



Council to Homeless Persons Strategic Plan 2016 - 2019



# Letter from CHP Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) is the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with a commitment to ending homelessness.

Over the last three years CHP has focused on elevating the issue of homelessness in our community and building the capacity to end it.

Over the life of the 2012-2015 Strategic Plan, CHP has:

- Elevated ending homelessness to a statewide priority by expanding our presence in the media, developing a comprehensive plan for action called *A framework for ending homelessness* and engaging the business, philanthropic and mainstream support sectors in efforts to end homelessness
- Increased consumer participation in policy and practice development by expanding the reach of the PESP program to new audiences, implementing a new database for the Homelessness Advocacy Service, evaluating the PESP program and embedding consumer input into all CHP publications.
- Built Victoria's capacity to end homelessness by disseminating information on policy and best practice through Parity magazine, public forums, the CHP website and fortnightly e- bulletin and publishing Australia's first introductory textbook on homelessness: *Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction*
- Strengthened CHP's capacity and sustainability by securing philanthropic funding for major projects, achieving accreditation and exceeding the accreditation standard for community and professional capacity building.

The 2016-19 Strategic Plan builds on the work of the previous plan, strengthening the resolve in the community to end homelessness.

The work is guided by cross-sector collaboration, as well as strong partnerships with people who have experienced homelessness, in recognition that a consumer perspective is one of the most powerful ways to inform decisions about policy and practice.

We will continue to work closely with all our partners in ending homelessness in Victoria throughout the life of the Plan.

Jane Barnes, Chair

Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer

## Introduction

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) is the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with an interest in and commitment to ending homelessness.

CHP currently:

- seeks to influence federal and state government policy in ending homelessness
- provides the Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS) -the pioneering complaints service of Victoria's homelessness services sector
- leads consumer participation within Victoria's homelessness service sector through the Peer Education and Support Program (PESP)
- produces Parity, Australia's leading national publication on homelessness
- enhances the capacity of Victoria's homelessness and broader service sectors through the provision of training and forums and dissemination of current policy, practice and research information.

The ***Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) 2016 – 2019 strategic plan*** (the Plan) supports the Board's vision for tackling homelessness in Victoria. The plan is strongly evidence based, grounded in consumer experience and developed through considered cross-sector consultation.

### The strategic planning process

To inform the '2016-19 Strategic Plan', six open consultations for homelessness services were held across the state, in addition to a range of workshops with members of the Peer Education and Support Program team, CHP Staff, the CHP Board and other key stakeholders.

### What we mean by 'ending homelessness'

Homelessness occurs at the intersection of personal vulnerabilities and structural forces, such as poverty and housing affordability. People who become homeless are often financially disadvantaged and some will have spent a lifetime in insecure housing.

Ending homelessness doesn't mean that people will never find themselves without shelter. It means that homelessness will be rare, the experience brief, and it will only happen once.

To achieve this vision, Victoria requires the services to help people manage the vulnerabilities that can lead to homelessness. Pathways into homelessness include mental ill health, relationship breakdown, substance misuse, family violence, or indeed a combination of these factors. There is neither a single cause, nor a single solution. Some people may need relatively little assistance for a short period of time, while others may need support over a lifetime.

Ending homelessness also requires action to reduce poverty, increase access to employment and critically to improve the supply of housing that is affordable to people on low incomes.

## What we know about homelessness

Almost 23,000 Victorians are homeless. On any given night, families with children, young people, older people, single adults and people with disabilities; people in regional and rural Victoria and urban neighborhoods experience homelessness. Homelessness is on the rise in Victoria increasing 20 per cent between 2006 and 2011 (ABS 2012). Demand for homelessness services is increasing year on year.

Several structural factors continue to contribute to the steady increase in homelessness. The number of homes that are affordable to low income households continues to shrink. Incomes from government benefits and pensions do not keep pace with rising housing costs. Casualised work has made employment less secure and incomes less predictable. Community support for households to remain healthy and stable, are increasingly under-resourced, harder to access and often lack a focus on keeping people housed.

Each experience of homelessness is individual, however evidence continues to show that early experiences of homelessness and ongoing trauma, contribute to prolonged periods of homelessness later in life. Preventing homelessness for children and young people is central in efforts to end long term homelessness.

## What's needed to end homelessness for good?

The communities that have been successful in reducing homelessness and in some cases eliminating rough sleeping altogether, have identified common themes as part of an integrated response. To replicate this success in Victoria we need:

- A strategic framework - for ending homelessness to guide a system-level, whole of community response
- Clear access – to make sure people can find the assistance they need when they need it
- Targeted prevention – to stop households losing their homes in the first place
- Crisis responses – to respond to immediate needs when people are homeless or about to become homeless
- Rapid re-housing - to get people back into housing fast and build the supports they need to stay housed
- Permanent supportive housing – to secure long-term affordable housing for people who have experienced chronic homelessness
- Mobilisation of mainstream services – to ensure intervention as soon as possible.

# Strategic plan

## Purpose

CHP is the peak Victorian body representing organisations and individuals with a commitment to ending homelessness

## Vision

An end to homelessness in Victoria.

## Mission

CHP works to end homelessness through leadership in policy development, advocacy, capacity building and consumer participation.

## Guiding principles

CHP is driven by underlying principles that give focus to its belief that homelessness is unacceptable, avoidable and within our reach to resolve. To that end, we will:

- Provide leadership in preventing and ending homelessness by developing, supporting and promoting evidence-based research, policy and practice
- Maximise effective consumer engagement in the development of homelessness policy and practice development
- Build the capacity of CHP members, and the homelessness and broader service sectors to achieve the best outcomes for people who experience homelessness
- Influence as strategically and effectively as possible to achieve our mission
- Galvanise cross-sector collaboration to strengthen a shared commitment to ending homelessness.

## Strategic directions

To work toward ending homelessness in Victoria over the next three years, CHP will:

1. Build community commitment to end homelessness
2. Strengthen consumer participation to end homelessness
3. Build the capacity of the human services system to end homelessness
4. Strengthen CHP's capabilities and sustainability to end homelessness.

## Monitoring and communication

The Plan includes objectives to support each of the strategic directions listed above. Each year CHP's operational plan will include KPIs designed to progressively achieve each of the plan's objectives. Updates on CHP's advancement toward meeting the objectives of the Plan will be provided to the Board through regular reporting processes, and to our stakeholders and members through our Annual Report.

# 1. Build community commitment to end homelessness

CHP will engage the Victorian community and policy makers in finding solutions to end homelessness by promoting the interventions that research and practice have proven to be effective.

## Objectives:

- Promote solutions to ending homelessness with a strong and independent voice
- Generate evidence based policy debate on homelessness
- Influence community attitudes and government policy about homelessness by harnessing the expertise of both people experiencing homelessness and those working in the Specialist Homelessness Sector.
- Inform the development of policy and services that are designed to prevent homelessness, reduce the duration of homelessness, and stop the recurrence of homelessness.

## 2. Strengthen consumer participation to end homelessness

The experience of people who have been homeless is a powerful way to inform both policy and service delivery. CHP will strengthen its own commitment to consumer participation and seek to expand the role of consumers in policy and service development.

### Objectives:

- Further embed consumer engagement and participation in CHP structures and work
- Strengthen consumer participation in the co-design of human services policy and service development
- Expand consumer engagement, participation and feedback across the Victorian homelessness services system
- Enhance opportunities to provide feedback on the consumer experience of the Specialist Homelessness Service System from the evidence gathered through the Homelessness Advocacy Service
- Support consumer voices to be heard in policy discussion and public debate.

## 3. Build capacity to end homelessness

Ending homelessness requires a service system that delivers the right support at the right time, alongside access to affordable housing. CHP will advocate for the right tools and sufficient resources to end homelessness in Victoria.

### Objectives:

- Articulate and promote the interventions needed to end homelessness within an integrated human services system
- Support the development of the specialist homelessness sector workforce
- Provide leadership and support to the sector and other stakeholders by bringing together and disseminating the evidence about homelessness including best practice, data, research, and lived experience
- Provide opportunities to share information and learn about best practice for preventing and ending homelessness
- Influence as effectively as possible to secure adequate resources for ending homelessness.
- Advocate to and support generalist services to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

## 4. Strengthen CHP's capability and sustainability to end homelessness

CHP will work closely with organisations and individuals with an interest in ending homelessness to achieve its mission. To do this CHP will continue to develop its organisational capability and sustainability.

### Objectives:

- Deliver value to CHP's members by strengthening the voice of CHP
- Enhance CHP's capacity to be responsive to its membership
- Maintain CHP's financial viability
- Promote and maintain effective and sustainable organisational governance
- Underpin organisational capacity through effective workforce recruitment, retention and succession planning.