

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Prue Licht

Organisation Name: Yarra Ranged Housing Action group

Your position or role: Community Member

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::

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

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

Working in the mental health sector ,Working in the alcohol or other drug services sector ,Working with Aboriginal Victorians ,An advocacy body ,Working in Homelessness services ,Concerned citizen

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e27efe5d8811-Preview attachment Submission for Yrhag 2.docx \[Word\] 20 KB.URL](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Prue Licht

YARRA RANGES HOUSING ACTION GROUP

**To positively influence the provision of affordable housing in the local area,
through raising awareness and advocating/lobbying to all levels of
government and community**

Yarra Ranges Housing Action Group



The Yarra Ranges Housing Action Group, (YRHAG) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. As a group, we have concerns about housing affordability and its inevitable consequences in terms of homelessness and the impact it has on people on low incomes and benefit recipient singles and families in the Yarra Ranges.

Yarra Ranges Housing Action Group was established as a result of a forum in Lilydale in October 2012 run by Anglicare for Anti-Poverty week. It consists of housing and support agencies, and individuals, who have an interest and passion for housing issues and the associated risks for the population in the Yarra Ranges.

The definition of homelessness in this submission is those people who have no secure and safe place to sleep on any given night. They may be sleeping in their car, on a friend's sofa or sleeping rough in the forest or on a city street. They may be temporarily in a motel or night shelter. They may be in severely overcrowded and inadequate accommodation.

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- There are certain factors which predispose people to the likelihood of homelessness or the risk of becoming so. Poverty is a certainty, compounded by domestic violence, mental health issues, disability and drug and alcohol problems, amongst many other factors increasing people's vulnerability.
- As house prices increase so do rental prices, so that people who may not in the past have been homeless, have become so.
- Older women, particularly those who have been traditional homemakers and therefore not worked for many years and those retiring from the work force or becoming unemployed before the pension starts, are at great risk, as they are forced onto Newstart with little or no prospect of finding work. While they may not consider themselves homeless, if they are able, they are living with their children or in a friend's converted garage or caravan.
- Families and many young people, in an age of insecure, contract employment also cannot afford the increasing rents and have no hope of entering the housing market.
- People generally want to stay close to their friends, family and community. This sometimes becomes impossible when choices are limited or non-existent.

Background

An Anglicare report from April 2019 based on their research from a Snapshot which surveyed over 69,000 rental listings across Australia. found that there is a chronic shortage of affordable rentals across Australia. The report said that:

- 317 rentals were affordable for a single person on the Disability Support Pension
- 75 rentals were affordable for a single parent with one child on Newstart

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- 2 rentals were affordable for a single person in a property or share house on Newstart

- 1 rental was affordable for a single person in a property or share house on Youth Allowance.

- 0 rentals were affordable for a single person on Newstart or Youth Allowance in any major city or regional centre.

The magazine “Parity” in June 2016 said that more than 22,000 Victorians are homeless on any given night. More than 260,000 low income rental households are known to be in housing stress in Victoria and at that time there was a short fall of 80,000 affordable rental properties.

The 2016 census figures indicate an increase in homelessness in every category and we know there are tens of thousands of people homeless across Australia every night.

The rate of homelessness in Australia has increased 4.6 per cent over the last five years, according to new data from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing.

The latest estimates reveal more than 116,000 people were experiencing homelessness in Australia on Census night, representing 50 homeless persons for every 10,000 people.

Dr Paul Jelfs, General Manager of Population and Social Statistics, said that while there was an overall increase in the estimate of homelessness in Australia, this number is made up of various distinct groups and each tells a different story.

People living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings, defined as requiring four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the people who usually live there, was the greatest contributor to the national increase in homelessness.

“In 2016, this group accounted for 51,088 people, up from 41,370 in 2011.

“On Census night, 8,200 people were estimated to be ‘sleeping rough’ in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out – an increase from 3.2 persons per 10,000 people in 2011 to 3.5 persons per 10,000 people in 2016,” Dr Jelfs said.

Younger and older Australians have also emerged as groups experiencing increasing homelessness in Australia.

“One quarter of all people experiencing homelessness in 2016 was aged between 20 and 30 years,” Dr Jelfs said.

People aged between 65 and 74 years experiencing homelessness increased to 27 persons per 10,000 people, up from 25 persons per 10,000 people in 2011.

Recent migrants (those who arrived within the five years prior to the 2016 Census) accounted for 15 per cent of the homeless estimate. Almost three quarters of this group were living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings and the majority came from countries in South-East Asia, North-East Asia and Southern and Central Asia, including India, China and Afghanistan.

The overall number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness in 2016 was 23,437. More than two out of three were living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings, with just less than 10 per cent ‘sleeping rough’.

Further 2016 Census homelessness data can be found on the [ABS website](#).

Key stats – homelessness (a)

	2016	2011	2006	2001	% change (2011 - 2016)	% change (2006 - 2011)	% change (2001 - 2006)
		(b)					
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	8,200	6,810	7,247	8,946	20.4%	-6.0%	-19.0%

Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	21,235	21,258	17,329	13,420	-0.1%	22.7%	29.1%
Persons staying temporarily with other households	17,725	17,374	17,663	17,880	2.0%	-1.6%	-1.2%
Persons living in boarding houses	17,503	14,944	15,460	21,300	17.1%	-3.3%	-27.4%
Persons in other temporary lodging	678	682	500	338	-0.6%	36.4%	47.9%
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	51,088	41,370	31,531	33,430	23.5%	31.2%	-5.7%
Total	116,427	102,439	89,728	95,314	13.7%	14.2%	-5.9%

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Notes

(a) Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. As a result cells may not add to the totals.

(b) Homeless estimates from 2011 for the category 'Persons living in boarding houses' have been revised.

Interview opportunities with Dr Paul Jelfs are available.



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Homelessness Inquiry must consider incomes versus rent and rental availability particularly for low income people. House values continue to rise, while there is also a rise in the inequality of incomes and increased levels of poverty amongst people who in the past would not have fallen into this cohort.

There has been a shift in suburban affordability which has meant that people who may in the past have been able to afford to buy a house are now forced into the rental market and will never be able to buy, thus putting increased stress on the availability of affordable houses to rent. This results in a high degree of housing stress, with households paying up to 69% of their income in many instances. Governments at all levels need to concentrate on policies which

increase the actual supply of houses to the lower end of the market. It needs to be noted that the shortage of secure, stable and affordable housing is reaching crisis levels in this community.

Without increased funding that will actually provide appropriate housing this situation will continue and more people will be living on the streets. Homelessness is isolating and leaves people vulnerable to long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health. It makes it difficult for people to maintain social supports, education and work.

Indigenous people are more likely to experience homelessness than any other Australian.

Public housing waiting lists are now so long that a low income does not mean that you have any hope of housing in the foreseeable future. The availability of Public Housing through the Office of Housing is extremely limited and has stagnated due to insufficient funding over recent years.

Families, older people, singles and people with disabilities are increasingly becoming homeless. Some people manage to secure crisis or transitional housing, but as there is not a pathway to long term, affordable, secure housing, they remain in a crisis situation which in turn causes more stress and less available crisis accommodation.

Family violence is the single largest cause of homelessness in Australia. Homelessness is also caused by poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, mental illness, shortage of affordable housing, sexual assault, addiction, financial difficulty, gambling and social isolation.

84% of people presenting as homeless or at risk have experienced some kind of trauma. The longer they remain in insecure housing, the greater the impact of the trauma on their mental health and wellbeing. Rapid re-housing, early intervention and prevention are solutions to this.

Homelessness is growing in the Yarra Ranges area of Melbourne. Many families are becoming homeless due the high cost of private rental, to family violence, to ageing, to illness and disability.

Support and welfare agencies in the Yarra Ranges are seeing increased levels of complexity and larger numbers of people who cannot sustain secure affordable housing and have never previously asked for assistance, but now are finding more difficulty managing.

Centrelink Payments have stagnated and become increasingly difficult to obtain and increases in the cost of living, including prohibitive rental and energy costs have pushed families to the brink of destitution.

Solutions

There needs to be recognition, at governmental levels, that an increasing proportion of the community will never be able to purchase a house, this situation is made worse by the seemingly unending loss of stable, secure employment for a significant number of people particularly in the manufacturing sector which may historically be at the lower end of the housing market.

Workers see that Centrelink payments are totally inadequate, particularly Newstart payments, and the system is difficult to navigate and inflexible.

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Federal and State Governments need to work together, without the influence of party politics.

YRHAG would hope that a National Housing Plan be developed to address the crisis which now exists in all capital cities.

Priority be given to immediately funding the provision of a range of housing to be added to the Ministry of Housing stock.

A review of current Ministry of Housing management strategies be undertaken to ensure that all existing housing stock is maintained and utilised with the maximum efficiency and minimum loss of capacity.

