Council to Homeless Persons

Victorian State Budget 2026/27 Submission

A moment of choice

November 2025

Council to Homeless Persons is the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with a commitment to ending homelessness

Our vision is to end homelessness in Victoria. We work towards this goal through leadership in policy and advocacy, building the capacity of Victoria's homelessness sector, and working in partnership with people who are or who have been without a home.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners of the land and waters on which we live and work. CHP's office is located in Collingwood, on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. CHP's work is focussed across all Victoria – the lands of many different Aboriginal people across thousands of generations. CHP acknowledges the pride, strength, and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we pay our respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging. Always was, always will be.

Recognising Lived Experience

Council to Homeless Persons thanks people with lived experience of homelessness who bravely share their perspectives to inform our work. Their knowledge and expertise are vital to understanding homelessness and what it takes to end it. We must hear their voices and act.

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Foreword: A moment of choice

This Victorian Government is building a proud legacy of reform. From Treaty to voluntary assisted dying, supervised injecting rooms to pill testing, Victoria leads the nation in positive changes that foster fairness and justice. Now the Government has a chance to add ending homelessness to that list. But without decisive investment in the 2026/27 Budget, this opportunity will be lost – and tens of thousands of Victorians will pay the price.

Over the past decade, the Victorian Government has achieved significant homelessness reforms. The *From Homelessness to a Home* program dramatically reduced rough sleeping during its operation. Rental protection programs support people at risk of homelessness to retain their tenancies in 91% of cases. And by funding the first stages of the Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system, the Government has laid the groundwork to end the disproportionate experience of homelessness amongst Victoria's Aboriginal community.

These accomplishments demonstrate that the Victorian Government has the capacity to end homelessness. And with targeted and decisive investments in the 2026/27 Budget, the Government can achieve this goal, securing its legacy of homelessness reform.

The alternative to making this historic choice is stark. Victoria's social housing waiting list continues to lengthen. The average wait time for social housing is nearly double the Government's own target. And dual crises of rental affordability and cost-of-living are driving more and more Victorians to the doors of under-resourced homelessness services. Failure to make significant investments now, and particularly failing to commit to a social housing building blitz in Victoria, risks our housing deficit becoming so vast it is irrecoverable – exposing generations of Victorians to unimaginable trauma and in too many cases costing them their lives.
The need for action is urgent.

In Victoria's 2023/24 Budget, $103.9 million was committed towards ending homelessness. This investment was welcome, but the reforms it enables will at best only slow the slide in Victoria's homelessness numbers. In an escalating crisis, Victoria needs to do more. We need to start getting ahead of the problem, and that requires larger investments now.

These must focus on the three key responses we know can end homelessness:

1. Expanding prevention and early intervention programs.
2. Investing more in crisis responses.
3. Committing to a social housing building blitz in Victoria.

Prevent homelessness before it starts

CHP urges the Victorian Government to act decisively and swiftly to prevent more Victorians from slipping into homelessness. The impacts on their lives and the broader community would be severe, long-lasting, and incredibly costly. We need targeted investment now to expand renter protection programs, build strong social housing communities, and involve the broader community sector in preventing homelessness. This

investment would protect the stretched specialist homelessness sector from being completely overwhelmed and divert people from the Victorian Housing Register.

This represents a significant return on investment because crisis services and social housing are more expensive to deliver than programs that support people at risk of homelessness. At the same time, investing in homelessness prevention will make for a stronger and fairer society.

Many community-based organisations are working in this space already, even if they are not officially part of the specialist homelessness sector. Youth services, mental health support, community legal centres, and food banks all have a role to play in preventing people from falling into homelessness. Investing to better connect these services with the homelessness sector will amplify their effectiveness, delivering exponentially better outcomes for Victorians in need of support.

Expand crisis support

The evidence is clear: Housing First is the most effective way to end rough sleeping for good. *From Homelessness to a Home* proved Victoria could end rough sleeping through assertive outreach coupled with safe and permanent accommodation. Despite the program's success, it was closed and replaced with smaller programs. This has directly led to the increasing number of people sleeping rough. It's time to be bold and commit to ending rough sleeping through funding programs that work.

This must be coupled with an expansion of assertive outreach throughout Victoria, and an increase in specialised crisis accommodation.

Build more social housing

CHP welcomes the initial investments in social housing through the Big Housing Build, Regional Housing Fund, and the anticipated social homes through the Housing Australia Future Fund and the renewal of Melbourne's public housing towers. However, these programs barely scratch the surface of demand, and are slow to come online. We need many more homes than these initiatives promise to deliver and, while they are being built, we need interim measures to support people needing help now.

It is essential that the government invest in a social housing building blitz. Without it, tens of thousands of Victorians – our friends, family, and neighbours – will be unnecessarily exposed to trauma and risk losing their lives.

SGS Economics' "Growing Social Housing" report shows that Victoria needs to build 7,990 additional social homes per year for a decade just to reach the national average of social housing. The government's own independent infrastructure advisor, Infrastructure Victoria, has recommended it is necessary and affordable for the State to invest in building at least 60,000 homes over the next 15 years. Victoria must at the very least commit to this level of build.

The housing crisis is the most significant challenges facing Victoria today. Addressing it requires a whole-of-government commitment in lockstep with a whole-of-community effort. And achieving this is within reach. We urge the Government to act with vision and empathy, and in so doing secure your legacy by delivering housing justice for Victoria.

Deborah Di Natale
Chief Executive Officer

Summary of Recommendations

CHP recommends the Victorian Government makes the following investments in the 2026/27 State Budget.

The initiatives in **bold** are vital projects at risk of ending as their funding lapses in 2026.

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort

- Continue funding implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, including by:
    - Providing funding to grow Aboriginal social housing by 3,000 new social homes over 10 years for Aboriginal people in Victoria, to be owned and operated by the Aboriginal community
    - Providing ongoing funding for the two Aboriginal-specific homelessness entry points and additional funding to expand to two additional sites
    - Extending funding for the Aboriginal Homes Thrive

Build more social housing

- Grow Victoria's public and community housing stock by at least 60,000 homes over the next 15 years to provide safe and dignified homes for Victorians experiencing homelessness.

Prevent homelessness before it starts

- Establish and resource a cross-sector Victorian Homelessness Prevention Task Force to design and deliver a Victorian Homelessness Prevention Action Plan
- Expand the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) and Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP) and employ outreach workers to reach people at risk of homelessness in the private rental market where they may seek support from other sectors
- Invest in the Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program to ensure it can work with all renters who need support to resolve tenancy disputes and so they can be as well represented at VCAT as rental providers
- Fund community development officers to support residents in public and community housing, transitional accommodation, and other housing settings
- Increase funding to Tenancy Plus to support social housing residents at risk of homelessness

Expand crisis support

- Provide new and additional funding to provide victim-survivors of family violence with the support they need to stay safe, including funding Flexible Support Packages to meet demand and **renewing and indexing Family Violence Crisis Brokerage (FVCB)**
- Double the current number of refuges for women, young people, and children leaving family violence and provide ongoing operational funding

- **Extend the Personal Safety Initiative funding due to lapse in 2025-26**
- Fund enough new entry point workers to meet increasing demand
- Increase the Housing Establishment Fund to meet current levels of unmet demand for short-term accommodation
- Increase funding for assertive outreach Victoria-wide
- Invest in a comprehensive statewide Housing First uplift to support all rough sleepers

Amplifying lived experience

- Invest in a 5-year statewide homelessness sector plan to elevate lived experience voice, skills, and impact.
- Build the capacity of people with lived experience to engage in governance, representation, education and training, program co-design and review, and lived-experience informed research.
- Support the development of homelessness lived experience peer workforce guidelines
- Support the development and delivery of lived experience workforce training to the specialist homelessness services sector
- Pilot a program to offer enhanced support for lived experience workers in the specialist homelessness services sector, and conduct a program evaluation

End youth homelessness

- Build 500 medium-term homes for young people with mental illness, including providing wraparound support as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in 2020 and committed to by the Victorian Labor Government
- Build 5,000 social properties for homeless young people and provide ongoing operational funding
- Support the development of a Victorian Youth Homelessness Strategy
- Invest in support for young people with concurrent mental illness and homelessness including through boosting YPARCs
- **Renew and scale up lapsing funding for ongoing operational costs associated with projects funded through the youth capital grants**

Housing equality for LGBTIQA+ Victorians

- Expand the Pride in Place model to support LGBTIQA+ Victorians across the state
- Build a dedicated crisis-transitional housing facility for transgender and gender diverse Victorians and provide ongoing operational funding
- Invest in a program of research and practice development for transgender and gender diverse Victorians

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort

Colonisation of Victoria forced Aboriginal people off their own land. Colonial structures continue to cause unjust and disproportionately high rates of homelessness among the Aboriginal community. In 2020, a bold vision was put forward to create a Victoria where every Aboriginal person has a home. It is time to deliver on that vision.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should

- Continue funding implementation of *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*, including by:
  - Providing funding to grow Aboriginal social housing by 3,000 new social homes over 10 years for Aboriginal people in Victoria, to be owned and operated by the Aboriginal community
  - Providing ongoing funding for the two Aboriginal-specific homelessness entry points and additional funding to expand to two additional sites
  - Extending funding for the Aboriginal Homes Thrive

Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort (Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home): the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework is a nation-leading example of self-determination.[1] Created by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) through new Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF), the *Framework* recognises the inter-generational impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people and lays out a pathway to address this injustice.[i] As Victoria moves towards Treaty, it is time to appropriately resource ACCOs to deliver *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoot* and end homelessness for Aboriginal people within a generation.

The scale of the challenge is significant. Aboriginal people in Victoria are far more likely to experience homelessness than non-Aboriginal people. Over 13 per cent of clients seeking support from specialist homelessness services are Aboriginal, despite only 1 per cent of Victorians being Aboriginal.[2] One in five Aboriginal Victorians seek support from specialist homelessness services compared to one in 80 non-Aboriginal Victorians.

> The Framework has been developed by the community for the community. This is its strength… The Framework provides a 20 year agenda to guide its work. Its implementation must build on the momentum we have created. It

[i] In line with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum, CHP uses the term 'Aboriginal people' to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples in Victoria.

> will require all of our good will, application and innovation, and with the right resources we are sure that we can do it.[3]
>
> **Professor Kerry Arabena (Steering Committee Chair) and Daphne Yarram (Steering Committee Deputy Chair)**

Implementation of the Framework is led and governed by the AHHF, representing true community control. The Framework is appropriately broad, recognising the interdependencies of many parts of the housing market and the homelessness service sector. Within this broad scope, the AHHF has prepared the Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system in Victoria to guide implementation of reforms for the homelessness sector. The policy lays out a timeline of specific activities needed to redesign the specialist homelessness sector to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Investment in this initiative would demonstrate the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination and sharing power with Aboriginal people.

A core part of reform is increasing the proportion of social housing that is owned and managed by ACCOs for Aboriginal people. This model of social housing is truly self-determined and provides the best results for residents. Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisations have identified a need to continue building new community housing to address the scale of the challenge. They estimate at least 3,000 homes over the next 10 years is an achievable foundation for and independent, capable and effective Aboriginal housing sector. Delivering these homes is the minimum required to keep up with increasing demand.

Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation in St Kilda and Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative in Geelong are piloting Aboriginal community-controlled entry points with excellent results. These targeted services address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and offer a culturally safe response. Each service includes wraparound support for Aboriginal people which is effective in addressing complex cases and achieving positive results. Given the pilot's success, the Victorian Government should expand the service to operate in other parts of the state, in priority sites that will be self-determined.

Some Aboriginal people housing in community housing managed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria seek ongoing support to help manage their housing. Aboriginal Homes Thrive is an important, strengths-based and Aboriginal-led program that offers vital support. The program works through a prevention lens to help residents in community housing to navigate and connect to relevant support services and programs. Ultimately, the program intervenes to stop residents returning to housing insecurity.

Build more social housing

In the worst housing crisis of a lifetime, the Victorian Government has a responsibility to build enough public and community housing to ensure every Victorian has somewhere safe and dignified to call home. Victoria still lags far behind the national average and the government's own infrastructure advisory body recommends a large-scale investment in social housing. We must act now or the gap risks becoming irrecoverable.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should:

- Grow Victoria's public and community housing stock by at least 60,000 homes over the next 15 years to provide safe and dignified homes for Victorians experiencing homelessness.

Social housing is the single most important tool for ending homelessness. There is a proportion of the Victorian population who are excluded from the private housing market, and social housing offers these people a safe and stable home. After many decades of underinvestment, Victoria is now committing to building social housing through initiatives like the Big Housing Build, the Regional Housing Fund, and the high-rise redevelopment program.

However, Victoria is starting on the back foot. The state has the lowest proportion of social housing in Australia and is far below the national average. This is at a time when the homelessness crisis in Victoria is particularly stark. Nearly one in three people seeking homelessness services in Australia in 2023-24 were in Victoria. The state has the highest number of people seeking support (101,962), over 50 per cent higher than New South Wales (67,894).[4] The Victorian Housing Register (VHR) has 66,117 applications, a 7.4 per cent increase from last year.[5] In this moment of crisis, the Victorian Government spends only $399.80 per person on social housing and homelessness services, which is dwarfed by spending on police and justice.[6]

The current lack of social housing forms an impenetrable barrier for specialist homelessness services. Where services are unable to support clients to access social housing, they know it is only a matter of time before their interim fixes come undone and the person they are supporting falls back into homelessness. Even victim-survivors of family violence, who receive priority access for social housing, have to wait an average of 19.5 months for a home, nearly twice as long as they should be, according to the government's own target of 10.5 months.[7]

CHP's members consistently identify the lack of social housing options as the key challenge to their work. Without a safe and affordable home to offer clients, homelessness sector workers know that their options are limited. Coupled with increasing demands for services, workers can offer only limited support which they know will often not effectively address the essential needs of the Victorians coming to their doors.

> We don't have any housing, so it's kind of pointless. We need housing before we can support these people who are struggling, sleeping rough, or about to be sleeping rough, or about to lose their home. …[Otherwise], we'll just end up in a cycle.
>
> **Jess, lived experience advocate**

In this severe deficit of social housing, there is no time left to spare. Victoria needs tens of thousands more social homes not just to provide long-term housing, but to remove the crippling blockages this shortfall has caused in Victoria's crisis accommodation and transitional housing, and as an essential enabler for prevention programs to be successful.

The "Growing Social Housing" Report by SGS Economics released earlier this year shows that Victoria needs to build 7,990 social homes every year for the next decade to bring Victoria up to the national average proportion of social housing.[8] Even that effort, which is not even close to current commitments, is not enough to meet the need.

The government's own independent infrastructure advisory body, Infrastructure Victoria, has recommended the government build at least 60,000 homes over the next 15 years to meet demand and contribute to the economic security of the state.[9] This would be a modest but vital start.

The ratio of public to community housing in future builds is also important. Since the establishment of the community housing model, there has been a consensus that there is an ongoing need for both community and public housing. Their different operating models and financial sustainability considerations mean that public and community housing can cover a broad range of people needing housing support. Recent investment that includes only community housing may lead to a higher number of homes available than if funding was shared between community and public housing, but public housing is able to provide more secure tenancies for people with complex needs. Community housing organisations can sometimes struggle to support people with complex needs, so the gradual shift from public to community housing risks further excluding Victoria's most vulnerable from accessing safe and supportive housing. Working together, public housing and community housing are the most important part of the blueprint to ending homelessness. Future initiatives to build social housing should ensure that the number of public homes continues to grow.

Prevent homelessness before it starts

Homelessness is avoidable, with the right support. Prevention and early intervention programs not only save people from trauma, they are also cost effective. And with social housing availability dragging behind demand, a specialist homelessness sector straining at the seams, and high rents and low vacancies, investing in prevention will relieve the pressure on Victoria's overloaded system and escalating social housing waiting list.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should

- Establish and resource a cross-sector Victorian Homelessness Prevention Task Force to design and deliver a Victorian Homelessness Prevention Action Plan
- Expand the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) and Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP) and employ outreach workers to reach people at risk of homelessness in the private rental market where they may seek support from other sectors
- Invest in the Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program to ensure it can work with all renters who need support to resolve tenancy disputes and so they can be well represented at VCAT
- Fund community development officers to support residents in public and community housing, transitional accommodation, and other housing settings
- Increase funding to Tenancy Plus to support social housing residents at risk of homelessness

A Victorian Homelessness Prevention Task Force and Action Plan

In this time of increasing demand for specialist homelessness services and for social housing, a crucial way to alleviate the pressure is to help people stay in their homes. Preventing homelessness leads to better outcomes for people and is more cost-efficient in the long run.

The homelessness sector is geared towards responding to crisis. Services are stretched and the housing crisis means there are more people in crisis than there is assistance available. On top of this, the lack of social housing to offer people in crisis means that people who start experiencing homelessness are likely to go through long-term cycles of homelessness. The situation requires significant investment into crisis support and additional social housing. But we can reduce the pressure on specialist homelessness services and on the Victorian Housing Register by preventing people from needing them in the first place.

Homelessness is a traumatising and life-altering experience, with significant impacts on all aspects of a person's life. Protecting people from experiencing homelessness in the first place would have long-term

positive benefits for the individual and the community. The homelessness sector also benefits because of the reduced demand for crisis services. Investing in prevention activities does more than just stop people from being homeless, it also creates stronger and fairer communities.

Homelessness services and other related social services express significant interest in increasing investment in homelessness prevention. Specialist homelessness services see how effective early intervention can be, although they rarely get the chance to do so because they have to focus on the most pressing cases.

> We can't do any prevention work with someone who's about to lose their rental in a couple of weeks, because we are focused on the person in front of us who's sleeping on the streets tonight.
>
> **SHS worker from metropolitan Melbourne**

> We used to do a lot of prevention. People would come in with a notice to vacate and there was lots we could do. But now we have to say "we have to prioritise people who are homeless tonight"
>
> **SHS worker in Melbourne's western suburbs**

Representatives from other sectors, like family violence, youth services, and mental health, also see the value in a collaborative approach to homelessness prevention. The issues they focus on all become much more dangerous if their clients lose their home.

> There should be a shared responsibility for homelessness prevention - homelessness services are not the catch all
>
> **Community services worker from regional Victoria**

People arriving at specialist homelessness services needing crisis support have often already sought support from different services. Specialist homelessness services report that people seeking homelessness support from them have already engaged with many institutions and services, including:

- Police
- Courts
- Hospitals
- Prison
- Family violence services
- Youth services (including people ageing out of youth services)
- Centrelink and Services Australia
- Schools
- Health centres
- Libraries
- Family services
- Out-of-home care
- Youth mental health services

- Refugee and migrants support services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Alcohol and other drug services
- Child Protection
- Local government services including maternal and child health
- Community and Neighbourhood Houses
- Food banks

The wide range of services supporting people reflects the multiple pathways into homelessness for Victorians. Each of these engagements represents an important opportunity to intervene early to stop a situation deteriorating into homelessness. CHP does not expect all these sectors to be able to provide comprehensive housing support, but there is an opportunity to collaborate across sectors to ensure support is available at the right place and at the right time. Doing so leads to better outcomes and a more cost-effective intervention.

> People are proud and they don't want to ask for help, and they don't know how to ask for help because they don't know what's available. What could be really beneficial is giving people that knowledge of where to get that help and having the right people to support them and have those conversations… Knowledge is power, so we need to get the resources out.
>
> **Jess, lived experience advocate**

Already, several homelessness prevention programs are underway in Victoria, with encouragingly positive results. However, given the scale of the housing crisis, it is time to ramp up investment in this space in a co-ordinated and sustained way. The research shows that investing in early intervention and prevention activities can keep people connected to their homes, alleviate pressure on crisis services, and prevent a lifetime cycle of insecurity.[10] Investing to prevent homelessness before it starts aligns with the Victorian Government's Early Intervention Investment Framework which seeks to guide investment to provide timely assistance and reduce the pressure on acute services.[11] In this moment of housing crisis, with homelessness services and social housing simply unable to meet demand, it is vital that the Victorian Government expand investment into preventing homelessness.

> Housing is a fundamental right and needs to be accessible to all citizens. The prevention of homelessness benefits all. We know how to prevent homelessness, and we need the resources to organise to do that
>
> **SHS worker from metropolitan Melbourne**

> Access Points can only really help people who are help-seekers. There are plenty more people out there who need support.
>
> **SHS operations manager in the western suburbs**

> We need resources to be allocated specifically into prevention and early intervention of homelessness. That way, the impacts are felt downstream in reduced homelessness crisis
>
> **SHS worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

> People who access other services such as mental health, AOD and others should be assessed for risk of homelessness and given the expert support required to stop it happening
>
> **SHS worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

A successful homelessness prevention system would include a range of initiatives that draw on the breadth of expertise in the specialist homelessness sector and other allied sectors. Initiatives to expand existing models of 'inreach', where homelessness workers seek to connect with people at risk of homelessness where they are accessing other services; multidisciplinary teams, where teams with a range of skills work together to provide wraparound support; and meaningful partnerships between services and government departments to promote collaboration.[12]

> We need to do more inreach where people are already presenting, combining specialist expertise within connected places
>
> **SHS worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

> Multidisciplinary teams with different skills, for example mental health, health, financial counselling, education/training, community development, can be really useful in supporting people to avoid becoming homeless
>
> **SHS worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

> Time, time and more time – allowing for organic as well as structured partnerships
>
> **Community services worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

CHP recommends the government invest in the development of a Victorian Homelessness Prevention Action Plan by a new Victorian Homelessness Prevention Task Force, which should be drawn from multiple community sectors and multiple parts of government. This approach recognises the important role of all community services in contributing to preventing homelessness, and the many parts of government which influence housing outcomes. The development of the Action Plan would address outstanding questions about a shared understanding of homelessness prevention as it interacts with multiple sectors and how prevention work would interact with but be distinct from crisis support. The process would draw lessons from best practice and innovative initiatives that are already in place in Victoria (including PRAP, MACNI and Safe at Home programs outlined below), and those from around the world.

As a starting point, the Task Force should consider the following for inclusion in an Action Plan:

- Implementation of a No Wrong Door model supported by a risk assessment tool for other community service sectors to identify people at risk of homelessness and funded coordination support to help people navigate multiple sectors
- Funding to help specialist homelessness services and other social services to co-ordinate homelessness prevention activities
- Additional funding to specialist homelessness services to help them expand their capacity so they can support people at risk of homelessness, rather than having to direct limited capacity towards people in crisis
- Program evaluation and research into effective homelessness prevention activities to guide future investment
- Rapid response funding to resource existing examples of effective community-based homelessness prevention work, and funding to scale up initiatives where appropriate

Integral to the success of a Victorian Homelessness Prevention Action Plan is the commitment to fund initiatives and programs from the beginning. That is why this year's budget should allocate resources to both design and implement the Action Plan.

Boost support for renters

The pressure on renters in Victoria has been somewhat alleviated by recent expansions to tenancy rights but they are still being squeezed by unchecked rent increases along with the rising cost of living. Supporting renters hold onto their homes is the most cost-effective way of preventing people becoming homeless. Rents are the largest part of most household budgets, and low vacancy rates mean rents continue to climb.

In the twelve months ending March 2025, rents in Victoria rose 3.9 per cent, after increasing 5.9 per cent in 2024, 13.7 per cent in 2023 and 11 per cent in 2022.[13] Each year, rental increases are higher than CPI and wage growth. Although increased renter protection legislation will come into force by the end of 2025 which includes the removal of no-fault evictions, renters will still be made homeless after receiving unaffordable rental increases. Many more people are at risk of losing their rental home without targeted supported. Failing to support renters would see a large increase in the number of households losing their homes and seeking support from over-capacity specialist homelessness services.

Targeted investment to support renters is a low-cost way to help people hold onto homes and avoid homelessness. Existing programs like the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) and the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP) offer effective and timely support to help people maintain their homes. Not only does this save Victorians from the physical and mental trauma of homelessness, but it also diverts them from needing to access Victoria's limited social housing stock. In fact, tenancy assistance programs are one of the most powerful tools in relieving the pressure on social housing waiting lists.[14] Private rental assistance is the most cost-effective homelessness response. Contributing to a bond or a month's rent is far cheaper than providing ongoing case management, emergency housing, and social housing. Programs are also effective: in 91% of cases where people at risk of homelessness were supported by a service, the service was able to help them maintain their housing.[15]

Last year, a review of the Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP) showed that demand for services like PRAP and TAAP is significantly increasing in a context of cost-of-living pressures. But as demand and costs increase, funding has stayed level, meaning PRAP and TAAP are unable to deal with the wave of people seeking support. CHP members report demand for PRAP far exceeding their allocated funding. In one case, the lack of funding has led to a service is turning away nearly 6,000 people over 12 months (2024-25), representing 72 per cent of people in rental stress seeking support and who are eligible for PRAP. Boosting these programs would have an immediate positive effect on helping people hold onto their rentals and avoiding eviction into homelessness.

In addition to expanding PRAP to meet demand, more work needs to be done to ensure that everyone eligible for support is able to access it. Specialist homelessness services are ideally placed to connect support-seekers with rental assistance, but the scale of the crisis means that private renters are not active clients at specialist homelessness services. The focus of SHS is on people in crisis, and they have limited resources to support people currently struggling in private rentals. Instead, the PRAP model would benefit from targeted support to connect and collaborate with other services who are supporting people who may be at risk of homelessness. Engaging with these services would help the program reach more people while also supporting the goals of other social services.

A lot of people feel anxious, people experiencing rent stress are not going to express it until it gets to that stage where they're just about out that door, because of that stigma. We need to destigmatise it so they can reach out earlier to services that can assist. Keep the information casual and palatable.

Goodie, lived experience advocate

Build strong social housing communities

People living in public and community housing and in emergency accommodation deserve to feel part of their community, just like all Victorians. Building this sense of belonging leads to better outcomes for residents and can contribute to stronger tenancies. This is important because recent investment into social housing is bringing social housing to new neighbourhoods where support and community connection may be missing. Investing in building a strong sense of community for social housing residents, and between social housing residents and different tenured neighbours, can create more pride for residents in their tenancy and help nurture the public perception of social housing.

Residents who feel part of a community are more likely to do what they can to stay where they are. Some specialist homelessness services already employ dedicated community development officers who work with residents to develop and deliver community events, organise workshops, and connect residents with other services. Importantly, these roles are distinct from tenancy workers to ensure residents can get support and engage with their community, separate from managing their tenancy. The programs are effective in reducing behaviours of concern that could lead to eviction, reducing the risk of rental arrears, and encouraging residents of transitional accommodation to stay.

> Community development workers can address the risk of anti-social behaviour by helping people connect to the broader community. If you make someone care about the place they live in, they'll fight to protect it. The community development officer can help people make a place where people want to stay
>
> **SHS worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

Tenancy Plus offers vital and tailored support to social housing residents. The program is seeing increased demand and needs to be expanded. The model is effective in assisting tenants to establish, strengthen, and maintain their tenancies, especially when their tenancy and broader community safety is at risk. Tenancy Plus provides case management, support, advocacy, and information. These supports respond to issues like rental arrears, dealing with mental health or drug and alcohol issues, hoarding and squalor, behavioural breaches, and family violence. The model is sound, but limited funding compared with increasing demand means the program is unable to work with everyone who needs support. The delivery of the model is already place-based and flexible, so it is ready to scale up to meet demand.

Expand crisis support

Over 100,000 Victorians sought support from the specialist homelessness sector in 2023-24, but many of them did not get the help they needed, due to insufficient funding and the social housing shortage causing flow-on blockages in crisis and transitional accommodation. Targeted investment can ensure that Victorians can access the right support when they are most in need.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should:

- Provide new and additional funding to provide victim-survivors of family violence with the support they need to stay safe, including funding Flexible Support Packages to meet demand and **renewing and indexing Family Violence Crisis Brokerage (FVCB)**
- Double the current number of refuges for women, young people, and children leaving family violence and provide ongoing operational funding
- **Extend the Personal Safety Initiative funding due to lapse in 2025-26**
- Fund enough new entry point workers to meet increasing demand
- Increase the Housing Establishment Fund to meet current levels of unmet demand for short-term accommodation
- Increase funding for assertive outreach Victoria-wide
- Invest in a comprehensive statewide Housing First uplift to support all rough sleepers

Women and children are safe at home

Family violence is the leading driver of homelessness, but it doesn't have to be. Programs that support women and children victim-survivors to remain safe at home already exist. By providing funding to scale up programs that work and committing ongoing funding for lapsing initiatives, Victoria can keep all victim-survivors safe from harm.

Victoria is making important reforms to end family violence. This position comes after significant investment in the family violence sector and structural changes after the 2015 Royal Commission. Together, these initiatives have shifted the way we think about family violence, and who bears responsibility to change. However, despite widespread understanding 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 2023-24, over 30,000 people seeking housing support from homelessness services cited family violence as the primary reason for their housing insecurity.[16]. That's over 30,000 people who had to leave their own home because staying had become unsafe. In the midst of a housing crisis caused in large part by the severe lack of social housing, victim-survivors are waiting an average of 19.5 months to access housing - nearly twice as long as

the government's own target.[17] During this time, their attempts to heal from their experiences and get on with their lives are hampered by the everyday unfairness and uncertainty of housing insecurity.

World leading thinking lays a positive foundation, but must be backed up by world-leading action. Family violence is the largest driver of homelessness in Victoria, and we need to fund the tools to meet this challenge. Existing programs provide vital support but are under increasing pressure while also dealing with budget cuts and lapsing funding. Targeted investment in initiatives like additional refuges would bolster the ability of the sector to support victim-survivors.

Safe at Home programs keep victim-survivors affected by family violence in their home and in their communities, while removing the person using violence. These program support perpetrators to change their behaviour and reduces the number of people at risk of homelessness. As the specialist homelessness sector is under increasing strain, programs like this offer a much-needed reprieve. Not only is it a more just outcome, removing the burden of moving from victim-survivors, but it is also easier and more cost-effective to find accommodation for a single perpetrator than a larger grouping of mother and children.

Research conducted by CHP and Safe and Equal, the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence, shows the vital support that Safe at Home provides, and the dangers posed by the double threat of reduced funding and increasing demand.

> There's a misconception about the amount of brokerage family violence workers have access to. The average family violence package has been reduced by 70 per cent in our region—it's only $3,000 maximum per person. Last year we got $50,000 and this year we got $14,000
>
> **Specialist family violence service in regional Victoria**

> Within the first few days of the month, we're told FSP [Flexible Support Package funding] is all used up
>
> **Specialist Homelessness Service in metropolitan Melbourne**

A key finding from that research is of the negative impacts for victim-survivors as they are forced to 'ping-pong' between stretched services, while never finding adequate support. Some services report cuts of between 30 and 70 per cent. Combined with increasing demand for services, these funding cuts are putting people in danger. Services are forced to limit the funding available to clients so they can spread the resources across as many people as possible, even if those clients need much more to stay safe and start their healing journey. Family violence crisis brokerage (FVCB) funding is due to end at the end of this financial year, putting an additional strain on the family violence sector. Crisis brokerage is meant for recovery needs, but in a context of increasing costs for emergency accommodation for victim-survivors, funding is increasingly needed to cover motel accommodation. If FVCB is not renewed and in the absence of other emergency accommodation options, victim-survivors will be forced to couch surf with acquaintances, sleep in their cars, or even return to live with perpetrators of violence.

Wait list times for homelessness IAP consultations result in consumers coming back to The Orange Door for emergency accommodation

Specialist Family Violence Service in regional Victoria

The family violence system aims to keep victim-survivors safe in their own homes rather than moving them into new housing. In the midst of a housing affordability crisis and the gradual reduction in resources, this is becoming more difficult. The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI), part of the Flexible Support Package, offers an essential service in funding security upgrades like locks and security systems to make a victim-survivor's home safe for future occupation. However, the two-year funding package for PSI coordination is due to expire at the end of 2025-26. PSI Coordinators engage with local, vetted security providers to ensure that they can provide the services that align with what victim-survivors need. If this funding stops, some regions will lose their PSI Coordinator, risking delays in providing security upgrades and forcing victim-survivors to leave their home unnecessarily.

Fund entry points

When people seek help to get out of homelessness, they should receive it. Victoria has a network of access points staffed by skilled and passionate workers. But as the housing crisis worsens, they are facing increasing demand for support.

For nearly 100,000 Victorians last year, the first step to ending homelessness begins with a conversation. This could take place at a designated Intake and Assessment Planning entry point with a specialist intake worker. For a rough sleeper, it may be a conversation in a public space with someone from an assertive outreach team. Or it could happen over the phone when they need support after business hours. This conversation marks the person's entry into the specialist homelessness sector and access to the supports available.

Intake services have always run lean. Wait times are long and, in the middle of a housing crisis, getting longer. Some people find they have to do 'intake' at multiple services before getting the support they need. This shows the impacts of underinvesting in the sector, and the negative feedback loop it creates: to get help, people create multiple requests for assistance with separate organisations. Until recently, specialist homelessness services had been proud to see everybody who seeks support. They do so, even when accommodation and case management was not available. Even the small act of recognising someone's distress can make a difference and provide much-needed hope. But, more and more now in a sector of limited resources, workers are forced to make difficult choices about who deserves help most and who has to miss out.

In 2025, the housing crisis has continued to spiral out of control, directly impacting intake services. Nearly a million people in Victoria are at risk of homelessness according to modelling from Homelessness Australia.[18] Agencies are understaffed and burnt out. Phone calls go to voicemail, although nobody has the time to return the calls. Agencies are increasingly forced to turn people away and shut their doors early. The number of people seeking support from services and walking away empty handed is increasing.[19] This has negative effects on other sectors, including the family violence sector which is increasingly being asked to find housing for people who have been turned down from homelessness services and side-tracking them from their primary purpose of keeping victim-survivors safe and supported.[20] The result of this is funding that is supposed to be used to support victim-survivors recover and heal is being eaten up on costly and unsuitable motel stays.

The blockages in the specialist homelessness sector have discouraged people who are experiencing homelessness from seeking support in the first place. One study showed that 67 per cent of people who had experienced homelessness did not seek support from specialist homelessness services, likely because they knew about their limited ability to provide support.[21]The result is we are likely severely underestimating homelessness in Victoria and failing the most vulnerable Victorians.

Investment is sorely needed to bolster Victoria's entry points. Doing so would alleviate the pressure on them, and on other parts of the homelessness sector including social housing, and allow them to offer support to everyone who seeks it. Funding entry points to meet demand would ensure people get the help when they need it, preventing them from falling into a cycle of homelessness.

End rough sleeping for good

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

Housing First programs achieve remarkable results. The model recognises that many rough sleepers are managing multiple, intersecting issues. These could include mental health challenges, an experience of family or domestic violence, relationship breakdown, alcohol or other drug use, or chronic unemployment. Resolving these challenges are next to impossible without a stable home. Rather than asking rough sleepers to deal with these challenges at the same time as they manage their housing situation, a Housing First approach prioritises a safe and secure home. Only from this foundation can people begin a healing journey that involves addressing intersecting issues.

The foundation of Housing First is effective assertive outreach. Outreach workers engage rough sleepers where they are, rather than waiting for them to attend a service. It may take some time to build up a trusting connection, but this is vital to providing appropriate support. Increasing the capacity of outreach is the best way of ensuring community safety of all members of the community, including rough sleepers and the broader community. In the very small number of regions where assertive outreach workers are currently funded by the state government, CHP members report this is at levels too low to meet need. And entire other regions of Victoria, such as Gippsland, have no funding at all for assertive outreach.

In the absence of adequate assertive outreach, we are seeing mounting pressure on local governments to take punitive and ineffective coercive measures like expensive and counterproductive programs to introduce security guards to move rough sleepers on. Local government is a vital partner in the work to end homelessness and the state must support them by funding more assertive outreach.

Once rough sleepers are re-engaged with the homelessness system, Housing First programs provide them a pathway to stable, long-term housing.

Housing First makes common sense and is backed by the evidence. Worldwide, most Housing First programs achieve sustained housing for up to 90 per cent of clients–a remarkable feat when compared against traditional models' 50 per cent success rate.[22] 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.[23] No programs of a similar size have achieved results this good anywhere in the world. Victoria was leading the world in ending rough sleeping for good, until the program was cut after just two years. The decision has contributed directly to the increase in the number of people sleeping rough. Reviving this Housing First program would demonstrate Victorian's world-leading commitment to ending homelessness and build a powerful and enduring legacy.

Amplifying lived experience

People with lived experience of homelessness understand it best. To ensure Victoria's resources are used most effectively when responding to homelessness, lived experience must be integrated into all levels of service design and delivery.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should:

- Invest in a 5-year statewide homelessness sector plan to elevate lived experience voice, skills, and impact.
- Build the capacity of people with lived experience to engage in governance, representation, education and training, program co-design and review, and lived-experience informed research.
- Support the development of homelessness lived experience peer workforce guidelines
- Support the development and delivery of lived experience workforce training to the specialist homelessness services sector
- Pilot a program to offer enhanced support for lived experience workers in the specialist homelessness services sector, and conduct a program evaluation

People with lived experience of homelessness bring a vital perspective to the sector. Increasingly, they are joining homelessness services as employees. In these roles, their personal experiences inform their professional work. Service users, homelessness services, and Homes Victoria all recognise the value of embracing lived experience. As the lived experience workforce grows, strategic investment is key to ensuring that workers with lived experience are well supported and agencies are prepared. Thinking strategically now means laying out a pathway for more lived experience workers to join the sector in a range of roles from the frontline to the boardroom.

Integrating lived experience in service design and delivery has long been recognised and valued in other social service areas like mental healthcare and alcohol and other drug (AoD) support services. For example, the Royal Commission into Mental Health called for people with lived experience to be central to the re-design of the mental health sector and employed to deliver peer support.[24] In the homelessness sector though, integration of lived experience is relatively new.

> Lived experience for the homelessness sector works extremely well. [We are] able to communicate on the same level. This works well in regional areas. I think homelessness organisations should have lived experience as part their make-up to ensure clients receive best practice
>
> **SHS worker in regional Victoria with personal lived experience of homelessness**

The dangers of mishandling the integration of lived experience into the SHS workforce are plain. Studies show that people with lived experience can feel 'unseen, unheard and disempowered' when engaged as

lived experience advisors by services, reflecting some persistent structural challenges.[25] While frontline peer work is improved by integrating people with lived experience, there is also an untapped potential in involving them in much broader types of work including governance, representation, education and training, program co-design, and co-research about homelessness.[26] Like in other sectors, incorporating people with lived experience in frontline, advisory, or governance roles is important and challenging work. There is appetite within the sector for working in this space, and plenty of powerful advocates who are ready to share their expertise. Investment in development of a lived experience workforce now, framed by guidelines, would lay the foundations for meaningful, safe, and sustainable integration of lived experience across the whole specialist homelessness sector.

> Lived expertise and lived experience is such a crucial part of what can drive our work and can create much needed safety. The problem we face is funding for these roles, to be able to have them, you have to have the funding to recruit or someone already in the team that fits the criteria, which most of the time isn't possible
>
> **SHS worker in regional Victoria**

End youth homelessness

Thousands of young Victorians experience homelessness each year and are let down by a system that is not designed for them. It doesn't have to be this way. Ending youth homelessness is achievable and would help young people avoid a lifetime of insecurity. It's time to back the solutions that work.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should:

- Build 500 medium-term homes for young people with mental illness, including providing wraparound support as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in 2020 and committed to by the Victorian Labor Government
- Build 5,000 social properties for homeless young people and provide ongoing operational funding
- Support the development of a Victorian Youth Homelessness Strategy
- Invest in support for young people with concurrent mental illness and homelessness including through boosting YPARCs
- **Renew and scale up lapsing funding for ongoing operational costs associated with projects funded through the youth capital grants**

The current approach to youth homelessness is failing young people. In Victoria, over 22,000 people seeking support from specialist homelessness services in 2023-24 were young people aged 10-24.[27] That means around 60 young people are seeking homelessness support in Victoria every single day. Alarmingly, over half of these young people presented alone. Things are getting worse, not better. There were a thousand more young people seeking support in 2023-24 than the year before, a year-on-year increase of 5 per cent.

The mainstream homelessness system was developed to respond to the needs of adults, not young people.[28] This means there are expectations about personal and financial independence that clash with young people's position. Young people's lower income, whether from paid work or from income support payments, is usually lower than adults which excludes them from community housing and most private rentals. When seeking support, too many young people face obstacles in getting the help they need. Young people let down by the system are presenting at hospital emergency departments and unable to continue studying and working, leading to significant immediate costs and putting them on the back foot. Failing these young people means setting them up for a lifetime of harm, by exacerbating mental health issues and forcing them to experience the trauma of housing insecurity.

Analysis of nearly 4,000 people's records across two homelessness services in Melbourne showed that the most common cause for adult homelessness is experiencing homelessness as a young person.[29] Homeless people were twice as likely to have an experience of homelessness as a young person than be forced into homelessness by substance abuse or mental health. The youth to adult homelessness pathway affects three

times as many people as family breakdown. Targeted investment supporting young people is an integral part a robust homelessness prevention system.

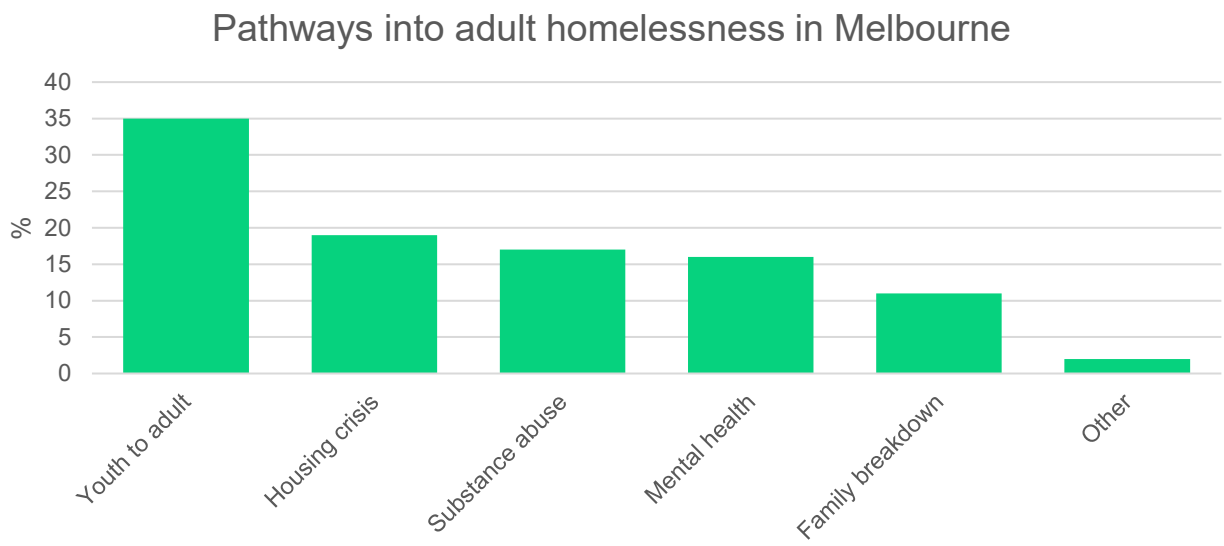

Figure 1 Adapted from Chamberlain and Johnson (2011)

> [An ideal homelessness system] should be proactive, inclusive and community-driven, keeping young people safely housed through early support, collaboration and systems that act before crisis hits.
>
> **SHS worker in metropolitan Melbourne**

In the face of this challenge, we need a Victorian Youth Homelessness Strategy. Earlier this year, CHP convened the Victorian Youth Homelessness Assembly, bringing together sector leaders, frontline workers, researchers and young people with lived experience of homelessness to identify priorities that need to be encompassed in such a Strategy. A report on the Assembly will be delivered to the government before the end of this year. Now, the sector needs the government to partner with it to fund development of a strategy reflecting these priorities.

Five years ago, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended the Victorian Government build 500 medium-term supported housing places for young people with mental illness – a recommendation the Victorian Government committed to implementing. [30] But so far, none have been built. After years of inaction, the need for these homes has not diminished. Instead, they are needed now more than ever as the housing affordability crisis worsens. Building these places would fill an important gap in both the mental health and homelessness sectors, alleviating pressure on costly crisis responses. With every day that passes without these important homes, young people who should be safely housed and supported are left struggling. They are bouncing between services without getting better and are increasingly presenting to hospital emergency departments. The homes would provide wrap-around support to vulnerable young Victorians. Providing housing and support at this stage in their lives would have a lifelong positive effect and reduce the pressure on services.

One aspect of the mental health reform that has been funded is the Youth Prevention and Recovery Centres (YPARCs), with five new locations and renovations of three existing services. This residential program model offers important wraparound support to young people that sets them on the right track. However, the program does not include any support for housing issues, which is common among young people being referred to YPARCs. YPARCs find it difficult to admit young people with insecure housing or at risk of homelessness because the stress of housing insecurity can undermine the aim of providing therapeutic mental health care.[31] But these are exactly the young people who need support the most. Reviewing the YPARC model and resourcing could help address these systemic issues and ensure the program is accessible to the people who need it most. If YPARCs can admit young people with intersecting mental health and housing issues, they can play an important role in ensuring young people are supported to step confidently out of the service into a safe and secure home to continue their healing journey.

Housing equality for LGBTIQA+ Victorians

Victoria prides itself on loving, supporting, and celebrating our queer community. With LGBTIQA+ people facing particular risks of homelessness and additional risks in the mainstream homelessness sector, it is time to invest in dedicated, community-led support.

In the 2026/27 State Budget, the Victorian Government should:

- Expand the Pride in Place model to support LGBTIQA+ Victorians across the state
- Build a dedicated crisis-transitional housing facility for transgender and gender diverse Victorians and provide ongoing operational funding
- Invest in a program of research and practice development for transgender and gender diverse Victorians

Equality is an important value to Victorians, but it takes an ongoing effort to make equality a reality. Queer people face higher rates of homelessness, due to family rejection, relationship breakdowns, impacts of historical abuse and neglect, and structural exclusion and discrimination. And they have distinct pathways into homelessness and experiences of services.[32] The exclusion queer people face in broader society shapes their experience accessing housing in the private rental market and seeking support from homelessness services.

Recognising this, last year the Victorian Government provided another four years of funding for Pride in Place to provide support to LGBTIQA+ people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The program offers a vital lifeline with a place-based model that emphasises peer support. Pride in Place offers a unique and important support to a marginalised community. Although its funding has not grown from its initial pilot, it is seeing increasing demand for its services, including from people in areas beyond the program's remit. LGBTIQA+ people live across the state, not just in the four regions where Pride in Place is funded. The Victorian Government should scale up the Pride in Place model to provide support to all LGBTIQA+ Victorians.

Homelessness services are providing high quality services to queer Victorians, but there is a significant challenge in finding safe accommodation options. Multi-occupancy accommodation used for crisis or transitional housing is not always safe for queer people, especially trans and gender diverse people. Some trans people have reported experiencing gender-based violence and harassment while staying in crisis and transitional accommodation. Dedicated accommodation is needed to safely house trans Victorians at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The initiative would also be a centre of excellence in working with trans and gender-diverse Victorians, with lessons to inform other homelessness services across the state.

Victoria is working towards a society where LGBTIQA+ people can live an authentic and full life. Part of this effort must support LGBTIQA+ people at risk of or experiencing homelessness by ensuring they have access to a safe and effective service to overcome the social harms they experience.

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Together we can end homelessness.

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