

## Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Mrs Janice Lane

**Organisation Name:**City of Greater Geelong

**Your position or role:** Manager, Healthy Communities

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

**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:**

The submission from City of Greater Geelong is provided as an uploaded file.

**Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:**

### FILE ATTACHMENTS

**File1:** [5e69755e3ee98-Submission - Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria - Final - Feb 2020.docx](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Janice Lane

**THE CITY OF  
GREATER GEELONG**

# **PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS**



**SUBMISSION**

**FEBRUARY 2020**

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# Introduction

The City of Greater Geelong is Victoria's largest regional city. It is located 75 kilometres south west of Melbourne, covers an area of 1,247 km<sup>2</sup> and comprises suburban, coastal and country areas, with more than 50 townships. It has a population of over 252,217 (as at 30 June 2018), which is forecast to grow to 393,216 by 2041.

Access to secure housing is one of the most basic human rights, protected by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). However, homelessness is about more than housing, it is about "a lack of connectedness with family, friends and the community and lack of control over one's environment"<sup>1</sup>. People who are homeless also experience limitations to other human rights such as access to education, liberty, security, privacy, freedom from discrimination and the right to vote<sup>2</sup>.

Geelong is a relatively disadvantaged area, with a SEIFA Index of 994. Sixteen small areas are relatively disadvantaged with significant levels of disadvantage evident in Corio (830), Whittington (821) and Norlane/North Shore (731). Corio-Norlane has the greatest proportion of people who are homeless (161 people).

## LOCAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The City of Greater Geelong has a range of plans and strategies with a twofold approach of supporting services assisting people experiencing homelessness and implementing actions aimed at achieving the provision of accessible and affordable housing outcomes.

The City is committed to working towards a '**Clever and Creative**' future. For the community, this means, among other things, that 'an inclusive, diverse, healthy and socially connected community' will be achieved when there is "a variety of affordable options for people to rent or buy a home"<sup>3</sup>.

One of the goals of the **Council Plan 2018-22** is 'improved health and safety of our community' where

Council is committed to address homelessness, family violence, food shortages and public safety. One of the key priorities within this goal area is to develop a housing policy and to provide a range of social and affordable housing options.

The **Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) 2018-21** acknowledges that access to safe and affordable housing is a key factor for more equitable health and wellbeing outcomes, and one of the major issues impacting individuals and families in the municipality.

The Plan also acknowledges that climate change, and especially sea level rise, will impact housing affordability into the future. Climate change will need to be an important consideration in addressing homelessness as "homelessness and poverty are interrelated and drive vulnerability to climate change"<sup>4</sup>.

The **Settlement Strategy 2018** identifies selected strategies to achieve an increase in the level of social and affordable housing in Geelong. Strategies include supporting affordable housing in areas suitable for increased housing density and diversity, and inclusionary zoning.

The City's **Social Housing Plan 2018-41** estimates that 13,500 new social housing dwellings will be required by 2041 to overcome homelessness and housing poverty, which is an estimated investment of \$235 million per annum. This level of investment is far beyond the capacity of any local government and is only possible if State and Commonwealth Governments are committed to working in partnership. Currently, only 3 per cent of housing stock in Greater Geelong is classified as social housing. Under the Social Housing Plan, there are a variety of strategies outlined to increase this to 10 per cent by 2041.

Local government is not the level of government responsible for the delivery of social housing. Council's role in social housing is one of leadership and advocacy,

<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008, Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/homelessness-human-rights-issue-2008> accessed 11 February 2020

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008, Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/homelessness-human-rights-issue-2008> accessed 11 February 2020

<sup>3</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2017, Greater Geelong: A Clever and Creative Future, p24

<sup>4</sup> Red Cross (Victoria), 2016, Climate change, housing and homelessness, <https://www.nccarf.edu.au/sites/default/files/Forum%20report%20on%20homelessness%20and%20climate%20change%20final.pdf> accessed 22 January 2020, p6

investment, partnerships, planning, urban renewal and capacity building<sup>5</sup>.

However, as the level of government closest to the community, we have a detailed understanding of the impacts for individuals and families which arise from a lack of social housing, including homelessness and housing poverty.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Terms of Reference 1

1. The State government advocate to the Commonwealth government for a National Housing Policy and system wide change to influence secure, affordable and positive housing outcomes that recognise current and emerging needs.
2. The State government update and renew its commitment to the 'A Better Place: Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy'.
3. The State government work closely with local government to understand the nature of homelessness and identify and address the driving factors.
4. The State government involve people with lived experience of homelessness in the development of tailored solutions to current and future challenges.

### Terms of Reference 2

5. Provide flexible, non-time limited funding for all areas of prevention, response and chronic homelessness recovery to more intensively support the most vulnerable people.
6. Ensure programs are delivered by very experienced case managers and community housing models where localised and tailored support is provided and a sense of community and belonging is fostered.
7. Urgently review the waiting list for public housing allocations policy including responses to support tenants experiencing anti-social behaviours.

8. Ensure Geelong is part of the Public Housing Renewal Program, as 50% of public housing is concentrated in three suburbs (Corio, Norlane and Whittington) and more than 50% of these dwellings are either beyond or close to the end of their economic life. Geelong does not currently appear to be part of this program.
9. Continue community renewal program in areas such as Norlane, through the Homes for Victorians program and a partnership with Council, a Registered Housing Association and the state government.
10. The Department of Health and Human Services enter into a collaborative partnership with the City, with an Agreement that leads to a more planned approach to addressing existing stock management, as well as possible future developments.
11. Work with local service providers to increase the supply of crisis accommodation especially for women escaping family violence.
12. Expand the Education First Youth Foyer model to Geelong. The outcomes overwhelmingly demonstrate the success of this model<sup>6</sup>.
13. Raise the age for young people in out of home care, including permanent care, to access funded support from 18 years of age to 21 or 25 years of age. Ensure this funding is flexible to meet their needs.
14. Consider the needs of emerging population groups, such as older women, who will need social and more affordable housing into the future
15. The State government implement an awareness campaign to enable consistent messaging around the drivers of homelessness to be communicated at state, regional and local levels.

### Terms of Reference 3

16. Develop partnerships and service coordination mechanisms for complex issues inter-related to homelessness, such as food security and mental health, to reduce gaps, overlap and duplication.
17. Build a stronger relationship with the service sector to understand access barriers.

<sup>5</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41

<sup>6</sup> Barwon South West Homelessness Network, 2018, Homelessness in Barwon South West Region, [https://q21hwbpillar.com.au/sites/default/files/news\\_items/bsw\\_homelessness\\_report\\_-\\_2018.pdf](https://q21hwbpillar.com.au/sites/default/files/news_items/bsw_homelessness_report_-_2018.pdf)

18. Support mainstream services to tailor their approaches to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
19. The Towards Home Plus, Private Rental Assistance and Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy programs are of great importance to the homelessness sector, and any secure funding investment in improving homelessness services should also acknowledge and enhance the delivery of these programs, especially in areas of increasing need.
20. The state government make inclusionary zoning mandatory and incentivise developers to include more affordable housing in new developments.
21. That through the Geelong Authority, the State Government supports inclusionary zoning and delivery of social housing within central Geelong and in areas of need throughout the Geelong region.
22. That there is ongoing investment by the state government in increasing the supply of secure affordable and social housing.

# Terms of Reference 1: Provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria

Homelessness in both Greater Geelong and the Barwon South West region is growing at a faster rate than Victoria.

Homelessness in the Barwon South West Region increased by 23 per cent from 924 people in 2011, to 1137 in 2016<sup>7</sup>. Over the same period, homelessness in the City of Greater Geelong increased by a slightly slower rate of 19 percent, from 630 in 2011 to 750 people in 2016<sup>8</sup>. Latest figures for Victoria show a 13.7 per cent increase between 2014 and 2018<sup>9</sup>.

Many residents across the City are also vulnerable to increasing housing costs and subsequent financial difficulties which may increase their future risk of homelessness.

The majority (68.8%) of homes are either owned outright or with a mortgage and almost a third (27.7%) are in private rental or rented through social or housing authority<sup>10</sup>.

## NUMBER OF HOMELESS PERSONS

The total number of homeless people in the Geelong Statistical Area 3 (SA3) was 712 on Census night (2016), with a further 431 marginally housed and at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness circumstances on Census night	Number
Living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out	67
Living in supported accommodation for the homeless	252
Staying temporarily with other households	121
Living in boarding houses	113
Living in other temporary lodgings	0
Living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	157
<b>Total</b>	<b>712</b>

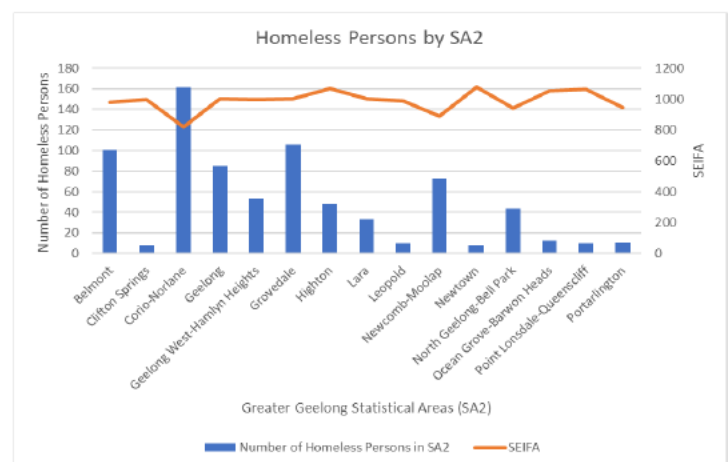
Marginally housed on Census night	Number
Living in other crowded dwellings	315
Living in other improvised dwellings	6
Marginally housed in caravan parks	110
<b>Total</b>	<b>431</b>

Source: ABS Census 2016, as referenced in City of Greater Geelong, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p49

Data note: These figures do not include the Bellarine Peninsula.

Including the Bellarine Peninsula, current data estimates a total of 763 homeless persons in the City of Greater Geelong<sup>11</sup>.

The majority (36%) of Greater Geelong's homeless population are living in supported accommodation for the homeless, closely followed by people living in 'severely' overcrowded dwellings (22%)<sup>12</sup>.



Source: [www.ABS.Stat](http://www.ABS.Stat), SEIFA by Statistical Area 2 (SA2)

These numbers are conservative estimates and underestimate the true number of people experiencing homelessness, particularly the number of women and children escaping family violence who would be seeking assistance with housing.

<sup>7</sup> Barwon South West Homelessness Network, 2018

<sup>8</sup> ABS, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Everybody's Home, 2018, A plan to end homelessness, [www.everybodyshome.com.au/our-campaign/a-plan-to-end-homelessness/](http://www.everybodyshome.com.au/our-campaign/a-plan-to-end-homelessness/), accessed 25 February 2020

<sup>10</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p30

<sup>11</sup> ABS.Stat, 2016, [http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS\\_SEIFA\\_SA2#](http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS_SEIFA_SA2#)

<sup>12</sup> ABS, 2016 via [www.socialstatistics.com.au](http://www.socialstatistics.com.au)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

For the State government to –

1. advocate to the Commonwealth government for a National Housing Policy and system wide change to influence secure, affordable and positive housing outcomes that recognise current and emerging needs;
2. update and renew its commitment to the 'A Better Place: Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy';
3. work closely with local government to understand the nature of homelessness and identify and address the driving factors; and
4. involve people with lived experience of homelessness in the development of tailored solutions to current and future challenges.



## Terms of Reference 2: Investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness

The causes of homelessness are extremely complex and inter-related.

Lacking a home influences a person's ability to access services, education, food, support and opportunities to engage in society more broadly.

For many people who experience homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, access to long term secure housing will see emotional, physical and health risks reduced, and individuals and families can carry on with their lives, mostly without support services. For others, the longer the homelessness continues, the deeper the complexity and scale of personal and family needs become; requiring external and intensive supports to be allocated.

For those few who have been excluded from secure, safe housing and support for their entire lives, a different and far more intensive program of accommodation and support must be delivered. If people have never enjoyed what a sense of 'home' is, it is difficult to expect adjustment when only short-term accommodation is available.

### LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The main factor impacting on homelessness is the lack of affordable housing<sup>13</sup>. "Across Victoria, housing affordability is at its lowest level in 20 years"<sup>14</sup> and there has been a significant decline in the availability of affordable private rental dwellings"<sup>15</sup>.

Anecdotally, homelessness services are increasingly seeing low to middle income families being pushed out of the private rental market, putting increased pressure on an already short supply of suitable affordable properties and social housing options.

The best solution to homelessness is to address the causes and prevent people becoming homeless in the first place. "The provision of social housing in the first instance is considered the most appropriate response to homelessness and the imminent threat of homelessness"<sup>16</sup>.

### Accommodation Supply

Outlined in the City's draft Social Housing Plan 2018-41, households on the housing waiting list are likely to be experiencing housing stress or homelessness. There is a total of 2,699 people on the social housing waiting list for the Department of Health and Human Services Barwon (Geelong) office, of which 1,610 are listed for priority access and 1,089 have registered their interest<sup>17</sup>. The current demand for long term social/community and public housing is such that only those people presenting a case for high and complex needs are allocated priority housing. This is in addition to the many other households in rental stress who do not register their interest in social/community and public housing, which may be because of the significant waiting times or to avoid the perceived stigma.

Most community housing properties (86%) are for long term accommodation. For those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, there are 155 transitional housing properties. All crisis accommodation for families and adults (20 properties) in Greater Geelong are provided by the Salvation Army<sup>18</sup>. There is also a youth refuge in Geelong managed by Barwon Child Youth and Family (BCYF) for young people<sup>19</sup>, and Neami Towards Home Plus Geelong housing program offers support and accommodation<sup>20</sup>.

Due to the high demand on public and social housing, people are remaining in crisis accommodation for longer periods of time, meaning those in need have nowhere to go.

<sup>13</sup> VCOSS, 2019, Five ways to turn the tide on homelessness, <https://www.vcoff.org.au/news/five-ways-to-turn-the-tide-on-homelessness/> accessed 5 February 2020

<sup>14</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p32

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp40-42

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p52

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p60

<sup>19</sup> Barwon Child Youth and Family, 2020, Youth Homelessness, <https://www.bcyf.org.au/youth-services/youth-homelessness/> accessed 25 February 2020

<sup>20</sup> Neami National, Towards Home Geelong, <https://www.neaminational.org.au/find-services/towards-home-geelong/>, accessed 25 February 2020

At the National Homelessness Week in 2019, Jenny Smith, CEO of Council to Homeless Persons, is quoted as saying “we can’t house the homeless without housing. This crisis will continue to get worse until there is substantial investment in social and affordable housing”<sup>21</sup>. This position is also supported by the City.

Additionally, investment towards improving public housing conditions also needs to be considered. Consultation for the Social Housing Plan identified that “existing public housing standards are far less now than should be expected”. Other themes included low standards, poor building condition, inadequate maintenance, need for upgrades and lack of supporting infrastructure<sup>22</sup>.

## HOUSING AND RENTAL STRESS

There are approximately 9,900 households (11% of all households) living in housing stress in Geelong, with the highest proportion living in Corio and Norlane, two of Geelong’s most affordable areas (19%). This is closely followed by Newcomb, South Geelong, St Albans and Whittington (16%) and Belmont and Highton (11%).

Households experiencing rental stress (26% of all households renting privately in Geelong) are generally considered to be more at risk of homelessness than households experiencing mortgage stress due to tenure security and risk of eviction.

In addition, Greater Geelong has more low-income households (21%) than Melbourne (17%) when compared to all households, and a significant number of these are in receipt of government income support.

Income support has not increased at the same rate as inflation, so those on Centrelink benefits are struggling. For a family of two adults and children on Centrelink benefits, the percentage of properties available for rent which would be affordable has decreased from 80.9 per cent in September 2001 to 14.9 per cent in June 2019<sup>23</sup>. This reduction in rental affordability has been underpinned by significant increases in median prices for houses, apartments, and vacant house blocks over the last 15 years.

The following population groups in the Greater Geelong community are the most vulnerable to housing stress, and especially to increased rental costs.

When compared to Greater Melbourne, Greater Geelong has:

- More lone person households (28% compared to 23.2%)
  - The largest group of households experiencing rental stress (41%) and represent 28% of all households experiencing mortgage stress. This is a reflection both of relatively low incomes when compared to other households, and the very difficult rental market.
- More one parent families (11.1% compared to 10.1%)
  - About 20% of single parent families experience housing stress due to factors such as single incomes, part time work and child care costs. Larger households (i.e. 3 or more children) generally experience higher levels of stress.
- A higher proportion of the population identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (1.0% compared to 0.5%). Evidence shows Aboriginal people experience higher rates of unemployment, family violence and homelessness. There are approximately 2,400 people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background living in Greater Geelong, which is the largest regional population in Victoria<sup>24</sup>.
- A higher proportion of low-income households (21.1% compared to 16.7%)
- Fewer households connected to the internet (15.8% of households with no internet connection compared to 11.3%).

Also, the following groups of people may require social/affordable housing:

- Women and children escaping family violence who are forced to leave home. They may lack income or rental history and have limited financial resources due to the abuse and control exercised by the perpetrator.
- People leaving nearby prisons who may wish to settle in Geelong (e.g. Barwon Prison, Marnong Correctional

<sup>21</sup> Kerr, N, 2019, ‘Geelong homeless at record high’, *Geelong Independent*, 9 August 2019, <https://geelongindy.com.au/news/09-08-2019/geelong-homeless-at-record-high/> accessed 12 February 2020

<sup>22</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 218-41, p38

<sup>23</sup> ABS, 2016 via [www.socialstatistics.com.au](http://www.socialstatistics.com.au)

<sup>24</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p38

Centre) have low incomes, lack rental history and experience discrimination<sup>25</sup>.

- People with disability represent six per cent of the Greater Geelong population (14,000 people). There are nearly 9,000 people in City of Greater Geelong in receipt of the Disability Support Pension who may also need assistance with activities of daily living.
- Refugees have higher levels of need due to lack of resources, language difficulties, past trauma and limited access to services. Some may have had prior financial support that no longer exists.
- Some young people live unstable lives and are disengaged from education and employment. Young people with mental health issues, disabilities, and young people leaving care are particularly at risk of homelessness.
- Older person households represent only 4.5 per cent of households experiencing housing stress, mainly due to relatively higher levels of home ownership. However as discussed below older women particularly are at increasing risk of homelessness<sup>26</sup>.

The Barwon South West Region has the least number of affordable rental properties compared to all other regional areas in Victoria<sup>27</sup>. In March 2000, there were 882 affordable rentals in Greater Geelong, or 59.6% of all dwellings. By September 2019, this number had decreased to 411 dwellings or 19.9% of dwellings<sup>28</sup>.

In Greater Geelong, people who are newly arrived or who are from refugee backgrounds are the most likely to be renting their homes<sup>29</sup>. A high proportion of households experiencing rental stress are lone person households (41%) and one parent families (30%). Meaning 71 per cent of households experiencing rental stress are headed by one person.

In Greater Geelong, 37 per cent of renting households have income which, after payment of rent and adjustment for their cost of living, falls below the Henderson Poverty Line. The income for a higher proportion of lone person households (49% compared to 57%) and one parent families (62% compared to 57%), fall below the poverty line when compared to Victoria<sup>30</sup>.

## FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence is the most common reason for accessing support through homelessness services, comprising 33 per cent of clients in this region. In the Barwon South West Region, more women (65%) than men (38%) sought homelessness assistance in 2015-16<sup>31</sup>.

Data for Family Violence Specialist Homelessness Services for women and children residing in Greater Geelong state that of the 782 clients who were supported during 2018-19, 36.4 per cent of support periods included housing related services<sup>32</sup>. State-wide, 40 per cent of all clients of Specialist Homelessness Services had experienced family and domestic violence<sup>33</sup>.

With only 20 crisis accommodation properties in Greater Geelong, women and their children escaping family violence effectively have nowhere to go. This leaves women in situations where they fear for their lives, can be easily located by perpetrators or are sent to temporary accommodation out of town, in run down and unsafe caravan parks. This crisis accommodation or transitional housing program also leaves women and children experiencing homelessness in more vulnerable high-risk situations than remaining with the perpetrator. This failure of the system to provide safe and adequate shelter places women in more danger, which is widely understood by the family violence sector.

<sup>25</sup> AIHW, 2019, The Health of Australian Prisoners 2018, Commonwealth Government, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/prisoners/health-australia-prisoners-2018/contents/summary> accessed 25 February 2020

<sup>26</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p38

<sup>27</sup> Barwon South West Homelessness Network, 2018

<sup>28</sup> DHHS Rental Report, 2019, <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>, accessed 22 January 2020

<sup>29</sup> ABS, 2016 via [www.socialstatistics.com.au](http://www.socialstatistics.com.au)

<sup>30</sup> ABS, 2016, via [www.socialstatistics.com.au](http://www.socialstatistics.com.au)

<sup>31</sup> Barwon South West Homelessness Network, 2018

<sup>32</sup> Victoria Police, 2019, Family Violence Database 2018-19, <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portalfamily-violence-infographics/family-violence-specialist-homelessness> accessed 22 January 2020

<sup>33</sup> AIHW, 2019, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2018-19, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/client-groups-of-interest/clients-who-have-experienced-family-and-domestic-violence> accessed 5 February 2020

## YOUNG PEOPLE

State-wide, “young people account for nearly one fifth of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness”<sup>34</sup>. Locally, this is primarily due to family violence and/or conflict. If young people need to leave their family home, they can have trouble finding long term accommodation and are more likely than other age groups to become homeless<sup>35</sup>.

The Geelong Project works with seven local schools in low socio-economic areas to identify young people at risk of homelessness. This project is led by Barwon Child Youth and Family and refers those at risk to Headspace or the City’s Youth Services team for prevention and early intervention initiatives. The project aims to keep young people engaged and prevent homelessness.

In addition, the Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer model provides up to two years accommodation in a supported environment, allowing young people to complete their education. This program currently only operates in Warrnambool and the expansion of this model to the Barwon Region and Geelong would be beneficial for young people at risk of disengaging from education.

Prevention and early intervention projects such as these provide valuable interventions, especially for young people, and should be expanded.

Currently, young people living in out of home care lose their income support once they turn 18 years of age, placing them at risk of homelessness<sup>36</sup>.

## OLDER PEOPLE

Homelessness amongst older people increased by 40 per cent in the decade from 2006 to 2016<sup>37</sup>. With the older population expected to increase into the future, so too will

the number of older people who may face homelessness. In Greater Geelong, the number of persons over 60 is expected to increase by 30.5 per cent and comprise 24.8 per cent of the total population<sup>38</sup>.

Since 2011, there has been a 31 per cent increase in the number of women experiencing homelessness<sup>39</sup>. Single older women can be experiencing homelessness for the first time later in life for many reasons, including the death of an income earning spouse, having insufficient superannuation to fund rising living costs, discrimination in the housing market, and poor health resulting from abuse, separation and/or divorce.

“Homelessness is a growing problem for older Australians and will likely continue to increase over time due to an ageing population and declining rates of home ownership among older people”<sup>40</sup>. Older people are also presenting to specialist homelessness services with more complex issues that take longer to resolve, and they have greater difficulty securing housing<sup>41</sup>.

Older people are extremely vulnerable to the health effects of homelessness. While only one in seven Australians experiencing homelessness in 2014-15 were over 55 years of age, 7 per cent of clients accessing specialist homelessness services were in this age group<sup>42</sup>. In 2016, the number of older Australians experiencing homelessness had risen to one in six. This may indicate a lack of support for older people, placing

<sup>34</sup> VCOSS, 2019, <https://www.vcross.org.au/news/five-ways-to-turn-the-tide-on-homelessness/> accessed 5 February 2020

<sup>35</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/homelessness> accessed 16 January 2020

<sup>36</sup> Barwon South West Region Homelessness Network, 2018

<sup>37</sup> Council to Homeless Persons, <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Homelessness-and-older-people-fact-sheet.pdf> accessed 16 January 2020

<sup>38</sup> Id The Population Experts, <https://forecast.id.com.au/geelong/population-age-structure?AgeTypeKey=3> accessed 12 February 2020

<sup>39</sup> Council to Homeless Persons, <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Homelessness-and-older-people-fact-sheet.pdf> accessed 16 January 2020

<sup>40</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/diversity/people-at-risk-of-homelessness> accessed 16 January 2020

<sup>41</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australia-at-a-glance/contents/diversity/people-at-risk-of-homelessness> accessed 16 January 2020

<sup>42</sup> Homelessness Australia, [https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness\\_and\\_Older\\_People.pdf](https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness_and_Older_People.pdf) accessed 16 January 2020

them at increased risk of physical and mental health impacts including depression and respiratory disorders<sup>43</sup>.

## FOOD SECURITY

For people who experience homelessness, there is a flow on effect for their food security. With access to food and shelter being among the most basic human needs in order to survive, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model suggests that until these basic physical needs are met, a person's potential to achieve greater health and wellbeing is limited<sup>44</sup>.

Based on our own research, data suggests that between 3 and 4 per cent of the Geelong population experience food insecurity, reporting that they ran out of food and could not afford to buy more in the previous 12 months<sup>45</sup>. This question has been the predominant measure of food security across Australia, and as a single measure, it underreports rates of food insecurity. Food security is also associated with low income, unemployment, social isolation and single person households.

The City recently held a forum with emergency food relief providers across Greater Geelong. These organisations identified that many forms of assistance intersect with food relief, providing referrals for people in need of emergency food access; including homelessness, family violence, mental health (especially regarding young people) and employment services.

## STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

People who are experiencing homelessness are subject to wide ranging stigma and discrimination, which influences their access to services and ultimately, their health and wellbeing.

Housing status is perceived to be under someone's individual control. For this reason, homeless people are "likely to face highly legitimised forms of discrimination, amplifying negative wellbeing consequences"<sup>46</sup>.

People who are sleeping rough are at the coalface of negative community attitudes. City staff working out in the community, particularly in Geelong's CBD, find that these people are often lonely and in need of human connection. Challenging life circumstances such as the death of a parent, divorce or losing a job can be the trigger forcing someone into homelessness. Fostering community compassion and increasing understanding of the drivers of homelessness is an important part of addressing stigma.

The City's Amenity Protection Unit has seen a noticeable increase in the number of complaints about people living in their cars, which may be influenced, in part, by the associated stigma of homelessness. People experiencing homelessness may also be dealing with other issues such as mental illness, alcohol and drug addiction or disability. Research from AHURI suggests that the more unstable someone's housing arrangements are, the poorer their mental health. This relationship also goes both ways<sup>47</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

5. Provide flexible, non-time limited funding for all areas of prevention, response and chronic homelessness recovery to more intensively support the most vulnerable people.
6. Ensure programs are delivered by very experienced case managers and community housing models where localised and tailored support is provided and a sense of community and belonging is fostered.
7. Urgently review the waiting list for public housing allocations policy including responses to support tenants experiencing anti-social behaviours.
8. Ensure Geelong is part of the Public Housing Renewal Program, as 50% of public housing is concentrated in three suburbs (Corio, Norlane and Whittington) and more than 50% of these dwellings are either beyond or close to the end of their

<sup>43</sup> Homelessness Australia, [https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness\\_and\\_Older\\_People.pdf](https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness_and_Older_People.pdf) accessed 16 January 2020

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, T et al, 2016, 'Promoting Health by Addressing Basic Needs: Effect of Problem Resolution on Contacting Health Referrals', *Health Education and Behaviour*, April 2016, vol 43, no 2, pp201-207, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5029788/> accessed 19 February 2020

<sup>45</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Geelong Preventative Health Survey 2017, City of Greater Geelong

<sup>46</sup> Johnstone et al, 2015, Discrimination and wellbeing amongst the homeless: the role of multiple group membership, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol 6, Article 739

<sup>47</sup> AHURI, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/understanding-links-between-mental-health-housing-homelessness> accessed 12 February 2020



economic life. Geelong does not currently appear to be part of this program.

9. Continue community renewal program in areas such as Norlane, through the Homes for Victorians program and a partnership with Council, a Registered Housing Association and the state government.
10. The Department of Health and Human Services enter into a collaborative partnership with the City, with an Agreement that leads to a more planned approach to addressing existing stock management, as well as possible future developments.
11. Work with local service providers to increase the supply of crisis accommodation especially for women escaping family violence.
12. Expand the Education First Youth Foyer model to Geelong. The outcomes overwhelmingly demonstrate the success of this model<sup>48</sup>.
13. Raise the age for young people in out of home care, including permanent care, to access funded support from 18 years of age to 21 or 25 years of age. Ensure this funding is flexible to meet their needs.
14. Consider the needs of emerging population groups, such as older women, who will need social and more affordable housing into the future
15. The State government implement an awareness campaign to enable consistent messaging around the drivers of homelessness to be communicated at state, regional and local levels.

<sup>48</sup> Barwon South West Homelessness Network, 2018, Homelessness in Barwon South West Region, [https://q21hwbpillar.com.au/sites/default/files/news\\_items/bsw\\_homelessness\\_report\\_-\\_2018.pdf](https://q21hwbpillar.com.au/sites/default/files/news_items/bsw_homelessness_report_-_2018.pdf)

## Terms of Reference 3: Identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless

### SERVICES

For individuals who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, having a home is a key factor in being able to access services. For example, public housing tenants can access Public Tenant Employment Program (PTEP) which provides individuals with workplace training as a pathway towards employment.

Whilst the City is not a provider of homelessness services, there are a range of local agencies who have programs in place, funded by the state government, to help people who are homeless or at risk.

AHURI advocate for better coordination between mainstream services (such as health care, employment, education, income support etc.) and specialist homelessness services to ensure that no one falls through the gaps. Mainstream services also need to tailor their services specific to the needs of the homeless population to relieve the pressure on specialist homelessness services<sup>49</sup>.

Anecdotally, there is a sense that the service system surrounding homelessness and its inter-related factors (such as food relief) is only for those in desperate need. This is a barrier for people feeling they can access supports.

In addition, structural changes may be necessary to accommodate the needs of those seeking support. For example, women escaping family violence who are dependent on a spouse can be subject to a means test before access to support services is granted. Failing this test due to a higher income means they do not receive the services and supports they need. This is a symptom of the shifting demographics and reasons for homelessness and needs to inform service design and implementation.

### PROGRAMS

Neami Geelong commenced delivery of the '**Towards Home Plus**' Program in February 2019. This is one component of the Victorian Government's 'Home for

Victorians Strategy' which targets rough sleepers by providing support to obtain stable housing. The program includes assertive outreach, specialist personnel and case management. This program relies on the 'housing first' model which is based on providing safe and secure housing before addressing other issues. The housing first approach to service delivery is also advocated by Launch Housing<sup>50</sup>. However, with a limited supply of affordable housing, this model is severely at risk.

The **Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP)** helps tenants at risk of losing their private rental tenancy or helping those in need gain a new tenancy. Originally a state funded program until June 2019, it was expanded under Royal Commission into Family Violence and has been shown to be highly effective<sup>51</sup>.

The **Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP)** helps tenants to deal with issues in a private tenancy arrangement to avoid becoming homeless. Service providers in Geelong include Bethany, Diversitat and Uniting Care Geelong.

### PLANNING LEVERS

"Recent changes made by the State Government to the Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987 also now allow local governments to negotiate with developers about including social housing in new developments"<sup>52</sup>. Council's Social Housing Plan 2018-41 highlights that Council should collaborate with State and Commonwealth governments to increase the supply of social housing.

The Geelong Authority, established as a Ministerial Advisory Committee for the Minister for Planning in 2015, oversees the implementation of the Revitalising Central Geelong Action Plan which has been adopted and funded by the State Government. With Geelong set to experience high population growth due to the region's attractive lifestyle, access to employment, recreation, arts, culture and beaches, the inclusion of social housing within central Geelong will be important. City of Greater Geelong's partnership with the State Government through the Geelong Authority will be a central aspect to increasing

<sup>49</sup> Black C and Gronda H, 2011, Evidence for improving access to homelessness services, AHURI Research Synthesis Service, July 2011

<sup>50</sup> Launch Housing, <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/category/policy-agenda/>, accessed 5 February 2020

<sup>51</sup> VCOSS, 2019, Five ways to turn the tide on homelessness, <https://www.vcooss.org.au/news/five-ways-to-turn-the-tide-on-homelessness/> accessed 5 February 2020

<sup>52</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p32

housing supply and implementing the Social Housing Plan 2018-41.

In addition, social housing is unevenly distributed across the municipality<sup>53</sup>, so the introduction of inclusionary zoning for new developments in the region's growth areas will be an important aspect of providing a variety of options for those in need.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

16. Develop partnerships and service coordination mechanisms for complex issues inter-related to homelessness, such as food security and mental health, to reduce gaps, overlap and duplication.
17. Build a stronger relationship with the service sector to understand access barriers.
18. Support mainstream services to tailor their approaches to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
19. The Towards Home Plus, Private Rental Assistance and Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy programs are of great importance to the homelessness sector, and any secure funding investment in improving homelessness services should also acknowledge and enhance the delivery of these programs, especially in areas of increasing need.
20. The state government make inclusionary zoning mandatory and incentivise developers to include more affordable housing in new developments.
21. That through the Geelong Authority, the State Government supports inclusionary zoning and delivery of social housing within central Geelong and in areas of need throughout the Geelong region.
22. That there is ongoing investment by the state government in increasing the supply of secure affordable and social housing.

<sup>53</sup> City of Greater Geelong, 2019, Social Housing Plan 2018-41, p59