



18 November 2022

The Hon Daniel Andrews, Premier Daniel.Andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon Danny Pearson, Minister for Housing Danny.Pearson@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon Matthew Guy, Leader of the Opposition Matthew.Guy@parliament.vic.gov.au

Mr Richard Riordan, Shadow Minister for Housing Richard.Riordan@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dr Samantha Ratnam, Leader of the Victorian Greens, Spokesperson for Housing
Samantha.Ratnam@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Premier, Minister, Opposition Leader, Mr Riordan and Dr Ratnam,

A new approach to youth homelessness is needed

We the undersigned believe that the next Government of Victoria should do more to address youth homelessness. Specifically, we are calling on all parties to commit to 5,000 new social housing properties for young people over four years, and a new youth homelessness strategy.

Victoria has a very high level of youth homelessness, and the systems in place to support young people without homes are both under-resourced and out of date. One in six people seeking homelessness assistance last year was aged between 15-24 years. Victoria is yet to develop for them a joined-up system of support. Victoria's last youth homelessness plan was written in 2006.

Recent investments in housing and homelessness have meant that thousands of additional people have been supported out of homelessness. However, these resources have largely been made available to adults. Investment in developing and delivering responses for young people experiencing homelessness has been more limited.

The following investments have been made in recent years:

- The Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System pledged 500 new social housing properties for young people with concurrent homelessness and mental illness;
- A housing subsidy is being provided to young people leaving care, and
- \$50 million for social and affordable housing for young people was set aside as part of the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build.

These investments are very welcome, however more youth housing will be needed if we're to achieve the vision set out in the recent Victorian Youth Strategy *Our promise, Your future* that:



Young people experience security, are safe from harm (discrimination, neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse) and live in a stable home that is affordable and nurturing.

Last year 17,743 young people aged 15-24 years sought assistance from Victoria's specialist homelessness services. 12,845 of them presented alone. Others presented not as dependents, but as parents themselves.

Of the 8,830 young people who needed medium or long-term accommodation, only two in five of them were able to be provided with or referred to accommodation. Housing was not available for 5,060 young people without a home.

Without a housing option, young people can become stuck on a housing trajectory that puts them in increasing danger. While homeless, young people face risks of violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse, which can compound previous traumas.

The longer that young people are without a stable home, the more likely it is they will develop serious health and mental issues and have contact with the justice system.ⁱ Prolonged youth homelessness is also strongly associated with educational disengagement, and a lifetime of reduced earning. Not only does youth homelessness occasion significant harm to the individuals who experience it, but it results in enormous long-term costs to government.ⁱⁱ

Despite the high level of need, Victoria has very few housing options for young people without homes. Currently in Victoria only 541 transitional and 66 long term properties are designated for young people, and in 2021 only 238 public housing properties from the general stock were tenanted by young people as lead tenant.ⁱⁱⁱ

The recently released Victorian Youth Strategy *Our promise, Your future: Victoria's youth strategy 2022–2027* included a commitment to: **Recognise the unique needs of young people within the Victorian Government's new Ten-year social and affordable housing strategy.**

We, the undersigned, recommend that this include 5,000 new social housing properties over four years for the young people who currently miss out on the medium and long term housing that they need. In order to deliver homes that are affordable for young people on very low incomes and include the support needed, a specialist youth housing funding model will be needed that recognises the additional costs and impact of the lowest Centrelink payment.

In addition to these properties, a new Victorian Youth Homelessness Strategy is needed to prevent, and provide support to young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

In addition to the care needs common to many young people, those experiencing homelessness often have specialist support needs, such as mental health support, treatment for substance misuse, or to get their education and employment goals back on track. Currently the support that is available to young people is typified by its scarcity, and services face significant difficulty in providing support for as long as it is need by a young person.



A youth homelessness strategy could deliver new, improved, and increased responses to preventing youth homelessness, supporting young people to live well at home where possible. The strategy could also increase support resources such that young people who can't live at home have the support that they need, and deliver intensive programs for young people who face multiple exclusions. The strategy should also pair the young people who do receive social housing with the support that they need to thrive in it.

Some young people need a home that includes on-site support. Not all 15-24 year olds are ready to assume full responsibility for a household. They too deserve to be cared for in a way similar to that available to young people who can live with their parents.

Medium-term, staffed core-and-cluster or congregate facilities can help young people to not just remain housed, but to receive the daily support that is a normal part of adolescence for so many other young people. Supported homes like these, are part of the 5,000 social housing properties that we need for young people.

Young Victorians shouldn't have to face homelessness. At present most can't be provided with housing, the supports available often don't reflect the level of need, and the result of this failure is that young people suffer greater harm, and often a lifetime of disadvantage.

Victorian housing and homelessness services are calling for 6,000 new social housing properties per year for ten years. As part of this commitment, the next Victorian Government should deliver 5,000 new social housing properties for young people over four years, and also implement a youth homelessness strategy.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Smith
CEO
Council to Homeless Persons

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Smith', written in a cursive style.

On behalf of :

Anglicare Victoria
Annie North Inc
Barwon Child, Youth & Family (BCYF)
batyr
Berry Street
Centre for Multicultural Youth

Colac Area Health
Community Information & Support Victoria
Dr Guy Johnson, Professor of Urban
Housing and Homelessness, RMIT
EACH
Family Access Network Inc



Federation of Community Legal Centres Vic
Flat Out Inc
Frankston City Council
Future Connect
Gippsland Homelessness Network
Gippsland Lakes Complete Health
Holy Fools Inc
Hope Street Youth and Family Services Ltd
Housing Justice
Humanists Victoria
Inner Eastern Local Learning Employment Network
Jesuit Social Services
Juno
Justice Connect
Kids Under Cover
Latitude: Directions for Young People
Loddon Mallee Homelessness Network
Mallee Accommodation and Support Program (MASP)
McAuley Community Services for Women
Melbourne City Mission
Mental Health Victoria
Merri Outreach Support Service
NESAY Inc
Northern Melbourne Homelessness Network
Orygen
Parents Victoria Inc
Quantum Support Services
South East Community Links
South Port Community Housing Group
Southern Homelessness Services Network
StreetSmart Australia
Tenants Victoria
The Bridge Youth Service
The Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare
The Salvation Army
Thorne Harbour Health
Transition Village Wallan
Uniting Gippsland
Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS)
Victorian Public Tenants Association
WAYSS
Wellways Australia
WESNET (Women's Services Network) Inc
Western Homelessness Network
Whitelion Youth
Windana Drug and Alcohol Recovery
Wombat Housing Support Services Inc
Young People's Legal Rights Centre
Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic)
Youth Development Australia Ltd
Youth Support + Advocacy Service

ⁱ 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.3.

ⁱⁱ MacKenzie, D., Flatau, P., Steen, A., and Thielking, M., 2016, *The cost of youth homelessness in Australia; Research briefing*. Swinburne University Institute for Social Research, the University of Western Australia and Charles Sturt University, p.26

ⁱⁱⁱ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, 2021, *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria; Final report. Appendix C: Department of Health and Human Services response to questionnaire*. Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, (appendix page) p.8.