



Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria - City of Port Phillip

January 2020

Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

City of Port Phillip

The City of Port Phillip congratulates the Victorian Parliament for undertaking this inquiry into homelessness and welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission.

The City of Port Phillip (CoPP) is located in Melbourne's inner southern suburbs between two and eight kilometres from the Melbourne CBD. Port Phillip is made up of nine neighbourhoods and includes the suburbs of Albert Park, Middle Park, Balaclava, St Kilda East, Elwood, Ripponlea, St Kilda, St Kilda West, Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and parts of the new Fisherman's Bend Urban Renewal Area.

The City of Port Phillip has a diverse community with an estimated resident population in 2017 of 110,967 people. Port Phillip's population is expected to grow to more than 168,549 people by 2041; a significant 55 per cent increase from the 2017 estimate. The City of Port Phillip (the Council) has a proud tradition of responding to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and has added to its well established affordable housing strategies by developing specific homelessness action strategies which have been aligned to a series of Council Plan directives and the Municipal Health & Wellbeing Plan.

Council has an enduring commitment to social justice and recognises homelessness, primarily a housing problem, as a priority. Affordable housing is consequently an important element of the Council's strategy to help those experiencing housing stress and who have no home.

Human rights principles inform Council's approach to rough sleepers and managing public space, working in a targeted way to ensure the rights and interests of vulnerable people, who are sleeping rough, are also met. Council is legally obliged as a public authority within the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 to consider human rights when it makes laws, develops policies and provides services. Council's responses to homelessness are in accordance with this Charter.

Council believes that local government plays a key role ensuring people have access to affordable, secure housing and support required to sustain tenancies and develop a sense of belonging to their community. This approach is consistent with the aims of the *Victorian Local Government Act 1989* that requires local government authorities to:

- consider the diverse needs of their local community in decision making,
- provide leadership by establishing strategic objectives and measure achievements, and
- advocate for the interests of their local community to other communities and governments.

What do we know about Homelessness?

Australia is one of the few countries that counts homelessness in its national census. In addition, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) collects detailed data on people who use government funded homelessness support services. Other submissions have provided an overview of this data and measurement of homelessness to the Inquiry, so CoPP will focus on some aspects of the data relevant to our submission.

The greatest increase in homelessness has been in inner city areas of capital cities.

The *Australian Homelessness Monitor*ⁱ reports that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that homelessness has increased the most in capital cities and that generally rates of increases have been highest in the inner city areas.

Rough Sleeping is rising at faster rates than other forms of homelessness.

The Monitorⁱⁱ also reports that rough sleeping is increasing at a faster rate than other forms of homelessness. The ABS show that nationally, rough sleeping grew by 20% between 2011 and

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2016. This was especially true in the City of Melbourne which recorded a 200% increase in rough sleeping. Port Phillip Zero (see below) indicates that rough sleeping has increased in CoPP by 51% since the 2016 Census (71 to 107).

Older people represent the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness

Older people in the 55-74 age group, in particular single women, were the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness in the 2016 Census. In the decade to 2016, this group grew by 55%. This is also reflected in the AIHW data on service use. This showed a 26% increase over the past three years where old age was identified as a presenting service issue.ⁱⁱⁱ

People rough sleeping are older than other people experiencing homelessness

ABS data^{iv} shows that the two largest cohorts that experience *overall homelessness* (by age) are people aged 19-24 (17,725 people) and 25-34 (24,224), and the two largest cohorts experiencing *rough sleeping* by age are 35-44 (1,756 people) and 45-54 (1,782). This would suggest people who are rough sleeping have likely experienced other forms of homelessness (homeless services, couch surfing, marginal or extreme over crowded housing) prior to sleeping rough. Importantly, it presents a very compelling argument for intervening early to find sustainable solutions for young people experiencing homelessness, to ensure that they do not move into rough sleeping over time.

SUMMARY

- Homelessness is increasing and the increase is greatest in the inner city areas of big cities.
- Rough sleeping is increasing at faster rates than other forms of homelessness and in the City of Port Phillip it has increased by over 50% since the 2016 Census.
- Older people are the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness.
- People rough sleeping are older than other cohorts of people experiencing homelessness.

What causes or contributes to Homelessness?

Homelessness is complex and can arise from a range of complex issues, so it is difficult to point to a single cause as being the sole driver. Suzanne Fitzpatrick^v reports that it can be the result of an interplay of “individual, interpersonal and structural” factors. It is possible however to point to some common themes or correlations that indicate the main drivers of homelessness.

A Lack of Affordable Housing

There are several indicators that suggest the increase in homelessness in Australia is driven by changes to housing markets and a corresponding lack of affordable housing.

Fitzpatrick^{vi} reports that comparative research suggest that housing market trends have the most direct impact on levels of homelessness. In Australia it appears that the decline in social housing, driven by a decline in investment in social housing, has contributed to an increase in homelessness. The Homelessness Monitor^{vii} reports that during the four years from 2013/14 to 2016/17 investment in social housing *declined* by 8% while spending on homelessness support services *increased* by 29%. At the same time the number of affordable housing units have declined, particularly in inner city area of large cities, which are the areas that have seen the largest increases in homelessness.

AIHW data reports that in 2016/17, 24% of service users reported that their reason for seeking service was a “housing crisis” and this represented a 32% increase on the previous two years - the fastest growing category of reasons for seeking homelessness support.^{viii}

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This broadening of the housing affordability problem creates an imperative to increase affordable housing across the spectrum of need (very low, low and moderate income households) and through the provision of both social and private housing. More affordable housing for moderate income households will ultimately increase the supply of social housing for the most vulnerable, and persons experiencing homelessness, through reducing bottle necks in housing supply along the spectrum. The Victorian Planning System offers significant potential to deliver both scale and diversity of new social/affordable housing, through a combination of the current voluntary (value sharing) approach and the introduction of mandatory 'inclusionary' mechanisms.

Family Violence

AHW reports that domestic and family violence is the most commonly reported "main reason" for seeking assistance' from a homelessness support service. In 2016-17, 27% of services reported family violence as the prime presenting issue; this represents a 24% increase in the previous two years.

Income and Poverty

The Homelessness Monitor reports that people who rely on social security benefits, particularly Newstart and Youth Allowance, are considered at great risk of homelessness. The failure to adequately index these payments, particularly Commonwealth Rent Assistance, has meant that the capacity of people to pay rent has declined, especially in those markets that have seen rents increase substantially above CPI.

Saunders, Wong and Bradbury (2016)^{ix} have identified that poverty levels are increasing, due to increasing amounts of incomes being spent on housing. They compare poverty levels before housing costs (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC). Their work shows that housing costs are now an important contributor to poverty leading to an increase in the overall poverty rate by 3.3%. They report that the rising cost of housing has seen 613,000 people fall below the poverty line from 2003-04 to 2013-14 because of high housing costs; 229,000 of these people are children.

SUMMARY

Evidence suggest that the main drivers of homelessness are:

- lack of affordable housing
- Family Violence, and
- poverty and a lack of adequate income.

Housing First Approaches Reduce Homelessness

Housing First

Housing First is an approach that places people experiencing homelessness directly into permanent and safe housing with "wrap around" support services to address complex needs such as mental health and alcohol and drug support. This differs from the traditional approaches which place people in short term crisis accommodation until they were "stabilised" and then into housing.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Housing (AHURI) report published in 2012^x examined USA Housing First programs and found that they were successful in retaining accommodation for those people at risk of homelessness. A longitudinal study of 225 people in the USA compared the outcomes of those using traditional services and those using a Housing First program. The research found that 88 per cent of those in the Housing First program retained their housing for two years compared to 47 per cent in the other programs.

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European program evaluations have measured results that match or exceed the success achieved in North America across the indicators of ending homelessness for people with high support needs, health and well-being and social integration.

Chez Soi^{xi} was a randomised controlled study across five provinces in Canada which used a housing first approach for people who were rough sleeping with a mental illness. The experimental group received a housing first approach and the control group received “treatment as usual”. 62% of those participants receiving the housing first approach were housed the whole time in the last six months, whereas 31% of the treatment as usual approach were housed.

Housing First programs can also be cost efficient for governments and the community. Data from one Housing First program in the UK found housing a homeless person cost £9,600 per person per year (excluding rent), which was around £1,000 per year less than placing the person in a shelter and nearly £8,000 less than placing them in a high-intensity support service (excluding rent).

Similarly, AHURI research published in 2016^{xii} identified that providing housing (albeit not necessarily through a Housing First model) for homeless people in Western Australia saved the health system \$4,846 per person per year in the period 2009-12, mainly through people spending fewer days in hospitals and psychiatric care. Supported accommodation programs for people experiencing homelessness also led to an average of \$2,397 (in 2011) in reduced costs for the justice system (e.g. reduced prison time and engagement with police).

A Lack of Social Housing is the Biggest Barrier to Implementing Housing First

The biggest barrier to implementing Housing First in Victoria is a lack of social and affordable housing. The Homeless Monitor^{xiii} reports that recent trends in government housing expenditure and

in government supported housing provision have been highly problematic. Despite the ageing of the public housing stock and the ongoing intensification of unmet housing need, capital investment in social housing fell by 8% in the four years to 2016-17. Expenditure on homelessness services increased by 29% over the same period (in real terms) and is on track to exceed \$1 billion by 2020. This pattern means that it is very difficult to implement Housing First approaches as there is no housing to complement the investment in support.

The Victorian government’s *Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Taskforce*^{xiv} reported in 2017 that Victoria would need to provide 1,700 new social housing homes per year over the next twenty years to maintain social housing at its current level of 3.5% of total housing stock. The same report identified that double this amount is required (3,400 per year) if lower income households currently facing housing stress in the private rental market, are to have affordable housing.

The *2016 Productivity Commission Report on Government Services*^{xv} indicated that Victoria had far lower levels of public and social housing than NSW. NSW had 110,000 units of public housing and 28,214 units of community housing, whereas Victoria had 64,404 units of public housing and 12,689 units of community housing. The report also shows that Victoria’s capital spending on public housing was \$149.2 million for the 2015-15 year whereas NSW was \$344.9m and Queensland was \$277 million.

SUMMARY

- There is now an established and credible evidence base that demonstrates that “Housing First” approaches to homelessness are effective in reducing rough sleeping.
- The biggest barrier to implementing Housing First approaches in Victoria is a lack of social housing.
- Despite significant recent investment by government, social housing stock has continued to decline in Victoria, while levels of homelessness, including rough sleeping, has increased.

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Early Intervention and Prevention Programs

Evidence also suggests that it is possible to prevent or minimise episodes and length of homelessness. Quality education, employment, positive physical and mental health, social connectedness, positive and respectful relationships and affordable housing are the major protective factors against homelessness.

When people refer to homelessness prevention programs, they are usually referring to programs that intervene at early stages of homelessness or immediately prior to a person becoming homeless. These are often characterised as early intervention programs.

Rapid ReHousing

This refers to programs which intervene to quickly get someone re-housed when they become homeless, or to prevent them from losing their housing in the first instance. These approaches are used in Europe, USA and Australia. The Urban Institute in the USA^{xvi} reports there is a small, but growing, body of evidence on the efficacy of rapid re-housing. It finds that most of the evidence points toward rapid re-housing as successful in helping families exit homeless shelters. The intervention has low barriers to entry, high placement rates, and low rates of return to shelter.

Helping People Keep Housing

There have been a number of effective programs that stop people at risk of homelessness losing their housing. This is important as the Productivity Commission reports that about 2,000, or 7%, of tenants in public housing were evicted in 2012-13^{xvii}. The Victorian Tenancy Plus program (formerly Social Housing Advocacy and Assistance Program (SHASP)) is a successful early intervention program. The Productivity Commission^{xviii} reports that most people who engaged with the program maintained their tenancy.

Youth Foyers

Youth Foyers provide targeted housing and support into education and employment for a limited time (usually up to two years), for young people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. A number of evaluations of different foyer programs have found that Foyers are effective in improving housing, education, health and employment outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness. The five year evaluation of the Education First Youth Foyers^{xx} in Victoria, found that 85% of the young people were in work or education 12 months after exiting the foyer, 75% had completed Year 12 or higher and 50% were in their own housing, with only 1% in crisis accommodation.

City of Port Phillip - Homelessness

The City of Port Phillip has for many years experienced higher levels homelessness than other cities in Victoria and Australia.

Overall Homelessness

Port Phillip has the fourth highest number of homeless citizens in the state. The 2016 Census^{xx} reported that the five LGAs with the highest levels of overall homelessness were Dandenong (2,103), Melbourne (1,721), Brimbank (1,467), Port Phillip (1,127) and Tullamarine (849).

Rough Sleeping

While homelessness is a problem in many municipalities in Victoria, the 2016 ABS Census^{xxi} reported that rough sleeping exists in large numbers in only a few LGAs, notably Melbourne (345), Frankston (75), Port Phillip (71), Yarra (66) and Geelong (67).

Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness and causes greatest personal harm to individuals. According to 2016 Census^{xxii} data, rough sleeping accounted for 8% of the total homeless population in Victoria.

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Rough sleeping has increased substantially in the City of Port Phillip since 2016. A StreetCount taken in February 2018 indicated that there were 91 people rough sleeping in Port Phillip, whereas currently there are 107 people sleeping rough in the City.

Council Strategies

Council has two main strategies which aim to address homelessness. *In our Backyard: Growing Affordable Housing in Port Phillip 2015-2025*^{xxiii} is Council's affordable housing strategy. This continues Council's 30 year history of directly investing in affordable housing in the City. *Think and Act: Homelessness Action Strategy 2015 – 2020*^{xxiv} is Council's homelessness strategy.

Over the past 4½ years of the Homelessness Action Strategy, Council has worked with over a 1000 people aged over 50 to assist them to apply for a range of housing and support. Council has also directly assisted over 300 people aged 50 plus to move into social housing locally (most through Council's nomination rights into older person public housing). Over 50 % of these people were long term local residents on low incomes, mainly receiving Centrelink Newstart benefits, who were losing their private housing.

Since July 2019, Port Phillip with service providers in the City, has implemented a "by-name", real time list of people sleeping rough through the *Port Phillip Zero* initiative (refer below). Council has also provided grants to enable a response for rough sleepers on extreme heat days.

Port Phillip Zero

Council, along with a range of service providers and other agencies, has initiated Port Phillip Zero, a "collective impact" response to rough sleeping throughout the City. Collective impact is where a range of groups from different sectors agree to co-operate and work together to solve a common and complex problem.

In Port Phillip, the agencies below have joined together with a common agenda; to achieve functional zero rough sleeping in the City (where the number of people who enter rough sleeping each fortnight is no greater than the number of people who are housed and supported each fortnight).

- City of Port Phillip
- St Kilda Police
- DHHS
- Alfred Health
- Launch Housing
- Sacred Heart Mission
- Salvation Army
- Star Health
- Housing First
- St Kilda Community Housing
- Wellways
- Justice Connect

The Collective Impact Forum^{xxv} describes four key features of collective impact programs:

- a common agenda
- shared measurement
- mutually reinforcing activities
- continuous communication.

An important component of Port Phillip Zero is the By Name List, which allows us to know the number of people rough sleeping in "real time". The By Name List, is a shared measurement tool. This is a near-to-real time mechanism for rigorous and reliable data capture on the incidence and prevalence

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of homelessness and the effectiveness of our housing response. The By Name List is used to monitor service delivery, allocate responsibility for finding solutions for people, track trends and outcomes, identify system barriers, and to inform and drive system improvements. The By Name List is updated fortnightly and means that we can identify and work with all people who are rough sleeping in the City at a given point in time.

The By Name List is updated at the fortnightly Service Co-ordination Meeting as part of the Project. Most importantly, this meeting aims to find housing matched with relevant support for people on the List. This meeting discusses and agrees on service responses for individuals, allocates responsibilities to different agencies and updates the List.

The shortage of affordable housing and the barrier this creates to implementing Housing First solutions (refer above) has particularly played out in CoPP.

Table One (below) indicates the fortnightly changes in the numbers of people sleeping rough in the City. Inflow indicates new people identified as sleeping rough by agencies and outflows indicates the number of people who have exited rough sleeping. Over the five months, there have been 22 outflows; only nine of these have been into permanent housing. Of these nine, three had their housing breakdown within two weeks. This means that a total of six rough sleepers were successfully housed within those five months. The other outflows were to hospital (3), death (1), institution (1), loss of contact i.e. out of municipality (15) and short – term housing (4).

This shows that under Port Phillip Zero, only nine people who were rough sleeping found housing over the five months. This is despite the combined efforts of the Department of Health and Human Services, Police, Alfred Health, Star Health, all homelessness support services and community housing providers meeting fortnightly to try to find housing. During this same period, 32 new people were rough sleeping in the city.

TABLE ONE
Port Phillip Zero - Inflows, Outflows and Total Number of People Rough Sleeping

Fortnight Ending (2019)	Number Of People Rough Sleeping In City	Inflow This Fortnight (i.e. New People Rough Sleeping)	Outflow This Fortnight (People Housed Or Other Exits)	Explanation/Notes
24 July	98	6	0	
7 August	104	4	1	1 housed (DHHS)
28 August	108	2	1	1 housed (CH)
11 September	109	2	0	1 removed - error
25 September	111	2	0	
9 October	112	1	0	
22 October	111	7	8	2 housed 6 lost contact
6 November	104	3	10	3 housed 6 lost contact 1 error removed
20 November	107	5	2	2 housed

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The City of Port Phillip has some of the most expensive housing in Victoria, which means that without a significant subsidy, private rental is not a viable housing exit for people who are rough sleeping. The Department of Health and Human Services' *Quarterly Rent Report* provides data on rental trends, including the number of affordable lettings, per LGA, per quarter. The affordability benchmark used is that no more than 30 per cent of gross income is spent on rent by lower income households on rent. Lower income households are defined as those receiving Centrelink incomes.

There is hardly any private rental housing that is deemed affordable in the City of Port Phillip. For the September 2019 Quarter, there were 2,814 new lettings across the City with only 15 of these being affordable.

Table Two shows that there were NO one-bedroom units deemed affordable in CoPP for the September 2019 Quarter, seven two-bedroom units, five three-bedroom units and three four plus bedroom units which were deemed affordable out of 1,632 lettings for the quarter.

TABLE TWO
September 2019 Quarter – Number of Affordable lettings for City of Port Phillip^{xxvi}

Number of Bedrooms	Number of Lettings for the Quarter	Number of Lettings that are Affordable
One bedroom	692	0
Two bedrooms	807	7
Three bedroom	106	5
Four + bedroom	27	3

In addition, we have seen a significant decline in rooming house beds in the City over the past few years. Rooming houses have traditionally been a significant provider of affordable housing in the City for people living in poverty, and a housing option for people who are rough sleeping.

Table Three shows that since 2017, CoPP has lost 315 rooming house beds. During this time rough sleeping has increased significantly in the City.

TABLE THREE
Loss of Rooming House/Marginal Housing Rooms in City of Port Phillip

Address	Private or Community	Reasons	Numbers	Year
Gatwick Hotel *	Private	Sold/closed	80-100	2017
Regal 5 Little Grey St. St Kilda	Community Managed- Housing First	Closed due to planned redevelopment	50	2018
96 Tennyson St Elwood	Private Rooming House	Sold/closed	17	2018

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St Kilda Apartments Formerly City Gate) 6 Tennyson St. St Kilda	Community Managed-Housing First	Closed due to planned demolition/redevelopment	47	2018
Beach House, 24 Little Grey St. St Kilda	Community Managed-St Kilda Community Housing	Closed due to planned redevelopment	22	2018
Chelmsford, 50 Barkly St. St Kilda	Community Managed-Housing First	Closed due to planned redevelopment	15 (plus a further 27 in Jan 2020)	2019
Oslo Hotel , 38 Grey St. St Kilda	Private Hotel	Sold/closed	2 longer term	2018
24 A Jervois St. East St Kilda	Private Rooming House	Sold/closed	23	2019
*Sacs EST 300 overnight referrals pa to Gatwick		Total approx	300	

Recommendations

Housing Affordability

The City of Port Phillip recognises that over the past few years, the Government has made substantial investments in housing. However, this is still not sufficient to address the decline in social housing. At current rates of investment we will continue to see a continued decline in social housing as a percentage of housing stock.

In order to address the decline in social housing and overall housing affordability, it is recommended that:

1. The Victorian State Government develops and advocates for a holistic approach, across different sectors and all levels of Government, to address the scale of the affordable housing challenge; incorporating policy, funding/financing, innovative delivery models and supporting governance arrangements.
2. The Victorian State Government establishes a dedicated funding stream to ensure a continual program of new social housing stock, upgrades and renewal of existing social housing stock.

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3. The level of investment provided through this funding stream, combined with other measures (e.g. changes to planning), is sufficient to maintain social (public and community) housing levels in Victoria at 3.5% of total dwellings. Swinburne University^{xxvii} estimates that in order to achieve this, the delivery of 30,800 new social housing dwellings by 2031 and 60,200 new social housing by 2051 would be required. To achieve this, an average of 3,000 new dwellings per year until 2031, and over 1,800 dwellings per year between 2031 and 2051 will need to be delivered.
4. The Victorian State Government maximises opportunities presented by the Victorian Planning System to deliver significant new social and affordable housing through a combination of:
 - 4.1 Enhanced 'value sharing' mechanisms: where additional development yield above a nominated level is 'paid for' through the delivery of social and affordable housing e.g. density bonus systems. These 'opt-in' models are available under the current system of Voluntary Housing Agreements.
 - 4.2 Inclusionary mechanisms: mandated requirements for inclusion of a specified proportion of social and affordable housing within a development, or payment of a cash-in-lieu contribution to enable housing to be delivered elsewhere in the area.

Housing First and Rough Sleeping

It is recommended that:

5. Victoria reviews its policies and programs for rough sleeping to ensure that a Housing First approach to solving rough sleeping is properly implemented, reflecting the fundamentals of placing people directly into housing with wrap around support. This will necessitate sourcing an adequate supply of housing to match the investment which the State has already made in assertive outreach programs. This would significantly reduce the number of people rough sleeping in Victoria over time.
6. As part of this, at least one Common Ground be developed in each of the Cities of Melbourne, Yarra and Port Phillip, as per the advice from the Inner Metropolitan Partnership. This would include sufficient ongoing, operational funding to enable 24 hour support at each site.
7. Explore with relevant providers and stakeholders the introduction of a "By Name List" across the inner metropolitan area, with dedicated co-ordination of services to match people with housing and support.
8. Allocate 500 units of social housing stock in the first instance to the funded assertive outreach programs, so that a Housing First approach can genuinely be implemented. This could include requiring an amount of new housing developed under the Social Housing Growth Fund to be allocated to assertive outreach programs.

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