

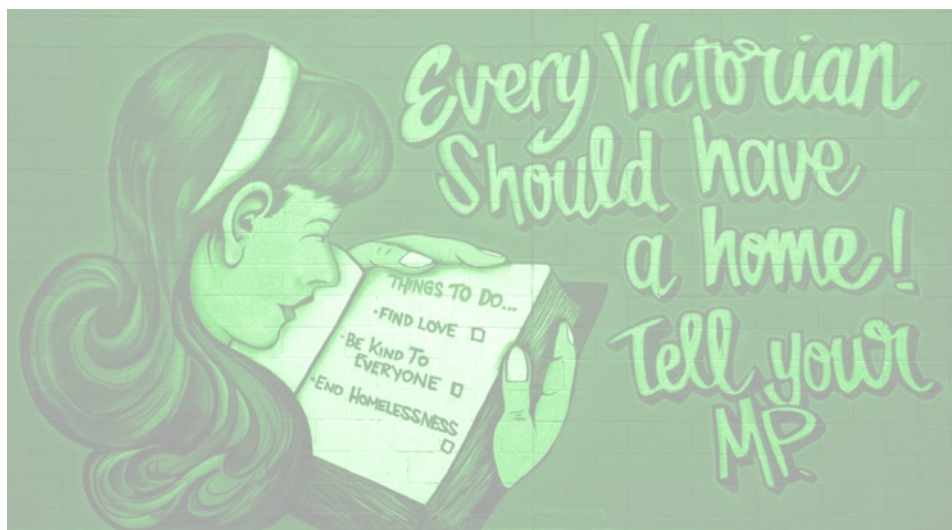
Resolving / Responding to Homelessness in Melbourne's North

Homelessness “Doesn't discriminate,
it's terrible, shameful, dangerous
for all who experience it”

“Housing is a fundamental right”
Chris Sidoti Human Rights Commissioner,
Northern Homelessness Network

This submission has been prepared by
the Northern Homelessness Network

Dec 2019



Aborigines AFVancement League, Anglicare Victoria, Australian Community Support Organisation, Berry Street Inc (Northern), Bethlehem Community Inc, Caroline Chisholm Society, Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services , Flat Out , Georgina Collective , Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, Haven Home Safe, Hope Street Youth and Family Services, Jesuit Social Services, Launch Housing, Merri Outreach Support Service, Margaret Tucker Hostel for Girls, Melbourne City Mission, Mind Australia, NEAMI National, DPV Community Health, St Mary's House of Welcome, The Salvation Army, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-operative, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-operative, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, VincentCare Victoria, Women's Information Support and Housing in the North

Executive Summary

Despite a recent softening in the housing market, Melbourne remains in the midst of a housing crisis. In Victoria, homelessness has increased by 43% over the period spanning 2006 to 2016. On census night 2016, 16% of those who identified as homeless were in Melbourne's Northern region. This number often fails to represent those in other forms of supported accommodation such as rooming houses or precarious accommodation. There has also been an increase in the number of people in housing stress and those who are house sitting, 'couch surfing', or in dwellings that are significantly overcrowded.

Being homeless does not just mean you don't have a roof over your head. A home is meant to provide “security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space”¹.

There are 17,572 social housing properties in Melbourne's North **7,405 households are on the waiting list for access to those properties.**

The number of people with nowhere to live or at serious risk of homelessness is increasing and significant steps must be taken to mitigate this in the short term, and implement structural changes in the long term. A once affordable and accessible region, with a diversity of dwelling typologies, public transport options and community amenity, the north has changed rapidly in the last decade. The median house price has significantly increased to \$830K as has the median rental rate for a two bedroom dwelling to \$470 per week.

A person with 2 dependents is eligible for \$604.00 per fortnight on Newstart Allowance and would be eligible for \$162.00 in rental assistance. This person would be unable to lease a property in the region at an affordable rate – 30% of income. The cost of a median rental of two bedroom dwelling as noted above, would be 122.7% of the above Newstart Allowance. Competition for more

affordable properties is high as higher income households try to rent and save.

Census 2016 identified a 16% increase in homelessness in Melbourne's North **In 2018/19, 23,062 people presented to homelessness services in the North for assistance**

Indigenous representation in the homelessness sector is extremely high in the Northern region. Displacement for Aboriginal communities and families continues and the homelessness services sector are not provided sufficient resources to adequately address their cultural and housing needs. Historically, the North has provided more affordable housing but as prices increase many Aboriginal people are being forced further out, away from the services, and community. Consultation and collaboration with communities is needed to create sustainable solutions that respect and reflect diverse family and community structures. This diversity will not only benefit indigenous communities and may offer unique perspectives on better ways of collaborating.

This paper provides the context for a report released by the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks in February 2019: 'The Crisis in Crisis: the appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west'. It also builds on the work by the Western Network and references their report "Ending homelessness in Melbourne's West", 2019.

The response to the *Crisis in Crisis* report from State Members of Parliament in Melbourne's West has been very positive. That experience has not been shared by those working in the North. Few MPs in the North have demonstrated the appetite to really address the social and economic chasm emerging.

¹ Mallet, 2004

Homelessness services stress that housing must be considered essential infrastructure and that a housing first policy agenda be developed to ensure that the complexity and cost of providing other emergency and secondary issue services not be prioritised over the provision of housing first and foremost.

What do we need to address homelessness?

Put simply, we need housing. The Northern Homelessness Network believes that the key to addressing homelessness is long term affordable housing and a culture that prioritises everyone having a place to call home not property as part of financial investment portfolio.

This report provides an overview of homelessness in the North, from the perspective of the homelessness service system and incorporates our ideas for how to best address this issue. We know that we don't have all the answers and we would welcome the opportunity to work with Government to find solutions to this unacceptable social construct.

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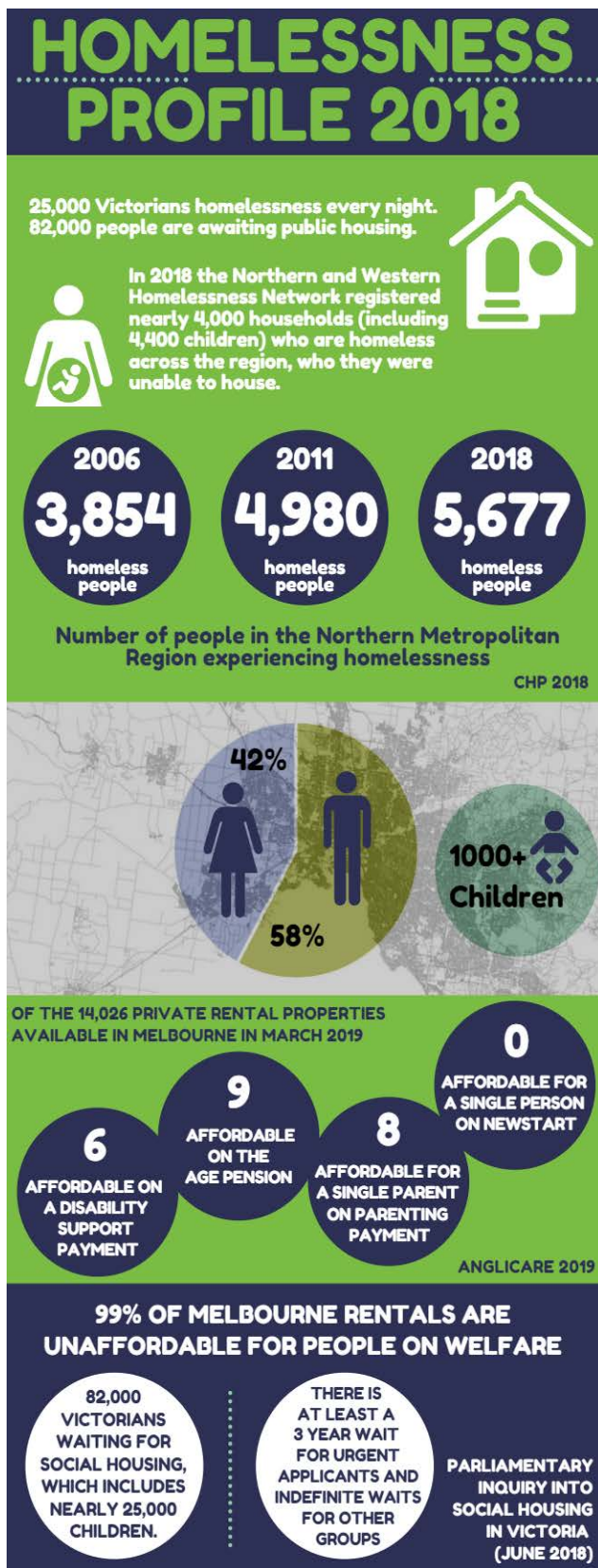
1. Introduction & Context

The Northern Homelessness Networks comprises
30 Specialist Homelessness and Family Violence Services (SHSs)
managing 105 programs operating in Melbourne's North.

The focus of the Northern Homelessness Networks' (NHN) work is to improve responses to people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne's North through:

- coordinated homelessness service system arrangements,
- consumer consultation,
- linkages with allied service sectors and shared professional development.

NHN works closely with Western Homelessness Network (WHN) with which they share a number of working groups, and is a member of the Victorian Homelessness Network, which coordinates homelessness networks across the state.



This data represents conditions across Victoria, Melbourne, and the northern metropolitan region prior to and including 2018

The experience of homelessness and precarious housing in the north is a microcosm of a much broader issues across Melbourne, Victoria and Australia.

Countless reports have already been prepared by many organisations including Council to Homeless Persons, AHURI, Anglicare etc.

The sector and people directly affected are at their wits end with, experiencing an increased sense of hopelessness and distrust.

These numbers represent vulnerable people in our community who just need a little support to get back on their feet. They are not the problem!

Melbourne and the north needs to treat housing as a fundamental human right not a luxury item.

Living in the squalor conditions found in many temporary accommodation options will no longer be tolerated.

The Crisis in Crisis Report Prepared by the Northern and Western Homelessness Network states:

“As a sector we are no longer prepared to refer people to substandard crisis accommodation, nor are we willing to participate in continuing to harm vulnerable people seeking our assistance.”

On census night 2016, Melbourne recorded, 1,161,643 families and 1,832,043 private dwellings, a difference of 670,400 (or 36%); 10% of dwellings were described as unoccupied. There was an equal

measure 30% who owned outright and 30% who rented, and 36% owned with a mortgage. Only 0.8% listed 'other tenure type and 2.7% didn't list their tenure type.²

These figures demonstrate that a lack of dwellings is not the only factor in homelessness or even housing stress. Second dwellings, short-term rentals, vacant dwellings, and punitive tenancy laws artificially create a culture of scarcity in the housing sector. The lack of tenure diversity also ensures that, unless a household's economic capacity complies directly to the market, there are very few alternatives for participation in what is a basic human right.

The Impact of being without a stable home results in acute and chronic impacts across a number of different areas of people's lives and wellbeing.

These effects are self-reported and also validated by frontline workers who witness the short and long term effects of precarious housing and homelessness.



According to the latest official estimates, Melbourne remains the largest and fastest growing capital city³ and the State of Victoria is extremely unprepared for the population boom. Melbourne's population is expected to be 8.5million by 2050, within this context, the Northern suburbs are estimated to be in the top three resident populations in the City of Melbourne.

If Australia is to address homelessness and housing stress, an additional 730,000 social housing dwellings will be required over the next two decades.⁴ To fill this housing gap will require the government to direct funds into needs-based public investment addressing social factors that can be influenced by density, location and quality of housing.

When a household spends over 30% of their combined income on housing they are deemed to be in housing stress; the 2016 census showed that those on low incomes spend over 30% of it on rent. Even 40.3% of eligible pensioners receiving rent assistance spend over 30% of their incomes on rent which means there is little left to cover other necessities such as food and medical care.⁵

Private rental used to be an affordable option for low income earners. Now, due to lack of supply and a highly competitive rental market, 94% of rental properties are unaffordable for low income earners.

Every Victorian Should Have a Home⁶:

² Census Data https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/2GME1

³ ABS, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3218.0main+features952016-17>

⁴ AHURI, Social housing as infrastructure: rationale, prioritisation and investment pathway, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/315>

⁵ The Conversation, Australia's social housing policy needs stronger leadership and an investment overhaul <https://theconversation.com/australias-social-housing-policy-needs-stronger-leadership-and-an-investment-overhaul-119097>

⁶ Every Victorian Should Have a Home, Information about the Campaign, 2019

Many Victorians are experiencing the impact of the current housing crisis:

- In 2016 nearly 20% of all Victorian households were living in housing stress
- Housing prices are rising faster than incomes
- In 2011 Victoria was already 48,000 affordable private rental dwellings short
- In 2016, nearly 25,000 Victorians were homeless on Census night
- The Northern Homelessness Networks hold a list of nearly 3,000 households (including 2,200 children) who are homeless in Melbourne's north who we are unable to house

Australia needs a National Housing Strategy and complementary city and regional strategies that create a framework for the provision of housing and essential infrastructure. Housing, employment, education, and civic opportunities must be co-located to avoid disenfranchising large populations. Current development models are not meeting people's social or economic needs. Long commutes and housing stress are in turn damaging personal and community life, as well as compromising education and employment productivity⁷. A National Housing Strategy is necessary to address growing inequality which is now more closely linked to home ownership than it is to education or employment prospects⁸. The Northern region includes the following Local Government Areas:

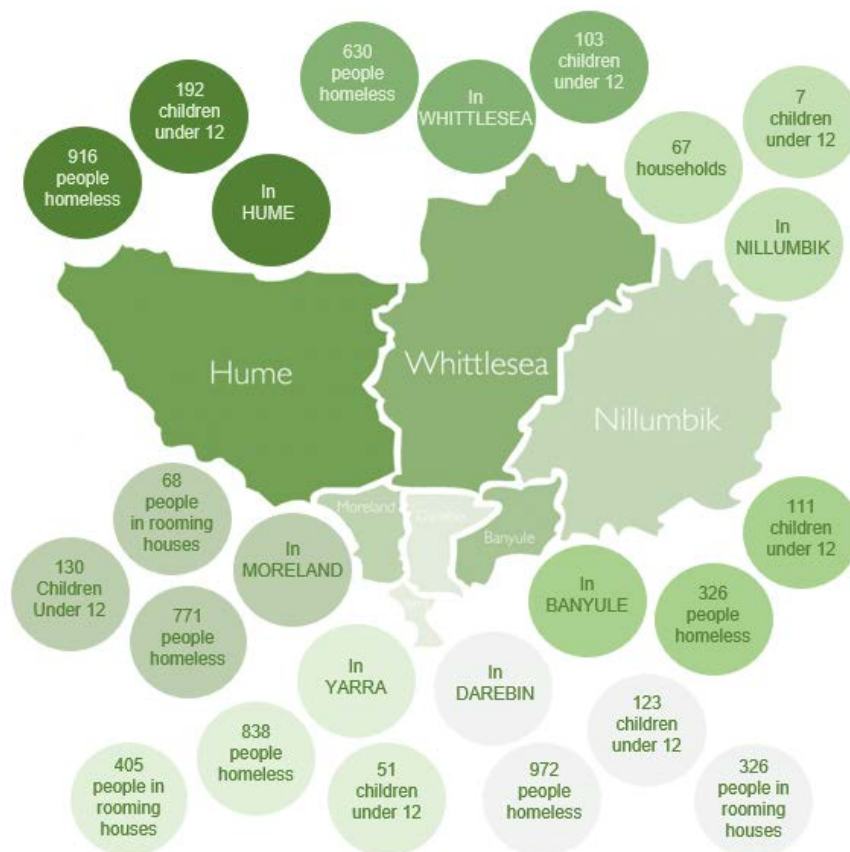


Image adapted from: <https://www.nifvs.org.au/about/the-northern-region/>

⁷ ABC, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/housing-shortage-in-victoria-as-supply-cant-keep-up-with-growth/8830596>

⁸ Greg Jericho, *The rich are getting richer – and their wealth is safe as houses*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2015/sep/14/the-rich-are-getting-richer-and-their-wealth-is-safe-as-houses>

Melbourne's housing crisis can be attributed to a lack of government support to address housing and homelessness. There is a growing number of people sleeping rough on the streets of Melbourne but this visible face of homelessness only accounts for 5% of the total number of people experiencing homelessness.

The homeless service system does what they can to provide support to the 23,062 households who presented to the services seeking assistance in 2018/19. However, the demand far outweighs the capacity to respond. The limitations in capacity to support these households is devastating. "With an Aboriginal population of 6,868 the Northern Metropolitan region accounts for approximately 14% of Victoria's total Aboriginal population."⁹ This means a higher percentage of the homeless population are indigenous and, as such, there is greater demand for culturally appropriate housing and services.

2. How does the Homelessness Service System work?

The Homelessness Service System is operating in a permanent state of crisis. The conditions of existing privately operated emergency and temporary housing are in complete disrepair and often uninhabitable. In an unprecedented move the Northern and Western Homelessness Network have resolved to boycott several underperforming private accommodation providers due to the conditions of the properties. In the northern region 3 providers offered 1,330 assists during 2018/19 at a total cost of \$268,208. These short term emergency accommodation venues can no longer be used as they are extremely poor quality and dangerous¹⁰. This means those 1,330 nights will need to be accommodated elsewhere or join the list of people sleeping rough. It is a difficult decision however the standards must be improved to be considered a viable and safe alternative.

For over a decade, the need for homelessness services has been over and above the capacity of the sector. In response to this, the homelessness service system was re-structured in an effort to better manage and respond to the demand. The intention was threefold:

1. Create a clear access points (to avoid consumers from needing to constantly retell their story to multiple service providers),
2. Create a shared and transparent needs assessment model, and
3. Create an equitable referral process to effectively manage limited resources.¹¹

The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks meet every six weeks to share information and undertake evaluation and work on operational improvement to continually evolve best practice service delivery. Once a year, the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks undertake a consumer survey in order to better understand the lived experiences and service requirements to support the evolution of best practice delivery.

The challenges experienced in the current system are detailed in the following image.

⁹ <https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/in-my-region/northern-metropolitan>

¹⁰ *A Crisis in Crisis, The appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west*, Northern and Western Homelessness Networks, 2019

¹¹ Western Homelessness Network, *Ending homelessness in Melbourne's West*, 2019, Pg.4

HOMELESSNESS PRESENTATIONS IN THE NORTH

Present to one of three access points:

Vincent Care Community Hub, Glenroy

Launch Housing, Fitzroy

Haven Home Safe, Preston

Overview:

Unfortunately, more people present to the access point services than there are appointments. This can mean waiting at the service all day. "The pressure of the numbers of people presenting is so great that appointments, which should probably be up to two hours long, are generally no longer than 45 minutes. In this time an Initial Assessment & Planning (IA&P) Worker works with the consumer to identify what they need, provides information about options and works with the consumer on a short term plan." (WN)

The role of these services is triage:

- 1.. Assessment
- 2.. Short term planning
- 3.. Referral to available resources
- 4.. Review, repeat

Getting an appointment:

People often queue prior to 9am in order to be seen, this includes people navigating other services and employment or income obligations, women and families also juggling school drop-off and other commitments. Many people miss out on appointments and must start the process again the following day.

If I have nowhere to stay:

If no appointment is available, then the reception staff will generally organise a night in local low cost private accommodation. The consumer then needs to return to the service the next day for a full appointment.

Appointment Process:

Assessment consultations should last 2 hours but due to pressure they are generally closer to 45 mins. The Initial Assessment & Planning (IA&P) Worker works with consumers to identify needs and provide information on options to establish a shortterm plan.

Emergency accommodation options:

- There are 423 government funded crisis beds across Victoria.
- Across the northern region 5204 crisis beds were required in 2018-2019
- The alternatives, low cost private accommodation and rooming houses, are an inadequate response for vulnerable people, women and children.
- These short-term stay options cost the tax payer \$1.59m to house people in the private sector.

Further support options:

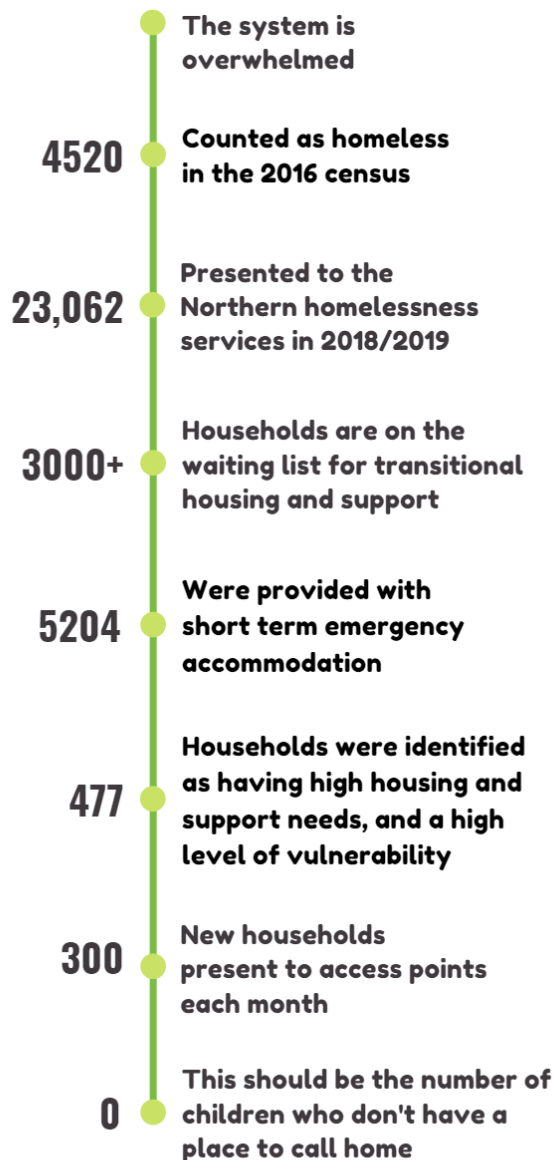
If the client needs further support (to find housing or to address anything that is impacting on their ability to maintain housing) or access to housing, their name is placed on a 'prioritisation list', awaiting referral to available resources. At present there are 477 households on the prioritisation lists in the North. Only a small portion of those presenting for assistance will be able to access homelessness case management support.

Figure: Experiencing homelessness in the North

3. The system is overwhelmed



Northern Services STATS



Every Victorian
should have a home!

Analysis of demand data gives a sense of the degree of crisis:

Homelessness has continued to rise in the north of Melbourne with an increase of 16% of households identifying as homeless since 2011 and 4520 people counted as homeless in the 2016 census.

Of the 4520 people, 16% or 717 were children under the age of 12. 72% or 3291 people were women. 32% or 1484 people were living in severely overcrowded accommodation. 46% of homeless state that the cause is family violence.

Each month in Melbourne's north

Over 300 new households
present to access points

but only approximately
25 transitional housing vacancies and
50 case managed support vacancies
are available.

Those not triaged into these vacancies
join ever growing wait lists.

In Melbourne's north in September
2019 there were 3,000 households on
waitlists for Transitional housing and
support, including:

- 2,200 children,
- 666 young people (16-24 yrs),
- and 1,403 adults.

Over half of these households had been
waiting for over 9 months.

4. What does the homelessness service sector say?

The Homelessness Service System is coordinated and client centred. There is a strong sense of joint responsibility for supporting clients. It is however overwhelmed by demand and in urgent need of up updated service coordination tools. The experience of homelessness is devastating for those individuals presenting and is extremely distressing for a workforce that is funded to respond to their needs.

The following survey was undertaken to better understand the experience and needs of frontline workers. The word clouds demonstrate the most frequent words used in their responses and highlight the sense of helplessness and permanent state of crisis which limits their capacity to meaningfully engage in the innovation and development needed.

Prevention / Early Intervention

Q. What are the key issues related to the prevention and intervening early in the cycle of homelessness?

issues_{time} affordable housing_{system} support
prevention early intervention Lack_{family} resources_{options}
services

Overview: Respondents identified lack of resources, funding and support as key issues. Lack of all types of housing from crisis options to long-term affordable housing. The government needs to invest in prevention and early-intervention without pulling funding from organisations who need to focus on crisis support. Current eligibility criteria and protocols leave many falling through the cracks and only able to access support once they reach crisis point. There is a lack of funding for mental health services, A&OD, family breakdown and support for youth experiencing homelessness to complete education including those leaving statutory care.

Q. What works well or what are your suggested solutions for prevention of homelessness and intervening early in the cycles of homelessness?

intervention_{work} programs longer term people mental health
housing_{first} support needs

Overview: Myths surrounding causality of homelessness abound and continue to hamper meaningful progress in the fight against it. Many people experience a combination of determinants that lead to homelessness but these are seldom, individually, the direct cause. Other issues such as mental ill health or A&OD use are very rarely the cause and more often a side effect of homelessness. The best method is a stable supply of appropriate housing solutions to meet a range of individual and household needs and financial capacity, including provision for acute crisis events.

Lack of Accessible, Affordable or Appropriate Housing

Q. What are the key issues related to lack of affordable, accessible or appropriate housing?

support_{enough} public_{people} housing_{lack}

Overview: The private market is not providing a broad enough range of housing. There needs to be significant investment in public housing to meet the immediate shortfall and, in the long term, a seismic shift in the delivery of housing. High density apartments do not meet the needs of most families (lifestyle &/or budget) and more affordable housing is being forced to the urban fringe creating a range of other challenges in spatial isolation and inequity in access to jobs and education. There is also a lack of creativity and diversity in how people access housing; the public and community housing sector is very small and private market is increasingly inaccessible due to unaffordable rental or purchase price.

Q. What works or what are your suggested solutions related to lack of affordable, accessible or appropriate housing?

increase_{stock} housing_{public} housing_{Build}

Overview: There needs to be a national housing strategy to address the provision of housing as essential infrastructure. Within this there must be prescribed quotas with explicit targets at the local council level. More diverse and hybrid models of finance and ownership must be explored through funded pilot projects. Statewide inclusionary zoning and better utilisation of 'Lazy Land' will help boost affordable housing stock. There needs to be stronger private tenancy laws to better protect renters. The Housing First model¹² comes highly supported as do many other international examples including Community Land Trusts and mixed tenure cooperatives.

Lack of Support to Identify Housing Options, Maintain Tenancies and Address Underlying Issues

Q. What are the key issues related to lack of support to identify housing options, maintain tenancies and address underlying issues?

mental health_{lack} housing_{needs} support

Overview: There is a lack of appropriate housing across the entire housing sector including within the public and homelessness housing sector, this makes it very difficult to find appropriately priced accommodation in the private market and to match clients with suitable accommodation in the homelessness sector. Complex needs also create barriers as there is inadequate funding available to create a coordinated response, i.e. NDIS, immigration status, trauma, and children. Lack of choice is very disempowering and puts vulnerable people at increased risk. When

¹² <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/what-is-the-housing-first-model>

appropriate housing is available it is possible and necessary to provide wraparound services to help clients sustain their accommodation.

Q. What works or what are your suggested solutions related to lack of support to identify housing option, maintain tenancies and address underlying issues?

crisis support

Overview: Respondents identified service coordination as a primary concern. Existing systems including but not limited to, Centrelink, NDIS, mental health services, and homelessness services are not well connected and fail to collectively address client needs. There needs to be more funding for people to maintain their private market housing in order to avoid homelessness and more housing for short term and crisis accommodation. Following this immediate concern however is the need for more housing and wraparound services that are client led not funding led.

Lack of Public Housing and Community Housing in New Developments

Q. What are the key issues related to lack of public and community housing in new developments?

Lack

Overview: Respondents indicated a complete lack of confidence: in government to provide support and housing; in the community housing sector to provide appropriate housing and service solutions; and in the systemic lack of will or empathy to pursue meaningful inroads to mitigate factors that lead to homelessness in the first place. The community housing sector is in addition to, not an alternative to, the public and social housing sector. At this point there are insufficient instruments to adequately manage the implementation of inclusionary zoning and the long term affordability and management of the stock. The Urban Renewal projects have resulted in an increase in pressure in the system as many tenancies remain vacant awaiting demolition. Selling off public land with a negligible increase in stock is considered ill-conceived and shortsighted.

Q. What works or what are your suggested solutions related to lack of public and community housing in new developments?

housing

Overview: It does not get more straightforward than that. All mechanisms that increase the number of dwellings reserved for very low, low, and increasingly key worker income earners, must be facilitated through the planning process and property taxation. Inclusionary zoning must be implemented at the State planning level and work in concert with a national housing strategy to ensure housing is located according to demand not supply.

Responding to Innovative Housing Solutions

Q. What are the key issues related to innovative housing solutions?

housing

Overview: Providing safe and affordable accommodation cannot be parceled off to the not for profit or community housing sector, Public Housing must be a fundamental State government responsibility. There are concerns that innovation is code for abdication by government for the delivery of housing. Private and philanthropic ventures will not be sufficient to curb the unfolding crisis. Innovation must occur across the sector with funding for pilot projects but these must be in addition to significant funding for subsequent housing development delivery.

Q. What works or what are your suggested solutions related to responding to innovative housing solutions?

Overview: From the responses to this question it is evident that sector workers on the front line have little time and capacity to ruminate on innovative housing alternatives. Though it is clear they aspire to see these emerge. There needs to be more coordination between different levels of government. A National Housing Strategy protected in legislation, well-resourced and with a robust implementation program. It is unacceptable to continue to have research, enquiries, and more reports. Now is the time for all levels of government to prioritise innovative housing solutions and demonstrate this via courageous economic and social action.

5. What do our clients say?

When you look on realestate.com.au,
when you watch “The Block” or
Grand Designs you don’t hear phrases like this
about the final product:

“Horrific/degrading; felt like a cell”

“The worst nights of my entire life.”

**“Unsafe, uncomfortable,
scared, lonely, worried.”**

Unfortunately these are the conditions
experienced when people receive crisis housing
support. For this reason many find more security
and predictability sleeping rough.

This is an unacceptable response
for men, women, and children
experiencing homelessness and
housing stress.

While this may be considered an
unfortunate but necessary step toward securing
more secure affordable housing,
the availability of transitional and long-term
housing is in equally short supply.

NECIA

“If I can just keep the
children housed and at
school things will be okay”

HANNAH

“Losing my property was
terrifying for me and my
kids. I just didn’t know
where to turn”

DANIELLE

“I am so thankful that I became aware
of this service, I didn’t know supports
were available to me. I thought I would
have to do it all on my own”

MURAT

“NDIS is hard. So much paperwork, so
many appointments, so expensive.
Without a support worker and a roof
over my head I’d be done for”

GAVIN

“I Didn’t know I was on the wrong
benefit! Wondered why I was always
getting cut off. Can’t pay rent if you
don’t have any money”

EMMA

“Leaving him was terrifying. I tried
to smooth things over so the kids
and I left. Really he should have
left the house not us”

6. Case Studies

Necia’s Story

Necia, an Aboriginal woman in her 60s was given a Notice to Vacate as the owner was moving back into the premises. She has sole care of 10 grandchildren and had experienced financial abuse from her son. Necia and her grandchildren, were in overcrowded and precarious housing.

Quote: “If I can just keep the children housed and at school things will be okay”.

How does it happen now?

- No appropriate accommodation available so placed in a beach side school camp facility.
- Children are not able to attend school regularly because schools are too far away. Negotiations with Child Protection and attend court.
- Office of Housing application completed under family violence, 10 birth certificates are required for the children.

The process under a better system?

- That Aboriginal ratios for THM allocations are resurrected in the NMR.
- That culturally appropriate long term housing is available.

- Discussion with Transitional housing providers with no positive outcome.
- Transferred to a hard to let property at the behest of DHHs Regional Director.
- Children reengage with school, sons' financial abuse continues.
- Case management begins with son.
- Support service and grandmother plan the exit back to country in QLD.

Hannah's Story

Hannah is a sole parent of 3 children. She received a Notice to Vacate her Private Rental property and had existing financial debts due to housing and other associated expenses.

Quote: "Losing my property was terrifying for me and my kids. I just didn't know where to turn".

How does it happen now?

- It is 6 weeks before she is able to see a Private Rental Assistance Program worker and in the intervening period is evicted from her property. She is forced to move in with friends.
- When assessed she is assisted with financial counselling, material aid, and assisted to complete written private rental applications.
- She applies for many properties and after 4 months finds a property but it is in a new area.
- Assisted with brokerage funds to establish the new private rental and helped to find new community links including new schools for the children.

The process under a better system?

- Real Estate Agent/ tenant seek assistance prior to Notice to Vacate being served.
- Financial counselling received
- Debts resolved
- Tenancy saved

Danielle's Story

Danielle, 21 year old, 4 months pregnant, couch surfing and sub-letting rentals with Sudanese friends. No contact with the father of the child, disconnected from family who live interstate, education and employment due to mental health conditions. Income limited to youth allowance resulted in financial hardship. Danielle was also lonely and lacked connection and belonging.

Quote: "I am so thankful that I became aware of this service, I didn't know supports were available to me. I thought I would have to do it all on my own.

How does it happen now?

Danielle found the youth homelessness service through Ask Izzy (App) and made an email enquiry through the services website.

Danielle undertook the initial assessment but the Refuge was full and there were 60 on the waitlist. *Luckily* she still had a couch-surfing option available to her and there was a support worker

The process under a better system?

Early intervention to stop Danielle falling through the cracks and becoming homeless. Community awareness on support available for young people, provided through schools, doctors, mental health providers.

Essential for this young person to have access to programs diverting Danielle out of the

available. Couch-surfing and share housing are seldom possible once a young person has a child.

Due to lack of capacity, support programs were not available to her - these programs are designed to facilitate reparative work both with the young person and their community which mitigates against them entering a cycle of homelessness.

Current status:

Linked Danielle back into Mental Health Services
Brokerage available for counselling
Exploring housing options
Parenting classes

homelessness service system and linking her into a family support program. Programs that help reconnect young people to family are often limited to those under 20. And should be extended.

Young women pregnant and couch surfing not given the parenting benefit until they have the baby means they can't make progress on finding suitable accommodation to create a stable solution prior to the baby being born.

Parenting payments must commence much earlier and should not be held up by process registering

Murat's Story

Murat, male mid 50s psycho/ social disability alongside intellectual impairment and long term homelessness, primary issue in this case is services not connecting.

Quote: "NDIS is hard. So much paperwork, so many appointments, so expensive. Without a support worker and a roof over my head I'd be done for".

How does it happen now?

Described in the sector as HEFed (Housing Establishment Fund) and left, Murat was given temporary accommodation in a low-end rooming house which does not adequately meet his social capacity and disability needs.

Murat was successfully referred to homelessness support short term and after 1 year of tireless advocacy linked with an appropriate NDIS response.

Homelessness support without appropriate budget for neuropsychological assessment and naturalisation documentation

The process under a better system?

This person requires immediate access to public housing while appropriate supports are arranged.

The bureaucracy of the NDIS process must be streamlined allowing for ease of access to free documents and assessments including neuropsychological assessment, occupational therapy assessment and naturalisation documentation.

Cases like this also require a longer homelessness support period and greater education of doctors when completing documentation following mandatory medical assessments in order to ensure the correct package is allocated.

Gavin's Story

Gavin, a single male, with a history of rough sleeping and precarious housing. He has an acquired brain injury and interaction with the criminal justice system. He presently has no income.

Quote: "I didn't know I was on the wrong benefit! Wondered why I was always getting cut off. Can't

pay rent if you don't have any money”.

How does it happen now?

Gavin was HEFed into a private rooming house and successfully referred for homelessness support but it's only short term.

His immediate legal issues were resolved and income reinstated, however he was put back on NewStart Allowance rate when he should be on DSP (disability support pension). This leaves him in a precarious housing position with no certainty and no capacity to secure private rental in the current market.

The process under a better system?

Gavin should be referred to supported emergency accommodation.

A neuropsychological assessment completed swiftly and subsequently Centrelink to take a lead and do the paperwork associated with getting him onto the appropriate income.

Centrelink and support workers must coordinate their case management to ensure timely and appropriate payments and services to mitigate against a return to the criminal justice system.

Emma's Story

Emma, 37 year old woman with 3 children, called the Police after experiencing family violence. Police attend and confirm that the father has perpetrated violence and issue a safety notice to the father.

Quote: “Leaving him was terrifying. I tried to smooth things over so the kids and I left. Really he should have left the house not us”.

How does it happen now?

The police remove the mother and the three children as the father states he has no alternative accommodation and the mother confirms she can stay temporarily with her mother.

This accommodation shortly ends, resulting in Emma and her children moving from private crisis accommodation to private crisis accommodation – at an estimated cost of over \$4000 paid by the Homelessness Service System agencies.

Emma returns to the father/perpetrator due to lack of accommodation as services state there is no additional funding available. DHHS, Child Protection, then attend the home and remove the mother and the children and make an application to Children's Court where an Interim Accommodation Order is granted.

A number of services are involved from FV (Family Violence) Services to DHHS Child Protection but none are familiar with S233A of the RTA which provides for the lease to be changed into the Protected Persons name.

The process under a better system?

Perpetrator is removed from the property and police make an immediate referral so he can access emergency accommodation.

FV support is made immediately available via L17 process.

Work commences immediately on the S233A of the RTA which provides for the lease to be changed into the Protected Persons name.

Emma and children stay safely and legally in the property.

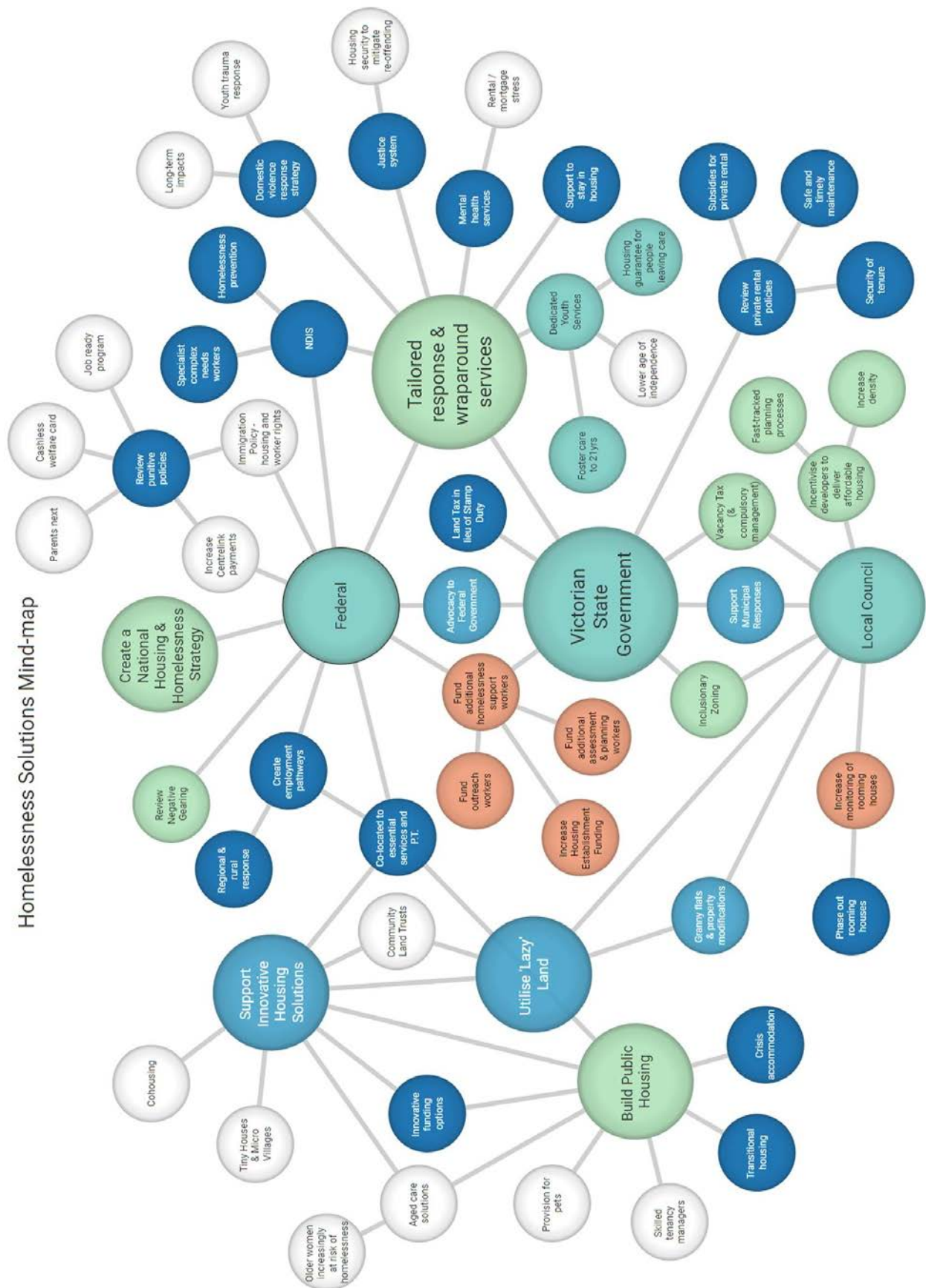
This application is finally lodged by an Aboriginal

Women's Family Violence Service to have the women and the children returned back to their primary residence and the perpetrator removed.

7. The complexity of the situation

Services are currently operating in crisis mode. In these conditions they are failing to meet demand and are afforded insufficient resources and funding to innovate in the sector.

The solutions must address all stages of housing insecurity to create a holistic response and mitigate attrition of housing security into homelessness. These include: ensuring affordable housing across the open market and addressing housing stress and insecurity; providing the conditions for innovation in the housing sector to develop and expand new models of supply and tenure; to ensure responsive services for acute homelessness events; and programs for cultural narratives that support healthy housing and relationship behaviour (i.e. eliminate family violence, embrace indigenous perspectives, reduce dependency on speculative growth as an instrument of financial security).



8. Table of solutions

SOCIAL

Unacceptable Unnecessarily complex service provision rather than housing	Solutions (Proposal & Examples) Housing First Model ¹³ providing people with the safe and appropriate housing as a priority in order to provide the safety and security for people to address, with support, other factors that may be impacting their housing stability.	Benefits (Impact / Goal) Access to housing is a necessary first step from which many others are possible. A safe and secure home-base facilitates people getting to appointments, interviews, employment, and education. If they have nowhere safe to sleep, eat, and shower everything else is a luxury not a priority.
Family Violence	Mitigating family violence through prevention programs is essential to reduce the occurrence to begin with. If FV occurs victims and their children must be provided with safe transitional housing as a pathway back to independence. Women and children who are supported are able to re-establish themselves very effectively and avoid long-term homelessness.	Families escaping FV must be in safe emergency housing (or take sole occupancy of the original dwelling if appropriate) until a long term solution is found. Staying in unsafe (often uninhabitable) conditions exacerbates trauma and can result in women returning to unsafe circumstances (better the devil you know).
Youth Homelessness	<p>No young person should be without a home. There are a raft of solutions. The first is lifting foster care to 21 years (not 18) this helps young people complete secondary education and contemplate next steps before aging out of youth support services.</p> <p>Secondary (moveable) units / studios are a good solution for backyards and other under utilised space to mitigate overcrowding and facilitate young people stay at home or in their community. (Village 21 / Kids Undercover)</p> <p>Increase and extend programs such as Reconnect and Youth Reconciliation connecting young people to parents in a new healthy relationship/extended family or significant others, allows support beyond the age of 18. These programs are beneficial for parents, families and young people and can provide new opportunities for safe and secure housing for young adults.</p>	<p>Ensure young people are adequately supported to engage in education and work, facilitating their capacity to reach their potential and not become stuck in an intergenerational cycle of trauma and precarity.</p> <p>An extended adolescents and impenetrable private housing market means leaving home is difficult to impossible for most young people. This is even more of an issue if there are other compounding factors at play, such as, LGBTIQ, mental health, experience in foster care or of family violence, A&OD use personally or by immediate family. It is unreasonable to expect young people to enter precarious housing and homelessness.</p>

¹³ AHURI, *What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?*, 2018, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/what-is-the-housing-first-model>

For the many young people for whom returning to family is not an option, to expand current housing and support models that evidenced effectiveness as well as investing in new models. Models assisting young people to access different housing/accommodation types e.g. private rental; supported transitional housing; Step Ahead model; Foyer Model; etc

Increase the number of specialist supported crisis accommodation, particularly in growth corridors and regional areas.

Establish a quota of public and social housing properties specifically for young people including young families.

Increase amount of brokerage available to young people to assist them to access and sustain private rental.

The homelessness youth allowance to be increased immediately to the adult Newstart level with the same supplementary benefits as the Aged Pension and indexed in the same way as the Aged Pension.

Indigenous representation

The homelessness and housing solutions offered are seldom appropriate for anyone, least of all for First Nations individuals and families. Cultural competence training is a must, followed by innovation in housing provision for first nations people that supports their cultural, family and community needs

Access to essential services and public transport

Everyone requires access to essential services, employment and education opportunities. Provision of 'affordable' (slightly cheaper) housing without these amenities is increasing inequality and exacerbating financial and familial stress. Congestion and commuting must be planned and in equal measure housing must be treated as essential infrastructure.

Chronic

Provision of appropriate and affordable

Culturally appropriate housing and service provision to ensure long term tenure in housing solutions rather than perpetual crisis situations. If accommodation is designed to support its occupants' lifestyles then it is more likely to be sustained and facilitate participation in other opportunities such as education, employment and community contribution.

The burden of homelessness must not be replaced with new burdens associated with spatial isolation. Public and affordable housing must be provided in places which reduced private vehicle dependence and expense. A National Housing Strategy would provide a framework for housing and community amenity provision, leveraging existing and proposed transport infrastructure.

It is predicated first on the provision

homelessness	housing as well as ongoing support programs that help support people to remain housed. Essential to stop the revolving door phenomenon of people continuously presenting to homelessness services.	of housing that is sensitive to client needs and has long term security of tenure so that other supports can be put in place to not only ensure the housing is maintained but also that people then have the opportunity to address in other challenges they face with the necessary support in place.
Mental health and A&OD	These are highly intersectional issues with significant comorbidity. Service provision needs to be far more integrated particularly where NDIS and homelessness services interact. There is an existing "Making Links Collaborative Practice Guide" (framework for collaborative work) has already been prepared but it needs to be taken up by DHHS and associated service providers, this requires additional resourcing beyond the existing capacity of the sector.	Using frameworks that foster a collaborative approach would significantly reduce time and money in the provision of services to these clients. Many of these clients wait in precarious conditions for the necessary processors to take place. This is not appropriate particularly where mental and physical health conditions make basic processes so much harder.
Funding led not client led	Client centred funding and a targeted approach to funding and service agreements.	Capacity to be flexible with funding to provide intensive support when required and reduced services as appropriate without detrimental to the client needs
Unsafe emergency accommodation	In May 2020 The Homelessness Network has agreed to only use private emergency accommodation providers on the approved list in order to ensure clients are not being forced to live in dangerous and uninhabitable accommodation.	Ensures only safe and reputable accommodation options are selected to not exploit the agencies on price or the users in safety and security.

ECONOMIC

Unacceptable Funding from all levels of government	Solutions (Proposal & Examples) Increase the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF). The sector can no longer rely on unsafe and dangerous temporary accommodation options that are, despite their condition, quite expensive.	Benefits (Impact / Goal) Enables the purchase of safe and appropriate self-contained emergency housing and reduces dependence on unsafe boarding houses. This should only be viewed as an interim solution until more appropriate long term housing is
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Access Points are under resourced to meet the demand for homelessness services

Increased regulation as well as monitoring and implementation of regulations for privately operated boarding/rooming houses. Adequate funding to provide necessary assessment and planning to ensure clients are appropriately matched to housing and services. This is the most cost effective way to address demand and ensure sustainable outcomes.

made available.

People should be able to make an appointment rather than queue. Each assessment should be afforded adequate time and result in a raft of services via a single point of contact rather than needing to constantly retell their story.

From emergency accommodation to stable long term solutions.

Victorian Government must fund housing and Crisis Accommodation Outreach Support programs. People cannot stay in temporary accommodation and are forced to continuous re-present to homelessness services. This is a waste of everyone's time and scarce resources.

Reliance on temporary and emergency beds is not a homelessness solution. It is also an expensive way to provide accommodation and services and also leads to additional costs associated with either the criminal justice and/or health services costs.

Increasing market based housing availability

Renting down:

As house prices increase so does the comparative deposit. Therefore people seeking to enter the market are renting the most affordable accommodation in order to save, this reduces the number of more affordable dwellings for people on lower incomes.

Tax strategies and incentives are significant levers in the context of affordable housing. They must be prioritised to first ensure every Australian has access to a safe and secure place to live.

Investors (negative gearing):

Incentives to own additional dwellings should not be prioritised over primary accommodation

Under utilised secondary dwellings:

Must pursue vacancy taxes to ensure that dwellings are not being under utilised

Short-term rentals:

Many cities are taxing or banning short term stay rentals to address homelessness and housing availability

REGULATION / POLICY

**Unacceptable
No set targets or prescriptive goals**

Solutions (Proposal & Examples)

The State Government must set targets and objectives for new social housing provision if we are to make meaningful progress on reducing the experience of homelessness.

Benefits (Impact / Goal)

As the population increases the rate of homelessness will continue to increase unless housing is considered essential infrastructure. A national housing strategy with state based requirements will ensure

Rent stress and eviction

Short term funding to help renters remain in private rental and enacting a mandatory process for owners and real estate agents to work with renters who are identified as at risk of eviction to access support services to help them sustain the accommodation.

supply meets demand.

Necessary support to stop people entering homelessness until more long term housing affordability solutions enter the market. These solutions must be innovated and piloted with the support of all levels of government.

Inclusionary zoning & value capture

Land rezoning under the guise of housing affordability fails to address affordability and is used to exponential increase speculative value.

All levels of government must look at land rezoning opportunities to ensure housing is provided as essential infrastructure. Selling off public housing land to private developers is the opposite to this. There have been successful pilot projects locally and internationally using the tiny house villages model to establish safe temporary and emergency housing and create the opportunity to provide wraparound support services.

‘Crisis’ accommodation

Phase out reliance on private rooming houses and motels as emergency accommodation. The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, in partnership, construct a variety of secure, self-contained accommodation options for individuals and families that are safe.

Accommodation in backyards provides a number of potential benefits; keeping families together, providing empty nesters with additional company and income, allowing people to downsize within their existing community.

Transitional accommodation

Temporary accommodation should be provided through public housing provision and through new solutions which include transportable accommodation on family or ‘lazy land’ within existing communities.

We need to transition away from the idea that homelessness is part of the housing mix and anticipate housing needs to ensure everyone has a place to call home. There is an opportunity to better utilise government land, church land, and using the airspace over municipal assets to provide social and affordable housing.

Lazy land

Victorian and Local Governments to source available land and reduce planning restrictions to facilitate innovative building options. These solutions include the installation of transportable units for temporary sites and alternative housing models such as community land trusts and community-led housing initiatives.

Homelessness is a complex issue but the solutions are actually quite simple.

We either pay for housing, or we pay for everything else.

We pay for housing, or we provide a raft of other services to address the anti-social implications of not addressing housing as essential infrastructure.

“As homes are treated as assets rather than places of survival, vulnerable families and individuals are left paying more than they can afford for poor quality homes.¹⁴”

¹⁴ Progress, date? ‘PropTech’ could exploit renters like uber does workers, pg 7
Resolving / Responding to Homelessness in Melbourne’s North
A Northern Homelessness Network Report 2019

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Attachments

Crisis in Crisis
Acronyms