



Council
to Homeless
Persons



Walk In Her Shoes

Statewide Community Insights Report

September 2026

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 acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung People on whose land our office is located and the Traditional Custodians of the many lands on which we work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. We honour the histories, cultures, knowledges, and enduring connection to Country of First Nations peoples. We support Treaty as a pathway to self-determination, justice, and a future where First Peoples' voices, rights and sovereignty are respected. We work to address the overrepresentation of First Nations people in homelessness, building on the achievements of First Nations land rights, housing, and social justice warriors. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

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.

Thankyou

Every Council to Homeless Persons' report ends with a statement of CHP's paramount belief: **Together, we can end homelessness**. The solutions to end homelessness in Victoria are well known. But it will take an all-of-State partnership to get us there: all levels of government working together with the Specialist Homelessness Sector, the many community services sectors whose work intersects the experience of homelessness, and an informed and empathetic general public - all committed to prioritising the actions needed to ensure every Victorian has somewhere safe and dignified to live.

Walk In Her Shoes was designed in part to help create just such a partnership. But its success was also dependent on many of those stakeholder groups stepping forward to support to the project.

Thanks to the lived experience experts who generously shared their first-hand insights about homelessness for the project. The three remarkable women who shared their stories for the exhibition itself - Brea, Diana and Vanessa – are the heart of *Walk In Her Shoes*. We are indebted to them for their trust in us, and for the eloquence, insight and grace with which they have chosen to transform the trauma of their own experience into an opportunity to create a better future for others. Thanks to illustrator Jo Waite, herself someone with lived experience of homelessness, who brought the women's stories so powerfully to life through the illustrations in the exhibition. And huge thanks to all the lived experience experts who participated on every forum panel in *Walk In Her Shoes*' twelve city tour.

Thanks to the representatives of all the homelessness and other community services organisations who spoke at our forums, highlighting the outstanding work they do while also speaking with courageous frankness about what they *cannot* do due to failures in our housing and homelessness systems.

Thanks to the members of Victorian Parliament who participated in forums in their local electorates. Their willingness to listen, to be asked the hard questions, and to keep their responses issues-focussed and non-partisan was important and appreciated.

Thanks to the first two peaks who joined us as partners in this project: the Municipal Association of Victoria and Community Information Services Victoria (CISVIC). And thanks to the twelve local governments who swung behind us with support, providing venues, catering and other vital assistance to make this project possible: the City of Casey, the City of Ballarat, the City of Greater Shepparton, Mornington Peninsula Shire, the City of Whittlesea, the City of Wyndham, the City of Darebin, the City of Greater Geelong, the City of Whitehorse, the City of Latrobe, the City of Maroondah, and the City of Melbourne.

Last but far from least, thanks to the thousands of everyday community members who visited the exhibition, participated in the forums, and shared their priorities for change on the exhibition's Community Insights Boards at each stop. This report distils the insights from all twelve cities into one statewide summary.

Council to Homeless Persons

Foreword

On behalf of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), I am pleased to introduce this report, prepared in support of Council to Homeless Persons' *Walk in Her Shoes* program.

Homelessness among women is one of the fastest growing and least visible housing crises facing Victoria. Older women, those escaping family violence, and women on low or insecure incomes are increasingly at risk. Often, it's invisible because their experience of homelessness looks like couch-surfing, staying in unsafe relationships, or sleeping in cars rather than on the street. *Walk in Her Shoes* exists to put this reality in front of the community and decision-makers by sharing the unique but not uncommon experiences of three women experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

As the legislated peak body representing Victoria's 79 councils, the MAV sees first-hand the pressure this crisis places on local communities. It is impacting housing services, family violence responses, and the councils working every day to support residents at risk and the broader community. Local government cannot solve homelessness alone, but it is often the first point of contact, and councils have a critical role to play alongside state and federal governments and the community sector in prevention, early intervention, and ensuring services are there when women need them most.

The MAV is proud to stand alongside Council to Homeless Persons in this work, and we thank the Minister for Homelessness, participating councils, and the Victorian community for their continued commitment to ensuring no Victorian woman is left without a safe place to call home.

Kelly Grigsby
Chief Executive Officer
Municipal Association of Victoria



Foreword

The stories shared through *Walk In Her Shoes* shine a light on a reality that too often remains hidden: the growing number of women experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, and the daily uncertainty that comes with not knowing where home will be tomorrow.

Across Victoria, Community Information and Support (CIS) agencies see these realities every day. As trusted services embedded in local communities, our members are often among the first places people turn when life becomes difficult, seeking practical support, trusted information, and someone who will listen without judgement. CIS agencies provide much more than immediate assistance. Our members are at the frontline of increased homelessness, responding to gaps in the housing system through innovative, community-based approaches that focus on safety, stability and early intervention. Yet we also know that behind every statistic is a person, and often a woman, carrying the weight of circumstances that have made secure housing increasingly difficult to attain.

What makes *Walk in Her Shoes* so powerful is its ability to move beyond statistics and policy discussions, bringing to life the real experiences of women facing housing insecurity and homelessness. By sharing lived experiences with honesty and compassion, it builds understanding, challenges assumptions, inspires empathy, and encourages us all to consider the structural factors that put women at risk. It reminds us that homelessness is rarely the result of a single event. More often, it emerges from a complex intersection of housing affordability pressures, financial hardship, family violence, health challenges, caring responsibilities, and systemic barriers.

Addressing these challenges requires more than any one organisation can achieve alone. Lasting change depends on collaboration between community organisations, governments, councils, philanthropy, businesses and local communities. When we work together, we create stronger pathways to safety, stability and belonging.

CISVic is proud to support the work of Council to Homeless Persons and the *Walk in Her Shoes* project. We thank everyone who participated, shared their stories, and contributed to a growing movement for change. Together, we can build communities where every woman has access to the safe, secure housing she deserves.

Kate Wheller
Chief Executive Officer
Community Information & Support Victoria (CISVic)

Introduction

There is a lot of talk about Victoria's housing and homelessness crisis. But too often, those conversations happen in abstract language. Supply. Demand. Presentation numbers. Wait times. Vacancy rates... But homelessness is not abstract. Behind every statistic is a real story of a real person. A person whose life is being put at risk because of a system that is failing them.

Often the truth of those stories is far different than people presume. For many, homelessness is equated with a man sleeping rough outside a train station. Rough sleeping is a very concerning and life-threatening aspect of the homelessness experience – and one that is increasing in Victoria – but it still accounts for only 10% of presentations at Victorian homelessness services.

The truth is that in Victoria today, homelessness most often looks like a woman aged between 25-44, who is likely to be leaving family violence, and probably has in her care a child under the age of ten.

Women make up nearly 60% of the people coming to our state's homelessness services. And more than a third of people coming to services are children and young people under the age 25.

That is homelessness in Victoria today.

It's a mother and her children sleeping in their car in a McDonald's carpark. It's a couch-surfing teenager trying to stay engaged at school while worrying where they'll sleep tonight. It's a woman over the age of 55 queuing day after day outside overwhelmed homelessness providers, hoping today is the day she might be "lucky" enough to get inside the door and be able to find some kind of accommodation. It's a woman leaving family violence, only then to consider returning to the perpetrator because there is no social housing available and the makeshift emergency accommodation that services can provide often seems scarier than the danger in the family home that she's familiar with.

Council to Homeless Persons created the *Walk In Her Shoes* exhibition and forum series to highlight this hidden face of homelessness. Because it is only with understanding that we can have empathy and change.

Walk In Her Shoes has been about listening. Listening to women and young people experiencing homelessness. Listening to frontline services about the obstacles they face supporting their fellow Victorians. And listening to local communities about their priorities to end this crisis.

At every stop on the *Walk In Her Shoes* tour, community members shared these priorities through questions asked at the local forums, and through comments they left on "Community Insights" boards that formed part of the exhibition. This report consolidates those insights into one statewide summary.

What we heard was loud and clear. In every single city we visited, two factors were cited as the main obstacles to ending homelessness in that area:

1. **There is not enough social housing.** Rocketing cost of living and rising rents mean that there are little to no private rental properties available. And decades of underinvestment in social housing means there is not enough public and community housing to provide a safe home for those failed by the private rental market.
2. **Homelessness services are being overwhelmed by a level of need they are not resourced to support.** Time and again in forums, frontline workers spoke of their organisations no longer having enough time and resources to properly support people presenting at risk of homelessness, because the person in the queue behind them is already in a life-threatening crisis. Forced to ration resources in order to support people in the most severe circumstances, many Victorians at risk of homelessness are turned away from homelessness services, only to return in crisis several weeks later.

We also heard consistently from regional communities a sense that Victoria's they receive less support than metropolitan cities. Housing is hard to find, but there are also fewer crisis accommodation options, and longer distances between services. There are also fewer specialist supports for family violence, mental health or other complex needs. This all adds to the pressure that in a smaller community, your story can travel faster than you do, and stigma can feel heavier.

Community feedback resounded with understandable frustration and fear at this lack of infrastructure and support. As one respondent on the Mornington Peninsula wrote "[We need] More public housing on the Peninsula. I'm terrified – no family and I'm heading towards 55 years old." But the community's insights also resounded with a clear and articulate list of the actions they want from the State Government.

Many responses were recommended, but five themes dominated at virtually every stop on the tour:

1. Build more social housing, especially public housing

As one respondent in Whittlesea eloquently expressed, "The housing is number one. It's the biggest foundation for people. Home is your safe place. Once you get stable accommodation, you can help [people] with their mental health, getting back into education, finding a job."

In particular, community feedback focussed on a demand that the State Government build more public housing.

2. Invest in more prevention and early intervention

Given the scale of need in Victoria, homelessness responses are understandably crisis-focussed. But the community repeatedly identified that we can only end the crisis by shifting the focus of our work upstream. As a respondent in Ballarat said: "Primary prevention is the key to changing things long term. People need to be able to access a service when they need it, before it gets to a crisis point. We need more capacity to see people earlier". And as we heard in Darebin: "If we had a system that stopped people from getting to this point, we wouldn't have to pick up the pieces afterwards."

3. Take more action to end family violence

Family violence is the number one reason people seek homelessness support in Victoria so, unsurprisingly, more effective action to end family violence was a frequent piece of community feedback. As a respondent on the Mornington Peninsula powerfully articulated, “Women shouldn’t have to choose between violence and poverty.”

Insights ranged from improving family violence prevention, to increasing the number of family violence refuges, to focussing more on new “Safe At Home” family violence responses that aim to keep women and children safely in the family home while instead removing the perpetrator of violence.

4. Boost crisis responses

In every city, the local community demanded an increase in crisis responses. Calls focussed on two responses in particular: increasing crisis accommodation and increasing assertive outreach linked to supportive housing, to support people sleeping rough to access long-term housing as part of a Housing First approach.

5. Improve coordination and integration of services.

Finally, there was a resounding community call for more integration between the specialist homelessness sector and other community organisations and sectors supporting people with intersecting needs, such as family violence, health, mental health, and AOD services.

Respondents spoke of the difficulty navigating the homelessness system, of being “ping ponged” between “disconnected” services and becoming “stuck in referral loops”. As a Wyndham respondent said “We need a better first line of support, meaning integrated support from all services.” And as we heard from a frontline worker in Darebin, “These siloed services that we’ve relied on for decades, it doesn’t have to be that way. People have different and sometimes complex needs, and we need to be able to respond flexibly.”

Taken together, these five responses constitute a robust, evidence-backed roadmap to ending homelessness in Victoria. What’s needed next is the political will to invest in it.

This brings to mind a post-it note left on the boards at our City of Melbourne forum. It reads: “Charities are supporting homelessness... Pity about Government”.

When seeing this comment, there may be an instinctive reaction from our political representatives to say the writer might not be aware of the many homelessness responses which Victorian governments have committed to over the past two decades. But I encourage you to pause and consider more deeply that comment, along with the many others in this report that call for more investment in supporting people with the essentials for a safe and dignified life.

As the community feedback encapsulated in this report makes clear, the obstacles being faced by people seeking a safe home in Victoria are many and significant. Our extraordinary homelessness workforce has

been forced to rely on patchwork fixes to operate in a system that is not designed to deal with this degree of need. And those patchwork fixes are no longer enough.

The community can see and feel the scale of homelessness crisis in Victoria. But they don't see government action on a scale equal to that crisis.

Redbridge polling shows voters support action on homelessness. What that Melbourne quote and the many like it in this report tell us is that the community don't just support homelessness action - they're demanding it. And with November's election fast approaching, now is the opportunity of our political leaders to deliver.

Deborah Di Natale
Chief Executive Officer
Council to Homeless Persons



What is *Walk In Her Shoes*?

Walk In Her Shoes has been a statewide immersive public engagement initiative that harnessed the power of lived experience storytelling, evidence-led policy, and community partnerships to improve public understanding of homelessness and mobilise action on the solutions that can end it.

Touring 12 Victorian Local Government Areas from October 2025 until September 2026, *Walk In Her Shoes* created change through a unique combination of activation elements:

The exhibition

The centrepiece of *Walk In Her Shoes* is a touring exhibition that tells the story of three remarkable women who experienced homelessness at different stages of life:

- Brea, who experienced homelessness as a youth;
- Diana, who experienced homelessness as a middle-aged mother caring for two children; and
- Vanessa, who experienced homelessness as an older Victorian.

By following the women's journeys, participants learn more about catalysts for homelessness, barriers people experience navigating the homelessness system, and the responses that can end homelessness.

Community forums

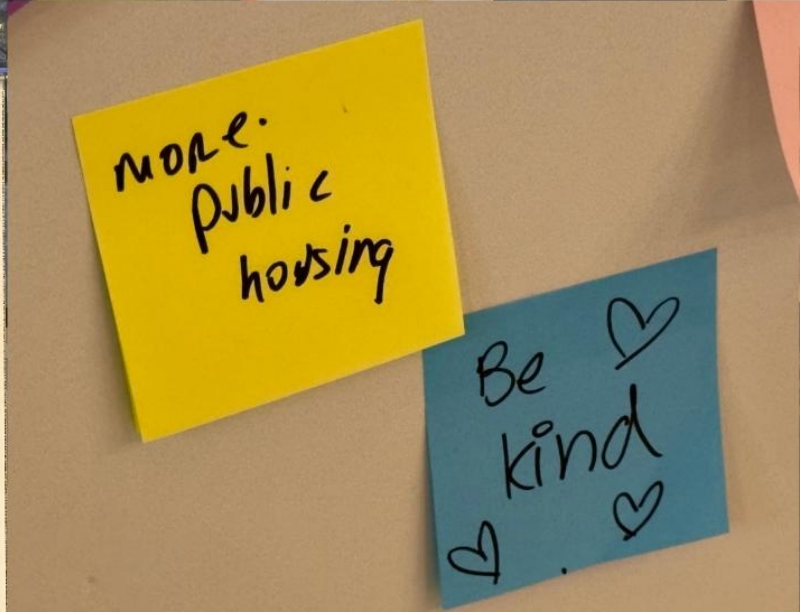
A forum at each stop on the exhibition's tour brought together community leaders, MPs, local homelessness service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness for meaningful dialogue about the local experience of homelessness, its systemic causes, and each community's priority actions for ending their region's homelessness crisis.

Follow-up MP engagement

On each leg of the *Walk In Her Shoes* tour, the local community was invited to share their thoughts on two questions:

1. What is getting in the way of ending homelessness in your community?
2. What should the State Government do to end homelessness in your community?

Responses were gathered through comments at the local forum, and on "Community Insights" boards that formed part the exhibition. These were then distilled into a local Community Insights Report for each city, that was presented to local MPs in a follow-up meeting with Council to Homeless Persons and community advocates.





A better future.

Because no mother should have to choose between her children and her home.





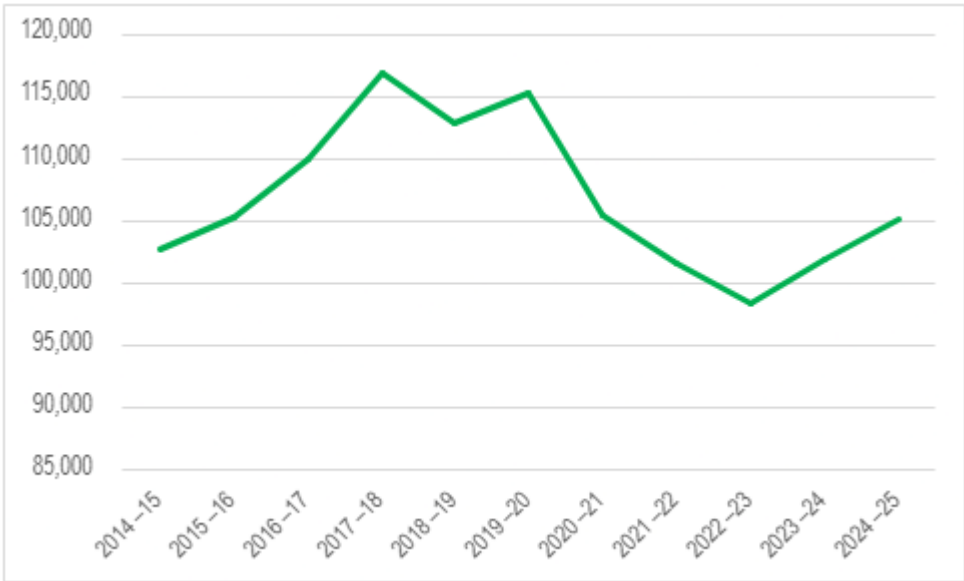
Snapshot of homelessness in Victoria

Snapshot of homelessness in Victoria

Total presentations, gender and age

In 2024-25, **105,125 people across Victoria sought support from the Specialist Homelessness Sector (SHS)**. 59% of them were women. After making significant inroads into the presentation peaks of 2017-19 (which reached as high as 116,872), presentations have started rising consistently and significantly again since 2022-23.

Number of people seeking support from Specialist Homelessness Services in Victoria¹



Number of people seeking support from the SHS in Victoria by gender²

	2023-24	2024-25
Male	42,429	43,232
Female	59,532	61,893
Total	101,962	105,125

Among people seeking support from the SHS in Victoria, the largest age bracket is people aged 30-39, representing 21% of all SHS clients. 37,617 (or 36%) are children and young people aged under 25.

Number of people seeking support in Victoria by age³

Age group	2024-25
0-9	14,787
10-19	14,430
20-29	17,555
30-39	21,990
40-49	17,561
50-59	10,765
60+	8,034

Working homelessness is rapidly growing

Victoria is seeing very rapid and significant growth of working people seeking support from the SHS. **Between 2020-21 and 2024-25, the number of working people seeking homelessness support in Victoria grew by 42 per cent.** This increase is caused by worsening housing affordability combined with languishing salaries, compared to rent increases and a lack of affordable housing.

38% of working Victorians coming to homelessness services were in full-time employment.

Number of workers seeking support from Specialist Homelessness Services in Victoria⁴

	2020-21	2024-25	Four-year growth
Men	2,644	3,609	36.5%
Women	6,927	9,986	44%
Total	9,571	13,595	42%

Homelessness Presentations by Local Government Area

Of Victoria's 79 Local Government Areas, Wyndham, Greater Geelong, Casey, Melbourne and Melton have the highest number of people presenting at homelessness services.

The highest rates of increase are happening in the Pyrenees, Golden Plains, Moine and Banyule – although all of those except Banyule are increasing from a relatively low base.

Maroondah, Whittlesea, Hume, Greater Bendigo, Darebin and Yarra Ranges have all experienced at least a 25% increase in presentations over the past two years while also being in the Top 20 for most presentations.



Top 20 highest LGAs for homelessness presentations in Victoria (*Walk In Her Shoes* cities marked in green)⁵

Rank	LGA	2022-23	2024-25	Two-year growth
1	Wyndham	4,340	5,120	18%
2	Greater Geelong	4,645	4,918	6%
3	Casey	4,078	4,236	4%
4	Melbourne	3,854	4,087	6%
5	Melton	3,739	4,040	8%
6	Hume	2,775	3,614	30%
7	Brimbank	3,346	3,279	-2%
8	Greater Dandenong	3,357	3,264	-3%
9	Greater Bendigo	2,466	3,184	29%
10	Ballarat	2,587	3,072	19%
11	Frankston	2,876	2,681	-7%
12	Latrobe	2,766	2,667	-4%
13	Greater Shepparton	2,037	2,313	14%
14	Whittlesea	1,716	2,238	30%
15	Mildura	2,282	2,161	-5%
16	Maroondah	1,590	2,094	32%
17	Knox	1,941	2,055	6%
18	Yarra Ranges	1,550	1,938	25%
19	Port Phillip	2,057	1,932	-6%
20	Darebin	1,517	1,902	25%

Top 20 LGAs for highest rate of increase in homelessness presentations in Victoria (*Walk In Her Shoes* cities marked in green)⁶

Rank	LGA	2022-23	2024-25	Two-year growth
1	Pyrenees	125	236	89%
2	Macedon Ranges	267	433	62%
3	Golden Plains	117	178	52%
4	Moyne	150	220	47%
5	Banyule	1,006	1,364	36%
6	West Wimmera	37	50	35%
7	Nillumbik	187	252	35%
8	Maroondah	1,590	2,094	32%
9	Whittlesea	1,716	2,238	30%
10	Hume	2,775	3,614	30%
11	Moonee Valley	940	1,215	29%
12	Greater Bendigo	2,466	3,184	29%
13	Darebin	1,517	1,902	25%
14	Yarra	956	1,196	25%
15	Yarra Ranges	1,550	1,938	25%
16	South Gippsland	420	522	24%
17	Bayside (Vic.)	433	538	24%
18	Moorabool	381	464	22%
19	Moira	476	578	21%
20	Mount Alexander	389	469	21%



What we heard from the community

The Problem: What's getting in the way of ending homelessness in Victoria?

1. There is a severe lack of social housing and affordable private rentals

Decades of underinvestment in social housing in Victoria means we have a severe lack of homes. **Victoria has a shortfall of at least 146,100 social housing homes**, according to analysis of the 2021 Census by UNSW City Futures Research Centre.⁷

Social housing is an essential support for Victorians who are not or cannot be served by the private rental market. And right now the private market is inaccessible for many Victorians. The *2026 Priced Out* report from Everybody's Home found that there is nowhere in Victoria where the median private rental is affordable on the Australian median income of \$74,100. And in Melbourne, even a person on an annual income of \$130,000 would need to spend more than 30% of their income (constituting rental stress) in order to afford the median unit.⁸

In the midst of this rental crisis, figures from the Productivity Commission show that Victoria has the lowest proportion of social housing in the country, far below the national average (3%, compared to 4% nationally). Recent investment through the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund are welcome, but much more is needed to bring the State up to the national average, let alone meet demand. In fact, Victoria's proportion of social housing has actually reduced over the time of the Big Housing Build (from 3.6% in 2016, to 3.1% in 2019, to 3% today).

Victoria's social housing deficit has direct negative impacts. Homelessness services have limited long-term housing options available to their clients. Lack of long-term housing has also created bottlenecks in crisis and transitional accommodation, dramatically reducing services' ability to provide support for people presenting in crisis.

The result is that tens of thousands of Victorians are cycling through insecure housing arrangements and emergency accommodation for years before finding a home. **The average wait time for social housing in Victoria for a person leaving family violence is currently 18.6 months, nearly double the Government's target of 10.5 months.**

The shortage also places pressure on vulnerable Victorians to move far from their support networks to find housing – causing stress and undercutting the chances of success in their new tenancy. For example, at our Wyndham forum, Amber Maihi from Ngawala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation described the case of single mother who was offered social housing on the other side of Melbourne, far away from her community and support network. She turned the offer down, for this reason. Homes Victoria reportedly recorded this as a case of an appropriate offer being refused, with a strike left against her name.

In Their Words:

“We are in a crisis point in terms of a lack of social housing” – Casey

“[There's] NO HOUSING!” – Wyndham

“There's been decades of neglect and lack of coordination between the three levels of government to increase the availability of social housing” - Casey

“We are in a housing crisis at the moment in Victoria. The target for social housing is not enough to meet the demand on the waiting list. Social housing needs to be increased to cater for the demand.” – Darebin

“Housing and homelessness are not considered a priority, and individuals are caught up in that.” - Maroondah

“There's not as many affordable rentals in our community anymore that people are able to rent, as well as very long public housing waiting lists” – Casey

“Rent is too high, and there are not enough homes available.” - Maroondah

“Over thirty years, the housing stock has become less, private rental has become much more expensive, and social and public housing have become less accessible and the waiting lists are getting longer” - Casey

“Social housing has declined, so where do people go?” – Darebin

“People are coming to us [ie homelessness service providers] and getting worse because of their experience. If we can house people quickly and their experience is short, we would see fewer negative consequences” - Ballarat

“There's real housing scarcity in Shepparton, especially affordable or social housing.” - Shepparton

“Lack of affordable housing. The situation is so very bad – mothers sleeping in their cars. Dreadful” - Whitehorse

“A single person can't find anything for rent in this area.” - Darebin

“People are priced out of private rentals.” – Latrobe

“Crazy high rent and housing prices.” - Shepparton

“People are applying for public housing just to sit on an already exhausted waitlist. We need to do more.” – Latrobe

2. Homelessness services are stretched and underfunded

Panellists and attendees at every *Walk In Her Shoes* forum spoke about the important and life-changing potential of crisis response services. They shared how services connect people with housing, help them access other services, and avoid long-term negative impacts of homelessness. However, they all talked about the sector sinking against rising demand and stagnating funding.

With our State in dual housing affordability and cost of living crises, more and more people are turning to homelessness services for help and not receiving what they need. Support systems are overwhelmed, causing dire situations for vulnerable Victorians. Homelessness services are forced to ration their support for people in the most severe circumstances. People who do the right thing and come to services to prevent homelessness are often turned away as services reach capacity of the day, just to return several weeks later in a worse state.

This creates enormous trauma for the people seeking support – life-threatening risk, in fact, considering the average life expectancy of a person experiencing homelessness in Victoria is just 44, more than 30 years less than the general population.⁹

It also creates significant stress and low morale for frontline workers, contributing to a turnover in key roles in the homelessness sector of 26% percent annually. Sixty per cent of those departing workers are leaving the homelessness sector completely.¹⁰

A key focus at forums was the lack of crisis accommodation in Victoria. Based on most recent 2021 figures, Victoria has 728 crisis accommodation properties (including refuges, short-term self-contained units for older women escaping family violence, and major supported crisis accommodation).¹¹ With insufficient crisis places to meet demand, the sector has come to rely on motels as emergency accommodation. Respondents repeatedly noted that this accommodation is inappropriate. Conditions in many motels are perceived as unsafe by both frontline workers and people seeking support. They are also expensive, inefficiently exhausting homelessness services' funding without providing Victorians a pathway to long-term housing. As Haven Home Safe's Riva Alice said at our Whittlesea forum, "the hotel room is never the answer but that's the go-to because it's the only option."

Another key focus was the need to do more to engage directly with people sleeping rough. There were regular calls for more assertive outreach. Several of the *Walk In Her Shoes* forums occurred before the State Government's announcement in July 2026 that it will invest in assertive outreach teams in ten new areas of Victoria: Brimbank, Shepparton, Hume, Whitehorse, Latrobe, Darebin, Bairnsdale, Maribyrnong, Wodonga and the Mornington Peninsula. This investment is welcome but will still leave many areas of Victoria without assertive outreach. Existing assertive outreach teams have also identified a need for expansion in order to meet the level of need in their local communities.¹² So more assertive outreach continues to be needed across Victoria.

In Their Words:

“Over the last thirty years, I’ve seen that the resources have dwindled for services supporting people experiencing homelessness” – Casey

“Homelessness services are not adequately resourced to support people to navigate the system properly.” – Darebin

“There’s a severe lack of crisis accommodation in Ballarat, meaning people who are forced out of home have nowhere to go. People arrive to our services for help and there’s nothing we can do” - Ballarat

“People walk through our door with hope and leave with nothing. It is so difficult to try again. You end up on multiple waiting lists with no real options.” – Shepparton

“We have some serious gaps in services cause by a lack of funding for mental health services and not enough wraparound supports, services, and connection” – Ballarat

“The crisis options aren’t good. There are caravan parks, motels, and businesses whose job is not to end homelessness. There are no real options. If you’re a woman and child fleeing violence, there’s a risk associated with that accommodation. We have no idea if that place is safe or who’s in the room next door.” – Shepparton

“The accommodation options on the Peninsula are not appropriate and not safe. People are leaving the Peninsula to seek accommodation but when they do find it in Frankston or the city, they might only get a spot for six weeks. They’ll become cyclic users of short term refuges because there is simply nowhere left to go. We see many people go back to homes where the violence happens, and that can be when child protection gets involved. We need a supportive housing option for these people. These are excellent mums.” – Mornington Peninsula

“Our assertive outreach worker is only a 0.6 FTE. We need much more than that to see everyone out there.” - Wyndham

“We have whole families living in cars who are not engaged with any services. And the numbers are way higher than we think. Last year, we were feeding 900 people a week, about a third were homeless.” - Shepparton

“We have people sleeping under bridges, and by lakes. Rough sleeping in Gippsland is up by nearly 15%. In Narracan it’s up by nearly 30%.” – Latrobe

“There is simply no emergency accommodation in the northern suburbs for women, trans, and gender diverse people and their children.” – Darebin

“Not enough support for older women dealing with housing issues” - Melbourne

The Problem: Other obstacles identified by communities

While not mentioned as regularly as the Top 2 obstacles previously cited, several other problems were mentioned repeatedly by respondents at multiple locations on the *Walk In Her Shoes* tour.

Cost of living pressures

Respondents in approximately one third of areas singled out increasing cost of living as a significant obstacle to ending homelessness. Community members highlighted the challenges this causes for people at risk of homelessness and identified a range of systemic causes.

One community in which there was a very high proportion of comments (approx. 25% of all feedback) focussing on cost of living was Wyndham. Wyndham has historically been more affordable than other suburbs closer to Melbourne's CBD. This has attracted people on lower incomes. Now, as Member for Werribee John Lister pointed out at the forum, rising rents in Melbourne's middle ring have pushed more families to move further out. This increased demand has an upward pressure on rents, pricing Wyndham locals out of their own neighbourhoods. Wyndham City Council estimates that 34% of very low- to moderate-income households in Wyndham are in housing stress.¹³ In this growing corridor, managing housing supply and demand is key, and expanding the meagre scale of social housing is a vital investment into a safety net.

In their words:

"Reduce the cost of living" – Wyndham

"[We need to] reduce taxes and make everyday life/groceries cheaper and more affordable" - Wyndham

"Cost of living [is a major barrier to ending homelessness]" – Whitehorse

"Homes and food are so expensive." – Maroondah

"People are experiencing too many financial problems." - Maroondah

"The high cost of living: utilities, rates, food. Inequality and great divide between rich and poor" - Geelong

"[What's getting in the way of ending homelessness is] Cost of living, lack of support, ignorance, insecure employment, insecure housing, lack of compassion" - Geelong

Lack of services in regional areas

At most regional locations visited by the *Walk In Her Shoes* project, respondents argued that regional areas of Victoria are underserved for support services, and are receiving less than their fair share of funding compared to metropolitan Melbourne.

For example, at the Mornington Peninsula forum, attendees noted that many services were only available in Frankston, which was difficult for people to reach by public transport.

Analysis by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council also indicated the region's tight rental market is putting residents into rental stress at higher rates than the Greater Melbourne average.¹⁴ Median rents are \$50 per week higher than in Greater Melbourne, and over a third of households are in rental stress compared with 26.8 per cent in Greater Melbourne.

Everybody's Home's *2026 Priced Out* report finds Victoria's regional areas offer slightly cheaper rentals than metropolitan Melbourne, though the median rental price in all these areas would cause rental stress for a person on the median Australian income.¹⁵ However it needs to be considered that incomes are generally lower in regional areas¹⁶, which would compound rental stress.

Attendees at the Mornington Peninsula forum argued that the large portion of revenue raised by the state through the Short Stay Levy on Peninsula AirBnbs means that the area should receive a proportionate investment in homelessness services. The former Minister for Housing and Building, The Hon. Harriet Shing, said that the Levy was not just about raising revenue, but also to encourage property owners to convert AirBnbs back into long-term private rentals.

In their words:

"There is a huge funding disparity between metro and regional. They have more accommodation services, refuges, capacity." - Shepparton

"Living in Latrobe is good for the regional quieter pace, but we also have fewer services." – Latrobe

"People, especially women with disabilities, are not being effectively represented – especially in rural communities where there are limited resources" - Geelong

Services operate in silos and the system is difficult to navigate

Homelessness is a highly intersectional experience. A need for a home is rarely the only problem people are seeking support for when they present to services. They may also be leaving family violence, or dealing with significant health or mental health challenges, or needing AoD [Alcohol and other Drugs] support. Successfully resolving any one issue is often dependent on receiving adequate support for the other issues.

But at every *Walk In Her Shoes* stop, a prominent and consistent problem identified by respondents was that Victoria's community services are too fragmented to meet people's complex and overlapping needs.

Respondents spoke of the difficulty navigating the homelessness system, of being "ping ponged" between "disconnected" services and becoming "stuck in referral loops". As a Wyndham respondent said "We need a better first line of support, meaning integrated support from all services." And as we heard from a frontline worker in Darebin, "These siloed services that we've relied on for decades, it doesn't have to be that way. People have different and sometimes complex needs, and we need to be able to respond flexibly."

In their words:

"We have great services out there, but my experience is that they're not connected. You're feeling ping ponged everywhere. I was educating them about what's happening the sector – that's not supposed to be my role! I was there to get help myself." – Whittlesea

"The service system is very complicated. There's a number of people coming in who need an interpreter or with low literacy. We take care with them, but we know it's a difficult system we are helping them to navigate." – Whittlesea

"Disconnection – often people get stuck in referral loops – there is no cohesion between services" - Geelong

"When it comes to services like AoD [Alcohol and other Drugs], family violence, mental health, it's often really hard to engage with those services. If you're experiencing homelessness, it's even harder to access those services" – Casey

"Lack of connection [between] housing and health" - Melbourne

"at Juno [a support provider for women and non-binary people in crisis] ... we have both family violence and homelessness teams – we see how the systems don't work well together." - Darebin

"The whole system is not working together well. There's a lack of coordination and no holistic approach. Many teams not collaborating, just looking at their own department." – Shepparton

The Solution: Victoria's top priorities for change

1. Build more public and community housing

One of the top two homelessness actions demanded in every community *Walk In Her Shoes* visited was for the Government to build more social housing. Without housing that is affordable, appropriate, and long-term, there are no real exits for people experiencing homelessness.

As private rentals in Victoria are becoming unaffordable even to people on the median Australian wage, public and community housing provide a vital safety net. Even formally affordable areas like Whittlesea and Wyndham are now becoming unaffordable, as we heard at our forums there.

In particular, there was a significant community demand for more public housing, which charges lower rents and provides more secure tenancies for people with more complex needs. This reflects community concern at the diminishment of public housing in Victoria's social housing mix, as evidenced by the Productivity Commission's finding that there has only been a net increase of 36 public housing properties over the past nine years, compared to a net increase of 5389 community housing properties over the same period.

There was also encouragement from community for more innovation and flexibility in how we unlock more housing stock. Along these lines, at the Latrobe forum, panellist Wayne Farnham MP called for the region to consider whether under-utilised infrastructure can be converted into social housing. He pointed to a community initiative that renovated four unused aged-care units to provide housing for women over 55 experiencing homelessness, and asked whether council-owned properties could similarly be converted as a short-term solution while more social housing is built.

In their words:

"The number one intervention needed is plentiful supply of social housing." – Latrobe

"State government and opposition – bipartisan action is needed to end homelessness. Build homes and refuges now." – Mornington Peninsula

"The housing is number one. It's the biggest foundation for people. Home is your safe place. Once you get stable accommodation, you can help them with their mental health, getting back into education, finding a job." – Whittlesea

"Investing in housing improves education, justice, health, mental health – it justifies itself." – Mornington Peninsula

“We haven’t rebuilt enough housing after the government sold off public housing in the ‘80s.” – Whittlesea

“Increase targets for social housing” - Geelong

“We need a funding pipeline to boost public and social housing in Casey” – Casey

“[We need] More public housing on the Peninsula. I’m terrified – no family and I’m heading towards 55 years old.” – Mornington Peninsula

“Build more public housing.” – Wyndham

“We need much more public housing” – Ballarat

“We need a huge increase in public housing on the Mornington Peninsula.” - Mornington Peninsula

“Stop demolishing public housing” – Whitehorse

“Don’t knock down housing commission for profit” - Casey

“Halt plans to knock down housing towers” - Casey

“State funded builder, to reduce build costs and create more apprenticeships” – Latrobe

“Revise the Housing Commission” - Geelong

“Houses to be built with success in mind, with supportive services ongoing” – Latrobe

“More community housing + support” – Whitehorse

“Community houses similar to Disability SIL housing to be funded with outreach workers coming to the individuals with supported multi-level care” - Geelong

“Build more social housing close to existing services” - Geelong

“Build homes to suit inter-generational families” – Casey

“Prioritise funding and allocate empty apartments to support homelessness and affordable housing” – Geelong

“Use land for housing – there is lots of it and we have lots of ideas” – Geelong

“Renovate some of the empty houses that are out there and utilise them.” - Wyndham

2. More investment in prevention and early intervention

Forum attendees and exhibition visitors throughout Victoria were united in calling for much more to be done to intervene early to prevent homelessness. This is essential to ending homelessness in a system where crisis responses are overwhelmed and there is inadequate social housing for everyone who needs it.

It also reflects a community recognising that homelessness is a symptom of deeper challenges, and we cannot begin to end homelessness without also focusing on reducing the structural drivers. As one respondent in Whitehorse wrote: “We are looking at an end result: ‘homelessness’. What are the causes?”

Victoria’s major current approach to prevention is tenancy protection programs such as the Private Rental Assistance Program and Tenancy Plus, but respondents called for broader and deeper prevention. This included addressing root causes such as economic insecurity and the top driver of homelessness: family and domestic violence. It also included improving integration of systems, and education about homelessness, to help people at risk of homelessness be identified faster and referred for support.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of another kind of prevention: continuing support for people *after* they regain housing. For most people who’ve experienced homelessness, true healing can only really start once they have regained permanent housing. The first 12 months of housing is a period of considerable adjustment, as a person works to re-establish the capacity to trust, reconnect to community and otherwise start their recovery. Ongoing support can be crucial to helping a person through this adjustment. As lived experience panellist Sam told us at our Melbourne forum, the fact he had support during this period was the difference between him being able to maintain his tenancy, while many of his friends who did not have supports were unable to maintain their tenancies. But as respondents at multiple forums told us, lack of resources means that providers often have to close support soon after a client finds housing.

Funding homelessness prevention is in line with the government’s own Early Intervention Investment Framework which encourages spending now to improve lives, deliver better outcomes across the system, and, ultimately, save money in the long run by avoiding costly crisis responses in health, mental health, and justice.

In their words:

“Primary prevention is the key to changing things long term. People need to be able to access a service when they need it, before it gets to a crisis point. We need more capacity to see people earlier” - Ballarat

“If we had a system that stopped people from getting to this point, we wouldn’t have to pick up the pieces afterwards. The system causes so much more trauma as we go.” - Darebin

“To really address instability, we need to switch into prevention mode, rather than focusing only on crisis response” - Ballarat

“We are looking at an end result: ‘homelessness’. What are the causes?” - Whitehorse

“If you go up the line and stop the issue in the first place, you can avoid the consequence later on” – Ballarat

“Early intervention works.” - Darebin

“The best thing we can do is to prevent it from happening in the first place. This means Respectful Relationships, social and affordable housing, social security nets from the federal government, education and jobs, public health system, connections to the community... all these contribute to the social environment that can work to prevent homelessness.” - Darebin

“The effects on people are massive and that’s why we need early intervention. It changes their whole life. We can break the cycle.” - Shepparton

“We need to be working on prevention so we’re able to see people before it gets to that late stage where it’s more difficult to support.” - Darebin

“Invest hugely (people, time, money) in early intervention, education and support” – Geelong

“Early intervention is key. A hub would work to help people get support all in the same place.” - Whittlesea

“Early intervention support, family violence support” - Whitehorse

“Increase mental health crisis, education and awareness for all about available resources” – Whitehorse

“More awareness is required for public so they know where to go and access the services.” - Wyndham

“CAV [Consumer Affairs Victoria] and RDRV [Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria] processes made easier and more accessible” – Geelong

“Our job is to provide safe housing but we can’t do that if we are having to support that person to survive just one day. Even if we do get them into housing, we have to close support very quickly. We don’t have the capacity to respond to complex needs and our funding simply doesn’t continue. What we are seeing is people having quite complex experiences and trauma that can have long term effects.” - Darebin

“It’s not just ‘get the home’, it’s the support afterwards as well.” – Wyndham

“Support workers for new residents ALWAYS” - Melbourne

“As we are building more social homes, we need to add support for people after they are housed. This is vital to supporting successful tenancies when the walls start closing in.” - Wyndham

“Create equitable access to home loans for people/women “starting over” – ie not a first home buyer but rebuilding life after family breakdown” – Latrobe

3. End family violence

Family violence is the number one driver of homelessness in Victoria. So it is not surprising that doing more to end family violence was another high priority action identified by the community at almost every stop on the *Walk In Her Shoes* tour. As a respondent in Mornington Peninsula wrote, “Women shouldn’t have to choose between violence and poverty”.

Darebin panellist Eve Giles from Juno, an organisation supporting women, trans and gender diverse people and children who are experiencing homelessness or family violence, described a bleak situation: ‘Women who come and technically have somewhere to go because they have a car can’t get support. By the time they get into Juno, they are at their worst. We have to go into turbo action mode just to get them accommodation for three days.’ Eve’s description echoed experiences shared often at *Walk In Her Shoes* forums.

Responses demanded by the public included a number of different approaches. There was a call for more investment in family violence prevention, such as through behaviour change programs. There were calls to build more family violence refuges across Victoria. And there were also calls to shift the state’s approach to family violence to preference keeping women and children in the family home, while moving the perpetrator out and providing him with housing and behaviour change support. This early intervention approach, known as [Safe At Home](#), is currently being trialled in parts of Victoria and is showing positive results.

While the Safe At Home approach still results in some homelessness, it requires a smaller number of people to be supported (a single perpetrator rather than a larger family unit leaving the perpetrator). And crucially, it prevents the children experiencing homelessness. Statistics show that experience of homelessness as a child is a significant predictor of repeated homelessness as an adult – so keeping children safe at home is also effective (and cost-efficient) prevention of future homelessness.

In their words:

“Women shouldn’t have to choose between violence and poverty.” – Mornington Peninsula

“Get DV under control” - Latrobe

“Address family violence before it becomes homelessness.” – Latrobe

“Prioritise [addressing] the root causes of homelessness e.g. family violence.” - Shepparton

“[We need to do more to address] family violence” – Whitehorse

“Our community is working together to prevent domestic violence, but we need support for more preventative programs” – Ballarat

“We need more domestic violence prevention to reduce the amount of people fleeing unsafe homes” – Whitehorse

“Invest in primary prevention of gendered violence” – Geelong

“Concentrated focus on ending domestic violence which leads to women and young people’s homelessness” - Geelong

“DV – move to men leaving the home, instead of women and children” – Latrobe

“Continue to fund Safe at Home” - Geelong

“Provide more long-term support for women and children leaving domestic violence.” - Maroondah

“Funding for crisis accommodation to support women and children escaping domestic and family violence” – Casey

“[There’s] Inadequate funding for women’s emergency accommodation and services” - Geelong

“More funding for women and children’s safe and affordable housing and emergency refuge access” – Geelong

“[There’s] not enough housing (safe and affordable) for women and children or families.” - Wyndham

“Create safe accommodation for young people and women.” – Mornington Peninsula

“Strengthen tenancy laws to protect women from eviction when leaving violence” - Casey

4. Boost resources for crisis responses to meet the increasing demand

Specialist homelessness services in Victoria provide vital support to people experiencing homelessness, but are dealing with an increasing demand for their services without a commensurate uplift in their resourcing. At every *Walk In Her Shoes* forum, an increase in crisis responses was one of the top community demands.

Discussion focussed in particular on two forms of crisis response: increasing crisis accommodation and increasing assertive outreach to engage people sleeping rough and support them into long-term housing.

A lack of crisis accommodation was cited as an issue in most forums, but we also heard of innovative approaches that perhaps suggest a way forward to quickly unlock more crisis options. For example, in Darebin, Merri Outreach Support Service (MOSS) spoke of a new plan they have underway to establish crisis accommodation with a support hub using tiny houses placed on surplus land donated by the local council.

In regard to assertive outreach, there were calls to increase not just the outreach itself but also the supportive housing that should be attached to it under a Housing First approach. Housing First is an international best practice approach to provide housing upfront with wraparound supports to people who have been sleeping rough, supporting them into long-term homes.

For example, Latrobe panellist Mitchell Burney from Quantum Support Services spoke of the success of their Homes First program, which is based on Housing First principles. Mitch said the Homes First program has supported 43 people in the region, 38 of whom have been able to access public housing. All but one of these people has successfully maintained their tenancy. But Homes First is not currently funded at scale in Latrobe – there are 13 more places funded next year, after which the current program lapses. Mitchell called for Homes First to be scaled up. (The Homes First program is running in several other locations across Victoria, with similar limits on its current execution there.)

In their words:

“More funding for homelessness entry points and other frontline services to assist those in need complete tasks to secure safe and affordable housing” – Whitehorse

“More flexible funding for housing access points.” - Wyndham

“More funding, more staff” - Whitehorse

“Funding more therapeutic supports to help people heal from the trauma of FV/homelessness” – Whitehorse

“More funding for ACCOs [Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations] and other support agencies so we can get that support out into Community” - Geelong

“Multidisciplinary support is paramount.” – Wyndham

“Significantly fund crisis services on the Peninsula. Our centres, especially Rosebud, are not state government funded.” – Mornington Peninsula

“Crisis accommodation in Gippsland!” - Latrobe

“Creative solutions for crisis accommodation – tiny homes, or refurbishing vacant buildings” - Latrobe

“Fund safe places / shelter for rough sleepers” - Latrobe

“I’d love to see a Housing First policy which prevents people experiencing homelessness in the first place, working across education, family violence, health, mental health, and the justice system.” – Mornington Peninsula

“Commit to and invest in Housing First initiatives.” - Wyndham

“Housing First and wrap-around support” - Whitehorse

“Homes First needs to become the norm and be scaled up.” - Latrobe

“Homes First should receive ongoing funding” - Latrobe

“We really need more funding for assertive outreach programs. Nobody chooses rough sleeping, it’s such a hard pathway. Persistence and taking the time to engage is key. Not one housing pathway is going to work for everyone.” – Darebin

“Assertive outreach is really what we need. People have been working in this sector for many years, but a lot of workers don’t see what’s happening on the ground. Now we’re out there, meeting people where they’re at makes a huge difference.” – Whittlesea

“[We need] funding for assertive outreach. On-street social workers. Homelessness beds. AOD rehab beds.” – Melbourne

“Provide greater funding for assertive outreach.” - Maroondah

“[We need] funded assertive outreach” – Latrobe

“Reach out to those sleeping on the streets.” – Whittlesea

“More outreach services for preventative health and social support.” – Mornington Peninsula

5. Better co-ordination and integration of services

The final homelessness action prominently demanded at every *Walk In Her Shoes* stop was for community services to be better co-ordinated and integrated, so that people are supported holistically.

Respondents reflected on homelessness often being experienced in conjunction with other needs (family violence support, mental health, alcohol and other drugs) and said that homelessness organisations and other intersecting community service sectors still operate too much in siloes despite the best efforts of workers. Participants wanted services to work in a more integrated way, with a coordinated approach rather than people having to navigate multiple disconnected systems.

This echoed the findings of the *Bridging The Gap* research project conducted by Council to Homeless Persons and Safe and Equal in 2024-25, which found that one in five women, young people, and children who are experiencing family violence and homelessness and present to either the homelessness or family violence service systems are ultimately referred out to the other sector before being referred back to their initial intake point without having received the crisis accommodation they seek.¹⁷

The clear message from respondents across the *Walk In Her Shoes* project was that people should be able to find the right support without being passed between services, and that prevention, housing, family violence responses and community support should operate as part of a collective effort to end homelessness.

The value of the multidisciplinary support that can come from improved collaboration was highlighted at our Wyndham forum by Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation's Amber Maihi, who spoke of the success of cross-sector partnerships on which Ngwala relies being "essential to addressing First Nations homelessness. Entry points are stretched thin, so those relationships get better outcomes for our community. Our partnerships are built on genuine self-determination."

A final point made repeatedly at forums is that improved integration must also include integration of lived experience into service design and delivery. As one respondent in Darebin said: "When we build anything, we have to build together. This includes people with lived experience. Every system, every project. Not a tick-box, not only at the beginning; all the way through. Everything we do is rotating around what happens to us."

In their words:

"We need a better first line of support, meaning integrated support from all services." - Wyndham

"Services need to be better coordinated." - Wyndham

"These siloed services that we've relied on for decades, it doesn't have to be that way. People have different and sometimes complex needs, and we need to be able to respond flexibly." - Darebin

“Responses need to be flexible and collaborative. People’s lives are messy and don’t fit into neat boxes.” – Darebin

“Foster collaboration between services – no more silos!” - Geelong

“Invest in holistic support to keep people in stable housing.” – Shepparton

“Early intervention is key. A hub would work to help people get support all in the same place.” - Whittlesea

“We need better integration of ALL services – ‘one stop shop’” - Casey

“Increase funding for existing organisations, connecting services...” – Ballarat

“More collective response from services, supports, across neighbouring areas.” – Wyndham

“We need a more collaborative approach.” - Shepparton

“Combine/umbrella Gippsland services, working as one unique body – a collective approach” – Latrobe

“Provide more funding for community-based housing support services and improve access to information and advocacy.” - Casey

“We need a combined health and housing response. More homeless nurses working with outreach workers – connecting people with community health, preventing emergency presentations at hospitals and hospital readmissions.” – Mornington Peninsula

“More funding to support services such as mental health, domestic violence, alcohol and drug use.” - Whittlesea

“When we build anything, we have to build together. This includes people with lived experience. Every system, every project. Not a tick-box, not only at the beginning; all the way through. Everything we do is rotating around what happens to us.” - Darebin

“Enable the voice of lived experience and have it valued” - Geelong

“Co-Design with lived experience” - Geelong

The Solution: Other common calls for change across Victoria

While not heard at every single forum, there were several other homelessness actions that were mentioned by respondents at multiple locations on the *Walk In Her Shoes* tour.

Improve awareness and overcome stigma

Participants in just over a quarter of local government areas we visited highlighted a need to improve community understanding and awareness about homelessness and to overcome negative stigma.

Unconscious bias and a lack of understanding can lead people experiencing homelessness to be judged or shunned rather than welcomed and supported. Misunderstandings about homelessness can also delay people even recognising themselves as experiencing or being at risk of homelessness, meaning they don't seek support until already in crisis.

Shaini, a lived experience advocate at the Latrobe forum, also challenged narrow preconceptions about what it means to recover from homelessness: "Four walls and a roof does not constitute a home."

In their words:

"There needs to be more empathy and greater awareness of the different reasons why people become homeless. It is often not their choice." - Maroondah

"We need to change attitudes to homelessness." - Latrobe

"People don't know how to help." – Latrobe

"The NIMBY mentality is getting in the way – look after each other and don't look down on people" - Geelong

"Build awareness and reduce the stigma." - Shepparton

"We need a campaign to normalise people living with homelessness so they can be welcomed not shamed." – Latrobe

Recognise housing a human right

As part of calls to build more public and community housing, respondents in nearly half the *Walk In Her Shoes* stops called for housing to be recognised as a human right in Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Victoria's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner Ro Allen AM recently echoed this call in their comments for the launch of *Parity* magazine's August 2026 "Homelessness as Health Emergency" edition:

"Under international human rights law, the right to housing is encapsulated by the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to housing.

"Australia's Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights recently recommended this model be included in a federal Human Rights Act.

"The A.C.T included the right to housing in its Human Rights Act in 2025.

"It's time for Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities to catch up.

"Including a right to housing in the Charter would ensure that the government of the day considers the impacts of new laws, regulations and policies on the right to housing."

In their words:

"It's a problem that housing is not [recognised as] a human right" – Melbourne

"Actively treat housing as a human right" *[this contribution was followed by many others agreeing]* - Whitehorse

"Treat housing as a human right" – Geelong

"Make homes a right by giving them a home" – Geelong

"The government is not treating housing as a human right, but as a commodity or investment." – Maroondah

"Invest in public housing and social housing – it's a human right!" – Whittlesea

"What's getting in the way of ending homelessness is ... housing [is treated] as investment rather than a basic a human right for shelter." - Casey

Better support for migrants and people speaking English as a second language

Respondents in several locations (Casey in particular) identified that targeted support is needed for migrants at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This was identified as especially being the case for people in visa insecurity.

These calls focussed on:

- providing improved translation services and resources to help people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to understand tenancy rights and navigate the housing and homelessness systems; and
- providing housing support regardless of visa status.

In Ballarat, Harvinder Jain from Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council spoke of the importance to improve prevention through responses that address emotional instability, financial instability or relationship disconnections early before they become a catalyst for homelessness. Harvinder also advocated for upskilling programs to help people find employment.

In their words:

“We need education for migrants and refugees on housing systems” – Casey

“Racial discrimination is impacting service provision.” - Maroondah

“We need safe reporting pathways for women, regardless of immigration status” – Casey

“Fund programs that offer rental assistance, bond loans and wraparound support services for women on temporary visas” - Casey

“Increase availability of culturally appropriate crisis and transitional housing for victim survivors of family violence and provide support regardless of visa status” – Casey

“Women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds need translated resources to help them understand tenancy laws and help them navigate the housing system” - Casey

“We need better information in different languages.” - Wyndham

Ending youth homelessness

Nearly 23,000 people seeking support from specialist homelessness services in 2024-25 were young people aged 10-24.¹⁸ Alarmingly, nearly half of these young people were alone, without the support of family. Things are getting worse, not better: there has been an 8.7% increase in the number of young people seeking support over the past two years.

The mainstream homelessness system was developed to respond to the needs of adults, not young people. This means there are expectations about personal and financial independence that clash with young people's realities. Young people's lower income, whether from paid work or from income support payments, is usually lower than adults which has historically excluded them from community housing and most private rentals (though recent supplements announced by the Federal Government will improve young people's ability to access community housing). 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. And tragically, when they do present at emergency departments in mental health crisis, they are often discharged back into homelessness.

Respondents in several areas visited by *Walk In Her Shoes* called for more action to end youth homelessness, recognising that failing these young people means setting them up for a lifetime of harm and, in many cases, recurring homelessness once they reach adulthood.

In their words:

"Youth education support line, doing their best to help" – Whitehorse

"Youth-led projects and youth lived experience advocates" – Whitehorse

"More youth specific housing choices" – Whitehorse

"Young people shouldn't be held back by circumstances beyond their control. We need more investment in Mornington across public transport, housing, health, and more." – Mornington Peninsula

"Concentrated focus on ending domestic violence which leads to women and young people's homelessness" – Geelong

"Build more homes for younger people to access." – Wyndham

"[Lack of social housing] impacts our young people's ability to work and rent locally." – Mornington Peninsula

Foundational structural change to put people first: Rental protection, income supports and tax changes

Recurring in several local government areas we visited were calls for a broader underlying shift in policy to prioritise people and the basic essentials for a dignified life. Respondents mentioned capping or freezing rents, changes to create tax fairness, doing more to stimulate employment, and advocating to the Federal Government to raise income support payments.

Comments such as “Charities are supporting homelessness... Pity about Government” (left at our Melbourne stop) speak to sense of community frustration at a lack of major action by governments commensurate with the scale of the homelessness crisis Victorians are now seeing and feeling every day.

In their words:

“Government needs to be more caring towards individuals.” – Maroondah

“Charities are supporting homelessness... Pity about Government” - Melbourne

“Fix the root causes like structural and systemic problems like jobs.” – Wyndham

“Fund social services and stop wasting taxpayers money on bullshit” - Melbourne

“More employment opportunities” – Whitehorse

“Spend less money on sport, fancy buildings, the military etc. and prioritise people – health, families, secure employment & secure housing for all” - Geelong

“Cap rental increases” – Melbourne

“Lower rents” – Mornington Peninsula

“Rent freeze” – Mornington Peninsula

“Advocate to the federal government to increase centrelink payments to jobseekers so people have an adequate income to afford housing” - Ballarat

“Raise Centrelink payments” – Mornington Peninsula

“Tax big businesses and the rich” – Mornington Peninsula

“Top rich list not paying tax, making mega millions” - Melbourne

We know the solutions to end homelessness. It's time for the government to back them.

Every home is a future. And Victoria can assure that future for tens of thousands of people through three key areas of investment:

1. Expand prevention and early intervention programs

Prevention programs are incredibly effective and cost efficient. We can stop homelessness before it begins with more funding for rental protection programs like the Private Rental Assistance Program, and early intervention approaches linking schools, health clinics, prisons and other key partners to homelessness services.

2. Better crisis responses

Our over-stretched homelessness sector needs more resources so it can support Victorians when they're most in need. Victoria needs:

- more specialised crisis accommodation, especially for young people and people leaving family violence;
- more assertive outreach to engage rough sleepers, connecting them with homelessness services to ensure they can access the support they need; and
- more Housing First programs to support those rough sleepers on a path to long-term housing.

3. Lift Victoria's proportion of social housing to the national average

Victoria has the lowest proportion of social housing of any state or territory in Australia. We need a Social Housing Building Blitz of 80,000 additional public and community homes to lift our housing stock up the national average.

The State Government's own infrastructure adviser, Infrastructure Victoria, says the government can and should be building 60,000 new social homes by 2040. So, let's get started.

For more information about key interventions to end homelessness, read Council to Homeless Person's 2026 Election Priorities Guide: <https://bit.ly/CHPElectionGuide>



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Together we can end homelessness.

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