

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

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SURVEY QUESTIONS

Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this inquiry into homelessness to consider::

Public housing,Housing affordability,Services,Family violence,Mental health,Employment,Rough sleeping,Indigenous people

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :

An advocacy body ,Public sector body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e339f06dc3a2-City of Greater Dandenong Submission - Victorian Homelessness Inquiry - January 2020.docx](#)

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Signature:

Ashish Sitoula



City of Greater Dandenong's submission to Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

31 January 2020

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Introduction

The City of Greater Dandenong (Council) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Homelessness. This submission focuses on the state of homelessness in the Greater Dandenong municipality, with particular reference to the:

1. The scale and nature of homelessness;
2. The social, economic and policy factors that bear upon service delivery to local people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness; and
3. Policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivery of services to people who are homeless in the local area.

Victoria's current population of 6.7 million is expected to increase by 50 per cent to 10.1 million by 2051, with 8 million people living in greater Melbourne and 2.1 million people in Victoria's regional areas¹. This is driven in part by significant net interstate migration and net overseas migration².

Over 24,000 Victorians will be homeless tonight, including families with children, young people, older people, single adults and people with disabilities.³ On average 1,100 people sleep rough in Victoria including on city streets and in parks/gardens, carparks, sporting grounds, bushland areas and coastal reserves. They are just the tip of the iceberg.

¹ Victoria in Future 2016, p1

² ABS Australian Demographic Statistics, September quarter 2017

³ Council to Homeless Persons homelessness factsheet 2019

Definitions for the purpose of this submission

Homelessness

Homelessness is about not having a home, including a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety or the ability to control living space (Mallet, 2004). Accordingly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines someone as homeless if their current living arrangement:

- Is in a dwelling that 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.

Overcrowding

To determine the number of homeless people, the ABS counts people who are living somewhere temporarily, in a boarding house, living in supported homelessness accommodation, sleeping out (or in things such as tents) and living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

However, for the City of Greater Dandenong, this definition of "severely crowded dwellings" has been modified to 'overcrowded' dwellings for the purpose of measuring differences in the prevalence of overcrowding by geographic area and by segment of the community, as the sum of:

- 4 or more persons in a dwelling with 0 or 1 bedrooms
- 6 or more persons in a dwelling of 2 bedrooms
- 7 or more persons in a dwelling of 3 bedrooms.

The corresponding figures for Greater Dandenong are as follows:

- 2016: 5,270 dwellings or 4.1 per cent of occupied private dwellings (excluding those for which inadequate information was recorded). This was by far the highest percentage and number of overcrowded dwellings, in Victoria (second highest was Brimbank, at 2.5 per cent).
- 2011: 4,422 dwellings or 3.5 per cent of occupied private dwellings.

In 2016, the prevalence of overcrowding reached 7.2 per cent among rented households and 5.5 per cent for couples with children. These figures soar to 23 per cent for certain ethnicities.

Scale and nature of homelessness in Greater Dandenong - social conditions impacting on homelessness

Homelessness in Greater Dandenong is different to the homelessness witnessed in Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD), inner cities or along coastal suburbs. This is because Greater Dandenong is a community of marked cultural diversity and ongoing migrant settlement which faces the challenges of low-income levels, high unemployment, unfavourable educational outcomes, a substantial rate of refugee settlement, lower levels of mental and physical health than the Victorian average, and elevated crime rates.

This municipality is the most multicultural and diverse in Australia with residents from 157 birthplaces and 64 per cent of its population born overseas. Over 200 languages and dialects are spoken within the municipality with languages other than English spoken by over two-thirds (70 per cent) of its residents – the highest level in Victoria. A significant portion of the residents are recent migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum.

The population cohorts most at risk of homelessness in Australia have been identified as disengaged youth, recent migrants including refugees and people seeking asylum (who are collectively referred to as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, i.e., CALD population), single-parent households, people living in rent-related poverty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women over the age of 55, unemployed residents and low-income households, women and children escaping family violence, LGBTIQ young people, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, and older people living on a pension.

These population cohorts, with or without intersectional disadvantages, account for approximately two-fifths of Greater Dandenong's population. Their circumstances place many at risk of housing-related financial stress or homelessness. The information presented below describes the scale and nature of homelessness in this community.

Homelessness

Based on the ABS definition, 1,942 persons in Greater Dandenong were homeless in 2016, accounting for 1.2 per cent of its population– nearly three times the Victorian average of 0.42 per cent. Council's own analysis of overcrowded dwellings reveals there are approximately 17,000 people at-risk of homelessness or seeking some form of homelessness support to address or prevent homelessness. These figures are supported by the data from specialist homelessness services.

Overcrowding

In 2016, 4.1 per cent of private dwellings in Greater Dandenong, numbering 5,720 homes, were overcrowded – the highest proportion in metropolitan Melbourne. Residents in rented accommodation were most at risk of overcrowding, with 7.2 per cent living in overcrowded conditions, compared with 2.2 per cent of those in dwellings owned or being purchased by their occupants.

Population and demographic profile

Based on the 2016 Census, the population of the municipality in 2019 is approximately 174,000. The population spread adjusted to 2019 figures, is presented in the table below:

Table: Population distribution in Greater Dandenong

Age range	Number	Per cent of total population
0-14	32,000	18.4 per cent
15-24	22,000	12.6 per cent
25-64	95,000	54.6 per cent
65+	25,000	14.4 per cent
Total	174,000	100 per cent

In the year 2016-17, 1,806 migrants settled in Greater Dandenong, the fourth highest number in Victoria. In addition, the Commonwealth Government reports that in 2019, there were nearly 1,303 people seeking asylum in this municipality, representing the highest number in any Victorian municipality and accounting for 22 per cent of all people seeking asylum in Victoria. The Federal Government cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services allowance to the people seeking asylum from June 2018 has further exacerbated poverty and destitution among this cohort.

Older population

The number of people aged over the age of 65 years in Greater Dandenong is similar to the Australian population of 15 per cent. Nationally these figures are expected to rise to 21-23 per cent by 2066. However, for Greater Dandenong, this cohort will cross the 20 per cent mark by 2030.

Older residents in Greater Dandenong receive relatively low incomes and exhibit a high level of dependence upon rental accommodation, exposing many to the risk of homelessness.

In 2016, the median income of residents aged 60-64 was \$416 – 67 per cent of the Victorian level of \$618. Among residents aged 65 years or more, 71 per cent were dependent upon the aged pension in 2019, compared to 59 per cent across Victoria.

At the time of the 2016 Census, 16 per cent of residents aged 65 years or more were living in rented accommodation, compared with 11 per cent of older people across Victoria.

Young people

Greater Dandenong's current population of young people aged between 15-24 years is 22,000 and is expected to grow by 50 per cent by 2030.

Educational and employment outcomes are relatively unfavourable among young people in Greater Dandenong. The current youth population, of 20,000 15 to 24 year-olds, is expected to grow by 50 per cent by 2030. Over 17 per cent of these young people are disengaged - neither enrolled in school nor employed - the second highest level in metropolitan Melbourne, and substantially more than the corresponding metropolitan figure, of 10 per cent.

In 2017, 16 per cent of year 9 pupils in Greater Dandenong did not meet national literacy benchmarks – the third highest level in Victoria and twice the Victorian level of 8 per cent. In 2016, 13 percent of 20-24 year-olds had left school before year 11, compared with 8.3 per cent across metropolitan Melbourne.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In 2016, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with children in Greater Dandenong were one-parent families – more than twice the level of 27

per cent among the general population. Fifty per cent of indigenous residents of Greater Dandenong, aged 15 or more, had left school before year 11, compared with 34 per cent of other residents. Their unemployment rate stood at 22 per cent in 2016, significantly higher than the corresponding level of 10 per cent among the general population at this time.

Social and economic vulnerabilities

People experiencing homelessness, and those at risk of homelessness, are among Australia's most socially and economically disadvantaged. Homeless people become further marginalised because of prevalent social stigma associated with homelessness. This is often demonstrated by a narrative which often incorrectly conflates anti-social behaviour with homelessness.

Housing tenure

In 2016, over half (54 per cent) of private dwellings in Greater Dandenong were owned or being purchased by their occupants – a decline from 65 per cent in 2011. Home ownership levels are lowest among recent settlers.

Housing costs

In the past two decades, the cost of housing for local residents has surpassed growth in incomes. The median cost of houses in Greater Dandenong rose from 3.2 years of average median household income in 1996, to 8.1 years in 2016. Meantime, the proportion of rental properties affordable to Centrelink recipients in Greater Dandenong has plunged from 83 per cent in 2001, to 4.9 per cent by 2019.

Incomes

In 2016, median individual weekly gross individual incomes in Greater Dandenong stood at \$476, 71 per cent of the metropolitan average, and the lowest level in Melbourne.

In 2016, 31 per cent of families with children in Greater Dandenong had no parent in paid employment – the highest level in metropolitan Melbourne and substantially more than the State level of 19 per cent.

Unemployment

Unemployment rates in Greater Dandenong reached 10 per cent in 2018 - the highest level in Victoria and nearly twice the metropolitan average of 5.6 per cent.

Family violence

In 2018-19, the rate of police-recorded incidents of alleged violence within families was 20 per cent higher than the metropolitan level and the third highest in Melbourne.

Family violence makes a substantial contribution to the risk and prevalence of homelessness in this municipality. Of the 3,000 requests for assistance from specialist homelessness services in Greater Dandenong in 2018-19, 57 per cent involved females, of whom, nearly half (43%) cited family violence as their reason for seeking assistance.⁴

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Homelessness Services Report 2018/19

Rent-related financial stress

The Australian private rental sector (PRS) swelled by 38 per cent over the period 2006–2016, more than twice the rate of household growth. Moreover, on present policy and market settings, this growth is expected to continue in the future.⁵

Findings from the 2016 Census reveal that 38 per cent of renting households in Greater Dandenong faced poverty after paying their rent, the second highest level in Victoria. Just over half (55 per cent) of lone person households and 59 per cent of renting one-parent families were living in rent-related poverty.

Fluency and literacy in English

In 2016, approximately one in five residents, that is, 25,500 people or 18 per cent of the population had limited fluency in spoken English. This is four times the metropolitan level of 4 per cent, and the highest level in Victoria. An estimated 26 per cent of residents have very limited English literacy. Limited English fluency and literacy raises the prospect of unemployment for such residents leading to social isolation and further socio-economic disadvantage.

Mental health

The 2017 Victorian Population Health Survey recorded that 22 per cent of Greater Dandenong residents were experiencing ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of psychological distress - the fourth highest rate in Victoria and substantially higher than the State average of 15 per cent.

The 2015 VicHealth Indicators Survey measured ‘wellbeing’ through responses to questions about standard of living, achievements in life, community connection, personal relationships, safety and future security. The result for Greater Dandenong residents was the third lowest level in Victoria. Personal resilience was also measured in the survey, with residents scoring at 5.5 out of 10 – the lowest score in the State.

Disability

Adjusted for differences in age structure among Victorian municipalities, the disability rate in Greater Dandenong in 2016 was 7.2 per cent, which was the seventh highest in the state, and substantially higher than the corresponding Victorian rate of 5.6 per cent. There are very few crisis and transitional accommodation options for people with physical disabilities.

⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute - Inquiry into the future of the private rental sector—Executive summary 2018

Recommendations

Homelessness in Greater Dandenong is among the highest in Victoria, and the municipality ranks 23rd on the rate of social and affordable housing. As of 2019, approximately 5,000 people are on the waiting list of the Victorian Housing Register in this region.

Homelessness can only be addressed through a housing-first approach, which requires an increase in the stock of social and affordable housing to enable people to reside in their communities, complemented by a service system that assists to stabilise and support residents.

Implementation of the five recommendations of the Everybody's Home campaign holds the promise of substantially alleviating homelessness in Australia.

A Housing-First approach must also include a service system that engages with people at-risk of homelessness. Particularly, comprehensive programs must be aimed at addressing single or multiple issues. These include but are not limited to programs to address family violence, mental health, disabilities, engage youth in education and employment, promote reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and conduct assertive outreach programs for people who are rough sleeping.

The following are some approaches that can significantly address homelessness in the short to medium term:

1. The Victorian Government should contribute to the expanded national investment to increase social and affordable housing, in line with the Everybody's Home campaign recommendations. It is forecast that Australia will need 500,000 social and affordable homes by 2026.⁶ This can only be achieved if investments in bricks and mortar are made today.
2. The Victorian Government should include mandatory provisions in the Victorian Planning Scheme for developer contributions to include social and affordable housing in their planning and delivery.
3. The Victorian Government should remove the Clause requirement from the Victorian Planning Scheme that hampers the ability for a secondary dwelling to be built on established properties.
4. Activation of private rentals. Since February 2019, Greater Dandenong Council has facilitated relationships between transitional and crisis-accommodation service providers and private rental owners, making homes available to a family violence transitional accommodation service through head-leasing. The State Government could enhance the appeal of this approach through additional subsidies and/or tax benefits.
5. The Victorian Government address chronic rental stress through strong advocacy to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance, Newstart and Youth allowances, as recommended by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) in their 'Raise the Rate' Campaign.
6. Rent capping options should be considered by the State Government, to be held in place until the problem of homelessness is redressed and an adequate supply of social and affordable housing is established.

Conclusion

The City of Greater Dandenong looks forward to working the Victorian State Government to ensure that all people have safe, affordable and secure housing.

⁶ Everybody's Home Campaign www.everybodyshome.com.au