

Ministerial Homelessness Reform Advisory Group

Communique – Meetings 1 and 2

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Working as one to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring

We know the best outcomes are achieved when we work together towards a common goal and share our collective knowledge, skills, and experience.

The newly formed Ministerial Homelessness Reform Advisory Group (MHRAG) builds on the work of the previous Victorian Homelessness Advisory Committee and includes representation from metro and regional organisations and steps are underway to appoint two people with lived experience. Membership details are provided below. Homes Victoria's Lived Experience Reference Group will also play a key role in informing reform work.

Advice provided through MHRAG as well as other engagement channels will help shape system reform, strengthen sector capacity and capability, and guide best practice evidence-based approaches to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

The group meets each quarter, December, March, June and September for a term of 18 months and is committed to sharing updates with the sector, including recent meeting updates below.

The MHRAG is one way in which the sector and people with lived experience of homelessness can engage with the Victorian Government. We encourage your advocacy and communication direct to government and/or through conversations with the MHRAG members to demonstrate service innovation and improvements.

December 2023 MHRAG - Setting up for success

The inaugural December 2023 meeting centred on laying the foundations for a homelessness service system to have maximum positive impact on the people it serves. This included discussion on options to improve the structure and delivery of homelessness services for people across the state who need them, including how to support the dedicated staff who work in homelessness services.

MHRAG also discussed the current state of Victoria's homelessness service system – including investment, high-level trends in service usage and the important intersections with other service sectors.

Future meetings will consider the varying needs of people experiencing homelessness. This will inform future system design, potential opportunities for prevention, and highlight the success of programs, while considering changes to ensure the system works better for the people it serves and the staff who work within it.

The Minister for Housing acknowledged the specialist homelessness services sector's deep knowledge, experience, and commitment to the work they do every day, and recognised this commitment needs to be harnessed.

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March 2024 MHRAG - Timely, targeted and needs based support

At the March 2024 meeting, members were invited to present case studies of client experiences with Victoria's homelessness service system. The client journeys provided insights into what is working, challenges and opportunities for change.

Conversation highlighted the excellent work already being delivered by the sector, despite the current challenging economic climate. Members also recognised other challenges, including:

- the impact of increasing pressures on entry points and crisis responses on clients receiving services and staff
- how to ensure the system can support the independent and unique needs of children, while simultaneously serving the family unit
- the shortage of housing supply and the direct impact on homelessness
- the long-wait times experienced by clients, impacting how staff can best help people needing support, especially crisis support, and
- how to enable collaboration with other service systems, such as the education, health systems and family violence systems.

The group noted that while people's experiences are thematically similar, different responses are often required and the system needs to be able to tailor to these needs. The group identified and agreed to three streams of support to guide future discussions on improvements to the homelessness service system:

- early responses for at-risk people who may still be housed in private rental or living in home ownership, or people who experience homelessness early in life
- targeted and specialist responses for people who are, or are at risk of homelessness and who need support to address current challenges and build skills and capacity gain independence, and
- intensive responses for people experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping to access a stable home and get the range of health and social supports they need to maintain their home.

These topics will feed into the June MHRAG meeting where members will consider options for how to improve homelessness accommodation and supports.

MHRAG members also discussed the negotiations as part of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, acknowledging that sector advocacy has played a major part in negotiations to date. MHRAG members were thanked, as well as other community groups and people with lived experience for their efforts.

Members

The MHRAG members are listed below.

Name	Role
The Hon. Harriet Shing (Co-Chair)	Minister for Housing
Deborah Di Natale (Co-Chair)	CEO, Council to Homeless Persons
Jane Barnes	Chief of Staff, Wintringham
Julie Edwards	CEO, Jesuit Social Services

Tania Farha	CEO, Safe and Equal
Moana Ferris	Member of the Homelessness Lived Experience Reference Group
Simon Flagg	CEO, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative Limited
Dr Michael Fotheringham	Managing Director, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)
Dr Heather Holst	Commissioner for Residential Tenancies, Victoria
Peter McGrath	State Homelessness Manager, The Salvation Army
Wayne Merritt	CEO, CEO WAYSS
Trudi Ray	CEO, Haven Home Safe
Darren Smith	CEO, Aboriginal Housing Victoria
Vicki Sutton	CEO, Melbourne City Mission
Christine Thirkell	Member of the Homelessness Lived Experience Reference Group
Sarah Toohey	CEO, Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic)
De-Joel Upkett	CEO, Ngwala Willumbong
Hang Vo	CEO, Sacred Heart Mission
Bevan Warner	CEO, Launch Housing

Departmental representatives

Name	Role
Peta McCammon	Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Dannii de Kretser	Deputy CEO, Homes Victoria
Danny O’Kelly	Deputy Secretary, Community Operations and Practice Leadership
Sherri Bruinhout	Executive Director, Homelessness and Housing Support