

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Jolene Gailitis

Organisation Name: Triggs Advocacy group homelessness advocacy group/Chisholm Institute Frankston
Your position or role: Student

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

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

Academic & research , Concerned citizen

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Ex-offenders, people who have aged out of the foster care system

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Please see attached file for submission

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5ee188a2e69cb-Trigs advocacy group submission inquiry to homelessness in Victoria.docx](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Jolene Gailitis



8th June 2020

Parliament of Victoria
Legislative Council, Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE, VIC, 3002

PARLIMENTARY INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS

Dear Legal and Social Issues Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry. As first year students completing our Diploma of Community Services, we have been following the inquiry with great interest, not only for our professional education but as advocates for the community members we seek to work with in the future.

Our submission will briefly discuss each social issue in order of priority as identified by our group along with the recommendations we support. We have also identified additional vulnerable groups that we will address in conclusion.

- **PUBLIC HOUSING** – As many of the community organisations during the public hearings have identified, the estimated number of public houses needed is 6000 per year for the next 10 years in order to meet the current demands for public housing, this is not including the additional number of Victorians that may find themselves homeless due to the economic downturn caused by Covid-19. While the \$500 million package allocated to the upgrade of existing housing and building of new social housing is very much welcomed, there seems to be much more houses needed to meet these targets. According to the Victorian Public Tenants Association, as of November 2019 there were over 50,000 applications on the register with an extra 500 added each month. The average waiting times for priority housing is up to almost 11 months and non-priority can be up to 12 years. We feel this must be treated as a crisis by our State Government.

Recommendations-

- To pass the bill introduced by Samantha Ratnam to amend the Housing act (1983) to create a public charter of rights for public housing tenants and establish a public housing ombudsman.
- To consider using vacant units and apartments as interim accommodation for people on long public housing lists.

- To create legislation preventing the sale of public housing land for private profit
 - To advocate to the federal government the reallocation of recently announced grant funds allocated to private property owners home renovations to be used for public housing construction.
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- **HOUSING AFFORDABILITY-** Lack of rental properties on the market perhaps caused by many investment properties being used as air bnb and short-term rentals has driven up prices making private rentals unattainable to single people and Centrelink recipients. Rooming houses have been a lifeline to single men and students unable to obtain public or social housing, but these have also become unaffordable to many as well as being unsafe and in disrepair. Due to the unaffordability in private rentals many people have been unable to pay their rent resulting in evictions and breaching the Residential Tenancies Act, resulting in having their names added to a blacklist which prevents them from renting for many years making them extremely vulnerable to homelessness during this time. Many casual workers fall into this category with the gap between losing work and receiving government assistance taking up to six weeks can find themselves in rental arrears, evicted, blacklisted and homeless.

Recommendations-

- Improvement to rooming house legislation with capped rentals and greater protection for residents.
 - Faster processing for Centrelink benefits to protect tenants falling behind in rental payments.
 - Extension of rental arrears penalisation to match the gap in government assistance and avoid eviction and tenancy blacklisting.
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- **ROUGH SLEEPING** – Our local community of Frankston has been listed as a rough sleepers hotspot, identified by the government as part of the rough sleepers action plan launched in 2018, however despite the \$45 million package allocated to solving this problem, our own community has no emergency or crisis accommodation available to our homeless community. With the Covid-19 crisis, the government have provided emergency accommodation to thousands of rough sleepers across Victoria proving that the funds are available to support rough sleepers and could be allocated outside the pandemic for emergency accommodation. There is much concern for the rough sleepers across Victoria as to what happens after the pandemic has passed, as winter has arrived, it seems morally incomprehensible to allow rough sleepers to go back to their previous conditions. There is also the questionable issue of charging rough sleepers part payment for their accommodation while returning travellers in quarantine have their accommodation fully paid. We are also concerned about what sounded like a

wonderful initiative called the Sleep Bus. This initiative is a registered DGR and won the Telstra award for 2017 charity of the year. It has many corporate donors and continues to collect fundraising money from the Australian public yet is nowhere to be seen and can provide no evidence of having accommodated any rough sleepers.

Recommendations-

- More emergency and crisis accommodation for outer suburbs and regional areas.
- Extension of covid-19 emergency accommodation for rough sleepers until accommodation can be provided.
- Investigation of charities that fail to deliver on service and initiatives like the Sleep Bus to be taken up instead by government or funding delivered to a reputable not-for profit to implement and manage.
- **INDIGENOUS/FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE-** The committee would be aware of the inequity faced by first nations people in Victoria with Aboriginal Housing Victoria identifying that one in six Aboriginal people will experience homelessness in Victoria. In 2019, 17% of Aboriginal people in Victoria sought assistance from a homelessness service and almost half were already homeless. This is the highest rate in Australia. Around half of those requiring assistance were under 25. Our first nations people are overrepresented in the State system whether it be incarceration, youth detention, foster or State care. Those leaving the State Institutions without any support are at high risk of homelessness, with the risk of discrimination from landlords, employers and public being so much higher due to the stigma around first nations people. Homelessness for first nations people is intertwined with family violence, child removal, low educational outcomes, substance abuse, poor health and mental health and another example of the widening gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Recommendations-

- For the State government to deliver and continue its funding and support for the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework developed by AHV and ensure the policy remains led by First Nations people.
- Develop programs specified for first nations people transitioning from State institutions.
- Promote equality and respect for first nations people through government advertising and education.
- **Family Violence-** Frankston has also been listed as one the highest areas for family violence incidences for many years in a row according to ABS statistics. Women and children are a very high risk for homelessness in a family violence situation with many victims having little rental history or finances due to the controlling nature of the perpetrator of the violence and

faced with a choice of staying in a unsafe environment or risking homelessness along with their children. Without local emergency accommodation many victims who have no support networks or family to go to remained trapped in abusive and violent relationships.

Recommendations-

- More emergency and crisis accommodation in outer suburbs and regional areas.
- Counselling, rehabilitation, and support for the perpetrators of violence to break the cycle.
- Respectful relationship and gender equality education in every school curriculum.
- **SERVICES-** This inquiry has had many service providers identifying the gaps in service including the lack of funding available to hire more staff to keep better records of clients and to provide long-term housing to their clients and in the case of our local community this includes short-term accommodation. The enquiry has also revealed a unique opportunity provided by the Covid-19 response where many clients have been housed in the same area making a cross-disciplinary approach to care available from many different services. It has also been made apparent that telehealth services and non-contact consultations with many services have not been possible in the homelessness sector where face-to face contact is imperative to service delivery due to mental health issues, clients being uncontactable by phone and unable to travel to make appointments. With the closing of many Centrelink and welfare offices across Victoria this must be accounted for when considering service delivery.

Recommendations-

- More funding for outreach services.
- Funding for service providers to provide smartphones to their clients to keep them informed of appointments as access internet services and public health announcements.
- Establish a central database where service providers can share information.
- **MENTAL HEALTH-** Mental health is not something that can be overlooked in homelessness, whether mental health is the cause of homelessness in some cases, or the result of in other instances, people experiencing mental health issues are a very vulnerable group with complex needs and as identified by the hospitals and mental health services that have advised this committee with their submissions, there is a lack of transitional housing available for mental health patients being discharged and can lead them back where they started with no support. Rooming houses and social housing can sometimes be inappropriate for those experiencing poor mental health. Mental health for

those in rough sleeping situations can be dangerous for themselves as well as those around them.

Recommendations-

- More funding to mental health services
 - Mobile case workers making sure people sleeping rough are taking medication and are safe.
 - Early prevention measures worked into the school curriculum in early years.
 - Public education to remove stigma of mental illness.
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- **EMPLOYMENT-** Employment when you are already homeless can be near impossible without access to basic needs coupled with the discrimination from the public and potential employers. Lack of employment opportunities especially with older people who are competing with a younger workforce with up to date technical skills can be a contributing factor to homelessness. Casual workers are on the increase, replacing full time work and making many workers vulnerable to the market changes, particularly with seasonal work such as hospitality and tourism. Lack of full-time employment also makes it very difficult to secure a rental property or get a loan, leaving casual workers severely disadvantaged and the rise of unemployment following Covid-19 is set to rise as many businesses were unable to survive the pandemic.

Recommendations-

- More free training opportunities, especially targeted to older people to update skills
- Government funded traineeships for people experiencing homelessness.
- Government campaign with advertising to address the stigma of homelessness to help remove discrimination. Letting people who are homeless tell their stories.

The other vulnerable groups we identified were **ex-offenders** and people that had aged out of the **foster care system**.

Some recommendations to prevent homelessness in these groups were:

- Easing probation restrictions for ex-offenders to make gaining employment more realistic.
- Assistance with obtaining rental accommodation as both these groups are likely to suffer discrimination from rental agents and landlords.
- Incentives to employers to employ ex-offenders.
- Increase the age to 21 for out of State care young people and provide support to make the transition.