

**ELIZABETH
MORGAN HOUSE
ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S SERVICES**



**Submission to the
Parliamentary Inquiry into
Homelessness
February 2020**

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ABOUT EMH

WHO WE ARE:

EMH is a proud Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). We are a peak Aboriginal Women's Service in Victoria as well as a peak provider of family violence support. We provide holistic, culturally safe refuge accommodation and broad case management to Aboriginal* women and children who have or are experiencing family violence. We not only provide crucial family violence support but also assist with housing support. We have proudly been providing this support to our community since 1976.

WHAT WE DO WELL:

Many EMH clients are homeless or experiencing housing distress and are managing multiple and complex issues. We work holistically by addressing an individual's broader support needs in order to obtain or maintain safe, affordable and appropriate housing.

Family Violence Support

Where possible EMH works with women, their support network as well as landlords to increase the safety of their current residence and avoid homelessness. This often requires the development of detailed case plans and finances secured through various funds. When this is not possible or safe, EMH strongly advocates for resources to secure alternative accommodation and minimise the period of instability. EMH has demonstrated its commitment to maintain support to families from crisis through to the establishment of settlement period in long term housing. This period of support often encompasses several years.

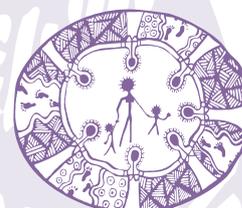
Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC)

EMH works to ensure that women incarcerated in at DPFC are aware of their tenancy rights, particularly those relating directly to social housing leases. We assist women to apply for Correctional Transfers which allows them to relinquish their social housing property and be heavily prioritised for a new allocation when their parole or release date nears. This allows for the property to maximise its potential, reduces the likelihood of arrears and squatters, as well as property damage. It also provides the tenant a "fresh start" in a new location after they are released.

EMH also support women at DPFC to apply for absence rebate. This ensures that the rent charged continues to be affordable. Additionally, we advocate with landlords and police to act on squatters and address property damage.

Pending Evictions

EMH works with tenants and occupants of households to address issues threatening tenancies including escalating arrears or pending evictions. EMH ensures social housing rebates are applied correctly, Centrelink incomes are maximised by resolving breaches, assists parents to apply for Child Support and assists individuals to lodge tax returns. We also support individuals to review outgoing expenses, address debts and reduce expenditure. Our Case Management Program can also provide advocacy at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and links in to external specialist supports such as drug and alcohol supports, and mental health supports via our established and growing partnerships. This level of available practical support is quite unique in the sector. EMH finds that our holistic way of working is embraced and valued by our clients and other services.



CONSIDERATIONS RATIONALE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(please note a summary of our recommendations has been provided at the end of this document)

CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Aboriginal Housing Stress and Homelessness

Aboriginal people are ten times more likely to experience homelessness.¹ The ongoing and pervasive impacts of colonisation, dispossession of land, Stolen Wages, intergenerational poverty, loss of lore and culture and systemic racism continue to drive social and economic inequality for Aboriginals that we see today resulting in significant inequality such as the greater rates of homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The relevant government agencies as well as services that provide homelessness support to people within the Aboriginal community, seek direction and inclusion from the community itself to ensure that all levels of response in tackling homelessness are culturally appropriate and responsive

HOMELESSNESS

Inability to Maintain Crucial Support Services as Not Eligible Due to Transience

People who have no stable accommodation often couch surf with friends or family or are accommodated in various crisis accommodation that is arranged by Access Points. This often means that homeless people are moving across Melbourne or around Victoria to have a roof over their head. The unintended result of this is that people are moving out of "service catchments" and struggle to either be linked in or remain linked in with services who may be able to provide them support. This extends to family services, counselling, drug and alcohol services etc.

RECOMMENDATION:

2. The support sector needs to provide allowances to continue to work with individuals and families that are transient and moving between local government and funded catchment area

HOUSING AND AVAILABILITY

Shrinking Property Sizes

One of the noted side effects of the DHHS selling off properties primarily in the northern metro area is the loss of properties with larger rear yards.

Aboriginal people are more likely to care for their Elders than non-Aboriginal people and this was often facilitated by the provision of movable units on a family members social housing block. EMH has noted that the growing absence of larger properties that have no space for moveable units has meant that Elders are moving into the main home and contributing to overcrowding. EMH are also seeing the same consequences for families that would like to be able to accommodate young parents with their babies or teenagers in moveable unit or via Kids Under Cover bungalows. Yard sizes are not allowing the construction of additional dwellings.

¹ AIHW 2019, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People: A focus Report on Housing & Homelessness.



Consequently, the young person is too often unable to stay at home and enters into transience or the youth refuge system.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3. Social Housing maintain and obtain properties with larger sized yards to provide for the inclusion of moveable units or bungalows.
4. Social Housing allocations target properties with larger yards to families that would then apply for a moveable unit or a Kids Under Cover bungalow to keep Elders and young people at home for longer.

Barriers for Single People Securing Accommodation

Due to extremely limited one-bedroom social housing stock, single people remain homeless for longer and have limited chances of being accommodated in social housing. The low income of Newstart Allowance makes it almost impossible to find affordable private rentals, particularly in metropolitan areas². Often, EMH find single people being told by homelessness services their only option is a boarding house. The quality and security of these boarding houses is often questionable and many of our clients have advised they would feel safer sleeping on the street. This can be understood further by reviewing the paper 2019 "Crisis in Crisis" a Northern and Western Homelessness Paper.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

5. Centrelink rental assistance should be increased to ensure access to safe and stable housing is possible for people on Newstart payments
6. Tighter controls on boarding houses and hotels which clients are housed in to ensure adequate and safe living conditions
7. Additional one-bedroom social housing properties to accommodate the increasing need for single people.

The Private Rental Market is Unaffordable

Many of our clients are on government supported payments, or low wages. For those on Centrelink benefits, a meagre 2% of Victoria's private rental market is financially accessible³. For single people on Newstart Allowance, it is near impossible to find affordable, long term and sustainable housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

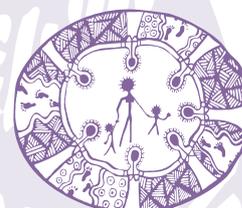
8. Longer leases offered to those entering the private rental market. 24-month leases will allow people to establish themselves within communities and provide housing stability
9. Enhanced support through PRAP and Rapid housing Response Program. Rental subsidies should continue for the duration of a lease, or until income increases.

Support for Maintaining Housing

EMH has provided support to a number of families post-eviction from social housing where early and targeted intervention very likely would have saved the tenancy. There are a number of individuals that need ongoing, or intermittent support, from external services as support issues

² Anglicare 2019

³ Anglicare 2019



arise such as child removals, financial difficulties or occurring family violence. EMH find that many services are funded to only provide support to families for a limited time once accommodation is secured regardless of the status of the client supports needs or capacity to maintain a tenancy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

10. Flexibility in the length of time in which support services are able to continue to engage individuals once long-term accommodation is secured
11. Funding of Aboriginal culturally-specific tenancy programs focused on addressing support needs
12. Social Housing providers to actively encourage tenants at risk of eviction to engage with appropriate support services and conduct facilitated referrals

Accessible Social Housing Stock

Over the past several years there has been a preference for new social housing acquisitions on the fringes of Melbourne rather than in urban settings. As a consequence, EMH sees clients struggling to sustain tenancies due to isolation, as well as there being a lack of childcare, bulk billing medical centres, public transport, accessible support services and even garbage collections yet to commence.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

13. Social Housing continue to expand so that stock is purchased in both urban and established less-urban areas
14. Government funding to expand to allow social services to provide supports in new suburbs
15. A review of the suburbs within the Preston Broadband which currently covers an expansive area which includes 14 suburbs from Preston out to South Morang. The separation of this broadband into two separate areas would allow for families to select a broadband that would provide for the greatest chance of sustainability

Family Violence Sector Response

The current Victorian refuge system is unable to meet the demand of unsafe women and children who require safe accommodation in the form of refuge. The lack of available beds equates to many women and children staying in inappropriate crisis accommodation such as hotels while awaiting to access refuges, or other forms of appropriate accommodation. The hotels used are usually far away from their supportive networks, public transport, and other resources and families are often required to make do without kitchen facilities. These hotels are also used by other crisis accommodation services which support both men and women who may have complex mental health and substance misuse challenges. Women tell us they feel unsafe, intimidated or victimised in these settings.

Generally, women are only accommodated in hotels by Safe Steps for a maximum seven days at which point they are often exited in to housing Access Points.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

16. Funding for crisis accommodation should be increased to accommodate women and children within appropriate hotel accommodation for more than seven days
17. Better collaboration between Safe Steps, family violence services and specialist homelessness services to minimise the moves and disruptions for clients. This will also limit the level of risk that these families are experiencing.



18. Clients should be consulted in relation to where they would like to be accommodated. Safety is of course the priority, however where possible practitioners should work with clients to accommodate requests to facilitate positive exit options.

19. Refuge accommodation should be increased within metropolitan Melbourne to ensure the demand can be met, without resorting to inadequate hotels and boarding houses.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Blockage within Transitional Housing (THM) Properties

EMH finds it extremely difficult to source THM accommodation for clients residing in our refuge, as well as clients supported through our Outreach program. Once clients do move into THM accommodation, they are often there for a minimum of five years, due to a lack of offers from social housing or alternative exit options. The result of this in Northern and Western metropolitan Melbourne is transitional accommodation being used in a long-term capacity, reducing the system's ability to respond to those in crisis.

Since the Housing Priority Categories have changed with the introduction of the Victorian Housing Register, EMH has seen a dramatic decrease of turnover or offers of long-term tenancies, resulting in an increase in the length of tenancies as the long term Social Housing Providers focus of transferring tenancies within their own stock. Presently EMH has a number of families that have been in Transitional Housing for five years or longer, the longest currently being seven years. EMH welcomes the current DHHS review of transitional housing as a way to formally recognise the strengths and limitations of the system.

The Aboriginal community itself has been disadvantaged with the loss of our/EMH's direct nomination rights into transitional housing. Consequently, EMH now have fewer exits available to our families in our refuge and other crisis arranged accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

20. Increase the number of transitional housing properties across the state in a calculated approach

21. Reintroduce a set of minimum targets for marginalised groups across all managers of transitional accommodation such as for Aboriginal people and those seeking exit from refuge

22. Ensure refuge providers have direct nomination rights into transitional housing

23. Ensure a fair distribution of THMs across the SAAP sector with any monopoly of THM allocations managed

24. The Victorian government increase social housing stock by 6,000 per annum to match the national average of 4.5 per cent of total housing stock. Including an increase in long term social housing managed by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide exit options for those needing to exit transitional housing

PREGNANCY AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Pregnancy

Homelessness can affect a mother's health including inadequate weight gain, anaemia and bleeding problems. Homeless women also experience difficulty accessing antenatal care.



Homeless people also experience greater mental health problems than the wider population⁴. Practical issues such as a lack of storage and refrigeration can restrict a homeless pregnant woman's ability to maintain a healthy diet. These difficulties extend to boarding houses and motels which are overwhelmingly inappropriate due to access issues for heavily pregnant women, lack of cooking or cleaning facilities and safety concerns due to other residents. There is often no appropriate sleeping space for babies or toddlers (eg cots) who have to co-sleep with mum which statistically is linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It has been found that experiences of prenatal homelessness were associated with disproportionately higher rates of risk factors for poor perinatal outcomes⁵. Community rooming houses are also identified as not being suitable to the needs of women with babies and small children⁶ with Child Protection often advising mothers to immediately find more appropriate accommodation.

Women experiencing family violence during pregnancy are at greater risk of homicide or serious injury. Given the evidence that the risk of violence can escalate with pregnancy and childbirth, attention to this group of homeless women is warranted⁷.

RECOMMENDATION:

25. Adequately fund programs, including Aboriginal culturally specific programs, with a primary focus on practical support as well as assistance to secure accommodation for pregnant women in housing distress

Affordability Issues for Pregnant Women

Due to affordability issues, pregnant homeless women are also often unable to access appropriate private rental until their baby is born and their income increases.

A particular barrier facing pregnant women is the delay in their ability to receive Centrelink Parenting Payments while the application is being processed post-birth, which further exacerbates their ability to enter the private rental market. Some youth services have been able to bridge this gap with the use of brokerage funds⁸.

RECOMMENDATION:

26. Where private rental is secured by a pregnant woman an extension of brokerage funds to cover the period until the newborns Centrelink Payments commence

Lack of Data on Pregnancy and Homelessness

There is a major gap in Australian homelessness research regarding the experiences of pregnant homeless women. Not having accurate data on the number of women who are pregnant and homeless in Victoria, and their circumstances, is a significant impediment to improving services and providing the best possible responses to this group of women and their children⁹.

RECOMMENDATION:

27. Consideration of including into SHIP an option to identify a woman as pregnant

28. Family Safety Victoria to share information relating to number of women seeking family violence assistance that is collected via the Family Violence Risk Assessments

29. Funding for research into the experiences of homeless pregnant women.

⁴⁻⁹ (Launch Housing, 2018)



Lack of Wraparound Support Services After Baby is Born

Across Australia, progress towards closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is stalling and, in some cases, going backwards. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children are dying at three times the rate of other Australian children¹⁰.

RECOMMENDATION:

30. Giving new parents the supportive environment they need to bring their children into the world. Provide wrap-around services to families linking them with health supports and facilitating access to appointments by providing transport as well as practical support with meal planning, hygiene, washing clothes and other household tasks. Parents and carers can get help with sleeping, feeding, care and attachment¹¹.

Homelessness and its Effects on Children

Childhood trauma has profound and long-lasting impacts and is a major risk factor for experiencing mental ill health and adversity in adulthood. Experiencing homelessness as a child increases the risk of being placed in out of home care, school disengagement, unemployment and experiencing homelessness in adulthood¹².

1 in 4 Aboriginal people accessing specialist homelessness services are children aged under 10 years¹³.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

31. Additional funding for trauma counselling and programs extended to children in crisis accommodation including culturally specific services

32. Tighter controls to ensure children are placed in safe and adequate crisis accommodation ensuring children should not be placed within boarding homes

33. Increased the stock of transitional and long term properties.

Aboriginal Children Placed into Out of Home Care Due to Lack of Housing Options

Aboriginal children are a staggering 10.2 times more likely to be removed from their families¹⁴. 88% of Victorian Aboriginal child removals have family violence listed as a protective factor¹⁵, and one third of Child Protection notifications cite neglect (including housing suitability and stability) as a protective concern¹⁶.

RECOMMENDATION:

34. Every measure should be taken to maintain Aboriginal family units. This includes provision of short, transitional and long-term housing in order to keep families safe and together. The lack of a home should never be the reason an Aboriginal child is removed from their family.

¹⁰ RANZCOG National Women's Health Summit, 2 March 2018, Patricia Turner, CEO NACCHO Keynote address "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Health"

¹¹ (Save the Children, 2020)

¹² Atkinson, J 2013, 'Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children' Resource sheet no. 21 AIHW & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

¹³ AIHW 2019

¹⁴ Family Matters, 2019, A Reporting on Family Violence in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Communities, pp.5.

¹⁵ Commission for Children and Young People 2016, 'Always was, always will be Koori children': Systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria, pp. 47.

¹⁶ 'Child Protection & Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children', AIFS, 2019



HOUSING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Aboriginal Children and Young People

Housing support for young people has been associated with financial and employment stability as well as reduced chances of dropping out of school and developing substance dependency. Research in Australia has found that maintaining independent housing often relies on young people having access to emotional and material support, from professional or other sources¹⁷. Date also tells us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in out-of-home care compared with non-Indigenous children (9.5 times more likely), with some women encountering the child protection system during pregnancy, leading to removal of their babies soon after birth¹⁸.

RECOMMENDATION:

35. Greater emphasis following the DHHS Child Protection Manual, which states: "A cultural plan must be provided to the child to help to maintain and develop their Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal community and culture. This will be part of the care and placement planning process¹⁹."

The Importance of Cultural Support Plans for Aboriginal Children in Care

The continued development of Cultural Support Plans and proactive connection with family for Aboriginal children and young people in care is critical. This provides opportunity for the young people to turn to their birth family or community for support and possibly accommodation options once care placement ends. Currently foster care ends at age 18. Often, EMH see young people exited from their placement on or shortly after their 18th birthday, which can bring an abrupt end to their year 11 or 12 schooling. Aboriginal children in care sadly may not have been able to maintain contact with their family and may have no birth family to seek accommodation or support from. As a result, they may find themselves isolated and alone with minimal resources and living skills.

RECOMMENDATION:

36. Mainstream services should consult with Aboriginal organisations if Aboriginal care leavers are to retain a connection to their culture and communities²⁰.

37. Greater emphasis following the DHHS Child Protection Manual, which states: "A cultural plan must be provided to the child to help to maintain and develop their Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal community and culture. This will be part of the care and placement planning process²¹."

38. Pass the bill in the Upper House extending leaving foster care age to 21

Poor Quality Accommodation for Care Leavers

Care leavers are at particular risk of homelessness or only being able to secure poor-quality accommodation. Australian research found that 34.7% of research participants who had left care

¹⁷ (Cameron, McPherson, Gatwirir, & Parmenter, 2019)

¹⁸ (Australian Government: Department of Health, 2019)

¹⁹ (State Government of Victoria, 2017)

²⁰ (Australian Government: Department of Health, 2019)

²¹ (Australian Government: Department of Health, 2019)



were homeless in their first year. Homelessness often results from the low affordability of private rental and the perceived age discrimination encountered in this market as well as the complicated nature of applying for public housing²².

RECOMMENDATION:

39. Additional funding for youth support services including youth refuges

40. Greater investment of services and focus on maintaining family units at the initial stages of Child Protection involvement thus recognising and responding to that fact that the past and current practices of the removal of Aboriginal children has long standing and transgenerational impacts that can be seen in the rates of homelessness

Young Aboriginal People Leaving Care - Gaps in the data

Aboriginal children and young people are over-represented in the Australian child welfare system. However, little is known about these young people's experiences as they leave care. Statistical anomalies and significant data gaps are barriers to developing informed policy and practice initiatives in this area. Reported numbers of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care do not align with official statistics concerning Aboriginal young people leaving care²³.

RECOMMENDATION:

41. Funding for research into the experiences of young Aboriginal people leaving care.

OVERCROWDING

Overcrowding

In Victoria in 2016 7.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households were considered to be overcrowded compared to 3.6% of non-Aboriginal households²⁴. The lack of accessible, affordable and appropriate accommodation by the broader support sector often results in individuals and families forced to rely on extended family to accommodate them for an unknown period of time.

RECOMMENDATION:

42. Social Housing providers to review their current tenancies and identify stock that is underutilised and incentivise tenants to move to appropriately sized stock. This would then increase the number of larger sized properties that are available to be allocated and housing larger families would increase the income generated by these properties

Out of Kin/Community Care of Children due to Overcrowding

EMH has supported families that have applied to have children placed into their care that have had their accommodation deemed inappropriate by DHHS Child Protection solely due to overcrowding.

When accommodation is deemed to be inappropriate, and no other appropriate kin can be located, Aboriginal children are then placed in out-of-home and possibly out-of-community care. This placement determination goes against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child

²² (Cameron, McPherson, Gatwirir, & Parmenter, 2019)

²³ Indigenous young people leaving care: Questioning the gaps in official statistics Indigenous Law Bulletin Volume 8 Issue 28 (Jan/Mar 2017) Baidawi, Susan1; Saunders, Bernadette2; Mendes, Philip

²⁴ (AIHW 2019).



Placement Principle which seeks to enhance and preserve Aboriginal children's connection to family and community.

RECOMMENDATION:

43. Stronger regard for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle when assessing accommodation needs of families. DHHS Child Protection to play an active role in facilitating referrals and advocating with relevant services to assist identified families to receive accommodation via SAAP funded or DHHS services thus reducing the number of children entering out of home care.

A Community Environment for Better Supported Care

The housing support sector has minimal accommodation options available for people who have support needs that impact on their ability to maintain accommodation. There are also families that are at risk of family violence but do not meet the criteria for high security yet their needs are high and complex. For these families it is critical that easy access to support is available to help with the healing and recovery post-crisis.

RECOMMENDATION:

44. Funding and support for EMH's "Tiny Homes" proposed project: A cluster of self-contained homes or relocatable units with services on site/nearby for tenants to have wrap-around supports. This supported community would function as a "One stop shop" where the clients can access advice and services but are also free to interact with community. (more information about this proposal can be provided on request.)

LACK OF SERVICES

No Crisis Options in the North

There is a lack of supported or appropriate crisis accommodation in the North (not including FV refuge). As a result, we see clients and victim survivors accommodated in highly unsuitable accommodation such as privately operated, substandard "boarding houses" that often do not meet safety legislation. This poses a range of problems, most significantly that DHHS Child Protection deem the accommodation inappropriate. The primary parent, often the mother, must immediately find other more suitable accommodation, which she is too often unable to do.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 45. Increased enforced compliance of private boarding houses to minimum standards, with the minimum standards reviewed
- 46. Restrictions to HEF (Housing and Establishment Fund) allowances to prohibit spending on private boarding houses
- 47. Creation of a staffed and supported crisis accommodation service in the North

Limited Options for Excluded Men

With the increased powers that Police now have in excluding the person who uses violence (often men) from their primary residence, we have seen an increase in men entering the homelessness system, primarily by couch surfing with extended family. The lack of appropriate and affordable



crisis accommodation as well as the massive shortage of single bedroom transitional and long-term accommodation is compounding the issue of overcrowding of homes within the Aboriginal community. The homelessness of the person who uses violence is often a risk factor for the woman and her children. Pressure may be placed on the victim of violence to vary orders, to allow the user of violence to return to the home.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 48. An increase in the supply of sustainably affordable crisis accommodation that is accessible as soon after exclusion as possible.
- 49. Increased single person transitional and long-term accommodation.
- 50. Adequately fund services that provide case management support, including that which is culturally appropriate for the Aboriginal community, as well as accommodation support to those that use violence.

Options for People with no Accommodation Experiencing the Criminal Justice System

People who present in court and do not have a suitable address to advise the Courts of are often denied bail and remanded. EMH also finds that people do not have an accommodation to be released too are often denied parole. When crisis accommodation can be sourced, such as hotels and boarding houses, the Courts often advise that the accommodation is unsuitable and will not be considered. For a primary parent being incarcerated this has a massive impact on the family unit and we see children ending up in care with parents struggling to regain custody upon release.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 51. Review of the strengths and weaknesses of SAAP funded housing programs that currently provide services within Victorian custody centres and look to enhance the strengths
- 52. Increase funding and capacity of programs that provide housing and support to people experiencing the criminal justice system
- 53. Increase supported crisis accommodation in urban and regional areas

Extra Financial Support for Women Experiencing Homeless and Family Violence

Family Violence Flexible Support (FVFSP) packages of up to \$7000 are available in Victoria to women experiencing family violence to assist them 'to access support, move out of crisis, stabilise and improve their safety, well-being and independence' (DHHS, 2016). Unfortunately, women unable to access support from family violence services due to agency capacity as well as others who do not meet the threshold to receive family violence support may miss out on access to this support²⁵.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 54. Increased funding for family violence specific case managers, including for Aboriginal specific family violence case managers, to increase support and access to women needing a FVFSP

²⁵ (Launch Housing, 2018)



STAFF RETENTION

Retaining Staff in the Social Housing Sector

A broad range of knowledge and system navigation is needed to ensure streamline processes for our clients and to contribute to best outcomes. Unfortunately, there is a high turnover in much of the SAAP and support system and this results in loss of knowledge within the system that is not easily replaced.

RECOMMENDATION:

55. A review of funding for SAAP funded services to allow for the advancement and retention of highly skilled staff within the sector

SUMMARY OF EMH'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

Aboriginal Housing Stress and Homelessness

1. The relevant government agencies as well as services that provide homelessness support to people within the community, seek direction and inclusion from the community itself to ensure that all levels of response in tackling homelessness are culturally appropriate and responsive

Inability to Maintain Crucial Support Services as Not Eligible Due to Transience

2. The support sector needs to provide allowances to continue to work with individuals and families that are transience and moving between local government and funded catchment area

Shrinking Property Sizes

3. Social Housing maintain and obtain properties with larger sized yards to provide for the inclusion of moveable units or bungalows.

4. Social Housing allocations target properties with larger yards towards families that would then apply for a moveable unit or a Kids Under Cover bungalow to keep Elders and young people at home for longer.

Barriers for Single People Securing Accommodation

5. Centrelink rental assistance should be increased to ensure access to safe and stable housing is possible for people on Newstart payments

6. Tighter controls on boarding houses and hotels which clients are housed in to ensure adequate and safe living conditions

7. Additional one-bedroom social housing properties to accommodate the increasing need for single people.

The Private Rental Market is Unaffordable

8. Longer leases offered to those entering the private rental market. 24-month leases will allow people to establish themselves within communities and provide housing stability

9. Enhanced support through PRAP and Rapid housing Response Program. Subsidies should continue for the duration of a lease, or until income increases.

Support for Maintaining Housing

10. Flexibility in the length of time in which support services are able to continue to engage individuals once long-term accommodation is secured



11. Funding of Aboriginal culturally-specific tenancy programs focused on addressing support needs
12. Social Housing providers to actively encourage tenants at risk of eviction to engage with appropriate support services and conduct facilitated referrals

Accessible Social Housing Stock

13. Social Housing continue to expand in a way where stock is purchased in both urban and established less-urban areas
14. Government funding to expand to allow social services to be able to provide supports in new suburbs
15. A review of the suburbs within the Preston Broadband which currently covers an expansive areas which includes 14 suburbs from Preston out to South Morang. The separation of this broadband into two separate areas would allow for families to select a broadband that would provide for the greatest chance of sustainability

Family Violence Sector Response

16. Funding for crisis accommodation should be increased to accommodate women and children within hotels for more than seven days
17. Better collaboration between Safe Steps, family violence services and specialist homelessness services to minimise the moves and disruptions for clients. This will also limit the level of risk that these families are at.
18. Clients should be consulted in relation to where they would like to be accommodated. Safety is of course the priority, however where possible practitioners should work with clients to accommodate requests to facilitate positive exit options.
19. Refuge accommodation should be increased within metropolitan Melbourne to ensure the demand can be met, without resorting to inadequate hotels and boarding houses.

Blockage within Transitional Housing (THM) Properties

20. Increase the number of transitional housing properties across the state in a calculated approach
21. Reintroduce a set of minimum targets for marginalised groups across all managers of transitional accommodation such as for Aboriginal people and those seeking exit from refuge
22. Ensure refuge providers have direct nomination rights into transitional housing
23. Ensure a fair distribution of THMs across the SAAP sector with any monopoly of THM allocations managed
24. The Victorian government increase social housing stock by 6,000 per annum to match the national average of 4.5 per cent of total housing stock. Including an increase in long term social housing managed by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide exit options for those needing to exit transitional housing

Pregnancy

25. Adequately fund programs, including Aboriginal culturally specific programs, with a primary focus on practical support as well as assistance to secure accommodation for pregnant women in housing distress

Affordability Issues for Pregnant Women

26. Where private rental is secured by a pregnant woman an extension of brokerage funds to cover the period until the newborns Centrelink Payments commence



Lack of Data on Pregnancy and Homelessness

27. Consideration of including into SHIP an option to identify a woman as pregnant

28. Family Safety Victoria to share information relating to number of women seeking family violence assistance that is collected via the Family Violence Risk Assessments

29. Funding for research into the experiences of homeless pregnant women.

Lack of Wraparound Support Services After Baby is Born

30. Giving new parents the supportive environment they need to bring their children into the world.

Provide wrap-around services to families linking them with health supports and facilitating access to appointments by providing transport as well as practical support with meal planning, hygiene, washing clothes and other household tasks. Parents and carers can get help with sleeping, feeding, care and attachment.

Homelessness and its Effects on Children

31. Additional funding for trauma counselling and programs extended to children in crisis accommodation including culturally specific services

32. Tighter controls to ensure children are placed in safe and adequate crisis accommodation ensuring children should not be placed within boarding homes

33. Increased the stock of transitional and long term properties.

Aboriginal Children Placed into Out of Home Care Due to Lack of Housing Options

34. Every measure should be taken to maintain Aboriginal family units. This includes provision of short, transitional and long-term housing in order to keep families safe and together. The lack of a home should never be the reason an Aboriginal child is removed from their family.

Aboriginal Children and Young People

35. Greater emphasis following The DHHS Child Protection Manual, which states: "A cultural plan must be provided to the child to help to maintain and develop their Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal community and culture. This will be part of the care and placement planning process.

The Importance of Cultural Support Plans for Aboriginal Children in Care

36. Mainstream services should consult with Aboriginal organisations if Aboriginal care leavers are to retain a connection to their culture and communities.

37. Greater emphasis following The DHHS Child Protection Manual, which states: "A cultural plan must be provided to the child to help to maintain and develop their Aboriginal identity and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal community and culture. This will be part of the care and placement planning process.

38. Pass the bill in the Upper House extending leaving foster care age to 21

Poor Quality Accommodation for Care Leavers

39. Additional funding for youth support services including youth refuges

40. Greater investment of services and focus on maintaining family units at the initial stages of Child Protection involvement thus recognising and responding to that fact that the past and current practices of the removal of Aboriginal children has long standing and transgenerational impacts that can be seen in the rates of homelessness

Young Aboriginal People Leaving Care - Gaps in the data

41. Funding for research into the experiences of young Aboriginal people leaving care



Overcrowding

42. Social Housing providers to review their current tenancies and identify stock that is underutilised and incentivise tenants to move to appropriately sized stock. This would then increase the number of larger sized properties that are available to be allocated and housing larger families would increase the income generated by these properties.

Out of Kin/Community Care of Children due to Overcrowding

43. Stronger regard for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle when assessing accommodation needs of families. DHHS Child Protection to play an active role in facilitating referrals and advocating with relevant services to assist identified families to receive accommodation via SAAP funded or DHHS services thus reducing the number of children entering out of home care.

A Community Environment for Better Supported Care

44. EMH's "Tiny homes" proposed project: A cluster of self-contained homes or relocatable units with services on site/nearby for tenants to have wrap-around supports. This supported community would function as a "One stop shop" where the clients can access advice and services but are also free to interact with community.

No Crisis Options in the North

- 45. Increased enforced compliance of private boarding houses to minimum standards, with the minimum standards reviewed
- 46. Restrictions to HEF (Housing and Establishment Fund) allowances to prohibit spending on private boarding houses
- 47. Creation of a staffed and supported crisis accommodation service in the north

Limited Options for Excluded Men

- 48. An increase in the supply of sustainably affordable crisis accommodation that is accessible as soon after exclusion as possible
- 49. Increased single person transitional and long-term accommodation
- 50. Adequately fund services that provide case management support as well as accommodation support to those that use violence

Options for People with no Accommodation Experiencing the Criminal Justice System

- 51. Review of the strengths and weaknesses of SAAP funded housing programs that currently provide services within Victorian custody centres and look to enhance the strengths
- 52. Increase funding and capacity of programs that provide housing and support to people experiencing the criminal justice system
- 53. Increase supported crisis accommodation in urban and regional areas

Extra Financial Support for Women Experiencing Homeless and Family Violence

54. Increased funding for family violence specific case managers, including for Aboriginal specific family violence case managers, to increase support and access to women needing a FVSP

Retaining Staff in the Social Housing Sector

55. A review of funding for SAAP funded services to allow for the advancement and retention of highly skilled staff within the sector

