

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Melbourne—Friday, 22 November 2019

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WITNESS

Ms Kate Colvin, Manager, Policy and Communications, Council to Homeless Persons.

The CHAIR: Good morning. Kate, I know that you have done this before here.

Ms COLVIN: No, never before.

The CHAIR: Oh really? Well, welcome. I am very pleased.

Ms LOVELL: I am amazed in all the years you have been doing this work.

The CHAIR: I am amazed too; that is right.

Ms LOVELL: Yes, really amazed.

The CHAIR: In that case, for your information the evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by our *Constitution Act* and also our Legislative Council standing orders, so anything that you say here is protected by law. However, if you were to make the same comments outside, they may not be protected. False and misleading evidence to a committee can be considered contempt of Parliament.

As I mentioned, we are recording, so we have Hansard here, and you will be provided with a transcript at the end.

Welcome. If you would like to make some opening comments, then we can move to questions.

Ms COLVIN: Wonderful. Thank you for having me. I would like to begin by acknowledging that the Inquiry hearing today is on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and emerging and any elders or Aboriginal community members who might be participating in the room today or via the webcast.

I would also like to thank parliamentary members for holding this Inquiry. Homelessness is such an important issue that is devastating the lives of people across Victoria, and the time that you are going to take looking into the issue over the coming months is greatly appreciated.

Visual presentation.

Ms COLVIN: Today I am going to talk about three main things. I think homelessness is misunderstood so I am going to talk a little bit first about what is homelessness and what that experience means to people. I am going to talk about how much homelessness we have in Victoria, but just briefly, and some of the drivers of that; and then lastly I am going to talk about what the solutions are, and I think you have already heard some of that from Guy, so hopefully what I say will build on what Guy has said.

So what is homelessness? This is the ABS definition, and I think it captures part of it. When I started at Council to Homeless Persons I knew that homelessness was a real problem and I knew people found it a really devastating experience, but I think in my understanding I really concentrated on the physical deprivation that people might experience: the experience of being cold if you have to sleep outside or you do not have a warm bed, the difficulty of keeping clean and being comfortable if you cannot access a shower, cooking a decent meal if you cannot access a kitchen. But I think after having listened to a lot of people with lived experience of homelessness speak about the problem, I understand better now that those physical deprivations, whilst they are really hard for people, often they are not the worst part of the problem. The difficulty is that homelessness is a really profound feeling of dislocation from that private space, from that safe space that we call our home, from that place where we have time to recover from times that are difficult.

It involves a loss of status in the community and that can be really devastating. It involves a shift in people's identity from being someone who is a worker, a home owner, a part of that community, to someone who is pushed to the margins of that community. Those more psychological problems cause massive stress and anxiety for people. They can also cause a lot of shame and self-doubt, even at times self-loathing, and all of those

feelings are really corrosive for people's mental health. I missed all of Guy's presentation but I hope that he shared with you his research which showed that more people who are homeless gained a mental illness after being homeless than actually had one before they went into homelessness, and it is because of those feelings of dislocation and shame and stress and anxiety that that is the case.

I want to pause for a moment on that reflection about what homelessness is because I think it is really important as you embark on this Inquiry that you get a deep sense for yourself about what the problem is you are trying to solve. I am going to ask you to think about what having a home means to you. I hope that it is a place where you have been able to make happy memories, where if you have kids they can be comfortable and secure and that means that then they can be their best selves. When kids are really stressed, we all know that is when they struggle. But having a home is also where you have to manage life's hard moments: where you have to get up out of a warm bed and keep it together while a kid is screaming through the night, as I have done. But also when you are grieving a loss when you have lost a family member, when you have had a really super-crap day at work—maybe you thought you would win an election and you did not, maybe you had a really horrid radio interview or you had a difficult conversation with the boss—and you have got to go home and put on your game face and get ready for the next day and come back out into the public world. It is at those times that we need our home. We need that comfort, we need that security, we need that safe place to recover ourselves, to manage the ups and downs of adult life.

It is not just about one night. It is not just about having a warm bed for that night. Becoming homeless is a process of losing a home and the grief that is associated with that, and then it is a process of striving to be rehomed, to regain that safe place. So when we are thinking about solutions as you go through the Inquiry I ask you to ask yourself of the solution that is being offered, not, 'Will it work for those people, those different people who are homeless?', but ask, 'Would that work for me if it was me who was homeless? Would I put my mum there? Would I put my daughter there, or my brother there?'. Is that solution helping people to get back to that full sense of a home, or is it just about getting people sheltered for a night?

Now I am going to talk a little bit about how much homelessness we have in Victoria. You will probably see these figures come up again through the Inquiry so I will whip through them. The Census showed that almost 25 000 people were homeless on Census night. Of course over the course of a year there are many different nights and a lot more people experience homelessness, so who is accessing Victorian homelessness services? Almost 117 000 people a year. It has increased 26 per cent in five years. The most common client coming to a homeless service is a young woman in her 20s or 30s with children. I think often people think of the archetypal homelessness client as something different to that but one in five clients are children and one in 10 are Aboriginal, and just keep in mind that Aboriginal Victorians are less than 1 per cent of the population, so that is a really massive over-representation.

There are many ways to not have a home. When we think about that real meaning of home and the comfort and security that people need to manage life's ups and downs, in that sense the people that we see sleeping rough on the street are only the tip of the iceberg. Typically people who are struggling in private rentals will cycle through a series of forms of marginal accommodation, some of which we would consider homelessness. Someone might lose their housing and move first to a friend's place and sleep on the couch. Their welcome might run out after a couple of days, it might run out after a couple of weeks, but eventually perhaps it runs out and when their welcome runs out maybe they go to a rooming house. People who have lived in rooming houses, sometimes people have a good experience but often what we very commonly hear is that people find that experience frightening. Often in bed at night they can hear other people fighting, screaming at each other, hurting each other. They might be threatened or even hurt themselves, and they are very likely to be around people who are using illicit drugs.

So while we have got this process happening, we have also got the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System happening. I think I should mention that about one in four people who exit acute mental health care in Victoria are likely to go into—we say into homelessness; often what it really is is into a rooming house. If you think about someone in that very delicate state of health, where they really need some quiet time to recover, to get well, and they are in an environment where it is a frightening place to be. Often when it gets too frightening, maybe when someone actually has been hurt or the threats are too much for them, they leave the rooming house, often into rough sleeping. And then from rough sleeping, often people will end up in a motel

and emergency accommodation. People will often say they have many of the same problems in motels where there have been a lot of people who are homeless put as the experiences that they have in rooming houses. And so then perhaps they have met some people in their homeless experience and they have got a squat, and they move in with them and the cycle keeps continuing.

I think that is important to think about because whilst you see people on the street, a month later it is quite likely to be a different set of people because the people who are on the street have moved through the cycle. But the problem with that is also that we cannot solve it by just solving the problem for people on the street; we have to solve the broader problem and get people into that proper place, that more full sense of home, where people have privacy and security and a proper place to be.

Why do we have so much homelessness in Victoria? I think when people come to homeless services they are asked about the main reasons that they are seeking assistance, so this data is drawn from that questioning. Thirty-eight per cent are coming to homeless services because of family violence and 35 per cent because of a range of housing issues. Very closely related to that is the next one—11 per cent, which is financial employment difficulties. The two—family violence and housing—are not unrelated in the sense that you can experience family violence and it should not translate into homelessness. If a woman fleeing violence could afford a new tenancy, then she would have a lot of appalling experiences in that cycle but not necessarily homelessness. If people come to homeless services having experienced family violence, it is usually because they are struggling to be rehomed.

So what is happening? I think Guy mentioned before the big problem in housing and how that is translating into homelessness, so I will build on that. This is a picture about the private rental market. The problem that we have is that in the private rental market, in cities in particular, there is a lot of pressure, particularly on low-cost rental stock, and so rents are going up higher than low wages and higher than Centrelink payments—actually even higher for lower income rents relative to wages than for all rents. What that is about is when there is pressure on the rental market—remember it is a competitive process—every individual rental opportunity has its own sort of mini-competition for it and the landlord will pick the best, probably the highest income household for that property. So when people are struggling to get into home ownership, maybe they try and save money by renting a cheaper property than they would otherwise choose. They then squeeze out a household who that is the only property they could afford. They then are pushed down to an even more marginal property and then essentially they are squeezing the lowest income households out the bottom of that process.

The problem is most serious for singles and for single parents with just one child, because the income, relative to the housing market, is much lower. These figures are from the Rent Report that DHHS produce, which is drawn from all of the bonds that are registered in Victoria. It shows that only 20 one-bedroom rentals in Melbourne were affordable in a whole quarter for people on Newstart, and 1.4 per cent of two-bedroom rentals were affordable to a single parent and child. So that really just leaves the lowest income earners with nowhere to go.

So you think, ‘Well, what’s the social housing safety net?’ If people are struggling in the private market, surely there is a safety net, surely they can get into social housing. But Victoria’s population has been growing fast. Even though the State Government has been doing some investment, the social housing proportion of all housing stock has been decreasing. This chart shows just how bad that decrease is. Every year it falls further, and that makes it harder and harder for households who are struggling in the rental market to get into social housing. What this means for homelessness is that it is driving more people to our doors—people who are squeezed out the bottom of the rental market, many who, as Guy described, their only problem is that they cannot find a place that they can afford to rent. Some of them will have additional needs, but a lot are really just struggling with poverty and the high cost of rent. But it also makes rehousing people really hard. So people come to homeless services needing to be rehoused, but there are no affordable places to put them, and that means it becomes a bottleneck in the homeless service system.

So the question then is: how do you fix that bottleneck? You have got all these extra people who are experiencing homelessness because of the rental market coming into the homeless service system, and they come in and they go to crisis accommodation, but the thing is if they cannot get out of crisis accommodation, they cannot leave because there is no housing for them to leave into. So they end up staying in crisis accommodation that is intended for just a week or two weeks or six weeks—they stay for months. Sometimes

they stay for a year, or in transitional housing that is intended for three months, and they end up staying for two years. That means that the next person who comes through the door whose housing situation has fallen apart, they have got nowhere to stay, they cannot go into crisis accommodation because it is full of all the people who cannot leave into long-term housing. Perhaps then they are put in motel accommodation, which has some of the problems that I described before, and the cycle goes on.

Often I think when we look at this problem superficially we think, 'What we need to do is build more crisis accommodation', but the way the maths works is that that really does not stack up. It is like you are making the body of the bottle wider, but you are doing nothing about the neck. What we are trying to communicate—and often I think it is misunderstood—is you think we are the homeless service system delivering crisis accommodation, and why don't we just say, 'You should have more crisis accommodation'. It is because, as Guy said in his presentation, it is not about making the homeless service system bigger; it is about making the solutions work, and the solution is making the neck of the bottle bigger and making more housing that people can move into.

We had Canadian experts here for the conference that we had just last month, and they also warned us about this problem. They said you do not make an overall homelessness service system work just by building a big emergency response. You need instead to focus on preventing people falling into homelessness, and there are a lot of strategies that work to do that, and on getting people quickly out of homelessness into housing and supports. Another reason that we want to do that and do it quickly is that homelessness, I think, is always a bad experience, but if it is a short experience, it is a lot less bad than if it is a long experience. So if someone has a short experience of homelessness and they are quickly rehoused, I particularly think about this given that the most common clients are women and children, so you think a child has an experience of losing their home. Yes, that is traumatic. If they can be quickly rehoused and hopefully stay at the same school, then the level of disruption in their lives is minimised. If they are homeless for a year and are moved around through multiple different emergency responses, think about what that does to their education. Think about what that does to their connection with friends. Think about what that does dragging around after a mum who is that stressed moving through all those situations. That will probably have lifelong impacts on their health.

Then you think, 'Well, what then are governments doing about it if the real problem is housing, and what is the housing spending looking like?'. I have tracked the Victorian state budgets over multiple years. This chart shows you in the blue what the Victorian Government is spending on social housing and homelessness together, and in orange what the Commonwealth contributes to Victoria towards that blue spending. The blue minus the orange is what the State adds on top of the Commonwealth's investment. You can see that the Commonwealth investment has sort of declined over time. It has, really over the last five or six years, been just basically static. If we were to add in population growth and inflation to that chart, which are not there now, you would see that it is declining in real terms. The State Government, though, have been increasing their investment, which is really positive. But the State Government does still spend less than half the national average per Victorian on social housing compared to other states. So you think we are one of the wealthiest states—I think perhaps we would be the wealthiest state in Australia per person, per head of population, and yet we spend the least on social housing.

I want to draw your attention to another problem in the State's spending that I think is not well understood, and I will distribute when I finish some more information about this. Alongside the fact that Victoria spends less per head than other states, there is also a process underway which dates back to 1997 where every year Treasury takes \$50 million out of the office of housing's resources, which is \$50 million less than then the office of housing have to—

Ms LOVELL: It is not nearly that amount any more, Kate, because I renegotiated it. There was a sliding scale and it was much lower than the \$50 million. It used to be \$50 million, you are right—I have not got the figures now—but it is much lower and over a much shorter period as well.

Ms COLVIN: Okay. Maybe that bears a bit more investigation, but that is not quite what shows up in the budget documents.

Ms LOVELL: Well, it should—unless they have gone back to that. But I had renegotiated that.

Ms COLVIN: Just to explain this a little bit more, it dates back to 1997. Treasurer Alan Stockdale was the Treasurer and at the time State assets were being sold to pay down state debt. The office of housing had a debt to the Commonwealth, assets were sold and that debt was retired, so in effect at that stage you think, well, the ledger is clean. We have lost an asset but we have lost a debt at the same time. But that is not where the story ended. Treasurer Stockdale made an arrangement—it was called the deed of assumption—which required the office of housing to pay this \$50 million a year to Treasury until 2042. The payment at the time was subject to renegotiation between the director and the minister for housing, so while most years it was paid, in some years when budgets in the office of housing were tight a lesser sum or no resources were paid. But in the 2011–12 budget, which Ms Lovell is referring to, I think, the Government varied the agreement, making the payment mandatory between 2011–12 and 2022–23. That enabled the Government at the time to record \$450 million as an additional surplus in that budget, but that was an expense against the office of housing.

Ms LOVELL: Just to explain, the debt was always the office of housing's debt. When Stockdale paid it off, the debt went from being a debt from the office of housing to the Commonwealth to being a debt from the office of housing to the State, because it was not money that came out of housing. That is why that debt continued to exist. But I agree, it should not have continued to have to be paid, but that was the way it was structured.

Ms COLVIN: Yes. Following the restructure through to 2022, so it is mandatory through this period, it will revert to being not necessarily mandatory but still subject to that deed. So I think that is an opportunity. It is an easy opportunity where the State could easily or immediately deliver an extra \$50 million a year into social housing investment.

The CHAIR: Absolutely.

Ms COLVIN: Those resources, were they able to go back into the office of housing, would go some way towards addressing the social housing shortfall that we have. The latest AHURI research—the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, which is really the nation's lead housing research outfit—says that we have a shortfall in Victoria of 102 800 properties. I think arguably the Victorian Government would need further contributions from the Federal Government to fully address the shortfall, and yet, as I think I have explained, the Victorian Government could do a lot more than they are doing now. So in the upcoming budget we will be calling for the State Government to commit to an extra 6000 social housing properties a year each year for 10 years and for a commitment to mandatory inclusionary zoning.

Victoria also has a really significant shortfall in support capacity. Every day 90 people are turned away from homelessness services because of a lack of resources. I think, as Guy Johnson explained, while many people who are experiencing homelessness need only a short period of support, others have higher needs, and the reality is that currently the resources are not there to give people the length of support or intensity of support they need other than in a few niche programs which are able to deliver that support and when they do are usually very successful.

There are a number of areas where there is more support needed, but I am going to flag in particular two, because I know I need to wrap up.

The CHAIR: Yes, that would be great. Thank you.

Ms COLVIN: A couple of budgets ago the State Government introduced investment to support young people leaving care, but only 50 of the 500 young people leaving care each year are able to receive that support. So we are asking for that support to be expanded to all care leavers, because young people at that time of their life, particularly those who are highly vulnerable and have been in the care of the state, do need support to gain and sustain housing and also to help manage a whole lot of other issues that they have. The other is thinking about the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the huge gap that exists in the community for supported housing for people who have mental illness. We will be prioritising a call for supported housing options for people in that circumstance.

That brings me to the end. In conclusion I just want to finish with three messages. As you conduct this Inquiry, I ask you to always ask yourselves: when people are putting solutions to you, is this a solution that will get

people into a real home, a place that you would feel safe yourself? Is this a solution that will prevent homelessness or which will get people quickly out of homelessness? And lastly, is this a solution that will provide the support needed by more vulnerable people to sustain their housing?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Kate. Those are very good points for us to bear in mind. We have got a few minutes for questions.

Mr GRIMLEY: Thanks, Kate, for the submission. You spoke about prevention being the key to the avenue to address homelessness. Prior to your submission the professor indicated that prevention was very difficult due to the unpredictability of homelessness. So I suppose my question is: in your eyes, what should be the focus of the Government right now in addressing issues of homelessness and housing?

Ms COLVIN: You have mentioned specifically in the prevention space. There is a lot more work that can be done to make sure people have the legal support that they need when they are facing eviction proceedings or when there are issues with their tenancy that have not got to eviction proceedings level. So making sure people have that information—it is not that easy to get hold of a lawyer to help you in that circumstance if you do not have the resources to get one—and then also making sure that people have the support that they need. It is not always just about legal issues, but people might have support needs to help them manage housing. If they are struggling with a problem with hoarding, for example, then support can help someone in that circumstance. So there are support needs in that prevention space, but really the biggest priority I would say is exactly the same as what Guy said—more social housing, which would prevent people becoming homeless and also assist people out of homelessness.

Ms VAGHELA: Just a quick one. You mentioned CHP calling for 6000 homes per year for the next 10 years. How did you come to that conclusion of 6000 homes?

Ms COLVIN: It is based on some work that Judy Yates did for the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which talked about bringing Victoria's proportion of social housing up to the national average of 4.5 per cent.

Dr KIEU: I just have a quick question. Thank you, Kate, for the submission. Being the data person that I am, I am wondering about the figures you have been giving. The Commonwealth support for homelessness in the State of Victoria has been flat or even decreasing and the State is increasing, but the number per head is still the lowest in the country. Even though the population of Victoria is increasing, when compared in absolute terms it is still lower than New South Wales. Yet in New South Wales they have more per head than Victoria. Would it be interesting and a better measure if you said how much funding there is per head for homeless people? So that would be more of a direct support with funding. Do you have the figure?

Ms COLVIN: No. The figures on the amount per head are drawn from the Productivity Commission. Victoria has a higher number of people accessing homelessness services than New South Wales. I do not have it in my head; I would have to come back to you about what the comparison is in terms of the number of people experiencing homelessness and the amount per head for someone who is experiencing homelessness.

The CHAIR: I do not know that per head would be a relevant figure, because some people require far more support than others.

Dr KIEU: You can just use it to measure how much the Government is supporting directly, because—

Ms COLVIN: Sorry to interrupt. The figure per head was not about homelessness funding; it was about social housing funding. So it is slightly different.

The CHAIR: That leads to a quick question I have. There seems to be this notion that the support packages are for six weeks and 13 weeks. As we heard from Guy, everybody is different. Why did we come to a six-week package and a 13-week package?

Ms COLVIN: Because the homelessness service system was built at a time when it was a transition support. So if you have a lot of affordable housing out there in the rental market and someone experiences a period of homelessness because their tenancy falls apart for some reason, then they come to a homeless service. They

have six weeks of support to help resolve what perhaps those financial drivers and those financial issues were, they get help to secure a new tenancy, they move into the new tenancy, they get a little bit of support to settle in, and then the staff move on to the next person. But what happens now is that people come to a homelessness service, that support period starts and they try to find them a housing situation. There is no housing situation to be found. By the end of the six weeks there is still no housing situation that has been found, they are still in perhaps emergency or crisis accommodation and there are still more people coming through the door needing support.

Ms LOVELL: The door keeps revolving

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms COLVIN: So some services have been able to restructure that support to provide longer periods of support where it is more intensively needed, but you have to keep in mind that every time that happens, if there are 20 places funded for the short period of support and 20 places funded for the long period of support and you use a quarter of those on a small number of people requiring long support, then there are always going to be 100 people coming through the door for those 40 support places anyway, so you will be seeing less people. Either way you cut it there is not enough.

The CHAIR: So to me it seems like that structure is actually problematic now.

Ms COLVIN: Yes, and yet I suppose there is a question mark. Even though I would certainly say there is more support capacity needed, I suppose we are also saying it is not a problem that can be fixed just with support.

The CHAIR: No, that is right. It just seems that that rigidity of the six- and 13-week packaging and how it is funded does not seem to be fit for purpose.

Ms COLVIN: No.

Ms LOVELL: So, Kate, thanks very much. It was great. Sorry I had to go out. We are dealing with something at the office.

Ms COLVIN: No, not at all.

Ms LOVELL: Obviously in homelessness we have different levels of response and different levels of funding within those—there is the crisis support, there is the early intervention support, there are the long-term solutions and you have obviously also identified housing as the number one issue for a long-term solution. What would you identify as being the number one thing that needs to be changed in the crisis and the early intervention space for finding a solution to homelessness?

Ms COLVIN: There has been one program funded which has been extraordinarily successful, actually, called the Private Rental Assistance Program. So I think it really started before the Royal Commission into Family Violence but did get some extra resources through that period. It touches back on what Guy Johnson was talking about, about rapid rehousing. So whilst the rental market is unaffordable for many people who come through homeless services, it is not unaffordable for all, particularly in some rural locations where there is still affordable housing or other parts of Melbourne where there is still affordable housing, particularly for larger family groups or for a woman and children coming through family violence where there is a reasonable prospect that after a period she will be able to get back into employment. So in those circumstances the Private Rental Assistance Program offers a subsidy into private rental and assistance to secure a rental property. So effectively it works how a homelessness system is supposed to work: a woman presents, she needs to be rehoused, the private rental assistance worker rehouses her, that housing is secured with a subsidy so it is affordable during the period when her income is not high and then that situation is effectively ended. So that is a fantastic early intervention, and it was continued on in the last budget.

In crisis support I think there have been some really good changes over the last few years to make the crisis supported accommodation. Just so people understand the different terminology, we use that to refer to the formal supported crisis—the staffed crisis services. They operated on a throughput model, but some reforms

now mean that they operate where people can stay for a longer period in that crisis accommodation until some longer-term accommodation is secured. So that will work better for the people who are able to access that support. Of course what it also means is that there will be less spots available and more people will miss out on staying in crisis supported accommodation.

Ms LOVELL: Which leads to a supplementary question, then. We talked about the episodes of support and now we are talking about leaving people in crisis accommodation longer, which would mean that some people might miss out on the access to that crisis accommodation. But do you feel it would be better to actually service people for longer to get a better outcome even if we had to service less people in order to do that? I know it is a really vexed question.

Ms COLVIN: It is a vexed question. There is no easy answer. I think it is better to focus on getting outcomes with the people that we work with and to succeed and end people's homelessness, because that is the point of the work. But it is not a happy situation for people to miss out on support that they really need.

Ms LOVELL: But we would be better to fund services for outcomes than to fund services for throughput?

Ms COLVIN: That is a separate question again. So I think that it is important to focus on the outcomes; whether or not you achieve that by funding for outcomes is a separate question. So I think some of the most important work that the homelessness sector does is with some of the people who are most vulnerable in the community, who are some of the community members who are hardest to stick to housing, who have experienced trauma. I think Guy described some of the reasons why people's housing situations might fall through. So if you were to simply fund for outcomes, you would create an incentive to not work with that client group, who is really the most important client group to work with.

The CHAIR: That is right. You would end up with the cherrypicking again.

Ms COLVIN: Because, Ms Lovell, if you came to a homelessness service and said, 'Oh, a few things fell over and I'm homeless', you know, anyone could easily fix your circumstances; we just need to get you some housing and you are fine. So it would be a pity to orient the services in that way, I think.

Mr BARTON: G'day, Kate. You have answered a lot of the questions already, I think. There are many, many small groups and charities and faith-based groups doing enormous work, fantastic work, and no-one is taking anything away from that. It is certainly my view that this Committee is not going to come up with a set of recommendations that are going to fix everything. I think this is going to be an ongoing thing forever, and governments have to sort of accept that this is it and treat it accordingly. Do you think we can do better in the coordination of all the different groups, and is there opportunity to fix overlap where we are spending money, where one group is doing something, the other group is doing a similar thing and there is an overlap there—so we can pull that out and also deal with the red tape? I certainly know some issues about some red tape—about getting some things done. Are there opportunities there to open up the pathways, to head us in the direction we need to go?

Ms COLVIN: I think the sector has always focused on continuous improvement; you could never say there are not things to be improved. Even if things were perfect, you would always be focusing on improvement.

Mr BARTON: You can always find something.

Ms COLVIN: But I think any suggestion that there are clients who have multiple case workers who are all working with them in an overlapping way is—I think that would be very rare, because access to casework is a very scarce resource. There are a lot more people who miss out on access to casework than are able to get it, particularly longer term casework. There are also already a number of processes in the sector that facilitate coordination. Each local area of service providers—I think there are eight in the state—have a coordinating point. They meet together as a network, work through those coordination issues and tend to know each other quite well. Then there are also particular initiatives of coordination, say, particularly around rough sleeping. There is service coordination in the city of Melbourne around different organisations that work on rough sleeping and I think also in Port Phillip, though Cathy Humphrey would be better to ask about that. So I think that that is probably not where the gains—

Mr BARTON: Can be made.

Ms COLVIN: can be made.

Mr BARTON: Can I just ask one other little question: eighteen-year-olds—when kids have been in care and they turn 18, I have been told that it is almost like, ‘Good luck, on your way’. How much service is available to look after them?

Ms COLVIN: Well, the new funding through the Home Stretch initiative provides the support and accommodation support that young people need, but as I said it is only 50 a year.

The CHAIR: Fifty places.

Ms COLVIN: Five-hundred a year leave care. I think between 40 and 50 per cent will come to a homeless service within a year of leaving care. And often they are taken straight there by the case manager. I think that is a terrible outcome. They leave the out-of-home care system, straight to a youth refuge. That is not a plan for the future. That is not security. Youth refuges are somewhere where you can only stay for a limited period of time. So there is a massive lack of support. I have not dealt—

The CHAIR: But we should be offering support to all 500.

Ms COLVIN: Yes. But that highlights a broader issue for young people who are unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness. Young people leaving out-of-home care are one part of a broader group. There are other young people who have not been in the care system who need support. At a later point, or perhaps from other members of the sector who are focusing on youth homelessness, that is certainly an important area where young people need both support and often housing—and not just housing.

Mr BARTON: Sorry, Kate, if we do not get this part right, this is going to go on their entire lives, isn't it?

Ms COLVIN: And right at the time when they should be concentrating on their education, their education is disrupted.

The CHAIR: Which we know is another preventive factor.

Ms COLVIN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That was great. I know it is hard to be rushing through these hearings. Kate, thanks very much. That was really insightful. If you do want to leave that other material for us, we will make sure everyone gets it. As I said earlier, you will get a transcript of today, and feel free to make any corrections to that.

Ms COLVIN: Great. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.