



Infrastructure Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy

Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter Group

This submission has been prepared at officer level and draws on previous Charter Group submissions. The timeframe for submissions did not enable direct consideration at member Council meetings. Therefore this submission is made subject noting that individual Councils may amend or withdraw from the position put forward in this submission.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Kulin Nation and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Table of Contents

1. Preamble	3
2. About the Charter Group.....	3
3. The Challenge for the Charter Councils' area.....	4
4. Response to questions posed by Infrastructure Victoria	5
Social housing is essential community infrastructure	5
When supply is lacking prioritisation matters	5
Improved access to current data will support policy development and service planning.....	5
It is important not to confuse social and affordable housing	6
Access to services and community infrastructure is critical to liveability, health and social cohesion	7
Existing infrastructure in established areas will struggle to keep pace with growth.....	7
5. Response to Recommendations.....	8
Attachment - The extent of the housing challenge in the Charter Region	11

Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year Strategy objectives



1. Preamble

The Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness and Social Housing Group (Charter Group) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year Strategy.

A long-term view and a coordinated, integrated approach are required to ensure that infrastructure keeps pace with population growth, and that Government delivers the infrastructure essential to social cohesion and equality of opportunity.

This submission has been prepared at officer level and draws on previous Charter Group submissions. The timeframe did not enable direct consideration at Council meetings and therefore should be read alongside individual council submissions.

2. About the Charter Group

The Charter Group comprises 13 councils from the middle and outer ring suburbs of south and east metropolitan Melbourne. Our combined residential population is over two million people. The councils are Bayside, Casey, Cardinia, Frankston, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Knox, Manningham, Monash, Maroondah, Mornington Peninsula, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.



The group works with the Municipal Association of Victoria, Homes Victoria in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Eastern Region Group of Councils and the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance.

The Charter Group was initiated by Monash Council in 2019 to make a difference for the 22,000 Victorians experiencing homelessness, of which over a third (7,916¹) are in our council areas. Together we highlight issues associated with homelessness and social housing; advocate for systemic reforms to prevent homelessness risks from occurring; and work to improve our responses when they do. Our work has sparked interest among other Victorian councils.

Our advocacy platform is in the form of a [Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter \(Charter\)](#). The Charter supports a housing first² approach and prioritises three levers which are:

1. Work in partnership with federal and state government, public and private sector partners to increase the supply of social housing and respond to homelessness in south and east Melbourne.
2. Scope land within our region with the potential to be re-purposed for the development of social housing.
3. Advocate for inclusive housing growth, including through mandatory inclusionary zoning.

¹ ABS Census 2016

² AHURI (2018) Brief: 'What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?'. Updated 25 May 2018. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/brief/what-housing-first-model-and-how-does-it-help-those-experiencinghomelessness>

To assist build support for social housing and reduce stigma experienced by social housing residents. we developed a [Social Housing Messaging Guide](#). The guide provides a series of evidence-informed tips and sample messages to shift community attitudes around social and affordable housing and ensure a consistent approach.

3. The Challenge for the Charter Councils' area

The Charter Group acknowledges the current challenges associated with cost-of-living pressures and reducing housing affordability. We also note that budgets at both state and federal level will be constrained for many years to come. This directly impacts on our communities and Councils' ability to respond to these needs.

The recent *Housing Statement* and *Plan for Victoria* envisage rates of growth significantly greater than the [Victoria in Future](#) projections that councils had planned for. As the same time, local government's role in planning is being reduced, largely due to the perception that the planning process is impacting housing supply, and consequently affordability. We acknowledge the need for more social and affordable housing, but believe councils, with communities should continue to play an active role in how their local areas develop and how these needs are met over time.

The recent release of a *Plan for Victoria* missed the opportunity to set out a plan for infrastructure and service delivery to support growth, and to close out the backlog in demand for social housing.

We agree strongly with Infrastructure Victoria that:

- *Victoria needs well-planned and maintained infrastructure to support the state's growing population.*
- *Good planning helps governments deliver the right infrastructure when and where it is needed*
- *Infrastructure planning involves multiple government agencies, local councils and industry partners.*
- *Victoria can make more of its existing infrastructure*
- *Victoria's infrastructure contribution system isn't delivering what growing communities need.*

The Charter Group advocates that homelessness and social housing policy, strategy and services need to reflect and respond to local and regional circumstances and be informed by specific local and regional insights. We see social housing as essential community infrastructure and seek systemic change to increase the supply of permanent, safe, appropriate and timely housing for the most vulnerable members of our community.

The shortfall in social housing is the result of decades of underfunding and of rent income for social housing failing to keep pace with costs. While land use planning has a role to play, a sharper focus on homelessness prevention, a 'Housing First' approach and a sustainable funding stream would reverse the decline in the supply of public and community housing.

We have set out in detail the housing challenges facing the region as an attachment. Please note that the data referenced was collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Response to questions posed by Infrastructure Victoria

As part of the consultation process Infrastructure Victoria asked the following questions directly related to Housing, Cities, and Across Sectors. We make the following comments in response.

New homes - How can the Victorian Government make sure new residential developments include affordable housing options?

Affordable housing - Do you support the proposal to build 60,000 more social homes over the next 15 years?

Social housing is essential community infrastructure

To ensure supply keeps up with demand and that affordability is not further reduced is a critical challenge.

In the Charter region our analysis agrees with Infrastructure Victoria that social housing provision is not keeping pace with demand, and that prevalent housing types may not align with local social housing needs.

For our region there is a growing need for homelessness support services, growing demand for social housing, while the availability of affordable rental stock is plummeting. While over 50,000 Victorian households are waiting for social housing, in south and east Melbourne the situation is dire as 32 per cent of Victorians experiencing homelessness and 40 per cent of people on the social housing waiting list living in this region.

A social housing dwelling target should be made explicit within each council's housing target set by the State.

When supply is lacking prioritisation matters

People more likely to experience homelessness should be prioritised.

We believe that low-income households; people seeking asylum; people with a disability and people experiencing a severe and enduring mental illness are cohorts to be prioritised. Locational factors impacting these cohorts should also be considered.

Improved access to current data will support policy development and service planning

The Charter Group has argued for improved access to data, and a consistent and agreed method to determine local need.

Access to data is critical for councils to effectively influence the amount of social housing in their local area and to facilitate effective, place-based service provision. This would support performance monitoring and improve transparency and accountability. There is a lack of visibility of how social housing provision is responding to localised need. State data on social housing is not available publicly and data shared with councils is not live data.

Access to data could be improved through:

- state government level collation and release of authoritative homelessness and housing data annually relevant to each Local Government Area, including local progress against social housing targets
- AIHW providing interactive data at postcode and LGA area geographies on their dashboard
- the delivery of street counts at regular intervals such as undertaken by the City of Melbourne³

³ City of Melbourne Street Count <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support-services/social-support/what-we-are-doing/Pages/streetcount.aspx>

- an agreed homelessness definition to reduce undercounting

Guidance from government is lacking regarding sources of data, methodologies and assumptions that should be used to understand and project housing need and future demand. This is inefficient and councils must purchase data and commission specialist research in parallel that does not aggregate across councils.

Data that would assist councils understand the local need for social and affordable housing includes:

- known state government priorities for the provision of social housing by type, amount and location / LGA and any social housing projects in the pipeline that may be unknown to local government
- data showing comparative demand and movement of social housing residents between municipalities (to avoid displacement of longer-term local residents in need)
- state government priorities for the provision of specialist housing with operational support funding (e.g. crisis accommodation and support for young people / youth foyers, for victims of family violence, for people exiting the justice system, or for people exiting the hospital system with complex needs)
- supply data - rolling average vacancy numbers of social housing dwellings at a municipal level
- demand data - raw de-identified data (or at least reports analysing data) associated with the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) including locational data, municipal data, transfer, priority, housing type and demographic data.

It is important not to confuse social and affordable housing

The current focus on affordable housing may have diluted the needed focus on increasing social housing.

To improve consistency and build awareness across councils the Charter Group developed a glossary of terms⁴. We use the affordable housing definition in the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, which is 'housing, including social housing, that is appropriate for the housing needs of very low, low and moderate-income households'. Social Housing is defined as including both public housing and community housing (housing owned, controlled or managed by a participating registered agency).

Our definition of 'homelessness' aligns with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Council to Homeless Persons' (CHP) definitions reflecting contemporary practice. Homelessness is more than rooflessness, and along with rough sleepers includes people in a dwelling that is inadequate; has no tenure; or does not allow them to have control of, or access to space for social relations⁵.

Rough sleeping is around 7 per cent of homelessness with 'hidden homelessness' common across our region. This includes those in supported accommodation for the homeless, boarding houses, severely overcrowded dwellings, and those staying with other households or in other temporary lodgings⁶.

Liveability - How can the Victorian Government encourage more new homes near existing infrastructure and make sure these communities are good places to live?

Access to transport - What do you think about rezoning so that more homes can be closer to public transport?

Policy changes - What else should the Victorian Government consider when rezoning land for more new homes?

⁴ Charter Group - Glossary of Terms <https://www.monash.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/community/documents/charter-group-glossary-group-glossary-terms-version-1-9-march-2021.pdf>

⁵ Council for Homeless Persons definition: <https://chp.org.au/homelessness/>

⁶ Council to Homeless Persons 2019, 'Making a Difference – Effective Local Government Responses to Homelessness', commissioned by Monash Council October 2019, p.2

Infrastructure contributions - How could Victoria's infrastructure contributions system be simplified for all types of housing development?

Making it fair and equitable - How could Victoria's infrastructure contributions system be simplified for all types of housing development?

Access to services and community infrastructure is critical to liveability, health and social cohesion

The Charter Group recognises the importance of access to services and open space for liveability, equality of opportunity and social cohesion.

Best practice models of social housing and housing support need to be identified and aligned with major infrastructure projects. These should consider specific needs and opportunities at a local and regional scale and how they can create tangible value locally.

Financial incentives for the private provision of affordable housing, including build-to-rent and rent-to-buy initiatives, taxation, low / no interest loans, long term peppercorn leases of surplus government land and other measures must also consider local community infrastructure needs, contribute to local amenity and provide spaces for community development.

Many new social and affordable housing projects do not have spaces for social meals programs or other community building activities which could have easily been provided for.

Existing infrastructure in established areas will struggle to keep pace with growth

It cannot be assumed that growth can simply be accommodated within existing facilities in established areas.

Many facilities will need to be expanded, upgraded or replaced. New infrastructure will also be required. Rate capping, inflation, and taxes such as the Windfall Gains Tax collectively reduce councils' ability to respond and heighten the need for alternative funding streams.

Consideration must be given to introduce Inclusionary Zoning state-wide, and to a developer contribution mechanism for established urban areas in all planning schemes. This would:

- support targets to increase provision of social housing to meet the current shortfall
- support new social and affordable housing development
- enable local agreements with developers (if still required) without them being overturned by VCAT
- ensure fit for purpose properties come onto the market for targeted at risk cohorts (such as women and children fleeing family violence, Aboriginal people)
- fund local government pilots to build capability
- encourage innovation and diversity in social and affordable housing, such as shared equity or community land trusts using government owned land under a long-term lease

5. Response to Recommendations

The Charter Group has not responded to the breadth of matters in the draft Strategy. We have commented on those recommendations of direct relevance to our purpose.

#	Recommendation.	Comment
Objective 1: Victorians have good access to housing, jobs, services and opportunities		
1	Build more social housing.	Strong support The Charter Group is pleased that this critical recommendation is first. The Charter Group agrees with the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) who recommend that the most powerful action local governments can take to reduce homelessness is to support the delivery of homes that people can afford. For the lowest income households most vulnerable to homelessness, this means the provision of social housing. The State Government Housing Targets set for each LGA should include within them a specific social housing target based on need. The Charter Group has advocated for the National Homelessness and Housing Agreement (which we see as primarily a funding agreement between the Australian and State governments) to have a clear focus on homelessness prevention and the delivery of adequate, safe, secure and sustainable social housing.
6	Make Government infrastructure more accessible	Support This should also extend to newly built and renewed social housing stock meeting national accessible design standards so that current and future accessibility needs of residents are assured.
7	Rezone locations near existing infrastructure for more home choices.	Recommendation not required While we accept the benefits of a compact city, Charter councils already plan for additional development in areas well serviced by transport and community infrastructure and with access to open space and amenities. This is reflected in their Housing or Residential Strategies and detailed plans for centres and corridors. The significant work undertaken to date by councils should be supported and not replaced with blanket rezoning and removal of tailored controls. Reviewing and rezoning such locations is a core local government function and their local knowledge should be leveraged. The need to augment or replace existing infrastructure to accommodate future growth in established areas should also be acknowledged.

	Future - Mandate more affordable homes near existing infrastructure.	Support This is an important area for future work to ensure that affordable housing is available in well located areas. This work should predominately focus on social housing. In the interim direct government investment in public and community housing in these areas is required. The Charter Group have long advocated for inclusionary zoning to provide for social and affordable housing, particularly in well located areas and were disappointed that the State Government walked away from its commitment to this. It is not yet clear whether the Development Facilitation Program fast track has achieved additional affordable housing. Of concern to the Charter Group is the rapid loss of affordable rental stock across Melbourne and the region. This is a pervasive issue and in particular impacts areas with significant 1960-70's flat developments in single ownership.
Objective 3: Aboriginal people have self-determination and equal outcomes to other Victorians		
22	Invest in secure housing for Aboriginal Victorians.	Support The Charter Group considers Aboriginal Victorians a priority cohort.
Objective 4: Victoria has a thriving natural environment		
26	Better use government land for open space and greenery.	Support Big Build projects and additional dwelling growth across the Charter councils' area is already negatively impacting on tree canopy cover and open space. We note that unsubdivided Build to Rent developments increase demand without any Public Open Space contribution which must be addressed. Similarly the application of the Windfall Gains Tax to local government is a disincentive for Councils to rezone, redevelop and rearrange their land holdings. Councils should be exempt so that they may assist to address open space gaps and connectivity. Rapid growth means additional open space will be required as well as the need to address gaps and improve connectivity. This will require government investment. Demand pressures on active open space are also growing, as is the demand for stadium sports, synthetic playing surfaces, lighting and weather protection. These needs can often be met at the expense of the amount and quality of public open space and improved planning and collaboration is required

Objective 5: Victoria is resilient to climate change and future risks		
27	Better prepare infrastructure for climate change.	Support More resilient and adaptive infrastructure should assist to reduce operating and maintenance costs over time to benefit communities. Several Charter councils are exposed to flood, fire and other climate hazards and there is a need to enable them to 'build back better' to increase infrastructure resilience.
28	Use new flood maps to revise planning schemes.	Support Avoiding housing people in areas of known risk is critical as is addressing known flood risks where people already live. This challenge will increase as our climate changes, and while we support the recommendation for the State Government to provide greater assistance, we note that flood management is a shared responsibility between Water Authorities and the Charter councils and must be done cooperatively to leverage local knowledge
Objective 6: Victoria has a high productivity and circular economy		
35	Prepare and publish infrastructure sector plans to shape Victoria's cities.	Support Long term spatial planning for state infrastructure has been lacking. Coordination between the plans is also important as we all seek to plan and use infrastructure more efficiently.
36	Reform infrastructure contributions.	Support The Charter Group strongly supports this recommendation. There is a need for a developer contribution mechanism for established areas. A blanket, 'off-the-shelf' approach within the control of councils is preferred that enables contributions for social and affordable housing and the associated community infrastructure growing communities need. This developer contribution mechanism (or alternative) could be designed to ensure that unsubdivided Build to Rent developments make Public Open Space (POS) contributions commensurate with their scale and impact. As is the case currently for POS contributions raised through development in established areas, funds should be collected by Councils, held in a special purpose reserve, and expended in that local area.

Attachment - The extent of the housing challenge in the Charter Region

Housing affordability

Housing affordability is a growing problem in Australia and a growing issue for many residents in our region. Indicators of the regional challenge include:

- the share of households renting social housing has stagnated or declined in all councils in the region, and is below the metropolitan average level in most councils
- the number of affordable private rentals within the region has plunged compared with the early 2000's
- all Charter region councils experienced a significant increase in the median house price over the last decade, ranging between 47% and 80%
- the average 10-year growth in median house price among Charter councils is 64% which has been faster than the metropolitan Melbourne increase of 51% over the same period
- by 2020 eight of the 13 Charter councils had median house prices exceeding the metropolitan median

The Charter Group has estimated the need for social housing over the next twenty years by applying the Minimum Supply of Social Housing methodology. The estimated shortfall (the estimated number of 'most housing vulnerable' households in the region exceeding social and forecast affordable private rental supply) is detailed below and expected to increase if no additional actions are taken to increase supply.

Figure 1 - Estimated shortfall of social housing five-yearly 2021-2041 in the Charter Region

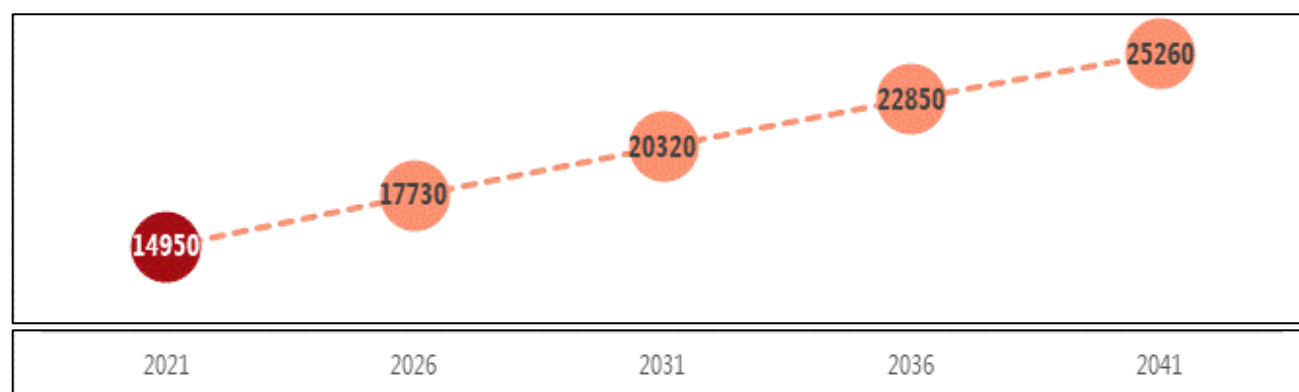
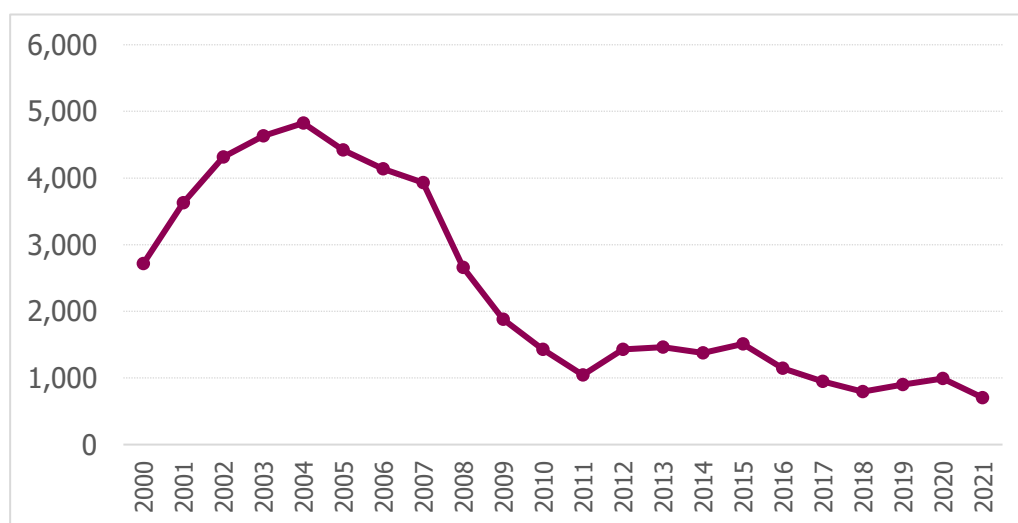


Table 1 Minimum supply of social housing – key statistics (Figures rounded for summary)

41,610	SE households in the target group in 2021
18,690	Number of local social housing dwellings as at 2020
7,970	Estimated number of affordable private rentals as at 2021
-14,950	The shortage of social housing/affordable private rentals as at 2021
-25,260	Projected shortage in the SE region by 2041 if no action taken
1,260	Yearly addition of social housing/affordable private rentals to meet forecast need by 2041
64%	Capacity to meet lower cost rental housing need in 2021

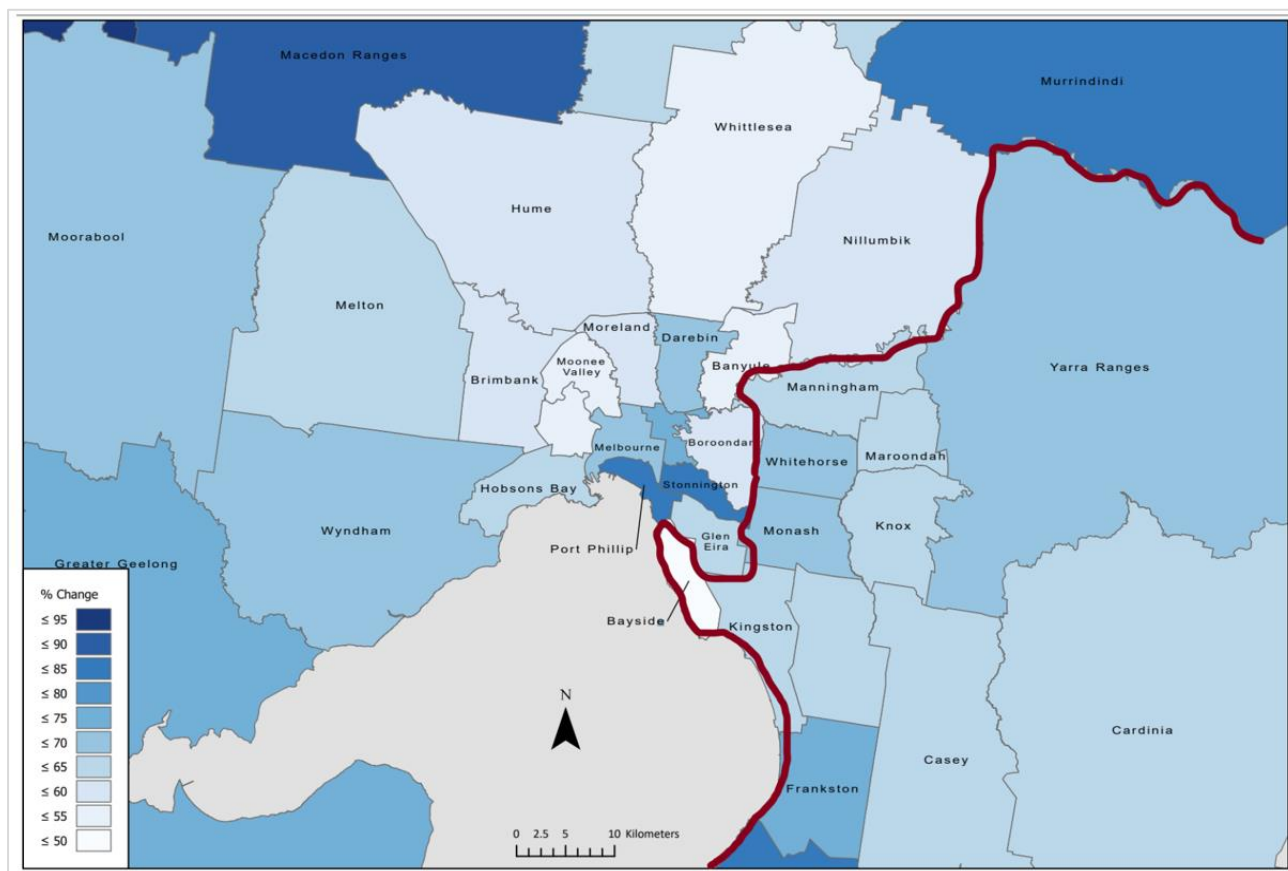
Over the past twenty years, the availability of affordable rental housing in the region has plummeted. The decline in affordable rental stock effectively negates any growth in social housing for the region.

Figure 2 Number of affordable rentals in the Charter region (March quarter (all sixes))



Source: Department of Health and Human Services <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>.

Figure 3 Ten-year change in median house price in the Charter region 2010-2020



Source: A Guide to Property Values, Annual analysis of property sales data from Valuer-General Victoria, January-December 2020

Minimum Supply of Social Housing Methodology

The Minimum Supply of Social Housing methodology aims to quantify social housing need and provide methodologically justified estimates of the minimum number of social housing dwellings needed to meet demand in localities to 2041. It was developed by Knox Council in 2010⁷ in response to the growing lack of housing affordability and a desire to strengthen its approach to affordable housing.

The methodology deliberately targets social housing as a subset of affordable housing to respond to the needs of the most housing vulnerable in the community and to leverage local government's greater capacity to influence the public sector and social housing market in partnership with social housing providers.

The methodology quantifies the minimum amount of social housing required to meet the needs of a 'target group' of very low-income households (in the lowest 10% of equivalised household incomes, nationally) that do not own their home. It considers the capacity of existing social housing and availability of affordable private rental housing to meet local demand, and so determine the need for social housing (Figure 7).

The approach presumes that the demand and supply conditions at the time of review can be projected into the future using household forecasts. Quantifying the estimated shortfall of low-cost rental housing over a future time period can then be translated into an aspirational annual supply figure to address the deficit.

Figure 4 The Minimum Supply of Social Housing Methodology



The methodology does not represent the full extent of people experiencing housing stress or requiring housing assistance due to affordability issues. It links to the most housing vulnerable households - the lowest 10% of household incomes. The need for government supported social housing and affordable private rental housing goes well beyond this group. Further, the methodology considers the availability of affordable private rentals as an input to determining the need for social housing - assuming that need can be offset by the entire supply of private rentals deemed 'affordable', regardless of 'fit for purpose'. It also assumes that all affordable private rentals are accessed by the most housing vulnerable households - the target group. Neither is the case. Therefore the minimum supply calculations are a very conservative measure of the social housing deficit, and the shortfall arrived at for the SE Charter region is truly a minimum figure.

⁷ Defining affordable housing and a minimum supply of social housing for Knox. A methodology for meeting social housing needs, 2010-2030', Knox City Council (2011)

Homelessness

The dynamics and incidence of homelessness in our region differs from the rest of Victoria due to local socio-economic and locational factors. This means that the homelessness challenges local areas face are different and different groups of people are impacted, limiting the effectiveness of a “one size fits all” response. A range of tailored solutions are needed to respond to these vastly different needs. For example, family law and school retention factors are relevant levers to reduce the incidence of and impacts on women and children experiencing or at risk of homelessness due to family violence.

Two data sources are available to local government to determine local homelessness rates. They are the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data (point in time data collected every five years) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) service data collected monthly. While not without limitations, used together, these data sets can provide a good indication of the numbers, drivers and types of homelessness in our region and local areas.

In addition, data for the region regarding the demographics and needs of clients of Specialist Homelessness Services indicates some key differences with Greater Melbourne. In the 2019/20 year they include:

- **Age** - the Charter region had a high level of children aged 0-17 being homeless (regional average of 30.4% of SHS clients compared to 25.7% across Greater Melbourne, except for Greater Dandenong and Bayside; and highest in Knox (34.3%) and Yarra Ranges (38.7%))
- **SHS clients at risk of homelessness** - the Charter region averages 66.5% (60.7% Greater Melbourne)
- **Reason for seeking assistance** - interpersonal relationships predominate at 41.3% (33.7% Greater Melbourne) while accommodation (Mornington Peninsula) and financial factors (Knox, Manningham, Maroondah) are above Greater Melbourne

According to 2016 ABS Census data there are 7,916⁸ people experiencing homelessness in our region, representing one-third of all homelessness in Victoria. We consider this to be an undercount as regional metadata shows up to four times more homelessness than 2016 Census data. For instance, 2016 census showed 546 people as homeless in Frankston, whereas specialist homelessness service data showed that 2,000 people accessed homeless services for the same period.

AIHW 2017/18 data provides a clearer sense of the real-time incidence and types of homelessness in a local area and demonstrates that the types and rates of homelessness vary dramatically across our region. In our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness⁹ we stressed that:

The pattern of homelessness varies across the region:

- for example, Frankston and Mornington Peninsula have the highest rates of people sleeping rough, with more people in severely overcrowded dwellings in Dandenong, Manningham, Casey and Cardinia. In Yarra Ranges more people couch surf; boarding houses predominate in Maroondah, Whitehorse and Monash. In Knox and Maroondah more people are in supported homeless accommodation (although Maroondah has a concerning number of people sleeping rough)
- hidden homelessness & rough sleeping is rising - 20% of Victoria’s rough sleepers are in our region¹⁰

A very high number of clients who receive homelessness services in the region were not homeless the month before (Figure 1):

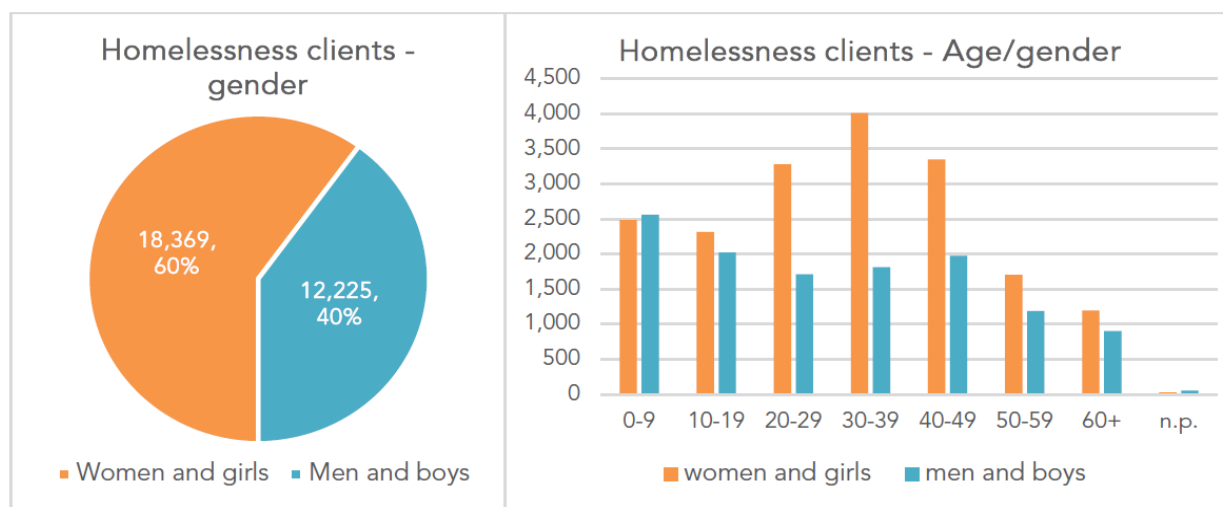
⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2016 – *Homeless Estimates Special Report*

⁹ <https://www.monash.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/community/documents/inquiry-into-homelessness-in-australia.pdf>

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2016 – *Homeless Estimates Special Report*

- 18,037 of the 24,734 clients that received specialist homelessness service provision, or 74%, were registered as 'not homeless' the previous month

Figure 5 - AIHW Specialist Homelessness data 2017-18 region-wide



Homelessness is a gendered issue with women and children over-represented in our region (Figure 2):

- 61% of people accessing specialist housing support services were women and girls, the opposite to the Melbourne CBD, where 61% of the 1,448 clients were male
- children (0-9 years) present as the second largest homeless cohort after women (20-49 years), larger than for any age group for men
- first time homelessness is also a gendered issue with large numbers of women and children coming into contact with homelessness service providers for the first time, and who, with the right supported transitional accommodation are unlikely to enter the 'homelessness system'¹¹
- repeated or chronic homelessness is less prevalent with the number of people previously housed exceeding the number who were homeless the month prior, the reverse of the situation in the CBD

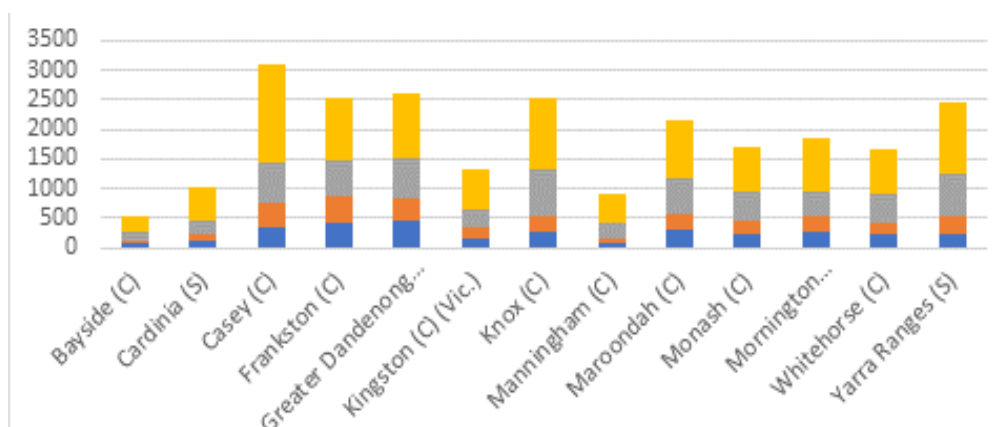
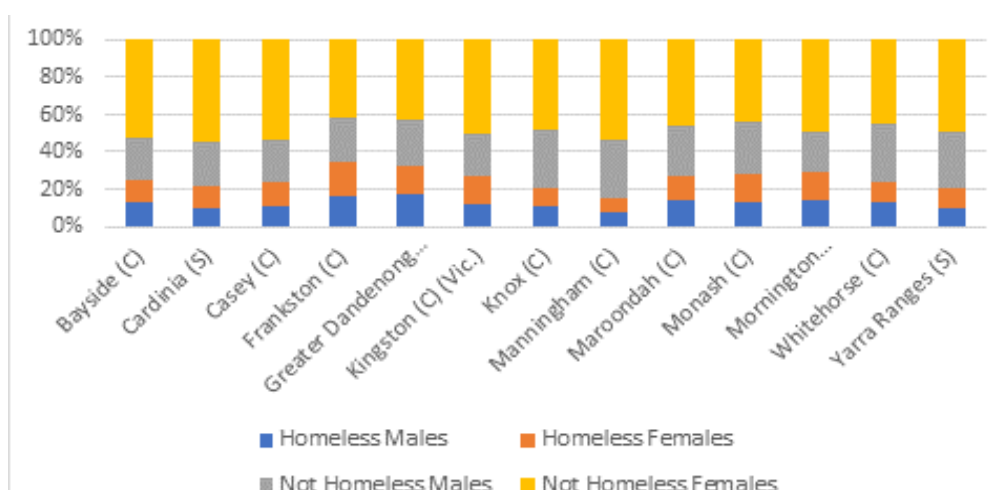


Figure 6 - Monthly count homelessness services - gender and status - Previous Month Count 2017/18

¹¹ See <http://www.nwhn.net.au/Crisis-in-Crisis.aspx>

Figure 7 - Proportion and gender - previous month homeless - Previous Month % 2017/18



Lack of suitable housing stock

There is a stark deficit of affordable housing in the Charter region and a lack of properties suitable for single person households. This causes increased reliance on unsuitable forms of housing and shelter for those on very low income households. Reliance on Rooming House accommodation is increasing across our region and, again, we are overrepresented in Victoria, with over a third of Victorians who live in rooming houses and 37% of Victorians who reside in overcrowded conditions being concentrated in our region.

Evidence suggests that long stays in shared accommodation can result in poor health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for children. The lack of autonomy with respect to shared accommodation presents significant health, wellbeing and safety risks for tenants. It is typical for shared accommodation include AOD users, prison leavers, people with a mental health condition or a disability, and (in some areas) families with children.

These environments are highly stressful for adults because living in close proximity with many highly vulnerable people creates its own challenges and stress, and because people can't move on with their lives while they don't know where they will be living longer-term.

Who is impacted and why

The main factors impacting homelessness in the region are rising rents in the private rental market and the inadequate supply of social housing¹². AIHW data shows that the key drivers of homelessness across our region are *housing issues and financial reasons* (50%) and *domestic and family violence* (38%)¹³.

Pathways into and out of homelessness and housing insecurity are neither linear nor uniform. Individuals and families who experience homelessness may have little in common with each other, aside from their need for adequate housing. Factors may be a lack of income, poor support networks, family violence, an adverse life event or other health issue¹⁴.

Social and economic factors:

Income - low income households are at risk of homelessness

¹² Council to Homeless Persons 2019, 'Making a Difference – Effective Local Government Responses to Homelessness', commissioned by Monash Council October 2019, p.1

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ S. Gaetz & E. DeJ, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto, 2017, p. 16

- Poverty is unequivocally linked with homelessness with very low-income households at greatest risk of homelessness due to the lack of affordable properties. Income levels differ across the region and the ABS Census 2016 identified all LGA's in the Charter Group as having more households with a combined household income of less than \$650 per week compared to Greater Melbourne (16.7%) ranging from 17.2%¹⁵ of households in Bayside, to 27.4% of households in Frankston¹⁶.

Domestic and family violence - rates in our region are among Melbourne's highest

- Victoria Police's Crime Statistics Agency data shows that in areas in our region family violence rates are among the highest in metropolitan Melbourne (areas within Frankston, Casey and Greater Dandenong¹⁷ had the highest rates of family violence police call outs in Melbourne from 1999 to 2018¹⁸.
- This is a gendered issue in our region as 80% of all family violence incidents are perpetrated on women¹⁹, flowing through to increasing numbers of women seeking support to escape family violence, often with no rental history, housing, work or superannuation. This can quickly translate into homelessness for many women and children and is our second highest single cause of homelessness in our region.

Early exposure to homelessness makes it more likely later in life

- Nationwide there has been a 284% increase over the past five years in the number of school students attending Specialist Homelessness Services²⁰ and there are elevated rates of early childhood exposure to homelessness currently trending across our region. Evidence suggests that early exposure to homelessness makes a repeat episode more likely later in life and heightens the risk of chronic homelessness²¹. Trauma during childhood can have long lasting effects on an individual's future circumstances.

Educational attainment – early school leavers can be disadvantaged

- One-third of homeless adults have a high school attainment below year 10²². School engagement is recognised universally as a protective factor for young people, with youth homelessness and early school leaving being intimately related. Additionally, more years of schooling lead to higher lifetime incomes, calculated in Australia to be 10% more for each additional year of schooling after nine years²³.

Timely access to mental health services can prevent homelessness

- People experiencing homelessness have complex and interconnected needs, and mental health issues often play a role. In 2018, 17,772 Victorians who presented at homelessness services cited mental health as one of the reasons they needed help. We support the argument advanced by Justice Connect that to effectively end homelessness, we must make mental health a priority²⁴.
- The transitioning of community mental health outreach services to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been a significant factor of people experiencing homelessness. Participants in programs like Personal Helpers and Mentors services (PHaMs) and Partners in Recovery (PIR) were completely cut off in the Southern Metropolitan Region during the rollout of the NDIS and many clients

¹⁵ See <https://profile.id.com.au/bayside/household-income-quartiles>

¹⁶ See <https://profile.id.com.au/frankston/household-income-quartiles?BMID=20>

¹⁷ Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, Family Violence Incidents by Local Government Area, 2018/2019

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ See <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/summary>

²⁰ See https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/Responding_to_the_shadow_pandemic_practitioner_views_on_the_nature_of_and_responses_to_violence_against_women_in_Victoria_Australia_during_the_COVID-19_restrictions/12433517

²¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Victoria, 2016

²² See <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features20March+Quarter+2012>

²³ See https://publiceducationfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Issues-Paper_What-Price-The-Gap.pdf

²⁴ Justice Connect, Creating a fairer and stronger community for Victorians experiencing mental illness, homelessness & housing insecurity, Submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, July 2019

still cannot access appropriate support, and transition packages are inadequate.

Key market factors include:

The shortage of affordable private rental housing and higher median rents

- affordable housing is where rent is no greater than 30% of total household income²⁵
- low-income families are also under enormous pressure with housing affordability; 10 years ago 30% of rental properties in metropolitan Melbourne were considered affordable to struggling families, however, it is now just 5.1%²⁶
- Anglicare identified that of the 69,485 properties listed for rent in Australia on March 23, 2019 only one property was affordable to a person receiving Youth Allowance and two properties were affordable for a single person on Newstart²⁷. In 2017 the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) identified less than 0.5% cent of rental properties were affordable to people solely on Newstart (now JobSeeker) or Youth Allowance in metropolitan Melbourne, and that people solely on disability or aged pensions were only marginally better off
- the shortage is most acute in capital city areas of Sydney, Hobart and Melbourne²⁸, in metropolitan Melbourne the proportion of new affordable private market lettings decreased to 7% in December 2019²⁹ and as low as 0.5% in our region (Bayside) and for nine councils, below 5% in December 2019
- there is an undersupply of single bedroom dwellings to support the high proportion of lone person households in our region, with between 15% (Casey) and 27% (Frankston and Mornington Peninsula) of properties tenanted by lone person households
- on average, the supply of 0-1 bedroom properties for our region represents only 1.3% of all housing stock (or 27,634 properties) compared to 3.5% for metropolitan Melbourne. Of these only 884 dwellings were deemed affordable for low and very low income earners across our whole region²⁹

Social housing shortfalls are pronounced

- social housing is critical infrastructure and is the best solution for homelessness prevention and early intervention for low-income households
- 15,200 dwellings are estimated to be needed each year for the next decade to meet current very low and low-income household need³⁰ in our region
- in Victoria, social housing is only 3.42% of all dwellings. At October 2019 there were 44,152³¹ households on the wait list for social housing, including 17,717 households in the south and east of Melbourne³²
- social housing rents are capped at 25 or 30% of household income³³ and in most cases social housing is among the only form of housing a JobSeeker recipient can afford

²⁵ L. Henriques-Gomes, "Homelessness becoming concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne", The Guardian, 30 May 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/australianews/2019/may/30/homelessness-becoming-concentrated-in-sydney-and-melbourne-studyfinds>

²⁶ DHHS, (2017) Rental Report: December Quarter <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>

²⁷ Anglicare Australia (2019) Rental Affordability Snapshot National Report <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/our-work/research-reports/the-rental-affordability-snapshot>

²⁸ L. Henriques-Gomes, "Homelessness becoming concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne", The Guardian, 30 May 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/australianews/2019/may/30/homelessness-becoming-concentrated-in-sydney-and-melbourne-studyfinds>

²⁹ Rental Report December Quarter 2019, Victorian Department of Health and Human Services 2019

³⁰ Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government 2017, 'Victoria's Social Housing Supply Requirements to 2036', p.3, <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/Victorias-social-housing-supply-requirements-to-2036.pdf>

³¹ In April 2025, CHP estimates over 63,000, and increasing by 2000 people each month

³² See http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content2/c7/A%20crisis%20in%20crisis%20doc%20final%20040219_155_0142202053.pdf

³³ Making a Difference – effective local government responses to homelessness, Council to Homeless Persons, commissioned by Monash Council, October 2019

- social housing supply is reducing while demand grows. Victorian Government research in 2016-17 (in response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence) identifies:
 - 1,700 more social housing homes are needed each year over the next 20 years to maintain the current 3.5% social housing share of the total homes in Victoria
 - Double this amount is needed over the next 20 years if lower income households, currently facing housing stress in the private rental market are to have affordable housing³⁴

Early intervention (a Housing First approach) is almost impossible in our region

- Only one emergency accommodation service supports 2 million residents and the estimated 7,916 people experiencing homelessness in our region. This single service manages four family units, nine single units, two rooms for couples and three women only places, and is clearly inadequate meaning early intervention is unlikely for other than a small handful of cases.
- Emergency accommodation providers and Specialist homelessness services in our region are often unable to assist people, or can only offer costly, inappropriate (and often unsafe) accommodation such as motel rooms and rooming houses. The only emergency accommodation provider located within our region, advised that the demand for their service is far beyond their capacity to support, noting that in 2019 over 500 women were turned away, unable to be assisted by their service.
- 'Housing First' quickly connects individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing and support services without preconditions or barriers to entry (such as sobriety, treatment or service participation). It recognises that safe and stable housing is a pre-condition to being able to address the factors leading to homelessness and is widely supported as effective in addressing cyclical and chronic homelessness. 'Housing First' recognises that housing is a human right, and that client support is separate and not conditional to housing³⁵.

Overcrowding is exacerbated for those on SRSS program support

- Overcrowding is particularly prominent in Greater Dandenong, which is also the municipality with the highest number of asylum seekers in the region. Overcrowding can be conceived of as a community response to preventing people being forced into rough sleeping
- The Federal Government has a responsibility to provide support to people until they get the outcome of their asylum claims and can move forward with their lives in a positive way.
- The Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) Program provides essential and basic support to individuals and families living in the Australian community while they await a decision about their refugee status, and further cuts are likely to create even greater homelessness risks for asylum seekers.

Mandatory contributions towards affordable housing should be required nationally

- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) developed an 'Understanding Inclusionary Zoning Brief' in 2017 to demonstrate how land use planning systems can be leveraged to deliver more social and affordable housing through Inclusionary Zoning(IZ).³⁶
- Inclusionary Zoning requires a proportion of multi-dwelling developments to be affordable (ideally >10%) and social housing (ideally > 5%) and is voluntary in many jurisdictions across Australia

³⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government 2017, 'Victoria's Social Housing Supply Requirements to 2036', p.3, <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/Victorias-social-housing-supply-requirements-to-2036.pdf>

³⁵ DHHS Towards Home <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/other-housing-projects>

³⁶ AHURI Final Report No. 120, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/120>

- Successful examples of mandatory IZ exist such as in London and New York.³⁷ A Ministerial Advisory Committee and Panel Report³⁸ have identified local approaches can be appropriate to address a gap at state level (as for Environmentally Sustainable Design). South Australia has made IZ mandatory³⁹ and, with the ACT have clear policy directions regarding affordable and social housing. This has resulted in steady increases in social and affordable housing. In the US and UK shared equity/ community land trust models are widely used to supply social and affordable housing.
- Since 2018 the Victorian Government has encouraged councils to negotiate directly with developers via Section 173 agreements under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. This has led to an ad-hoc and inefficient approach that has failed to address unmet housing need or deliver any sizeable numbers of affordable dwellings.

³⁷ *New directions in planning for affordable housing: Australian and international evidence and implications*, Gurran, N., Milligan, V., Baker, D., Beth Bugg, L., Christensen, S. (2008)

³⁸ Advisory Committee and Panel Report, *Environmentally Efficient Design Local Policies*, April 2004
[http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/Environmentally_Efficient_Design_AC_Report\(1\).pdf](http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/Environmentally_Efficient_Design_AC_Report(1).pdf)

³⁹ AHURI Final Report No. 120, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/120>