



## 1. Introduction

The Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers.

In developing this submission, the SHSN conducted a survey including both public housing residents and staff supporting public housing residents in Southern Melbourne, to gain their input into the views presented in this submission. Quotes and data from the SHSN survey are included in this submission.

## 2. About the SHSN

The **Vision** of the Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) is an end to homelessness in Southern Region of Melbourne.

The **Mission** of the "Victorian Homelessness Networks is to facilitate, inform and support regional homelessness services and stakeholders to work together to co-ordinate services to people who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness."

The Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) comprises all funded Specialist Homelessness Services in the Southern Region of Melbourne including services providing crisis, transitional, long term, family violence and youth support and accommodation. Our members include Launch Housing, the Salvation Army, Wayss, Sacred Heart Mission and the Better Health Network. More information about the SHSN can be found on our website <https://www.shsnetwork.online/>

The key strategic objectives of the SHSN are:

1. **Working together to end homelessness.**
2. **Acting as a conduit between the DFFH (Dept of Families, Fairness and Housing) and the regional services sector on issues and trends to inform policy**
3. **Strengthening the coordinated homelessness service system in the best interests of clients**

The Southern Region comprises ten local government areas in Southern Melbourne - Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip and Stonnington (see Figure 1). This is a geographically and socio-economically diverse region.

**Figure 1 Map of Melbourne's Southern Region Local Government Areas**



### 3. SHSN Submission to the Inquiry

Whilst the public housing towers are in need of investment, the SHSN has several serious concerns with the wholesale public housing tower redevelopment (referred to in this submission as “the redevelopment”) which is unlikely to improve access for people experiencing homelessness to housing and is likely to exacerbate many of the drivers of homelessness, potentially leading to increased homelessness and related issues costing governments and tax payers such as health, mental health, justice and police.

The SHSN’s four main concerns with the proposed public housing tower redevelopment are:

- 1. the impact of the public housing tower redevelopment on homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness through the slowing of housing offers to those on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR)**
- 2. the disruption of the redevelopment on residents, particularly those with experience of past trauma**
- 3. replacing public housing towers with community and affordable housing which is less accessible and appropriate for people on the lowest incomes**
- 4. build more public housing in areas where it is needed**

#### 3.1 SHSN Survey

The SHSN conducted a survey during March 2025 to inform the preparation of this submission. Public housing residents in the Southern region and staff working with public housing residents were invited to participate in the survey. 25 responses were received with six respondents living in public housing and 19 respondents working with people living in public housing in the Southern Region. Respondents included one person who used to live at 259 Malvern Road, South Yarra (the first tower to be redeveloped in the inner South); four staff working with residents living in this tower; and two staff working with people who used to live in this tower. The remaining respondents live in, or work with people that live in, other public housing in the inner South.

The questions focussed on how the redevelopment has affected residents, the communication about the redevelopment and feedback on the Government’s plans for public housing.

The survey results are included throughout this submission.

### 4. Impact of the redevelopment on homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness

The SHSN is greatly concerned about the impact of relocating tower residents on the already stressed social housing waiting lists with clients of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) programs having to wait even longer to access the housing they desperately need.

The redevelopment will have a huge impact on VHR allocations given the scale and timeframe of the redevelopment, especially with little new public housing included in the redevelopments. As residents affected by the redevelopment receive priority for social housing vacancies, those waiting on the VHR will have to wait even longer in dire circumstances to access social housing as vacancies are prioritised to those moving out of the towers.

The impact of the lack of public housing on people experiencing homelessness is severe and it is impacting our communities as people without homes become more visible and more unwell whilst waiting for housing. The lack of access to housing is leading to more and more people living on our streets and in unsafe accommodation, and dying there too. The longer people are homeless, the more entrenched their issues become and the harder and more expensive it is to help them end their homelessness.

People come to our member services because they need housing, yet SHS staff very rarely provide what they need. Most of our housing options are severely squeezed due to the tight rental markets and the lack of supply of public housing.

Our entry points are constantly triaging, providing band aid support of short term motel accommodation with very few long term solutions available due to the lack of access to public housing. Without sustainable housing options, there are very few outcomes that the SHS workforce are able to achieve for clients. Some staff work with clients for up to 10 years, supporting them whilst they wait for public housing. This is so frustrating for staff and for clients. This is very difficult for staff with many leaving the sector due to burnout.

In addition to the costs to governments and services, there is a high human cost. More people will experience homelessness for longer, compounding their trauma and increasing the health burden, and increasing their vulnerability to early death.

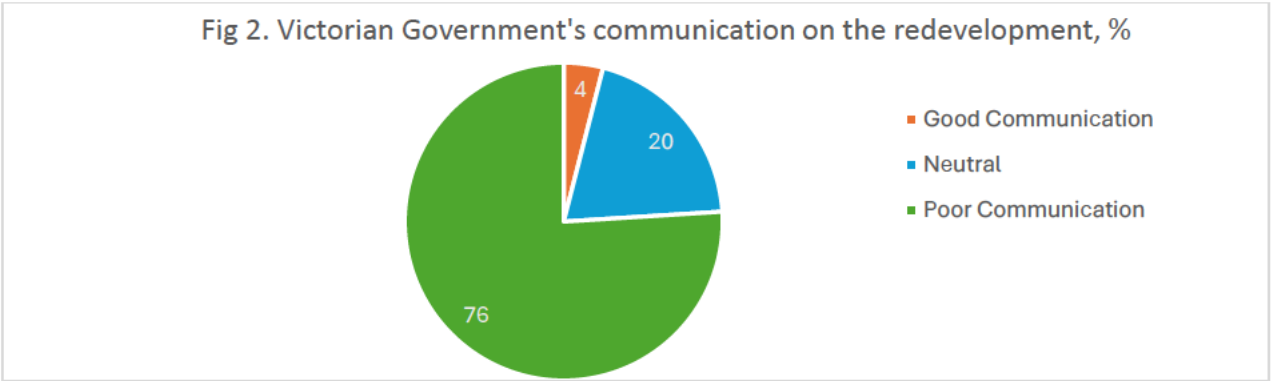
*It is putting a strain on the wider housing system and finding appropriate, safe and secure housing for others that are waiting for their VHRs to be approved as the pool of public housing shrinks.*

### 5. Impact of the redevelopment on public housing residents

The impact on public housing tower residents and nearby public housing residents is of great concern to SHSN members. The high profile redevelopment announcement made as part of the release of the Victorian Housing Statement in 2023 itself was very unsettling for residents and even traumatising for some residents who believed that these flats were their “forever home” and have built a community and supports in their local areas.

People accessing public housing often have experience of severe trauma and mental and physical health issues with little on-site support. The redevelopment has left some feeling overwhelmed and scared, even though they do not live in the South Yarra tower nominated for redevelopment in the current tranche. The failure to communicate effectively with public housing residents across the South, led some residents to feel scared about the future of their own housing.

The SHSN survey found that 76% of respondents felt that the Victorian Government’s communication about the redevelopment was “poor”, with only one respondent stating the communication was “good” (see Figure 2).



Comments from survey respondents in relation to communication about the redevelopment included:

- Communication is haphazard and unclear. Slipping notes under residents doors is traumatic. No clear communication re time lines and when things are going to happen*
- The issue of communication is far too complex to answer via a short survey. However, Homes Victoria held two consultations at Layfield Court, on how best to communicate with impacted residents. The consultations were held after the demolition was announced. This is only one example of Homes Victoria's complete incompetence.*
- It was awful for people to learn about the redevelopment from TV first, and the lack of consultation feels very disrespectful.*
- Some people reported to have just received a flyer under their doors. Some people reported to have had a conversation but that they did not fully comprehend it. People are feeling in the dark.*
- Built up expectations and didn't follow through with promises to keep us up to date with developments. Unable or unwilling to provide a timeline or any other guidance as to what is*

*happening to the Tower at 49 Union Street Windsor. Given the tower is for people over 55 and a majority of tenants are a lot older than that it would be nice to have some idea about our future.*

*We had a group from housing come and speak with us. There was a discussion and agreement of having similar meetings in the future. We haven't heard from them since.*

*Well all I heard was through news reports. No specific timelines. And everyone lumped in from blocks in frightful states to ours which is solidly and sensibly built and renovated quite recently. It's a great building and needs to be preserved and enjoyed for many more years.*

*There is often mixed information and feedback. I haven't received any direct feedback to my workplace or to my programs. Any information I have heard is by signing up to optional newsletters, or attending optional meetings, or through client feedback.*

*I didn't know about this redevelopment until now*

*There has been no communication and I work in the sector, which has put pressure on workers and clients.*

Anxiety was a major theme coming out of the SHSN survey for both residents and staff supporting them. The SHSN is also concerned that a small number of residents with experience of severe trauma may decide to leave of their own accord and become homeless, rather than waiting for this program to roll out to their property. Some support has been provided to residents in the affected South Yarra tower, however there is limited support services for residents not in the towers under redevelopment who are feeling anxious and requiring information and assurance.

The SHSN believes that the redevelopment needs to be handled sensitively, and additional resources should be provided to Tenancy Plus programs to support tenants at risk of losing their tenancies or those needing extra support during this time.

Those directly affected by the redevelopment are concerned about the loss of community and relationships with services that have often taken years to build. Transfers for residents affected by the redevelopment should be in the local area to keep people in contact with their local supports and community.

In addition, the SHSN survey results point to the redevelopment leading to a diminishing trust of government and services in this vulnerable cohort which is of great concern.

#### *Resident Quotes*

*I live in Park Towers I'm 65 and have invested a lot into my home which I couldn't afford to do in the future, I'm disabled. The building is better than any new high rises and only suffers from many of the wrong tenants who are violent and destroy property and the total mismanagement of the DFFH/Homes Vic they are just incompetent best.*

*The plan to demolish where I live is undermining my security and impacting on fellow residents. The block is being heavily graffitied and no work is being done to paint over it. The security doors are easily broken into and often left wide open for non-residents to stroll in and cruise around the 12 floors creating havoc. The community room was broken into and the large tv was stolen along with materials for the craft group. This has been a wonderful home for many older residents*

#### *Staff Quotes*

*Displacement, loss of community and community supports. uncertainty. fear of a new area and unknown location*

*Brings up trauma and past stress and makes people uncertain about their future. People are concerned about how to stay connected with friends, family, community, and supports.*

*There is ongoing conversation regarding this big project. A lot of questions, and amid the current housing shortage, it's a bit confusing.*

*It has created a distrust of Homes Victoria and stress about what happens to their family and friends in the towers. It makes them fearful that their accommodation may now be at risk too.*

*Uncertainty about their future and hopelessness around their chances of securing long term housing*

*Severe stress and anxiety of the unknown and the high risk of becoming homeless again.*

*My renters are becoming more apprehensive reporting maintenance due to the fact it highlights them and they are becoming more aware of other renters needs and living arrangements and are scared of what is going to happen to their tenancies in the future.*

*They would like to understand where they will go.*

*There is uncertainty, for people in public housing, and yet there is still that perception that they are regarded as a "forever home". But as we all know, nothing is forever. The moving and resettling in another area is a huge ask for anyone. Then to be told after the buildings are completed, they would have first option to return? How long will it take to complete the rebuild, we are talking years... So, it's a lot to get your head around, especially those who are effectively being relocated, to set up in another a home in another location, then relocated back again? The cost, the emotional toll, the cutting of ties, the list goes on.*

*People are feeling anxiety about the future, with there being little information provided to them as to what the plan is and what their rights are. People not yet in public housing are concerned about the impact of relocations on their timeframe of being offered a property.*

## **6. Shift to community and affordable housing instead of public housing**

The Victorian Government recently announced that the public housing towers in North Melbourne and Flemington will be rebuilt as community housing with no public housing. Decisions on the inclusion of public housing in the redevelopment of towers in the inner South have not been made as yet, however, recent rebuilds in Brighton and Prahran have been community housing not public housing. This is of great concern to SHSN members working with people on the lowest incomes.

People on lowest incomes – Youth Allowance and Job Seeker - are often excluded from community housing as the funding model does not allow for tenants on such low incomes. Other barriers include higher rents – 30% of income, compared to 25% for public housing – report of additional costs for community housing utilities, additional application forms (online which is also a barrier) and lack of capacity to house people with complex needs.

Our clients (ironically) do not have sufficient incomes to afford “affordable housing” which is often targeted at key workers such as teachers and nurses.

The SHSN understands the need for financial viability in community housing projects, however the redevelopment looks like it will mean less public housing is available for people on the lowest incomes when Victoria needs more, not less, of this type of housing.

*People are concerned about there being less public housing, and feeling anxious about community housing taking its place*

## **7. More public housing in areas where it is needed**

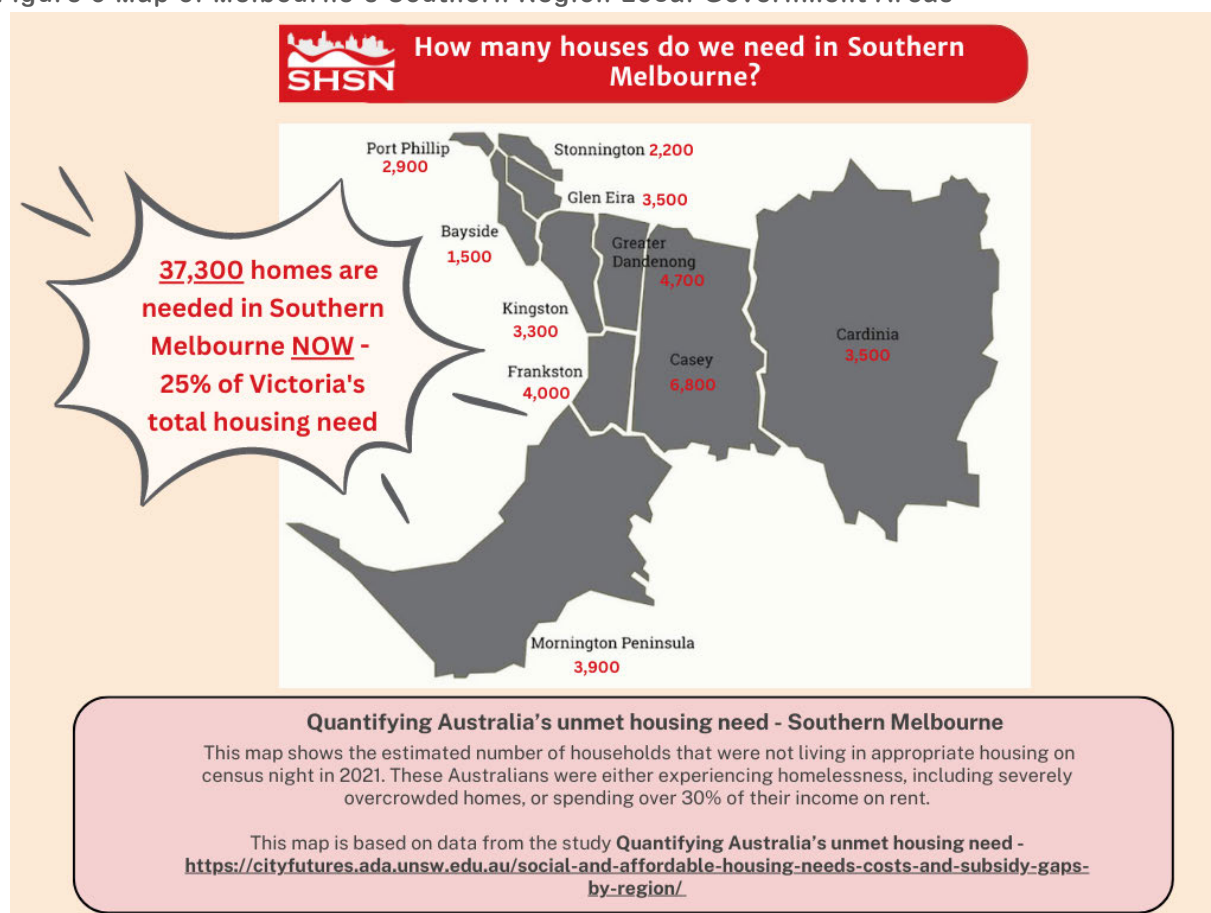
The Government focus and funding for the tower redevelopments is likely to mean that much-needed new public housing is less likely to be built, further adding to VHR waiting lists and times and compounding the trauma and disadvantage of those waiting for public housing.

The redevelopment is likely to absorb much of the Government investment in social housing until 2050 with little left for building new public housing in the areas that need it. The proposed 10% uplift in housing stock through the redevelopment is insufficient to meet the need in the inner South and will do nothing to meet the need for public housing in the outer South.

The SHSN is calling for a far greater investment in new public housing across the Southern region to meet the needs of people experiencing and, at risk of, homelessness. This includes building a diversity of housing stock to meet the needs of both singles and families (including every large families) across the outer South in areas such as Dandenong, Frankston and Narre Warren.

The Victorian Government's Big Housing Build has been a strong investment in social housing coming out of COVID and it is exciting to see the new developments coming online across the Southern region. However, the lack of investment in public housing prior to the Big Housing Build, together with the current housing and cost of living crises, has led to increased demand for public housing in the Southern region. This includes many areas across the Southern region which saw very little Big Housing Build investment. The map at Figure 3 shows the need for social housing (preferably public housing) in each local government area across the Southern region. This map is based on the University of NSW City Futures study using 2021 Census data and these figures are likely to have increased since 2021 due to the current housing crisis.

Figure 3 Map of Melbourne's Southern Region Local Government Areas



The recently released Infrastructure Victoria *Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy* called for more social housing as its very first recommendation.

*Draft Recommendation 1 Build more social housing - Consistently invest in new social housing to provide more Victorians on low incomes with access to a secure and affordable home (Infrastructure Victoria, 2025:18).*

Infrastructure Victoria point out that

*Without government investment, more people will experience homelessness and financial hardship. More people will also live in inadequate housing. This affects people's health, wellbeing, relationships and job opportunities (Infrastructure Victoria, 2025:18).*

The Draft Strategy explains that

*Victoria does not have enough social housing for all the people who need it. Over 51,000 households were on the waiting list for social housing in June 2024. The Victorian Government's initial Big Housing Build is coming to an end after funding 9,300 new social homes. Even with this, social housing will make up only 2.8% of homes in Victoria compared to a national average of 4%. This is the lowest of any Australian state or territory. Victoria needs an additional 60,000 social homes to meet the backlog of demand for homes. Building this number will also get Victoria closer to reaching the national average (Infrastructure Victoria, 2025:18).*

An increase of 10% of stock through the redevelopment is totally insufficient to meet the growing demand for public housing for people on the lowest incomes, locked out of housing markets and community housing and experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

*I feel it's a waste of money, and the towers should be updated and renovated instead. Other money should be provided and used for other public housing across the South East Regional area*

The SHSN believes that building more public housing for the many people on the VHR in urgent need of housing, in areas where they want to live, is a greater priority for Victoria than redeveloping existing housing. The redevelopment could occur after sufficient public housing is available to meet the current demand.

## 8. What the Victorian Government should do about the public housing towers and public housing

The SHSN survey asked respondents for their views on what the Victorian government should be doing about the towers and public housing in general. Here is an overview of the responses.

Most respondents supported the SHSN view that the Victorian Government should invest in more public housing in the areas where it is needed (88%) and 65% supported the view that new public housing should be built prior to demolishing the towers to minimise moves for residents.

60% of respondents preferred renovating the public housing towers instead of demolishing and rebuilding and 56% supported mandatory inclusion of public housing in new housing developments over a certain size.

Only 20% of respondents supported the focus on the public housing tower redevelopment and 28% supported the investment in community housing instead of public housing.



The survey asked respondents about the Victorian Government’s plans for public housing in general with the common theme being the need for more public housing to be built. The following comments were received about public housing in Victoria:

*not enough stock compared to demand*

*they have to be stopped they are giving away valuable urban and inner suburban land over to private hands what they’re doing is a really stupid deal just in economic terms.*

*I do not feel their proposed housing plans will meet projected needs for housing.*

*public housing should remain public not be taken over by community housing who don't house complex individuals*

*We need a lot more [public housing] as we have so many homeless at the present.*

*Victoria does not have any proper planning for public housing.*

*We need more public housing as a matter of urgency, and not a focus on community housing. We are letting people down by not keeping pace with development and growth. We need more public housing in the inner urban areas rather than continuing urban sprawl.*

*They have goals, not plans. If they had plans there would be a lot more certainty about timelines and where people are going to be housed while the rebuilding is going on.*

*There seems to be a lack of planning with service providers about the housing plans. Services are expected to help with no extra funding, with limited information and can see new houses being destroyed due to a lack of support for the people moving in there.*

*Where can I read the government's plans?*

*so misaligned with what our community needs.*

*We need more public housing properties to house those in need*

*Not enough funds being allocated for public housing in various areas. Nor enough Public housing being built.*

*The Victorian Government provided one of the poorest plans for public housing that has been seen in a long time. It is unthinkable that all towers will be demolished, with tight-knit communities displaced and that land no longer being in public hands. It is a costly and irreversible mistake that will forever change the public housing landscape in Victoria. The government needs to urgently change its plans and keep public housing in public hands.*

Survey respondents provided the following additional comments related to the redevelopment and public housing in Victoria:

*Just build more public housing. "Affordable housing" is not good enough or affordable*

*I would love to see more housing in the outer [areas] where the issues are, where people escaping violence can keep their children in their schools, be close to their family and not be caused anxiety being in the city.*

*We shouldn't be demolishing housing when we have the lowest proportion of social housing in the country and displacing people.*

*Communication and accountability are missing. Maintenance is a joke because their contractors have no idea what our rights are as tenants.*

*We no longer have an avenue for reporting issues to housing. Housing has to get onto the front foot and do something. We could end up having another Grenfell here. In the past six months we have had about six fires.*

*Needs to be heaps more [public housing]. Also the CCTV needs to be improved so that all the vandals and those that break in and roam around can be clearly identified.*

*Listen and speak to local Homelessness Entry Points in various areas who are at the coalface of homelessness.*

*Flemington and North Melbourne towers redevelopment do not include public housing is providing less chances of individuals and families to access affordable, long-term housing. This is a very poor decision.*

## 9. Conclusion

The SHSN advocates for evidence-based solutions to ending homelessness. We know that Housing First models are the most effective in ending homelessness and rapid access to stable housing is critical to preventing homelessness. But without access to public housing, our support services and the people we support are unable to end their homelessness.

The SHSN recommends the following for the Victorian Government's approach to public housing:

- vastly greater investment in new public housing across the Southern region to meet the demand, particularly in outer metropolitan areas, as a priority
- more effective communication to residents and support staff about changes to public housing
- increased support for residents at risk of returning to homelessness from social housing through programs such as Tenancy Plus
- increased public housing across the Southern region for people on the lowest incomes (compared to investment in community and affordable housing)
- increased investment in effective Housing First programs and other programs that combine stable housing with support services

The SHSN thanks you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Parliamentary Inquiry and looks forward to the Committee's report later this year.

## References

Infrastructure Victoria 2025, *Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy*

University of New South Wales (UNSW) 2023, *Housing Needs Dashboard, City Futures Research Centre*