

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Rosie Tuck

Organisation Name: Knox City Council

Your position or role: Coordinator Municipal Strategic and Social Planning

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::

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

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

Working in the mental health sector ,An advocacy body ,Public sector body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Knox City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into homelessness. This submission responds directly to the following terms of reference as described by the Legal and Social Issues Committee of the Legislative Council. Please find attached the submission

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e4c8f544611e-Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria - 2020-01-07.DOCX](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Rosie Tuck

The Legal and Social Issues Committee of the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Council - Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

1. Introduction

Knox City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into homelessness. This submission responds directly to the following terms of reference as described by the Legal and Social Issues Committee of the Legislative Council.

Terms of Reference:

- Provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria;
- Investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness; and
- Identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless.

The City of Knox is situated in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, approximately 20 to 25 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD, the population is 165,412 residents in 2020.¹ The city comprises 11 suburbs: Bayswater, Boronia, Ferntree Gully, Knoxfield, Rowville, Scoresby, The Basin, Wantirna and Wantirna South, Lysterfield, and Upper Ferntree Gully. Land use is primarily residential; of the residential areas 86.5% are separate houses, 12.5% medium density and 0.6% high density (apartments).²

2. Homelessness is defined as:

"If current living arrangements are in a dwelling that is inadequate; they have no security of tenure; or they do not have control, or access to space for social relations". It may include people living in improvised dwellings, tents and sleeping out; those living in supported accommodation for the homeless; those staying temporarily with other households; those living in boarding houses; those in other temporary lodgings; and those living in severely overcrowded buildings."³

In Victoria, the breakdown of percentages for each homeless category is estimated to be:

- Sleeping rough 5%;
- Supported accommodation for the homeless 34%;
- Boarding Houses 19%;
- Overcrowded dwellings 27%; and
- Staying with other households 15%.⁴

Many developed nations grapple with the challenge of homelessness and in recent years, the homelessness problem in Victoria has become acute. A lack in supply of social and affordable housing and family violence are the leading causes of homelessness and Victoria is at a critical juncture whereby long term investment is required to meet projected needs and to reduce the rapid escalation of people experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness.

3. The nature and scale of Homelessness in Knox

Having access to housing is one of our most basic human rights that is enshrined in international covenants and treaties yet there are 41,677 households on the waiting list for social housing in Victoria. This is 82,500 individual people, including almost 25,000 children. Research has identified that Victoria has a shortfall of 102,800 social housing properties. However the majority

¹ Forecast.id

² Profile id.2018

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing

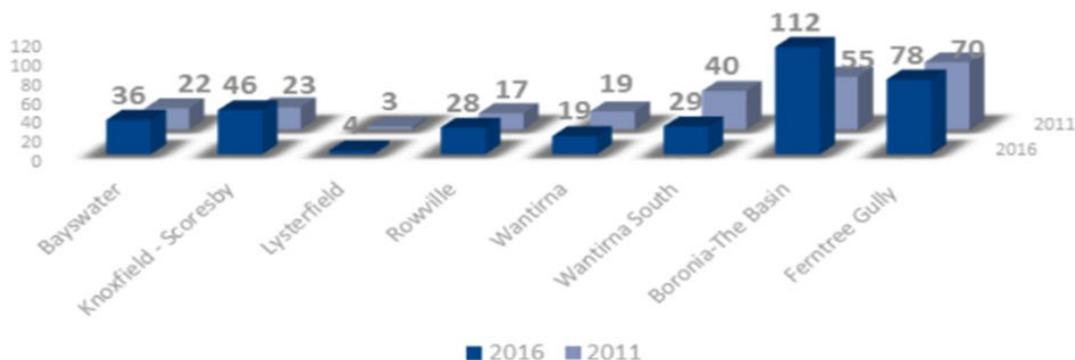
⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing

of the homeless population are unseen. They are not those sleeping rough but in overcrowded dwellings or boarding houses. As data becomes available it would be beneficial to monitor overcrowding and underutilisation in Knox.⁵

The count of homeless on the Census night is likely to be low because of the inability to account for all rough sleepers. Chamberlain et al. (2015) comment that “Census collectors are unlikely to find all of them because the census is held in winter when rough sleepers hide away to escape the cold, as well as for their own safety and security”.

In Knox, 365 people were counted as homeless; this is a rate of 23.7 people per population 10,000, 12 people were estimated to be ‘primary homeless’ as they were living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out. 138 people were in supported accommodation for the homeless, 70 staying temporarily in other households, and 104 in severely crowded dwellings. When comparing Knox to Victoria and Rural/Regional Victoria, Knox recorded a lower rate per population 10,000 for all homelessness categories except ‘severely crowded dwellings’. People living in severely crowded dwellings, or to a lesser extent, overcrowded dwellings, are a part of the invisible homeless. This category is important to monitor because there is a potential downward progression from living in crowded dwellings to living in supported accommodation, or sleeping out. The homeless count increased in all Knox suburbs between 2011 and 2016 with the exception of Wantirna South, decreasing from 40 to 29 people. Boronia/The Basin became the leading suburb for homelessness in Knox with the homeless count doubling from 55 to 112

Figure 1: Homelessness in Knox by suburb

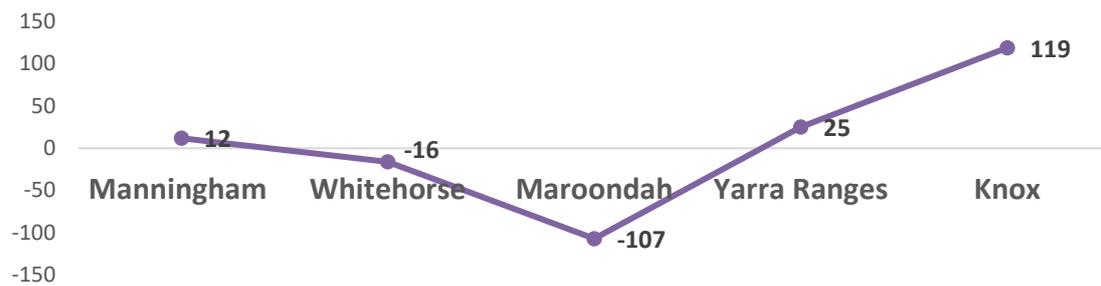


Knox experienced notable change between 2011 and 2016. First, the homeless population by 2016 had increased to 365 (+119 people). Figure 2 shows Knox had the greatest increase compared to the other Outer East LGA’S. The next highest was Yarra Ranges, with an increase of 25 people between 2011 and 2016.

Secondly, by 2016 Knox held the largest amount of homeless people compared to other LGA’s in the Outer East (ABS Census, 2016), only just outranking Yarra Ranges. Third, the rate of homeless people per population 10,000 increased in Knox between 2011 and 2016, from 16.5% to 23.7%. In 2016, Knox had the second highest rate of homelessness in the Outer East.

⁵ Knox Homelessness Profile 2018

Figure 2: Change in homeless population between 2011 and 2016 in the Outer East



The Salvation Army provides a rapid response service to homeless people in the Knox municipality and surrounding areas. This Service is under resourced and often there is a significant delay in response times. With a growing number of people rough sleeping in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) and a significant lack of housing services to refer clients to and existing services being underfunded, the community is looking to local governments for solutions. Uniting Harrison is the local Open Door housing provider for the Knox municipality. In 2018, Uniting Harrison’s Open Door Program moved to Glen Waverly, this presents accessibility issues for people experiencing homelessness as public transport to this area is not frequent or direct. Knox City Council’s has experienced an increase in people coming into Council seeking homelessness support since Uniting Harrison relocated. With limited options and insufficient State Government funding, some EMR Councils are providing funding to respond to homelessness and rough sleeping.

3.1 Social and Affordable Housing in Knox

Knox City Council has prepared a minimum supply of social housing formula. Defining social and affordable housing and a minimum supply of social housing for Knox is a methodology for meeting social housing needs (2014-2036).

A lack in supply of social and affordable housing is one of the leading causes of homelessness. Knox City Council has historically focused on social housing (as a sub-set of the broader affordable housing umbrella). Knox Council has calculated a minimum supply of social housing to be achieved over a time frame.⁶ This formula is calculated based on a target market defined as very low income households (in the lowest 10% of equalised household incomes, nationally calculated).⁷

The supply of social housing stock in Knox continues to be below the metropolitan average level of supply,⁸ Knox minimum supply (2016-2036) forecasts need for at least 860 social housing dwellings in Knox by 2036, this would equate to 43 additional dwellings per year over the next twenty years (2016-2036).

Table 1. Shortfall of social housing summary, Knox, 2016-2036	
Current (2016)	390
By 2021	530
By 2026	640
By 2031	750
By 2036	860

⁶ Knox City Council minimum supply of social housing, Knox (2014-2036)
⁷ Less the \$313 a week in 2011
⁸ Knox Council Minimum supply social housing (2016-2036)

Table 1.demonstrates the need for significant increase in social housing is required over time for those in the lowest 10% of household incomes exclusively. The chronic shortage in supply of social and affordable housing in Knox is in urgent need of attention.

3.2 Family violence

Family violence is one of the biggest drivers of homelessness, with a lack of supply of social and affordable housing a growing theme is that victims are making decisions to stay with the perpetrator because no suitable housing can be provided to them. Whilst the number of people disclosing family violence has increased, housing availability has decreased. In 2017-2018, family violence was the leading cause of homelessness in Victorian. Low levels of social housing means services are forced to refer women and children to hotels, through crisis accommodation and refuges rather than safe and secure housing.

3.3 Vulnerability

Whilst it is well established that anyone can become homeless regardless of socioeconomic circumstances, gender, age, cultural background etc., there are particular cohorts of people that are more at risk of acute homelessness. Many of these cohorts are extremely vulnerable and have experienced trauma at some point in their life therefore equally need safe and secure housing and medium to long term access to a range of other wrap around social and community services.

The vulnerability towards homelessness is particularly risky when people who live on the margins - such as those already on low incomes or short term employed – are further impacted by structural factors, such as unaffordable housing and inadequate supply of public housing (Hanover, 2018). Those at risk of homelessness are therefore people who are most vulnerable. Past and present data shows the homeless population comprises greater proportions of children and youth, people with a mental illness, recent migrants, refugees and asylum seeker, Indigenous people and women (Hanover, 2018; ABS Census, 2018).

Furthermore 2016 Census data showed 15% of those who were counted as homeless on Census night were born overseas and had arrived in Australian within the past five years. In addition, youth and young people made up a large proportion of the national homeless count,

- 60% of homeless people under 35 years of age.
- 42% of the increase in homelessness was in the 25 to 34 age group
- youth aged between 12 to 24 years made up 23% of those living in supported accommodation, and 16% staying temporarily in other households.⁹

3.3.1 Women aged over 55

In Knox and the broader community in Victoria, the number of homeless women aged over 55 has risen dramatically in the past year. This is due to a range of factors including rising housing unaffordability, higher rental prices and lower levels of superannuation combining to leave women unable to house themselves.¹⁰

⁹ Knox City Council Homelessness Social Profile, 2018

¹⁰ Council to Homeless Persons May 2018

3.3.2 Intersection of Mental Health and Homelessness

The Royal Commission (interim report) into Victoria's Mental Health System has revealed that more than one in six people who use public mental health services also access homelessness services. In consultation with local housing and mental health service providers in Knox anecdotal information confirms the intersectionality between these two crucial social issues. More than one in six people using public mental health services face homelessness. This highlights the tragedy of the revolving door that exists for people coming out of acute mental health care and into homelessness, and then back to acute care. The interim report has not identified the amount and type of housing required as a key element needed to provide proper care to people recovering from mental illness.¹¹

3.3.3 Ex-Prisoners

Prisoners (men and women) are exiting prison into homelessness. Research indicated that chronic homelessness, poverty and lack of support in transition back into the community and accommodation instability is a predictor of return to prison (Baldry, 2006). Currently, around half of the 10,780 people leaving prison each year, exit into homelessness (AIHW 2018). Reducing homelessness among prison leavers would reduce recidivism, prison spending and redirect funding into the supply of social housing.¹²

3.3.4 Out of Home Care

In Victoria 400 young people exit state care each year to independent living, and research shows that more than one third of these young people will experience homelessness in the first year. A lack of affordable housing is a major contributing factor. Aboriginal young people are particularly vulnerable and overly represented in out of home care. Post leaving care interventions are required to support the Young Person transitioning to independent living. Canada and UK have raised the age of Out of Home care to 21 years, this recommendation is also echoed by the CREATE Foundation, the Victorian Government could advocate for this at a federal level.¹³ Additionally, the CREATE Foundation (2016) reported significant concern regarding poor life outcomes post care in particular housing insecurity and homelessness.¹⁴

4. Summary of recommendations:

- Enhance knowledge about the characteristics of the homeless population in Knox, it could be beneficial to request local level data from ABS such as for gender, age, country of birth and Indigenous status this would illuminate the causes of homelessness;
- The provision of a well-resourced support program for people transitioning from acute mental health care, exiting prison, and Out of Home Care;
- Significantly increase funding to social and affordable housing and homelessness services to meet the demand;
- Provision of a universal approach to housing and homelessness services as well as addressing specific vulnerable population cohorts;
- Legislative change is required to raise the age of young people exiting Out of Home Care, to provide a safety net from homelessness;
- All levels of government contribute to the housing crisis through the increase in supply of social and affordable housing; and
- Housing is treated as 'infrastructure' and direct spending is allocated towards building social and affordable housing to meet the growing unmet need in Knox and across Victoria.

¹¹ The Royal Commission into Mental Health Services

¹² Council to Homeless Persons May 2018

¹³ Council to Homeless Persons June 2017

¹⁴ CREATE Foundation (2016) Out of Home Care in Australia: *Children and Young Peoples View of Out of Home Care*.