



## Ending chronic homelessness; stable affordable housing, and long term support

Rough sleeping accounts for just 5 per cent of homelessness in Victoria,<sup>45</sup> and almost half of these experiences are relatively short.<sup>46</sup> However, there is no doubt that the needs of longer term rough sleepers, and those experiencing chronic homelessness who cycle in and out of rough sleeping and marginal accommodation are substantial. Both Australian and international research and practice evidence is clear, that people experiencing chronic homelessness need both housing and intensive or longer term supports if they are to participate fully in the benefits of life in Victoria.

It has long been Victorian Government policy that everyone who has the capacity to, should be supported to live safely and independently in the community. That those among us with a need for ongoing supports are entitled to receive them in such a way that strengthens rather than restricts their full participation in the community. It is policy that we all have the right to see our friends and family, to cook our own meals, enjoy the local amenities like parks and libraries, and to develop satisfying and meaningful routines.

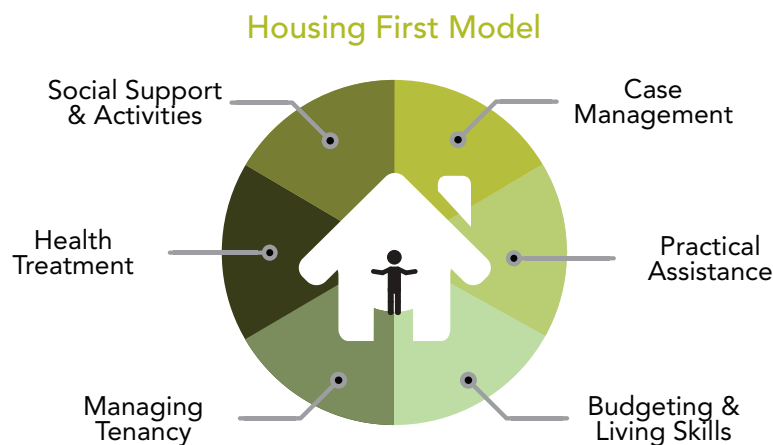
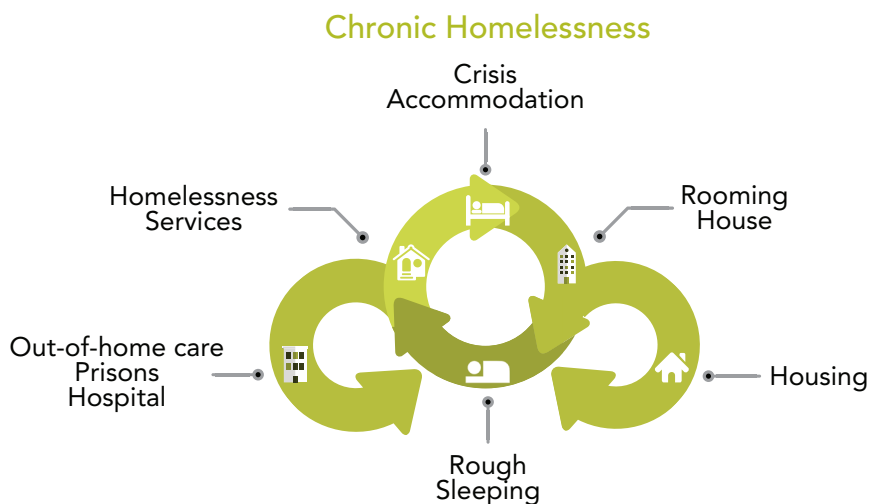
Yet we fail to live up to the promise of this policy. The reality is that many people in our community who need ongoing support with disability or mental illness or with recovery from significant trauma as children, do not receive that support, and as a consequence are highly vulnerable to becoming chronically homeless.

Some public policy issues are 'wicked' in nature; the solutions aren't apparent, the stakeholders too opposed. Chronic homelessness is *not* a wicked issue. Stable and affordable housing, and long-term support have been clearly demonstrated to be the effective solution. Victorians are united in the call to do more and do better to end chronic homelessness.<sup>47</sup> Government leadership to achieve it is needed.

# Delivering housing options for 'Housing First' approaches

Homelessness experts in Australia and across the world have conclusively demonstrated that the solution to housing chronically homeless populations is housing and support for as long as recovery may take;<sup>48</sup> an approach known as Permanent Supportive Housing or 'Housing First'.

Without Housing First approaches, including assertive outreach, intensive case management, multidisciplinary supports, and housing, people experiencing chronic homelessness have high frequency interactions with costly services including hospitals, mental health facilities, prisons and remand centres.<sup>49,50</sup> While extremely costly, these interactions fail to achieve positive outcomes due to their episodic, crisis driven, and time limited nature. Permanent Supportive Housing responses have been rigorously tested and found to achieve far greater housing sustainment outcomes for those who experience chronic homelessness.<sup>51,52</sup>



Source: *Housing First: Permanent supportive Housing*, Council to Homeless Persons, 2018

Victoria now has many of the critical elements of a Permanent Supportive Housing response. The *Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan* released in January 2018 includes assertive outreach, intensive case management, and the multidisciplinary supports required by people with multiple complex needs. A small number of people will require accommodation with on-site support.<sup>53</sup> The one missing element is access to housing.

As more people are supported to reduce their support needs, and even to full independence, permanent supportive housing workers will engage new consumers, ensuring a flow of people through the program. A matching flow of housing will be required. By ensuring that there is growth in Victoria's social housing stock, and setting part of it aside for 'Housing First' programs, we can complete the suite of resources required to ensure that Victoria's chronically homeless rough sleeping population have the supports that they need.

## CALL FOR ACTION

- 9. Deliver targeted housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness.**

## Supporting the transition to secure housing; follow up support for the rehoused

Among the many tragedies of chronic homelessness is the fact that once a person who has been chronically homeless has housing, they can find the experience of having a home again deeply distressing. People describe experiencing anxiety, loneliness, and being overwhelmed; and feeling like an outsider who doesn't fit in, who can't cope, and doesn't belong in their community.<sup>54, 55</sup>

Homelessness agencies currently focus the limited resources available on supporting people into housing, and to resolving issues that contributed to their homelessness. Yet very little support is typically available to a person making the transition that comes with access to secure housing. This adds to the stress of this transition, and in some instances can result in people returning to their previous (homeless) living arrangements in order to seek the comfort of familiar people and routines.<sup>56, 57</sup>

In prioritising addressing homelessness and its causes, insufficient attention is paid to its impacts. Our goal should not be simply to see people rehoused, but to see them able to enjoy the benefits of such housing, a goal that requires some support for this transition.

### CALL FOR ACTION

**10. Deliver post-housing support to people exiting chronic homelessness.**

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