NORTHERN HOMELESSNESS NETWORK

NHN

The Northern Homelessness Networks' (NHN) submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan consultation

For further information or to clarify any aspects of this submission please contact ████████████
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The Northern Homelessness Network (NHN) welcomes the opportunity to submit to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan consultation. The NHN is a collective of 30 member agencies, managing approximately 100 homelessness programs across seven Local Government areas of Yarra, Darebin, Merri-Bek, Hume, Nillumbik, Banyule and Whittlesea. The Network works collaboratively to improve responses to people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne's Northern region through:
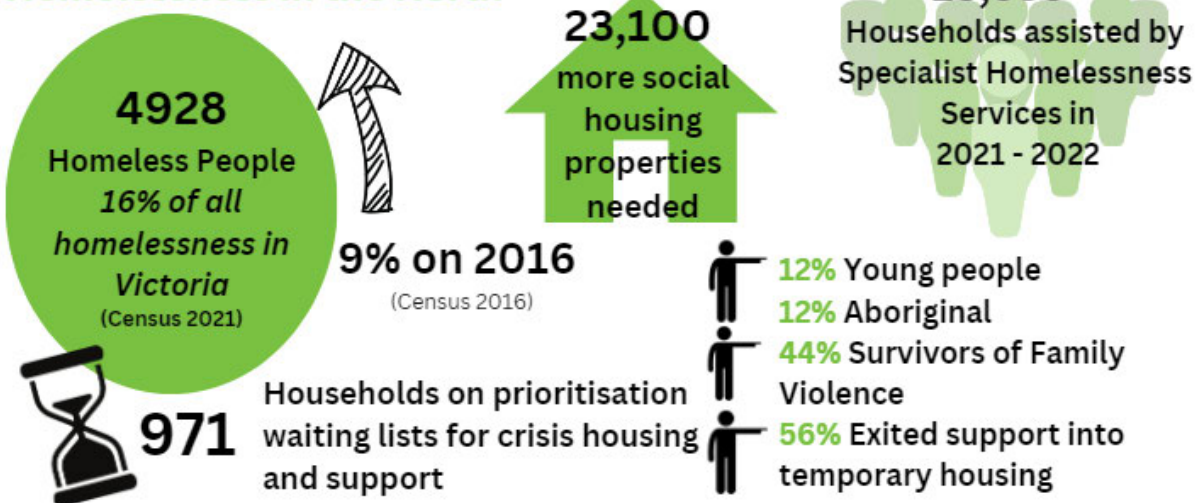
- coordinated homelessness service system arrangements
- consumer consultation
- linkages with allied service sectors and shared professional development.

The NHN believes that homelessness can be resolved. It requires three key elements:

1. A well-resourced homelessness service sector, working closely and collaboratively with a healthy community and public housing system that moves people quickly from experiencing homelessness to being housed, and strong working relationships with allied services (including family violence support, mental health support, alcohol and other drug support) to provide holistic support.
2. Enough social and community housing stock to meet the current and future demand; and
3. Adequate options to help people maintain and sustain their tenancies.

The homelessness and Housing crisis is a result of long term public policy neglect. There are no quick fixes to the entrenched problems. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan needs to provide short, medium, and long term policy and strategy that lead structural change and capital investment to *end homelessness* not just manage it. The Plan should commit all levels of government to work in partnership with the community services sector. It should detail measurable deliverables in publicly available and regularly reviewed implementation plans. Critically the Strategy needs to actively reflect the voice of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness in the North

4928 Homeless People *16% of all homelessness in Victoria* (Census 2021)

23,100 more social housing properties needed

18,533 Households assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services in 2021 - 2022

9% on 2016 (Census 2016)

971 Households on prioritisation waiting lists for crisis housing and support

12% Young people
12% Aboriginal
44% Survivors of Family Violence
56% Exited support into temporary housing

Homelessness risk factors and impact

People who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are among Australia's most socially and economically disadvantaged. Homelessness is a result of a range of social, economic and health related factors. There is no one path to homelessness, however international research indicates that unexpected or shock events for example the loss of employment or an experience of violence, can significantly increase the risk of homelessness and are much more significant than individual characteristics.[1]

> *"Every human being, no matter race, colour, has a heart and soul. Every single person has a story. We don't become homeless because we want to. I had a house, car, worked, until my partners suicide. Now nothing."*
> Homeless consumer

The homelessness service system is largely funded to be reactive with the greater proportion of programs focusing on a crisis model, providing short term support and accommodation with very few options for medium and longer term housing and support. While this can alleviate homelessness temporarily, it can exacerbate trauma and create a cycle of homelessness for many. The experience of homelessness and the ongoing cycle of homelessness puts people at a higher risk of violence, mental health issues, alcohol and other drug use, chronic health conditions and trauma. The cumulative impact of homelessness is enormously disruptive, causing extreme stress, hardship and trauma that has long lasting impacts on a person's life.

> *"It's 'coz of the cage the rat is in, not the rat."*
> Homeless consumer

The structural causes of homelessness including income inequality, unemployment and access to housing, gendered violence, racism and discrimination must be addressed by the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Preventing Homelessness

The most effective way to eliminate homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan must invest in a greater focus on prevention that strengthens universal and targeted support systems and commits to a substantial and ongoing investment in social housing to eliminate homelessness. Responses to homelessness need to shift from a system that manages homelessness to one that works to eliminate homelessness.[2]

Universal prevention measures, crisis prevention measures and targeted prevention measures are necessary to firstly reduce the incidence of homelessness and the length of time homelessness is experienced and ultimately, over time, to end homelessness.

Significant investment is needed to fund proven initiatives and to research and trial new targeted and crisis early intervention and prevention models in Australia.

Universal prevention measures

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should focus on the elimination of poverty as a key broad ranging prevention strategy to ending homelessness in Australia. Universal prevention

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[1] Bevitt, A., Chigavazaria, A., Herault, N., Johnson, G., Moschion, J., Scutella, R., Tseng, Y., Wooden, M., and Kalb, G. Journeys Home Research Report No. 6, May 2015

[2] Demos Helsinki, Housing First Europe Hub. A new systems perspective to ending homelessness

measures need to address the major drivers of homelessness including the adequacy and security of income support, access to appropriate housing, family wellbeing and racism and discrimination.

> *'[Homelessness] it's a very lonely place to be. The feeling of helplessness can be very depressing. Crime was my only financial option.'*
> Homeless consumer

Adequate income support

Whilst the 2023 Federal budget allowed for some increases in income support payments, they have not gone far enough to effect the change required to provide adequate income support. Australia ranks one of the lowest in terms of unemployment benefits payments across developed countries in the world.[3] Income support payments are not keeping pace with cost of living increases.
Job seeker and youth allowance payments should be on par with pensions and be indexed to wage increases and other price movements.

Rental assistance payment levels through the Commonwealth Rent Assistance initiative do not reflect actual rent costs nor keep pace with rental increases that have been considerable over the past 2 years. Commonwealth Rent Assistance should be benchmarked to the actual rents paid and indexed to price movements, this will act as a considerable protective measure to sustain tenancies and prevent tenancy breakdown.

The Commonwealth Rent Assistance is currently only available to people who receive income support payments. Providing access to rental assistance for low income earners would have a considerable impact on housing affordability and sustainability and could go a long way to preventing homelessness for this cohort.

Availability of safe, appropriate housing

The availability of housing is critical to both preventing and ending homelessness. This includes increasing public and community housing stock, strengthening tenancy protections and support to reduce the incidence of housing crisis and eviction. There is more information on what is required to increase access to housing later in the submission.

Addressing racism and discrimination

Taking action to reduce racism and discrimination will improve education, employment, housing, and health outcomes for marginalised communities that result in homelessness.

Support for families

Taking action to reduce gendered violence and provide families with what they need to thrive will reduce family violence, a major cause of homelessness amongst families. Support for families can also support young people to stay at home, reducing youth homelessness.

Crisis prevention - Support to sustain tenancies

A key early intervention response to people at risk of homelessness is the provision of crisis prevention in the form of support to sustain their current housing and assistance to establish new housing quickly after a housing breakdown.

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[3] OECD tax benefit data portal, referenced by Phillps, J. ACOSS in the Reducing Homelessness risk across the population presentation (September 2023).

Programs that support households in housing crisis to secure and maintain private rental housing (for example the Private Rental Access Program – PRAP and PRAP plus, Home Connect[4]) provide both financial support and assistance to stabilise private rental housing and actively sustain tenancies. Similarly, prevention programs supporting tenancies at risk in social and community housing provide a crucial role in preventing households re-entering homelessness[5] (for example Indigenous Tenancies at Risk program[6], Tenancy Plus[7], Housing Support for the Aged program[8]).

> **Consumer Vignette**
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> ███ *presented to a Homelessness Access Point seeking access to secure stable housing. She was couch surfing with her ███ primary and secondary aged children. She was in significant financial difficulty but managing to hold down employment. Yara did not speak English; with the assistance of an interpreter the intake and assessment worker supported her with information on private rental accommodation options and the completion of several rental applications. A rental option was procured, and assistance was provided through the Private Rental Assistance Program to secure the bond and rent in advance needed to acquire the property. ███ and her children are now safely and securely housed and maintaining their tenancy. Yara has maintained her employment, and her children are engaged in school.*

It is essential that homelessness support agencies are appropriately resourced to implement early prevention interventions at the time a risk of homelessness is identified. Crisis prevention and tenancy support programs are underfunded and unable to meet the high demand for their services and flexible funding to support establishment and arrears payments do not spread far enough. Crisis prevention work is highly skilled, staff are overwhelmed by the unmet need and under resourced to manage it. Access to case management that can provide ongoing and follow up support is limited which can impact on outcomes delivered, particularly for people with complex needs requiring intensive long term support. Further resources are required to address these issues and support these programs.

Additional funding is required to expand programs that provide legal assistance to tenants facing eviction, ensuring that their rights are protected at VCAT and with housing providers. The effectiveness of prevention and early intervention tenancy support programs will continue to be compromised while the systemic causes of homelessness remain unchallenged.

Targeted prevention

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan must commit to providing secure, long term funding for early intervention programs that are backed up by universal systemic change. Targeted prevention reduces the risk of homelessness for groups most at risk of homelessness. There are important opportunities to approach homelessness prevention from a comprehensive systems approach including family support, youth mental health support, tenancy, and legal advice. All service systems have a responsibility to identify homelessness risk and support interventions that will eliminate homelessness.

Every specialist homelessness support service has a focus on intervening as early as possible in a person's homelessness experience and preventing future homelessness. However, there are a range

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[4] HomeConnect | VincentCare
[5] Watson, J., Johnson, G. and Taylor, S. (2020) Staying home? Examining longer-term housing outcomes of the Private Rental Access Program (PRAP). Unison Housing, Melbourne
[6] Aboriginal Tenants at Risk Program – Aboriginal Advancement League (aal.org.au)
[7] Transitional Housing and Tenancy Support (launchhousing.org.au)
[8] Housing Support for the Aged Program(HSAP) - MOSS (merri.org.au)

of programs that model early intervention and prevention specifically that are proving to be successful by addressing homelessness risk.

Family Support

A strong family unit can provide love, safety, and security for all members. Providing support for families, particularly in difficult times can prevent violence and breakdown and prevent family and youth homelessness.

Family violence remains the major cause of homelessness amongst for women with children. Family violence reforms have significantly improved community awareness, streamlined access to support services and early intervention and prevention support for men who use violence. However, there remains a lack of crisis accommodation and long term support for families and children who have experienced violence. Family Violence refuges are unable to meet demand and families are often referred to homelessness entry points to access crisis accommodation. Due to a lack of crisis support, families can be placed in accommodation where they feel unsafe and lack appropriate amenity. Homelessness and Family Violence Support agencies have reported the lack of appropriate crisis and long term housing has resulted in women and children returning to a violent relationship.

> '[The accommodation] was unsafe for children, there was a lack of amenities and no cooking facilities. I shared one single bed with two children … lucky my children were two and three years old. If they were older, it would have been much harder. I did not sleep for two weeks when I was in crisis accommodation.'
> Homeless consumer

> '[The impact of homelessness is] big – I was forced to give up my kids to DHHS and sleep rough and squat in derelict properties. 5 years on I am still homeless.'
> Homeless consumer

Families can be separated due to a lack of safe housing which can have significant long term impacts on children and parents.

Children in homeless have their own experience of homelessness and the trauma associated with it, however there are few support programs who provide direct case management support to children in homeless families. Children often miss a considerable amount of school due to the transience of their living situation, the cost of schooling, access to transport and feelings of shame. Stress, trauma, and poverty can have a significant impact on children's ability to engage in education and reach their potential, which can impact on their future. An example of a program that is providing support directly to children is the Bright Futures program that operates in four regions of Victoria. The Bright Futures program[9] provides case management support for children experiencing homelessness in partnership with parents and caregivers and therapeutic group support for children. Additional funding for responses that address the impact of homelessness on children are required to reduce intergenerational trauma.

> '[Homelessness] affected my 6 year old son who started prep this year, he presented signs of anger, anxiety and depression, severe separation anxiety (as I had the same), constant feeling of unpredictability and instability. [He] started disrespecting females because of his anger about the absence of his maternal figure.'
> Homeless consumer

Family reconciliation and reunification programs can provide support, particularly for young people to prevent family breakdown and youth homelessness or reunify families to reduce the length of

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[9] Bright Futures - Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service - MOSS (merri.org.au)

time a young person is homeless (for example the Reconnect program[10] and Family Reconciliation Mediation Program[11]).

Support for people leaving custody

Leaving prison is a key transition that can result in homelessness. While there are a number of early intervention and prevention programs that support people leaving custodial care to prevent them from entering homelessness on their release, they are under resourced and unable to meet the demand for support. Access to appropriate long term

> 'I have been homeless for 3 years and I seek imprisonment as a form of housing.'
> *Homeless consumer*

accommodation is also a major issue. For a limited few, support services can provide access to accommodation directly through either private rental head lease (Link Justice Housing Program[12]) or a limited number of transitional housing properties (VACRO[13], Flat Out[14], Next Steps program[15]). However, these services cannot keep pace with the demand. Many people leaving custody without support from their own network must access private crisis accommodation if they seek to avoid rough sleeping. Crisis accommodation that can often be overcrowded, expensive and expose them to violence, drug use and criminal behaviour which can increase the risk of homelessness or reoffending. For some people, reoffending is seen as a viable housing option. There needs to be a specific funding boost for services providing specialist accommodation and support programs for people exiting prison.

Young people leaving care

Leaving out of home care is a critical transition time for young people and if appropriate support and housing is not put in place it can lead to homelessness. Ther are a range of programs that can support young people to establish themselves independently beyond out of home care (Better Futures[16], Home Stretch[17]). Programs can support extended kinship or foster care stays, transition allowances that support independent housing establishment, housing referral and time limited case management support. The majority of these programs do not come with their own housing allocation and depend on accessing immediate housing through homelessness entry points and longer term housing through social and community housing or private rental and therefore they are limited. COMPASS[18] is an example of a program that provides direct access to housing, more programs like this need to be funded.

Education and training pathways

Maintaining engagement in education is often severely compromised for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There are specific programs that support young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to engage in education, training and employment, including Youth

> 'How can I get a job if I cannot go to school and cannot have a safe home.'
> *Homeless consumer*

Education First Foyers. Youth Foyers integrate learning and accommodation that develop the skills of young people who are at risk of homelessness aged 16-24 years[19], providing access to education, training and employment and other supports. These early intervention and prevention programs are a good

[10] Reconnect Program 2021–2024 | vic.gov.au (www.vic.gov au)
[11] FRMP I Family Reconciliation Mediation Program Melbourne | Melbourne City Mission (mcm.org.au)
[12] Supported housing helping to shape new self-identity - Jesuit Social Services (jss.org.au)
[13] How we help - returning to community | Vacro
[14] Flat Out Inc.
[15] Next Steps - Jesuit Social Services (jss.org.au)
[16] Leaving care I TILA I Better Futures Intake and Access | Melbourne City Mission (mcm.org.au)
[17] Home stretch - DFFH Services
[18] Compass Leaving Care: Support for Care Leavers Victoria
[19] Education First Youth Foyers | Brotherhood of St. Laurence (bsl.org.au)

example of how holistic support and accommodation models can be achieved through partnership across sectors. More of these types of initiatives are required to have a significant impact on youth homelessness to break they cycle. Creating pathways to training and employment are also critical to support adults who are homeless, secure and stable accommodation is required to support engagement in training and sustaining employment.

The role of all service systems in prevention and response to homelessness

To be truly effective, prevention and early intervention must be approached from a comprehensive systems approach and involve partnerships across sectors including education, acute and community health, family support, child protection, criminal justice, mental health and alcohol and other drug support services.

All service systems have an important role to play in identifying when people are at risk of homelessness and supporting people to access the appropriate support as needed. Widespread professional education on homelessness, early intervention support and housing and homelessness support options is required across all sectors to both improve access and enhance opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

Improving connectivity between service systems is required to provide wrap around support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Funding to progress service sector connectivity is required to:

- Enable effective data sharing to prevent people slipping through the gaps between systems
- Establish targeted access agreements prioritising the most vulnerable and reducing barriers to services that will prevent homelessness and assist to resolve homelessness
- Enhanced care coordination to deliver holistic, wrap around support.
- Develop and test innovation in collaborative responses to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

> **Consumer Vignette**
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> *▉ is a ▉ year old Torres Strait Islander trans woman who experienced homelessness several times over her life and had a long term history of incarceration. She was chronically homeless for several years since moving to ▉ from ▉ and was not consistently receiving income support. There were several barriers for ▉ maintaining housing and seeking help from services including her history of substance use issues, mental health issues, eccentric and antisocial behaviour. It was difficult to communicate her needs and she could be misunderstood.*
>
> *Kath was referred to a specialist homelessness support service for older people for support and worked with an Aboriginal Family Violence support service. She was supported to stabilise her income through a Disability Support Pension, accessed long term accommodation and was assisted with a Home Care package (aged care) that provided her with regular in home support to establish daily routines and connections to the community. She has refused referral to mental health and alcohol and other drug support services. The stable support she receives assists in monitoring her wellbeing to ensure early detection of any issues and opportunities to link Kath to further supports as needed. Kath has successfully maintained her housing for ▉ years.*

The implementation of Family Violence reforms and the targeted funding it provided have seen great improvement in the connectivity between family violence services and homelessness services leading to better outcomes for individuals and families experiencing family violence and homelessness. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan offers the same opportunity to improve funding and system connectivity. Better connected systems will result in the earlier identification of the risk of homelessness, earlier intervention, and better access to support.

Culturally appropriate and Community led support for First Nations peoples

The NHN stands with the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (AHHF), which includes 38 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, in calling for a standalone National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan that provides a way home for all First Nations peoples, in urban, regional, and remote communities with a focus on specific vulnerable cohorts including children leaving child protection services, vulnerable families, people entering and exiting prison and Elders. The AHHF believe that given 28% of people experiencing homelessness are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and the unique needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, there needs to be a separate plan under which the solutions are designed and delivered by the First Nations community.

Responding to homelessness

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan needs to address the current limitations in the Homelessness Support System.

Overwhelmed and under resourced homelessness services

There is an unacceptably high number of people who cannot access support from the homelessness service system because the system is under resourced and cannot address demand. This means many people are not getting the help they need which can have devastating impacts on individuals and families including:

- Becoming entrenched in a cycle of repeated homelessness
- Having no alternatives to rough sleeping, unsafe couch surfing or rooming house accommodation with the risk of violence, and challenges accessing basic needs.
- Families being split up due to a lack of housing access and stability
- Women and children returning to violent homes because they cannot get the support and safe accommodation needed

Consumer Vignette

█████ *is a 23 year old woman with a history of family violence, mental health and substance use issues.* ████ *has been experiencing chronic homelessness since leaving state care. She has no family support or accommodation options.* █████ *has found it difficult to engage in youth refuge accommodation and was evicted due to aggression to staff and other residents.* █████ *regularly attends a Homelessness Access point to access emergency accommodation, which she receives only for short periods of time due to a lack of funding and availability of accommodation.* █████ *has refused referrals mental health and alcohol and other drug support as she does not see how she can prioritise this because of her homelessness. She has maintained a relationship with Intake and assessment staff who continue to engage her and offer her support options.*

Every missed opportunity to support an individual or family, also has system consequences including missed opportunities for prevention of homelessness and for prevention of re-entry to homelessness and creates significant costs and pressures on other service systems including acute health, child protection and justice services.

Additional funding is required to increase the capacity of services to support more people. Greater support resources will support earlier intervention, reduced periods of homelessness and lessen the likelihood of cyclical homelessness.

More resources will also reduce stress and prevent worker burnout, a significant issue across the homelessness service system that is impacting on worker attraction and retention. Additional workforce will also allow for better access to training and professional development. Retaining a skilled and stable workforce is critical to maintaining and improving support for people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

Adequate funding for longer and more intensive case management support

The fact that demand exceeds the capacity of services to respond results in a range of demand management strategies being used including limits on support periods and accommodation stays and access to intake appointments.

Current funding for most services places limitations on the intensity and length of support periods, focusing on throughput rather than outcomes, which can significantly impact the effectiveness of the support provided. For many people, particularly those with complex needs, short support periods are insufficient to address their support needs and limit trauma informed responses. The impact of support is also severely compromised by a lack of short term and long term secure housing outcomes.

> *'There is a lot of waiting and people get placed for only one night. It is hard. There have been times where I have been working and still haven't got help. There are times when I have had to sleep on the streets.'*
> Homeless consumer

The limited length of support periods and lack of housing options result in people who are homeless moving in and out of the homelessness service system. For those at risk of homelessness the lack of flexibility in length of support can put people at further risk of homelessness.

The National Housing and Homelessness Strategy needs to commit to funding programs with longer case management support periods.

Publicly funded crisis and short term accommodation

The National Housing and Homelessness Strategy must include a significant investment in publicly funded crisis accommodation to increase access to safe, secure, and cost effective accommodation for people who are homeless.

The lack of access to private rental accommodation and the chronic shortage of appropriate and supported crisis accommodation means that there is a significant shortage of short term and long-term accommodation for people who are homeless. With few other options, the homelessness service system is heavily reliant on private rooming houses and hotels to provide accommodation for homeless individuals and families. This accommodation is often overcrowded, in poor condition and is unsafe, particularly for vulnerable groups including people with mental health issues, women and children, young people, LGBTIQ+ people and people with disabilities. Private crisis accommodation often places further stress on individuals and families and further contributes to their trauma.

> *'There were times when it was not safe to leave the room for hours – even just to go to the toilet because it was so unsafe, I also felt scared to leave the room unoccupied as things had been stolen from the house.'*
> Homeless consumer

The North and West Homelessness Network report 'A Crisis in Crisis' details peoples experience in private substandard rooming house accommodation and highlights that in the current affordable housing crisis some of the worst private accommodation providers continue to flourish in an environment of high demand and low competition. [20] The drivers of the proliferation of substandard

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[20] Northern and Western Homelessness Network (2021) – A Crisis in Crisis – the appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west report.

Rooming House accommodation include a lack of housing affordability, insufficient social housing, and poverty. Melbourne is an extremely difficult city in which to find affordable private rental. What adds further pressure and reduces the pool of affordable rental properties are the unscrupulous private operators who buy up or rent houses at the most affordable end of the market and transform them into Rooming Houses that no one should have to live in. The report makes a clear recommendation for increased investment in safe, affordable, and publicly funded crisis supported accommodation across the North and West metropolitan region.

Local governments need to be held accountable and adequately resourced to regularly audit the conditions of private crisis accommodation to increase the standard and address significant public and environmental health concerns.

Private rooming house and hotel accommodation is not cost effective. The homelessness entry points in the Northern Region report that over $7 million of Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) funds were spent on private rooming house and hotel accommodation in 2022-2023. [21] Specialist Homelessness Service staff noted that complaints were addressed most successfully by approaching the operator directly and stating that no further Housing Establishment Funds (HEF funds) will be spent at a property until complaints are addressed and safety and amenity improved. Using the spending power of HEF is seen by homelessness services as a viable way of forcing action in a broken system where oversight is ineffective or absent. However, the effectiveness of this strategy is severely compromised by a lack of other crisis accommodation options.

Providing funding for an increased number of publicly funded crisis accommodation services will reduce the need to use low quality and unsafe private options, reduce cumulative trauma and increase the effectiveness of support interventions. It will also significantly improve the effectiveness of the Housing Establishment Fund and make this resource go further and support many more individuals and families through a time of crisis.

Reducing the incidence and impact of homelessness
The National Housing and Homelessness Plan must have a long term goal of eliminating homelessness. Where homelessness does occur, it should be brief to reduce the ongoing negative impact and non-recurring, so they never enter a cycle of homelessness. This cannot be a one size fits all approach. This requires funding a range of early intervention responses to respond to homelessness that meet the needs of different vulnerable groups including unaccompanied children and young people, First Nations Australians, LGBTIQ+ people, older people and people with serious mental illness.

Housing First responses
Housing led responses seek to minimise harm by reducing the length of the homelessness experience and providing rapid access to long term housing, and case management support that responds to individual needs and stays with the individual until support is no longer needed. The Housing First model is recognised as the most successful model to end homelessness for people with high support needs who have experienced long term or recurring homelessness. First adopted in New York in the 1990's, it proved to be extremely successful in supporting people to maintain housing and support engagement and has since been adopted throughout Europe, North America, and Australia. Evaluations of Housing First programs consistently report high levels of tenants

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[21] https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/housing-establishment-fund-hef-94113

sustaining their housing (typically ranging from 66% - 90%) which is significantly higher compared to other, more traditional approaches.[22]

There are a number of programs currently operating based on Housing First principles including From Homelessness to a Home (H2H)[23], Homes for families (H4F)[24] and Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI)[25]. These programs have had significant success in not only housing people quickly but also in supporting people to sustain their housing.

More initiatives modelling the Housing First approach are needed to resolve homelessness. This is only possible with an adequate supply of public and community housing. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should include guaranteed pathways for people experiencing chronic homelessness into public housing.

Advance to Zero

There are a number of regions across Australia that have implemented an Advance to Zero response to support the early identification of and coordinated response to people who are sleeping rough. Advance to Zero involves a collective impact approach, developing a collective response to a shared problem. Advance to Zero projects have a target of functional zero homelessness with the ultimate goal to end homelessness. Functional zero is reached when the inflow of new people experiencing homelessness and existing/known people experiencing homelessness is less than the number of people getting permanently housed.

Advance to zero approaches require strong collaboration across a range of service sectors and local government to ensure all people sleeping rough are identified and offered support.

Initiatives like Advance to Zero are an important foundation for ending homelessness and should be funded directly as part of the homelessness service system response.

Public and community housing

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should focus on the developing a pipeline of public and community housing for low income people in Australia as key strategy to ending homelessness in Australia.

Public and community housing provides an important safety net for households who are unlikely to afford housing in the private rental market or purchase their own home. It provides people with homes where they can live with dignity and in comfort, providing long term security and stability to live a fulfilling life.

> *'When you are homeless you never feel safe, who will hit you next or where you are. When you have a government house, you feel safe even if you have no food.'*
> Public Housing resident

Australians limited social housing is tightly targeted and its market share is declining. A significant and ongoing funding commitment needs to be made to increase public and community housing in Australia. The Australian Housing and Urban Research institute Inquiry – Social housing as infrastructure[26] estimated that an additional 727,300 social

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[22] Roggenbuck, C. (2022) Housing First: An evidence review of implementation, effectiveness and outcomes, report prepared by AHURI, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.

[23] From Homelessness to a Home (H2H) program guidelines - DFFH Service Providers

[24] Homes for Families (H4F) Program Guidelines (Word) - DFFH Service Providers

[25] Social-Impact-Bond-Journey-to-Social-Inclusion-Glossy.docx (live.com)

[26] Lawson, J., Pawson, H., Troy, L. van der Nouwelant, R. and Hamilton, C. (2018) Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway, AHURI Final Report 306, Australian Housing and Urban Research institute Limited, Melbourne, http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-inquiries/evidence-based-policy-inquiry-53140

housing dwellings are required to meet demand over the next 20 years, equating to an annual average growth of 5.5% over existing stock. This volume of growth requires an infrastructure investment pathway that supplies and maintains assets over a period of time. Community housing providers need appropriate financial incentives to encourage their involvement in the development and ongoing management of community housing developments. Community housing needs to be financially viable and sustainable to ensure people on statutory incomes have homes.

Public and community housing developments need to be fit for purpose, mindfully designed (informed by tenants and people experiencing homelessness) and close to services and community infrastructure including transport and green space. There needs to be a variety of housing types in a variety of locations so people can live in their chosen community in a property suited to their / their family's needs. New developments need to be supported by community development resources to build inclusive and vibrant communities and quickly address and minimise neighbourhood disruption.

Ongoing case management support should be available to people who need to support to sustain their tenancies, access a broad range of supports to meet their needs and engage in their community. This will actively reduce eviction and housing breakdown and prevent the cycle of homelessness.

Structural change to encourage greater investment in affordable housing, social housing, and community housing

The Victorian Governments Victorian Housing Statement includes a significant growth in public, community and affordable housing but this does not go far enough to meet the current and future housing demand.[27] The Federal Government needs to work in partnership with all States and Territories to commit to bold targets that will secure a public and community housing safety net that will redress the under investment that has been a major driver of homelessness across Australia.

There are several structural changes that would encourage greater invest in public, community and affordable housing. The National Housing and Homelessness plan must work across all levels of Government to introduce:

- Inclusionary zoning for new housing developments (including general residential and aged care independent living), introducing a requirement that 30% of dwellings built provide affordable housing *and* public and community housing with capped rents to improve housing sustainability. Once tested, the inclusionary zoning percentage can increase over time to provide an ongoing contribution until the required number of public and community housing stock is realised.
- Introduce a levy on short stay rental properties across Australia (this has recently been introduced a 7.5% levy in Victoria through the Victorian Housing Strategy[28]) and reinvest in the building and maintenance of social and affordable housing.
- Address the impact of negative gearing on housing affordability and realign negative gearing to support private rental for low income groups.
- Introduce legislation that better preserves the rights of renters and provides for adequate protections around standard of housing, cost, and rental increases.

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[27] www.vic.gov.au/housing-statement
[28] www.vic.gov.au/housing-statement

CASE STUDY

The following case study is an example of the importance of a broad support net to meet the needs of individuals and families and that accessible and the flexible ongoing support required to sustain housing and stop the cycle of homelessness.

Merri Outreach Support Service (MOSS), Hume Program had supported a ▓▓ a ▓ year old woman and her two young daughters ▓▓ years old, and ▓▓ ▓ years old, to obtain long term accommodation in a social housing building. MOSS has been providing onsite support to this social housing building for many years providing information, referral, and advice to tenants, to assist tenants to maintain tenancies, whilst also providing food relief, and pet food to the tenants and community members weekly.

As the family were housed in long term accommodation, MOSS had closed the support period however had continued to engage with the family and step in to provide information and advocacy where necessary.

MOSS had been informed that ▓▓ had passed away and the children were at risk of losing the place they had called home for many years. This was a very difficult and stressful time for the family. MOSS discovered that the children's father, ▓▓ had been residing in the property for some months before ▓▓ death as he was currently experiencing homelessness and required housing assistance. The family were concerned that they would be evicted from the accommodation and forced to re-enter homelessness, as ▓▓ was not part of the existing lease agreement. MOSS had liaised with the local access point and Office of Housing to advocate for the family and obtain further advice and information. MOSS was able to negotiate with the social housing building for the ▓▓ to be nominated as the leaseholder, as he was ▓▓ and ▓▓ primary carer. This provided the family with reassurance that they would not be re-entering homelessness again.

MOSS was advised that ▓▓ was going to inherit a previous debt that was allocated the tenancy from previous rent arrears. MOSS advocated that ▓▓ should not be re-traumatized and required to pay the outstanding rent arrears that were associated with the ▓▓ tenancy and that these fees to be removed. The process of having the debt removed is still in the hands of the social housing provider some months later. MOSS was able to obtain funding through a philanthropic agency to pay for the previous debts accumulated. The assistance of the funding had allowed the family to be free from ongoing financial stress during this difficult time. During the family's tenancy they have required support for material aid and a food relief which have both been provided to the family when required by local food pantries and philanthropic organizations. While this supports their immediate needs, it also allows an opportunity for the family to remain engaged and have regular contact with support workers they know and trust.

As ▓▓ and his children ▓▓ and ▓▓ were experiencing grief and loss following the recent passing of their mother/ ex-partner, they were supported to access appropriate services. MOSS had liaised with local mental health services, and health services to arrange appointments and provide outreach support. MOSS had also identified support needs for ▓▓▓▓ and had liaised with the schools the children attended and referred the children to the Bright Futures Program at MOSS to engage in intensive outreach case management.

As the Hume Program at MOSS is not funded to support families that are housed in long term accommodation ongoing there were boundaries for providing support, however as MOSS was able to support the family onsite engaging in regular contact, this allowed for positive and effective outcomes for the family to be obtained. The family are currently residing in the social housing building, they are linked to appropriate support services, but continue to engage with MOSS, to ensure that any issues regarding their tenancy are managed quickly, therefore allowing them to confidentially maintain their tenancy and have a decreased fear of a further episode of homelessness.

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan provides an important opportunity to progress the structural and operational reform needed to end homelessness. The plan must focus on universal prevention to address the structural causes of homelessness and increase resources for crisis and targeted prevention and early intervention measures. Importantly, the Plan must commit to substantial and ongoing funding to build more public and community housing to alleviate the bottleneck that actively contributes to the cycle of homelessness. The Northern Homelessness Network look forward to working with all levels of Government to implement the plan.

For further information or to clarify any aspects of this submission please contact ██████████████
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