Merri-bek City Council

Homelessness Strategy

2024 – 2034



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1. Vision

"Merri-bek City Council is dedicated to an approach that prioritises human rights and health equity, aiming to enhance outcomes for those facing homelessness. Council actively addresses homelessness by focusing on prevention strategies and implementing early, evidence-based interventions. We respond to homelessness by collaborating with community services and residents to ensure that everyone in Merri-bek has access to safe, stable housing, working towards a future where this is a reality for all."

2. Introduction

Homelessness can impact anyone at any stage of their life. Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the dignity and human rights of individuals facing homelessness, recognising that homelessness, including people who are sleeping rough, is often the result of systemic issues. Secure housing is a fundamental human right and a necessity, crucial for individuals and families to contribute positively to society and maintain their health and well-being. Studies indicate that unstable and inadequate housing can contribute to or worsen health challenges such as mental illness, substance abuse, and other major health conditions, in some cases causes death. In our discourse, we prioritise 'person first' language, referring to 'individuals who are sleeping rough' rather than 'rough sleepers', and 'people experiencing homelessness' instead of 'homeless individuals'.

3. Council's Role in supporting people who are experiencing homelessness

The Council adopts a comprehensive approach to tackle homelessness, internally and externally. It is crucial to maintain a coordinated and comprehensive strategy to effectively address the diverse and complex nature of homelessness. This strategy aims to consolidate the Council's efforts across the organisation and explore additional measures to prevent, intervene, and respond to homelessness in our community. The Council primarily engages in referring individuals and families experiencing homelessness to specialised support services, advocating for their rights, educating the community, and promoting prevention and intervention programs. Additionally, we play a vital role in training and informing our staff and the wider community to better understand and respond to homelessness. Importantly, the Council works in collaboration with partners and networks to maximise these efforts and explore systemic gaps and innovative approaches to address homelessness.

4. Context

Defining homelessness

While there is no single definition of homelessness, Homelessness refers to various living situations that fall short of basic housing standards. Individuals or families experiencing homelessness might be:

- People who are sleeping rough, residing in an improvised dwelling, or tent, sleeping in cars, overcrowded dwellings, squatting and therefore in living conditions that do not meet minimum standards and are not intended for habitation. Also included in this category of people who are sleeping rough are people who have no security of tenure, e.g., temporary lodgings, supported accommodation or couch surfing
- People who do not have control of and space for social relations, e.g., severely crowded dwellings, and does not have access to suitable alternatives.

Factors like rising rental costs, inadequate social security benefits, and a shortage of social housing contribute to homelessness. These conditions often force reliance on substandard and unsafe private accommodations, including emergency housing or overcrowded rentals. Squatting primarily arises from a lack of decent housing options. Individuals who squat due to political beliefs are legally considered homeless and eligible for support services. Couch surfers represent a significant yet often invisible segment of the homeless population. They are usually transient, making them hard to track. Couch surfing highlights that homelessness extends beyond the lack of a roof; it includes those without stable housing. It is a potential step towards chronic homelessness, underscoring the need for targeted policies and interventions.

Name	Sleeping rough	Supported accommodation and boarding Houses and temp Lodgings,	Stay temporary + Crowding	Total
Merri-bek 2021	91	378	235	704

Source: Census, 2021

According to the ABS census (2021) for Merri-bek, there were 704 people experiencing homelessness in Merri-bek. However, this is likely an undercount. The data collection also coincided with COVID-19 lockdown measures in Melbourne, which may have influenced the results. In addition, data from the Hume-Merri-bek access and intake points do not account for those who sought services but were deemed ineligible.

Risk Factors and causes of homelessness

Preventing homelessness is essential and hinges on providing sufficient safe, secure, and affordable housing that can meet the needs of diverse populations including families and children. Other effective strategies to avoid homelessness include managing tenancy issues, preparing for emergencies, and enhancing economic and social involvement through vocational support and community engagement. Homelessness stems from multiple causes. The Council for Homeless Persons identifies the primary reasons for homelessness in Victoria as financial difficulties, escaping family violence, and housing crises.

Who is homeless?

Certain groups experience structural disadvantages — societal conditions outside their control — making them more likely to experience homelessness. These groups include students and young people, and those leaving care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, newly arrived communities, asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities and mental illness, single parents, children and young people, older people, LGBTIQA+ people, people leaving prison, and people experiencing family violence. Children are dependent on their parents, family or caregivers and are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness as dependants. Homelessness has profound impacts on children's educational attainment, mental and physical health and social connections. Children in families experiencing homelessness are at risk of a range of intergenerational disadvantages.

Tailoring support and prevention requires a significant understanding of these demographics and risk factors and an intersectional lens should be applied for understanding the individual and their unique identities and intersecting risk factors. Understanding the demographics and risk factors associated with homelessness is crucial to tailor appropriate responses, support, and prevention efforts. Homeless people may often fall into multiple priority categories, making their situations even more challenging. Homelessness harms an individual's health and well-being. The longer an individual experiences homelessness, the greater the likelihood that they will have ongoing complex needs.

5. Strategic Directions

Each strategic direction aims to improve outcomes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and fits into three categories: response, early intervention, and homelessness prevention. Each of the strategic directions corresponds to actions in the Homelessness Action Plan.

Strategic Direction 1: Facilitate a coordinated and compassionate response that respects the human rights of people experiencing homelessness

Council aims to guide staff on how to respond to individuals who are sleeping rough in a way that is effective and consistent with our obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

We support people who are experiencing homelessness by:

1.1 Funding assertive outreach to support pathways into stable and secure housing for people who are sleeping rough
1.2 Coordinating homeless and other affiliated services with a collective impact approach, such as Functional Zero to support people from homelessness and into long-term, stable housing
1.3 Educating staff and the community on homelessness and how best to respond to people who are homeless, ensuring a human rights and health equity approach to people who are sleeping rough in public spaces
1.4 Listening to and advocating for the homelessness service sector and people who have a lived experience of homelessness

Strategic Direction 2: Support early intervention for people who are vulnerable or at risk to avoid homelessness

Council is committed to supporting early intervention activities for people at risk for homelessness. Through referrals to programs and services, Council aims to stabilise the housing situation of at-risk people and provide them with the tools to sustain it.

We support people at risk with early intervention by:

2.1 Referring individuals and families to homelessness organisations such as VincentCare or Merri Outreach Support Service.
2.2 Encourage referral and consistent information for prevention and early intervention at community touchpoints.
2.3 Improve the quality and availability of short-term crisis accommodation
2.4 Providing grants to community organisations that focus on homelessness prevention and early intervention

Strategic Direction 3: Investigate partnerships with prevention programs to address risk factors that lead to homelessness.

Prevention strategies aim to proactively reduce the likelihood of homelessness by addressing its root causes. Merri-bek City Council is key in promoting community programs and initiatives that support homelessness prevention.

We will support the prevention of homelessness by:

3.1 Promoting Maternal and Child Health, Early Years and Youth programs that aim to support stable foundations for families, thereby reducing long-term risk factors associated with homelessness
3.2 Promoting preventative initiatives including employment opportunities and financial

assistance

3.3 Promoting existing knowledge to support tenants' rights and increased support for people at risk of homelessness

3.4 Increasing the supply of public and community housing through planning, partnerships, and advocacy

6. Principles

Our approach to tackling homelessness is built on clear principles shaped by our policies and practices. These principles help us address homelessness in a thorough, understanding, and inclusive way. They include adopting the Housing First strategy, providing wrap-around support services, and focusing on the health and well-being of individuals and families, which guide how we make decisions at all levels. We make sure to include the real-life experiences of those affected by homelessness in our planning and policies, making our actions both relevant and effective. Our methods also take into account the specific challenges faced by women, non-binary individuals, and other groups facing structural disadvantages. By pushing for systemic changes and using a human rights-based approach, we aim for long-lasting solutions. These core values show our commitment to tackling homelessness with care, openness, and a dedication to building a safe and fair community for everyone.

Housing First and wrap-around services

The Housing First approach focuses on quickly providing homeless individuals with their own permanent accommodation. This method operates on the idea that having a stable place to live is a crucial first step. Once housed, individuals receive additional support tailored to their specific needs. For example, this might include access to healthcare services, job training programs, or counselling sessions, all aimed at helping them maintain their housing and improve their overall well-being.

'Wrap-around services' refer to a wide range of support options that are customised to each resident's unique circumstances. For instance, someone might receive mental health support, assistance with finding employment, or guidance in managing finances. These services are designed to surround the individual with the necessary tools and resources, enabling them to address various challenges and promote long-term stability in their housing situation.

The Council acknowledges that homelessness has many underlying causes. By first ensuring stable housing through the Housing First model, and then providing these comprehensive 'wrap-around' services, the focus is on tackling these root issues in a supportive, step-by-step manner

Health Lens

Access to appropriate, long-term housing in good condition is essential for a person's health and well-being. Housing and homelessness are major social determinants of health and health status can directly impact a person’s housing stress. Evidence shows life expectancy disparities between those with stable housing and those without.

Supporting human rights to be in public space

Merri-bek City Council is transitioning from anti-homeless architecture to pro-homeless architecture in our approach to public space design. This shift represents a fundamental change in how we view and accommodate the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness with human rights and health equity, actively designing welcoming spaces, acknowledging the value of informal architecture, and considering a various essential touchpoint, such as access to vital services like Centrelink and bathrooms, ultimately contributing to a more equitable, connected and compassionate community. By

embracing pro-homeless architecture, we aim to design public spaces that are not only accessible to everyone, but also provide practical support and facilities that can assist those in need. This change reflects our commitment to promoting equity, dignity, and compassion within our community, ensuring that our public spaces are welcoming and beneficial for all members of society, particularly the most vulnerable.

Promotion of how to respond to homelessness with a human rights approach

Council will use both internal coordination and public promotion on how to respond to homelessness with a human rights approach. Internally, we focus on integrating different council departments for a cohesive response to homelessness in general and in responding to specific situations. Relevant staff receive training in handling homelessness-related issues as a priority, including specific protocol training and access to guidelines for managing the belongings of homeless individuals in public spaces. We will develop a communication strategy to ensure that both the public and staff have access to current, accessible information about services, including the provision of updates to customer service hubs and informative materials being available in-service areas. Externally, a public campaign will be developed to enhance awareness and understanding of homelessness, including its definitions. We will also provide renters with information to assist in the prevention of eviction and have this information available at council touchpoints such as libraries, thereby contributing to a comprehensive approach to tackling homelessness.

Lived Experience

Including the lived experience of homelessness in council planning is a vital component that fosters a more empathetic and practical approach to policy development and service delivery. By incorporating the insights and perspectives of those who have directly experienced homelessness, council planning can align more closely with this community's actual needs and challenges. It ensures that strategies and initiatives are not only theoretically sound but are also practically relevant and responsive to the unique circumstances of homelessness.

Aboriginal Housing

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung (wu-rund-jeri woy-wur-rung people) are acknowledged as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways of Merri-bek. Aboriginal Victorians face significant housing challenges, being 14 times more likely to experience homelessness. Reports by the Productivity Commission and the Federal Government highlight ongoing disadvantages in education, income, and land dispossession. The Government's 'Closing the Gap' initiative aims to improve housing conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by 2031. The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework acknowledges the unique family dynamics in Aboriginal households, emphasising the need for housing that supports these structures. With the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population projected to grow, an additional 5,085 housing units are needed by 2036. It is crucial that affordable housing is developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal community, respecting their cultural and kinship needs, and managed by Aboriginal organisations. The

framework, mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort (Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home), emphasises the importance of addressing the high incidence of homelessness, specific to Aboriginal communities. It advocates for active support and implementation of its recommendations by councils, including measures focused on the root causes of homelessness and has been endorsed by the State Government.

Gender equity in housing

In addition to our commitment to the Housing First model, Council acknowledges the unique challenges faced by women and non-binary individuals who are homeless. Sometimes these groups do not sleep rough in public spaces due to the increased risks, leading to less visible forms of homelessness like couch surfing, sleeping in cars, or survival strategies that include trading sex for accommodation. Recognising this, Council is dedicated to ensuring that our approach to homelessness is inclusive and responsive to the needs of all individuals affected, including those who may not present as sleeping rough. We are committed to adapting our services and support systems to effectively reach and assist these vulnerable groups, ensuring that everyone has access to safe, stable housing and the necessary support to maintain it.

7. Policy settings

The policy setting is essential for understanding the multifaceted approach adopted by the Merri-bek City Council in addressing homelessness. From addressing the needs of those experiencing persistent homelessness to responding to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, each policy setting represents a critical aspect of our comprehensive approach. These settings include efforts to achieve Functional Zero in rough sleeping, advocacy for systemic change, provision of crisis and emergency accommodation, addressing the impacts of the climate emergency, tackling financial instability, and emphasizing the importance of social and public housing. Together, these policies form the foundation of our commitment to effectively address and reduce homelessness in our community.

Persistent homelessness

Persistent homelessness refers to a situation where individuals or families experience homelessness for extended periods or repeatedly. This form of homelessness is often a result of a complex interplay of factors including long-term socio-economic challenges, chronic health issues, mental illness, and a lack of access to affordable housing and supportive services. Individuals facing persistent homelessness are typically the most vulnerable in society, frequently slipping through the cracks of short-term or emergency-based interventions. This type of homelessness underscores the need for comprehensive, long-term strategies that go beyond immediate shelter solutions, focusing on stable housing coupled with tailored support services that address the underlying causes, help break the cycle of homelessness and address the unique needs of the individuals and families.

Functional Zero to address rough sleeping

People who are sleeping rough are the most visible form of homelessness. It can take many forms, including people sleeping in cars, tents, abandoned buildings and other locations, often on council-managed land. Council is implementing a service coordination approach called Functional Zero to address people who are sleeping rough. Functional Zero is a target, methodology and movement towards ending homelessness. This means homelessness is rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. Through Functional Zero, the council will coordinate services in the Merri-bek area who work in homelessness, health and legal, justice systems and refer to the homeless service system, collectively working together to implement a by-name list. This is a constantly updated list of people not yet in long-term safe and affordable housing that the group can support.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a key approach to address homelessness, focusing on influencing systemic changes to better support structurally disadvantaged populations. This includes advocating for policy revisions and increased funding across various sectors to alleviate housing cost burdens and enhance service delivery. We aim to strengthen the links between homelessness and broader housing strategies, ensuring a more coordinated and effective response. Part of our advocacy involves establishing accessible support services in community hubs like libraries and schools, creating a network of resources for those in need. This holistic approach underscores our commitment to creating sustainable, long-term solutions for homelessness.

Crisis, Transitional Housing and Emergency accommodation

This is a temporary solution that government, non-profit, and private providers support to those facing immediate homelessness. Council works with various stakeholders, such as environmental health who register rooming houses and The Building, Health and Planning who will investigate a ‘rooming house’ upon receipt of a complaint, to improve the quality and safety of existing crisis accommodation, private accommodation including hotels and rooming houses. The homelessness services endeavour to keep a close eye on the privately run rooming houses and low-end hotels they are reluctantly referring.

There is a significant shortage of crisis accommodation and short-term housing in the northern region. Council supports advocacy efforts like the "A Crisis in Crisis" campaign by North and Western Homelessness Networks, which recommends a shift toward safe, publicly funded crisis accommodation. Advocacy efforts are focused on increasing the number of dwellings, with a call for more Council involvement in providing hostels and safe temporary housing, through this Council may offer facilities or land for public and social housing developments. Advocacy is also aimed at allowing longer stays in temporary accommodation and considering the specific needs of various groups, such as dedicated Aboriginal-specific beds, to better cater to the diverse needs of those facing homelessness.

Climate Emergency

Climate change exacerbates the challenges faced by homeless individuals and introduces additional environmental stresses and hazards. Rising temperatures, extreme heat and extreme cold and

increased natural disasters pose significant threats to those without stable housing, who often cannot adapt or find shelter. These conditions can lead to poorer longer term health outcomes, health crises or fatalities. In Australia, research shows that extreme cold has greater health impacts to people sleeping rough compared to extreme heat. Climate change can also indirectly contribute to homelessness through the destruction of housing through storms or flooding can also displace people. Climate change complicates the homelessness issue, necessitating comprehensive, adaptive solutions including targeted responses during extreme weather events.

Financial Instability

Financial instability significantly contributes to homelessness. This instability often arises from a combination of low income and unexpected expenses, which can quickly deplete savings and make it difficult to afford housing. When individuals or families experience a sudden loss of income, such as job loss, or face unforeseen costs, like medical bills, they may struggle to pay rent or mortgages. This situation is exacerbated by limited access to affordable housing and social support services. As a result, financial instability can lead to eviction or foreclosure, forcing people into homelessness. Additionally, without a stable address, finding employment becomes more challenging, perpetuating the cycle of financial insecurity and homelessness.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted homelessness in Merri-bek City Council Local Government Area, underscoring the need for Emergency Housing, housing supply gaps, and wrap-around support. The economic fallout, including job losses and financial instability, placed many at risk of homelessness. The pandemic also strained shelter capacities and disrupted support networks, as social distancing reduced available spaces and many essential services were limited. Increased mental health issues due to isolation and further contributed to homelessness.

The importance on social and public housing

Affordable housing, defined under the Planning and Environment Act 1987, is intended for very low to moderate income households. It is priced to allow these households to manage other essential living costs, with income thresholds adjusted annually. However, affordable housing, especially in Homes Victoria affordable rental homes, is distinct from social housing and is typically priced about 10% lower than private rentals, with annual rent increases capped.

The key issue is that affordable housing, despite its intended purpose, remains inaccessible to individuals relying solely on statutory benefits. The rent levels, even at reduced rates, are often too high for those with the lowest incomes, as reported by homelessness services. Consequently, social and public housing, with rents adjusted to a percentage of the tenant's income, are the only realistic housing options for this demographic.

8. Strategic context and alignment

Merri-bek City Council Community Vision

The Council Plan 2021-2025 includes the Merri-bek Community Vision, an Imagine Merri-bek Community Panel developed through deliberative engagement. We work together proactively and transparently to continue to create a vibrant, safe, healthy, resilient, innovative and regenerative community.

The Council Plan 2021-2025 (integrated Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)

The Council's Plan 2021-2025 has been integrated with the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP), it outlines the Council's and the community's vision for the future. The Homelessness Strategy supports the delivery of the Council Plan through the following themes, strategies and actions: Theme 3: Healthy and Caring Merri-bek.

Strategy 3.11: To support service coordination, information provision and community advocacy for people experiencing insecure housing

Action 63: Enable leisure centres to use facilities to support homeless people

Action 64: Develop and implement the Council rough sleeping protocol

Action 65: Support service coordination, information provision and community advocacy for people experiencing insecure housing

Action 76: Continue to support Merri-bek Affordable Housing Ltd Partnership

Action 84: Continue to carry out research, technical studies, strategic planning, partnership building, engagement planning and affordable housing to guide the future of central Coburg.'

Action 152: Continue to implement the affordable housing action plan

Action 178: Establish homelessness assertive outreach program and service coordination with local homelessness and community service providers

Merri-bek Affordable Housing Action Plan (AHAP) 2022-2026

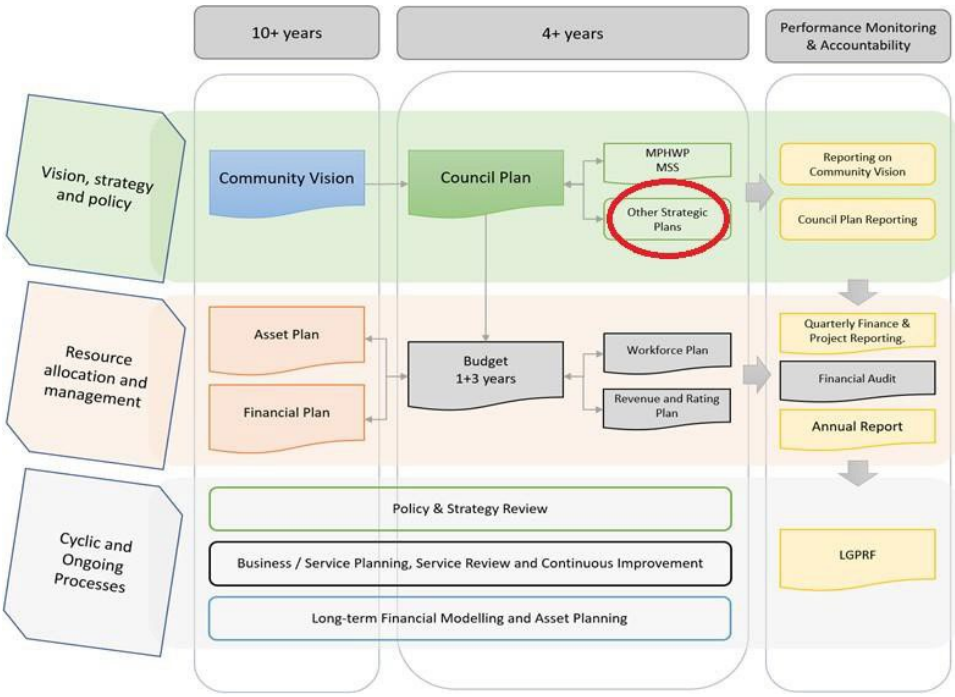
The objective of the Affordable Housing Action Plan is to increase the provision of affordable housing in Merri-bek through policy, advocacy, applied skills and investment. The AHAP has four Focus Areas under which achievable and effective actions are identified for implementation by officers across Council. These are:

1. Planning
2. Partnerships
3. Research and Advocacy
4. Support service coordination, information provision and advocacy for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Integrated planning framework

The Homelessness strategy is part of Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. Figure 2 shows where the Plan sits within the Framework. It is placed within 4-year strategic plans that support the delivery of the Merri-bek Community Vision and Council Plan.

Figure 2 Merri-bek Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework



9. Shared responsibility

The primary role of addressing homelessness sits at a Federal and State level, given their legislated roles concerning housing provision and homelessness support programs.

Federal Government

The Commonwealth Government has historically had the lead role in responding to homelessness through funding for housing supply and homelessness support services, initially through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) program, and more recently through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the National Affordable Housing Agreement. The first National Homelessness Strategy was developed in 2001 and followed by the 'Road Home' Homeless-ness Strategy of 2008, representing the most significant investment ever in

response to homelessness. From 1 July 2018, the current funding arrangements enable homelessness services to be delivered through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), which includes $4.6 billion in Commonwealth Rent Assistance (a supplementary payment to people on low incomes in the rental market paid via Centrelink) and $1.5 billion in payments via State and Territory governments.

- National Housing and Homelessness Plan: A 10-year Australian government strategy in development for safe and affordable housing and homelessness response, outlining short, medium, and long-term reforms. The plan aims to understand better Australia's housing and homelessness issues and the factors contributing to housing insecurity.
- Productivity Commission inquiry into the economic impacts of mental health: The inquiry's focus on understanding the economic effects of mental health can indirectly relate to homelessness by shedding light on the factors that contribute to mental health issues and their consequences. Though not a direct solution to homelessness, understanding these economic impacts can contribute to a more holistic approach by recognising mental health's role in housing stability and well-being. Housing affordability, social support, and healthcare access also influence the complexity of homelessness.

State Government

The Victorian Government have implemented numerous initiatives and policies to tackle the issue of homelessness, focusing on providing immediate support, long-term housing solutions, and preventive measures, as illustrated by the following programs and actions:

- 2018 Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan: The state's long-term plan to reduce rough sleeping, including early intervention and coordinated services, with many initiatives ceasing in July 2022.
- 2023 Victorian State Budget for Homelessness: Allocates $35.9 million in 2023-24 and $134 million over four years for housing and support, plus $3.75 million for specific initiatives. Includes $20 million for a 3.3% increase in community sector funding, with concerns expressed by organisations about the need for more funding.
- From Homelessness to Home Program: A program designed to support the transition from homelessness to stable housing, providing tailored assistance.
- State Care in Victoria for Homelessness Prevention: Focuses on preventing youth homelessness, offering 'safe at home' programs, and collaborating with services to address root causes like family violence and state care experiences.
- Support for Young People in Out-of-Home Care: Previously, individuals aged out of the system at 18, leading to homelessness for over a third of them within a year. The policy has been updated to assist those up to 21, with a $500 allowance in Victoria. Advocates call for more federal aid, including changes to the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA), and emphasise additional support to prevent homelessness among these individuals up to age 25.

- Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System: An investigation into mental health in Victoria, including the connection between mental health issues and homelessness.
- Victoria's Housing Statement: A package of housing initiatives including rental reforms and funding for maintaining housing as well as new social housing initiatives.
- Victoria's Big Housing Build: An initiative to facilitate residential development that includes affordable housing to meet existing and future needs. The provision offers developers an alternative planning decision pathway via the Minister for Planning for developments worth over $50M, which includes a 10% supply of affordable housing. This provision has the potential to increase the supply of affordable housing.
- 2017 Responding to people who are sleeping rough in extreme weather policy: This policy aims to reduce the risks to life and health of people sleeping rough during extreme weather conditions in Victoria.

Local Government

Historically, the primary responsibility of responding to and addressing homelessness resides with state and federal governments. In addition, the State and Commonwealth governments are responsible for increasing the supply of Social and Affordable Housing and funding homelessness services. Increasingly, local government are taking a more active role in addressing homelessness due to the urgent need for action.

Legislatively, local governments operate within a framework defined by acts such as the Local Government Act 2020 and The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 in Victoria. This legislation provides a mandate for Councils to improve community health and wellbeing, guiding Council's approach to homelessness.

Specialist Homelessness Services

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) refers to agencies that support individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness, funded under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement by state and federal governments. Various not-for-profit organisations administer these services through a centralised access point called 'Opening Doors' in Victoria. Beyond housing assistance, SHS offers an extensive array of general support services. These include case management, material aid, meals, laundry and shower facilities, and referrals to specialised services as needed, such as health, mental health, drug and alcohol, and legal services.

Some of the most significant gaps in service provision come from the length of the support period to get more people through a support program. Very few long-term support programs are available where case management support is ongoing for a significant time. This means, particularly for people living with high and complex needs, that safe housing may h be at risk

if their support needs are not being well understood and met, contributing to the cycle of homelessness.

Other Related service systems

Various service systems support homelessness prevention and intervention. The Family Violence Service system (The Orange Door) offers referral and accommodation options to mitigate homelessness, particularly for women, and collaborates with homelessness services for coordinated support. The mental health system provides treatment and support for mental health issues, another significant contributor to homelessness. In the realm of education, early intervention programs help disadvantaged young people re-engage with educational pathways, offering skills courses, specialist centres, and mentoring programs. These educational services are accessible to those who are homeless or at risk. For young people transitioning out of out-of-home care, programs are available to support their independent living to prevent homelessness during this critical period.

Private housing providers

State governments fund homelessness services, when there are no other viable options, they refer to private emergency housing. The private sector has a role in ensuring that these facilities are maintained to a high standard and offer necessary support services. This system not only provides immediate shelter to those in dire need but also forms a critical part of the broader strategy to manage and reduce homelessness, with private organisations playing a key role in this public-private partnership.

10. Monitoring, evaluating and review

Monitoring and evaluation

This strategy will undergo periodic review and updates as required. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial to understanding the strategy's impact and intended outcomes. This will be conducted with working groups, critical services in the homelessness space, and feedback from people with lived experience.

Council will receive reports detailing the progress and status of the strategy, as well as any significant changes in the policy environment. In the event of substantial alterations to the Council's policy positions or the broader policy landscape, a new strategy will be formulated to address the evolving circumstances effectively.