Financial Review, Rental housing shortage looms in hubs near fire zones by Nila Sweeney, 8 January 2020, accessible at: https://www.afr.com/property/residential/rental-housing-shortage-looms-in-hubs-near-fire-zones-20200108-p53prp

availability crisis' which is likely to further disadvantage people who are already experiencing financial disadvantage.[74]

Ending homelessness before disasters strike, and in the face of them, requires greater focus on prevention, rather than on addressing homelessness once it has already occurred.[75] Therefore, careful planning is needed to ensure adaptation strategies are in place to support people in times of disaster and prevent people and families from entering a cycle of homelessness.

Public and community housing dwellings have been destroyed or damaged in recent the fires and will need to be repaired or replaced urgently.[76] Given increased financial hardship and the destruction of hundreds of dwellings in affected communities, new public and community housing dwellings should be developed as a priority.[77]

No exits into homelessness from institutions

A 'zero tolerance' approach to people becoming homeless upon exiting hospitals and other health or institutional settings has been a key platform for our homelessness action plan. In 2019, a longitudinal study in Victoria found that people leaving out of home care are at high risk of becoming homeless or subject to ongoing housing instability.[78] Care leavers often struggle with finding housing due to lack of family supports or supportive social networks, limited financial resources and high rates of mental illness and/or issues related to past trauma. They also had lower than average levels of school attainment, low levels of employment, low incomes and high levels of financial stress which can contribute to increased risk of homelessness.[79]

Mission Australia is a member of the Home Stretch campaign[80] and we also provide specific programs for young people leaving out of home care, including Home Stretch as an offer under the Better Futures Model.

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[74] Financial Review, Rental housing shortage looms in hubs near fire zones by Nila Sweeney, 8 January 2020, accessible at: https://www.afr.com/property/residential/rental-housing-shortage-looms-in-hubs-near-fire-zones-20200108-p53prp

[75] VCOSS, Easing the crisis: Reducing risks for people experiencing homelessness in disasters and emergency events, 2016, accessible at: https://vcoss.org.au/policy/homelessness-in-disasters-and-emergency-events/

[76] ACOSS, Responding to the National Bushfire Crisis: A Plan for Action, 16 January 2020, accessible at: https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Bushfire-Recomendations.pdf

[77] ACOSS, Responding to the National Bushfire Crisis: A Plan for Action, 16 January 2020, accessible at: https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Bushfire-Recomendations.pdf

[78] S.Muir, J.Purtell, K.Hand & M.Carroll, Beyond 18: The Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care Wave 3 Research Report: Outcomes for young people leaving care in Victoria, Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2019, accessible at: https://aifs.gov.au/publications/beyond-18-longitudinal-study-leaving-care-wave-3-research-report

[79] S.Muir, J.Purtell, K.Hand & M.Carroll, Beyond 18: The Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care Wave 3 Research Report: Outcomes for young people leaving care in Victoria, Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2019, accessible at: https://aifs.gov.au/publications/beyond-18-longitudinal-study-leaving-care-wave-3-research-report

[80] See further: Home Stretch Campaign, accessible at: http://thehomestretch.org.au/about/

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The Better Futures model

Better Futures is a new way of supporting care leavers, engaging with young people and their support networks, including case managers and care teams early in their transition from care from age 15 and 9 months through to 21.

Better Futures aims to support young people to have an active voice in their transition planning and providing individualised supports across a range of life areas including housing, education, employment, and community connections.

The level of support offered by Better Futures is dependent upon the circumstances of the young person and current support arrangements.

Under the umbrella of the Better Futures program, there are a number of other support services that provide young people a range of services.

Community Connections

Community Connections aims to broker access to new pathways, opportunities, networks and resources within the community, so that young people can build enabling and sustained connections. Community Connections focusses on improving young people's social capital, with an emphasis on building support networks outside of the service system that provide opportunities for community participation and access to new pathways.

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Mission Australia delivers Better Futures across the Southern and Northern metropolitan regions of Melbourne. Although it is encouraging that Victoria is leading the other states and territories in the provision of support young people leaving out of home care up to 21 years, there are only a limited number of Home Stretch packages available.

> "Since the beginning of the contract in July 2019, we have already exhausted the number of packages allocated due to the significantly high demand for services. We are already seeing the positive results this program has been delivering and would encourage the government to increase the investment to support all young people leaving care."
>
> Mission Australia, Area Manager Victoria

Considering the success of this initiative, the community sector has called for an extension of Home Stretch program to be available to every young person leaving care.[81]

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[81] VCOSS, A State of Wellbeing: Victorian Pre-budget Submission 2020-2021, 2019, p.14, accessible at: https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/VCOSS-2020-21-SBS.pdf

People leaving prisons and detention facilities

People leaving prisons are at high risk of homelessness, particularly those who spent a considerable amount of time (i.e., 12 months or more) in juvenile detention.[82] On the other hand, stable housing may contribute to a decrease in reoffending and drug use.[83] Further, the growth of the prison population means there are a growing number of people at risk of homelessness and accommodation is a primary need at the time of release.[84]

There is a significant gap in supported accommodation options available to young people and adults on release from incarceration and more housing plus support packages are required. Stronger planning is also required for those exiting prison and other institutional settings such as acute mental health facilities to avoid individuals exiting into homelessness.

More resourcing is required for programs in which people are supported during incarceration and after release to prevent homelessness and reduce re-incarceration. Securing employment is a particular challenge for this group and should be included in support services as should drug and alcohol rehabilitation where required. Integrated approaches and intensive case management are needed for people who are homeless, have a cognitive impairment, mental ill-health or complex needs and are enmeshed in the criminal justice system.

Planning measures to address homelessness

In order to address the issue of homelessness and related issues more effectively, the State government adopt a raft of different approaches and measures that would include the Federal government, local governments, the community sector, private investors and corporations.

Inclusionary zoning

Inclusionary zoning has proven to be an effective tool in increasing affordable housing. Research found that between 2005 and 2016, planning schemes delivered 5,485 affordable homes rental and low cost home ownership dwellings in SA.[85] In the UK similar schemes led to 83,790 new affordable dwellings.

Currently, as part of the Victorian government's housing strategy, Homes for Victorians, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is undertaking an Inclusionary Housing Pilot (Pilot)

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[82] A. Bevitt et al, Journeys Home Research Report No.6 – Complete Findings from Waves 1 to 6, University of Melbourne, 2015, accessed at:
https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2202865/Scutella_et_al_Journeys_Home_Research_Report_W6.pdf

[83] Commonwealth of Australia, The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness, 2014.

[84] E. Baldry, Complex needs and the justice system' In Chamberlain, Johnson and Robinson ed Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2014.

[85] N. Gurran, et al, Supporting affordable housing supply: inclusionary planning in new and renewing communities, AHURI Final Report No. 297, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2018, accessible at:
https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/20483/Inquiry-into-increasing-affordable-housing-supply-Evidence-based-principles-and-strategies-for-Australian-policy-and-practice-Executive-Summary.pdf

on six surplus government land parcels.[86] Mission Australia encourages the government to significantly expand the current inclusionary zoning policies to meet the emerging housing demand.

Value capture

Value capture is another option that can be considered where governments impose a tax on the increase in value of a parcel of land when it increases because of an action by government, such as the land being rezoned to a higher value use (e.g. from farmland to residential housing), the building of more efficient local transport access, or the building of local amenities such as schools or cultural centres.[87] The future strategy should closely consider these options and direct the funds to increase social and affordable housing stock in Victoria.

Mixed developments

In order to cater for diverse needs of growing communities, it is important to invest in models that are designed and developed to meet the growing population in Victoria through mixed developments. In addition to building more affordable and social housing to meet the critical need, strategic planning should consider the demands of the population including access to infrastructure, amenities, accessible recreational spaces, facilities such as child care, aged care facilities and employment opportunities.

Ivanhoe Estate Development NSW

As part of the NSW Government's Communities Plus program, Mission Australia Housing will create at least 950 social housing dwellings and 128 affordable homes among the 3000 new dwellings in partnership with developers at Ivanhoe estate, 15 kilometres northwest of the Sydney CBD. This approach encompasses social, affordable and private properties that create a well-connected and supported community.

The development will provide residents with easy access to transport, services, jobs, quality amenities and open green spaces to support a vibrant and sustainable community. The development will include a high school, residential aged care, childcare centres, a supermarket, cafes and retail shops.

Mission Australia Housing will provide tenancy and asset management for the social housing residents and will also deliver community development utilising the Mission Australia Strengthening Communities model. Additionally, Mission Australia will coordinate support service for residents to increase their independence.

This model of urban renewal has potential to be adapted for developments in Victoria.

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[86] Department of Environment, land, water and planning, Inclusionary Housing Pilot, accessible at: https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/housing-strategy/inclusionary-housing-pilot
[87] AHURI, What is value capture? Understanding value capture and how it can fund infrastructure projects, 2017, accessible at: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/what-is-value-capture

Creating sustainable pathways out of homelessness

Concerted and strategic planning coupled with long-term and sustainable funding is required to address housing issues. It must also be noted that a diverse range of solutions are required to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness at different points in their life.

People who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are best placed to communicate their aspirations, strengths and needs, and to determine what solutions are best suited for their needs. Responses to homelessness should focus on the strengths of people who are experiencing homelessness and work with them to further develop their sense of agency in effecting change in their lives. The future strategy should ensure there are mechanisms in place to co-design and collaborate on housing solutions by consulting and meaningfully engaging people with lived experience.

Responses must be multi-dimensional, since for many people exiting homelessness is about more than just housing, and should address support needs across a range of areas including health and mental health, education, employment, and family and community connection. The provision of integrated, wrap-around services to people across a range of life domains can help them to sustain tenancies, achieve positive outcomes in housing, health and wellbeing, and social and economic participation.

Gateway Service, Tasmania

Since 2010, Mission Australia has delivered the Gateway service, as the lead in the South East and North West of Tasmania. Gateway is a unique early intervention and prevention model that acts as a single entry point for individuals, people living with disability and families across Tasmania to access information, brief intervention and be linked into appropriate services across the State. With two sites in Hobart and Devonport, this model delivers client-centred, collaborative and connected services. MA responded to more than 12,000 client contacts in the first 3 years of operation.

While the goal is long-term stable and secure accommodation, there is also a need for transitional short-term accommodation providing timely and effective services and working with people towards a range of housing, social and economic participation goals. These services play a vital role in the continuum of care by offering much needed accommodation to those who become homeless. Crisis accommodation can also serve an important purpose in assessing underlying needs and is a necessary part of the service system due to the shortage of affordable housing supply.

Housing first model

As discussed above, the Housing First model has proven to reduce homelessness and provide holistic, wrap around supports to people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. For example, Finland has increased investment in housing first solutions coupled with a national housing first policy and have been working towards ending homelessness over decades. As a result, they are the first country in

Europe to see a decline in the number of people experiencing homelessness.[88] This model can meet the diverse and complex needs of people, particularly those who have been experiencing chronic homelessness. Considering the positive outcomes achieved under this policy, a similar model can be adopted in Victoria.

Funding certainty for service provision

It is imperative that housing needs should be coupled with other services to ensure there is a consistent service presence in the local communities, with people aware of the services available to them and the services are able to build trust and relationships with local residents.

As recommended by Productivity Commission, to allow adequate time for service providers to establish their operations, and have a period of continuity in service provision and handover before the conclusion of the contract (when a new provider is selected), default contract lengths for family and community services should be increased to seven years, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services, this should be increased to 10 years.[89] Given the importance of these services in local communities, a review of current funding levels and contract length should be conducted and ensure funding enables services to attract and maintain adequate staffing levels and retain the qualified workforce.

Other relevant initiatives

There are numerous campaigns and initiatives at the national level to address housing and homelessness in Australia. They provide clear recommendations and practical solutions that should be considered as part of holistic measures to address housing and homelessness in Victoria.

Everybody's home campaign[90]

Mission Australia is a member of the Everybody's Home campaign which calls for co-operation between all levels of government, a plan to end homelessness, investment in 500,000 social and affordable housing across Australia, relief from chronic rental stress and a better deal for renters.

The Constellation Project [91]

The Constellation Project has been created to end homelessness within a generation. By combining collective intelligence, resources, networks and power, the project seeks to generate practical solutions that will create more homes and better journeys for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. Mission Australia is a founding member of this project.

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[88] See further: Centre for Policy Impact, Eradicating homelessness in Finland: the Housing First programme, 2019, accessible at: https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/eradicating-homelessness-finland-housing-first-programme/ and Y-Foundation, Housing first in Finland, accessible at: https://ysaatio.fi/en/housing-first-finland

[89] Productivity Commission, Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Reforms to Human Services, No 85, Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, 2017, accessible at: https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/humanservices/reforms/report

[90] See further: Everybody's Home, accessible at: https://everybodyshome.com.au/

[91] The constellation project, accessible at: https://www.theconstellationproject.com.au/about-the-project/