

## Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria

*“Housing is an important thing for a human being. If you don't have a house, you will feel unbalanced.”*

*“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, and worked until my partner's suicide. Now nothing.”*

*“Homelessness has been traumatic and turned my life upside down.”*

*“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.”*

*“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. “*

**Prepared by the Western Homelessness Network**

**July 2023**



# Membership of the Western Homelessness Network



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## 1. The Western Homelessness Network

This submission has been drafted by the Western Homelessness Network (WHN) to contribute to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria.

The Western Homelessness Network is the Network of 24 Specialist Homelessness Services, managing 114 programs that meet every six weeks with 10 allied services, in Melbourne's west to improve responses to people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne's West through management of coordinated homelessness service system arrangements, consumer consultation, linkages with allied service sectors and shared professional development.

Melbourne's west incorporates the Local Government Areas of Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong, Wyndham, Hobsons Bay, Brimbank and Melton.

Every year the services of the Network assist approximately 15,000 individuals and households who are experiencing homelessness and/or family violence in these Local Government Areas.

## 2. Thank you

The Network would like to thank the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee for undertaking this extremely important review, investigating an issue of such current concern to so many Victorians.

If you would like any more information about this submission, please contact: Sarah Langmore, Western Homelessness Networker at [sarah@wombat.org.au](mailto:sarah@wombat.org.au) or on 0407 832 169.

## 3. Introduction

The Western Homelessness Network has drafted this submission, which focuses on the impacts of the housing crisis in Melbourne's west, drawing on the experiences of those most impacted by the housing crisis: those who have lost, or at risk of losing, their homes.

Having a stable and affordable home is key to good health, mental health, stability and capacity to participate in society. **It is not acceptable, in a State as wealthy as Victoria, that so many Victorians are without a home.**

There is no doubt that Victoria is experiencing a significant housing crisis (see Section 4: Overview). Homelessness services in Melbourne's west have seen a continual rise in the numbers of people who are experiencing homelessness, with a commensurate reduction in the number of affordable homes available for those people.

The numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the West is a direct result of the housing crisis – both in terms of supply and affordability. The West has historically been one of the most affordable areas of Melbourne. This is no longer the case. Private rental vacancy rates are low in Melbourne (1%); rents are high and have now returned to pre COVID levels, following a slight decrease during 2020 and 2021. In March 2021 there were no private rental properties available in the West that were affordable for someone on Newstart or Youth Allowance<sup>8</sup>.

A key determinant in the increasing rate of homelessness in Victoria is the severe undersupply of social and affordable housing. Nearly one fifth<sup>10</sup> of those waiting for public housing in the State are awaiting housing in Melbourne's west.

An absence of safe, affordable housing is driving these marked increases in the numbers of households experiencing homelessness and the high numbers of people approved for priority access to social housing. Our supply of housing is insufficient to house our population. Plan Melbourne estimates that Melbourne will need an additional 1.6 million

new homes by 2051 to meet this current and growing need<sup>1</sup>. Melton and Wyndham, in Melbourne's west, are growing faster than any other area of Melbourne<sup>2</sup>. The supply of housing has not kept up with population growth.

Victoria needs a targeted strategy, enshrined in legislation, committing both State and Federal Governments to construction of sufficient housing stock, available to those on low incomes, to ensure that they have ongoing stability.

The Network specifically advocates for a focus on development of housing first models to ensure that anyone who becomes homeless can be quickly re-housed, in an area in which they wish to live, and provided with flexible support, to assist them to address any issues that will contribute to ongoing housing stability.

The Network recommends a move away from the reliance of private rental to a focus on construction of public housing as the most cost effective and stable form of housing for those on low incomes and those facing a range of physical and mental health issues, that limit full participation in the workforce.

It is clear from the numbers of people living in rental stress in Melbourne's west, that reliance on private rental as a stable housing option for those in the lower income quintiles, leads to enormous housing precarity.

Robert Pradolin, *Housing All Australians*, beautifully sums up the current state of the housing crisis and the need for Governments to recognise provision of housing as key infrastructure<sup>3</sup>:

“Housing for all is the key to Australia's long term economic prosperity – we need a paradigm shift in thinking and in doing so, recognise affordable, social and public housing for what it is: key public infrastructure.

We cannot solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions. We need to think differently...

Australia is in the midst of a housing crisis. Firstly in terms of its general affordability and secondly in terms of the availability of homes for key workers such as police, firefighters, nurses, teachers (affordable or workforce housing) and for the socially disadvantaged (social or public housing).

It makes good economic sense to locate these people in housing that maximises the value to the community and therefore minimises our long-term costs as taxpayers. If we do not acknowledge and address this issue now, it will only get worse and the longer-term cost to our community will only exacerbate the financial pressure to future federal and state budgets.

The lack of an investment in affordable/social/public housing by successive governments has resulted in what we see today in respect the level of homelessness on our streets. It is a direct result of market failure and decades of neglect in addressing this issue with a long-term perspective in mind. Homelessness is the canary in the coalmine of a much larger issue.

The economic impact and productivity of this country is inextricably linked to the fundamental need of a stable form of shelter to all its residents, rich or poor, so they can properly contribute to the economic prosperity of Australia.”

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Government, *Plan Melbourne, 2017 – 2050* (Melbourne, 2016 (?))

<sup>2</sup> NorthWest Primary Health Network, *North West Population Growth*, (NWPHN, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Pradolin, R, *Homelessness is the Canary in the Coalmine* (Australia, Pro Bono, 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2016)

The report, [Give Me Shelter](#)<sup>4</sup>, launched by Housing All Australians, clearly demonstrates the underlying business case for greater investment in affordable, public and social housing. The Report, written by SGS Economics and Planning found:

- **Every \$1 the Australian community invests in social and affordable housing will deliver \$2 in benefits. This rate of return is comparable to, or better than, those achieved in many other Australian infrastructure investments.**
- **Failure to act on shelter needs will be costing the community \$25b per year by 2051.**
- **The benefits of providing adequate housing are estimated at almost \$110b.**

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<sup>4</sup> SGS Economics and Planning, for Housing All Australians, Give Me Shelter (Melbourne, June 2022)

## 4. Overview

### 4.1. The housing crisis in Melbourne's west

There are two key issues surrounding the current state of social and affordable housing in Melbourne's West specifically and Victoria more broadly:

- The lack of supply of social, both public and community housing, and affordable housing in Melbourne's West.
- Decreasing housing affordability in the private housing market making it increasingly difficult for low-income individuals and people on welfare to secure stable housing.

Melbourne's west was previously one of the last bastions of affordable housing in Melbourne. This is no longer the case. A recent report by the Community Housing Industry Australia<sup>5</sup> found that 1 in 15 low-income households in Victoria are not in appropriate housing and that the **area worse affected is Melbourne's west**, where 6.9% (or more than 20,000 households) are not appropriately housed (57% of whom are families).

The table below shows that between 26% and 64% of all residents in Melbourne's west in the bottom two income quintiles are living in rental or mortgage stress<sup>6</sup>. This is a phenomenal proportion of the population living in precarious housing situations.

## Rent and Mortgage-related Financial Stress: 2021

	Mortgage stress			Rental stress			Financial stress from mortgage or rent		
	2021			2021			2021		
	Low income households (households in bottom 40% of income distribution) with mortgage stress	Mortgaged private dwellings	% in mortgage stress	Low income households (households in bottom 40% of income distribution) with rental stress	Rented private dwellings	% in rental stress	Low income households (households in bottom 40% of income distribution) under financial stress from mortgage or rent	Total low income households	% Low income households under financial stress from mortgage or rent
Brimbank	2,833	21,252	13.3	5,112	17,067	30.0	7,945	30,409	26.1
Hobsons Bay	722	11,849	6.1	2,249	10,164	22.1	2,971	11,445	26.0
Maribyrnong	692	11,243	6.2	2,986	14,440	20.7	3,678	10,093	36.4
Melbourne	1,011	11,360	8.9	12,790	47,582	26.9	13,801	21,728	63.5
Melton	3,403	28,982	11.7	3,747	12,424	30.2	7,150	21,275	33.6
Moonee Valley	800	14,800	5.4	3,040	15,408	19.7	3,840	14,514	26.5
Wyndham	4,772	43,354	11.0	6,670	27,648	24.1	11,442	31,566	36.2

The Anglicare Rental Report 2023 identified that there was not a single affordable property available for rent in Melbourne, in March 2023, for anyone on Jobseeker or Youth Allowance or for a couple or single parent with two children, in receipt of Jobseeker. As a consequence, between 53% and 77% of all those in the lowest income quintile, who are renting privately in Melbourne's west, are experiencing financial stress.

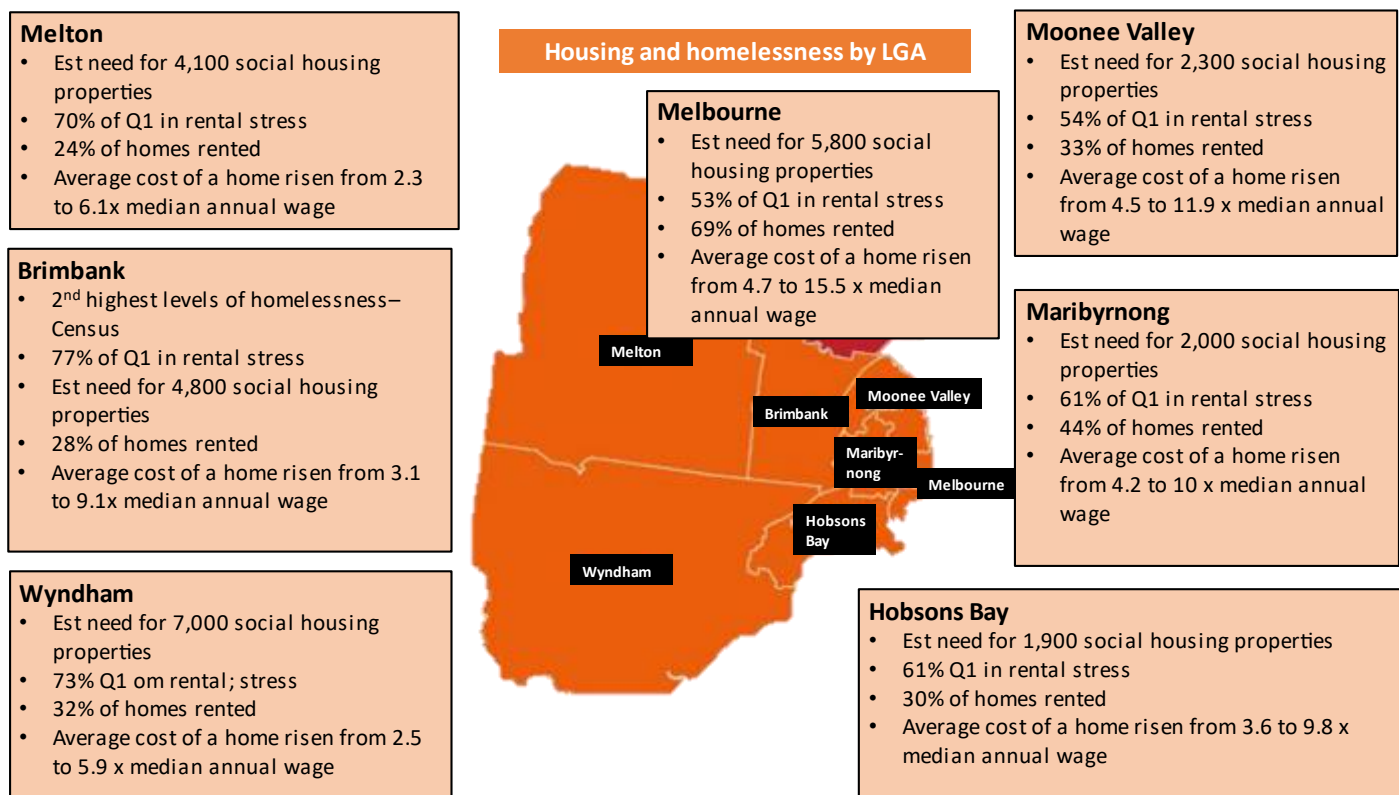
<sup>5</sup> Van den Nouwelant, R., Quantifying Australia's unmet housing need A national snapshot (Community Housing Industry Association, Australia, November 2022)

<sup>6</sup> PHIDU, Torrens University, Social Health Atlas (Australia, June 2023), at: [http://phidu.torrens.edu.au/current/data/sha-aust/lga/phidu\\_data\\_lga\\_vic.xls](http://phidu.torrens.edu.au/current/data/sha-aust/lga/phidu_data_lga_vic.xls)

Lack of supply has resulted in an all-time low in private rental affordability. Whilst Melton and Brimbank still rate in the top 10 most affordable local government areas (LGAs) for people earning a minimum wage, none of the LGAs in the West are represented in the top 10 most affordable Victorian LGAs for people who are receiving Centrelink payments.

Homelessness services are already reporting more and more households in rental and mortgage stress who are no longer able their housing and who become homeless. In addition, an increasing number of individuals and households report facing eviction because landlords can no longer afford to maintain investment properties.

### Housing need and affordability across the West



### 4.2. Social Housing in Melbourne’s West

Social housing provides not only an affordable housing option for the many Victorians on low incomes but provides a level of stability that is not offered by the private rental market. Stable housing is a necessary precursor for health and wellbeing and for capacity to effectively participate in employment, training and other forms of community activity.

The inadequate supply of social housing is a primary driver of homelessness in Melbourne’s West. A recent report by the Productivity Commission found that Victoria has significantly underspent on social housing in recent years, spending less than any other state in Australia<sup>7</sup>. Prior to the State Government’s investment through the Big Housing Build, social housing as a percentage of all housing stock being 3.4 per cent, significantly below the national average of 4.5 per cent. **In Melbourne’s West there are 13,853 social housing properties<sup>8</sup>. However, there are 30,372 households on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) waiting list<sup>9</sup>.**

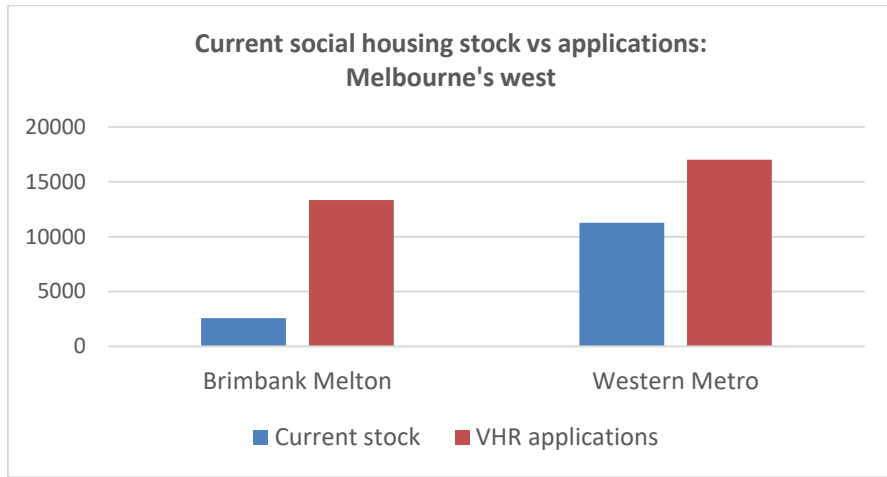
Service providers report extremely low allocation rates into social housing.

<sup>7</sup> Western Homelessness Network 2021, ‘Social and Affordable Housing Creation in Victoria’, Western Homelessness Network, (Yet to be published).

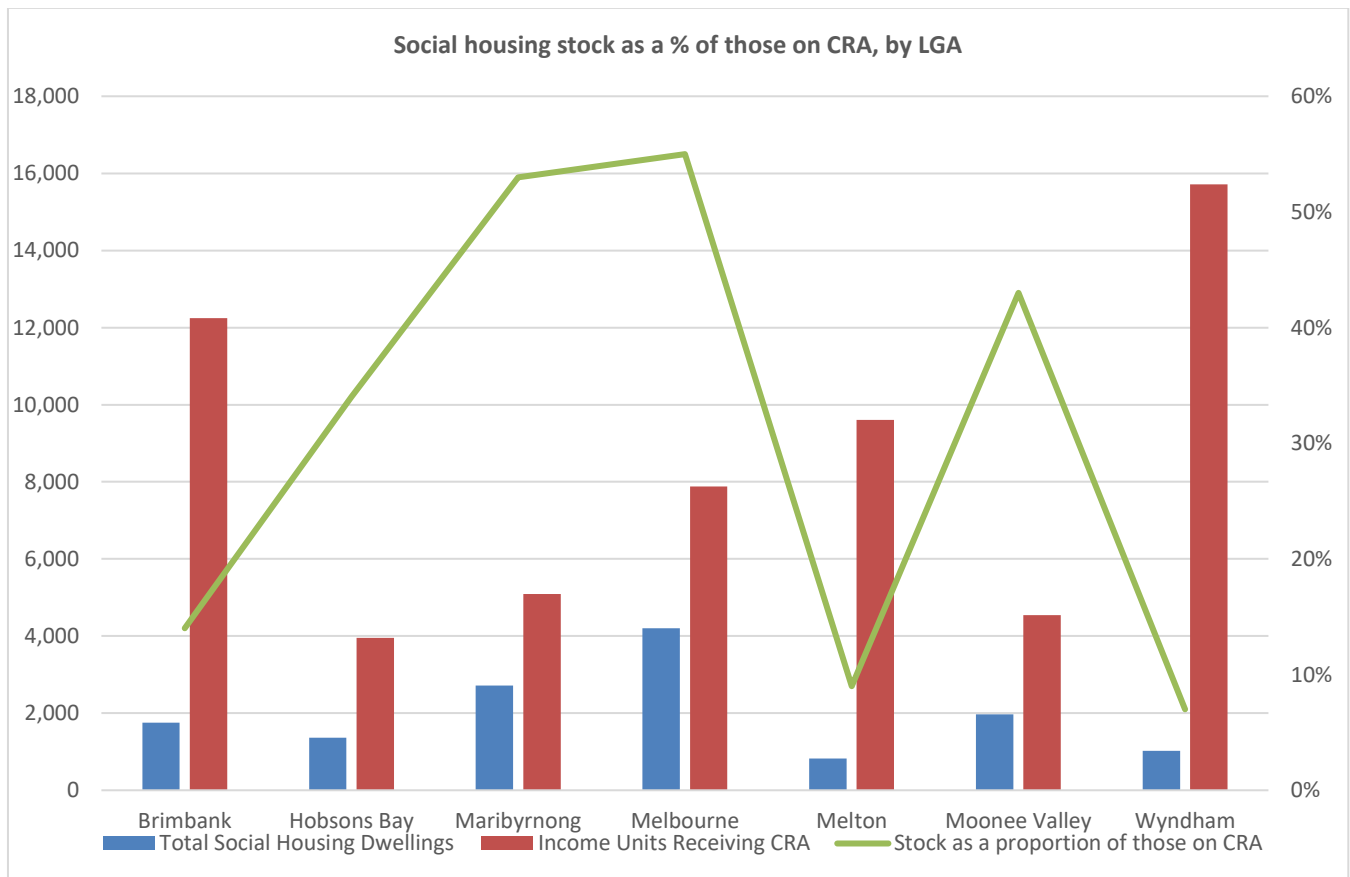
<sup>8</sup> WHN 2019b.

<sup>9</sup> Homes Victoria, VHR locational preferences with social housing stock count at 31 December 2022





The graph below shows the number of social housing properties across Melbourne’s west, compared with the number of people in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). The current increases in private rental affordability, compared with record low vacancy rates, are pushing more and more households, who are reliant on CRA, into homelessness.

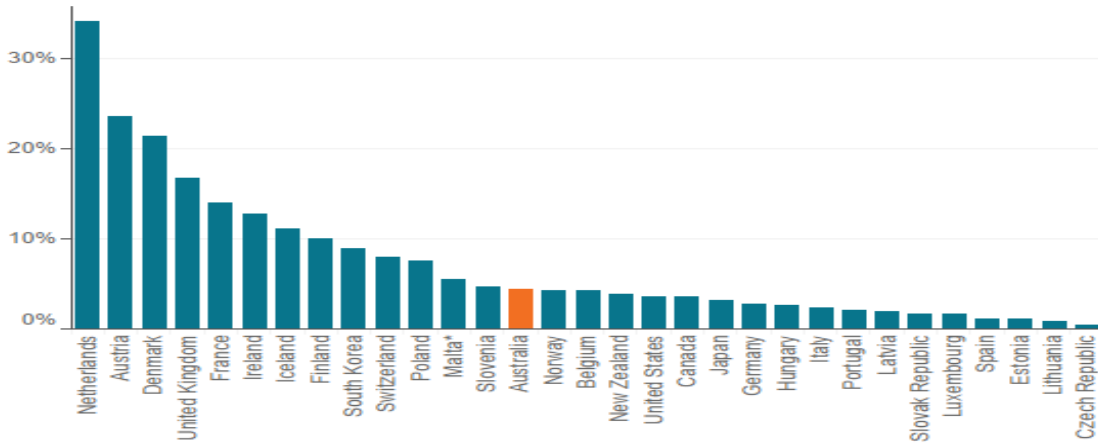


The Victorian Government’s Big Housing Build will increase the supply of social and affordable housing in Victoria, which will assist in moving people off the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) waiting list and reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness due to the housing shortage. However, the proportion of housing stock which is social housing is still minute, compared with many other OECD countries. For instance, in Austria, 20% of housing stock is social housing.

## Social housing: Social rental housing stock (OECD)



Social rental dwellings as a proportion of total housing stock (%), by country, 2020 or latest year available  
Australia and other countries



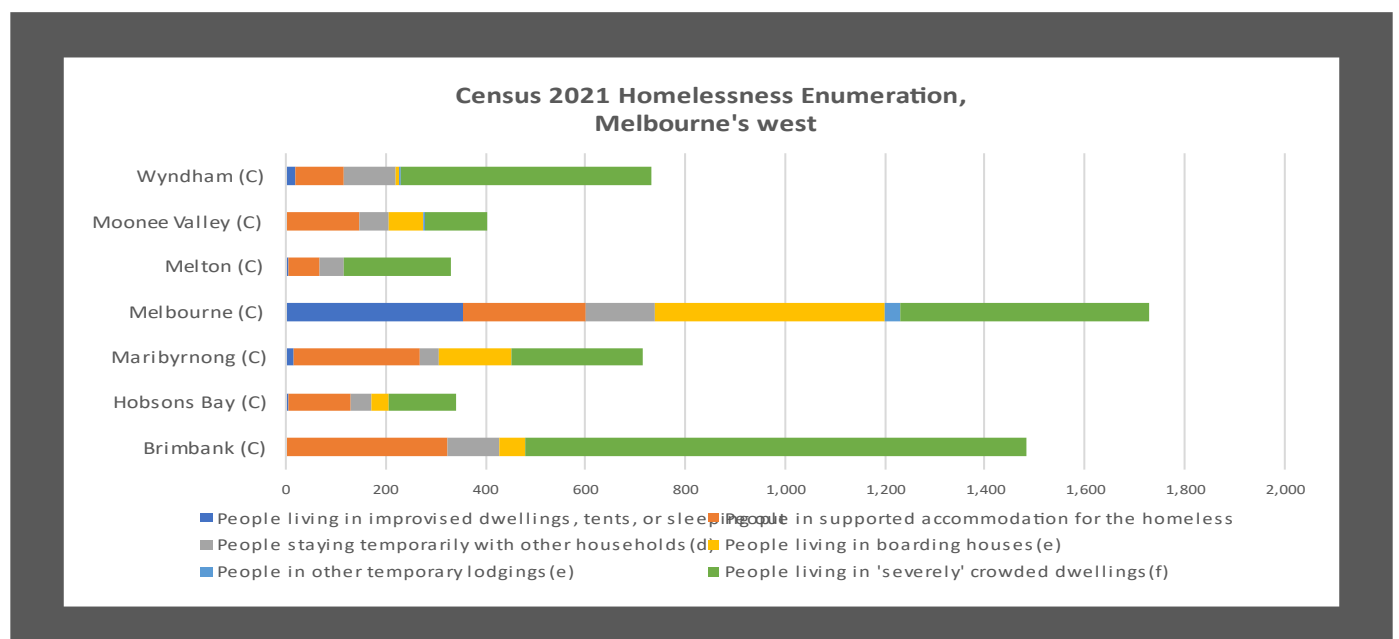
### 4.3. Homelessness in Melbourne’s west

Robert Pradolin, Housing All Australians, has referred to homelessness as the canary in the coalmine for the housing crisis.

The increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne’s west is testament to the growing impact of the crisis. The 2021 census showed that there was a 40% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne’s West over a ten year period.

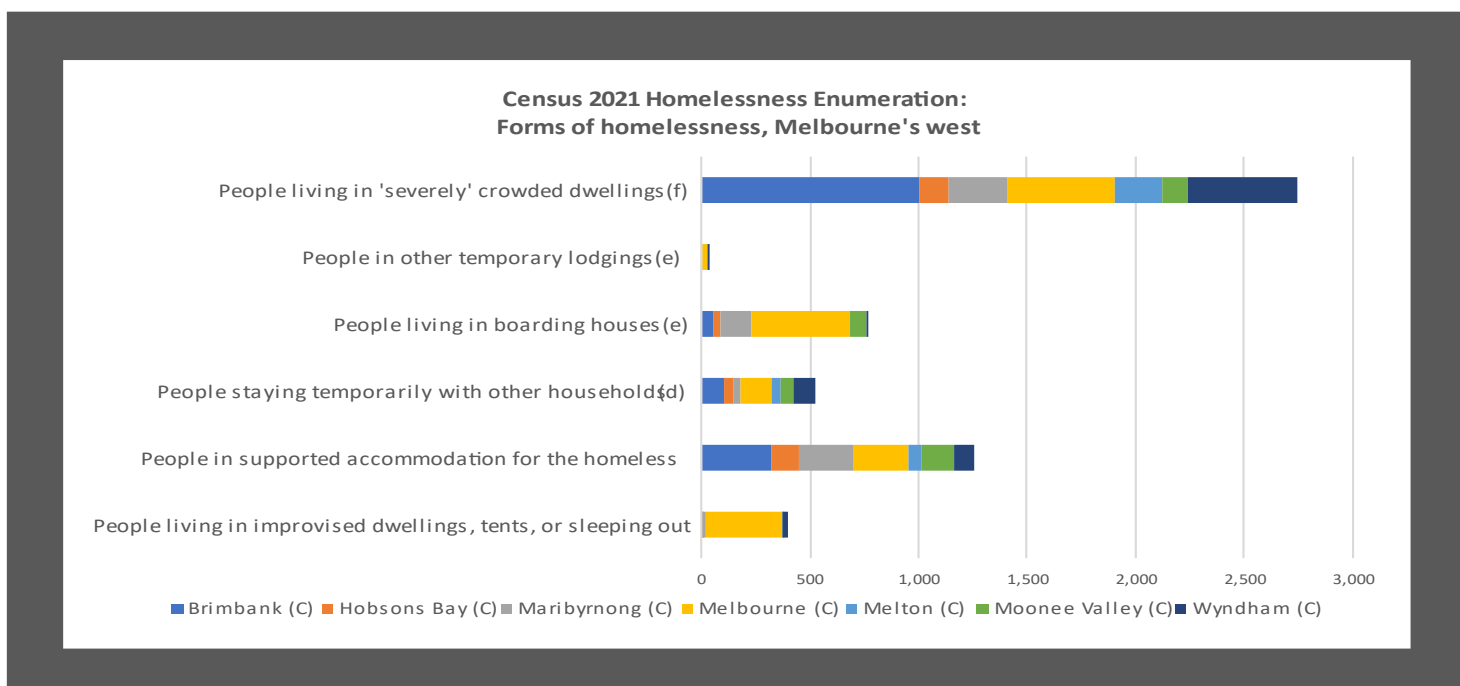
Census 2021 identified that nearly 20 % of all the people experiencing homelessness in Victoria identify as being in Melbourne’s west.

Homelessness data shows that the two key reasons people become homeless and require the assistance of the homelessness system are: financial difficulty and family violence. Financial difficulty, as a prime cause of homelessness, indicates a direct link between housing affordability and homelessness. Conversely, we know that lack of affordable housing is one key factors impacting on the capacity for victim survivors to escape situations of family violence.



The nature of homelessness in Melbourne’s West has been changing significantly in recent years. The housing affordability issues that have affected the west have led to a surge in overcrowding<sup>10</sup>, with an increase of 62% between the 2011 and 2021 censuses<sup>11</sup>. There was over a 50 percent increase in people living in boarding houses and nearly a 2,000% increase in the numbers of people living in other temporary lodgings.

Census year	People living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	People in supported accommodation for the homeless	People staying temporarily with other households(e)	People living in boarding houses(f)	People in other temporary lodgings(f)	People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings(g)	All homeless persons
<b>2011</b>	183	1217	509	597	25	1522	4070
<b>2021</b>	191	1298	344	915	519	2459	5718
<b># difference</b>	8	81	-165	318	494	937	1648
<b>% difference</b>	4	7	-32	53	1976	62	40



#### 4.4. People seeking homelessness assistance

When people have nowhere safe to live, they seek assistance from homelessness services. Homelessness services work to assist people to find appropriate long term housing, to address any issues that have contributed to an individual or household becoming homeless or that will impact future housing stability.

Homelessness services in Melbourne’s west generally have capacity to assist 15,000 individuals (11,000 households) each year. Services report an increasing number of people presenting for assistance, who the service system has no capacity to assist. In 2021/22, one of our two access/front end services was forced to turn away 8,000 people without even an appointment.

The housing crisis is so severe now that services are frequently unable to assist those individuals and households, not turned away, to source appropriate housing. The graph below shows the limited movement in tenure amongst those people assisted by homelessness services.

<sup>10</sup> Defined by the ABS as dwellings that are four or more bedrooms short, allowing for gender and age.

<sup>11</sup> ABS Homelessness Enumeration, Census 2021.

In 2021/22 24% of consumers exited homelessness support still experiencing homelessness and 40% exited still at risk of homelessness.

Services in the Western Homelessness Network reported specific changes in the cohorts presenting for homelessness assistance in the last five to ten years:

- An increase in the complexity of issues experienced by those who are presenting for assistance – this is largely the result of longer periods of homelessness, which impacts on the level of trauma experienced by consumers. As the housing market worsens and there are fewer options available to people the experiences of those presenting is deteriorating. The service system is increasingly reliant on vastly inadequate short-term emergency accommodation responses, which further impact negatively on consumers’ health, mental health and wellbeing. Services are also experiencing an increase in the numbers of people who exhibit aggression as a direct consequence of their level of trauma and distress.
- An increase in the numbers of people over 60 who are presenting experiencing homelessness, with a noticeable increase in the numbers of older women presenting for assistance.
- An increase in the numbers of large families presenting for assistance.
- An increase in the numbers of people from CALD communities presenting for assistance.
- An increase in the numbers of women and children experiencing family violence. The Family Violence Specialist Services are as overwhelmed by the numbers of women and children presenting as the generalist homelessness services.
- An increase in the numbers of young people presenting for assistance, particularly older young people.
- More veterans are presenting for assistance.
- More middle class people are now presenting for assistance as a result in the decline in affordable housing available.
- More people are presenting to the service system who are sleeping rough or who are living in severely overcrowded situations.
- Increasingly consumers are ‘couchsurfing’ staying in in secure situations with family and friends for longer periods<sup>12</sup>.

#### 4.5. Reliance on purchased emergency accommodation

In previous years, when it has not been possible to source housing for those presenting for assistance, the Homelessness Sector has utilised Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) to purchase temporary accommodation for those with nowhere to live.

The report, ‘A Crisis in Crisis’<sup>13</sup> highlighted the significant short comings of the current system. Victoria only has 423 publicly funded crisis beds. In one year alone the WHN had to source nearly 4,000 crisis beds, because of a lack of appropriate housing options.

The current system of crisis accommodation is both financially and operationally ineffective. Homelessness service providers in Melbourne’s West spent \$11.2 million of Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) to obtain

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<sup>12</sup> Western Homelessness Network 2019b, ‘Western Homelessness Network submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness’, WHN, < [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry\\_into\\_Homelessness\\_in\\_Victoria/Submissions/S103\\_-\\_Western\\_Homelessness\\_Network\\_Redacted.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry_into_Homelessness_in_Victoria/Submissions/S103_-_Western_Homelessness_Network_Redacted.pdf)>.

<sup>13</sup> Northern and Western Homelessness Networks, ‘A Crisis in Crisis: The Appalling State of Emergency Accommodation in Melbourne’s North and West’, (February 2019), <[http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/A%20crisis%20in%20crisis%20doc%20final%20040219\\_1550142202053.pdf](http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/A%20crisis%20in%20crisis%20doc%20final%20040219_1550142202053.pdf)>.

crisis accommodation from the private market during the COVID-19 crisis<sup>14</sup>. Even this level of expenditure was not sufficient to purchase the amount of accommodation for as many people as needed it, for as long as they needed it. Nor was it sufficient to purchase accommodation of an acceptable standard for vulnerable people.

The Sector is now unable to provide even this inadequate emergency housing response for single people who have nowhere to live.

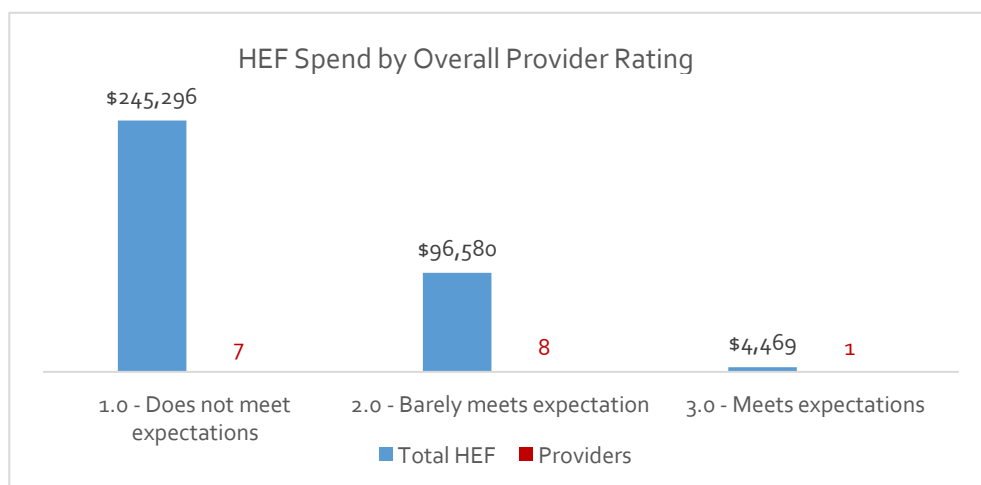
#### 4.6. Private rooming house accommodation

In this environment of high need for affordable housing and low supply private rooming houses have thrived.

When people are unable to source social housing or private rental accommodation, the remaining accommodation option available to them is private rooming house accommodation.

Services in the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks derived a rating scale (1 – Does not meet expectations-3 = Meets expectations) to identify how different accommodation sources measure up in comparison with facilities, identified by consumers, as key.

Across the top 20 most used private rooming houses during 2018-19 (by funds allocated to assist consumers to access rooming houses), 70% of all funds went to providers rated at 1.0 overall, accounting for over three-quarters of all assists. In terms of safety, 90% of assists were to providers rated at 1.0<sup>15</sup>.



Feedback from consumers about private rooming houses to Network sources is so poor that Network agencies only utilise private rooming houses in the absence of any other accommodation sources. Issues such as lack of safety and security, poor cleanliness and amenity, unaffordability, and lack of adherence to regulatory requirements are widespread.

The Crisis in Crisis II report<sup>16</sup> stated that:

“In 2017, a Launch Housing report on the experiences of clients supported by Launch Housing’s Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) program found that households sleeping rough had commonly refused rooming house options in the past. Many clients declined these options due to prior negative experiences, concerns around safety, and wanting to avoid being around drug-use (Kolar, 2017). It was found that clients were also reluctant to explore rooming house options for fear of exacerbating their own mental

<sup>14</sup> Northern and Western Homelessness Networks (NWHN) 2020, ‘Crisis Accommodation Options Reports’, NWHN.

<sup>15</sup> HEF Spend on Rooming Houses by Overall Provider Rating, NWLASNs 2018/19, NWHNs 2020

<sup>16</sup> Northern and Western Homelessness Networks 2020, ‘Crisis Accommodation Options Reports’, NWHN.

health issues. The Council to Homeless Person's 2014 rooming house report recorded similar feedback from its consultation, finding that 'the environment in rooming houses can be one which makes people feel incredibly unsafe', and that 'some individuals would rather sleep rough than stay in a rooming house' (CHP, 2014: 18)."

Unfortunately, private rooming house accommodation is most frequently utilised by single people who are unable to source appropriate accommodation. The experience of homelessness and inappropriate housing options leads to further trauma for many of these individuals. This level of trauma can lead to reduced mental and physical health and a reliance on substance abuse.

The longer people experience this level of trauma, the more complex the extent of issues they are experiencing can become. For some, this can manifest in challenging behaviours that present a risk to themselves or others, leading to evictions or barring from accommodation options, and services have traditionally had great difficulty finding appropriate options for this highly vulnerable group of people who need stable accommodation with linked support to assist them to counteract the years of trauma that they have experienced.

## 5. Recommendations

1. That State and Federal Government seize the opportunity provided by re-negotiation of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement to enshrine a National Housing and Homelessness Plan in legislation, identifying housing as a human right and part of the Country's key economic infrastructure.
2. That this Plan include a commitment to ongoing creation of social housing, with tangible targets. Research shows that public housing and direct government investment is the most cost-effective method of supplying affordable housing. **Recent analysis of the Big Housing Build plans, by academics from RMIT, found that if the record investment of \$5.3 billion dollars had been solely focused on public housing provision, 20,000 properties could have been created instead of the scheduled 12,000<sup>17</sup>.** Public housing also has advantages for tenants, with a lower percentage of income proscribed for rent, more tenancy security and less restrictive intake of tenants with complex needs or from overrepresented demographics such as young people<sup>18</sup>.
3. That State and Federal Governments construct sufficient social housing to enable rapid access to a 'Housing First' model of housing and support that eliminates reliance on private motels and rooming houses for emergency accommodation.
4. That State and Federal Governments, in partnership, construct a variety of secure, self-contained, temporary accommodation options for individuals and families as a safe alternative to existing emergency accommodation options, whilst they await permanent housing.
5. That the Victorian Government introduce and enforce a state-wide mandatory inclusionary zoning scheme in Victoria and a voluntary scheme such as the affordable housing agreements that are currently in place in Victoria.
6. That State and Federal Governments investigate and implement innovative models that can be implemented in a timely manner, to provide self contained short and medium term housing for those awaiting social housing.

Models could include the use of modular, transportable and demountable dwellings, and investigate partnership models with local levels of government, community housing organisations and the private sector for funding such programs.

There are currently 80,000 people on the VHR waiting list, which is expected to grow<sup>19</sup>. **Fully meeting the demand for social and affordable properties will take decades of continuous growth cycles to bring the social housing stock to national average and hopefully beyond.**

### Innovative Housing Options

In the same manner that a National Housing and Homelessness Plan should develop a model or framework for increasing stock rapidly to assist the 80,000 people on the Victorian Housing Register waiting list, it should also consider the use of innovative housing options, including the use of new methods of housing creation, such as transportable or modular housing. These options represent an efficient method for utilising surplus government land and have the potential to significantly improve the standard of emergency and transitional housing in Victoria and Melbourne's West, models which are required in the absence of sufficient affordable long-term housing<sup>20</sup>. These options offer government and other stakeholders an opportunity to utilise surplus

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<sup>17</sup> Porter, L & Kelly, D 2020, 'Does the Big Housing Build address the housing crisis in Victoria', RMIT University, <<https://cur.org.au/cms/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/big-housing-build-report-final.pdf>>.

<sup>18</sup> WHN 2021, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> WHN 2021, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> WHN 2021, p. 31

government land in a cost-effective and timely manner and quickly increase the amount of short to medium term housing properties for people at risk of experiencing homelessness, whilst they await allocation of social housing. Governments should investigate the potential for developing a state-wide framework that can provide guidelines, regulations, and potential sites for innovative development projects to inform community housing and private sector stakeholders.

These three types of stakeholders all played a role in the Harris Transportables project in Melbourne's West. The project used prefabricated tiny homes and surplus VicRoads land on Ballarat Road to house people who had experienced long-term homelessness. 57 tiny homes were built then placed on vacant land along Ballarat Road, these properties were available rent free for 15 years. These homes were designed by architects working with people with lived experience of homelessness and, by placing 6-12 units on a block, the project aimed to create community and stability for tenants<sup>21</sup>.



An example of such a program that was able to address both the drastic need for social housing in quick timeframe and use innovative housing production methods is the modular transitional housing project that was undertaken in Vancouver, Canada. In 2015, the Government of British-Columbia committed to a \$66 million plan of building 600 temporary modular homes, which will be located on underused or vacant government land sites<sup>22</sup>.

**This modular housing will be used as temporary transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness in the city and will be located on the land for up to 5 years, where they will then be replaced by permanent social and affordable housing<sup>23</sup>.** Victoria should investigate the feasibility of developing a similar framework.

Similarly, the WHN recommends that Homes Victoria extend its current 'granny flat' program to any households that have capacity to accommodate additional family and friends through use of a granny flat. Kids Under Cover has found this an excellent model for reducing stress on overcrowded families.

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<sup>21</sup> WHN 2021, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> WHN 2021, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> WHN 2021, p. 31.



## 6. What do people with lived experience of homelessness say?

### 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 I've 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*

#### **Quotes about the experience of staying in a rooming house:**

- *Dreadful. Intimidating. Racist.*
- *Unhygienic and hard to share with someone who was not clean and respectful (poo on the doorhandles)*
- *This was difficult. Kitchens and bathrooms were unclean. Cigarette smoke and drugs cause many problems. People were not being responsible for their mess*
- *People are untidy and don't really respect the next person so things can be untidy and unclean*
- *Yes, Scary, other tenants were abusive.*
- *Difficult a little Kitchen stuff/food went missing*
- *terrible, not suitable for kids*
- *It was difficult because lots of people don't respect share facilities*
- *Horrible. Lots of trouble with other residents getting drunk. Lack of amenities and very dirty ie. Fridge*
- *terrible/ too many people, dirty, expensive, bad landlord*
- *Scary*
- *no one cleans places are dirty & smell too many people in one room. prison is better.*

#### **What would you change about rooming house accommodation?**

- *less rats in the walls; cleaner*
- *Make it safer*
- *Everything' needs cleaning and products provided*
- *Security should be looked at and advise ahead of the drug issues and risk incurred*
- *make it clean, private, cheaper*
- *Better facilities, there was broken furniture and the house was run down*
- *I would make it more affordable*
- *Get rid of rooming houses- not a productive environment*
- *Matching people on suitability, e.g. drug pushers vs non-users/recovering. More security*
- *More cleanliness, protection from bed bugs.*
- *cheaper, get rid of junkies. clean them up*

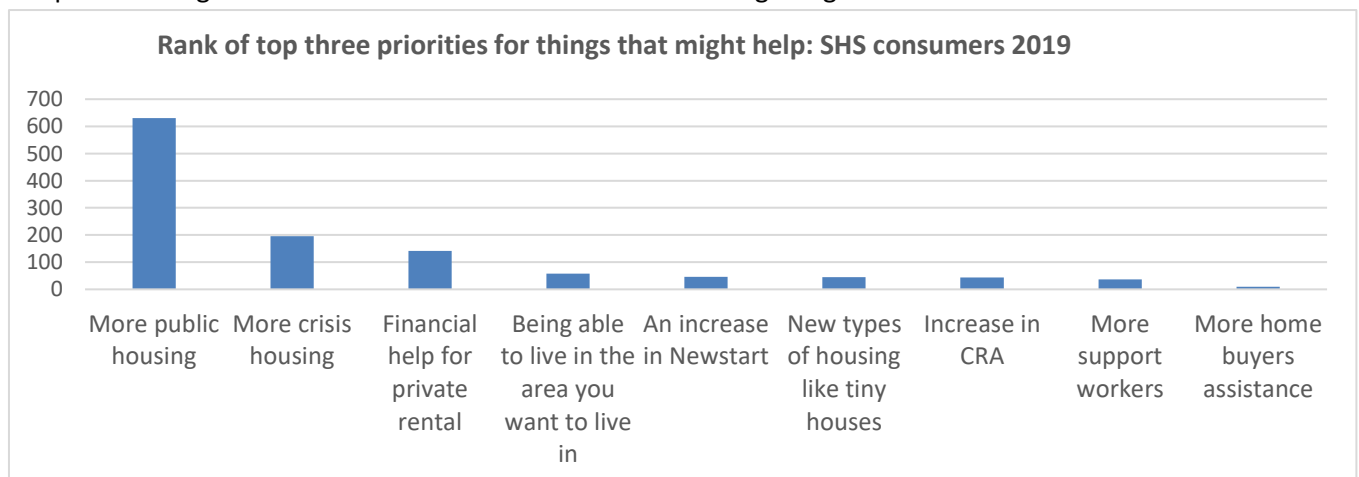
- Greater security for women
- not to have kids in a rooming house
- It was difficult sharing facilities with people that had complex mental health and addiction problems.
- Not run properly by the owners. Tenants are running wild.
- Cleanliness, no bed bugs, safety, female only sections
- more facilities; improved cleanliness
- Cleanliness and help

The table below shows the perceived safety of various emergency accommodation types. The lower the percentage score, the less safe consumers felt. Men rated caravan parks and rooming/boarding houses as the least safe options and women rated rooming/boarding houses as the least safe option. Combined results identify rooming/boarding houses as being the least safe of each of the options.

	Congregate crisis facilities with support	Hostel	Hotel	Motel	Refuge (e.g. Family Violence or Young People)	Rooming or boarding house	Caravan Park
Supportive	39%	4%	5%	11%	39%	9%	4%
Difficult or stressful	12%	20%	19%	37%	11%	40%	16%
Dirty	6%	16%	15%	30%	3%	44%	15%
Unhealthy	9%	18%	12%	34%	5%	39%	14%
Overcrowded	11%	20%	11%	23%	11%	39%	18%
Expensive	11%	15%	19%	37%	5%	45%	14%
Didn't have the facilities or the amenities I need like kitchens, toilet, laundry or bathrooms	5%	11%	21%	48%	0%	26%	21%
I felt discriminated against	16%	24%	13%	24%	5%	47%	8%

### What might help?

People accessing homelessness services identified the following things that would assist them:



## 6.1. Case studies: Impact of the housing crisis

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### **Andrew**

Andrew is a 55-year-old male who has experienced a number of episodes of homelessness since undergoing a separation from his wife. Andrew originally lived with his family and children in the family home, though unfortunately due to a separation from his wife, he left the family home, approached a homelessness access point service for accommodation options and entered the homelessness system.

After accessing crisis arranged accommodation, Andrew has been technically homeless since 2018: he has moved from one shared/rooming house option to another. Between 2018 to the present, Andrew has accessed three different rooming house facilities. In this time, Andrew has reported having to contend with verbal threats /abuse, threats of physical violence, theft as well as witnessing on a daily basis in his first two share options, drug use and dealing by some of the other residents. Andrew reported that in his most recent share/boarding option, he has not had to contend with as much violence and other anti-social behaviour as has previously been experienced in his previous two shared options.

Andrew's health in the time that he has been residing in share options, has been compromised due to renal failure. Subsequently, Andrew had to undergo lifesaving surgery and had a kidney transplant. Due to the very poor hygiene standards in the first two rooming houses, the Andrew was in constant fear that he could become seriously ill due to his compromised health, whilst also having to contend with other residents who presented with mental health and or substance use issues. Andrew reported on many occasions being depressed as well as fearful; finding it very hard to sleep at night as there was constant fighting most nights between other residents, and generally no peace.

Due to very limited options, the homelessness support service has developed an exit plan with Andrew that includes trying to access a shared house that had better standards, as well as applying for social housing through the Priority Homeless with Support Public Victorian Housing Register.

Andrew now lives in a little bit of hope that one day, he may be able to access suitable housing through the public housing waiting list, though he understands that the waiting list is very long, and that it may be some time before he can truly call anywhere home.

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### **John**

John 38 originally from NSW came to Melbourne after relationship breakdown with arranged employment transfer. Because his relationship had ended, he decided to leave NSW earlier than planned and had been using his savings to self-fund in a motel.

John reached out to a homelessness support service for some support in the motel at the point of reaching the end of his savings. He explained that work was delayed and would need assistance with alternative accommodation. The local homelessness access point service sourced a rooming house paid for a two week stay. John stayed at the rooming house for three nights.

John reported that the property was uninhabitable for him. John returned to the motel. A homelessness support service funded a two week stay in the hotel. In this time, John started work and was able to secure a private rooming house on his own with a supplier unknown to the homelessness service. No information is available about the quality of this accommodation.

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### **Kerry**

Kerry is a 46 yo single woman, was living in a private rooming house in South Melbourne. Kerry disclosed that she didn't feel safe in her current housing due to the house mates trying to break into her room, steal her belongings, and asking for money. Kerry disclosed that there was a lot of drug use, violence, and arguments within the house. Kerry had a history of PTSD from historical past trauma and being itinerant. Kerry also had no family supports in Australia as she had fled Rwanda in 1994 after the loss of her entire family in the Rwandan Genocide.

Kerry had attempted to resolve her housing situation by contacting the landlord for assistance and asked if there was anything that could be done, the landlord seemed disinterested. Kerry asked if there was another house she could move into, but there was no availability. Kerry really wanted her own accommodation; her income was not substantial enough for her to afford her own private rental.

The accommodation environment was impacting on her mental health with several visits from the CAT team. The case worker liaised with the homelessness access point and advocated for Kerry to receive crisis accommodation. Kerry was funded for 3 nights in Laverton.

Kerry attended many inspections for rooming and shared housing and was unsuccessful. Kerry found a sharehouse that she was successful for and required assistance with rent in advance and bond. Kerry had already moved into the house and the case worker proceeded to gather all information to provide financial assistance. While acquiring the documents, it came to light that the tenant of the property was subletting to Kerry and in fact the property was a Public Housing property. Kerry still wanted to stay there once she had moved in and found it extremely difficult to be accepted for any accommodation. Kerry was also advised that the access point service would no longer continue to assist her.

The case worker managed to source some financial assistance but was unable to assist access to funds for the bond. Kerry made an agreement with the tenant that she would pay the bond off. Five days later Kerry went to the bathroom at 3 am and the male tenant requested that she have sex with him in return for the bond.

Through case worker advocacy Kerry was again provided with purchased motel accommodation through the access point. Kerry was admitted to the Psychiatric ward. On release, Kerry was provided with further purchased short term accommodation in an apartment. Kerry felt relieved as this was her own accommodation, and she was living alone. Whilst co-contributing Kerry managed to secure part time employment which enabled her to look for private rental. Kerry was successful in securing a unit in Footscray and was assisted with rent in advance, bond, furniture white goods and material aid.

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## 6.2. What should housing be?

The Network would like to finish with comments from tenants about what their ideal accommodation would be like. As can be seen from the responses below, expectations of ideal accommodation are not high, nor are they any greater than the expectations that most Victorians would (or should) have of their home:

- *Rooms that lock. Clean, mutual amenities*
- *Clean. Decent to live with*
- *A home*
- *Clean and safe*
- *Nice and safe*
- *Respectful staff and clean safe environment*
- *Social workers available. 24 hour surveillance Manager on property daily Better cleaners*
- *Comfortable and safe*
- *Safe, drug free and suitable facilities and clean, monitored by security.*
- *Safe and secure environment*
- *Just to feel safe and comfortable*
- *somewhere clean, where you can feel safe.*
- *Clean, private and safe*
- *A nice, accommodating place to be and no-one to bother you. That would be the nicest thing*
- *I don't really know. Perhaps by yourself, safe and staff on board.*
- *Self-contained unit*
- *safe and secure affordable and clean*
- *ACCORDING TO ME IT SHOULD BE SUPPORTIVE, SAFE, CLEAN, AND REASONABLE IN RENT*
- *Private space*
- *A place that feels like you are at home and where you have freedom to come and go as you like and not too crowded. And you have your own place.*