





The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to Infrastructure Victoria's *Laying the Foundations* paper.

We support the breadth of the objectives expressed in the paper, and particularly welcome the inclusion of objectives that draw attention to the importance of addressing: disadvantage; creating healthy, safe and vibrant communities, enabling workforce participation; and enhancing productivity. Each of these in their own way is critical to addressing homelessness, which is the core focus of the Council to Homeless Persons.

However in order to achieve these objectives, far greater attention needs to be paid to addressing the crisis of housing affordability, currently experienced in Victoria by low and middle income households. While housing is mentioned in the list of needs in relation to addressing disadvantage, it is also critical to creating healthy, safe and vibrant communities, enabling workforce participation; and enhancing productivity.

Within the spectrum of built forms in a modern state, it is our homes that make the most significant impact on individual, family and community life. Housing provides physical protection for people from the elements, and is the physical platform from which individuals live their daily lives, and engage in the activities of family and social life.

While the home we live in is important to us as individuals and families; the diversity and location of housing within communities is also critical to broader community wellbeing. It is the combination of housing types, tenures and levels of affordability in a community that determine social mix - across ages, income levels, and cultural backgrounds. This synthesis also has important economic consequences, and impacts on other infrastructure forms. For example, a community in which affordable rental housing is only in places far from employment nodes will add to the pressure on transport systems, as lower paid workers commute long distances; will have lower productivity as flexibility is lost, and time is wasted in commuting. This will generate broader issues of entrenched disadvantage within the locations distant from jobs.

Historically, building the housing the community needed was considered an important role for Government. In Victoria, Government enacted this role with major projects of slum reclamation and housing construction.

In recent years, Government has retreated from this role with serious consequences. Numerous reports have documented Melbourne's 'donut' form, in which only people housed in inner areas have ready access to employment, while the majority living in the ring suburbs commute or remain unemployed. Children growing up in inner areas are rarely able to afford to continue living near family when they leave home. Family

breakdown commonly involves relocating to cheaper places far from the family member's existing communities and supports.

In locations in Victoria where housing is relatively cheaper, unemployment is high, and persistent disadvantage is entrenched. This creates an overlapping web of disadvantage that manifests across social and economic indices, including in high crime rates, poor school completion, child abuse and neglect, and high rates of drug abuse, mental illness and disability. [Vinson et al, *Dropping off the edge 2015*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia]

Homelessness is another manifestation of the failure of our housing infrastructure to meet the needs of our community. In Victoria more than 20,000 people are homeless on any given night. Affordability is almost always a driver of people's experiences of homelessness, which in addition to exacting a disastrous personal toll on those who experience it, also creates significant pressure on other infrastructure and services, including our hospitals, prisons, and community care system.

The breadth and scale of the issues identified here, that are the result of poor planning of housing infrastructure, is currently scarcely recognised in the *Laying the Foundations* discussion paper.

Council to Homeless Persons proposes that housing, and the availability in particular of housing that is affordable, be considered as a core and fundamental part of the infrastructure project being tackled by Infrastructure Victoria.

We look forward to continuing to engage in dialogue about the development of infrastructure as the process to develop a strategy continues.