Regional Local Government
HOMELESSNESS
and Social Housing Group Charter

Submission: National Housing and Homelessness Plan

Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Group

.

	City of Casey	Cardinia	Frankston City	GREATER DANDENONG City of Opportunity	Knox City Council	City of KINGSTON
MANNINGHAM	CITY OF MONASH	Maroondah City Council	MORNINGTON PENINSULA Shire	CITY OF WHITEHORSE	Yarra Ranges Council	Bayside

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

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Executive Summary

The Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness and Social Housing Group (Charter Group) welcomes the Department of Social Services 'release of *the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Issues Paper* as it works towards a National Plan and is pleased to make a submission to this important initiative.

The Group comprises 13 councils representing over 2 million residents in the east and south-east of Melbourne. More information is available about the Group at Question 7. This submission has been prepared at officer level and draws on previous Group submissions and the Charter itself. Individual Councils may also make submissions.

Our advocacy platform is in the form of a *[Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter (Charter)](.)*. The Charter supports a housing first[1] approach and prioritises three levers which are:

1. Work in partnership with federal and state government, public and private sector partners to increase the supply of social housing and respond to homelessness in south and east Melbourne.

2. Scope land within our region with the potential to be re-purposed for the development of social housing.

3. Advocate for inclusive housing growth, including through mandatory inclusionary zoning.

The current housing crisis in Australia has been exacerbated by sustained underinvestment in social housing and by poor policy and regulatory frameworks. The National Plan must enable:

  − Adequate and sustained investment in Social (Public and Community) Housing

  − Broad use of Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning

  − Tailored service responses that recognise the particular needs of suburban homelessness

  − Affordable housing to be considered as essential infrastructure

This submission responds to the questions of greatest relevance to the Charter region and the roles and responsibilities of local government.

We acknowledge the complex range of factors that can lead to homelessness and demand for social housing and consider access to safe and secure housing as one of the most basic human rights, and that social housing (public and community housing) is a fundamental aspect of essential public health infrastructure.

While Federal and State Governments have the primary responsibility for the housing system including the prevention of homelessness and provision of public housing, we recognise that there is also a (limited) role in the system for local government. A combined commitment across three levels of government is necessary through the National Plan and Agreement to address the inadequate supply of social housing and to address the systemic pre-conditions that increase the risk of homelessness.

The housing shortage is an increasing national challenge beyond the resources of the States alone to address. The shortfall in social housing for people on very low incomes and for those most vulnerable to homelessness[2] must be addressed as a priority, and any response requires the critical financial 'levers' available to the Federal Government to succeed.

We recommend that the National Plan:

  − Primarily focus on homelessness prevention, the need for integrated homelessness support services and adequate social housing to enable a Housing First approach to succeed

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

- Significantly increase the focus on maintaining and growing public and community housing, and establish a sustainable funding source to do this

- Contain national, state and regional targets to deliver an additional 500,000 social dwellings across Australia over 5 years to meet the shortfall and address localised cohort needs

- Leverage social housing development opportunities through the use of government land

- Create (outside of the NHHA) incentives for private investment in affordable housing (to rent and buy) through taxation, low / no interest loans, long term peppercorn leases of surplus government land and other measures, noting that the Charter Group sees the NHHA as primarily a funding agreement between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments, which would be most effective if limited to homelessness prevention and the delivery of adequate, safe, secure and sustainable social housing

  - Identify and fund best practice models of social housing and housing support geared towards specific localised needs and opportunities

  - Improve data collection and sharing

  - Recognise and fund social housing managers for the structural shortfall between capped rent income (from pensions, JobSeeker, Youth Allowance etc) and the true cost of providing, maintaining and improving social housing and the support services their residents often need

The Charter Group agrees with the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) who recommend that the most powerful action local governments can take to reduce homelessness is to support the delivery of homes that people can afford. For the lowest income households that are most vulnerable to homelessness, this means the provision of social housing.

The Charter Group advocates strongly that homelessness and social housing policy, strategy and services need to reflect and respond to local and regional circumstances and be informed by specific insights gained through operating at a local and regional level.

The Charter Group of councils are seeking systemic change to increase the supply of permanent, safe, appropriate and timely housing for the most vulnerable members of our community and to embed 'Housing First' as a key foundational principle, fundamental for health, recovery and safety.

This submission has been prepared at officer level and draws on the Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter and previous Charter Group submissions. Formal endorsement from the Councils in the Charter Group has not been sought. This submission is made noting that individual Councils may make direct submissions that build on or vary from the position put forward in this submission.

Question 1: How can governments and community service providers reduce homelessness and/or support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless in Australia?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Question 1 - Reducing homelessness and support for people at risk of homelessness

The Charter group agree that a responsive and coordinated service system, that intervenes early and takes a Housing First approach is critical to reduce homelessness and to support people at risk of homelessness. Our first lever states:

1. *Work in partnership with federal and state government, public and private sector partners to increase the supply of social housing and respond to homelessness in south and east Melbourne.*

- Tailored solutions are required to respond to local socio-economic factors and particular needs of different cohorts at risk of homelessness

- In our region, the high proportion of female adult SHS clients and the high proportion of female clients presenting for the first time suggests that first time homelessness is a gendered issue

- With the right supported transitional accommodation women and children are less likely to enter the homelessness system

- Quality education, employment, positive physical and mental health, social connectedness, positive and respectful relationships, and affordable housing are the major protective factors against homelessness

- Early intervention is paramount, significant and sustained reductions in homelessness and increased stable housing outcomes can be achieved through

- using a Housing First, Functional Zero, Youth Foyer or other approach will achieve more stable housing outcomes.

- The current lack of local social housing and access to support services limits the ability and effectiveness of early intervention

- Greater provision of social housing across the housing spectrum, including crisis accommodation and pathways for single people to exit rooming houses is required as a priority

- Dependence upon rental accommodation is increasing in our disadvantaged communities

- A National Plan to improve data collection and sharing will flow through to better coordinated and more effective services

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DETAILED DISCUSSION

Q 1.1 - Key factors leading to homelessness in the charter region and their extent

The patterns, dynamics, and incidences of homelessness in our region differ from that of the rest of Victoria. The Charter region spans the middle and outer suburban areas to the east and south-east of Melbourne.

To understand the factors leading to homelessness and the extent of homelessness in the charter region, there are two readily available data sources; The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data (point in time data collected every five years) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) service data collected monthly. While not without limitations, when used together these data sets provide a good indication of the numbers, drivers and types of homelessness in our region and local areas. In addition, regional data regarding the demographics and needs of clients of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) indicates some key differences compared with Greater Melbourne and provide greater insight into causal

factors.

As indicated by AIHW data, the key drivers of homelessness across our region are housing issues and financial reasons (50%) and domestic and family violence (38%)[3].

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

These differing socio-economic and locational factors mean homelessness challenges differ across different areas, impacting different groups of people differently and limiting the effectiveness of any 'one size fits all' response. There is a need for localised, tailored solutions. For example, for women and children experiencing or at risk of homelessness due to family violence, family law and school retention factors are a more relevant solution.

Q 1.2 - Actions that can be taken to prevent homelessness and support people who may be at risk of homelessness

Evidence suggests it is possible to prevent or minimise episodes and length of homelessness.

While quality education, employment, positive physical and mental health, social connectedness, positive and respectful relationships, and affordable housing are the major protective factors against homelessness, homelessness prevention or early intervention programs can have significant success. These programs intervene at early stages of homelessness, or immediately prior to a person becoming homeless and are particularly important for youth and families facing first time homelessness. Programs can include:

Help to keep people housed

A number of effective programs, such as the Victorian Tenancy Plus program (formerly Social Housing Advocacy and Assistance Program - SHASP) reported by the Productivity Commission[4] provide early intervention to assist participants to maintain their tenancy. This is important as the Productivity Commission reports that about 2,000, or 7%, of tenants in public housing were evicted in 2012-13[5].

Youth Foyers to provide housing and support into education and employment for young people

Youth Foyers provide targeted housing and support for a limited time (usually up to two years) for young people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. Several evaluations of different foyer programs have found Foyers effective in improving housing, education, health, and employment outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness. The five-year evaluation of the Education First Youth Foyers[6] in Victoria, found that 85% of the young people were in work or education 12 months after exiting the foyer, 75% had completed Year 12 or higher and 50% were in their own housing, with only 1% in crisis accommodation.

Housing First approaches move individuals quickly out of homelessness into permanent housing

Housing First approaches place people experiencing homelessness directly into permanent and safe housing with 'wrap around' support services to address complex needs (such as mental health, and alcohol and drug support). It differs from traditional approaches such as crisis or transitional accommodation that support

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[3] Council to Homeless Persons 2019, *'Making a Difference – Effective Local Government Responses to Homelessness',* commissioned by Monash Council October 2019

[4] Productivity Commission Inquiry Report: *Introducing Competition and Informed Consumer Choices into Human Services*. Social housing Ch. 5 to 7 www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/human-services/reforms/report/02-humanservices-reforms-housing.pdf

[5] Ibid

[6] Coddou, M Borlagdan, J & Mallett, S 2019 *Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers*, Brotherhood of St Laurence & Launch Housing, Melbourne
http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11369/1/Coddou_etal_Starting_a_future_Education_First_Youth_Foyers_outcomes_2019.pdf

people to stabilise before being permanently housed.

Benefits include more rapid access to permanent housing and the multiple support services and systems needed, a harm minimisation (rather than abstinence) approach and enabling people experiencing homelessness to remain connected to their local communities.

Insufficient and inadequate social housing stock and limited capacity and extent of the homelessness service system in an area can limit effectiveness.

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) examined[7] USA Housing First programs finding they retained accommodation for more people at risk of homelessness compared with traditional services - 88% of those in the Housing First program retained their housing for two years compared to 47% in other programs. European program evaluations have demonstrated similar or better results across a range of cohorts. In Canada, Chez Soi[8], a randomised controlled study across five provinces using a Housing First approach for people with a mental illness who were rough sleeping found 62% of participants were housed for the whole six months compared to 31% for the control group receiving 'treatment as usual'.

Housing First programs have proven cost efficient for governments and the community. In the UK, housing a homeless person cost £9,600 per year (excluding rent) - about £1,000 less in a shelter and nearly £8,000 less than in a high-intensity support service (excluding rent). In Western Australia, AHURI[9] identified that housing homeless people saved the health system $4,846 per person per year (2009 -2012) mainly through people spending fewer days in hospitals and psychiatric care. Similarly, supportive accommodation programs led to an average of $2,397 (in 2011) in reduced costs for the justice system through reduced prison time and interactions with police.

We note that Homelessness Australia[10] is currently supporting the introduction of a Housing First approach with By Name Lists to measure homelessness in various regions and cities. This data is a major improvement on mainstream data collections, however further investigation is required to establish whether this approach to data collection warrants rolling out more broadly, and if so, what the most effective data system approach would be.

A Common Ground model supports improved access to services

Common Ground is a model that provides permanent supportive housing. It combines the provision of a secure home with the services that support people to sustain their tenancy in that home, including a concierge service to manage access to the physical building and ensure safety, and to coordinate service supports. It is an example of a supportive accommodation program that improves outcomes and can be more cost effective.

In Victoria when supportive accommodation is provided through a Housing First model by a Housing Association or Provider, they are unable to access Homelessness service funding - a disincentive to providing stable and permanent housing to complex cohorts, on very low incomes. Funding should be available for flexible support periods and to support partnering with specialist services to prevent further homelessness of families and individuals.

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[7] Johnson, G Parkinson, S & Parsell, C 2012 *Policy shift or program drift? Implementing Housing First in Australia*. AHURI Final Report No 184. www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2064/AHURI_Final_Report_No184_Policy_shift_or_program_drift_Implementing_Housing_First_in_Australia.pdf

[8] Goering, P Veldhuizen, S Watson, A Adair, C Kopp, B Latimer, E Nelson, G MacNaughton, E Streiner, D & Aubry, T 2014. *National at Home/Chez Soi Final Report*. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada. www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/mhcc_at_home_report_national_cross-site_eng_2_0.pdf

[9] Flatau, P Zaretzky, K Wood, L Miscenko, D 2016 *The financing, delivery and effectiveness of programs to reduce homelessness.* AHURI Final Report 270 www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/9900/AHURI_Final_Report_No270_Thefinancing,-delivery-and-effectiveness-ofprograms-to-reduce-homelessness.pdf

[10] Housing First – Homelessness Australia

Using a By-Name list to achieve Functional Zero

Significant and sustained reductions in homelessness has been achieved using a functional zero approach.

This originated as part of a national campaign, 'Built for Zero' in the United States, where seven communities achieved Functional Zero for veterans' homelessness and four communities for chronic homelessness.

Functional Zero street homelessness is achieved when the number of individuals sleeping rough in an area is less than the available housing for 3+ months. It is a person-centred and data-driven approach achieved when there are enough services, housing and shelter beds for everyone who needs them. It uses a common assessment tool and By-Name list to track and understand the names and needs of every person experiencing homelessness in real-time and to better coordinate local service systems to more effectively allocate housing and support resources often using a Housing First approach.

In Frankston, the Zero Project brings a coalition of homelessness, housing, health, government and community partners together to end rough sleeping. The project adheres to five key principles:

- Person-centred and inclusive

- Housing First

- No wrong door

- Continuous improvement

- Collective action

In Dandenong, Council and Launch Housing are bringing the local service system together around a By-Name list of all people sleeping rough. When met, people are added to the list, combined resources then provide support, and they are helped to move out of crisis and into stable, long-term housing. Dandenong Zero's goal is to achieve Functional Zero by July 2025, which they have defined as *when the number of people entering and experiencing rough sleeping in a month is less than the 6-monthly average placement rate into long-term housing*. Progress is reported monthly at Dandenong Zero - Homelessness Project | Greater Dandenong Council

Q 1.3 - Homelessness supports and services that we need more of

Dependence upon rental accommodation is increasing in disadvantaged communities

With high and increasing levels of renting, many more residents are becoming exposed to housing stress and need tenancy and advocacy support due to the impact of rising rental costs.

Changes could be made to the current social housing system to improve outcomes for tenants by improving funding to Tenant Advocacy groups and organisations. Access to Tenants Victoria is limited due to the high number of people in acute crisis, prioritising those with existing tribunal claims, or unable to access their home due to flood, fire, et al. Call centres will not take calls so early prevention, advice, and advocacy is lacking to ensure that tenants are aware of their rights and can legally act against inadequate housing standards.

Current trends show that residents seeking rental accommodation are faced with increasing costs and diminishing choice. Recent settlers, younger residents and disabled people are segments of the community highly dependent upon rental accommodation, and therefore vulnerable to the impact of rising rents. For disabled people, among residents aged 25-64 years living with severe disability, 45% rent their private accommodation, compared with 38% of others.

As more people rent, home ownership is declining. In Greater Dandenong[11] for example, in 2021 nearly two-thirds (62%) of private dwellings were either owned or being purchased by their occupants – a decline from 65% in 2011. Conversely, 36% of dwellings are rented, a higher proportion than for Victoria (31% of private accommodation is rented by its occupants). Between 1991 to 2021, the proportion of private dwellings in Greater Dandenong rented by their occupants surged from 27% to 36% and for the fifteen years to 2021, the rise in proportion of residents renting was most pronounced among younger individuals and families.

Funding constrains the capacity of local homelessness support systems - many are often unavailable when people need them

Just as the Housing First approach is threatened by a lack of supply of Social Housing, assertive outreach is often constrained by limited funding and limited service hours, making early intervention almost impossible in our region. Extending hours of operation for assertive outreach would better cater to rough sleepers' needs, especially outside of business hours so that By-Name lists may be fully engaged, and case management improved.

Additionally, access to emergency accommodation is limited for our region of 2 million people, with a very limited number of providers available to support the estimated 7,916 people experiencing homelessness. For example, the major provider, Launch Housing at Bob's Place in Dandenong, manages four family units, nine single units, two rooms for couples and three women only places which is clearly inadequate, meaning early intervention is unlikely for many people. In 2019, they advised over 500 women were turned away, unable to be assisted by their service.

This means that emergency accommodation providers and specialist homelessness services in our region are often unable to assist people, or can only offer costly, inappropriate (and often unsafe) accommodation such as motel rooms and rooming houses.

The sector needs to be adequately resourced in order to provide enough services to prevent the bottle-neck of social housing that leaves many people without services and subsequently experiencing homelessness. There is an obvious need for clear pathways for clients from mental health services, prisons, residential health services (such as rehab) out-of-home based care services and family violence services to be able to access both crisis and long-term accommodation. Currently the system is streamlined so that access to crisis and transitional housing is via a front door service for each region, however this has only led to gaps due to demand, eligibility and a single-entry point.

Funding for tenancy support agencies is inadequate to meet the support needs of tenants and address increasing waiting lists. Timely support to maintain a tenancy can prevent homelessness and early intervention should be prioritised. Issues around tenancy can often be addressed with a quick intervention and outcomes often prevent tenants from being evicted or from being victimised in their own property.

Overcrowding is exacerbated for those on SRSS program support

Overcrowding is often conceived as a community response to preventing people being forced into rough sleeping and is particularly prominent in Greater Dandenong, a municipality with the highest number of asylum seekers in the region.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to provide support to people until they get the outcome of their asylum claims and can move forward with their lives in a positive way.

The Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) Program provides essential and basic support to individuals

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[11] Victorian Office of Housing 2022. Rental Report June 2022. Victorian Government, Melbourne. Affordability is measured relative to Centrelink benefit levels relative to rental costs. For example, the affordability of three-bedroom houses is determined as the proportion of such dwellings whose rental cost was less than 30% of the income of a couple with two children on JobSeeker allowance after rent assistance had been deducted from the cost of rent. This approach gives a measure of the *availability* of affordable housing, though not the actual match between incomes and housing costs.

and families living in the community in Australia while they await a decision about their refugee status. Further cuts are likely to create even greater homelessness risks for asylum seekers.

Q 1.4 - How homelessness services can be better coordinated and more effective.

Strong local relationships and access to data enable better coordination and more effective homelessness services

Local government can play many roles in supporting a more effective homelessness service system and to increase the supply of social and affordable housing. These roles are discussed in Question 2.

The National Plan should ensure priority cohorts are identified with their location mapped to ensure that they can be focussed on, which would flow through to the National Homelessness and Housing Agreement.

The Charter Group recognises the importance of access to quality, timely and accurate data to support service planning and delivery, performance monitoring, transparency and accountability; all necessary for better coordinated and more effective homelessness services.

There is a lack of visibility of how social housing provision is responding to localised need. State data on social housing is not available publicly and data shared with councils is not live data. NIFIC, for example, does not appear to actively respond to localised needs as it relies on individual organisations making direct project specific applications with little or no local justification or verification of need.

Better coordinated and effective homelessness services would better align resources with need.

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

For the Charter Group, while access to data itself will not overcome the current inadequacy of homelessness support services and the lack of social housing, access to data is critical for councils to effectively influence the amount of social housing in their local area and to facilitate effective, place-based service provision.

In addition to ABS 5-yearly census data and Australia Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) monthly service data, Knox Council has developed a *Minimum Supply of Affordable Housing Methodology[12]* which has been applied across the Charter region. The methodology deliberately targets social housing as a subset of affordable housing to respond to the needs of the most housing vulnerable in the community and to leverage local government's greater capacity to influence the public sector and social housing market in partnership with social housing providers.

As a member of Frankston Zero and Dandenong Zero, those councils gain access to monthly, real-time data on the number of people moving through the homelessness system in their municipality to update the By Name List. Key data points include the number of people:

− housed through the community

− who haven't engaged with the community for 90 days or more, or have moved

− outside of the community

− who are new to sleeping rough

− returning from housing

− returning or re-engaging with the community

− who are currently sleeping rough

− who would be sleeping rough, but are temporarily accommodated, for example in a crisis shelter.

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[12] www.knox.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/Minimum%20Supply%20of%20Affordable%20Housing%20in%20Knox%202014%20-%202036.PDF

Data and information sharing practices rightly protect the people who are sleeping rough, however, for meaningful system change, barriers need to be removed and coordinated responses need to be developed based on the evidence that exists in each partner's silo.

A National Plan to improve data will flow through to better coordinated and more effective services

Access to data could be improved through the National Plan and NHHA requiring state government level collation and release of authoritative homelessness and housing data annually relevant to each local government area, including progress against any regional social housing targets. AIHW could regularly provide interactive data at postcode and LGA area geographies on their dashboard and national street counts, as undertaken by the City of Melbourne[13].

This would help to overcome the lack of guidance from government regarding sources of data, methodologies and assumptions that should be used to understand and project housing need and future demand (such as for urban planning) and would be more efficient. Currently councils must purchase data and commission specialist research and analysis in parallel that does not aggregate across councils.

Which data would be useful?

The National Plan could assist to improve access to data at a local level, according to each State's needs and requirements, and improve resources to collect and analyse data.

- supply data - rolling average vacancy numbers of social housing dwellings at a municipal level

     o contextualised by number / pipeline of social dwellings and beds/units across diverse types of accommodation (e.g. Crisis, youth refuges, youth foyers, residential aged care, mental health and specialist disability accommodation etc.)

- demand data - raw de-identified data (or at least reports analysing data) associated with the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) at a local government scale

     o data extraction by DFFH Divisions, DFFH Offices and DFFH districts

     o any data that can be extracted at a municipal level

     o demand data by Transfer Lists of the VHR

     o demand data by the Priority Access List of the VHR

     o demand data by the Register of Interest list of the VHR

     o demand data for housing type (e.g. by size of bedroom) including preferences by district

     o demand data by Priority Category and Priority Type in the Priority Access List and the Register of Interest List and as a total

- Any data showing movement of social housing residents between municipalities

- Any data showing demand for applicants to reside (as one of their preferences) within their current municipality, including for demand by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, young and older people.

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[13] City of Melbourne Street Count www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support- services/social-support/what-we-are-doing/Pages/streetcount.aspx

Question 2: How can governments, across all levels, best work with communities to support better housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Question 2 - Improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strat Islander people

The National Plan should provide for self-determination and enable local knowledge and cultural values to inform decision making.

Aboriginal Australians are over-represented in the homelessness system in Victoria - being 0.8% of our population but over 10% of homelessness service users, receiving less than 3% of funding.

In Victoria, Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) supports the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (AHHF) *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home*. This program provides culturally safe and culturally responsive housing.

We assume that the National Plan will provide for a range of tailored responses to cater to the diversity of cohorts and locational needs, and that standalone, or separate plans should not be required.

However, until the current over-representations of First Nations peoples is addressed, we consider a standalone plan is warranted Improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be a national priority.

DISCUSSION

Q 2.1 & 2.2 - Considerations and benefits of a culturally appropriate response to support better housing outcomes

Improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be a national priority

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions in several areas including housing[14].

Historical experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people in Australia and the ongoing impacts of colonisation have had a significant impact on housing situations and conditions. We recognise that First Nations people have significantly less access to affordable, secure and quality housing[15]and that this current housing experience cannot be decoupled from the historical experience of dispossession and dislocation.

Our Councils have a strong commitment to the recognition of, and justice for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we support positive, meaningful change to address and redress historical and current injustices and continued systemic discrimination.

Target 9 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Agreement) states that *'88% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will live in appropriate housing that is not overcrowded by 2031'*. We also acknowledge that Aboriginal Registered Housing Agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCHOs) are best placed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and are often preferred over mainstream services. We champion self-determination and the expertise and knowledge of Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) and support the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (AHHF) *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person*

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[14] UNDRIP, 2007

[15] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing, web article published 7/9/23.

Has a Home.

Aboriginal Australians are overrepresented in the homelessness system. According to 2021 Census data, 13,799 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in Victoria, being 0.8% of the total population but 10.2% of homelessness service users[16]. Despite this overrepresentation, First Nations people receive less than 3% of funding[17].

A current key strategic direction in AHV's framework is a call for a standalone National Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Plan. This would present a unique opportunity for the AHHF to highlight to government culturally distinct causes of homelessness and the impacts of Aboriginal housing exclusion.

It should be the role of all levels of government to work with communities to support better housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. AHV have an MOU with the City of Darebin, the first of its kind in Victoria, and employ an officer to work towards all 79 councils having similar MOUs, with a particular focus on the LGAs where they have properties.

Education is needed to support elected officials at the local, state and federal level to understand the benefits of working closely with community organisations to build mutual trust and respect.

The National Plan should provide for a range of tailored responses to cater to the diversity of cohorts and locational needs, and that standalone, or separate plans should not be required.

However, until the current over-representations of First Nations peoples is addressed, we consider a standalone plan is warranted Improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be a national priority.

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[16] Australian Institute Health and Welfare SHS Annual Report 2020-2021
[17] Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, https://vahhf.org.au/advocacy/platform/, web page visited 28/9/2023.

Question 3: How can all levels of governments, along with housing organisations, institutional investors, not-for-profits, and private industry, improve access to social housing, which includes public housing and community housing?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Question 3: How can all levels of governments, along with housing organisations, institutional investors, not-for-profits, and private industry, improve access to social housing, which includes public housing and community housing?

This is core to all three Charter 'levers':

1. *Work in partnership with federal and state government, public and private sector partners to increase the supply of social housing and respond to homelessness in south and east Melbourne.*

2. *Scope land within our region with the potential to be re-purposed for the development of social housing.*

3. *Advocate for inclusive housing growth, including through mandatory inclusionary zoning.*

Just as all levels of government, housing organisations, public, private and institutional investors and the development industry have a role to play, the range of solutions and responses should also be broad. The current crisis is not simply a 'supply' problem - decades of underinvestment particularly impacting public and social housing in Victoria has put additional pressure on the housing system more broadly and bottlenecks throughout the system limit early intervention.

Victoria is lagging and has failed to leverage decades of rapid growth to maintain and increase its social housing stock. There are proven interventions in other jurisdictions that should be learned from and applied here.

In the short term there should be:

-   A clear policy and investment focus on public and social housing

-   A plan to introduce Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) to fund social housing

-   Targets established locally or regionally from national targets

In the longer term, disincentives to investment in affordable housing, such as subsidies that are inflationary or only focus on new builds could be identified and removed, and new models, such as shared equity and preserving low cost rentals could be piloted.

Good data and strong local input to the pipeline for delivery of social housing will help to ensure the right housing is built in the right locations.

Local government play significant (and often unheralded) roles in advocating for, partnering, and facilitating social and affordable housing outcomes for their communities. It is vital that their roles are recognised (and supported) beyond being a planning authority.

SNAPSHOT - The extent of the challenge for our region:

For the Charter region there is a growing need for homelessness support services, growing demand for social housing, and a plummeting availability of affordable rental stock. In Victoria 44,152 households are waiting for social housing. In south and east Melbourne, the situation is dire as 32% of Victorians experiencing homelessness and 40% of people on the social housing waiting list live in this region. Indicators of the regional challenge include:

- The share of households renting social housing has stagnated or declined in all councils in the region, and is below the metropolitan average level in most councils

- The number of affordable private rentals within the region has plunged compared with the early 2000s

- A significant increase in the median house price over the last decade of between 47% and 80% across the region - averaging 64% which is higher than the metropolitan Melbourne increase of 51% and by 2020, eight of the 13 Charter Councils had median house prices exceeding the metropolitan median

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

Inevitably this will lead to greater pressure on the social housing system.
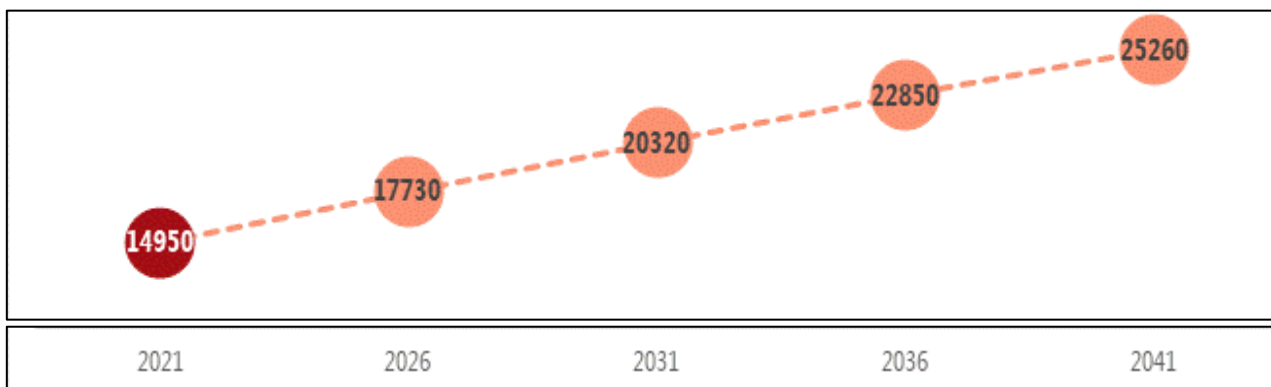
Figure 1 - Estimated shortfall of social housing five-yearly 2021-2041 in the Charter Region

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

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

DETAILED DISCUSSION

Q 3.2 & 3.3 - Actions that can be taken today and longer-term policies to ensure availability and support to social housing

A clear policy and investment focus on public and social housing

Victoria is lagging nationally in its provision of social housing, and its recent focus on affordable housing has failed to noticeably impact on demand.

Targeted, direct and sustained investment in social housing is required, and could be supported through an inclusionary zoning mechanism to fund this essential community infrastructure.

Charter Councils see themselves and a willing partner in this housing challenge and are identifying underutilised land and development opportunities to contribute to social housing supply.

Plan to introduce Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) to fund social housing

Currently Victorian councils can enter voluntary Section 173 agreements with a developer to include affordable housing. These mechanisms are cumbersome, costly and inefficient and must be negotiated one project at a time.

The State Government stepped back from its plan to mandate inclusionary zoning in regional cities and metropolitan councils.

The Charter group consider that without inclusionary zoning the private market will be less likely to deliver social housing in high amenity, well-serviced locations and it is key to redressing the critical shortfall of social and affordable housing in Victoria.

In 2017, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) developed an 'Understanding Inclusionary Zoning Brief' to demonstrate how land use planning systems can be leveraged to deliver more social and affordable housing through voluntary or mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (IZ).[18]

IZ requires a proportion of multi-dwelling developments to be affordable (ideally 10%) and social housing (ideally 5%). It is voluntary in many jurisdictions across Australia, including Victoria. IZ provisions, while not without urban design and implementation challenges, show promising results and increased affordable housing in London and New York[19]. South Australia and the ACT adopted clear policy directions regarding affordable and social housing with South Australia making IZ mandatory, resulting in steady increases in social and affordable housing since the policies were introduced.

Embedding mandatory Inclusionary Zoning as a national requirement in the National Plan will assist Victoria to deliver affordable and social dwellings efficiently and at scale.

Better leverage of major projects

For any national plan, leveraging existing Federal and State infrastructure projects, particularly when already happening at locations with good transport access and near services is critical. In Victoria for example, the Level Crossing Removal project is not being leveraged for essential community infrastructure despite occurring along train lines. Local government can be a valuable partner here. Similarly, through partnership local government can leverage their own land to access investment and expertise to facilitate social and affordable housing development.

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[18] AHURI Final Report No. 120, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, ww.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/120.
[19] *New directions in planning for affordable housing: Australian and international evidence and implications*, Gurran, N Milligan, V Baker, D Beth Bugg, L., Christensen, S 2008 AHURI Final Report No. 120, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final- reports/120.

Strong local relationships also assist to leverage social housing outcomes. In Vancouver, partnerships with churches with surplus land have resulted in developments including 400 units on four United Church sites.

Meaningful targets that translate National and State goals regionally or locally

Functional Zero, as used in the homelessness service sector could be applied more broadly to all aspects of the social and affordable housing service system.

At a minimum, the National Housing Accord aspirational target of 1 million new, well-located homes over 5 years from 2024 and the additional commitment to another 10,000 homes by both State and Federal Governments should be expressed for regions, if not LGAs.

Councils should be involved in setting regional or local targets. Established areas often have centuries old infrastructure or lack additional capacity for the services residents need. In growth areas, a significant backlog in the provision of community infrastructure exists.

Setting regional or local targets would also support achievement of the 'reasonable waiting time target' expressed by the Victorian Housing Register.

In the longer term, a process to identify and progressively remove disincentives to investment in social and affordable housing, such as subsidies that are inflationary or that only focus on new builds would assist to reduce pressure on social housing.

Learn from best practices in other jurisdictions

Models well established in other jurisdictions, such as shared equity and preserving low-cost rentals, could be advanced through supported pilot projects to be more rapidly adapted to the local context and increase the supply of social housing.

In the US and UK shared equity/community land trust models are widely used to supply social and affordable housing.

Shared Equity / Community Land Trusts: The Community Land Trust (CLT) model involves creating a not-for-profit entity to acquire and hold land for community benefit and provide secure affordable access to housing (and sometimes commercial and community services for residents). The CLT acquires land and or buildings through purchase or donation. This land is held in perpetuity (for instance, on a 99-year lease) so that it can always be used for affordable housing. Access to this land is often limited to very low- to moderate-income households. The Cities of Sydney and Port Phillip are exploring an Australian model of a CLT[20].

Preserving low cost rentals: Melbourne needs more well-located, affordable, rental dwellings to serve low income households and prevent them 'crowding out' social housing and lower cost private rental options. Preserving low-cost rental is much less expensive than building new low-cost rental, so mechanisms to preserve and expand low-cost market rental should be advocated for by governments as part of planning reform.

Scale up build-to-rent: In the Greater Vancouver municipality of Burnaby, rental-only zoning in areas close to trains and other frequent public transit forms part of recent legislative reform[21]. Developers who demolish rental buildings need to construct low-cost replacement units, and all new multi-unit developments are required to provide 20% affordable rental.

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[20] Crabtree, L & Twill, J 2019 Foundations of Equity: A Metropolitan Land Trust Policy. Sydney: City of Sydney. Retrieved 1 November 2019 from www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/314159/Foundations-of-Equity_A- metropolitan-land-trust-policy.pdf

[21] Gawley, K 2019 *Burnaby passes bold rental-only zoning plan to protect, create housing* Burnaby Now, May 28, 2019. Retrieved 8 October 2019 from www.vancouverisawesome.com/2019/05/28/rental-only-zoning-housing-burnaby-bc/

Q 3.4 - How governments can ensure social housing is built in the right locations to meet the current and future needs of social housing tenants and the broader community

Understand who needs to be housed

To ensure social housing is built in the right locations to meet current and future need, it is important to understand:

- Who is needing social housing and how this may change

- Where these people and their support networks are

- How well sites identified for social housing are serviced; not just to transport, shops and job opportunities, but also to the homelessness service system

Access to state provided local data about local demand and social (and affordable) housing needs should be improved. This would inform Councils own planning and advocacy. This could also include data showing comparative demand and movement of social housing residents between municipalities (to avoid displacement of longer term local residents in need).

Greater visibility of the State's priorities for the provision of social housing (by type, amount, location / LGA) and the pipeline of social housing projects is also needed. State priorities for the provision of specialist housing with operational funding for specialised housing supports (e.g. crisis accommodation and support for young people, youth foyers, for victims of family violence, for people exiting the justice system, for people exiting the hospital system with complex needs) should also form part of this information.

Ensuring land is well serviced

Well located land is one of the biggest costs of delivering social housing. It is also a powerful tool for Councils to use to improve social housing availability locally.

Appropriate locations for social housing must broadly account for the needs of very low- and low-income households. The priority cohorts at greatest risk of homelessness include people living with a disability, older people, people seeking asylum, and people living with chronic health conditions (such as mental health).

Locations that consider environmental, socio-economic, and cultural factors and that afford access to employment, education, transport, health providers and other services are ideal.

The east and southeast of Melbourne encompass both established and significant growth areas presenting vastly different contexts, benefits and challenges. For example, the need for access to a car will vary among cohorts, making public transport access important which many locations cannot offer.

There are tools available to assess how well serviced areas are to assist to identify land in suitable locations. For example, the University of Melbourne Transforming Housing Project developed an online Housing Access Rating Tool (HART) for Greater Melbourne and Geelong.[22] It brings together infrastructure rich areas with vacant or underutilized government-owned land and for our region identified:

- In the south, Oakleigh South, Dingley Village, Mentone, Mordialloc, Chelsea, Springvale, Noble Park, Dandenong, Cranbourne, Hampton Park, Narre Warren, Carrum Downs and Frankston Centre.

- In the east, Bulleen, Box Hill, Mount Waverley, Clayton, Wantirna South, Rowville, Ferntree Gully and Lilydale. An output from the HART tool is shown below.

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[22] Hart, Raynor and Whitzman, 2018 Housing Access Rating Tool (HART) (unimelb.edu.au)
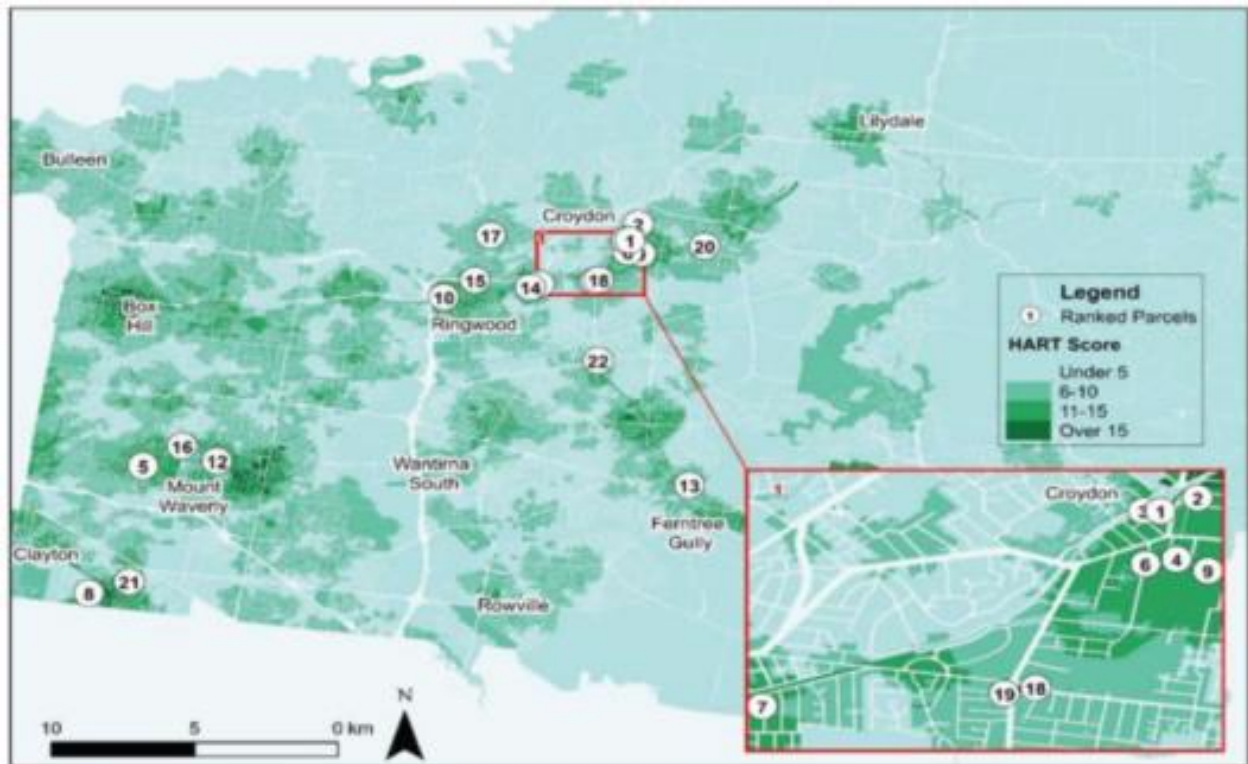
Figure 2 - East metropolitan HART scores and government land sites

Recognise the various roles played by Local Government

Local government play significant (and often unheralded) roles in advocating for, partnering, and facilitating social and affordable housing outcomes for their communities. This role goes well beyond what is described in the issues paper of being a mere planning authority and highlights the need for all levels of government to work in unison to close the social housing shortfall.

The Charter group of councils is active in both identifying communities most at risk and in need of social housing, as well as identifying appropriate locations and land for social housing developments within their municipality.

Charter councils work in partnership with Federal and State governments, and public and private sector partners, in a coordinated approach to enable increased provision of social housing and an enhanced service response to homelessness in east and southeast Melbourne.

As the closest level of government to communities, councils have great understanding and insight into local communities in need of social housing as well as potential land and locations for development. Encouraging partnerships and 'asset bundling' among not-for-profit groups in order to access better financing terms and serve a broader segment of at-risk populations is also within the remit of local government.

However, once a development is brought forward, justified and funded, broader community views come into consideration. The Charter has explored messaging around social housing to allay community concerns and help build community understanding of the nature of and need for social housing. Again, this work is constrained by limited access to data, such as to the Victorian Housing Register. Better information sharing between different levels of government is crucial.

Question 4: What should governments, private industries, the not-for-profit and community sectors focus on to help improve access to housing and housing affordability in the private market?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Question 4: What should governments, private industries, the not-for-profit and community sectors focus on to help improve access to housing and housing affordability in the private market?

The focus of the Charter group is on homelessness and social housing - early intervention to reduce the risk of homelessness and measures to grow the supply of social housing - for the lowest income households most vulnerable to homelessness. Retaining affordable private rental stock is a priority so as to not further stress the system or add t demand. This is consistent with all three Charter 'levers':

1. *Work in partnership with federal and state government, public and private sector partners to increase the supply of social housing and respond to homelessness in south and east Melbourne.*

2. *Scope land within our region with the potential to be re-purposed for the development of social housing.*

3. *Advocate for inclusive housing growth, including through mandatory inclusionary zoning.*

Access to housing and affordable housing in the private market could be enhanced through:

- Incentives to retain affordable rental dwellings

- Incentives for the private provision of affordable housing, including moving from build-to-rent to 'rent-to-buy'

- Identify, fund and pilot best practice models of social housing and housing support to build community acceptance and develop new models

- Introduce mandatory Inclusionary Zoning

Longer term policies that could be considered include:

– How to ensure ongoing funding for State Governments to fulfil their role in supplying public housing

– A program to enable ageing social housing to be improved while keeping people in their community

– Clarifying the role of public and private rooming house accommodation

– Recognise 'residualisation' (the concentration of those in greatest need in limited social housing stock) and consider a *supportive tenancy model* to extend more support

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[23] (overleaf)

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[23] DELWP Map 15 Lower cost housing in Melbourne 1995 - 2015 www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/628357/plan-melbourne-map-improvements-to-transport-infrastructure-committed-and-potential.pdf

SNAPSHOT - Lack of suitable affordable stock for Melbourne and our region

Access to affordable housing across Melbourne (shown in maps below) has declined significantly.
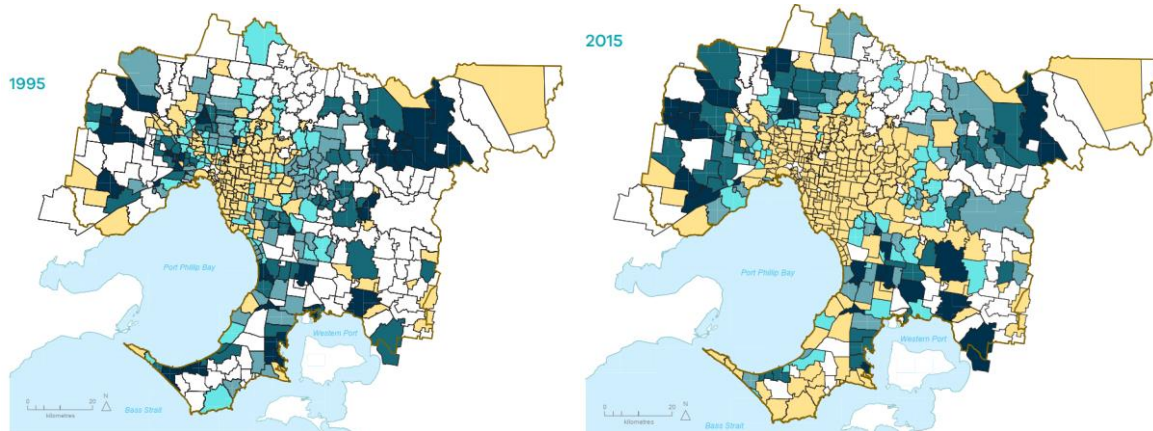
Map 15

Lower-cost housing in metropolitan Melbourne 1995 and 2015

Note: Lower-cost housing for the purpose of this illustration is defined as the cheapest 25% of all houses sold in Melbourne in the relevant year. In 1995 this was houses that sold for less than $100,000. In 2015 it was houses that sold for less than $415,000.

Distribution of lower-cost houses sold by suburb (%)

- 75 to 100
- 50 to 75
- 25 to 50
- 10 to 25
- 0 to 10
- limited data

Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
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For our region, there is a stark shortfall of affordable housing and of properties suitable for single person households. This causes increased reliance on unsuitable forms of housing and shelter for those on very low income. Reliance on private rooming house accommodation is increasing, and our region is over-represented. Over a third of Victoria's rooming house residents and 37% of those in overcrowded conditions are in our region.

Long stays in shared accommodation can result in poor health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for children. The lack of autonomy with respect to shared accommodation can present significant health, wellbeing and safety risks for tenants. Shared accommodation typically includes AOD users, prison leavers, people with a mental health condition or a disability making for highly stressful environments. Living in close proximity with many highly vulnerable people creates its own challenges and stress, and because people don't know where they will be living longer-term, they can't move on with their lives.

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

Growth in housing costs have surpassed average increases in income, resulting in a marked reduction in housing affordability in recent years. In Greater Dandenong, the proportion of rental properties that are affordable to Centrelink recipients has declined from 83% in 2001, to 9% by 2022.

DETAILED DISCUSSION

Q 4.1 - Actions that can be taken now to improve access to affordable housing to buy and to rent

Plan to introduce Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) to fund social and affordable housing

The social, economic and physical housing-market factors impacting our region are rising rents in the private rental market and the inadequate supply of social housing. In addition to the discussion of Inclusionary Zoning in the previous section, the Charter Group considers that embedding mandatory Inclusionary Zoning as a national requirement in the National Plan will engage the private sector to contribute to delivering affordable and social dwellings efficiently and at scale.

We believe that inclusionary zoning would:

− support new social and affordable housing development

− remove the need for local agreements that can be overturned on appeal (VCAT in Victoria)

− ensure fit for purpose properties are coming onto the market for targeted at risk cohorts (such as women and children fleeing family violence)

The shortfall in social housing is the result of decades of underfunding and not a problem with the planning approvals system.

Other housing market factors – we lack suitable, diverse and affordable housing

The housing market in Australia is principally privately owned, driven by competitive market forces, and stimulated by years of government subsidies, landlord tax breaks, and interest rate cuts. Rapid population growth and increased housing demand places Australia in a perfect storm for increased homelessness and rising need for social and affordable housing for lower income households.

Key market factors include:

− A shortage of affordable private rental housing and higher median rents - lettings decreased to 7% in December 2019[24] and as low as 0.5% (Bayside) and under 5% for nine councils in the Charter region in December 2019

− Lack of single bedroom dwellings to support the high proportion of lone person households in our region - between 15% (Casey) and 27% (Frankston and Mornington Peninsula) of properties are tenanted by lone person households yet on average 0-1 bedroom properties are only 1.3% of all housing stock, compared to 3.5% for metropolitan Melbourne.

− Social housing shortfalls are pronounced and waiting lists are growing - 15,200 dwellings are estimated to be needed each year for the next decade to meet current very low and low-income household need[25] in our region.

  o In Victoria, Government research in 2016-17 (in response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence) identified 1,700 more social housing homes needed each year for 20 years to maintain the current 3.5% social housing share of the total homes in Victoria

  o Double this is needed if lower income households, currently facing housing stress in the private rental market are to have affordable housing[26]

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[24] *Rental Report December Quarter 2019*, Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government, 2019

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

[26] ibid

- Social housing rents are capped at 25 or 30% of household income[27] and in most cases social housing is among the only form of housing a JobSeeker recipient can afford

To begin to address housing market factors that contribute to homelessness and inadequate social housing:

- Introduce a National Plan

- Incentivise the private provision of affordable housing through build-to-rent and rent-to-buy initiatives

- Identify and fund best practice models of social housing and housing support, geared towards specific needs and opportunities at a local and regional scale

- Introduce a requirement for mandatory contributions (through *Inclusionary Zoning)* within state level planning schemes/provisions for social housing

Q 4.2 - Longer term policies that should be considered to improve access to affordable housing to buy and to rent

While a National Plan will set a holistic and long-term vision for early intervention, improved coordination, response to prevent homelessness, and a plan to meet the current shortfall in social housing, there are a number of other policies that need to be considered.

In particular, the role of Rooming Houses needs greater clarity. In its report *Rooming house futures: governing for growth, fairness and transparency* AHURI stated that "Rooming houses are of particular concern to governments for several reasons. First, some of society's most excluded and vulnerable individuals, often on a legally insecure or 'non-tenured' basis. Second, conditions of occupancy can heighten resident safety risks, especially in relation to fire. And third, rooming houses are often high turnover accommodation, and sometimes associated with local disturbance and associated neighbourhood complaints".[28]

While this may be true of many poorly managed private rooming houses, it is not true for all. Social housing also includes rooming house accommodation and at a time of an increasing gap between demand and supply for social and affordable housing its importance should not be overlooked.

Longer term policies to be considered:

- How to ensure an enduring and adequate source of funding for State Governments to fulfil their role in supplying public housing

- A program to enable ageing social housing to be improved while keeping people in their community

- Clarifying the role of public and private rooming house accommodation as part of the social and affordable housing supply and how their management could be more nuanced /streamlined

- Residualisation - recognise that historic underinvestment has meant those in greatest need are now concentrated in the limited social housing stock available[29]

- Consider a *supportive tenancy model* to extend more support to social housing residents, that is more efficient than homelessness services or common ground and recognises the residualisation challenge

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[27] *Making a Difference – effective local government responses to homelessness,* Council to Homeless Persons, commissioned by Monash Council, October 2019

[28] Dalton, T Pawson, H & Hulse, K for Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, August 2015, p 6. *Rooming house futures: governing for growth, fairness and transparency.*

[29] *Understanding the 'residualisation' of social housing, AHURI 2019* Understanding the 'residualisation' of social housing | AHURI

- Encourage innovation and diversity in social and affordable housing, such as shared equity/community land trusts by providing government owned land under a long-term lease

Question 5: How could governments work better with industry, community services and other organisations to improve housing outcomes for all Australians?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Question 5: How could governments work better with industry, community services and other organisations to improve housing outcomes for all Australians?

The Charter recognises the importance of working in partnership through lever 1:

1. *Work in partnership with federal and state government, public and private sector partners to increase the supply of social housing and respond to homelessness in south and east Melbourne.*

As a willing partner, councils can offer a:

- Community centred and informed approach

- Stronger local partnerships and knowledge exchange

We believe that a state-wide communications campaign is urgently required to address stigma and strengthen connections between social housing residents and the wider community. We note that:

- Education and involvement is key to empowering communities and addressing stigma about homelessness and social housing

- Funding participation in community development activities is necessary to create strong and resilient social housing communities

- Engaging residents, clients and neighbours in the planning and governance of social and affordable housing, as well as in the delivery of programs improves neighbourhood outcomes

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DETAILED DISCUSSION

Q 5.1 - Greater coordination between levels of government

Local networks add significant value to government, NFPs and the private sector while providing community leadership

Since the Charter's inception almost four years-ago, it has become clear that a partnership approach is critical. While the Charter Group is a more recent example of a network coming together, it is innovative and unusual as it is CEO driven. There is a significant local variation in the manifestation of homelessness both regionally and locally and networks such as this play a key role aligning effort.

At the local level, the Mornington Peninsula Shire supports a Mornington Peninsula Housing Network to link the work of local charities and Specialist Homelessness Services and other local health and welfare agencies. The Network also has a multi-agency case review group focussing on an integrated assertive outreach approach to people who are rough sleeping. Local government involvement in such a network provides a unique opportunity to understand the gaps in the system and advocate for solutions.

Q 5.2 - Involving communities in initiatives to improve housing and homelessness

Education and involvement is key to empowering communities and addressing stigma about homelessness and social housing

If we are to transform the housing system and end homelessness in Australia, actions and strategies contained in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan must be understood, accepted and supported by the community. This will require work to educate and empower communities which should be underpinned by the participation of people with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity.

The Charter Councils' have witnessed growing awareness and support for action to tackle homelessness and housing issues within our communities, however we also continue to observe considerable stigma and misconceptions about homelessness and social housing. This can impede and undermine efforts to address homelessness and delay or even prevent the building of new social and affordable housing.

Strategies can range from broad community education campaigns to humanising homelessness through storytelling and sharing lived experience. The Charter Councils are currently collaborating on a project aimed at shifting community perceptions and increasing acceptance for social housing. We have engaged consultants to develop a messaging guide for local governments, which will communicate the issues of homelessness and social housing acceptance in a positive, values-based and persuasive way. The guide will be informed by extensive research on current public perceptions and discourse around social housing, and test messaging with communities to identify the most persuasive messages.

Create strong and resilient social housing communities through funding participation in community development activities

Funding for community development and place-based programs to promote community inclusion and support residents of social housing developments enhance the connections of new residents into community life. Programs can include gardening and cooking programs, parenting support programs, recreation opportunities with local sporting clubs, social & support groups. Local Councils are well placed to support such community development activity however resources are needed to facilitate involvement.

Engage residents, clients and neighbours in the planning and governance of social and affordable housing, as well as in the delivery of programs

Engagement of residents in the design and planning for programs, as well as directly in property management, is key to building thriving and integrated social housing communities and should be reflected in the National Plan. With resourcing, neighbourhood houses could deliver these outreach programs and help to build long-term connections to mainstream programs and an improved sense of place and community.

A state-wide communications campaign to address stigma and strengthen connections between social housing residents and the wider community

A state-wide communications campaign is required to address stigma around social housing and promote inclusion and participation for social housing residents. The Charter Group notes a key role for State Government in providing community engagement resources and support, potentially via the MAV. Local government has seen first-hand opposition to proposed social housing developments from community members and at times, even within Council. This opposition has the power to stop projects in their tracks.

Via the (proposed) 10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy for Victoria the State Government could commit to state-wide consultation and communications to deliver clear and consistent messages, attuned to local needs and context. To consolidate support for social housing as a legitimate and needed form of housing, adequate services and supports are needed and would contribute to successful tenancies

Question 6: How can governments, the private and community sectors, help to improve sustainable housing and better prepare housing for the effects of climate change?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Question 6: How can governments, the private and community sectors, help to improve sustainable housing and better prepare housing for the effects of climate change?

A priority for all levels of government is to ensure that planning systems and building codes include siting and environmental performance standards that avoid known risks and build resilience to heatwaves and flooding in response to climate change.

As the cost of damage associated with the impacts of natural disasters increases, it is critical that we 'build back better' to reduce our future exposures. The Charter region is impacted by the shocks of major weather events, leading to floods, fire and storms as well as the day-to-day stresses of a warming and drying climate. The rate of loss of canopy trees is higher in our region than for Melbourne.

Opportunities to progress more quickly towards sustainable and resilient housing could include:

- Mandatory energy efficiency reporting at point of sale / point of rent

- Mandatory energy efficiency upgrades at point of sale / point of rent

- Longer (5+ years) minimum rental term

- Minimum national ESD requirements

- Height and density bonus *only* where minimum ESD (and social housing contributions) are met,

- Conversely, fixed height limits that *reduce* proportionally when ESD and Social Housing ratios are not achieved

- National risk assessment and hazard mapping, translated into planning scheme map specific information

- More community education, early warning and community access to relief centres.

DETAILED DISCUSSION

Q 6.1, 2 & 3 - General comments regarding resilient and sustainable housing

A priority for all levels of government is to ensure that planning systems and building codes include siting and environmental performance standards that avoid known risks and build resilience to heatwaves and flooding in response to climate change.

As the cost of damage associated with the impacts of natural disasters increases, it is critical that we 'build back better' to reduce our future exposures. The Charter region is impacted by the shocks of major weather events, leading to floods, fire and storms as well as the day-to-day stresses of a warming and drying climate. The rate of loss of canopy trees is higher in our region than for Melbourne.

As well as avoiding development in areas at current (or projected future) risk from fire, flood or coastal inundation and erosion, other matters that should be considered for existing and new housing include:

- Optimising northern orientation for passive heating and cooling

- Insulation, including double glazing

- Draught proofing and curtains for thermal efficiency

- Natural ventilation

- Retention and planting of canopy trees

Much of the regions housing stock, including social housing, needs energy efficiency upgrades. While costly, this would reduce operational (heating and cooling) costs and improve amenity for residents. Residents least able to withstand increasing energy costs should be targeted in government upgrade programs.

To avoid 'at risk' areas, spatial mapping to identify these areas is required and must be done consistently, coordinated at a state level, and shared across all levels of government. A National hazard assessment is underway which should then be translated into detailed maps at a planning scheme scale for urban areas and for critical social and economic infrastructure.

Opportunities to progress more quickly towards sustainable and resilient housing could include:

- Mandatory energy efficiency reporting at point of sale / point of rent

- Mandatory energy efficiency upgrades at point of sale / point of rent

- Longer (5+ years) minimum rental term

- Minimum national ESD requirements

- Height and density bonus *only* where minimum ESD (and social housing contributions) are met,

- Conversely, fixed height limits that *reduce* proportionally when ESD and Social Housing contributions are not achieved

- National risk assessment and hazard mapping, translated into planning scheme map specific information.

- Community education, early warning and community access to relief centres.

Question 7: About the Charter Group

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

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

The Group was initiated by Monash Council in 2019 to make a difference for the 22,000 Victorians experiencing homelessness - of which over a third (7,916[30] Victorians) are in our council areas. As a group we highlight regional issues associated with homelessness and social housing; advocate for systemic reforms to prevent homelessness risks from occurring; and work to improve our responses when they do. Our work has sparked interest among other Victorian councils.

Our advocacy platform is in the form of a *Regional Local Government Homelessness and Social Housing Charter (Charter)*. The Charter supports a housing first[31] approach and prioritises three levers which are:

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

The Charter Group has developed a glossary of terms[32] to improve consistency across councils. We use the affordable housing definition in the Victorian *Planning and Environment Act* 1987, which is '*housing, including social housing, that is appropriate for the housing needs of very low, low and moderate-income households'*. Social Housing is defined as including both public housing and community housing. Community housing is housing owned, controlled or managed by a participating registered agency.

Our definition of 'homelessness' aligns with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Council to Homeless Persons' (CHP) definitions. These reflect contemporary practice and recognise that homelessness is more than rooflessness. Along with rough sleepers, the experience of homelessness includes every person in a dwelling that is inadequate; has no tenure; has a short and non-extendable tenure; or does not allow control of, or access to space for social relations[33]. Rough sleeping makes up around 7% of homelessness with 'hidden homelessness' common across our region. Hidden homelessness includes those in supported accommodation for the homeless, boarding houses, severely overcrowded dwellings, and those staying with other households or in other temporary lodgings[34].

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[30] ABS Census 2016

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

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

[33] Council for Homeless Persons definition: https://chp.org.au/homelessness/

[34] Council to Homeless Persons 2019, *Making a Difference – Effective LGovt Responses to Homelessness* commissioned by Monash Council 2019, p.2