

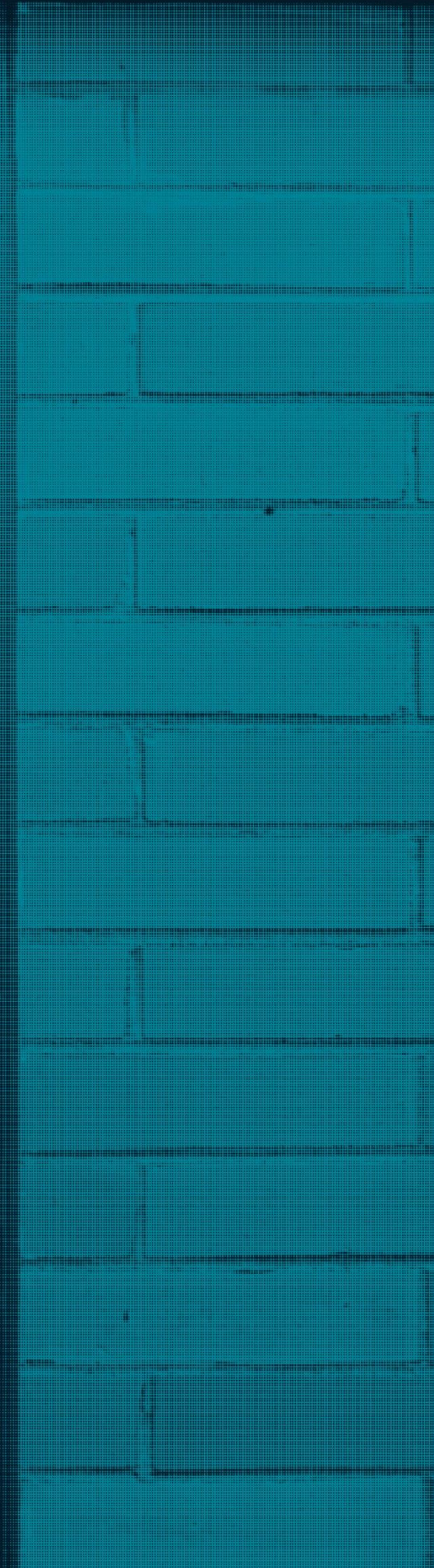


Youth Affairs
Council Victoria

YACVic Submission:

National Housing and Homelessness Plan

October 2023



Acknowledgement of Country

Our work takes place across Victoria.

YACVic's head office is on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation in Naarm (Melbourne). We also have offices on the lands of the Gunditjmara Nation in Warrnambool, and on the lands of the Wemba Wemba and Wadi Wadi Nations in Swan Hill.

YACVic pays our respects to Elders past and present for their wisdom, strength, support and leadership. Bunjil's lore states that those who walk on this land must care for Country and the waterways as well as care for the children and young people.

We stand in solidarity to pay respect to the ongoing culture and continued history of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. Sovereignty was never ceded.

[This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.](#)

About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate for young people aged 12–25 and the youth sector in Victoria. Our vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities. As a peak body, we work closely with young Victorians, and the sector that supports them, to deliver effective advocacy, events, training, resources and support – so that young people can live their best lives. We're driven by our valuable members and their vision for a positive future for young Victorians.

YACVic Rural is our advocacy and development arm focused on rural and regional young people and the youth sector throughout Victoria, with a physical presence in the Great South Coast and Southern Mallee regions.

About YDAS

Youth Disability and Advocacy Service (YDAS) is Victoria's only advocacy service that works directly with young people with disability to achieve their human rights. Young people aged 12–25 with disability can access our free individual advocacy service if they need advice or help.

YDAS also does ongoing systemic advocacy work to improve policy around issues that are important to young people with disability.

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Summary of Recommendations

A National Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Youth Housing and Homelessness Standalone Plan.

We recommend the establishment of a National Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan specifically tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by young people (age 12-25) at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This dedicated plan will allow for targeted strategies and resources to end youth homelessness and address housing insecurity early and effectively, with built in strategies to empower young people with the skills they need to transition to adulthood.

Recommendation 2: Co-design the National Housing and Homelessness Plan with young people.

To ensure that the National Housing and Homelessness Plan truly reflects the needs of and empowers young people, they must be involved in co-design processes. Engaging young people in decision-making will lead to more inclusive and effective policies that consider their lived experiences.¹

Investing in Early Intervention and Prevention

Recommendation 3: Invest in place-based prevention and early intervention initiatives, providing targeted support for priority cohorts. The consultation to note the Geelong Project for further exploration and scale.²

Prevention and early intervention into youth homelessness will require systems change approach, connecting family, education, employment, and community sectors to address the needs of a young person in housing crisis before they experience homelessness. These initiatives should be person-centred, trauma-informed, and multi-disciplinary approach, with a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of the young person. We advocate for dedicated funding for prevention and early intervention services, including support for young people to maintain tenancies and prevent eviction. By addressing issues before they escalate, we can keep more young people stably housed and prevent the trauma of experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 4: Provide trauma-informed, LGBTQI+ inclusive, and cultural safety training for employees in mainstream services.

To identify signs of housing insecurity before young people experience homelessness, we recommend introducing trauma-informed training programs for employees in mainstream services such as health, employment, education, and training services. Training should address the mental health and wellbeing of young people, providing tailored and strengths-based support so the young

person can stay housed and engaged with education or employment. A trauma-informed approach will ensure young people have safe networks to access for support, without facing stigma or discrimination.

A Housing Framework for Young People

Recommendation 5: Build dedicated social housing stock for young people.

We propose the dedication of social housing stock to young people, in areas which are geographically accessible for transport and education and employment opportunities. This measure will provide stability for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and must provide wrap-around service support which are decided by the young person's requirements.

Recommendation 6: Implement and enforce minimum standards in new social housing and upgrade existing social housing, particularly to combat the ongoing impact of climate change.

All housing should be designed to be accessible for all young people, including disabled young people, and minimum standards for safe housing must be enforced. In response to the growing impact of climate change, we recommend that all new social housing stock be designed with energy efficiency in mind. This will reduce environmental impact but lower utility costs for residents, making housing more affordable.

Recommendation 7: Increase the rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, in line with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's recommendation.³

In line with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's recommendation, we propose increasing the rate of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance. This adjustment will alleviate the financial burden on young people, making private rental housing more accessible.

Recommendation 8: Improve access to affordable housing and private rentals for young people.

Introduce and enforce anti-discriminatory practices in the rental sector, including training for real estate agents and in social housing. Prepare and support young people to live independently, and access more rental support systems.

Services and Support

Recommendation 9: Provide wrap-around support for young people in social housing, dependent on their needs not their tenancy.

To ensure young people are not caught in cycles of homelessness we recommend services provide support to young people which meet their needs, rather than discontinuing services based on length of time. This will ensure young people are supported into stable housing situations and empower them to engage with employment and education opportunities. Support services must be attached to

the young person, not their tenancy, to allow for consistent support regardless of change in tenancy arrangements.

Recommendation 10: Create a cohesive system between mainstream and specialist homelessness services to streamline referral pathways and provide more holistic service support.

Create a more cohesive system between mainstream and specialist homelessness services. Streamlining referral pathways and providing holistic wellbeing support will ensure young people receive the assistance they need. This holistic approach will mean young people have access to support in all areas of their life, not just housing.

Recommendation 11: Improve data collection and reporting mechanisms for social housing and specialist homelessness services.

Enhancing data collection and reporting mechanisms for specialist homelessness services and social housing will provide more accurate insight into the unmet demand for social housing, and assist in developing support strategies for young people on waitlists. This will provide a more accurate understanding of young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and their support needs, enabling targeted interventions.

Recommendation 12: Invest in service information programs for young people.

To empower young people with knowledge of available services we recommend investing in information programs or campaigns including outreach programs, to inform young people on where they can find support. These programs should be designed to meet the unique needs of young people, be delivered through relevant and credible platforms, and foster trust, accessibility, and cultural safety.

Youth homelessness: What we know

Young people have consistently been overlooked in housing and homelessness frameworks; too often they are given the same solutions as adults experiencing homelessness, when young people have a unique set of needs. Unlike older cohorts experiencing homelessness, young people often require continuous, wrap-around support while they are developing independent living skills.⁴ We know that there are triggers which force young people to leave home and systemic causes, such as lack of affordable housing, which result in homelessness.⁵ By focusing solely on housing solutions without supporting a young person's development, we fail to address the systemic causes of youth homelessness effectively.⁵

The types of homelessness experienced by young people are markedly different from those of other cohorts. Young people experiencing homelessness in the last census identified as:⁶

- Living in severely crowded dwellings (58%)
- Living in supported accommodation (17%)
- Staying temporarily with other households, known as couch surfing (11%)

Some young people may not self-identify as homeless as they associate the term only with 'rough sleeping', and therefore not seek support even while experiencing homelessness, including mental health supports.⁵ When young people were asked to describe their homelessness experience, many used descriptors outside these formal categories, such as "in-between housing", "subletting", "living in a car", and "living in a tent".⁵ These descriptors highlight the disconnect between how young people might view their housing situation, and how homelessness is more often spoken about.

Young people both experiencing and those at risk of or experiencing homelessness face unique barriers to accessing stable housing; this includes a lack of resources often attributed to adults, such as stable income and a network of support, and which young people may need support to develop.⁸ Other systemic barriers to accessing safe and secure housing include:⁹

- Lack of available affordable private rentals
- Lack of social housing
- Rental discrimination
- Ineffective support due to siloed services

Within the youth homelessness category there are specific challenges faced by those under 18. These young people often encounter difficulties in accessing essential services such as healthcare and mental health support; they may lack access to Medicare, face transportation barriers, struggle with financial constraints, and disengagement with the education system.¹⁰ Moreover, accessing mental health services often requires a guardian to advocate for access and

attend appointments, making it challenging for young people to obtain the necessary care. This leaves young people under 18 at a large disadvantage.

Youth homelessness has severe consequences, including a higher mortality rate among young people experiencing homelessness.⁶ We need solutions which focus on intervening before a young person experiences housing crisis and to ensure that there is enough housing and social support so any experiences of homelessness are brief and non-reoccurring.

A national youth housing and homelessness plan

We call for a standalone National Youth Housing and Homeless Plan to address the unique needs of young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

This plan should include the [new model for youth housing](#)¹¹ developed by the housing and homelessness sector, to provide a whole systems approach to supporting young people currently at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

We call for the immediate provision of housing to end couch surfing, refuge-hopping, and rough sleeping by young people, unsafe practices that can exacerbate the mental and physical trauma associated with homelessness.⁶

We ask the government to implement a national approach to prevention and early intervention initiatives, including consistent outcomes-based reporting, with clearly defined referral pathways to improve clarity over service provision responsibilities.

In this submission, we outline recommendations for a housing system designed to meet the needs of young people, particularly those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These solutions have been informed by the collective expertise of the housing and homelessness sector, and to achieve them we recommend referencing the forthcoming Australian Government Youth Engagement Strategy as a best practice guide.

It is essential that young people with lived experience of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness are consulted and contribute to the design of a National Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan, as they are the experts of their own lives and know what solutions are needed.⁵

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Recommendation 2: Co-design the National Housing and Homelessness Plan with young people.

Early intervention and prevention

Early intervention and prevention are essential to identify and address the root causes of homelessness before its onset. Successful early intervention strategies work to maintain school and workplace engagement, strengthen family and

community relationships, and provide young people with mental health support before they reach crisis point.¹²

Targeted prevention efforts should focus on high-risk groups within the youth population, recognising that specific vulnerabilities are associated with some young people overrepresented in the homelessness sector.¹²

Targeted prevention extends beyond the scope of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and applies a whole of system approach to integrate various social supports, including those related to family violence, education, employment, disability support services, and mental health services.¹³ By tailoring interventions to the unique needs of young people at-risk of experiencing homelessness, we can address systemic causes of homelessness and provide solutions early.¹³

To effectively address youth homelessness, young people must be identified as a priority cohort, and policies and strategies should be designed with a deep understanding of the multifaceted systemic and social factors influencing their homelessness experiences. The following groups have been identified as priority cohorts at risk of or overrepresented in youth homelessness.¹³ In this we acknowledge all young people have intersecting identities and a unique person-centred approach is the best way to design appropriate and effective support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are disproportionately overrepresented in youth homelessness data compared to the general youth population. In the 2021 census, 26% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness were aged 12-25.¹⁴ The majority were living in 'severely overcrowded dwellings, followed by living in supported accommodation.¹⁴

Early intervention strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must include:

1. Developing culturally safe services

All services, whether related to housing, health, or support, must be culturally sensitive and respect the unique cultural identity and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Cultural safety fosters trust and engagement, facilitating early intervention and prevention efforts; this includes providing place-based, culturally appropriate mental health support services.¹⁵ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people need services in locations that are accessible and culturally relevant. Cultural competency training is a necessity for all service providers; ensuring those who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have a deep understanding of their culture and the ongoing impact of colonisation.¹⁵

2. Addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth justice and out-of-home care

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are overrepresented in both out-of-home care and juvenile justice systems; they are 10x more likely to be living in out of home care than non-Indigenous children,¹⁶ and 16x more likely to be under a supervision order than non-Indigenous young people.¹⁷ Early intervention strategies should include tailored support for these young people during their transition out of care and justice systems to ensure they have stable accommodation. Early intervention should focus on reconciliation and reconnection with families of origin where safe to do so, enabling young people to draw on their cultural support networks for stability and guidance. Targeted solutions must align with principles of self-determination, and focus on addressing the systemic inequities which remove young people from their families and foster their connection to culture and community.

3. Community Controlled Housing Organisations

Supporting and collaborating with Community Controlled Housing Organisations is essential; these organisations are often best positioned to address the housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who should be actively involved in planning and implementing housing solutions.¹⁸

Disabled young people

The number of disabled young people experiencing homelessness is steadily increasing. In 2021, Mission Australia reported 13.6% of young people experiencing first-time homelessness had a disability, compared to just 5.5% in 2017.¹⁹ And of young people presenting alone to SHS in 2021, 48% identified having a mental health issue.²⁰ Disabled young people are often overlooked in service and housing design, with some young people placed in aged care facilities due to lack of appropriate supported housing.²¹

Early intervention and prevention strategies supporting disabled young people should all be co-designed with disabled young people, to ensure their voices and expertise meaningfully included.

1. Accessible and affordable housing

Ensure that new social housing projects have a quota for accessibly and adaptably built housing with a percentage reserved specifically for disabled young people.²² Expand the criteria for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) using a youth lens which includes disabled young people who may need additional support when transitioning to independence.²²

2. Individualised support plans

Creating individualised support plans results in disabled young people accessing the support they need, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. These plans should address assisting disabled young people in locating disability inclusive accommodation and ensure they have a level of choice on par with other young people about their living arrangements.²²

3. Collaboration with advocacy organisations

Collaborating with disability advocacy organisations and involving disabled young people in the policy development process will result in policies and programs which are better informed and aligned with the experiences and needs of disabled young people.

4. Accessible information

Improve disabled young people's housing options by ensuring that information about housing, services, and support is provided in accessible formats which consider various accessibility needs, including visual, auditory, and cognitive.²²

5. Transition planning

Disabled young people should be offered transition planning for life after leaving school or care. This should focus on housing stability and independent living to ensure all young people have a smooth and supported transition into adulthood.

LGBTQI+ young people

LGBTQI+ young people are overrepresented among young people experiencing homelessness and faces distinct vulnerabilities, including higher risk of suicide. The 2021 Writing Themselves In 4 report highlighted almost one in four (23.6%) LGBTQI+ young people had experienced homelessness in their lifetime.²³

Early intervention and prevention strategies supporting LGBTQI+ young people must include:

1. Training and support for staff

Trauma-informed care training for staff is essential and should not be limited to SHS but provided to workers across education, employment, family violence, alcohol and other drug and mental health services. We recommend Rainbow Tick accreditation become mandatory for all youth housing services, to create safe and affirming spaces which will encourage service access for LGBTQI+ young people.²⁴ Trauma-informed training should help workers identify and support LGBTQI+ youth who may be experiencing homelessness or housing instability due to family rejection or discrimination, and barriers linked to accessing health and other services, often due to discrimination and stigma, must be actively addressed.

2. Family reunification programs

Existing family reunification programs like Reconnect need more funding to provide specialised support for LGBTQI+ young people and their families.¹³ These programs should be place-based, and actively collaborate with other services that LGBTQI+ youth are accessing, ensuring a holistic and coordinated approach to support. Promotion of family and community acceptance is key to reducing rejection and discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ young people.²³ Outreach programs and education initiatives can play a significant role in raising awareness and fostering understanding among families, schools and communities.

3. LGBTQI+ housing services

Establishing LGBTQI+ housing services that offer supportive and affirming environments is critical. These services should provide LGBTQI+ young people with access to counselling and other essential support services in a safe and validating environment.

4. Accurate demographic data

Including gender and sexual identities on census data will provide more accurate demographic data and inform the development of needs-based services.²³ This data can help target resources where they are most needed and is an important step in acknowledging the identities and lived experiences of LGBTQI+ young people.

Victim/survivors of family violence

Experiencing family violence or family breakdown is the leading reason for why young people experience homelessness, with 28% of young people identifying this as the main reason for seeking assistance from SHS.²⁰ There are also many young people who experience violence within their homes who may not immediately recognise themselves as victim survivors. To effectively combat this issue, increased investment in early intervention and prevention strategies is needed, particularly for young people who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and may be navigating housing and support services alone.

Education and awareness campaigns and training should raise awareness about family and domestic violence among young people and those who work with them, and promote service access pathways. Training needs to be codesigned and delivered with young people with a lived experience of family violence, and should address:

1. Recognising signs of family violence and family disruption

Equipping professionals, including teachers and youth workers, with the knowledge and skills to identify the signs of family and domestic violence, even when young people may not readily disclose their experiences.

2. Trauma-informed care

Training programs should emphasise creating safe and non-judgmental spaces for young people to disclose their experiences and seek assistance. These programs should also be sensitive to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of young victim survivors. Staff across all sectors should access this training, not just specialist homeless services.

3. Access to services

Ensuring that individuals working with young people are aware of the available

services and resources, as well as how to connect young victim survivors with support.

Reconnect – a case study

Reconnect is a community-based program designed to support young people to develop healthier relationships with their families, with a focus on family reunification.

In the 2011-12 period, 92% of Reconnect clients were homeless or at risk of homelessness when they initially sought support; however this figure decreased significantly to 20% by the end of their involvement with Reconnect.¹² This substantial reduction in the risk of homelessness demonstrates the program's effectiveness in providing early intervention.

Reconnect services include:

1. Individual and family counselling: Reconnect provides counselling services to help young people and their families address and overcome emotional and relational challenges.
2. Family mediation: The program facilitates mediation sessions, to support conflict resolution and improve communication.
3. Referrals to other agencies and services for wrap around service support.
4. Accompaniment and advocacy assistance to ensure young people can navigate complex systems and access the services they need.

Out-of-Home Care and Juvenile Justice System Leavers

The lack of systemic support for young people leaving out of home care (OOHC) or the youth justice system has left these young people at higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Young people leaving OOHC are overrepresented in the youth justice system, as insufficient support for pathways to independent living often leave them in precarious housing.⁵ The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's study found 54% of OOHC leavers are at risk of experiencing homelessness, and within four years 31% had received a custodial or community youth justice sentence.²⁵

Early intervention and prevention strategies supporting young people leaving OOHC and youth justice systems must involve young people with lived experience, and should include:

1. A review of Australia's bail regulations

The majority of young people in Australia's youth justice centres are unsentenced; in 2022, 78% of young people in youth justice centres were being held on remand, and for many it was due to housing not meeting bail requirements.²⁶ State and Federal government must work together to review bail requirements, to ensure

there is greater access to supported accommodation for young people seeking bail.¹²

2. Extend support to 25 and develop transition plans for all young people

While all states have committed to extending OOHC support to 21, young people must have the option of accessing continuous wraparound support once leaving care. Many young people in care and youth justice systems do not have the opportunity to develop independent living skills, including applying for identity documents, applying for private rentals and navigating complex education and employment systems.

Young people should be provided with comprehensive care plans for their transition to independent living, including access to support workers, and help finding safe and stable housing. All plans should be trauma-informed, strengths-based, and person-centred, with the young person helping to develop their own plans.

3. A coordinated care approach

Similar to the *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement*, we need to agree to a nationally consistent approach to the “collection, linkage, and sharing of data and reporting on people discharged” from OOHC and justice settings to decrease risk of homelessness, under ‘performance monitoring and reporting framework’.

The Geelong Project - a case study

In 2016, The Geelong Project initiated a population screening process in schools within the Greater Geelong area, identifying students vulnerable to homelessness based on a range of indicators. For these students the project implemented proactive, pre-crisis interventions that were youth-focused and family-centred.

The framework offers a range of response levels, including active monitoring, short-term support, and wrap-around support for complex cases, with interventions are tailored to individual needs. This model recognises that a social services system is an ecosystem of services, including social and educational programs and institutions, rather than siloed services.

The Geelong Project is an example of the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model and has demonstrated effectiveness in addressing youth homelessness and improving school engagement. The 2016 screening process identified 185 vulnerable students. Six months later, an impressive 9 out of 10 of these students were still living at home. Only six students sought help at the local Youth Entry Point for homelessness services, highlighting the effectiveness of early intervention in preventing homelessness.

The COSS model significantly improved school engagement. After six months, 85% of students identified as at-risk remained in school, reducing early school leaving by nearly 20%.

Recommendation 3: Invest in place-based prevention and early intervention initiatives, providing targeted support for priority cohorts. The consultation to note the Geelong Project for further exploration and scale.

Recommendation 4: Provide trauma-informed, LGBTQI+ inclusive, and cultural safety training for employees in mainstream services.

A Housing Plan

Australia faces a series of systemic barriers contributing to youth homelessness. These barriers include:

1. **Low rental vacancy:** Low rental vacancy rates limit the availability of affordable housing for individuals and families in need. This contributes to housing instability and homelessness.
2. **Impact of climate change:** Housing threatened by climate change is often substandard and unliveable, exacerbating the housing crisis. Climate disasters further compound this issue by causing extensive damage and loss to housing stock.
3. **Lack of housing options:** The limited availability of housing options creates bottlenecks in the system, intensifying primary homelessness and further entrenching homelessness for those within it.
4. **Children and young people in SHS:** Children and young people accessing SHS face few exit options, which forces them into a cycle of homelessness, where they "refuge-hop" between youth SHS services, couch surfing, or even sleeping rough.
5. **Climate disasters:** Increasing climate disasters such as floods and fires put significant strain on transitional and short-term housing services, leading to a lack of available housing options and bottlenecks within the system. This results in the entrenchment of homelessness for those within the system, particularly for young people who have fewer safe housing options.

To address these systemic barriers YACVic supports in full the housing and homelessness sector's ['New Model for Youth Housing in Australia'](#) framework, including a Housing First model for young people.

The Housing First Model

The Housing First model is recognised as the most successful approach to ending homelessness for people with high support needs. This model prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes, treating housing as a fundamental human right. From this point any other support needs, such as addressing alcohol and drug dependency, or physical and mental health issues, are addressed through coordinated and intensive support.

To implement the Housing First model effectively significant resources should be invested in social housing. And, in addition to housing, resources should be

allocated to provide the support needed for individuals to sustain their housing. This includes services addressing substance use issues, mental health, and physical health issues.

Below we provide some of the key considerations for housing first models.

Subsidised housing for young people

Young people are currently not prioritised when building and allocating social housing; barriers to accessing social housing include young people having lower incomes and less rental history, positioning them as less financially viable tenants.²⁷

1. Increase youth-dedicated social housing

Develop and quarantine a substantial portion of social housing units specifically for young people experiencing homelessness. These units should be tailored to their unique needs, providing a safe and supportive environment.

2. Individualised tenancy duration

Allow young people to determine the duration of their tenancy, based on their individual requirements. This approach promotes stability and independence.

3. Location considerations

Ensure that youth-dedicated social housing is strategically located near employment and educational opportunities. Access to public transportation and essential services is essential for young people to participate in the economy and continue in their education.

4. Diverse accommodation models with 24/7 onsite support

These programs should run in-house skill development programs, link residents to other service providers, and provide support for young people who may not be ready for formal commitments to education and training. This approach is particularly suited for 16-18 year-olds who require a higher level of support and guidance. Provide access to 24/7 onsite support services to address immediate needs and crisis situations. Support staff should be trained to work with young people effectively.

5. Flexible rent models

Implement flexible rent models that accommodate young people's changing economic situations. Rent should be adjusted based on income, allowing for a gradual transition to financial and housing independence.

Recommendation 5: Build dedicated social housing stock for young people.

Recommendation 6: Implement and enforce minimum standards in new social housing and upgrade existing social housing, particularly to combat the ongoing impact of climate change.

Services and support

Young people require systems of support, not just housing. Below are some key considerations to improve continuity of service provision and promote sector coordination.

1. Link housing and support services to young person, not tenancy

Develop a model where the provision of support services is determined by the individual needs of young people rather than their tenancy. This ensures support remains accessible regardless of changes in housing arrangements. Recognise the non-linear recovery pathways that young people may experience and acknowledge variations in program engagement over time. While the first 12 months can be a critical period, provide support for up to three years to accommodate different needs and trajectories.

2. Person-centred, strengths-based, goal-oriented, and holistic support

Implement supports that are person-centred, strengths-based, goal-oriented, outcome-focused, and holistic in nature. This approach empowers young people to set and achieve personal goals while addressing their overall well-being. All services and supports must be trauma-informed to address the complex needs of young people who may have experienced trauma. Trauma-informed care recognises the impact of trauma on individuals and provides a safe and supportive environment for recovery.

3. Service integration and case coordination

Enhance service integration to ensure continuous support as needs evolve. Focus on providing case coordination for young people with complex needs, ensuring they receive the right mix of services.

4. Research and data evaluation

Invest in research and data collection to evaluate the impact of support services beyond homeless services. Evaluate their effects on health, justice, housing, child protection, and social services to measure the broader social impact.

5. Equality in income support

Ensure that financial implications for organisations providing youth housing are mitigated by providing access to a range of rental properties and relevant subsidies that make housing provision for young people financially viable.

6. Address impact of climate change

Encourage landlords to invest in more energy-efficient infrastructure by introducing requirements for heating and cooling systems in rental properties. Develop mechanisms to enforce these requirements and ensure that energy costs are appropriately allocated between landlords and tenants.

7. Eliminate age-based discrimination

Implement measures to eliminate age-based discrimination in the rental market, ensuring that young people are not unfairly disadvantaged when trying to secure housing. (Such as the [Foot in the Door](#) program).

Encourage collaboration between Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and real estate agents to assist young people in need.

Develop programs to address the lack of rental references and insecurity associated with share-housing. These programs should support young people in building a rental history and gaining confidence in securing stable housing.

8. Private Rental Assistance Programs

Expand and promote programs like the [Private Rental Assistance Program](#) (PRAP) in Victoria.¹² These programs help individuals experiencing homelessness secure private rentals by providing financial assistance to maintain tenancies. The young cohort may require additional community support to participate effectively.

These recommendations aim to create a more equitable and accessible housing market for young people in Australia, addressing the rental gap and providing the necessary financial and supportive mechanisms to secure and maintain stable housing.

Recommendation 7: Increase the rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, in line with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's recommendation.³

Recommendation 8: Improve access to affordable housing and private rentals for young people.

[Whole-of-systems approach to crisis support](#)

To address the root causes of homeless, Australia needs to incorporate a whole systems approach. The housing sector must collaborate with mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and education and employment systems to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to support. Whole-of-systems support, should also include the following:

1. Increase funding for specialist homelessness services

Allocate increased funding to Specialist Homelessness Services to enhance their capacity to provide comprehensive crisis support to young people in need.

2. Clear referral pathways

Establish clear referral pathways between housing, mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment and support, and education and employment systems to facilitate a seamless transition for young people in crisis.

3. Expand crisis beds

Increase the number of crisis beds to provide safe emergency accommodation for young people facing homelessness.

4. Enhance exit options: Improve exit options from crisis accommodation. Allow young people below the age of 16 to access safe housing. Create medium to long-term options that do not solely rely on social housing. Refuges should offer stays of up to 2 years, allowing children to complete their schooling. Current practices that involve exiting young people every three months need to be revised. Ensure that supportive services align with the age-appropriate needs of young people.

5. Extended housing support

Promote the availability of medium-term accommodations that typically offer 1-2 years of support. This stability allows young people to reconnect with their families, complete their education, engage in work or training, and foster positive social connections.

Recommendation 9: Provide wrap-around support for young people, which is dependent on their needs, not their tenancy.

Recommendation 10: Create a cohesive system between mainstream and specialist homelessness services to streamline referral pathways and provide more holistic service support.

Recommendation 11: Improve data collection and reporting mechanisms for social housing and specialist homelessness services.

Recommendation 12: Invest in service information programs for young people.

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