



Ending Youth Homelessness

Solutions from Young People



Youth Affairs
Council Victoria

Youth Affairs Council Victoria

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading advocate for young people aged 12–25 and youth workers in Victoria. Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

We propel action that inspires positive change for young people and the youth sector. We champion young people's equity, inclusion, connection and opportunity. We act, and support others to act, with authenticity, empathy, respect, curiosity, optimism, dynamism and excellence.

Contact

Youth Affairs Council Victoria Level 2, 235
Queen Street Melbourne, Victoria 3000
(03) 9267 3700 | lrycken@yacvic.org.au

Authors

Luke Rycken, YACVic Policy Manager
Sebastian Antoine, YACVic Policy and
Research Officer

YACVic is grateful for the support of everyone that contributed to this submission, including the young people, workers and community members that participated in our consultations.



YACVic respectfully acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this continent. YACVic acknowledges the Gunditjmara, Latji Latji, Barkindji, Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung people as traditional custodians of the lands of which the writing and consultations for this submission took place and pay our respects to their ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging.

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Young People and Homelessness	6
Frankie's Story	8
Triggers and Causes	9
Tayla's Story	13
Impact	15
Solutions	16
1. A Fair Rental Market	17
2. More Social Housing	19
3. Provide Support for Young People	21
4. Raise the Rate	25
Conclusion	27
References	29

Executive Summary

There is a youth homelessness crisis in Victoria. **Twenty-six per cent** of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria are aged between 12 and 24 and on any night at least **6,000 young people** are homeless. Thousands more young people will experience homelessness each year until decision-makers commit to ending youth homelessness.

This report elevates the voices of young people with lived experience of homelessness who have generously shared their stories and the solutions they believe can end youth homelessness in the next ten years.

Homelessness happens when people are unable to continue living in their current home but have no other options for suitable alternative accommodation. Family violence, mental ill-health, relationship breakdown, alcohol and other drug dependence, or transitioning out of the justice system or out-of-home care, commonly precede homelessness. The absence of affordable rental properties and the failure to provide social housing and adequate income support directly prevents young people from accessing alternative accommodation. This is dramatically affecting young people's lives and resulting in mental ill-health, school disengagement, unemployment, violence and unsafe sexual encounters.



Source: Flickr. Author: Denisbin. 2016

It is time to end the youth homelessness crisis in Victoria.

The resources, solutions and capacity to end youth homelessness already exist; what is needed now is investment and action. The young people interviewed for this report have identified four ways to end youth homelessness within the next ten years. These solutions are based on young people's real experiences and understanding of what is needed. Young people call on the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to immediately commit to their solutions to end youth homelessness.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Create a fair private rental market that works for young people.

Recommendation 2:

Commit to an ongoing program to build enough social housing to end the waiting list.

Recommendation 3:

Provide proper support for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 4:

Immediately raise the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance.

Young People and Homelessness

There is a youth homelessness crisis in Victoria. On any night, at least 6,000 young people are homeless. They are sleeping on the streets, couch surfing and seeking shelter in unsafe accommodation. Twenty-six per cent of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria are aged between 12 and 24 despite only making up 16% of the population.¹ Young people are nearly twice as likely to experience homelessness than other people. Those who experience homelessness are less likely to be engaged in education or employment and are at increased risk of exposure to detrimental health factors such as mental ill-health, drug use, malnutrition, limited access to medical care and education, unsafe sexual encounters and violence.²

Thousands more young people will experience homelessness each year until we all begin genuine work towards ending youth homelessness.

Youth homelessness is varied and most young people experiencing homelessness are couch surfing, living in severely overcrowded dwellings or in supported accommodation.³ Only 2% are living rough in tents or sleeping outside.⁴ To genuinely understand homelessness it is essential to consider the experiences of young people and to end homelessness we all need to involve young people in designing and implementing solutions.

This report elevates the voices of young people with lived experience of homelessness. They have generously shared their stories and experiences so



Source: Unsplash

that decision-makers can better understand what youth homelessness looks like and the solutions that will work. They carry with them a remarkable level of resilience and maturity, as well as a firm hope that things will get better.

It is time to end homelessness by intervening earlier, better supporting young people and ensuring access to housing whenever it is needed.

YACVic recognises that young people exiting out-of-home care or justice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young disabled people, young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, young people in rural and regional areas, LGBTQIA+ young people, young refugees and asylum seekers have unique experiences of homelessness. The solutions in this report are relevant to all young people and should be implemented with consideration of the particular needs of individual cohorts.

Young people use a variety of terms to describe their experiences when discussing homelessness:

overpopulated housing

subletting

living in a tent

in-between housing

unstable parents

living in a car

housing insecure

sleeping rough

squatting

abandoned

insecure

couch surfing

uncertainty

living rough

houseless

institutionalised

Frankie's Story

Content warning: this case study references anxiety and depression.

"Currently I sleep on a mattress on the floor of a friend's mother's spare room. Some money goes on things I didn't buy when I had a home: like fast food, laundry, stuff I used to be able to do at home. **Being homeless is expensive.**

I don't see friends anymore, it's so embarrassing to be homeless I don't want to see their faces. They're good people but I still have that fear of being mocked. They all ask, 'but have you done this and this?' and I answer, 'of course I'm trying everything'. But even friends assume I'm just not trying hard enough.

It's so hard to sleep at night, I think that this is only temporary accommodation and panic about what I will do in the future. The rental market hasn't improved in the new year and I would very much like it to. I don't get out much besides canvassing for rentals and seeing my sisters. I'm kept awake at night by anxiety, so I often find myself sleeping during the day. During my worst depressive episodes' years ago this was common. I feel like **because of my housing situation I'm sliding back into my darkest mental health period** and the progress I've made over the years is being lost. I used to paint and do art for my mental health but obviously I can't do that right now and I'm yearning for my art set and for some normality.

I'm on medication for my bipolar diagnosis and for years it worked, but this new extreme situation makes my doctor think about a re-evaluation of my meds. It's always so hard on my body and mind to change up medications, I feel like I don't have time to worry about new medications or about my mental health. Being homeless takes up so much time and energy, I had sympathy with homeless people before, but I **had no idea it would take everything I had just to get through the day.**"

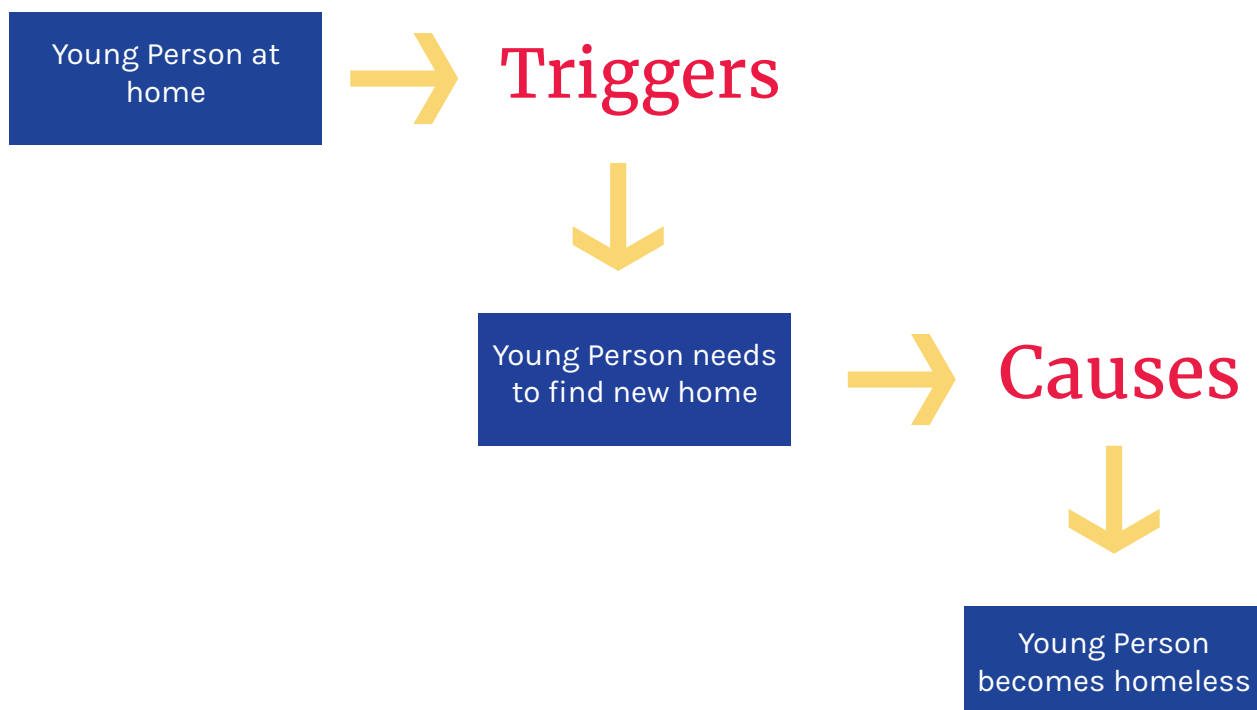
Frankie – Young person in Warrnambool

Triggers and Causes

Homelessness happens when people are unable to continue living in their current home but have no other options for suitable alternative accommodation. There are a variety of reasons why young people can no longer live in their previous home. Common reasons include family violence and relationship breakdown. While these are reasons young people are forced to seek new housing, they do not cause people to be homeless. Homelessness is caused by factors that prevent people from finding suitable alternative accommodation when they need it. This may be because of unaffordable rental prices, or a lack of suitable jobs for young people. Therefore, there are **triggers** which force young people to leave their previous accommodation, and **causes** which mean that they cannot find

suitable alternative accommodation, which together result in homelessness.

The major and direct causes of homelessness are the lack of affordable housing and inadequate income support for young people. The absence of social housing and inadequacy of Newstart and Youth Allowance payments mean that there is no safety net available when young people experience a trigger that requires them to find new accommodation. This is despite young people being the most likely to have low incomes and the most likely to experience homelessness.⁵



Flow-chart describing how triggers and causes play a role in young people becoming homeless

Triggers

Young people identified several common triggers that occurred prior to them experiencing homelessness. Alarming, every single young person we spoke with had experienced some form of family violence. This is consistent with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2018-19* that identified family violence as the most commonly cited experience by people seeking homelessness support.

Young people also listed their own mental ill-health as a common trigger, and noted that home environments that resulted in anxiety, stress and depression both required them to seek alternative accommodation and made it more difficult to secure employment. Relationship breakdown, alcohol and other drug dependence, dangerous accommodation and transitioning out of the justice system or out-of-home care were the next most common triggers identified by young people. Traumatic events, such as a death in the family, parents' divorce,

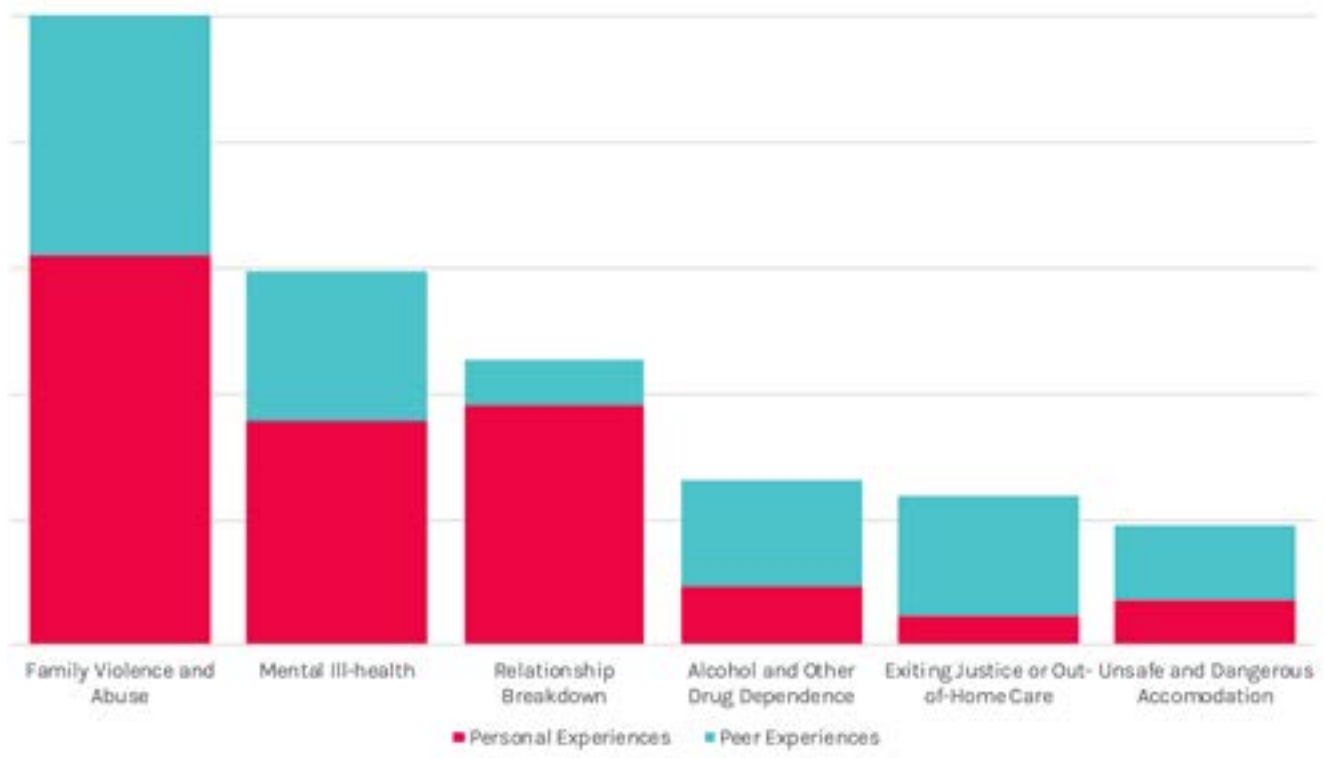
a negative family response to coming out as queer, or being kicked out of a rental were other common factors. Each of these triggers provides an insight into common experiences prior to homelessness and highlights the social, familial and environmental factors that pre-empt homelessness.

'My step-dad kicked me out in Year 8. I moved in with my dad and then my step mum kicked me out. They didn't give me any help, they just told me to "fuck off".'

– Young person in Mildura

'It's so hard here. There'll be 40 people going for a shitty one bedroom place. In our town of 30,000, there's probably only 30 places for rent. And all of those are out of my budget.'

– Young person in Warrnambool



The most common triggers experienced by young people and their peers in our consultations

Causes

Young people identified common causes that prevented them from finding appropriate alternative accommodation when it was needed. **In every location we visited, young people spoke about a severe lack of affordable rentals.** Young people consistently identified that the available rentals in their area were unaffordable, both for those who were currently employed and for those receiving Newstart or Youth Allowance. This issue has become more severe and commonplace with the increasing casualisation of entry-level work and the dramatic increase in property and rental prices in Victoria compared with Newstart and Youth Allowance.

Insufficient money was also listed as a common barrier for young people seeking accommodation. Young people regularly commented on the difficulty of finding suitable work because there is simply none available. Several young people noted that they were employed casually at several workplaces but had no guarantee of regular hours which makes budgeting and saving nearly impossible.

Many young people discussed how they were let down by people they expected to rely on for support. This includes families failing to provide support, friends closing their doors in a time of need, inadequate Centrelink payments and homelessness services being unable to provide support because they are overworked, underfunded, and have specific eligibility requirements. Some young people discussed how they had been unaware of services that could support them when they needed it most. This is particularly true for young people in rural and regional Victoria.

Young people had also commonly encountered discrimination and stigma when applying for houses or jobs. Landlords and real estate agents expect renters to have years of rental history or long-term employment, placing them at a disadvantage to longer-term renters.⁴ These structural factors illustrate the difficult circumstances that many young people find themselves in when they desperately need to find a new place to live. The prevalence of these triggers and causes of homelessness is reflected in data from Specialist Homelessness Services about the reasons clients approach them for support.³



The most common causes experienced by young people and their peers in our consultations

Tayla's Story

Content warning: this case study contains episodes of domestic violence, abuse and attempted suicide.

"I ran away from home at 17 after my mother threatened to kill me. Preceding this, she had outed me as LGBTIQ+ to others, strangled me, and had a long history of physical, mental and emotional abuse going back to my infancy. When I needed to attend university, I moved in with her parents, my grandparents. They were also abusive, but less severely and **I thought being treated bad was okay if I survived and got an education.** Then my grandfather threw me over three meters across the kitchen when I was trying to provide first aid to my grandmother. I swore to him and to myself that if they ever hurt me again like that, I would call the police. Then he got drunk and punched me in the face. So, I called the police.

Calling the police sent my life into a spiral, where they only did things that were symbolic of helping me – like getting an intervention order that only said not to hit me again – but hurtful enough to his patriarchal pride that he threw me out of home with 30 minutes notice. He then threatened the people I couch-surfed with until they threw me out too. The people I stayed with weren't willing to speak directly to the police, so his threats didn't mean anything. All the support services I was pointed to required way more mental and physical energy than I had to give, as I was still doing my bachelor's degree full-time during all this. 'Call this number' then

'call that number'. I was passed around like a hot potato. I was treated like I needed to go away in 12 weeks or less. The only organisations that interacted with me wanted me to go under the radar like I wasn't at uni, like I didn't have the threads I needed to keep together to feel even slightly human.

I ended up only interacting with organisations for purely short-term financials; stable accommodation was impossible to achieve. Housing is definitely too expensive to afford on Youth Allowance. **I now have housing, but it costs 73% of my Youth Allowance and Rent Assistance to afford a single bedroom** in shared accommodation, over an hour away from my university. This sort of economic stress makes thinking about the future and goal setting an exercise in pessimism and reinforces the same factors that caused homelessness in the first place.

Where could I get food? Soap? Can I sleep at uni in between my classes? How do I live for tomorrow and the next day?' These were the questions I focussed on. I couldn't function very well, and wanted very badly to 'die', in the terms of not existing anymore, or to get so hurt that I didn't have to think anymore. I very nearly

went into traffic and train tracks during my walks before snapping out of it.

My experiences broke my trust. I've had secure housing for five months now, and I still feel guilty for every dollar I spend in case I lose everything again. I can't interact properly with my peers, because my sense of humour is too dark and I can't have 'fun' properly. I can't let loose in case I lose it all, because the only person who will ever help me survive is myself. I struggle to find something worthwhile in myself and burn all the energy I have volunteering for my community and helping others until I have an 80-hour workweek. I don't create art anymore.

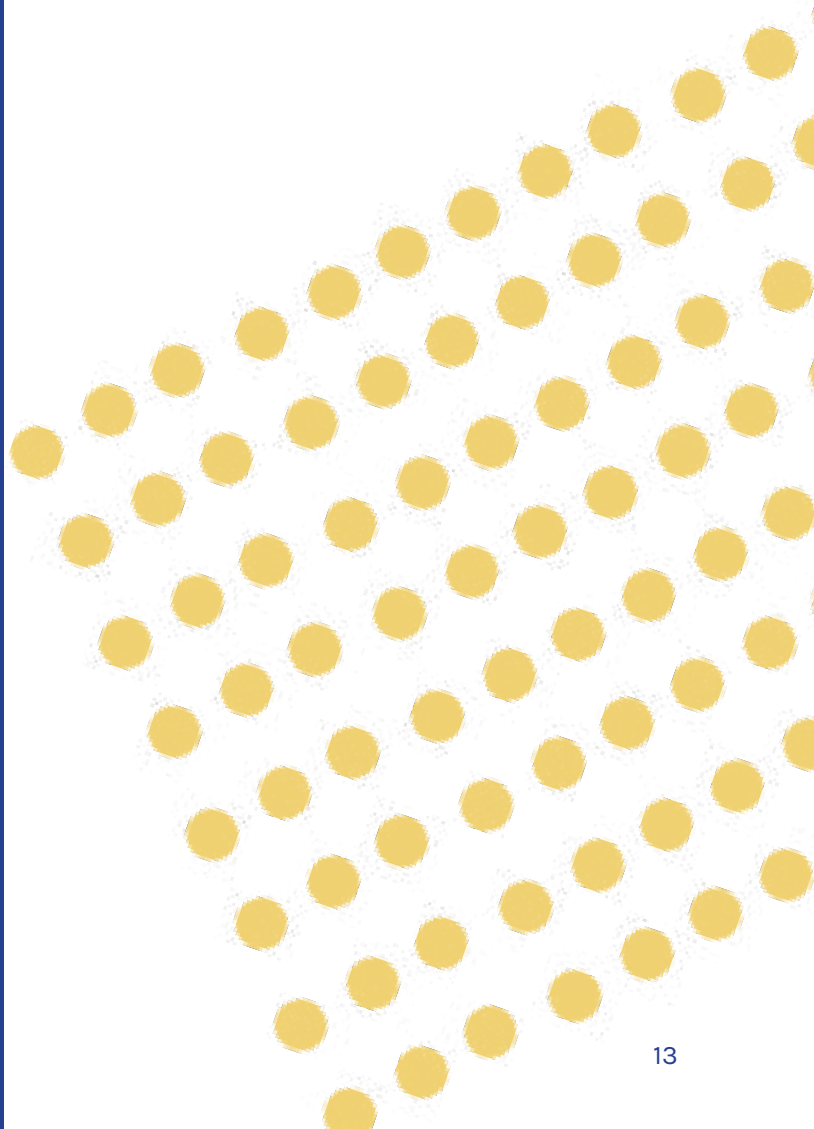
Because I got in contact with the court system in a domestic violence case, my experience was very poorly tailored to my needs. Everything was based around a mother with children escaping a violent and possibly obsessive partner, and **they didn't help me connect with services that would help me properly.** I didn't want to abandon my education. My partner is amazing and always has been my strength. All I got was a phone number, that would give me another phone number and so on. Five or so of these in, and I was completely done and spent. Some places gave me support, getting me key items, but there was a push to get rid of me and they didn't want to hear my story or understand me. They wanted me out in 8-12 weeks.

Uni gave me extra time for assignments, food and vouchers. Friends gave me

sympathy and their time, which was appreciated, but often not quite what I needed, especially as word spreads around. It made me feel broken and out of place.

Ultimately, I just wanted to feel safe and heard."

Tayla – Young person from Melbourne



Impacts

Homelessness has a significant impact on the lives of young people.

Experiencing homelessness dramatically affects young people's feelings of self-worth and often results in anxiety, depression and fear. Young people who have experienced homelessness are more likely to be disengaged from education and employment.² They are also more likely to be at increased risk of exposure to detrimental health factors including mental ill-health,

drug use, malnutrition, limited access to medical care, violence and unsafe sexual encounters.⁸

Ending homelessness will mean that young people are safe from these risks and will allow them to focus on their goals, education, employment and the rest of their lives.

Young people said that being homeless made them feel:



Solutions

The resources, solutions and capacity to end youth homelessness already exist – what is needed now is investment and action. This must start with collaboration with young people who have experienced homelessness to design and deliver solutions.⁴ Young people are experts by experience and know how to best support other people who are at-risk of homelessness. We all need to commit to genuinely working alongside these young people and valuing their expertise to design and implement solutions to end youth homelessness.

Young people have directly identified four recommendations that they know will immediately reduce the number of young people experiencing homelessness. If these are implemented, we can together end youth homelessness in the next ten years.

Recommendation 1: Create a fair private rental market that works for young people

Recommendation 2: Commit to an ongoing program to build enough social housing to end the waiting list

Recommendation 3: Provide proper support for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness

Recommendation 4: Raise the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance



Source: Unsplash

‘I want young people involved at every step of the way, from designing, to implementation to reviewing. As soon as you have the thought, get a young person. This is the only way to make sure that the solutions will work’ –
Young person who has experienced homelessness, currently studying community services

‘If you try and put everyone in a box, they’re not going to fit. There are so many different reasons why people are homeless, which means that **there needs to be many different types of solutions. Why don’t politicians understand?’**
– Young person from Shepparton

1. A Fair Private Rental Market

The private rental market is currently unaffordable and inaccessible for young people. This is a significant and direct cause of youth homelessness. **The cost of private rentals has increased dramatically over the past decade** compared with young people's median income and Centrelink payments.⁵ As a result, far fewer rental properties are affordable. This prevents young people on low incomes from finding accommodation when they need it.⁶ When young people do find accommodation, they often have to spend an unsustainable proportion of their income on rent, meaning that they are unable to afford essentials and regularly skip meals.⁷

It is also common for young people to only have access to dangerous rental properties that do not include the minimum requirements to live safely. Young people provided examples of properties in Victoria with unusable bathrooms, unsafe kitchens and bedrooms infested with pests. These types of properties are unacceptable for any person and demonstrate the need for better quality affordable rentals. Young people also identified discrimination as a common occurrence when applying for properties. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and people who had lived in the out-of-home-care system stated that they had often been turned away from the only available rental properties. Young people identified that an increase in short-term private rental letting, such as Airbnb, means there are fewer affordable private rentals available. These experiences and factors contribute to an unfair private rental market that perpetuates homelessness.⁸



Source: Unsplash

All young people deserve a place to live and those who are studying, working casually, or receiving Newstart and Youth Allowance payments should be able to access affordable housing in the rental market. Young people in casual, part-time or full-time work should not have to spend so much of their income on housing that they are unable to afford essentials. While the Victorian Government's Rent Fair reforms are a welcome first step in making it easier for young people to rent a place to live,⁹ more drastic measures are required to ensure that all young people can afford

'Before you put a place up for rent, someone independent should come around. There are so many places that are charging way too much. It would mean all the places with mould and other issues would have to be renovated first too!'

— Young person from Shepparton

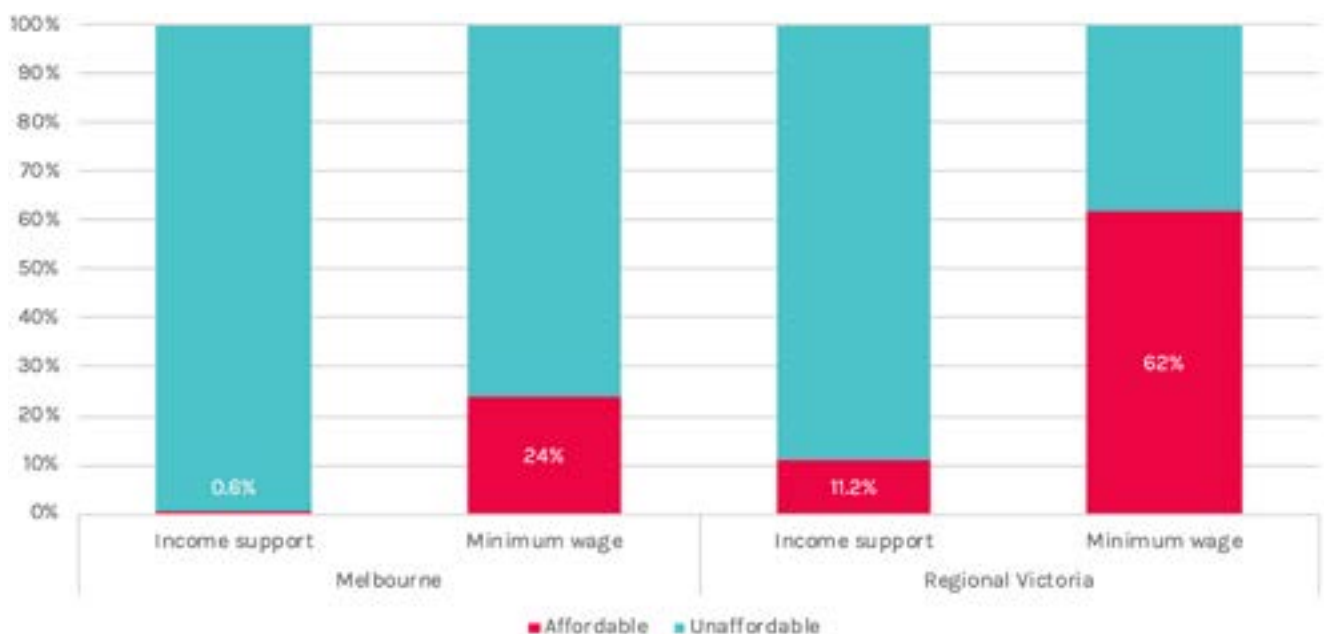
accommodation. Young people want an increase in the number of affordable rental properties, minimum property standards that ensure all accommodation is liveable, and an end to discrimination when applying for housing.

They know that creating a fair private rental market that works for young people is a vital first step towards ending youth homelessness and specifically recommend:

- Giving planners the power to force developers to build a significant percentage of affordable properties in new developments
- Enforcing minimum property standards to make sure all rental properties are liveable
- Ending discrimination towards young renters by implementing and enforcing stronger regulations
- Preventing frequent and significant increases in rental prices by toughening rental reforms.

‘I know what I can afford, and I don't want to be homeless anymore — so please give me a chance’
 – Young person in Warrnambool

Recommendation 1:
 Create a fair private rental market that works for young people.



Proportion of houses that are suitable for households on income support (eg Newstart or Youth Allowance) or minimum wage⁸

2. More Social Housing

There is not enough social housing in Victoria and as a result there are currently 51,551 applications on the social housing waiting list.¹⁰ **This means that 51,551 people and their families are going without a proper place to live.** They are sleeping on couches, bouncing between crisis centres, sleeping rough or living in unsafe or unsanitary conditions. Young people have stated that the lack of social housing means that it is impossible to access social housing when it is needed. **The waiting list is so long that many young people choose not to apply,** knowing that their application will take months or years to be successful. Analysis by MCM shows that the issue is exacerbated by the current social housing model, which sets rent levels based on income. Young people's incomes are generally lower, especially if they are on Youth Allowance, making them less financially viable and social housing providers less willing to house them.¹¹

Young people want and need to be able to access social housing. All young people deserve to have a place to call home and people who are experiencing family violence, looking for work or locked out of the private rental market, should have access to suitable accommodation. There must be enough social housing that it is a real option for young people whenever the need arises. Social housing needs to become an increasingly normalised and accessible option as more Victorians than ever before experience housing stress.^{7,12}

Young people also want to contribute to how social housing is built and managed. Young



Source: Flickr. Author: Matthew Perkins, 2016.

people are experts in what types of social housing will and will not work and should always be consulted to ensure that new properties are appropriate and accessible. This will ensure that new social housing is effective and works for those young people who need it most.

YACVic welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment to renewing and increasing the number of social housing properties through the Social Housing Pipeline, especially the investment in innovative approaches to increasing social housing stock.¹³ However, this is not nearly enough to meet the growing demand. As a direct result, young people are becoming homeless.

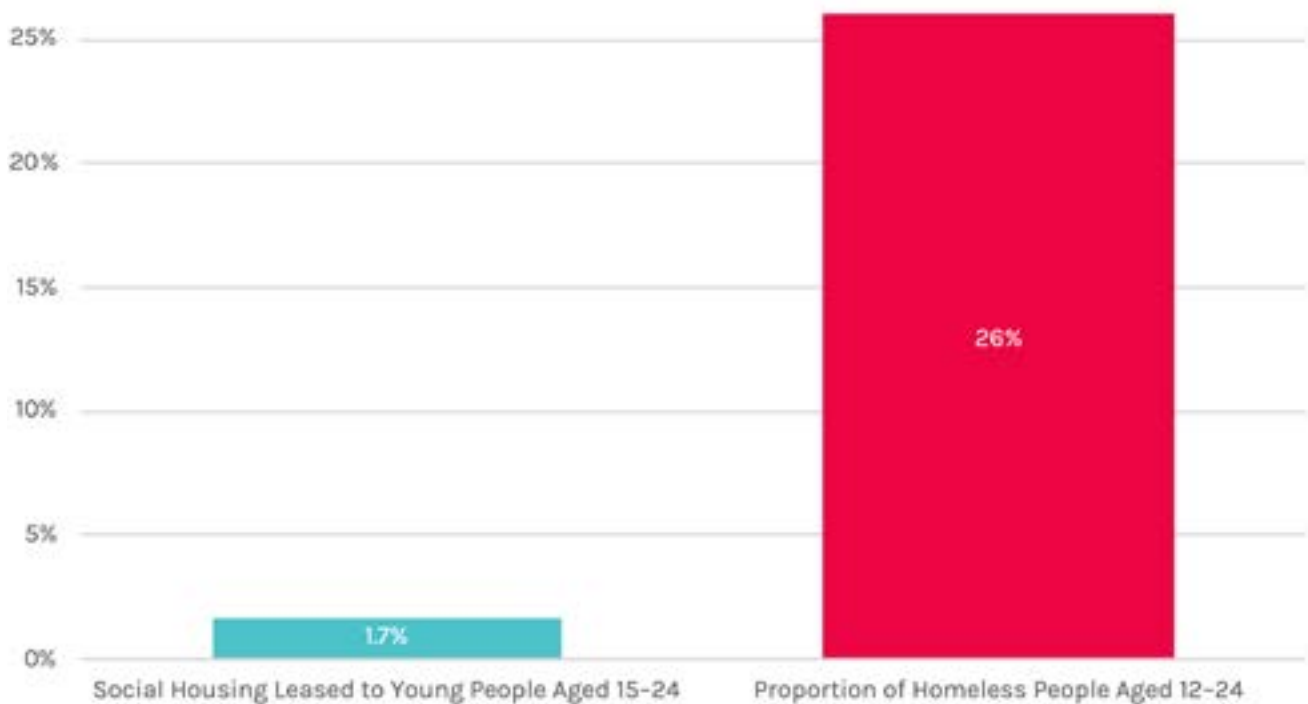
'For a long time I wanted to live by myself in a house but it just wasn't possible. Make sure there's social housing for single people'
– Young person in Warrnambool

Young people call on the Government to commit to an ongoing program to build enough social housing to end the waiting list as a crucial part of ending youth homelessness and specifically recommend that:

- Nobody should wait to have a place to call home
- Young people are always consulted so that new social housing works them
- There is a range of housing to suit different household types
- There is a spread of housing across Victoria, so young people can continue to live in their local communities

Young people want the government to urgently build at least 3,000 new social housing properties each year across Victoria to address soaring demand in line with the Whittlesea Declaration.¹⁴

Recommendation 2:
Commit to an ongoing program to build enough social housing to end the waiting list.



A comparison of the proportion of social housing leased to young people and the proportion of homeless people who are aged 12-24^{15,1}

3. Provide Support for Young People

Homelessness services and skilled youth workers provide important and valued supports which prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place and assist people who are experiencing homelessness into secure housing. However, young people are still falling through the gaps.

Services are overworked and underfunded meaning that many young people who need support are missing out.

More than 76% of people in Victoria who approached services and were identified as needing long-term housing were turned away because services had no capacity to help them.¹⁶ Young people stated that they were refused support when they were at risk of homelessness or living in temporary shelters. Young people described being told that they failed to meet certain criteria and that services were too busy to help them. Young people were frustrated about being left without access to support when they were passed between services and identified that some services take months to support new clients because they are working beyond their capacity.

It is unacceptable that young people who need support to survive are denied because services are underfunded. The failure of services is caused by a lack of investment and support from government, causing more young people to enter homelessness and to miss out on support when they need it most.



Source: Unsplash

Young people who are let down by their families or support networks need access to alternative support to become independent in a relevant, timely and effective manner.

'A worker with personal experience was helpful.' – Young person in Mildura

'They [service providers] haven't experienced it [homelessness] themselves. They don't know the practical stuff. They don't know how hard it is. And they don't know how it feels.' – Young person in Warrnambool

'Once you hit 25, [Service A] puts you into [Service B]. The transition is pretty shit. **It's taken two months for me to get onto [Service B] after finishing with [Service A]. What am I supposed to do?**

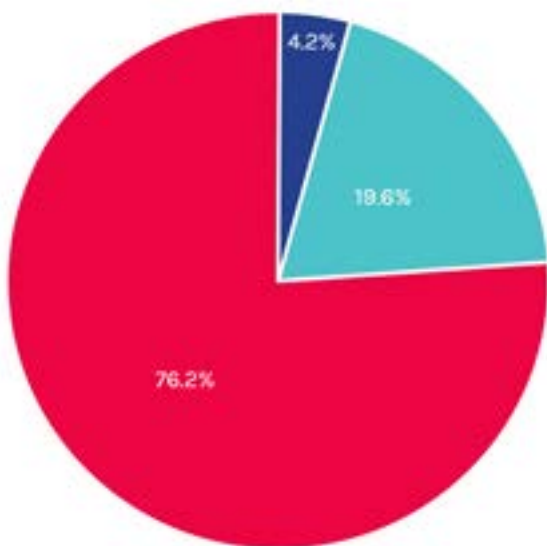
– Young person in Warrnambool

Well-funded early intervention and prevention programs are an essential component of this support.¹⁷ Youth work programs successfully address the common triggers that precede homelessness, including family violence, mental ill-health, relationship breakdown, alcohol and other drug dependence, and transitioning out of the justice system or out-of-home care.^{18, 19, 20} Young people want skilled youth workers who will connect them with others in their community and with the support systems that work best.

Youth workers work alongside young people to enable them to become independent on their own terms and prevent them

from experiencing homelessness. Early intervention and prevention through greater investment in youth work is an effective, low cost and evidence-based approach to preventing homelessness.²²

Youth work also provides a significant return on investment by increasing engagement in education, volunteering and employment.²¹ The government can learn from successful early intervention programs like Youth Foyers and Banyule City Council's Time Out, and should commit to properly funding early intervention, prioritising community-led, place-based responses.²²



- Not provided with Long-term Accommodation or Referral
- Supported into Long-term Accommodation or Referral
- Referred to another service

Outcomes for people in Victoria who approach services and are identified as needing long-term accommodation.²³

'One [youth worker] did a lot of things really well and a lot of things pre-emptively which stopped me from becoming homeless.'
 – Young person in Melbourne

To end youth homelessness young people are calling for proper support for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness and specifically recommend:

- Expanding funding for youth workers to deliver proven models of early intervention programs like Youth Foyers and Time Out
- Increasing investment in homelessness service providers so that all young people can access support
- Broadening the scope of eligibility criteria so all young people who need it can get support
- Hiring more people with lived experience of homelessness to work in homelessness service providers
- Guaranteeing young people access to support when transitioning between services.

'I applied for the parent payment because I became the legal guardian for my younger sister. I then got that three months later. In that time, she turned 16. So, they gave me the extra lump sum for when you wait a long time. It's \$1000. I was like 'okay! I looked after her for three months, I'll go and buy a sweet washing machine! Except, when she turned 16, they then decided that she would get her own money. And even though I did look after her for those three months, it was now negated. So, I had to pay back that \$1000 that they made me wait for, that they gave me, that they then changed their minds about.'

— Young person from Warrnambool

Recommendation 3:

Provide proper support services for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness.

'They will tell you to go to [Service]. They can't do anything. **They give us a tent to sleep in.** But where do you put that? You can't go down to the river or anything.'

— Young person in Mildura

'I went to six to ten house inspections and my youth worker helped me out a lot. It only took me three months [to find a place to rent].'

— Young person in Mildura

'Youth services need to be extended. We get dropped off when we turn 21.'

— Young person in Mildura

'I need to study to keep my payments, but I can't afford to study.'

— Young person in Warrnambool

4. Raise the Rate

Newstart and Youth Allowance payments are too low and this is a direct and significant cause of youth homelessness.

The Business Council of Australia has stated the current rate of Newstart is so low that it is acting as a barrier for people seeking work.²⁴ Young people on Newstart or Youth Allowance are unable to afford food and secure housing, along with suitable clothing, public transport, internet access and a phone, all of which are essential to secure a job.²⁵ This creates further disadvantage and stress in a job market with only one job available for every eight people seeking work.²⁶

The level of Newstart and Youth Allowance hasn't changed in real terms in the past two decades despite the cost of accommodation and essentials increasing dramatically over the same period.²⁷ This means that young people are now faced with the extremely high cost of rental properties and the need to secure internet access and a mobile phone without any corresponding increase in Centrelink payments. The current rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance traps young people in poverty rather than supporting them into independence.²⁶ Young people are regularly skipping meals because they cannot afford to eat.⁹ Young people told us that they did not want to be on Youth Allowance or Newstart, but that the rate of payments are not high enough to allow them to find suitable work, move toward financial independence and support them into long-term accommodation.



Source: Unsplash

Young people deserve proper financial support is adequate to afford food, transport and other essentials and allows them to afford secure accommodation while they are studying or looking for full-time work. It is essential that all young people can easily access payments without having to meet difficult application processes and reporting requirements. Support payments should be readily available to young people as soon as they need it. Raising the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance will lift young people out of poverty and make it easier for them to study, find suitable work, and move into sustainable, long-term independence.²⁹ Raising the rate will lead to increased consumer spending, strengthen the economy and create thousands of additional jobs.²⁷

'No-one will hire me, so that's why I'm on Centrelink. It's shit. Centrelink doesn't give me enough money to be able to rent.'

– Young person from Warrnambool

Young people are calling on the Government to immediately raise the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance so that it provides proper support while they are studying or looking for work rather than trapping them in poverty and specifically recommend:

- Immediately raising the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance by at least \$95 a week
- Aligning increases of Centrelink payments with wage growth rather than CPI
- Making it easier for young people to access payments as soon as they are needed and without punitive demands
- Allowing flexibility to ensure that young people are supported no matter how their circumstances change.

Recommendation 4: Immediately raise the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance.

'By the time we pay for the caravan park and food, we have nothing. And the caravan park's [fees are] going up after Friday, so we don't know what we're going to do after that.'
— Young person in Warrnambool in a household of four



Comparison of Youth Allowance and Rent Assistance with required expenses over a fortnight

End Youth Homelessness

It is time to end the youth homelessness crisis in Victoria. This can be done in the next ten years by implementing young people's solutions. The young people who have contributed to this report are experts by experience and know that their solutions are urgently needed to improve the lives of thousands of young people in Victoria.

They know that a fair private rental market, more social housing, better support and an increase in Newstart and Youth Allowance is needed to end young people being forced into homelessness.

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments must take urgent action and commit to young people's recommendations to end youth homelessness in the next ten years.

Recommendation 1: Create a fair private rental market that works for young people

Recommendation 2: Commit to an ongoing program to build enough social housing to end the waiting list

Recommendation 3: Provide proper support for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness

Recommendation 4: Raise the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance



Source: Unsplash

"I don't want to be homeless anymore
– so please give me a chance."
– Young person from Warrnambool

References

- ¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). Census of population and housing: Estimating homelessness [Data set]. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2049.0Main+Features12016?OpenDocument>
- ² Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. (2012). Literature Review: Effective interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Canberra, Australia. Barker, J., Humphries, P., McArthur, M. & Thomson, L. Retrieved from https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2012/literature_review.pdf
- ³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). Couch surfers: a profile of Specialist Homelessness Services clients [Data set]. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/couch-surfers-a-profile-of-specialist-homelessness/data>
- ⁴ Youth Affairs Council Victoria. (2020). Youth Participation. Retrieved from <https://www.yacvic.org.au/resources/youth-participation/>
- ⁵ Parliamentary Library & Information Service, Parliament of Victoria. (2017). Housing Affordability in Victoria. Melbourne, Victoria. Raynor, K., Dosen, I. & Otter, C. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publications/research-papers/send/36-research-papers/13840-housing-affordability-in-victoria>
- ⁶ Anglicare Victoria. (2019). Rental Affordability: 2019 Victoria Snapshot. Retrieved from https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/41_Rental_Affordability_Report_FA_LR_03.pdf
- ⁷ Australian Council of Social Service. (2019). “I regularly don’t eat at all”: Trying to get by on Newstart. Retrieved from <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/190729-Survey-of-people-on-Newstart-and-Youth-Allowance.pdf>
- ⁸ Flanagan, K (2017). Homelessness, Tasmania ... and Airbnb. *Parity* 30(5) 11-12.
- ⁹ State Government of Victoria. (2019). Rent Fair - rental reforms for Victorians. Retrieved from <https://www.vic.gov.au/rentfair-rental-reforms-victorians>
- ¹⁰ Department of Health and Human Services, State Government of Victoria. (2019). Victorian Housing Register applications. Retrieved from <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register>.
- ¹¹ Melbourne City Mission (2020). Submission to the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria, March 2020.
- ¹² Barwon South West Homelessness Network. (2018). Homelessness in Barwon South West Region. Retrieved from https://g21hwbpillar.com.au/sites/default/files/news_items/bsw_homelessness_report_-_2018.pdf
- ¹³ Department of Health and Human Services, State Government of Victoria. (2020). Social Housing Pipeline. Retrieved from <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/social-housing-pipeline>
- ¹⁴ Everybody’s Home Alliance. (2018). The Whittlesea Declaration: A shared vision for housing in Victoria. Retrieved from <https://www.vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Whittlesea-Declaration-2018.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). National Social Housing Survey 2018 [Data tables].

Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/national-social-housing-survey-2018-key-results/data>

¹⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2019). Report on Government Services 2019, Part G, Section 19. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2019/housing-and-homelessness/homelessness-services>

¹⁷ Youth Affairs Council Victoria. (2020). Youth Work Matters. Retrieved from <https://www.yacvic.org.au/advocacy/youth-work-matters-victorian-youth-sector-calls-for-more-trained-supported-youth-workers/>

¹⁸ AHURI Research Synthesis Service. (2011). Youth Mentoring. Retrieved from <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2011/11/apo-nid27350-1152146.pdf>

¹⁹ The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia. (2016) The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia: Research Briefing 28 April, 2016. Retrieved from https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/20343727/1000008507_published_report.pdf

²⁰ Hart, K. (2016). The efficacy of community justice intervention services to increase social capital and reduce incarceration for young adults (thesis). Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

²¹ National Youth Council of Ireland and Indecon (International Economic Consultants). (2012) Assessment Of The Economic Value Of Youth Work. Retrieved from http://www.youth.ie/economic_value

²² Banyule Youth Services. (2020). Time Out: Housing Information and Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.banyuleyouth.com/housing-information-resources>

²³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Specialist Homelessness Services annual report

[Data tables]. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/data>

²⁴ Business Council of Australia. (2012). Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Allowance Payment System for Jobseekers and Others. Retrieved from <https://www.bca.com.au/submission-to-the-senate-inquiry-into-the-adequacy-of-the-allowance-payment-system-for-jobseekers-and-others>

²⁵ Australian Council of Social Service. (2019). Raise the Rate: Briefing Note. Retrieved from https://raisetherate.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/20190430_Briefing-note.pdf

²⁶ Australian Council of Social Services. (2019). Raise the Rate: Increase Newstart and related payments. Retrieved from <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Raise-the-Rate-Explainer-1.pdf>

²⁷ Phillips, B (2019). Cited in Henriques-Gomes, L (2019). 'One of the worst': how Newstart compares to unemployment payments in rest of the world' in The Guardian. Retrieved online <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jul/23/one-of-the-worst-how-newstart-compares-to-unemployment-payments-in-rest-of-the-world>

²⁸ Deloitte (2018). Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates. Retrieved from <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DAE-Analysis-of-the-impact-of-raising-benefit-rates-FINAL-4-September-...-1.pdf>

