

PROOF VERSION ONLY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Melbourne – Friday 4 April 2025

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Wayne Farnham

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee

WITNESSES

Darren Smith, Chair,

Andrea Levey, Member, and

Paul Michaels, Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum; and

Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group.

The CHAIR: Thank you everyone for joining us today for the public hearing for the Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria. I would really warmly like to welcome Housing for the Aged Action Group and the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum.

I will just run through some important formalities before we begin. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during the hearing.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so for you to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for making the time to meet with the committee today. My name is Juliana Addison, and I am the Chair. I am the Member for Wendouree, representing central Ballarat.

Martin CAMERON: Martin Cameron, Member for Morwell and Deputy Chair, so down in Latrobe Valley.

Wayne FARNHAM: Wayne Farnham, Member for Narracan, and I cover the West Gippsland region.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Jordan Crugnale, Member for Bass. I have got the sort of Western Port area, Casey, Cardinia and then the whole of Bass Coast shire.

Daniela DE MARTINO: I am Daniela De Martino. I am the Member for Monbulk, and I cover the Dandenong Ranges.

The CHAIR: Earlier today we did acknowledgement of the land on which we meet, but I would like to acknowledge that again and pay my respects to elders past and present and extend that to any Aboriginal people who are here with us today.

Would you like to start off with introducing yourself and maybe making a brief statement? Darren, shall we start with you?

Darren SMITH: Sure. My name is Darren Smith. I am the Chair of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. I am also the CEO of Aboriginal Housing Victoria, which I think is why there is a little bit of confusion here. I am a Palawa man from Tasmania, but have lived here in Naarm for the last 35 years.

The CHAIR: A warm welcome to you.

Darren SMITH: Would you like a statement?

The CHAIR: Shall we introduce everyone? That might be good for Hansard.

Andrea LEVEY: Hi, my name is Andrea Levey. I am the Manager of Sector Development at Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

The CHAIR: Welcome.

Andrea LEVEY: Thank you.

Paul MICHAELS: I am Paul Michaels, I am Manager of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum with Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

Fiona YORK: I am Fiona York. I am the Executive Officer of Housing for the Aged Action Group.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Who would like to start with initial comments? Should we start with you, Fiona?

Fiona YORK: I can start, yes. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners and pay my respect to elders past and present. I also note that everything that I am speaking about today, Aboriginal people experience that in a disproportionate way, so I just want to acknowledge that it is a lot worse for older people in regional Victoria.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak today. I am from Housing for the Aged Action Group. We are also known as 'HAAG'. We are a member-based organisation. We have been around for 40 years, and we deliver the Home at Last service in Victoria, which provides information and support services for older people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We also have a national awareness-raising campaign that advocates for policy responses on a federal level as well. Our services across regional Victoria include a statewide phone line which provides housing advice and support. We also have outreach support to help people access housing in the Goulburn Valley–Hume region, the Barwon region and the Mornington Peninsula region, which is not strictly regional, however it still faces a lot of the same issues as regional areas do. This also includes the federally funded Care Finder program, which connects people at risk of homelessness with aged care services.

There are three things that we want to emphasise today. One is that despite the assumptions that older people in regional Victoria own their own homes, increasing numbers of people do not, and they find themselves facing the real and frightening prospect of homelessness in older age. We desperately need more homes for low-income older Victorians and the best way to do that is by investing in public and community housing and low-cost retirement housing. But we have observed anecdotally that there can be community opposition to social housing developments in regional areas, and we would like to see a lot more proactive community responses to be able to combat some of that misinformation and those stereotypes around public housing. Older people in regional Victoria are facing a significant and growing housing crisis that has serious impacts on their health and wellbeing, and this limits their ability to access aged care supports – it is very difficult to be able to access in-home care if you do not have a stable house.

We undertook research in 2023 with Swinburne University which was based on census data, and it demonstrates that the Australian retirement housing system is built on the expectation that older people own their own home at the time of retirement, but we know that the proportion of people over 55 who live in their homes owned outright is declining, and this includes people in regional Victoria. It also shows that there is a big increase in the number of older people renting, with nearly 29,000 people over 55 in the lowest incomes renting privately in regional Victoria, which is a 63 per cent increase in 10 years, so a significant jump in older people in regional Victoria who are living on low incomes in the private rental market.

We know that the private rental market is not necessarily appropriate for older people because of the escalating rents. We know that the Anglicare *Rental Affordability Snapshot* showed that there are hardly any rental properties even in regional Victoria that are affordable for older people on JobSeeker or the age pension. If your rent goes up by a small amount, you are going to have to choose between buying food, medicine and paying bills and rent, so we know that people are going without medications, without food, without heating or cooling so that they can prioritise their rent, so they are getting their rent paid. We hear every day from older people who are in crisis due to receiving eviction notices and unaffordable rent increases. It is an extremely stressful situation that really impacts on their health.

The result of this is that homelessness has also increased rapidly in regional Victoria. There has been a 52 per cent increase in homelessness in five years in regional Victoria compared with a 17 per cent rise in metropolitan areas. That shows how bad the housing crisis actually is in regional Victoria, and I think it is hidden, it is away from people's view, and that is why it is so great to be able to speak about housing supply, which is the most important solution to homelessness.

The other issue that we see is that when older people are faced with this crisis they do not know where to start to be able to resolve the issues. They may not have access to the internet, they may find it difficult to navigate online applications and they are competing in a very tight rental market with younger people in the workforce. Renting is insecure, so people can be evicted at any time, and a lot of the housing stock in regional Victoria is also of a poor standard. Around 50 per cent of our clients have got mobility issues which impact on their housing, which means that if they have a fall or they end up in hospital, they cannot come back into their homes, because there are stairs to navigate or it is just inappropriate, but they are often reluctant to request the basic modifications that would improve the safety of their homes because they fear eviction. Our main solution for this, and it is in our submission in more detail, is that we really think there needs to be provision of social housing that provides security of tenure, and we also know that there has been a decrease in the proportion of older social housing renters in regional Victoria as well.

We also know that even when people – local government and state government and the community – work together to be able to build housing, there can be opposition to that, and that can mean that housing is delayed. What we would like to see is that regional councils are supported to be able to bring the community along with them so that these housing developments can be accepted and part of the fabric of life. The provision of low-cost housing is the solution to homelessness. We have some other recommendations in our submission around the short-stay levy being reinvested back into the places where it comes from and around the secondary dwelling, being granny flats and things like that, being actually provided for older people so they can stay in their communities and they do not need to move into town to get the services that they need. I will leave it there and direct it over to you guys.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thanks, Fiona. Darren.

Darren SMITH: I have got a presentation.

The CHAIR: We would love a presentation.

Darren SMITH: I am going to pass you copies, and apologies to the member online.

Daniela DE MARTINO: No problems, thank you.

The CHAIR: I will hold onto one for you, Daniela.

Darren SMITH: I would like to begin by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners of the country we are on today, and pay my respects to their elders past and present, and I would also like to acknowledge we are on Aboriginal land that has never been ceded.

I just wanted to start by thanking you for the invitation and the time to come and talk to you today. I am going to take you through a presentation, which is mostly high level, explaining the circumstances of Aboriginal people with respect to house and homelessness in Victoria, and then at the end we will talk about some of our understanding of what is happening out in the regions. I think it is worthwhile setting it up, but I thought it would be also good to start with a statement from the Honourable Harriet Shing, member of Parliament, from the Yoorrook testimony where she has acknowledged the role of government in terms of the current position of Aboriginal people with respect to housing and homelessness.

I would also like to explain who the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum is. There are 38 Aboriginal community controlled organisations across Victoria that are part of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. They are organisations that are Aboriginal housing providers, they are organisations that are Aboriginal homelessness providers and they are organisations that are very interested in the housing and homelessness issues in their communities. It does include traditional owner corporations who are considering becoming social housing providers.

The Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum's main role is in terms of implementing *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort* and working with government around how we need to do that. I will talk about the Aboriginal homelessness crisis in Victoria. I do not know how aware you are of what is happening in Victoria, but there is an absolute crisis of Aboriginal homelessness. One in five Aboriginal people in Victoria are accessing specialist homelessness services every year, which, if that same situation was occurring in the general population, would mean over a million people accessing specialist homelessness services a year. It would be on

the front page of every paper and the Victorian government would be in absolute crisis working out how to respond to it.

The causes of that crisis are the things that you know and understand as well, which are slightly more pointed in the Aboriginal community – so housing market failure, which I do not need to tell you about, and I am sure there are people who can talk about what is happening out in the regions and in metro Melbourne with a far greater level of specificity and detail than what I can, but there are also factors that are specific to the Aboriginal community. If you look closely, you can see a very clear line between current homelessness in the Aboriginal community and dispossession going back 200 years, and that includes the lack of intergenerational wealth. The other factor that you may not be aware of is the rapid Aboriginal population growth. We have had a demographer do some population projection for us, and even looking back it confirms, when you go back over historical censuses, that the Aboriginal population doubles every 20 years, roughly. So it just means that there is an edge to what is going on in the Aboriginal community as well. The other issue that we have is, because of the current circumstances, there is an over-reliance on the broken safety net of social housing and homelessness services. The other issue which I am sure you have possibly heard a number of times already is racism, and it is a factor that is more blatant and more obvious the further you move away from the centre of the CBD of Melbourne. If you want some confirmation of that, you probably do not need to look much further than the referendum last year and who voted yes and who voted no and where.

I want to talk a little bit about *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort*. Back in 2018–19, we went through a process with the Aboriginal community where we went and asked government for some funding because we thought we needed to develop an Aboriginal housing and homelessness policy for Victoria. We could not see that we were making much progress, and when we went through that process, we basically went through it with community. It was an Aboriginal community-led process. We came back to government, and we presented it to government in Queen's Hall back in 2020, and it was accepted by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister for Housing at the time, which was Gavin Jennings and Richard Wynne. Essentially, *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort* is a 20-year road map outlining the reforms in order to actually address the housing and homelessness issues of the Aboriginal community and to ensure that every Aboriginal person has a home. And *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* – that is what it means in the Gunditjmara dialect languages.

The next page is: *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort* has five key strategic objectives or goals – secure housing improves life outcomes, build supply to meet the needs of a growing Aboriginal population, open doors to home ownership and private rental, an Aboriginal-focused homelessness system and a capable system that delivers Aboriginal housing needs, and that responds directly to the issues and needs of the Aboriginal community. Our approach to housing is not that you pick one issue off at a time and deal with it. You need to be thinking holistically about all the issues, because they are all interconnected and interrelated, and one of the challenges is the government sees things in terms of programs, initiatives, portfolios which do not necessarily allow you to do that.

Since 2020 there has been progress, and we have lined them up in this table against the priority areas, the five strategic goals. Some of the key things are that there has been relief, particularly for regional communities, through the Aboriginal private rental assistance program. There were zero programs in 2020, and there are now 10 right across Victoria, which are working well and delivering. Through the Big Housing Build *Mana-na Woorn-tyeen Maar-takoort* has a target for all new investment into housing and homelessness for 10 per cent of those new investments to be set aside for Aboriginal people, in recognition that we are starting from far further back in the field than everybody else. That, particularly through the Big Housing Build, has meant that we have seen growth in the number of new houses being provided to Aboriginal people but also too, in terms of through the Social Housing Growth Fund, that Aboriginal community controlled organisations actually own the 10 per cent of the Social Housing Growth Fund properties as well, so the wealth goes back to the Aboriginal community as well as the response through Aboriginal people also being picked up.

There have also been investments into homelessness in recognition that the homelessness system is not working effectively for Aboriginal people. We went through a process, supported by government, of developing a blueprint for reforming the homelessness system so that Aboriginal people are more effectively supported into housing and their support needs are met in an improved way. The blueprint is essentially a devolved reform process. Basically we are working from pilots, which have been fully established now in Geelong and across over in St Kilda. Wathaurong co-op and Ngwala Willumbong have both been funded and have established their entry points over there. That was funded through budget, back three years ago now. Through the last budget

there was an allocation of funding which was distributed. It was provided to the Aboriginal community in accordance with Aboriginal self-determination and on the basis that the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum would identify the distribution of funding – where it would go and what it would be for. Again, it was primarily about supporting a number of Aboriginal homelessness providers, particularly in the regions, that have very small funding allocations but that have expectations about what they can do to support Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

The last one is that there have been some investments, particularly into capacity building to support the Aboriginal community controlled organisations in recognition that there is a need to build the scale and the ability to deliver high-quality services in the sector, in recognition that currently the majority of the funding for Aboriginal clients goes into the mainstream and only a small proportion goes into Aboriginal organisations. Okay, I can breath.

The CHAIR: You are doing well.

Darren SMITH: The next one, just to try and give you –

The CHAIR: I am just conscious of the time. We might be able to read some of this. It would be really great to ask some questions.

Darren SMITH: Sure. How long do I have?

The CHAIR: Well, we have got about –

Darren SMITH: Okay, I am going to keep moving very quickly, then.

The CHAIR: Great. Please do.

Darren SMITH: The state of progress – the next slide is on the impact. Very clearly, despite all the progress that we have made, the number of Aboriginal people accessing specialist homelessness services, the number of Aboriginal people on the VHR and the proportion of Aboriginal people in social housing are all going the wrong way, so we really need to keep moving. We are moving to a position where the funding is at risk, for more social housing growth, and we recognise that we need to actually keep growing, because we have got 7300 Aboriginal people currently on the VHR, and we are asking –

The CHAIR: Do you have a regional breakdown of that, or is that statewide?

Darren SMITH: We have got a regional breakdown in a minute around the percentage of people that are across the regions on the VHR. There are two targets – two pieces of work. The Aboriginal homelessness target is all about doing the work that we need to do in order to understand how we actually reduce Aboriginal homelessness. Rather than it continuing to go up, we want to see it go down, and over the next 10 years we want to reduce it by 10 per cent a year. Then we would like to see a commitment to fund 3000 additional Aboriginal social housing dwellings, which would be owned by the Aboriginal community controlled sector.

The next page is just a summary of that. I will keep moving up the back, onto this page about Aboriginal social housing demand in regional Victoria. I am just going to point to that, but it does say that 66 per cent of Aboriginal Victorian social housing need is in regional Victoria. On the next page is the distribution of where the highest LGAs are in terms of population, and it identifies the projected growth rate going into the future, which gives you an indication of where the main LGAs are for Aboriginal housing needs. There is a slide with the homelessness data, and what that identifies is that 60 per cent of Aboriginal Victorian specialist homelessness services clients are coming from regional areas. That does not mean that they are being serviced in regional areas; it means that that is where they came from. I will leave the rest of those facts there for you to have a look at. I am going to go to this one.

The CHAIR: Beautiful. Yellow, yes. Over to you – barriers, yes.

Darren SMITH: In terms of social housing growth, these are the barriers to Aboriginal community controlled organisations being able to participate in government capital funding rounds and also in terms of the other constraints that they have. They are fairly obvious. As part of those 3000 additional Aboriginal social housing dwellings that we are working with government on, we are also putting together a reform paper which

identifies that there are reforms required in terms of procurement, in terms of planning and in terms of land supply where those levers can be tweaked so that they actually encourage Aboriginal proposals, reduce the costs and reduce the risks of building new housing. So this is kind of the solutions page.

The regional planning slide is just an indication of some of the issues that we are going through, but we are also supporting a regional planning process because we recognise that we need to have the planning down in the regions with the ACCOs that are identified, because each region is different and has different needs. Also, as part of having an Aboriginal community housing sector that can participate, we need to build scale, we need to build capability and we need to do it on a regional basis because that is where it actually happens; it does not happen in Melbourne.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Darren, for that very comprehensive presentation. I am sorry that we had to race through it, but it is fantastic that we have all got our own copies to hold onto. Thank you as well, Fiona. Just one issue for me, coming from Ballarat – it is interesting to see the percentage growth for my community – is that we had a lot of orphanages with the stolen generation in Ballarat. One of the real issues we have for the elders in my community is that Nazareth House was an orphanage that many of the stolen generation were put into, and now that is an aged care facility, and they are not going back. There is no way that they are going to go back. We have done some really good work, which I am very proud of, in Ballarat with BADAC, and what our ACCO has done is a beautiful new development for the elders. I was talking to Karen Heap about it just the other day and she said people are settling in and it is really working well. That is why I am tying the aged and Aboriginal people together. When you have so many Aboriginal members of your community from the stolen generation, the issue of caring for the aged and what housing looks like for them is a real challenge. But that is just my analysis. Who would like to continue on while I compose myself?

Fiona YORK: Can I just make a quick comment about that. I think it is a real issue when aged care is being delivered a lot, and homelessness services, by faith-based organisations that also have this historical abuse, which is often not dealt with. And we hear often, not just from Aboriginal community members but culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTI, forgotten Australians and care leavers that they will not go back to those services. We need to have secular organisations and community-led organisations empowered and given the capacity to actually deliver those services themselves because, yes, older people will not be reinstitutionalised and they will just say no.

The CHAIR: Absolutely, and to be able to have that in regional areas – I think there is more consumer choice in metropolitan Melbourne. They have often got very limited consumer choice, and therefore people are being forced to go and seek help from services that they are not interested receiving help from. Darren?

Darren SMITH: Just quickly, in the slide deck there is also a slide about the different cohorts that we recognise in the Aboriginal community – elders are definitely one. Even though we are a very young population, we now have a growing number of elders and aged people. Aboriginal Housing Victoria has 1800 properties across the state, and we recognise and see the issue about ageing people in larger houses and the need to have some kind of a solution around pathways to aged care, including pathways to multiple housing for those people.

Andrea LEVEY: I just wanted to say I have been to the BADAC elders housing.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Andrea LEVEY: I went with Mike McCaw from BADAC. He took us around and showed us it while was still in development but nearly finished, and I think it is an excellent example of what should be happening. I think it is amazing.

The CHAIR: A really good model that we should be replicating.

Andrea LEVEY: Yes, definitely.

The CHAIR: We are very proud of it, so it is great.

Martin CAMERON: We have a lot of younger Indigenous people that couch-surf a fair bit in Morwell and surrounds. The numbers that you have put here, are they picking up everybody, do you think? Or are there some that maybe are slipping through, so they may be a little bit higher than what you have got here?

Darren SMITH: The numbers count who fronts up at a homelessness service, and then they count who puts in a VHR application, so I think it would be an undercount. I think that there are a lot of young people particularly who will not be putting in a VHR application. They will not be fronting up to homelessness services.

Martin CAMERON: Yes, because just looking at the figures there, I thought they were probably a little bit lighter on than what we are hearing on the ground as we work with the providers. And it is the same with our ageing population too; it is a huge concern. Wayne used to be a builder and I am an ex-plumber, and being involved in that particular part of the community, knowing that the houses are not fit for purpose for them, where do they go, as you say, if they do have a fall? That is why they are in aged care, because they are not coming back to their house that they may have been in for a very long time. So it is a real issue moving forward.

Fiona YORK: Yes, for sure. And we know the population is ageing, but it is ageing a lot quicker in regional Victoria, and some of the electorates have got very, very high proportions of people over 65. So it is already here in regional Victoria.

Martin CAMERON: Absolutely. It is great data, though. Thank you. I appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Can I just say anecdotally – and sometimes a case study is emblematic of a bigger issue – there is an amazing woman who lived in a block of flats just opposite me. I run into her a lot down the street, and I go, ‘I haven’t seen you for a while.’ ‘Oh, I had to move.’ And then I see her again and I go, ‘How are you going in your new place?’ ‘Oh, I’ve had to move twice since then.’ One of the real issues, and we have talked about it today, is there not being a lot of one-bedroom units in regional Victoria. But this woman, who is living on a pension, is now under the most horrendous mortgage stress. She is an older woman, and I see her and I go, ‘Hello,’ and she is just like, ‘Every time I have to move, there are the costs of moving, as well as the spikes, to get into the next place when it is so competitive.’ What should the government be doing to support older Victorians in these circumstances?

Fiona YORK: Well, we need more housing that is affordable, and genuinely affordable, for people on the pension. We need more investment in public and community housing but also low-cost retirement housing. In the past, there used to be a lot more independent living units, low-cost retirement housing in regional Victoria. Twelve units or so behind a church or something like that – a lot of those were one-bedroom and they were places where people retired into, and they were affordable. That stock is disappearing; it is being turned into more expensive housing or sold off or turned into residential aged care, and we are losing that mix of housing types. We do not have those choices anymore. So I think all of those things need to be invested in by government.

But for people with a mortgage that are in mortgage stress, there are some federal government schemes that are not very well known that can assist people on the age pension to be able to stay in their homes, and I think there are some possible options for state government to come in with those shared-equity-type schemes for older people. Because at the moment people with a small amount of assets cannot get into public housing because there is an asset limit, they cannot purchase anything because of housing costs, and they sit there in private rental whittling away their savings because there is nothing for them. But they are not eligible for bank loans because they are older and all of the shared equity schemes are tailored towards first homebuyers and younger people. So we do think that there is some sort of lever there that could assist people, or assist people that want to downsize potentially as well, into something more appropriate. It is a housing supply issue and then it is also those other sorts of supports for older people.

The CHAIR: And a mix of housing as well for –

Fiona YORK: Choice and variety, yes.

The CHAIR: Absolutely.

Fiona YORK: And just one thing I was going to mention is that particularly in regional Victoria the regional centres are the places that tend to get the investment and tend to get the services. We deliver a service in the Goulburn Valley Hume region. We are not in Shepparton. We are in all of the little towns around the place – Tongala and Tatura and all those small, small places where you might have a neighbourhood house and a community centre and maybe a district nurse if you are lucky, or a bush nurse, and that is it. And so, really, people want to stay in those communities, but they cannot afford to. They are impacted by housing costs, lack of services, lack of transport, and we need to see more around looking at the smaller towns; everyone should not be needing to contract to the large centres either. So, how do we keep people in those communities and keep them viable?

The CHAIR: These are some really important points. Are there any other questions?

Wayne FARNHAM: Hundreds.

The CHAIR: Hundreds of questions. Can I just ask, and maybe this is for both organisations: how has Aboriginal and older Victorians' experience of homelessness changed in recent decades?

Fiona YORK: It has got a lot worse. We are seeing really high numbers coming through the door, more than ever before. And I think a lot of people do not necessarily front up at services. They might not recognise themselves as at risk; they might not know where to go for help. So we are definitely seeing a massive increase in our services. Like I said, we have been around for 40 years. I think when HAAG first started on the Mornington Peninsula in the 1980s, there were something like 900 older pensioners on the waitlist for public housing. I mean, you know, that is 40 years change, and we have seen that demand increase incredibly. I think the issue is, for older people, that there are just fewer and fewer options for them, and it is much more difficult when you are older to navigate the system, to be able to deal with change, to move away from what you know. It is harder when you get older – you are not going to be wanting to sleep on the laundry floor anymore; you do not want to be share-housing. All those sorts of things I think are really – it is just disproportionately becoming harder for older people.

Darren SMITH: I think it is the same. I think the rates of homelessness across the entire population have basically been growing at about 8 to 10 per cent a year in the Aboriginal community. I cannot tell you if proportionally there are more older people that are experiencing homelessness. I think we can take a note of that and we can come back to you.

The CHAIR: That would be great.

Darren SMITH: But yes, I think there is a certain, as Fiona was explaining – I agree with what you were saying, that it is more pointy for older people, because there are less options around how they can be insecurely housed, if that makes sense.

Martin CAMERON: Is the age demographic of homelessness in the Aboriginal committee at one level? Like, is it our youth, is it the middle-aged? I know you have not got much data on the elderly, but is there one demographic that is worse than others?

Darren SMITH: I think it is reasonably well spread out. There are a high number of Aboriginal children that are fronting up to homelessness services – we know that – unaccompanied and as part of family, so there are an incredible number of young people. But I do not feel like I can comment more broadly than that other than to say that we know there are young people leaving care that are turning up in relatively high numbers. We know that there are women and children experiencing family violence that are turning up in fairly high numbers. I think it is around 48 per cent of people accessing specialist homelessness services that say they have experienced family violence and 30 per cent of Aboriginal people say it is the leading cause of why they are fronting up to homelessness services.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thank you for your advocacy for some of our most vulnerable Victorians. We know that the housing issue is a huge issue for many across Victoria, but you are you are really advocating strongly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians. I just want to say thank you for the work you do. Thank you for the work you have done organising for your presentation today. It has really been a solemn way to finish a very important day of hearings. We are going to be going out to the regions. We will be coming up to Ballarat, so we might even ask BADAC if we could have a look at the homes for the elders, if

that would be appropriate. But it is something that will be at the forefront of our minds, so thank you very much. Thank you for making the time to participate. If you would like to provide any additional information or responses to any questions taken on notice, please speak to our Secretariat.

Committee adjourned.