

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Melbourne—Tuesday, 14 July 2020

(via videoconference)

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Mr Enver Erdogan

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

WITNESSES

Mr Sebastian Antoine, Policy and Research Officer, and

Ms Cassandra Prigg, Youth Affairs Council Victoria.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I now declare open the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues public hearing for the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised. I would like now to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands each of us is gathered on today, and I pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also acknowledge my colleagues participating today and thank those who provided apologies.

Now some more formalities for the witnesses. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide in the hearing is protected by law. However, any comments repeated outside the hearing may not be so protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. So I welcome you, Cass and Seb, for your submission today. Please take some minutes to provide some opening remarks. Thank you.

Mr ANTOINE: Fantastic. Thank you, Deputy Chair, and thank you, committee members. Good afternoon. My name is Sebastian Antoine. I am the Policy and Research Officer at Youth Affairs Council Victoria. I am joined here today by Cassandra Prigg, a young woman joining us from Warrnambool, who has lived experience of homelessness. There are three things I will cover in my opening remarks: first, I will tell you a little bit about YACVic, the Youth Affairs Council Victoria; then I will step you through the submission that we made earlier this year to this inquiry; and then I will briefly introduce Cassandra and let her make some opening remarks as well.

So YACVic is the peak body for young people and the youth sector—young people being people aged between 12 and 25 and ‘youth sector’ defined as anyone who works with young people. It used to be quite narrowly defined as simply just youth workers, but now we think broader than that. We are 60 years old—this is our 60th birthday this year—and we are a member-based organisation, with members that are young people, youth workers and youth work organisations as well. In this conversation around youth homelessness, and all the conversations that we have, we bring an impartial voice to the table. We do not deliver services ourselves. We always advocate for the best interests of young people, and often that involves advocating alongside young people, like what we are doing today.

We have identified that homelessness is a big issue for young people. The stats show that at least 6000 young people are experiencing homelessness on any night, which means that they are over-represented in statistics. Young people are only 16 per cent of the population in Victoria but 26 per cent of the homeless population in Victoria, which means they are nearly twice as likely to experience homelessness than anyone else. That is coupled with the fact that the ABS admits that they are not very good at counting the number of homeless young people. Their methodology just is not good enough yet, and they are working on it. But we think that estimate of 6000 young people is off by potentially 100 per cent. So there might be 12 000 young people experiencing homelessness across Victoria. And the reason it is so hard to count is because youth homelessness looks different to homelessness for other age groups. So we know that only 2 per cent of young people are sleeping rough and the remainder are in all sorts of different kinds of situations, which I will talk about a bit later. We know that young people have difficulty accessing services, and they are sometimes sidelined in discussions around homelessness because so few of them are sleeping rough.

So I will talk a little bit about the report that we submitted earlier this year, the report *Ending Youth Homelessness: Solutions from Young People*. The submission centres the voices and experiences and solutions of young people with direct lived experience of homelessness. It was informed by three consultations that we ran, in Melbourne, in Warrnambool and in Mildura. In each of those locations young people from around the

area came to visit, and Cassandra was one of those young people. In the conversations we asked about young people's experience of homelessness and heard a variety of different things, and we asked them what they knew would help end youth homelessness. What we heard was a few of the young people we talked to had slept rough, but the vast majority had done other kinds of things in their experience of homelessness. They were bouncing between different places of accommodation, they were couch surfing at friends' and strangers' houses, they were sleeping in cars, or they were in insecure tenancies or living in overcrowded accommodation or unsafe or unsanitary accommodation. They variously described feeling abandoned, uncertain, institutionalised, anxious and neglected, and they described their situation as being 'in-between housing', being 'housing insecure' or being 'houseless'.

We know that youth homelessness is bad for everybody involved, which is why we are stoked today that you are focusing on this issue for the hearing. We asked young people to tell us why they entered homelessness, and we heard a variety of things that we really neatly categorised into two different parts. We noticed that there were reasons, what we call triggers, which meant that young people had to leave the place that they were living, and other reasons, which we call causes, which actually prevented young people from finding safe, affordable and accessible housing when they needed to.

So the examples of triggers: most of the young people we talked to had experienced some form of family violence or abuse. Young people talked about the relationships they had in their lives breaking down, between their housemates, their partners or their families, meaning that they had to move out of home. But other young people had different stories. They were leaving home to move to the city to go to university or to pursue work, so it is not all that bad. We also heard from young people who were exiting the justice system or exiting out-of-home care who just did not have a place to go next. So those are examples of the triggers.

The examples of the causes are the things that we know are preventing young people from accessing appropriate long-term safe housing. The most important one was just a lack of affordable housing. Young people told us that there are not enough affordable, accessible houses for them—that is both in Melbourne and in regional Victoria. They also identified that they simply just did not have enough money to afford to make ends meet to pay the bills—and that is, you know, hearing from people who were working full-time or who were on income support payments while they were studying full-time or looking for work. And we heard from young people who had several casual jobs but just not enough hours to earn enough money. And the other thing that they identified was the lack of support, and that was from services, from government but also from family and friends, and their regular support networks.

Lastly, I will talk about the solutions that young people identified and shaped as integral to ending youth homelessness. The first one is about making a fair private rental market, which involves enforcing minimum property standards amongst other things. I am happy to talk about the details later on today.

The second solution was about making social housing a real option for young people. Young people we talked to just knew that social housing for them was not a real option. There are 50 000 applications-plus on the waiting list for social housing, and young people are always put at the bottom because of the particular circumstances that they have. Again, happy to talk about that in more detail.

The third solution was about providing support to young people. Now, there are some great models of support around youth homelessness. I know you heard from the Geelong Project yesterday and service providers today and yesterday and probably throughout the hearings that you have done. But we know that there are thousands of young people across the state that need those services and that just are not getting them. And providing those services involves ramping up the capacity of what services can deliver now as well as modifying the system so it works better for young people.

The fourth and final solution is about raising the rate for good. Young people on income support payments agree with the research that says that the current rate, or the pre-COVID rates, of income support are just absolutely insufficient to pay the bills, pay the rent or do all of the things that are necessary to be studying full-time or to be looking for work. We know it traps people in that cycle of poverty and reliance on insufficient income support.

So you will notice that all of these solutions are not groundbreaking. They line up with what other organisations are saying, in particular the Everybody's Home campaign, but what we have done in the report and what we

will talk about today is how these solutions have been identified and shaped by young people as the kind of really important things that we need to do to properly end youth homelessness. So I might wrap it up there and introduce Cass, who is a young woman with lived experience of homelessness. She will tell you briefly about what her story is and her solutions, and then we will open the floor to questions. So thank you very much.

Ms PRIGG: Hi, everyone. I just wanted to say thank you first of all for the opportunity to share a little bit about my experience. So I guess I am here because this is something that I have gone through. For me, my experience with homelessness was when I was about 19 years old. I was in my second year of university at the University of Melbourne. The previous year I had lived in on-campus accommodation at Queen's College. I paid the fees myself, and it was not affordable for me to stay on for another year, because at that time it was about \$25 000 a year and I was reliant on income support, especially because I was dealing with some mental health issues. Also, I was a high-achieving student but not so incredibly gifted that I was going to get given a scholarship, so I needed to find a different housing solution for my second year at university. I would have preferred to be in a share house. Ideally I would have liked to have been living on my own, but that is not really a possibility for young people anywhere. So I ended up living with my dad, who lives in Reservoir. That relationship broke down really quickly. My mental health deteriorated even further. He was not in a position to respond to that in a good way. The relationship really broke down, and I was not safe there anymore.

I did not end up sleeping rough. There were some nights where it got pretty close to that. But I was couch surfing, staying with friends, and that went on for about a month, maybe six weeks. During all that time I was searching for accommodation. The thing is—this definitely is not the case for everyone; I would not say I am representative in this scenario—I had about \$5000 in the bank. It was not that I had no money; it was just that I knew that I would need that money to pay bond, to pay rent and so on. I could not just go and live it up at a hotel and just wait for the storm to pass. So it was not exactly that I had no money. Obviously I could not have a private rental all to myself. I did not have those kinds of resources. But I did not have the networks in order to find somewhere, a sharing situation, a share house, somewhere like that, and so it took me quite a long time to find that. Eventually that was a short lease, a room in a share house for one month. That gave me a little bit of breathing room to figure out my next move, and eventually I found out a more permanent spot in a share house close to uni.

But during that month to six weeks I did not know where my next meal was coming from or where I was going to sleep that night. It is easy to have an intellectual awareness of homelessness and think, 'Wow, that must suck'. It does. I cannot explain to you how much it sucks and how exhausting it is dealing with feeling extremely anxious and also deeply ashamed, because you just feel like a failure. You feel like the lowest of the low, like an absolute outcast, because you have not even managed to keep a roof over your head. I tried to reason with myself and be, like, 'Look, all these things went wrong; it's not necessarily my fault'. But you still feel a really deep sense of shame.

During this time I linked in with Melbourne City Mission to try and get some help and get some support around finding housing. They kept me updated, but they were not able to find me crisis accommodation, because there were always people who were worse off, basically. I also talked to the housing office at the University of Melbourne, who at that time at least were extremely ill-equipped to deal with a homeless student. They offered me a bed in a shared dorm at one of the youth hostels, and I had to try to explain why that was not suitable for my situation and why I needed a private space, because of my mental health issues primarily. The University of Melbourne used to have their own share houses or properties for students who were particularly disadvantaged and for students with a disability, but they sold them off the year prior to me becoming homeless. I would not say that any Victorian universities are better equipped to deal with that, but definitely I did not have a positive experience trying to seek help from the university. The other thing was that I had already taken out a long-term loan from the University of Melbourne to pay for my college fees the previous year. So even if I had needed financial assistance, it is not something they would have been in a position to offer me.

During all this time I was still going to classes, I was still doing my assignments. I was very determined to stay at university because I felt like if I dropped out and was on a Jobseeker payment, then I would just get absolutely trapped in a cycle of poverty, and I was very anxious about the idea of having to deal with mutual obligations and to search for work when I, in terms of my health, was absolutely not in a position to be working. So I was extremely anxious and it was really hard. I consider myself really lucky that I managed to escape from that. I think it really easily could have gone the other way and I would have been trapped in that cycle of poverty—sleeping rough, couch surfing, in and out of mental health support and never getting better.

So what I want to advocate for is I think we definitely need more social and public housing. That is really important. All of the 50 000 people on the waitlist have a story like mine, have a story to tell and are doing it really tough, including two of my really good friends, who are currently living at my mum's house with their 17-year-old sister, who they have guardianship of because of massive family breakdown. Their parents were drug addicts. They were doing really well. They were in a private rental. They got given notice to leave the private rental and because the rental market here in Warrnambool and pretty much everywhere is so tight they have not been able to find another place. They are on the public housing waitlist—they have been for years—but that is not likely to happen anytime soon, so they are technically homeless. They have been living at my mum's house for six months, which is not a long-term solution. It is overcrowded. They have got a teenager who has had a pretty rough start to life and is now doing it really tough again. There are so many stories like mine and like theirs, and you just think: that is 50 000 people who need somewhere to live that is safe and where they can stay long term.

I think also it is important that we embrace a Housing First model. Everyone has got issues—I have mental health issues; for other people it is substance abuse or drug and alcohol dependence—but we have to give people a home first. You have to fulfil those basic needs before you can start to work on the more complex issues. You are not going to be able to kick a habit or be mentally well if you are out on the streets. You need to be safe and you need to feel safe. So I guess those are the main things that I wanted to get across to the committee—we need more housing and it has to be a Housing First approach. But I am really happy to take questions. I would really like to answer any questions that you have. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you very much, Cass, for sharing with us your personal story. Thank you, Seb, for representing Youth Affairs Council Victoria. I have a quick question for Cass. Mental health issues are one of the drivers for homelessness. Particularly for the younger cohort there are some mental health issues, particularly in this COVID time. So do you see this affecting a lot of your peers? And particularly in this time of the pandemic do you feel more anxious in dealing with the future to come—very uncertain?

Ms PRIGG: I have had an interesting experience, which again is not necessarily representative of everyone. I am still studying full time and working part time and because of the coronavirus supplement I am actually doing better financially than I have ever done.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: But that may be coming to an end soon, the supplement and the support.

Ms PRIGG: Exactly, and that brings me a lot of anxiety because I have been applying for jobs, but everyone has been applying for jobs and there are not many going. I have seven or eight casual roles with Deakin University. I am not getting any hours at the moment because of the coronavirus. So it is sort of a ticking time bomb until the end of September and a lot of uncertainty about whether I will basically be thrust back into poverty and not be able to pay rent and things anymore. So, yes, it is interesting in that it has brought some positives, but those could be quite short term.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes. I have a quick question for Seb. For the younger people, finding accommodation that is affordable is very difficult, particularly if they do not have a rental history and so on and so forth. But they also need a lot of services at different stages or at the same time. So how can a person in a situation of need find a pathway through the jungle, particularly where we do not have a central point of contact?

Mr ANTOINE: Yes, I think that is a really interesting question. There are some great models out there which combine provision of housing in a housing first model with the kind of wraparound supports that young people need. I think part of that is recognising that there are different kinds of experiences of homelessness that young people have, where some people who are doing absolutely just fine get evicted from their homes and enter into homelessness might not necessarily need the kinds of wraparound support of someone who has gone through a more traumatic experience.

On your question about the single point of entry, I think that is a factor of the system that we have got at the moment, and of course it would be interesting to discuss what that could look like in a better system I think as well as having things in a place-based system, where if you are living in rural and regional Victoria, you do not have to go through a system that is run out of Melbourne and does not understand your scenario, for example. I think as well what we have demonstrated in the report is with this system design stuff you can really get some

great results by using a youth participation approach and involving young people with lived experience in redesigning systems. That is something that YACVic has tested quite well over the past 60 years and something we can definitely talk about going forward, for sure.

Ms VAGHELA: [Zoom dropout] and I read the submission and there are four recommendations in the submission. My question is going to Cassandra. Cassandra, thank you very much for telling your personal story. I think you are selling yourself very short. You are a very determined person. I know that there is a lot of stigma and shame attached when there are complex issues, when you are facing homelessness and have mental health issues and so on and so forth. Now, you are a young person who has been in the system, and I am sure there are other young people who are trying to navigate the system and might not know what to do first. If you recommended, say, three changes to the current system, what would they be, which would make it easier for a young person to navigate the system?

Ms PRIGG: I have to be honest and say while the system can be a real maze to navigate and simplifying it would definitely be helpful—having a single point of contact—one of the major issues is the lack of resourcing. We need to put more money into housing. There needs to be more social housing. I know I keep repeating myself, but that is the major issue. From my experience it was not that I could not access those services. I was able to go in. I had a drop-in appointment at Melbourne City Mission. I was able to see someone very quickly. They were able to talk through my issues. It was the next step that was missing, which was the availability of housing. So yes, it is definitely an issue, but I would say it is probably not the biggest issue.

Mr ANTOINE: Do you mind if I jump in there?

Ms VAGHELA: Yes.

Mr ANTOINE: I think it is a great question, because I think that is where your heads are at at the moment about this system redesign thing. I think it might be worth considering what a system looks like if young people do not have to enter it in the first place. If young people have easier, more accessible access to affordable housing on the private rental market, whatever that looks like, or to social housing or to income support payments that mean they can afford to pay the rent at whatever house they live in, I think that understanding of the system would be fantastic, and I think that is what we should really strive for.

In terms of specific changes to the system there are a few things that the young people we talked to suggested. One of the things aligns with what has come out of the royal commission into mental health in Victoria, which is about the importance of peer workers and having workers in the system that understand what it feels like to be homeless. That means they can understand their clients better and act as a trusted adviser in that space. There are a few other things as well. We heard about how difficult it is to transition from youth homelessness services once you turn 25 into adult homelessness services and how sometimes it takes months and months and months after being cut off from the youth services to be brought into the adult homelessness services. So that is an issue as well. Plus the different kinds of age groups—some services will offer help up until you are 21, and then you are off on your own. Another thing that came up was the lack of access to support for young people in rural and regional areas, so that is definitely something that you could or should consider.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, everyone, for coming. Seb, it is lovely to see you again. Cassandra, thank you so much for telling your story. It is so important that we hear from young people who have experienced that. You are in charge of your own lives, and to hear your real-life experience guides us to the real needs of young people. So, Cassandra, I just wish you all the best. You are in a really difficult situation, and I hope that you will continue to be an advocate in this space to assist support agencies et cetera to understand your needs and how people can ensure that young people like yourself are supported in some way, shape or form so that you do have a roof over your head and that you are, more importantly, safe. So take care, and thank you both for coming.

Ms LOVELL: I am going to ask Cassandra the same questions that I asked Kea in the last session as a young person who is a consumer of services. Yes, Seb, we would all like a world where people did not have to access service, but that is going to take a long time. So at the moment, while people do need to access services, as a consumer of services, if you were minister for the day, what would be three things you would do that could make it easier for you to access the service? I am not asking you for the solutions of how many houses need to

be built or what needs to happen but about your interaction with the housing officers and what would make it easier for you—the things that you found difficult.

Ms PRIGG: Again I am going to be blunt and say I think that you are missing the point. I did not find it difficult to access services, unless what you mean by services is housing, in which case that did not happen.

Ms LOVELL: Well, it is the whole system, so housing as well, yes.

Ms PRIGG: Well, I would say exactly what you do not want me to say, which is I would increase the stock of public and social housing, because, yes, I was able to talk to people at a social services agency. For me it was Melbourne City Mission, because they covered the area that I was in. They provided homelessness services. I would call them every day and be told that there were no beds available. So for me it was not an issue of linking in with those services; it was that they did not have the resources to support me.

Ms LOVELL: Yes. And that is pleasing to hear—that it was not a problem for you to link in with services.

Ms PRIGG: And again I would say I am not necessarily representative of everyone. Young people have unique issues accessing these services, getting linked in with these services, because they are young people, and that might be something Seb wants to talk to, but for me that was definitely not the issue. I found them really great to interact with; it is just that they could not help me.

Mr ANTOINE: I might jump in on that, if that is okay, Dr Kieu, to say that those services are offering amazing support to young people; it is just an issue of capacity. So as Cassandra said in the beginning, there are so many more young people that are in a worse position than her that MCM and other service providers were helping; it is just that they did not have the capacity to extend that support to as many people that they needed to.

Ms LOVELL: And that is pleasing to hear. It is not pleasing to hear they did not have capacity but pleasing to hear that the interaction was good, because that is not always the case for people when they are interacting with our housing services.

Mr ANTOINE: Yes, definitely.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I have got a message from Fiona Patten. She cannot get her video to work, but she would like to convey her thanks to Cassandra for sharing her story and to say hello to Seb. She would like to have a question: what can we do about the discrimination that young people experience in the private rental market? Perhaps that is for Seb.

Mr ANTOINE: Yes, that is a great question, Fiona. Thank you for asking it, and hello to you as well. We certainly did identify that young people experienced discrimination when applying for rentals. It is a systemic problem. Young people are younger, so they naturally have a shorter rental history, so they do not look as attractive as tenants. They also likely earn less because they are at the beginning of their career, or they are studying full-time so they are on inadequate income support payments. So they are not attractive renters. One of the suggestions of the young people we talked to was about reducing the amount of information that you have to fill out on tenant application forms. They are running to pages and pages now and asking all sorts of questions, many of which are to weed out bad tenants. But we know that everyone just wants a home, a roof over their head, so that could be one way of addressing it. But it is really a systemic issue.

I might actually just say—sorry, Cass, just very quickly—that the Rent Fair reforms that the Victorian government have introduced have been fantastic and have really changed the game. But they do not really address the power imbalance between landlords and agents and tenants, and they still do not stop no-grounds evictions, which came up a lot amongst the young people that we were talking to. Sorry, Cassandra, over to you.

Ms PRIGG: Yes. I know we are running out of time, so I will try to keep it brief. I think Fiona has hit on something really important. I would say that there is also often double discrimination, or more than that, so young people who are also people of colour, people who are in the LGBT community, especially trans people. I have lived in several share houses with non-binary people and young trans women, and they were discriminated against, yes, because they were young but also because they were trans, and also because they

were young and trans. And our real estate agent would consistently misgender them, did not understand their life experiences. And so, yes, that is one thing I have had some experience with where real estate agents really do not necessarily understand young people and also some of the communities that they might be serving.

The other thing is I know in Warrnambool—this is slightly tangential—the rental market is really tight. I know that is true for many, many areas, including Melbourne. So the thing is, with my friends who I talked about earlier, they go and look for a property, one that they can afford, and they get knocked back because there is such high demand for rentals, there will always be someone who has got a higher income than them and the real estate agent is going to go, ‘Well, they’re a better bet’. If you increase the stock of public and social housing, that puts downwards pressure on private rentals and so, yes, if you have one public housing unit, you are giving a home to one person or one family, but you are also making it easier for people in the private rental market to find somewhere that they can live.

Dr CUMMING: Thank you, Seb, and thank you, Cassandra, for telling your stories. Seb, I must say that I do concur. I think it is probably a lot larger than 6000 youth who are homeless at the moment. And Cassandra, your lived experience is an experience that I hear time and time again. I have three teenagers and over the weekend I had a couch surfer, plus listening to—because my teenagers are quite social—one of the other children that attended my place, who experienced domestic violence, in the background. It is very complex. There is a lot of stigma and discrimination in the private market. There is a lot of housing stock, from what I understand, and there are a lot of empty houses and even, having these conversations over many years, a lot of apartments in the city that are just sitting there empty. I know many councils and others have tried to actually incentivise making those empty houses, empty apartments, usable.

But I do thank you, Cassandra, because I do believe that there needs to be a direct market for social housing and especially even a lot of single accommodation for youth. I am not quite sure if both of you would like to just expand upon what you have said earlier around how we could actually help with the stigma or the discrimination or what in the way of the Rent Fair model or Housing First model we could do to make it better for young people to get into private rentals as well as getting into the current social housing. I must say, Cassandra, it was a little disappointing to hear about your experience being in a university and having to hear that they do not even have that proper housing support there. I am just thinking of even that you are very articulate. I thank you for your presentation.

I guess, Seb, what about the younger children that we are actually seeing, or is there something I guess both of you might be able to share in the way of primary school or something that could have helped both your understanding and journey that might help others when they are younger?

Mr ANTOINE: Thanks, Dr Cumming. I will keep it very brief, because I know we are running out of time. I am going to jump to the middle part of your question. There are two things that I might suggest. On a macro scale would be to create some kind of policies to enforce the building of affordable housing, whether that is within the social housing system or on the private market; and on the micro scale, to change some policies to make renting fairer, things like enforcing minimum property standards, things like preventing the regular increase of rent, and things like ensuring that—we are hearing from young people who are living in houses that are infested with cockroaches and termites and ants, kitchens that do not work and bathrooms that are unsanitary. That should not come onto the private rental market in the first place. So basic things like that we are still asking for. Cassandra, do you have any thoughts?

Ms PRIGG: Yes. In terms of my personal experience, one thing that might have sort of changed the course of my life in a positive way would have been some of those mental health interventions when I was younger. It is something my mum fought really hard for. I was assessed by a psychologist who determined that I was, you know, highly gifted and needed enrichment and so on, but I had anxiety around going to school. I found it, honestly, really boring because it was easy. And those problems sort of intensified going into high school. The other thing I would say is if I had my time again, obviously I would do things very differently, but it would have been a really good option if I could have stayed at one of the residential colleges at the university. I simply could not afford it.

Dr CUMMING: Reduced rent or something.

Ms PRIGG: Yes. I really think we all have a part to play, and I think the universities do have a part to play in making sure that their vulnerable students can access on-campus housing. That is something that the colleges and college presidents could definitely be doing more, because they do offer a certain amount of scholarships for very gifted, talented students, be that in academia or sport, but they do not offer a lot of scholarships for people who are really disadvantaged.

Dr CUMMING: I know in my area, Cassandra, we have got Western Chances. But, yes, I think that that is definitely a point.

Mr TARLAMIS: I do not have any questions, but I would just like to thank Seb for his submission and talking to us today and also thank Cassandra for sharing her personal story, and I wish you all the best for the future as well.

Ms PRIGG: Thank you.

Mr BARTON: Thanks, Seb and Cass. I just want to go back over what Fiona discussed before: ending discrimination for young renters and implementing and enforcing stronger regulations. My own experience is I was forced to sell my home and had to go into the rental market at nearly 60 years of age, and I had not done that my entire life. I was absolutely staggered by the hoops that I had to jump through to get a rental property, even though I have owned property all my life. I am big enough and ugly enough to be able to work my way through it, but I do not know how younger people would be able to take these things on. That was certainly a major issue and was an eye-opener for me. The other thing is enforcing minimum property standards and things like that. The amount of rubbish out there is staggering. How big an issue is that? Was I just unlucky? Was I looking in the wrong place because I was trying to be cheap? How big a problem is it, Seb?

Mr ANTOINE: Yes, I think it is a huge problem, Mr Barton. I think your experience is very common, and I really appreciate you bringing it up. I think, first, that the hoops that you have to jump through, young people are thinking about that all the time, and I think it might be worth remembering that we do not get any information from landlords. We do not know how many investment properties they have. We do not know how many tenants they have evicted in the past. That kind of information is a one-way street, where young people are telling landlords everything about themselves and not getting anything in return.

In terms of the state of housing, I think it is a huge issue across the state, in metro Melbourne and in regional Victoria, and I think part of that is due to the state of the rental market. It is a leasing market. So renters have to compete with each other for the available houses, and there just are not enough to go around. So landlords can get away with offering houses that are not really fit for human habitation.

Mr BARTON: Seb, the other thing I found was that there was auctioning of the rent.

Mr ANTOINE: Yes.

Mr BARTON: And I do not know how anyone on support payments or anything like that could possibly compete with someone who is working and all that sort of stuff.

Mr ANTOINE: Yes. You have to bid above the listed leasing price for your application to be considered. Yes, I think the Rent Fair reforms have done some work in that space, but it is absolutely still happening, for sure.

Mr BARTON: A bit more to go yet.

Mr ANTOINE: Yes. Do you want to add anything to that, Cass?

Ms PRIGG: I agree with both of you. Mr Barton, age discrimination goes both ways—very aware of that. People discriminate against young people, but they discriminate against older people as well, just like they discriminate against parents. We are all suffering. But yes, I have definitely gone through applying for properties multiple times. You would imagine in somewhere like Warrnambool it is probably a bit easier to get a rental property—not really; it is still pretty hard. I am in a rental property now with two housemates, and we had applied for maybe 10 before we got this one, so yes, it is definitely still a big issue.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Cassandra, for sharing your story. I just want to disclose that I did live on College Crescent at St Hilda's College next door to Queen's for some time as a resident tutor.

Ms PRIGG: Lovely.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: So I understand how fantastic the environment is and the support, but it is not the most affordable place to live—I do understand that very well. Thank you, Seb, for presenting on behalf of Youth Affairs Council Victoria. Your submission and what you have given today will have been recorded, and you will be presented with a proof, so please take your time to go through that to make sure that you are not misrepresented in any way. Eventually that will find its way to the website of the Parliament, the committee website, and be made available to the public, so please do have a look. So thank you once again, and thank you, all the committee members. We will see some of you tomorrow at our meeting.

Ms PRIGG: Thanks for the invite.

Mr ANTOINE: Thank you to the committee, and feel free to reach out if you would like to discuss more.

Committee adjourned.