

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Mr Don Stokes

Organisation Name:
Your position or role:

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this inquiry into homelessness to consider::

Public housing, Housing affordability, Services, Mental health, Family violence, Indigenous people, Rough sleeping, Employment

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :

Concerned citizen

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Submission into the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria 5 January 2020

Don Stokes

[REDACTED]

The Statistics.

Productivity Commission report:

‘Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options’ (link below)

– finds the number of low-income households in rental stress has doubled in the past two decades. The report also finds that more 600,000 households are in rental stress (spending more than 30% of income on rent).

Rent Assistance is currently \$68.50 a week for singles paying more than \$150 per week in rent. Less than half of people receiving Newstart receive Rent Assistance.

Frozen income support payments, stagnant wages and a lack of investment in public housing has led to severe rates of rental stress among low income households and excessive national homelessness rates.

The report shows that in the last 20 years, the proportion of people in home ownership and social housing has fallen, leaving more people in the private rental market, including those on very low incomes.

The number of people sleeping rough in the Melbourne city is up 70% since 2014 (ABC news report 16 March 2017)

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/renters>

The human cost

Homelessness is major contributor to mental illness, poor health, poverty, unemployment and poor access to essential services including education.

Homelessness disproportionately affects people already at risk of social dislocation, including the mentally ill, vulnerable youth, unemployed, Indigenous, disabled and refugees.

The impact of homelessness on youth is debilitating and almost always lifelong often including flow-on

generational damage.

The economic cost

The cost of homelessness to society is greater than it would cost to address it. Cost include associated health costs, including mental health.

Homeless people are more often victims or perpetrators of crime. Our prisons disproportionately house people locked up for crimes of poverty.

The impact of homelessness on youth is debilitating, and long lasting, and incurs extended loss of productivity and social dependence costs.

The 'Case for investing in last resort housing' (link below) report found investment in last-resort housing had a cost-benefit ratio of 2.7 - that is, for every \$1 spent on housing rough sleepers society would derive \$2.70 worth of benefits over a 20-year period.

Just as Homelessness perpetuates the costs to society, so eliminating it will perpetuate the benefits.

https://sustainable.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2756874/MSSI-IssuesPaper-10_Last-Resort-Housing_2017_0.pdf

The causes

There are many underlying causes of homelessness.

Poverty and the inability to afford adequate housing are central to the causes of homelessness, exacerbated by long-term or short-term unemployment, debt and other financial pressures, and housing market pressures, such as rising rental and house prices and the lack of public housing.

Financial difficulty is often accompanied by other personal or family problems, such as family breakdown, domestic violence, poor physical and mental health, substance and other addictions.

Social isolation can mean that people lack the necessary support to assist them through periods of stress and help them manage ongoing problems.

The tax system contributes to Australia having among the highest housing costs and highest household debt in the world.

Negative gearing is a major cause of homelessness through the effect of inflating the cost of residential housing, and giving investors incentive to profit from housing in an environment of inadequate regulations controlling quality of accommodation and security of tenancy.

Human rights

Housing is a fundamental human right.

Aside from Australia's moral responsibility to all citizens, as a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Australian governments at all levels are under an obligation to honour the right to adequate housing.

Public housing

The private rental market does not offer secure, affordable housing to financially vulnerable people, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness.

The security of public housing is a foundation of community participation and productivity.

Public housing offers relief from financial turmoil and gives people a base from which to find or keep paid work.

Government should invest directly in more housing for people on the lowest incomes.

Victorian Government role in addressing homelessness

The ongoing failure of the Federal Government to properly fund NewStart and Rent Assistance is a major cause of rental stress and homelessness, with the associated social and economic costs.

These costs, however, are mostly borne by the State, and could be greatly reduced if the Victorian Government properly funded emergency housing, and had an effective program of building an adequate supply of quality public housing with associated social support programs.

The State Government could also reduce homelessness by assisting the most vulnerable people as they come to the attention of relief agencies or the justice system in times of most stress, IE; people coming out of

prison, youth at risk, domestic violence victims, people suffering mental health episodes.

The State Government could take more account of the financial returns associated with avoiding social breakdown, together with taking a longer view than the political cycle, to justify a much larger budget to fund public housing construction, emergency accommodation and other homeless reduction strategies. I submit that there is no justification for homelessness in Australia, and that the Victorian Government provide adequate resources to eliminate it in Victoria, in addition making strong representations to the Federal Government to keep the safety net above the poverty line.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e11614aea2a0-202001 Homelessness submission.docx](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Don Stokes

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