

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Shepparton—Wednesday, 11 March 2020

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Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Enver Erdogan

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESSES

Mr Bryan Lipmann, Chief Executive Officer,

Ms Gayle Reeve, Regional Community Care and Outreach Manager, and

Ms Jane Barnes, Chief of Staff, Wintringham Specialist Aged Care.

The CHAIR: I am declaring open the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues, and this is a public hearing for our Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. I am sure I do not need to mention it, but could people please put their phones on silent—Committee Members in particular. Just a little bit of housekeeping before we start: as you can see, Hansard is recording this. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is provided under the standing orders of our Legislative Council but also under the *Constitution Act*. Therefore any information you give today is protected by law. However, any comment that might be repeated outside may not have that same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the Committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. We are recording, as I mentioned. You will receive a transcript of that. We encourage you to have a look at that and send it back, but ultimately it will go up onto our website. Of course I suspect it will form part of our report and, I suspect, part of our recommendations, but no pressure. If you would like to start with some opening remarks, and then we will get into questions. Thank you.

Mr LIPMANN: I realise that some of you know a fair bit about Wintringham, but maybe others do not.

The CHAIR: No, that is right.

Mr LIPMANN: Do you want to know our background at all?

The CHAIR: I think a quick background would be lovely, Bryan. Thank you.

Mr LIPMANN: Okay. In 1985 I started working at a homeless persons night shelter, which was in those days the largest night shelter in Australia. Jane came at almost the same time. Even though I had had a lifetime of working in the bush—shearing and slaughtering and jackerooing—I was not prepared for the amazing sights I saw at that shelter, where there was wanton violence and murders, rapes, but acts of great kindness and gentleness too. But nothing prepared me for it. And the fact it was within walking distance of the city was even more disturbing. I suppose it really impacted on me greatly, but to some extent I loved it. It was exciting, and I was only a young fellow.

It was when my parents got frail and sick and had to go into care that I saw how wonderful aged care was in this country. I naturally thought, ‘Why are my guys in the night shelter dying, often in appalling circumstances?’. And so I then tried to approach church and charitable aged-care services to take our guys. As some of you know, I am a reasonably forceful fellow. I did not make one placement. Not one church or charitable organisation took one of my 150 aged-care residents. So with the impetuosity of youth and the support of some terrific people, I left and set up Wintringham for the sole purpose of looking after the aged, frail homeless men and women. That has grown now quite considerably. We are now the largest in the country, in Australia. We have about 700 staff. We have a range of six aged-care facilities, including a nursing home—the only nursing home for homeless people in Australia, maybe even in the world. We have about 600 aged-care packages or home-care packages now—no, about 800 now; it has grown. We have about 600 or 700 housing units. We are about to start a major development in Tasmania—also here in Shepparton, which I can talk about later and which is a really exciting project.

Throughout the journey of Wintringham we have not deviated at all. We still are a social justice non-religious organisation working with elderly homeless men and women. Any service they need we try to deliver, and if we cannot, we broker it in. That is a summary of Wintringham, unless you want any more information about it.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Gayle, did you want to make any opening comments, or Jane?

Ms REEVE: Not at this stage.

The CHAIR: Great. Maybe just before we get into questions, though, you would like to speak just a little bit specifically about the Shepparton project, because it has been mentioned in previous submissions.

Mr LIPMANN: I think that one of the things that I would like to mention is in the first paragraph or two of our submission, and I would really ask you to direct your attention to this. What we offer the State Government, or whoever is in power, is really an amazing deal: we say that we will look after the aged homeless entirely with Commonwealth funds. That is a big deal. As a result of Wintringham's negotiations with government over a long period, literally hundreds of millions of dollars have flown from aged care to the homeless sector. Now, how we do that is we have to provide the housing, and the housing almost always has to be funded not by the Commonwealth but by the State or sometimes I can get some philanthropy. But the point I am trying to make is that for a relatively minimal amount of capital investment at the start and some supports—well, supports is a major issue, but some of the supports can come from elsewhere—we then support those people until death with Commonwealth funds.

I was recently at the aged care royal commission, and I told the people I have 1500 people over the age of 50 on my housing waiting list. In a country as wealthy as this it is just a disgrace: 1500 people over the age of 50 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and, significantly, there are people here in Shepparton in the same place. Now, all of those people will prematurely age because they will not have the housing and the support and the love and the safety and security that my mum had, so therefore they will enter the aged-care system early, creating, apart from the pain to them, a drain on the economy. I do not think there would be any homeless worker in Australia who would say anything other than, 'We need more housing'.

Ms LOVELL: Hear, hear!

Mr LIPMANN: And while it is distressing, I would have to say governments have not funded it. They have not funded it. The only significant funding we had was a one-off stimulus funding under Rudd, and we built about \$33 million worth of housing, and, significantly, 36 here in Shepparton. But short of that, in my entire 35 years of doing this job virtually no capital funding has come in at all. That is why we have got this problem now of massive street homelessness. While it is distressing to see young people on the streets, for me it is much more distressing to see elderly frail people on the streets.

The CHAIR: I could not agree with you more, Bryan. I will kick off asking some questions. I must say, the 'till stumps' motto that you have got, I nearly cried just reading that. What is interesting is that your definition of an older person is not the State definition, it is not the Federal definition. Now, you have been very successful, obviously, with the Commonwealth in arguing for that younger definition. Have you been as successful with the State in arguing that in the funding models you are providing aged care to someone who does not necessarily fit the definition of aged care under a State model?

Mr LIPMANN: It is not really relevant. Most of the funding for aged care comes from the Commonwealth. The State, we have programs here, including here. But, no, we have never had a major problem with the age.

Ms BARNES: No, but we are running into some now with the introduction of NDIS.

Mr LIPMANN: No, that is Commonwealth.

Ms BARNES: Yes, but the shift for under-65s is purely the State responsibility now, not the Commonwealth responsibility. So we are starting to ramp up our work to ensure that—Bryan has been doing a lot of work about younger people in residential aged-care homes. I guess we would be looking for the State to ensure the continued support of our outreach programs for those under 65—that continues—that the Commonwealth will not pick up.

Mr LIPMANN: It is a really good point that Jane is making. When we established Wintringham the age group was essentially expected to be 65, and we argued that premature aging exists because of homelessness. We rode in on the back of the Koori argument and were successful. So for 30 years we have taken people who are 50 and above, provided they have prematurely aged. I chose 50 because I was only in my 30s and 50 seemed an awful long way away.

Mr BARTON: I am a bit concerned now. I am on the wrong side of 50.

The CHAIR: Believe me, it was difficult to read.

Mr LIPMANN: Well, I am not looking forward to getting to 50, I tell you that.

The CHAIR: Well, I stopped at 37.

Mr LIPMANN: Good on you, mate. Well done. So now we have the situation because of the great benefit of the introduction of the NDIS. I am not criticising it at all, but it has made our life much more complicated because now when we have got someone who is under 65 the Commonwealth refers them through to NDIS. So then we have to try and negotiate that, and, as Jane says, it is complicated because of inter-jurisdictions, but we are working on it.

Ms BARNES: I think the other thing is—you might have picked up through all the media around the royal commission—that the pathway and the gateway into aged care is really complicated. So to add another level of complication to get through the NDIS, which is that insurance framework gateway, to have to get through that before you even get looked at by Commonwealth aged-care services.

Mr LIPMANN: And the other problem about it is that whereas my mum sat at home waiting for the approval to enter aged care, our guys are out in the streets and so we cannot find them sometimes. So we lose them. The consequence has been that while the bureaucracies are grappling with this—which category does it fall into?—we either lose our guys or they can die. It is more than just an inconvenience.

The CHAIR: It is life and death.

Mr LIPMANN: It is a significant issue.

Ms LOVELL: I am really interested in what you are doing here in Shepparton. So I would really like to hear a little bit more about the new development here and how that is being funded and if there is anything that you need from the State to assist.

Mr LIPMANN: Yes—to all of that. Well, as you know we took over the Miller homes, which you had some involvement in, and through many reasons in Victoria we now have, I think, 36, is it?

Ms REEVE: I think so. I will just check it, and yes.

Mr LIPMANN: Thirty-six units we have built on Maude Street. We did have a problem, even though we are doing housing and outreach home care, which is what to do with guys who are getting older and frailer. That was a continuing problem. Around about this time the nurses federation gave me \$2 million, which I have to say must be almost the greatest compliment Wintringham has ever had. For a union to give an employer money is pretty spectacular. So I was pretty amazed. It was quite thrilling. So I took that \$2 million and I went to the Ian Potter Foundation and they pledged \$2.5 if the State Government pledged \$5.5, and Martin Foley signed that off. So we got that \$10 million. Then I took all of that money up to Canberra and said, 'I want some aged-care beds and capital to build that and licences'. They eventually gave us \$5 million for that and 20 licences. The end effect is that you are going to have on adjacent land which we have now purchased in Wyndham Street an additional 24 beds and 20 aged-care beds. So we now have a way to care for people till stumps. The great news for Shepparton is that it has not cost you a zack; we have totally self-funded it. But in return we do need support. When I say 'support', I do not mean Wintringham needs support—we always like to get it—but basically we need funding to enable our workers to look after our guys.

The aged care is funded through the Commonwealth. Those workers—the nurses and the personal care workers—that is all funded through the Commonwealth, but the housing is not. For the housing we need a support worker. It is not expensive, but we need a support worker to work under our managers, Gayle Reeve and Dee Henley, to support those people living in the house. The level of life experiences and disability our guys have—it is not possible just to give them a room and say, 'See you later'. Some people need intensive support almost daily, others only occasionally. Get Gayle started on this, she will not stop. It is just endless problems.

The CHAIR: Yes, we are going to get to Harry in a second.

Ms LOVELL: Bryan and Jane have such vast experience in night shelters—Bryan in the old Gordon House, Jane with the time at the Salvos. There have been some suggestions along the way of things that could be done immediately to get people off the riverbank and into somewhere to sleep—things like sleeping in church halls, opening up church halls and things like that, which sounds on first value a good solution, but can you give us an insight into whether that would be workable or what problems you might see with it?

Ms BARNES: Are you happy for me to field that one first?

Mr LIPMANN: Yes, absolutely. You go first.

Ms BARNES: Okay. Look, street homelessness and rough sleeping—I mean, it is incredibly visual, and it impacts on you. Your immediate response is, ‘We’ve got to do something about this. So let’s open up something. Let’s do something. Let’s feed them. Let’s bring in a bus. Let’s do whatever we can to create a sense of support and safety for people’. The problem with opening and doing things like that is it does not solve the problem. It is a bit of a bandaid, but it is not even a whole bandaid, if you like. Because once you put people into a night shelter or whatever, you have still got to find an exit point, you have to find support, you have got to keep them safe. In any sort of congregate environment, particularly with the levels of complexity of needs that we have with people who have got maybe alcohol issues, drug dependency issues, mental health issues, putting them into a congregate environment—and when you say something like a hall, which is not even purpose built for the job—it creates even more problems, particularly around safety and security.

But the other thing, I think, that we have found—nearly 30 years in here, and 25 years with the Salvos—is that the things that worked were our permanent solutions. So you probably have heard a lot already about HousingFirst, and certainly about Melbourne Street to Home, which I was heavily involved in at the beginning. And when that was first funded, the first year we got 50 homes and we actually managed to house 50 people. And, you know what, two years later more than 80 per cent—it might even have been nearly 90 per cent—were still housed. It was permanent housing with support. You have got to have the support, you know. When we do a crisis response and we do a short-term response we are still not tackling what is the actual problem, which is finding that permanent housing solution. In fact we create a whole lot of other problems along the way—community exhaustion, if you like, too, so the surrounding places from the church or the crisis centre. You get a lot of neighbourhood angst around who is there and how you are keeping them supported.

When we had firstly the Gill and at Flagstaff, 50 per cent of our workers’ time was spent outside working with the people who were hanging around other than those that were actually housed. And at one stage we had to completely refocus our model because we had 64 beds at Flagstaff but we were turning away something like 80 people a day—and the effort that goes into that. So when you create something like that, Wendy, what happens is you bring them in. I get that that does not actually solve the immediate problem of people sleeping rough, but we have to have an aggressive long-term view—one that says we invest heavily now in housing and in supporting those people who are in their housing and keeping them housed. There was an incredible statistic that recently the Council to Homeless Persons came across, where something like 80 per cent of people that are going to an access point are already in housing. So an immediate investment to keep them in their housing—that deals with some people that are coming into the system. Then those that actually hit the system: that we have that longer term, assertive—what can I say—kind of really, really intensive, I guess, approach to getting them housed and keeping them housed.

Mr BARTON: Absolutely. There is no argument here about aggressive getting people in homes—do whatever we need to do. But I do have a different view. I have got a family member who lives in Bairnsdale, who works in welfare. Funnily enough, I already knew about this story. It is a father who is living on the bank with his five kids. Those kids had been pulled out of school. The father has had mental issues. Surely bringing them inside so they can have a shower, they can be washed, they can be fed and getting those kids off to school is better than them staying on that riverbank.

Mr LIPMANN: I have just had a long conversation with the Lord Mayor on exactly the same issue. She wants to do the same thing in Melbourne, so it is a common response. The Pratt family wanted me to build cardboard shelters.

Mr BARTON: None of us like this stuff.

Mr LIPMANN: I have had people who have wanted to go out and bring portable showers into the city. I have had people who wanted to distribute sleeping bags. All of them are good people who want to do something. I totally agree with you. The problem is though that, as Jane said, it just does not work. Between Jane and I, it is frightening to think of it—we have done 70 years in shelters or in homelessness. You know, I am just pleading with you: take advice. When I want to build a house I am going to employ an architect because he knows more about it than I do. Take advice. Crisis shelters are terrible places. People are so vulnerable. Kids who go into those types of places do not travel well for the rest of their life, I can promise you that.

Mr BARTON: What do we do with them?

Mr LIPMANN: There is one other thing I can say to you. I told a Prime Minister, when he came to Wintringham, that we have no recidivism. Now, that is an amazing statement. I do not think any homeless organisation in the world can say that. Maybe they can, but anyway, I can. So recidivism is like in jails—it is rotating door, and all the night shelters, the crisis ones, have recidivism. That is what they do—they rotate people out. I made a pact with myself when I started Wintringham that I would never do transitional housing and I would never do that type of stuff. Every one of our guys comes off the streets in the most appalling circumstances. We have had people flyblown. You know, you cannot even begin to imagine what must have happened—regularly raped, whatever—but at Wintringham they go straight into permanent housing, and Gayle and her magnificent staff care for them. Now, it is not a quick answer, and that is your problem and I appreciate that. The trouble with the argument that, for example, the Lord Mayor is giving to me is that it sucks money out of the system—you know, to do something, what she is talking about. And she is good woman—I admire her. I think what she is trying to say, it is coming from the heart, and she is obviously getting a lot of pressure from local traders. But there is so little money in homelessness, so little money, and these types of projects suck it out. We cannot get the money out of philanthropy for permanent housing because it has gone to these crisis projects, because it is such a seemingly well-meaning approach.

There is one other statistic that Jane gave me about Ireland versus Finland. I might ask you to repeat that one.

Ms BARNES: There was a study done: Ireland, Finland, Denmark and the different approaches that people took to solving homelessness. Finland took a long-term approach, and it was about building housing and social housing. I am going to leave Denmark out because they were kind of right in the middle. Ireland took an approach about investing because they had that really visual ‘There is this family, five kids. What are we going to do? We need to do something now’. So they invested at the crisis end. At the end of a 10-year study, Ireland’s homeless population had grown 10-fold, or something like that, and Finland’s had reduced to almost nil. They have one 30-bed shelter in the whole of the country now. So whilst it does not deal with that situation that you talked about—that very real, very visible, very emotional situation in Bairnsdale—what it does show is that we have to start somewhere, and if we do start somewhere and we do invest and we do invest with a long view about, ‘This is what we’re going to aim for’, which is that zero homelessness, it works, you know. So I think there is, for me, nothing more powerful than the evidence that sits with those two countries with their massive investments, and Ireland’s investment is still going up because they are having to still deal with the sheer volume of people who are coming into homelessness because housing is still unaffordable. You know, they do not have a social housing infrastructure and they do not have the support mechanisms.

Mr BARTON: I absolutely agree with you. I could not agree with you more.

Ms BARNES: I know you do. I can see that.

Mr BARTON: But the frustration for me—I have got five kids living on a riverbank and they are not safe.

Ms BARNES: That is what we are saying to you. We cannot guarantee their safety in a hall or in a shelter. I mean, kids are so vulnerable. At Gordon House we had 10 family rooms. Bryan and I were just talking about this the other day. One of the first things that we would do when a woman came in with children was sit her down and let her know the danger of the environment—how important it was for her children to never, ever be left alone. And as Bryan said, it really scars. It is not an experience that you would ever do. So we need to be creative around: how do we deal with that immediate homelessness? We need to be thinking about our Housing Establishment Fund, our emergency accommodation purchases. I think we can learn a lot out of the work that

has happened through the family violence initiatives and the private rental assistance programs, and that is where we need to crank it up so that your family of five and those kids are safe.

Mr LIPMANN: You really would be doing a lot better if you pushed and lobbied both government and prospective—

The CHAIR: And bought them a house.

Mr LIPMANN: The answer is going to come from the house. I remember having vigorous discussions with you when you were a Minister, Wendy, about how many savings can be made in welfare. Really, I said, 'We've pruned that'. We are running pretty efficient organisations now. They may not have been 30 years ago, but they really are now and there is no further pruning to be made. What we need is a massive investment. I was saying to the Chair just a few minutes ago: in my life, I think this homelessness is an issue that has galvanised the concern and the worries of Australia the equivalent of, say, the Vietnam War. Maybe let us see how long the coronavirus scares people, but almost every family has been affected in some way through homelessness. We have all got these horror stories, and yet Victoria's is the lowest spending on public housing and Australia's spending on public housing is a disgrace compared to overseas countries. It is a disgraceful banner that can be shared across the political spectrum.

Ms LOVELL: What we need is a response that produces an outcome for the individual, not a response that makes people feel better because we are not seeing people sleeping outside the 7-Eleven on Bourke Street.

Ms BARNES: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: We will just take that as a comment right now. I am just conscious of time, and I am conscious that Kaushaliya had some questions.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Bryan, Gayle and Jane, for your presentation. Bryan, you mentioned about aged care getting the funding from the Commonwealth Government, but you also mentioned that you got it from Ian Potter, Australian nursing and midwifery and others, and the State Government. Is that the first time that the State Government has given money for aged care?

Mr LIPMANN: No, the State Government did not give it for aged care, the State Government gave it for the housing. The Commonwealth gave it for aged care.

Ms VAGHELA: Okay, for the housing. So this sort of partnership—has that happened for the first time?

Mr LIPMANN: No, it has happened before. We have built a nursing home under a complicated arrangement. Generally speaking, though, the housing services are funded through State, and the Commonwealth funds aged care.

Ms VAGHELA: So the partnership between local government, State Government the Commonwealth and private organisations—do you think there is a future that way?

Mr LIPMANN: Yes, I think there is. I mean, that is my job really—to stock the shelves, and I do that by brokering money from a wide range of services. The days of just going into one government department and winning them over and you walk out with \$20 million are long gone. So if you need 10, they might give you 2. So then I have got to go to the next person. It is funny—my dad used to build tiny little plastic toys that used to be in Kellogg's cornflakes. Remember all those little—

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LIPMANN: Everyone knows them. Dad did that. He sold it to all around the world. One day I was going through terrible frustration and I said to him, 'How long does it take you to build a factory?'. He said, 'Oh, don't talk to me'. He was European; he was Viennese. 'Don't talk to me—forever. By the time I buy the land, get a design, get a builder—it could be nine, 10 months'. It takes me nine years to do a job—seven to nine years. I do not think I have ever done anything much quicker than that, because it just takes so long. It only takes a year and a half to build. It takes that long to get your permits, to raise the funds.

Mr BARTON: Sorry, Bryan. Could you just tell me about the numbers for the demand again—how many people you have got waiting.

Mr LIPMANN: Our figures do now allow us to break down to Shepparton, but for Victoria we have got 1500 people over the age of 50 waiting on a housing list. So presumably that is pretty well everybody in this room who could be homeless or at risk of homelessness. So they are couch surfing. The other thing I was—

Mr BARTON: You are assuming I am over 50.

Mr LIPMANN: Yes, I am. The interesting thing is when I started Wintringham—and Jane was around at that time—it was for street people. It was for really hardcore homeless people that had lived for a long time on the streets and had a variety of afflictions, whether it was drinking. Not so much drugs in those days—it was starting to happen. There was certainly a lot of smoking, a lot of brain injury—a lot of difficult people. And of course we still do that. We probably do it more than we ever did. But we also now are getting a huge number of people who do not give any indication that they are homeless. Something has just happened to them. The husband has died or the wife has died or they have been kicked out of home or they have got sick; they lost their job. There are so many things.

It really came home to me—I was at Maryborough. We have got some housing at Maryborough, and we had given five women a house. They were pretty excited, and they decided to put on a morning tea for us. So I went up there and we had a lovely time. And I looked at these ladies and I thought, you know, ‘Wintringham’s losing it. These people are not homeless’, but because they had come a long way from Melbourne to Maryborough, I sat a long time with them, and I had a good talk to every one of them. Every one of them was homeless—every one, even though they did not look it. They looked just like us. They were all nicely presented. They had put on a dress and lippy and whatever. But every one of them had been couch surfing or, in one case, even discharged from the local hospital with cancer and still with nowhere to live. One woman had been sleeping in the park, but most of them had just been sleeping on couches of friends or kids, and they do not look homeless. So this is the new wave that is coming through—and it is not just Wintringham—and increasingly with women, which is now getting a lot of publicity.

Mr BARTON: It is not just the over 50s too; we have got this new working poor now, where you can actually have a job and not be able to afford to pay your rent.

Mr LIPMANN: Yes, that is right. Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: Can I just turn to that ongoing support that you provide, which really is quite magnificent. Reading those case studies—and Gayle and I just had a quick chat about Harry before—that really intensive work, I can see how that does not necessarily fit into any funding models that exist today. I had two questions. One was: what proportion of your bottom dollar is used in that really intensive support work that you need for your clients? And also, you are making your recommendations: ‘funding must enable flexible periods of case management support for as long as is needed’—obviously, and you have some excellent examples of that. So I am wondering if you have got any ideas on how we might word that or how Government might word that in its funding models. Because you are not the first person to say this, and obviously your examples have been great. So, yes: how much do you spend on it, and how would we word that?

Ms REEVE: That is tough.

The CHAIR: I am just asking if you could just write the report for us!

Mr LIPMANN: The key thing is it goes back to, I guess, almost this trust issue. We need to be able to devote enough time to a client that we think is needed and not according to a program or regime. So we have all got instances where 2, 3, 4 hours of intervention pretty well solves the issue and that person is never seen again. They had a blip. They needed someone to get them over that blip.

The CHAIR: To help navigate.

Mr LIPMANN: Yes. Then we have got other people who are going to need that amount of care per day for the rest of their life, and there is no getting around it. Once upon a time they would have been locked up in wards. Thankfully we do not do that now, but there is a cost to that. So it has to be flexible funding.

Ms BARNES: It is the individualised approach—very much so. Homelessness assistance funding in particular has usually been timed. It has been: three-month is your short term or your crisis, and then six-month for your transitional. You are supposed to turn people over and, you know, people do not work like that. Particularly we are seeing more and more people who have the complexity of needs that comes from being in the child protection system and in the juvie justice system, and everything else that goes along with that. I mean, they are not people who you can, as Bryan said before, house and leave. So I think there is some reform work that is going on that is starting to really look at homelessness assistance being individualised in its approach and being able to be tailored to needs. I think some of the stuff that we saw through the rough sleeper task force around permanent supportive housing, that is pretty much what Wintringham does. I guess the challenge for the over 50s—and it comes back to the question around the Commonwealth-State demarcation—is that HACC used to be the funding that the State was administering that would enable some of that support to be provided to the under 65s. But it was not the time-limited support that the homelessness assistance funding had always been. We would be mighty keen to see the sort of home support—the practical, roll your sleeves up and ‘How do you actually keep maintaining it now?’. You can have your case workers and your social workers coming in and out if there are crises or if there are things that need to be dealt with. But with some people it is just: come in.

I think the other thing is a lot of the people that we work with do not have a lot of family support. It is very evident in our resi aged-care facilities. Our costs are expensive because we do not have daughters to come in and take mum or dad off to the appointments—all those sorts of things. It is the same in our housing. There are no family or those sorts of familial supports that enable people to keep their homes and stay home.

Mr LIPMANN: One of the things that I would also like to say is that there are certain areas in welfare—and do not misunderstand this—that are more mature than others. I think youth homelessness is relatively immature, only in the sense that we do not really have a model, although I have heard some people say they have got a model. I do not know whether it really works. So it is a developing process. And there are certain other areas within welfare that are somewhere along the spectrum of mature-immature. The aged homeless is an extremely mature segment because we actually have demonstrated—and probably not just us; I can only talk about Wintringham—that we have a mature system. From the time that one of Gayle’s outreach workers finds an elderly homeless woman or man I can pretty well guarantee that we can care for them until death.

The CHAIR: And how long will it take you from when Gayle’s team finds that person to put them into maybe some permanent housing?

Mr LIPMANN: Housing? Well, I mean, it depends on how many vacancies we have got.

Ms BARNES: They are struggling at the moment.

Mr LIPMANN: But we actually have a model. What I am trying to say is that one thing I have noticed over doing the job for an awfully long time is every time you get a change of government, they want a new model—something new, bright and sparky so they can tear up this one: ‘That’s a terrible idea. We’re going to have this one’.

Mr BARTON: Something shiny and bright.

Mr LIPMANN: It often looks pretty similar to the other one.

The CHAIR: I am an op-shopper really.

Mr LIPMANN: What I am saying is that we actually have some systems that work, and what I would be arguing is: look at what we are doing in Shepparton. It started off with what they used to call a homeless innovation action project. Why isn’t that replicated? Why haven’t we got one in every region? Why haven’t we got one in Gippsland—

Mr BARTON: Why haven’t we, Bryan?

Mr LIPMANN: Well, we never got funded for it. I mean, we were told: ‘This is a great model. We want to roll it out’. Well, it never happened.

Ms LOVELL: But two of those innovation action projects continue here in Shepparton—yours and the STAR housing one.

Mr LIPMANN: Yes, terrific. But why didn't we take this model that works and take it over to—

Ms LOVELL: Because I am no longer Minister, Bryan.

Mr LIPMANN: No, not you. I will take for granted that you were going to do it, all right? I mean, there are all parts of Victoria we could be rolling it out into. I think that is the real issue.

Ms REEVE: Can I just add in there: just to give a bit of context, I have worked in homelessness now for over 30 years. I have worked in family homelessness; I have worked in family violence. And when I came to Wintringham I saw the model of flexible support, housing support, and I am thinking, 'Why aren't we doing this everywhere?'. It supports people into housing. It is respectful, it gives people dignity and it supports people right through. And it prevents a re-entry into homelessness, and I can say that in all confidence. And, can I say, it is a really cheap model really because it actually is cost savings in so many ways. But it works. And it is kind to people, and it gives people the dignity and respect that they deserve. I am very proud to actually be able to be working for Wintringham.

The CHAIR: Yes. I think those are absolutely beautiful words.

Mr LIPMANN: Can I make one more—

The CHAIR: Well, yes, but Gayle's was pretty good, Bryan.

Mr LIPMANN: I am not going into Gayle's area. I want to go into housing because you are aware that there are housing associations in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Oh. Sorry, yes, I did want to ask you that question. Go on.

Mr LIPMANN: I knew you were going to.

The CHAIR: I actually had it written down.

Mr LIPMANN: The Victorian Government—successive governments—have looked at housing associations as being the growth vehicles, and they pretty well rely on what they call leverage. So an organisation has to contribute 25 per cent of the funds, and then the State Government will contribute the balance of 75 per cent. We are a housing association. We are the only housing association working with the aged exclusively. That model does not work for us because we do not do debt. The reason we do not do debt is we do 100 per cent homeless people, and you cannot make enough money to service a debt. I cannot go to the bank and borrow 50 million bucks because I cannot service that debt. I can if I am in an ordinary form of housing or even social housing, but I cannot do it in the housing I do. Successive ministers—we have pleaded with them. When you are setting up these standards of leverage for housing associations, there has to be some recognition there are some organisations—Aboriginal housing is another one—which concentrate entirely on a specific client group which does not service the debt. You do not make enough money to service the debt.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Bryan, and I did have a note. Do you want to tell us how much that is? Because you have said in your recommendations you request a discrete capital funding pool that needs to sit there.

Mr LIPMANN: Oh, I don't want a lot—you know, a billion or something like that.

The CHAIR: A billion? Excellent. Thank you. You seem like the sort of guy who will share as well.

Mr LIPMANN: In all seriousness, I have got 1500 people on my waitlist. That is going to take me half a billion dollars, without land.

The CHAIR: I think it is really interesting. We will ask the same question, I think, when we talk to some of the Aboriginal housing organisations about that funding pool. The connection between the Aboriginal community, the synergies that you have kind of mentioned throughout this, maybe there is something there—that there are some distinct cohorts that need a slightly different model.

Mr LIPMANN: I would only ask you: if you would make a recommendation like that, you should ensure it is quarantined.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LIPMANN: Because there is a great problem. If there is just a pool of funding, then organisations who have better connections or maybe just luck or whatever, they will end up accessing it. You should identify what that money should be used for and then quarantine it so it can only go to those organisations that are genuinely going to address the issue that you have identified.

The CHAIR: Or you have identified.

Ms LOVELL: Hear, hear!

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. That is really inspiring—love your work. If you would not mind also, Gayle: if you do see Betty or Harry or any of the case studies that you have provided in here, if you could pass on our regards. It was really wonderful to read their stories.

Ms BARNES: We actually have one of our clients coming in for the consultation with the community session at 4 o'clock.

The CHAIR: Oh, fantastic.

Ms BARNES: So, yes, hopefully she will be able to speak to some of that experience.

The CHAIR: Hearing about George's story, I mean—

Ms REEVE: And as I sort of had said to Fiona: sadly, we could provide dozens of these case studies for people that we are working with right now. They are individual stories, individual journeys, that need that individual response and flexibility. But, sadly, that is just a typical case study of the people we are seeing, and that is quite sad really.

Ms LOVELL: It is.

Mr LIPMANN: Can I also return the compliment. You guys have shown a lot of real interest. I have done a lot of these over the years and sometimes the committees have not been totally engaged. But you guys are, so thank you.

The CHAIR: Yes, thanks, Bryan. Thank you very much. I think you actually got a cheer in the back as well, so well done.

Ms LOVELL: Hear, hear!

Witnesses withdrew.