

Yarra Homelessness Strategy

Supporting people experiencing
homelessness

DRAFT



Acknowledgment of Country

Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the Traditional Owners of this country, pays tribute to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Yarra, and gives respect to the Elders past and present.

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Mayor's foreword

To be inserted prior to publication, when adopted.

Headline data – estimating homelessness in the City of Yarra

From the ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimated Homelessness, 2016:

The rate of homelessness in Yarra is 95 per 10,000 population, the fourth highest rate for any Victorian municipality, and more than double that of the state average.

- The Census estimated 838 homeless people in Yarra, including 64 people experiencing primary homelessness (i.e. living in tents, improvised dwellings, or sleeping out).
- In addition, there were 170 marginally housed persons.

From the AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2017–18:

In 2017–18 there were 1,070 clients from Yarra accessing specialist homelessness services.

- Of these clients:
 - 546 were homeless and 463 were at risk of being homeless.
 - 547 were female and 523 male.

From the 2018 StreetCount:

On Tuesday 19 June 2018, 392 people were counted sleeping rough in inner Melbourne, including 29 people in Yarra.

- Of the 392 people sleeping rough in inner Melbourne (includes the Cities of Melbourne, Yarra, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Maribyrnong):
 - 78 percent were male, and 22 percent were female
 - 54 percent of people were aged 26–40, with 34 percent aged 41–60

Council's vision

Yarra's first Homelessness Strategy will ensure that Council's strategic directions and operational responses to homelessness will be well informed, principled, and sustained through a robust and coordinated framework.

This strategy, and its associated actions, aims to foster a compassionate city by building on Yarra's existing Responding to Homelessness Protocol and other homelessness initiatives. To achieve this, Council will work in partnership with stakeholders, networks and neighbouring municipalities to address homelessness in our communities and rough sleeping on our streets.

Council's commitment to human rights

Yarra City Council is committed to promoting social justice and building on a culture of human rights by recognising that:

...all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Council believes that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [themselves] and of [their] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [their] control.

Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

This strategy aims to find practical and compassionate ways to reduce homelessness and its effects on the whole Yarra community that are underpinned by a human rights commitment.

Definitions

Situations

Homelessness

Sleeping in public places, or sleeping rough (see definition below), is the most visible form of homelessness, but the term is inclusive of a variety of insecure housing situations, such as couch surfing, staying with family, and living in temporary accommodation, such as a hotel or rooming house. While there is no one definition, it is necessary to have a working understanding of homelessness in order to discuss these situations and complexities that they involve.

The *statistical definition* of homelessness that has been developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to track homelessness numbers, emphasises that to be *home-less* is not the same as being *roof-less*. That is to say that being homeless is having inadequate or insecure housing arrangements, but it is not only something that occurs when a person has no shelter.

Specifically, the ABS considers someone to be experiencing homelessness if:¹

- they are in a dwelling that is inadequate, or
- they have no secure tenure of a dwelling, or if their tenure is short and cannot be extended, or
- they are in a living situation that does not allow them to have control of, or access to, space for social relations.

This definition was developed by a cross-sector working group to 'operationalise' and explain more clearly the concepts of the ABS's previously used cultural definition of homelessness.² Further to this, the ABS notes that overcrowding, a common housing issue, is one way in which a dwelling would be considered to be inadequate for the people living there.³

The *cultural definition*⁴ of homelessness takes into account an accepted minimum community standard of housing (being a small one-bedroom flat with a bathroom and kitchen), and divides homelessness into categories in relation to this standard as follows:⁵

- ***Marginally housed:*** people in housing situations close to the minimum standard
- ***Tertiary homelessness:*** people living in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure

¹ ABS (2018) 'Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016', Canberra, available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Appendix12016?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodn=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view> (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

² ABS (2011) 'Position Paper – ABS Review of Counting the Homeless Methodology', Canberra, available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/90db868e528d3eebca2578df00228cee?opendocument> (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Developed for the ABS by researchers Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2008) in their report 'Counting the Homeless 2006', Commonwealth of Australia, p 3.

⁵ Ibid.

- **Secondary homelessness:** people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses
- **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks, etc)

The cultural definition is useful in understanding greater nuance in individual situations in a social context, and is still widely used in research, discussion and advocacy within the homelessness sector. For this reason, this strategy uses the terminology of the cultural definition, with the understanding that the underlying concepts of homelessness of this definition are those articulated in the current ABS statistical definition.

Sleeping rough

Rough Sleepers are people who sleep or are bedded down in the open air. They may also be sleeping in buildings or other places not designed for habitation, such as sheds, car parks, abandoned buildings and so on. It is generally understood that this group of people is one of the most marginalised and vulnerable in the community.

Housing types

Crisis and emergency accommodation

Crisis and emergency accommodation includes a range of specialist services for people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, escaping family violence, or in other emergency situations. It includes women's refuges, youth refuges and major crisis supported accommodation services.

These services are available 24-hours a day, however they are temporary and designed to immediately assist people in crisis to stabilise their situation before they move on to something more permanent.

Social housing

Social Housing is an umbrella term for long term housing that includes both Public Housing and Community Housing (as per the *Housing Act 1983*). *Public housing* is government owned and managed, whereas *community housing* is managed (and sometimes owned) by not-for-profit organisations. All social housing must be applied for through the Victorian Housing Register.

Table 1: Weekly income limits for eligible households applying for social housing in Victoria

Household type	Register of Interest	Priority housing
Single	\$1,014	\$567
Couple	\$1,552	\$981
Family with one or two parents and dependent children	\$2,092	\$1,017
Each additional dependent	\$339	\$36

Source: *Social Housing Eligibility, HousingVic, DHHS, 1 April 2019*

Public housing

Public Housing is non-profit housing that is delivered on behalf of the Government and or the relevant department (as per the *Housing Act 1983*).

It usually refers to rental housing that is targeted to very-low and low income households on an affordable basis (requiring no more than 25 percent of income on rent). These households are predominantly those in receipt of Commonwealth income support, such as the disability or aged pension. Public Housing is owned and managed by the State Government housing authority, or managed by community housing providers on the government's behalf. Tenure is not time limited but is subject to tenants meeting rental conditions contained in their tenancy agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services.

Community housing

Community housing is housing that is owned, controlled and/or managed by a registered community housing agency.

It is targeted to low-to-moderate income and/or special needs households who meet income and asset tests, in accordance with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. Community Housing is managed and generally owned by a non-government housing provider such as not-for-profit charitable organisations including housing associations, housing providers and cooperatives.

Rents are commonly capped at between 25 percent and 30 percent of household income and can be up to 75 percent of market rent. Many providers incorporate local support services and tenant participation in maintenance and management.

Rooming houses

A rooming house (also referred to as a 'boarding house'⁶) is a building where rooms are available to rent individually, accommodating four or more tenants at the property in this way. At most rooming houses, residents share bathrooms, kitchens, laundries and other common areas.

Rooming house operators must comply with minimum standards set out in the *Residential Tenancies (Rooming House Standards) Regulations 2012*.⁷ These standards relate to privacy, security, safety and amenity in rooming houses.

Rooming houses are not necessarily an affordable housing product as they are privately managed.

Transitional accommodation

Transitional Housing is a supported short-term accommodation program. It acts as a stepping stone to more permanent housing.

People moving into transitional housing have often been victims of a change in circumstance. For example, a lost job has meant the rent can't be paid, a relationship break-up leaves one

⁶ Victorian Legal Aid (2019) 'Rooming Houses', available at <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/housing-and-tenancy/rooming-houses> (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

⁷ The regulations are available here: http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_reg/rthsr2012554/ (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

partner with no money or support, or a person may lose the support of – or can no longer live with – other family members.

A key element of transitional housing is that it's a temporary option, and tenants must actively work with their support provider to apply for long-term housing.

Homelessness responses

Assertive outreach

Assertive outreach is when a representative from a homelessness service provider purposefully sets out to engage with people who are marginalised and vulnerable due to their situation. This type of outreach is active, rather than passive, and is undertaken when it is thought by the service provider or social worker that someone who needs the service would otherwise not connect with the support they require.⁸

Housing First

The term 'Housing First' refers to a way of addressing homelessness by providing secure, long-term housing as quickly as possible to people who are homeless, and then providing comprehensive services to them to address the other issues and complexities of their circumstances. By providing long-term instead of temporary housing, it is believed that people who were experiencing homelessness can shift their focus from worrying about where they will sleep to overcoming other difficulties in their lives and improving their wellbeing.

Specialist homelessness services

A specialist homelessness service (SHS) is the type of assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency with the aim of responding to or preventing homelessness for an individual. This kind of assistance will often include multiple services that go beyond the provision of accommodation. Additional supports are often aimed at assisting a person to sustain housing in the longer term, and may include life skills (e.g. domestic tasks), mental and physical health services, specialised counselling for family violence and/or drug and alcohol addiction, legal support, financial counselling, cultural support and employment services.⁹

Wraparound services

Wraparound services are support services delivered through a holistic method that is tailored to each person, taking into account their circumstances and particular needs. In a wraparound approach, multiple services are coordinated so as to work collaboratively in a way that is responsive to each aspect of a person's situation. Wraparound services are particularly used to build long-term capabilities for individuals and families, which extend

⁸ Council to Homeless Persons (2019) *Assertive Outreach Resource*, p2, available at: <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Assertive-outreach-resource.pdf> (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2019) *Homelessness Services Glossary*, available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/glossary> (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

beyond any immediate crisis, providing skills to sustain a more stable living situation into the future.¹⁰

Government agencies and instruments

Department of Health and Human Services

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is an agency of the Victorian State Government that delivers health and human services through policies, programs and regulatory oversight. The range of programs includes services for women, ambulance services, children and families, sport and recreation, health and wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs and housing and homelessness.

Director of Housing

The Director of Housing (DoH) is the body corporate established under section 9(2) of the *Housing Act 1983*. The Director of Housing, sits within DHHS and is the landlord of Victoria's public housing. The Director has powers to purchase, develop, lease and sell property.¹¹

Victorian Housing Register

The Victorian Housing Register (VHR) manages applications for long-term social housing in Victoria. The waitlist now combines public and community housing applications for housing so that people only need to apply once and can be considered for both types of housing.

Priority access is given to those people who are:

- homeless and receiving support
- escaping or have escaped family violence
- living with a disability or who have significant support needs
- in need of special housing

People who meet these criteria, and income eligibility as per Table 1, comprise the housing Priority List. The broader Register of Interest list is based solely on income and asset tests.

¹⁰ Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (2019) *Living on the edge: Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence*, Canberra, p. 45, available at: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024242/toc_pdf/LivingontheEdge.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

¹¹ VAGO 'Managing Victoria's Public Housing', June 2017

1. Context



1.1. Introduction

Having an adequate home is a fundamental human right. It is essential not only to surviving, but also to enabling people to engage in life and society with dignity.¹²

Homelessness has increased markedly in Victoria in the last decade. The ABS Census notes a 43 percent increase in the number of Victorians experiencing homelessness between 2006 and 2016. Homelessness is often higher in the inner city and Yarra has the fourth highest rate of homelessness of all municipalities in Victoria.

As a lived experience, homelessness is shaped by social factors (such as alcohol/drug dependency, mental health concerns etc.), as well as structural and economic factors, such as poverty, disconnection from the labour market, and lack of housing for low income households. When people are homeless, many of their basic human rights become compromised, and they become distanced from family, friends and the community and lose control over their environment.

Those who sleep rough are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community. They experience a range of harms – such as violence, extreme weather conditions and poor diet – with lasting impacts on their health and wellbeing that can worsen over time.¹³

Homelessness takes a range of forms. Some people may have become suddenly homeless requiring crisis accommodation, while others may be sleeping rough in public places over a long period of time or ‘couch surfing’ between friends, family and acquaintances. Diverse, multi-disciplinary strategies from multiple stakeholders are required to address this growing and often complex issue.

Commonwealth and State Governments hold the primary roles for funding and providing services to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. By contrast, the role of local governments in addressing homelessness is not specified in Australian legislation, however Councils have a history of responding to homelessness in *some* way as it is the tier of government closest to the community.

Yarra City Council recognises that access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing is not only a basic requirement for all people, but also an essential component of an inclusive, dynamic and sustainable community. This is a concern not only for those individuals affected, but also for the wider community including residents, workers, services, visitors and businesses. Through education, advocacy and partnerships with service providers, Council seeks to ensure our city is a welcoming place for everyone, where the response to our most vulnerable citizens is one of compassion and respect for human rights.

1.2. Purpose and scope

The purpose of this strategy is to facilitate a coordinated and compassionate response to homelessness in Yarra. It is concerned with addressing and responding to the issues and circumstances concerning people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and who may be sleeping rough in the area.

¹² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1996) ‘Housing as a Human Right’, Sydney, p. 1, available at https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/human_rights/housing.pdf (Accessed 1 Oct 2019).

¹³ Department of Health and Human Services (January 2018) ‘Victoria’s homelessness and rough sleeping action plan’, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

It also outlines Council’s position and operations, and role as an advocate.

Long-term social and affordable accommodation is out of scope here, instead being the specific focus of Yarra’s Social and Affordable Housing Strategy. These two strategies should be considered together and between them they respond to the full spectrum of homelessness and housing types.

The private housing market is considered of Yarra’s Housing Strategy.

At a local level, the Homelessness Strategy aligns with and responds to initiatives and resolutions presented in the following Council strategies and plans:



Through the Homelessness Strategy, Council will focus on:

- supporting people sleeping rough in public spaces through an informed human rights framework,
- collaborating with agencies to address and prevent homelessness, and
- advocating for long-term solutions that reduce homelessness and create pathways to permanent housing and improved health and wellbeing.

As rough sleeping is a critical crisis point for people who are homeless, additional attention is paid to circumstances and the complexities that must be considered around this issue.

1.3. Review and reporting

Actions responding to the three key priority areas outlined in this Strategy will be revisited regularly. This will enable Council to be responsive to the changing needs of the community and to changes in the social, economic and political environment.

Towards the end of the calendar year, a report will be presented to Council, outlining activities which have been undertaken as well as those planned for the coming year. Elements of the Strategy will be updated when it is apparent that this is required. These updates will be presented to Council for endorsement. At the point of major changes to Council’s policy positions and/or the broader policy environment a new Strategy should be developed.

1.4. Policy and practice

Local government's role in addressing homelessness

The recent decisions of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) have committed all tiers of government – including local government – to reducing homelessness. It is important therefore to understand what actions local governments currently undertake in addressing homelessness, how other programs and policies implemented by local government may affect the homeless population and how 'best practice' in the area of local government and homelessness could be conceived.¹⁴

President of the Australian Local Government Association, Mayor David O'Loughlin, notes that local councils are now positioned 'at the forefront of community efforts to tackle Australia's worsening housing affordability and homelessness challenges.'¹⁵

Responses by each municipal council depend on what particular issues are priorities in their communities. Actions being taken to address homelessness include using excess council land or buildings to create housing. Councils are also collaborating with local community service providers, and helping meet housing needs through council-owned caravan parks.¹⁶

Local government is the tier of government closest to the people of Australia and is important for the health and wellbeing of communities through the services it provides and through its role in managing development. This means that local government is also important in addressing homelessness, which is often a very public phenomenon when people are sleeping rough. Living life entirely in public spaces is a confronting experience both for the person who is rough sleeping and for others who use the space. It requires a sensitivity and understanding that local government is best positioned to facilitate.

Accordingly, although the main economic and policy drivers to address homelessness at a broader scale are at the state and federal level, councils in Victoria are finding different ways to play an active role in addressing the alarming increase in homelessness.

Given that this is not a core function of local government, differing levels of resourcing have been allocated to homelessness across the sector. In the City of Melbourne, where homelessness is a very considerable and visible issue, significant resources are being allocated to responding to, and ultimately reducing, homelessness.

These are some of the ways that local governments in Victoria are currently engaging with homelessness:

- Protocols to assist council staff and the community in responding respectfully to rough sleeping
- Information and education through council websites and other forums
- Partnerships with and/or funding of outreach services
- Community grants
- Facilitating networks for the homelessness services industry
- Advocacy to other levels of government

¹⁴ Andrew Beer and Felicity Prance, 'Local Government and Homelessness in Australia: Understanding the Big Picture', Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning, University of Adelaide, 2013.

¹⁵ Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) (2019), 'Homelessness Week' <https://alga.asn.au/homelessness-week/> (Accessed 8 Oct 2019)

¹⁶ Ibid

- Various strategies to support an increase in short and long-term affordable housing options for the homeless
- Primary research, e.g. the StreetCount
- Providing lockers where people sleeping rough can safely store their belongings

There is value to having a coordinated and clear response to homelessness at the municipal level, particularly in providing a welcoming environment for all. However, given the transient nature of the issue it is imperative to also work collaboratively across municipal boundaries and in particular with our neighbouring inner-city local government areas.

A whole-of-Council response

Yarra Council's operational response to homelessness has been guided by the 'Protocol for Responding to Rough Sleeping and Squatting in Yarra' (the Protocol) (see [appendix 1](#)), and by our Emergency Management response to people sleeping rough in extreme weather.

The Protocol was initially developed in 2012 in response to increasing numbers of people sleeping rough in Yarra. In consultation with Hanover Assertive Outreach team and other local homelessness services, Council developed the internal protocol to assist staff to respond most effectively to rough sleeping and squatting. The Protocol is based on a human rights approach and outlines procedures for responding to rough sleeping, including referrals. There has been good uptake of this protocol across the organisation and staff have responded with a variety of creative initiatives that strive to address homelessness and make Yarra a welcoming and compassionate place.

The following list is an example of some of Council's current activities across the organisation. It shows how services are working both collaboratively and individually to facilitate an effective response to the community's needs around homelessness.

Aged and Disability Services

- Partners with cohealth to provide meals through local cafes.
- Provides nutrition grants for local non-profit organisations to provide meals through food packages and local soup vans.
- Provides support services to people in local rooming houses.

Community Partnerships

- Collaborates with local service providers and other areas of Council to coordinate responses to rough sleeping in Yarra.
- Convenes Yarra's Housing and Homelessness Network.
- Develops and manages Yarra's Homelessness Strategy.
- Manages community grant streams.
- Partners with cohealth to provide weekly meals and coordinate services for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community.
- Supports community engagement and outreach across Council.

Economic Development

- Works to provide information to traders to educate the local business community about homelessness.

- Advocates for Council’s role and facilitates connections between local traders, Council services and rough sleepers.

Facilities

- Works with Yarra’s homelessness advisors on handling clean ups at public sites respectfully.

Family, Children & Youth Services

- Provides a family support program.
- Participates in ‘The Orange Door’, a Victorian State Government initiative to provide free services and support to people who are experiencing (or who have experienced) family violence, including offering extra support for people looking after children and to address housing and homelessness.¹⁷

Social Policy and Research

- Develops and administers strategies and responses concerning social and affordable housing in the municipality with the aim of promoting the suitability, quality and availability of this housing.

Yarra Leisure

- Collaborates with other areas of Council to facilitate use of Yarra’s Leisure facilities for people experiencing homelessness.

Yarra Libraries

- Programs events based around educating the community about homelessness and engaging in dialogue about key issues for the community.
- Makes everyone welcome in library spaces (including allowing people to sleep if it is not interfering with others).
- Enables people to join, borrow and use the libraries resources with no fixed address.
- Partners with Open Table to provide free community meals two times per month.

Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government has committed to investing more than \$6 billion in housing support and homelessness services in the next year, including approximately \$4.6 billion on Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) and more than \$1.5 billion through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA – see below).¹⁸

The Federal government also have a number of initiatives related to increasing the supply of social and affordable housing.

NHHA

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is a bilateral agreement between the federal government and the states and territories. In July 2018 the NHHA replaced the previous

¹⁷ State Government of Victoria (2018) ‘What is the Orange Door?’, available at: <https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au/what-is-the-orange-door> (Accessed 4 Oct 2019).

¹⁸ Department of Social Services (2019) at <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support/programmes-services/homelessness> (Accessed 8 Oct. 2019)

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the National Affordable Housing Agreement, joining the two streams of housing and homelessness. The NHHA includes \$125 million set aside for homelessness services in 2019–20. States and territories are expected to match this funding.

Under the NHHA, to receive funding, state and territory governments will need to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting.

The following priority homelessness cohorts have been identified in the NHHA:

- women and children affected by family and domestic violence,
- children and young people,
- Indigenous Australians,
- people experiencing repeat homelessness,
- people exiting from care or institutions into homelessness, and
- older people.

Domestic and Family Violence

In August 2019, the Federal Government endorsed the fourth action plan for the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. Actions resulting from this endorsement include a \$60 million capital grant program that will aim to increase the number of new or expanded emergency accommodation dwellings that are appropriate for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.¹⁹ It is calculated that this program could build up to 450 safe places and assist up to 6,500 women and children per year.²⁰ The Commonwealth Government will also provide \$18 million through the *Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes* program to continue supporting states and territories to provide security updates and safety planning.²¹

Young people and homelessness

In order to assist the increasing numbers of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the *Reconnect Program* has received a funding commitment from the Federal Government of up to \$118 million over five years.²²

The Reconnect Program aims to break the cycle of homelessness by providing holistic support to whole families through counselling, group work, mediation and practical support. It supports young people to find stable accommodation, improve relationships with their family, gain employment or stay at school, and start participating in the local community.²³

¹⁹ Department of Social Services (2019) at <https://www.dss.gov.au/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022> (Accessed 9 Oct. 2019)

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Department of Social Services (2019) at <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support/programmes-services/homelessness/domestic-and-family-violence> (Accessed 8 Oct. 2019)

²² Department of Social Services (2019) at <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support/programmes-services/homelessness> (Accessed 8 Oct 2019)

²³ *ibid*

Victorian Government

The primary plan guiding Victoria's response to homelessness is the 2018 *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*.²⁴ Additionally, the Victorian Government have set out their intentions with regard to increasing the supply of affordable housing through the *Homes for Victorians (2017)* strategy.

The homelessness and rough sleeping action plan notes that there has been an increase in the number of people sleeping rough in Victoria in recent years, and subsequently the number of people seeking homelessness services.

The plan identifies three groups affected by rough sleeping:

1. those who are **recently homeless and sleeping rough due to personal crises**,
2. those who have been **sleeping rough for an extended period** of time and have multiple related issues, and
3. those who are at **risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping after leaving an institutional setting**.

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan is a framework for reducing the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping with a focus on prevention and early intervention. The action plan is guided by four key themes:

1. Intervening early to prevent homelessness
2. Providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible
3. Support to maintain stable accommodation
4. An effective and responsive homelessness services system

Each response is aimed to be delivered within the context of the three groups identified above.

Affordable Housing

Homes for Victorians (2017) and *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* outline a number of initiatives and funding streams to increase the number of social and affordable housing dwellings in Victoria, largely through public-private partnerships, but crucially they set no target of how many dwellings that need to be added in the coming period.²⁵

The *Homes for Victorians* strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing in Victoria through:

- a \$1 billion Social Housing Growth Fund,
- the development of 6,000 social housing dwellings,
- renewal of 2,500 ageing public housing dwellings,
- \$100 million in low cost loans, and
- \$1 billion in government guarantees to housing associations to enable them to expand their stock.

In addition, the government has identified 52 parcels of land across the state for development into social housing. These development opportunities are all intended to increase supply of social housing in partnership with the private sector.

²⁴ Department of Health and Human Services (January 2018) 'Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan', Victorian Government, Melbourne.

²⁵ Infrastructure Victoria have estimated a need for approximately 30,000 new affordable dwellings across Victoria within 0-10 years. In 'Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy', December 2016.

Other programs and funding

The following funding streams are also highlighted in *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*:

- \$9.8 million for the **Towards Home program** that will provide temporary accommodation with intensive, flexible and specialist support for people with histories of recurring and persistent homelessness.
- A \$109 million **homelessness package** to assist people who are homeless or at risk by intervening earlier to prevent homelessness, improving responses to people in crisis and supporting people to sustain their housing and achieve independence.
- A \$152 million **Family Violence Housing Blitz** to redevelop refuges, and build and buy more housing for women and children escaping family violence.
- \$33.2 million to extend **private rental brokerage** for a further two years to assist people to secure and maintain accommodation in the private rental market as a long-term housing option.²⁶

Despite all of these initiatives, there is no sign of a decrease in homelessness in the short-term.

Services

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) is an umbrella term for a range of agencies that provide support to people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and receive funding under the NHHA.²⁷ These services are delivered by a range of not-for-profit organisations through a centralised access point.

SHS provide assistance to access short term or long term housing and help people at-risk to remain housed. Temporary housing is generally provided by registered housing providers or housing associations. This includes transitional housing, crisis accommodation, as well as emergency accommodation which is paid for by a homelessness service but provided in the private sector such as cheap motels, rooming or boarding houses. SHS can also assist people into longer term housing in the private rental market or through applications for social housing.

In addition to housing support, SHS also provide a broad range of general support services, including:²⁸

- Advice and information regarding housing options
- Advocacy and liaison
- Assistance to access income support payments
- Assistance with applications for public and community housing
- Assistance with rent arrears or emergency accommodation
- Meals
- Laundry or shower services
- Material aid
- Case management
- Assertive outreach

²⁶ Department of Health and Human Services (January 2018) 'Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan', Victorian Government, Melbourne.

²⁷ As explained in Launch Housing's 'Explainer: The homelessness services system and demand for services'. Available at: <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/explainer-the-homelessness-services-system-and-demand-for-services/> (Accessed 10 Oct. 2019)

²⁸ As outlined in Launch Housing's 'Explainer: The homelessness services system and demand for services'. Available at: <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/explainer-the-homelessness-services-system-and-demand-for-services/> (Accessed 10 Oct. 2019)

- Support around sexual assault or family violence
- Referral to specialist services as required (such as health, mental health services, drug and alcohol, legal)
- Court support

1.5. Research

Recognising causes and understanding vulnerability to homelessness

People who are homeless are not a distinct and separate population. The line between being homeless and not being homeless is quite fluid and the pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear nor uniform. Individuals and families who end up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable, and lack adequate housing and income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. Homelessness is not just about a lack of housing, but also about severe marginalisation, disadvantage, and discrimination.

Common causes of homelessness

The causes of homelessness reflect a complex interplay between *structural factors*, *systems failures* and *individual circumstances*.²⁹ Importantly, homelessness can be both the result of complex issues and the cause of them. Experiences of homelessness are also likely to add to any pre-existing problems.

Homelessness often involves multiple complexities such as:³⁰

- The chronic shortage of affordable and available rental housing
- Domestic and family violence
- Intergenerational poverty
- Financial crisis
- Long term unemployment
- Economic and social exclusion
- Severe and persistent mental illness and psychological distress
- Substance abuse
- Exiting state care
- Exiting prison
- Severe overcrowding/housing crisis.

Frequently, people will experience multiple issues at once, which compounds the impact on their lives and living situations.

Being at risk

Many Australians experience events at some point in their lives that may place them at greater risk of homelessness. It is estimated that more than half (57 percent) of lower income rental households in the private market experience rental stress (paying more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing costs),³¹ and around 1 in 6 women (1.6 million) have experienced some form of partner violence since the age of 15, putting them at risk of homelessness.³² For someone under housing

²⁹ Homeless Hub (2017) 'Causes of Homelessness', available at <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/causes-homelessness>

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ ABS (2019) Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2017–18. ABS cat no. 4130.0. Canberra: ABS.

³² ABS (2017) Personal safety, Australia, 2016. ABS cat no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

stress, losing their job due to illness or retrenchment could create a critical situation in which they become homeless. Someone experiencing domestic violence may have no safety net or resources, or will sacrifice what they do have in order to escape a dire situation.

These situations and figures begin to reveal how some people are particularly at risk of homelessness due to circumstances beyond their control. In particular, AIHW recognises that people who 'have experienced family and domestic violence, young people, children on care and protection orders, [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] Australians, people leaving health or social care arrangements, and Australians aged 55 or older' are in particularly vulnerable circumstances.³³

LGBTIQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Intersex Queer or Questioning) people are also over-represented in homeless populations due to both the complexity of their experiences and difficulty accessing services.³⁴

Vulnerable groups

Data and research suggests that the following groups have an increased risk of homelessness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- **Data:** 18 percent (almost 11,000) Aboriginal people in Victoria, were in contact with homelessness services in 2017–18, as compared to 1.8 percent of Victorians.³⁵ Additionally, Aboriginal people are over-represented as homelessness clients – 10.4 percent of homelessness clients in Victoria are Aboriginal yet they only make up 0.9 percent of the population.³⁶
- **Needs:** wraparound services that accommodate cultural needs and enable self-determination, provide mental and physical health care, housing to enable caring for extended families, and supported pathways from homelessness to long-term secure housing. Specific supports may also be required around elements such as employment, the legal system, disability, alcohol and drugs, and family violence.

Asylum seekers

- **Issue:** Recent changes to eligibility for Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) – a safety net for vulnerable people seeking asylum who are excluded from mainstream support services in Australia – has put thousands of vulnerable people at risk of homelessness. The tightening criteria for eligibility has increased reliance on community and charitable organisations to provide basic supports, in particular housing. Organisations such as the Red Cross and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre report a vast increase in demand for housing services since the new rules came into effect and are unable to meet the demand.³⁷

³³ AIHW (2019) 'Homelessness and Homelessness Services' at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services> (accessed 10 Oct 2019)

³⁴ Mission Australia, Review of Homelessness, 2015

³⁵ Productivity Commission, Table 19A.4 in Report on Government Services, 2019 (as presented in Aboriginal Housing Victoria 'Key Data' graphic, available at: <https://ahvic.org.au/cms/uploads/docs/web-key-data-housing-and-homelessness-victoria-.pdf>)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, *Cutting the Safety Net: The Impact of Cuts to Status Resolution Support Services* (2019). Available at: <https://www.asrc.org.au/resources/publications/> (Accessed: 24/09/19).

- **Needs:** legal support around visas, employment pathways, English language training as well as healthcare and housing suitable for families.

Children and young people

- **Data:** 20 to 29 year olds are the largest age cohort of people who are homeless in Yarra.³⁸
- **Needs:** Support from wraparound services including life skills, physical and mental health, education and employment. There may also be involvement of human services where children are concerned.

Family violence

- **Data:** Family violence is the number one cause for seeking homelessness assistance in Victoria.³⁹
- **Needs:** Wraparound support services including mental and physical health support, employment pathways, and housing that has high safety standards and can accommodate a family.

LGBTIQ+

- **Data:** LBG people are at least twice as likely as heterosexuals to experience homelessness and LGBTQ people are more likely to experience homelessness at a younger age and this is driven by family rejection⁴⁰
- **Needs:** Wraparound support services including mental and physical health support, and housing that has high safety standards. For trans and gender diverse clients, in particular, a sense of safety often includes the need for private bathroom facilities, and being placed in gender appropriate accommodation.⁴¹

Older people

- **Data:** Yarra's older population has significantly lower earnings than the broader population with almost half earning less than \$500 a week (roughly aligned with 'very low' income bracket for singles), as compared to one in four for the broader Yarra population aged 15 years and over.⁴² Financial insecurities can occur when people have reached the end of their working lives, rely on the age pension for income, lack future earnings potential, and have increased health costs. Older single women (see below) often face additional financial disadvantage due to lower superannuation or as a result of changed circumstances such as divorce, or death of a partner.
- **Needs:** Mental and physical health care, social supports, accessible, or adaptable, affordable homes to support comfortable ageing and independent living.

Older women

- **Data:** Women over 55 years are the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Australia.⁴³ They frequently have had a lifetime of income disadvantage through diminished earning capacity due to carer and family responsibilities.

³⁸ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016 and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Collection – LGA data cube, 2017-18.

³⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist homelessness services 2017-18: Victoria', Australian Government.

⁴⁰ Gay and Lesbian Foundation of Australia (2017) 'LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria'. Available at: <http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/research-and-policy/reports/> (accessed 10 Oct 2019).

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016

⁴³ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016

- **Needs:** Mental and physical health care, affordable housing with social and health support and accessible, or adaptable, homes to support comfortable ageing.

People with mental illness

- **Data:** People living with mental illness frequently have inappropriate health and social support, and reduced access to employment, which leads directly and quickly to poverty and unstable housing.⁴⁴ Studies have also demonstrated that homelessness itself directly causes mental health issues.⁴⁵
- **Needs:** strong wraparound supports including both mental and physical health, life skills, employment and education and pathways to find and maintain stable, long-term social housing.

People with substance abuse issues

- **Data:** There is a strong association between drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness, with studies from the homelessness services sector showing that 43 percent of the homeless population in Melbourne reported that they had alcohol and other drug use problems.⁴⁶ Of these people, one third reported having substance abuse issues prior to becoming homeless.
- **Needs:** People who have substance abuse issues require strong supports for their mental and physical health, social needs, and employment and education in order to find and maintain long-term stable housing. As in all cases, housing should be the first priority so that they have a secure place to focus on addressing their other needs (see Housing First below).

Homelessness in Yarra

Accurate data on homelessness is difficult to obtain due to the transient and hidden nature of the problem, however it is clear that rates of homelessness have grown over the last decade nationally and internationally. In the 2016 Census, it was estimated that 116,000 people in Australia were homeless, an increase of 4.6 percent from 2011. People in severely overcrowded dwellings, elderly and younger people, and people sleeping rough were the groups with the largest spikes.

The rate of homelessness in Yarra is 95 per 10,000 population, the fourth highest rate for any Victorian municipality, and more than double that of Victoria as a whole (42 per 10,000).⁴⁷

The 2016 estimate of homelessness in Yarra was 838, including 64 people experiencing primary homelessness (i.e. living in tents, improvised dwellings, or sleeping out), a similar number to the 2011 Census.⁴⁸ The on-the-ground Officer and assertive outreach experience is however of consistent growth in numbers of reported rough sleeping sites, and increasing complexity of incidents related to primary homelessness.

Rough sleepers are the most visible homeless group, however they only make up a small proportion of people who are homeless. According to the 2016 Census, the largest homeless group in Yarra was

⁴⁴ Smith, J (2018) *Introduction; Mental Health, Disability and Homelessness*, Council to Homeless Persons at <https://chp.org.au/mental-health-disability-and-homelessness/> (Accessed 10 Oct 2019).

⁴⁵ *ibid*

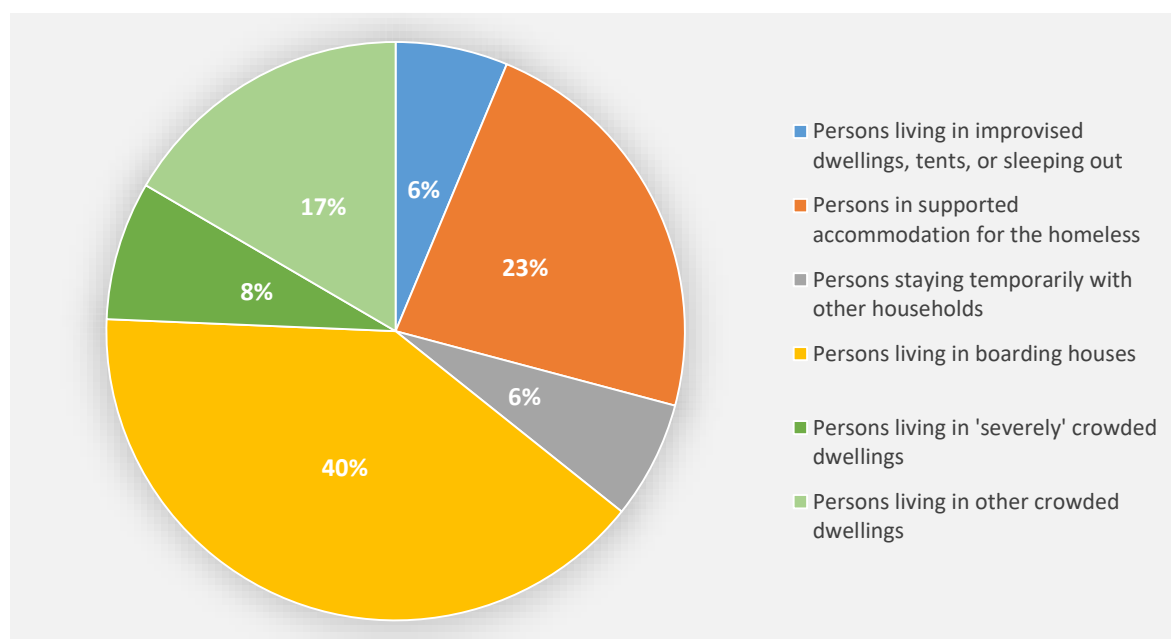
⁴⁶ AIHW (2019) 'Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs in Australia', at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/priority-populations/homeless-people> (Accessed 10 Oct 19)

⁴⁷ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016

⁴⁸ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2011 and 2016

persons living in boarding houses, followed by persons living in over-crowded dwellings or supported accommodation for the homeless, see Figure 1 overleaf.⁴⁹

Figure 1: Proportion of homeless in Yarra by living situation, 2016



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016

According to the AIHW Specialist Homeless Services 2017-18 data:⁵⁰

- 288,800 people were assisted by specialist homelessness agencies across Australia, equivalent to 1 in 85 Australians
- In Victoria, 116,872 clients were assisted by specialist homelessness services
- 37 percent were homeless on first presentation
- 64 percent were female and 36 percent male
- 1 in 10 were Indigenous
- domestic and family violence was the number one reason for seeking assistance (47 percent)
- 40 percent sought assistance because of financial difficulties and 37 percent because of housing crisis
- 9 in 10 clients (91 percent) at risk of homelessness were assisted to maintain housing
- 3 in 10 clients (29 percent) who were homeless were assisted into housing.

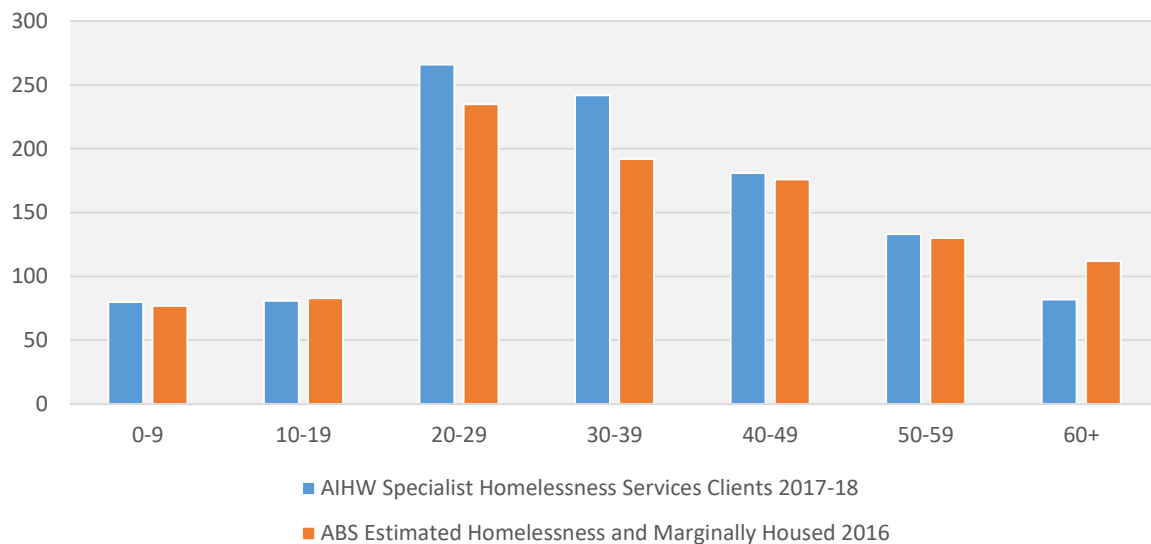
In 2017–18, 1,070 homelessness clients were recorded in Yarra, of which 547 were female and 523 male. Just over half of all clients in Yarra (51 percent) were homeless at the time of seeking assistance, considerably higher than the proportion for Victoria.

⁴⁹ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016.

⁵⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016) *Specialist Homelessness Services 2015–16*, available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/data> (Accessed 4 Oct 2019).

Most homeless or marginally housed people in Yarra are relatively young – aged 20–29, followed by the 30–39 years age bracket. Notably, about 160 children were recorded in both the ABS estimates and specialist homelessness services client data for Yarra.⁵¹ See Figure 2, overleaf.

Figure 2: Age profile of homeless population in Yarra



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services clients, 2017-18 and ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016

It is important to note that although data from the ABS Census and Specialist Homelessness Services Collection gives us some indication of the extent of the problem, a 2014 national survey from the ABS found that that in the previous 10 years the majority of people who experienced homelessness (67 percent) did not approach services for assistance at the time of their most recent episode of homelessness.⁵²

Sleeping Rough in Yarra

It is almost impossible to get an accurate account of the number of people sleeping rough.

The City of Melbourne StreetCount aims to gain a better understanding of how many people are sleeping rough on a given night of the year, including collection of basic demographics and people’s circumstances.

The City of Melbourne have been doing biennial counts since 2008. In 2018 the five inner-city municipalities of Melbourne, Maribyrnong, Yarra, Stonnington and Port Philip participated together for the first time.

On Tuesday 19 June 2018, 392 people were counted sleeping rough in inner Melbourne, including 29 people in Yarra. Of the 392 people sleeping rough in inner Melbourne 78 percent were male, and 22 percent were female, and 54 percent of people were aged 26–40.

⁵¹ ABS Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness, 2016 and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Collection – LGA data cube, 2017–18.

⁵² ABS (2015) ‘General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014’, Cat. no. 4159.0

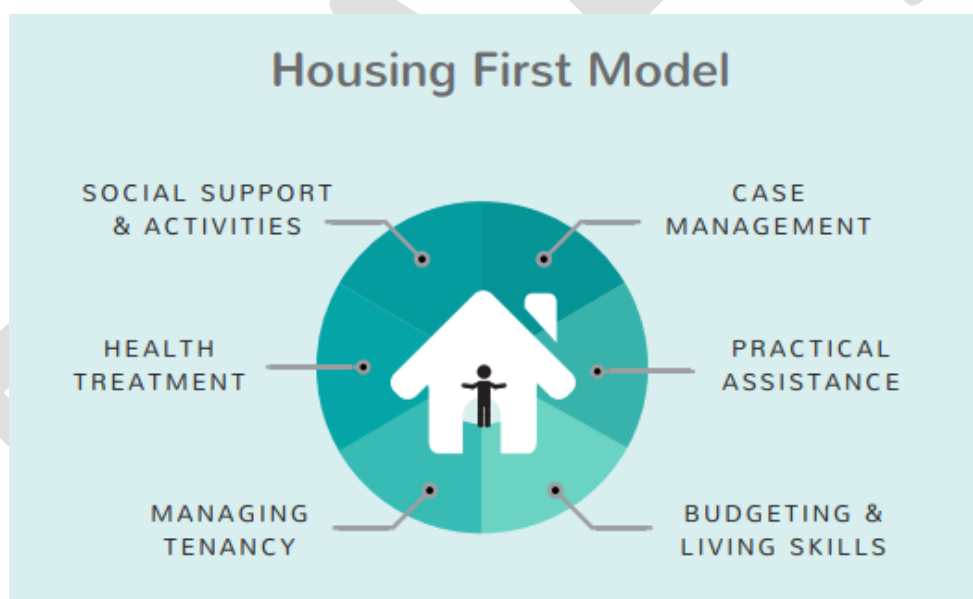
Best practice responses to homelessness

There has been a recent policy shift away from responding to homelessness after the fact, to preventative approaches that aim to avoid homelessness in the first instance. This shift has been shown to prevent potential further trauma for the individual and save government funds by better directing resources, and reducing need for supportive services long term. Where homelessness has occurred, it is recognised that providing long-term secure housing is the first and most essential step to creating a sustainable pathway out of homelessness, and the capacity to address associated factors.

Housing First

As outlined above, the causes of homelessness are complex and homeless people often face a number of health and wellbeing issues. When responding to homelessness, Australian and international research indicates however, that the most effective approach is to secure stable housing first, and then address additional complex needs through targeted 'wraparound' services.⁵³ This is known as the 'Housing First' model.

Figure 3: Housing First Model



Source: Council for Homeless Persons

By providing long-term instead of temporary housing, it is believed that people who were experiencing homelessness can shift their focus from worrying about where they will sleep to overcoming other difficulties in their lives and improving their wellbeing. This inverts previous practice where services sought first to address personal issues, such as illness or addiction, as a prerequisite to accessing long-term housing.

The Housing First model began in the United States in the early 1990s and has since been applied in various formats internationally, including in Australia. Evaluation of Housing First programs have

⁵³ Council to Homeless Persons (2018) 'Housing First: Permanent Supportive Housing'. Available at: <http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-180606-Housing-First-2018-6-June.pdf> (accessed 10 Oct 2019).

found markedly higher retention of housing for participants in these programs. Data from the UK also suggests that it is a cost-efficient approach for governments.⁵⁴

Despite general support for the approach in Australia, there have been challenges in rolling out Housing First programs due to a lack of affordable housing stock.⁵⁵

Wraparound services

In accordance with the Housing First model, once housing has been secured, people often require targeted and tailored wraparound services to maintain their housing long term and start rebuilding their lives.

Wraparound services are essentially a collection of support services delivered through a holistic method, taking into account each person's circumstances and particular needs. Multiple services work in a coordinated way to build long-term capabilities for individuals and families, which extend beyond any immediate crisis, providing skills to sustain a more stable living situation into the future.⁵⁶

In order for wraparound services to be effective, a collaborative and coordinated services system is required that enables simple referrals that don't require people to retell their story multiple times.

Services might include support to maintain tenancies, alcohol and drug treatment, mental health care, parenting support, education and employment programs, as well as a myriad of other supports required by the individual.

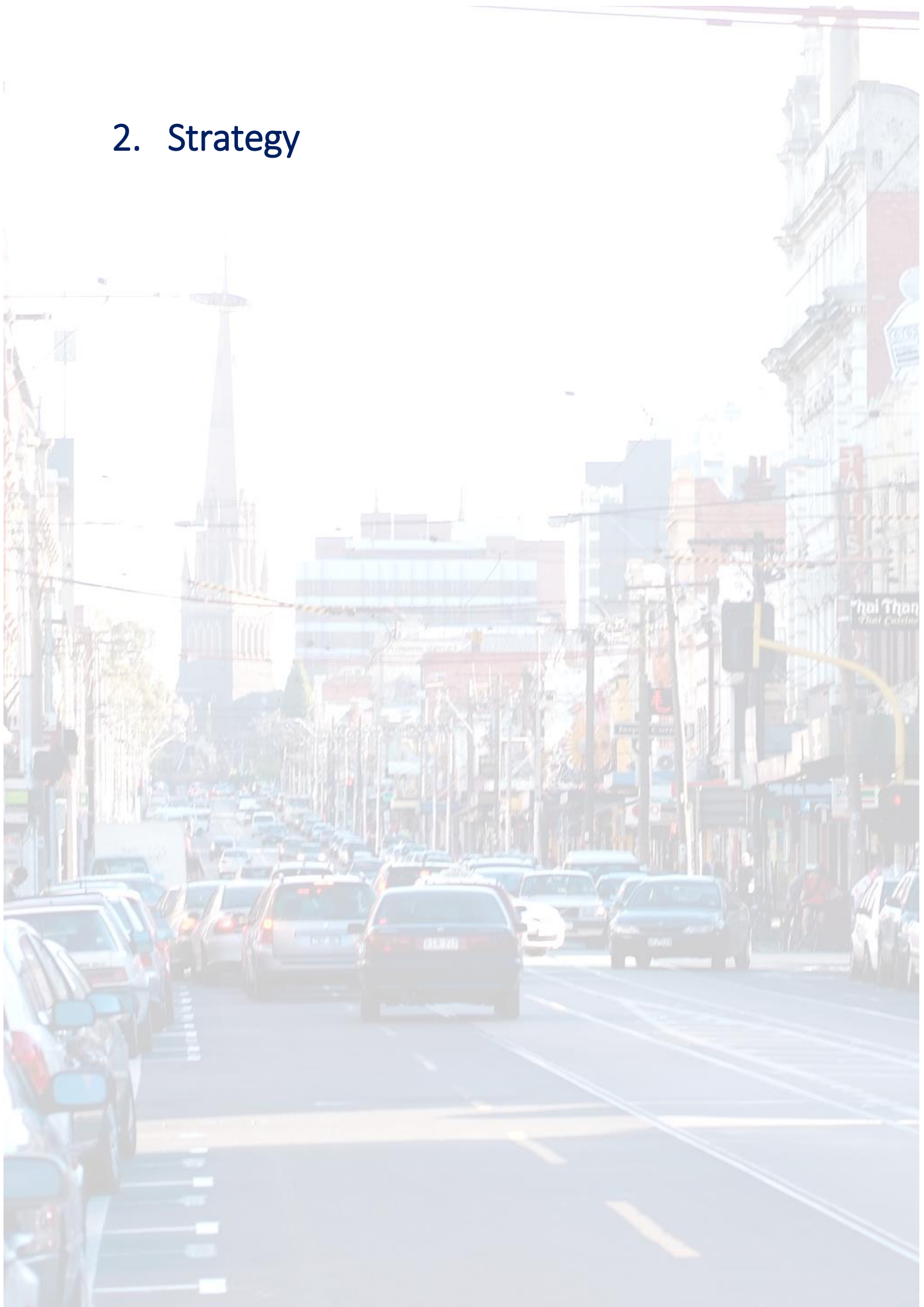
Provision of support services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness acknowledges that although crucially important, housing in and of itself, is not sufficient to ensure that people are able to secure housing long term and participate in society.

⁵⁴ AHURI Brief (2018) 'What is the Housing First model and how does it help those experiencing homelessness?'. Available at: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy/ahuri-briefs/what-is-the-housing-first-model> (accessed 10 Oct 2019).

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (2019) *Living on the edge: Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence*, Canberra, p. 45, available at: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024242/toc_pdf/LivingontheEdge.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf (Accessed 3 Oct 2019).

2. Strategy



2.1. Themes

In the development of the Homelessness Strategy some common themes were identified through consultation:

- There needs to be clarity around Council's response to homelessness and people sleeping rough. This includes educating stakeholders, and sustaining a cross-Council commitment to the Protocol.
- Collaboration and partnerships with local agencies were also raised, looking at a holistic and sustainable approach to addressing systemic factors leading to homelessness.
- Stakeholders were keen for Council to use its voice to advocate for preventing and addressing homelessness, including advocating for emergency crisis accommodation and social and affordable housing in Yarra as a way to break the cycle of homelessness.

It is clear that local government cannot work in isolation on this matter. In consultation with the community, including people with lived experience of homelessness, the following key priorities were developed. These priorities will be the foundation of our work moving forward.

2.2. Priority Areas

Yarra's three priority areas are:



Priority 1: An Informed Response to Rough Sleeping

Council will employ a coordinated and practical response to rough sleeping, engaging all areas of the organisation through our Rough Sleeping Protocol.

We will work across council, the homelessness sector and the community to develop best practice ways of utilising existing and potential resources most effectively.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1.1: COMPASSIONATE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE

Ensure a compassionate approach in the management of homeless people and rough sleepers in Council's public spaces.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1.2: AN INFORMED COMMUNITY

Educate and advocate across Council about the systemic nature of homelessness and the duty of care a community has to ensure the human rights of all are protected.

Priority 2: Collaboration

Council will build on existing connections and create new partnerships with stakeholders and networks to work most effectively for sustainable, achievable and accountable outcomes for those who are homeless or sleeping rough in Yarra.

We will ensure that collaboration is not restricted by arbitrary municipal borders to ensure a realistic and holistic approach for a transient community.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2.1: EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Work with stakeholders and service providers to coordinate and partner on initiatives that will help people sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness in our municipality, and across inner metropolitan Melbourne.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2.2: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COLLABORATIONS

Be a key facilitator to ensure that people who are homeless, service providers, local businesses, and the community have a voice in the ongoing discussion about, and development of programs to address, homelessness and rough sleeping in Yarra.

Priority 3: Advocacy

Council is committed to using its voice to advocate on homelessness and rough sleeping matters that support positive and effective outcomes.

We are committed to protecting the human rights of residents and visitors to our municipality and will be a voice for the vulnerable and those living at risk.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4.1: ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Council will utilise our connections to advocate not only for availability of social and affordable housing, but also for appropriate funding and support of alcohol and drug services, mental health support services, and family support programs.

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3. Appendices



3.1. Appendix 1

HOW TO RESPOND TO ROUGH SLEEPING and SQUATTING IN YARRA

Last updated 2017

ISSUE AND RESPONSE

Homelessness and insecure housing are on the rise in large cities all around the world as housing affordability and other forces impact on the ability of people to get and keep their housing.

Over recent years Yarra has seen a rise in the number of people who are sleeping rough (for example on the streets, in parks, and in vehicles) and who are squatting in disused buildings. At the same time there has been a net loss of public housing and in the number of rooming house beds available to people who traditionally used rooming houses rather than slept rough.

You may come into contact with people who are experiencing homelessness and who may need help from homelessness services. Many residents and traders who come into contact with people sleeping rough call Council seeking ways to get them help.

This protocol aims to help staff respond effectively to homelessness by raising awareness of our homelessness referral procedures.

REFERRALS

We have an ongoing agreement with Launch Housing assertive outreach program to give us the resources to respond in a timely and effective way to rough sleeping. This agreement means Launch Housing will respond to our referrals within 48 hours, provide feedback, advice and other information on rough sleeping in the City of Yarra. They will also liaise with us on any actions we need to take that affect people sleeping rough.

How to make a referral:

- Use yarraroughsleepers.com.au to make a referral online,
- Email roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au or phone Council on **9205 5555** to advise officers of the location, description, duration of stay, any access points or information related to the health and wellbeing of the person/s sleeping rough or squatting.

All referrals, feedback and follow up information about rough sleeping in Yarra are collated at roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au

ROUGH SLEEPING

According to Homelessness Australia, around 6% of people experiencing homelessness sleep rough. Most people who are homeless are in overcrowded, insecure and inappropriate housing, such as staying with relatives, couch surfing, in rooming houses, or in unsafe and temporary dwellings. Most rough sleepers choose places that are as safe as possible, well lit, around people, and close to services.

If you have any concerns about safety, please ring police on **000**. If the situation is not urgent or unsafe, working collaboratively with the outreach team may be an option. In this case call Council on **9205 5555** or email roughsleeping@yarracity.vic.gov.au

SLEEPING IN VEHICLES, TENTS

Our local laws acknowledge homelessness as special circumstances. Wherever possible, homeless people sleeping in tents and in vehicles should be referred for contact by the outreach team before our officers take action.

SQUATTING

If there are any concerns about safety of squatters, call the police on **000**. On private (including statutory authorities) premises, our Building Services team need to be informed to ensure premises are made safe. On council premises Building Maintenance needs to be informed.

HOMELESSNESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

All Victorians have a right to be in public spaces, and generally staff should only approach a person sleeping rough if:

- They appear distressed and/or in need of assistance.
- They are sheltering in circumstances that threaten the health and safety of themselves and/or others.
- They are accompanied by children who appear to be under 15 or appear to be under 17 themselves.
- Their behaviour threatens the safety and security of people around them or could result in damage to property or to the environment.
- Their safety is threatened by others.

We need to consider whether our decisions and actions are compatible with human rights under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, which obliges Council to ensure people's rights are respected.

HOMELESS PEOPLE USING COUNCIL SERVICES

All people have a right to equal standards of service irrespective of their social status. Should staff have any concerns about safety around people using our services, call the police on **000**. For issues around behaviour that may relate to homelessness, you can seek advice from local homelessness agencies. Our Policy Advisor Housing and Homelessness **x5094** may assist in liaising with an appropriate service.

Or check out services on Ask Izzy www.infoxchange.org/au/communityprograms/homeless-help

Ask Izzy is a mobile website that connects people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with essential services such as shelter, food, clothing and health care.

ILLEGAL ACTIVITY

If you are witness to or have concerns about illegal activity call the police on 000 immediately. Our officers have no authority to act on issues that are police matters, including begging.

YARRA SYRINGE DISPOSAL HOTLINE

If you find needles or syringes in a public place or on private or council premises, call 9417 5125 or email yarrasyringe.disposal@cohealth.org.au

Your request will be acted on within 24 hours.

TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE AND COORDINATED RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS RELATED TO HOMELESSNESS BY COUNCIL OFFICERS

The protocol is produced in accordance with Yarra Council's obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006.

AFTER HOURS OPTIONS

The Crisis Contact Centre (CCC) is a generalist service which provides a 24/7, 365 days of the year, statewide and local crisis response to people of all ages. It is a high volume service and responds to the diverse needs of over 8000 households each year. CCC also links people with other support providers to address post-crisis needs.

Free call 24/7: 1800 627 727 Phone: 9536 7777

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3.2 Appendix 2

YEAR 1 ACTION PLAN

Key priority 1: AN INFORMED RESPONSE TO ROUGH SLEEPING

STRATEGIC GOAL 1.1: COMPASSIONATE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE

Ensure a compassionate and patient approach is utilised in the management of homeless people and rough sleepers in Council parks and public spaces.

Action	Implementation	Responsibility (including partners)
1.1.1 Respond effectively to people sleeping rough in Yarra	<p>Continue to implement Council's 'How to Respond to Rough Sleeping and Squatting in Yarra Protocol'</p> <p>Continue to engage Launch Housing as the outreach contract to respond to rough sleeping in the municipality</p> <p>Provide assistance for people sleeping rough during extreme weather conditions eg. free gym passes</p>	<p>Community Partnerships</p> <p>Outreach Contract</p> <p>Recreation & Leisure</p> <p>People & Culture</p>
1.1.2 Provide Council spaces and facilities that are safe, accessible and welcoming for people at risk of / or experiencing homelessness	<p>Continue to implement strategies to ensure Council's parks, recreation facilities, libraries and other venues are accessible and inclusive</p> <p>Ensure all staff adopt a compassionate approach and response to people sleeping rough in Council's open spaces and facilities</p>	Whole-of-Council

STRATEGIC GOAL 1.2: AN INFORMED COMMUNITY

Educate and advocate across Council, to local businesses, and to the broader community the systemic nature of homelessness and the duty of care a community has to ensure the human rights of all are protected.

Action	Implementation	Responsibility (including partners)
1.2.1 Ensure Councillors and officers are aware of homelessness referral procedures, and Council's responsibilities under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights	<p>Communicate and promote the Protocol to staff utilising a range of media</p> <p>Facilitate information sessions for Council staff, including training on how to use the online rough sleeping reporting tool</p>	<p>Community Partnerships</p> <p>Communications</p>

		Investigate inclusion of training in Council's internal training calendar	
1.2.2	Ensure the wider community, including residents and traders, are aware of homelessness referral procedures, and Council's responsibilities under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights	Facilitate community information sessions on Council's homelessness referral procedures Develop targeted resources for the community on Council's homelessness referral procedures	Community Partnerships Communications Economic Development
1.2.3	Encourage other municipalities to align with Council's 'How to Respond to Rough Sleeping and Squatting in Yarra Protocol'	Promote the Protocol at relevant meetings and networks Promote to the Protocol through external platforms	Community Partnerships Communications
1.2.4	Include the voice of people with lived experience of homelessness in the development of policies, strategies, and programs that affect them	Ensure community engagement processes involve people with lived experience of homelessness Ensure people with lived experience are invited to attend relevant networks and meetings where appropriate	Whole-of-Council
1.2.5	Develop methods of accessible forms of communication for hard to reach people, at risk of / or experiencing homelessness	Ensure that Council collateral is available in a variety of formats Investigate avenues for distributing collateral for hard to reach people	Community Partnerships

Key priority 2: COLLABORATION

STRATEGIC GOAL 2.1: EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Work with stakeholders and service providers to coordinate and partner on initiatives that will help people sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness in our municipality, and across inner metropolitan Melbourne.

Action	Implementation	Responsibility (including partners)
2.1.1 Continue to actively partner with key stakeholders on initiatives that address homelessness issues	Support and implement IMAP actions that address the prevention of homelessness, including participation in Street Count. Observe the Operating Protocol between Council and Victoria Police	Community Partnerships IMAP?? Victoria Police

STRATEGIC GOAL 2.2: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COLLABORATIONS

Undertake a key facilitation role in ensuring that the voices of the homeless, service providers, local business, and the community can be heard in the ongoing discussion about, and development of programs to address, homelessness and rough sleeping in Yarra.

Action	Implementation	Responsibility (including partners)
2.2.1 Foster and facilitate relationships with key agencies and community service providers to strengthen support in the homelessness sector.	Continue to facilitate the Yarra Housing and Homelessness Network Continue to actively support other relevant networks including the Melbourne Metropolitan Rooming House Group Continue to work closely with services that respond to people at risk of / or experiencing homelessness including Victoria Police, Launch Housing, Council to Homeless Persons, Frontyard Youth Services and other local organisations Promote online platforms that provide information on services related to homelessness	Community Partnerships Family, Children's & Youth Services Aged & Disability Services Library Services
2.2.2 Support opportunities for people at risk of /	Support Council lead initiatives such as Billabong BBQ	Library Services Arts & Culture

or experiencing homelessness to connect with others	<p>Promote and support events from service delivery teams to foster increased community engagement</p> <p>Support initiatives addressing homelessness through the Community Grants program</p>	<p>Recreation & Leisure Families, Children & Youth Services Community Partnerships Economic Development Community Grants</p>
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Key priority 3: **ADVOCACY**

STRATEGIC GOAL 3.1: ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Council will utilise our considerable reach and connections to advocate not only for availability of social and affordable housing, but also for appropriate funding and support of alcohol and drug services, mental health support services, and family support programs.

Action	Implementation	Responsibility (including partners)
3.1.1 Advocate at a local, state and federal level for an increase in more adequate (safe and secure) social and affordable housing in Yarra as a key way to address housing stress and homelessness.	<p>Research and lobby at all levels of government for more crisis/emergency accommodation and transitional housing in Yarra, as part of the housing continuum, and to align with the Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.</p> <p>Ensure Council responds to future reviews of housing and homelessness</p> <p>Strengthen advocacy submissions by partnering with key stakeholders where appropriate</p>	Social Policy Community Partnerships
3.1.2 Advocate at a local, state and federal level for an increase in funding for support and programs which focus on supporting vulnerable people and outreach to those experiencing primary homelessness	<p>Research and lobby at all levels of government for relevant funding to prevent and support contributors of homelessness for example mental health, substance misuse issues, family violence, etc.</p> <p>Work with local networks and agencies on ways to advocate for funding to support issues connected to homelessness</p>	
3.1.3 Facilitate events with the aim of raising awareness on issues relating to homelessness	<p>Recognise, promote and coordinate activities for key events such as Homelessness Week, Anti-Poverty Week and Street Count</p> <p>Build on research, latest trends and best practice of addressing homelessness through coordinated initiatives</p>	Community Partnerships Library Services

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