

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Jen Pollard

Organisation Name: Central highlands Creating Connections Youth Homeless Practitioners Hub

Your position or role: Appointed representative of CHCCYHPH

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, Employment, Rough sleeping, Indigenous people

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

An advocacy body , Working in Homelessness services

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Youth issues

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

We have taken considerable time highlighting issues, please give these views your consideration

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e5332d404d35-Submission One.docx](#)

File2: [5e5332d4068cf-Submission Two.docx](#)

File3: [5e5332d406abd-Submission Three.docx](#)

Signature:

Jen Pollard

There needs to be adequate investment in public and community housing stock for those who need it most. In Ballarat, we are experiencing very little movement from transitional and crisis managed housing to social housing. Anecdotal evidence from DHHS suggests that this is because of the allocations process within DHHS whereby only one allocation in every three is offered to the homeless with support category.

Housing affordability is a major issue; a person who is reliant on Centrelink or is underemployed cannot afford the cost of private rental. We believe there should be incentives to landlords to encourage an applicant to be successful – such as rent capping or subsidised rent from the government.

We also believe that the rate of Newstart allowance needs to be increased. Current private rental vacancy rates in Ballarat are at 0.8%, making the market much more competitive and out of reach for our clientele.

Homelessness requires a Federal and State response. A long term plan needs to be developed in consultation with peak bodies (CHP) and key stakeholders, reviewing overseas responses to homelessness in areas such as Scandinavia and European countries.

Additional foyer type accommodation and support options for young people would be advantageous with fewer rigid criteria for entry.

A lack of housing is one of the major reasons why people become homeless. There are limited options for single adults to overcome homelessness – is there scope to invest in helping people purchase or rent a tiny home? Could the rent paid be considered as a payment towards owning the property?

Housing first models means to end homelessness, not to manage homelessness. This is by providing permanent housing and needs-based support to people. Housing First has the potential to save money in the long term. Secure housing provides a platform for the person to improve their wellbeing.

Programs such as Journey to Social Inclusion and Assertive Outreach (Street to home, Ballarat) and Haven offer programs that benefit our clients.

Journey to Social Inclusion program; is an outcomes based funding mechanism bringing together government, sacred heart mission, philanthropy and investors. They

work with people for three years to settle into a home and slowly work towards independently staying in their home.

Street to home; Offers case management and assertive outreach to assist people who are experiencing chronic homelessness to access and sustain housing and services.

Haven; Home, Safe owns and manages a range of long-term affordable rental properties right across Victoria for people on low to moderate incomes. Haven work with individuals, families, support agencies, and government to meet specific housing needs.

Rents are offered at discounted rates with tenants receiving a discount off the market rent based on their household income.

Personal experience in the Homelessness sector in the past five years has seen accessing all forms of housing at an all time low.

Some of the contributing factors are noted below:

- Lack of affordable housing across the board: DHHS and other Government and Community Housing not able to increase stock to meet community need/increasing population. People moving from Melbourne areas into regional areas due to high rent prices. This in turn forces regional rent prices up and increases the number of people applying for any Private Rental properties that are available;
- Families who have been 'lucky' to be placed in Transitional Housing Management are stuck for months to at times years in what traditionally had been housing for a few weeks or at most a few months as access to all other forms of 'affordable' housing including DHHS housing has all but dried up;
- Housing not affordable for people whose income comprises solely of Centrelink Independent youth allowance or Newstart or part time/casual work with limited shifts/hours;
- Private rentals become unaffordable for families who may have children removed for a variety of reasons often this is not permanent. However, the parent loses the Centrelink FTB payments and as a result cannot sustain the cost of the rental property and therefore becomes homeless;
- Not uncommon for clients to advise at least 50 other attend open inspections for rental properties. Maximum I was advised of was 200+ attending an open inspection;
- Regularly advised by clients they have applied for 100+ properties – many still without success;
- Renters stuck in substandard PRs often without heating due to lack of PRs available;
- Homelessness used to be 'inconvenience' for a few weeks. Over the last few years it has increased to months/years of couch surfing, staying in unaffordable motels with co-payments by the local agency subject to their funds not running out, living in cars, caravans, tents, etc;
- Change of allocation by DHHS to priority transfers. This has literally stopped any allocation to approved Seg 1 Homeless with Support clients and Older persons approved Seg 1 Homeless with Support clients;
- Closure of institutions without putting anywhere near sufficient accommodation options in place (short, medium and long term) for people who do not have the capacity to live independently has had an impact on homelessness and placed added pressure on accommodation providers;
- The rise of recent years of Air BnBs has also had a detrimental impact on Private Rentals remaining in/coming into the market.

Since the Family Violence Commission initiatives have been implemented, Seg 1 priority homelessness applications have been reduced to 1 allocation for every 3 applicants. Effectively; Priority Family Violence transfers have taken any available housing that was previously available to our clients. Robbing Peter to pay Paul!!

In the past, we were able to gain housing for single mothers within 18mths. Currently it has been over 3yrs with no housing in sight. There are no exit points for clients, as they are unable to afford private rental and must compete with applicants who are employed and therefore do not get considered. Clients are staying in our programs longer, with nowhere to go and therefore not releasing accommodation for new clients to be supported.

If our clients are fortunate enough to secure private rental; they do so at the cost of being put back to the general list for housing which doubles the waiting time. This does not mean they can afford private rental; it means they go without basic items to keep a roof over their head. They struggle with utility costs and need to rely on emergency food services to eat.

We have supported clients after they have handed their keys back to Office of Housing due to conflict with neighbours only to find themselves with no where to go. Office of housing accept the return of keys at end of tenancy; no questions asked. It would be beneficial if a housing support service could offer an intervention that assists them to remain where they are and find a resolution to the problem rather than fleeing.

Our program can only offer limited support after client has exited. There is not enough time to allow the client to settle in and alleviate any problems that may affect the success of the tenancy.

If a client has an Office of Housing debt; they are unable to pay it back through Centrepay. They have to take a bar coded card to the post office and pay the agreed amount each fortnight. This means the client has to decide if the debt is a priority amongst their fortnightly costs; more often than not this results in no payment. When they do not address their debt, Office of Housing may offer them housing, but it becomes an ongoing debt with them. A deduction through Centrepay would give them an easy option to repay debt and reduce the debt before they get offered housing.

Office of housing does not offer ongoing support for tenancies; resulting in considerable damage to property, extra persons residing at property, single mothers whose children have been removed remain in family properties, persons living in public housing who have increased their income, can afford private rental but choose to stay in cheaper housing. The only reason a person is evicted from public housing is if they do not pay!! Warnings are given for breach of 'neighbourly behaviour statement' rarely result in eviction.

There is a huge shortage of single bedroom housing; partly due to the cost to build plus the resale on property.

NDIS has proven to be another barrier to housing for our clients. Without a dedicated disability support service, clients are struggling to gain housing dedicated to their needs. Trying to get support for our clients is a minefield of paperwork with no guaranteed outcome.

Government could consider purchasing motels that are for sale or closed and rezoning them for social housing. Centacare have a program called Mitchell Apartments that has converted motel rooms into individual units for clients with a live in Manager. This has proven to be a successful model.