Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Elaine Carbines

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,Mental health,Family violence,Indigenous people,Rough sleeping,Employment,Services

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

Are there any additional themes we should consider?
Please refer to the G21 submission

YOUR SUBMISSION
Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS
File1: 5e2a6c9ed1a67-2020-01-23 - Ms Lilian Topic re - G21 Submission re Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.pdf
File2:
File3:

Signature:
Elaine Carbines

![G21 Geelong Region Alliance logo]

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23rd January 2020

Ms Lilian Topic
Secretary
Legal and Social Issues Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Ms Topic

RE: G21 SUBMISSION RE INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA

Thank you for the opportunity for G21 - Geelong Region Alliance to provide a submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into homelessness in Victoria.
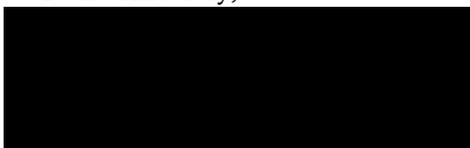
G21 - Geelong Region Alliance (G21) is the formal alliance of government, business and community organisations working together to improve the lives of people within the Geelong region across Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe and Surf Coast.

Under the G21 - Geelong Region Alliance we have brought together our region's leaders to develop a regional plan, determine regional priority projects and advocate for their implementation. We represent the voice of the G21 region and have a formal role, as the Regional Strategic Planning Committee, in advising the State and Federal Governments on regional issues and priorities.

A key priority for the G21 Board is to address disadvantage in our region and we consider homelessness to be a major contributor to the levels of poverty experienced by many in our community.

We therefore appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's homelessness inquiry and would be happy to expand on it at a public hearing.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Carbines
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

G21 is the formal alliance of the government, business and community organisations, working together to improve people's lives in the Geelong region.

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INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA

G21 – GEELONG REGION ALLIANCE SUBMISSION

About G21 - Geelong Region Alliance

G21 - Geelong Region Alliance is the formal alliance of government, business and community organisations working together to improve the lives of people within the Geelong region across five municipalities: Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe and Surf Coast.

G21 works as a forum to discuss regional issues across interest groups and municipalities resulting in better co-ordinated research, consultation and planning. G21 supports the delivery of projects that benefit the region across municipal boundaries and is a platform for the region to speak with one voice to all levels of government.

Provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness

The G21 region has seen an increase in homelessness with the 2016 Census citing a 23% increase in the number of people identifying as homeless or living in severe overcrowding[1,2]. Since the 2011 Census, this equates to an increase of 4.2% per year, more than double the rate of the region's population growth[3].

In addition, the 2018-19 homelessness service data for the G21 region identifies a 10% increase in the number of people accessing Victorian State funded homelessness services over the past 4 years, from 4,701 individuals in 2014-15 to 5,178 individuals in 2018-19[4].

Further analysis of the homelessness service data identifies that in the G21 region:
* There is a slight difference between the number of male and female clients (48% and 52% respectively)
* 16% of clients are under 10 years old
* 5% of clients are over 60 years old.

For Victoria, the homelessness service data suggests the reasons for accessing homelessness services are gendered. Family and Domestic Violence was the main reason most commonly listed by female clients (45%); Housing Crisis was the most commonly listed reason for male clients (23%). For male and female children under 10 years old, Family and Domestic Violence is by far the most common reason for seeking homelessness support (just over 50% of all clients under 10 years old).

Family and Domestic Violence remains a pervasive issue in the G21 region and a significant safety, health and wellbeing risk for women and children. The region's number of incidents per 100,000 people is slightly higher than the Victorian average with the region also seeing an increase in the reporting of Family Violence as well as Family Violence related charges laid against perpetrators[3].

In addition to those experiencing homelessness there are also households at risk of homelessness. For example, the 2016 Census identifies around 11% of all households are in housing stress in the G21 region, a slight increase from 2011.

Renters in the region experience the highest levels of housing stress, with 32% considered to be in rental stress.

This is of concern in the region because essentially a third of all renters are paying too large a proportion of their income on housing costs, rendering them economically vulnerable and potentially insecure in their housing options[5].

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

The availability of affordable housing in the G21 region is, and has been for some time, a significant issue. It impacts individuals and families wanting to enter the private rental market, those wanting to enter into Social Housing, or those wanting to purchase a home. In 2007, the *Geelong Region Plan*[6] identified affordable housing as a key issue for the region with a range of regional challenges including: the lack of affordable rental housing, a lack of housing supply for sale, increasing property values, and a lack of growth in Social Housing.

The current housing situation for the region suggests that these regional challenges still remain:
- The G21 region has seen a significant decrease in rental affordability; in some areas the proportion of affordable rentals has dropped from 90% to under 5% over the last 20 years[7].
- The G21 region has seen significant increases in house and land prices. All Local Government Areas in the region have seen at least a doubling of prices over the last 20 years, with many areas seeing a tripling or quadrupling of prices[8]. Median rents and mortgages have also increased across the region[9].
- A large proportion of dwellings in the region is considered "under-utilised", in some Local Government Areas this accounts for nearly half of dwellings[10].
- Approximately 18% of dwellings in the G21 region are unoccupied, higher than the state rate of 11%. This is largely due to a high number of holiday homes in the region's coastal areas[3].
- Social Housing stock remains inadequate to meet the projected and current need[11].

These housing challenges combined mean there are significant limitations for access to the private housing market and to Social Housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

This is likely exacerbated for those living in disadvantage. In 2016, the G21 - Geelong Region Alliance released *Addressing Disadvantage Through Affordable Social Housing* which detailed the importance of Social Housing as a means of supporting those experiencing disadvantage in the region[9]. In the G21 region close to third of renters live below the poverty line and this is notably higher for one parent families and lone households where the majority live below the poverty line[12]. This vulnerable group will have the most difficulty in maintaining their position in the private rental market or purchasing a home; they may require Social Housing as an alternative option.

However, Social Housing in the region is inadequate. According to Geelong's recently released *Social Housing Plan 2018 - 2041*[11], Social Housing stock in Geelong is approximately 4,300 dwellings, around 85% of which is owned by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). There are around 3,000 people on housing waitlists and in addition to these, the current estimated demand is approximately 10,000 people with the projected demand to be close to 17,000 in 2041. This means that Social Housing stock in Geelong is inadequate to meet demand and the region will need to deliver around 13,500 new Social Housing dwellings by 2041.

As discussed above, the private rental market has become increasingly unaffordable to individuals and families in the G21 region. Colac Otway, for example, has the highest levels of rental affordability in the region at approximately 37% of dwellings[7], however, a snapshot from recent data suggests this Shire has experienced a rapid decline, dropping from 73 affordable rental properties in June 2018 to 44 properties in June 2019[13]. With Social Housing stock inadequate and a declining stock of affordable rentals, individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness have little housing options within the region.

Colac Otway also presents an example of increasingly limited emergency accommodation, traditionally short-term options such as motels or caravan parks used for those in an immediate crisis.

A consultation with the Barwon South West Homelessness Network identified that support services in the region have seen a significant decline in emergency accommodation in the last six months due to the housing of construction workers working on major infrastructure projects. This provides an additional challenge for using the private market to provide housing options to people experiencing homelessness.

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

The G21 - Geelong Region Alliance asserts that delivering services to people who are experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, is reliant on the adequate provision of housing. Given the limitations of the private market, Social Housing is likely a key piece of infrastructure that will need investment and long-term planning.

The G21 - Geelong Region Alliance recommended in 2016[9] that all levels of government have a responsibility to develop Social Housing and that local government is a significant partner due to its ability to:

- **Assess need** – Councils have the local knowledge to map the social and economic drivers that affect access to social housing and gain a clear assessment of housing need.
- **Advocate** – Councils play a role in advocating to address disadvantage at many levels – from the state and national stage (in shaping policy) to the local situation.
- **Support local social housing providers and community groups** – Councils are positive corporate citizens in their community and routinely support housing and other community support organisations.
- **Provide preferential access to land** – Councils support the development of Social Housing through the leasing and/or transfer of land not required for other purposes.
- **Provide housing** – Councils are directly involved in providing housing in the community.
- **Provide a statutory framework** – Councils use tools such as the Municipal Strategic Statement and the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan to create a framework to support the development of Social Housing.
- **Facilitate planning and approvals** – Councils, within the confines of legislative requirements, work with providers of social housing to benefit the community.
- **Deliver community services** – Councils deliver a wide range of community, health and social support services to residents of social housing, often in partnership with community support agencies.

Working together, across all levels of government to develop Social Housing stock, will provide secure housing options for those experiencing disadvantage and vulnerable to homelessness, as well as providing short, medium and long-term housing solutions to those in a homelessness crisis. Social Housing can provide an alternative housing option to the private market, where properties continue to become unaffordable.

In order to develop further stock, a "reliable pipeline of co-investment" [9] is required, which could include:
- Direct grants to community groups to support the costs of construction and/or acquisition of land.
- Mechanisms to make underutilised state and commonwealth owned property available for development as Social Housing.
- Support to local government to facilitate the development of Social Housing on underutilised land.

The G21 - Geelong Region Alliance also recommends the Inquiry consider some of the following innovations:
- **The City of Greater Geelong's *Social Housing Plan 2018 – 2041*[11]**: as an example of a council-led, evidence-based and sustainable approach to develop Social Housing to meet current and future demand.
- **Norlane Integrated Community Development, Common Equity Housing Ltd (CEHL) and Sirovilla:** as examples of some of the different housing models in the G21 region providing secure housing for people facing disadvantage, models where private and public funding has been utilised.

Finally, in regard to the provision of homelessness services, the G21 - Geelong Region Alliance supports the best practice approach of Housing First[14] for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, whereby safe and permanent housing is the first priority, followed by the provision of appropriate services. However, such practice requires adequate levels of housing stock and it is unlikely that Housing First can be an effective strategy until the challenge of available housing is met.

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