



Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

This submission is made on behalf of The National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW).

NFAW is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women.

NFAW welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to address women's homelessness and housing precarity, the Victorian Government should:

- Develop a gender-responsive policy and funding approach to homelessness. Gender-responsive homelessness policy must include the principles of visibility, capability and accountability. Visibility ensures that women in their diversity are identified and included. Capability ensures that gender-responsive services and models across the housing continuum are adequately resourced. Accountability ensures gender indicators are included in performance and outcomes frameworks.
- Recognise the role of the specialist domestic and family violence services sector in preventing and responding to gender-based violence, as a major driver of women's homelessness.
- Set and deliver ambitious, evidence-based goals to increase affordable housing stock, recognising social housing as a critical form of tenure for women and their families.
- Ensure funding sustainability and certainty for Flexible Support Packages (FSPs).
- Recognise and respond to the acute risk of homelessness facing women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence.
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GENDERED DRIVERS OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a women's issue which requires a response that accounts for the gendered causes and impacts of homelessness for women.

Women's housing needs and situations are shaped, in large part, by economic inequality, gender-based violence and caring responsibilities.

Women are more reliant on housing assistance and services because of violence, economic disadvantage and caring responsibilities. Under-resourcing and failings in these systems therefore disproportionately impact on women. For example, women make up **62%** of people who remain in housing stress *after* receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) nation-wide.¹ In Victoria, there are 285 482 people receiving CRA.²

Women are significantly more likely than men to lose their housing as a result of violence. Overall, of the 112 900 people assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2018-19 in Victoria, 44% cited domestic and family violence as a reason for seeking assistance. **Seventy-eight per cent** of the people experiencing domestic and family violence and being assisted by specialist homelessness services in Victoria are female.

The prospect of homelessness forces women to stay in violent and unsafe relationships. According to the 2016 Personal Safety Survey, of women who have previously temporarily separated from previous partners who were violent, 11.2% cited "nowhere else to go" as a reason for returning to the relationship.³ As a result, a lack of affordable housing is linked to women remaining in violent relationships.⁴ Women on temporary visas experiencing violence are especially disadvantaged and crisis and long-term housing has been identified as the service most required by this group.⁵

The confluence of economic inequality and unaffordable housing is seen in the high rates of housing stress among single mothers and the rising ranks of single, older women experiencing homelessness. Across Australia there are 89,700 single mother-led households living in rental stress.⁶ In Victoria, the 2019 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot indicated that just 0.1% of available rentals are affordable and suitable for a single parent with two children (one under 5 and one under 10) in receipt of the parent payment single.⁷ In Victoria, there are 45 063 women receiving the parenting payment single, making up 95.8% of all parenting payment single recipients.⁸

¹ As of September 2018, data requested by Equality Rights Alliance from Department of Social Services.

² Department of Social Services 2019

³ ABS: 2017, Experience of Partner Violence DataCube Table 22.3

⁴ Wendt 2015

⁵ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence 2018

⁶ National Shelter et al 2018

⁷ Anglicare Victoria 2019

⁸ Department of Social Services 2019

From 2006 to 2016 there was a 97% jump in the number of older women in the private rental market nation-wide.⁹ Between the 2011 and 2016 Census, the numbers of women aged 55+ experiencing homelessness in Victoria rose by 70.8%.¹⁰ Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicate an 8% annual average increase of women aged 55+ assisted by specialist homelessness services between 2011-12 and 2018-19 in Victoria. For the total specialist homelessness services population, the average annual increase has been 3%.¹¹

A GENDER LENS ON HOMELESSNESS AND HOMELESSNESS POLICY

A coherent gender responsive strategy on housing affordability and homelessness is needed to address the myriad housing challenges faced by growing numbers of women.

Access to dedicated payments for victims and survivors, such as the Flexible Support Packages (FSP), are a welcome measure. The fact that 66% of FSP funding goes towards safe and secure housing is testament to the critical need for housing support for women leaving violence.¹² Further, 37% of people receiving FSPs are in living in the private rental market.¹³ Research from ANROWS indicates victims and survivors require ongoing support to maintain housing in the long-term.¹⁴ The efficacy of dedicated and direct funding support packages for victims and survivors is also predicated on the existence of an integrated, cohesive and properly resourced domestic and family violence service system and the availability of affordable housing, the absence of which risks undermining such measures. NFAW endorses submissions from Domestic Violence Victoria, Council to Homeless Persons, and others, calling for long-term funding certainty into the future for the FSPs.

Women's specialist and domestic and family violence specialist services are critical to a gender-responsive approach to women's housing precarity and homelessness. These services exist across the housing continuum, from crisis accommodation to long-term social housing. Women's specialist services are appropriately specialised, competent, inclusive, accessible and culturally safe to meet the needs of women and their children.¹⁵ Policies and funding models to address homelessness must ensure appropriate levels of funding are directed towards services with specialist capability to address the gendered dynamics of violence and homelessness.¹⁶ The reliance on motels as a form of crisis accommodation for women and children who have escaped violence seriously undermines efforts to ensure appropriate safety and amenity. NFAW echoes the concerns raised about this in the submissions from Safe Steps, McAuley, Domestic Violence

⁹ National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group 2018

¹⁰ *Submission into the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness: Housing and Homelessness for Older People*, Housing for the Aged Action Group, January 2020.

¹¹ AIHW: 2019 Historical data 2011-12 to 2018-19 tables 1 and 6.

¹² Family Safety Victoria 2017

¹³ Family Safety Victoria 2017

¹⁴ Cortis et al 2015

¹⁵ Equality Rights Alliance 2019 and Australian Women Against Violence Alliance 2016

¹⁶ Equality Rights Alliance 2019

Victoria and Women's Property Initiatives, among others in relation to the use of motels in crisis responses to domestic and family violence.

Social housing is a feminised form of tenure, with women making up 62% of main tenants across social housing programs in Australia.¹⁷ In Victoria 50 120 people are waiting for social housing and 45% are in the greatest need.¹⁸ The lack of long-term affordable and social housing is a major driver of women's homelessness and housing precarity. As stated in the submission of Women's Property Initiatives, "with no exit points into long term housing, crisis accomodation will continually get clogged."¹⁹ NFAW endorses the call from Safe Steps for 'game-changing' investment in crisis accommodation, community housing, and affordable long-term housing.²⁰

¹⁷ AIHW 2019

¹⁸ Productivity Commission 2020

¹⁹ Women's Property Initiatives 2020

²⁰ Safe Steps 2020

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