

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

2024-30



CITY OF MELBOURNE



Make Room – creative and culturally safe

An important part of developing Make Room was the creation of Cultural Safety Guidelines. These helped make sure culturally appropriate design and service delivery models were applied – and that residents feel welcome and included throughout the building.

As part of this – and given the over-representation of First Nations people who experience homelessness and rough sleeping – we worked closely with First Nations artists Matthew Harris and Mitch Mahoney (Boonwurrung and Barkindji) to incorporate permanent, culturally informed artwork throughout the building.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Make Room's First Nations artworks and the artists.

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The City of Melbourne respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we govern, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong / Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and honour the unbroken spiritual, cultural and political connection they have maintained to this unique place for more than 2000 generations.

We accept the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart and are committed to walking together to build a better future.

Council Plan 2021-25

The Council Plan 2021-25 sets out our strategic direction and commitment to the community for the next four years. Based on six strategic objectives for our city, this is our detailed plan for our city's revitalisation and considers the needs of all people who access and experience the City of Melbourne municipality. For more information visit melbourne.vic.gov.au/council-plan



Access and affordability

Melbourne is a caring and inclusive city. We are working to reduce economic and social inequality through access to affordable housing, core services and information, with a focus on people experiencing homelessness, while ensuring the city is accessible and welcoming for all.

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August 2024

Cover Image: Make Room facility photography by Dianna Snape

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FOREWORD



Homelessness is something that people experience. It is not who they are. Being without secure and affordable accommodation can be devastating – whether it lasts a short time, several months or years.

We know people can reclaim control of their lives when housing is available. And yet, without a supply of secure housing options in inner Melbourne, people will continue to sleep in our streets and parks and endure hidden forms of homelessness – such as couch surfing or sleeping in cars.

We are living through a time of great change. This strategy aligns with the aspirations of the Victorian Government and the ambition of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, and – importantly – the people of Melbourne, who tell us they want homelessness eradicated. Without serious investment in public, social and affordable housing as our population grows, the scale and complexity of the homelessness crisis will worsen. Our Homelessness Strategy steps into this changing landscape to set the City of Melbourne's comprehensive policy position as we rise to the challenge of ending homelessness in the city.

Written in consultation with sector experts and people with lived experience, and illuminated by thoughtful community feedback, this strategy – and the action plans that follow – will guide our response until 2030. It aligns with Council's Affordable Housing Strategy 2030 and the Inclusive Melbourne Strategy 2022-32.

Access to safe and secure housing is a fundamental human right. It is critical to the health and wellbeing of individuals and the community.

Over the past two decades, we have advocated for change, invested in housing solutions, funded programs, and coordinated specialist services to connect people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with the support they need.

The City of Melbourne has an ambitious plan to end homelessness in the city. It is part of our broad vision to make Melbourne a better place for everyone to live.

In a targeted response to the growing housing and homelessness crisis, we established Homes Melbourne in early 2022. Homes Melbourne advocates for and facilitates the delivery of more safe, secure and affordable housing. We also fund and coordinate tailored homelessness support services across the municipality. By combining affordable housing with support for people so they can find and maintain durable housing solutions, we can end homelessness in Melbourne.

Our flagship Make Room project leads the way. It shows that it is possible for local government to make a difference, by converting a city building into specialist supported housing for at least 50 people for up to 12 months, or until stable long-term housing is secured.

We can't solve this problem alone, but we can end homelessness if we want to. Thank you to everyone who has dedicated time to this important strategy. And thank you to those who will partner with us to end homelessness.



Nicholas Reece
Lord Mayor of Melbourne



Councillor Dr Olivia Ball
Health, Wellbeing and Belonging portfolio lead

A note on language: Our use of the phrase 'Aboriginal people' within Victoria reflects cultural protocols that the Victorian Government has also adopted. We refer to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' when quoting national populations or statistics, including the Census.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision

An inclusive city where every person has a home and support to break the cycle of homelessness.

Our goal

To prevent and end homelessness in Melbourne.

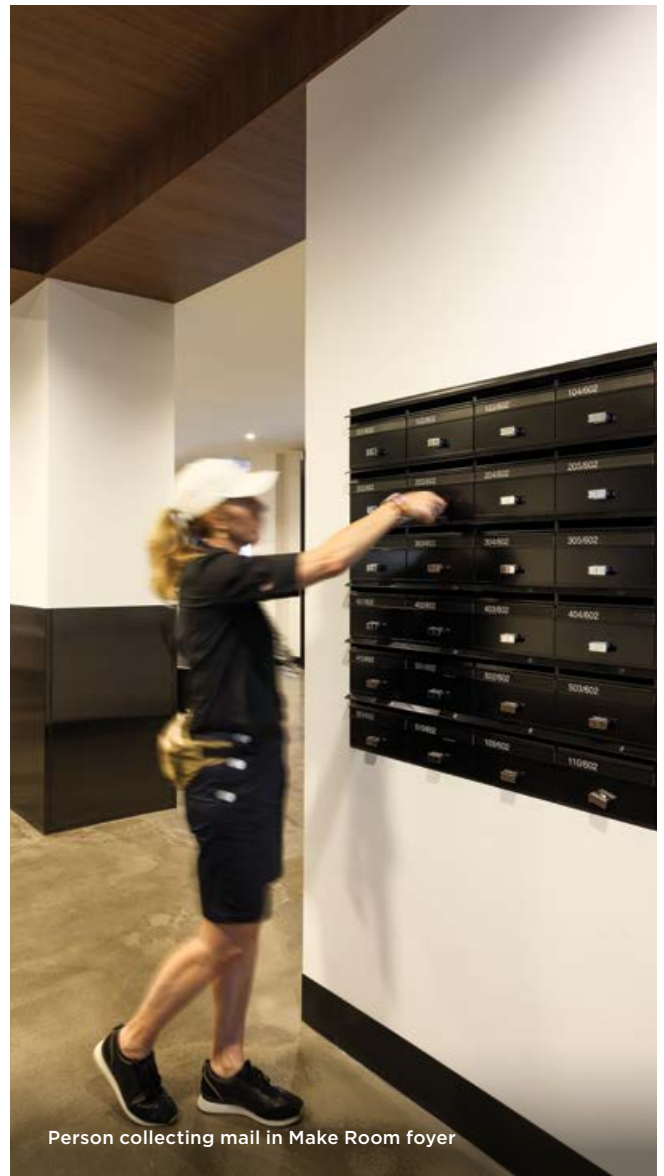
Our strategy

Adequate housing is a human right. It is essential infrastructure that is critical to health and wellbeing. Over the past two decades, we have invested in housing solutions and coordinated and funded services for people in need.

In early 2022, we established Homes Melbourne – a branch of the City of Melbourne focussed solely on homelessness and affordable housing – recognising that the complexity and extent of the housing crisis needed a comprehensive, targeted response. The work of Homes Melbourne includes:

- delivering affordable housing on Council-owned land
- advocating for systemic change and ongoing investment in the sector
- facilitating affordable housing through the planning system
- collaborating with community, public sector and industry partners to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Yet, despite all our work, the lack of affordable housing in the municipality undermines our efforts to get people into long-term, safe and secure housing. Without enough safe, appropriate housing, people can get caught in a cycle of homelessness.



Person collecting mail in Make Room foyer

Advocating for action

In addition to direct action and working in partnership, we also advocate for others to act. The Victorian and Australian governments have legislative responsibility for providing public, social and affordable housing, and for funding specialist housing and homelessness organisations. We are advocating for new and ongoing investment in social, specialist and affordable housing stock. Urgent change is also needed in the complex administrative processes of the housing, taxation, homelessness, justice, welfare and health systems.

Consultation and research

Our strategy is underpinned by a robust evidence base and extensive engagement with people who have lived experience of homelessness. We have consulted housing, health and homelessness sector organisations we fund or partner with to deliver services. We also engaged with the broader community – people who operate a business, live, work or study in Melbourne, and people who visit our city.

In early 2024, we released the draft strategy and asked the community for feedback through Participate Melbourne and 14 tailored engagement sessions. Based on the community's feedback, we updated our approach, including adding outcomes to support LGBTIQ+ people at risk of homelessness, embedding prevention work throughout our priorities and revising the language around priority groups to broaden our focus.

Guiding principles

Through research and engagement with the community, partners and experts, we have developed five principles to inform our vision, goals and priorities:

1. Person-centred approach

- Work is informed by people with lived experience of homelessness
- People are treated with dignity and respect
- Services are accessible and tailored to the unique needs of each person
- People are empowered to make their own choices (self-determination)

2. Health and wellbeing service response

Our responses are:

- trauma-informed
- culturally safe
- health-focused
- based on the knowledge that adequate housing is a social determinant of health.

3. Housing is a human right

- Housing is essential infrastructure
- Everyone has the right to safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing
- Homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring
- Housing must be appropriate for individual needs
- Different cohorts may require specialist housing stock
- Government has the primary responsibility to guarantee the right to adequate housing

4. Safety and security

- All people have access to our public spaces
- Everyone has a sense of belonging, inclusion and participation
- The City of Melbourne is a welcoming, accessible, vibrant city

5. Measure outcomes and impact

We will:

- use a qualitative and quantitative data-led approach.
- evaluate our impact
- adapt to improve outcomes
- provide open data and transparency.

Priorities

Under three priority areas, we will deliver outcomes to achieve our vision. Our priorities will be reviewed every two years and updated in response to the changing nature of homelessness, and social, political and economic changes. We will develop a costed action plan to implement this strategy. The table below outlines our implementation timeframes. 'Immediate' means within the first two years, 'medium' means within two to four years, and 'long-term' means within the lifetime of the strategy.

Priority 1. A city where everyone has a home

We take a person-centred approach, preventing people from becoming homeless or experiencing homelessness, and supporting each person on their pathway out of homelessness. People with lived experience of homelessness inform our work. Our priority groups are Aboriginal people, young people, women, people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough, and other groups facing exclusion.

OUTCOMES	OUR ROLE	COM ROLE
1.1 Aboriginal people at risk of homelessness have access to culturally safe health, homelessness prevention, support and housing services in our city.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Immediate
1.2 Young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are supported with prevention, intervention and housing services.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Immediate
1.3 Women at risk of or experiencing homelessness are supported to access secure, affordable homes that include the wraparound support services necessary to sustain housing.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Medium
1.4 People experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough are provided with coordinated housing, health and homelessness support services.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Immediate
1.5 Our work will amplify the voices of those experiencing homelessness including LGBTIQ+ communities and other groups who experience exclusion, including older people, people with disability and people from multicultural communities.	Advocate, partner and deliver	Medium

Priority 2. A city focused on ending homelessness through partnerships and collaboration

We will create an inclusive city where everyone is supported. People with lived experience of homelessness inform our work. We will ensure coordinated services, collaboration and advocacy through partnerships with our communities, governments, corporates and the homelessness sector.

OUTCOMES	OUR ROLE	COM ROLE
2.1 Strategic partnerships established through the Melbourne Service Coordination Project to deliver timely and tailored support for people experiencing homelessness.	Partner and deliver	Immediate
2.2 Homelessness and health services in the City of Melbourne meet the needs of our specific community of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.	Advocate, partner and deliver	Immediate
2.3 Our advocacy will operate effectively across different levels of government and systems to end homelessness.	Advocate	Medium

Priority 3. A city unified to end homelessness

We will support our community to be informed, respectful, empathetic, and united to end homelessness. People with lived experience inform our work. Our public spaces will be designed and managed to be safe, welcoming and inclusive.

OUTCOMES	OUR ROLE	COM ROLE
3.1 Our community is informed and united to create tangible and enduring change to end homelessness. Through collective community initiatives, we will reduce stigma and foster respect, empathy and understanding of homelessness.	Advocate, partner and deliver	Medium
3.2 Our services, facilities, programs and public spaces are informed by people with lived experience, as relevant, and are thoughtfully designed to be safe, accessible and welcoming for everyone.	Partner and deliver	Immediate
3.3 Our organisation supports, trains and equips all staff members to contribute to our shared goal of ending homelessness.	Deliver	Medium
3.4 Our business community and residents can access the support they need to help maintain a safe and welcoming public realm for all.	Partner and deliver	Immediate

Timeframe: Immediate: 1 to 2 years, Medium: 2 to 4 years, Long-term: 6 to 7 years

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness affects people from all sections of the community. It can occur when people experience a crisis such as job loss, grief or family violence, or to those who may have struggled with disadvantage all their lives. Everyone's experience of homelessness is unique, and it can happen to anyone at any point in their lives.

In our city, we are facing a housing and homelessness crisis, a situation mirrored across Australia and the world. Visible homelessness – people sleeping rough on the streets – is just the tip of the iceberg in our homelessness crisis. Many more women, children and families are part of the hidden problem – sleeping in their cars, on other people's couches and in severely overcrowded or temporary accommodation.

Homelessness is a community issue with far-reaching impacts. We have a responsibility to work together to prevent people from becoming homeless. If people do end up without housing, we want their experience of homelessness to be brief and non-recurring.

Housing is a human right – everyone has the right to safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing. It is not illegal to be homeless or to sleep rough in our city. We know people can reclaim control of their lives when appropriate housing and support is available. However, without access to safe, secure housing, people can become caught in a loop of homelessness and continue sleeping on our streets.

The City of Melbourne is a leader in shaping local government responses to homelessness and affordable housing. While we have made great steps forward, we also challenge ourselves as a city to do better, and we are committed to dedicating resources to create positive change.

We know that homelessness has far-reaching impacts on our city, and we seek to balance the many voices, experiences and competing needs of people who live, work, own a business, study in or visit the City of Melbourne. We strive for Melbourne to be a city where everyone can prosper. We aim to foster a city that accommodates the needs of all city users to ensure everyone feels safe and welcome.

We can't do it alone

Everyone has a role to play in tackling this housing and homelessness crisis: all levels of government, the private, property and development sectors, homelessness and health services, community and housing organisations and the broader community.

This strategy acknowledges the different roles that the City of Melbourne, the Victorian Government, and the Australian Government play in responding to various homelessness issues. The Victorian and Australian Governments have legislative responsibility for providing public, social and affordable housing and funding specialist housing and homelessness organisations.

This strategy recognises a collective response is needed and that residents, visitors and businesses all play a role in the success of this strategy. We are part of the Melbourne Zero Network. This alliance of 50 diverse Melbourne-based businesses, organisations, local government areas and community groups, unites to advocate for real change to end the stigma around street homelessness. This alliance publicly calls for change to make zero homelessness a reality and takes practical actions to end homelessness in our city. Together, we position Melbourne as one of the most liveable cities for everyone.

Homelessness in the City of Melbourne

Snapshot of homelessness in our city

- 130 people sleeping rough
- 5 per cent were Aboriginal people (Aboriginal people only comprise 0.5 per cent of our population)
- 15 per cent were young people aged 15 to 25
- 36 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness were women, and 20 per cent of those women were aged 20 to 24
- 1163 people experiencing homelessness in total

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 Census, released March 2023

We are committed to supporting each person on their pathway out of homelessness. Our work will amplify the voices of LGBTIQ+ communities and other groups of people who may experience exclusion, including older people, people with disability and people from multicultural communities.

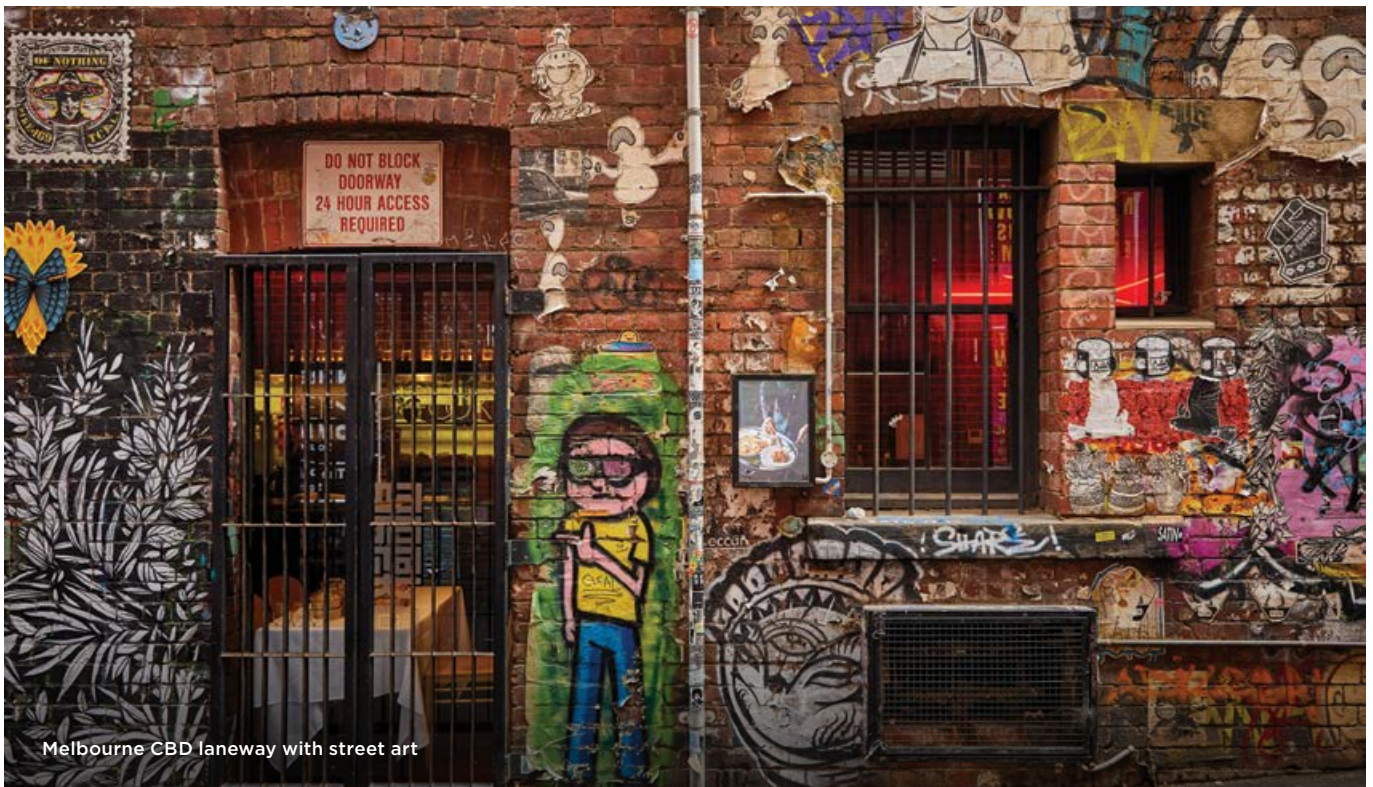
There is a current lack of data relating to homelessness in LGBTIQ+ communities. We are committed to ongoing work to understand our community's needs and adjust our focus accordingly. Part of this work will identify any additional priority groups throughout the strategy's lifecycle so we can meet their unique support needs. We recognise the intersectionality of identity - a person experiencing homelessness may hold the identity of many cohorts.

Our strategy focuses on Aboriginal people because they are over-represented in our homeless population and people experiencing chronic homelessness, women and young people because they have unique unmet needs within Melbourne's homelessness system.

Causes of homelessness

The causes of homelessness and housing stress are complex. They include poverty, domestic and family violence, rental stress, the gender pay gap, poor health, trauma, job insecurity, and poor availability and supply of housing stock.

The most significant cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. In this context, the term 'affordable housing' refers to accommodation for any member of our community who is part of a very low, low, or moderate-income household. Affordable housing is not cheap quality. It is fit-for-purpose housing priced reasonably in relation to its occupants' income.



Melbourne CBD laneway with street art

Income ranges for very low, low and moderate income households, July 2024

	VERY LOW-INCOME RANGE (ANNUAL)	LOW-INCOME RANGE (ANNUAL)	MODERATE INCOME RANGE (ANNUAL)
Single adult	Up to \$30,640	\$30,641 to \$49,020	\$49,021 to \$73,530
Couple, no dependant	Up to \$45,950	\$45,951 to \$73,530	\$73,531 to \$110,300
Family (with one or two parents) and dependent children	Up to \$64,330	\$64,331 to 102,950	\$102,951 to \$154,410

Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987

Affordable housing includes social housing, a broad term that includes public and community housing.

- Public housing: long-term rental housing owned and managed by state governments.
- Community housing: long-term rental housing owned and managed by non-profit community housing organisations.

Government roles and responsibilities related to homelessness

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT	STATE GOVERNMENTS	LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
<p>The Australian Government provides funding for homelessness initiatives through the Department of Social Services, which administers programs to prevent and respond to homelessness.</p> <p>These programs include the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, which provides funding to state and territory governments to deliver homelessness services.</p> <p>They also set tax policy which influences housing supply and affordability.</p>	<p>State and territory governments fund homelessness initiatives through various programs and services, including specialist homelessness services, social and affordable housing programs, and homelessness prevention programs. State governments approve planning scheme amendments and control Victoria's Planning Provisions.</p>	<p>Local governments have a statutory and social responsibility for planning in their local community. They influence social and affordable housing outcomes by developing and implementing local planning schemes (subject to ministerial approval) and designing policies that respond to local homelessness and housing issues.</p>

The community expects local government to act. We have an explicit legislative responsibility and an ethical leadership responsibility to prevent people from becoming homeless. If people do end up without housing, we are also responsible for providing support to break the cycle of homelessness.



OVERVIEW

Defining homelessness

City of Melbourne uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of homelessness:

When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered as experiencing homelessness if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable
- does not allow them to have control of and access to space for social relations.

McKenzie and Chamberlain's (1992) cultural definition is also widely used in the homelessness sector and includes three categories of homelessness:

- Primary homelessness is experienced by people without conventional accommodation – sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings.
- Secondary homelessness is experienced by people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another – emergency accommodation, youth refuges and couch surfing.
- Tertiary homelessness is experienced by people staying in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards – boarding houses or caravan parks.

Homelessness in the City of Melbourne

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census recorded 1163 people experiencing homelessness in the City of Melbourne out of 169,860 residents. The figure is down from 2016 when the Census recorded 1725 people as experiencing homelessness.

However, this Census was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, so these patterns do not necessarily indicate ongoing trends. For example, in 2020, before the pandemic, more than 300 people slept rough in the City of Melbourne every night. The Census occurred during COVID-19: during this period, the Victorian Government accommodated people sleeping rough in hotels. This could account for the decrease.

The City of Melbourne has a specific legislative, moral, ethical and leadership responsibility to create a city where every person has a home. We work on prevention, early intervention and crisis response, collaborating with all levels of government, the private, property and development sectors, homelessness and health services, and community and housing organisations.

In early 2022, Homes Melbourne, an entity of the City of Melbourne, was created as a comprehensive, targeted response to end homelessness and increase safe, secure, and affordable housing.

The homelessness spectrum



As the local government authority, we have a statutory and social responsibility for planning for our local community. We support social and affordable housing outcomes through the Melbourne Planning Scheme and by planning and funding infrastructure development.

The Activities Local Law 2024 contributes to the City of Melbourne's approach to the health, security and welfare of residents, businesses and the environment. It protects public places and specifies our role in addressing rooming houses and squats.

We also have a formal operating protocol with Victoria Police to address rough sleeping in the city. It is not illegal to be homeless or to sleep rough in the City of Melbourne, and we respect the rights of people who are sleeping rough. Our Activities Local Law prevents camping in public spaces, in order to maintain amenities for all. The Activities Local Law 2024 makes it possible to act quickly to protect public safety and amenity while ensuring that people experiencing homelessness can access necessary services.

Supporting each person who is experiencing homelessness

We are committed to supporting each person on their pathway out of homelessness. Our work will amplify the voices of LGBTIQ+ communities and other groups who experience exclusion, including older people, people with disability and people from multicultural communities.

LGBTIQ+ people and practitioners in Victoria reported discrimination when engaging with the homelessness service system following disclosure (McNair, 2017). This can result in experiences of vulnerability and stigma.

We recognise the intersectionality of identity – a person who is at risk of or experiencing homelessness may hold the identity of many cohorts. This intersectionality needs to be considered when designing policy and service delivery systems.

There is a need for more detail about the homelessness risks and service needs of LGBTIQ+ people. This is, in part, hampered by the lack of collection of data on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity in major Australian Government population surveys such as the Census.

We are committed to working with our community to understand their needs and adjust our work accordingly. Part of our work will identify any additional priority groups throughout the strategy's lifecycle so we can meet their unique support needs.

Our strategy focuses on Aboriginal people because they are over-represented in our homeless population. It focuses on people experiencing chronic homelessness, women and young people because they also have unique unmet needs within Melbourne's homelessness system.

1. Aboriginal people

Aboriginal people are vastly over-represented in Melbourne's overall homelessness population and the chronic homelessness cohort. Only 0.5 per cent of the City of Melbourne's population identifies as Aboriginal. Despite this, 5 per cent of people experiencing homelessness and 15 per cent experiencing chronic homelessness identify as Aboriginal people (ABS Census 2021, City of Melbourne By Name List, February 2023).

Aboriginal people in Victoria experience contact with homelessness services at 10 times the rate of other Victorians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, December 2022).

For Aboriginal women, race and gender-based discrimination intersect to compound disadvantage and discrimination. A tailored, self-determined response is required to address the needs of Aboriginal women who experience family violence and are at risk of homelessness.

Despite Aboriginal people representing a high percentage of people experiencing homelessness, there is no Aboriginal-specific access point within Melbourne's CBD or established partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs).

Research to develop a blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system reported that Aboriginal people often find mainstream services 'cold' and 'scary', and lack culturally safe environments (Aboriginal Housing Victoria, 2021).

Cultural safety means creating an environment where Aboriginal people feel safe, respected and empowered, and can access support services that respect and acknowledge their cultural identity, values and beliefs. Culturally safe environments address the systemic barriers and discrimination that Aboriginal people face in the homelessness system.

Despite the Victorian Government's development of a Cultural Safety Framework in 2019, there are currently no mechanisms to monitor the delivery of culturally safe services across the homelessness system in Melbourne.

Aboriginal people have specific cultural and housing needs that are being overlooked. The current homelessness system does not support self-determination. It does not offer choices and options between services or housing choices. There is a call for more Aboriginal staff across the system – including in outreach services and government bodies – to increase representation, understanding, self-determination and participation in decision-making processes.

What is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation?

An Aboriginal community-controlled organisation is a community-led organisation owned and operated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

ACCOs provide various health, social and community services tailored to the needs and cultural requirements of their local communities.

They strongly emphasise self-determination, community empowerment and cultural safety. They operate on the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should control the design, delivery and evaluation of their community's health and social services.

ACCOs also prioritise the employment and training of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and are often governed by community-elected boards of directors.

JASON RUSSELL

In search of home sweet home

How does a house become a home? It's a question that Jason Russell still asks himself, years after he put chronic homelessness behind him.

The rituals that helped Jason Russell survive on the streets of inner-city Melbourne for nearly two decades are hard to shake.

"When I first got the keys to the new place, I was terrified. I slept in the lounge room. I didn't know there was a bedroom. I wouldn't cook in the kitchen. I was hard-wired to living in a squat," Jason said.

In the abandoned inner-city factory where he took shelter for four years, Jason learnt to leave no trace of himself. Nothing that could be linked back to him.

"Now my place is like an Airbnb. I could put my wallet in my pocket and walk out the door and nobody would know it was me living here. Apart from the didgeridoo ... that might be a giveaway."

In his former life on the northern coast of NSW, Jason was a firefighter and a family man with a wife and three kids. A proud member of the Birabri Nation.

Things started to unravel when an underlying mental health condition worsened, leading to an honourable discharge from NSW Fire and Rescue.

"As a firefighter we know how to stabilise a body ... but an injury to the mind, I didn't know or understand it. Everything fell to pieces. My career, my world, my family life."

Jason left his community behind, thinking this would help him escape his "demons".

After roaming the country for a decade, he eventually found the anonymity he craved in inner-city Melbourne.

Ever since, he's been unlearning the compound stresses of what he describes as an "18-year bad day".

While Jason lurched from squat to crisis accommodation to transitional housing and back again, his instincts as a first responder never left him.

"As a firefighter, it was instilled in me to look out for my community."

Jason volunteered at soup kitchens and drop-in centres. He got to know the workers, the agencies. He made friends among those who were also experiencing homelessness.

He started advising the homelessness sector on ways to improve the collection and sharing of data.

"Knowing what it meant to be homeless has made me such a great advocate."



"Knowing what it meant to be homeless has made me such a great advocate."

- Jason

He has a knack for sharing insights that resonate with first responders. Together, they find ways to better connect with people experiencing homelessness. "I can walk into a room of firefighters or police, and they'll respect me. I can tell my story, and everyone knows."

Two years ago, Jason was finally handed the keys to a new house in a suburb that put some distance between him and the squats where demons still lurked.

"I'm housed in a beautiful property. I know that home is where the heart is. I passionately want to make this my home.

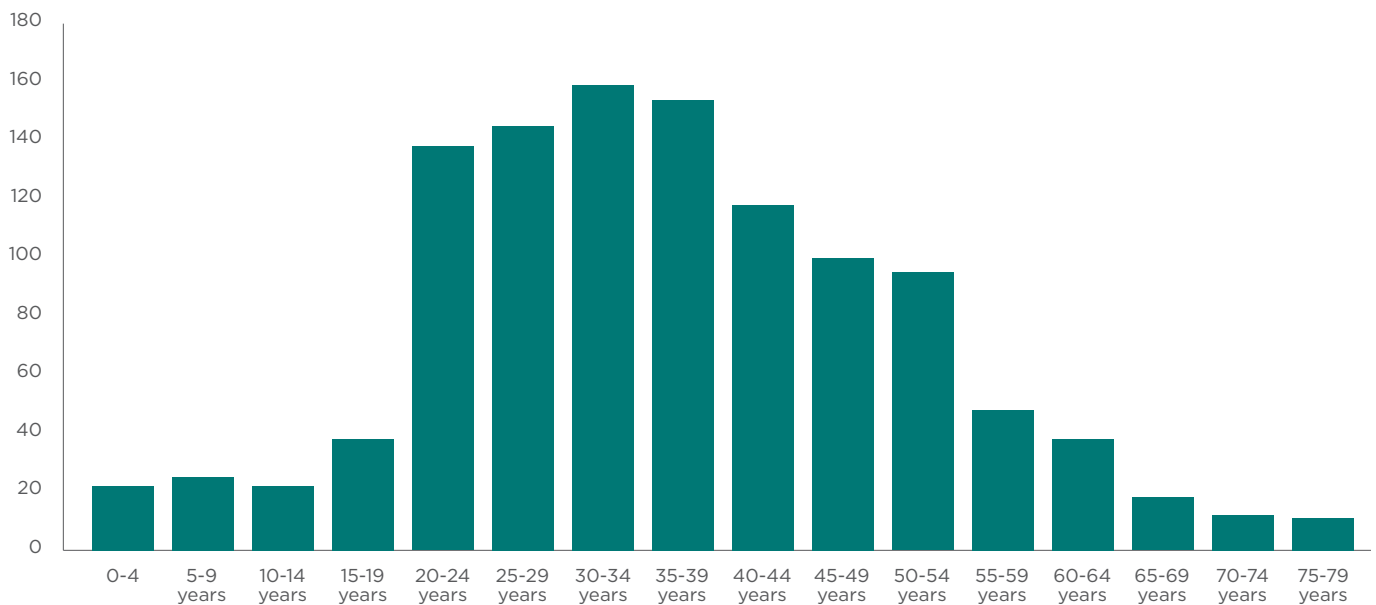
"Is it 'home sweet home'? Not yet. I'm working on that," Jason said.

2. Young people (15 to 25 years old)

In Melbourne, young people experience high incidences of homelessness – 15 per cent of people (174) who were homeless in our city were aged 15 to 25 (ABS 2021 Census).

The impacts of homelessness on young people are immense, and the causes that drove them into homelessness are unjust. These include childhood abuse and neglect, family and sexual violence and homophobia (Melbourne City Mission, April 2024).

Homelessness by age groups in years (City of Melbourne, 2021)



Key

■ 1163 people in total

Given the high incidence of trauma among young people experiencing homelessness, there is a need to address mental health and wellbeing in young people in a way that differs from other cohorts.

In 2020–21, one in six clients of homelessness services in Melbourne were aged 15 to 24 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - AIHW, 2021). Yet the current homelessness system in Melbourne focuses on adults. Young people are caught in this system, and their unique service and housing needs go unmet. The Council to Homeless Persons advocates for a state-wide, youth-specific homelessness strategy to help prevent youth homelessness and to effectively respond to young people without a home (Council to Homeless Persons – CHP, 2022).

Research by the Institute of Child Protection Studies also shows that acting early and supporting young people when they are first at risk of experiencing homelessness reduces long-term entrenchment within the adult system (Barker, 2015). Preventing young people from experiencing homelessness is key. The longer young people experience homelessness, the more likely they are to develop severe health and mental issues and have contact with the justice system.

Young people need tailored, specialised and extended support periods. They are at a particular developmental phase in their lives and require support and service responses that are specific to their life stage. Young people require access to a range of supported and independent housing options. This includes specialist-supported housing, with family violence support, to enable them to be safe and gain stability.

The existing power imbalance between young people and adults increases dramatically when young people have experienced abuse and trauma. In the current homelessness system, intimidation increases when young people engage with adult-centric services.

Establishing youth-safe spaces will ensure young people can more comfortably engage with services (AHURI, April 2020). Better collaboration between services would also reduce the need for young people to repeat their stories to different agencies, which is re-traumatising.

Without proper support, young people without a home are more likely to end up in the justice system, cycling in and out of emergency departments due to mental health concerns, become further victimised by family violence, or die by suicide (Melbourne City Mission, April 2024).



Two young people accessing support services

JOAL PRESINCULA

The changing face of homelessness

A fake ID, a savvy older friend and survival instincts were the only things keeping 16-year-old Joal Presincula from the streets when she had nowhere else to go.

Even though she was clubbing all night every night, Joal Presincula still managed to get herself to school most days.

When she fell asleep in class, her friends assumed it was because she'd had a big night.

"My friends had no idea. Nobody had any idea," Joal said.

She avoided going home, where her mum and three growing siblings were jammed into a chaotic two-bedroom unit.

For as long as Joal could remember, her mum had contended with family violence, trauma and clinical depression.

She drifted to the bright lights of the city's nightlife instead.

"It took a long time for me to realise that couch surfing was homelessness. It's not just staying at a friend's house, or at a hotel after the club. It's actual homelessness."

It was two years before an older friend urged her to call a homelessness service to help her find a bed in a youth refuge.

She was nearly 19 years old before transitional accommodation came up, and she could talk her way into a private rental.

Life settled down. Joal's boyfriend moved in. She got pregnant and had a baby at 22, but things unraveled fast when the landlord sold the property.

"So I was experiencing homelessness again, now with a child. I tried to live with the baby's dad for a bit, but there was family violence. We couch-surfed. We lived with family. We just lived anywhere we could."

When she came into contact with homelessness workers, she put on a brave face.

"I didn't spill my guts to anyone. I'd say: 'I'm great, I just need help with somewhere to live'. And they were like, 'you're not bad enough'."

Joal didn't know that sharing a fuller picture of her situation with workers would help to prioritise her housing needs on a growing waiting list in metropolitan Melbourne.

Joal's anxiety escalated to panic attacks. A doctor prepared a mental health care plan, diagnosed her with depression and referred her to a psychologist.

That's when things started to change for the better.



"My friends had no idea. Nobody had any idea."

- Joal

Joal's psychologist paired her with a social worker and together they found the language to address Joal's circumstances to give her the best chance of success in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

As well as advocating to find Joal safe accommodation, the social worker also tended to her other needs: daytime rehab, a weekly playgroup, therapy. Access to a laptop so she could study.

Secure housing finally came up for Joal 11 years ago. She's still living in the same place.

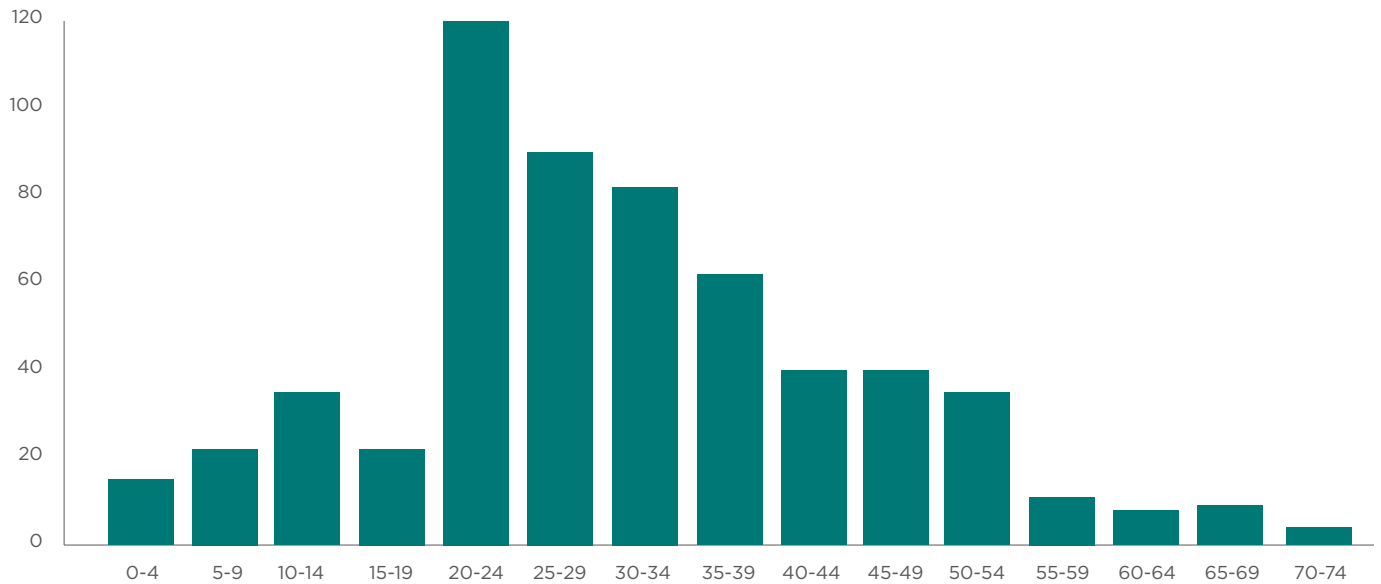
"Looking back, it's so funny to me that I only worked with that social worker for three months. But that three months is the reason I'm housed today all these years later."

3. Women

Women aged 20 to 24 were the largest female age group experiencing homelessness in the City of Melbourne, with 119 people out of 633, or almost 20 per cent (ABS 2021 Census). Across our city, 36 per cent of people who were

recorded as experiencing homelessness in the 2021 Census were women. The number of women with young children who don't have anywhere to live has risen dramatically in the past five years. Family violence is the primary cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia (AHURI, October 2022).

Women experiencing homelessness by age group in years (City of Melbourne, 2021)



Key
■ 633 women in total

Almost one-third of the people sleeping rough in our city are women (42 of 149 total according to By Names List data, May 2024). Yet many more women and children are part of the hidden homelessness problem – sleeping in their cars, on other people’s couches and in severely overcrowded or temporary accommodation.

Women are less likely than men to sleep rough due to safety concerns, reducing their visibility. Women are also more likely to ‘self-manage’ their homelessness through strategies such as moving in with a partner, moving between family and friends, and seeking jobs providing housing, such as live-in care work, further decreasing their visibility within the homelessness system.

Women face systemic economic disadvantages when compared with men. Inequalities put women at a greater risk of experiencing homelessness or housing stress as they age. Women, on average, earn \$231.50 per week less

than men (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2024). Women-dominated industries such as health care and social assistance are paid significantly less than industries dominated by men. Women are over-represented as part-time workers in low-paid sectors, and 60 per cent of low-income earners are women. Due to these financial inequalities, women have less superannuation and are financially unequal to men at retirement age. In recent years, the gender superannuation gap has been between 22 and 35 per cent (Australians Investing in Women, October 2022).

The risk of experiencing homelessness for older women is directly aligned with inequities in retirement income systems and the fact women are more likely to live alone than men. Forty-five per cent of older women who rent in the private market spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, increasing the risk of housing stress or experiencing a period of homelessness (Australians Investing in Women, October 2022).

JODY LETT

On fragile peace and permanent housing

A home is a hard-won and fragile thing, according to former public servant and military veteran Jody Lett. She spent six months living with her daughter in an old delivery van.

After breaking the cycle of homelessness once before, Jody is motivated to make sure history doesn't repeat. Some days are easier than others.

"Expenses are hiking. I'm stressing over it," Jody said.

To help cover the mortgage repayments on her house on the outskirts of Melbourne, Jody has someone to share the rising costs of living.

"If there's a situation where my companion can't be in the house anymore – say if they have a car accident, I am doomed. I lose my house. You know what I mean? It's that fragile."

A decade ago, Jody owned her own home in regional Victoria. She had a job with the federal government.

Jody was also contending with chronic pain from injuries acquired in an earlier life. She spent a decade working in the military, carrying around her weight in personal protective equipment.

Rehabilitation was intensive, but Jody was focused.

"It was like a full-time job, driving back and forward to medical appointments. I'd have to be in Horsham one day ... or Heidelberg, or Maryborough. And I didn't get to choose the days I could attend," Jody said.

First, she ran down her leave entitlements. Then she took leave without pay. When her savings ran out, Jody sold her house and relocated with her teenage daughter to another regional town with cheaper rent, closer to a rehabilitation hub.

When the money ran out, Jody sold her possessions to raise enough cash for an old delivery van.

The van would be home for Jody and daughter for six months. They couch surfed when they could with friends and family. Her daughter quickly fell behind with her remote schoolwork.

"My mental availability wasn't there to support her. We didn't have time for [meals]. Not showering today. Wearing the same clothes we wore yesterday. Anything that could buy us more time."

Jody gravitated towards the CBD for treatment. Here she connected with the homelessness sector and found her way into transitional housing. It was a step up from the van, but the peace was still fragile.

"You'd think you were settled. Then you'd find out you were unable to stay, and the displacement starts again."



"You'd think you were settled. Then you'd find out you were unable to stay, and the displacement starts again."

- Jody

Receiving the permanent disability pension meant Jody could access her superannuation early, and she turned her attention to putting down roots.

"I wanted to be near family and friends, somewhere I could afford to buy. A bus stop out the front. Good health options, access to schooling. A large supermarket for affordable food."

Finally, everything in her house could be modified to support her disability.

Some days she feels a sense of calm and freedom. On hard days, Jody thinks about buying a motor home and hitting the road.

She's also aware that if she decides to run, she could set in motion the cycle of homelessness she's worked so hard to break.

4. People experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough

Long-term homelessness (12 months or longer) in inner Melbourne was experienced by 70 per cent of people aged between 19 and 24, and 85 per cent of people 25 or older who experienced homelessness.

City of Melbourne and Launch Housing coordinate the Melbourne By Name List, which provides real-time, quality data to inform service planning, service access improvements, decision-making and confirmation of who is moving in and out of homelessness in our municipality. The By Name List identifies 149 people experiencing homelessness, with 73 people reported to be experiencing rough sleeping (City of Melbourne, May 2024).

People experiencing long-term homelessness often have multiple and complex needs, and many experience mental health difficulties. There are elevated rates of depression, substance use, and complex mental illness (including psychosis and schizophrenia) experienced in this homelessness population. The high prevalence of alcohol and drug use among individuals experiencing chronic homelessness is a common consequence of homelessness. It's a method often used to cope with the dangers, stress and anxiety they face during homelessness.

For people experiencing long-term homelessness, it is now widely understood that housing alone is unlikely to be an adequate or lasting solution. Many who have been sleeping rough for an extended time have experienced deep trauma and violence, have complex needs, and require physical and mental health support.

In addition to exiting homelessness, people need support to improve their health and wellbeing and to build the skills, independence and social connections required to experience and maintain a better quality of life.

Melbourne's hospitals provide healthcare for many experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough. Yet our hospitals are under-resourced and not working with homelessness services as effectively as they could. People are still discharged into street homelessness, especially on weekends when most support services are closed. Coordinated discharge planning remains a gap. A less siloed approach is needed to recognise chronic homelessness as a health emergency.



Person carrying backpack down laneway

In our city, the homelessness service system is not receiving effective responses from community mental health teams. Catchment area restrictions can limit services' ability to support people. Given the transient nature of sleeping rough and moving between municipalities, people experiencing chronic homelessness can fall through the gaps. Catchment area restrictions are one of the most significant challenges service organisations face when supporting people who are unwell and experiencing homelessness. The effect of this is evident in the number of people with untreated mental health issues who are seen by our daily support team in the CBD daily.

People sleeping rough for an extended time usually require specialist housing stock and ongoing support. However, there is a lack of specialist housing with wraparound support services in Melbourne and nationwide. Without investment in tailored housing solutions for people who have experienced long-term rough sleeping, the number of people ending up back on the streets will continue to rise.

HELEN MATTHEWS

Building bridges

Adjusting to life in a new city took its toll on Helen when she arrived in Melbourne on a whim. It was the first step in a journey to sobriety and stable housing.

Finding your feet in a new city can be a challenge at the best of times, but for Helen Matthews, a spontaneous midlife move to Melbourne quickly turned into sensory overload.

"I burned a lot of bridges in Adelaide. When you're in the midst of an addiction, you don't plan ahead. You think a change of scenery will make a difference," Helen said.

She couch-surfed at a friend's one-bedroom flat. Outside her comfort zone, Helen's undiagnosed neurodivergence took charge: she got louder, drank more and intensified. She soon wore out her welcome.

"I found myself having nowhere to sleep ... so I stayed up all night at Flinders Street Station. What I found there was totally unexpected," Helen said.

Someone bought her a coffee. Another introduced her to a nearby soup van, offering a warm meal and connection to housing support workers.

Occasionally a bed would come up for Helen in a rooming house, but she'd have to weigh up the risks before saying yes.

Emergency accommodation can be filled with a mix of characters working through their own issues. That can be intimidating, and sometimes threatening, especially for older women who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community. Would she be safe there?

"In one rooming house, a guy I was absolutely terrified of broke in. It took a week to fix the door. In another rooming house, the roof collapsed."

One thing she could control was her relationship with substances. From a position of early sobriety, she began to address the unseen patterns at play in her life since childhood.

It was an act of bravery for Helen to step into the rooms of a trauma-informed psychologist.

The medical system can be intimidating. Waiting rooms are hectic. The lights are bright. Making it on time to an appointment is stressful. Power imbalances are everywhere.

"When you come from trauma, you're picking up energy from people. Not just the workers. Everyone in there. It's how you feel when you walk in the door. Sometimes you walk straight out again."

And yet she stuck with the psychologist and finally grieved the son she'd given up for adoption in Adelaide. She also received a proper diagnosis of autism, ADHD and post-traumatic stress.



"Moving to Melbourne was a blessing in disguise, even though it's been a journey to get where I've got."

- Helen

"Now that I've been diagnosed, I've got a bit more understanding of how my brain operates. And tools I can use in times where it's difficult. And support through the NDIS. That's made things a lot easier."

A private rental finally came up in a new complex. Helen has lived in the same place for almost seven years and is firmly in recovery, and she's gradually extending herself into unfamiliar situations.

"I've never really mixed with the LGBTIQ+ community. I'm trying to meet someone."

"Moving to Melbourne was a blessing in disguise, even though it's been a journey to get where I've got."

What is causing Melbourne's homelessness crisis?

The causes of homelessness and housing stress are complex. They include poverty, domestic and family violence, rental stress, the gender pay gap, poor health, trauma, job insecurity, and poor availability and supply of housing stock.

Domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence is the primary reason women, children and young people seek assistance from homelessness services in Melbourne (AHURI, October 2022). Children who experience homelessness are more likely to become homeless when they reach adulthood. There is a strong correlation between homelessness and the following factors: childhood poverty, family breakdown, child protection or out-of-home care, and low levels of education.

Limited funding for support services and shortage of supported housing options

The primary challenges within the homelessness system in Melbourne also include a lack of funding for support services and a shortage of emergency accommodations and supported housing options. The Victorian Government has implemented various measures to address these challenges, including funding new housing initiatives and support services. More needs to be done, at a quicker pace, by all levels of government to create suitable emergency accommodation, supported housing and tailored support options in our city.

There are not enough affordable homes in our city

The most significant cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. Affordable housing is for any member of our community who is part of a very low, low, or moderate-income household. Affordable housing is not cheap quality. It is fit-for-purpose housing priced reasonably in relation to its occupants' income.

Affordable housing is a broad term that includes:

- **Social housing:** a broad term that includes public housing and community housing.
- **Public housing:** long-term rental housing owned and managed by state governments.
- **Community housing:** long-term rental housing owned and managed by community housing organisations.

All Melburnians deserve access to safe, secure and affordable housing. Housing is essential infrastructure that is vital to the functioning of our society and economy. Our research shows that for every \$1 invested in affordable housing, the community benefits by \$3 through worker retention, educational benefits, enhanced human capital, health cost savings, and reduced family violence and crime.

Yet decades of under-investment in social and affordable housing are compounded by several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Our growing population is accelerating house prices and affecting the already stressed rental market. And living costs have risen sharply. In addition, the growth in wages and income support is failing to meet the increasing cost of rent.

Approximately 6000 affordable rental homes were needed in 2016 to meet the current demand in the City of Melbourne (SGS Economics & Planning, 2019). Without intervention, the current affordable housing crisis will worsen. This shortfall could quadruple to more than 23,000 if we do nothing by 2036.

Our city is not alone – there is a vast unmet demand for social housing across the state. The latest Victorian Government figures show that almost 68,000 households are on the Victorian Housing Register (Homes Victoria, March 2023). This refers to households that are eligible for social housing. It means more than 120,000 people are facing wait times of several years for social housing.

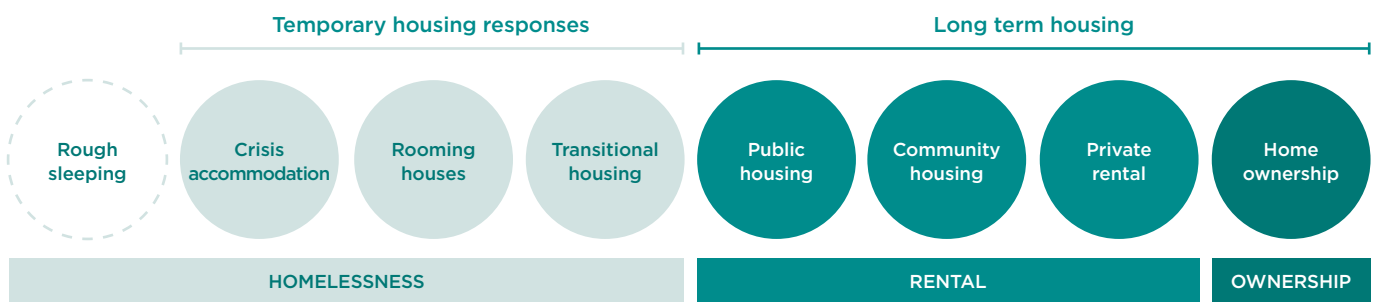
The lack of social and affordable housing for people with the lowest incomes often leads to people living in severely overcrowded accommodation. Overcrowding mainly occurs in unregistered rooming houses where two or three-bedroom apartments accommodate up to 15 people (CHP, 2019).

Combine this with a lack of affordable housing options, it is increasingly difficult for people to break the cycle of homelessness and find secure long-term housing.

Housing spectrum

There is a strong relationship between the availability, accessibility and affordability of the different types of housing tenures. Our goal is to end homelessness in Melbourne by securing sustainable and affordable housing for all.

Housing spectrum



Secure long-term housing covers rental and home ownership. At the other end of the housing spectrum, the worst-case outcome is rough sleeping. Without a supply of secure housing options in inner Melbourne, sleeping rough will remain the only option for many people.

The cycle of homelessness



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In developing this strategy, we have considered the global, national, state and local context and relevant legislation at the international, national, state and local levels.

In addition to the legislative responsibilities outlined here, our community expects us to act. The Council Plan 2021–25 vision for the City of Melbourne is a ‘city of possibility’ with universal access to housing, safety and wellbeing.

We have an explicit legislative, moral, ethical and leadership responsibility to create a city where every person has a home and support to break the cycle of homelessness.

Global context: international legislation

International human rights law

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights formalises the right to adequate housing (Article 25). At the time, all UN member countries, including Australia, adopted the declaration.

International human rights law further recognises that every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing (Article 11, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Australia ratified this Covenant in 1975.

People experiencing homelessness face potential violations of a wide range of human rights, such as the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education, and the right to freedom from discrimination. Several international treaties protect these human rights, particularly the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a party to all these treaties, Australia has legal and moral obligations to respect, protect and realise the human rights of all people.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Leaving no one behind is an essential theme of the Sustainable Development Goals, a United Nations framework. City of Melbourne has committed to this framework in its Voluntary Local Review.

The framework consists of 17 goals with specific targets focused on economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. City of Melbourne has embraced the goals to make Melbourne a better place to live, work and visit. We will develop an action plan to implement this strategy, which will help us measure progress against the goals over time.

These are the goals that intersect with our approach to ending homelessness:



End poverty in all its forms everywhere



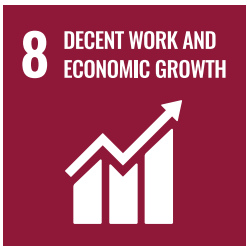
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



Good health and wellbeing – ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages



Gender equality – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



Reduce inequality within the city



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels






Source: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Australian context: existing roles and responsibilities

Solving the complex problems of homelessness and housing shortages requires a collaborative effort between all levels of government in Australia, the private, property and development sectors, community and housing organisations and the broader community.

The Victorian and Australian governments have legislative responsibility for providing social and affordable housing, and funding specialist housing and homelessness organisations.

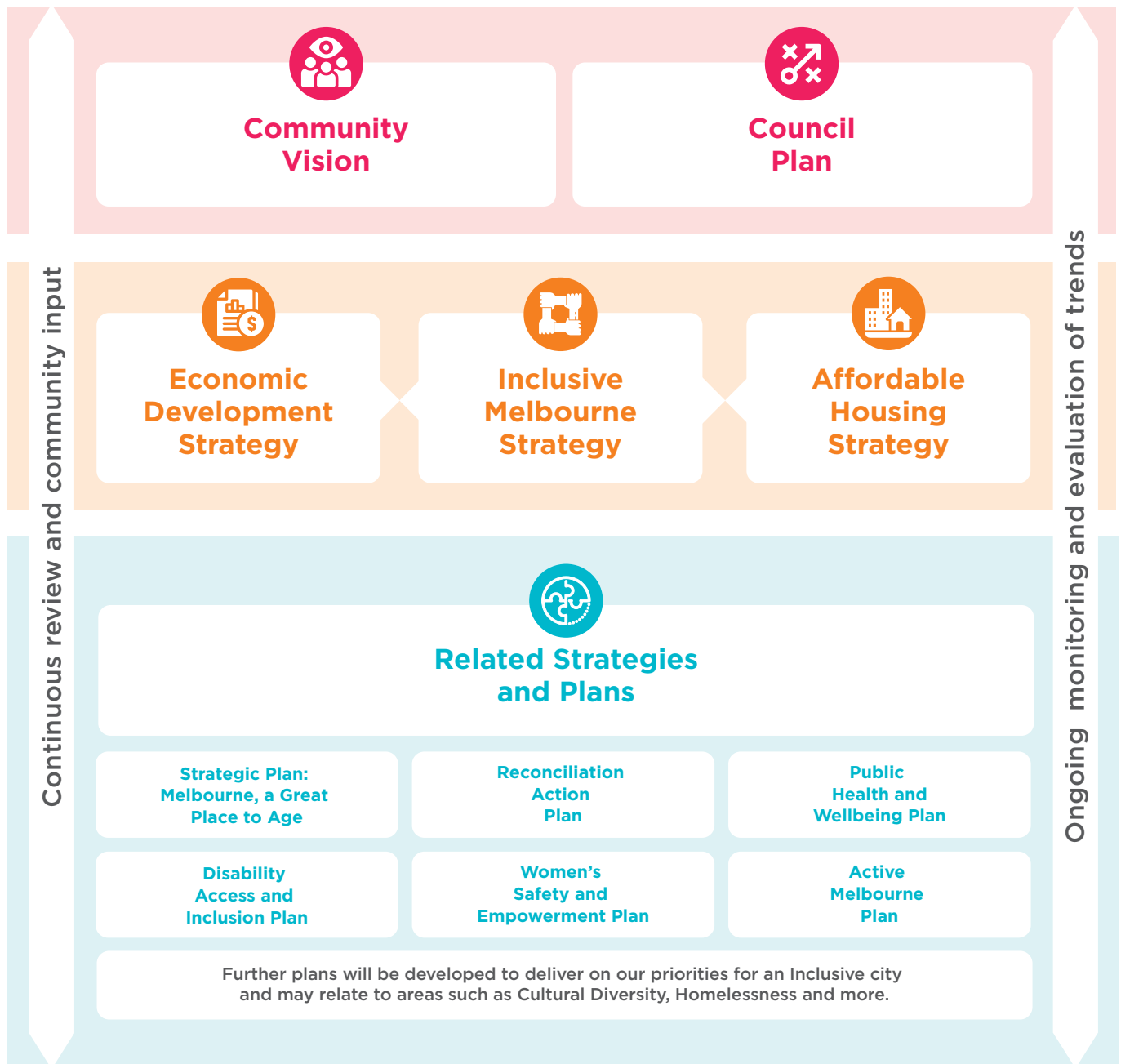
Relevant Victorian and local legislation

	VICTORIAN	LOCAL
	<p>Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities sets out all people's rights, freedoms and responsibilities in Victoria. Local governments must act in a manner compatible with human rights when making decisions under the Charter: freedom, equality, dignity, cultural and property rights, the right to protection of families and children, and the right to participate in public life.</p>	<p>The City of Melbourne, as the local government authority, has a statutory and social responsibility for planning for our local community. We support social and affordable housing outcomes through the planning scheme and by planning and funding infrastructure development. The Melbourne Planning Scheme covers land in our municipality. It contains state and local planning policies, zones, overlays, and other land use and development provisions.</p>
	<p>Under Victoria's Local Government Act 2020, City of Melbourne must act for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community. We must achieve the best outcomes for the community, plan for climate change and provide accessible and equitable services responsive to diverse needs.</p>	<p>The Activities Local Law 2024 contributes to the City of Melbourne's long-term and responsible approach to the health, vitality, prosperity, security and welfare of residents, businesses, and the environment. This local law aims to protect public places, provide for safety, control and manage the use of premises and vehicles, and promote a healthy and peaceful physical and social environment. It also specifies our role in addressing rooming houses and squats.</p>
	<p>Local governments support community members in achieving optimal health and wellbeing, as set out in section 24 of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.</p>	<p>We have a formal operating protocol with Victoria Police to address rough sleeping in the city. The Homelessness Protocol and our ongoing work to end homelessness make it possible to act quickly to protect public safety and amenity while ensuring that the city's most vulnerable people can access the necessary services.</p>
	<p>Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020 requires public entities, including councils, to support the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs and delivery of services in our workplaces and in the communities we serve. City of Melbourne will conduct gender impact assessments on all policies, programs, and services we develop.</p>	<p>As a member of the Welcoming Cities network, we are committed to creating a place where everyone belongs and participates in our society. The Welcoming Cities Standard sets the national standard for cultural diversity and inclusion policy and practice in local government.</p>
	<p>The Child Safe Standards were introduced via an amendment to the Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005 and are compulsory for all Victorian organisations that provide services or facilities for children.</p>	

Existing strategies and policies

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT	VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT	CITY OF MELBOURNE
<p>Australia does not have a national homelessness strategy (as of May 2024). Still, the Australian Government has committed to developing a 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan to help more Australians access safe and affordable housing.</p> <p>Through the Housing Australia Future Fund, the Australian Government has committed to investing \$10 billion and spending any earnings – up to \$500 million a year, on affordable and social housing projects. Parliament passed the bill in September 2023.</p> <p>National Housing and Homelessness Agreement: began in July 2018, providing around \$1.6 billion yearly to states and territories to improve access to secure and affordable housing across the spectrum.</p> <p>National Housing Supply and Affordability Council: advises on national housing policy matters at the request of the Minister for Housing, and on its own initiative. Members of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council were appointed by the Australian Government in January 2024 for a four-year term. The members are from across government, industry, the community sector and academia.</p> <p>National Housing Accord 2022: includes an initial, aspirational national target of delivering a total of one million new, well-located homes over five years from 2024, and immediate and longer-term actions for all parties to support the delivery of more affordable homes.</p>	<p>The Victorian Government announced its Big Housing Build in November 2020 – a \$5.3 billion investment in more social and affordable housing.</p> <p>The Social and Affordable Housing Compact is vital to the Victorian Government’s Big Housing Build. The compact outlines a strengthened state and local government partnership. It gives councils a seat at the table in identifying priorities for social and affordable housing growth and homelessness in their municipalities.</p> <p>In September 2023, the Victorian Government released Victoria’s Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–34, setting a target to build 800,000 homes in Victoria over the next decade. The statement has a simple proposition: build more homes, and they’ll be more affordable.</p>	<p>In our Council Plan 2021–25 under the strategic objective for access and affordability, we reduce economic and social inequality by ensuring universal access to housing, core services and information.</p> <p>Our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021–25 prioritises housing and homelessness, including reducing homelessness and increasing the supply of affordable homes in our municipality.</p> <p>Our Affordable Housing Strategy 2030 is a 10-year strategy that outlines our commitment to planning, advocating for, and delivering more affordable housing in our city.</p> <p>Our Inclusive Melbourne Strategy 2022–32 helps to advance inclusion and equality in our city. It outlines how we will embrace the diversity of cultures, ages, genders, sexualities, backgrounds, religions and abilities of all who live, work, study and visit the city.</p>

The relevant City of Melbourne strategies and plans



What we heard from the community

This strategy has been shaped with targeted engagement from Homes Melbourne's Interim Homelessness Advisory Group, direct engagement of people with lived experience of homelessness and partner agencies. We also sought community feedback on the draft strategy in early 2024.

Throughout our detailed research into the homelessness system, we have engaged with and listened to people with lived experience, businesses and diverse communities across the city. We've also involved the community in the four-year Council Plan, Community Vision, and Community Engagement Policy.

We used primary and secondary research to build a detailed understanding of the homelessness service system in Melbourne.

Our research included facilitated workshops with frontline workers and people with lived experience of homelessness, 1:1 in-depth interviews with 29 sector experts, a CBD business owner survey and a comprehensive review of existing homelessness research.

During these consultations, we heard that inclusion matters to everyone. For example, almost one in five – 19 per cent – of people said their top priority for the City of Melbourne is to be inclusive, accessible and affordable.

It is clear that our community wants us to act to create an inclusive, welcoming and safe city with sustainable and affordable housing for every person. This feedback has helped shape our vision, goal, guiding principles, priorities and actions.

What we heard about the role of our city

We are committed to reducing social exclusion and creating a city in which every member of our community can participate. The community told us how they use and view the city, which will help ensure all people can access and feel safe and secure in our public spaces. It will enable us to create a sense of belonging and inclusion for residents, businesses, workers and visitors, and people experiencing homelessness.

What role does the City of Melbourne play for people who visit, live, work and play here?

A central meeting place



A place to live

A place to connect with the community



A place to access services and businesses in a condensed space (CBD)

A place to experience urban culture



A place to experience leisure and enjoyment

What role does the City of Melbourne play for an individual experiencing homelessness?

A place to seek safety and refuge



A place to seek support

A place to seek anonymity when society isolates you



“The city is particularly important for those who come from small communities - the city offers the refuge of anonymity”

- People with lived experience workshop

“We’d sleep in the city because the cameras are here and it’s safe”

- Individual with lived experience

“A lot of people report feeling safe - cameras, well lit, strong community among rough sleepers, essential services - can’t go hungry, if anything, sometimes being over-served”

- Frontline worker

“Addressing social isolation is important for primary homeless - that’s why people come into the city alongside accessing services”

- Sector expert

The Community Vision for Melbourne

The Community Vision was developed through a deliberative engagement process with people who live, work, study, visit or own a business in Melbourne. It is set out in our Council Plan 2021–25.

The community's aspirations for our municipality over 10 years have helped guide the development of this strategy:

- **Melbourne is affordable:** Our city remains vibrant and diverse by being affordable for everyone.
- **The community participates in city decisions:** Community members feel empowered to contribute their ideas and knowledge to the decision-making process, finding solutions to complex problems that will work for everyone.
- **The design of our city is inclusive:** It is made up of safe and accessible places and services where everyone can come together.
- **People feel safe in the city:** All people who visit, work and live in the city can do so and feel safe at any time of the day or night.
- **Health and wellbeing are prioritised:** City of Melbourne's policies, spaces and services support the community's physical health and mental wellbeing for the benefit of all.

What we heard from our neighbourhoods

In 2021, we began working with a Neighbourhood Model that focuses on listening to our neighbourhoods to help us plan our services and activities. Our city is a dynamic place made up of unique neighbourhoods: Carlton, Parkville, East Melbourne, West Melbourne, North Melbourne, Kensington, Docklands, South Yarra, Southbank and the CBD Hoddle Grid – all with their own needs, services and priorities.

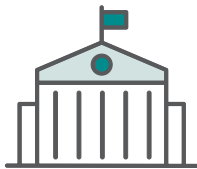
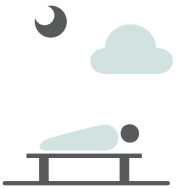
The communities articulated their priorities in 10 online Neighbourhood Portals. Safety was the number one priority across every neighbourhood, as identified by more than 7000 people in our municipality. Safety and wellbeing issues can be broken down into two themes: safety in the streets, and safer roads and bike lanes. On the theme of safety in the streets, priorities include better lighting and improved street safety for all users, addressing drug and alcohol use, mental health and aggressive behaviour, and increased police presence (we heard mixed views on this), and more amenities including public toilets, seating, tables and drinking fountains.

What we heard from business owners

Our research team engaged with business owners to understand their sentiments around homelessness in Melbourne, how they want to be involved, and what impacts they perceive homelessness has on their business. A survey was conducted with CBD business owners to gather their input. The survey received fewer than 20 responses, so it is not exhaustive in capturing current sentiment. However, these initial findings will guide further conversations and engagement with businesses in the CBD.

Business owner perceptions of the current state

70% of business owners feel that their business is moderately or severely impacted by homelessness



Concerns exist around

The individual sleeping outside in extreme weather conditions

There isn't enough action being taken by the government

How to engage with someone who is under the influence and not knowing how they will react

The image people sleeping rough presents of the city to visitors or customers

Aggressive and anti-social behaviour creating intimidation

Note: Anti-social behaviour is often connected to homelessness, although not all anti-social behaviour is by people experiencing homelessness

Community engagement

In early 2024, we released the draft strategy and asked the community for feedback through Participate Melbourne and 14 tailored engagement sessions. Based on the community's feedback, we updated our approach, including adding outcomes to support LGBTIQ+ people at risk of homelessness, embedding prevention work throughout our priorities and revising the language around priority groups to broaden our focus.

Other changes included strengthening the City of Melbourne's role in preventing and responding to homelessness, increasing our partnership and collaboration work, and adding context to the causes of youth homelessness. We also included recognition of the need for long-term and intensive support for people experiencing chronic homelessness to transition out of homelessness successfully. Acknowledgment of the unique experience of Aboriginal women experiencing homelessness was also added to the strategy.



Three community engagement staff

Community feedback on the draft Homelessness Strategy

Background

Between March and April 2024, the City of Melbourne undertook community engagement on its Draft Homelessness Strategy 2024–30. The strategy aims to articulate a bold vision for the City of Melbourne’s future work to end homelessness and create lasting change. The engagement will help inform the final strategy. This is a snapshot of the results.

Reach



86 surveys received



122 focus group participants



6 email submissions

Participants



Females made up **48%** of participants; **43%** were male; **4%** were non-binary/gender diverse; **5%** didn’t identify their gender.



The largest age groups represented were **35-39** years (13%) and **50-54** years age group (12%).



53% of participants were home-owners; **35%** were in private rentals; **5%** were in social housing; **1%** were either in temporary shelter / without conventional accommodation.

What we did



Implemented an on-going media plan and communications to promote the community engagement



Facilitated round tables with stakeholders including local businesses, residents, the Homelessness Advisory Committee, Melbourne Service Coordination Project, Victoria Police and Wurundjeri Elders



Facilitated tailored focus groups with four priority cohorts



Opened the Participate Melbourne survey to all community members for seven weeks



Facilitated online Q + A sessions with the wider community

Feedback



Vision

An inclusive city where every person has a home and support to break the cycle of homelessness

The majority of participants across the survey, focus groups, and emailed submissions expressed a strong commitment to helping tackle homelessness and to ensuring that the City of Melbourne is a better place for everyone to live - 86% of survey participants selected that they support the vision.



Priority 1

A city where everyone has a home

78% of survey participants agreed with Priority 1.

There was agreement across discussions that solving homelessness would benefit both people directly affected by it and the wider community.

There were requests to adjust the priority groups outlined in the strategy to ensure no-one is left behind.

“Without secure, affordable housing poverty becomes an insurmountable barrier. We are one of the richest countries in the world. There is no excuse for not housing everyone.”

- participant



Priority 2

A city where no-one is left behind

85% of survey participants agreed with Priority 2.

The importance of homelessness prevention was a key focus in discussions on this priority, as well as the need to recognise that homelessness can happen quickly.

Collaboration between services was raised as an important way of working.

“The transient nature of homelessness in the city was recognised, with a request for people to be supported whichever LGA they moved to, without having to re-tell their stories and re-do paperwork.”

- Peer Education Support Program



Priority 3

A city unified to end homelessness

85% of survey participants agreed with Priority 3.

The need for a unified approach to the complex problem of homelessness was raised.

The importance of reducing stigma and informing the community to enhance empathy toward people experiencing homelessness was expressed.

“The group gave feedback that using young people as lived-experience spokespeople would help break down stigmatisation and increase community understanding....”

- Young People focus group

Future opportunities



Participants were asked to highlight key future opportunities for responding to homelessness. The most popular opportunities were as follows:



Service hubs for people experiencing homelessness



Pilot a safe space for women at risk of homelessness



Focus on ending homelessness



Enhanced social and affordable housing

Strategy updates



Strengthen the Vision and Goal to more clearly define CoM’s role as a local government authority in preventing and ending homelessness.



Ensure that the drivers of homelessness for young people are clearly communicated.



Acknowledge that the unique experience of Aboriginal women experiencing homelessness requires a tailored, self-determined response.



Modify Priority 3.2 to reflect our commitment to work more closely with people with lived experience of homelessness



Acknowledge the long term, intensive support needed by people experiencing chronic homelessness



Add a Priority 1 outcome that reflects CoM’s commitment to amplifying the voices of groups who may experience exclusion, including LGBTQIA+ communities, older people, people with a disability, and people from multicultural communities.



Rename Priority 2 from ‘A city where no one is left behind’ to ‘A city focussed on ending homelessness through prevention, partnerships and collaboration’.



PRIORITIES FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS

To achieve our vision of an inclusive city where every person has a home and support to break the cycle of homelessness, we are committed to outcomes under three priority areas:

1. A city where everyone has a home.
2. A city focused on ending homelessness through partnerships and collaboration.
3. A city unified to end homelessness.

Everyone has a role to play in addressing the housing crisis: all levels of government, the private, property and development sectors, community and housing organisations and the broader community.

Our three priority areas include outcomes we will deliver directly and where we will work in partnership. The Victorian and Australian governments have legislative responsibility for providing social and affordable housing and funding specialist housing and homelessness organisations, so our first two priorities show where we will advocate for other levels of government to act.

Tracking our progress

We have included indicators against each outcome in the priority areas outlined here, so that we can monitor our progress. These measures will help track the strategy's progress and effectiveness in ending homelessness in our city.

We have recorded baseline year data and will use qualitative and quantitative analysis from our funded services to report on trends and progress. Success indicators will be tracked over the strategy's seven years, and we will inform the community of our progress yearly.

A costed two-year action plan will be developed to help implement this strategy. We will review the plan and priority areas every two years and update them in response to the changing nature of homelessness, and social, political and economic changes. We will undertake periodic, participatory strategy reviews to ensure our outcomes and indicators continue to meet community aspirations.

Priority 1. A city where everyone has a home

We take a person-centred approach, preventing people from becoming homeless and supporting each person on their pathway out of homelessness. People with lived experience of homelessness inform our work. Our priority groups are Aboriginal people, young people, women, people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough, and other groups facing exclusion.

Challenges and opportunities

Each person has specific housing and support needs. To succeed, the programs we deliver, invest in and coordinate must be accessible and tailored to the needs of each individual. For example, the research uncovered women are less likely to sleep rough due to safety concerns, reducing their visibility. Family violence is the primary cause of homelessness among women and children. Women are more likely to be hidden from the homelessness system, moving between family and friends or looking for jobs that provide them with housing.

We recognise that there is a need for more detail about the homelessness risks and service needs and important intersections of LGBTIQ+ people. This is partly hampered by the lack of collection of data on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity in major Australian Government population surveys such as the Census. We are committed to ongoing work to ensure that we understand our community's needs and adjust our focus accordingly.

People experiencing chronic homelessness have the most complex needs and support requirements. Housing alone cannot support them in housing stability. Ongoing support is crucial for people to remain housed successfully.

Research shows that young people are getting lost in the adult homelessness system and need specialist services. The existing power imbalance between young people and adults increases dramatically when young people experience abuse. Acting early and supporting young people when they are first at risk of experiencing homelessness allows for significantly reducing long-term entrenchment within the adult system.

The longer young people are experiencing homelessness, the more likely they are to develop serious health and mental issues and have contact with the justice system. We need to address mental health and wellbeing in young people differently. To support young people out of homelessness, we will invest in housing options with specialist family violence and mental health programs to enable them to be safe and gain stability.

The lack of housing stock is the biggest blocker for a person trying to break the cycle of homelessness. Rooming houses and other housing options are often unsafe and not located where people want to be. There are long waiting periods for public housing, and temporary accommodation usually has time limits, yet there are no appropriate long-term housing options for people to transition to. The Affordable Housing Strategy 2020–30 outlines our commitment to delivering, planning, and advocating for more affordable housing in Melbourne.

Working with our community and partners

City of Melbourne will partner with the Victorian Government and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to ensure that culturally appropriate affordable housing options and homelessness prevention and support services are available. This work will include investigating an Aboriginal-specific housing access point in the city, providing a community place for Aboriginal people. We will continue collaborating to develop cultural safety guidelines for housing projects.

We will support prevention work so that young people at risk have every chance of avoiding homelessness, including programs addressing family violence and building life skills for young people to help them navigate the housing market and manage mental health and wellbeing. Together with youth-specific support organisations, we will fund services co-designed with young people and offer housing options with specialist family violence support.

For women at risk of homelessness due to family violence, we will support prevention projects that keep women and children safely housed through integrated legal and social work assistance. These services successfully prevent homelessness and reduce housing insecurity.

People who have experienced chronic homelessness have complex needs and usually require specialist housing and ongoing support. We will work with our health, housing and service partners to ensure that people have specialist housing with wraparound support services, including employment pathways, skills training, and alcohol and other drug services.

Advocacy positions

We will advocate for prevention and intervention programs and housing for all individuals, focusing on Aboriginal people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, young people, women, people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough, and LGBTIQ+ community members. Given the lack of culturally appropriate housing and high levels of Aboriginal people living in severely overcrowded dwellings, we will advocate for culturally relevant housing stock.

The City of Melbourne will also advocate for the Victorian and Australian governments to work directly with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to enable self-determination and flexibility in how funding is used.

Priority 1. A city where everyone has a home

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	MONITORING OUR PROGRESS	OUR ROLE	TIMEFRAME
1.1 Aboriginal people at risk of or experiencing homelessness have access to culturally safe health, homelessness prevention, support and housing services in our city.	Availability of culturally safe housing for Aboriginal people (baseline date and data to be determined)	Increase from baseline year	Advocate, partner, deliver	Medium
	Number of Aboriginal people experiencing chronic homelessness or rough sleeping (baseline date and data to be determined)	Decrease from baseline year		
1.2 Young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are supported with prevention, intervention and housing services.	Number of young people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping in City of Melbourne (baseline date and data to be determined)	Decrease from baseline year	Advocate, partner, deliver	Immediate
1.3 Women at risk of or experiencing homelessness are supported to access secure, affordable homes that include the wraparound support services necessary to sustain housing.	Number of women experiencing chronic homelessness or rough sleeping (baseline date and data to be determined)	Decrease on baseline year	Partner and deliver	Medium
	Number of women accessing support and prevention measures (baseline date and data to be determined)			
1.4 People experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough are provided with coordinated housing, health and homelessness support services.	Number of people sleeping rough in our municipality (baseline date and data to be determined)	Zero	Partner, deliver	Medium
	Percentage of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness or rough sleeping housed in Make Room (baseline date to be determined)	Increase from baseline year		
1.5 Our work will amplify the voices of those experiencing homelessness including LGBTIQ+ communities and other groups who experience exclusion, including older people, people with disability and people from multicultural communities.	Our research and advocacy leads to increased sector understanding of the unique service needs of LGBTIQ+ communities and other groups who may experience exclusion, including older people, people with disability and people from multicultural communities	Increased funding, investment and system coordination	Advocate, partner and deliver	Medium

Priority 2. A city focused on ending homelessness through partnerships and collaboration

We will create an inclusive city where everyone is supported. People with lived experience of homelessness inform our work. We will ensure coordinated services, collaboration and advocacy through partnerships with our communities, governments, corporates and the homelessness sector.

Challenges and opportunities

Our research highlighted many problems with the homelessness service system. Short-term and unstable funding is causing high staff turnover for service providers. To succeed, funding should be based on people's needs, not location. In addition, Victorian Government funding boundaries don't match the transient and episodic nature of homelessness, leaving people to fall through the gaps. We will advocate for broader changes to reduce unstable and siloed funding across the sector. We will also work to maximise the impact of our investment in services delivered on our behalf.

Timely access to healthcare can drastically improve a person's circumstances, and mental health support is vital. Yet people experiencing homelessness are turning to Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and hospitals to access emergency care. Given this, we will advocate for better integration between the homelessness, housing and health systems.

The research also shows that data gaps restrict Melbourne's homelessness sector from achieving a lasting impact. Our work will support the sector's use of data to identify and help at-risk individuals, intervene early and minimise forced re-sharing of trauma through improved data-sharing practices.

Working with our community and partners

Through the Melbourne Service Coordination Project, we will work with our 17 partners to achieve collaborative case management, implement data-sharing protocols and use data analysis to identify and support at-risk individuals. Our collaborative work will improve individual support by ensuring that services are underpinned by a health and trauma-informed model of care, and that people are connected to social services, employment pathways, skills training, mental health, and alcohol and other drug services. This group will also ensure that housing options are suitable and that long-term and ongoing support is provided after an individual is housed.

We will also develop partnerships to increase social and affordable housing, and encourage corporate, community and philanthropic contributions. We will join with local, national and international networks, including the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors and the M9 local council group, to ensure we deliver best practices.

Advocacy positions

We will advocate for systemic change, funding and investment to secure appropriate, affordable housing and support people on a pathway out of homelessness. Increased funding and investment from the Victorian and Australian governments are crucial to enable the construction of safe and suitable housing with wraparound support for all people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The research showed that systemic reform is urgently needed – the homelessness sector has a stretched frontline workforce and high staff turnover.

Our advocacy will also include calls for better coordination between the homelessness and justice systems. People who are in and out of custody are repeatedly arrested for warrants or charges related to their homelessness, mental health, or alcohol or drug presentation. Interactions with Victoria Police and the justice system can also perpetuate trauma and, without addressing the root causes of homelessness, contribute to cycles of poverty and the continuation of homelessness.

We will advocate for state and national investment in early intervention and preventative programs targeted at people as they leave institutions, including hospitals, out-of-home care and prisons.

Priority 2. A city focused on ending homelessness through partnerships and collaboration

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	MONITORING OUR PROGRESS	OUR ROLE	TIMEFRAME
2.1 Strategic partnerships established through the Melbourne Service Coordination Project will deliver timely and tailored support for people experiencing homelessness.	Number of instances where housing, health and homelessness support services are coordinated and integrated to provide comprehensive care (baseline date and data to be determined)	Increase on baseline year	Partner, deliver	Immediate
2.2 Homelessness and health services in the City of Melbourne met the needs of our specific homeless community.	Decrease in overall homelessness in our city (baseline 2021 ABSCensus figures, released March 2023)	Decrease on baseline year	Advocate, partner, deliver	Medium
2.3 Our advocacy will operate effectively across different levels of government and systems to end homelessness.	Our advocacy positions result in systemic change, increased funding and improved government responses to end homelessness	Increased funding, investment and system coordination	Advocate	Immediate

Priority 3. A city unified to end homelessness

We will support our community to be informed, respectful, empathetic and united to end homelessness. People with lived experience of homelessness inform our work. Our public spaces will be designed and managed to be safe, welcoming and inclusive.

Challenges and opportunities

Across the world, cities offer a wide range of services, but people experiencing homelessness are often stigmatised and marginalised, leading to social exclusion and discrimination. The trauma of street homelessness often creates new problems, making it difficult for people to recover, access and maintain housing without intensive support.

As a capital city, we need to balance the many voices, experiences and competing needs of people who live, work, own a business, study in or visit the City of Melbourne. Our city is a hub where people access various services and amenities, including education, healthcare, transportation, entertainment, tourism and cultural experiences. We want Melbourne to be a city where everyone can prosper and feel welcome. Fostering a city that balances the needs of all city users will ensure that everyone feels safe and welcome, including those affected by poverty and homelessness.

We've heard from residents and businesses that they have safety concerns, especially at night in the CBD. It is important to note that a common misconception exists that people experiencing homelessness are responsible for anti-social and violent behaviours in the city. Only a small percentage of these behaviours have been linked to homelessness.

Our actions include shifting perceptions and removing the stigma around homelessness through awareness, training and education campaigns. Research shows that 91 per cent of Melburnians agree we should do more to end homelessness. The majority (86 per cent) believe it is the government's responsibility to solve homelessness, and (80 per cent) agree that if we work together, we can end homelessness (Launch Housing Perceptions Research 2022).

What we will do

When designing new open spaces, parks, gardens and buildings, we will create inclusive, easily accessible areas. In addition, we will leverage our social and creative capital, including our arts program, libraries and event funding, to foster inclusion and belonging. By activating public spaces beyond 9 to 5 and ensuring areas are well-lit, we will enhance community safety, and security will be increased to support people sleeping rough.

To achieve our vision, we will build our team's capacity. We will implement an organisation-wide approach with processes and systems that enable effective collaboration that benefits our community. To ensure we take a whole-of-council approach to ending homelessness, we will embed the aims and principles of this plan within future plans and strategies.

We will build on our skills, knowledge, and capabilities and deliver human rights training for all our team members so that they can work together to end homelessness in our city. Our staff training will include understanding the trauma of rough sleeping in our city, responding, and providing referrals to specialist support and partners. Through our maternal and child health, social work, and family support services, we will assess and support women and their children in family violence situations to make informed decisions regarding safety and accommodation.

Working with our community and partners

We are part of the Melbourne Zero Network. This alliance of diverse Melbourne-based businesses, organisations and community groups is publicly calling for change to make zero homelessness a reality. The network also takes practical actions to end street homelessness in our city. Melbourne Zero is a coalition of partners, uniting to advocate for real change to end the stigma around street homelessness and position Melbourne as one of the most liveable cities for everyone. In partnership with Melbourne Zero, we will continue our leadership role to change common attitudes around homelessness and what it means for many people in our community to be without a home.

We will use a co-design approach with people with lived experience and diverse communities to design facilities, buildings, parks, gardens and other public open spaces. This approach will ensure that the knowledge of people who have experienced the challenges of street homelessness is incorporated to prevent barriers to accessing our assets. We will also continue participatory decision-making processes by including people who have experienced homelessness in our Homelessness Advisory Committee and developing research, strategies, and programs.

Priority 3. A city unified to end homelessness

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	MONITORING OUR PROGRESS	OUR ROLE	TIMEFRAME
3.1 Our community is informed and united to create tangible and enduring change to end homelessness. Through collective community initiatives, we will reduce stigma and foster respect, empathy and understanding of homelessness.	Number of community members actively participating in awareness campaigns, events, training and educational activities	Percentage of individuals who report increased understanding of the causes and impacts of homelessness.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Medium
3.2 Our services, programs and public spaces are informed by people with lived experience, as relevant, and are thoughtfully designed to be safe, accessible and welcoming for everyone.	Number of services programs and public spaces designed with input from people with a lived experience of homelessness and local organisations and groups	Increase on baseline year	Partner and deliver	Immediate
	Regular assessments and audits, and feedback from users of physical spaces to ensure they are inclusive, safe, accessible and welcoming	User satisfaction surveys		
3.3 Our organisation supports, trains and equips all staff members to contribute to our shared goal of ending homelessness.	Percentage of staff members who complete training programs related to homelessness awareness, prevention and support	Increase on baseline year	Deliver	Medium
3.4 Our business community and residents can access the support they need to help maintain a safe and welcoming public realm for all.	Number of business and residents that participate in programs related to homelessness awareness, prevention and support	Increase on baseline year	Partner and deliver	Immediate
	Improved perceptions of safety	User satisfaction surveys	Partner and deliver	Immediate



APPENDIX A: HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

Across Australia on Census night in 2021, an estimated 122,494 people were experiencing homelessness. This figure was up 5.2 per cent from the 2016 Census when 116,427 people had no home. This rate of increase was lower than the rate of increase for Australia's total population (9 per cent), which meant the rate of homelessness fell slightly.

Snapshot of homelessness in our city

- An estimated 122,494 people across Australia were experiencing homelessness
- Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) were young people aged 12 to 24 years (28,204 people)
- 20 per cent of people experiencing homelessness (24,930) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- There was a 10 per cent increase in the number of women experiencing homelessness

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census, released March 2023

The ABS released the 2021 Census homelessness data in March 2023. The data has shown several changes in patterns of homelessness since 2016. It is worth noting that these patterns do not necessarily indicate ongoing trends, as the Census occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, AHURI, 2023).

The most significant increases in homelessness in 2021 were among children and young people, women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AHURI, 2023).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness saw an increase of more than 6 per cent, with the majority living in severely crowded dwellings. One-third of people living in severely overcrowded dwellings identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Council to Homeless Persons, CHP, 2019). These figures show we desperately need culturally appropriate social housing stock across Australia.

One in five people (20 per cent) experiencing homelessness in Australia are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, despite comprising just 3.2 per cent of the Australian population (ABS 2021 Census).

Almost two out of five (40 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness are under 18.

Aboriginal people and communities, particularly women and children, experience disproportionate impacts from family violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 27 times as likely to be hospitalised for assault as non-Indigenous women between July 2017 and June 2019 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, 2023).

Children and young people experienced the worst increases in homelessness

The biggest increases since 2016 in the proportion of people experiencing homelessness were children aged less than 12 (up by 11 per cent), and those aged 12 to 18 (up by 14 per cent). Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of all people experiencing homelessness were young people aged 12 to 24 years. (AHURI, April 2023).

One in five people (21 per cent) recorded as homeless in 2021 were young adults aged 25 to 34. As in 2016, this group had the highest number of people experiencing homelessness (25,504 people).

Homelessness among women was up significantly, with the youngest women worst affected

There was a 10 per cent increase in the number of women and a much slower 2 per cent increase in the number of men experiencing homelessness since 2016. However, more than half (56 per cent) of all people experiencing homelessness are men. Women accounted for 81.7 per cent of the 6067 increase of people experiencing homelessness in 2021.

Rates of homelessness for young women aged 12 to 24 increased from 68 out of every 10,000 in 2016 to 70 out of every 10,000 in 2021. The 2016 Census saw older women become the fastest-growing group of homeless, but in 2021, this rate stabilised at 19 out of every 10,000 women over 55.

In Victoria

Victoria has the second-highest number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia, with over 30,605 people, after New South Wales, which has 34,982 (ABS, 2021 Census).

The statistics show that 25 per cent of Australia's homeless population lives in Victoria. That's one in every four people experiencing homelessness.

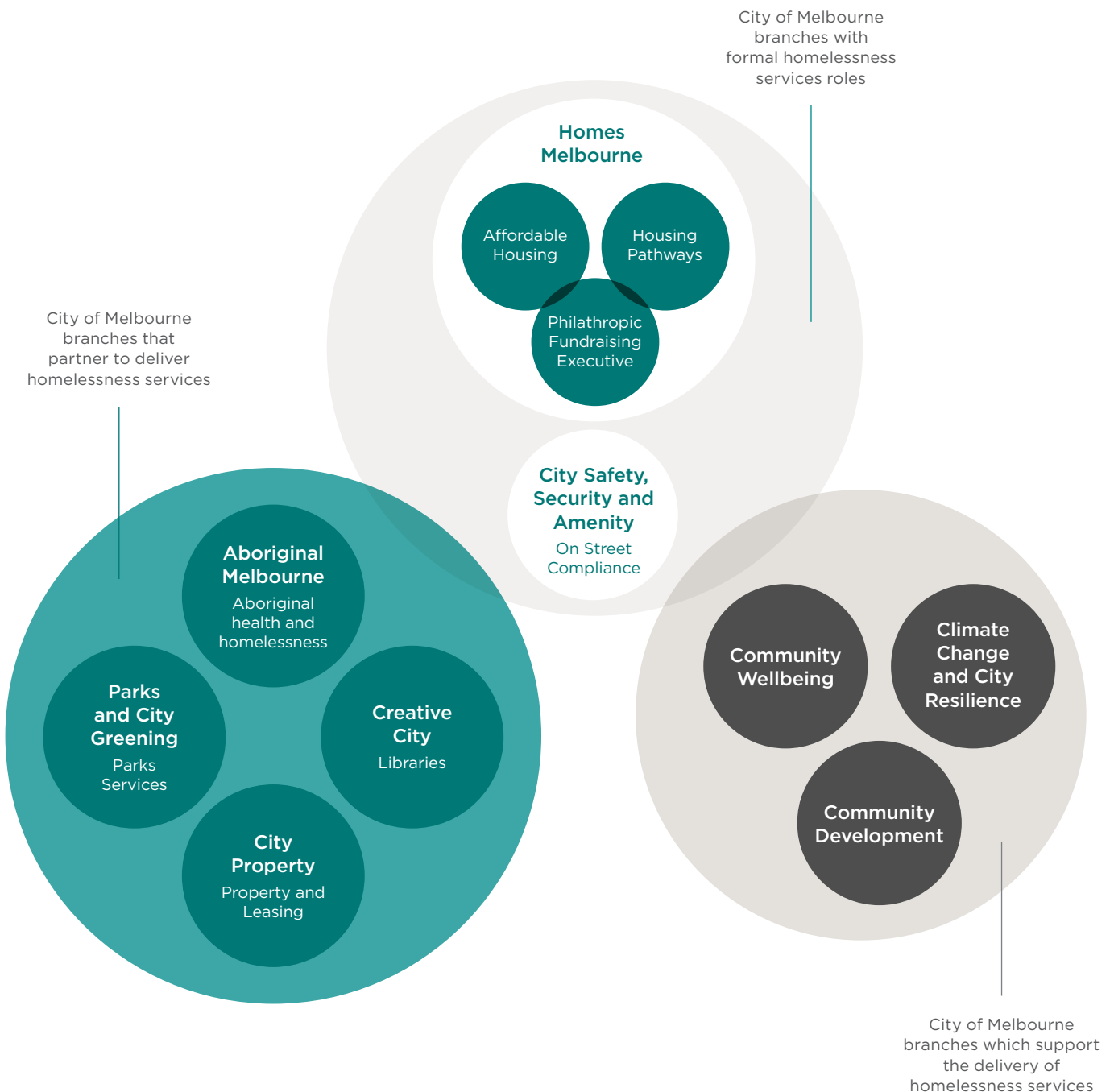
Table 1. Homeless operational groups by state (ABS 2021 Census)

STATE OR TERRITORY	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUSTRALIA
People living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out	956	1022	2051	323	2322	231	666	59	7636
People in supported accommodation for the homeless	5038	7823	4125	2495	1604	531	1812	863	24,291
People staying temporarily with other households	4088	2531	4981	1322	2150	588	670	274	16,597
People living in boarding houses	8839	8578	2972	659	637	257	67	134	22,137
People in other temporary lodgings	1423	1583	488	255	110	29	42	6	3934
People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	14640	9068	7839	2352	2941	709	9904	447	47,895
All people experiencing homelessness	34,982	30,605	22,444	7413	9757	2346	13157	1780	122,494

APPENDIX B: WHAT HAS CITY OF MELBOURNE DONE SO FAR?

City of Melbourne is a national leader in local government responses to homelessness and affordable housing. Over the past two decades, we have invested in housing solutions, worked to address the complex drivers of homelessness, and coordinated and funded services for people in need.

We support the Housing First approach, which prioritises getting people into permanent housing with accompanying support services as the best way to address homelessness. Yet despite all our work over the past 20 years, the city’s lack of housing stock debilitates our efforts to get people into long-term, safe, and secure housing.



Homes Melbourne

Homes Melbourne is a multi-disciplinary team within the City of Melbourne, created to end homelessness and increase safe, secure, and affordable housing in our city. It was established in early 2022, recognising that the complexity and extent of the housing crisis needed a comprehensive, targeted response.

Homes Melbourne leads our approach to ending homelessness and creating lasting change. Our aim is to:



Support the coordination of services for people experiencing rough sleeping



Use Council-owned land for affordable, long-term rental housing



Increase pathways out of homelessness and into affordable long-term rental housing



Leverage the planning system to facilitate affordable housing with developers



Design and deliver human-centred, trauma-informed, culturally safe homelessness services and programs



Advocate for systemic change to improve housing outcomes for community members



Advocate for systemic change to improve multi-sectoral responses to homelessness



Attract funding and partnerships to increase social and affordable housing



Use Council-owned land for specialist transitional housing to support people experiencing persistent homelessness and rough sleeping



Work with partners to deliver 6000 affordable homes

Housing

Make Room

Make Room is a unique partnership between City of Melbourne, the Victorian Government, housing providers, and corporate and philanthropic organisations. We are converting a Council-owned building at 602 Little Bourke Street - valued at \$12 million - into specialist supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough. Unison Housing, a registered community housing provider, is refurbishing the property, including up to 50 studio apartments, living areas, wraparound support, and a social enterprise. Residents will stay for up to 12 months or until they are connected with long-term housing.



Make Room building

Affordable Housing Strategy

The Affordable Housing Strategy 2020–30 outlines our commitment to delivering, planning and advocating for more affordable housing in Melbourne. Affordable housing is essential infrastructure to support Melbourne’s ambition to be a liveable, inclusive and prosperous city.

Drill Hall

In 2001, we provided the Drill Hall building in Victoria Street, Melbourne, to Housing Choices Australia as a long-term lease, allowing 59 housing units to be built for low-income, vulnerable and marginalised people.

Common Ground

City of Melbourne worked with Launch Housing to establish Elizabeth Street Common Ground. It provides permanent, affordable, high-quality housing to 65 people with complex needs who have experienced chronic homelessness, many for more than 10 years. An additional 66 apartments exist for low-income workers and students.

Ending homelessness targets

Our Council Plan 2021–25 commits City of Melbourne to reduce economic and social inequality by ensuring universal access to housing, core services and information. It includes the following homelessness targets:

- The number of people sleeping rough who have not been offered accommodation. Target: zero.

The number of people supported through a range of accommodation, including long-term supportive housing and affordable housing. Target: 500 (by 2025).

Advocacy



Homelessness Advisory Committee

City of Melbourne’s Homelessness Advisory Committee brings together people with broad and diverse knowledge and experience of issues relating to homelessness. It provides an essential point of contact between the Council and people with personal and professional experience and knowledge of homelessness.



Council of Capital City Lord Mayors

Homes Melbourne chairs the National Housing and Homelessness Working Group for the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors. This group leads the development of the housing and homelessness action plan and advocacy agenda and provides expert advice to capital city CEOs and Lord Mayors.



Research and engagement

Homes Melbourne is part of an international network of cities committed to sharing knowledge and approaches to addressing homelessness and undertakes research projects on emerging issues and trends in the city.

Outreach

Operation Protocol

Operation Protocol is a partnership outreach program between City of Melbourne, Victoria Police and the Salvation Army. It aims to balance supporting people experiencing homelessness with maintaining safety and amenity in the city.

Park rangers

As well as keeping parks and public spaces clean and maintained, City of Melbourne's park rangers have adopted a welfare role, referring people sleeping rough to outreach and homelessness services.

Daily support team

The daily support team works with people sleeping rough through referrals to services providing coordinated housing and health intervention. We are the first council in Victoria to have an in-house assertive outreach team.

Support and partnerships

Melbourne Service Coordination Project

The Melbourne Service Coordination Project, in partnership with Homes Victoria, brings together 17 agencies working with people sleeping rough in the CBD. The project provides a platform that helps achieve four outcomes to reduce homelessness: coordinated service delivery, information sharing, housing outcomes and systems-level advocacy. It provides a tailored response for people experiencing homelessness.

By Name List

City of Melbourne and Launch Housing lead the By Name List, which gathers data about homelessness in the municipality. The By Name List is the most accurate, complete and timely list possible of all individuals experiencing rough sleeping in the City of Melbourne. It is an efficient method for monitoring outcomes for people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness. The support services involved in the Service Coordination Project add consenting people to the By Name List and link people to support and provide pathways out of homelessness.

Library social worker

In an Australian-first, our dedicated library social worker supports people experiencing homelessness and other complex needs in the municipality. Working across the six City of Melbourne libraries, the library social worker helps library staff understand and respond to homelessness, and works with people with multiple and complex needs.

The Helping Out Guide

We publish and distribute the annual Helping Out guide, which provides a comprehensive list of free and low-cost services from organisations in the central city and surrounding suburbs.

Homelessness Support Hubs

This pilot examines homelessness support hub sites where people can access essential support, including food, showers, lockers, information, housing and homelessness advice, and services within the CBD.

Support for grassroots organisations

Many informal, grassroots organisations operating in Melbourne provide mobile support services to people sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness and poverty, including meals, clothing, bedding, showers and laundry facilities. We provide these groups with training and resources to provide the best outcomes for the people they support.

Community grants

We provide annual and two-year grants to fund community connection, social inclusion, access and participation for residents.

Extreme weather planning

Our program provides tailored support and respite options to people experiencing primary homelessness during extreme weather.

Funding

We contract the following organisations to prevent homelessness:

- The Salvation Army Melbourne Project 614 supplies meals, clothing, and counselling to support people at risk of homelessness.
- Melbourne City Mission's Frontyard Youth Services provides emergency accommodation, case management and support for young people experiencing homelessness.
- Cohealth Central City Community Health is a service for people experiencing homelessness. It provides dietitian services, drug and alcohol counselling, allied health and mental health services. It is a unique service and one of the only community health services dedicated to helping people experiencing homelessness.
- Justice Connect's Women's Homelessness Prevention Project keeps women and children safely housed through integrated legal and social work assistance. It is the only service of its type in Victoria and successfully prevents and reduces housing insecurity.

Training and inclusion

Connect Respect training

This free online training program supports businesses to build their understanding and support their response to homelessness in the city. We developed Connect Respect with the Council to Homeless Persons and local businesses to address business concerns about the impact of rough sleeping on their operations and the safety of staff and customers.

Voice of people with lived experience

Consumer participation is a fundamental component of our homelessness response. In partnership with Council to Homeless Persons' Peer Education and Support Program, we ensure that people with a lived experience of homelessness meaningfully inform the development of policies and initiatives that impact the lives of people without a home.

Cultural safety guidelines

We are developing cultural safety guidelines to inform housing projects. They will support our housing projects to be culturally safe places, with strategic design considerations underpinned by Aboriginal perspectives and the opportunity to celebrate culture and acknowledge the country we are building on.

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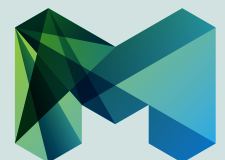
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