

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Lisa Sweeney

Organisation Name:SANE Australia

Your position or role: Head of Policy and Advocacy

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::

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

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

Working in the mental health sector

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

NIL

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Submission to the Inquiry attached.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

NIL

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e33b3f504775-SANE submission - Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Lisa Sweeney



31 January 2019

Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Via Online Portal

Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness

SANE Australia is a national mental health charity dedicated to making a real difference in the lives of people affected by complex mental health issues. We work to support the more than four million Australians affected by complex mental health issues including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, complex trauma and severe depression and anxiety.

Founded in 1986 in Melbourne as the Schizophrenia Australia Foundation, SANE Australia's focus is on supporting the approximately four million Australians affected by complex mental health issues. This includes adults aged 18 and over living in Australia who identify as having a complex mental illness or an experience of complex trauma or very high levels of psychological distress. For every person affected by mental health issues, there is a network of additional people impacted, including carers, family, friends and colleagues who often play a critical role in supporting their recovery.

SANE's work includes promoting mental health literacy, destigmatising poorly understood mental health issues, online peer support and information, specialist helpline support, research and advocacy. Established twenty years ago in 1999, SANE Australia's StigmaWatch program pioneered stigma-reduction through tackling media representation of mental illness and suicide. The Dax Centre and the Anne Deveson Research Centre (ADRC) also form part of the SANE Australia group.

We welcome the work currently underway through Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness as this is an issue that affects many of the people we serve.

Safe and affordable housing is a fundamental ingredient for both preventing mental illness and promoting recovery. It is also a basic human right. People affected by complex mental health issues often face housing insecurity and homelessness, which can trigger or exacerbate their condition. There are many reasons for this, including the impact of deinstitutionalisation, lack of affordable housing stock, and the unacceptably long waitlists for social and public housing.

The number of people sleeping rough in Victoria has increased due to a lack of crisis accommodation. A significant proportion of people sleeping rough are affected by mental illness with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reporting that 17,772 people affected by mental health issues presented to homelessness services last year¹.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) Health and Welfare Services: Homelessness services <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview>



In addition to the significant health and safety risks posed to people sleeping on the streets, more resources are required from our Emergency Departments and frontline emergency services.

The Housing First model prioritises safe and permanent housing as the first step in securing multidisciplinary support². Given the intersection between homelessness and mental health issues, intersectionality and available referral pathways between the two systems is critical. Investment in safe and affordable housing, and support to maintain that housing, is also an investment in mental healthcare.

As per [our submission](#) to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, we recommend the Victorian Government:

1. Increase availability of programs to support people affected by complex mental health issues to maintain stable housing, including access to the private rental market.
2. Increase social housing availability with increased triaging for people affected by complex mental health issues, as per the Housing First model.
3. Increase the number of people affected by complex mental health issues housed in social and public housing and actively monitor and reduce the waitlist.
4. Increase the number of supported housing placements for people affected by complex mental health issues.

SANE Australia is currently undertaking a National Stigma Report Card project, conducted in partnership with the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne, with the generous support of the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

The project includes the '[Our Turn to Speak](#)' survey will explore the experiences of 5,000 people affected by complex mental health issues across 14 different life domains, of which housing is one. Data from the survey is expected in the second half of 2020 and could be used to inform the development of future strategies to improve housing outcomes for Victorians affected by complex mental health issues.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this work with you further.

Kind regards,



Jack Heath
Chief Executive Officer
SANE Australia

² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2018) *Housing, homelessness and mental health: towards system change*. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/media/252441/Housing-homelessness-and-mental-health-towards-systems-change.pdf>