

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Phuong Nguyen

Organisation Name:Hobsons Bay City Council

Your position or role: Acting Coordinator Economic Development and Social Planning

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::

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

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

Public sector body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

See attachment

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e327b3f1dae4-Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria - Hobsons Bay Submission - 2020 \(A3245172\).pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Phuong Nguyen



30 January 2020

Fiona Patten
Chair of Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues
Committee
E: homelessnessinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Ask for: Melanie O'Neil
Phone: 9932 1103
Our Ref: A3245172

Dear Fiona,

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. Council recognises the growing issue of homelessness across Victoria, and seeks to contextualise the scale and nature of homelessness in Hobsons Bay and the Western Metropolitan Region.

Homelessness in Victoria is a housing system issue resulting from growing housing prices, and a limited supply of affordable housing. While Hobsons Bay once provided relatively affordable housing opportunities, due to rising house prices and rents there is a growing shortage of affordable and appropriate housing in Hobsons Bay. This means households on low incomes have very limited housing choice or they may no longer be able to afford to live in the municipality. Affordable housing for those on low income may be substandard, insecure in tenure and isolated from services and infrastructure. In some cases, low income residents are at risk of, or are, experiencing homelessness.

Please find attached our submission, which recommends that State Government:

- take a leadership role to improve data standards and collection to ensure a unified and meaningful approach across local government to understand the level of homelessness and account for transit populations
- consider the introduction of mandatory planning mechanisms for affordable housing in Victoria
- increase the supply of public housing across Victoria to prevent the onset of homelessness and to allow those people experiencing homelessness to exit the cycle
- ensure new public housing is appropriate for emerging risk groups
- actively manage surplus land and prioritise its use for public and social housing.

We look forward to the outcome of this inquiry, and ongoing opportunities to be involved. For further information please contact the Melanie O'Neil, Senior Social Planning and Policy Officer, 9932 1103.

Regards,



Penelope Winslade
Director Sustainable Communities

Hobsons Bay City Council Submission: Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Local context

The City of Hobsons Bay covers an area of 64 square kilometres, extending seven to 20 kilometres south-west of Melbourne's central business district, and is home to approximately 96,470 residents. It is difficult to measure in full the number of people at risk of / or experiencing homelessness in Hobsons Bay. There is no specific data available to Council on how many residents within Hobsons Bay are on the Victorian Housing Register however, there has been an increase in the number of households on the Register across Melbourne's west. As at September 2019, there were 4,251 'priority access' social housing applicants on the Victorian Housing Register in Melbourne's west¹. This has grown from 3,871 in September 2018. Those on the priority access are likely to be experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

It is also difficult to measure the portion of Hobsons Bay's population that is experiencing homelessness due to the difficulties in measuring homelessness through Census data. Census data does not capture hard to reach populations, transit and seasonal fluctuations. Inner-city councils perform street counts annually to measure the number of people sleeping rough. However, homelessness is not only represented by rough sleeping, it is also represented by people living temporarily with family or friends, in severely crowded dwellings, in emergency or supported accommodation for the homeless, or insecure tenancies. Within Hobsons Bay, there is anecdotal evidence from a local homelessness service that there may be a small transient population temporarily living in the municipality not accurately accounted for in the Census. Council is committed to more fully understanding the level of homelessness in Hobsons Bay including the drivers and types of homelessness as outlined in our social policy - A Fair Hobsons Bay for All². To better measure the size of homelessness across the western region and Melbourne as a whole, a unified and meaningful approach is required.

Recommendation:

- State government take a leadership role to improve data standards and collection to ensure a unified and meaningful approach across local government to understand the level of homelessness and account for transit populations.

¹ Victorian Government. (2019). Victorian Housing Register. Retrieved from <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register>

² Hobsons Bay City Council. (2019a). A Fairer Hobsons Bay for All. Retrieved from <https://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/council/policies/social-policies-amp-plans/a-fairer-hobsons-bay.pdf>

Factors impacting homelessness

Financial stress and lack of suitable housing

In 2016, 8.4 per cent of Hobsons Bay households experienced mortgage stress and 23.9 per cent experienced rental stress. 'Housing stress' applies to households with incomes in the bottom 40 per cent, who also spend 30 per cent or more of their income on housing. As a result of financial stresses, many households have a very limited budget to purchase other essential items such as healthy food, access health services, or participate socially.

The cost of housing in Hobsons Bay has increasingly become a barrier for low income households wishing to rent or own a home in the municipality. There is a shortfall of affordable private rental dwellings resulting in many low income households seeking social housing. However, there is also an inadequate supply of social housing due to a lack of new public housing and varying success when negotiating with private developers to include affordable housing within their developments. The provision of more public and social housing will ensure rents are set at affordable rates for very low, low and moderate income households and provide greater certainty of tenure. Public and social housing has the ability to reduce the likelihood of people becoming homeless.

Emerging risk groups

Younger and older Australians have emerged as groups experiencing increasing levels of homelessness in Australia. The North and West Homelessness Networks identifies family violence, poverty and mental health as major contributing factors to homelessness, however they report people remain homeless due to a lack of affordable housing³.

Of those experiencing homelessness in Hobsons Bay, 1 in 4 were aged between 12 and 24⁴. There are concerns that this figure may be underreported for young people due to the prevalence of couch surfing and their reluctance to disclose to their friends that they cannot return home⁵. Furthermore, service providers within Hobsons Bay that support young people and women escaping family violence have shared anecdotal evidence of increased demand for their services. Housing must be appropriate and safe for those in emerging risk groups.

³ NWHN. 2019b. Melbourne's Housing Crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.nwhn.net.au/Homelessness-in-North-and-West-Melbourne.aspx>

⁴ ibid

⁵ ABS. (2018). Youth Homelessness. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Main%20Features302016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view=>

Policy factors impacting homelessness

Policy targeting housing affordability, such as the First Home Loan Deposit Scheme and HomesVic Shared Equity Initiative, are aimed at first home buyers without specifically targeting very low and low income earners. These types of policies often create additional demand for housing without ensuring supply of appropriate housing. These policies do not assist those who are at risk or are already experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness solutions are often reactionary and fund emergency responses including rooming houses and low cost hotels without breaking the cycle of homelessness. In some cases, emergency accommodation can increase mental and physical health risks due to unsanitary conditions and the threat of violence⁶. There are housing models across Europe and Canada that provide long term solutions under a housing first model. This model delivers stable housing on a rights basis rather than on condition of an individual meeting requirements such as discontinuing use of alcohol or other drugs. The basic underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed⁷.

Recommendation:

- State Government increase the supply of public housing across Victoria to prevent the onset of homelessness and to allow those people experiencing homelessness to exit the cycle.
- State Government ensure new public housing is appropriate for emerging risk groups.

Local policy addressing affordable housing

Council's Affordable Housing Policy Statement aims to create more affordable housing within the municipality to assist those at risk of homelessness and to provide an option for those experiencing homelessness to exit the cycle of homelessness. Affordable Housing has the ability to prevent the onset of homelessness.

Council aims to create affordable housing through a number of actions:

- advocate for changes to the State Planning Policy Framework to provide explicit support for affordable housing in planning as requested through recent letter from Mayors across Melbourne⁸

⁶ NWHN. 2019a. A Crisis in Crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.nwhn.net.au/Crisis-in-Crisis.aspx>

⁷ Homeless Hub. 2019. Case studies. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-first/case-studies>

⁸ Hobson Bay City Council. (2019b). Council submissions. Retrieved from <https://www.hobsonsabay.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/council/advocacy/submissions-2019/joint-mayor-letter-to-minister-for-planning-affordable-housing.pdf>

- voluntary negotiations with developers to include affordable housing within developments
- the creation of the Hobsons Bay Affordable Housing Trust to provide a method to collect, hold and manage assets such as land, money and buildings, including contributions from developers
- seek asset transfers of surplus Victorian Government land within Hobsons Bay to the Hobsons Bay Affordable Housing Trust for the purposes of increasing the overall supply of affordable housing
- seek productive partnership with the Hobsons Bay Affordable Housing Trust and the Director of Housing to ensure there is no future net loss of the estimated 990 public housing dwellings in Hobsons Bay

Recommendation:

- State Government consider the introduction of mandatory planning mechanisms for affordable housing in Victoria.
- State Government actively manage surplus land and prioritise its use for public and social housing.