

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Epping—Thursday, 27 February 2020

MEMBERS

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Mr Rodney Barton

Ms Georgie Crozier

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Enver Erdogan

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESSES

Ms Jo Smith, General Manager, Support Services South, Haven; Home, Safe; and

Mr Quinn Pawson, CEO,

Mr Paul Turton, General Manager, Homelessness Services,

Mr Tony Clarke, Hub Manager, Northern Community Hub, Glenroy, and

Ms Grace Hyde, Manager, Initial Assessment and Planning Team, Northern Community Hub, VincentCare.

The CHAIR: Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for making the time. I will call the meeting open again, it being the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues and our public Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. We are very pleased to be out here as well. I understand it is one of the first times a committee has actually travelled to the interface areas to do this, and this morning just proved why it was such a good idea to be here.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is under our *Constitution Act* and through the standing orders of the Legislative Council, meaning that anything that you say or comment on here today is protected by law. However, if you were to repeat those comments outside this place, it may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the Committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. As you can see, our fantastic Hansard team have travelled up here with us. They will be recording, and you will receive a transcript of that recording over the next couple of days. We encourage you to have a look at it to make sure that it does not represent anything that you have said, but also bear in mind that transcript will be go onto our website and will become public.

I believe that we are going to hear from VincentCare first. Do you want us to go through both of the presentations or open it up for questions in between them? Which do you think would be more useful?

Mr PAWSON: Probably it be would be good to hear both the presentations—are you okay with that, Jo?—and then open it up.

The CHAIR: See both the presentations and then open it up; yes, I think they are probably going to flow quite well together.

Mr PAWSON: Then you have got Jo's perspective as well.

Ms SMITH: Skip through bits of mine that you have already covered.

The CHAIR: Yes, okay. Fantastic. So we will do the presentations and then we will open it up to questions. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Mr PAWSON: My colleagues here, who are on the ground here, will speak a lot more eloquently to the issues than I will as the CEO of VincentCare. We really value the fact that you have taken the time to come and to listen. It says a lot about yourselves as parliamentarians. It says a lot about how the Parliament works that you come out and engage with the experience of some of the most marginalised people in our community. So we do thank you. We know what your schedules are like—well, we have some sense of it at least—and so we do appreciate it. I will pass over to Paul, the General Manager of Homelessness Services. Certainly when we get into Q & A and so forth, Tony and Grace will bring all of their experience to bear as well.

Mr TURTON: Thanks, Quinn. Again, I just want to echo Quinn's acknowledgement of your interest in the issue. Obviously we have been engaged with the issue for some time. We just want to raise some of the high-level points, which will be an introduction to a bigger conversation we hope to have with you. There are obviously going to be things that are going to come up again and again and again in all of the hearings. We are conscious that the first point we have mentioned here around social housing has probably come up repeatedly

and you have probably heard this message loud and clear. We want to just name it and acknowledge that it is a key issue. We also want to really talk about early and responsive engagement, and we will speak to our experience there as well, particularly from an access point where we are at the front end: people coming in who are in a housing crisis or homelessness crisis. We want to suggest some things from our learning, some ideas around integrated support. That is an emerging and I think a persistent challenge at the moment.

Really, we are just again probably giving you statistics you have already seen, I imagine. We want to just re-emphasise again the rise in demand. It is interesting that across Victoria it is quite high. We are seeing very high demand at Northern Community Hub, which is based in Glenroy. In particular, and it has probably been noted, about 61 per cent are women who are coming to our hub. It is quite a high number of women who are there, so that is a particular concern. Again, this is around the housing stock issue, but particularly notice the connection between women who are accessing our services and their experience of family violence. So family violence is a pretty high driver of homelessness, and I know this has been recognised in the recent royal commission. Again, this is a persistent, wicked problem.

Mr CLARKE: If I could say too there, Paul, just over 50 per cent of the people that come in are women, and 70 per cent of those women have experienced family violence recently or in the last two years, so it is a very, very high level demand.

The CHAIR: Is that a significant increase in what you saw—

Mr CLARKE: It is increasing, yes, absolutely.

Mr TURTON: And so the reason we are calling out the social housing issue is that we are seeing the pressure being put at the front end because there are no pathways for these women in particular to go from crisis service to crisis accommodation to transitional to long-term housing. There is a block, and so we are seeing a real demand at the front end, which is very challenging. I just wanted to draw attention to this call from our peak body, the Council to Homeless Persons, around their budget submission around an increase of 600 units per year for the next 10 years just to get us back up to the national average.

Again we talked about early and responsive engagement. This is really from our perspective as a homelessness access point. We are seeing that the demand is increasing. Just an interesting stat is that the 423 Government-funded crisis accommodation beds across Victoria are what was available to 3000 people who needed to use those beds. So clearly the supply is well below what is required. In our region alone—it is hard to find—we had to find 9000 instances of accommodation in 2018 for those who could not access these Government-funded beds. So it is alternative accommodation. There is accommodation of last resort, we call it—so that is places like motel rooms, rooming houses and in some cases people are in unregistered rooming houses. So there is an opportunity for certain providers to set up unregistered or to purchase a five-bedroom house, divide it into seven rooms as an unregistered house and run it and basically use people's Centrelink income to derive a huge income out of that house. You have probably heard that already. We are noticing that at the moment it is a real challenge keeping people safe with limited accommodation options.

I have called out this figure before about domestic and family violence being a really key driver: 76 per cent of all presentations, the main cause is around accommodation needs and domestic and family violence. One of the wicked problems we are finding—this is around the relationship between people becoming homeless and having the experience of family violence—is that women have a risk of their children being removed by child protection because they are in a family violence situation. And when they leave that situation, as they are encouraged to do, they leave into a situation of homelessness, and at that point, because they are homeless, they are at risk of having their children removed because they are homeless. It is a perverse consequence of a wicked problem in our community, and so what our services are doing is trying to respond to provide the safety and the stability for those children and that family unit, particularly the women and the children, to make sure they are connected to services and even to schools for the children and provided with as much stability as possible. But you would appreciate it is hard to do that without housing.

Mr PAWSON: I think the system punishes in this case the women and the children and in particular it punishes women for trying to keep themselves and their children safe by not providing them with a safe house and by putting them in the sort of environments—and for us being forced into—in which we know we cannot

guarantee the safety of women and children, and then there is the risk of further damage to the children. So we are actually setting the women and children up for failure. Sorry.

Mr TURTON: No, that is a really good point. That was the point I was just wanting to emphasise there. It is a really wicked problem. And again we are left with these short-term accommodation providers, which are hotels, motels, backpackers and rooming houses. Once upon a time it used to be caravan parks. They have been sold and so we are even losing these accommodation options of last resort. We are left with, since 2014—so between 2014 and 2019—over 500 private housing of last resort stock being lost. This is like the improvised dwellings of caravan parks and all those. That has gone as well. What I mentioned earlier is exploitative housing forms similar to rooming houses are now popping up all over Victoria because there is an opportunity to make a load of money. So again what we are finding is we are putting people into unsafe situations, like unsafe motels and alternative accommodation, and particularly women and children going into these places, and they are limited options.

We also recognise that the longer a person stays homeless, the greater their risk of harm and death. So the greater risk of use of alcohol and other drug use. Alcohol and other drug use is quite high amongst homelessness populations, and even in our crisis accommodation services substance use of one form or another is quite high amongst the homelessness population. It is no surprise people are self-medicating. People are stressed, traumatised through the actual experience of homelessness, not to mention maybe the drivers of homelessness, whether it is family violence or whether it is some other form—

The CHAIR: Of trauma.

Mr TURTON: Mental ill health is another one which is quite high. The impact on children: there is a lot of evidence to suggest—I will not quote it here—but for young people who end up homeless, there is a higher likelihood that they will have a lifelong career of homelessness unless we intervene early. Again, just noting the alarming status of the risk of death between four and eight times that of the general population through homelessness, which makes sense given the circumstances people are living in.

So what we want to say is that there is there is no single solution. People say, ‘The solution’s social housing’. We agree that, yes, we need safe, affordable long-term housing. We also need safe, affordable, secure temporary accommodation. Even if we had all the sufficient social housing, there would still be a requirement to have crisis accommodation for people through a short period of time who need wraparound support. We need safe, accessible and integrated support services. So the big challenge we have is trying to connect all of our varied services, whether it is the justice services, our mainstream health services, allied health services, homelessness services, family violence services, the full range of services together so we are starting to work together to solve a common problem.

One of the things we have noticed, and particularly at the northern community hub in Glenroy, is the time that we are working with people has increased significantly. It is much more intensive work we are doing, much more complex needs and complex presentations. This is just in the last year—our data between the previous year, between 2018–19 and 19 and 20, so February of this year—the time we are spending with initial assessment and planning has increased dramatically. It is by about 40 per cent—about 42 per cent. Our payments are going up because we are looking at providing people with payments to get into alternative accommodation, and that is going up, but also we are seeing a higher growth of people who are identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attending our services as well. They are the noticeable demands. The demand overall—the number of people and the number of contacts—is pretty much stable. It has not increased. It has decreased slightly, but the complexity has increased and the demands have increased in that way.

One of the interesting things we want to call out is 58 per cent of people presenting at VincentCare’s access point in Glenroy in the past 12 months have had a prior mental health diagnosis. So they are the people with a mental health diagnosis. This does not count the people who have an undiagnosed mental health issue.

Mr CLARKE: The ambulance system knows us quite well. They are out there quite regularly.

Mr TURTON: This points to this issue around complexity, real challenges here. VincentCare talks about a pathways approach, which we use. We do not view homelessness as a lifelong experience but as a point in time. This is an experience at a point in time in someone’s life, and our job is to help them navigate their way

through that experience so they can sustain and re-engage socially, economically, with a safe house, all of that. They can actually realise the aspirations we all hold. So it is trying to move people through that experience, and it is why we call it a homelessness recovery model. It actually really responds to people's experience of trauma. It is a focus on recovery and a focus on their destination, which is well out of homelessness. It looks at people's strengths and abilities versus deficits.

So what is really important is we need to have an integrated, coordinated response across sectors to really wrap services around people, around women, families and children—a coordinated, integrated response. So we are calling for commissioning our work into the future to enable service cooperation and collaboration and service integration. So the way Government can commission the work is around requirements and being accountable—requiring people to be accountable for service integration.

We are seeing as a critical success factor in getting real results and making a real difference in people's lives when we can work together with agencies and actually start to focus on the particular needs of each person and each family unit. Particularly when we have applied this approach to working with people who identify as LGBTIQ in our community, we have made a real focus of that at VincentCare. We have seen some amazing results, and we have done a lot of listening and learning. We still admit we are in the learning space around working with a diverse range of communities. Whether they are culturally diverse or whether they identify as LGBTIQ or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, we are finding we need to do a lot more learning and listening to those communities to really develop a more appropriate service response.

One of the things we wanted to just highlight quickly in our presentation is some work that is being done locally. Grace, did you want to talk about ANASH.

Ms HYDE: Yes. The ANASH panel was a trial over 2017 and 2018, and it was a new approach to housing singles. VincentCare was one of the three sites chosen, and we worked with the department and other services in the area to successfully house 15 clients in a matter of four months. Those 15 clients had 114 years of homelessness and had engagement with all of the service providers that met each fortnight to discuss them. I guess we challenged the practice of every service that was around the table. We were able to rapidly engage with mental health services, the MACNI panel—

The CHAIR: Sorry, what is that?

Ms HYDE: The Multiple and Complex Support Needs Initiative with the department. All of those clients were linked in and successfully housed in a rapid amount of time, so the department gave up office of housing stock to rapidly house them, VincentCare provided transitional housing stock and they are all successfully housed.

Mr CLARKE: So MACNI is a program that is there for clients with the most complex needs—very highly complex. It is very hard to get into the program, so that is who we are working with.

The CHAIR: That is an amazing result.

Mr CLARKE: Because of integration that is what the outcome was there.

Mr TURTON: It is amazing what happens when you are focused on working together so you have a common outcome. It is a really good example. It won an award, didn't it, that initiative?

Ms HYDE: It did, yes.

Mr ONDARCHIE: Grace, this is scalable, though, isn't it?

Ms HYDE: Yes, definitely.

Mr PAWSON: Absolutely. I think what Grace beautifully highlights there is a systemic issue in homelessness services, but exactly the same thing is coming out in the royal commission into mental health at the minute, and it came out of the family violence royal commission. It has come out in every inquiry into child protection services. These big human service systems where you have got multiple players involved in people's lives, and people having difficulty navigating and the players not knowing that they are involved. So you have

actually got to get outside the institutional imperatives of each organisation in a way in which Grace just so beautifully described. What you have got there is everybody being able to give up the organisational boundaries and ask the question: 'How can we actually deliver?'.

But you have actually got to have incentives in your contracts, incentives that drive organisations into that space. I think it is an important takeaway in my mind whenever you look at a big human service system.

Ms HYDE: I think it was also, throughout the process, I guess, of the 12-month period, important to highlight what services we were able to offer and provide compared to how they would usually work. So all of a sudden accommodation was provided rapidly, wraparound support, long-term support was provided—so just that really working together.

The CHAIR: Does that mean you all went around the room initially and kind of—

Ms HYDE: Yes. Every fortnight we met, and we also had a consumer on the panel, which was fantastic. Mainly VincentCare supported the majority of the clients; two of the clients were supported by WISHIN.

Mr TURTON: Thanks, Grace. Again, probably the same principle: what we are learning is when we can actually make cross-sector partnerships work, we can work in partnership well, we get amazing results for service users. One of the mechanisms in the homelessness system in Victoria is something called the Opening Doors Framework. Part of one of the aspects of that particular framework is the local area service network. That has been going for about 11 years, so we recommend that that needs to be re-looked at.

The purpose of that local area service network is around service integration and coordination. I think we need to look at it and how it is actually performing that function. I think, being designed 11 years ago, it probably needs a refresh and we need to look at how we are commissioning that work. The Opening Doors Framework itself probably needs a review as well, in my mind, but certainly we would be calling for a review of the LASN.

Ms MAXWELL: Sorry, Paul, in regard to that, would you also say that that lead agency needs to be reviewed, because often if child protection/DHHS are involved they will be the lead agency, but that is not necessarily a client-focused response. So I think often it should be—and please correct me if I am wrong—that the needs of the person need to be the priority, and so whoever is in charge of that at that time, whatever organisation can provide that first priority for that person, should then become the lead agency in supporting that person. Often you will have agencies that will say, 'Oh, no, we don't do that'.

Mr TURTON: Yes.

Ms MAXWELL: But they are the lead agency.

Mr TURTON: So it is about accountability and ownership, and taking ownership of the—

Ms MAXWELL: I think it comes into that.

Mr TURTON: Agreed.

Ms MAXWELL: Yes, local area service networks, of reviewing that in its entirety.

Mr TURTON: I would agree with that. I think it is an excellent suggestion. Anything that can actually bring the focus to the person and around the service user is absolutely what we need. There could be a whole range of other ways we could approach that as well. I think that is one way of looking at it.

The CHAIR: It looks like that should be the first question, yes, when that person presents.

Ms HYDE: Yes.

Mr TURTON: That has pretty much covered our presentation anyway, so over to you, Jo. Sorry about the time.

Ms SMITH: There would certainly be scope for the various agencies to get together and agree who is going to be the lead agency. It does not necessarily have to be the same one, but child protection could say, 'We'll

take front seat on this one', and in another case DHHS housing might take it. But you can get some very poor communication, and it is bewildering for people who are already in a stressful situation.

Ms MAXWELL: And that one case coordinator who can help link them all in, so it is that one person.

Ms SMITH: Yes, absolutely.

Ms MAXWELL: They only need to speak to one person, and that one person then brings in the relative supports.

Mr TURTON: Yes, because we see the system from our perspective, but for a service user they just see the point of connection. All of the stuff that happens behind the scenes should be invisible to them. They should just get the wraparound response.

Ms SMITH: Yes, and they should know who to talk to and be able to contact them, not have to trail around from pillar to post, and that is what happens.

Visual presentation.

Ms SMITH: That is just a little bit of background information on Haven. Originally Loddon Mallee Housing merged with North East Housing in Preston, where I work, and we are an affordable housing association. We are an Opening Doors homeless access point. What we do not do out of the metro office is any case management. At the Preston office we cover Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik and Whittlesea.

That is some stats. I went into some stuff about how homelessness is defined because people think of homelessness as rooflessness, but of course it is not. The vast majority of homeless people are not on the streets. They are couch surfing, they are in very insecure housing, they are in the hotels and rooming houses that Paul and his colleagues have mentioned. There is a lot of very deeply unsatisfactory and exploitative housing out there. If people can only get housing that is bad for their health, is unsafe, that marginalises them, puts them into dangerous situations—and we see a lot of it—

The CHAIR: Jo, can I just stop you for a second? I am just conscious that some of the people in the room are having trouble hearing you down that end, so we might just try and redirect—

Ms SMITH: I will just swap places.

In the Preston office we see a lot of people who are very overcrowded. We see a lot of cases of two or three families, especially refugee families, where there can be two families with four, five, six kids and one or two parents, all sharing the one-, two- or three-bedroom house. Also, we do have rough sleepers. We have a little cluster that hang around in the footy oval just opposite our office, and we know there are quite a lot of squats and empty semi-derelict buildings that people are sleeping in. Over the past year, in 2019, the recorded contacts are over 1000 a month, and that is not counting all the ones that do not get recorded. Many contacts are with our parkies coming in and saying, 'Can I get a coffee and have a shower?'. 'Of course you can'. Those are not necessarily recorded. And people phone us and are not recorded until we see them.

Housing has become less and less acceptable. I completely agree that we need much more social housing, but we also need access to affordable housing. It was really interesting to me to look at some of these statistics. Those are the median rents in Whittlesea from the most recent government figures available. This is affordability in Whittlesea. As you can see, 20 years ago nearly half the houses in Whittlesea—in fact 15 years or 16 years ago more than half the houses—were deemed affordable by the Government's own figures. Now it is at 12.7. It has been down to as low as 7 or 8 per cent as property prices rise. Rents do not do massive sways in the way that the property prices do, but they do go up and sometimes they go down a bit as well. So in terms of people that we see being able to access housing, and there is also the relative insecurity of private rental compared to social and community housing—this is again mentioning the LASNs; they attempt to work in a consumer-focused, strength-based way. The wall we always slide down is the lack of housing. I mean, it is a cliché to say it, but what cures homelessness is enough housing—enough affordable and sustainable housing.

As you can see in those figures, just over half of the people we see are women. I do not think it is really in dispute that the biggest single driver of homelessness is family violence. Just over half are single. It is very hard to find anything for someone who is single, especially if their only income is Newstart. Six per cent are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which is about four times the incidence in the population. So you can see that that is a group that is massively over-represented.

You probably do not want to even have to look through that, but the same thing: family and friends, the crisis accommodation. The motels available to us are not the ones you would ever pick for your holidays. People will show us on the phone, 'Look, look, this is only \$60 a night and it's this deal or that will be offered'. They will not have a bar of us. The hotels that the homeless services are able to access are the ones of which Channel 9 reports are made up: the dodgy, the expensive. They may not be super expensive and often the people working there are trying to be kind and do the right thing. But if you have got three kids, you have fled family violence and we put you in one hotel room in a place that is pretty basic, it is very unsustainable. Even if you go and view all of those—say, in Whittlesea—12 per cent of properties that are potentially affordable for you, landlords do not have to give any reason why they did not pick you. If they have got to choose between, say, a couple with two jobs and one child or a mum on parenting payment with three kids who is fleeing family violence, in the vast majority of cases the former is going to get the guernsey. So it is very hard for people.

There is a massive backlog in access to public housing. We see a lot of people who say, 'Oh, I've been on the list for five years', or, 'I've got priority. Do you think I'll get housed this year?'. That is always a no, and not next year either in most cases. Many people on the public housing list clearly will never actually get up to the top of it and get housed. It is good to see movement in development of social housing, community housing, affordable housing that we provide. It is still not enough to meet all the need but it kind of bridges some of that gap between the insecurity and expense of private rental and the security and inaccessibility—but security if you can get into it—and affordability of public housing and community housing.

I can only back up what has been said, which is that putting wraparound support around people is what makes housing sustainable. It is also far, far better value to provide that support, provide the housing. The countries like Scandinavian countries, and Iceland particularly, that have gone down the path of housing first—put people into housing, put the support in place; that is how ANASH has been so successful—get far better return on your money than endlessly focusing, as Ireland did, on crisis accommodation: ever more hostels, dormitories et cetera.

You throw a lot of money at people you do not want to give money to, the people who operate the rooming houses, for example, who are certainly laughing all the way to the bank on public money, for no improved outcome. Someone's life is not improved by any time in the sort of rooming houses available, and much as we try very hard not to use the unregistered rooming houses, we cannot stop providers from filtering people into those. All we can do is work with local authorities to report them, to investigate and try and shut them down. It is frustrating because of the amount of money to be made from rooming houses. In a house, say, with four people, they will all be paying about \$220 to \$250 a week. The provider may be paying \$300 for that property. Most of them are rented by the providers. They may be paying \$200, maybe \$300 now, for that property. So they are raking in up to \$1000 a week, which even when you allow for the fact that bills are covered, there is still a lot of money to be made from it. You would hope that the least people could do is provide somewhere that is decent, say, and upholds human dignity, but there are plenty of horror stories about rooming houses, and of course you are sharing randomly.

The CHAIR: We passed legislation a couple of years ago to try and improve this circumstance.

Ms SMITH: Absolutely, and, look, some people want to do the right thing. The largest providers are often the least responsible. There are community rooming houses—Haven runs four—but there is very little movement. Haven also is a provider of transitional housing, but the 'transit' has kind of vanished from transitional for the moment because there is so little movement in public housing. Five years ago, when I was first working at Haven, there were maybe eight to 10 transitional properties a month to be allocated to people who would move on within a year or two, usually to public housing, sometimes to private rentals, sometimes to ownership—usually to public or community housing. We are down to an average of less than two a month at the moment because there is so little movement in public housing. In the fullness of time, say, at the big redevelopment at Heidelberg, there will be a flurry of allocations because they will put up all these lovely new

properties, like happened in Kensington. But for the moment there is very little movement and the gulf between renting privately and renting publicly is enormous. We have a very small public housing sector in Australia generally, but I think particularly in Victoria. You mentioned the need to bring it up to at least the national average.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms SMITH: The options: community owned, those are at about 30 per cent of income. Public housing is at 25 per cent of income. Private rental, very little regulation of cost. That said, I am a long-time private renter. Of course, I can get chosen for a house because I have got a job, but someone who, even though they have an income—if you are a single parent, you are on parenting payment and family tax, you have got three or four children, your income will support a rental if you are reasonable about what you are looking for. But landlords have no obligation to tell you why they did not pick you, and in many instances they are not going to pick you. The community rooming houses. SRSs are accommodation for people who need support. They are pretty basic. The ones that are accessible to people on low incomes tend to be on the basic side—supported residential services.

The CHAIR: Does NDIS kick into those?

Ms SMITH: It can do, yes. NDIS—that is a whole separate can of worms really when it comes to housing.

The CHAIR: Hang on, you finish; we will go back there.

Ms SMITH: We have a Moving On program that has just been re-funded for another 50 properties, which is wonderful. It is a program where we lease a property and then headlease it to the tenant and they pay an increasing amount of the rent over the years. So they start out only paying a third of it, then 60 per cent, then up to the full amount. The vast majority of these have been completely successful. I think there has been one failed tenancy and a couple where it was rolled forward for another year of subsidy. It is an empowering model because with the one we use people go and find a house they like, we do the application and rent it. Landlords love it because they get a year's rent up-front, but we want landlords who are going to roll it forward, who are not just going to say, 'Bye, see you later', at the end of the year. That has been quite a successful model. The Olympia project I should have taken off because it is pretty much wound up now. Those are properties that are going to be redeveloped at Heidelberg. This is just a bit of stuff about the properties that we have got. That is our friends at the St Kilda Crisis Centre, and they are the out-of-hours service. That is it for me.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you both. Thank you, Paul. I think what we are hearing a lot is this notion that there are lots and lots of services out there and there are millions and millions of dollars being spent on those services, but that coordination is lacking. Have you got any thoughts? Certainly the model that you spoke about sounds great. Is that something that we really could roll out? You mentioned changing contracts for services, changing the incentives for services, ensuring that they were operating in partnership. Are those the types of things that governments could write into contracts or that we as a Committee could be recommending to Government—that they change the way they do business with people like yourselves?

Mr TURTON: Yes, of course.

Mr CLARKE: I think so. I think what has happened is we are both access points and it has literally come to that. We wait each day—don't we, Jo?—and many people come in at 9 o'clock and we triage and we manage those clients and support those clients throughout the day. Those who need accommodation that night we see quickly, and those who do not will come back and see us later—as in later during the day—and that is just the demand that holds us for the day. It is the same as every access point across the city.

An area that we are looking at and want to explore is how we can better connect with mainstream services, so Northern Hospital, community health centres, police, Centrelink as well and community health centres and schools and how we can outreach to those services and operate the same services and access point, but within community, whether it is secondary consultations or whether it is attending services where people are safe. We will not have a student at 16 come into our office—it just will not happen. It feels too unsafe. So we can go out to them and that builds community anywhere. It does not matter about the service; it is actually where the client is and how we can assist them.

Mr TURTON: I think it would be important to write into contracts that requirement, and I think you need to have a way of measuring that and accountability for that. I would go so far as to say let us put some accountability for that in place, and let us find a way to measure it and measure performance.

The CHAIR: Do you have any idea, because it seems that there is that outcome-driven funding, but quite often you are dealing with really complicated clients. So as you have seen, you are saying they are becoming much more complicated, so saying, 'These are outcomes', I am wondering—it sounds like we need new measurements.

Mr PAWSON: Yes, I think you do on how service is coordinated. Definitely. I think it is worth thinking about very, very carefully how you provide the incentives for people to do the sorts of things that grow so beautifully—how you provide the incentives. I think there is some work and there is some research to be done. I do not think it is simple, but the sort of thing Grace described I have seen across different service systems work really, really well, but it has never been scaled and we have never got the measurements for the department to know and the Government to know it is getting value for the money and it is providing the incentives to nudge the service system to do the sorts of things.

The CHAIR: That is right. Is there anything you can direct us towards? As you said, it is not just in homelessness; we have seen it in mental health and we have seen it in family violence.

Mr PAWSON: Yes. I can come back to you with something on that. Very happy to do that, but there is some good work being done around the world on that.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Quinn. Lovely.

Mr CLARKE: We are fortunate as an access point, so there are 70 staff that work at the northern community hub, so Glenroy. But we are working in Sunbury, Craigieburn, right down to Brunswick, so it is a large area to cover. There is that initial response, that triage response, and that prioritisation and the support that sits accompanying that, plus our partner services like WISHIN, who you met with this morning—that is a part of that service system. So that linkage goes across. That works well. It is similar to yourselves, operating in the same system with your service partners.

Ms SMITH: Yes, we try to get people appointments where possible, and we have access to some funding that pays to go into or to sustain private rental, and that works well for a lot of people, the PRAP funding that is delegated to us from Launch—private rental access program assistance.

The CHAIR: Yes, everybody speaks positively about PRAP.

Ms SMITH: Yes, and it helps people sustain their housing or helps them go into housing. I think there is a—

The CHAIR: You have to be at a crisis point to make that appointment, don't you?

Mr CLARKE: No, not quite. It could be a prevention or an early intervention tool, yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: So we had Jade saying if you know you are being evicted on Tuesday, you cannot go to the access point until Friday, when you actually are homeless.

Ms SMITH: No, you can come to the access point the minute you get the notice to vacate. I think it might vary across access points. It is very difficult if we have somebody ring us on day 119 of a 120-day notice to vacate. We may find that it was not even properly served or it was served in revenge or in response to somebody seeking to exercise a right and could therefore have been found invalid had they appealed it in time, or we could have negotiated to save that tenancy. So we want people to contact us when their tenancy is at risk.

I would also say in the crisis accommodation, especially rooming houses, people can be a bit out of sight, out of mind, because our focus when it comes to allocating resources and case management is we often prioritise the people who are in hotels because they are in the most immediately unsatisfactory and, to be honest, expensive situations. We ask people to put half their income towards the hotel, which is quite a big ask and quite a lot of money. It does not leave very much.

They can be a bit out of sight, out of mind, so having better options people could go to but also a more streamlined pathway that means that we do not lose track of those people and that they have hope that continued engagement will lead somewhere. We see a lot of people who are tied to a job network provider, and they say, 'Well, I keep going for these appointments but I have been doing that for six months and I haven't got a job yet', or 'I keep coming in here to see you but I haven't got a house yet'. So you want people to feel that there is hope. The biggest single thing we need is more housing, whether that is through the private sector, through incentives for landlords to work with the access points to make properties available; whether it is putting more wraparound support in place to make tenants more attractive. Obviously we would all love to see more social and community and public housing available for people, but also the support for people to sustain that housing. It is a sort of dark joke in the sector that it is chicken and egg about mental health, because if you did not have a mental health problem before you became homeless, you are probably going to have one after. The longer you are homeless, the harder it is to re-engage. We are talking about chronically marginalised people, and then you get that intergenerational marginalisation where young people have never had secure housing. They have never had anyone role modelling normal working patterns. People who work are often in very insecure work: they might be cleaning; they might be doing either cash in hand or being poorly paid, or the sort of work where you are taking all the risk, taking whatever shifts you can get—people who have never experienced stability and whose parents have never experienced stability.

Mr PAWSON: You made a really important point there, I think, Jo, around the change in the labour market. I mean, the entry-level positions are now a whole lot less secure than they were a generation ago. I think one needs to understand the labour market, the housing market, then, in a sense, the marketplace of political ideas, where the withdrawal of the government dollar from affordable housing has been significant over multiple decades. If you look back to previous generations who were stewards of the space, they said, 'Yes, we must invest in schools' and 'We must invest in hospitals' and 'We must invest in roads and power stations' and all the other things that are critical pieces of public infrastructure. But we have been silent in the narrative on housing for the better part of three decades in a way that previous generations would not have. Previous generations understood that. They saw the Great Depression. They saw people who were for multiple decades out of housing, and they said that we have a responsibility as a community.

I understand the limits that if the public do not go somewhere, then it is very hard politically as well. But somehow there needs to be some sort of debate no matter who is in office. Everyone agrees we need to build schools. We might disagree how we get there. But there has been almost a collusion to remain silent on this, around investment. I think building the case in the public mind is really, really crucial. Similarly, if a person is not in a job and is in insecure employment, somewhere along the line the public dollar is going to be required to support them into secure housing.

Mr BARTON: Absolutely. It is an area that I am very concerned about. We have got an inquiry into the gig economy coming out in a matter of weeks, I believe. I am very concerned about the casualisation of work these days. People will not be able to afford things. We have got the trade union movement doing work around Jetstar workers working 20 to 25 hours a week. There is no way they can afford to pay rent on a property like that, let alone feed themselves and the kids and stuff like that. I think it is a massive issue. One of the things that I am very keen for this Committee to do is the cause. It is a major driver. We have now got the working poor. This is something Australia should not be proud of.

The CHAIR: I will take that as a comment.

Mr BARTON: Yes. It is one of the things that we need to address. It is one of the things we have to understand, because this will cause—

The CHAIR: No doubt homelessness will come out in the gig economy report, and the gig economy will come out in the homelessness report.

Mr BARTON: I hope so.

Mr TURTON: Understanding root causes is really important—really important.

Ms SMITH: And what can be done about them. Can I just say, Australia has always had a really high rate of home ownership compared to most other countries in the world to be honest, and increasingly we see a lot of

people saying, 'We were always able to buy a house. Our kids aren't going to be able to buy a house', and that is increasingly true. We are seeing a whole generation coming through for whom property ownership is a dream, at the same time as we have investors able to accumulate houses, and if they are providing them at good rentals to people in need on a secure tenancy with responsible stewardship, that is fantastic. If, however, they are simply profiteering, it becomes a different issue, but we have always had this high rate.

I think a lot of people have been alerted to the housing crisis by booming prices. It used to be that people could pay off a mortgage in 15 years. Now mortgages are 30 years, and people are stretched to their limit to even get onto that property ladder. I think that is raising it in the public consciousness that housing is so inaccessible.

The CHAIR: Any last comments?

Ms MAXWELL: I would just like to say thank you very much for being here and providing the wealth of information that you have. It is greatly appreciated.

The CHAIR: Yes, it really has been wonderful. All day there has been a building up of the evidence as we have heard from different people, so I commend Lilian on the order in which she has brought people together in front of us today. Are there any final things that you would like to leave us with? We have got the first three points, I think, writ very clearly, but do you want to reiterate—

Mr PAWSON: The only other thing would be the regulatory environment. I understand this is really difficult for the property development side of the equation, but to create the regulatory incentives to free up the development opportunities for social housing and so forth. Right now in the development space there are no incentives there for the property development industry to have to effectively be required to take into account the percentage of the population that are going to require social housing—the developments around here by way of example. And if you get that into play, then you know you have a pipeline. Right now no-one—

The CHAIR: So inclusionary zoning?

Mr TURTON: South Australia have been doing it since the 60s, and they have been well ahead in this.

Mr BARTON: What are they doing? About 15 per cent or something, is it?

Mr TURTON: I do not know the current numbers for South Australia, but I know it has been incredibly successful and it is integrated. You cannot tell public housing from privately owned housing.

Ms SMITH: Yes, if I could quickly add a note on that very issue, all the research, as far as I understand it, shows that mixed communities work best. Rather than have a pocket of poverty and deprivation that is a public housing estate, communities where there is a range of interests, of the degree of economic activity, of background—those are the happy, successful communities in which people thrive. So that integration model is what works.

Mr TURTON: Inclusionary zoning.

The CHAIR: Inclusionary zoning, other incentives—would you be thinking of relief on certain state taxes?

Mr BARTON: Stamp duty, perhaps?

Mr PAWSON: Stamp duty and that sort of stuff, yes, absolutely.

Ms SMITH: Make it worth their while.

Mr PAWSON: Yes, you have got a pull factor then, rather than just a push factor.

Ms SMITH: Like most things.

The CHAIR: I mentioned it before, but when we met with some of the developers at that last meeting, there was a real sense that for them to be employing quality staff they needed to be more than just profit; they needed to be purpose.

Mr PAWSON: There is goodwill there, absolutely there is goodwill.

The CHAIR: That is exactly right.

Mr PAWSON: It is not a them and us. You meet developers who have enormous goodwill, but the incentives are not there.

The CHAIR: Again, it does seem to be that it is this integration puzzle, doesn't it? And it is how we make that work. Hopefully at the end of this we will have figured it out.

Mr PAWSON: Terrific.

Mr CLARKE: Thanks for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: As I say, you will get a transcript of today. Have a read through and make sure we have represented you honestly.

Mr PAWSON: Thanks very much, Fiona.

Witnesses withdrew.