

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Kathleen Lovelock

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

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

Concerned citizen

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Welfare - keeping Jobseeker at COVID-19 rates

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

Victorian Inquiry into Homelessness

My name is Kathleen Lovelock and I am a sessional academic at the University of Melbourne and I am a concerned citizen as I know that homelessness is a serious concern for Victorians and the government is morally obliged to act to improve the situation for many vulnerable and marginalised individuals and families that deserve support.

Recommendations

- Public Housing accommodation (including SOMIH Accommodation) and support should be increased and tailored to individual needs, with more 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation available, to support vulnerable ATSI individuals and single parent families.
- Targets are needed to reduce ATSI homelessness by a designated percentage each year. This is required to address growing rates of homelessness and to break intergenerational patterns of trauma.[1]
- homelessness services should be accessible and culturally appropriate.
- The Victorian Government must increase social welfare Centrelink payments
- Homelessness, Family Violence and other extreme circumstances should be exemptions to meeting Centrelink Reporting Obligations
- Crisis accommodation should be more readily available for vulnerable ATSI experiencing domestic violence or other situations which might force homelessness.
- Initiatives should be introduced by the Victorian Government to reduce Domestic Violence in ATSI communities

Homelessness is a significant issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the Government has a responsibility to these individuals, as well as every person in the state.

Data suggest that each year 15%-18% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ('ATSI') Victorians may be experience homelessness or be at risk of homelessness.[2] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people only total 0.8% of Victoria's population, and are highly susceptible to homelessness.[3] In the three years up to 2018, homelessness among Victoria's Aboriginal community grew by 22% compared to 10% for other Victorians.[4]

Targets are needed by the Victorian government to aim to reduce homelessness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. This is required to address growing rates of homelessness and to break intergenerational patterns of trauma. [5]

Social and Public Housing

Lack of social and public housing

19% of ATSI households in Victoria currently live in some form of social housing,[6] however the demand for public housing is exceeding the availability. The Department of Health and Human Services stated that as 31 March 2018, the number of people on the Victorian Housing Register (public housing waiting list) was 82,499.[7] The shortage of public housing is an issue heavily affecting Victoria's ATSI population, given the large percentage of ATSI that reside in public housing. In addition to the large waiting list, 8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in urban Victoria are overcrowded, skewing homelessness statistics and emphasising the need for more available public housing.[8]

The Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program speculates that the failure of the Victorian Public Housing system to keep up with the demand of public housing is the result of a lack of investment in housing stock over years.[9] Victoria not only has the lowest level of social housing units per capita, when compared with other Australian states,[10] but also Victoria's per capita investment in social housing (\$82.94) is lower than all other states, and half the national average (\$166.93).[11]

To maintain current social housing tenure under the projected population scenarios modelled by Aboriginal Housing Victoria, an additional 1438 social housing units are required for Aboriginal households in Victoria by 2021, and an additional 5085 by 2036.[12]

Additional public housing must be built in order to satisfy the waiting list demand. Sufficient SOMIH homes must be constructed to help prevent the prevalence of ATSI homelessness and meet ATSI housing demands. More 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation must be constructed or made available, to support vulnerable ATSI individuals and single parent families[AM1] .

Income and Social Welfare should be increased for everyone, but in particular for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The median weekly personal income for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria is \$479,[13] compared to a median weekly personal income of \$644 for non-ATSI Victorians.[14]

As of the 2016 Census, 55% of Victorian ATSI were either unemployed or not in the labour force.[15] At this same time, 44.6% of ATSI Australians aged 15 and over were receiving some form of Centrelink income support payment, compared with 26% of non-ATSI Australians in the same age group.[16]

In 2017 Centrelink's Newstart recipient households were living \$124 a week below the poverty line.[17] The maximum rate of Newstart allowance for a single adult is currently \$279.50 per week, totaling less than 40 per cent of the current minimum weekly wage.

According to University of New South Wales research, a healthy minimum budget for single adult without children is \$434 per week, equaling \$96 more than Newstart allowance, Rent Assistance and the Energy Supplement combined in July 2017.[18]

The recommendations made in the 'Homeward Bound' Report, by the National Social Security Rights Network and Canberra Community should be followed,[19] ('Homeward Bound Report') that the Victorian Government lobby for Centrelink payment reforms including;

- a. An immediate raise to Newstart Allowance by at least \$75;
- b. An increase to Rent Assistance payments by 30%;
- c. That Newstart Allowance be indexed twice per year to wage levels and the consumer price index;
- d. The Family Tax Benefit should be increased for single parents with older children; and
- e. Single parents on Newstart should receive the same minimum \$75 increase as single people without children[AM2] .

ATSI homeless are some of the most vulnerable members of society and are also disadvantaged by the onerous reporting obligations placed upon welfare recipients.

Many homeless are experiencing mental health issues, illiteracy (including digital illiteracy), extreme poverty, poor health and other hardships impacting on their capacity to meet reporting obligations. The Homeward Bound Report found that of the 71 people who received Newstart or another payment, almost 20% struggled to maintain mutual obligations and lost access to their income despite vulnerabilities.[20]

Domestic Violence

Domestic and family violence remains one of the primary causes of homelessness, with 28% of Australian

ATSI reporting domestic and family violence as the main reason for their homelessness.[21] Domestic and family violence is also a huge and growing concern for non-ATSI women, with it being one of the primary causes of homelessness for women in Australia.

Intervention violence orders are commonly used to exclude males or perpetrators from family homes, As many male ATSI rarely had housing options and were effectively homeless once excluded, they often return to the family home despite intervention orders making the policy ineffective.[22] As overcrowding, poverty, unsafe living conditions and domestic violence are often inter-connected, ATSI women affected by violence may be hesitant to contact authorities due to fears of child removal. This fear is exacerbated by the historical intergenerational trauma associated with child removal for many ATSI parents.

AHURI (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute) state in their report, 'Improving Housing and Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence for ATSI Individuals and Families, ('AHURI Report') that ATSI women have very few housing pathways after experiencing domestic violence.[23] Acute shortages in crisis and transitional housing may often result in ATSI Women and Children being turned away from at-capacity refuges. The AHURI report further states that ATSI women and children continue to experience barriers to a model of care which acknowledges their difference, exacerbated by their reliance upon the social housing.[24]

Approximately 5 percent of the social housing in Victoria is short and medium-term accommodation under the crisis supported accommodation and transitional housing management programs.[25]

As domestic violence has been demonstrated as a primary cause for homelessness, I recommend the Victorian Government introduce initiatives to target and minimise domestic violence in ATSI communities[AM4] .

I urge the Victorian Government to use this information to act to support individuals experiencing homelessness, and those at risk of homelessness, as they have a moral obligation and responsibility to do so. Housing is a central tenet of a safe and happy life that we all deserve. To be a proud Victorian we must all be given the support required.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Kathleen Lovelock

[1] Aboriginal Housing Victoria, 'The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit' Analytics & Policy Observatory, (Report of Findings, April 2019) 17 .

[2] Aboriginal Housing Victoria, 'The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit' Analytics & Policy Observatory, (Report of Findings, April 2019) 17 .

[3] '2016 Census: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples QuickStats' Australian Bureau of Statistics (Website, July 2019) .

[4] Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 'Victorian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Homelessness' Council to Homeless Persons (Fact Sheet, 2019) .

[5] Aboriginal Housing Victoria, 'The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit' Analytics & Policy Observatory, (Report of Findings, April 2019) 17 .

[6] Louise Tierney et al, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: A focus report on housing and homelessness (Focus Report, 2019, Australian Institute of Health of Welfare) 35.

[7] Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program (Report, June 2018, Legislative Council: Legal and Social Issues Committee: Parliament of Victoria) 23.

[8] 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population 2016', Australian Bureau of Statistics (Website, July 2018)

[9] Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program (Report, June 2018, Legislative Council: Legal and Social Issues Committee: Parliament of Victoria) 19.

[10] Prof Tony Burke, Managing Victoria's public housing (Report, Victorian Auditor-General's Office PP No 254, Session 2014–17, June 2017) 18.

[11] Aboriginal Housing Victoria, 'The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit' Analytics & Policy Observatory, (Report of Findings, April 2019) 17 .

[12] Aboriginal Housing Victoria, 'The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Summit' Analytics & Policy Observatory, (Report of Findings, April 2019) 9 .

[13] '2016 Census: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples Quickstats', Australian Bureau of Statistics (Website, 12 July 2019) .

[14] '2016 Census Quickstats' Australian Bureau of Statistics (Website, 12 July 2019)

[15] '2016 Census: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples Quickstats', Australian Bureau of Statistics (Website, 12 July 2019) .

[16] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Australia's Welfare 2017' Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Australia's Welfare Series no. 13 AUS 214 Canberra AIHW, 2017) .

[17] Luke Henriques-Gomes, 'Households on Newstart have suffered 'dramatic' rise in poverty over 25 years' The Guardian (Article, 13 September 2019) .

[18] P Saunders and M Bedford, New Minimum Income for Healthy Living Budget Standards for Low-Paid and Unemployed Australians (SPRC Report, November 2017, Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW) 103.

[19] National Social Security Rights Network, Overview of Public Housing in the ACT – Homeward Bound (Report, Canberra Community Law, December 2019) 47.

[20] National Social Security Rights Network, Overview of Public Housing in the ACT – Homeward Bound (Report, Canberra Community Law, December 2019) 48.

[21] Louise Tierney et al, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: A focus report on housing and homelessness (Focus Report, 2019, Australian Institute of Health of Welfare) 54.

[22] Kyllie Cripps and Daphne Habibis, Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for ATSI individuals and families (AHURI Final Report No. 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, August 2019) 24.

[23] Kyllie Cripps and Daphne Habibis, Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for ATSI individuals and families (AHURI Final Report No. 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, August 2019) 1.

[24] Kyllie Cripps and Daphne Habibis, Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for ATSI individuals and families (AHURI Final Report No. 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, August 2019) 2.

[25] 'Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHHS)' Aboriginal Housing Victoria (Literature Review, 2018) .

[AM1]Public Housing accommodation and support should be increased and tailored to individual needs, with more 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation available, to support vulnerable ATSI individuals and single parent families.

[AM2]The Victorian Government must increase social welfare Centrelink payments such as Newstart

[AM3]

· Crisis accommodation should be more readily available for vulnerable ATSI experiencing domestic violence or other situations which might force homelessness.

[AM4]Initiatives should be introduced by the Victorian Government to reduce Domestic Violence in ATSI communities

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [See31dd24b518-Homelessnes Inquiry VIC ATSI.docx](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Kathleen Lovelock