



**Council
to Homeless
Persons**

State Budget Submission

Ending Homelessness: A
roadmap for homelessness
reform

February 2025

Content

Acknowledgement	2
Foreword: We have the roadmap to end homelessness	3
Summary of recommendations	4
Every Victorian safely housed.....	6
End rough sleeping for good.....	8
<i>Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort</i> – Every Aboriginal person has a home (Gunditjmara).....	14
Fund Entry Points	15
End youth homelessness.....	17
Housing equality for LGBTIQ+ Victorians.....	20
A system where lived experience leads	21
Supporting renters to prevent homelessness	23
Women and children are safe at home	27
Summary of investment required	29

Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, Council to Homeless Persons acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. Council to Homeless Persons is committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas, and their rich contribution to society.

Foreword: We have the roadmap to end homelessness

Homelessness is not an unsolvable problem. The Victorian Government has shown its commitment to positive change. The sector is ready and reform is underway. Now is the moment to bring all the essential pieces together for an effective system that can end the housing and homelessness crisis.

This submission lays out the key elements of a system to eradicate homelessness, and the first steps for new investment from a State dedicated to that cause. Across the following pages:

- We measure the total number of households in Victoria that need public and community housing.
- We present categorical evidence that Victoria's homelessness services lead the world in responding to rough sleeping.
- We support the blueprint for a self-determined Aboriginal-specific homelessness system, developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and community members.
- We outline a collaborative multi-sector package to end youth homelessness.

The housing crisis is the biggest issue in Victoria today. Rents rose by another 13.7 per cent last year. Meanwhile the spiralling cost of living is putting incredible pressure on Victorians – particularly victim-survivors of family violence, who are struggling with costs more than most. As rents increase beyond households' ability to pay, more people are made homeless. Last year, one in every 67 Victorians sought assistance from a homelessness service. Over the past two years, homelessness among employed people has increased in 61 of Victoria's 80 local government areas. Being evicted from a private rental often results in homelessness. And desperately low vacancy rates then keep them locked in homelessness, unable to secure a home.

Budget 2025/26 needs to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis, as well as include a cost-of-living package to support Victorians who can't make ends meet.

This budget is also an opportunity to invest in developing the practice that's going to be integral to homelessness service reform, including developing a lived experience workforce, and finding solutions that work for trans Victorians.

This can be the moment that the Victorian Government starts to turn around the housing, homelessness and cost of living crisis. We know the way forward. Halfway through the current term of Parliament, there's no time to lose.



Deborah Di Natale
Chief Executive Officer

Summary of recommendations

CHP recommends the Victorian Government makes these investments in the 2025-26 State Budget...

<p>Every Victorian safely housed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$4.9 billion in 2025-26 (\$20.5 billion over four years) to grow Victoria’s public and community housing stock, and house Victorians experiencing homelessness. 	<p><i>Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort – Every Aboriginal person has a home home (Gunditjmara)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$88.5 million in 2025-26 (\$178.6 million over four years) to fully implement the <i>Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system</i>
<p>End rough sleeping for good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An additional \$11.1 million in 2025-26 (\$46.4 million over four years) to renew lapsing funding under the Rough Sleeping Action Plan An additional \$17.2 million in 2025-26 (\$72 million over four years) in Homes for Families An additional \$5.1 million in 2025-26 (\$21.3 million over four years) to develop and run Assertive Outreach in 10 areas across Victoria An additional \$2.5 million in 2025-26 (\$10.5 million over four years) to run the Homelessness After Hours statewide service \$65 million in 2025-26 (\$271.8 million over four years) in Housing First uplift 	<p>Fund entry points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$5.4 million in 2025-26 (\$22.6 million over four years) to bring on 32 new entry point workers to meet demand \$5.6 million in 2025-26 (\$23.3 million over four years) in new and additional Housing Establishment Fund to meet current levels of unmet demand for short-term accommodation
	<p>End youth homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$1 billion in 2025-26 (\$4.2 billion over four years) to build 5,000 social properties for homeless young people \$8.8 million in 2025-26 (\$93.3 million over four years) to fund the operation of those properties \$33.7 million in 2025-26 (\$141 million over four years) in a youth homelessness strategy \$13.7 million in 2025-26 (\$57.3 million over four years) in support for young people with concurrent mental illness and homelessness.

<p>Housing equality for LGBTIQ+ Victorians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1.5 million in 2025-26 (\$6.4 million over four years) ongoing funding for Pride in Place • \$5.5 million in 2025-26 in building a dedicated crisis-transitional housing facility for transgender and gender diverse Victorians • \$0.6 million in 2025-26 (\$4.7 million over four years) to fund the operation of the facility • \$1.2 million in 2025-26 (\$5.2 million over four years) in research and practice development for this group. 	<p>A system where lived experience leads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1.3 million in 2025-26 (\$2.3 million over four years) in developing homelessness lived experience workforce guidelines • \$1.6 million over four years (commencing 2026-27) in developing and delivering lived experience workforce training to the specialist homelessness services sector • \$1.2 million over four years (commencing 2026-27) in piloting enhanced support for lived experience workers, and evaluation
<p>Supporting renters to prevent homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$13.7 million in 2025-26 (\$57.3 million over four years) to prevent homelessness for people already living in social housing, through TenancyPlus • \$22.8 million in 2025-26 (\$95.69 million over four years) to prevent homelessness among private renters, through the Private Rental Assistance Program • \$14.3 million in 2025-26 (\$59.82 million over four years) to ensure renters are equally as well-represented at VCAT as landlords, through the Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program • \$1.5 million in 2025-26 (\$6.26 million over four years) to prevent homelessness among older Victorians 	<p>Women and children are safe at home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$45.3 million in new and additional funding (\$189.5 million over four years) to provide women, young people and children with the support they need, including funding Flexible Support Packages to meet demand-- they need; • \$6.5 million in 2025-26 (\$24.4 million over four years) to build 18 new 8-bed core and cluster refuges to women, young people and children leaving family violence; • \$4.25 million in 2025-26 (\$42.2 million over four years) to operate refuges to keep women, young people and children safe; • \$550,000 in additional funding (\$2.3 million over four years) to fund the Motel Coordination Project.

Every Victorian safely housed

Victoria still needs a minimum of 6,000 new social homes per year for the next decade. In the worst housing crisis in a lifetime, this has to be the centrepiece of the Victorian budget.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest an additional ...

\$4.9 billion in 2025-26 (\$20.5 billion over four years) to grow Victoria's public and community housing stock, and house Victorians experiencing homelessness.

A home is more than shelter. It's the foundation for the moments that help us thrive: meals with family and friends, birthday celebrations, quiet cups of tea, and everything in between. A home is where we bring people together and where we retreat for comfort, reflection and security. But far too many Victorians are locked out.

102,000 Victorians sought support from specialist homelessness services in 2023/24, and the number of working Victorians seeking homelessness support has increased 23 per cent over the past 5 years.¹ As of September 2024, nearly 64,000 Victorians are on the public housing waitlist, and more than 36,000 Victorians on the priority waitlist.² These growing numbers show that having a place to call home is becoming an unachievable dream for more and more Victorians.

And this has desperate real-life consequences. Women, young people, and children leaving family violence now experience homelessness for an average of 19.5 months before they are offered social housing. This is well above the government's target of 10.5 months. In these long months, the constant pressures of homelessness hinder their recovery, and disrupt children's development. Too many women return to violent partners rather than put their children through that. Many other Victorians are in need too, with priority applicants waiting 19.8 months for social housing.³

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2023/24 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report

² New applications and transfer applications - <https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/applications-victorian-housing-register-vhr>

³ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Annual Report 2023-24, p.43

The strongest protection against homelessness is social housing. But Victoria lags behind every other State and Territory in Australia on this front. Welcome investments were made as part of the Big Housing Build but, so great was the neglect of social housing supply in Victoria over the prior decade, that Victoria still has the lowest proportion of social housing in the country. And while Victoria's 2023 Housing Statement set an aim to deliver 260,000 additional homes over the next ten years, it pledged only a minimum of approximately 700 additional social homes over thirty years.

It was a pledge that failed to reflect the scale of Victoria's need then, and has become even more insufficient now as the dual housing crisis and cost of living crisis have surged across Victoria.

This Budget needs to be a moment of transformative action on social housing supply. As the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria recommended, Victoria needs a minimum of 60,000 additional social housing properties to be built over ten years. This 6,000 new social homes per year is required simply to meet current demand, and it's an estimate that is likely to have increased by Budget Night 2025.



End rough sleeping for good

Victoria can end rough sleeping. We already have successful programs that get Victorians off the street, into homes, and connected with the supports they need. Now we need to build on that potential.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest...

- An additional \$11.1 million in 2025-26 (\$46.4 million over four years) to renew lapsing funding under the Rough Sleeping Action Plan
- An additional \$17.2 million in 2025-26 (\$72 million over four years) in Homes for Families
- An additional \$5.1 million in 2025-26 (\$21.3 million over four years) to develop and run Assertive Outreach in 10 areas across Victoria
- An additional \$2.5 million in 2025-26 (\$10.5 million over four years) to run the Homelessness After Hours statewide service
- \$65 million in 2025-26 (\$271.8 million over four years) in Housing First uplift

Housing First programs achieve remarkable results, both housing rough sleepers and keeping them well enough to hold onto that home. At the lower end worldwide, some achieve sustained housing for around 80 per cent of clients. Most achieve around 90 per cent – a remarkable feat when compared against traditional models' 50 per cent success rate. A recent evaluation of Australia's largest ever Housing First program, Victoria's *From Homelessness to a Home*, found that 95 per cent of clients were in stable housing.⁴ Council to Homeless Persons is not aware of any program of a similar size anywhere in the world that has achieved such results. Achieving such high rates of success in Housing First shows that we need to continue supporting Housing First approaches, including through existing mechanisms like the Community of Practice.

Despite its incredible success, *From Homelessness to a Home* was wound down last year and replaced with a smaller but still welcome Housing First program. In the next budget, two further Housing First programs face closure if their funding is not renewed:

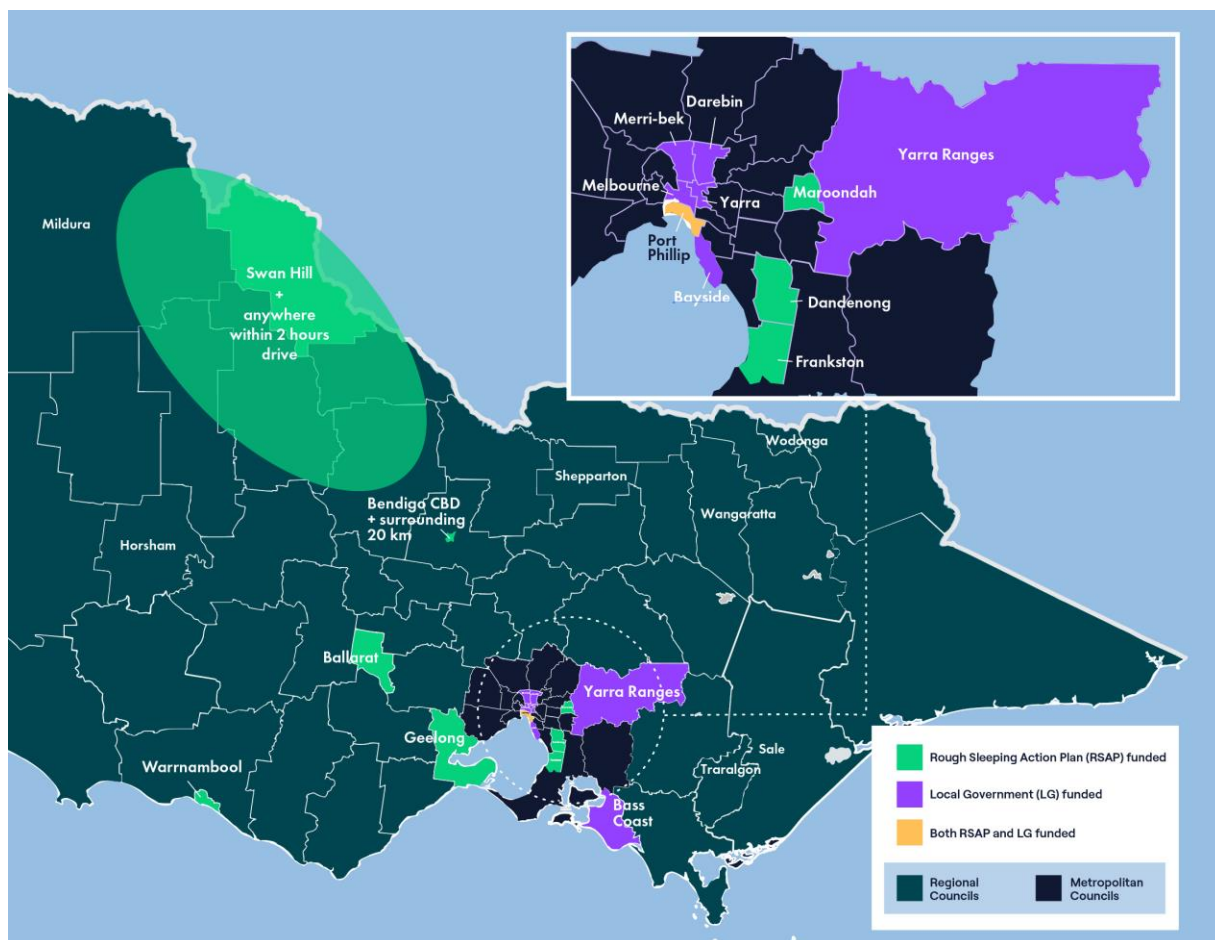
- the Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan ("RSAP"), provides Housing First responses in six locations, and assertive outreach in nine; and
- *Homes for Families*, a program focussing specifically on families with children.

⁴ https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202407/05246%20H2H%20Outcomes%20Evaluation%20Snapshot%20Report%20REV%205-7-24_accessible.pdf

Assertive outreach is the main way for specialist homelessness services to engage with people who are sleeping rough. It's the process of meeting people where they are at, building trusting relationships, and helping them through the process of finding a home and supportive services in line with their needs. It is also an essential part of keeping people safe from climate change: as fire seasons are set to become earlier and more extreme, assertive outreach means we can get early supports to people in danger out in the bush.

Despite the critical role of assertive outreach in engaging with the people who need support most, much of Victoria currently has no assertive outreach. Funding assertive outreach must be part of Victoria's plan to address the human impact of climate change for people sleeping rough. As figure 1 shows below, assertive outreach is so essential that many local government entities are now funding it, despite the clear responsibility of the State to provide homelessness support services.

Figure 1. RSAP funding at risk of lapsing, and local government funded assertive outreach programs



Funding for the Homelessness After Hours statewide service is also lapsing, increasing the danger to those made homeless after 5 pm.

Without action, RSAP, *Homes for Families* and the Homelessness After Hours statewide services will end in June 2025. It is of immediate importance that these critical and life-saving programs are extended and expanded.

With support from the Victorian Government, the State can lead the world in ending rough sleeping. But to do it, we need programs like the Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan and Homes for Families, more support for Housing First programs, and assertive outreach covering every community in Victoria.



Case Study: Stacey manages the Ballarat Street to Home program, funded through RSAP.

“We have twelve staff in the program, including our three-person assertive outreach team. It’s their role to go out and find people who are experiencing rough sleeping in the Central Highlands region and provide them material aid and support, meet their basic comfort needs and build rapport, and then provide intensive case management and support them into long term stable housing.”

Stacey’s team has worked hard to build connections to ensure there is a whole community working to identify and support people who are sleeping rough—even when Stacey’s team can’t be everywhere all at once.

“We have a lot of partnerships within the community, and we have really great relationships—the relationships we need to ensure everybody’s safety.”

For Stacey’s team, identifying people who are sleeping rough is just the first step. The Ballarat Street to Home team provides tailored and wrap-around supports to a diverse cohort of people who are sleeping rough.

“We are supporting the most complex and risky family violence cases, attempting to keep people alive... Providing support when the person who uses violence has hidden the family in tents in rural locations where they are not seen or heard if they need help. We are working alongside people with chronic, complex and exceptionally risky mental health conditions, keeping them safe. Advocating for tertiary service involvement and not taking no for an answer, reducing recidivism and improving overall community safety and combatting stigma by ensuring vulnerable people have access to tertiary supports and medication.

“We support Victoria Police to interact in a safe way with our consumers when they have to, always supporting the interactions and ensuring our consumers are safe and supported. During extreme weather or emergency events, we engage with SES, CFA and Victoria Police, providing locations of all our consumers in danger areas, ensuring they are extracted safely and supported, or towed out in floods.

Stacey’s team works using Housing First principles: “It’s very hard for people to address their needs whilst they are sleeping rough. We ensure children are seen and heard, and have a 100% success rate in housing families experiencing rough sleeping. Most into private rentals when they can afford it, easing the pressure on the Victorian housing register.

“Some people need a little bit more. Some people need a little bit less, but we make sure that we ask them what they need.”

Unfortunately, unless new funding is made available, the entire program will end on 30 June 2025. That would have devastating consequences.

“Housing will fall over when our consumers aren’t able to reach out for support. We still have consumers from 5 years ago that will reach out for support, and we always provide it. That’s 56 households, just from last financial year alone, that could fall over.

Losing funding would not only mean losing highly experienced staff, but losing the positive impacts of Street to Home for the Ballarat community.

“My team would happily find new work if there were no longer people who needed our support. There is a running joke about us all owning a plant store together one day, when there are no more people who need us! But the numbers are increasing, the demographic is expanding, more and more people are falling on hardship and finding themselves experiencing rough sleeping. We are finding children now, and older people that desperately need our support. We need to keep providing it.”

Ballarat Street to Home is a critical program supporting the people who need it most. Continuing and expanding funding under RSAP means getting people off the streets, into a home, and on the path to recovery and healing.

Case Study: The role of minimum standards in enabling rooming house residents to live dignified lives

Adam was sleeping rough in the bush. Then RSAP workers introduced themselves.

I never imagined I'd be homeless. After years of success and adventure, including travelling around the world, visiting over 50 countries, living on a beach in Spain for a few years, life took an unexpected turn. Brexit, a friend's cancer diagnosis, and then COVID-19 left me stranded penniless overseas. When I finally made it back to Australia, I thought I would sort everything out in a few days. But I was shocked by the cost of everything, especially accommodation. I found myself without options.

With nowhere else to go, I ended up in Creswick, living under a tarp in the free camping area. I thought I'd find some gold, get back on my feet quickly. Reality proved harsher. Gold was scarce, and jobs were even scarcer.

Eventually, I landed a cleaning job at the hospital – three hours a day, starting at 6 am. I'd wake up before dawn, wade through two creeks in gumboots, work my shift, then spend every spare moment prospecting for gold. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

During those nine months in the bush, I encountered others like me – lost souls trying to escape their circumstances or clinging to their last shred of hope. That's when I first noticed the RSAP workers. They were the only charity I saw out there, consistently showing up, asking how people were doing, offering help without judgement.

At first, I brushed them off. "I'm fine," I'd say. "I'll sort this out myself." But as the months wore on and my situation didn't improve, I began to see the impact they were having. They housed a pregnant young couple who had been living in a tent. They found accommodation for a family with four kids who kept getting moved on by rangers.

Aidan, one of the RSAP workers, became a familiar face. We'd chat, and one day I mentioned my struggle to save up for a rental bond. "We might be able to help with that" he said casually. I didn't think much of it at the time.

A few months later, Aidan called with a cryptic message: "You'll get a call this afternoon. I can't tell you what it's about, but if you say yes, you might have a place to stay. If you say no, you might never get this offer again."

It's strange how quickly you can adapt to hardship. After months in the bush, I'd grown accustomed to the constant vigilance, the lack of amenities, the daily struggle for basic necessities. Part of me was hesitant to leave the life I'd cobbled together.

But because I believed Aidan had my best interests at heart, I said yes.

Although my physical situation changed immediately, my mental change wasn't so quick. Even after moving into proper housing, it took me months to fully appreciate it all. Slowly, I began to realise what it meant to feel relaxed about your own safety and security again. To have hot water, a fridge, somewhere to wash your clothes, a roof that didn't leak and walls that rats didn't constantly chew through. To not worry about my belongings being stolen or ruined by the elements.

More than the physical comforts, it was the peace of mind that proved most valuable. With a stable and secure base, I could finally start rebuilding my life. The constant stress of survival gave way to mental space to hope for the future.

Looking back, I'm struck by how easily circumstances can spiral out of control, how quickly one can go from a very comfortable easy life to really struggling. But I'm also reminded of the power of kindness and persistence. The RSAP team didn't give up on me, even when I was reluctant to accept help.

Their seemingly small acts of service – a friendly chat, a bottle of water, assistance with a bond – created ripples of change that transformed not just my life, but the lives of many others I saw them help.

Today, I'm getting back on my feet, grateful for the second chance I've been given. And I've learned a powerful lesson: sometimes, the bravest thing we can do is accept the helping hand that's offered to us.

RSAP's support was transformative. It provided not just a home, but a foundation for a new beginning. Their approach was different from other charities I had encountered. They didn't impose; they didn't judge, they simply offered help and respected my dignity. Their consistent presence in the bush, their willingness to assist with practical needs, made a massive difference.



Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort – Every Aboriginal person has a home

Over 150 Aboriginal leaders in Victoria built a self-determined blueprint for ending Aboriginal homelessness. Only government funding is needed to see it delivered.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest an additional...

- \$88.5 million in 2025-26 (\$178.6 million over four years) to fully implement the *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system*

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, and the resultant *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system*, are nation-leading examples of a self-determined path to end homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. As Victoria moves towards greater self-determination, and at the same time homelessness reform, it is extremely timely that a deeply considered path forwards is already available.⁵

It is also necessary, given that Aboriginal homelessness in Victoria continues to grow. The number of Aboriginal Victorians visiting a homelessness service has increased by 116 per cent since 2011; in this same period, homelessness for non-Aboriginal Australians has increased by 25 per cent. In 2011, Aboriginal Victorians made up 6 per cent of the total population of people visiting homelessness services — in 2022-23 it was 13 per cent.

The *Blueprint* has a detailed set of recommendations and timeframe for implementation.⁶ Among them, we can reduce the incidence of Aboriginal homelessness by intervening early. Programs like Aboriginal Private Rental Access Program (APRAP) and Aboriginal Tenancies at Risk (ATAR) mean Aboriginal families can keep their homes in the overheated rental market, and keep their connections to their schools and communities. The *Blueprint's* action on homelessness for Aboriginal youth, and supports for Aboriginal women and children in the face of family violence, are equally as essential.

True self-determination requires the Victorian Government to view the *Blueprint* as a cohesive set of reforms, not as a list of options, and to fully fund its implementation.

⁵ <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/governments-commitment-self-determination>

⁶ <https://vahhf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Blueprint.pdf>

Fund Entry Points

When homelessness does occur, Victorians should be able to visit any entry point and be seen that same day, receiving the response that meets their immediate needs and long-term goals.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest an additional...

- \$5.4 million in 2025-26 (\$22.6 million over four years) to bring on 32 new entry point workers to meet demand
- \$5.6 million in 2025-26 (\$23.3 million over four years) in new and additional Housing Establishment Fund to meet current levels of unmet demand for short-term accommodation

For around 100,000 Victorians each year, the first step to ending their homelessness begins with a meeting. It might be in a designated homelessness "entry point", it might be at the public space they're living on, or it might take place on the phone when they need assistance after hours. Officially known as "intake", from this first meeting a person's support journey can begin.

Intake services have always run lean. Wait times can be long, and people are often required to visit different agencies when their first point of entry is unable to meet demand. Historically, every consumer was seen, even when the accommodation and case management they needed may not have been available. Everybody had a chance for their needs to be heard, and to be prioritised against the limited housing and support available. It meant that those most in need got helped.

In 2024, as the housing crisis has hit new heights, intake services are crumbling. Agencies are so understaffed that phones redirect to voicemail, and voicemails go unanswered. Agencies are turning people away and shutting their doors early. These difficult decisions are being made to protect workers. A report by Unison demonstrates that households presenting to entry points are also increasingly complex, with higher rates of mental health issues, AoD challenges, and family violence than ever before.⁷

⁷ https://unison.org.au/cms/uploads/docs/inside-the-front-door_iap-report_final.pdf

We need to get the best outcomes out of scarce homelessness resources. Intake tools are essential to that mission, providing access to homelessness supports and driving prioritisation. For the system to operate as intended, we need to grow our intake response.

We need more workers, and we need more funding to provide appropriate responses to the consumers who come through our doors. New and additional funding to hire 32 additional workers, and new and additional HEF funding will enable SHS agencies to provide better responses to more people.

End youth homelessness

Some of the best minds in youth homelessness have developed a plan to end youth homelessness. It's ambitious, as we should be for our young people.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest an additional...

- \$1 billion in 2025-26 (\$4.2 billion over four years) to build 5,000 social properties for homeless young people
- \$8.8 million in 2025-26 (\$93.3 million over four years) to fund the operation of those properties
- \$33.7 million in 2025-26 (\$141 million over four years) in a youth homelessness strategy
- \$13.7 million in 2025-26 (\$57.3 million over four years) in support for young people with concurrent mental illness and homelessness.

Many of Victoria's experts in youth homelessness — CHP, Melbourne City Mission, The Salvation Army, Kids Under Cover, and Community Housing Industry Association — have developed [a model to end youth homelessness](#).

Victoria's current approach to youth homelessness isn't working. Business as usual means nearly 16,000 young people are visiting Victorian homelessness services per year — that's 44 young people visiting a homelessness service each day. More than 11,000 of these young people (70 per cent) visit a homelessness service alone. Young people make up 16 per cent of all people seeking support from homelessness services. 15 per cent of all young people visiting a homelessness service identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, despite roughly 3 per cent of Victoria's population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. And 10 per cent of all young people visiting a service identified domestic and family violence as the primary reason for homelessness.

For too many young people, homelessness is not a one-time event. It becomes persistent. That is because Victoria's housing and homelessness system was developed to respond to the needs of adults — not young people. Assumptions about personal and financial independence are baked into the housing and homelessness system. For thousands of young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, affording the co-contribution for community housing is improbable; the private rental market even more so. When young people try to interact with this system, they come up against obstacles that prolong their instability, and put them at risk of long-term mental health issues and persistent homelessness. Without the tools to intervene early, many young people never get back on track.

Overcoming these obstacles is about more than just bricks and mortar and financial support. Young people who are unable to stay at home become the head of their own household — regardless of whether they have the tools, resources, and maturity to do so. A housing model for young people experiencing homelessness must include a wrap-around support package. This support package must follow each young person,

providing them a stepping stone to begin recovering from the trauma of whatever drove them into homelessness; develop the skills they need to live independently; and, where appropriate, to return to the mainstream housing market — armed with the tools they need to live full, independent, and healthy lives.



Case Study: Tara

Tara experienced homelessness after moving to Melbourne from out of state as an 18 year old. She now lives in supported accommodation for young people who have experienced homelessness.

“I enjoy it. Personally, I think it gives me my own space, my own privacy, which I didn’t have for a very long time. When I was homeless, I had to share a lot of communal spaces with other young people, live in a small room and constantly having loud noises wake me up, so I think the peace is definitely very nice. It’s nice to be able to focus on uni, and to have a place where I know I’m not going to be kicked out the next day or three months down the line.

“That security is so important to me. It allows me to go back to uni, to focus on my health. It allows me to have my privacy and to feel like I am a human again and not to feel ashamed about bringing my friends around or to be seen around people. Another thing I like about it is it’s subsidised for my needs. I don’t pay the full rent amount, it’s based on my income — 25% to 30% is taken out from my youth allowance. So I don’t have to constantly worry about where I’m getting the money from. If it’s in my account, it’s automatically taken out. And any time there’s anything that happens, I feel safe because there’s someone always around, but they’re not constantly over you. It’s given me back my sense of independence.”

One of the biggest differences in Tara’s journey out of homelessness was getting connected with services, finding space to breathe, and working with adults who earned her trust.

“Knowing that I had people behind me who wanted to get me to a finish line, who wanted the best possible outcome for me, which in this case was going back to uni, having my own place, having that sense of normality. That sense of my own security, and finding my footing a little bit again. Having that support has definitely been the main thing that has ended my homelessness. Caseworkers, whether that’s my medical team, whether it’s my mental health workers, that’s been the most important thing; the understanding, the empathy, the ‘no need to rush’. But then picking my hand up when I’ve fallen and don’t think I can keep going.”

Building relationships with her caseworkers and learning to ask for help are ongoing parts of Tara’s healing:

“I’ve always been hyper independent, always done everything for myself. With my caseworker, she’s been remarkable. Not stepping too far forward and coddling me, but being there just enough, reminding me that I can speak to her — especially regarding my mental health — and reminding me not to feel like a burden or like I’m taking resources away from other people. So that’s definitely been an amazing thing for my mental health and my actual recovery. It’s allowed me to grow. It’s allowed me to realise, ‘hey, I do need help. And this is a safe person to talk to.’ They just remind me, ‘guess what? We’re not going to give up on you. We’re going to keep fighting for you.’”

Social housing and case management are a lifeline out of homelessness for young people like Tara. A youth homelessness strategy built on more than bricks and mortar — where the lived experiences and realities of youth homelessness are front and centre — will give young people like Tara the strong foundations they need to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Housing equality for LGBTIQ+ Victorians

Equality is the Victorian way. From the Victorian Pride Centre to the Midsumma festival, LGBTIQ+ family planning to government recognition of diverse genders, Victoria loves, supports and celebrates our queer community. It's time to show that same support in responding to homelessness.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest:

- \$1.5 million in 2025-26 (\$6.4 million over four years) ongoing funding for Pride in Place
- \$5.5 million in 2025-26 in building a dedicated crisis-transitional housing facility for transgender and gender diverse Victorians
- \$0.6 million in 2025-26 (\$4.7 million over four years) to fund the operation of the facility
- \$1.2 million in 2025-26 (\$5.2 million over four years) in research and practice development for this group.

Equality is an important value in our State, but it is also an ongoing project. We cannot say equality has been achieved while LGBTIQ+ people face heightened levels of family rejection, violence, poverty, housing discrimination and homelessness. One in three gay and lesbian Australians has been homeless and the rates are even higher among trans people.

Programs working with LGBTIQ+ people to end their homelessness are proving very effective. Victoria's Pride in Place program is among the most comprehensive, providing case management, peer support, and expert (and safe) housing advice to LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness. In 2024/25, Pride in Place had its funding renewed by the Victorian Government - but only for one year. This important program should be continued, and its funding made ongoing.

While homelessness services are achieving excellence in delivering person-to-person services to queer Victorians, a key difficulty is evident in finding safe accommodation options. Sadly, high-density accommodation options for people experiencing homelessness aren't always safe for trans people. Some trans people in supported crisis accommodation have reported experiencing violence, harassment, sexual violence, and the use of threats to force participation in unwanted or illegal activity.

Dedicated crisis-transitional housing is needed to safely house the most vulnerable trans Victorians facing homelessness. This would also serve as a centre to drive excellence in working with trans and non-binary Victorians.

As the work to make Victoria a more equal society continues, we must ensure we have safe and effective services supporting our LGBTIQ+ community overcome the social harms they experience.

A system where lived experience leads

Lived experience needs to be at the center of homelessness reform – and we need to get it right.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest an additional:

- \$1.3 million in 2025-26 (\$2.3 million over four years) in developing homelessness lived experience workforce guidelines
- \$1.6 million over four years (commencing 2026-27) in developing and delivering lived experience workforce training to the specialist homelessness services sector
- \$1.2 million over four years (commencing 2026-27) in piloting enhanced support for lived experience workers, and evaluation

There has been an important development in homelessness practice: people who have experienced homelessness are joining homelessness agencies as employees. People without homes, recent Homes Victoria funding rounds, and homelessness services all agree that this development presents immense promise. As we look to homelessness reform in 2025, growing the homelessness lived experience workforce must be a major area of focus.

This approach brings people who have escaped homelessness together with those currently experiencing it, to provide support. It has been a core part of other social service areas like mental healthcare and Alcohol and Other Drug supports for decades, but in homelessness it's relatively new. Studies have shown that people experiencing homelessness are more engaged when supported by someone with lived experience. There are also benefits in helping people who have been without a home for a long time to reintegrate into their community and meet the expectations we have of renters, like signing up for utilities, paying bills, and figuring out the appliances.

The further rollout of lived experience workers in Victoria's specialist homelessness services currently faces an impediment. As a new model, and one that bears a superficial likeness to traditional case management, the role of lived experience workers is poorly understood in many workplaces. This can put the distinction between their role and case management at risk. Managing a lived experience workforce also requires new approaches to supervision, organisational culture, career development, and executive leadership. It's nothing short of a sector-wide culture-change project.

To meet the promise of homelessness system reform, Victoria needs to get ready for a lived experience workforce. Thankfully, we have some guidance from the sectors that have come before us. Replicating the work of the [National Mental Health Commission](#), dedicated workforce guidelines for homelessness services should be created, adapting these essential tools to reflect the unique considerations of working with a

homelessness lived experience workforce. Once developed, a training package should be piloted to bring this thinking into Victorian workplaces.

If the homelessness services reform agenda shared by the Victorian Government and specialist homelessness services is going to be successful, supporting the sector to get lived experience workforce support right is going to be fundamental.



Supporting renters to prevent homelessness

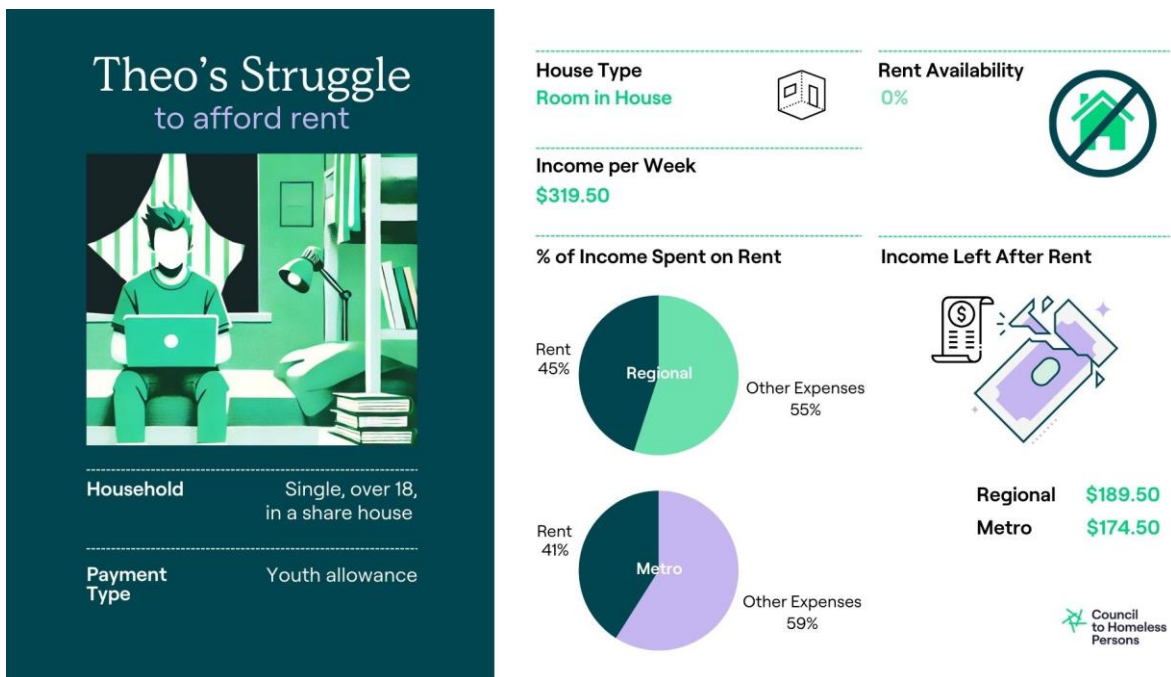
In a cost-of-living crisis, and one of the most important supports the Government can provide Victorians is better rental protection.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest an additional...

- \$13.7 million in 2025-26 (\$57.3 million over four years) to prevent homelessness for people already living in social housing, through TenancyPlus
- \$22.8 million in 2025-26 (\$95.69 million over four years) to prevent homelessness among private renters, through the Private Rental Assistance Program
- \$14.3 million in 2025-26 (\$59.82 million over four years) to ensure renters are equally as well-represented at VCAT as landlords, through the Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program
- \$1.5 million in 2025-26 (\$6.26 million over four years) to prevent homelessness among older Victorians

Despite some early signs that inflation may be easing, the cost-of-living pain is not. Rents are the largest part of most household budgets, and they continue to increase. There is no substitute for a home, and so as rents continue to grow 10.4 per cent this year and 14.3 per cent the year prior, Victorians make cuts to every other aspect of their lives. Opinion polling shows that 58 per cent of Victorians want the Victorian Government to do more on housing affordability.⁸

Figure 2: Proportion of private rentals affordable and appropriate across Victoria for Victorians with different incomes – single 18+ in a share house



⁸ <https://www.propertycouncil.com.au/property-australia/7-in-10-victorians-think-the-government-isnt-doing-enough-on-housing>

Figure 3: Proportion of private rentals affordable and appropriate across Victoria for Victorians with different incomes – single parent with two children under 10

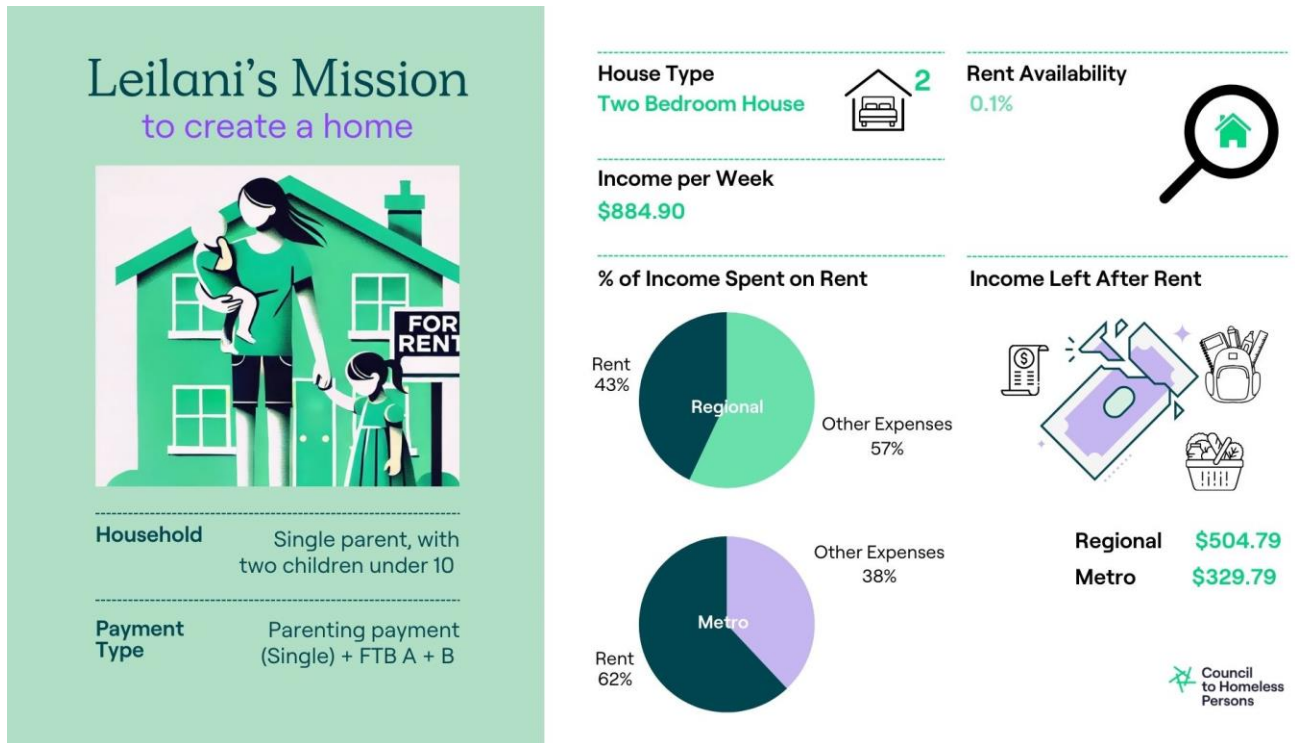


Figure 4: Proportion of private rentals affordable and appropriate across Victoria for Victorians with different incomes – couple with two children under 10

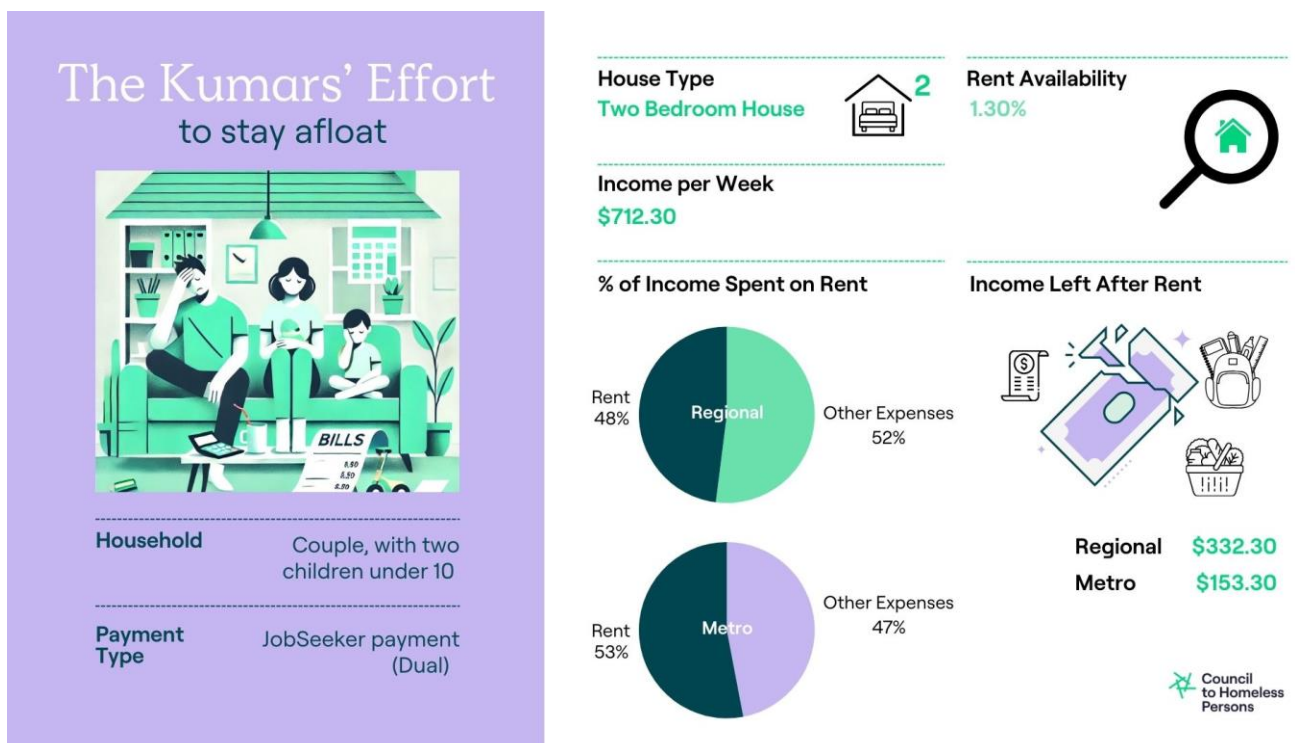



Figure 5: Proportion of private rentals affordable and appropriate across Victoria for Victorians with different incomes – couple with no children

Ru & Chen's Choice between essentials



Household Couple, no children

Payment Type Age pension (Basic rate)

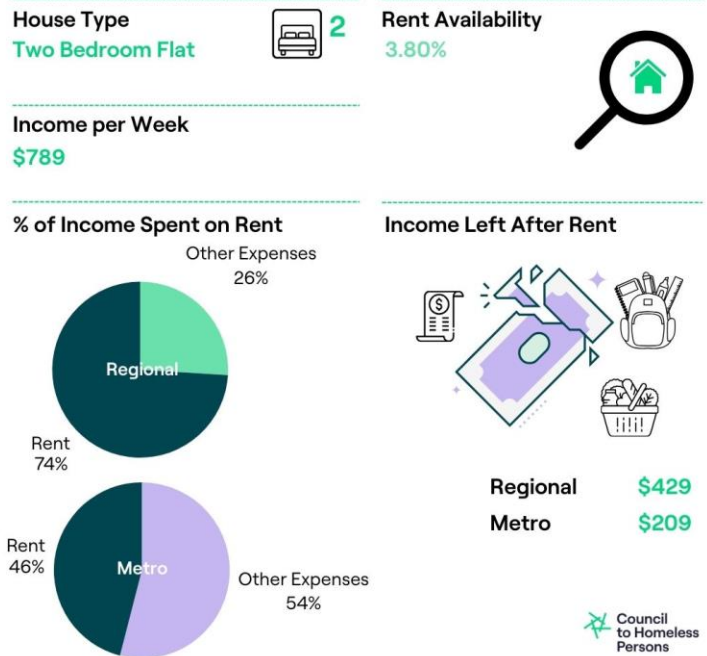


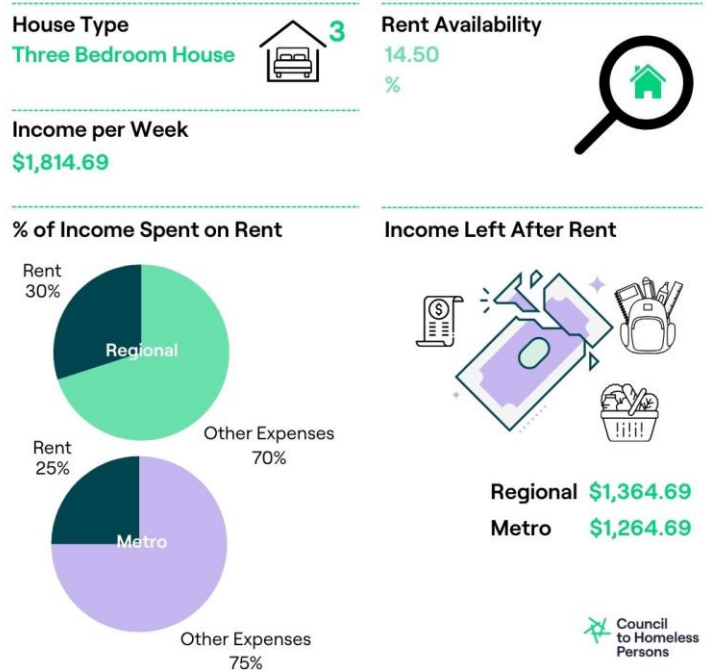
Figure 6: Proportion of private rentals affordable and appropriate across Victoria for Victorians with different incomes – couple with two children under 10

Ali & Noor's Fight to make ends meet



Household Couple, with two children under 10

Payment Type Minimum wage (one full-time) + Parenting Payment (Partnered) FTB A + B



This Budget must provide support for the broad swaths of Victorians who are impacted by the housing crisis.

A highly targeted way to provide relief for households at risk of eviction during to rental pressures is to fund Victoria's homelessness services. Programs like the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) have been shown to be among the lowest cost means for providing rental relief. They're also highly effective, as indicated by the fact that in 91% of cases in 2023/24 when people presented at risk of homelessness, homelessness services were able to help them maintain their housing.⁹

An October 2024 review of the Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP), demand for renters support programs like PRAP and TAAP is surging in response to cost of living pressures. But although rents have increased, increased funding for these programs hasn't followed – meaning PRAP and TAAP now struggle to support the new influx of people needing help and, in PRAP's case, more brokerage is needed per transaction. Boosting these programs would immediately support people facing eviction into homelessness. In tough times, it is essential that we are able to respond to surging demand.

A program for social housing renters, TenancyPlus, is also in need of expansion. In 2024, the Victorian Government piloted the “managed rental response” in public housing. Intended to increase community wellbeing on larger social housing sites, the response seeks to provide support earlier to social housing tenancies at risk, and strengthen Homes Victoria's power to end problematic tenancies. While the stronger powers have now been legislated, renters are still waiting for a meaningful increase in assistance. The existing TenancyPlus program is far too small to assist all households in active management. To achieve the intent of this reform, it must be greatly increased.

It is clear that Victorians are desperate for relief from the high cost of housing. With two years until the next Victorian election, the 2025-26 budget is the best opportunity this Parliament will get to provide that relief. There is still time for the current public mood of housing instability and cost pressures to become one of relief and optimism.

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023/24 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report

Women and children are safe at home

Women and children shouldn't be made homeless by family violence. We can keep victim-survivors safe at home. But Safe at Home funding is dwindling.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government should invest:

- \$45.3 million in new and additional funding (\$189.5 million over four years) to provide women, young people and children with the support they need, including funding Flexible Support Packages to meet demand-- they need;
- \$6.5 million in 2025-26 (\$24.4 million over four years) to build 18 new 8-bed core and cluster refuges to women, young people and children leaving family violence;
- \$4.25 million in 2025-26 (\$42.2 million over four years) to operate refuges to keep women, young people and children safe;
- \$550,000 in additional funding (\$2.3 million over four years) to fund the Motel Coordination Project.

Victoria is a recognised world-leader in ending family violence. Part of this has been shifting the way we think about family violence, and who bears the responsibility to change. But despite a shifting recognition that victim-survivors are not responsible for change, far too many women, young people and children face homelessness as a result of family violence. In 2022-23, more than 26,000 of these cohorts visiting homelessness services identified family violence as the main reason for visiting. That's 26,000 women, young people and children at risk of homelessness because of family violence. 26,000 Victorians who were forced to leave home, because staying had become too unsafe. Women, young people and children experiencing family violence are currently waiting an average of 19.5 months to get off the priority waitlist and into social housing.

World-leading thinking is positive, but it needs to be reflected in world leading systems. We know that family violence is a homelessness issue — and we already have the tools we need to meet this challenge. We need to invest in Safe at Home responses, and in trialling technological solutions that help us to better keep women and children safely accommodated.

Safe at Home responses keep women and children affected by family violence in their homes and communities of choice while removing and supporting the person using violence — and reducing the number of people who experience homelessness.¹⁰ Over the last eight years, broad agreement has emerged that

¹⁰ https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/safe-home-operational-framework_0.pdf

Safe at Home responses are an integral part of Victoria's work to prevent homelessness for women and children impacted by family violence.

Safe at Home responses like Flexible Support Packages (FSP) just make sense: it is much more cost effective to find housing for a single person using violence than for an entire family affected by violence. It also reduces the number of people, especially children, exposed to the harms of homelessness. At their core, FSPs are meant to enable victim-survivors to decide the direction of their healing journey.

Right now, demand for FSPs outstrips funding. Providing new and additional funding to Safe at Home responses including FSP means keeping more women, young people and children safe in their chosen homes and supported by their chosen communities.

When Safe at Home responses like FSP are not desirable or possible, we need to be able to house women and children somewhere safe. Family violence refuges provide a for-purpose, safe, supported accommodation for women, young people and children facing homelessness as a result of family violence. Investing in more refuges in more communities means enabling women to stay connected to their support networks. This is particularly critical for children and young people who need to retain vital links to education. The government has already invested in expanding the availability of core and cluster refuges and increasing the total capacity of the refuge system. Building on these investments with new and additional funding to ensure core and cluster refuges can operate at full capacity is an important step in ensuring more women, young people and children experiencing homelessness and family violence get the tailored crisis supports they need.

The 227 recommendations from the *Royal Commission* may have been acquitted, but that does not mean our work is done. Fortunately, we have the tools we need to keep women, young people and children affected by family violence safe in their homes and supported by their communities.

Summary of investment required

Every Victorian Safely Housed

Initiative	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m	Total \$m	Ongoing \$m
Increase social housing	\$4.9 billion	\$5.1 billion	\$5.2 billion	\$5.3 billion	\$20.5 billion	

End rough sleeping for good

Initiative	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m	Total \$m	Ongoing \$m
Re-fund RSAP	\$11.1 million	\$11.4 million	\$11.8 million	\$12.1 million	\$46.4 million	
Homes for Families	\$17.2 million	\$17.7 million	\$18.2 million	\$18.8 million	\$71.9 million	
Assertive outreach	\$5.1 million	\$5.25 million	\$5.41 million	\$5.57 million	\$21.33 million	
After hours statewide service	\$2.5 million	\$2.6 million	\$2.7 million	\$2.7 million	\$10.5 million	
Housing First uplift	\$65 million	\$66.9 million	\$68.9 million	\$71 million	\$271.8 million	
Subtotal	\$100.9 million	\$103.85 million	\$107.01 million	\$110.17 million	\$421.93 million	

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort

Initiative	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m	Total \$m	Ongoing \$m
Housing support for Aboriginal youth in Victoria	\$23.2 million	\$3.3 million	\$3.4 million	\$3.5 million	\$33.4 million	\$3.6 million
Housing support for Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence	\$40.7 million	\$0.7 million	\$0.7 million	\$0.8 million	\$42.9 million	\$0.8 million
Expansion of Aboriginal Entry Points	\$13.6 million	\$14.0 million	\$14.4 million	\$14.9 million	\$56.9 million	\$15.3 million
Supporting Aboriginal Victorians to sustain housing	\$9.5 million	\$9.7 million	\$10.0 million	\$10.3 million	\$39.5 million	\$10.6 million
Assisting Aboriginal people on the Victorian Housing Register	\$0.3 million	\$0.3 million	\$0.3 million	-	\$0.9 million	-
Assisting Aboriginal Victorians to access the private rental market	\$1.2 million	\$1.2 million	\$1.3 million	\$1.3 million	\$5.0 million	\$1.4 million
Subtotal	\$88.5 million	\$29.2 million	\$30.1 million	\$30.8 million	\$178.6 million	\$31.7 million

Fund Entry Points

Initiative	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29	Total	Ongoing
32 additional entry point workers	\$5.4 million	\$5.6 million	\$5.7 million	\$5.9 million	\$22.6 million	\$6.12 million
New and additional funding for Housing Establishment Fund (HEF)	\$5.6 million	\$5.7 million	\$5.9 million	\$6.1 million	\$23.3 million	\$6.3 million
Subtotal	\$11 million	\$11.3 million	\$11.6 million	\$12 million	\$45.9 million	\$12.42 million

Help for homeless young people

Initiative	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2026-27	Total	Ongoing
Dedicated social housing for young people	\$1 billion	\$1 billion	\$1.1 billion	\$1.1 billion	\$4.2 billion	-
Fund the gap in operating costs	\$8.8 million	\$18.1 million	\$28.0 million	\$38.4 million	\$93.3 million	\$39.6 million
A youth homelessness strategy	\$33.7 million	\$34.7 million	\$35.8 million	\$36.8 million	\$141 million	\$37.9 million
Mental health supports	\$13.7 million	\$14.1 million	\$14.5 million	\$15 million	\$57.3 million	\$15.5 million
Subtotal	1.05 billion	1.09 billion	1.14 billion	\$1.18 billion	\$4.47 billion	\$93 million

A system where lived experience leads

Initiative	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Total	Ongoing
Workforce development strategy	\$300,000	-	-	-	\$300,000	-
Develop and promote 8 guideline resources	\$900,000	\$900,000	-	-	\$1,800,000	-
Develop and promote Aboriginal specific guidelines	\$100,000	\$100,000	-	-	\$200,000	-
Train the SHS on lived experience workforce readiness	-	\$400,000	\$800,000	-	\$1,200,000	-
Develop and deliver training on Aboriginal specific workforce readiness	-	\$200,000	\$200,000	-	\$400,000	-
Pilot embedding lived experience workers in SHS	-	\$500,000	\$500,000	-	\$1,000,000	-
Evaluation	-	-	-	\$200,000	\$200,000	-
Subtotal	\$1,300,000	\$2,100,000	\$1,500,000	\$200,000	\$5,100,000	-

Housing Equality for LGBTIQ+ Victorians

Initiative	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Total	Ongoing
Pride in place	\$1,500,000	\$1,600,000	\$1,600,000	\$1,700,000	\$6,400,000	\$1,700,000
Capital funding for crisis-transitional facility for trans people	\$5,500,000	-	-	-	\$5,500,000	-
Funding to operate the facility	\$600,000	\$1,300,000	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000	\$4,700,000	\$1,500,000
Research and practice development	\$1,200,000	\$1,300,000	\$1,300,000	\$1,400,000	\$5,200,000	\$1,400,000
Subtotal	\$8,800,000	\$4,200,000	\$4,300,000	\$4,500,000	\$21,800,000	\$4,600,000

Supporting renters to prevent homelessness

Initiative	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Total
TenancyPlus	\$13,700,000	\$14,111,000	\$14,534,330	\$14,970,360	\$57,315,690
Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP)	\$22,800,000	\$23,480,000	\$24,510,000	\$24,900,000	\$95,690,000
Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program (TAAP)	\$14,300,000	\$14,730,000	\$15,170,000	\$15,620,000	\$59,820,000
Preventing homelessness among older Victorian renters	\$1,500,000	\$1,540,000	\$1,590,000	\$1,630,000	\$6,260,000
Subtotal	\$52,300,000	\$53,861,000	\$55,804,330	\$57,120,360	\$219,085,690

Additional funding required to keep women and children are safe at home

Initiative	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Total	Ongoing
Flexible Support Packages	\$45,300,000	\$46,600,000	\$48,060,000	\$49,500,000	\$189,460,000	\$50,900,000
Building 18 core and cluster refuges to meet existing demand	\$6,500,000	\$6,700,000	\$5,500,000	\$5,700,000	\$24,400,000	-
Operating refuges to meet demand	\$4,250,000	\$8,670,000	\$12,600,000	\$16,700,000	\$42,220,000	\$17,700,000
Motel Coordination Project	\$550,000	\$566,500	\$583,495	\$601,000	\$2,300,995	\$619,030
Subtotals	\$56,600,000	\$62,536,500	\$66,743,495	\$72,501,000	\$258,380,995	\$69,219,030