



Council to Homeless Persons Rooming House Project June 2014
The state of rooming house reform in Victoria



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List of acronyms

BCA	Building Code of Australia
CAV	Consumer Affairs Victoria
CHP	Council to Homeless Persons
DHS	Department of Human Services
HEF	Housing Establishment Fund
HPLC	Public Interest Law Clearinghouse Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic
LGA	Local government area
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
RAAV	Registered Accommodation Association of Victoria
RTA	<i>Residential Tenancies Act 1997</i> (Vic)
SHSS	Specialist Homelessness Service Sector
TUV	Tenants Union of Victoria

Summary

Rooming houses have long been used as an accommodation option for individuals experiencing homelessness. As the demographics of the homeless population changed, combined with a shortage of affordable housing, the face of residents of rooming houses also altered dramatically.

Rooming houses provide residents with a single room, and shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Unlike a share house arrangement, rooming house residents have no say about who they share those facilities with. More and more rooming houses are used as an accommodation option for people with complex needs and single people who simply cannot afford or find a one bedroom property. Rooming houses vary in quality from large scale operations with professional on site management, to smaller four bedroom homes that have been subdivided into a warren of sub-standard rooms.

Concern about the standards of rooming houses has been around since the early 1980's, however, it was not until two people died in a Melbourne rooming house fire in 2006 that the Victorian Government made a concerted effort to improve the safety and amenity for residents.

In 2009, 40 organisations, including CHP launched the *Call This A Home?* campaign, petitioning for safe rooming houses in Victoria. The campaign brought together peak bodies, organisations and individuals, to lobby government to change legislation and introduce minimum standards for rooming house accommodation.

As a result the Government established a Rooming House Taskforce chaired by Albert Park MP Martin Foley, which made 32 recommendations, all of which were supported by the government and many have now been implemented.

CHP strongly supports these reforms to improve the quality and amenity in rooming houses. Despite these changes homelessness services continue to report poor standards and exploitative behavior by landlords.

This project has reviewed the implementation of the rooming house reforms in order to identify areas for further work and improvement. The project involved legislative scan, consultation with consumers, service providers and peak bodies around Victoria to determine how legislative changes were made, enforced and compliance issues identified, as well as how the changes have impacted on people experiencing homelessness.

The project found widespread confusion about the roles of different regulatory bodies in relation to registration and regulation of rooming houses. In navigating the rooming

house reforms and assisting tenants to enforce their rights services must be aware of the issues in question and which authority is responsible.

The project also found that specialist homelessness services continue to rely on rooming houses as a housing option for people experiencing homelessness. For people working in specialist homelessness services, there continues to be an ethical dilemma about placing a vulnerable individual into a potentially unsafe rooming house. However, the housing affordability crisis means that there are often limited alternatives. As described by the North-West Homelessness Network submission to the Housing Establishment Fund Review Project (2011):

'staff become depressed and demoralised by their own unwilling complicity in a system that, due to chronic under resourcing, fails to meet the needs of a significant percentage of people who seek its assistance every day'

The consultations and legislative scan and review of the taskforce recommendations informed CHP's key recommendations, which are outlined as follows.

1. Implement the ten outstanding recommendations from the Rooming House Taskforce Report including:

- Allowing third parties to take rooming house matters to VCAT, where that third party can prove standing as a representative body.
- Trialing alternative accommodation models such as a 'community hotel'.
- Investigate new funding models for building housing for single people.
- The state Government work with Federal Government agencies to ensure payments are only being made to registered operators.

2. Support ongoing education for SHSS's and local councils

There is widespread confusion within both the SHSS and local councils around the regulation of rooming houses. To make sure that rooming house reforms work both in principle and practice, there is a need for ongoing education for those working with people in rooming houses and those working with rooming house operators.

3. Test rent capping initiatives with SHSS's

Each year homelessness services spend millions of dollars on rooming houses, caravan parks and motels as emergency accommodation. This represents significant purchasing power that could be used to moderate the excessive rent increases seen in rooming houses in recent years. A rent cap on rooming house costs could be trialed by homelessness services in a specific geographic area.

4. Invest in ongoing outreach to rooming houses

When people are referred to a rooming house as a crisis accommodation option, assertive outreach and follow up should be provided as part of routine practice. This

allows services continue to work with consumers to secure appropriate long term housing. This may be through private rental or social housing. In both cases, assertive outreach can assist residents to complete relevant housing applications.

5. Increase the supply of affordable housing options

As noted throughout the report, individuals and households often seek accommodation in the rooming house sector as they have no other housing options. Ultimately investments in affordable housing will be required.

Rooming Houses in Victoria

'[In 1871, around] the slums of Melbourne... now the central business district... it was announced that "The Society for the Promotion of Morality have taken the very practical step of initiating a company for the erection of lodging houses on sanitary principles... for thousands of persons in this city who have no homes of their own" ... It had 296 men in dormitories, shared rooms and single rooms' (Jordan, 1994)

An overview of rooming houses

Rooming houses have long been used as an accommodation option for individuals in Melbourne, providing 'an integral part of most cities' dwelling stock' (O'Hanlon, 2009). O'Hanlon believes, historically, rooming houses provided 'safe and respectable shelter' to between five and ten percent of individuals in Australian cities. Historical records show, however, that there has always been diversity in the quality of rooming and boarding houses. For example, in Prahran, in the early part of the 20th century accommodation could range from mansions converted into private wings for families, to individuals in poverty, who rented rooms from others in financial stress (Wilde, 1993).

The face and clientele of rooming houses changed over the 20th century, through suburb gentrification, immigration, changes to the *Health Act 1919*, and Australia's prosperous post war economy. Prior to the 1950s, economic climate and global factors would also have influenced the population of rooming houses, with war and the depression forcing some people into a shared situation to make ends meet. Between the 1950s and 1970s there was a sharp decline in rooming houses with stock dropping from 5,000 to 1,500 properties (Neil and Fopp, 1992).

As with residents of rooming houses, the profile of the Victorian homeless population has changed since the 1970s, with increasing numbers of young people, women, families and older people presenting at services seeking accommodation and support. Despite service responses to the changing demographic – such as the establishment of youth and women's refuges – the demand for crisis and long term accommodation still outweighs the available supply.

The National Housing Supply Council (NHSC) report that between 2001-2011 rental costs for a two bedroom flat in Melbourne increased by 80 per cent, and a 3 bedroom

house by 68 per cent (NHSC 2012). The NHSC also found that 34 per cent of low income public and private renters in Victoria were in housing stress. Increases in the cost of private rental properties and a lack of available affordable housing options have resulted in homelessness services becoming increasingly reliant on rooming houses to accommodate a range of people.

The exact population of rooming houses has always been difficult to determine. While rooming houses are now required to be registered with their local council, the registration process only records the number of bedrooms, not the number of residents in a property. Furthermore, the sector is aware that unregistered rooming houses continue to operate. Without having a clear idea of the exact number of people in rooming houses, it can be challenging to develop service responses for this population.

The ABS recorded 5,144 residents of rooming houses in 2001 and 3,050 in 2006. In 2011, rooming houses were again on the rise with 4,397 residents recorded as part of Victoria's homeless population.

Number of rooming house residents recorded by census year		
2001	2006	2011
5,144	3,050	4,397

Chamberlain (2012) proposed an alternative methodology for counting the number of residents, which examined council records of registered rooming houses and local knowledge of unregistered properties. He used the number of bedrooms listed with the council as a proxy for the number of people residing in the property. Chamberlain estimated that as many as 12,568 people were residents in rooming houses across Melbourne, compared to census estimates of 4,397 rooming house residents across Victoria.

A further challenge to counting the population of rooming houses relates to the Public Health Regulations, where, according to measures to prevent overcrowding, a child under the age of three is not counted as a person, and two children under the age of three are counted as one person.

Substandard conditions in rooming houses have been well documented and have focused on issues of cleanliness, violence, unsafe premises, substance abuse and overcrowding. In 2006, Martin and Bates wrote:

'there is a room that used to be a linen cupboard under the stairs. Residents laugh, amazed how the landlord

was ever able to get a bed into it, let alone a person.
Another man lives in a laundry’.

Despite rooming houses receiving attention for many years, significant reforms did not come into effect until very recently. Residents had minimal protection under tenancy laws and there was little regulation of premises. Compounding this issue were different definitions of what constituted a rooming house across the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act* and the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (RTA).

Recent developments

There have been significant changes to legislation in relation to Victorian rooming houses in recent years. The major catalyst for this was the deaths of Leigh Sinclair and Christopher Giorgi in a Melbourne rooming house fire in 2006. A Coronial Inquest, held during 2008-2009, found that the deaths they were preventable and occurred as a direct result of substandard conditions in the rooming house - especially a lack of safety measures.

During the Coronial Inquest, CHP, the Tenants Union of Victoria (TUV) and the PILCH Homeless Persons Legal Clinic (HPLC) presented evidence around the substandard conditions experienced by many tenants living in Victorian rooming houses, including widespread safety issues. The Coroner’s report adopted seven of the eight recommendations given by CHP, TUV and HPLC (Coroners Court of Victoria, 2009a/b).

In 2009, CHP and 39 organisations launched the ‘*Call This a Home?*’ campaign, which called on the Victorian Government to introduce legislation to improve the safety and standards of rooming houses.

Call This a Home? petitioned government to introduce:

- comprehensive minimum standards to ensure the basic needs of all rooming house residents are met
- effective registration, monitoring and enforcement to bring hundreds of rooming houses into the system and ensure their compliance with standards; and,
- a licensing system to regulate the management of private rooming houses to prevent exploitative practices. (*Call this a home?* 2009)

Following the campaign, the Government announced the establishment of the Rooming House Taskforce, and employed an additional 12 CAV inspectors, specifically to respond to enforcing rooming house standards. In September 2010, the Taskforce’s final report was released which detailed 32 recommendations to government. These included suggested minimum standards, as well as recommendations for improving the amenity of rooming houses. The then Labor Government endorsed all 32 recommendations (Victorian Government 2009).

As part of the decision to implement minimum standards for safety and amenity in Rooming houses, the Department of Human Services (DHS) completed a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS). The RIS used a multi-criteria analysis to show the cost and benefit of seventeen potential standards in rooming houses, providing a final recommendation that 11 of these standards should be implemented. The minimum standards were introduced in 2011, and became enforceable in March 2013.

Rooming house reform at a glance

Of the 32 Recommendations of the Rooming House Taskforce accepted by the Government, 16 have been implemented, six have been part implemented and 10 have not been implemented. Further detail on the implementation of each recommendation is outlined in Appendix 1.

As a result of the rooming house taskforce, significant changes have been made to the sector including a system of registration, minimum standards of safety and amenity, the introduction of electrical and gas safety checks and amendment to a number of legislative anomalies. Particular effort was made by government and the SHSS to ensure children were not placed in rooming houses and the Accommodation Options for Families program is ongoing.

A number of recommendations appear to have been implemented however there is little evidence of ongoing maintenance of policies and procedures in all local councils, in particular in relation to the implementation of Rooming House Closure Protocols.

A number of more complex recommendations remain outstanding. These include working with ASIC and the Tax Office to pursue rogue operators, allowing Third Parties the right to take proceedings at VCAT and working with Centrelink to ensure direct payments are not made to unregistered operators. There are also a number of relatively straightforward recommendations that remain outstanding, these include developing a 'community hotel' model as an alternative to rooming house accommodation and trialing alternative uses of HEF to provide alternative housing solutions for people.

Importantly a number of recommendations that address the supply of affordable housing, the key driver for people accessing accommodation in the rooming house sector, remain outstanding. These long term recommendations should now be pursued by government as a matter of urgency. As the findings from CHP's consultations demonstrate, the rooming house sector continues to provide a last ditch accommodation option for vulnerable people unable to secure alternative housing.

Rooming house reform in detail

This section outlines the reforms and their implementation in detail and is to be read alongside Appendix 1 of this report. The table contained in Appendix 1 shows the Taskforce Recommendations, changes to legislation or action taken, and highlights areas for ongoing action.

The rooming house reforms introduced a system of registration for rooming houses, new housing standards and made recommendations on new models of providing housing. Responsibility for implementing these changes lies with a number of different government authorities. Local councils are responsible for the registration of the dwelling as a rooming house and the associated requirements for the dwelling under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act. Consumer Affairs Victoria are responsible for regulating the relationships between the operator and the residents, as outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act, including the enforcement of minimum standards. However Consumer Affairs are only able to enter premises to inspect minimum standards where a property is registered as a rooming house with the local council. The Department of Human Services is the authority that is responsible for managing the welfare of residents in the case of a rooming house closure and imminent homelessness.

Understanding the responsibility of each authority is essential for both services and residents. This understanding is vital to ensure their rights are protected and the legislative protections secured by the Rooming House Taskforce recommendations are implemented.

Registration – the role of local council

Due to legislative changes as a result of the Rooming House Taskforce Recommendations, all rooming houses in Victoria are legally required to be registered with their local council. Councils have sole responsibility for the registration and deregistration of rooming houses. In the event that an unregistered rooming house is identified, only a local council can inspect and require a rooming house operator or owner to register the premises.

This registration relates to the health and safety conditions of the building itself. The original recommendations by the Rooming House Taskforce called for a system of registration for rooming house operators that included a fit and proper person test. The state government indicated in 2012 that they will not implement licensing of rooming house owners or operators.

How registration works

Rooming house registration is the concern of two departments of the local councils - the building and planning department and the public health or health and safety department. Firstly, The department in charge of building and planning looks at each

premises in relation to size, classification, fire safety and emergency procedures, ventilation and the like. These are legislated under the *Building Act 1993*; Building Regulations 2006 and the Building Code of Australia (BCA). While a council issues the permit, inspections can be conducted by a Private Building Surveyor and presented to council.

Secondly, the premises have to be registered by an Environmental Health Officer (EHO), as a prescribed accommodation facility. This process is relatively simple, in that council is provided with to-scale floor plans detailing the size of rooms, and sanitary facilities. These are submitted with an application and payment, and an indication of how many people will be living in the house. An inspector may visit the property to ensure conditions set out in the Health Regulations are met. If premises comply with both building and health requirements, councils will issue a registration for the premises.

Local councils are able to put conditions on a registration, which can include property improvements which must be undertaken within a specified time.

A broad summary of the role of each council inspector in relation to registering a rooming house and enforcing compliance is outlined below, adapted from CAV's resource, *Rooming houses: A guide for residents and operators* and relevant legislation.

Building Inspector*	Health Inspector
General state of repair	Register of residents
Ventilation	Number of bathrooms
Fire hazards**	General hygiene
Display of health, building and fire safety measures**	Room size
Fire prevention systems**	Rubbish collection
Emergency lighting and exits	Pest control
Any other risk to life, safety or health	Adequate supply of hot and cold water
	Issues of overcrowding
	Noise complaints

*Private Surveyors can also administer building regulations

** The MFB and CFA are also able to conduct assessments of building fire safety

While operators are charged a fee for registering and renewing registrations of prescribed accommodation, local councils have not been provided with any additional resources by the State Government to investigate and enforce breaches. Chamberlain's (2012) research reported, a council worker stating they struggled to keep up with demand, with one council reporting that 200 rooming house properties were under inspection at the time of interview.

When a rooming house, either changes ownership or moves address, council must be notified and alter the building's registration details accordingly. Local councils are the only authorities who are able to deregister a rooming house.

Despite the significant work completed to ensure compliance, the SHSS is aware that a number of rooming houses are still unregistered, and that sometimes operators register one property, while leaving others unregistered.

Monitoring

Local councils have an ongoing role in relation to monitoring certain conditions within rooming houses in relation to the Building Code, Building Regulations, *Public Health and Wellbeing Act* or Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations.

Local Councils are also required to renew rooming house registrations at least every three years (*Public Health and Wellbeing Act, S 74*). Across Victoria, local councils operate slightly differently based on internal risk identification frameworks, and local needs. It appears that most Councils require renewal on a 12 monthly basis.

A publically accessible, statewide online registry of rooming houses went live in October 2013. The registry allows people to search for a registered rooming house by address or municipality, and when a property is registered, will include details of the owner or businesses that operates the property. Further information about the operator is held by CAV and is not made available to the public. The registry is designed to be updated in real time by CAV, based on information provided by councils, and allows users to contact local councils directly in the event a known or suspected rooming house is not listed. The statewide registry enables people working across the SHSS to easily check the registration status of the rooming houses they know of and use.

Local councils can also become aware of an unregistered rooming house through complaints from neighbors, specialist homelessness services or by CAV.

Minimum standards the role of CAV

Minimum standards in rooming houses are included in the Residential Tenancies Act and as such Consumer Affairs Victoria is responsible for enforcing these standards. CAV can fine or pursue an operator through court action in relation to breaches of the minimum standards. They can also look into lodgment of bonds, unfair eviction and other tenancy matters as outlined in the RTA.

In the twelve months prior to minimum standards being introduced, CAV undertook intensive education, advice and visits to rooming house owners to ensure they understood their obligations under the new standards and what they needed to do to comply. It was a significant and focused effort by CAV who visited 870 rooming houses in this time, providing guidance in person and in writing to operators. A significant number of visits were attended with local council.

CAV reports most operators wanted to ensure they were fully compliant, and many were well placed to become compliant within required timeframes. However, the number of officers now working solely on rooming house inspections has reduced considerably.

Unfortunately, in 2013, as part of the review of consumer protection, the Auditor General highlighted significant deficiencies in CAV's compliance activities. Of the 24 inspections rooming house inspections audited not one compliance officer gained entry to the property and seven were recorded as taking only one minute to complete (Victorian Auditor General 2013). CAV is working to address issues raised in this report.

CHP has been advised that a large number of infringement notices have been issued. Fines are substantial, where individuals can be issued \$700 on the spot fines for each breach. For companies the fines increase up to \$2,800 on-the-spot fines for each breach.

Closure protocols – DHS and homelessness services

Following the taskforce recommendations, DHS provided funding for HomeGround Services to prepare draft closure protocols and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between housing and homelessness services and local councils. The closure protocols had an emphasis on ensuring that the needs of residents were put first, and that seamless information exchange between councils, services and residents occurred. There are a number of examples which highlight how this organized, strategic approach produced better outcomes for residents (see Case Study below), however these guidelines have not been used consistently across the state and councils are not mandated to report to a third party (including homelessness services) when rooming house registrations are suspended or canceled.

Reports from within the sector, however, highlight that relationships with local councils and the provision of adequate resources to manage rooming house closures have a significant impact on how services can work with residents to secure alternative accommodation.

Case Study – The Hub Fitzroy

The Hub, Fitzroy's last large private rooming house, was home to 83 people in 2010, when developers gave residents 60 days to vacate. Residents paid approximately \$160 per week, and there were significant concerns that there would be no affordable accommodation available in the area, to ensure residents stayed connected to local services. HomeGround, worked with local and state government, who 'quickly made brokerage and worker funding available' (Holst, 2011). Through collaborative efforts with government, service providers and accommodations agencies, HomeGround reported that of the 63 remaining residents, 48 secured alternative accommodation. The remaining residents were placed in temporary accommodation while waiting for social housing.¹

¹ <http://www.homeground.org.au/publication/fitzroy-s-hub-closes>

Key issues from the consultations

The consultations found significant variation in local government responses to Rooming Houses. Furthermore, changes in housing affordability in different regions has meant that in some areas rooming houses have closed down, while in other areas, the number of rooming houses is growing.

Housing affordability drives the rooming house industry

The lack of affordable housing in Victoria has been documented throughout a variety of research, publications and campaigns. As reported by DHS (2013), less than one per cent of rental properties in Melbourne are affordable to a single person receiving Newstart Allowance. This places low and very-low income Australians in a precarious situation in relation to housing security. In March 2014, 35,027 people remained on the public housing waiting list.

SHSS's are forced to use rooming houses to provide crisis, temporary and longer term accommodation to individuals in housing crises. Funding for this comes through the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF), which was designed as a method of assisting people to access private rental, or to maintain tenancies, or to access emergency short term accommodation. Goodman et al (2012) stated that 'the decline in public housing and the lack of government and community sector emergency shelter means that some low-income households have little choice but to seek accommodation in rooming or boarding houses'.

A lack of affordable private rental accommodation means a significant amount of HEF is used to pay for rooming house accommodation. Across the state, homelessness service providers note HEF funding being used up rapidly, with little other funding able to be offered to clients.

In 2011-12, the Victorian government reported that 36,000 households were provided with HEF to the value of \$9.06 million dollars, or on average \$250 each.

Rooming houses are becoming more expensive

Throughout the consultations, service providers noted that accommodation within rooming houses has become more expensive in recent years. The consultation heard stories of a single mother paying \$480 per week for two rooms in a rooming house, and another single father paying \$300 a week for a single room for himself and his young son.

In 2013, a *7:30 Report* investigation showed a four bedroom dormitory where individuals were paying \$140 each per week. The report said, at full capacity, the

owner could be earning up to \$2,800 a week in rental income. Individuals receiving NewStart or Youth Allowance are, reportedly, now less likely to be able to afford a single room, and are being forced into shared rooms, which are slightly cheaper.

Because of the increasing cost of rooming house accommodation, individuals become trapped in unsuitable accommodation, in which they can neither afford to remain, nor leave.

The situation is becoming so dire, that some agencies noted they were unable to use HEF money for rooming houses at all, as the cost of the rooms is so high that the tenancies are not considered sustainable from the outset.

These increases in rent were thought to be being driven by two key factors. Firstly, where a rooming house has had to invest money to comply with minimum standards, they are likely to try and pass these costs on to residents. Secondly, and what is apparently the main driver for rental increases, is that the market is sustained by demand for accommodation. This places SHSS in an ethical dilemma, whether to continue to pay high rents in rooming houses, knowing that this cost is unsustainable for residents.

Commonwealth Rental Assistance

It was noted in consultations that, alongside the increasing costs of accommodation in rooming houses, there is a significant opportunity for the Commonwealth Government– which administers both Centrelink and the Commonwealth Rent Assistance program - to better work with the states in relation to how funding is being used. For example, this may include identification of unregistered rooming houses, and their residents, as well as reviewing who is operating these rooming houses.

Cooperation between services and Centrelink has the potential to improve monitoring and regulation of rooming houses. Centrelink help to identify rooming houses by cross checking payments and CRA deductions to show where four or more people are living at the same address. The property can then be referred to council for registration and to local services to contact residents and provide housing assistance where requested.

Some residents would rather sleep rough

Despite the introduction of minimum standards, the environment in rooming houses can be one of which makes people feel incredibly unsafe. Safety issues can be a result of physical threats, unpredictable behavior of other residents with problematic substance use, untreated mental health issues, or threats to general health through poor ventilation, pest infestation and unsanitary conditions. Some individuals would rather sleep rough than stay in a rooming house. Other individuals simply do not want to share spaces with strangers – this can be related to the individual's history, the lack of single sex rooming houses (for women and families) or simply previous experience in rooming houses. The consultation also heard reports of workers being too scared to visit some rooming houses, which highlights how dire situations can be for residents.

Families are still living in rooming houses

In response to the recommendations of the Rooming House Taskforce the Accommodations Options for Families program was established. This program focuses on ensuring families are not referred to rooming houses, and instead, directed to alternative accommodations options. In addition, its active outreach identifies families currently in rooming houses, and sources alternative accommodation. In 2013, the state government funded this program for another five years. There is significant demand for AOF services, and they are not available uniformly across the state. Throughout the consultations, practitioners reported that there were still instances of families remaining in and being referred to rooming houses. Indeed the 2011 Census counted 32 people under 12 living in rooming house accommodation in Victoria.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

There appears to be an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers living in rooming houses. Reports by specialist agencies such as Hotham Mission, The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and The Centre for Multicultural Youth (see references) have provided insights to the key areas affecting asylum seekers and refugees. These include culturally inappropriate mixes within houses, heightened risk of trauma for asylum seekers and refugees placed into unsupervised houses, and danger to women and children placed into rooming houses. This report does not attempt to replicate this work, but acknowledges that an individual's immigration status, language barriers, restrictions on their ability to work, and a lack of income can place these individuals at profound risk of homelessness.

In addition, when individuals are ineligible for Centrelink payments, and are relying on settlement funding (often only 90% of Centrelink payments), the high rents charged to residents means people have no money to live on after paying for accommodation.

Safety of women in rooming houses

The issues of gender in rooming houses is particularly important, considering the path that has led many women into homelessness. Figures show that half the women and children presenting at homelessness services in Victoria had been the victim of domestic violence.

The consultation heard stories of women escaping family violence moving into a single gender rooming house, only to be told by the manager that males would be moving in. These clients had no recourse, as the nature of their tenancy meant that they, as all rooming house clients, have exclusive rights to only their rooms.

Legislative breaches

The Homelessness Advocacy Service has reported increases in the number of people seeking assistance where there have been breaches of the *Residential Tenancies Act*. Examples include, failure to allow residents access to belongings in the event of rental arrears, premises that had flea infestations and residents not being given copies of the CAV Guide to Rooming Houses.

Commercial guesthouses, pubs and motels

In metropolitan areas rooming houses are often used as a form of emergency accommodation for those experiencing homelessness. Within regional areas there is often very little access to crisis accommodation and in lieu of rooming houses to use for this purpose services in regional Victoria are turning to pubs and motels as well as commercial guesthouses to secure accommodation. Traditionally, services have to rely on caravan parks to house people experiencing homelessness; however with the significant closures of caravan parks, these regional areas have been forced to use other forms of accommodation.

The growth in student accommodation

There has been a documented increase in the number of student accommodation facilities in Australia, with international students accounting for 21.5% of the tertiary student population (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). While rental affordability affects a large number of students in Victoria, there have been a number of significant issues raised around international students in rooming houses. Following the 2008 deaths of three Indian students in a rooming house, the TUV and PILCH, Homeless Persons Legal Centre (HPLC) prepared a submission to the Coroner (submitted in January 2013), highlighted these key areas of concern:

- A lack of knowledge of relevant legislation;
- Language barriers;
- Lack of fire safety awareness;
- Visa restrictions on hours worked, and related financial crisis; and,
- Lack of access to local services.

Smith et al (2007) noted that unlike many local students, international students are unable to return home if housing crisis occurs and that they often have poor knowledge of locations and local housing markets. In addition, students often struggle to provide proof of income or rental references to real estate agents, meaning housing options are limited.

PILCH HPLC and the TUV recommended to the coroner a simplified and more accessible version of the CAV guidebook for rooming house renters, specifically including information about fire safety. There was also a call for CAV to develop educational campaigns specific to international students around their rights and responsibilities. CAV could potentially partner with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade

(MFB), which has invested considerable resources in its Student Fire Safety Initiative. The MFB provide workshops (locally, at universities and TAFEs, and in India), printed material and YouTube videos to provide information for international students around fire safety and smoke alarms.

Residents are unwilling to report substandard conditions

Time and time again, service providers reported that residents are unwilling to report breaches of the standards and conditions in rooming houses, as they are afraid of eviction, or being unable to access any other form of accommodation. Despite Taskforce Recommendations, changes to the RTA did not give third parties the ability to make a complaint on behalf of the tenant.

Service providers reported stand over tactics being used on residents to collect rent, and to dissuade them for making reports. In the consultation consumers who had been in rental arrears reported being locked out of their rooms and unable to collect their personal belongings. They were too scared to contact the rooming house manager due to fear of violent retribution.

Issues arising from the standards

Minimum standards have gone some way to improving the amenity and safety of many rooming houses. However the cost of compliance has resulted in what one worker described as the 'domino effect of closures'. This was particularly noted in the Southern region.

In Melbourne's East, it is reported that while large operations are shutting down, there is a marked increase in subletting single rooms in three bedroom properties . Under these circumstances, although the living arrangements (occupancy of a single room) are similar to those of a rooming house, they are not covered by minimum standards, as there are under four individuals living in the property. This is exacerbating the issue of hidden homelessness in these regions.

Future directions

While Victoria continues to face a shortage of affordable housing, there will continue to be demand for rooming house accommodation. The taskforce recommendations that have been implemented have made significant improvements to minimum standards and legislation. The next step is for the State Government to implement the more complex and difficult recommendations to provide new forms of crisis accommodation, ensure greater compliance with the standards and grow the supply of affordable housing.

Implement the outstanding recommendations from the Rooming House Taskforce report

Consider legislative change to allow for third-party action to be taken under the RTA in relation to rooming house issue where a representative body can show standing at VCAT

Many tenants of rooming houses have had experiences of homelessness and sleeping rough. As the only form of accommodation they have been able to secure, they are often unlikely to take action through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to improve their housing conditions for fear of retribution. This consultation heard numerous examples of tenants who were reluctant to seek remedy for fear of eviction or other retaliatory action.

The vulnerability of tenants in rooming houses was recognized by this recommendation in the Taskforce Report and continues to be an important issue. Allowing third parties that have a representative role such as the Tenants Union, to take action at VCAT to enforce minimum standards and other rooming house conditions will encourage compliance with basic tenancy and decent housing standards for vulnerable Victorians.

Initiate action in collaboration with the Australian Taxation Office, Centrelink and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to investigate the operations of unscrupulous rooming house operators.

Significant amounts of State and Commonwealth money are provided to rooming house operators through the use of Housing Establishment Funds and Commonwealth Rent Assistance. There have been instances where rooming house operators with criminal backgrounds have exploited and threatened vulnerable tenants while in receipt of significant State and Commonwealth funds. Particularly in the absence of a 'fit and proper person' test, there is a need to ensure the use of government funds is monitored and illegal activity investigated.

Amend the Housing Establishment Fund guidelines to require that funding for crisis housing can only be used in legally registered rooming houses

A number of homelessness services have developed internal policies so that consumers are not referred to any unregistered rooming house. However, resource constraints mean there may not be consistency of following up whether or not properties are registered. Services have indicated that they would welcome a mandate from DHS that government funding could not be used in unregistered rooming houses.

Introduce a system of registration for rooming house operators in Victoria through the Business Licensing Authority.

The public rooming house register and registration process help to ensure that properties meet basic standards for health, safety and amenity. However there is still no way to ensure that rooming house operators meet basic standards to deliver accommodations services to the most vulnerable. Homelessness services undergo rigorous accreditation processes and yet rooming house providers, who also house people who have experienced homelessness, and are often in receipt of government funds, do not even have to pass a police check. The current registration process for rooming houses fails to account for a significant portion of the risk of rooming house accommodation. It is like registering a car, while letting an unlicensed person drive it.

State Government to work with the Commonwealth, to ensure that deductions from income support payments (or other forms of statutory assistance), are not directed to operators of unregistered rooming houses.

In 2013 the Federal Department of Human Services commissioned an independent review of the Centrepay System. In response to a submission by CHP and the Tenants Union of Victoria, this review recommended

- “Centrepay should adopt a more sophisticated, comprehensive and nuanced service provider applicant approval process, more closely matching what is being done in the banking sector. This would include tailoring the provider approval process more closely to service provider operational risk categories and how they might impact customers. For example, boarding and rooming house providers might need to provide documentation around proving they are ‘fit and proper persons’ and that their boarding/rooming house is registered and complies with regulatory requirements. (Budils 2013 p.98)
- “Special approval criteria should be established, and subsequent compliance monitoring criteria developed, for the boarding and rooming house category of service provision within Centrepay, to address the issues raised in the joint submission by the Tenants Union and Council to Homeless Persons in Victoria, and institute such other checks that might be pertinent to other State and Territory jurisdictions. (Budils 2013 p.98)

CHP encourages the Victorian Government to seek a commitment from the federal Department of Human Services to implement the recommendations.

Work with community housing providers and the REIV to establish a not-for-profit managed model of leased rooming houses as an alternative market option. Such a model would have community based providers establishing small rooming houses in leased premises offering accommodation at reasonable rents

While this recommendation has been partly implemented, through the purchase and lease of rooming houses by DHS, there continues to be a need to trial and invest in alternative rooming house models.

Develop a targeted private rental assistance package to help rooming house residents who are unable to access social housing. The program would help this group to establish affordable tenancies in the private rental market. It would target rooming house residents who are identified as able to sustain a tenancy with limited assistance in the form of rental information, brokerage, start-up costs and time-limited assistance.

Individuals continue to be forced in to rooming houses through a lack of alternative housing options. Preferences and discrimination in the private rental market mean that low income households face multiple barriers to securing rental housing. More sophisticated models of support and financial assistance are needed to help these households secure long term rental housing.

State Government to work with the Commonwealth, to prioritise private sector investment facilitation models, which will encourage new approaches to low-income singles accommodation.

Public policy is increasingly focused on securing private financing mechanisms to construct new affordable housing. Significant academic research has been conducted to further develop models to encourage private investment. These models must be pursued more actively if we are to grow the supply of affordable housing to a point where households are no longer driven to rooming house accommodation as a last resort.

Explore a range of alternative accommodation responses with the community sector including:

- Trial of a community hotel model in conjunction with community housing agencies
- Identifying and encouraging opportunities for more innovative uses of Housing Establishment Funds to target solutions for private rooming house residents

There are a number of resources to draw on to trial innovative models to provide temporary accommodations as an alternative to rooming houses. Some community organisations are head leasing rental properties to provide accommodation alternatives, however, additional flexibility in the use of HEF and additional policy and program support and funding streams could allow for larger scale initiatives.

Additional Recommendations

Support ongoing education for SHSS's and local councils

There is widespread confusion within both the SHSS and local councils around the regulation of rooming houses. There is a need to bring together local council workers, CAV and SHSS's to provide clarification around the process for reporting building issues, health issues and breaches of the Residential Tenancies Act, including minimum standards. This would assist in building relationships between the SHSS and local government to support early identification of rooming house issues and to support residents.

Test rent capping initiatives with SHSS's

Each year homelessness services spend millions of dollars on rooming houses, caravan parks and motels as emergency accommodation. This represents significant purchasing power that could be used to try to moderate the excessive rent increases seen in rooming houses in recent years. CHP recommends that a rent cap on rooming house costs be trialed by homelessness services in a specific geographic area. This would involve working with local rooming houses to notify them of the maximum amount of HEF a SHSS would allocate per room/shared room, based on location and amenity. By working in this manner, SHSS's could use their purchasing power and potentially limit the astronomical growth in rents for rooming houses.

Invest in ongoing outreach to rooming houses

When people are referred to a rooming house as a crisis accommodation option, assertive outreach and follow up should be provided as part of routine practice, to assist services to continue to work with that consumer to secure appropriate long term housing. This may be through private rental or social housing. In both cases, assertive outreach can assist residents to complete relevant housing applications.

A number of organisations and services are funded to provide assertive outreach services to rooming house residents (these include TUV and Merri Outreach). Assertive outreach has been shown to be effective in providing early intervention in conflict resolution, continued engagement with services, and assisting individuals to move into more secure and appropriate accommodation.

Long Term Recommendations

Increase the supply of affordable housing options

As noted throughout the report, individuals and households often seek accommodation in the rooming house sector as they have no other housing options. With a severe shortage of affordable housing in the private rental market and extremely long waits for social housing, there is an immediate and growing need to increase the supply of affordable housing. CHP has recently joined with six other peak bodies to outline government action required to improve the supply of low cost housing including:

- A whole of government affordable housing strategy
- Annual investment of \$200m in a Social Housing Supply Program and innovative financing options
- Stock transfers to the community housing sector
- A subsidy to meet the needs of highly disadvantaged tenants
- Making sure that both public housing and social housing meet the high standards of financial management and reporting.

Appendix 1: Rooming House Taskforce Recommendations

Taskforce Recommendations	Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
<p>1. Immediately establish additional legislated minimum standards for rooming houses, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locks on toilet and bathroom doors • Fire-safe locks on bedroom doors • Provision of a working double power outlet in each bedroom • Window coverings in each bedroom • Fire evacuation plan • Power overload protection. 	<p>Since March 2013, these minimum standards are enforceable by CAV under the Residential Tenancies Act (Rooming House Standards) Regulations 2012. Tenant must issue a 'Breach of Duty' (available from CAV website and from TUV) to the operator if standards are not met, and can seek VCAT involvement if operator is unresponsive.</p>	<p>Implemented in full.</p>	<p>The Regulatory Impact statement reviewed a number of additional standards. Over time to further improve the standard and amenity of the accommodation provided these additional standards should be considered. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of fly screens on each window • Provision of a screen door at entrance • Ensuring window coverings offer thermal protection • Inclusion of furnished living areas • Ceiling insulation • Fixed energy efficient heating in central area
<p>2. In conjunction with other recommended reforms, State Government to phase in the introduction of other additional standards after a new regulatory system is in place, with consideration given to including as minimum standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic gas and electrical safety checks • Appliance upgrades to higher levels of 	<p>Rooming House Standards require gas safety checks by a plumber every two years and electrical safety checks by an electrician every five years. Records must be kept and supplied as required. Under Building Regulation (2006), rooming houses must have hard wired smoke detectors.</p>	<p>Implemented in part.</p>	<p>The outstanding recommendation is the need for appliances to be upgraded to higher levels of water and energy efficiency.</p>

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	<p>water and energy efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of hard wired smoke detectors in each habitable room • Minimum common areas – living area and kitchen/meals area. 			
3	<p>Establish targeted program for registered operators to improve thermal efficiency of premises and upgrade with more energy and water efficient fixtures/appliances.</p>	<p>‘Envirogroup’ won a tender to improve energy and water efficiency of 60 properties through the 2011 ‘Rooming House Audit and Retrofit Project’. Envirogroup and Sustainability Victoria were contacted to see report. Despite multiple requests it was not received.</p>	<p>Implemented in full.</p>	
4	<p>Include references into the RTA to identify other relevant legislation regarding rooming house standards with which compliance is required (eg Health Act 1958, Building Code of Australia), with a view to providing rooming house operators access to all necessary standards in one identifiable piece of legislation.</p>	<p>Rooming House Standards Regulations 2012 and the Residential Tenancies Act includes these references.</p>	<p>Implemented in full.</p>	<p>While these have been implemented, to ensure compliance with legislation, and support for residents, greater community understanding of the legislation and standard is required, particularly by the SHSS to assist with monitoring and enforcement.</p>
5	<p>Require rooming house operators to secure a compliance certificate for Health Act 1958 and Regulations as well as</p>	<p>This occurs through local council. All rooming houses must be registered. Significant fines occur if not. Some council areas are reporting</p>	<p>Implemented in full.</p>	<p>In some regions, the issue is not so much with compliance, but enforcing over time. As stated throughout this report, checks are subject to</p>

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	Building Regulations to evidence that premises meet legislated standards prior to being able to lawfully operate a rooming house.	positive results, where they are now into a second round of compliance checks. Changes in 2011 to the Building Code requires compliance with disability access in Class 1b buildings are reported as dissuading owners from registering their houses or opening rooming houses (RAAV, 2012)		local council renewal of registration.
6	Initiate an information campaign targeted at operators, owners and real estate agents of premises used as private rooming houses so that all parties are aware of their responsibilities regarding existing standards and their liabilities and penalties where standards are not met.	CAV produces 'Rooming Houses. A guide for residents and operators', they also held information sessions, some in conjunction with local councils. RAAV conducted 25 information sessions with operators, some in conjunction with councils (2011-2012), and produced a guidebook for operators and 2 page introduction to minimum standards.	Implemented in full.	There has been an extensive educational campaign targeted to owners and agents, and these issues should now be embedded in industry training as standard practice. Ongoing educational campaigns aimed at consumers, and best practice for SHSS are required to support ongoing compliance.
7	State Government increase penalties and fines within the RTA to at least that equivalent to other comparable legislation operating in the sector (eg the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008) to act as an appropriate deterrent.	There were increases to penalties in the RTA to increase consistency with other Acts.	Implemented in full.	CAV has reported significant fines have been issued.
8	Expand the powers of the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria to initiate	Business Licensing Act (1998)	Implemented in full.	Auditor General's report has criticised the quality and timeliness of inspections and compliance

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	investigations and a range of legal actions including compliance action under the RTA in her own right. Where it can be established that it is in the public interest to address unlawful practices by particular operators, representative actions be available.			checks. CAV is working to address issues raised by the Auditor General.
9	Consider legislative change to allow for third-party action to be taken under the RTA in relation to rooming house issues where a representative body can establish standing before VCAT.	This proposal was intended to allow TUV to be able to issue breaches to owners, and bring cases to VCAT in order to protect consumers. It was not implemented.	Not implemented.	In order to increase consumer protection CHP strongly believed this recommendation should be implemented.
10	Expand the powers of CAV inspectors in respect of rooming houses to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing inspectors with the power to enter non-residential rooms in rooming houses for the purposes of assessing compliance with the RTA • Delegating powers to investigate alleged breaches under the Health Act 1958 and regulations with respect to rooming houses when working in conjunction with local government. Protocols would need to be developed between CAV, MAV and DHS to around the application of this 	CAV inspectors have been given increased powers only in relation to the RTA. Auditor General's Report shows significant issues in relation to Inspections. There has been some discussion that the AG's report may not accurately reflect the work being put in by CAV, however, there is clearly scope for improvements. The number of rooming house specific inspectors has decreased significantly since the change to Victorian government.	Implemented in part.	CHP intends to assist the SHSS to better understand roles and responsibilities of Building Inspectors, Environmental Health Officers and Consumer Affairs.

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	power.			
11	Enforcement agencies to work with homelessness services and tenant advocacy groups to develop appropriate communication strategies to assist residents to understand enforcement action and any impact it may have on their residency.	HomeGround developed draft closure protocols and MOUs for services and councils. These were available on the Victorian Government website, but has since been removed.	Implemented – however now not publically available.	<p>It is unclear whether all councils have established closure protocols/MOUs with local services.</p> <p>It is also unclear whether CAV and DHS have similar protocols for enforcement and compliance measures.</p> <p>CHP has been advised that success in working with tenants is very dependent on the local DHS office providing extra resources for workers to assist client when there is a closure.</p>
12	State Government initiate action in collaboration with the Australian Tax Office, Centrelink and the Australian Securities Investments Commission to investigate the operations of unscrupulous rooming house operators.	This has not occurred at a State level.	Not implemented	CHP will continue to advocate for the recommendations of the Centrepay Review regarding rooming house operators be implemented
13	Provide fire services (MFB and CFA) with legislative powers to require immediate rectification action when breaches of fire safety standards are identified in rooming houses	Proposed changes to legislation giving the MFB Chief Officer power to require rectification works for fire safety matters was never presented to Parliament.	Not implemented	The Chief Officer can inspect buildings and enforce maintenance of essential safety measures, however requiring work to be carried out is still the sole domain of the local councils Municipal Building Surveyors. MFB Chief Officer would refer to council.

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
14	<p>Establish as part of the Estate Agents (Professional Conduct) Regulations 2008 a clear duty for real estate agents to notify Local Government where they reasonably believe that a property managed through their agency is being used as an unregistered rooming house.</p> <p>REIV to incorporate information regarding rooming house standards and registration as part of the ethics and property management components of its continuing professional development training.</p>	<p>The RTA places the 'onus on owner/owners agent to notify (in accordance with in accordance with Division 4 of Part 6 of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008)'. The CAV website provides information to agents on legal obligations, reporting and recording.</p>	Implemented in full.	REIV ran forums for agents prior to changes to the RTA. Education on Agent responsibilities regarding rooming house premises should be required for new agents entering the industry.
15	<p>Introduce a system of registration for rooming house operators in Victoria through the Business Licensing Authority. Premises must be registered with local government and operators must be registered with State Government. This system will include sanctions against unregistered operators and reflect increased penalties for non-compliance with other applicable legislation operating in the sector</p>	<p>All rooming houses now must be registered with local council under Health and Building Codes. A central record is held by DHS. Significant fines exist for unregistered rooming houses.</p> <p>However business operators are not required to be registered with the Business Licensing Authority.</p>	Implemented in part.	While a system of registration of dwellings has been implemented, there is no system for registration of rooming house operators. Real estate agents are required to be licensed and yet those responsible for management of the tenancy of particularly vulnerable households are not. There continue to be reports of exploitative operators in the rooming house sector highlighting the importance of registration that includes a 'fit and proper persons test.
16	Establish a state-wide register of	Launched October 2013	Implemented in full.	

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	registered rooming houses and provide this to agencies requiring this information to fulfil their accommodation and housing related responsibilities.			
17	State Government lead the development and implementation of a best-practice model for local government registration and compliance of rooming houses.	MAV created a toolkit and guidelines which are publically available on line.	Implemented in full.	There continues to be significant differences of approach to registration and compliance by local councils. There is a need for those in rooming houses and the SHSS to understand the varying registration and enforcement mechanisms to support compliance.
18	Amend the Housing Establishment Fund Guidelines to require that funding for crisis housing can only be utilised in legally registered rooming houses	This has not occurred, however consultations showed that many SHSS would support this initiative.	Not implemented	It was intended that this recommendation be phased in alongside the CAV online registry going live. This recommendations should now be implemented.
19	State Government work with the Commonwealth to ensure that deductions from income support payments (or other forms of statutory assistance) are not directed to operators of unregistered rooming houses.	The federal government undertook a review of Centrepay, but state government has not taken a lead on this recommendation. Report on the Independent Review of Centrelink released August 2013. The Report heavily drew on CHP and TUV calls for increased and special compliance for rooming house owners and operators, including Fit	Not implemented	CHP will continue to advocate for the recommendations of the Centrepay Review regarding rooming house operators be implemented

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
		and Proper Persons Check.		
20	Review the current policy position requiring leverage of 25 per cent from registered housing associations in relation to projects housing clients on very low incomes and/or with complex needs with a view to establishing a more nuanced policy approach which will facilitate the development of more community-managed housing stock targeting low-income singles	While in policy this has not changed, in new projects there is a recognition that the current 25 per cent leveraging requirements have constrained the ability of Community Housing to provide housing for very low income singles	Implemented in part	
21	Work with community housing providers and the REIV to establish a not-for-profit managed model of leased rooming houses as an alternative market option. Such a model would have community based providers establishing small rooming houses in leased premises offering accommodation at reasonable rents.	In 2009-2010, DHS's annual report noted the purchase of nine new rooming houses and leased 18 rooming houses which provided 526 new rooms, all of which were run by NFP's. CHP is unable to locate figures after this year.	Implemented in part	
22	Develop a package to respond to families with children in housing crisis which should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A priority allocation of 200 additional properties to community housing 	The government provided funding for the Accommodation Options for Families, which successfully assisted families avoid, or be relocated from rooming houses. In 2013, the Victorian Government committed \$19 million	Implemented in full	The consultations showed that while there is general understanding that rooming houses are unacceptable options for families, referrals were still being made there, due to a lack of affordable housing options. There is a need to further

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	<p>providers as part of a one off, time limited, families response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertive outreach to identify families in rooming houses and redirect them to more suitable housing responses • Targeted brokerage to assist families with low support needs access private rental market (see below). 	over 5 years to continue AOF.		extend the AoF program to give at least metropolitan wide coverage and increase it's capacity.
23	Develop a targeted private rental assistance package to help rooming house residents who are unable to access social housing. The program would help this group to establish affordable tenancies in the private rental market. It would target rooming house residents who are identified as able to sustain a tenancy with limited assistance in the form of rental information, brokerage, start-up costs and time-limited assistance.	Both AOF and the Private Rental Brokerage Program received funding following the Taskforce report.	Not implemented	While programs exist to support people into private rental such as AOF and the PRBP. There continued to be high demand for these services and they are not wholly targeted at rooming house residents.
24	Create new accommodation options by expanding stock of not-for-profit rooming houses through a dedicated singles housing purchase program or new developments.	Many of the dwellings constructed through the Nation Building Stimulus Package provided this.	Not implemented.	An ongoing funding and construction plan is required to meet this groups continued need for housing.

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
25	State Government work with the Commonwealth to prioritise private sector investment facilitation models which will encourage new approaches to low-income singles accommodation.		Not Implemented.	
26	Deliver a clear policy framework and implementation timetable for the immediate and longer term regulatory changes proposed in this report. The timetable should be framed to allow sufficient time for the rooming house industry to adjust to new regulatory requirements and for safeguards for residents to be put in place. It should, however, be no longer than strictly necessary given the unacceptable practices currently occurring in the market	There was a gradual roll in of standards and legislative change.	Implemented in full.	
27	Develop protocols for local government to use with homelessness service providers, other community support services and DHS regions to manage rooming house closures.	State Government funded HomeGround to develop draft closure protocols, which were successfully used in some closures. These are used at the discretion of the local council and SHSS. This project was unable to access these on the Victorian Government website. Also, unlikely to be used uniformly across local councils.	Implemented in full.	Request that these Guidelines be redistributed to local council, possibly through MAV, and made available once again on the Victorian Government website.

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
28	Legislate protections for residents to prevent summary eviction by a property owner where the operator of a leased rooming house defaults on their lease. Such protections should allow residents to remain in situ until relocation or orderly closure process can be established by ensuring that the owner of the property is responsible for the continuing residency arrangements.	Section 289A of the RTA requires the owner to issue individual Notices to Vacate to Residents if they have not been issued by the operator of the rooming house.	Implemented in part.	
29	Explore a range of alternative accommodation responses with the community sector including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial of a community hotel model in conjunction with community housing agencies • Identifying and encouraging opportunities for more innovative uses of Housing Establishment Funds to target solutions for private rooming house residents. 	This did not occur.	Not implemented.	There is an urgent need to trial alternative accommodation options
30	Continue a dedicated interdepartmental committee (IDC) to implement the response to unregistered rooming houses. This committee should develop a strategy	We believe that the IDC team is still operational within the Victorian Government.	Implemented in full.	

Taskforce Recommendations		Progress to date (September 2013)	Level of implementation	Future directions
	for ongoing engagement with the industry and sector stakeholders who have contributed to the formulation of this report which includes quarterly updates on progress towards implementation of these recommendations			
31	Provide support to the RAAV to develop a revised code of conduct for members in light of the regulatory changes proposed in this report.	RAAV launched a best practice handbook for operators, conducted education sessions for operators and produced a 2 page overview of minimum standards.	Implemented in full	There is a need for best practice guidelines for supporting residents of rooming houses. CHP will examine opportunities to develop a best practice guide for the SHSS.
32	Establish pilot community development project targeting residents in registered rooming house properties in conjunction with the RAAV and relevant community services agencies.	This was neither mandated or funded, however some NFP's rooming houses have begun to implement community development projects in their properties.	Not implemented	

Appendix 2: Roles of CAV and Local Council

BUILDING AND HEALTH REGULATIONS (Local Council)		TENANCY ISSUES/MIMINUM STANDARDS
Building Inspector	Health Inspector	Consumer Affairs
General state of repair	Register of residents and record keeping	Fire safe locks in bedrooms
Ventilation	Number of bathrooms, toilets,	Two working power outlets in bedrooms
Fire hazards*	General hygiene, facilities in good repair, and good working order	Window coverings that can be opened and closed and ensure privacy in bedrooms
Display of health, building and fire safety measures*	Room size and overcrowding	Privacy latches on shared bathrooms and toilets
Fire prevention systems*	Rubbish and refuse collection and provision of receptacles	A food preparation area
Emergency lighting and exits	Pest control	A kitchen sink
Any other risk to life, safety or health	Continuous supply of water to facilities	Any other risk to life, safety or health
Size and registration as either 1b or 3	Drinking water that is fir for human consumption	Lodgment of bonds
	Continuous supply of hot and cold water to toilet, bathing, kitchen and laundry	Conditions of lease
	Sewage and waste water disposal	Repairs
	Cleaning of rooms between tenants	
	Advertising property as a rooming house	

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