

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Jess Pomeroy

Organisation Name:Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic)

Your position or role: Policy & Projects

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::

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

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

A peak body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

The theme for public housing should be expanded to include community housing as well.

Supply of social housing

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e33c082af967-CHIA Vic submission Homelessness in Victoria Jan 2020.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Jess Pomeroy

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Submission by the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria

CHIA Vic welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee for consideration in the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

CHIA Vic is the peak body that represents the not-for-profit community housing sector in Victoria. CHIA Vic's member community housing organisations (CHOs) are committed to providing secure, affordable and decent housing for people on low to middle incomes. Members include the 38 CHOs registered as housing associations or housing providers under the Victorian regulatory framework for non-profit housing organisations, plus other organisations and individuals interested in housing.

Background

The terms of reference for this inquiry are broad, including: the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria; the social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and the policies and practices that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

CHIA Vic believes that the first two issues have been well covered by the research undertaken by AHURI and other homelessness bodies such as Council to Homeless Persons/Homelessness Australia. Two publications that would be worth reviewing are AHURI's 2016 review of the homelessness service system¹, and their recently published report on the changing geography of homelessness².

It is our belief that the scale and the factors impacting on homelessness are well known within the housing and homelessness sectors and researchers working with these sectors. We would encourage the Committee to engage with this research in the course of this Inquiry.

CHIA Vic has chosen instead to focus our submission on what we see as the four key areas required for an effective response to homelessness. These are:

1. Growing the supply of affordable housing
2. Increasing the funding for supports to enable intensive wrap around supports for people at risk of homelessness
3. Providing housing and support options for people who cannot sustain their tenancies without a high level of on-site support
4. Ensuring that the housing and homelessness system has a culturally responsive approach to working with Aboriginal clients.

¹ Brackertz, N., Fotheringham, M., and Winter, I. (2016) *Effectiveness of the homelessness service system*. AHURI Research Report for Housing and Homelessness Senior Officers Network, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/10629/Future-homelessness-reforms-and-funding-AHURI-Research-Report.pdf

² Parkinson, S., Batterham, D., Reynolds, M. and Wood, G. (2019) *The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016*, AHURI Final Report No. 313, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/313>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-5119601.

Grow the supply of affordable housing

CHIA Vic recognises that building new social and affordable housing is not a short-term solution. However, a key factor contributing to homelessness in Victoria is the lack of affordable housing for people on low incomes. Policy responses that do not attempt to address the availability of housing will ultimately fail to achieve the objective of ending homelessness.

Of the 112,900 clients assisted by Victorian homelessness services in Victoria in 2018-19 only 3 in 10 clients who were homeless were assisted into housing, and a greater proportion of clients in Victoria (58%) needed accommodation compared to the national average (49%).³

The Anglicare Victoria Rental Affordability Snapshot for 2019 found that only 274 rental properties across the whole of Victoria were suitable for at least one household type living on income support payments without placing them in housing stress. Within metropolitan Melbourne this dropped to 83 properties, or 0.6% of all available rentals.⁴

There are two ways to ensure that more housing is affordable to low income households. One is to increase their income through greater income support, which is what the Raise the Rate campaign is advocating for. An increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), or a Victorian supplement to CRA would also assist in raising the income levels of our most vulnerable citizens.

The other response is to increase the supply of affordable housing, by funding the creation of more social housing.

In 2018-19 Victoria spent the least amount per capita on social housing, \$92.02 per Victorian. This is just over half of the national average (\$159.10 per person)⁵. We also have the lowest level of social housing across Australia, 3.2% of our housing stock compared to 4.6% nationally⁶. However, Victoria's population is growing faster than any other jurisdiction, with an average increase of 125,000 people per year forecasted to grow the population to 11.2 million people by 2056.⁷

Action is urgently needed to grow the supply of social housing in Victoria, not only to catch up with the rest of the nation but to keep pace with our rapid population growth. Recognising that each year we do nothing we are making the problem worse, CHIA Vic and the other housing and homelessness peaks in Victoria have been calling on Government for several years now to commit to a supply target and grow the supply of social housing

Targets are more than symbolic. They provide focus and establish a platform for review and accountability. CHIA Vic suggests that the right target is to match the national average of social

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) *Specialist homelessness services 2018–19: Victoria fact sheet*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, [AIHW Specialist homeless services annual report 2018-19](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness/specialist-homeless-services-annual-report-2018-19)

⁴ Anglicare Victoria (2019) *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, Anglicare, <https://anglicareras.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/victoria.pdf>

⁵ Productivity Commission (2020) *Report on Government Services*, Housing data tables, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2020/housing-and-homelessness/housing#downloads>

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). *Housing assistance in Australia 2019*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2019>

⁷ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2019) *Victoria in Future (2019) – Population Projections 2016 to 2056*, Melbourne, <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/land-use-and-population-research/victoria-in-future>

housing of 4.5% in 10 years. Based on research undertaken by CHIA Vic⁸ this means we need to deliver approximately 60,000 community and public housing dwellings within the next 10 years and at least 5,000 of these need to be designated for Aboriginal people in line with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. While this figure is daunting we believe that it is possible. There are many overseas and local examples where community housing sectors have successfully geared up to deliver large growth programs in partnership with Government.

The Social Housing Growth Fund initiative launched as part of Homes for Victorians is a good start but will not be enough to meet these targets.

Government needs to commit significant funds to meet these targets, and CHIA Vic strongly encourages them to consider borrowing to fund this investment. Investment in housing delivers a range of benefits over time including:

- Greater social inclusion through the creation of safe and healthy communities
- Increased economic participation through housing stability and access to employment opportunities in the labour market
- Generation of strong financial returns in the form of rent and capital gains.⁹

The Victorian government has committed to increasing the level of state net indebtedness in order to grow the economy and ultimately benefit all Victorians through a higher standard of living. Quality, affordable housing will provide the platform for an improved standard of living for the most vulnerable low income households.

At a time of great shortages of affordable housing in the state, there could surely be no better candidate for a portion of the state's additional indebtedness than new social housing, especially as the public housing stock — valued at \$26b — is debt free.

Given the significant number of properties required to meet demand, growing the supply of social housing needs to be a whole of government approach. There are a range of departments involved in planning and funding social and affordable housing, many of whom are already doing work in this space. However a solution to the homelessness crisis requires all of them to work together in an integrated and coordinated response.

Increasing the funding for supports

Homelessness supports are an essential part of the solution to homelessness. Not only do they assist homeless people to find housing, if brought online before someone becomes homeless support workers can work with clients to ensure that they are able to sustain their tenancies.

The cheapest and most effective response is to prevent someone from becoming homeless in the first place. However, due to insufficient funding and a lack of coordination the current housing and homelessness system in Victoria often does not respond until someone is homeless or on the verge of homelessness. This is not acceptable.

⁸ CHIA Vic (2016) *Quantifying the shortfall of Social and Affordable Housing*, Melbourne, <https://chiavic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CHFV-Housing-Needs-Estimates.pdf>

⁹ Infrastructure Victoria (2016) *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, Melbourne, https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/IV_30_Year_Strategy_WEB_V2.pdf

We need system reform to create alignment between housing and supports, ensuring tenants can access the supports they need to stay housed. This includes not just tenancy support services, such as Tenancy Plus, but also mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and other allied support services.

We need a system where a range of supports can ‘wrap around’ a household at risk of homelessness, acting to stabilise the tenancy and address the issues that caused it to become at risk in the first place. When adopted early enough this will act to reduce the number of households falling into homelessness in the first place.

Not only do we need alignment between housing and supports, we also need a significant increase in funding for support agencies to ensure clients get support when they need it and for as long as they need it. Increasing investment in preventative measures will have the added benefit of driving savings in health, justice, education and employment budgets.

The most effective approach to providing preventative supports as described above is outcome-based and includes case-management that is culturally relevant, individualised, strength based, and person-centred.

There are a range of individual programs doing excellent work of this nature with their clients but they are not available everywhere.

Similarly there are good reform initiatives being pursued under Victoria’s Homelessness and rough sleeping action plan, but they are not available to everyone who needs them.

With an average of 105 requests for assistance turned away each day¹⁰ by specialist homeless services across Victoria, and homelessness workers reporting that they often spend their time simply trying to find housing rather than helping clients address the underlying issues that led to being homeless it is clear that any effective response to the homelessness crisis in Victoria is going to require a concerted, coordinated effort across multiple sectors as well as government, and a significant increase in funding for supports.

Providing supportive housing for high-need cohorts

Making wrap around supports available to anyone who needs them will assist the majority of households to sustain their tenancies. However there is a small cohort with multiple and complex needs that will require permanent support to sustain their housing. Historically, many vulnerable individuals requiring this level of support would have been housed in institutions which have been closed due to inadequate quality of care, and which have not been adequately replaced.

Permanent supportive housing in Australia has tended to focus on the most vulnerable chronically homeless in the community. This includes people with long-term or multiple episodes of homelessness, as well as those with disabilities, mental illness or substance misuse disorders.¹¹ Supportive housing models can be provided either in a single location with supports on-site (e.g. a Common Ground type of set up) or at scattered sites with outreach support.¹²

¹⁰ AIHW (2019) *Specialist homelessness services 2018–19: Victoria*

¹¹ Parsell, C et al (2015) *Brisbane Common Ground Evaluation: Final Report*, ISSR Research Report, Brisbane, <https://issr.uq.edu.au/files/4003/BrisbaneCommonGroundFinalReport.pdf>

¹² Council to Homeless Persons (2018) *Housing First*, Melbourne, <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-180606-Housing-First-2018-6-June.pdf>

For those tenants unable to sustain their tenancies without a significant level of on-site support, models such as Common Ground provide an effective housing response. They build in the supports and structure onsite that tenants may need to address the causes of a person's experience of homelessness and to reduce the likelihood of a tenancy failing. The key principles underpinning Common Ground are:

- stable and affordable housing;
- safety;
- accessible and voluntary support services; and
- tenant independence.

By removing barriers to supports, allowing clients to access supports when they want them, and creating a safe and secure home environment for residents through a 24 hour concierge and security systems these programs create an environment where clients with complex needs can find stability and begin to make life improvements in a range of areas.

Common Ground and similar single-site supportive housing programs have been found to be very effective in sustaining housing for people with complex needs and a history of homelessness^{13,14} Furthermore, by reducing service use of a range of state-funded services, these programs can generate significant cost offsets across state government.¹⁵

Even in an environment where sufficient funding for wrap around support services is available there will remain a small cohort of people who require housing with onsite support and security, who are unable to sustain their tenancies without this framework.

Victorian examples of the Common Ground approach include Elizabeth St Common Ground, operated by Launch Housing,¹⁶ and the Queen Street Rooming House Plus Program operated by Community Housing Limited in partnership with Sacred Heart¹⁷.

A culturally responsive approach to Aboriginal housing and homelessness

In line with the principle of self-determination CHIA Vic is committed to supporting the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. The Framework was funded by the Victorian Government and developed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria in partnership with the Aboriginal community in Victoria between 2018-2019. It will be launched in early 2020.

The work that informed the Framework identified that the Victorian Aboriginal community is fast growing, experiencing complex historical disadvantage, and has the highest and fastest growing rate of people accessing specialist homelessness services in Australia.

¹³ Parsell, C et al (2015)

¹⁴ Launch Housing (2015) Elizabeth Street Common Ground 5th Anniversary, Melbourne
https://www.launchhousing.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/LH_ESCG_booklet_04.pdf

¹⁵ Parsell et al (2015) p.148

¹⁶ <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/service/elizabeth-street-common-ground/>

see also https://www.launchhousing.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/LH_ESCG_booklet_04.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.sacredheartmission.org/seek-help/housing-support/rooming-house>

Safe secure housing is the foundation of any solution to Aboriginal homelessness, with all other investments likely to be ineffective without it. The overarching vision of the Framework is for every Aboriginal person to have a home.

Growing the supply of housing for the Aboriginal community is essential. The fast-growing Aboriginal population will drive demand for an additional 27,000 dwellings by 2036. Of these at least 5,000 must be social housing units, and these figures will merely allow Victoria to maintain the status quo.

The Framework emphasises that current homelessness cannot be seen in isolation from historical government policy. Intergenerational dispossession from land and culture and the removal of children have resulted in the very high level of disadvantage now experienced by Aboriginal Victorians.

In response the Framework proposes a target of a 10% reduction in Aboriginal homelessness, compounding each year for 10 years.

The Framework sets out a number of principles, including those listed below, that relate directly to addressing Aboriginal homelessness in Victoria. We believe that these should be incorporated into any response to Victorian homelessness:

- A housing and homelessness safety net that provides Aboriginal clients with dignity, respect and quality of life;
- A housing and homelessness system that is accountable to the Aboriginal community through transparent, disaggregated public reporting of outcomes for people who seek assistance;
- An easily accessible housing and homelessness system which is responsive to Aboriginal housing needs and understands their connection to land, culture and family networks;
- A system that uses housing as a platform for other services, building on individuals' community strengths to deliver people-centred outcomes that break the cycle of disadvantage; and
- A system that builds the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to upskill, create critical mass for development and engage in productive partnerships with the mainstream.

A culturally responsive homelessness system would need to create clear entry points for Aboriginal people and provide tailored support for those at high risk. Whether accessing services through an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation or a mainstream organisation Aboriginal Victorians should be able to easily access culturally safe and appropriate support as and when they need it.

Recommendations

Growth

- Set a target for social housing growth in Victoria, ideally at least 6,000 dwellings per year which should include 500 dwellings each year specifically for Aboriginal people
- Commit to funding social housing, through borrowing if required
- Identify whole of government opportunities to leverage funding, such as:
 - working with the planning system
 - providing government land for social housing developments

- leveraging all major infrastructure developments
- building support within key government departments such as the Valuer General and related entities such as Development Victoria

Supports

- Commit to reforming the support system to ensure better integration and coordination between housing and support, and between support agencies working on different issues
- Increase the funding available for tenancy-related supports to ensure clients can access support when it is needed, and for as long as is required

Supportive housing

- Assess the level of need for permanent supportive housing across Victoria
- Fund the development and delivery of supportive housing programs as required

Meeting the needs of Aboriginal people

- Create clear entry points for all Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of homelessness through a networked and culturally safe mainstream and a capable and resourced Aboriginal Community Controlled sector
- Provide better access to affordable and social housing including funding the development of 5000 additional social housing units for Aboriginal people by 2036
- Set a target of reducing Aboriginal homelessness by 10% a year, compounding each year
- Support the development of culturally safe mainstream homelessness and housing sectors
- Support the development of strong and capable Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that deliver housing and homelessness services alongside access to broader services that support sustained tenancies and pathways to improved life outcomes.
- Foster strong partnerships between mainstream and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Build a housing and homeless system based on respect and self-determination for Aboriginal people.