

## Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Mrs Ruth Payne

**Organisation Name:** Colac Area Health

**Your position or role:** Manager Family and Community Programs

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

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

Working in the health sector

**Are there any additional themes we should consider?**

Rights of Children being more protected within the homelessness system in relation to child specific services, greater advocacy and therapeutic supports

### YOUR SUBMISSION

**Submission:**

**Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:**

The opportunity for the South West homelessness sector to convene with the committee re what place based responses would look like within regional communities - might be outside the remit of the terms of reference

### FILE ATTACHMENTS

**File1:** [5e6ada5a1ce21-Submission to Parliamentary Homelessness Enquiry Feb 2020 from Colac Area Health.docx](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Ruth Payne



Submission to Parliamentary Homelessness Enquiry Feb 2020 from Colac Area Health

## **Introduction**

Colac Area Health is an integrated health service that delivers a diverse range of preventative, early intervention, secondary and tertiary health and community services.

Our Family and Community Programs team is an Orange Door access point seeing about 100 individuals per month, has a Family services team that delivers 11,542 hours of service a year to vulnerable families. Our homeless service which is a transitional support program for people who are homeless to transition to rental properties or public housing works with 53 families a year. Our Family Violence program works with 100 families per year.

## **Profile of COS**

COS has a population of 21,503 people and is a rural community that offers a regional and coastal lifestyle, low unemployment and significant tourism opportunities, value adding industries (like Bulla and AKD), significant agricultural industry of dairy, beef and sheep and proximity to Geelong and Warrnambool.

The challenges are poor public transport, high levels of disadvantage the township of Colac is within the bottom 5% of all Victorian towns in relation to social economic disadvantage. There are high rates of Family Violence 1424 incidents per 100,000 compared to 1165 State Average and CP substantiation rates are 16.8 compared to the state average of 11.4

Weekly personal income of \$570 is the lowest across the five local government area that form G21.

Homelessness rates is 0.3 compared to 0.4 for Victoria.

## **Changing scale and nature of homelessness**

### **Rental and mortgage stress**

In Our Shire the rate of mortgage stress is 11.6% compared to 10.2% for Victoria and median rents have increased significantly from median rent in 2016 of \$210 to \$270

The entry points for people that are homeless in our region are under severe stress with 400 households at any one time seeking homelessness support.

People seeking these services are often people not able to sustain rent and/or defaulting on mortgages. For our community there are a few affordable properties to rent. A google search today 6 February revealed 38 properties to rent in Colac 8 x2 bedrooms at median rent of \$270, 16 x2 bedrooms median rent of \$323 and 2 x4 bedroom median rent of 385. Guidelines are that households do not commit more than 30% of their income to housing costs so given our median

income of \$570 most people and all low income people could not afford any of these rents.

Additionally the regional allocation of HEF always runs out by the first week of the month so smaller rural communities cannot gain access to this funding.

Our Family Violence high rate of incidents also mean women and children experiencing family violence do not have access to local safe and affordable housing. No accommodation provider in Colac will offer crisis accommodation to women leaving family violence. There is no crisis accommodation so women and children have to leave the area disrupting family, friendship and other support networks, employment and education.

Our services are often paying huge costs to caravan parks for accommodation for women and children leaving Family Violence.

Social housing and crisis accommodation is an enduring need of our community. Our main social housing option is public housing 290 properties but these are ageing and not in good repair and have created areas of generational disadvantage.

### **Service System Overview**

The adult entry point is offered one day a week by a Geelong based agency and this is often a phone assessment.

On other days people need to go to Geelong – there are 4 trains a day or wait till the following week.

There is long delays in assessment being completed and there are no exit points for our clients eg crisis or social housing stock.

In times of staffing issues this one day a week service has been withdrawn.

Our agency hold an amount of PRAP funding and people are referred from the entry point but there is no additional funding to support a proper assessment and offer of case management to these people- often single men. Lately we have had 3 people a week referred for PRAP funding which is a limited resource. Again the lack of affordable rental impacts on how the PRAP funding can be used.

Our service model that has located our homeless staff with our Family violence staff has offered better integration of service planning for our clients but the homelessness role, is just one funded positions. We aim to offer timely case management and try to be flexible as we can in securing some accommodation option for our clients. However the last 12- 18 months has seen this to become more of a challenge.

### **Recommendations**

Our agency would recommend

- Expansion of social housing providers and a commitment to fund a minimum number new of social housing properties across Victoria. It is safe and affordable housing that will best address the system issues in the sector.
- Funding of crisis properties in regional communities.
- Locating satellite entry points that could relieve the demand on the bigger entry points like fund one in Colac for example, – this is a model that has worked with the Orange Door.
- More funding for existing entry points
- Fund training for entry points staff to be more skilled in holistic assessments and brief interventions
- More funding for case management.
- Provide training to the real-estate industry about the nature of family violence and its intersection with homelessness. Regionally 33 % of people seeking homeless services were leaving Family Violence.
- Establish regional governance structures that bring the homelessness sector into the family and community services systems to link up with AOD, mental health and Family violence.
- Offer more SHIP grants for Local government to explore social housing options of Council owned land.
- Extend HEF so other agencies can hold the funds regionally and increase the HEF allocation.
- Expand the FOYER program
- Support a national homelessness strategy so there is Federal and State government leadership and commitment to end homelessness. Finland did it.

#### References:

All references are from G21 Regional Profiles of Colac Otway Shire 2019