

• CITY OF PORT PHILLIP •

THINK+ACT

Homelessness Action Strategy

2015-2020



IT TAKES A WHOLE COMMUNITY TO MAKE A PLACE A HOME

Contents



An enduring commitment

FOREWORD FROM MAYOR, CR. AMANDA STEVENS

We are pleased to be releasing the Homelessness Action Strategy 2015–2020. The City of Port Phillip is a diverse community which has a long standing and enduring commitment to social inclusion for all residents. Council actively supports the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs. This support includes the ways in which we work with the community to address and reduce homelessness. Council recognises this overarching framework builds upon the successful implementation of our previous five year strategy.

We want to ensure Port Phillip is a healthy and creative city, one that is resilient, vibrant and well governed for all. The Homelessness Action Strategy 2015–2020 is aligned to Council’s Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan which recognises that ‘a broad range of social, economic and environmental factors need to be considered to improve health. Factors such as shelter, income, education, environment, social connection, access to services and equity have direct impacts on health, and also influence a person’s ability to improve their own health and wellbeing.’

Although there are a number of wealthy households in Port Phillip, some 16% of our current households could be classified as low income. Between 2006 and 2011 private rents in Port Phillip had risen by 46%,¹ and 8% or over 7000 Port Phillip residents

were estimated as living in poverty.² The Port Phillip municipality is recognised as an area with a very low proportion of affordable housing with over 3000 households living in rental stress.

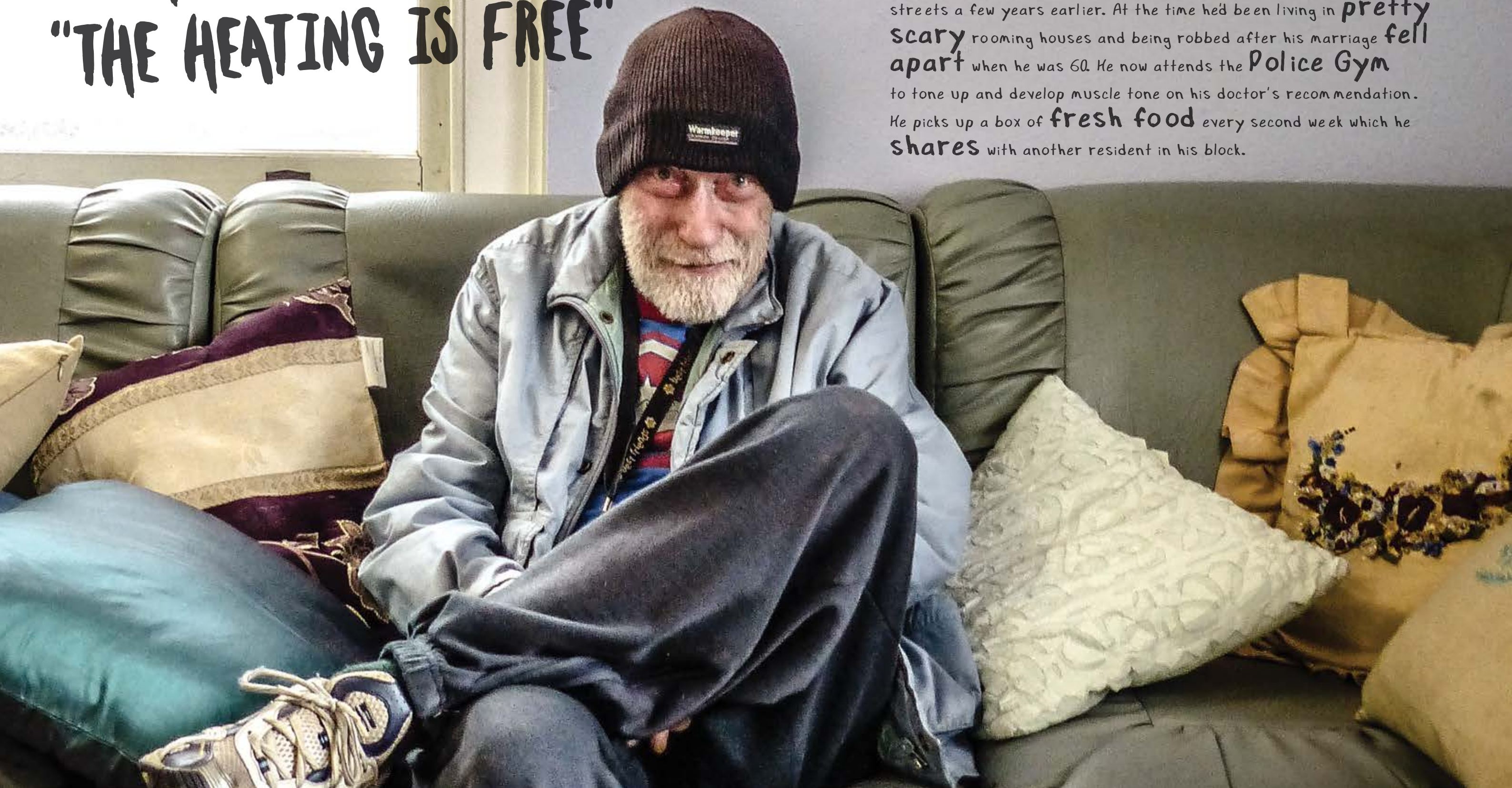
Port Phillip’s approach to homelessness encompasses both individual and structural factors. We understand that life circumstances of individuals and the social and economic contexts in the broader community can lead to homelessness. Homelessness places people at harm, impacting on personal safety, health and wellbeing, security of possessions and their ability to engage and connect with employment and education opportunities. In the 2011 Census,³ over 1500 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in Port Phillip.

The City of Port Phillip leads by example in pursuing social justice for all people in our community. Our Social Justice Charter promotes principles of participation, partnership, access, respect for diversity, addressing the cost of living and reducing disadvantage and enjoying the city by being connected. We recognise that a broad range of social, economic and environmental factors need to be considered to improve health and wellbeing and that it takes a whole community to make a place a home. Council’s role is to be welcoming and inclusive, equipped to connect people to services and partner and advocate on the issue of homelessness.

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ONE OF THE FANTASTIC THINGS, HE SAID IS "THE HEATING IS FREE"

Osbert lives in a public housing flat he is very happy with. He pays for one hour home care assistance per fortnight to help keep it lovely and clean. One of the fantastic things, he said is "the heating is free." He does his washing on the weekends when everything else is closed. Osbert had to let go of some self-protective behaviours learnt sleeping rough on the streets a few years earlier. At the time he'd been living in pretty scary rooming houses and being robbed after his marriage fell apart when he was 60. He now attends the Police Gym to tone up and develop muscle tone on his doctor's recommendation. He picks up a box of fresh food every second week which he shares with another resident in his block.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognising homelessness

Council recognises that homelessness can have complex and diverse origins and that it can happen to anyone at any stage of their life. Homelessness can be caused by something outside of a person's control such as not being able to locate secure, safe and affordable accommodation.

Council acknowledges our health is a reflection of the community and environment that we live in, the risk factors we are exposed to and the opportunities afforded to us throughout life. A key action in developing a healthy and inclusive city is ensuring a diversity of housing options is delivering affordable housing to meet our community needs. Council promotes social justice through facilitating inclusive public space and access to community facilities such as libraries, parks, and community centres.

Port Phillip is recognised as an area with a very low proportion of affordable housing. Research has shown that losing the ability to afford housing can have wide ranging impacts on many aspects of life. State government, council and a range of housing services are frequently approached by people experiencing housing stress which can ultimately lead to homelessness if suitable accommodation cannot be located.

Housing stress is defined as a household in the lowest 40% of income groups that is paying more than 30% of their income on their rent or mortgage. Despite government investment and the work of many organisations, homelessness and the provision of affordable housing remains a major and growing issue for many people in the community. Integrated affordable housing is essential in all communities – exclusionary design is unhealthy for everyone.

The City of Port Phillip supports the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs and pursues social justice for all people in our community.

This can be achieved through a number of actions available to us as a council which include:

- Leading initiatives with the community, as well as with housing provision and homelessness services, community and health sectors, state and federal governments and local businesses, to ensure people have the best chance of moving out of homelessness into secure homes, and
- Focusing on people in our community experiencing homelessness, those with multiple and complex needs and those most at risk of becoming homeless in the next five years such as households experiencing housing stress.



HOMELESSNESS CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE AT ANY STAGE OF THEIR LIFE

Council's vision

The City of Port Phillip Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020 seeks to reduce the risks associated with homelessness through the development of agreed actions, continuing council's role as a leader, advocate, planner, facilitator and service provider.

Council recognise that homelessness can often remain hidden as many people constantly move around trying to secure housing.

In response to the municipality's growing population and the sustained local shortage of affordable housing and low skill entry employment, homelessness is expected to continue to increase. Despite this, council's strategic leadership in this area makes a measurable difference to mitigating the impacts of homelessness. Council recognises that homelessness affects a broad range of people. Reducing and preventing homelessness relies on integrating planning and actions across all levels of government, different service sectors, parts of the community and by actively including people with a lived experience of homelessness and/or housing stress. Many actions can be carried out within council's current staffing and budget levels.



COUNCIL'S STRATEGY

This strategy aims to address the complexity of homelessness by focusing on 4 key themes:

1. **Building a more informed response** – enhancing community awareness, facilitating research and information sharing across all service sectors
2. **Staying connected** – strengthening integrated responses to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and housing stress through diverse partnerships
3. **Being inclusive** – listening to and advocating with people who have a lived experience of homelessness
4. **Focusing on prevention and early intervention** – supporting the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs and improving access to support and information to obtain suitable housing.

THEMES AND ACTIONS

1. Building a more informed response to addressing and reducing homelessness.

Council has fulfilled diverse and effective roles over many years seeking to reduce and prevent homelessness which have included the development of housing, funding of grants and subsidies as well as providing and planning services.

Council is uniquely placed to take a lead role locally in raising community understanding of homelessness. To do this it is essential to integrate local sector knowledge of homeless trends, triggers, issues and needs.

COUNCIL WILL PARTNER WITH OTHERS TO DEVELOP AND DELIVER TIMELY, RELEVANT LOCAL DATA COLLATION, INTERPRETATION AND EXPAND PUBLICATION CAPACITY.

This will be achieved by the following actions:

- Supporting awareness raising programs and events enhancing and promoting understanding of homelessness in consultation with people who have a lived experience of homelessness
- Developing a shared framework to document services available to people experiencing homelessness and unmet demand/turn away, and release these publicly as part of the annual homeless report
- Monitoring the community's access to direct services/gaps in service responses
- Publishing a local homelessness situation report annually which will include efforts by council and local agencies to address gaps in services
- Facilitating the local homeless count for the 2016 Census and undertaking an evaluation of this strategy at its mid-term in 2018 after release of the homelessness data.

ACTION LIST:

- Annual Homeless Memorial supported each June and an initiative related to Homeless Prevention Week is held each August
- Shared Data Forum in 2015 to establish the terms of reference and development of shared framework to identify services available and local level of turn away – report by end of 2015 to demonstrate service capacity and inform advocacy to state and federal government
- Homelessness Report presented to council annually from December 2015 outlining community awareness initiatives
- Coordinate effective homeless enumeration related to Census in August 2016
- Evaluation of Homelessness Action Strategy completed in 2018.

“Any solution to homelessness should be focused and start locally. It has to start at council level. They should develop a strategy and tactics for advocating for a solution to homelessness. There is a need for clear objectives and measurement of results.”

(SURVEY RESPONDENT-DEVELOPMENT OF HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY 2015-2020)

THEMES AND ACTIONS

2. Staying connected

Over many years, council has advocated and partnered with a range of innovative support services.

In terms of homelessness, these partnerships have included the local Opening Doors entry point at Launch Housing Services who deliver federal and state government funded homelessness programs.

Council works with outreach programs operating locally including Launch Housing Services Melbourne Street to Home (MS2H),⁴ Inner South Community Health Community Connection Program (CCP), Assertive Mental Health Outreach (AMHO) and the Alfred Hospital Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Service (HOPS) – all targeting the most vulnerable people who are experiencing homelessness and are rough sleeping.

Council regularly liaises with Victoria Police, Centrelink, Launch Housing Services, Sacred Heart Mission, Royal District Nursing Services (RDNS) Homeless Persons Program (HPP), Salvation Army Crisis Services, Alfred Health, Inner South Community Health and local housing providers. No single organisation or level of government can address homelessness alone.

Program providers have highlighted the high incidence of trauma and entrenched exclusion experienced by people who remain homeless for long periods, in particular those who have moved from experience of homelessness as a child or young person through to adult homelessness.



COUNCIL WILL WORK WITH AGENCIES TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PREFERRED MODELS FOR FORMAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN PORT PHILLIP.

This will be achieved by the following actions:

- Annually reviewing and implementing as required the Sudden Rooming House Closure Protocol in event of sudden closures of housing impacting on multiple numbers of residents; updated annually in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP)
- Delivering the Social Meals in Rooming Houses in partnership with local agencies and incorporating initiatives regarding extreme weather such as heat wave responses
- Coordinating and facilitating integrated responses to homelessness in public spaces within council's services and with external partners through council's Protocol for Assisting People who are Sleeping Rough
- Exploring feasibility in establishing a Community Partnerships Framework promoting links with business and philanthropic communities.

ACTION LIST:

- Annual reviews of protocols completed and documented
- Report number of Social Meals in Rooming houses annually
- Report number of responses to homelessness in public spaces released annually
- Feasibility study of establishing Community Partnerships Framework carried out 2015/2016.

THEMES AND ACTIONS

3. Being inclusive

Council actively recognises and greatly respects the skill, knowledge and expertise of people with a lived experience of homelessness. There is strong support for greater inclusion of people with a lived experience of homelessness to be consulted in the development and implementation of policies and programs.

COUNCIL WILL DEVELOP FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP ENABLING THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS TO ENGAGE FULLY IN COMMUNITY LIFE.

This will be achieved through the following actions:

- Exploring opportunities to develop a homelessness community reference group seeking to inform the implementation of the strategy and evaluation
- Developing improved methods of delivering information to hard to reach parts of the community on how to access assistance
- Providing opportunities for social engagement in community spaces
- Promoting low and no cost inclusive events, recreation and activities in parks and public spaces.

ACTION LIST:

- Feasibility study regarding development of a community reference group carried out in 2015
- Communications strategy with expanded information methods developed in 2015 and reviewed annually
- Annual Homelessness Report documenting opportunities for community engagement and inclusion strategies
- Annual Homelessness Report documenting low/no cost events, recreation and activities in parks and open spaces.

“Council should promote Port Phillip as a community of multiple communities which add to the area’s character. To aid that diversity, housing that caters for low socio-economic groups should be supported and the views and input of those who have experienced homelessness actively sought.”

(SURVEY RESPONDENT-DEVELOPMENT OF DRAFT HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY 2015–2020).

“The most important thing is building relationships, building social connections as these allow social inclusion. Social interaction leads to engagement that often sees participants achieve well beyond their expectations and can be transformational.”

(LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATION SERVICE WORKER HOMELESSNESS, DEVELOPMENT OF DRAFT HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY 2015–2020).

THEMES AND ACTIONS

4. Focusing on prevention and early intervention

The City of Port Phillip has facilitated the provision of public and community housing in Port Phillip for the state government's Office of Housing and other community housing organisations. Facilitation can include assistance required by providers in order to help support or develop community housing projects.

Timely access to safe, secure and affordable housing, and support if required, is the key to preventing homelessness and reducing the time spent in homelessness. Research has also identified that another vital part in preventing homelessness is for an individual or family to be connected to others in their community and have networks to turn to when they first experience difficulties.⁵

COUNCIL WILL INVESTIGATE AND EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER INFORM AND LINK THE COMMUNITY TO AVAILABLE SERVICES AIMED AT PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS OR REDUCING THE TIME PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS.

This will be achieved through the following actions:

- Supporting the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs
- Ensuring people have access to relevant and timely support and information to access suitable housing, in particular that family violence services are widely known and integrated into council's homelessness response

- Delivering integrated service responses across council's direct service responsibilities that include Child, Family and Youth Programs and with older people through home support and council's nominations to local older person public housing⁶
- Advocating for and considering strategies to support local community housing organisations including those that address the needs of persons most at risk of homelessness.

ACTION LIST:

- Align actions promoting affordable housing outlined in Draft City of Port Phillip Strengthening Community Housing Partnerships Strategy in 2015 and review of council's 10 year Housing Strategy in 2016
- Review council's online information quarterly regarding local housing and homelessness services and document this in the Annual Homeless report
- Report numbers of people experiencing homelessness assisted by Council's Child, Family and Youth programs and Housing & Homelessness Services in the annual Local Homelessness report
- Ongoing monitoring of research regarding Family Violence and Homelessness to ensure it informs Council's Health & Wellbeing Plan, Housing and Homelessness strategies with the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children
- Council submission to the federal government's future reviews of housing and homelessness and document other submissions and advocacy each year made to state or federal governments to retain and expand services locally.

“80% of homelessness can be solved by providing adequate housing. A small percentage of people need some assistance and an even smaller proportion need intensive assistance.”

(LOCAL COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDER-DEVELOPMENT OF DRAFT HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY 2015-2020)

"THE WORST OF IT IS THAT YOU CAN'T TRUST ANYONE AT ALL..."

Pat feels really **safe** in the small self-contained space in the **award winning K2 Apartment block** he lives in. He's been there since it opened. "It's really good," he says. Getting to move into a **new home** was just great.

It made a big difference no longer being **homeless**. Pat knows lots of people who are still **homeless**. When the **weather** changes it worries Pat, he knows what it is to be **exposed to extremes** of the heat or cold. "The worst of it is that you **can't trust** anyone at all," he said. "You can't ever leave your **stuff** as it gets pinched, even your **blankets** do."

Pat's a **Kiwi** who has been in **Australia** for over **30 years**. He's been in St Kilda for the last five. Living in **K2** is the most **comfortable** he has been for some time.



Background

The City of Port Phillip has a strong and enduring commitment to address social justice and to recognising homelessness as a priority. Port Phillip's approach is widely acknowledged within Australia:⁷

‘The City of Port Phillip is renowned for its proactive and innovative approaches to end homelessness. Homelessness is understood as a housing problem. Affordable housing is consequently an important element of the council’s strategy to help those experiencing housing stress. A human rights based approach informs the council’s approach to rough sleepers and managing public space. Since 2001, the council has worked to protect the rights and interests of vulnerable people sleeping in public space. The City of Port Phillip provides many examples of best practice.’



In developing council's approach, a range of national, state and local government responses to homelessness have been reviewed. The Victorian Local Government Act 1989 requires local government authorities to:

- Take into account the diverse needs of their local community in decision making
- Provide leadership by establishing strategic objectives and measure achievements, and
- Advocate for the interests of their local community to other communities and governments.

Council is also legally obliged as a public authority within the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 to consider human rights when it makes laws, develops policies and provides services. Council's responses to homelessness are in accordance with this charter.

Collective action⁸ creates stronger, healthier communities and requires important contributors from different sectors working to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem such as homelessness.

“A respectful community is one where difference is understood, sought after and celebrated, where people are valued for their individuality and feel free to be themselves. The City of Port Phillip commits to ensuring respect for all members of the community.”⁹

In 2008, council demonstrated its specific commitment to addressing homelessness by releasing Hope: Homelessness Action Strategy 2008–2013 which facilitated an enhanced understanding of homelessness and led integrated responses to reducing homelessness.

Strong partnerships between council, housing providers, health and community agencies have improved outcomes for people locally who are experiencing homelessness to assist them to access support and move into secure housing. However, services have consistently reported not being able¹⁰ to provide assistance to all who present needing help.¹¹ Launch Housing Services reported in July 2014 that their agency was turning away nine out of ten housing applicants.¹²

Who is homeless in Port Phillip?

DEFINITIONS

Homelessness can affect people at any age and life stage. It is currently defined as when:

- **“A person does not have suitable accommodation and their current living arrangement**
- **Is in a dwelling which is inadequate; or**
- **Has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or**
- **Does not allow them to have control of or access to space for social relations.”¹³**

Definitions of homelessness are variably understood across the community. From an individual's own perspective they may see themselves as housed, but they may be defined as insecurely housed or experiencing homelessness by services.

Terms distinguishing between various states of homelessness have been used in this strategy to distinguish between groups and these terms are also in common use:

- **Primary homelessness** – or sleeping rough – without a shelter of any kind.
- **Secondary homelessness** – living in temporary housing and ‘couch surfing’ at a friend or family member's home, an institution or refuge.
- **Tertiary homelessness¹⁴** – living in rooming houses and inadequate housing including severe overcrowding; safety concerns; substandard or unsafe dwellings and insecure housing – threatened with eviction and/ or having no security of tenure.

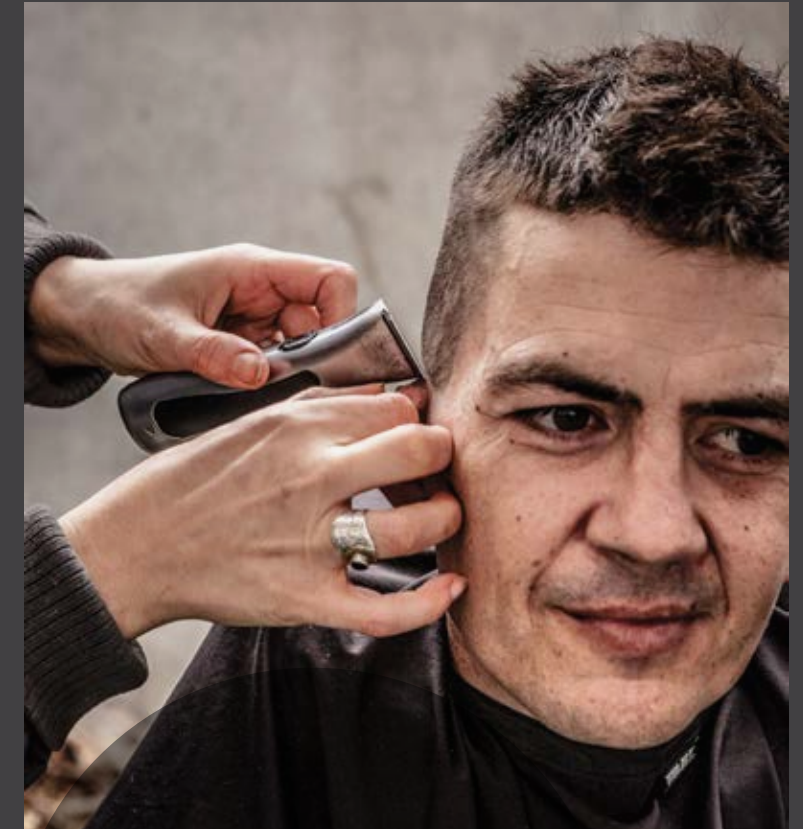
Some people struggle to obtain safe accommodation in terms of their personal belongings and/or their own personal safety and will elect to sleep rough as an alternative even though it is far from safe or secure.

Many people facing absolute homelessness are finding themselves in substandard, insecure, unregistered private rooming houses. These can be in units or houses with a room to rent and shared kitchen and bathroom. Community services are reporting they are observing increased numbers of families and older women in these premises when they cannot obtain other forms of private rental and different models of shared accommodation are growing across Melbourne. Proactive vigilance and attention to addressing this expanding rental sector is urgently required. Homelessness agencies are often left with little choice but to refer people in crisis to these properties as there are few vacancies offering affordable, suitable housing options.

Local individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at a high risk of becoming homeless include:

- A person who cannot access affordable and secure housing – there is added vulnerability for households in the private rental market, particularly as one in five local renters receive incomes below the poverty line¹⁵
- Women and children who are escaping family violence – 40% of family homelessness is attributed to being caused by family violence
- People who lose their jobs and struggle to secure adequate hours of work for an income that can cover the costs of rent, food and heating ending up in their cars – this is often referred to as hidden homelessness
- People previously working and renting or paying a mortgage who become injured or seriously unwell and unable to return to full time work
- People on a Centrelink income such as an Age or Disability Support Pension or unemployment benefits and unable to secure affordable housing
- People previously staying temporarily with a friend or family member where they have worn out their welcome.

The ‘on any given day’ graphic (see overleaf), produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for 2013/14 is quite a startling realisation, for those who are not familiar with this issue, of the extent of homelessness in Australia. A problem that is as much hidden as it is misunderstood.¹⁷



“Each night, some 22,000 Victorians experience homelessness, and the problem is often hidden – you are also homeless if you are couch-surfing or sleeping in cars or overcrowded accommodation ... 1 in 7 Victorians today who can't afford their housing costs are at risk of being included in the homelessness statistics, and requiring ongoing housing supports.”¹⁶

ON ANY GIVEN DAY ...

1,500 SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS AGENCIES IN AUSTRALIA WERE SUPPORTING OVER **56,000 CLIENTS**

OVER 10,000 OF THESE CLIENTS WERE YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTING ALONE AND OVER **13,500** WERE CHILDREN IN FAMILIES THAT WERE BEING SUPPORTED

7,500 CLIENTS REPORT HAVING SLEPT **ROUGH** IN THE LAST MONTH

JUST UNDER 7,000 CLIENTS SPENT THEIR PREVIOUS NIGHT SLEEPING IN CRISIS ACCOMMODATION.

399 NEW CLIENTS WILL SEEK SUPPORT FROM A **SAS AGENCY**

423 PEOPLE WERE **UNABLE** TO BE ASSISTED

AGENCIES CLOSED 414 CASES OF WHICH **67%** RESULTED IN **STABLE** HOUSING OUTCOMES

Those at risk of homelessness

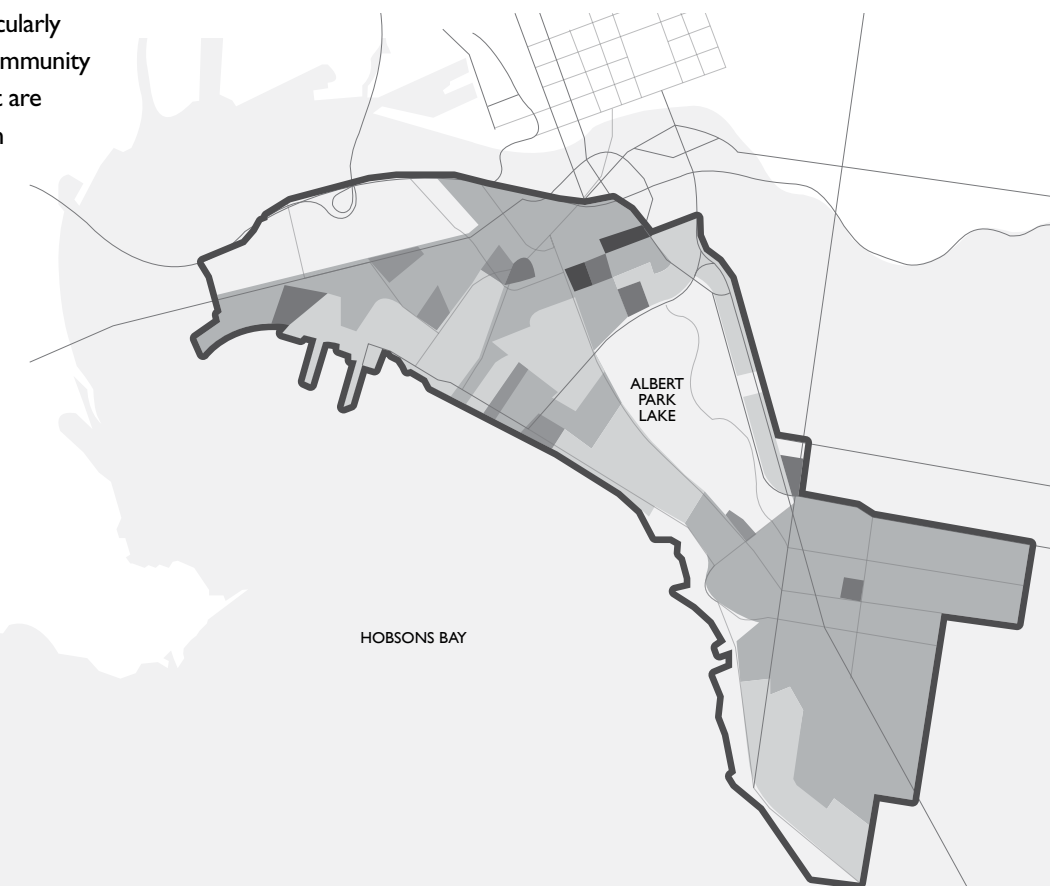
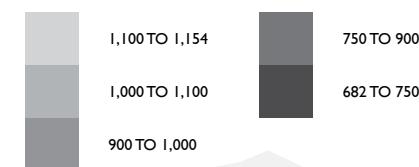
Homelessness is caused in part by incomes that do not meet basic need and fuelled by rent levels that are not affordable to those in the lower 40% of income groups. This leaves people with low to medium incomes competing for the very limited and often substandard options remaining.¹⁸

Australia is experiencing a widespread and increasing housing shortage. Particular groups report discrimination in the housing market, particularly sole parent families, young people, people on Centrelink benefits and Indigenous people.

Renters are increasingly the typical form of tenure in the inner city regions and this is particularly evident in Port Phillip. Port Phillip is a community of renters compared to other areas that are predominantly home owners. More than 50% of the population in Port Phillip are renters compared to 20–30% nationally.

This map depicts the spatial areas of greatest disadvantage in Port Phillip in 2011 using the SEIFA index. This is primarily used to rank areas according to socio-economic advantage and disadvantage based on census data. The census variables used cover a number of domains and include household income, education, employment, occupation, housing and other indicators of advantage and disadvantage. Combined, the indexes provide more general measures of socio-economic status than is given by measuring one of the domains in isolation.

SEIFA by SA1, Port Phillip



**SHE HAS A PLAN
WHICH SHE CAN
SEE AND KNOWS
THE HOOPS SHE
HAS TO JUMP
THROUGH**



Sharon has been sleeping out for about three years now. Having come to terms with **alcoholism**, Sharon has **set goals** and **sobered** up on the first steps on a **brave** new journey. She has a plan which she can see and knows the hoops she has to **jump through**. She has things to look forward to. Her **children's company** is the most important of these.

But it wasn't always this way. Sharon has lived in **St Kilda** for more than twenty years now. She used to live in **Public Housing** but one day on the way back from shopping was **mugged** with an iron bar. Wounded and badly frightened, she **entrusted** her young son to her mother, it was **no place to bring up a child** she thought, and moved from her old life. The **violence** on the **streets** worries Sharon now. She says it is **not safe** out there anymore, particularly for **women**.

Facts about homelessness

Homelessness is an issue of significant proportion right across Australia. In 2011, more than 100,000 people nationally were experiencing homelessness (105,237). Statistics identify that those experiencing homelessness are as equally likely to be female as male, and equally likely to be younger children as those aged between 18–45 years.

The number of people experiencing homelessness grew across Victoria between 2006 and 2011 to number 22,789 Victorians; one in five was under the age of 12yrs.¹⁹

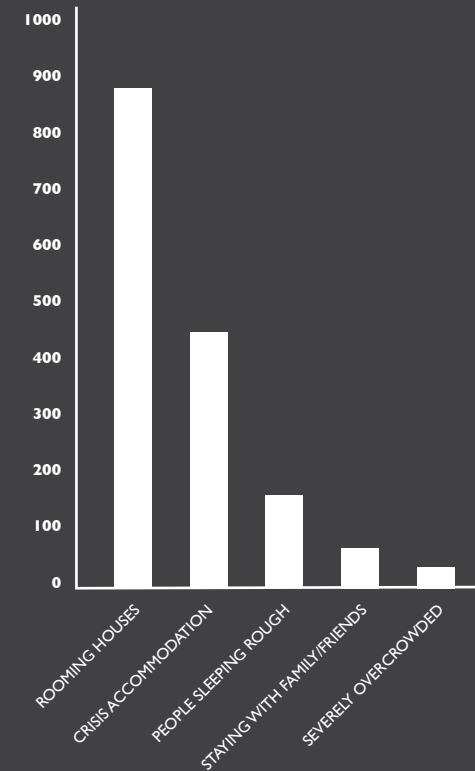
The number of people experiencing homelessness between 2006 and 2011 grew by 32% in the Port Phillip area compared to national increase of homelessness of 30.89%.²⁰ Current data of homelessness in the City of Port Phillip is derived from the available Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) August 2011 Homelessness Census data²¹ and Victorian Government Rental Reports.²²

City of Port Phillip has the highest numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the inner south east region of Melbourne and second highest across the Melbourne metropolitan area because it has been an area that has sustained a large number of rooming houses. These figures are evident in the sustained, high unmet demand being reported by local homelessness services and the increasing waiting lists of public and community housing providers.²³ In such an environment, it can be argued that increased effort and greater collaboration between all three levels of government and the service delivery sector is required to develop more effective outcomes.²⁴

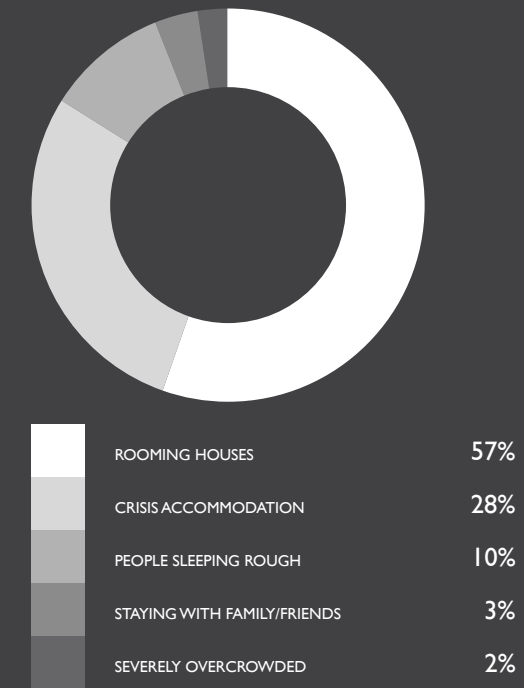
The ABS defines rooming houses as a form of homelessness due to the less secure form of tenure and often limited amenity and private space in this accommodation. The largest group of people experiencing homelessness in Port Phillip live in rooming houses – 892 people.²⁵

Port Phillip has a long standing tradition of providing shared accommodation in private hotels and boarding houses. Whilst meeting the definition of a form of homelessness, others view their tenancy in a rooming house as their home. In addition, many community managed rooming houses have been upgraded over the past five years to meet more modern housing and habitation standards and offer self-contained accommodation. In 2013, state government legislation required minimum standards for all rooming houses which included the establishment and publishing of an online public register of registered rooming houses in Victoria.

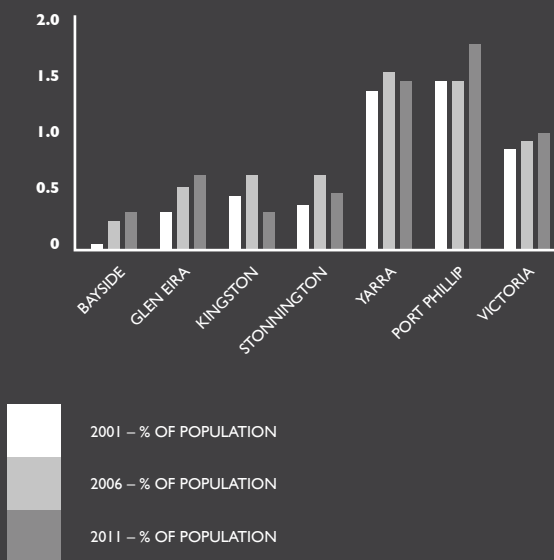
Number of people counted as experiencing homelessness in Port Phillip, Census 2011



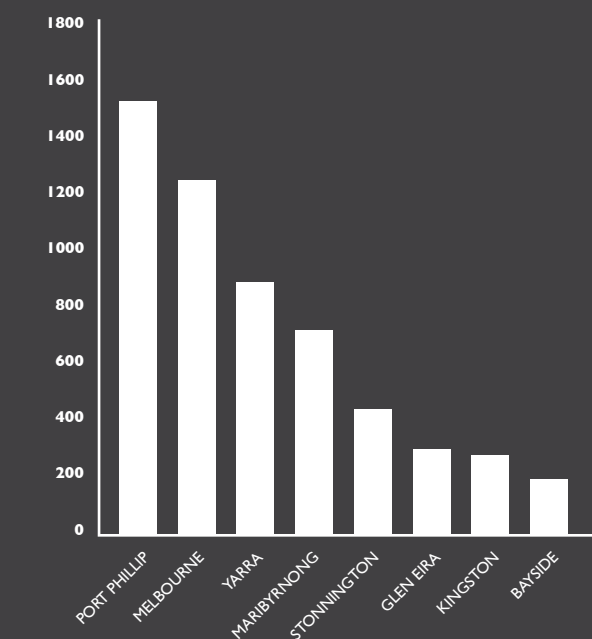
Number of people counted as experiencing homelessness in Port Phillip, Census 2011



ABS Estimates of People Experiencing Homelessness over 10 years



Number of people counted as homeless by Inner, Inner South and Bayside LGAs, Census 2011



“In September 2014, rent for a room in the St Kilda area ranged from between \$180 and \$300 per week. For a recipient of a Centrelink Newstart payment (unemployment benefits) receiving additional maximum rent assistance, rent could represent between 60 to 70% of their income.”

Better appointed and increasingly self-contained community rooming house stock has reduced episodes of homelessness for those living in these houses. Recent sector experience is of a reduction in turnover following rooming house renovations from rooms and communal facilities to small self-contained units. Homelessness services have noted more difficulty in accessing vacancies.

There are complex inter-relationships between rooming houses, homelessness services and the homeless population. Many specialist homelessness services use rooming houses, motels and hotels for short term crisis accommodation for those experiencing homelessness due to there being no available beds at funded crisis services. This can affect families with small children, youth and older people.

For some residents, the experience has been transformative and established a greater sense of security and home. For others who have experienced the loss of communal areas and courtyards in the renovated properties, more time is spent in public ‘third spaces’ such as meeting friends in the street, libraries and parks instead of the alternative of sitting alone in their room.

The City of Greater Dandenong with 1,634 people estimated as homeless is the only Melbourne municipality with a greater number than Port Phillip.²⁶

Public housing stock in Port Phillip remained constant from 2006 to 2011. There was a small increase in the community housing stock over this time due to new projects bringing the total social housing stock (public and community housing) from 3386 units in 2006 to 3790 units in 2011, however the proportion of social housing within the overall housing stock in the municipality has fallen from 5.42% in 2001 to 4.75% in 2011.

Families experiencing homelessness



Poverty impacts on a child’s opportunities and increases poor health and education outcomes. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates a 70% risk of single parents and their children living in poverty.²⁷

- Sole parent families in private rental households face greatest housing stress, particularly following changes to Centrelink policy early 2013. These led to a reduction in benefits available to a sole parent when their youngest child reaches 8 years of age.
- In Port Phillip in 2011, 55 families consisting of couples with children under 15 and 179 families consisting of a sole parent with children under the age of 15 were living in social housing.²⁸
- In Port Phillip, 34.95% of single parent families are in receipt of parenting payment. It is estimated 7.9% of all children in Port Phillip live in poverty.²⁹
- A range of specialist services for women and children who experience family violence are located in Port Phillip including crisis accommodation and refuges however, services report significant increases in women and children seeking assistance. Every year local housing services also see hundreds of children facing homelessness because of family violence circumstances. It is estimated that 44% of homelessness is caused by family violence.³⁰
- The introduction of the Enhanced Family Violence Framework in 2011 has started to improve police responses by increasing the number of alleged offenders being removed from the family home across Victoria, rather than letting things escalate to a point at which the victim and children must flee and attempt to find housing. However this is not always safe or possible and numbers of reports of family violence have been steadily increasing.³¹

Young people at risk of homelessness

“The face of homelessness had changed drastically over the past 50 years, from old men lining up for a feed to young people affected by family violence and a lack of housing.”³²



- Youth homelessness is one of the biggest problems facing Australia. Current statistics show that almost half of all homeless persons are less than 24 years of age.³³
- Homelessness amongst children and young people is strongly linked to relationship and family breakdown, domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse, anxiety or depression, unemployment and substance abuse. Young people may also find themselves homeless when their families are unable to afford suitable housing or are evicted from their housing.³⁴
- Children who are homeless are likely to face constant violation of these rights and are forced to endure conditions which are detrimental to their health and development. Homeless children and young people often suffer from extreme levels of distress, low self-esteem, depression, mental health problems and behavioural problems because they are victims of or witnesses to abuse. They are also at high risk of exploitation and further exposure to violence, and often have difficulty participating in school education.
- Early school leaving has been shown to be a key risk indicator of homelessness.³⁵ In 2011, Port Phillip 4.6% of 15–19 year olds and 8% of 20–24 year olds were not in paid employment or in education.

Later life homelessness



- Housing affordability and accessibility is a key structural factor highlighted in the vulnerability of a relatively small but increasing group of older Australians to homelessness in later life. Access to broader range and choice of affordable housing and accommodation options was identified by council in 2006 in its 10 year positive ageing strategy.³⁶
- Older people, who have not achieved home ownership by retirement are at great risk of significant disruption on retirement. These risks include a greater chance of moving to less secure tenure in low cost and often substandard and inappropriate housing for their needs as they age.
- It has been argued that the highest priority for housing should be accorded to securing housing tenure for older people in rental accommodation when they are approaching retirement.³⁷
- Recent research³⁸ found that 68.6% of older people becoming homeless nationally are private renters experiencing homelessness for the first time in older age after decades of managing to secure and sustain accommodation.
- National research is indicating that there is an increasing likelihood that households in the pre-retirement 55–64 age group will carry larger housing debts into their retirement than previously has been experienced.
- In 2014, the Centrelink Age pension was \$421.40 per week for an individual and \$635.30 per week for a couple, making the 30% housing stress cut off rent amount \$126 per week for a single person household and \$190 per week for a couple. There are virtually no available properties at this price available in Port Phillip or much of metropolitan Melbourne.³⁹
- Council has seen a growing number of local older people presenting in acute housing stress and/or homeless. Council's Housing and Homelessness Services assisted 416 individuals aged 50 years and over in 2013/2014 which was a 30% increase from the previous 12 months.
- Port Phillip has the largest percentage (29.9%) of people over 65 years living alone compared to the Inner South East region (26.6%). Data on older people living in lone-person households provides an indication of the population living in the community who may require additional support and services.⁴⁰

Homelessness policy overview

COUNCIL'S HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY IS A LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY RESPONSE AND MUST BE CONSIDERED WITHIN THE BROADER INTERNATIONAL, FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY ARENA.

INTERNATIONAL

The international response to homelessness is guided by the United Nations Human Rights Covenants and legislation of which Australia is a signatory. Homelessness, inadequate housing and forced evictions represent violations of international human rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognises the right to adequate housing which is more than just shelter.

Homelessness is more than just a housing issue. Homelessness is about human rights. People experiencing homelessness are not merely objects of charity, seeking help and compassion – like all Australians, they are individuals entitled to the protection and promotion of their human rights. Since human rights belong to everyone, it is in the interests of our community as a whole to ensure that the rights of people experiencing homelessness are respected and protected.⁴¹

“Adequate shelter means ... adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities - all at a reasonable cost. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, older age or lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control.”

NATIONAL

At the federal level the Australian Government Policy: The Road Home – A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness 2007 outlined a strong commitment to ensuring that no one in Australia is homeless and set an ambitious target to halve homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020. During 2008–2013 there was additional investment from both the federal and state governments in the homelessness sector and in the development of new affordable housing initiatives. Despite this, the reported level of homelessness by 2011 continued to increase.

This national homelessness strategy established the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) 2009–2013. The NPAH was initially extended to June 2014, then to June 2015 and currently to June 2017. The NPAH contributes funds to a range of homelessness services in partnership with states.

Many of these programs are delivered by agencies based in Port Phillip and the inner south region of Melbourne. Nationally the proportion of people sleeping rough has fallen across 2001–2011 from 5 persons per 1,000 to 3 people per 1000. However other categories of homelessness have increased.⁴²

In May 2014, the federal government acknowledged the National Housing Supply Council had estimated the national shortfall in housing stock in 2011 was 228,000 dwellings. Assuming historic demographic and supply trends continue, this gap was estimated to increase to nearly 370,000 dwellings by 2016, and 663,000 by 2031. In late 2014, a federal senate inquiry explored housing affordability⁴³ and a further review of the Commonwealth government's role regarding housing and homelessness is planned 2015–2016 as part of its Reform of the Federation White Paper.⁴⁴

In December 2011, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Select Council on Housing and Homelessness was established to take an integrated approach to the related policy areas of housing supply, social and affordable housing and homelessness. The Select Council aims to drive an effective national response to reducing homelessness in Australia, and coordinate housing policy reform to assist COAG meeting its objective of providing all Australians with access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation.⁴⁵

STATE

In 2011, the Victorian state government released the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–2015 (VHAP)⁴⁶ which outlined how it would respond to homelessness. Its overall objective was to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness and decreasing the duration and impact of homelessness.

The VHAP focused on three key areas:

- Supporting innovative approaches to homelessness
- Investigating models focusing specifically on early intervention and prevention, and
- Better targeting of resources when and where they are most needed and where they will make the biggest difference.

In 2014, the state government was reviewing the VHAP and preparing a future homelessness strategy. This was occurring against a background of continuing long term uncertainty about future level of federal government funding for homelessness. The state government had released the New Directions for Social Housing in mid-2014 which had outlined its policy regarding providing quality housing to those in greatest need. In November 2014 there was a change of state government. Council will continue to monitor and respond to emerging federal and state government policies.

Launch Housing Services and the Salvation Army Crisis Services continue to deliver funded Opening Doors entry points that are located in Port Phillip. The purpose of these access points is to assess needs, prioritise and connect people to the services and resources they need. Each Department of Human Services region has one of these access points. Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) aim to assist people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to access and maintain stable and secure accommodation. Research has examined the client outcomes of these services and the net costs of these programs for governments. Governments face direct costs for these programs, but much greater budgetary savings result from the reduced use of non-homelessness services (e.g. health, justice and welfare services).

LOCAL

More than any level of government, councils play a coordinating role, bringing together material, social and community resources to prevent and end homelessness.”

(COUNCIL TO HOMELESS PERSONS' SUBMISSION TO CITY OF PORT PHILLIP HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY 2015-2020 JANUARY 2015).

To date, council has reviewed its response in regards to similar approaches to homelessness and housing stress by other local government authorities and has developed a range of strategic responses addressing local challenges in Port Phillip:

- Social Justice Charter 2011 has sought to embed social justice principles across all areas of council and at all points of contact from customer service points at town halls, libraries, community centres and sporting facilities through to specific public place management processes.
- Housing Strategy 2007-2017 has had widespread success in facilitating the expansion of affordable housing by setting targets for the provision of affordable housing. This has supported well designed affordable housing projects in Port Phillip and establishment of the Port Phillip Housing Trust as well as research such as Community Engagement and Community Housing in 2009.
- Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017 incorporates the World Health Organisation's Social Determinants of Health model that recognise the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age shape the health and wellbeing of a community.
- Hope: Homelessness Action Strategy 2008-2013 framed council's responses for the most vulnerable members of our community and guided collaboration with welfare services in the region, acting as a point of referral when necessary. It delivered a consistent resource for both council staff and councillors, and for the broader community.
- When reviewed in the first half of 2013, it was found to have provided a clear and consistent framework to guide council understanding and responding to the complexity and challenges of homelessness within the local community.
- Council Local Law No.1 (Community Amenity) 2013 and Protocol for assisting people who are sleeping rough 2012 developed formal and informal processes to ensure an integrated response to public homelessness within council areas and with local agencies.

Our methodology

While developing council's Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020, many people contributed how to best ensure coordination of a local homelessness response. This strategy draws on the belief that Port Phillip has a strong commitment to respecting diversity, dignity, human rights and social inclusion of all and a refuge for those who need one.⁴⁷

Any strategy needs to engage with people to better understand the issue and develop a well-informed response. Council has developed this by carefully listening to the Port Phillip community. Over September and October 2013, 158 residents, workers and people experiencing homelessness were interviewed and participated in focus groups and workshops. We also consulted widely in 2013 when developing the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan and housing and homelessness issues were often raised. Further consultation occurred December 2014 and January 2015.

City of Port Phillip has been committed to include the stories and perspectives of people who have a lived experience of homelessness. It is important that their voice directly informs our work. Here are some of the things they told us:

- “We need more affordable housing that doesn't have associated health risks such as dampness, poor ventilation and lack of heating” (Resident response-development of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017)
- “There are things that could happen to make life better, another safe centre like the St. Kilda Drop in catering for people with mental illnesses might be a good start” (Resident and someone with lived experience of homelessness, development of Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020)
- “Gentrification, rental increases, expensive cost of living pushes people out on to the street.” (Resident response-development of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017)
- “It saddens me that people have to live this way in such a prosperous country like ours.” (Resident, development of Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020)
- “Being homeless is very unhappy, you don't feel part of society and you can't enjoy the pleasures of life... Council should talk to people and ask for ideas, also they could provide activities and outings.” (Resident and someone with lived experience of homelessness, development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020).

HE CAN'T LEAVE HIS WINDOWS OPEN FOR AIR FOR FEAR OF BEING ROBBED

Before his accident Glenn worked at Ngwala Willumbong, a specialist alcohol service for the indigenous community based in St Kilda. A pallet that fell off the back of a truck left him injured with limited options. It was his second major accident. In his first, many years ago now, he came off a motorcycle. Glenn walks with a pronounced limp.

Glenn now lives in a self-contained rooming house chosen for him while he recuperated. He didn't think to look first. It was perhaps half the size of the room we were in and contained his bedroom, lounge and bathroom. He can't leave his windows open for air for fear of being robbed. If he cooks, he has to share facilities with the same people that steal from him. If he opens the windows he has no privacy as people can look in as they walk past his front door. Someone even rips his veggies out before they've had a chance to grow. Losing possessions is frustrating. He "may as well be homeless" he says, he is just as at risk. Glenn's been homeless before. He started life that way. He was taken away at 3 years old from his parents. He was a stolen generation child. When he finally located his mother, it was too late to meet her.



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Glossary

ABS – The Australian Bureau of Statistics.

AHURI – The Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute.

AIHW – The Australian Institute of Health & Welfare.

Public housing – This is housing that is owned and managed by the Victorian State Government.

Community Housing Provider – a community not for profit organisation managing tenancies on behalf of the State Government Housing Authority.

Community Housing Association – a community based, not-for-profit housing company who manage stock either owned by the company or for State Government Housing Authority; also actively seek to generate new housing stock.

Social housing – refers to public and community housing.

Housing stress – refers to the lowest 40% of income groups who are paying more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgage costs.

NATSEM – National Centre for Economic and Social Modelling, (part of Australian National University).

NRAS – National Rental Affordability Scheme – a Federal Government funded scheme designed to generate additional affordable rental housing units.

OECD – The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which promotes policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world. The OECD provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems.

Poverty Line – a relative concept measuring a point below which people are considered to be in poverty. In Australia, 40% of average weekly income is understood to be the poverty line.

Rooming House – Rooming houses (sometimes also referred to as boarding houses) generally provide housing for single people who (sometimes through disadvantage) find it difficult to access other private rental housing. Traditionally residents rent a bedroom (rather than self-contained flats/units) and use shared common facilities such as bathrooms, lounges, kitchens and laundries. Increasingly community managed rooming houses include partially or fully self-contained bed sitters/studio units.

SEIFA is primarily used to rank areas according to socio-economic advantage and disadvantage based on census data. The census variables used cover a number of domains and include household income, education, employment, occupation, housing and other indicators of advantage and disadvantage. Combined, the indexes provide more general measures of socio-economic status than is given by measuring one of the domains in isolation. A higher score on the index means a lower level of disadvantage. A lower score on the index means a higher level of disadvantage. In 2011, City of Port Phillip the median score was 1,065.7 on the SEIFA index of disadvantage.

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City of Port Phillip

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Council acknowledges people and elders, past and present of Yalukit Willam and the Kulin Nation.
We acknowledge and uphold their relationship to this land.