While they are staying in the motel, they are all sharing a room. Facilities are limited and they have a small kitchenette to prepare food. They are expected to continue to look for private rentals and other alternatives such as caravan parks and appropriate rooming houses. This impacts their financial situation as they spend extra money on food, public transport and storage costs.

After six weeks in the motel, this family has some luck. The crisis team has managed to successfully refer them to a vacancy at Launch in Dandenong – the closest supported crisis accommodation. They are provided with Myki cards and begin the journey to Dandenong on public transport (about 1 hour and 45 minutes). The children are disadvantaged as they are taken out of school/kinder or childcare and sent to a new place on a temporary basis.

At this stage, in several situations people refuse to relocate and resort to other alternatives such as couch surfing and sleeping in cars in order to remain in their community. This may be due to part time work commitments or family that are relying on them. They may prioritise their children staying in school or may be anxious about a place they are not familiar with so far away.

The pathway from crisis accommodation such as Launch housing is into one of our transitional housing properties. In the Rosebud/McCrae area, there are five transitional housing properties for families. One family may occupy a property for over two years while waiting for priority public housing, which explains why these properties aren't readily available at the right time.

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INTERFACE COUNCILS BUDGET SUBMISSION 2020-21: SERVICE INNOVATION FUND

Pilot project: *Home as a Haven*

As part of the Interface Councils Budget Submission 2020-21, Interface Councils developed a group of pilot projects that utilise innovative approaches, such as local commissioning, to revise the service delivery model and produce more positive outcomes for people as well as long-term savings for State Government.

In September, this pilot project was presented to members of Parliament including the following MPs:

- Treasurer Tim Pallas
- Minister for Suburban Development Marlene Kairouz
- Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; Women and Youth Affairs Gabrielle Williams
- Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos
- Minister for Child Protection; Disability; Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan, and
- Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade Martin Pakula

Interface Councils is encouraged by the interim recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health and believes there is an opportunity to capitalise on them to deliver services in a way that will change people's lives and improve critical parts of the health and human services system, such as in a holistic response to homelessness. In addition, recent reports by Infrastructure Australia and Infrastructure Victoria highlight affordable housing as a key component of social infrastructure and should be considered alongside this submission.

Service levels in the Interface Councils Region (ICR) are at a significantly lower level than the average for the rest of metropolitan Melbourne.[12] The gap in local service provision equates to more than a quarter of a billion dollars, which is demonstrated in the following statistics for the region:

- There are 52.3% fewer psychologists, representing an estimated $57 million funding gap.
- There is 49.1% less family violence support, representing a $17 million funding gap.
- There is 22.3% less mental health support, representing an estimated $7 million funding gap.
- There is 13.4% less alcohol and other drugs support, representing an estimated funding gap of more than $1 million.

Project overview

The *Home as a Haven* pilot project target gaps in essential services and aim to meet the specific needs of Melbourne's outer suburban communities. One of these service gaps is homelessness. The project is an assertive outreach program helping those experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness by providing housing support and specialist homelessness services.

Intervention techniques and targetted responses will be used to support individuals get back on their feet and into secure housing. It will provide assessment, referral, casework & case management, assistance to access emergency & supported accommodation, access to laundry, bathroom and cooking facilities, early & crisis intervention, ongoing support, assistance to access health & community services, emergency supplies & food packages. It must be noted that a risk to the outcome of this project is the lack of affordable rental housing across the region.

Yarra Ranges Council and Nillumbik Shire Council were identified as ideal areas to trial this new approach because there is a significant need to address this issue from both a social and public health perspective. In

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[12] *Human Services Gap Analysis,* 2017; *One Melbourne or Two,* 2018

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total more than 1000 people are sleeping rough every night in these municipalities. Of this number, over 100 are women living alone and aged 55 and over, and 240 are people receiving the Disability Support Pension.

Yarra Ranges does not have any crisis housing, while Nillumbik Shire has some of the lowest levels in the ICR. Low income, mortgage stress and high rental costs increase the potential for a person to become homeless. According to 2016 Census data, both Yarra Ranges and Nillumbik have above average levels of households affected by mortgage stress, despite below average housing costs. The number of households affected by either rental or mortgage stress is typically highest in the most disadvantaged areas.

Timing and stage of development

The pilot project would run over a 12-month period. During this time the quantity and quality of outreach efforts will be monitored to determine improvements in individuals' health and wellbeing with the intention of reducing the number of homeless persons. This project does not request recurrent funding. It is scalable to apply to other Victorian municipalities.

Benefits for State Government

Ensuring access to affordable housing and health services is a growing concern for the most vulnerable in society. This evidence-based approach aims to drive housing reform in Victoria to deliver long=term sustainable outcomes across the sector. Research by consulting firm SGS Economics and Planning in 2017 estimated that the benefit of providing housing to a person who is experiencing homelessness in Australia equates to $25,615 per person per year, through health cost savings, reduced crime and improved human and social capital. This supports the cost involved of providing outreach services, crisis housing and social housing.

This project would provide the following benefits:

- Reduce the demand on existing homelessness services through improving the overall health of individuals
- Contribute to reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness
- Generate greater understanding of the available services
- Reduce the cost to government services by approximately $2,000,000 per annum

Social and community benefits

It is widely acknowledged that adequate housing, including the prevention of precarious housing, is a key component of health promotion or disease prevention.[13] A safe and secure home is the basis on which strong individuals, healthy families and resilient communities are built.

This project seeks to improve health and wellbeing through assertive outreach and intensive case management support services designed to engage with individuals at risk or currently experiencing homelessness. It will provide individuals with increased capability for holding onto accommodation and to seek employment opportunities by promoting the recovery model. This is a person-centred approach focused on inclusivity to empower individuals, with a strong evidence base.

It is estimated that this project will reduce the number of homeless people by 60% in the region through specific measures to improve physical health, mental health, social connectedness and overall wellbeing. When people are physically and mentally healthy, they are more likely to maintain their tenancies in their new accommodation.

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[13] VicHealth, 2011

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Partnership organisations

Anchor Housing and Support Services is the key partner to Yarra Ranges Council. Anchor would work in conjunction with other health services, such as Inspiro and Uniting Care Australia to continue to deliver this program.

In Nillumbik, Melbourne Youth Support Service (MYSS), Frontyard or Vicky's Place (Melbourne City Mission) may be appropriate partners to consider.

Costs

The total cost of the pilot project will be approximately $800,000. This will include the appointment of four homeless assertive outreach officers for a 12-month period per municipality. In addition to the salary expenses, there will be operating expense costs, supplies & on-ground costs, project management and supervision expenses.

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RESPONDING TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

CAUSE

Investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness

Factors impacting homelessness are inextricably tied to those regarding systemic disadvantage. Social, economic and policy drivers of homelessness are complex and the subject of ongoing research.

Specific demographics are disproportionately vulnerable to homelessness and are less readily able to find appropriate and affordable housing. This includes people on such a low income they are unable to compete for rental properties with people with stable employment and a good rental record. These groups of people commonly include women, single persons, sole parent families, young people, older people, people living with a disability, people living with a mental illness, refugees and asylum seekers.

Housing insecurity can affect anyone. In recent times, vulnerability to becoming homeless has increasingly included professionals, households where partners separate and people who may have a prolonged illness that impacts their ability to pay their high mortgage or rent.

Social factors

Social determinants in increasing or decreasing the prospect of homelessness include a person's social and cultural characteristics, environmental events and neighbourhood, community and demographic factors. The following social factors in particular lead to and exacerbate homelessness:

- **A lack of local services to provide early intervention for mental health conditions**
    - o Existing conditions are exacerbated when people are unable to reach basic services.
    - o Often people only seek help in desperate situations that could have been prevented.
    - o There are long wait times (sometimes in excess of three years) for social housing due to the lack of new social/crisis housing stock.

- **Domestic and family violence**
    - o This is consistently reported - by Interface Councils and other sources - as a leading driver of homelessness.
    - o Women and children fleeing from violence are particularly affected.
    - o Anchor reported family breakdown as a result of family violence as responsible for nearly half of all reported cases of homelessness.

- **Social, physical and cultural isolation**
    - o While this is a common issue among Interface Councils, each of the ten municipalities has unique demographics that must be taken into account.
    - o For example, Yarra Ranges Council has a high percentage of new arrivals who are from refugee backgrounds. Many are families purchasing in the area who may feel the effects of a lack of cultural diversity and a mature service sector in this respect, as opposed to growth area Councils such as Hume City Council with established diversity and social supports in place.
    - o Stigma and misconceptions about homelessness isolate people.

- **Mental illness and public sentiment**
    - o Stigma around mental illness & addiction and historical trauma increase individual vulnerability to be homeless.
    - o It is important to recognise homelessness can also cause declining mental health, rather than mental health being the cause of homelessness.

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- o The Interim Report by the Royal Commission into Mental Health acknowledged 'there is a growing understanding of the close relationship between trauma, poor mental health and mental illness, and increasing recognition of the need for trauma-informed mental health treatment, care and support.'[14]
- o Public misunderstanding and a lack of school-based education have a negative influence on the homeless population and surrounding conversation. This also impacts decisions about investments in new social housing as local community perceptions may come to the fore in planning decisions.

- **Cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD)**
  - o CALD communities face more barriers to accessing housing than other demographics.
  - o Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities are also disproportionately affected by homelessness in the ICR.
  - o City of Whittlesea has the greatest population of people of ATSI descent by Local Government area in Greater Melbourne (0.8% of the population compared with 0.5% of Greater Melbourne.)
  - o ATSI women are overrepresented in the homelessness population. For example, one in four women presenting at a homelessness service in Whittlesea is of ATSI descent and 14% of Victoria's asylum seeker population lives in the municipality.

- **Limited or zero crisis/transitional housing**
  - o Limited housing solutions for vulnerable communities exacerbate existing conditions.
  - o Some organisations in the ICR use money from the Housing Establishment Fund to "buy beds" for people to live in motels, caravan parks, backpacker accommodation and rooming houses because there is no other choice. These options are expensive, often unsafe and unhygienic and not suitable to meet the needs of highly vulnerable groups such as women and children escaping family violence.
  - o The quality of crisis and transitional housing is often unacceptable. Private rooming houses are expensive and can leave people with no disposable income for food, transport etc.

- **2009 Black Saturday bushfires**
  - o Weather will always have a disproportionate impact on the homeless and at risk groups, while simultaneously increasing that cohort.
  - o The ongoing environmental and social impact of the Black Saturday bushfires is still an issue for Local Councils such as City of Whittlesea, Yarra Ranges and Mitchell Shire Council.
  - o Bushfires have the potential to strip people of their housing and exacerbate vulnerabilities in both urban and rural areas.
  - o The link between natural disasters and family violence is important for the Committee to recognise. It is explored in detail in this report by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.
  - o Domestic and family violence levels increased after Black Saturday. Homelessness, unemployment and increased alcohol and drug use are characteristic of the disaster recovery period.[15]
  - o Governments and service providers need to take extreme weather conditions into consideration preemptively. This is a challenge in areas of bushland in particular, such as Yarra Ranges, where people camp in the forests.

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[14]https://rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/download_file/view_inline/2175l; p39
[15]https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-apr-2013-the-hidden-disaster-domestic-violence-in-the-aftermath-of-natural-disaster/

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Economic factors

The following economic factors lead to and exacerbate homelessness:

- **Lack of affordable housing stock**
  - This is a core driver of homelessness across the ICR.
  - There is not enough appropriate housing for the growing population.
  - There are no appropriate transitional housing solutions for those at risk.

- **Lack of coordination between services**
  - This is a well-documented driver of increased homelessness in Australia.
  - This is particularly significant regarding family violence prevention efforts in the region.

- **Private rental costs and mortgage stress**
  - On average, over 13% of households in the ICR experience mortgage stress – this is higher than the average for metropolitan Melbourne and the rest of Victoria.[16]
  - Some municipalities have even higher rates than this average, such as Whittlesea which has 19% of people (or 12,613 households) experiencing housing stress.

- **Cost of living expenses**
  - Basic costs required to live do not correspond with wages for low and moderate income workers.
  - Expenses are exacerbated by costs associated with long travel distances, which are often required to be made in private vehicles.
  - Centrelink payments do not cover housing or essential expenses such as utility bills, transport, groceries, education and medical bills.
  - Financial vulnerabilities mean people are less likely to seek out the services they need to prevent them from becoming homeless due to associated costs.

- **Lack of local and diverse employment opportunities**
  - As well as not being diverse, jobs are unstable in the region.
  - There is a lack of employment for low skilled residents and a lack of local white collar employment opportunities.

Policy factors

The following policy factors lead to and exacerbate homelessness:

- **Policy emphasis and clarity**
  - Some Interface Councils reported a lack of clear policy related to homelessness from the State Government.
  - Public health policy that prioritises early intervention, early treatment for mental health conditions and coordination between agencies is vital but is not commonplace.

- **State-owned land for social housing**
  - Victorian social housing is limited in supply and does not meet increasing demand.
  - State-owned and under-used land should be tapped into to develop new social housing applying current models e.g. Launch Housing and VicRoads.
  - There is a need for greater transparency in this area to clarify the role of Local Councils in this process. For example, as planning authorities, advocates and partners in developing new social housing on state-owned land.

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[16] *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot,* 2017; p18

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- **Development and planning policy revisions**
    - o Mandating inclusionary zoning is critical for the provision of social and affordable housing to keep up with population growth as well as the servicing of social housing tenants.
    - o There are existing opportunities in growth areas to increase the amount of affordable housing if specific provisions are included in Precinct Structure Plans and other land use planning documents and the Victorian Planning Act.
    - o There is no requirement that new developments include social/affordable/crisis housing in growth corridor developments and this is a significant missed opportunity.
    - o The reliance on voluntary S173 agreements between developers and Councils to include social and affordable housing in new developments is problematic. This only delivers a very small number of dwellings, if any, and is costly to all involved.

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RESPONDING TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

SOLUTIONS

Identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless

FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT

Residents of the ICR experience family violence at higher rates than the rest of Victoria. There is a significant lack of resources and support services to provide early intervention or prevention measures locally. Family violence data in the Human Service Gap Analysis shows there is a gap of service provision of over 49% in this area compared with the metropolitan Melbourne average.

Interface Councils acknowledges the Victorian Government is committed to implementing all the recommendations of the Family Violence Royal Commission and the interim recommendations from the Royal Commission into Mental Health. The Family Violence Reforms currently being rolled out will have a significant impact on the delivery of Child Protection and ChildFIRST services across the state.[17] However, the gap of over $27 million in family violence support centres[18] is concerning. Compounding this issue is the difficulty quantifying demand when there are very few local services to record it, or none at all.

A key point of referral and data repository for family violence response and support is The Orange Door hub. The geographical locations of the ten municipalities mean that more than one hub is needed. However, no Orange Door hubs have been established, or are in the pipeline, for the region. The impact of not having a local hub inhibits outreach capabilities and stretches the "hub and spoke" model to breaking point.

Interface Councils is advocating for an Orange Door hub to be established in the ICR at a both a group and individual Council level. IFC has met with both the Minister for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Family Safety Victoria more than once in recent months to discuss this issue further. While Interface Councils acknowledges certain services need to be in place before a hub is established, this situation poses a "chicken and egg" scenario for Local Councils with those at risk members of community suffering most.

Without adequate family violence and mental health support, there is increased risk that the most vulnerable groups in the region will more readily end up homeless. Limited services exist at the moment and increased funding, more accessible support and a holistic approach focusing on prevention is urgently needed.

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[17] *Human Services Gap Analysis*, 2017; p43
[18] Ibid; p8

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Mitchell Shire Council:
Family Violence Incidents Rate
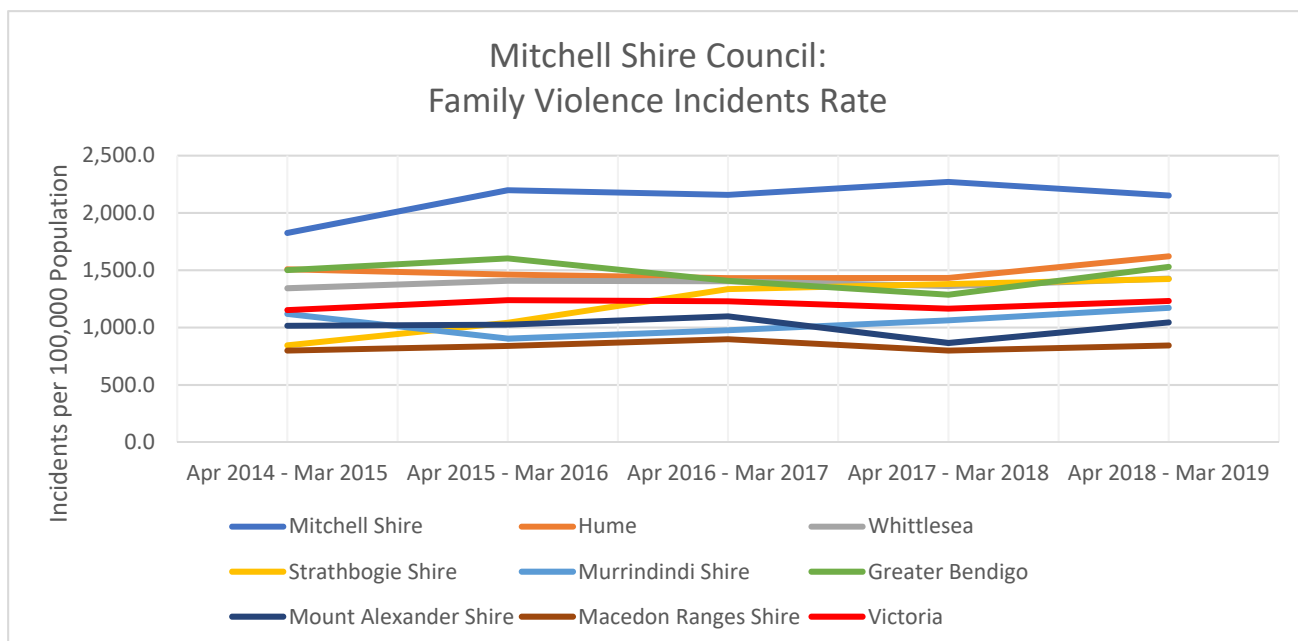
Mitchell Shire Council has one of the highest rates of domestic and family violence among Interface Councils and across the rest of Victoria, with 2,147.5 incidents per 100,000 people. This is the 11th highest rate of family violence for LGAs in Victoria, and almost double the state average.

Mitchell Shire has areas of very high socio-economic disadvantage. Notably Seymour, Broadford and Kilmore are all below the state average on the Index of Relative Social Disadvantage. Seymour is within the bottom 9% for relative disadvantage.

The graph above (supplied by Mitchell Shire Council) highlights the scale of this challenge and compares Mitchell with other Local Councils in the neighbouring areas.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND ASSERTIVE OUTREACH

Early intervention and assertive outreach are core components of an effective systematic response to homelessness. There is considerable evidence, from a local and state perspective, that shows the value of prevention services for people at risk of homelessness. As noted in this submission already, this critically intersects with the need for housing stock where people can live safely, affordably and securely.

However, the capacity for Interface Councils to support their residents experiencing homelessness is severely restricted due to insufficient homelessness services and affordable, appropriate housing, or none at all. For example, Hume City Council has the seventh highest number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria yet lacks a local access point. The closest available access point is located in Glenroy, which services a large geographical area that includes Broadmeadows in the south east, Craigieburn in the north and Sunbury in the north west. Within the larger cohort needing outreach and early intervention services, there is a big proportion of homeless and 'housing-vulnerable' residents from CALD backgrounds needing effective and culturally-appropriate early-intervention services. Increased funding for early intervention is essential to identify people who are at risk before they actually become homeless. Because a significant portion of people are in marginalised or living in overcrowded housing arrangements, more resourcing is critical to prevent the cycle of homelessness continuing in outer suburban communities in particular.

Although many individual Councils partner with a range of agencies and organisations that deliver some outreach services, there is an acute need for an increase in this type of service and for more service providers

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to be located in, and based from, Interface Councils. This is because the effects of service providers and clients having to travel long distances to and from services is a major barrier to assistance. The effect this has on residents ranges from an increased expense to not using the service at all and therefore it is common for any efforts to do with early intervention to fail.

Given the lack of localised services, the provision of outreach services would ensure local communities have more access to early intervention measures and response efforts.

Further, according to Wyndham City Council, over 50% of people presenting to homelessness services in Wyndham City do so in crisis. This is the opposite trend to other IAP services across Victoria.[19] Intervention measures such as appropriate housing advice, referrals and knowing where to go for help before a crisis point transpires are crucial.

There is an opportunity to leverage and adapt what is already working locally. The following programs and services have positively impacted local communities in Melbourne's west:

- The West Justice Mortgage Stress Program has prevented homelessness in 100% of cases in their management.
- The Geelong Project is a ground-breaking early intervention program that tackles youth homelessness by identifying the risk profiles of high school kids by using the Australian Index of Adolescent Development.
- The State Government's Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) service provides a brokerage service preventing people from falling through the gaps into homelessness and into the private rental market.
- The H3 Head Leasing Scheme not only provides Head Leased accommodation but also support to help people maintain housing and attempts to break the cycle of homelessness.
  - Within H3, a number of prevention services exist and prevent homelessness by responding, assessing and case managing clients to maintain or support their current circumstances.
  - For example, Uniting Wyndham's H3 Early Intervention Program, H3 Rough Sleepers program (outreach capacity), MCM young person's outreach program and Whitelion's outreach program.

SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND CRISIS HOUSING

An effective and affordable housing system is a fundamental component that is a requirement that urgently needs redressing to assist with the homelessness problem.

Limited resourcing across the continuum of social and affordable housing means there is an inadequate supply of solutions to homelessness in the ICR. For example, in the City of Whittlesea and Yarra Ranges Council there is no operational crisis housing at all. This can mean people are exposed to unsafe and inappropriate solutions are relied upon in times of crisis, including budget motels, caravan parks and rooming houses. Municipalities are not allocated appropriate shares of resourcing and this has led to more disadvantages socio-economic profiles over time in some municipalities. Local Councils have reported that State Government resourcing of social housing has no transparent geographical criteria, which is problematic. Once homeless individuals and families access crisis accommodation, the transition to long-term and sustainable housing is often a drawn out and difficult journey. The gap in social housing required to house people continues to grow and requires urgent action.

There is very limited youth crisis accommodation in the ICR. To access vacancies, young people often need to travel alone to places far away from their municipality and support systems. For example, in the Mornington Peninsula, young people may need to travel to inner Melbourne, Dandenong, Box Hill or Ringwood. For people

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[19] Unisons Housing Research Lab Report dated August 2018 -https://www.unison.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/6075--unison--rmit-research-report-no-1--diversity-and-complexity-(web-ready).pdf

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in Whittlesea, to access [Haven Home Safe](#), the mandatory first step to access specialist services, is located in Preston. This is extremely difficult for people to get to and requires private transport or a lengthy trip on public transport. For many, this barrier will mean they will not make the effort at all. The opening hours further prevent people from making the trip, with the service only open before 5pm on weekdays.

Although the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) enables housing payments for Specialist Disability Accommodation, there is still a deficit of this type of accommodation. Some of these potential providers approach Councils for financial assistance or land in order to make their projects viable. In Whittlesea, a recent survey of residents living with a disability found that 67% of respondents said affordability was a barrier to living in their preferred housing. In addition, 22% could not afford to live in their preferred area, 27% could not afford adequate home-based support and 18% could not afford housing with appropriate accessible design features.

Interface Councils supports the *Homes for Victorians* strategy and its whole-of-government response to addressing housing affordability and increasing the supply of affordable and social housing. However, the ICR must be treated as having unique requirements in this area and forward planning must follow accordingly.

INTEGRATED PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The social and economic factors that impact the homelessness cohort already identified in this submission are magnified by a widespread lack of access to integrated public transport. Better utilisation of our existing roads and an increase in public transport would support access to the services that assist with homelessness relief.

VAGO acknowledges historical deficiencies and underfunding in this area, which includes a lack of adequate planning in growth areas in particular. [20]

In the ICR, just over 55% of residents live near public transport. This is 40% lower when compared to middle and metropolitan Melbourne. In addition, 75% of residents travel to work, school and supermarkets by car. The congestion, and associated health risks, residents experience is a reflection of the lack of transport mode choice and hence the car-dependency in the region. Almost one in five ICR residents have a two-hour or more daily commute to work, which is higher than middle and metropolitan Melbourne. [21] These figures take on a new significance when you consider a single parent family trying to maintain a household after leaving a domestic violence situation.

In addition, the inadequate provision of bus services and routes means those who are homeless are not able to access specialist services as required when they don't own their own vehicle. Between 2006 and 2016, the shift from vehicle-based transport to public transport for Interface Councils labour force participants has been much smaller than trends observed for labour force participants outside of the ICR, whose proportion of vehicle-based travel has declined from 76% to 70%, with the proportion of public transport usage increasing from 12% to 16%. [22]

For example, Mornington Peninsula Shire has the second lowest provision of public transport per person in metropolitan Melbourne, which impacts vulnerable and socially disadvantaged residents most. 82% of the Shire has no public transport at all.

The lack of a cross-peninsula service also means that those from the Western Port side are not able to get to any other services on the Port Phillip side (i.e. Rosebud – the only office in the municipality supported by The Salvation Army Homelessness Service).

The lack of both bus and train services in the area prohibits the majority of the community to have a direct and timely link to Melbourne's CBD and other areas where there are emergency accommodation options and job opportunities. Currently, residents around the peninsula have to go to a station on the Stony Point line, which then connects to Frankston station, to get to the CBD. This service varies in frequency from one and a half to

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[20] https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/coordinating-public-transport?section=
[21] *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot,* 2017; p2
[22] *One Melbourne or Two, 2018*

two hours with limited services on weekends. This has a big impact on users, as some emergency accommodation, job opportunities or specialist services require residents to travel into the CBD after normal working hours.

In the long term, integrated transport planning is urgently needed for growth corridors, with meaningful Local Council engagement embedded into that process. Forward planning in terms of bus routes, connectivity with train timetables and improving services is necessary for new communities but is not included in State Government processes currently.

RECOGNITION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

The reach of Interface Councils across local communities is unrivalled and there are many opportunities for this to be better utilised by State Government. The group occupies a unique position as the State Government's "early warning system" because they are the tier of government closest to the community and therefore have the greatest insight into local needs. They have oversight of and administer various networks, which can be better utilised to assist with homelessness prevention and service coordination. However, in general the capacity for Councils to do this work is limited due to insufficient resources.

Support for family violence is best implemented at a local level, with local solutions and with local leaders and community at the forefront. Gender equality principles can be embedded across multiple community settings and services such as youth, kindergartens, maternal and child health, family day care and aged services to tackle one of the determinants of homelessness over the longer term. Funding to support this, and Local Council's work in partnership with others, would strengthen the ability of Interface Councils to respond.

Based on the diverse needs of individual communities (including culture, language, migrant experience, demographic, economies and geographies), state- or nation-wide strategies will get the most traction if implemented at the local level using existing services and infrastructure.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Interface Councils is committed to working with State and Federal Governments to reduce the rate of homelessness in local communities and recommends:

➢ Sustained non-partisan commitment to provide ongoing funding to drive grassroots, whole-of-population, early intervention and primary prevention initiatives. These measures must be pursued at a large scale over an adequate length of time.

➢ Appropriate national, state and local housing strategies that address homelessness and a requirement for Local Governments to conduct housing needs analyses every four years and produce a strategy with an action plan in order to meet the future needs of an expanding population. This must include appropriate funding to ensure implementation.

➢ Change the Victorian Planning Act to require mandatory inclusionary zoning in developments of scale.

➢ State Government funding to support service delivery required at a local level to assist those at risk of homelessness or those who are already homeless. Assertive outreach models should be a central tenet of this.

➢ Establish Orange Door hubs or similar coordinated access points in the Interface Councils Region. This should include access to appropriate accommodation plus preventative wrap-around services to enable appropriate first-time responses to those who need it, when they need it.

➢ Provision of services that are locally accessible and culturally appropriate for women, children, queer people, the elderly and people with a disability.

➢ Greater financial support for Local Governments in the prevention of family violence, particularly regarding early intervention and prevention measures. Consider innovative models of housing women and their children escaping family violence and implement pilot programs as a matter of urgency.

➢ A commitment to school-based programs that promote greater respect for women and gender equality that include financial literacy. For example, the Respectful Relationships program should be rolled out to all non-government schools and across early years providers.

➢ Greater accountability and regulation across the sector against recognised standards. For instance, there needs to be a commitment to reform the standard of rooming houses, and a commitment to better fund and integrate crisis accommodation with other types of accommodation. Consider setting rent caps for rooming houses to prevent exploitation by private owners.

➢ Greater value to be placed on resourcing and staff in the services sector; staff need to be recognised, professional and upskilled.

➢ Provision of adequate and secure tenure accommodations to divert families and young people away from the already overwhelmed homelessness sector.

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