

22 April 2024

Everybody's Home
info@everybodyshome.com.au
2 Stanley Street
Collingwood
Victoria 3066

Dear Commissioners,

Re: Submission to the People's Commission into the Housing Crisis

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. Melbourne City Mission is pleased to submit our National Housing and Homelessness Plan submission for consideration by the Commissioners.

This contribution speaks to following aspects the Commission's terms of reference:

- The experiences of people, especially unaccompanied children and young people, struggling to access affordable and suitable housing;
- The impacts of current policy settings on young people's access to housing, especially social housing; and
- Actions that can be taken by governments to improve equitable access to housing for young people.

We would welcome the opportunity to expand on our recommendations, or further discuss our proposals in this area. Please do not hesitate to be in touch if you would like to discuss the issues raised in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,



Shorna Moore
Head of Policy, Advocacy and Government Relations



Submission:
**National Housing and
Homelessness Plan 2023**

By Shorna Moore and Douschka Dobson

Acknowledgment Of Country



Melbourne City Mission and Melbourne City Mission Housing acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and note that this document was developed on the lands of the Bunurong, Wurundjeri peoples and Woiwurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the culture, dreams, and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are the true custodians of the land upon which we live and work.

Melbourne City Mission and Melbourne City Mission Housing recognise the right to self-determination and provides endorsement of submissions made by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Acknowledgments

This Submission would not have been possible without the generosity and support of several individuals. Most importantly, we would like to thank Danielle Cassar, Imogen Johnstone, Elvis Martin, Cathy Beacham and Raymond Davis whose lived and living experience and collaboration have been integral to shaping and guiding this Submission.

We would also like to acknowledge the children, young people, adults, and families who continue to live with the experience of homelessness every day, and in doing so, respectfully include the memory of those who have lost their lives.

The Submission also draws on the expertise of Melbourne City Mission and Melbourne City Mission Housing staff. Particular thanks to: Vicki Sutton, Lisa Dalla-Zuanna, Kylie Smith, Emma Bruce, Mark Ott, Ainsley Bedggood, Lisa O'Brien, Andrea Hutton, Marita Hagel, Steven Theoclitou, Melanie O'Toole, Renee Page, Janelle Thomson, Oliver Ryan, Luke Berry, Samantha Ware, Waleska Parrino, Sandhya Jadunundun, Joel Douch and Ben Reed.

About MCM and MCM Housing

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) is a community service organisation that provides a range of supports to people who are experiencing different forms of disadvantage across Victoria.

Our vision is to contribute to a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources. We work alongside people and communities to provide long-term, sustainable pathways away from disadvantage.

MCM has more than 80 programs which span multiple service systems, including homelessness, disability, child and family services, early childhood education and care, health (home-based palliative care), mental health, family violence and education and training.

MCM Housing is a newly formed registered Community Housing Provider, addresses the youth housing gap providing young people with affordable and social housing in Victoria.

MCM provides a range of housing and homelessness supports to young people, and adults and families. Specialist Homelessness Services provided by MCM include:

- Frontyard Youth Services – provides a range of integrated supports to young people aged 12 to 24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including support with housing, health, mental health, legal issues, Centrelink, employment and living skills. Frontyard operates the only State-wide specialist access point for young people aged 16-24 seeking to access the Homelessness Services system, including an 18bed CBD-based crisis accommodation service for complex young people experiencing rough sleeping.
- Four Youth Refuge programs across the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne which provide short-term accommodation to over 600 young people each year.

- Youth Foyer Programs that provide intensive case management and fully furnished medium term accommodation to young people for up to 3 years.
- Early intervention homelessness programs including RECONNECT, Detour in metropolitan and regional locations, and the state-wide Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program, supporting over 921 young people each year to remain housed and connected to family, school, and their community.
- Short and long-term support to assist over 848 adults and family households to find and keep long-term housing each year.
- Homelessness to Home program providing 1,845 packages (including housing and both homelessness and allied health support) across metropolitan Melbourne.

MCM Housing:

- Engages in the design, construction, management, and head-leasing of properties, actively working in partnership with governments, developers, philanthropic trusts and private investors to provide housing for Victorian young people.
- Works alongside young people and local communities to design and develop properties with support that disrupts the experience or risk of homelessness.
- Housing and support for young people aged 16 – 24 years of age who are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness.
- Flexible support in the development of skills and confidence for independent living, securing and maintaining housing.
- Access to integrated MCM support services including educational and employment pathways.

MCM also encompasses the Hester Hornbrook Academy, an Independent registered Specialist Assistance School providing senior-secondary education and wrap-around supports to over 430 students across campuses in the Melbourne CBD, Sunshine, South Melbourne and Prahran. The school is focused on reconnecting previously disengaged young people with education, delivering quality education programs in a high support flexible learning environment.

MCM has made the commitment to implement a systems-level, whole of organisation approach to trauma informed healing-oriented care. A [Healing Oriented Framework](#) has been developed by MCM to promote the physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual health and wellbeing; cultural inclusion and ongoing safety of people in contact with MCM. MCM maintains a holistic view of individuals, families, and communities in their ongoing process of healing.

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Executive Summary

Never has the need for a safe, secure and affordable home been so pressing than now. Our individual and collective health is reliant on finding appropriate housing for everyone, and the lack of affordable and social housing has been acutely felt. Having a home is critical for people's mental and physical health, their education and employment opportunities, their ability to care for children and fully participate in society.

Housing in Australia is currently treated as a commodity rather than a human right. People experiencing homelessness are generally treated by society as merely objects of charity and not as individuals entitled to protection and promotion of their universal human rights. The tension between the right to housing and the role of housing as a commodity is reflected in the ongoing affordability crisis that policy has been unable to address.

MCM and MCM Housing welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan (the Plan) and recognise the enormous opportunity it provides to achieve the changes needed to end homelessness and enshrine access to housing as a human right in Australia. The Plan is the ideal catalyst to coordinate planning, evaluation, and action to address homelessness in this country, given its long-term horizon, and a governance process that spans all levels of government.

In developing the Plan, an intersectional perspective is required for both systems and populations. An intersectional lens is important when considering people's needs to access housing and homelessness services. Aboriginal people, people with disability, people from CALD backgrounds and people who identify as LGBTQI+, for example, can have specific needs in relation to their housing and are overrepresented in the homeless population. Unaccompanied children and young people are highly represented among CALD and LGBTQI+ sectors of the population, and among people with disability, as well as forming part of the general population.

It is crucial that the Australian Government takes this opportunity to be transformative and invest – to rebuild and reactivate our social and affordable housing system and improve Australian people's safety, wellbeing and their ability to fully participate in society.

This Submission should be read in conjunction with the [Youth Housing Framework 2023](#) and MCM's submissions to the [Productivity Commission National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review](#) and [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#).

Section 1: The National Housing and Homelessness Plan

Having an ambition to end homelessness

A 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan (**Plan**) provides an enormous opportunity to achieve the changes needed to end homelessness and enshrine access to housing as a universal human right in Australia. The Plan is the ideal catalyst to coordinate planning, evaluation, and action to address homelessness in this country, given its long-term horizon, and a governance process that spans all levels of government.

In an affluent country like Australia, and backed by a proactive Government, it is possible to end homelessness – that is to make homelessness rare, brief, and not repeated. It requires looking beyond the narrow confines of programs and services and instead take a ‘systems level perspective’ that considers all policy, law and programs across all levels of government and industry that have an impact on the level of homelessness.

A structural and operational shift in the governance of homelessness requires the Plan to commit to targets to reduce homelessness by at least 50 per cent over five years and ending homelessness over ten years. In developing these targets, it is vital that the Plan considers all forms of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness including rough sleeping, couch surfing and severe overcrowding. The Plan needs to implement an initial set of concrete policy changes to achieve homelessness reduction targets, which involves establishing a process to monitor and review progress towards the targets and actions plans. These steps must include people with diverse lived experience in the processes of review and decision-making.

The recent federal, state and territory election results have delivered a loud and clear message across the country that the Australian public expect the Government to commit to policies that enable equality, fairness, and compassion. Ambitious reforms are needed as part of this Plan to create a system to eliminate homelessness, moving away from a system that manages homelessness.

Recommendation 1: The Plan needs an ambitious goal to end homelessness which involves setting targets and timelines for reducing homelessness, and ultimately ending homelessness.

Recommendation 2: The Plan needs to implement an initial set of policy changes to achieve homelessness reduction targets including establishing a process to monitor and review progress towards the targets, supported by diversity of lived experience.

A Dedicated Child and Youth Strategy

Children and young people who are homeless have usually fled or have been excluded from their family home as a direct result of family violence, abuse and or neglect.

In 2021-22, 39,300 young people aged 15 to 24 presented alone to homelessness services. Shockingly, a further 3,199 children aged 10-14 presented alone to homelessness services. These children and young people represent more than 1 in 6 of all homelessness clients.¹

In addition to not having a home, unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness lack the guardianship and adult care and support that is critical to their stage of development. They are likely to lack access to money needed for basic nutrition or to compete in the rental market, experiencing severe psychological distress, are at risk of, or will be experiencing violent victimisation, including sexual abuse and have less legal agency to enforce their rights. They will struggle to attend school regularly and get health care. And they are unlikely to know where to turn to for help.

In 2022, only 14 per cent of children under the age of 19 entering Victoria’s state-wide youth homelessness

¹ AIHW SHS Annual Report 2021-22. Table YOUNG.1: Young people presenting alone, by age and sex, 2021-22 plus data cubes

access point, Frontyard Youth Services, were engaged in school and 13 per cent engaged in further training.

This set of issues creates unique challenges for children and young people experiencing homelessness and the services that support them, and necessitates specialist interventions and supports appropriate to their developmental stage and needs. In addition to providing support within the homelessness service system, services responding to children and young people experiencing homelessness also need to be connected to, or able to navigate services outside of homelessness, including schools, health services, youth services, child protection and family services.

A different set of responses is also needed to prevent homelessness for children and young people that mobilises the networks and services where their risk of homelessness is identified, including in schools, or in interactions with police, or in the family support or child protection system. This creates unique opportunities to intervene early to prevent children and young people becoming homeless.

A child and youth specific lens is an essential component of all service systems, including housing and homelessness.

In 2021, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute was commissioned by MCM to investigate the policy framework for addressing youth homelessness in Victoria. This involved an analysis of data and review of current policy frameworks at a state and federal level. ***The Final Report: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria*** found that 'the current policy environment has been ineffective in reducing youth homelessness, support systems are fragmented and there are deficits in present service delivery'² and recommended the need for development of a youth-specific homelessness strategy in Victoria.

In Australia, there is currently no overarching strategy to address youth homelessness and coordinate support, housing and interventions for children and young people who are experiencing or at risk of homeless. General state-wide homelessness and housing policies, not specific to the needs of unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness, are what presently provides strategic guidance to address youth homelessness. Despite these policies and strategies mentioning youth homelessness, they are not tuned to the specific needs of children and young people.

The youth homelessness system operates differently and to some extent separately from the rest of the homelessness system and requires a strategic policy framework to ensure coordination of its particular components and to ensure consistent, equitable outcomes for children and young people experiencing homelessness.

To effectively meet the needs of unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness, the Plan must include a specialist strategy to end child and youth homelessness that maps both the reforms needed for prevention of child and youth homelessness and the services and youth housing models needed for best practice responses to children and young people without homes. A strategy needs to embrace all children and young people regardless of how they might self-identify, by applying an intersectional lens across populations and systems.

In addition, all State and Territory Governments should be required to develop and implement stand-alone child and youth homelessness action plans as part of their obligations under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. There also needs to be specific recognition of 'Unaccompanied Children and Young people' in the Plan and as a priority in the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

However, a strategy in of itself is not going to end child and youth homelessness. Sustained and meaningful investment in dedicated housing for young people is an essential part of addressing youth homelessness and is discussed in section four of this Submission.

² Alves, T. and Roggenbuck, C. (2021) Final Report: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria, prepared by AHURI, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, p1

Recommendation 3: To effectively respond to the needs of unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness:

- a. the Plan needs to include a dedicated Action Plan to end child and youth homelessness.
- b. all State and Territory Governments are required to develop and implement stand-alone Child and Youth Homelessness Actions Plans as part of their mutual obligations under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
- c. unaccompanied children and young people are explicitly recognised in the Plan and as a Priority Group under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

Housing as a human right

Acknowledging that homelessness is about human rights is important for how people who are homeless are viewed and treated by the Australian community and Government. People who are homeless are not merely objects of charity, seeking help and compassion. Like all Australians, they are individuals entitled to protection and promotion of their basic human rights.³

There are several International Treaties, to which Australia is a signatory, that enshrine the right to housing including in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Whilst housing is enshrined as a universal right internationally, Australia's domestic laws do not currently recognise the right to housing. Consequently, housing is currently treated as a commodity rather than a human right. The tension between the critical need for housing and the role of housing as a commodity is reflected in the ongoing affordability crisis that policy has been unable to address.

The Plan must recognise homelessness as a human rights issue and ensure the right to housing is enshrined in domestic law, including future and existing human rights legislation and charters.

Recommendation 4: To strengthen the universal human rights of Australians, the Plan needs to recognise homelessness as a human rights issue and ensure the right to housing is enshrined in domestic law, including future and existing human rights legislation and charters.

³ Australian Human Rights Commission, Discussion paper: Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue (2008)

Section 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

Preventing people from becoming homeless

The most effective and important change that can be made is to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place – stopping homelessness before it starts. Prevention of homelessness can occur at different points in the system. This Plan must recognise structural inequalities and commit to systemic reforms beyond homelessness service delivery and recognise the important role that mainstream and universal services play in preventing homelessness.

In Australia, universal prevention generally relates to policy settings outside of homelessness services and therefore it is critical to acknowledge the drivers of homelessness and its policy underpinnings. Structural issues such as the availability of affordable housing, the adequacy of income support payments and social support systems and gender inequality, must be addressed in this Plan.

An effective system of targeted prevention includes interventions that sit outside of the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) system and includes programs delivered by other human services systems, such as youth services or family violence programs. Targeted prevention will also include programs delivered by SHS.

Creating a system that aims to end homelessness requires placing far more emphasis and investment into homelessness prevention, so that homelessness policy shifts from the current reactionary and crisis orientation to a system that makes homelessness rare, brief and non-reoccurring⁴.

The responsibility for preventing homelessness needs to be shared across government at local, state, and federal levels and include:

- Building more social and affordable housing and strengthening tenancy protections and supports.

Increasing the adequacy and security of income support payments and low wages, especially for children, young people and women.

- Taking action to reduce gendered violence and to provide families with the support they need to thrive will reduce family violence and child abuse and neglect.
- Taking action to reduce racism and discrimination will improve employment, housing and health outcomes for marginalised communities that result in homelessness

Preventing child and youth homelessness

Most children and young people become homeless because of conflict, violence or physical or sexual abuse in the family home, or because their family of origin are unable to provide a home for them due to poverty, mental or physical ill-health, criminal justice involvement, or death. Living in overcrowded homes also exacerbates tensions that lead to children and young people leaving home.

Governments can prevent child and youth homelessness by providing:

- adequate income support, especially Youth Allowance, and availability of social housing so families have appropriate and affordable homes;

⁴ Canadian Homeless Hub, The Canadian Framework for Homelessness Prevention, available at <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention/framework-preventing-homelessness>

- universal education, health, mental health, and disability services that support children, young people, and families to thrive; and
- interventions to prevent, and effectively respond to child abuse and domestic and family violence.

Increasing the rates of income support payments

To reduce poverty and inequality in Australia, there is an immediate need to lift the Job Seeker and Youth Allowance rates. The recommendations from the 2023-24 Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Report⁵ were clear in the urgency to increase these rates as the number one priority, citing the current inadequacy in relation to entrenched poverty and risk of homelessness.

Analysis by Homelessness Australia in early 2023, showed while overall youth incomes support payments in Victoria increased 10 to 12 per cent in two years, rents surged 24 per cent. A young person who paid 63 per cent of their Youth Allowance income two years prior to share a two-bedroom unit will now pay 73 per cent of their income. Furthermore, Anglicare’s 2023 Rental Affordability Snapshot⁶ shows that any person on Job Seeker or Youth Allowance looking for a share house, could not afford any of the available rentals in several states.

The analysis shows that after paying rent a young person receiving a Youth Allowance payment will have \$13 a day to cover food, transport, medicines, utilities, and other costs across their essential life domains. The expectation is unrealistic and comes with the potential for increased economic strain across other systems of care such as homelessness, mental health, and family violence.

Too often landlords will not rent to young people on such a low income, trapping them in homelessness.

As the largest youth homelessness service in Victoria, MCM is seeing children and young people impacted every day, becoming trapped in homelessness. This can mean returning to a violent residence, the instability of couch surfing or the risk associated with residing in adult rooming and boarding houses.

Continuing to increase the working age income support payments in line with the Consumer Price Index does not address the inadequacy, it merely means payments don’t become even more inadequate.

A substantial increase to Job Seeker, Youth Allowance, and related income support payments to at least \$76 per day and increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance (**CRA**) by 50 per cent, is an essential step to reduce the numbers of Australians being forced into homelessness by rising rents and the cost of living.

Recommendation 5: To reduce Australians being forced into homelessness by rising rents and the cost of living, Job Seeker, Youth Allowance, and related income support payments need to be increased to at least \$76 per day and CRA by 50 per cent.

Intervene early to avoid homelessness for children and young people at risk

“I went to hospital when my stepdad broke my nose when I was 12 but no one listened to me, they read about my ADHD and listened to my stepdad say I was a hyper-kid and I jumped off the couch. Then no one listened to me at the special school they sent me to, and I just ended up getting kicked out”.

“I was out walking the streets some nights from the age of 12 and sometimes I would sleep on a park bench – there were no posters or anyone to tell me I could get help, so I just went home

⁵ Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Report 2023-2024 (April 2023), available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/groups-councils-and-committees/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee>

⁶ Anglicare Australia, 2023: Rental Affordability Snapshot, available at: <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2023-rental-affordability-snapshot/>

until I finally got kicked out for good when I was 16”.

“If I had family violence support before I had to leave my home, had follow-up and parenting support that included my experience of homelessness and didn’t discriminate – it would have improved my situation before I had to move”.

“If I had received support for family violence and homelessness at the hospital when I attended asking for support, I would not have then experienced homelessness with child protection becoming involved – I had to find services myself anyway”.

- Voices of lived and living experience, MCM service users.

When children and young people become homeless, it is often because of family conflict, violence or abuse experienced at home. As such, child and youth homelessness is not solely a housing issue for services to address but an outcome that could be prevented by focusing on early intervention.

Each Australian State and Territory have child protection services that are responsible for responding to children at risk of harm, however these services are only for children whose abuse or neglect is being investigated or legally evidenced and successfully prosecuted. In practice, child protection services tend to focus investigative effort on the youngest children at risk, and children over twelve commonly fall through the gaps. The nature of child abuse may also delay child protection involvement until (or if) children develop skills to self-report.

The reality is that many children leave a home where they are unsafe but do not meet the practiced (as opposed to legislative) threshold for child protection involvement. These children usually couch surf with extended family and friends, acquaintances and strangers, or access SHS unaccompanied. They may also sleep rough.

LGBTIQ children and young people are over-represented among children and young people who leave homes in which they feel unsafe. Children may also flee unsafe situations in the out-of-home care system.

Distress being experienced by children and young people in the early stages of a pathway into homelessness is often apparent to teachers and other people in their community, but there are very limited supports available to intervene. Without help, their likelihood of becoming homeless, and exposure to cumulative harm, increases. They may be unable to access food, healthcare, or education, experience physical or sexual victimisation, and be introduced to unsafe environments, where drug use and criminal activity is common.

Early intervention approaches

Despite evidence to suggest early intervention can positively impact child and youth homelessness, the current approach to early intervention in Australia is ad hoc and underfunded⁷. The early intervention service system can be characterised as small, fragmented, variable (e.g., offering a range of programs grounded in varying degrees of evidence), and underfunded relative to acute services.⁸

A successful early intervention system delivers the right services (i.e., evidence-informed, and effective services to address need) at the right time (i.e., in response to a problem as it first emerges) to the right people (i.e., those with the most need who will benefit most) in the right way (i.e., tailored to people’s needs, preferences and values).⁹

Available evidence suggests building on associated protective factors can help prevent child and youth homelessness and its recurrence. This includes helping children and young people reconnect with their families, connect to community and education and with youth-specific and appropriate housing.

In 2008 the White Paper titled *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness* set out a strategic agenda to reduce homelessness in Australia by 2020. A key strategy in this paper focused on

⁷ Rose, V., Mildon, R. & Hateley-Browne, J. (2022). What early intervention looks like across the service system. Paper prepared for the Victorian Department of Treasury & Finance. Centre for Evidence and Implementation

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

early intervention.¹⁰

Despite this commitment from the Australian Government, the system remains crisis focused and the current response to child and youth homelessness is failing children and young people. The current crisis focused approach is missing critical opportunities to intervene early and prevent additional harm and trauma to children and young people.

Reunification with family has long been identified as a key component of early intervention, however with the development of the person-centred approach to service delivery and the focus on crisis support, the family is often seen as part of the cause of homelessness and not a critical part of the immediate solution. In developing new or scaling existing early intervention programs such as the federally funded RECONNECT program, there is a need to reconsider the role of building and strengthening relationships between young people, their families (as they define them), and other meaningful adults in their lives (where safe to do so). This approach moves away from framing the family as the problem, which children and young people must be protected from, and instead focuses on healing, family reunification and building family resilience to deal with conflict and the impacts of family breakdown.

While resourcing is still needed in crisis and recovery, investment in early intervention approaches that involve stable housing and other supports (e.g., family counselling or mediation) will yield significant benefits across the system and reduce higher costs in other areas of justice and health. A key principle of seeking to divert young people from experiencing homelessness is to ensure they are encouraged to engage with services and that the branding of services is not stigmatising. This might involve integrating homelessness services into normative activities or institutions such as schools, health services, or other youth services.¹¹

- **Reconnect** is a longstanding federally funded early intervention program that seeks to improve a young person's relationships with family and involves counselling, group work, mediation, and practical support to the whole family. Evaluations of this program have found it to be effective in improving the capacity of young people and their families to manage conflict, improving communication and attitudes to school, and may have assisted in reducing youth homelessness at some points.¹²

Reconnect Program Review - Insights

As a leading Reconnect provider, over the past 10 years, MCM welcomes the Department of Social Services upcoming review of the Reconnect Program to reconsider youth homelessness issues and assess the scope and suitability of the program. As part of the review, consideration needs to be given to:

- Increased staffing and resourcing to meet need and increase capacity to respond sooner to prevent family breakdown and risk of homelessness
- Expand the age of eligibility from 10 to 21 years of age
- Extend capacity of early intervention response by increasing support periods from 3 months to minimum 6 months of support per family/young person. Effective early intervention requires time to build a strong and trusting relationships with the young person and family. Particularly with families who have had negative interactions with government services in the past or families who have negative preconceptions of community services.
- Revisit current allocation of LGAs based on areas of need and where current services are located

¹⁰ Australian Government. (2008). White Paper. The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness. <https://apo.org.au/node/2882>

¹¹ Roggenbuck, C. and Davison, J. (2021) Positioning Paper: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria, prepared by AHURI, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne

¹² MacKenzie, D. and Chamberlain, C. (2008) Young people homelessness in Australia 2006, Commonwealth of Australia and Counting the Homeless 2006 project, Hawthorn, Victoria

- **Detour** is a state funded early intervention program delivered by MCM in the south-eastern and western suburbs of Melbourne and Shepparton. The Detour program began as a pilot program in August 2012, and supports young people to avoid homelessness or becoming entrenched in homelessness through connecting with affordable and sustainable housing, linking to employment and education or stabilising their situation in the family home (see In Focus below).
- **Community of Services and Schools (COSS) model** is place based and seeks to focus efforts at schools, where young people's community and peers are often located. The model emphasises 'collective impact', in which support is coordinated across a range of welfare providers in a locality. The COSS in Geelong is the most celebrated Victorian example, but similar arrangements have been implemented in other states and overseas¹³. Evaluations of the Geelong model have shown significant reductions in youth homelessness in the local area over several years. Aspects of the model include a population screening tool and data intensive approaches to risk identification, a single entry-point to support, and local community leadership and formalised practices through community development processes.¹⁴

In Focus: Detour Program

The Detour program is a Victorian funded early intervention program that is delivered by MCM in the western and southeastern suburbs of Melbourne and Shepparton. The program aims to permanently divert vulnerable young people away from the homelessness system. The objectives of the program are:

- To implement an approach that helps young people develop the skills and resources they need to achieve their potential.
- To involve young people in creating an integrated plan that leads to successful independence.
To connect young people to their families, community and the right support at the right time.

Detour accepts referrals from universal services, family or young person (self-referral) and offers a flexible approach for young people and their families using case management combined with coaching to support young people to develop living skills, communication skills and independence with support periods varying from 3 months to 9 months and the option to extend if they need. Detour also follows up with the young person post support to check in on their progress and whether they need further support.

Detour has formed a long-standing partnership with Kids Under Cover (KUC) and has access to five studios per year which can be placed on a property. The studios provide the young person with a degree of independent living while maintaining appropriate family connections.¹⁵

Detour also partners with schools and services to facilitate early detection and engagement of young people at risk of homelessness. Youth Coaches are available to provide secondary consultations and receive referrals. Partners include secondary schools, youth employment services, headspace, local youth family services.

Professionally trained Detour Coaches focus on the young person's potential. Detour Coaches receive Certificate IV, accredited training via a tailored 12-month coaching program. This adds comprehensive, strengths focused skill set to traditional youth, case and social work skills and expertise. Detour coaches are trained in Family Mediation skills. This supports their ability to work with a young person and family members or house mates, and to facilitate improved communication and conflict to resolve issues.

¹³ MacKenzie, D., Hand, T and Dean, A. (2020). Early intervention strategies to prevent youth homelessness

¹⁴ Roggenbuck, C. and Davison, J. (2021) Positioning Paper: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria, prepared by AHURI, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne

¹⁵ Available at <https://www.kuc.org.au/library/a-new-place-to-call-home/>

Early intervention approaches prevent entrenched homelessness and the associated negative impacts on the child or young person. Governments can intervene to provide the care needed by children and young people who are at risk of homelessness, or who are currently homeless through investment in:

- relationship-based support and care coordination services
- crisis residential care and family reunification services
- family mediation and reconciliation support
- universal screening of school students to identify children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness leading to timely referral to early intervention programs (e.g. Reconnect)
- active support for children and young people to access education and engage in learning
- authorisation for targeted services, such as adolescent health, mental health and homelessness services, to work with children unaccompanied by a parent or guardian
- specialist child and youth services to fill gaps in the care needed for the most vulnerable children, including adolescent trauma care, residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation and mental health services, child and youth mental health outreach, and rehabilitation programs for children and young people who sexually offend or use violence
- timely escalation and transfer of children from homelessness services to child protection
- non-statutory residential care for children unable to return home and not accepted into OOHC.

Existing research also demonstrates that more investment in early intervention approaches achieves significant benefits across the system and can lead to future cost reductions in other service systems, for example the criminal justice system or health system.¹⁶

Early intervention and preventative approaches are an essential component of the Plan and must be a key priority and sufficiently resourced under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. This can be achieved through the establishment of a new Prevention and Early Intervention Fund.

Recommendation 6: To divert children and young people from experiencing homelessness, the Australian Government needs to:

- a. elevate early intervention and preventative approaches as a key priority in the Plan and new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and ensure services are sufficiently resourced to meet the increasing demand of children and young people experiencing homelessness in Australia.
- b. establish a Prevention and Early intervention Fund under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and invest in the development of new early intervention responses as well as scale existing programs that have proven success in providing assistance for children and young people at risk of homelessness. This includes a Victorian state-wide expansion of the Detour Program and Community of Services and Schools model.
- c. ensure timely identification, escalation and or referrals to early intervention programs by developing a whole of government Early Intervention Policy Framework.

¹⁶ Alves, T. and Roggenbuck, C. (2021) Final Report: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria, prepared by AHURI, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, p11

Section 3: Responding to Homelessness - By Making It Brief and Non-Recurring

A Responsive Homelessness System

The Productivity Commission's 2022 report on the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement In Need of Repair substantiated that the causes of homelessness are predominantly 'structural' in nature and described Australia's growing levels of homelessness as clear and concerning evidence of 'national policy failure'.

A successful homelessness service system is premised on people transitioning out of homelessness into social or private housing. Without appropriate exit pathways, or transition supports there is a systemic bottleneck that locks people and resources into reactionary short-term crisis responses.

As noted above in this Submission, evidence from overseas shows a combination of early intervention, prevention and rapid re-housing responses have shown to move people quickly from experiencing homelessness into needs and age-appropriate long-term housing options¹⁷. It is crucial for people to exit homelessness as quickly as possible because of the impacts on health and wellbeing and economic exclusion the longer people live without a secure home.

Youth homelessness has significant consequences for the long-term trajectory of the lives of young people. Australian evidence has shown that the longer young people stay in homelessness, the higher the risk they will continue to experience it over the course of their life.¹⁸

It has been well evidenced that the current homelessness system is fragmented, outdated in critical transition points, diverse in its funding sources across all tiers of government, organisations, and other philanthropic associations. Ending homelessness in Australia will require a system that is sufficiently funded to deliver a coordinated response that disrupts pathways into homelessness, responds appropriately to need and is place-based and capable of rapid rehousing.

Redesigning the homelessness system: person-centred, place and support paced

The current SHS system including crisis accommodation and support is not meeting the unmet demand, particularly for unaccompanied children and young people and those living in regional or remote areas, or the unmet support needs of complexity exacerbated by extended periods of homelessness and immediate crisis. Acute housing need in the current SHS system means funded shelter, or refuge stays of 6 to 8 weeks, an over-reliance on purchased crisis accommodation and cyclical short-stays with only a minority exiting crisis accommodation into long-term housing or with ongoing support.

On average there are two youth refuge bed vacancies available in metropolitan Melbourne per day. This compares with 3,200 unaccompanied young people in Victoria attending a SHS per day.¹⁹

Currently, there are 34 unaccompanied children and young people on MCM's 'priority' wait list for a refuge bed - with an average of two months wait for a suitable referral to a vacancy.

A crisis response is critical for people experiencing homelessness with high support needs and appropriate for the most vulnerable populations including First Nations people, rough-sleepers, young people presenting alone, those displaced due to violence and children and young people leaving care or institutional settings.

¹⁷ [Ending Homelessness Together](#) Annual Report to the Parliament of Scotland 2022

¹⁸ Johnson, G., Scutella, R., Tseng, Y. and Wood, G. (2015) Entries and exits from homelessness: a dynamic analysis of the relationship between structural conditions and individual characteristics, AHURI Final Report

¹⁹ Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22, On any given day infographics - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au), available at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/on-any-given-day-infographics>

Funded programs of 6 to 8 week shelter and support are no longer working. In addition to the lack of viable housing options, there is also waitlisting for access to basic needs. Periods of waiting to access Centrelink²⁰, mental health support and disability support, an interview with a Jobs Services Provider all exceed the 6 to 8 week duration of support. Not meeting the support gaps contributes to recurring homelessness and can increase the acuity of needs.

MCM operates five youth refuges in metropolitan Melbourne which equates to almost 30 per cent of all refuge beds in Victoria. The overall average length of stay in a youth refuge was 3.5 months with 40 per cent of young people residing there up to 12 months and over.

MCM operates the State-wide Youth Homelessness Access Point located in Melbourne. Data over a five-year period between 2017 to 2021, found that 63.5 per cent of young people in Victoria who entered the state's youth homelessness system returned at least twice. More than 250 young people re-presented more than four times and over 145 re-presented more than 5 times.

"There was a whiteboard that existed in one of the refuges that actually has a tally where young people keep count how many times they come through the refuge."

"I had to move 5 times in 5 months and I'm no better off, every time I got comfortable with a place or a worker I had to move-on. I feel like giving-up."

- Voices of lived and living experience, MCM service users.

Funded models of integrated care that provide a secure address with adequate timeframes and a duration of support that responds to the needs of an individual creates positive outcomes and ends the experience of homelessness quickly. Such models can hold place and support pace for the duration needed. Reoccurring, cyclic experiences of homelessness are often represented in data that shows funded models that require *outputs* rather than *outcomes*.

In Focus: Integrated Service Model: Frontyard Youth Services

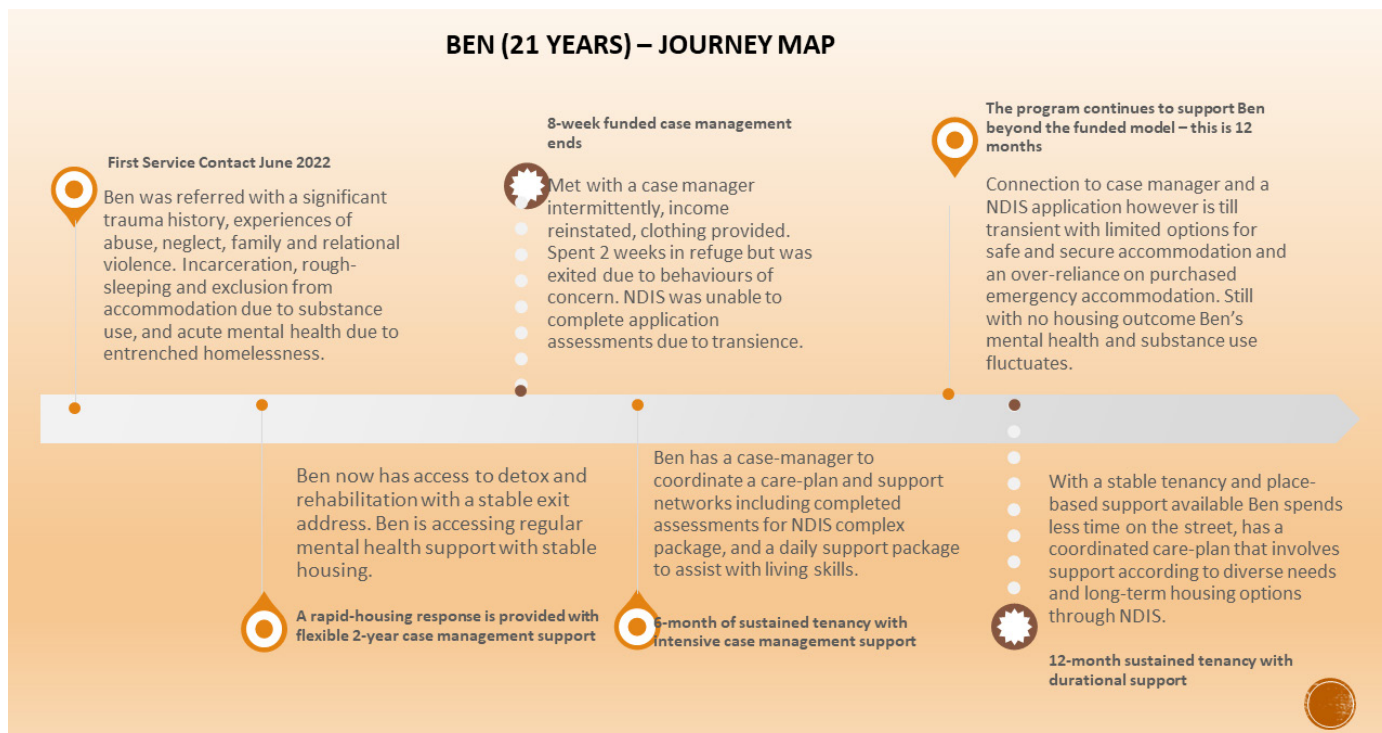
MCM's Frontyard integrated service provides a range of multidisciplinary programs to meet the holistic needs of young people aged between 12 and 25 years who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Integration of services at FYS, including the newly built accommodation were in response to young people cycling through short periods of refuge and support with very little being done to better their situation, or provide pathways out of homelessness.

- Frontyard aims to support young people to meet their physical, emotional, and social needs and to develop pathways out of homelessness. Many of the services at Frontyard work with young people across greater Melbourne and throughout Victoria.
- Frontyard's integrated model includes a suite of primary and allied health, specialist housing, assertive outreach, therapeutic supports, early intervention & prevention services, legal, education and employment.
- Frontyard's 18 bed crisis accommodation, Circuit Breaker, operates 24/7 and provides higher intensity supports, including enhanced mental health, drug and alcohol, and therapeutic supports, to respond and creatively engage those young people with the most complex barriers to sustainable housing options.

²⁰ To access Youth Allowance's Unreasonable to Live at Home (the typical allowance for young people experiencing homelessness), it can take up to 6 months dependent on the circumstances and access to trusted adults and decision makers plus access to identification.

In the current system, it is common for the SHS crisis support and accommodation providers to work outside of the funded output delivery models to achieve outcomes for those whose needs are complex. The case-study mapping below typifies an MCM SHS case management program response, and journey for a young person experiencing homelessness with complex needs.



The upper trajectory was the actual case management response and journey for Ben, which required resourcing outside of the government funded modelling to provide much needed support to Ben. The lower trajectory provides a projection for the same needs and responses with a rapid-housing response with durational case management support and coordination.

People sleeping rough comprise around 8 percent of people experiencing homelessness on any given night. Despite being a small proportion of people who are homeless, this is a highly vulnerable group who require tailored responses.

Case Study: MCM Rough Sleeper Initiative

MCM's Rough Sleeper Program was developed in partnership with local government and health services to support rough sleepers in Melbourne's Western Suburbs. Many are single, older males who due to lack of crisis accommodation options and prioritisation will not receive a housing response from access points.

Sam's Story

The MCM Rough Sleeper Program was contacted by a local access point with a request for material aid for a mobile phone for a male, Sam (single male) aged 34 currently in a hospital funded emergency hotel room for 1 night. Sam would return to rough sleeping as he was not prioritised for a housing response due to his lone status. The program requested a referral from the access point believing Sam may need more intensive support.

Sam had been in hospital for the previous two months after sustaining serious injuries from being assaulted while sleeping rough. Sam also had multiple medical conditions including the effects of alcohol dependency causing risk of serious harm. He had been discharged despite presenting with challenging health conditions.

Prior to hospitalisation, Sam had been couch-surfing, sleeping rough and had expressed interest in support to access the housing register, and alcohol dependency treatment.

Sam is culturally and linguistically diverse with English as a second language, had no formal or informal support networks and no bank account or phone.

MCM 6-week support outcome: Sam received support to receive income, a bank account and a phone was funded in purchased emergency accommodation (outside of the program's funding capacity), placed on the Victorian Housing Register, and was relocated to a boarding house.

Evidence shows that an effective crisis system should be funded and designed to provide:

- **Flexible length of accommodation** that is sensitive to individual circumstances yet provides some level of certainty that people will not be exited back into homelessness.
- **Place-based, whole-system approaches** to meet complex needs universally with support that is paced for the duration of need.
- **Support staff that can respond with care and experience** culturally, as peer workers, and with lived experience and shared identities.
- **Trauma informed and healing oriented with a multi-disciplined response** to diverse needs.
- **Physical and culturally safe environments.**
- **Provides options for living environments** such as, self-contained accommodation for families
- **Ongoing and appropriate support** after exiting crisis accommodation into long-term accommodation to promote tenancy sustainment.²¹

Recommendation 7: To ensure homelessness is brief and non-recurring, there needs to be an increase in funding for SHS to the level needed to create a well-functioning system. This includes immediately increasing funding by \$450 million annually to address current unmet need and projected growth in demand and removing restrictions that prevent flexible, person-centred responses.

Recommendation 8: To support a well-functioning homelessness system, the Plan needs to support a national homelessness sector and workforce capability program to drive adoption of evidence-based and best practice program approaches and practice models.

Addressing unmet need in regional and remote areas

Regional rates of homelessness have increased more than double the rate of capital cities (13 per cent compared with 6 per cent) in the four years between 2017-18 to 2021-22.²²

Displacement from geographical areas of belonging to receive a homelessness support and/or housing response is a prolific feature for people in regional and rural areas. Having to leave a place of home, country, family, and community holds particular risk For First Nation's people still impacted by harm

21 Batterham, D., Tually, S., Coram, V., McKinley, K., Kolar, V., McNelis, S. and Goodwin-Smith, I. (2023) Crisis accommodation in Australia: now and for the future, AHURI Final Report No. 407, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/407>

22 Launch Housing, [Homelessness Monitor 2022](#)

enacted through colonial practices of displacement.

The flow from regional areas across the state including border towns from those seeking homelessness support services is challenging. Young people who seek support at the access point have often left their home and communities reluctantly. Being in a busy urban environment can also create exposure to unfamiliar risks increased by lack of resources and waiting times for a response.

Case Study: Abby's Story

"I was terrified, I was in the middle of the city, I didn't know Melbourne well, and didn't have anyone there I knew - I was really unsure I was going to make it at times."

Abby is a proud Kamilaroi woman. Abby, at the time was 20 years-of-age and lived in a small regional town of Victoria approximately 200km from Melbourne. Abby experienced intimate partner violence marked with significant physical, emotional, financial, racial abuse and coercive control. To ensure her immediate safety, Abby needed to acquire secure housing and support to begin a healing journey.

It was important to Abby to receive culturally appropriate support for some understanding of her experience of intimate partner violence and its cultural connection to intergenerational trauma. Abby couch surfed for a while, received some emergency relief support and informal support from community and family, however this time was unstable, unpredictable, unsafe and did not always meet Abby's basic needs.

Abby made the decision to leave her hometown to travel to Melbourne, where she had no informal support network, to receive the service support she needed. Abby found culturally specific mental health support through a youth mental health service, which led to connection with the only youth specific homelessness access point, Frontyard.

Frontyard was able to provide immediate homelessness case management, and shortly after crisis accommodation at an MCM refuge for a 6-month period. Due to the Frontyard model, Abby was able to receive integrated health, housing, and legal support.

Abby would have preferred not to have left her hometown, the relocation occurred solely because the housing and support services were not available regionally. Relocating exacerbated Abby's distress and isolation.

Increased funding into rural, regional, and remote areas ensures an even playing field for the delivery of effective support services across different jurisdictions removing the 'post-code lottery' for many people who are isolated geographically and in need of support and security.

Recommendation 9: To address postcode injustice for people living in regional areas, a pipeline of affordable housing and support needs to be developed to match geographical need alongside mechanisms to identify effective regional policy responses and delivery challenges.

Responding to the needs of dependent children in the youth homelessness system

The babies, toddlers, and children of young people in the homelessness system have been classified as extensions of their parents and neglected by government policy and a dedicated response. These dependent children are often the silent consumer in the youth homelessness system.

Between 2017 and 2021, MCM's youth homelessness refuges had at least 410 babies and children (under five years of age) presenting with parents under the age of 24. Further data from MCM's Young Women's Programs showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, the number of young women accessing the organisation's homelessness services, including mothers aged 16 to 24 with babies and children, increased by 145 per cent.

Supports are available to young parents in SHS funded crisis accommodation, however limited staffing

models and a lack of specialist expertise and funding for supports that meet the unique developmental needs of the child, result in an absence of attention. For example, there is no requirement for individual care-plans for those children either born or supported in the youth homelessness system, they are treated as extensions of their parent(s).

In Focus: MCM's Child Wellbeing Program

MCM's Intensive Children's and Family Services (ICFS) recognised the gap in policy that requires dependent children of young people in homelessness services to be supported individually, and not as an extension of their young parents. The critical developmental milestones for pregnancy, infancy and childhood are very different to that of a young person who is a parent.

The youth homelessness system was not resourced with child practitioners and services that ensure individual care-planning, assessment and specialised support that met the physical, mental, and developmental milestones of the children

An internal partnership was created with MCM youth family refuges and MCM Intensive Children's and Family Services. The partnership evolved into an initiative and subsequent pilot program that recognised dependent children experiencing homelessness in their own right.

The Child Wellbeing Program has a primacy to support crucial developmental needs and early childhood milestones. Providing a specialist response to the specificity of needs that are recognised as separate to the parent(s). Milestones that meet nutritional, emotional and physical goals for maturation.

Framework: A wellbeing framework was developed that required individual care-plans for pregnancies and all dependent children to be developed by child practitioners that assessed, identified, and provided support to ensure crucial developmental goals were met.

Provision: Child practitioners were embedded across MCM youth refuges and would work alongside homelessness support workers to create plans for pregnancies and all dependent children in the MCM youth refuges.

Impact: From June 2022 to July 2023 a total of 596 services and supports associated with the individual care-plans of pregnant parents, infants, toddlers, and children were delivered across three MCM youth refuges. An evidence base was created to evaluate the developmental milestones achieved from specialist child practitioner led plans and service response to meet those milestones, including diversion from the Child Protection system. The strengthening of familial bonds while creating parallel care-plans to meet the individual needs of both children and young parents.

Recommendation 10: To support the developmental, emotional and physical needs of dependent children, there needs to be a dedicated and specialist child wellbeing response funded and embedded in the youth homelessness system.

A Multi-disciplined response for an effective homelessness system

For many people experiencing homelessness, homelessness services are the only stable point from which to seek support. The homelessness system is not only a 'housing worker' system but also responds to domestic and family violence, acute and deteriorating mental health, alcohol and substance dependencies and undiagnosed disabilities.

Many referrals to MCM's Frontyard Youth Services are from family violence and disability access points, mental health institutions, youth justice and correctional facilities. For those that are housed in an MCM crisis accommodation, there is a further need to ensure the support model for their 'living arrangements' is safe, embedded and meets the duration of need.

Responding to young people experiencing family violence and homelessness in their own right

A primary causality factor for young people presenting alone to homelessness services was and still remains family violence. A gap visible in the homelessness system is invisible in the family violence system, that of young people experiencing violence from a parent who were often not seen or responded to as victim survivors of family violence.

A September 2022, snapshot data capture from 110 young people supported in MCM's youth homelessness programs, found that almost 90 per cent of young people experienced family violence growing up in the home, 57.1 per cent of females went on to experience intimate partner violence and 35.5 per cent of males went on to use violence in their intimate partner relationships.

In Focus: Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence

In 2021, the [Amplify Report](#) was released by MCM urging the community services sector and the government to come together to recognise young people as victim survivors of family violence in their own right and provide the support they deserve.

The report made recommendations and clear actions for responding to young people as distinct from younger children and adults to stem the tide of young people falling through gaps into homelessness, justice, and mental health systems. Those with lived experience were at the centre of the report findings and recommendations.

Key recommendations of the Amplify Report were recognised with funding from the National Partnership Agreement on Family, domestic and Sexual violence Responses (NPA) in 2023, and the Amplify pilot was realised. The objective of the pilot is to support unaccompanied young people aged 15 to 19 who are victim survivors of family violence engaged in the SHS and will:

- Trial innovative youth specific family violence case management in response to family violence and homelessness.
- Increase the sector's capacity to understand and respond to family violence in context of youth homelessness.
- Increase the timeliness and accessibility of service responses for young people experiencing homelessness due to family violence.

Responding to the mental health crisis for young people experiencing homelessness

The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan (2021) sets a clear goal to address the 'missing middle' the service gap for the provision of crucial mental health supports.²³ Homelessness services are often an anchor point for those requiring a response for acute mental health needs.

People are presenting to homelessness services with an acuity of needs often exacerbated by the fact they do not have a home. Structural barriers often do not take into consideration transience (no fixed post-code) and the funding model for service-based appointments only.

Mental health amongst young people nationally is worsening.²⁴ Suicide accounts for 38 per cent of the deaths among young people aged 15 to 24 years old. Between 2018 and 2020 this made suicide the leading cause of death among young Australians.²⁵

In 2021-22, 92.5 per cent of the young people who came to MCM's youth homelessness access point were

²³ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health 2021 [National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan](#)

²⁴ Payne, S (2023) [Experts highlight barriers to mental health support as major factor in youth homelessness - ABC News](#) Accessed 14 October 2023

²⁵ [AIHW Suicide & self-harm monitoring 2023](#). Accessed 14 October 2023

flagged with having a mental health issue and 58.7 per cent had a mental health diagnosis.

A further Snapshot conducted in March 2023 across MCM's homelessness crisis accommodation programs also found:

- More than 40 percent of unaccompanied young people had experienced a significant episode of mental health crisis in the accommodation and
- More than 25 percent had used self-injury to manage their distress in the accommodation.

Many of the young people that MCM support experience complex mental health with co-presenting Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) issues, this co-morbidity creates a barrier to accessing mental health supports, leaving many unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness excluded from mental health services (including mental health accommodation) and without the supports they need to improve their wellbeing.

In response, MCM has partnered with St. Vincent's Hospital (Public Health Network) to deliver the '*Enhanced Check-In Program*' based at Frontyard Youth Services and staffed with mental health peer workers, occupational therapists and clinical supervisors providing therapeutic care, clinical assessment, and referral.

Homelessness services, which encompass therapeutic frameworks, are not designed, or resourced to respond to this significant distress and episodic mental health deterioration and are therefore unable to meet the presenting mental health needs. Consequently, hospital emergency departments are being used to respond to these mental health needs which has led to a persistent cycling between homelessness and emergency services.

While the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended the establishment of 500 supported housing places for young people experiencing mental ill-health, beyond that, there was little outlined in that report to address the systemic, policy, structural and funding barriers to mental health services supporting the currently invisible demographic of unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness.

People with Disability: homelessness and access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme

There are many barriers for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness to access and benefit from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (**NDIS**) including coordination, care-planning, and the psycho-social recovery framework.

Young people with disability are over-represented in the homelessness system. Often presenting with complex needs (including disability both diagnosed and undiagnosed), they are falling through the gaps between the homelessness and disability sectors with no ongoing support from family or support workers who are funded through a crisis response lens.²⁶

The challenge is creating multi-system responses when it's almost always outside of funding mandates and scope of practice as defined under the NDIS, mental health, and homelessness services. Systems require a design that coordinates and streamlines access for people with disabilities.

Recommendation 11: To address the development of a skilled workforce able to achieve greater wellbeing for those who are experiencing homelessness, the Plan would require specialist family violence workers, mental health practitioners and disability support workers to be embedded in SHS.

26 Melbourne City Mission submission 2019, [Final Report | Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#)

Section 4: The Need For Housing Led Responses

Secure housing is fundamental to live a safe, dignified and productive life – yet there are more than 60,000 people waiting for social housing in Victoria, and 30,660 Victorians homeless on any one night.

Many more people who are not yet homeless are at risk of losing their housing and becoming dependent on the social housing system due to a range of factors, including declining housing affordability, rental stress and instability, family violence, child abuse and poor mental health.

The lack of social and affordable housing options is the most common and severe block to funded homelessness agencies like MCM.

Build the scale and impact of social and affordable housing

Increased affordable, appropriate and safe housing is required to address the escalating homelessness crisis and ensure Australia's economic productivity and liveability, and most importantly the wellbeing of our community is restored. To build a resilient affordable housing system, immediate action needs to occur in coordination with other levels of government to improve the fairness of the private market and provide a long-term plan and investment pipeline for social and affordable housing.

A variety of policy mechanisms and financial supports are required to achieve this, including planning reforms and increased and continuing State and Federal investment in social and affordable housing supply. There is a critical opportunity to introduce a mandatory inclusionary zoning scheme that will allow the growth of private market housing to contribute to the growth of social and affordable housing.

These reforms should be introduced alongside a long-term target for social housing growth across Australia. MCM supports the position of the Victorian peak housing bodies, including Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, for the introduction of a long-term target for social housing growth of at least 60,000 additional homes over the next 10 years and a housing strategy aimed at achieving that target and, ultimately, ensuring all Victorians have access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing.²⁷

In 2021, the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria recommended mandatory inclusionary zoning be investigated as a potential solution to increase long-term housing options for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.²⁸ Unlike South Australia and Sydney, which have proven successful mandatory inclusion policies, Victoria has had a system of voluntary affordable housing agreements since 2018. While these have helped facilitate discussions between councils and developers about social and affordable housing needs, in most cases they have delivered very few homes.²⁹

If Australia's social and affordable housing stock is not significantly expanded, more and more people will become homeless or end up in insecure, unsafe housing. Once people are in this position, it is difficult to retain or find employment, stay healthy, care for children – and often challenging to re-enter housing in the private rental market.

Recommendation 12: The Plan needs to set transparent social housing growth targets. For example, in Victoria, a statewide social housing growth target of at least 6,000 new social housing properties per year for the next 10 years is needed.

Recommendation 13: To deliver a pipeline of social and affordable housing for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, the introduction of mandatory inclusionary zoning schemes is required.

²⁷ CHIA Vic Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria (July 2023), available at <https://chiavic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Submission-on-Victorian-Rental-Crisis-2023.pdf>

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

Housing First models for people with complex needs

Housing First is now recognised as the most successful model to end homelessness for people with high complexity of support needs. Housing First programs in Australia and overseas are delivering an almost 90 per cent housing sustainment rate.³⁰

The Housing First model prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. From this point, any other support needs they might have – such as alcohol and drug dependency, physical and/or mental health problems – are addressed through coordinated and intensive support.

Central to the concept of Housing First is that permanent housing is provided without a test of having to be 'housing ready' and is built upon the principle that housing is a human right. Furthermore, maintaining the tenancy is not dependent on the tenant using support services.

Homeless to a Home (H2H) program is a Victorian Government initiative providing support and pathways into safe, secure, and sustainable medium and long-term housing for 1,845 households, who were residing in emergency accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MCM's H2H initiative provides access to stable long-term housing and sustained personalised support for up to 2 years. The program has supported 348 people in Melbourne's North and West to transition out of long-term homelessness. Delivered in partnership with Co-Health and Unison Housing, the program has had substantial impacts on the people supported including a tenancy sustainment rate of 85 per cent and a Personal Wellbeing Score 6+ points higher than the Australian average for personal wellbeing. Other outcomes have included:

- Family reunification of parents with their children
- Reconnection with employment
- Steep reductions in substance use
- Sustained increases in feelings of safety & stability

Case Study: H2H: Courtney & Kurt's Story

Courtney and Kurt were in a difficult situation.

Courtney had experienced significant family violence, Kurt had come into contact with the justice system, and they were both struggling with substance use, anxiety and depression. They were both sleeping rough in Melbourne's Western suburbs.

After being referred to MCM's H2H program, their needs, goals and aspirations were identified. They were quickly successfully housed and flexibly supported to build the living skills required to maintain their tenancy.

With H2H's support, they have sustained their housing and have both achieved 2 years of sobriety. Courtney has now regained her drivers' licence and is eager to rejoin the workforce. Kurt has now reconnected with his teenage sons, who visit his stable house regularly. He has plans to start his own maintenance business.

Housing First models of support are effective at tackling entrenched homelessness. In 2021, the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria recommended that the 'Victorian Government expand Housing First programs throughout metropolitan, regional and rural areas to include further cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, in addition to rough sleepers.'³¹

³⁰ Johnson, G., Parkinson, S. and Parsell, C., (2012) [AHURI Essay Policy shift or program drift? Implementing Housing First in Australia p.8](#)

³¹ Committee Interim Report: Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria (4 August 2020) , available at <https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/inquiry-into-homelessness-in-victoria/reports>

Despite their success, there is inadequate resourcing in the homelessness and housing system to extend this high support approach beyond existing small-scale initiatives. There is an opportunity to systematise this approach and make significant inroads into tackling entrenched homelessness.

Recommendation 14: To enable people at risk of chronic homelessness to gain and sustain housing, the Plan needs to embed Housing First as the system-wide approach.

A housing response is required for unaccompanied young people

Across Australia, youth homelessness is at a critical point and the demand severely outweighs the availability of suitable housing. Data analysis conducted by Council to Homeless Persons indicates that in 2021/22, there were approximately 5,000 unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness in Victoria who engaged a SHS seeking medium to long-term housing, but whose needs were not met.³²

The current social housing system is designed for adults and adult problems. Nationally, young people aged 15 to 24 are only 2.8 per cent of main tenants in social housing³³, despite that they make up about half of all single people who seek help from SHS. The current business model of social housing means that providers are often reluctant to accept young people because of their low incomes (including Centrelink and entry level wages), lack of support and because they are regarded as risky tenants.

Removing young people's financial barriers to accessing housing

Housing in Victoria is particularly difficult for young people to access due to their low incomes. Young people, whose incomes, whether from Centrelink payments, or from entry level wages, are considerably lower than that of an adult.

Anglicare Australia's Rental Affordability Snapshot 2023³⁴ identified that there were no properties available that would be affordable for a single person on Youth Allowance. This makes affordability for young people particularly pertinent – the Unable to Live at Home Youth Allowance for a young person is \$602.80 per fortnight which is approximately 25 per cent less than those on Jobseeker.

A constant challenge for the community housing sector is young people's incapacity to pay the amount of rent required to run and maintain a property under the current social rent models. Social housing, provided by registered Housing Associations and Community Housing Providers, is not geared toward providing housing to young people as rent is calculated based on tenant or household income and is generally set at 25 – 30 per cent of income. A young people's lower incomes make them less financially viable for providers, as a result, very few young people are housed compared to other community cohorts.

³² This demand is drawn from Specialist Homelessness Services Collection data.

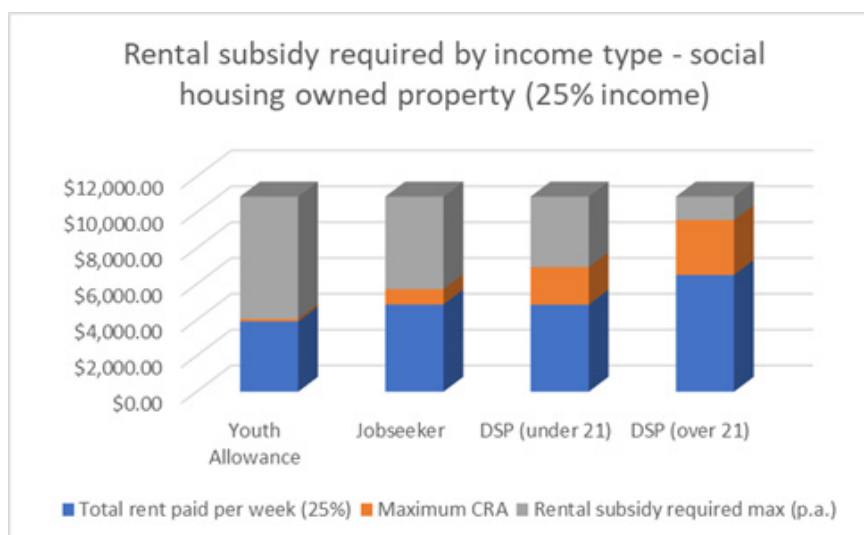
³³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). Data tables: Social housing households 2022; Available at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/data>

³⁴ Anglicare Australia, 2023: Rental Affordability Snapshot, available at <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2023-rental-affordability-snapshot/>

The below table outlines the maximum rate of Unable to Live at Home Allowance (UTLAH) for a single person per fortnight and compares this amount to other income support payments.

Income source	Youth Allowance	Jobseeker	DSP (under 21)	DSP (over 21)
Max allowance per fortnight	\$602.80	\$749.20	\$747.60	\$1,002.50
Fortnightly rent revenue based on 30% of income	\$180.84	\$224.76	\$224.28	\$300.75
Maximum CRA	\$28.08	\$61.02	\$60.66	\$118.01
Total rent paid per fortnight (rent plus CRA)	\$208.92	\$285.78	\$284.94	\$418.76
Total rent paid per week (30%)	\$104.46	\$142.89	\$142.47	\$209.38
Fortnightly rent revenue based on 25% of income	\$150.70	\$187.30	\$186.90	\$250.63
Maximum CRA	\$5.48	\$32.93	\$80.42	\$118.01
Total rent paid per fortnight (rent plus CRA)	\$156.18	\$220.23	\$267.32	\$368.64
Total rent paid per week (25%)	\$78.09	\$110.11	\$133.66	\$184.32

Young people currently receive lower Commonwealth income support payments than adults, which presents significant financial implications for organisations providing youth housing. As shown above, the maximum amount of rent that a social housing provider can collect from a young person on Youth Allowance is \$90.42 per week (30 per cent of income). The young person will only be eligible for CRA of \$14.04 per week. Given this, opening up access to a range of rental properties will require the availability of subsidies that are deep enough to make the provision of housing for young people viable.



Depending on the type of rental property, the required subsidy will vary. For example, a head leased property from the private rental market, will require a greater subsidy than an existing social housing dwelling. We also recognise that the viability gap is generally lower for share house arrangements or when an existing social housing property is allocated to a young person.

Recommendation 15: To improve equity of access to housing for young people, the Plan requires the Australian Government to work with State and Territory Governments to address the rental gap across all tenancy types until a young person can afford the rent unassisted. This can be achieved via the introduction of a rental subsidy to make the provision of housing for young people viable and reforms to Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

Dedicated tenancies for unaccompanied young people

While removing financial barriers for young people to access and sustain social housing is critical, there is a further need to quarantine a proportion of housing stock for young people as they are often regarded as risky tenants due to their lack of experience and rental history and an assumption that they will not care for the property.

Case Study: Barriers to purchase and head lease off private market

A registered Community Housing Provider entered an Agreement with a private investment Fund that is purpose driven and invests in social and affordable housing. The partnership involved the Fund purchasing 15 new properties (2-bedroom apartments) off the private market and would head lease for 5 years to the Community Housing Provider to lease to young people aged 18-22. The new properties is to be located close to public transport and in locations that have employment, education, and recreational opportunities for young people.

After 12 months of trying to secure the properties, the Fund has continually faced barriers by developers and body corporates preferring not to sell the properties to the Fund when they are made aware that they will be used to house young people. The Fund has put forward at least four competitive offers to developers which have been refused based on the perception that it would potentially affect private sales of the remaining stock (which impacts construction start and delayed profit) and a perception that there could be high levels of neighbourhood complaints connected to their developments which causes a reputational risk.

Despite the welcome injection of social and affordable housing stock by State and Federal governments, the overall scale of the challenge facing young people experiencing homelessness will be broadly unchanged unless a proportion of the new social housing stock is quarantined for young people. The proportion of stock allocated to young people should be in line with SHS data (which currently shows young people make up at least 15 per cent of the homelessness cohort accessing SHS). SHS data has been selected as a benchmark rather than the significantly higher percentage of young people counted on the 2021 Census night (being 25 per cent), to acknowledge other early intervention programs to address youth homelessness (e.g. family reconciliation).

As discussed in further detail below, it is envisaged that a housing system for young people comprises a stable medium-term tenure (up to 5 years) and wrap-around support, with the intention that the young person be supported within that period to build up the skills and financial capacity to live independently and transition into private rental. This medium-term model differs from the longer-term or 'permanent' social housing model, traditionally designed for adults.

Recommendation 16: To ensure young people benefit from the growth in social and affordable housing, the Plan needs to guarantee a proportion of at least 15 per cent of all new social housing is allocated to unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness. A dedicated stream of youth housing supply will address housing discrimination experienced by young people based on their age, lower incomes and inexperience in the rental market.

A linked housing and support model for unaccompanied young people

Homelessness during adolescence means disconnection from supportive and nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers that enable young people to build the confidence and capability to transition to an independent adulthood. The absence of these supports in early adulthood creates a high-pressure environment in which young people are forced into survival mode, and don't have the luxury of years to develop coping strategies, emotional regulation and problem-solving skills.

Young people who become homeless at an early age are also forced to take on a range of adult responsibilities, without having been given the time and support to develop the knowledge and skills required, including how to maintain a property and their tenancy rights and responsibilities.

That said, most housing options and support services provided in Victoria, and in Australia more generally, assume that a person has developed independent living skills and are experiencing a momentary crisis, and as a result, young people's ability to sustain their housing remains highly problematic.

Case Study: Need for integrated supports with housing

Tilly had experienced several years of homelessness which included transitions of couch-surfing, sleeping-rough and crisis accommodation.

Tilly acquired transitional housing which included case management support for the duration of the tenancy. While supported in transitional housing, she secured a job as a receptionist, maintained the transitional tenancy, and experienced a safe and supportive relationship through the care coordination.

When Tilly was 24 years of age, she secured longer term community housing as she had stable income and lower (if any) support needs. Once in longer-term housing, the support provision and care continuum received in the transitional housing program ended. Shortly after moving houses, everything started to unravel for Tilly and as a result she lost her employment.

Her loss of employment and struggle to budget her income had an increasingly negative impact on her mental health, and as a result, she began to accumulate rental arrears and stopped communicating with her housing provider. Neighbours also started to complain to the housing provider as Tilly regularly played loud music and parked over her neighbour's driveway.

The community housing provider tried to connect with Tilly and talk to her about her responsibilities as a tenant as well as mediate complaints between the neighbours. Without parental or strong supports in place for Tilly, the housing provider found it difficult to communicate with her including attempts to renegotiate rent or enter payment plans. The housing provider also made multiple referrals to Tenancy Plus but the program was short-term only and was unable to respond to issues that had already deteriorated to an untenable place for Tilly.

The housing provider had no other option but to apply for a Compliance Order at VCATT which put Tilly at risk of homelessness, criminalisation and exclusion from affordable housing options in the future. Without support to properly work with her, the housing provider is concerned that Tilly will be evicted and will be forced to enter the adult specialist homelessness system.

While making more social housing available is a critical first step, there's a further need to connect young people with models of supported housing that are appropriate for their needs. In other words, while housing may end an individual episode of homelessness, integrated, safe, effective and appropriate supports breaks the cycle and provides a pathway to independence.

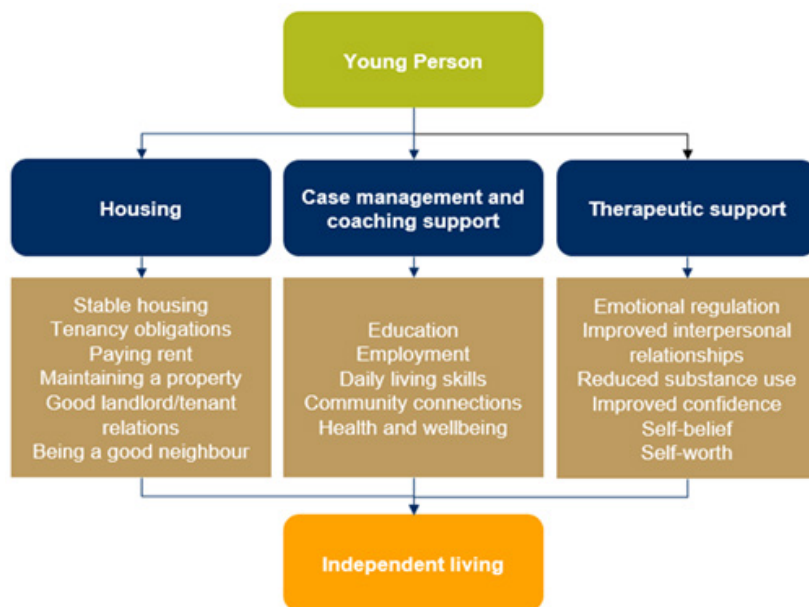
In Focus: Youth Housing Initiative

MCM in partnership with MCM Housing has developed a new housing program for young people, the Youth Housing Initiative (YHI), to support young people to transition to independence and permanently exit homelessness. This program was developed to fill a gap in long term housing and support options for young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness, particularly for young people who require substantial support to maintain housing in the face of substantial mental health and trauma related issues.

MCM Housing received funding through the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build to build small, specialised social housing developments for young people in various locations across Victoria.

The program is based on Housing First principles and is designed to build the independence and resilience of young people experiencing homelessness who are falling through the gaps in the current service delivery landscape, addressing the complex personal and structural causes of their homelessness over a sustained period.

YHI provides three interchangeable levels of housing and support for a period of up to 4 years, allowing young people to more seamlessly and efficiently step up or down in support as they transition to independence.



MCM engaged Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to analyse the financial costs of the program against the expected fiscal savings to Governments. The YHI cohort are high consumers of government services and support across a range of expenditure areas. By providing young people with an enhanced service and housing stability over 4 years, the expected government savings generated during and beyond the direct four-year measurement period are estimated to be at least \$222,000 per person, which is an average 29 per cent reduction in the baseline costs (20 per cent reduction in Commonwealth Government savings).

In Focus: Expansion of Youth Foyer Programs

Multiple models of youth foyers exist in Australia and have been developed by individual agencies and government departments. There are several types of youth foyers in Victoria, including those delivered by MCM and Education First Youth Foyers.

MCM's Youth Foyer Program

MCM is a leader in the provision of youth foyers and set up its first foyer program in 2004 as an innovative response to youth homelessness. MCM currently operate 4 Youth Foyer programs across Melbourne:

- The Precinct – located in North Fitzroy
- Lion Garden – located in Melbourne CBD
- Hoddle Street – located in Collingwood
- H3 – located in Werribee

MCM's Youth Foyer Program, underpinned by MCM's Trauma Informed Healing Oriented Framework, offers young people aged 16 to 25 safe, stable and affordable accommodation for up to 3 years, alongside integrated case management support that is holistic, client-centred and strength-based. An additional 6 months of after-care support post-foyer is also embedded in the MCM model.

Foyer offers young people facing homelessness a chance to change their path, explore and move through barriers to employment and education toward their desired goals.

Throughout their journey, young people are offered opportunities to develop and build on their skills and prepare to live independently. Support is adaptable, non-judgemental and flexible to needs; young people are encouraged to develop positive and productive relationships and to connect with their wider community.

Accommodation is fully furnished, self-contained apartments and units, with co-located staff support and program delivery. Two models also have a Residential Support Volunteer living onsite.

Recommendation 17: To support young people to progress towards greater housing independence and sustainable housing outcomes, youth dedicated stock needs to be matched with transitional and interventional services and support attached to the young person. This will ensure the young person has consistent support regardless of a relocation or a change in tenancy arrangement.

A Way Forward – Youth Housing Framework 2023

Without a fresh approach to provide a pathway out of homelessness, basic foundations like education, employment and family will remain out of reach for young people.

MCM, The Salvation Army, Council to Homeless Persons, Community Housing Industry Association Victoria and Kids Under Cover, supported by Homelessness Australia and Community Housing Industry Association National, commissioned Nous Consulting to develop a framework to address the structural and social services barriers preventing unaccompanied children and young people from finding safe homes.

The attached Youth Housing Framework 2023 in Appendix A provides a foundation for the design and implementation of a dedicated and fit-for-purpose youth housing model. The Framework offers a model for youth housing that should be adopted in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and rolled out across the country.

The framework relates to young people aged 15-24 who are engaged with the homelessness service system. It is not predicated on a young person's lifelong interactions with social housing, rather it seeks a response that empowers our young people with the skills and resilience needed to transition to adulthood and achieve sustainable, functional outcomes –enabling them to progress towards greater housing

independence and, when appropriate, exit the supported housing system.

The Framework provides a foundation for policy discussion and action and encompasses three components:

1. Provision of housing
2. Services and support
3. Subsidies for viability.

Targeted effective intervention with young people aged 15-24 who are engaged with the homelessness service system can deliver significant dividends to Australian, State and Territory Governments, community and most importantly, the young people themselves.

An effective solution needs to empower young Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness to develop the skills and resilience needed to thrive in adulthood, including economic and social participation with housing independence.

While leading a National Housing and Homelessness Plan, and developing new funding models for housing, now is an ideal time to develop a dedicated approach to youth housing that aligns with the Australian Government's priority in improving outcomes for children and young people.

Recommendation 18: To improve housing outcomes for unaccompanied young people, the Youth Housing Framework should be adopted in the Plan and rolled out across the country.



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mcmhousing.org.au



A new model for youth housing in Australia

September 2023

Youth housing and homelessness organisations are providing a framework for consideration in the design of a fit-for-purpose youth housing model.

This framework provides a foundation for ongoing discussion and represents our ask of the Australian Government, which is:

The design and implementation of a dedicated and fit-for-purpose youth housing model.

The framework relates to young people aged 15-24 who are engaged with the homelessness service system. It is not predicated on a young person's lifelong interactions with social housing, rather it seeks a response that empowers our young people with the skills and resilience needed to transition to adulthood and achieve sustainable, functional outcomes – enabling them to progress towards greater housing independence and, when appropriate, exit the supported housing system.

We recognise that focused thinking, planning and engagement will be required to ensure the model works effectively for different jurisdictional governments, the sector and most importantly, young people. We also understand the significance of this commitment - but we too are part of the solution.

Given this, we invite the Australian Government to partner with us in creating an effective and efficient model, aligned with its priorities in improving outcomes for young people.

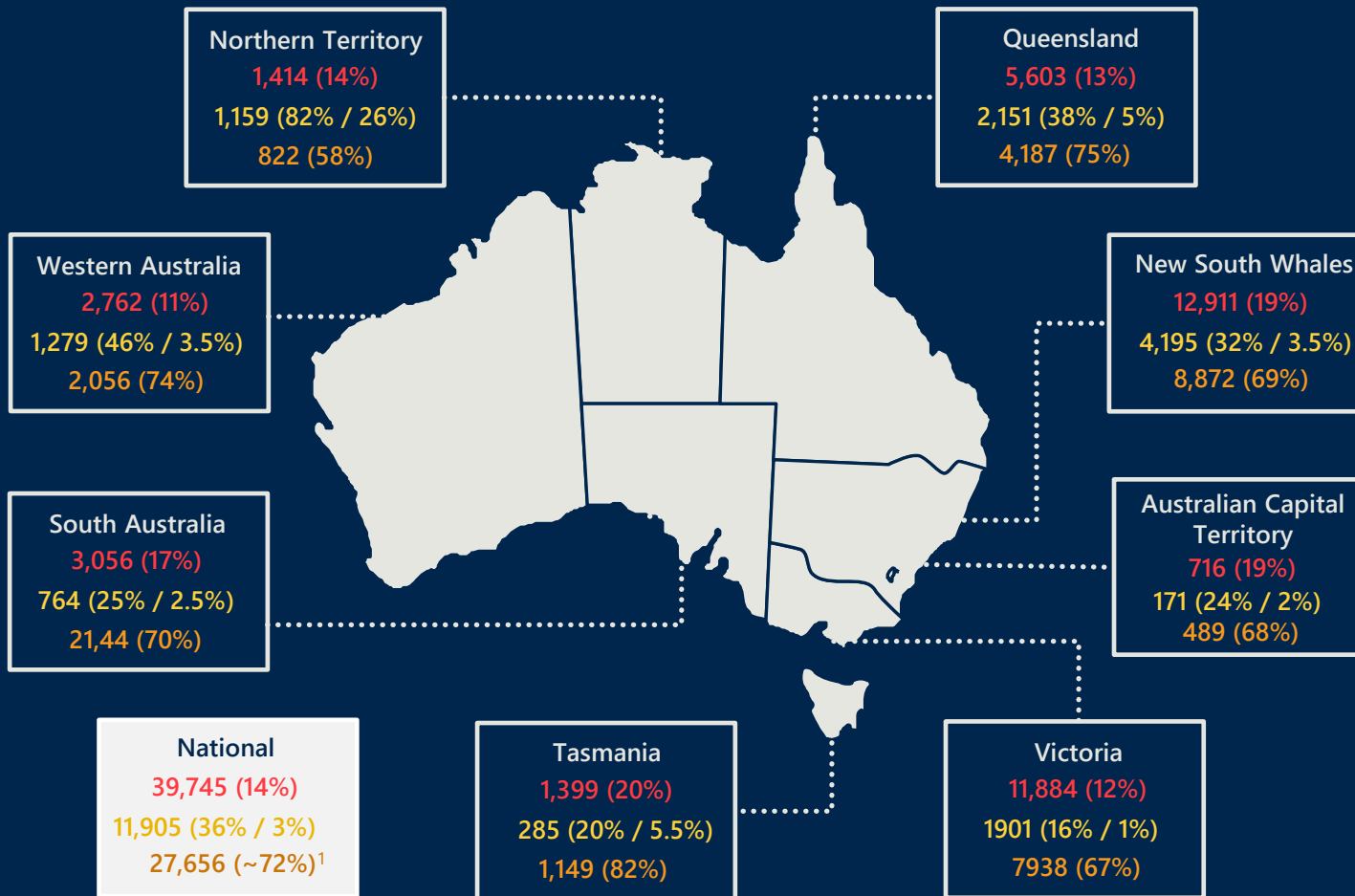
This framework was collaboratively designed by a range of sector stakeholders...



... and supported by:



Young people are the fourth largest group of people presenting alone to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and make up around a quarter of all people experiencing homelessness.



LEGEND

Young people presenting alone

% represents the proportion of young people within the total of all people presenting to SHSs.

First Nations young people presenting alone

% represents proportion of all young people presenting alone and the % of First Nations people per jurisdiction.

Young people presenting alone who were not enrolled in any form of education & training

% represents proportion of not enrolled young people within all young people presenting to SHSs

Sources:
ABS, 2021 Census All Persons QuickStats
AIHW, Specialists homelessness services (2021-22) & Homelessness and overcrowding (2016)

¹ Data on the young people presenting alone who were not enrolled in any form of education & training was calculated by multiplying the percentage of young people presenting alone with the total number of non-enrolled presentations. The total of this differs slightly from the 72% stated in the Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22.

Regardless of the work and efforts to date, the current approach is not suitable for young people.

Across Australia, youth homelessness is at a critical point and the demand severely outweighs the availability of suitable housing. Recent research highlights the challenges created by the lack of a youth-specific policy or framework, as well as other barriers to achieving effective outcomes for young people, such as:

- poor coordination of housing and support
- lack of housing options
- restrictions in duration and support.

As the Australian Government is currently leading a National Housing and Homelessness Plan and developing new funding for housing models, now is an ideal time to develop a dedicated approach to youth housing.

Early consideration by the sector indicates that there are three key areas to focus on:



This framework provides high-level detail against each focus area. However, it does not seek to determine the operational or programmatic aspects that will underpin a comprehensive model and implementation approach.

In developing this framework, the sector has considered contemporary research, best practice initiatives across Australia and internationally, such as the Canadian Housing First for Youth Framework.

We also recognise the extensive work being undertaken by the Australian Government to reform Australia's housing system and improve outcomes for young people, including:

- National Housing and Homelessness Plan
- National Housing Accord 2022
- Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF)
- Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children

See pages 13 and 14 of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan issues paper for full names of policies.

¹ Roggenbuck, C. and Davison, J. (2021) Positioning Paper: Towards a Youth Homelessness Strategy for Victoria, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited

² The Final Report (2021) recommends 500 supported medium-term youth housing places.

The foundations of the proposed model are based on the unique issues facing young people that necessitate a targeted approach to housing.

1

PROVISION OF HOUSING

Initial modelling indicates that Australia needs additional subsidised housing tenancies for young people.¹

These tenancies must meet the unique needs of, and be the best fit for, each young person. This includes for the duration the young person requires it.

The program should consider where it is best located and how it can flex to support longer-term tenancies as the needs and circumstances of young people evolve.

2

SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Stock allocation must be complemented with a support package allocated to the young person for the duration of their needs, rather than the tenancy.

Supports need to be strengths-based, goal oriented, outcome-focused and holistic in nature.

A dedicated youth housing model presents an opportunity for defining the range of service possibilities suitable across the spectrum of needs.

3

SUBSIDIES FOR VIABILITY

The provision of youth housing is currently unviable at existing subsidy levels. Increasing access to suitable housing for young people will require addressing the rental gap across all tenancy types until a young person can afford the rent unassisted.

A model which provides a subsidy sufficient for young people to meet market rents would allow for housing to be sourced from the existing private rental market and social housing stock, and could generate new construction.

The model could also consider additional opportunities to increase access, including land allocation and the ability for Community Housing Organisations to leverage funding for development.

¹ Data analysis conducted by Council to Homeless Person indicates that there is a need for ~5000 dedicated youth tenancies in Victoria. This demand is drawn from Specialist Homelessness Services Collection data.

1 PROVISION OF HOUSING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Australian Government needs to increase the provision of youth-dedicated tenancies to meet current and future demand.

Increasing the number of dedicated tenancies for young people will require a creative solution. Recognising that housing affordability and supply pressures exist across the entire system, this solution needs to be designed in conjunction with other housing reform work currently underway. Services also recognise that there will be a need to prioritise actions, with an increase in provision occurring over a determined period.

Regardless of the approach, all youth-dedicated tenancies must:

- prioritise 'best fit' for the individual
- be affordable and available
- be geographically dispersed, in line with demand and opportunities for education and employment.

This proposal is designed to include all forms of housing from private rental to social housing, to meet the needs of young people. The approach should particularly consider how to increase the current levels of social housing.

The sector suggests the most suitable segmentation of the new tenancies is into dwelling types, rather than categories based on the complexity of need, or allocation to a specific program or model. This will enable the housing stock to flex as a young person's circumstances change, and the collective demand and system-level approaches and best practice models evolve.

Outlined in the table overleaf are options to address housing needs. These are segmented into tenancy type and provide considerations for purpose and provision across each.

1 TYPOLOGY OF HOUSING NEEDED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Most of the stock required is 2+ bedroom, low-medium density properties.

TYPE	PURPOSE AND PROVISION	ALLOCATION
1 BEDROOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-contained with an ensuite bathroom • Longer term, as required by the young person • Suitable for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower complexity of need, with communal facilities • Medium to high complexity of need • 24/7 on-call support, off-site intensive support • Preference for low density 	10%
2 OR MORE BEDROOMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-contained with ensuites or additional bathrooms depending on the tenancy arrangements • Longer term, as required by the young person • Suitable for low, medium and high complexity of need • Preference for low-medium density, with families in a lower density settings • Scattered sites • 24/7 on-call support, off-site intensive support, flexible outreach where appropriate 	80%
CONGREGATE HOUSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-contained rooms or studios with communal spaces and facilities (6-8 tenants per dwelling) • Medium term, as required by the young person • Suitable for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium to high need, but tied to a program for a higher level of support • Medium to high density • 24/7 staffing, on-site support, flexible outreach where appropriate 	5%
CLUSTER HOUSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-contained rooms or studios with communal spaces and facilities • Suitable for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low needs e.g., for young people with affordability issues • Medium to high need, but tied to a program for a higher level of support • Medium to high density, but purpose built e.g., tailored to a particular client group • On-site support (business hours), off-site intensive support, flexible outreach where appropriate • Potential to use Housing First 	5%

2

SERVICES AND SUPPORT

A young person’s access to integrated, safe, effective and appropriate services and supports that respond to their needs, preferences and circumstances is essential to them achieving a sustainable housing outcome.

The sector has determined the following factors as key to the design of services and supports within the model:

ATTACHED TO THE YOUNG PERSON, NOT THE TENANCY

Youth-dedicated stock and the funding allocation for services and supports should be considered discrete packages, with services and supports attached to the young person and not the tenancy to ensure a young person has consistent support regardless of a relocation or a change in tenancy arrangements.

For some housing types, e.g., core and cluster models, it may be more appropriate for some support to be attached to the tenancy rather than the person for onsite service provision. As a principle, support should follow a young person as needed as they change tenures

INTEGRATED AND CONTINUOUS

The need for better service integration is heightened for young people due to the transitory nature of their interactions with the housing and homelessness system, to ensure they receive continuous support as their needs, housing situation and eligibility for different services evolve. All services and supports should be well coordinated across service providers and at a system level, with an emphasis on providing case-coordination for young people with complex needs.

While the coordination of housing services and supports is appropriate and necessary, this also needs to empower young people to exercise their rights and ensure their needs are prioritised over the tenancy.



INTERVENTIONAL AS WELL AS TRANSITIONAL

The services and support are not just transitional, they are interventions that result in improved wellbeing, engagement in the workforce, and reduced long-term engagement with high-cost services such as social housing, homelessness and/or justice systems. This includes proactive outreach to engage young people in the service system.

While we recognise that social or supported housing is not a long-term solution for most young people, there need to be mechanisms to identify those who require ongoing support and well-established referral and transitional pathways.

TRAUMA-INFORMED AND FUNCTIONAL

The delivery of all services and supports must be trauma informed. It is also important to consider the optimal staffing mix, which should consist of a key worker, therapeutic support and support for functional outcomes e.g., living skills, employment, education and training, recreation, health and wellbeing etc.

However, we recognise existing workforce shortages and other challenges in providing the range of supports required by a young person. Given this, the sector suggests that it may be suitable to link a young person with a single, highly skilled case worker. Noting that this approach would not be suitable for young people with complex needs, and services and support should be underpinned by suitable brokerage.

3

SUBSIDIES FOR VIABILITY

The provision of youth housing under the current funding model is unviable and increasing access will require an appropriate funding allocation.

Young people currently receive lower Commonwealth income support payments than adults, which presents significant financial implications for organisations providing youth housing. Given this, opening up access to a range of rental properties will require the availability of subsidies that are deep enough to make the provision of housing for young people viable.

The September June quarter 2023 Homes Victoria Rental Report shows the median rent for a one-bedroom unit in metropolitan Melbourne is \$425 per week.¹ The maximum Youth Allowance take home for a single young person with no children is \$301.40 per week. This means a housing provider can collect no more than \$90.42 (30% of that income) plus CRA of \$14.04 per week. **Therefore a typical rental subsidy required would be approximately \$320.50 per week**, and would need to increase as rents rise.

Depending on the type of rental property, the required subsidy will vary. For example, a head-leased property from the private rental market, will require a greater subsidy than an existing social housing dwelling. We also recognise that the viability gap is generally lower for share house arrangements or when an existing social housing property is allocated to a young person.

A higher subsidy, however, could achieve a net growth in the overall stock of youth-appropriate rental properties, which is the ultimate goal of this proposal. Nevertheless, this proposal is designed to work with a range of rental property types - both to broaden the number of properties available to young people and allow the greatest flexibility in designing an effective youth housing program.

We welcome a conversation with government about these subsidy requirements, how they are calculated, and how they can be leveraged to encourage the development of new young person housing across the diversity of housing types.

¹ Weekly rents – National, SQM Research, September 2023 - <https://sqmresearch.com.au/weekly-rents.php?national=1&t=1>

The sector invites the Australian Government to partner with us in designing an effective solution.

The sector is committed and looks forward to working with the Australian Government to design the solution to the shared issue of youth homelessness.

A dedicated and fit-for-purpose youth housing model will ensure that young people have access to the housing and support most appropriate for their circumstances, for the time needed to achieve their goals. It must address youth homelessness as it stands today and prevent future young people from experiencing homelessness, and in particular, the impacts that often lead to life-long disadvantages.

Youth housing will and should always sit within the broader housing and homelessness system. However, the model must be targeted - with a youth-appropriate approach to services and supports, and the correct funding allocation that opens up access to new, youth-specific housing stock.

Recovery focused and strengths-based, a new approach is desperately needed that meets demand and resolves system-level barriers. Moreover, this model has a compelling business case, and its potential return on investment extends far beyond the inherent social outcomes for young people, or the return that can be achieved within the adult system. It offers wide reaching economic benefits, including the increased labour market participation and earning capacity of the next generation adults. It will also likely reduce the burden on the health and social service system, creating efficiencies for the decades to come.

Achieving these outcomes will require a commitment and focused investment of time and resources, yet it will not mean starting from scratch. There is a wealth of knowledge within the Australian Government and across the sector, and an evidence base of practices and programs that that can be adapted to suit the context in each state and territory.

The sector is committed to resolving this significant issue and looks forward to working with the Australian Government in designing the solution.



A bigger idea of success

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750

PEOPLE

70

PRINCIPALS

5

COUNTRIES