

Homelessness Assistance inventory

We have relied heavily on Department of Families, Fairness and Housing documents when compiling this information sheet. We will continue to add and alter this document as appropriate. Apologies for any programmatic oversights, please let us know if you identify any.

*Many thanks Sarah and Meredith
Northern and Western Homelessness Networkers*

Homelessness in Victoria

Homelessness is primarily caused by the current housing crisis. Victoria has a dearth of affordable housing and has too few houses for the growing population. Melbourne will need 2.2 million new houses by 2050.

Under the Australian Bureau of Statistics statistical definition of homelessness, *when a person does not have accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:*

- *is in a dwelling that is inadequate,*
- *has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or*
- *does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.*

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has developed six homeless operational groups in assessing whether people enumerated (counted) in the Census were likely to have been homeless on Census night. These groups are:

- *persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out,*
- *persons in supported accommodation for the homeless,*
- *persons staying temporarily with other households,*
- *persons living in boarding houses,*
- *persons in other temporary lodging, and*
- *persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.*

24,828 people identified as being homeless in Victoria at the last census (2016).

First Nations People experience homelessness at a much higher rate than non Indigenous people. In fact, if non Indigenous people experienced homelessness at the same rate, there would be 1M people experiencing homelessness in Victoria. While less than one per cent of Victoria's population identify as Aboriginal, 7.2 per cent of homelessness service clients identified as Aboriginal in 2012-13.

For some people, homelessness is an isolated event, it happens once and for a short time. For others, homelessness is part of a chaotic and uncertain life of poverty and disadvantage. These people tend to cycle in and out of homelessness and, when they do find housing, it can be short term.

Homelessness Assistance

Accommodation for people experiencing homelessness

When someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness, they are eligible to access crisis and emergency accommodation and transitional housing in Victoria. DHHS funds organisations to provide support to people to stabilise and rebuild their lives and access long-term housing or remain in housing. Homelessness accommodation assistance in Victoria is provided in the following forms:

- **crisis and emergency accommodation;**
- **transitional housing;**
- **longer-term homelessness assistance models linked to support.**

Crisis accommodation and emergency accommodation is short-term housing linked with support. This accommodation is managed by community service organisations across the State and funded by the Director. As at 30 June 2014, there were 307 crisis properties in Victoria.

People residing in crisis accommodation are not subject to the rights and responsibilities afforded to tenancies through the Residential Tenancies Act. People who live in crisis accommodation do not pay rent, though some facilities may charge a small service fee to cover non-support provisions such as cleaning meals.

All **crisis supported accommodation services** focus on stabilising people's immediate crisis situation and assisting them to transition to stable medium to longer-term housing involving, for instance, transitional housing, public housing, private rental or to safely return to their homes.

There are three main types of **crisis supported accommodation**. They are:

- **women's refuges**, which are premises across the State to keep women and children safe and stabilise their circumstances when they experience family violence;
- **youth refuges**, to get young people outcomes in education, employment and parenting skills, and to connect them with family where appropriate; and
- **mainstream adult and family crisis accommodation.**

Women's refuges

As at 30 June 2015, there were 31 women's refuge sites across Victoria, made up of 54 individual properties/units. Women's refuges can accommodate around 105 households at any given time, depending on the needs of families. Sites are dispersed in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

Youth refuges

Youth refuges are funded to deliver immediate accommodation and support to young people aged 16-25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Refuges provide a period of stabilisation and support and have a key role in assisting young people to avoid and move beyond homelessness.

As at June 2014, there were 20 youth refuges in Victoria. Fourteen of the refuges are owned by the Director and the remainder are owned by community housing or community service providers. All youth refuges are managed by community service organisations.

These youth refuges contain around a combined total of 159 beds (July 2015). Seven youth refuges are funded to deliver an enhanced model of service delivery that focuses on specialist support, family reconciliation and follow-up support.

Mainstream adult and family crisis accommodation

There are large, medium and smaller crisis facilities and properties that are available for adults and families in crisis.

Congregate style accommodation includes:

- a facility at **Southbank**, which provides around 45 rooms for single males and females and some couples;
- **Ozanam House**, North Melbourne, which provides around 50 rooms for single males (currently under redevelopment); and
- **Flagstaff**, West Melbourne, which provides around 64 rooms for single males.

Medium size crisis facilities are located in Ballarat, Dandenong, South Melbourne, St Kilda, St Kilda East and Croydon. There are other dispersed crisis accommodation properties across the state. Women's refuges have access to some of these properties.

People who are accommodated in crisis housing might, on exit from this accommodation, move to transitional housing, long-term public or other social housing, move to a boarding house or rooming house, gain private rental or return to their previous living arrangement. Others may cycle in and out of homelessness due to a lack of suitable exit options or because their support needs are not met.

Transitional housing

As at 30 June 2014, there were 3,667 transitional housing properties across Victoria. These properties are owned or leased by the Director and managed by around 13 transitional housing managers in 2015-16 who are also registered community housing providers under the Housing Act 1983.

The aims of transitional housing are to:

- provide housing assistance to individuals and families in crisis as a result of homelessness or impending homelessness; and
- assist individuals and families in housing crisis to establish or maintain appropriate, secure and sustainable housing through the provision of transitional housing, initial assessment and planning, and support.

Youth Foyers

There are around 198 units in Youth Foyer models in Victoria. Youth foyers are integrated learning and accommodation centres providing up to two years of safe and secure housing, support and training for young people aged 16-25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Youth Foyers are a transformational model that actively address homelessness and disadvantage to enable young people to have improved educational attainment and employment outcomes, improved relationships with their family and improved housing outcomes.

Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing provides safe, permanent, affordable housing combined with support services for people who have experienced chronic homelessness caused or exacerbated by multiple, complex needs such as mental illness, substance misuse, chronic disease or a history of incarceration.

The Department funds supportive housing in the form of 66 beds in the Elizabeth Street Common Ground program and the High Street Preston Supportive Housing.

Supportive Housing aims to end homelessness quickly for chronically homeless people, by providing them with a permanent place to live with a range of linked or onsite supports to help them maximise their future prospects, in terms of health and mental health, management of substance misuse issues and community and economic participation.

Longer-term homelessness assistance- 'Housing First'

In addition to the more traditional forms of homelessness assistance, there is longer-term housing options such as Youth Foyer and supportive housing models. These options are based on the principle of 'housing first', which is about rapidly securing longer-term housing for someone experiencing homelessness and wrapping the right supports around the person or household to keep them in their housing. Housing first means that households do not need to journey through crisis and transitional housing, on their way to longer-term housing.

Other Homelessness assistance

There are other forms of housing and homelessness assistance available in Victoria, which include supports to maintain social housing or services to assist people gain and maintain private rental housing. There are three main categories:

- **The Housing Establishment Fund;**
- **Support to access and maintain housing; and**
- **Private rental housing and home renovation assistance.**

The **Housing Establishment Fund** can be used to pay for:

- crisis accommodation in motels, hotels, rooming houses and boarding houses;
- practical assistance such as transport;
- housing establishment costs, such as rent in advance to establish a tenancy for a household; and
- paying rental arrears to avoid a household becoming homeless.

Approximately 40,000 households are assisted through the Housing Establishment Fund in Victoria each year.

Support to access and maintain housing

There are a number of activities to support a household to access and maintain housing and meet their goals in life. Activities include:

- **Initial assessment and planning**, which provides an initial assessment of needs, risks and vulnerabilities for people who need homelessness services. This provides, information and responses including providing information and referral about access to housing, safety planning or referrals to other support services.
- A **Statewide telephone information and referral** service for clients experiencing a crisis. This Statewide 1800 number and after-hours service assists all people experiencing housing crisis, including assistance in accessing the Housing Establishment Fund or forms of accommodation.
- **Safe Steps** is the Statewide family violence crisis service. Safe Steps provides a telephone information and referral service which operates 24 hours per day, seven days per week and supports women and children in crisis to access the Housing Establishment Fund or other forms of assistance, such as refugees and other supports
- **Transition support**, which provides assessment, referral and case-managed support beyond crisis, with casework activities matched to a person's goals and plan. These activities may include counselling, crisis resolution, life-skills training, and advocacy and assistance with accessing appropriate long-term housing, training and employment opportunities. Transitional support can be provided irrespective of clients' living situation or location.
- **Tenancy Plus**, which provides case management to help people in social housing maintain their tenancy and prevent homelessness, and
- **Indigenous tenancies at risk** of eviction program, which provides support and advocacy for Aboriginal households at risk of eviction to maintain their tenancy and prevent homelessness.
- A **bond loan program** is funded and provided by the Director to assist households to meet the cost of paying a bond on a private rental property
- The **Accommodation Options for Families program** is funded from the Victorian Property Fund (which is administered by the Department of Justice and Regulation) to assist households who are at risk of entering private and unsuitable rooming house accommodation to be diverted into more appropriate forms of accommodation, including private rental. This program includes private rental brokerage assistance.

- At the Commonwealth level there is the provision of **Commonwealth Rental Assistance**.
- The **Safe at Home program** is funded to keep women and children safe in their home. The program provides case-managed support to enable more women and children to stay safely in the family home where appropriate.

Long term housing

The forms of housing assistance available for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness including public housing, community housing and Indigenous community housing

Social housing

Social housing comprises all short, medium and long-term housing in Victoria which the Director generally owns or has an interest in. Social housing is targeted to Victorians on low income or those who are homeless. In Victoria, there were 85,199 social housing properties available as at 30 June 2014.

Long term social housing includes housing options in the form of:

- **Public housing;**
- **Community housing; and**
- **Indigenous community housing.**

Public housing

As at 30 June 2014, there were 64,886 public housing properties in Victoria. These properties were largely owned and managed by the Director, noting some properties are leased to the Director from private property owners. The Department supports the Director in the delivery of the public housing program. Public housing includes separate housing and medium-to high-density dwellings and flats. Tenure in public housing is governed by the Residential Tenancies Act.

Public housing is a major form of long-term rental assistance offered to low-income people in need of public rental assistance. Public housing tenants are not required to pay more than 25 per cent of their combined household income in rent. The rent payable is formally determined by calculating market rent value and applying a rebate when requested by tenants to ensure rental payments do not exceed the maximum percentage.

Public housing is in high demand. As at 30 June 2015, there were 34,464 approved applications on the public housing waiting list in Victoria. In addition, there were 7,503 existing public housing tenants wishing to transfer to another property. The public housing waiting lists are growing by 500 people a week.

Long Term Community housing

As at 30 June 2014, there were 14,344 long-term community-housing properties in Victoria. Community housing is rental housing for people on low incomes or with special needs. Some organisations specialise in helping specific groups, like people with a disability, women, singles and older people.

Community housing is delivered by registered housing agencies in accordance with the Housing Act. Organisations are registered under the Housing Act as either-

- housing associations; or
- housing providers.

The Registrar of Housing Agencies regulates housing associations and housing providers through a set of performance standards. Renters of community housing generally pay no more than 30 per cent of their combined household income by way of rent. One of the performance standards relates to affordability. Tenants of long-term community housing are also eligible to receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Eligibility for long-term community housing is similar to public housing and is targeted to Victorians on low incomes. However, there are higher income and asset limits may be higher in community housing than public housing.

Community and Public housing can be accessed through the **Victorian Housing Register**. Homelessness assistance services can assist people to submit VHR applications. The Register has two categories:

- Priority Access for those most in need
- Register of Interest for all eligible people to be considered for social housing

More information about the VHR can be found at: <http://housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register-makes-applying-housing-easy>

Indigenous Community housing

As at 30 June 2014, there were 1,995 Indigenous community housing properties in Victoria. Eligibility for Indigenous community housing is for Aboriginal households on low incomes. Eligibility for Indigenous community housing for properties managed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria is in line with eligibility requirements for public housing, where households have one or more Aboriginal member.

Indigenous community housing is delivered by Aboriginal community controlled organisations in Victoria. Of these organisations, one is a registered housing provider - Aboriginal Housing Victoria. Another two organisations partner with other housing associations to deliver Indigenous community housing to Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria manages the largest portfolio of Indigenous community housing in Victoria. As at 30 June 2014, Aboriginal Housing Victoria reported managing 1,522 properties, 1,451 of which were owned by the Director