



Council to Homeless Persons Budget Submission 2022 – 2023



Contents

Introduction.....	3
Preventing more homelessness.....	4
Sustaining exits from homelessness.....	5
Aboriginal homelessness.....	6
Housing options for young people.....	7
LGBTIQ+ homelessness.....	9
References.....	10

Introduction

Homelessness has skyrocketed in the past two years. As entire industries have been stood down, and regional rents have increased rapidly, an enormous surge in demand has seen many homelessness services overwhelmed with calls for assistance. Without the staff to respond, many services have been forced to turn off their voicemails. Those who don't succeed in making contact with a worker, aren't recorded in the statistics.

This budget submission highlights strategic priorities to scale homelessness services up to meet the level of demand. It also calls for investment in targeted programs to address gaps in the current services, including housing and support for young people, and long-term flexible support for adults and families with complex needs.

This budget submission was written with the current moment in mind. It builds on and complements recent investments by the Victorian Government in the *Private Rental Assistance Program*, *From Homelessness to a Home*, and the *Rough Sleeping Initiative*. It also accounts for opportunities stemming from the *Big Housing Build* which is currently underway, and the soon to be published *Ten Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy*, and *Social Housing Regulation Review*.

There are so many opportunities at this moment to reimagine homelessness service delivery in Victoria, and to build a homelessness service system that can end homelessness in our State. But the stressors of the current time also mean that alongside seizing the opportunities, we need to bolster the foundations.

Preventing more homelessness

To access most of Victoria’s approximately 140 homelessness support organisations, people without a home must first visit an ‘entry point’ service, to have their needs assessed, and be matched to the most relevant local service.

Since 2011, the number of people accessing Victoria’s homelessness services has increased by almost 30,000 and has grown in complexity. More clients have mental health issues (from 18% of clients to 31%), have experienced family violence (36% - 46%), or are without income (4% - 9%). More people are also requiring support multiple times each year. Despite this growth in need, there has not been any permanent increase to the entry point workforce since 2009.

In 2019-20, entry points were already so under-resourced they were unable to meet the needs of 108 people seeking help each day. In 2021, new surges in homelessness have made demand impossible to manage, with staff so busy, they don’t have any capacity to return calls. Unmet demand has increased to 133 people each day, not including those who couldn’t get through.

The result is a greater proportion of effort inevitably directed to responding to immediate crises, such as finding a roof for the night for as many people as possible. This leaves less capacity for the time consuming, but critical work that can prevent or help to quickly end homelessness.

To enable homelessness services to prevent as much homelessness as possible, we need to urgently increase resources for homelessness prevention. These staff can help people update social housing applications, get back onto Centrelink payments, negotiate an impending eviction, and connect with other supports.

In 2021, the Victorian Government funded 11 workers to support the Covid-19 hotel response. This expanded capacity needs to be retained, and expanded.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Homelessness Prevention/ Intake Assessment and Planning workers	\$2.2 M	\$2.3 M	\$2.3 M	\$2.4 M
Brokerage	\$26.1 M	\$26.9 M	\$27.7 M	\$28.5 M
Total additional homelessness prevention/ intake assessments	40,500	40,500	40,500	40,500
Total cost	\$28.3 M	\$29.2M	\$30.0M	\$30.9M

Sustaining exits from homelessness

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian Government supported over 19,000 Victorians without homes to stay in hotels.¹ Those provided with accommodation included many people with long histories of rough sleeping, and/ or with high and complex needs.

While homelessness services were able to support many of those staying in hotels into private rentals, lack of access to social housing or ongoing support, meant there were initially not any housing options for those with more complex needs.

The support needs of this group were extreme – with many people having complex health and mental health issues, disabilities, and other challenges. Many also had significant histories of contact with homelessness, health and justice services – without achieving positive long-term outcomes.

The Victorian Government’s response to this challenge was a visionary investment in *From Homelessness to a Home*, to provide housing and support for 1,845 households. This has impacted in a life changing way on many people who have received housing and support. People’s housing has stabilised, they are better able to manage their health conditions, and some have gained employment.

These achievements should be celebrated. However, recovery from long histories of trauma and social exclusion isn’t a ‘set and forget’ prospect. While a person grows in self-esteem and confidence in their abilities and new routines, new adversity can be a major stumbling block. Part of the reason that Housing First programs work, is that support is provided for as long as it’s needed. And there lies the dark cloud in this otherwise shining success story. That support is currently not budgeted in the next financial year.

From Homelessness to a Home is a major achievement that will deliver ongoing dividends. On some calculations, it has halved rough sleeping in Victoria. For \$55 million per annum, we can keep people sustainably housed, and reduce the use of costly crisis responses in health and justice.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Households supported	1,845	1,845	1,845	1,845
Total cost	\$55.0 M	\$56.7 M	\$58.3 M	\$60.1 M

Aboriginal homelessness

The Victorian Government’s Aboriginal self-determination agenda has made great strides over the past eight years with The Victoria Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort (Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home)* establishing a clear path for greater Aboriginal community control of housing and homelessness services. The Government’s *Ten Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy* and the independent *Social Housing Regulation Review* will both be published prior to the 2022-23 Victorian Budget. Both processes include enormous opportunities to embed self-determination actions from *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort* into the Victorian Government’s work.

Aboriginal community control includes the control of resources. To kickstart Aboriginal community control of specialist homelessness services, then what’s needed for excellent homelessness practice will need to be resourced. Holistic wrap-around supports allow organisations to meet the various needs of the person seeking help. The ability to work with a client as long as is needed; combined with dedicated access to housing, are the essential components of the highly successful Housing First approach for ending homelessness.²

The current moment represents a confluence of a Government with a strong self-determination agenda, with two important policy pieces setting out future directions for housing and homelessness, as well as a community-led framework for Aboriginal housing and homelessness. It is the ideal opportunity to reduce Aboriginal homelessness by progressing Aboriginal community control of homelessness service delivery.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Aboriginal Housing First for 489 people	\$14.6 M	\$15.0 M	\$15.5 M	\$15.9 M

Housing options for young people

Youth homelessness is rife in Victoria: with 17,743 young people aged 15-24 seeking help in 2020-21; 12,845 of whom were young people presenting alone. Shockingly, only two in five of the 8,830 young people presenting to homelessness services needing medium or long-term accommodation, were able to be provided with/ or referred to accommodation. There was no housing available for 5,060 young people without a home.

So many young people in need of housing miss out simply because Victoria has too few medium and long-term housing options that are suitable for young people. A lack of youth refuges also means that 28 per cent of young people needing it are not able to be provided with emergency accommodation.

The Victorian Government has recognised the need for medium term housing for young people by including a housing subsidy in the Home Stretch program, which provides extended housing and support to the age of 21 for young people exiting out of home care. A further \$50 million commitment³ was made to youth social housing in December 2021 to provide capital investment for new Youth Foyers or housing options for young people engaged in Home Stretch.

While each of these commitments are important and welcome, they leave a significant gap in housing that will result in thousands of young people remaining without a home, and the support they need to maximise their potential.

Young people experiencing homelessness have differing levels of readiness for independent housing, and many need support to sustain a home, and to achieve the other developmental milestones critical to their stage of life – like staying connected to education or work, learning to look after their health, and forming strong cultural and community connections. Support and housing can make the difference between thriving, or reinforcing the trauma experienced at home.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Housing and support for 500 young people	\$11.9 M	\$12.2 M	\$12.6 M	\$13.0 M
500 youth properties	\$125.0 M	\$128.8 M	\$132.6 M	\$136.6 M
Total cost	\$136.9 M	\$141.0 M	\$145.2 M	\$149.6 M

Stronger services

The past two years have seen enormous change in homelessness service delivery. Homelessness has increased as a result of economic conditions, while the public health requirements of the pandemic have seen homelessness services adapt their existing roles, while adopting new functions. New homelessness programs such as *From Homelessness to a Home* represent great strides in providing what is needed by people without homes – and at a service-system level this has seen a large-scale redeployment of highly skilled workers into new, complex roles.

At the same time as homelessness services reoriented, great expansions in allied sectors including family violence, mental health, and the NDIS, meant that the redeployment of homelessness workers didn't occur in a vacuum. Homelessness workers, whose clients regularly present with multiple complexities, are highly sought after to work in other service systems, due to their skill and experience achieving great outcomes for complex clients. Yet the SHS receives the lowest per-unit government funding across Victoria's community sector. This translates into the wage rates paid, impacting staff recruitment and retention. Systematic work is needed to examine the disparity in funding levels between SHS and other community sector services, and action taken to resource services appropriately.

In order to deliver the highest quality services possible in a complex environment, the service-system also needs to provide professional development, and guidance about best practice models. Homelessness services and workers *want* to be able to make real change for the most marginalised people. Supporting them to have the breadth of skills and tools needed is critical to strengthening the delivery of outcomes for people without homes.

To this end, the *SHS Industry Transition Plan* was developed through extensive collaboration across the SHS. It represents the SHS's goals to strengthen services, upskill the workforce, and transform service delivery. Funding for the plan is now set to lapse. Continued resourcing is needed to deliver the next stage of development supporting workers and organisations to extend their skills and sustain excellence in a changing environment.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
SHS funding review	\$0.2 M	\$0.2M	-	-
Continued implementation of the SHS transition plan	\$0.3 M	\$0.3 M	\$0.3 M	\$0.3 M
Total cost	\$0.5 M	\$0.5 M	\$0.3 M	\$0.3 M

LGBTIQ+ homelessness

Homelessness occurs at the intersection of structural forces, and personal vulnerabilities. Every time that conditions push more people into homelessness, marginalised communities face the first and greatest impact. Even so, that one in three LGBTIQ+ Australians has experienced homelessness⁴ is almost incomprehensible.

LGBTIQ+ people aren't only far more likely to experience homelessness – they're far more likely to experience homelessness in some of its most distressing manifestations. LGBTIQ+ people often face homelessness alongside complex needs, including childhood trauma, abuse, substance misuse, poor mental health, and suicidality.⁵ The high *incidence* of homelessness merits dedicated resources, but the high *complexity* necessitates specialised responses – we need specialist LGBTIQ+ homelessness workers.

As many homelessness services have sought rainbow tick accreditation of their own volition, so too have many sought to establish dedicated responses to LGBTIQ+ homelessness. Working in concert to identify safe housing options for LGBTIQ+ consumers, developing programs based on the needs of LGBTIQ+ clients, and hiring LGBTIQ+ peer workers to advocate for individuals and for strengthened service responses are vital to improving the capacity of mainstream homelessness services to respond to LGBTIQ+ homelessness. However, without dedicated resources, these services are too few, and many programs, unable to secure ongoing funding, have ceased.

Homelessness is characterised by scarcity, risk, and a profound isolation from the community. When paired with the discrimination in employment and housing, victimisation and violence, and family rejection that are too often experienced by LGBTIQ+ people, the effects of homelessness compound the forces of inequality. To combat this, homelessness programs must be funded to develop and deliver exceptional programs for LGBTIQ+ Victorians without homes, and to identify and provide safe housing options.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
3 services funded to deliver LGBTIQ+ pathways program	\$2.7 M	\$2.8 M	\$2.8 M	\$2.9 M

References

¹ Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F., 2021, *COVID-19: Rental Housing and Homelessness Impacts in Australia*, ACOSS & UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership, p.85

² Homelessness Australia, 2020, *Housing First Principles for Australia*, p.2

³ Premier of Victoria, 2021, *Media release: Boosting Support For Homeless Youth*, available at <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/boosting-support-homeless-youth>>

⁴ McNair, R., Andrews, C., Parkinson, S., & Dempsey, D., 2017, *LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, resilience and Access to Services in Victoria*, University of Melbourne and Swinburne University of Technology.

⁵ 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