



Northern and Western Homelessness Local Area Service Networks:

Summary of consumer feedback 2012 – 2020

What is the Annual Consumer System Survey?

From 2008 – 2011 the homelessness service system in Victoria was reformed to create coordinated regionally based service systems. One of the aims of this reform was to create a system that is easier for consumers to navigate, is more responsive to their needs and which allocates authority to the homelessness services in an area to manage their coordinated service system arrangements.

In July 2011 the North and West Homelessness Networks (NW LASNs) agreed to undertake annual consumer surveys in order to better understand consumer experiences of the regional coordinated homelessness service system over time, and to generate practice responses accordingly.

The primary purpose of the LASN Annual Consumer System Survey is to gauge the experience of all consumers of the NW LASNs and help to improve service system responsiveness to consumers by producing data about the efficacy of direct provision of assistance to consumers and coordinated service system arrangements.

The Annual Consumer System Surveys has several secondary purposes, which include:

- To examine the responsiveness of the service system,
- To assess the impact of a coordinated service system,
- To provide a consumer perspective on needs and the appropriateness of responses to needs.

The Networks want to know:

- How can we improve the service system?
- Is it meeting the needs of consumers?
- What do we need to advocate for?

The survey is designed, overseen, analysed and reported upon by the North and West LASNs' Consumer Feedback Working Group. Representatives of homelessness funded services and two consumer representatives sit on this Working Group. The Anglicare Victoria Research Ethics Committee provides ethics clearance prior to each survey.

The initial surveys were designed to monitor consumers' experiences of the coordinated service system. After several years, the Working Group found that very similar feedback was received each year. In 2016 the Working Group moved to a more qualitative exploration of the themes that had evolved over the previous years. The Working Groups then targeted specific issues arising from this feedback in 2017-2018. In 2019 the survey reverted to investigation of consumer experiences of the homelessness service system.

In 2020 the survey explored consumers' experiences of the COVID-19 lockdowns and of the homelessness sector's response to operating in a pandemic environment.

Number of survey responses to date:

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total to date
222	180	175	179	168	163	167	174	100	1,528

In the early years, slightly different survey questions were directed to consumers presenting to the homelessness access point services and those receiving case managed support.

In most years the CPWG has collated the consumer feedback received and presented it at a forum of consumers and homelessness practitioners. Those present at the Forum make recommendations back to the Networks about quality improvement and advocacy work that the Networks should undertake, in response to the consumer feedback.

The demographics of survey respondents are remarkably consistent with the demographics of those presenting to the homelessness service system for assistance – with the exception of a lower representation of people identifying First Nations people.

Key themes arising from the surveys have been:

- The experience of homelessness is devastating
- Melbourne is experiencing a housing crisis – the key thing that would improve consumers' experiences of the homelessness service system is access to affordable housing.
- Consumers feel respected by homelessness service providers.
- Consumers still have to tell/repeat their story more often than they would like.
- Emergency accommodation is generally inappropriate and harmful.

2020: Consumer experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the homelessness service system responses

The 2020 Consumer Survey was conducted during one of the COVID-19 lockdowns. This provided us with a unique opportunity to learn about consumer experiences of the pandemic and of the way that the homelessness system adapted to the pandemic environment. Unfortunately, one impact of the lockdown was to impact the numbers of consumers who participated in the survey. Much support work was remote which placed limitations on support for some consumers. However, people from a more significantly diverse range of ages and cultural backgrounds participated.

Key findings

Impact of COVID:

- Participants reported 104 negative impacts of COVID vs 11 positive impacts. The negative impacts most commonly reported were in the following areas: isolation (17), wellbeing (17), income (15) and housing situation (11).
- The majority of participants identified a deterioration in mental health through this period. 72% of participants reported experiencing a mental health issue, which was more difficult for them to manage during the pandemic, particularly during lockdowns.
- Most respondents talk about stress and distress with a portion reporting that their mental health became worse through the pandemic. 14 respondents either lost their jobs or were unable to get employment. Respondents report the impact of isolation and the negative impact of the pandemic on their relationships.
- 15% of respondents identified that they had become homeless as a result of the pandemic.
- 31 respondents reported that their income had gone down during the pandemic, while 36 respondents reported that their income had increase during the pandemic.
- Nearly two thirds of those people who reported that their income had gone down during the pandemic reported that housing was more difficult to access, whereas 29% of those whose income went up reported that their housing situation was easier. This suggests that the impact of the pandemic was not sufficient to cancel out the impact of the housing crisis.
- 70% of those whose income went down reported that this caused a decline in their mental health, nearly half reported an impact on their health and one third reported that it impacted on their capacity to care for their children. Conversely, nearly two thirds of those whose income went up reported that this made caring for their children easier.
- More men reported difficulties in finding housing, accessing food, health and mental health.
- Men born outside Australia experienced a greater decline in health and mental health issues.
- All respondents who reported experiencing a disability identified that capacity to care for children became more difficult.

Support

- Participants are largely happy with the support they are provided.

Accommodation

- 43 respondents (43%) identified that they had been accommodated in emergency accommodation by the homelessness sector during COVID. 75% of these respondents were accommodated in hotels and motels and only 11% in serviced apartments.
- There was a clear message from a number of participants that, even if the hotel accommodation was not great, it is better than rooming house accommodation.
- Just under half the respondents reported a good or OK experience in the hotels. Just over a third of those who stayed in hotels reported negative impacts including feeling unsafe, poor facilities and difficulty in the noisy/chaotic environment.

Three respondents said that the support was good – the descriptions suggest that this was in hotels with the Hotel Emergency Response.

Income

- Almost as many respondents said that their income had gone down (37%) during COVID as said their income had gone up (40%). Almost one quarter of respondents said that their income had remained the same.

Contact with the homelessness system

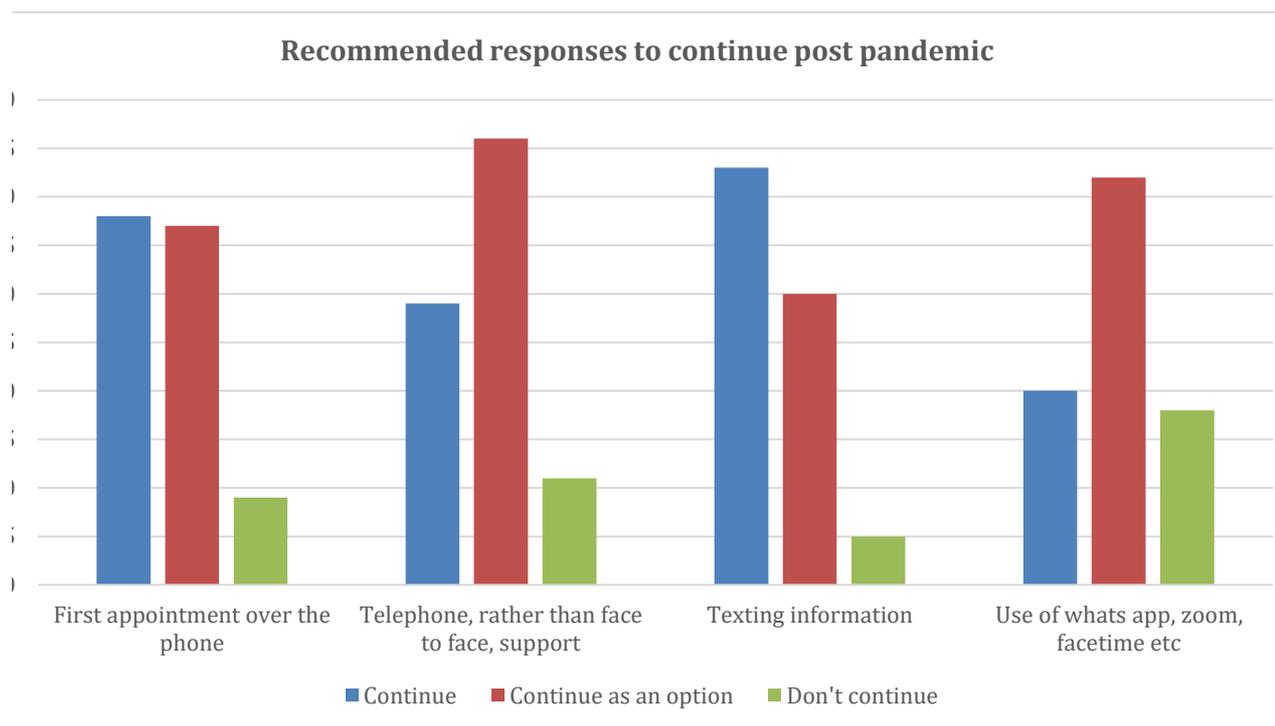
- 43% of participants contacted homelessness services for the first time. This is interesting as only 15% of participants reported becoming homeless as a result of the pandemic.
- Just over half of the participants identified that they would like services to continue to text as a preference (55%) and just under half would like to see the first appointment continue over the phone (45%). Participants have identified that they would like to see a variety of forms of communication continue as an option, particularly phone calls (53%) and texting, followed by holding the first appointment over the phone, rather than presenting to the service.
- A portion of participants would not like to see any alternative forms of communication to continue. This suggests that the homelessness sector should continue all forms of communication adopted during the pandemic but that we should ask consumers to choose their preferred mode of communication.
- Most respondents identified that they were satisfied with the support they received. Six participants responded that more housing is needed and four responded that they would like faster responses and more support.
- Other respondents identified that more vouchers, a wider variety of food options and more face to face contact would ease their situation.

Quotes from consumers: Impact of the pandemic

- *Covid 19 ruined my life! It meant that my industry was not allowed to work so I lost ALL income. It meant I couldn't pay my rent. I ended up squatting in the house, not paying rent. My mental health deteriorated to a point where I became reliant on drugs to get me through the day. I ended up in hospital for damage to my nerves on my spine from the drugs. While in hospital, the house was robbed, I lost everything of value as well as everything that meant something to me like photos and wedding stuff for example. Once I got home and realised I lost everything, my mental health took another hit. While in hospital I begged and begged to go into rehab but because of Covid it wasn't available. So it meant I went home and got back on drugs, ruining my life further. Because I couldn't pay, I became homeless. I am still homeless, in crisis accommodation with the likelihood of being out on the streets come January. My mental health is just destroyed, while in crisis accommodation I have been taken to hospital multiple times for suicide tendencies, because I don't want to live any more. Its not a nice lie at all. I have been a complete waste of a life. Each time in hospital I was told that there was nothing they could do and sent me home, spent 4 hrs on hold to mental health nurse who said I need to see other people. But I am so overwhelmed, so exhausted, so over everything, I have no energy to seek help, hence being taken to hospital. While I fill this out, i am currently figuring out where I can run away to, tried to message Lifeline online but nothing I was too late. My bags are packed. I am ready to go!!! But where? I just need to disappear. So that is what covid 19 did to me. Completely ruined me, broke me. It had a lot of impact on my life. Especially with my mental illness. Feeling isolated. It was hard to talk to my psychologist.*
- *Covid has in a way made my life better as I have been sleeping off the streets and have had more financial support from the Government*
- *Hard being homeless and trying to have shelter to be safe from Covid-19. Being in different areas and having fines and social distancing.*
- *Oh wow a lot, in positive ways, yeah, I don't know how to answer it shortly, pretty much just changed my life for the better. Finally off the drugs, got a support network like people such as yourself, a bit of communication with, I actually see the difference in my life and why I should of done this a while ago., although they say everything happens for a reason, so I'm not resentful about the past or anything, I'm actually grateful to be where I am not to have the support around me that I do have.*
- *Was already homeless before COVID19, though became displaced way out of area from Wyndham due to a*

lack of crisis options. COVID19 made things even more stressful sometimes on top of the stress caused by homelessness.

Question 12: During the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness services had to change the way they work. Services have had to provide most their assistance over the phone. People can now ring services, rather than having to present for an appointment. Some services are providing support through text, Whats app, zoom, messenger. Tick which you would like to see homelessness services continue with when they re-open.



Question 15: What was your experience of accommodation provided during the pandemic?

Themes:

Good	14
OK	6
Negatively impacted health	5
Unsafe	4
Good support	3
Poor facilities	2
Too loud/chaotic	3
Expensive	2

Quotes about accommodation provided during COVID:

- It was alright at the time, i was full on drinking everyday, there were people who came into my room and became friends and drank with me, i had my ups and downs, they had to bar my daughters and family to visit but i found it really hard not seeing family. my worker couldn't come to my room, we had to sit downstairs, it wasn't very private for meetings. I found it really hard not going to regional victoria for funerals - my worker helped me view the funeral by video and i really liked that i could do that, but i'm used to moving around freely so Covid has been really hard - i can't get to country and reconnect easily. the hotel workers were understanding - sometimes they would use big words - but they were good at keeping me calm when i*

was upset, the nurse and hotel manager were really helpful, the room was lovely, i loved having access to a bath, other people would knock on my room all the time for smokes, drinks and i did find it hard - i kept getting angry.

- *Some of the accommodation is good but some is very bad. If someone is homeless because of family violence and they get placed in rooming houses or motels for protection is ridiculous specially when the motel they get placed in has drug dealers, prostitutes, and people who have just been released from jail how's the person being protected? They are just being placed in more danger. And as for rooming houses they are just as bad. Someone suffering from mental Health issues does not need to be placed into a rooming house it just makes their mental health issues worse.*

2019: Consumer experiences of the homelessness service system

In 2019 we returned to exploring consumers' experiences of the coordinated homelessness service system arrangements. Homelessness services noticed changes in the numbers of young people presenting to the homelessness service system in 2019 so separated responses from adults and young people, 25 and under, to the survey questions.

Question 6: What can you tell us about your experience of the homelessness service system?

Theme	Adults #	Young people #
Very good	21	19
Long waiting times for assistance	7	
Immediate assistance	6	
Long wait for housing		5
Stressful and uncertain (hard with kids)	5	
Still homeless	5	
Appointment system not helpful	2	
THMS are good	3,	
Private rental assistance program (PRAP) useful	1	
Not an easy system to navigate	6	1
Poor conditions in emergency accommodation	4	3
Difficult to access with a disability (deaf)		1
Not easy to navigate		1

Quotes from adults

- *I felt I got immediate help from the first point. Happy services fulfilled my needs Waiting but fulfilled*
- *Stressful at homelessness, hard with kids, wait was stressful with kids*
- *It took 3 months to get into a hostel*
- *It hard to get real housing. Bad conditions in rooming houses. Expensive accommodation options*
- *Helpful there when you need them*
- *Trying to get assistance was hard. Difficult to get the right service. Felt palmed off. Trying to get into homeless service very hard*

Quotes from young people:

- *There is a lot of support but it's hard and a lengthy wait to get access to good accommodation has made me sometimes hopeless*
- *Services treated me well. Emergency accommodation: Hotel was dirty. People were doing drugs*
- *There is a lot of waiting and people get placed for only one night. It is hard. There have been times where I have been working and still haven't got help. There are times when I have had to sleep on the streets.*
- *It hasn't been very good I have been homeless for 3 years and I seek imprisonment as a form of housing*
- *Housing is an important thing for a human being. If you don't have a house, you will feel unbalanced. Very happy staying in this accommodation (Refuge). It is a good place for people like me.*
- *It's absolute crap. When I was experiencing Family violence I could not be moved due to lack of housing. Still stuck in insecure - system FAILED*

Question 7: What can homelessness services do to make it a better experience for you?

Theme	Adults #	Young people #
More houses	26	3
Quicker response to needs	12	
Assistance to get a house		11
Nothing/services are good	10	8
More equipped staff/more staff	10	
More crisis accommodation options	9	1
More funding	7	
Improve safety of hotels/motels/rooming houses	7	
More affordable housing options	5	
Demand government provide more support	5	
More information and education	3	
More long term housing options	3	
More transitional housing	2	
Better communication from access point		2
Auslan training		1

Quotes from adults:

- Better emergency accommodation. Family been put into small hotel room with not enough beds, high price per night when we had to pay out of pocket. Some motels were so dirty (bed bugs), unsafe being female by myself with kids.
- More resources, more funding, more houses.
- Nothing, I'm happy, couldn't ask for more.
- Better security in services, reduce violence somehow. I've been attached in both rooming houses without staff – but I feel safe in XXXX (government funded crisis supported accommodation).
- Shorter wait for housing. Services are good – easy to deal with. It's just about the housing availability.
- I guess more time to spend with clients.
- Understand I'm homeless not by choice. Not much, they have been great so far.
- They are trying the best they can.
- Cure my homelessness.
- Be better funded to enable quicker assistance for consumers.
- No queuing. Not use horrible hotels.
- I like to access a safe place to live.
- More information and details.
- They are wonderful but I would like it if there was more funding available.
- More *transitional* and public housing. Not make me feel like I am being judged. Have more funding available to help people like me.
- Have more options and opportunities for a better life and recovery process. More houses and support for mental health.

Quotes from young people:

- To make it a better experience for me they can help me to get a house
- Shorten the waiting period for transitioning into the next housing
- Have staff learn Auslan to communicate with deaf clients
- More houses; cheaper houses
- Other accommodation options. Have more long term options.
- Have more/better emergency services for accommodation stuff that is more long term, not just one night.
- They are empowering and help in confidence building
- Provide more housing options for young people
- They are doing all they can to help
- More housing & houses
- Would love if they could provide temporary accommodation. Listen to the people’s issues and support as much as they can.
- More housing options and more easy access for those experiencing family violence
- More housing with support. Services need to influence government and speak up more for housing

Question 8: How many homelessness services have you had contact with, in the last year?

Homelessness services	# adults	# young people	% adults	% young people
1	37	13	33%	35%
2-5	62	22	56%	60%
6-10	9	2	8%	5%
10+	3		2%	

Question 9: Some people have told us that they have had to repeat their information when they move from one homelessness service to another. What has been your experience of this?

Response	# of Adults	# of young people	% adults	% young people
Yes	45	16	44%	48%
Yes but it’s OK	12	5	12%	15%
No	32	4	31%	12%
Somewhat	4	2	4%	6%
NA	10	6	10%	18%
Total	103	33	101%	96%

Quotes from adults:

- Good experience of info being relayed and not any repetition.
- Services not communicating with one another. No time to investigate/look into previous contact
- can be a bit draining and bring up emotions. same paperwork
- Feel like a broken record that plays over forever
- Repeat everything from start to end/5-6 services.
- Having some kind of centralized record system could reduce information repeating

- Most definitely. The disconnect or lack of proper and prompt liaising b/w services meant a lot of repetitiveness
- Crap in the past had to repeat story find the services I am now working with good
- No not really. I feel discrimination because they act like they don't want to help me. Different people at front desk at different times and days give different information and makes it confusing at times to understand
- Yes, felt trauma. More than 10 times
- I found communications not linked so I had to constantly had to tell my story
- Happens a lot. In D/V Services too. Need Central database
- Yes you need to tell your story again which can be harmful to your mental health when you are trying to work through your issues
- No, not necessarily. I have been lucky to have a great bunch of workers with great handover skills.
- Yes, it's true! It's worse at the start with the access point because you see different workers all the time which is very frustrating. if you could even have one allocated worker at the access point that would make it easier.

Quotes from young people:

- Makes me feel sad. Make me think of the past again. Brings up too much memories.
- The same. It would be more convenient to forward their details to the next service.
- OK to repeat problems and information as they can assist my circumstances. Only those I trust.
- I don't mind if I get asked a lot of questions, as long as they try to help me.
- I would agree and it's annoying and time consuming to repeat my story over and over again.
- Exhausting, to have to retell story. Services should exchange information.
- Yes, I have had to repeat my information as previous services were reluctant to share across service providers.

Question 10: Do you feel you were treated respectfully by homelessness services?

Response	# of adults	# of young people	% of adults	% of young people
Yes	86	28	79%	76%
No	4	2	4%	5%
Somewhat	5	3	5%	8%
Depended on service	10	3	9%	8%
Depended on worker	3	1	3%	3%
Total	109	37		

Overall themes

Most people were happy with their overall experiences with the Specialist Homelessness Service System, however some people qualified their answers with exceptions such as the service provider or the type of service they were engaging with or the worker they encountered.

Question 11: Can you rank how you would most like to be contacted by homelessness services?

Calculated on the top three preferences:

Contact	Adults	Young people
Face to face	253 (46%)	61 (33%)
Telephone	197 (35%)	70 (38%)
Text	104 (19%)	54 (29%)

2018: Consumer experiences of homelessness and a lack of housing

The 2018 survey focussed on consumers' experiences of homelessness and on the impact of a lack of housing. As State and Federal elections were occurring in 2018/19 we asked consumers what they would like us to tell the Premier and Prime Minister on their behalf.

We also asked what they thought was needed to address homelessness.

Question 7: What impact has homelessness, or the risk of homelessness, had on your life (and on your children's live, if you have children)?

Theme	Women #	Men #
Stress	28	
Financial stress	16	5
Not being able to protect children; poor diet, disrupted schooling, no schooling, no toys, scary unpredictable accommodation	24	
Mental Health deterioration	10	11
Fear	9	
Anxiety	8	
Stress		8
Increased AOD use		8
Physical Health deterioration	7	
Depression increased	7	5
Traumatic	6	
Isolation	6	4
Couldn't plan or organise		5
Family breakdown; children taken into state care; partner leaving them		4
Education disrupted		4
Loss of self worth, confidence		3

Quotes about the impact of homelessness

- *Stress. Difficulty sleeping. Money worries.*
- *It made life difficult for the people I care for and my daughter being separated when we ended up homeless that it made so many of us depressed.*
- *Devastating. Just don't know what's going on. You can make any plans because you just don't know*
- *Very hard with children. Children need a good and safe home to live. Sharing and couch surfing is stressful on family.*
- *Big- I was forced to give up my kids to DHHS and sleep rough and squat in derelict properties. 5 years later I am still homeless.*
- *The ability to trust people. My safety. My mental health - depression. Isolation. Striped my confidence in life.*
- *It led to drug use and lost my son.*
- *Extreme stress. Not being able to play a protective role for my children. Not feeling safe.*
- *Not enough support at all. Prioritised means enough. Waiting around with kids and homeless. Hotel room for a few days only, very difficult when you are homeless.*
- *Mental health and physical health has declined and I am surviving by feeding off charity support - which ca not fully provide as allocations are exhausted.*
- *The crisis accommodation that I have been given isn't the best. I struggle to get the kids to school, there is no crisis accom close to where we were living before*
- *#Depression, fear, anxiety for myself and son. Sleeping in my car. #Lacking stable foundation. #Private rental market is discriminating against single Mothers.*

- *Children have had to stay in emergency accommodation, which was not in our preferred area. They missed out on some schooling. They were away from friends and relatives.*
- *Developing severe anxiety because of the fear of the unknown. My children seeing me struggle to leave the house and not understanding why.*
- *-A severe and profound effect that was traumatic, lonely and desperate. Often hopeless. A stranger in my own city. - Affected my 6 year old son (who started prep this year), he presented signs of anger, anxiety & depression, severe separatism anxiety (as I had the same), constant feeling of unpredictability & instability. Started disrespecting females because of his anger about the absence and lack of his maternal figure.*
- *Homelessness has been traumatic and turned my life upside down.*
- *I had to live in a mouldy crowded house. It had effected my mental extremely. I felt like I had no hope.*
- *A lot of ways Felt the lowest I've ever felt Incredibly traumatised and talking about it sometimes feels overwhelming scared of having to live on the street i was lack of motivation and i felt lonely. it had an impact on my education as i was not performing well due to the complications and all the things that was going on in my life.*
- *hard, broken down, you are nothing*
- *transient and feeling unsettled - very hard - not good on mental health - literally had no idea where I could go*
- *Loss of possessions, disjointed family, disrupted education and health issues*
- *I was in a motel for almost 7 months and had two in my care. I struggled as I had to pay towards this accommodation and I was unable to cook. The room was very crowded and this impacted on me and my children as we could establish a routine. I had to leave household goods behind and lived out a few a bags so this impacted children's education and wellbeing. I am pregnant and struggled during my pregnancy due to homelessness as the housing situation was very stressful*
- *I have felt ashamed and embarrassed. I've tried my hardest to keep it a secret from my children but it's really hard. They think we're on holiday. I was put in a nice motel and then moved to another one because it was cheaper. I then didn't have anywhere to cook so it became really expensive for me having to buy food all the time. I was scared. I didn't know anyone.*
- *Impacted on many aspects of my life. Caused me a lot of stress and this affected my parenting. Homelessness caused many financial issues and worrying about if I can put a roof over my kid's heads.*

Question 8: How could this have been avoided?

Theme	Women #	Men #
Affordable housing	36	14
More homelessness support workers	12	3
More information on services available to help	5	
More transitional housing		4
Raise community awareness	4	
Stop discrimination (private rental)	4	
Stop family violence	4	
Assistance with private rental		3
Stop putting people in rooming houses	3	3
Accommodation certainty	3	
Better early family life	3	
Better education	2	5
More information about services to help		3
More family support		2
More support whilst in prison		2

Question 9: How many times have you been homeless, or at risk of homelessness and for how long?

Theme	Women #	Men #
Once	41	13
Twice	18	5
3 times		5
4 times	5	
Many times	9	6
3 weeks	4	1
2 months	5	
4 months		2
6 months	7	
1 year	9	
2 years		5
3 years	3	
5 years		2
17 years		

Question 10: What impact has being without a suitable and affordable home had on your life?

Theme	Women #	Men #
Affects mental health (depression 15; anxiety 9)	41	24
Family breakdown/loss of children/loss of family/friends/relationship stress	22	9
Stress/worry/sleep problems	17	
Worry about children	17	
Financial stress/hardship	13	
Unsettled/lost/don't belong/Unsure of future/instability	12	9
Affects physical health	10	9
Scared/fearful/unsafe	9	
Loss of employment/can't work	9	12
Kids can't attend school	6	3
Hopeless/despair/suicidal	6	3
Turn to drugs/alcohol		5
Loss of confidence		3
Rape/sexual assault	2	
Other: Loneliness, Don't know what to do nowhere to cook, become involved in drugs, no stability, not enough food, anger, loose trust, everything, loss of confidence, shameful/feel judged, fail school, shameful/feel judged		

Quotes about the impact of being without a suitable and affordable home

- *Constant worry, losing time chasing options, stress, sleeping problems, nightmares, financial stress, depression, panic attacks*
- *It was just really bad and you pretty much feel lost like as if you don't belong anywhere or that no-one cares. As I used to have all doors shut on me which left me with no choices. There should be more and more accommodation out there for people, especially the ones with kids. Or kids that have special needs.*
- *Rape, financial hardship, scared, feared, syringes everywhere, seeing people die*
- *It's a feeling of hopelessness and despair which led to depression in all of us that one of us suicide if we were not reunited.*
- *Huge - I got caught up with the wrong people and became involved in drugs - being homeless has ruined my life.*
- *Loss of employment. No money. Without food.*
- *Safety. Mental Health. No stability. Poor lifestyle.*
- *Anger/depressions/resentment. Constantly feeling unsettled. This has affected my ability to be in the present moment with my children. Feelings of worry and anxiety about where we will live. Feeling outside of the rest of the world who have secure housing. Not being able to give my children things because I can't afford to.*
- *Moving away from our family and friends. Not feeling safe where we were staying.*
- *Made me reliant on Drugs (ICE) to stay awake cause Ive been taken advantage of and sexually abused touched while I have been asleep I haven't been able to be a mother to my kids/ can't see them and made me suicidal*
- *My health has declined. Mental health decline - trust stability.*
- *It's unhealthy . You worry every night while you are going to do tomorrow*
- *It impacted on everything.*
- *My mental health and wellbeing has been impacted a lot. I am unwell and feel disorganised, not confident and alone.*
- *I lost my children, had to put them in care with my mother and ex mother in law*
- *Stress, being ill most of the time, tiredness*
- *failing year 12 due to homelessness no privacy depression anxiety centrelink pressure*
- *I had to drop out of school Loss my job*
- *-fearful and scared - not knowing where I am going next - no safety net*
- *- physical illness - family breakdown - always feel depressed*
- *A massive impact you want the best for your kids and when you can't provide a safe and affordable home for them you start judging yourself and making yourself feel smaller then you already did. It takes a toll mentally, emotionally and physically. Knowing you can't provide a roof over their heads and make them feel safe as you can't afford to give them the basics.*
- *The impact of not being able to join in society in any meaningful, productive way. Depression. Cynicism towards society. Hopelessness.*
- *Anxiety, depression, family breakdown, distress, unsure what happen in future*
- *I was so stressed I couldn't eat and then I was sick and couldn't take care of my children properly. We couldn't cook and we couldn't enrol in school.*
- *Attempted suicide, drinking heavily, unable to work, ashamed*
- *It made it pretty well impossible to find paid employment, but I was able to manage 2 days of volunteer work a week while homeless and living in my van. It also added much stress on a day to day basis because of the instability and uncertainty of where I sleep.*
- *My health has deteriorated also very mental health has been impacted and confidence completely shot*
- *I am always dirty, crying & upset.*
- *It has impacted my mental and physical wellbeing and has made me resort to using drugs to cope with my situation*
- *I haven't had a secure home for 3 years my children have been to 4 different schools i am fed up with moving and now i need my own house and I can't get one*

Question 11: What has helped you during your experience of homelessness or risk of homelessness?

Theme	Women #	Men #
Support services	71	30
Access point services	17	7
Friends and family	16	7
Transitional housing	7	
Material aid/foodbanks/food vouchers	6	4
Nice people who care	5	3
Thinking of children	5	
Personal strength	3	
GP/hospital/health service		3
Detox/rehab/AOD service		3
Other things: Centrelink payments, legal service, police, GPs/hospital, instinct to survive, place to stay, mental health service, other people who are homeless, school, hope, drugs, AOD services, religion, psychiatrist, pet, music, religion, hope, showers, being motivated		

Quotes about what has helped:

- *The amazing help and patience of people around me that hardly know me*
- *Having a worker who knows the system. Being able to get transitional housing.*
- *Support services.*
- *Friends and family allowed my family to live with them. The services of [access point and support service]. Centrelink income support payment.*
- *All support workers and program supported me and linked me to support services. I met a lot of good people who listened to my problems.*
- *The support workers that never give up.*
- *Support workers. Organisations. Food banks etc. Family.*
- *The instinct to survive. My children.*
- *Friends and places like [access point service].*
- *Support from housing worker with searching and applying for private rentals financial assistance (FVFSF)*
- *Prison (Roof over my head) committing crime to make money to put a roof over my head/ hotel etc... Housing offices / [Access point services] emergency accommodation and living in my car*
- *Calling [access point service] and getting updated on what is happening and who can help me.*
- *Friends [Support service] Counselling*
- *Knowing I have a support worker who knows me personally and helps me as much as she can. It's nice knowing someone in the housing sector genuinely cares about our situation.*
- *Having support from support services as well as having some hope that things will one day be ok and work out. That I will hopefully have one day a house for me and my children*
- *-My partner never leaving my side. - the few people who helped us like my grandfather, my son's father and his mum. - My pet kitten who I found as a stray in March. -My son gives me hope. -Drugs. Without substances, I would have committed suicide. It was the only way I could get up and get through the day*
- *My support workers at [homelessness support service]. They helped me out with things like clothes, pots and pans, birthday and Christmas presents. These might seem like small things but they were really big things for me and the girls. These things brightened up our days. One time my worker gave us Easter eggs. This was our first Easter being homeless. I was wrapped.*
- *It wasn't easy at the time but gradually once worker allocated through Transitional housing. My worker and my strength and hope that life is going to change for me in a great way*
- *Having a place to stay*

- *My support worker always listened and did not judge me. They always helped me when I asked for things. They helped me find a house and helped me to make sure my children go to school.*
- *Homeless services have been the most help. AOD services also assisted.*
- *Being able to rely on friends and family who I do not want to inconvenience or impose on*
- *Hoping one day things might turn around.*
- *Services for homeless people are a godsend though there are not enough to go around.*
- *friends, family, that's about it there isn't much help out there*
- *Good support from friends. My support worker has been helpful. I don't feel alone*

Question 12: What is the most difficult thing that has happened to you (and your family) while being homeless or at risk of homelessness?

Theme	Women #	Men #
Worry about children	18	3
Lack of stability/sense of no future/uncertainty/lost	16	6
Fear/unsafe/vulnerability	13	
Having no-one/isolation	13	
Crisis accommodation	11	
Being assaulted		7
Family breakdown/separation	6	4
Rape/sexual assault	5	
Pregnant and homeless	5	
Loss of children	5	4
Physical decline/getting sick		4
Mental decline	4	
Cold	4	
Belongings stolen/robbed		4
Incarceration		3
Turning to drugs/alcohol		3
Family/relationship stress		3
Other: Getting sick, Physical decline, Family separation, Stress/can't relax, Nowhere to sleep, Everything, No money, Upset/feeling discriminated against, Belongings stolen, Lack of food, Missing school/uni, Couch surfing, having nowhere and sleeping in our car, Lack of food, Suicidal, Fear/Unsafe/Vulnerable, Everything		

Quotes about the worst thing that has happened as a result of homelessness

- *The worst thing was having no-one around and no-one out there to help you, as many out there just turn their back and don't realise what others are going through. So in the end this experience has affected me mentally and physically as well as my daughter. No-one out there should face or deserve to face homelessness.*
- **RAPE**
- *The most difficult thing that has happened to me was not knowing where my children would go to sleep.*
- *I just couldn't see a future. Just not knowing what's going on. Promises of getting a safe place and it doesn't happen because all the services end up with nowhere to house you.*
- *Being scared of what people are going to do. Being vulnerable and afraid.*
- *Being separated from husband and children. Friend I was living with placed restriction on when I can stay in the house. I had to leave in the morning and return at 6pm. During this time I went to shops, library to keep busy. It was very stressful because I couldn't relax.*
- *Being assaulted. Being in fights. Using drugs. Losing my health.*
- *I got sexually assaulted being homeless, then put in a hostel for men and women and got raped.*

- *Worrying about where I was going to sleep with the children to be safe. Not having any money, limited food options due to staying in motels with no cooking appliances. Going back to the perpetrator due to feeling unsafe at the motel where there were needles, violence, rats and drugs. Bed bugs.*
- *Arguments/fights with my parents.*
- *It's not difficult - it's degrading, humiliating etc*
- *Homeless and pregnant. Family violence. No family support.*
- *Pregnant and abortion while homeless, due to an assault.*
- *Feeling unsure of what will happen to us. Having to use a bucket as a toilet during the night as we didn't have a toilet in our room.*
- *Not being able to have somewhere I could call home. Family members have nowhere to visit us. Not having my grandchildren around.*
- *I've lost hope. Every day I feel no-one cares.*
- *Feeling scared and unsafe in crisis accom and having no other options*
- *Sleeping in my car at night in the cold and alone*
- *Domestic violence. Not having a home for me and my son. Living in fear.*
- *Nowhere to go. Hopeless. Helpless*
- *At [the motel] - gunmen burst into room mistaken identity of deceased girl that had stayed in room before me*
- *Trying to get my stuff around, transport. It was heartbreaking to see my little girl have to carry her suitcase around. Not knowing when we can eat again was also really difficult. Also, some of the hotels we stayed at were very scary and we felt so unsafe. I was hugging them all night ring awake because the neighbours were screaming and drinking all night.*
- *Just being homeless missing out of university and school for two months. Also going back was hard to cover all the content that I haven't studied. Sharing one bed room with my 3 siblings at the motel was hard. Not being able to do things like going out was hard as we didn't had money and also purchasing food. We lived in a really hard situation that time*
- *The hardest part for me was my kids not having a safe and stable affordable place to call home.*
- *Loss of employment. Breakdown of family relationships.*
- *Bashed. Stolen from. Stood over for money.*
- *Separation from family and supports*
- *Little sleep. Crime.*
- *Multiple counts of assault and loss of family*
- *Waiting to end my life*
- *Most difficult thing was the instability, the not knowing. if I would be asked to move on by police, or if someone would try to break in to the van at night while I slept, or if I got sick, what would I do?*
- *I think a lot and sometimes feel depressed. I do not have access to many things that can stop me from thinking*
- *family issues, relationships issues, issues with seeing your children without a safe and secure space, mental health issues*
- *Spending Christmas at someone else's house*

Question 13: Imagine you are now sitting with the Prime Minister of Australia or the Premier of Victoria – what would you tell them about the experience of homelessness or risk of homelessness?

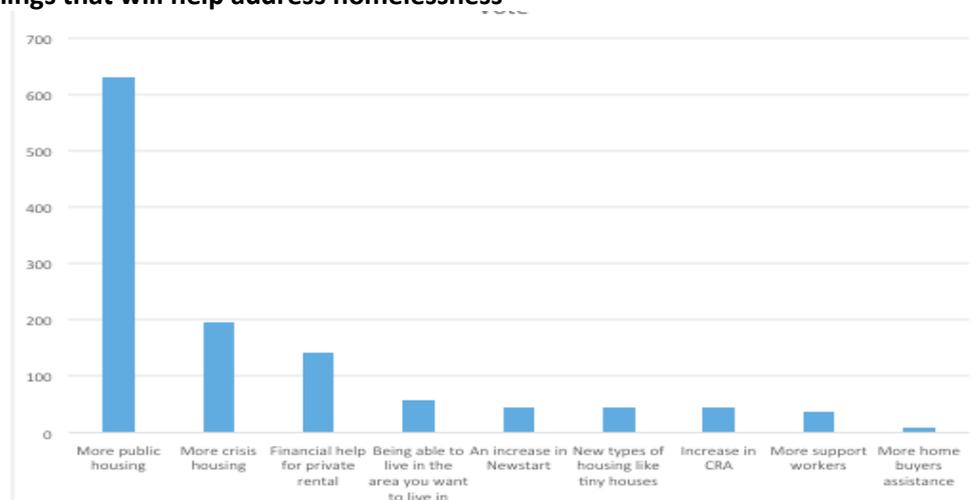
Theme	Women #	Men #
Build/create more housing (affordable/social)	48	14
Build your understanding of the reality of homelessness	24	23
Help people who are homeless/your citizens	10	5
Fund more support services	5	5
Provide a liveable income	3	
Fix the housing market	3	
More crisis accommodation near services		3
Other: More services for young people, Create more jobs, Clean and safe services open 24 hours, More stock like transitional housing		

What would you tell the Prime Minister/Premier?

- *Housing prices are out of control, has been for over a decade. Even basics in life (e.g. food, groceries, public transport, electricity/gas prices) are way more expensive than other 1st world countries. When found with a reduced income this makes like almost impossible to live as a normal person.*
- *I can write a book but need housing*
- *The worst situation you would experience except illness is not to have a shelter for you and your family. We need more organisations that can help these people in need.*
- *It is ridiculous how the rental market is and we should have affordable housing.*
- *They need to get off their backsides and do something about it. Provide more housing. So many ministry houses seem vacant - system's not run well.*
- *To have a real look at how bad the situation has become with homelessness.*
- *Australia is a big country with not enough housing. Please provide more stable and affordable housing for people. This can include OoH, community housing or private rental.*
- *Need to look after the people - low income people. Living costs are expensive. We need houses. Look after the children/education/wellbeing. Need to be in touch with homelessness and give more support.*
- *How would you like to be homeless for 5 years without your kids?*
- *Homelessness is not only not having a roof over your head but it has a big impact on your mental status because you felt like you are not equal to other people. You are at the bottom of society.*
- *That it is horrible and we need more houses.*
- *It can be avoided - please help!*
- *Homelessness is something that nobody should experience and when it happens, it can be unexpected and there is not enough support for people in need. Housing is an entitlement, not a dream.*
- *Every human being, no matter race, colour, have a heart and soul. Every single person has a story. We don't become homeless because we want to. I had a house, car, worked until my partner's suicide. Now nothing.*
- *It's frustrating, it's depressing, it's demoralising and just makes my health issues worse.*
- *I would like him to stay a night where they are asking my kids and myself to stay. And then ask would he want himself or his family to stay in these conditions. I don't think he would stay a night*
- *It was the hardest time I have been through in my life and should be more support and help for people that find themselves in this situation, it could happen to anyone.*
- *We need more housing. More, larger, affordable housing in our area.*
- *It is not fair my son and I are homeless. We need a house. My son deserves to be safe.*
- *When you are homeless you never feel safe, who will hit you or where you are. When you have a government house, you feel safe even if you have no food.*
- *There needs to be more public housing or other affordable options. We need more choice about where we want to live*

- Families experiencing homelessness need more help so their children are not homeless too.
- Build more houses and create new jobs so people are kept busy and engage in beneficial things for themselves and also the community
- We needed more crises accommodation and places that homeless people can go. There also needs to be more public housing or affordable housing. As private rental is the only option for low income earners and sometimes it's just not possible to survive on little income from centrelink and then have to pay most of my income on rent.
- I have had a bad experience while being homeless and i would like to urge you that, people need home to call their own and they are facing difficulties because there is not enough houses in Melbourne. We are facing difficulties in homelessness because there is no enough houses to be provided to us that's why it takes ages to find something.
- There needs to be more housing for young people
- Being homeless is very stressful and it is no good for children and families to be without a safe place I want them imagine how they would deal with this situation and what they would say to their children
- Absolutely horrific and there are no words that can describe it. I can understand now why so many people just give up, it's so sad. It could so easily be resolved - just buy some more houses, there are so many vacant properties and buildings, why can't these be donated or bought. These places could house so many people. It is so cold at night time and there are so many people doing it, it's unbelievable.
- Fix the cause of homelessness, not just band aid solutions. Affordable accommodation, affordable services, not a one size fits all approach
- That the despair and loneliness that you encounter is second to none. I would need much more space and time to explain to them exactly how they need to distribute funds to the right facilities.
- There are numerous empty dwellings and an over abundance of new units being built. Mainly investors sitting on the properties. Create some discussion in Parliament in relation to this - also squatter's rights.
- It's a very lonely place to be. The feeling of helplessness can be very depressing. Crime was my only financial option.
- It sucks! We need help. We are human and we deserve it just like everyone else.
- It's not fair for kids too ever feel this pressure. They shouldn't have to ever feel a doubt about a roof over their head or a meal in their stomach. They should be worried about kid things
- You need to give more help. I lost my job because of my health and now I am losing my home because I don't have enough money. Rent is too high and my Centrelink doesn't cover all my costs
- The Government needs to be smarter with their money to help people on the streets.
- Everyone deserves a place to call home.
- I wouldn't wish the feeling on my worst enemy.
- How can I get a job if I cannot go to school and cannot have a safe home.

Rank the top 3 things that will help address homelessness



2017: Consumer experiences of emergency accommodation

One of the issues that appeared through the consumer surveys over the years was the impact on consumers of stays in [largely inappropriate] emergency accommodation. The Northern and Western Homelessness Networks have been deeply concerned about the lack of appropriate emergency accommodation options. We wanted to know whether many of the options that we are forced to access for consumers are as bad as we think. We also wanted to find out what good quality emergency accommodation would look like and what consumers would like us to prioritise in terms of emergency accommodation.

So the 2017 consumer survey focussed solely on consumers' experiences of emergency accommodation - both government funded and private options.

The survey results were devastating. In response to this feedback the Networks' wrote the "Crisis in Crisis" report and spent much of 2019 advocating about the appalling lack of appropriate emergency accommodation options.

52% of respondents to this survey reported experiencing a disability and 23% reported two or more disabilities, indicating that we are referring a very vulnerable group of people into emergency accommodation.

How much did the accommodation cost?

- Motel costs for men \$190 - \$1,300 and for women \$175 - \$1,600 per week.
- Rooming/boarding house cost varied between \$100 and \$365 per week.

Was there support available at these accommodations?

- Generally there were no support workers available in hotels/motels, rooming houses or caravan parks.

Consumers reported on stays in a wide variety of forms of emergency accommodation:

	Male	Female
Caravan Park	14	9
Crisis facility (e.g. Flagstaff, Southbank, Ozanam)	33	3
Hostel	16	6
Hotel	11	16
Motel	25	35
Refuge	11	21
Rooming or Boarding House	34	15
Other	4	2

If you have ever stayed in any of these places, how safe did you feel? (Score out of 100)
 0 = I was terrified (0%), 1 = Unsafe (25%), 2 = It was okay (50%), 3 = Safe (75%), 4 = I felt very safe (100%)

	Average score Overall	Average score Males	Average score Females	Trans score (1 respondent)
Caravan Park	34%	33%	41%	NA
Crisis facility like Flagstaff, Southbank or Ozanam House	66%	66%	97%	80%
Hostel	36%	37%	34%	50%
Hotel	46%	54%	39%	94%
Motel	48%	49%	47%	51%
Refuge	72%	67%	81%	100%
Rooming or Boarding House	33%	34%	35%	100%

Do any of these descriptions fit the places you stayed?

	Crisis facility like Flagstaff, Southbank or Ozanam House	Hostel	Hotel	Motel	Refuge (e.g. Family Violence or Young People)	Rooming or boarding house	Caravan Park	Total Respondents
Supportive	39%	4%	5%	11%	39%	9%	4%	76
Difficult or stressful	12%	20%	19%	37%	11%	40%	16%	90
Dirty	6%	16%	15%	30%	3%	44%	15%	79
Unhealthy	9%	18%	12%	34%	5%	39%	14%	77

	Crisis facility like Flagstaff, Southbank or Ozanam House	Hostel	Hotel	Motel	Refuge (e.g. Family Violence or Young People)	Rooming or boarding house	Caravan Park	Total Respondents
Overcrowded	11%	20%	11%	23%	11%	39%	18%	56
Expensive	11%	15%	19%	37%	5%	45%	14%	84
Didn't have the facilities or the amenities I need like kitchens, toilet, laundry or bathrooms	5%	11%	21%	48%	0%	26%	21%	61
I felt discriminated against	16%	24%	13%	24%	5%	47%	8%	38

Have you ever felt discriminated against in any of these places?

- Women: safety and its absence; sense of exclusion/being unwelcome/poor treatment
- Men: Threats and violence, drugs, racism, homophobia, treatment by workers

What was good about the accommodation?

- Women: Safety and security, shelter (roof), privacy, support, appropriate for children, nothing
- Men: Shelter (roof), safety and security, support, privacy

What would you change?

- Women: improve facilities, improve safety and security, increase autonomy, better staff and support, improve cleanliness, greater space & privacy, greater affordability, greater appropriateness for children
- Men, greater safety and security, greater affordability, more support and better staff, better facilities, issues with other residents (drugs, over crowding), increase length of stay

What was it like staying in places with shared room/facilities?

- Women: hard/bad/terrible/horrible (violence and rape), unsafe, unclean/lack of care; not appropriate for children; some good (refuges); difficult to cook and can't store food
- Men: Bad/difficult/terrible/shit; unclean, overcrowded, unsafe, OK, community, great or good (refuges usually); poor facilities; difficult to cook and can't store food

Commentary

- Consumers reported that a mob mentality can develop amongst residents and this is very scary. Consumers also reported being too fearful to cook in shared kitchen facilities.
- Tenants Victoria reported seeing more people in rooming houses who are starving because they don't have enough money left for food after paying for accommodation.

What does your ideal emergency accommodation look like?

- Women: homely, spacious and private, good facilities – kitchen, safe and secure, clean, appropriate for children, supported
- Men: own space and private, safe and secure, supported, less restricted, affordable

What sort of long term housing do you want?

- Women: appropriate for children, safe and secure, affordable, permanent/stable, clean
- Men: Affordable, permanent/stable, safe and secure, privacy and space, wanting ownership of space, clean

If you had a choice between a self contained space (maybe small) or sharing with others with support onsite?

- 85% opted for self contained space (78% of men and 89% of women)
- 22% opted for congregate, supported facilities (22% of men and 11% of women)

Commentary

Numbers of consumers reported that they would like private rental but the sector and consumer experience is that the amount of affordable private rental available is very low. There is almost no affordable housing available for single people. Affording private rental on Newstart or disability support pension is nearly impossible.

Some participants reported appreciating the sense of community in congregate areas. Catherine proposed that we be more creative about building a sense of community. People can still have their own lockable space with a community built around.

Consumers reported that inviting people in to a bedsit feels too intrusive as there is no living room. The group proposed more gardens with shared sitting spaces so people can meet outside their rooms.

Shared housing can work when tenants have choice over who they live with. Most people, given the choice, wouldn't live with other people.

Participants reported feeling restricted by rules in shared facilities – like having to be at morning tea at specific times.

2016: Exploration of key themes

In 2016 the Networks moved to a qualitative survey, examining in greater depth nine themes that had arisen from previous surveys:

1. **Places people stay when they are homeless**
2. **Waiting for long-term housing**
3. **Waiting for a support worker**
4. **Support**
5. **The experiences of children**
6. **Fitting the system**
7. **Information sharing**
8. **Information about services and the service system**

5. In past surveys people have told us that a lack of affordable housing is the major issue for people experiencing homelessness. What has a lack of affordable housing meant to you?

The key themes in the responses were:

- Impact of expensive housing leading to rent arrears and eviction
- Impact on wider family and friends who help out
- Becoming homeless
- Impact on the direct family
- The struggle and distress of being unable to find a house (impact on self, including physical and mental health)
- No housing
- Long waiting lists

Quotes about what a lack of affordable housing has meant to respondents:

- *Couch surfing with friends and family. Eviction, Rent arrears.*
- *Accessing private rental has been very difficult. Previously I was moving between friends and family for 5 years. If it were not for family I would have been on the street.*
- *meant that I could end up on the street at any time after I move out of the transitional housing program. It's really scary and distressing.*
- *Not living independently alone or with my child.*
- *you can't pay rent you can't eat ... looking for stable accommodation*
- *Having to decide between food on the table, or a roof over our heads. It's also about providing a sense of safety; a secure environment, not only about cover from the rain.*
- *i have not been able to maintain a relationship with my children*
- *Terribly, affected your life. I had to live in dangerous environment.*
- *it's prevented myself and my children living together in a happy peaceful environment.*
- *I have had to live in my car for two years, and was at the point I was suicidal. I was not able to work because I had no stable home, and felt completely desperate.*
- *Being on the streets with children*
- *Staying in a dangerous place, risking mine and my children's safety*
- *stress, self doubt, worthlessness*
- *a lot. I've been homeless on a few occasions and living in your car isn't something you want to do.*
- *It means that as a victim of domestic violence I have been housed and surrounded by drunks, addicts and living with a sense of feeling unsafe*

- *living on the street mainly*
- *spending almost every cent on private rental*

7. Besides more housing, what would you like to see changed in the response to homelessness?

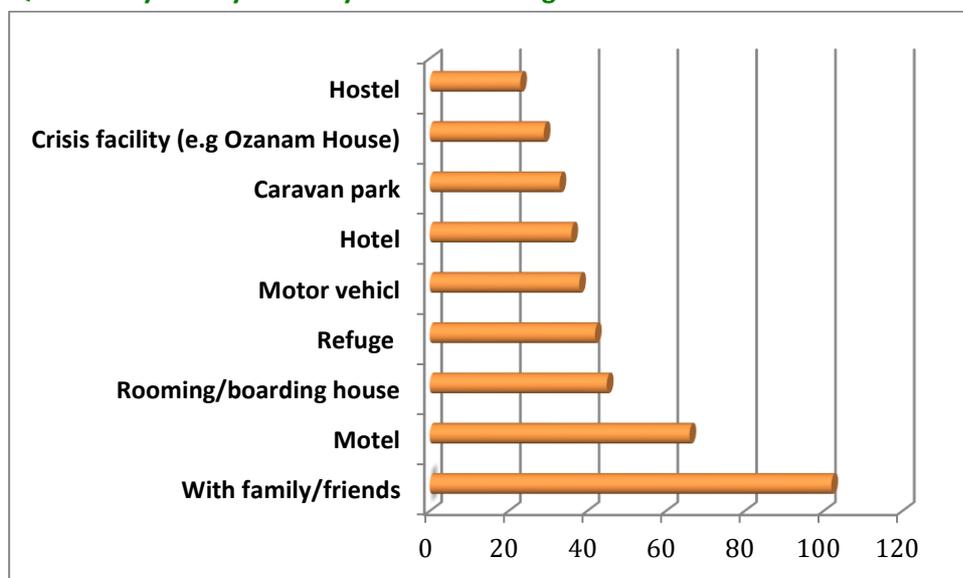
The key themes

- More support and assistance
- More services
- More appropriate emergency housing/accommodation
- Child support
- More funding especially to make housing affordable
- Community led/Peer models/Consumer empowerment
- System improvements including follow through

Quotes: suggested changes in homelessness responses:

- *More financial support, support and mentoring for child assistance and support from DHS. as well as assistance with employment and upskilling.*
- *More workers to support you while you wait. Better communication. Put application in then no one will tell you anything.*
- *more commitment to helping, feel like people let me down.*
- *Support to empower me to can overcome homelessness.*
- *Less homelessness - make things affordable.*
- *Increase in safe boarding houses and crisis accom. Renovate boarding houses to a better standard.*
- *Change allocation of funding direct more to the individuals than to agencies.*
- *No regions - causes barriers for homeless people.*
- *Better assessments of eligibility. Look at different states what they are doing.*
- *Services should move away and far from saviour industrial complex model to community-led lead by people who have had/are still experiencing homelessness. These people should also be paid for their expertise and insight. - Services need to stop using and take advantage and expect those who know what it's like to be homeless/at risk of homelessness to provide free service giving service providers their expertise, insight, training etc. - Peer and Leader model, Check out Berry Street and the drum youth services for more details. When recruiting new staff, prioritise people with lived experience of being homeless*
- *more organisations like xxx that support clients in all areas. I started from Crisis program at xxx then moved to longer term program. It helps not needing to start all over again with another service and other workers.*
- *When I went to the access point (on many occasions), the most I was provided with was a night here and there at a motel. This didn't resolve anything, and I just had to go back to sleeping in my car. I would have gone to crisis accommodation or anywhere that could have been arranged. Some support would have been very useful for me.*
- *I went to xxxxx & was sent to shared housing that was not appropriate for my children to be with me. Need more emergency & appropriate housing, I waited too long to be seen at Yarra H 2 days then I had to attend all the time, I was then placed in a rooming house and the children could not come with me,*
- *To be better crisis housing for families. The time when i first left my husband due to dv, i was in a motel and that was not appropriate for me and my children. it was not the safest environment for children. I was given two options of motel rooms. when you have children involved, you need more care taken to accommodation children in safe places.*

Q. 8 Have you stayed in any of the following?



Q. 9. What has been your experience of these places?

Themes

- There are differences between supported crisis accommodations and refuges, and the motel, hotels and rooming houses that are used for crisis accommodation
- Bad or not good
 - Unsafe, fearful, noisy, scary, dangerous
 - Difficult, stressful, degrading, nightmare
 - Unhealthy
 - Overcrowded
 - Expensive
 - Lack facilities and amenities, dirty
- Good, okay or positive
 - Supported
 - Safe
- Need more of the good ones
- Mixed experiences
 - Curfew and rules not great
- Stays are not long enough

Quotes about the places people stay if they are experiencing homelessness:

- *Difficult, stressful, especially with 3 children.*
- *Horrific/degrading felt like a cell.*
- *unsafe, uncomfortable, scared, lonely, worried.*
- *The worst nights of my entire life.*
- *Scary, unsafe environment, lack of support :overcrowding. Lack of support and Lack of access to needs and social support.*
- *I was scared at xxx apartments lots of men. wanting to talk to you and come in your room.*
- *Alot of my belongings stolen so not great.*
- *It was a bit difficult as I was sleeping on their couches. I felt intrusive and I was constantly tired and had no energy from the lack of sleep.*

- *Felt degraded.*
- *Positive experience - being homeless has helped secure housing.*
- *Nightmare to comfortable, safe, clean and facilitated room's (hotel). I'm so thankful for all your help you have no idea how much you're helped and saved me.*
- *Some boarding houses are okay, but landlord were aggressive and threatened violence.*
- *Motel was horrible dirty. a lot of unsafe people who had issues like drug addiction, difficult to be around with children. Had to access food van as could not cook cramped in one small room.*
- *Boarding house wasn't a safe one. Majority were psychos.*
- *It is really hard to live.*
- *Fearful, cold, noisy, bad people*
- *Workers at the refuge I was at were really lovely. However, there's a very urgent need for trans and gender diverse inclusive training.*
- *some are good it wasn't healthy, Motels and hotels were good , lived in the car near a service station and it was a bad experience*
- *Excellent - but far from practical, both financially, and mentally. (the ongoing stress of not knowing what tomorrow will bring can be harrowing.)*
- *Refuge: Hard to get along with workers. Found it hard to talk to them, maybe because it was first time. The workers could have made more of an effort. current refuge so much better, felt comfortable and welcomed.*
- *not very nice experiences living in a car for a year was hard. Living with people you don't know always ends up a nightmare. People know your homeless and the automatically think your scum. very sad for the homeless children.*
- *Not safe and dangerous. crisis facility full of dangerous and scary people. Motel was safe but too expensive to stay long term.*
- *very heartbreaking as myself and my children have been separated.*
- *It was awful living in my car. I couldn't cope mentally, and my physical health suffered. I couldn't eat properly or shower, and relied on Footscray mission for some of these services. I wanted to get back into work but couldn't from that situation.*
- *Unsafe for kids in Rooming House. Got robbed there.*
- *I suffered I was frightened children had to stay else.where due to safety.*
- *Unsafe for children, lack of amenities,- no cooking facilities, xxx- shared one single bed with two children- not comfortable. had to ask for a microwave. lucky my children were two and three yr old. if they were older it would have been much harder. i did not sleep for two weeks when i was in crisis accommodation.*
- *not good at all, depressing. I do not understand why the refuge has so many rules as i need my friends support to get me through my emotional trauma, but could not tell me them where i was staying.*
- *Varies from place to place, some have strict rules and curfews which leave me feeling like a child with no dignity*
- *Drug addicts, violence, assault, dirtiness, unclean toilets, toilets without doors*
- *Has not been the best of places to stay. Also not to mention that given my current situation, child protection would not approve of my residency there whilst I have custody of my daughter or would allow me to have her in such places.*
- *okay, best to keep to yourself.*
- *deeply disturbing*
- *cold lonesome depressing*

10. In past surveys, people have told us that the waiting times for housing are too long. What has been your experience?

Themes

- Wait times are too long
- It is very hard
- The result has been homelessness, family breakdown, violence, despair
- We need more housing (especially public housing, also community, transitional)
- We need more affordable housing
- We need more private rental
- We need more options and they need to be quicker with an easier process
- We want permanent stable, secure housing
- It is hard to find, acquire or maintain

Quotes about the wait for long-term housing

- *Very long waiting time causing family breakdown.*
- *I believe it's a matter of timing/chance. I was lucky and was provided immediate accommodation due to the availability, but otherwise it would tak forever.*
- *waiting for over 4 yrs/ - disheartening.*
- *Been on and off Seg 1 housing list for 19 years. Keep falling through the cracks.*
- *You can die before you get something.*
- *i have been waiting 52 years (Client ID #85)*
- *I was homesless on waiting list from age of 35 to 48, once i signed up with homeground it took 3 months to find me a place*
- *some fuckwit crackhead trashes their housing becomes homeless goes into crisis housing top priority with all the other crackheads meanwhile i get sent to this "boarding house" which is full of bedbugs a mattress covered in black mould a window that doesn't lock and i'm supposed to pay 280 dollars a fortnight for the privilege ... oh and the boarding house comes with crackheads too i haven't bothered going back to "housing"*
- *before i got into transitional housing it was four weeks in crisis accomm it was very difficult- uncertain. i understand situation and that there are a lot of homeless people. ideally a shorter timeframe would be better especially for kids.*
- *I had offers for housing in rural areas that were not appropriate for my circumstances and was forced to decline which made me feel helpless*
- *too long and difficult to access for people with disability/illness.*

Q. 11 Do you have any ideas for improving the wait for long-term housing?

- More houses (public, community and transitional especially)
- More affordable, safe good quality crisis accommodation
- More support while waiting
- More affordable housing, more financial support for making housing affordable
- More funding for housing and for services and support workers
- Safer housing options
- Better processes (applications, prioritization, communication)
- Nothing would have helped

Q. 12. In past surveys, people have told us that the waiting times for housing are too long. What would have helped you while you were waiting?

Themes

- Support from workers
- Understanding care, respect
- Getting connected to support
- More affordable, safe good quality crisis accommodation
- Just housing
- Nothing would have helped

14. In past surveys, people have told us that the waiting times for support workers are too long. Do you have any ideas for improving this?

Themes

- More workers/staff and funding for more
- Better to get immediate support
- Follow up and check in (even by phone) are helpful
- Advice for other people accessing homelessness services
- Free Wi-Fi and places to charge phones
- Processes that seem inflexible and are too much of a burden

15. In past surveys, people have told us that the waiting times for support workers are too long. What would have helped you while you were waiting?

Themes

- Nothing or not much
- More workers
- More support and better support
- Appointment times
- Better amenities like chairs, tea/coffee/drink/food,
- Better communication
- More information
- One worker
- More understanding, care and respect
- Recreation/respice/fun

16. In past surveys, people have told us that they value the support they receive. What did you expect support to be?

Themes

- Someone to help
- Help with housing applications and navigating the service system
- Providing information and education
- Help to find housing
- Describing a positive and valued experience (36 people did this)
- Assessment of needs
- Support to achieve goals
- Don't know
- Being listened to and not judged (understanding, care and respect)
- What we received or are getting now
- Happy with what received, grateful

Quotes about what respondents would like support to be:

- *understand better what 'support' can be offered... is it more than housing?*
- *Support provided was very good. I did not need any more than was provided.*
- *help me be myself, hear me out.*
- *I would love services to acknowledge that the system sucks, instead of dismissing this fact. I would love services to understand and always keep in mind that it is our fundamental right to live where we feel comfortable and safe living in. Please don't dismiss our right and expect us to rent in places in the outer suburbs just because it's cheaper. By doing this, you are creating and supporting another system of class and further advancing gentrification. Housing in any area should be affordable to everyone. Stand in solidarity with us. Listen to what we said and use your platform of privilege to advocate for our rights. Employ peer leader to work with us.*
- *keep the bad men away from me*
- *I honestly don't think I could possibly ask for more! As I said, for us, they certainly seem to go above and beyond to ensure that we were not only safe, but happy! - I suppose my 'concern' may be towards the sense that there were people that appeared to be taking advantage of the system. Stories about 'repeat offenders' that just don't seem to care that they are abusing the generosity of these establishments, on the grounds that they have illegal habits that they 'can't control'. It comes across as a flawed service when support is provided on the grounds that the service is there for Everyone.*
- *Re-assurance - as I am only offered three months crisis property and am worried about where I am going to go next.*
- *transport support pretty much as we can not afford to carry the weight of homelessness ourselves*
- *I need immediate housing as I have been attacked yesterday. Everyday is a struggle*
- *The support I got was the best.*
- *well I got the opposite I got an amazing man called xxx and he felt my pain*
- *Somewhere to live*

18. We've had feedback that being homeless with children is an incredibly difficult and challenging experience. As a parent/carer, how do you think your child has been impacted by homelessness?

Themes

- Affected child negatively (43 people felt that it had)
- Affected – had an impact (7 people felt that it had)
- Affected – not much, very little (9 people felt that it had)
- Affected home negatively (5 people felt that it had)
- Violence and crime
- Loss of routine (5 people felt that it had)
- Interrupted schooling (18 people felt that it had)
- Guilt, stress and anxiety
- Loss and separation from parent (13 people felt that it had)

19. We've had feedback that being homeless with children is an incredibly difficult and challenging experience. What have your children/child said about being homeless?

Themes

- Why is this happening to us
- We want to be like other children
- We are not like other children
- I miss my friends
- I hate this
- Scared, worried,
- Sad, depressed, quiet, disconnected
- Ashamed, angry, crying
- Can we go somewhere else
- It's your (parent) fault
- When can we get our own home, it would be great
- Why?
- Nothing said

Q. 20. We've had feedback that being homeless with children is an incredibly difficult and challenging experience. How can we improve homelessness services for children and their carers?

Themes

- More housing
- Accommodation that is suited to children (safe, access to cooking facilities, with other families)
- More accommodation and housing options close to schools and friends
- Quicker access to housing
- Keep us safe
- More workers and support for the child (assessment of trauma and counselling if needed)
- More support from schools
- Provide parents with some respite, 'this is so hard'
- Better processes, stop having to 'drag the kids' around
- Explain homeless to kids in age appropriate and hopeful ways
- Make children and families a priority
- Don't let families be split up

Q.21. People have told us in a number of different ways that they need to fit the system and not the other way around. What can you tell us about your experience of accessing homelessness services?

Themes

- Describing service access – Positive, valued and good experience (34 people did this)
- Describing service access – Okay or reasonable experience (12 people did this)
- Describing service access – Unsuccessful, Negative or Bad experience (30 people did this)
- Describing service access – Mixed (5 people did this)
- Need to fit certain criteria to get a service
- Wait times can be long
- The system needs changing, not the person, fix the system (homelessness and housing)
- Need more flexibility
- Workers are hard-working, professional and understanding
- Workers can also be rude and insensitive
- Services need to be louder and stronger advocates
- Luck plays a part in good outcomes
- The person still needs to make efforts

Quotes about the way respondents experienced the service system:

- *That I was discriminated against as I was a single male with a child.*
- *Housing services are hard to access. lining up. They don't answer the phones.*
- *they are supportive and hard working*
- *It's very hard. I can't get to xxx at 9am because of the kids but then they wont help me.*
- *they act like to support but they don't solve the actual homelessness.*
- *A lot of understanding people trying to help.*
- *There is no funding for women who are not experiencing domestic violence.*
- *I was scared , they comforted me and helped when I had none and nothing.*
- *It's hard for me to ask for help.*
- *It's coz of the cage the rat is in, not the rat.*
- *Because you move from area to area you cannot go to the same service all the time.*
- *They were rude and didn't care.*
- *It was hard to get an appointment as you have to be there very early. I got there at 6'o clock in the morning and waited until 9am.*
- *Service providers dismiss our effort of finding housing and dismiss the fact that there's minimal affordable housing on the market. Instead, they want us to 'get our shit together'. Why don't they use their platform to tell the system to 'get their shit together'.*
- *Right place at right time.*
- *I find it disappointing that people would feel uncomfortable about having to abide by the needs of a service that is ultimately just doing what we either lack the resources to do, or simply the time to do. I'd find it utterly insulting if I was helping someone out of a ditch, and they told me that they couldn't step up because they'd get their feet dirty, and try to tell me I just have to pull them! I was happy to do what ever was required of me to ensure that the current unfortunate situation I was in was remedied as quickly and efficiently as possible. If that meant that I had to go to offices, and make phone calls on a daily or hourly basis, then I did. I understood that I was not the only person or family in need, and that the support that I was being given was a Blessing and most certainly NOT a Privilege.*
- *some people just want to help you ... other people look at you like wtf are you even here for*
- *But after xxx they passed the buck to xxx and that's when i felt left out. did not get daily phone calls, vouchers, emotional support. Felt very unsettled, worried, confused as no one from xxx contacted. If you are not strong*

enough as a woman it may be quite easy to return to your abusive ex partner during this stage as i was not supported by xxx.

- *I became homeless while escaping family violence, I was offered refuge in the country, which were very far away from my child's doctors, I felt ungrateful saying no and was threatened that I would be ejected from safe steps for saying no. I felt belittled and not listened too*
- *yeah that's pretty much how i felt about the experience here as i have seen people who are violent and angry get their way much quicker than me*
- *too many assessments, too many questions*
- *Need to fix the housing system.*
- *The system is not designed to help homeless people it is much difficult to get help and support*
- *Pain having to access services whilst trying to ensure you lead a normal life so your children's lives aren't disrupted too much. It becomes hard when you have to queue in a line outside a service in the rain*
- *I don't have enough knowledge and education level to share with you my opinion*
- *i haven't got housing yet and I've been homeless for 3 years. I can't recover*
- *I have no income so I have no choice where I live*

22. People have told us in a number of different ways that they need to fit the system and not the other way around. What can homelessness services do to make it easier for you to deal with them?

Themes

- More services, more staff, more support
- Treat us all more equally
- Empathize more, be nicer
- Understanding, care and respect (we are people not numbers)
- Provide us with more options
- Fix the system, be creative, don't keep doing things the same if they are not working
- Nothing

Q. 23. Some people have told us that they have to repeat their information when they move from one service to another. What has been your experience of this?

Themes

- Yes its true and negative (28) and it's
 - Re-traumatising
 - Don't like it
 - Cruel
 - Frustrating
 - Annoying
 - Makes me angry
 - Is no-one listening?
- Yes it's true (46)
- Yes its true and necessary (13) because,
 - I understand why (it means its more accurate and can protect me)
 - My privacy
 - My confidentiality
 - I don't want full disclosure between agencies
 - Put up with it to get what you need
- Yes its true and sometimes I just don't do give all my information
- It's okay
- It hasn't happened to me (28)
- Can we do it better?

Quotes about respondents' experiences of re-telling their stories:

- *Re-traumatising*
- *Yes, has had to relay information repeatedly, even to workers of the same program.*
- *Yes, one database where all agencies can access your information once permission is given. sick of re telling my story.*
- *It's ok because they need to know and I like that they ask.*
- *I don't like to repeat my life experience.*
- *Always repeating yourself, makes me angry.*
- *Just have to keep repeating to get what you need.*
- *Frustrating - needing to explain yourself over and over.*
- *It's hard because I have to repeat the bad things that happens it upsets me.*
- *I don't want to tell my story to everyone I meet so I am not always honest and it doesn't help me. I lose out.*
- *They knew about my situation before I came in.*
- *Agreed. I noticed that one of the most obvious forms of abuse of the system came from the lack of communication between differing services. Users who had trashed or even burnt down their house with one service, would be casually laughing about it out the front of the next service. Likewise, having to pour your heart out, explaining the dire circumstances you're in, with complete strangers, is heart wrenching. But having to do it over and over again, is just cruel. - unless you are taking advantage of the system, in which case, it is just practice to them, getting more believable and desperate sounding at each recital.*
- *I agree. Its frustrating when this happens. the amount of time I had to fill out forms and signed forms with one agency only to repeat myself and do it al over again before my support even started and I was mentally not able to process everything given what I had just gone through.*
- *I have had support workers in the past, then when they change I have had to revisit my past. I need to build relationship with worker first before i tell them my story. Each time I change workers I have to start the cycle again and build trust....its hard, its very hard.*
- *true. i had to repeat and repeat my story over and over. especially when i had to repeat my story in front of my children was inappropriate- atxxx.*
- *Yes that is true. I was telling my story to too many people. You feel like you've locked up all your emotions - then you have to talk about everything. It messes you up in your mind a bit. No time gap to process all my trauma. Eg: in a month, i jumped from two different services.*
- *Should be able to transfer Info*
- *call and get told to come in. Come in and get told to call.*
- *it's like starting all over again and no ones cares what you've already done*
- *It is frustrating in crisis or any situation to repeat yourself in particular in situations where it has been traumatic*
- *that happens everywhere. That's why I don't like going to counsellors*

Q. 25. Some people have told us that they have to repeat their information when they move from one service to another. How could we improve this?

Themes

- Ideas for changing it (73 people provided ideas)
- One database for all services, then share my information with my consent
- Shared assessment form
- Better communication
- Listen properly, record it accurately and then read it before you meet someone
- Do we need to have regions, can I keep one service instead of lots of services
- Keep the same support worker to follow you through
- Change the system

27. People have told us the service system can be confusing and it's hard to know what will happen next and what to expect. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

Themes

- Ideas for improvement (46 people provided these)
- Make it easier to understand, clearer
- Be honest, transparent about what we are eligible for
- Make sure the workers know what's going on
- Step by step guides
- Better communication, regular updates, let us know what's going on
- Same information shared between all services

Examples are:

- more understanding of workers because you are already stressed.
- Being told what I can access and are eligible for.
- Make all services the same. Make sure all information is the same.
- Knowing whats going to happen.
- Treat consumers like adults not children and respect their way of life even if it differs from your own
- More information on what services offer and eligiablity for what is on offer.
- More communication
- More explaining
- one worker from the beginning to the end

Summary of survey results: 2012 – 2015

Q. 20 How could services work together better to help people experiencing homelessness?	
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>organise case management to have a central worker to navigate the system</i> • <i>By using the same assessment across services</i> • <i>If centrelink and all services worked together it would be easier to help the homeless</i> • <i>I found 1 person very abrupt and not helpful at all in assisting me or giving me further information. I was a matter of me ringing back 2 business days later and speaking to someone with a much better and helpful attitude. All other staff members were great.</i> • <i>No rooming houses. More crisis accommodation for families with animals & affordable. Services need to work as one to get housing & support for people.</i> • <i>In emergency share house accommodation people should keep to themselves because i've been bashed by other people, my own personal things have been stolen from housemates and dealing with people that are on drugs 24/7. People need to be aware of these things that can happen in the emergency shared house accommodation.</i> • <i>Have a system where we don't have to repeat ourselves. See us as a person not a number.</i> • <i>more caring..less assuming,..gather more intel from the homelessness,,,,,(try and live as a homelessness)),,experiencing the living</i> • <i>Feels that workers should provide more information regarding what accommodations and resources are available to them. Had to strongly push to get information such as list of accommodations which wasn't offered to her from the start. Would have appreciated if they explained what accommodations were on the list. Need more funding for more accommodation options especially for families.</i> • <i>A more unified system so that I am always given the correct information, so I'm not getting a different answer from each person.</i> • <i>Share more information about next step in accommodation. Don't know much about services even though I get place at homeless accommodation.</i> • <i>Support service has to communicate well with access point to provide better support and accurate information to the client needs</i>
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>explaining well, good and friendly people. well understand your company procedure</i> • <i>i love to see the work the services you are giving to us as families. Thank you for your good work.</i> • <i>More home should be built</i> • <i>it would be nice to get 1 support worker, not different people all the time</i> • <i>One stop shop - it is very hard to get to some places and make appointments on time. Need ONE place to fix then go</i> • <i>posters at train stations to advertise the service</i> • <i>so far, from what i have noticed, they are already well linked</i> • <i>Help support them to manage their rent and financial matters first in private rental. If public is not suitable.</i> • <i>More clarification regarding access points. Appointments at Access Points (YCH) need to be easier to make and more available. More IAP workers needed.</i> • <i>The workers communicated well but there is not enough crisis accommodation specially for families.</i> • <i>Homeless service system may perhaps be too complicated for clients with an intellectual disability or drug problem.</i> • <i>communication and understanding my issues</i> • <i>More funding. I was never referred to a support service by [access point service] or [access point service] or any other place I've been to.</i> • <i>All services should have a regular care team meetings with the client</i> • <i>I think that at the moment you guys are doing so much work and its really good. Me, my worker and my housing provider could have sat down and talked together when I had some problems early on in my tenancy.</i> • <i>It would be better if I didn't have to repeat myself to my support worker when I have just told everything to [the access point]</i> • <i>Joint meetings where a plan is written up for my care over the next year</i>

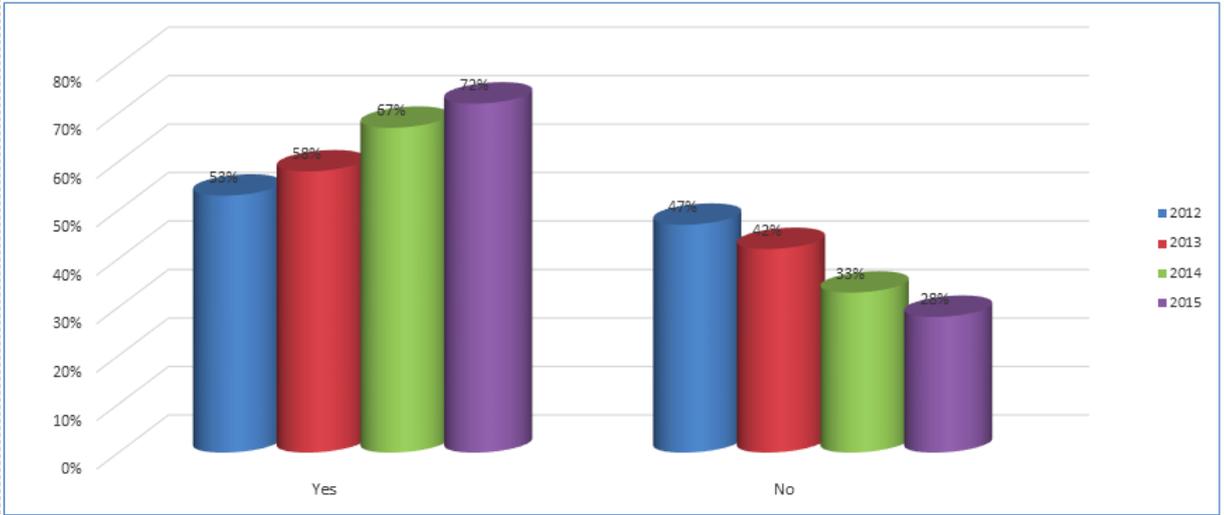
<p>2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Victoria needs more public housing</i> • <i>More public housing and emergency housing</i> • <i>Nothing else to mention except that I was helped extensively. However, it's not easy with so many people on the wait list and not enough housing stock for a large family needing 4 bedrooms and no housing stock readily becoming available. I went onto the housing list (general) in 2006.</i> • <i>They need to find appropriate accommodation - family and kids - language barrier, and if you end up in a shared situation price should be looked at as for just a room you share with your kids it way too much</i> • <i>Service to be available any time of the day to see the workers. (as the customer has to line up early before 9am to get to a limited spot available for the appointment for the day). Thanks</i> • <i>Providing the homeless with information about what their choices are, what options they have and what you can do to help them.</i> • <i>By communicating more often to come to a conclusion. The homeless service system is not too complicated but I do think that when someone is homeless and has children - help should be given ASAP. Because in my case, I was thinking suicidal in relation to my kids and I - living in a care was not appropriate with 3 kids. Thank you.</i> • <i>Do their job properly, have more empathy. Put yourselves in my shoes. This time around the homelessness service system is not too complicated</i> • <i>I didn't have much idea what I was doing before - service has brought me out of the fog. The homeless service system is too complicated, but with someone helping me it is a lot clearer. It was daunting in the beginning.</i> • <i>Our support worker has been amazing, they have been helpful, encouraging, helped link us with other supports, understood our situation and given us room to maintain our independence through this difficult period.</i> • <i>services should be linked to each other to enable staff access to client files. The first support worker after making contacting with other support services can provide a code like pin number to allow other supports to access a client file and familiarise themselves with the clients situation prior to a scheduled appointment with the client. Having a centralised web access to these services and clients would enable workers to provide better support links for their clients and allow more time spent on helping the client and arranging services prior to the appointment and allow more time to discuss options rather than history and repeating it time and time again</i>
<p>2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Services need funding IMO, not your fault, just a few pp! (people) to help...greedy landlords you who own dozens of homes etc. General comments after Q12: YCH in middle Footscray experiences and opinions, purely subjective,... 1. YCH in middle Footscray has been good. Not yet had negative experience Only thing is, seems a bit under staffed, and pp! working there prob. deserve * more resources * more bonuses - maybe govt bail out for \$ 2. YCH in Footscray (Barkly street) not as good. I appear to be in the way of their lunch break/coffee break/cig break etc. etc. etc.</i> • <i>From my experience I think its okay re referral, etc. But I think its hard for some when not enough housing, I know some get put in hotels, better to build more housing. Money better spent for the long term.</i> • <i>They could be better coordinated eg Salvo Care (Kew) sent me back to Vincent Care (Glenroy) to do something there that in the year 2015 could have been done in Kew if minor changes to policy were effected. This would have saved me three quarters of a day on public transport tooing and froing.</i> • <i>There is not enough housing for people. Homeless people can't wait for 6-7 years to be able to get roof over there head</i> • <i>more housing for young single people - some young people cannot do shared living</i> • <i>I believe its more about funding and more housing availability. Communication between services is ok, (depending on individuals)</i> • <i>\More communication between/with THM providers and person Would be happy to keep assessment in relating to SARS forms in file, so don't have to keep producing same docs time and again</i> • <i>too much information shared - Communicate better so one set of information is shared with the services instead of repeating all the time. - I was treated respectfully by this service, but some other services did not treat me respectfully.</i> • <i>Better integration using internet perhaps. Mygov is a great example: Medicare/Centrelink ATO - linked up and give better more accurate results and information</i> • <i>I think people should be made aware of homelessness services as they are hard to find.</i> • <i>I believe there needs too be more housing accommodation available as people need to get out of in</i>

very high risk situations, anything can happen whilst awaiting.

- Current service asked more questions. Access point didn't really ask much. Showed that lack of interest, didn't want to help, didn't give a shit.

Key improvement themes 2012	Key improvement themes 2013	Key improvement themes 2014	Key improvement themes 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services working together better • More housing • Better communication • More information about options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better communication • Services working together better • More housing • Services sharing information • More information about options • More community education options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More housing • Services working better together • Services sharing information • Better communication • More funding • Services to provide more care, empathy and understanding • Make things happen faster • More information about options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More housing • Services working better together • Services sharing information • Better communication • More information about options

Did you have to answer the same questions when talking to your support worker as you did at the access point?



2015: Consumers' experiences of the homelessness service system

Access Point Q. 13: How did you find out about the Access Point service you used?

The largest response remained 'word of mouth' however it had hovered around 50% for the preceding three years and fell to 30% in 2015. Finding out about Access Points via the Internet fell this year, replaced in second place by a large increase in services not listed, such as the Salvation Army and Disability and Employment Services. On the negative side, the number of people who found out about Access Point services from a GP and the 'Poster and 1800 number' remain at zero.

Access Point Q. 14: Was it hard or easy to find out about this access point?

Overall, 97% of respondents found it either 'easy' (39%) or 'neither hard or easy' (58%) to find out about this access point. This a good result however it comes with a significant fall in 'easy' (down 24% on 2014) and a large rise in 'neither hard or easy' up 26%. This represents an improvement opportunity.

Access Point Q. 15: What were you looking for when you came to this service?

Reasons related to housing are, as expected, the major responses that respondents were looking for when they came to the service. 'Housing', 'Crisis accommodation', 'help with public housing applications', 'information about my housing choices' and 'help with paying rent' are primary reasons and have remained so across all 4 surveys to 2015, generally in that order. The important role of IAP workers in helping people cope with crisis is highlighted by the continuing presence of 'someone to talk to and explain my problems' among the top 3 answers.

Access Point Q. 16: Did you get what you were looking for?

The major service responses consumers sought and which they received were 'someone to talk to and explain my problems' (79% down from a high of 93% in 2013) and 'information and about my housing choices' (78%, down from a high of 90% in 2013). Respondents receiving housing is at its lowest percentage since this question was first asked (61%, down 6% since 2013).

The 'yes I got it' scores are slightly higher for the top two categories and down for the rest. More people reported not getting housing (26%) in 2015 compared to 2014 (14%) suggesting that the possible issue with positive selection bias highlighted in last year's survey was at least partially addressed.

Access Point Q. 17: If you didn't get what you wanted, were you told why?

All survey respondents were told why they did not receive what they wanted (100%). This is an important and appreciated part of the communication process and a large improvement on last year (up 36%).

Access Point Q. 18: What was this explanation?

As with previous years the response was usually the lack of housing.

Access Point Q. 19: Which of these was most useful?

When asked to choose from a range of service options that were most useful, the same range of services identified in Q. 16 stood out and almost all were 'Very useful' or 'Useful'.

The most highly rated were 'Someone to talk to and explain my problems' (97%), 'Information about my housing choices' (96%), 'Someone to speak for me' (93%), 'Help with paying rent' (89%), 'Accommodation' (84%), 'Referral to a support service' (82%), and 'Help with public housing applications' (79%).

When we look at just the 'most useful' dimension, 'Help with my public housing application' is the most highly valued (79%, up 15% on 2014).

Support Q. 14: How long were you on a waiting list for a support worker before you got one?

59% of respondents said that they waited four weeks or less before they got access to a support worker. 41% waited more than four weeks, with 8% of these people waiting longer than a year.

Support Q. 15: Did you receive any follow up while waiting for a support worker?

The majority of support survey respondents did receive follow-up while they were waiting for a support worker, and this figure increased in the 2015 survey, up 3% to 57%.

Unfortunately, the experience of waiting was very negative for a significant minority (16). Here is selection of their responses,

- *Took a stabbing to happen before I got a worker.*
- *They made me go to their office [at least an hour away by public transport] every fortnight with 6 children. I couldn't miss an appointment. They treated my children like scum. I got really angry with them at the way they were treating my children like scum. I told them not to treat my children in a rude way.*
- *During this time I lost care of my children due to having wait for refuge and had to stay at home and wait.*
- *I felt mistreated by IAP*
- *I appreciated it but living in fear for 2 weeks was very scary and no reassuring made me feel like I had no support,*
- *I felt judged by the IAP and I was misinformed about what I was eligible for.*
- *During this time I lost care of my children due to having wait for refuge and had to stay at home and wait.*

While not all responses relate to the experience of not being supported during the wait for support, they do illustrate something that we know but cannot ever forget; for most people this is the most distressing experience of their lives, a time when they are at their most vulnerable. The positive comments are gratifying but Forum participants noted that we must do better.

Support Q. 17: How would you rate the speed with which your worker contacted you?

This year's survey say a large rise in the number of respondents who rated the speed with which their worker contacted them as 'Fast' (up 11% to 72%). Overall, the vast majority of respondents rated the speed with which their worker contacted them as either 'Fast' or 'Okay' (96%). A minority (4%) indicated that it was 'slow'. This is a major improvement on the 2014 results and one that support providers should feel justifiably proud of.

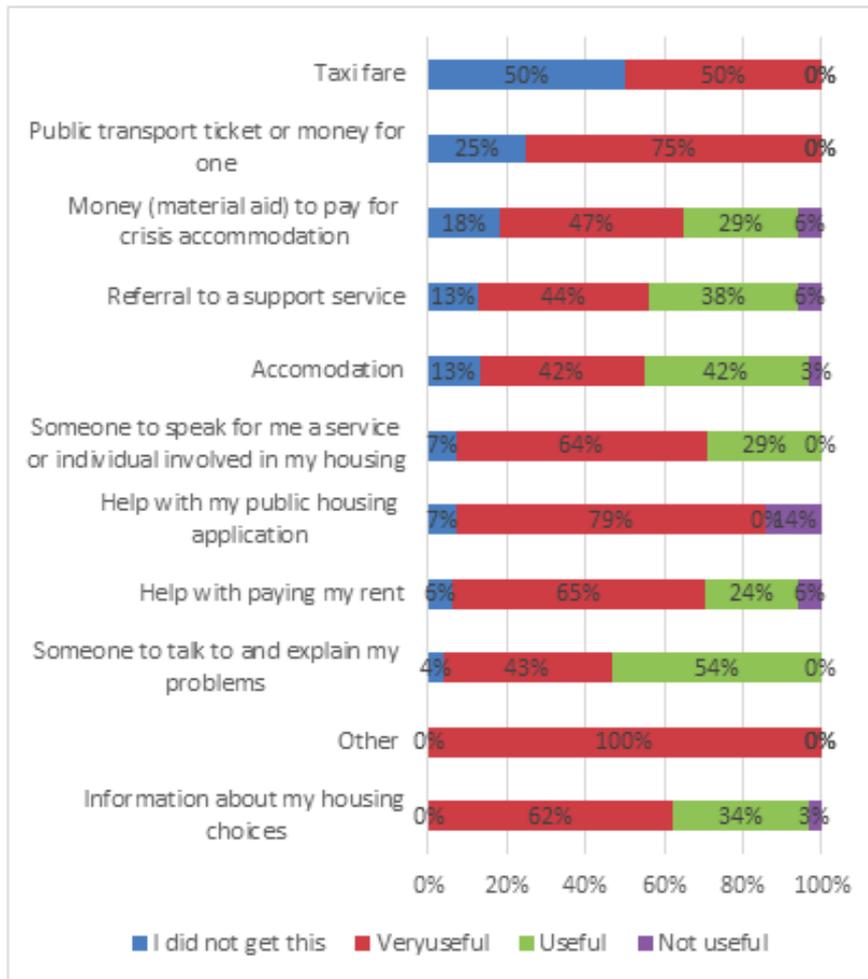
Support Q. 18: Do you believe that your support worker has communicated well with the access point which referred you for support?

The response to this question remains at a very high level with 99% of respondents believing that their support worker had communicated well with the access point service, which referred them. Another excellent result from Support providers.

Q. 19: Did you have to answer the same questions when talking to your support worker as you did at the access point?

The number of people who had to answer the same question when talking to their support worker has increased every year since the survey began. From just over half of all respondents to almost three-quarters (72%) in 2015. While it is accepted that support providers have a need for more in-depth information, having to answer the same questions when an assessment has already happened and (presumably) been passed on by the access point is an area which could be improved. This could only be justified if the wait time were so long that a new assessment was needed. This was not the case in 2015 when 60% of the people who responded to this question received support within 4 weeks. There is room for improvement here.

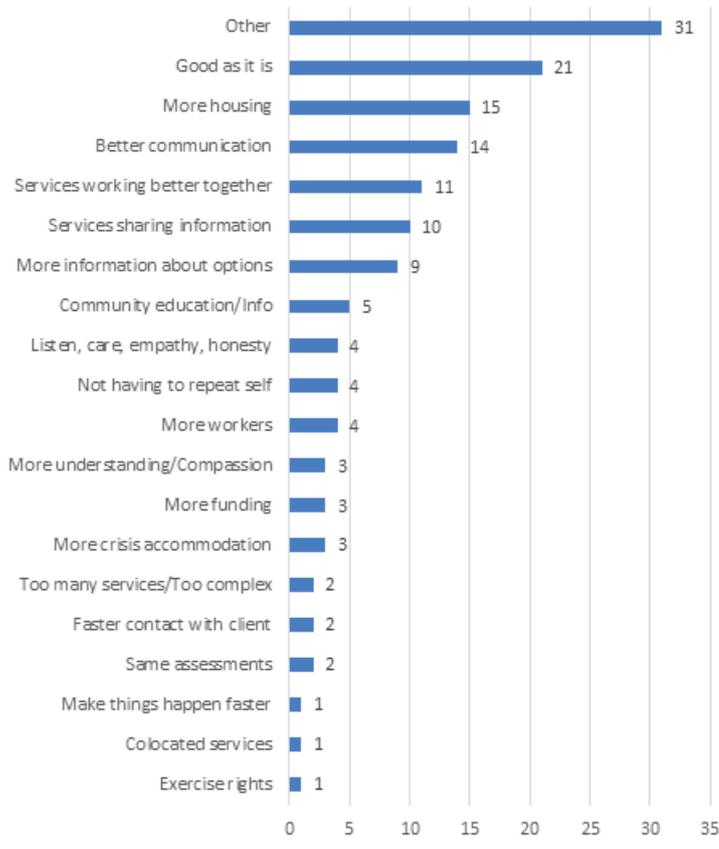
How useful was the assistance provided at access point services?



Q. 20 'How could services work better to help people experiencing homelessness?'

Responses from consumers at access point services:

- *Already an excellent job I am happy with service, it helps people. they understand ur problem*
- *I think you guys are doing a great job! Thank you for all your help.*
- *Not sure, happy with the service I am receiving*
- *I think they are doing the best they can. There are so many people unemployed, they could employ these people to help others short term. There could be big church accommodation centres that people can go and be guaranteed somewhere to sleep for the night. There isn't enough affordable housing and there should be more big crisis centres where you don't need applications for. Too many rules for these things. People who have been using drugs and have done well to stop using should be made a priority because most probably the people who may be able to support them are in fact users and will lead to them going back to using behaviours. I think there should be extra support for women who are sex workers, especially when they don't want to go back to their industry. There is more to it then what people think. Example: Being manipulated or stood over by people in the criminal world that need money and drugs and seek to take advantage of sex workers to take their earnings. There are limited workers available and I am currently waiting for a worker to help with my housing.*



Question 21: Do you think the amount of information you were asked to provide was okay?

Among **Access Point respondents**, only 1 person felt that it was not okay. The vast majority (88%) said ‘Yes’ and those who were ‘Unsure’ increased slightly to 10%. This is a result that continues to be positive.

Q. 22 ‘Do you think the homeless service system is too complicated?’

Responses from consumers at access point services:

19% of consumers responded that they do think the system is too complicated.

Customer service questions

- 88% of respondents said they were treated respectfully and 7% (3 consumers) said they were not
- 81% of respondents said they had their rights explained by their service and 10% (4 consumers) said they had not.

Consumer forum responses

1. Quality improvements

The forum participants felt that there were enough strands of evidence to suggest that better communication between Access Point and Support Provider services remains an area of improvement. The group discussed a number of ways that this could be encouraged:

- Systems continue to be reviewed to ensure that they best support the objectives of a coordinated service system. This includes building all IAP assessment fields within any Support Provider assessment form and agreeing to protocols, which ensure that;
 - We always ask questions for a purpose
 - We are person centred and guided by the client. In some cases being able to discuss an experience is important and workers need to be sensitive to this.
 - We share the assessment with the client and check that it is correct.
- LASNs to advocate with Victorian DHHS and AIHW for information sharing (data sharing to improve service responses) to be switched on between Access Points and Support Providers via SHIP (transfer data file).
- Support workers and IAP workers need to be considered themselves part of a coordinated service system. This would involve IAP workers committing to undertaking a thorough assessment, appropriate to need and Support workers committing to reading the IAP assessment and not repeating questions already asked unless enough

time has passed that we need to clarify some fields.

- The LASN must continue to provide guidance and training to all staff including providing examples of good assessments.
- The CFWG also feels its time to provide annual training for all workers on their place within the coordinated service system.

2. Interpreter Services

Forum participants were concerned about anecdotal evidence of a time limit and its impact upon consumers from a CALD background. Has this impacted upon the offer we make of interpreter services to consumers? There can be no arbitrarily imposed time limit when it comes to the accurate communication of consumer needs.

3. Improving service responses for families

The Forum encourages the LASN to be proactive and creative in responding to families in crisis and to anticipate the impact of service requirements and follow-up on them. For example, follow-up could be by phone or via outreach workers and the possible co-location of childcare facilities within Access Points should also be considered. Wherever possible, children should not participate in adult meetings.

4. People waiting for support must be provided with follow up

consistent theme across all four years of the surveys has been that people referred for support wait in crisis after their initial appointment without any follow-up to keep them informed of the progress of that referral. Providing some type of follow-up support has many advantages for the consumer, the primary one being the alleviation of anxiety and the nurturing of hope. It also has advantages for services, which can reassess needs and check if the person needs to remain on the prioritization list. The Forum encourages the LASN to consistently develop this type of service offer across all access points.

5. The coordinated service system is still confusing for consumers and needs to be explained more simply

This needs to be an ongoing endeavour and ideally would involve consumers in the design of communication materials and delivery of information.

6. Consumer representatives in waiting rooms

The Forum was made aware of upcoming efforts to develop consumer led 'meet and greet' service offers and that this has in fact been trialled by VincentCare in the recent past. There are many elements of the survey which support this innovation, not least of which is the need to better explain the system to consumers in crisis and the fact that word of mouth from other consumers is the most important way of doing that.

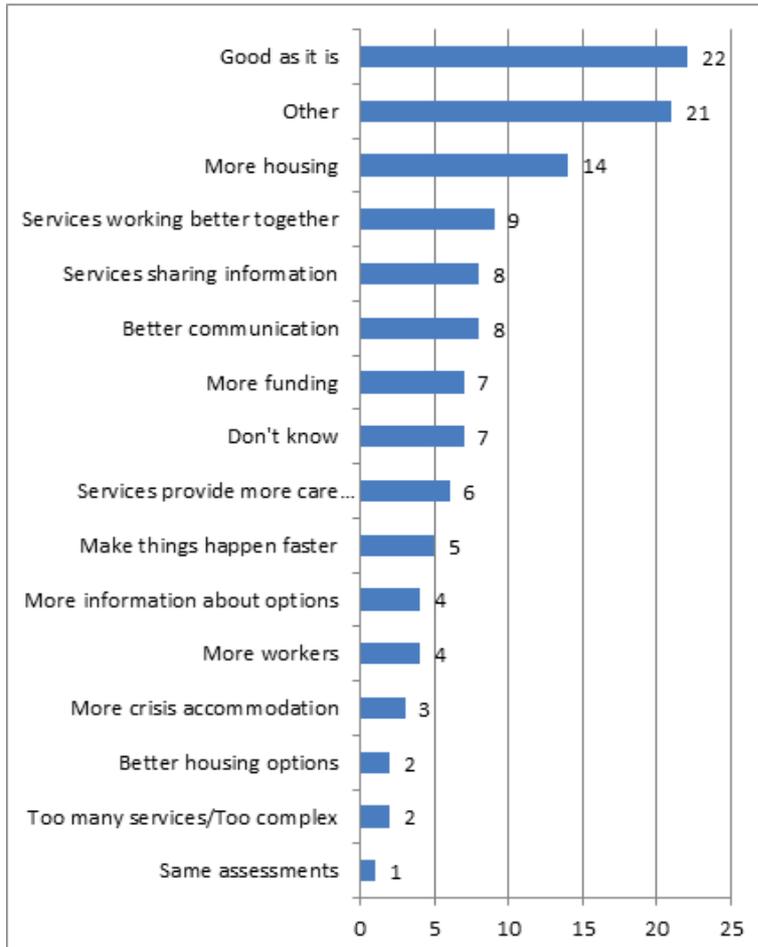
Consumers in waiting rooms can welcome people to access points, explain the system and make clear what they should expect. They can tell consumers in crisis about local services and participate in assessments if needed. They could also be employed to collect information on behalf of services. This also provides a valuable pathway into employment for consumers with lived experiences of homelessness.

7. Continue to focus on providing a respectful service

The two LASN's do this very well but cannot forget how important it is to ensure that consumers are treated respectfully, know their rights and that we offer interpreters to all consumers who are likely to need them. Given the consistently high results, the CFWG suggests that we assess this aspect of the coordinated service system every three years instead of annually.

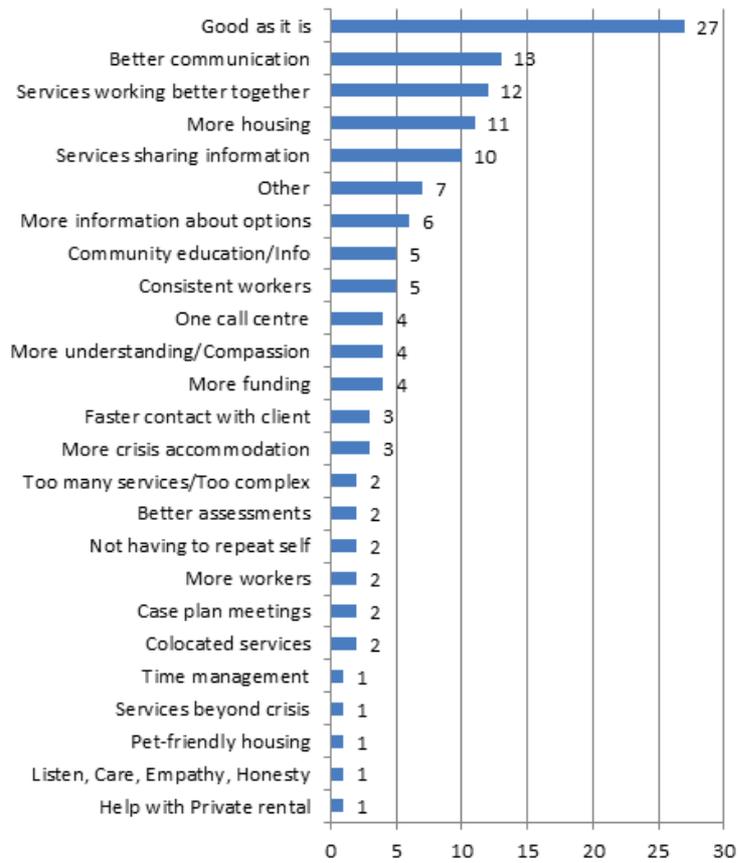
2014: Consumers' experiences of the homelessness service system

Q. 20 How could services work together better to help people experiencing homelessness?



2013: Consumers' experiences of the homelessness service system

Q. 20 How could services work together better to help people experiencing homelessness?



2012: Consumers' experiences of the homelessness service system

Q. 20 How could services work together better to help people experiencing homelessness?

