

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Melbourne—Wednesday, 9 September 2020

(via videoconference)

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Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

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WITNESSES

Mr Ben Rimmer, Director of Housing, and

Ms Sherri Bruinhout, Deputy Commander, COVID-19 Public Housing Response, and Executive Director, Housing Pathways and Outcomes, Housing Division, Department of Health and Human Services.

The CHAIR: Hello, everyone, and welcome back. As you know, this is the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues public hearing for the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. We really appreciate those who have joined us online. It really has been quite a terrific day, and it is the second-last day of public hearings for this inquiry. I am very pleased to be able to welcome Sherri Bruinhout and Ben Rimmer from DHHS. Thank you for making the time, because we know absolutely how busy your lives are and your work is. Joining me today we have Tien Kieu, the Deputy Chair; Lee Tarlamis; Kaushaliya Vaghela; Rod Barton; and of course Wendy Lovell.

Just a reminder that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. That is under our *Constitution Act* and the standing orders of our Legislative Council. Therefore the information that you provide today is protected by law. However, any comments repeated outside may not have the same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. Of course we cannot do this alone. There is a team of transcribers, the Hansard folk behind us, transcribing today. You will receive a transcript of this session. Please have a look at it and make sure we do not misrepresent anything that you have said today. Ultimately it will be on the committee's website and of course will form an important part of the inquiry and of our report. If you would like to make some opening remarks, and then we will open it up for a committee discussion. Thank you.

Mr RIMMER: Thank you very much, Chair. I might make a couple of introductory remarks and then hand over to my colleague Sherri to talk in more detail about the central homelessness features of things. I think there is a presentation somewhere that should come up, hopefully.

The CHAIR: The magic of technology. Ben, you do not happen to have it on your screen, do you, that you could share? It does not matter. If the committee has got it, I am sure they will be able to share it.

Mr RIMMER: Or Sherri might do it. Why don't I start?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr RIMMER: The presentation may be able to catch up with me. Sherri and I wanted to give today a quick overview really going back to the basics about the scale and causes of homelessness in Victoria: the policies and practices that we have in place in Victoria to respond; some of the challenges that have particularly confronted people experiencing homelessness during the COVID crisis and the government responses to that, some recent new investments that will help transition out of our current circumstances and into some more sustainable housing outcomes for people who have been in emergency accommodation during the COVID crisis, and then finally a little bit of an update about what is happening in relation to maintaining, renewing and growing social housing.

Visual presentation.

Mr RIMMER: If you look at the drivers of demand for homelessness services, the first and obvious point is that roughly half of people seeking homelessness services report commonwealth income support as their main income, so clearly the adequacy of commonwealth income support payments is a very critical issue when it comes to people's ability to get into a sustainable housing situation and to sustain that sustainable housing situation. Clearly a big part of that is Newstart allowance. There has been a lot of debate about the adequacy of Newstart. A significant component of people are on disability support and a significant component of people are on a parenting payment. Obviously all three of those payments have been subject to significant change in policy settings at the commonwealth level over the last decade or longer, with the increase of mutual obligations. One of the consequences of these things is that the process of getting onto payment and remaining on payment is incredibly important for people who are vulnerable in the housing market. There is a lot of

emerging evidence about the difficulty of proving identity, meeting various administrative hurdles and staying on payment for people who are perhaps experiencing some other challenges in their life.

One example of this is that about 10 per cent of homelessness clients who are over 15 reported that they had no income—zero income—from any source. These are people who are seeking homelessness services who are not in paid employment but who are not in receipt of commonwealth income support. That amount doubled between 2012 and 2018, so in those six years the number of people who reported zero income when they approached homelessness services doubled.

On the right-hand side of the chart you will see that obviously affordability in the housing market has been an ongoing challenge. It started low and stayed low in metropolitan Melbourne. Even in regional Victoria affordability has been declining. Clearly in the last few months you can just see a slight uptick at the end of this chart, which really reflects the impact of the pandemic on the rental market. But clearly access to affordable housing, including social housing, is challenging and getting more challenging. Even in country Victoria only 45 per cent of new lettings were affordable to people who are at the lower end of the income spectrum.

Obviously one component of this is the waiting list for social housing. There are about 41 000 households, around 80 000 people, who are currently on the Victorian Housing Register waiting for social housing. Priority housing applicants make up about half of that, and that is people who are experiencing homelessness, people who are experiencing family violence, single women over the age of 55 and a range of other priority housing categories.

In short, there are over 20 000 households who have a priority need for social housing on the waiting list as it is today. What that means in practice is that the vast majority of new social housing allocations are going to people who have priority housing applications, and people who are on what is called the register of interest are extremely unlikely to get a housing response through the current policy settings.

On the next slide, on the left-hand side, you can see that between 2012 and 2018 the number of people who have sought assistance from homelessness services has grown significantly over that time—22 per cent over that time—and if you go back to what I said previously, the percentage of people in 2012–13 who had zero income was 5 per cent, and it is now 10 per cent, so it has gone from, effectively, 4000 to 11 000 during that period. There is significant growth in people who are needing homelessness services.

If you look at the top right-hand side of this chart, 64 per cent of people who are seeking homelessness services are actually in a house and 36 per cent are homeless. One of the great success stories, and to be honest I think it is less understood than it perhaps should be, is the incredibly important work that the homelessness service system does for people at risk of homelessness. Of those 64 per cent, 91 per cent remain housed at the end of their support period, which given the precarious nature of their circumstances when they approached homelessness services is a great outcome. Obviously we would like it to be higher than that, but 91 per cent is a great outcome.

For people who are homeless when they approach homelessness services, obviously the challenge is much more significant, and only roughly 30 per cent of those are housed at the end of their support. There is a range of factors that are part of that. Obviously some people have some quite complex life circumstances that are going on, but clearly a very big part of that is just access to affordable housing.

The reasons why people present to homelessness will be well known to this committee, given the work that it has done over the past months and years—family violence, financial difficulties, mental health issues and those kinds of circumstances, on top of the basic challenge of pure access to affordable housing.

Sherri, do you want to take over the next slide?

Ms BRUINHOUT: Thank you, Ben. The next slide—I know the committee has had really deep engagement with the homelessness service system, but I think it is worth just looking at a slide that reiterates that the homelessness service system, while it does look quite schematic in this view, it is not as clearly delineated as this. However, there are 75 entry points by which people experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness can access homelessness services, and their responses are largely themed into three different types of responses that are offered. There are responses that are intervening early to help people to maintain their accommodation and prevent homelessness; there are services focused on providing accommodation,

getting people housed; and there are services focused on supporting people to maintain their housing, so keeping them housed.

Sitting underneath that you can see there is a service system that is enabled by technology, by peak bodies, by homelessness networkers—and I know this committee has heard from a number of those stakeholders. But also worth touching on, there is about \$300 million of funded services on offer throughout Victoria every year, and that is delivered by over 130 agencies offering 80 different projects or 80 different services. It is worth keeping in mind some of those services are small in scale and not all of them are available on a statewide basis.

But more than the structure of the service system I think what is really important is that the service system does a terrific job in being able to respond to people's needs. We largely see three different client cohorts presenting into homelessness services in Victoria: people who are at risk of homelessness or recently homeless—and Ben was just talking about the data that says quite a number of people are coming to homelessness services with housing that they would like to keep. There is a range of really good evidence-based programs that are delivered across Victoria to be able to support people that have that level of need. Largely it is a time-limited support to resolve the issues that have driven them to seek assistance.

The second cohort is the people who have experienced homelessness and who might have increased support needs. Generally those people require assistance for a more prolonged period of time and it might be over a few different service system responses to help them make it back on their feet. And there is a range of evidence-based programs that are delivered across Victoria that achieve those outcomes really well.

The last cohort that we see in the homeless services system is people who have what are often persistent and enduring episodes of homelessness, who have other associated issues that drive their ability to either obtain housing or maintain that housing. Generally the people who fall into this category do really well with the Housing First approach, and I know that this committee has had a number of submissions from agencies delivering a range of those services.

So I think what we understand is more than the structure that sits behind the homelessness service system is that being able to give the right response to meet the right need at the right level when people need it is a really effective response. And I know that this committee has heard a number of those examples over this year.

I am also aware that we have spoken informally to the committee on previous occasions, because I know that the members of the committee have been very concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable in our communities, including people experiencing homelessness. So again we have tried to work very hard with the service system to be able to put in a range of responses that are tailored to meet these people's needs. I will go into a little bit more detail, but there are a range of responses in terms of helping people to keep their accommodation when perhaps their financial situation or their health situation has changed in response to COVID-19 and a range of responses to be able to help them to maintain their accommodation in those challenging times. There have also been support services and infection control services to be able to assist people where they have needed to be placed in emergency accommodation so that they can abide by the chief health officer's directions to stay at home. We have also developed CIRFs, which stands for COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Facilities, and I will talk to you a little bit more about those. But I think it is really important to note that the homelessness services system is not responding in a bubble to people experiencing homelessness; that it has really been complemented and has leveraged other support services at state and federal and local government levels to be able to give people the wraparound service they require. The rent relief grants, I think, are a good example of that, as are the changes in commonwealth assistance that people have received during the pandemic.

To go into a little bit more detail, I think at this point I would like to really point out to the committee that the homelessness services system has been incredibly flexible and responsive during COVID-19 to ensure that there is an end-to-end service response for people who are either experiencing homelessness or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. So there has been additional accommodation to support programs like the Private Rental Assistance Program and the Housing Establishment Fund, which are programs that are intended to either assist people into emergency accommodation or to assist people with brokerage to keep their private rental accommodation stable during this time. To the homelessness services system's credit, they were very quick out of the blocks on these responses, and as you can see from this slide, from March this year these were programs that were increased and rolled out to support very vulnerable Victorians during the pandemic.

We have also been able to provide additional emergency accommodation to a large number of Victorians—and I will go into that on the next slide—to be able to shelter in place and abide by the directions of the chief health officer. We have also been able to incorporate support services and local responses to be able to support people who are receiving emergency accommodation, and I know that the committee have had a number of conversations with others on this topic as well.

And then finally the COVID isolation and recovery facilities—look, that is a real end-to-end response, so being able to invest in infection control to keep people safe and to enable them to shelter at home, but also having a facility where people who may contract COVID-19 and be homeless can receive a health and homelessness response while they isolate and while they get better and get the support that they need in order to do that, not only to keep them safe and well but to protect the community as well. And you can see that those programs have been effective since—well, from March and then April and July. It really is a testament to that service system working very closely with government and being very innovative and resilient at a time where the service delivery has been difficult to deliver—a lot of it has been remote—and the call on the service system has increased as well.

In terms of people receiving an emergency accommodation response during COVID-19, I thought that I would just update the committee with some more recent numbers, because I know that it is of interest to the committee. You can see that there have been a number of investments in temporary accommodation, the Housing Establishment Fund and the Private Rental Assistance Program, so during that time over 6000 households have benefited from those programs since March. As of last night, there were 2253 Victorians receiving emergency accommodation—purchased accommodation—to help them stay at home and shelter in place so that they can abide by our public health requirements. The sector has done a pretty terrific job in responding very quickly to a large demand. However, what continues to be a challenge for our sector is exit options for those people to come out of emergency accommodation. Pleasingly 566 households have exited emergency accommodation into private rental, and 102 people have received support through the CIRF—the COVID isolation recovery facility. Forty of those were COVID-positive, and the rest were either close contacts or requiring self-isolation because there were other health reasons that made them more susceptible or more vulnerable to COVID-19.

However, as I said, it continues to be a challenge: 635 people have exited emergency accommodation to no dwelling, so the service system is continuing to try and assist those people back into emergency accommodation; and 403 people have exited into couch surfing. I think Ben is going to give us a little bit more information on what we are doing to address that.

Mr RIMMER: Thanks, Sherri. So clearly through the emergency accommodation a large number of people are ending up in emergency accommodation. It really provided an enormous opportunity to try and really assist a particular cohort in a particular circumstance, driven by the context of the global pandemic, and try to help that cohort get out of the emergency accommodation situation and, rather than exit into homelessness, exit into a situation where there is stable housing and support provided to transition into a longer term safe, stable housing outcome.

On 28 July the Premier and the minister announced the From Homelessness to a Home \$150 million investment package. Some of that money is for additional Housing Establishment Fund funding, which effectively extends emergency accommodation until April for those who need it. Some of that money is to procure 1100 leased properties from the private rental market in order to really jump-start our ability to provide a housing outcome for these people. Some funding is allocated to boost the Private Rental Assistance Program. There are a number of people in hotel accommodation who we think could sustain a private rental with a little bit of support to start, so there is funding there for up to 150 households.

Probably most importantly, a significant component of this funding is in the form of support packages—really flexible, client-centred, client-specific support packages to assist people with complex needs. The cohort that ended up in emergency accommodation during this crisis do have a large number of complex needs. They are, as a group, a group of people who have engaged with multiple service systems across government. Obviously everyone's individual circumstances are different, but as a group there is a need for significant support, so there is a sizeable funding allocation on a kind of a per person funding approach to provide that flexible and tailored support.

Then the final component is really priority access to any available social housing outside of the 1100 leased properties. People in emergency accommodation are very high on the priority list, on the Victorian Housing Register, so we are doing work with them and with the Victorian Housing Register to try and get as many placed into housing as we can.

I think Sherri has already mentioned some complementary work around rental relief and around family violence responses. Again, the homelessness system is not an island; it is really part of a broader scheme of government support.

I am conscious of time, but just finally, I know the committee will be interested in what is happening in relation to improving the stock of social housing and also expanding the stock of social housing. There are four main things that are going on right now that are very active in creating additional housing opportunities for Victorians. The first is a maintenance and upgrade stimulus package as part of the \$2.7 billion building works package announced some months ago: \$498 million to maintain or upgrade director of housing properties; also some money to help upgrade and maintain community housing properties, and really the focus there is on immediate economic stimulus that also has the benefit of providing more and better housing options for the community.

A range of programs are underway—I think it is \$115 million in total—across justice housing, transitional emergency housing and Aboriginal housing that is really focused on very much that first step into the housing market from crisis and really helping people in a very direct way avoid homelessness and provide a greater number of options for homelessness service providers to refer people into, and housing options for the individuals involved. That package also includes some additional public housing dwellings and some additional community housing Aboriginal housing dwellings, about 170 in total.

The 1000 homes initiative I think the committee knows reasonably well. A significant number of those have been completed now, some are under construction and some are just about to start construction. Clearly COVID and the impacts on the construction sector have had an impact there.

On the right-hand side, the Social Housing Growth Fund—that is now a few years old, but it is really starting to produce significant ongoing outcomes: 116 new leases through community housing associations over the last couple of years and commitments in place to build nearly 800 new homes by 2022, so that will make a significant impact.

The fourth program and probably the most recent is the towers relocation program, really driven by the public health imperative of trying to reduce density and overcrowding in some of the large inner-city public housing towers. So this is a \$32 million program that really offers some particular larger households the opportunity to move into private rental properties for two years. It is a voluntary program. It is designed to enable families and communities to make some choices about where they want to live and how they want to proceed from their current accommodation. It is going to have a significant public health benefit but also will have the practical effect of opening up 420 additional social housing places.

So that is probably the end of the presentation. I do apologise, we appear to have gone over time, Chair, but our thanks to you and the committee for your continuing interest and engagement on this issue, and obviously we are open for any questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ben, and thank you, Sherri. That was a really excellent overview. My mind is still swimming with some of the numbers, and obviously my arithmetic in my head—addition in my head—is not as good as it used to be. I am just wondering, we keep hearing that we need 6000 new places every year just to meet the need. Are we going to get anywhere near that? I mean, it was very impressive, and we saw the really creative ways that you are looking to provide more housing without necessarily having to build it right now, but do you think we are on track to actually meet the need or to get to that 4 per cent public or social housing magic number that has been put to us over the months?

Mr RIMMER: I think how I would answer that, Chair, is that there is now a significant forward pipeline of social housing growth. If you add it up across the different programs—even excluding the 1100 dwellings that are part of the From Homelessness to a Home package—there are over 2000 dwellings currently on the books, currently in the pipeline, currently at some level of construction or on the pipeline towards construction. I think that is a significant uptick in activity and engagement and focus, and the team that I lead are really very focused

on delivering those initiatives as quickly as possible to meet as much of the housing need as possible. Now, if government gives us more work to do, we will gladly accept it, and it will meet more of the housing need, but there is a lot of work to do in the current program.

The CHAIR: Yes. Look, thank you. I will move you on to others very quickly. I mean, listening to you and looking at your submission, would you say that the government actually has a housing-first approach now?

Mr RIMMER: Sherri, do you want to answer that?

Ms BRUINHOUT: There are certainly a number of housing-first approaches. I think it is really important to understand though that housing-first is a very effective evidence-based approach for people who have persistent and enduring episodes of homelessness. So over the last decade or so there have been progressively more and more housing-first programs that have been rolled out in Victoria, and the sector have really increased their confidence and capability to deliver housing first. There is now actually a very sophisticated response in the service system to develop that. There is an opportunity perhaps to take some of that more to scale in terms of how we understand and tailor our existing services. I think though it is also worth keeping in mind that for other client cohorts—and we touched on three client cohorts—we have different programs that are equally just as effective for, say, intervening early and preventing homelessness. So the Private Rental Assistance Program, while you would not technically refer to that as a housing-first program, is incredibly successful—6000 people or households a year are able to maintain their private rental as a response to that.

The CHAIR: Have you done any modelling? I guess given that we are going to see a reduction in migration—so we are going to see a reduction in our population growth probably over the next few years—and we are also seeing, probably, a reduction in international students in the state, have you looked at the modelling of the broader housing market that may be available for you to exploit, for want of a better word?

Mr RIMMER: That is a great question. I think if you described it as, ‘Have we done modelling about that?’, that would be an overstatement. But have we looked at this issue? Yes. I mean, clearly over the next three or four years the housing market will have a different complexion than it was predicted to in January. There will be less demand from overseas migration, for example, and that does present opportunities in terms of housing stock that is perhaps on the market that might not otherwise be sold. But also, obviously it has opportunities in terms of supporting the construction sector and trying to ensure that as many livelihoods as possible in the construction sector are maintained through that period. So yes, we are looking at those issues.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tien.

Dr KIEU: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, both, for the presentation today. Thank you for your work. It is a big, big problem, and the government has been investing quite substantial amounts, particularly for this period—and moving forward as well. But homelessness in general is a very complex issue, with so many different causes resulting in the homelessness of a particular person. So that would require a very holistic approach with preventive measures, and in order to do that we also need to collect the data and then share the data, the information, because, for example, with the government giving out money or supporting some of the organisations or even local governments, sometimes there is some overlap and sometimes there is a clear gap and no agencies or organisations are filling that gap. So my quick question is, one, about the preventive measures and, secondly, about the data picture. It is a very difficult problem but is there anything that has been done about that or not? I have many other questions. I am sure the Chair will not be allowing me to ask all of them, but those are the very high-level questions.

Mr RIMMER: I might start on the preventative side, and Sherri maybe might talk about data. So clearly there is a lot of activity going on at the moment to prevent people from getting into an economic crisis, getting into a housing crisis, getting to a point where they cannot afford to sustain a tenancy. That is a very significant focus for the government at the moment. The rental relief scheme, the ban on evictions for rental arrears—those kinds of measures are an important part and we are working very closely with our colleagues in Consumer Affairs Victoria on those measures. And they come on top of the existing Private Rental Assistance Program, which gives people some support to maintain a tenancy if they are in a situation where that tenancy is under some challenge. So there is a lot of preventative work going on at the moment. I mean, I think it is fair to say that the next 12, 18 months will be challenging for people who are facing changes to their personal financial circumstances, their housing circumstances. So we expect that the homelessness service demand will continue

to be higher than normal for the foreseeable future because of some of those factors. So that preventative activity is all the more important because of that.

Sherri, do you want to talk about the data question?

Ms BRUINHOUT: Yes, sure. Deputy Chair, you hit on a really key—

One of the components of success of homelessness is being able to offer multidisciplinary supports that are able to be tailored to meet people's needs. So no doubt you would have seen in the department's submission, for example, people with a severe and persistent mental illness are eight times more likely than any other Victorian to access homelessness support services. So it is very important that we are able to link funding and link services together to be able to address that. But just as equally people who have a disability spend twice as many nights in emergency accommodation as people without a disability. So yet again that is another connection that we need to connect our funding, connect our agencies, in order to give the wraparound services that we need to tailor each of our services.

One of the challenges and one of the strengths of the homelessness service system is that people who come into that system are represented in a multitude of other service systems and the homelessness service system being able to knit that together to be able to come up with a tailored response that meets the needs of individuals. So that data has to drive both the local area responses but also the policy responses that sit on top of that. It is an absolutely critical issue at this time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Lee.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ben and Sherri. We have heard from other submitters but also it is mentioned in your report that support is often time limited and inflexible. Are there measures or steps being taken or what more can be done in that area to make sure that people are getting, you know, the services they need for the period that they need to get them to ensure better outcomes?

Ms BRUINHOUT: Would you like me to—

Mr RIMMER: Why don't I start really just by focusing in on the most recent announcement of the From Homelessness to a Home, which has very flexible funding that will continue for some time into the future—that is not predicated on the idea that someone will need 12 weeks or 24 weeks of service before exiting but is really predicated on the idea that for some people Housing First is a support journey that will last for a number of years. Particularly given the number of chronic rough sleepers in the community today, some of whom have been rough sleeping for 10 years or more, the support needs for those people are going to be significant and last well beyond a kind of traditional crisis episode.

But with that overview, Sherri, do you want to give more detail?

Ms BRUINHOUT: Yes, sure. That is exactly right, Ben. We have been facilitating conversations with the sector over the last 18 months, looking at exactly this issue about what the evidence says is the most appropriate response to people according to their needs. We talked about those three client cohort needs, but also there is then an overlay for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, for young people, for people over 55—so being able to tailor that response.

Certainly the sector is very interested in being able to be more creative with the durations of support, and indeed the more recent funding that the government has announced and that the department has administered has really been much more tailored to durations of support than it has been in the past. That is a legacy issue that has come from commonwealth-state housing agreements that had very defined periods of support in the establishment of the supported accommodation assistance program.

I think we are getting to the point now where the service system is a much more sophisticated and complex service system, and the ability to be thinking about our funding and service agreements that reflect that sophistication is certainly the conversations that we as a department are having with the sector. Obviously it is a complex issue because there is \$300 million worth of funding and service agreements that we are talking about, but certainly the ability to tailor the response to meet people's needs really does need to go very fundamentally

to that question of durations of support. So I think the conversations that we are having with the sector are certainly leading us to land that.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Lee. Wendy?

Ms LOVELL: Thank you very much. Hi. How are you both? Good to see you. You made the announcement the other day about moving people out of the towers into private rental, and I know that when I was the minister there was always projected to be around about now a bit of an excess of private rental properties in the market. If that has come to fruition, it has probably made it a little bit easier for you to get private rental. But also as people start losing jobs and stuff we are probably going to see people exiting the private rental market and perhaps moving back with family et cetera, which may slow down the building and construction industry, which is something that we need for recovery. Whilst I know that from the Social Housing Growth Fund you provide grants to AHAs to build social housing—and at the moment the state can only partner with a registered housing association—have you given any thought to perhaps entering into a scheme of loans to private developers to build rental properties to be rented back at a discounted rent?

Mr RIMMER: Thank you for the question. The answer is: that is not currently part of the government's policy thinking. There are all kinds of opportunities and requirements for how we might engage with the private sector during a period of economic downturn to support the construction market and, frankly, to take advantage of opportunities in the housing market. I mean, even the 1100 rental properties that we are taking up as part of the From Homelessness to a Home process, they will provide some support to a part of the rental market that might otherwise be experiencing some difficulty and causing some real challenges for landlords and other tenants and all kinds of things. So there are all kinds of different ways that we can get involved. Many of those have been discussed or will be discussed in future, but I cannot say that the specific opportunity that you talked about is something that is featuring at the moment.

Ms LOVELL: Okay. No, that is fine. And also, the 1000 homes initiative, you mentioned the numbers that have been built, the numbers under construction, the numbers about to be under construction. Are we able to get a list of not addresses but just general locations of where those properties have been distributed across the state?

Mr RIMMER: Sure. That is completely fine. We have a very large data request that is outstanding to the committee that has caused Sherri and I a number of sleepless nights in the last little while, but it is all to the good, and I cannot remember whether that specific question is part of that data request—

Ms LOVELL: I cannot remember either.

Mr RIMMER: but if it is not, we will put it in there. We will put it in there, because we should be able to provide that information.

Ms LOVELL: There were some figures that I asked last time you gave us a briefing, and that was around the waiting list and what the numbers actually represent in the numbers of people. I do not think we have got that yet. We may have, but I have not seen it if we have. But now we have got an updated waiting list—there are now 45 698 on that waiting list—what do those 45 698 applications mean in the number of people? Because obviously there are some singles on there but there are some large families as well, and average household size is 2.6, so it is going to be getting close to 100 000 people actually on that waiting list. And I just wondered if you could give us that for the three different sections: so for the priority access, what the 24 472 represents; what the register of interests, the 21 226, represents; and what the total representation is.

Mr RIMMER: So some of that we might need to come back to you on in a written answer, but by and large the number of people right now is something just north of 80 000 people on the waiting list, but I do not have the breakdown in the way that you have described it. So we will provide those.

Ms LOVELL: When it was down at around 37 000 it was given to the previous committee, and it was more than 80 000 then, so I would have thought that it would have probably increased quite significantly since then.

Mr RIMMER: We will check that.

Ms LOVELL: Thanks, Ben.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ben. Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Ben and Sherri, for your submission and your presentation today. My question is: do you think there is any unnecessary duplication of services in the homelessness sector? Can we do better in the coordination of the sector and all its different organisations in terms of funding and resources?

Mr RIMMER: I am going to start on that, but Sherri may have a slightly different view, and I am happy to have all views in front of the committee. I am going to start on that and say of course across the social services system there is opportunity to work more effectively. There are clients who are rough sleeping who are also clients of six or eight different government services, and it is not necessarily the best aspect of government service delivery the way that services to people who have really quite complex needs are integrated and coordinated around the needs of an individual client. So there is much more work to be done on that. There are really good discussions happening about how we get better at that, and obviously part of that is reducing duplication and overlap. But the most important part of that, from our perspective, I think, is that there is real opportunity to actually provide better outcomes for individuals who are going through very stressful and complex changes in their circumstances.

The homelessness system is part of that story, but it is by no means the only part of that story. There are also justice system interfaces, mental health system interfaces, child and family system interfaces and all of those kinds of things. So that is, I think, one answer to your question. But, Sherri, you might want to talk more specifically about homelessness.

Ms BRUINHOUT: Absolutely. I am sure the committee has heard numerous agencies lamenting the crisis-driven nature of the homelessness services system—that often we have to wait for people to be in crisis before we can respond. And then looking at, as we mentioned earlier, short durations of support that might resolve the immediate crisis, but we can often see a revolving door of people coming back into services. Certainly in the department we have heard that story in our deep engagement with the sector over the last 18 months or so when we have looked at what a new tailored approach might be for people experiencing homelessness. Certainly we have heard very loudly in the department that the current front-end structure of being able to respond to crises for short periods of time really is getting outputs, but really is not getting the deep and enduring outcomes that people may require when we look at wanting to resolve their issue of homelessness and to get them off that revolving door back into services after a period of time. So being able to—where we can tailor a program—really start to bring in those multidisciplinary teams and address the underlying driving causes that keep that crisis behaviour continuing. We are very alive to that. So being able to work with our services to take existing programs and invest in them with evidence to be able to give a different type of approach to how we might be doing that.

I would also say though that one of the challenges of the homelessness services system is a large amount of services—so 130 different services. I know it sounds like a lot. It certainly is from our end in terms of managing contracts. But I think we should also acknowledge that one of the strengths of the homelessness services system is that with that diversity it can deliver a very localised response to communities that have a deep connection to local communities, particularly in regional areas of Victoria. And while it does seem like a lot of agencies, I think there is a great strength that can come with having that diversity of agencies delivering homelessness programs as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That was very nicely timed actually. Thank you both, again. We know that you are doing extraordinary work at the moment. We also very much appreciate the added homework that we gave you via the questionnaires that we sent to you. We very much appreciate that those are on the way. Again, you will receive a transcript of today. But Ben and Sherri, thank you very much. It is always a great learning episode when we meet with you. The transcripts will be in the mail to you. Please check them and make sure that we have not misrepresented anything. That concludes today's public hearing. But we will be back again tomorrow. Thank you all for being involved. Thank you, Hansard. Thank you everyone on the team. That concludes the hearings today. Thanks.

Committee adjourned.