

MAKE SOCIAL HOUSING WORK

A Framework for Victoria's Public
and Community Housing 2020 – 2030



Social housing is short-term and long-term rental housing owned and run by the government or not-for-profit agencies. It includes both public housing and community housing. It is for people on low incomes, especially those who have recently experienced homelessness or who have other special needs.

Rent for social housing is set as a proportion of income. In Victoria, public housing tenants are charged 25 per cent of their income, or the market rent, whichever is lower.

Community housing organisations usually charge tenants between 25 to 30 per cent of their income plus the value of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance that each tenant receives, or 74.99 per cent of the market rent, whichever is lower.



CURRENT STATE IN VICTORIA

Despite a progressive social agenda in many other areas, Victoria has the lowest level of public and community housing stock in Australia (3.2 per cent of all households). This means a much greater reliance on the private rental market – amidst overwhelming evidence that this is not delivering for those on low incomes, or who face discrimination in the rental market. It means that the social and economic benefits of having safe, secure and affordable housing are out of reach for tens of thousands of low-income Victorians.

There are currently over 25,000 children on the public housing waiting list. Young people and older women are ending up on the streets or living in their cars due to a lack of housing. Women and children experiencing family violence are forced to remain living in violent homes. People with serious mental health problems have inadequate support to gain or retain housing. Ex-prisoners are re-offending in order to have the security of a prison bed due to lack of housing options. This is not the Victoria we want to live in.

We acknowledge that there have been some positive initiatives to improve responses to homelessness in recent years – including reform of the Residential Tenancies Act, the Social Housing Growth Fund, the Family Violence Housing Blitz, and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan. However, these initiatives are not enough to address the housing crisis we now face.

The Housing Peaks Alliance calls on the Victorian Government to develop a 10-year social housing plan. This will address the backlog of housing infrastructure and not only keep up with population growth but demonstrate a commitment to a stronger, fairer Victoria for future generations. We are keen to work with the government to explore shared interests and opportunities for pursuing this important social and economic agenda.

PROBLEMS TO ADDRESS

The current problems facing Victoria are the result of decades of under-investment. We have forgotten the critical role housing plays as part of the state's social and economic infrastructure. This is despite record population growth, economic growth and increased government revenues. The unacceptable outcomes include:

- Victoria is falling behind on social housing – social housing homes as a proportion of all households is 3.2 per cent, well below the national average of 4.5 per cent¹
- To simply maintain the current level of social housing at 3.2 per cent, 3,500 new public and community housing units would need to be built every year over the next 10 years
- Roughly one million Victorians live in housing stress²
- 25,000 people (and growing) have no home on any given night and more than 100,000 people seek help from homelessness services every year³
- Aboriginal people in Victoria are experiencing the highest rate and fastest growth of homelessness in the nation. Last year, 17 per cent of Aboriginal Victorians sought assistance from a homelessness service and over half (56 per cent) were already homeless⁴
- The existing social housing system of 81,708 households⁵ is at capacity, blocked and failing to meet demand even for those households in greatest need. More than 82,000 people remain on the waiting list (including 25,000 children)⁶ and only a handful of social housing homes become available each year
- Victoria's recurrent spending per person on social housing is less than half the national average⁷
- Lack of housing and the threat of homelessness is one of the most common reasons women and children experiencing family violence do not leave, or return to, a violent relationship⁸
- Almost 44 per cent of prisoners released in Victoria return to jail within two years, often due to lack of housing on release, at a cost of \$118,000 per prisoner per year⁹
- There is a lack of both new investment vehicles and integration between all levels of government and the private sector



PROPOSED

SOLUTIONS

We recognise that the Victorian Government faces a backlog of problems created by the under-investment in housing over the past 20 years, and that these must be addressed alongside a clear roadmap for the future. None of us can ignore this reality.

The Housing Peaks Alliance is committed to working with the Victorian Government to deliver practical and sustainable solutions to both the problems of lack of supply and inadequate support services. We all want a strong and sustainable social housing sector in Victoria.

We believe this requires:

Additional public and community housing stock

We believe this Government should set an agenda for increasing social housing homes by 6,000 every year for the next 10 years to match the national average of 4.5 per cent of all households.

Improved housing outcomes for all Aboriginal Victorians across their life course

Which can be achieved by building 300 Aboriginal housing units per year for the next ten years. Further, the Government can commit to and support the work of Aboriginal Housing Victoria in the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. This will assist Aboriginal organisations to own, manage and grow rental stock, and identify innovative models that secure housing for Aboriginal Victorians, including pathways to private ownership.

Additional investment in support services to assist those in greatest need

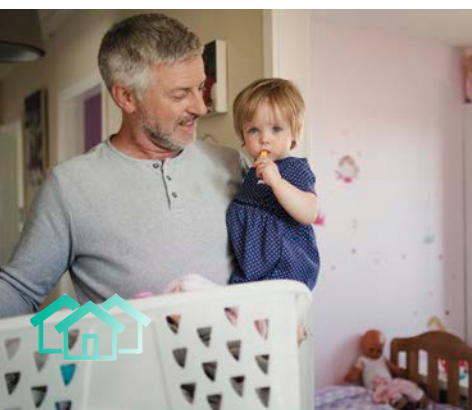
To assist those in greatest need – people with mental illness, women and children experiencing family violence, young people leaving care, people exiting prison into homelessness – to not only gain housing but also sustain it and avoid entering the cycle of evictions and rehousing that we currently witness. The waste of resources used in this cycle of poor housing outcomes should instead be spent on improved prevention and early intervention services.

Incorporating wellbeing into the State Budget framework

So it is measured properly and to ensure government spending is framed as an investment in improved quality of life for those in need. Measures used in the recent New Zealand budget include improving mental health, reducing child poverty, addressing inequality for Indigenous people, thriving in a digital age and transitioning to a low-emission sustainable economy. If New Zealand can do it, so can Victoria.

Establishing a high-level housing forum

Through which relevant State Government ministers and departments, local governments, community housing organisations, specialist homelessness service providers, tenant advocates and the private sector can work together to develop additional housing supply for low income households. This would include mutual investigation of available government land, innovative financing vehicles and improved management of existing stock. It would also provide a vehicle through which housing solutions can be planned and integrated across government in implementing recommendations from the Royal Commissions into Mental Health and Family Violence and other service system reforms.





SPECIFIC MEASURES

SUPPLY

To grow social housing stock to 4.5 per cent of all housing in Victoria, we need to **build 6,000 new social housing homes each year over 10 years.**

At least 300 new homes each year must be Aboriginal housing.¹⁰

New supply should be:

- Well located – near transport, jobs and services
- Safe and healthy – dwellings must be quality built, energy efficient, and universally accessible
- Focused on meeting priority and under-served needs, such as additional singles, large family units and accessible housing
- Made up of both Director of Housing owned and managed public housing properties and community housing properties.

Require 10 per cent of new large-scale housing developments be social housing homes by mandating inclusionary zoning, and provide appropriate lead time and transitional arrangements for this to occur.

Boost the funding available for social housing developments, including by increasing government borrowing, expanding existing funding mechanisms (such as the Social Housing Growth Fund) and introducing new, innovative funding mechanisms

Broaden access to government information to support new supply partnerships, such as GovMap – the new online single point of information about government-owned land in Victoria, and departmental modelling on social housing demand.

This provides stakeholders more access to important information that will allow them to generate more development partnership opportunities.

SUPPORT

Strengthen the transparency and accountability of the social housing system by publishing quarterly wait list and allocations data from the Victorian Housing Register. These reports should include key vulnerability indicators, including a person's priority level, their age and whether they are Aboriginal.

Deliver the support people need to gain and sustain tenancies, including in:

Prevention: Ensure that eviction into homelessness is a measure of last resort by:

- Providing all tenants with easily understood information in multiple languages about their legal rights and obligations
- Adequately funding legal advocacy for tenants
- Continue to develop and resource public and community housing providers to adopt 'Social Landlord' principles in their policy and practice
- Provide training for frontline public housing staff to improve their practice and support them to move into tenant support roles where appropriate
- Strengthen VCAT's accountability by creating an internal appeal mechanism for decisions made in the VCAT Residential Tenancies List
- Establish a single affordable and timely appeals process for both public and community housing tenants to access an independent system of review.

Early intervention: Ensure tenants at risk of eviction get timely support to prevent homelessness by:

- Expanding Tenancy Plus type programs – which support social housing tenants to address issues making them vulnerable to eviction – to tenants in private rental
- Strengthening early intervention and referral pathways to Tenancy Plus by public and community housing providers.

Ensure young people experiencing family conflict get the support they need to avoid homelessness by creating stronger pathways to family reconciliation and mediation interventions.

Ongoing flexible support: Ensure vulnerable tenants with ongoing support needs get the support they need to sustain tenancies by:

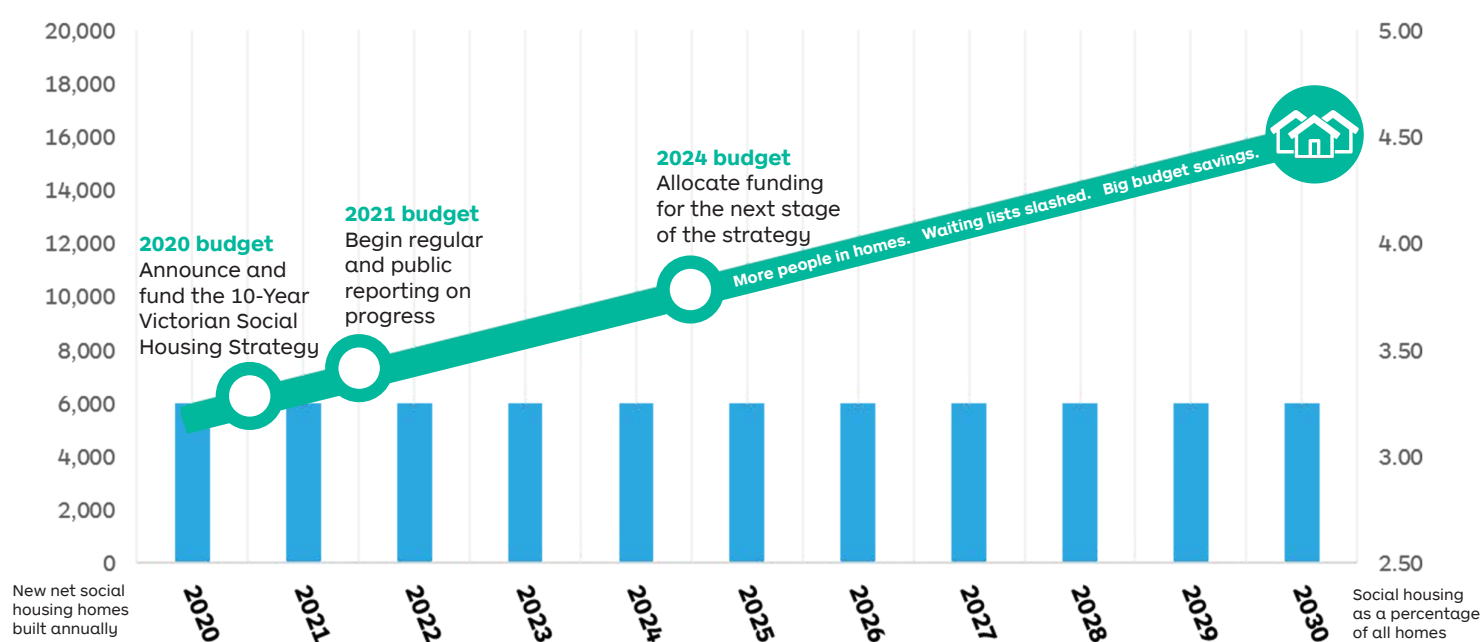
- Expanding permanent supportive housing teams to all of Victoria and to the scale required to meet ongoing need – the flexible, multidisciplinary and ongoing support these housing teams provide would enable a state-wide Housing First response to people with complex needs
- Supplementing permanent supportive housing teams with specialist mental health staff to provide intensive, recovery focused support to people exiting acute mental health care
- Expanding the HomeStretch support packages currently funded for 50 young people a year leaving out-of-home care to all young care leavers.



TIMEFRAME

Achieving the outcomes outlined above needs a serious commitment to a long-term plan, not a single year or single term of government response.

The Housing Peaks Alliance believes that immediate action will ensure that the Andrews Government can deliver measurable results by the end of this term and set Victoria up for the longer term. Failure to act now will only intensify the crisis currently facing the Victorian community and the Victorian Government.



Building 6,000 new social housing homes every year will increase the level of social housing to 4.5% of all households by 2030.

¹Derived from DELWP, *Victorians in Future 2019* (VIF2019), July 2019, p8 and DHHS, *Housing Assistance: Additional Service Delivery Data 2018 – 19*, September 2019, p8.

²Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4130.0, *Housing Occupancy and Costs*, 2015-16, Table 13.5 Household Estimates, Selected household characteristics, States and Territories, 2015-16.

³Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, *Census of Population and Housing 2016*.

⁴Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2018-19*, December 2019.

⁵Department of Health and Human Services, *Housing Assistance: Additional Service Delivery Data 2018 – 19*, September 2019, Table 15, p8.

⁶Department of Health and Human Services cited in Parliament of Victoria, Legal and Social Issues Committee 2018, *Report on the Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program*, June 2019, p23.

⁷Australian Productivity Commission, 2019, *Report on Government Services 2017-18, Part G Housing and Homelessness*.

⁸Flanagan, K et al, *Housing Outcomes after Domestic and Family Violence*, April 2019, p67.

⁹Australian Productivity Commission, 2019, *Report on Government Services 2019, Part C, Table CA.4*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2019/justice#attachables>

¹⁰Khalidi N, 2019, *Aboriginal Population and Households Projections, 2016-2036*, Victoria, Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

VCOSS and the Housing Peaks Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Victoria, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connections to land and community. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and Elders of past, present and future generations.

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The Housing Peaks Alliance is comprised of Aboriginal Housing Victoria, the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, the Council to Homeless Persons, Domestic Violence Victoria, Justice Connect, Tenants Victoria, the Victorian Public Tenants Association and the Victorian Council of Social Service.



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