Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Mr Shai Diner

Organisation Name:
Your position or role:

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,Mental health,Indigenous people,Services,Rough sleeping,Family violence,Employment

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :
Working in Homelessness services ,Academic & research

Are there any additional themes we should consider?
Community Housing
Safety

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:
Rooming houses are unsafe environments that perpetuate homelessness and should no longer be a tenable option for housing. More housing is required for single people to ensure that individuals are able to regain a sense of trust in the world around them and progress out of their experience of homelessness. Please Refer to attached document for more detail regarding this inquiry.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: 5e6f36e25910d-Shai Diner. Inquiry into Homelessness Iin Victoria.docx
File2:
File3:

Signature:
Shai Diner

On the Changing Nature and Scale of Homelessness across Victoria

Rooming houses have been a key component of the housing sector for the last four decades, originally set up to house the working class, as well as single and married tradesmen or visitors to a city (Greenhalgh *et al.*, 2004). The 1960's and 70's period saw a large increase in people moving away from rooming houses to self-contained units (Archer, 2009), leaving rooming houses to become a place for economically marginalised populations. (Dalton *et al.*, 2015). This was further exacerbated by the de-institutionalisation of large institutions, resulting in an increase of rooming house residents to accommodate people leaving state care and the criminal justice systems (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Rooming houses, although originally regarded as stable accommodation, have become a central part of housing people who are experiencing homelessness.

Although rooming houses have been previously viewed in a positive light as providing a safe and suitable housing environment for people experiencing homelessness, the current research suggests that rooming houses are quite the opposite - unsafe environments, and in turn perpetuating homelessness. Rooming houses are still offered as part of the temporary housing continuum for people experiencing homelessness; however by keeping rooming houses in the mix, residents are experiencing unstable living environments by being moved from one homeless environment to another. Due to the limited number of rooming houses being upgraded to self-contained housing, these people have no option other than to be placed into rooming houses. The lack of upgrading rooming houses mainly occurs for two reasons: (1) difficulty in obtaining funds to upgrade rooming houses to self-contained units, (2) an organisational believe that rooming houses are the best housing for people who have experienced homelessness and people actually want to live in rooming houses. Although the latter point may be true for a select few of people, the research I have conducted, and my work experience in the industry for 5 years has suggested that this is not accurate.

It is also important to note that housing organisations often place people who are experiencing homelessness into rooming houses, whilst placing people who require affordable housing into self-contained units, resulting in people who need housing the most are missing out.

Rooming houses are unsafe environments that perpetuate homelessness and should no longer be a tenable option for housing. More housing is required for single people to ensure that individuals are able to regain a sense of trust in the world around them and progress out of their experience of homelessness. There is very little research into rooming houses and the problems that are associated with the rooming houses.

Below are three case studies of suggesting the problems that happen in rooming houses:

Case Study:

Reed – (Diner 2019)

Reed[1] is a 50-year-old male, who migrated to Australia in his late 30's. Strenuous work conditions and severe mental health concerns saw Reed lose his employment. Although he had some back-up money to help pay his rent, he eventually had to move out of his place because he could no longer afford it. After couch surfing for a year, he sought out alternative accommodation. He spent roughly two years in private rooming houses before contacting South Port Community Housing Group Inc

---

[1] Pseudonym used

(SouthPort). After living in a rooming house for a few months, he moved into a self-contained unit. *(Diner 2019)*

Reed experience of a rooming house indicates the reason they should not be considered housing and should be converted to provide more housing for single people that is safe and secure.

Reed explains, "*It's a very, very rough environment. And sometimes it only just takes one person to create that roughness. You know, when I was – we'd be getting along really well and then there's this one person who, for whatever reason, is disruptive, is a disruptive influence…. Our arguments are around shared facilities. So, it might be an argument around where food is being stored, for example, or it might be an argument around hygiene, like cleaning up after one's self, like the toilet, for example. Or it might be around the use of the laundry facilities. So, it's generally around shared facilities. "(Diner 2019)*

Reed goes onto to explain that there was a sever loss of dignity when using shared facilities, and that, because of their condition*, "I always remember the feeling of a lack of dignity around doing things just like going to the toilet, like having a shower, just because there was just no respect or concern for the cleanliness of the place by some people".* The inherent nature of shared facilities in rooming houses means that tenants must rely on other tenants' desire to maintain a similar standard of toilet cleanliness. A communal toilet, which is often shared with more than 10 other individuals, can make it difficult to have a set standard that everyone will meet. *(Diner 2019)*

Yet, he goes onto explain that having a self-contained unit is a much better options, *"I'm not sleeping on the streets. I'm not in a rooming house. I'm in a unit. I'm in my own unit, my own home. And while, you know, it's not the biggest place, but I have my bed, I have my kitchen, and I have my bathroom. And at the moment, that's what I really need."* (Diner 2019)

Emma (Diner 2019)
Emma, a 53-year-old female, did not have anywhere to go after experiencing the loss of her partner, so she sought accommodation in a rooming house. Emma was recounting her experience of living in a rooming house and the difficulty, *"on a whole, a lot of, like people would just walk in off the street. You never know who was there. Oh, a lot of drug dealing going on there, that sort of thing... You get up in the morning to go to the toilet or to have a shower and there might be syringes on the floor and the bin is tipped over, crap on the floor.* Not only is this a hygiene issue, it is also a safety concern." *(Diner 2019)*

After living there for over a year and experiencing negative emotions, she managed to secure a place at a self-contained unit at SouthPort, where she has lived since. For Emma, Southport has also become her home, *"Yeah. Well, it feels like home. These are the sort of things you do when you got your own place, pottering around, doing all those sorts of things. So, yeah, it makes it feel like home. The more homely, the better."* It has gotten to the point that Emma now leaves her door unlocked when she is in the building. Evelyn, who lives in the same building as Emma, feels the same, *"Not feeling like I've got a home, a home base or anything. So it was really nice to actually have a space of my own and finally, you know, just mind a place like home."* (Diner 2019)

Emma's story is a clear indication of how self contained units provide the stability, the control and the safety required to exit homelessness in a meaningful and clear manner.

Liam

Liam, a 60-year-old man, struggled to make friends and find work when he moved to Melbourne in his 20's. Without any supports, he moved around Melbourne and Victoria, living in different rooming houses, including eventually into a SouthPort rooming house. Although he planned to use SouthPort housing as a stepping stone to find accommodation with other people his age, he was not successful for a variety of reasons. After years of living with SouthPort, Liam got the opportunity to move into a one-bedroom apartment, where has lived ever since. Private rental was not possible for Liam and the affordable rent allows him to spend his money on other, important costs, as he indicates, "*the only costs I've got are basically rent, transport, food, and very, very occasionally, clothing will be an item I need to buy, or maybe something needs to be done to the car*". (Diner 2019)

Conclusion

To combat homelessness, we do not need more affordable housing. We need more social housing targeting at people experiencing homelessness – and all the demographic of people who are homelessness

- Single
- Young People
- Families
- Family violence leavers

The state government needs more community housing providers to provide for people experiencing homelessness.

The community housing model is a positive one, when it targeting to those most in need; rather than those on the affordably housing spectrum, whilst putting people experiencing homelessness into rooming houses.

References

Archer, T. (2009). A Short History of Today's Rooming Houses of Victoria. *Parity*, *22*(5), 35–36. Retrieved from https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=106121439119604;res=IELFSC

Dalton, T., Pawson, H., & Hulse, K. (2015). Rooming house futures: Governing for growth, fairness and transparency. *AHURI Final Report No.245*, *Melbourne*, Aust. Hous. Urban Res. Inst.

Diner, S. (2017). *Housing and Homes: Understanding social support and ontological security among South Port Community Housing Group tenants*. Melbourne.

Diner, S. (2019), *Home as a site of ontological security for people who have experienced homelessness: an exploration of community housing as a source of stability, control and safety.* RMIT University. Melbourne

Greenhalgh, E., Miller, A., Minnery, J., Gurran, N., Jacobs, K., & Phibbs, P. (2004). Boarding houses and Government supply side intervention. In *AHURI Final Report No. 54*. Melbourne.