



Council to Homeless Persons Budget Submission 2021 –2022



Contents

Introduction.....	3
Assisting the most vulnerable Victorians	4
Prevent youth homelessness.....	6
A new approach to youth homelessness.....	7
Private Rental Assistance	9
Housing equality for LGBTIQ+ Victorians	10
Grow Aboriginal Community Control.....	11
References.....	12

Introduction

In 2021, Victoria stands at the precipice of an enormous opportunity to end homelessness. Victoria's Big Housing Build will see thousands of properties made available to people experiencing homelessness. Efforts to safely accommodate thousands of homeless Victorians in hotels during the pandemic not only kept people safe, but provided important information about the support needs of those with repeat experiences of homelessness. The supports provided through Homelessness to a Home will mean that many Victorians with repeat experiences of homelessness will stay housed for good. Together with the pre-existing service system, these new initiatives construct the foundations upon which to build a homelessness service response with enough capacity to stop Victorians from falling through the cracks, and into homelessness.

This Budget Submission seeks to leverage the successes of 2020 and opportunities of 2021, to orient support where it's needed most, for families, single adults, and for young people experiencing homelessness. We can expand and embed the long term supports that keep people safely housed after a long experience of homelessness, and we can prevent many people from ever experiencing homelessness in the first place.

Longer term support for young people experiencing homelessness can better meet their needs during a difficult and critical transition. Housing First programs can address the root causes of multiple disadvantage, supporting people to stay housed and to improve their health. The Private Rental Assistance Program can keep Victorians who can sustain private rentals housed and out of homelessness. Dedicated responses to LGBTIQ+ Victorians can begin to address the vast over-representation of this group among those without homes. A renewed focus on funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations can begin to address high rates of Aboriginal homelessness. Meanwhile, we can support many young people to avoid homelessness altogether, by helping them to reconnect with family, or to secure a placement in the home of a loving friend or relative.

As we implement and anticipate the results of Victoria's Big Housing Build, Victoria is poised to dramatically reduce homelessness. However, sustaining this reduction in homelessness will require a continued supply of social housing, the longer term supports that keep people well, and the prevention work needed to stop new entries into homelessness. The opportunities that exist today mean that now is the time to act.

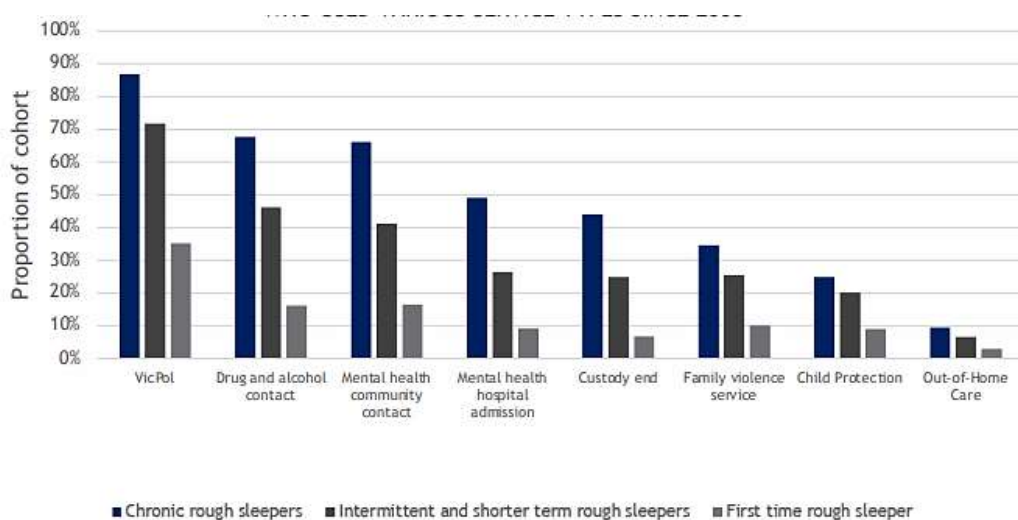
Assisting the most vulnerable Victorians

Victoria has never had a clearer line of sight to people with complex needs who cycle in and out of homelessness. As Victorians followed public health advice to ‘stay at home’ and stop the spread of COVID-19, almost 4,000 former rough sleepers took refuge in hotels.¹ The support needs assessments undertaken of hotel residents, mean that we now have a considerable knowledge of their needs.

Persistent service use by people with multiple and complex needs is often ineffective, but comes at a high cost to government. Time limited health and community services aren’t equipped to address the ongoing homelessness that contributes to worsening substance misuse or mental and physical health. Too many people leave intensive health or corrections services into homelessness, and fail to sustain outcomes. Department of Health and Human Services’ analysis of people’s history of service use reveals that approximately 70 per cent of ‘chronic rough sleepers’ have had contact with drug and alcohol services, 50 per cent have had mental health hospital admissions, and over 40 per cent have had custodial terms end in the last 12 years.² Despite the high rate of service use, and high cost to government associated with it, these individuals remain ‘chronically’ homeless.

This group of people with complex needs experiencing long term homelessness includes a growing number of older Victorians with complex needs, often including multiple chronic health conditions.

Proportion of 2019/20 rough sleeper cohorts by service use since 2008³



To achieve and sustain treatment outcomes for people who are multiply excluded, including older Victorians with complex needs, Housing First programs providing

a combination of secure housing and ongoing flexible support are required.^{4 5} The Victorian Government has recognised this through the recent Homelessness to a Home initiative, which adds to the Housing First programs initiated under the Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan (VHRSAP). Combined, these programs go a significant way towards developing a systemic response in Victoria for those who experience chronic or persistent homelessness.

However, with the hotel response clarifying that around 4,000 Victorians are cycling in and out of rough sleeping,⁶ these funded support packages are too few to put an end to people continuing the cycle of ill-health, homelessness and exclusion.

The new Homelessness to a Home response stands on the shoulders of the VHRSAP. But with funding for the VHRSAP set to lapse in the next financial year, both programs may now be at risk. Homelessness to a Home can support those we now know have been sleeping rough, while the VHRSAP is designed to address rough sleeping when and where it starts. Expanding this comprehensive response state-wide will mean that we can sustain the results that Homelessness to a Home achieves, and be on track to end rough sleeping.

At this moment we have an unprecedented understanding of the number of and challenges experienced by people who are without a home and have complex needs. We also have an historic investment in social housing, and hence an extraordinary opportunity to end long-term homelessness. If we fail to take this opportunity, Governments will still spend the money, just on service systems that aren't able to offer the housing and support that keep people well.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Refund and extend lapsing VHRSAP	\$17.2 M	\$17.7 M	\$18.2 M	\$18.8 M
Additional Homelessness to a Home packages	\$56.1 M	\$57.7 M	\$104.6 M	\$107.7 M
Total	\$73.3 M	\$75.4 M	\$122.8 M	\$126.5 M

Prevent youth homelessness

For young people, a home is supposed to be a place of love and support. As young people grow, they need assistance in their daily lives, and guidance in the steps and missteps that characterise the transition to adulthood. In short, they need a family.

As children develop into young adults, the roles, expectations and relationships within the family develop too, sometimes creating conflict. Yet even where this conflict becomes so great that a young person feels compelled to spend time out of the family home, it is rare for them to desire a complete break of family ties.⁷

For most young people experiencing homelessness, this is their situation. For these young people, the most appropriate responses to homelessness sit outside the homelessness service system. Their homelessness, while genuine, is best addressed within true homes. By providing a supportive place to stay with friends or extended family, and by giving them and their family the tools to communicate and navigate conflict in healthier ways, we can avoid the manifest harms of homelessness to young people.⁸

Victoria’s homelessness access points should be equipped with specialist youth homelessness prevention workers to support young people to identify and negotiate safe and supportive housing placements within their existing networks. Brokerage would allow these placements to thrive in the face of material considerations such as the availability of a bed.

If the immediate goal of such support is to divert young people from homelessness, and ensure their appropriate care within their existing networks, the ultimate goal is family reunification where safe. Focusing on improving family relationships and interactions is shown to be effective in addressing youth homelessness.⁹ But family reconciliation and mediation are badly underfunded in Victoria.

It’s time to reimagine what we can do for vulnerable young people. It’s time to keep them safely housed within caring communities, and connected to their family.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Access point youth homelessness prevention workers	\$7.6 M	\$7.8 M	\$8.1 M	\$8.3 M

A new approach to youth homelessness

While returning home is the best outcome for most young people, the family home is not always safe. Each year in Victoria, thousands of young people experience homelessness, unable to return to their family home. In a healthy home, young people develop with the benefit of daily guidance and care. But the influences on young people experiencing homelessness are often far less positive.¹⁰ Victoria needs to grapple with the question of how a service system can substitute the support that these young people need, but don't consistently have available in the family home.

Most funding for case management in homelessness services is for short periods of time to resolve an immediate crisis. But young people without safe family homes to which to return, aren't in a momentary crisis. They need care and guidance that is consistent, over the long term. Such longer-term support is currently rarely available. Frequently, young people miss out completely on the few short-term case management places available.

As a society, there is no clearer shared responsibility than that which we have for the wellbeing of young people. It's time to re-evaluate how we support the most vulnerable young people – those who don't have a safe home to which to return. The first step is to increase the availability and duration of case management.

Case management is important, but so too is a home. For many young people experiencing homelessness, a private rental property, either in a share house or alone, would be sustainable, if only it were attainable. But the low incomes and income supports that young people experiencing homelessness can access, mean that private rentals or even share house rents, are often unachievable.¹¹

Not all young people are ready to live independently once they leave refuge. They too deserve to be cared for in a means similar to that available to young people who are not homeless. Young people experiencing homelessness frequently also experience complex mental illness, trauma, and have other support needs. They should have an opportunity to live in staffed and supported accommodation, with private bedrooms, while addressing other goals, such as education, employment, or progress against their goal plans. Medium-term, staffed core-and-cluster or congregate facilities can help young people to not just remain housed, but to receive the daily living support that is a normal part of adolescence for so many other young people. Currently Victoria has a number of Youth Foyer programs that provide supported accommodation and links to

education, for which funding is lapsing. Refunding these programs, and expanding supported accommodation to locations without adequate programs will provide young Victorians with the homes they need to thrive.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Reformed case management	\$135.9 M	\$140.0 M	\$144.2 M	\$148.5 M
Rental subsidies	\$8.4 M	\$8.6 M	\$8.9 M	\$9.1 M
Supported homes for young people / new Youth Foyers	\$6.0 M	\$6.2 M	\$6.4 M	\$6.6 M
Capital build	\$25.5 M	-	-	-
Youth Foyer (lapsing) x 3	\$5.7 M	\$5.9 M	\$6.0 M	\$6.2 M
Total	\$181.5 M	\$160.7 M	\$165.5 M	\$170.4 M

Private Rental Assistance

At this time of great uncertainty, a critical tenancy support program often used to keep women and children escaping family violence housed, is at risk. Instead of letting the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) lapse in July, let's expand it.

PRAP has to date been a core component of the Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. PRAP supports women and children to stay housed, or to find new accommodation when they leave their abuser. PRAP has been enormously successful. Funded to support 6,000 households per year, PRAP supports many times that number of households, with demand far in excess of capacity in many regions. It achieves this at the lowest cost to government of any accommodation in the Family Violence Housing Blitz.¹²

At the time of writing, the health crisis in Victoria is contained. But for many people, the personal, economic crisis continues. Unemployment is up, and income support is set to plummet. The emergency tenancy protections that saved so many families from homelessness are expiring. Many face rental debts and housing costs that they can't afford.

Homelessness services are exceptionally successful at preventing homelessness among those at real risk of homelessness. Fully 88 per cent of people who come to homelessness services at risk of homelessness are housed at the end of support.¹³ These aren't small numbers; in 2019-20 one in every 57 Victorians sought support from a homelessness agency.¹⁴ As the emergency measures are withdrawn and tenancies face increased risk, this number is likely to grow in 2021-22. Already 108 people are turned away from homelessness services each day.¹⁵

Many of those renters who face debts and rents that they can't afford, are among the most vulnerable Victorians. A spike in evictions is likely, and for many, this will mark the beginning of their experience of homelessness. In the face of a large number of accrued rental debts, and a new wave of evictions, we must continue funding PRAP so that it can continue to keep women and children experiencing family violence, and others, safe from homelessness. The opportunity also presents to expand the program to meet the projected increase in need. An expanded program can combat both coronavirus rental debts and family violence related homelessness.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Expand PRAP and PRAP+	\$31.1 M	\$32.0 M	\$33.0 M	\$34.0 M

Housing equality for LGBTIQ+ Victorians

Studies show that LGBTIQ¹⁶ Victorians experience homelessness at almost three times the rate of the general population.¹⁷ Among Specialist Homelessness Service users, the research demonstrates that LGBTIQ people are more likely to present with significant complex needs, including childhood trauma, abuse, substance misuse, poor mental health, and suicidality.¹⁸ Despite this extremely high level of need, Victoria has very few services and programs specifically working with this population. LGBTIQ+ service consumers have reported, that a poor understanding of their circumstances can lead to inappropriate responses.

Specialised responses can help address the vulnerabilities that brought a person to homelessness in an environment that allows for respectful communication, cultural safety, and specific support, referral and advocacy.¹⁹ They would mean that people can access programs, services and accommodation whatever their gender identity and sexuality. This must be the goal of an equal society.

In addition to specialist support pathways for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness, dedicated housing options are required. LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness deserve housing options that can keep them safe from violence, affirm their identity, and are equipped to respond where necessary within the appropriate gender framework.

Peer support workers have been shown to be successful in the advocacy that both improves outcomes for consumers, and strengthens responses within service systems.²⁰ Paired with case managers and housing support workers, they can make a real difference in the outcomes for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness. A dedicated LGBTIQ+ crisis facility would mean that safe accommodation would be available at the moment of a person’s greatest crisis.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
LGBTIQ+ pathway workers	\$2.6 M	\$2.7 M	\$2.8 M	\$2.8 M
LGBTIQ+ accommodation	\$16.5 M	\$3.6 M	\$3.8 M	\$3.9 M
Total	\$19.1 M	\$6.3 M	\$6.6 M	\$6.7 M

Grow Aboriginal Community Control

One in 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians seek help for homelessness each year.^{21 22} Despite this, and the high efficacy of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's),²³ there are very few ACCO's funded to deliver homelessness responses. The level of Aboriginal homelessness means that ACCO's do work with people experiencing homelessness, but do so without the support of specialist homelessness services funding.

The Victoria Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort* (Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home) was launched in 2020. It describes a pathway to grow Aboriginal Community Controlled responses to homelessness. However, it can only be implemented with funding. Now is the time to act to address the ongoing injustice of Aboriginal homelessness.

CHP is calling for ten per cent of all new housing and homelessness funding to be in Aboriginal control, including initiatives in this budget submission. The Victorian Government recently took this step with the *Big Housing Build*. In addition to this, it is time to begin the work of implementing *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort*.

A critical recommendation of *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort* is that a sector capacity building and training program be funded to deliver the training and development needed to grow Aboriginal community control in the housing and homelessness sector. This will be a critical precondition to continued growth.

Another step that we can take now to build the Aboriginal Community Controlled homelessness workforce is to fund an Aboriginal housing advisory service, to provide advice and funds for housing to Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Capacity building & training program	\$0.3 M	\$0.2 M	\$0.1 M	\$0.1 M
Aboriginal housing advisory service	\$0.2 M	\$0.2 M	\$0.3 M	\$0.3 M
Total	\$0.5 M	\$0.4 M	\$0.4 M	\$0.4 M

References

- ¹ Pawson, H., Martin, C., Sisson, A., Thompson, S., Fitzpatrick, S. and Marsh, A., 2021, 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis', ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, Sydney, p.120
- ² Rimmer, B., 2020, 'Victoria's pandemic response – what we have learned', presentation at the National Homelessness Conference 2020 available at <<https://az659834.vo.msecnd.net/eventsairaueprod/production-ahuri-public/d61be8b455374703b40355a8856365f9>>
- ³ Ibid
- ⁴ Pleace, N., 2016, Housing First Guide Europe, FEANTSA the European Federation of National Organisations working with the homeless, pp. 20-22.
- ⁵ Chamberlain, C., & Johnson, G., 2018, *From long-term homelessness to stable housing: investigating 'liminality'*, in Housing Studies, Volume 22, Issue 8, pp. 1246 – 1263.
- ⁶ Pawson, H., Martin, C., Sisson, A., Thompson, S., Fitzpatrick, S. and Marsh, A., 2021, 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis', ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, Sydney, p.120
- ⁷ Synergistiq, 2013, Family mediation and reconciliation interventions in youth homelessness: Literature review, for Melbourne City Mission, Melbourne, p.3.
- ⁸ Barker, J., Humphries, P., McArthur, M., and Thomson, L., 2015, Literature Review: Effective interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, Australian Catholic University for Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra, p.2.
- ⁹ Barker, J., Humphries, P., McArthur, M., and Thomson, L., 2015, Literature Review: Effective interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, Australian Catholic University for Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra, p.16.
- ¹⁰ Johnson, G., Gronda, H., and Coutts, S., 2008, On the Outside; Pathways in and out of homelessness, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, p.147-148.
- ¹¹ Anglicare Australia, 2020, *Rental Affordability Snapshot: National Report April 2020*, p.9.
- ¹² Victorian Government, 2018, *Family Violence Housing Blitz Package evaluation: executive summary*

-
- ¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020, *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection*
- ¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020, *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection*
- ¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020, *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection*
- ¹⁶ Where we use a subset of LGBTIQ+ in this submission, it is because relevant studies have focused on these cohorts. It is not intended to exclude LGBTIQ+ people from the recommendation.
- ¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015, *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia*
- ¹⁸ McNair, R., Andrews, C., & Power, J., 2019, *Developing a LGBTI Safe Housing Network to Prevent Homelessness and Build Social Connection and Resilience*, University of Melbourne and La Trobe University, p.3
- ¹⁹ Andrews, C., Shelton, J., & McNair, R., 2019, *Developments in Responding to LGBTQ+ Homelessness in Australia and the United States*, in *Parity Magazine*, May 2019, Volume 32 – Issue 03, pp. 21-22
- ²⁰ McNair, R., Andrews, C., & Power, J., 2019, *Developing a LGBTI Safe Housing Network to Prevent Homelessness and Build Social Connection and Resilience*, University of Melbourne and La Trobe University
- ²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, 3238.0.55.001 - Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016
- ²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Victoria, 2019-20.
- ²³ Behrendt, L., Jorgensen, M., and Vivian, A., 2016, *Self-Determination: Background Concepts, Scoping paper 1 prepared for the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services*, for State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, Melbourne, pp. 12-15