



Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness, 2020

Submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee

Gippsland Homelessness Network

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Introduction

The Gippsland Homelessness Network (GHN) commends the Victorian Government for undertaking a Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness and providing the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry.

This submission builds on the evidence provided to the Legal and Social Issues Committee by Gippsland Homelessness Services at the public hearings convened in Gippsland on the 2nd and 3rd of December, 2019.

The Gippsland Homelessness Network (GHN) believes that housing is a basic human right. It's members work together to end homelessness. The GHN is one of nine Homelessness Networks in Victoria and has two Local Area Service Networks (LASN's). Inner Gippsland LASN consists of the Local Government Areas of Latrobe, Baw Baw, South Gippsland and Bass Coast Shires and Outer Gippsland LASN consists of the Local Government Areas of Wellington and East Gippsland.

The GHN has a membership of 12 funded Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS's) that provide crisis, transitional, long term, family violence, youth support and accommodation. We work collaboratively to achieve an integrated service system that provides support and assistance to people experiencing or at risk of Homelessness so that they can access and maintain secure, safe, affordable, appropriate housing in our region.

The Network supports Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in service delivery practice and capacity building through the provision of information, policy and program updates, data collection and collation, advice and resourcing to address and resolve issues of Homelessness. We run and participate in campaigns such as *Everybody's Home* and *Home Truths* and facilitate linkages with allied service sectors and share professional development opportunities.

Membership of the Gippsland Homelessness Network

Inner Gippsland LASN	Outer Gippsland LASN
Community Housing Limited	Community Housing Limited
Latrobe Community Health Service	Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
Quantum Support Services	Gippsland Lakes Complete Health
Salvation Army	Mallacoota District Health and Support Services
Salvation Army Housing	Orbost Regional Health
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	Quantum Support Services
	Uniting (Gippsland)
	Yarram District Health Service
Advisory members	Advisory members
Children's Resource Co-ordinator	Children's Resource Co-ordinator
Department of Health and Human Services representatives	Department of Health and Human Services representatives
Family Violence – Principal Strategic Advisor	Family Violence – Principal Strategic Advisor
Gippsland Homelessness Networker	Gippsland Homelessness Network Co-ordinator
Orange Door – Service Navigator	

About Gippsland

Gippsland covers 41,556 square kilometres and extends from Philip Island in the South West and to the New South Wales Border in the Far East of Victoria. It has a longitudinal population distribution totalling 271,804 (ABS 2016), representing 4.6 per cent of Victoria's population. The most populated region is Latrobe City making up 23% of Gippsland's population. Aboriginal people account for 2% of the population of Gippsland.

The Gippsland area includes the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnia; Port Albert in the South, east along the coast to Marlo and encompasses Mount Buller and the Alpine National Park.



Gippsland is best known for its primary production such as mining, power generation, farming and its tourist destinations. The closure of Hazelwood Power Station and the drought in some parts of Gippsland are taking a toll. Unemployment in Morwell was 15.3% in December, 2018 as compare to Victoria at 4.2% for the same time.

Across Victoria, lower birth rates and longer life expectancy have led to an ageing of the population, which is expected to continue. However, this trend is not as pronounced in the Gippsland region. The population aged 20-39 is still growing in all LGAs. However, there is a more rapid growth in the population aged over 60, which alongside declines in the population aged 0-19 in East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland and Wellington LGAs and will lead to continued population ageing in the future. All LGAs except Baw Baw and Bass Coast are experiencing population growth primarily in the over 60 (retiree) age group. An ageing population leads to an increasingly dependent population, with fewer working age adults to support those who have retired from the workforce.

Overall Gippsland's population is ageing faster than the rest of Victoria, retirees are seeking sea and tree changes in our Region and our young people are leaving Gippsland to attend university and pursue education opportunities.

East Gippsland experienced devastating bushfires for 3 months from the 21st of November, 2019 to the 27th of February, 2020 when finally declared contained.

On New Year's Eve fire threatened many East Gippsland communities and hit Sarsfield and the coastal town of Mallacoota hard, more than 100 houses were destroyed by fire. The Navy evacuated 1,160 people by sea from Mallacoota. The one road in and out of Mallacoota and the Princes Highway north of Orbost were closed and not opened again until late February.

A shroud of smoke lingered over Gippsland for months extending to Melbourne in the west and to New Zealand and beyond to the east.

East Gippsland communities experienced multiple evacuations, hundreds of homes and buildings were lost including farms, businesses and schools, hundreds of thousands of hectares burnt, thousands of livestock and millions of native fauna dead and the community traumatised.

The community was in a hyper vigilant state for 3 months, tuned to ABC radio and the Emergency Vic App. This experience has been traumatising for the East Gippsland community and recovery will take a very long time.

What does Homelessness look like in Gippsland? The scale and nature of homelessness

Homelessness in Gippsland is becoming more visible. Rough sleepers can be found in backstreets, by the rivers, at the beaches, under bridges, staying with friends or family, in overcrowded dwellings, squats and cars. In the past the incidence of homelessness in Gippsland could be described by the person in the street as nonexistent because it was not visible.

The five most common reasons that people were seeking homelessness assistance in Gippsland as collated by workers in homelessness services in 2015-2016¹

27% Housing Crisis

23% Family Violence

13% Financial Difficulties

10% Inadequate/inappropriate dwelling

8% Transition from custody and reflects engagement with Fulham Prison in Sale

Housing availability and affordability

Gippsland has a lack of supply of affordable, accessible housing for people on low incomes. Public and Community Housing availability is limited and priority is given to families and victim survivors of Family Violence.

Housing has become less affordable over the last decade due to incomes **not** keeping pace with increases in rental.² This unaffordability drives people into homelessness and prevents people in social housing from moving into private rental.³

Melbourne's growth has placed considerable pressure on Gippsland with people moving from Melbourne in the belief that they can secure cheaper rental. This squeezes the local housing supply driving up house prices and the cost of private rental making it unaffordable for people on low incomes. Unfortunately when people arrive in Gippsland they realise that there are few affordable housing options, fewer job prospects, limited public transport options, difficulty in accessing health care services and community support services.

At 31 December, 2019 there were 1,378 households awaiting priority access for Gippsland on the Victorian Housing Register⁴; 711 for Outer Gippsland, an increase of 57 since the 30th of September, 2019 and 667 for Inner Gippsland an increase of 11.

1,430 had registered Interest for Gippsland; 1044 for Inner Gippsland and 386 for Outer Gippsland. A total of 2,808, an increase of 85 in 3 months.

¹ AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing)

² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) Inquiry into funding and delivery of programs to reduce homelessness (April 2017), <doi:10.18408/ahuri-8209001>

³ ibid

⁴ Victorian Housing Register <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register>

The demand for private rental is greater than the supply and there is fierce competition for private rental properties. Landlords want their prospective tenants to be employed, have quality references, be available for a second interview and provide bank and income statements.

The DHHS Rental Report ⁵gauges private rental affordability, in the December, 2019 quarter there were only 38 one bedroom private rental properties that were affordable in Gippsland for singles; 34 of them in Latrobe.

DHHS Private Rental Report, December, 2019⁶

LGA	1 br	2 br	3 br	4 br	LGA Total
Bass Coast	0	9	44	26	79
Baw Baw	0	18	64	38	120
Latrobe	34	106	192	37	369
South Gippsland	0	18	33	15	66
Inner Gipps Total	34	151	333	116	634
East Gippsland	2	38	66	33	139
Wellington	2	58	83	27	170
Outer Gippsland Total	4	96	149	60	309
Gippsland Total	38	247	482	176	943

In January, 2020 The Rental Vacancy rate in Rural areas was 1.7% with a median rental of \$350 per week as compared to 2.2% vacancy rate and median rental of \$450 per week in Metropolitan areas.⁷

Income supports such as Newstart, Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rental Assistance are not sufficient to access and sustain secure, appropriate private rental options. To be eligible for the Bond Loan Scheme the weekly rental should be no more than 55% of income. The bond loan is driven by the availability of affordable rentals and the clients' capacity to pay rent. Only a very few recipients of government pensions, benefits or allowances could afford to pay the Rural median rental of \$350 per week. Hence, in 2018-19 the demand for assistance from the Bond Loan Scheme decreased by 6.1%,⁸

Since 2013 the number of Newstart recipients seeking housing assistance has increased by 75% outpacing the growth of the number of people receiving Newstart in the same period by 28%.⁹ Only two rental properties in Australia would be affordable for a single person on Newstart.¹⁰

'Housing Stress' is experienced if a household is paying more than 30% of its income in housing costs. As higher income households can spend a higher proportion of their income on housing without experiencing problems, they are often excluded from these types of analyses. Consequently, a ratio of 30/40 is often used as a benchmark—that is, if households that fall in the bottom 40% by

⁵ DHHS Rental Report <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>

⁶ ibid

⁷ Real Estate Institute of Victoria – Rental Rates <https://reiv.com.au/property-data/residential-rental>

⁸ DHHS, Housing Assistance: Additional service delivery data 2018 –19.

⁹ Homelessness Australia

¹⁰ Anglicare Rental Affordability Index, 2019

income spend more than 30% of their income on housing, they are defined as being in housing stress¹¹

The majority of recipients of income support experience housing stress. Rental prices are growing faster than incomes.¹²

Emergency Crisis Accommodation

The issues in accessing Emergency and Crisis Accommodation in regional, rural and remote areas are different to those experienced in a metro setting.

Victoria is experiencing massive population growth. This has led to an urban-rural drift where people move from the metropolitan area to rural communities in the belief that secure, affordable housing will be available. Reality bites when they discover that the supply of affordable, private rentals is limited and public and community housing has long waitlists, public transport, connectivity (both physical and digital), community and medical services are not always accessible.

Emergency/crisis accommodation options are few, consisting of private guest houses, rooming houses, motels, hotels, caravan parks, tents and swags

In the Bass Coast sub-region of Gippsland and in other small rural communities there is no emergency/crisis accommodation available. People seeking accommodation have to move on to larger communities.

Private guesthouses, where they exist, are unsuitable for the accommodation of families and young people.

Rooming Houses are few and predominantly for men. Workers speak of 'unofficial' rooming houses where the standard is so poor, no power, no kitchen, no heating, no bedding supplied at a cost of \$200+ per week. Workers are hesitant to 'blow the whistle' on such places because a scarce resource would be knocked out of a system that has very few options.

Motels and hotels are the only emergency/crisis accommodation option available to accommodate survivors of family violence and their children. They are costly, often not safe enough, have limited privacy, no cooking facilities and rooms not big enough to accommodate a large family.

Caravan Parks provide marginal and emergency/crisis accommodation. Caravan parks in rural areas are a dwindling commodity preferring to accommodate tourists and seasonal workers. In the main those that will take our clients are on the lower end and not desirable or safe.

¹¹ Housing Affordability in Australia – Dr Matthew Thomas and Alicia Hall

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About Parliament/Parliamentary Departments/Parliamentary Library/pubs/Briefing Book45p/HousingAffordability](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/Briefing_Book45p/HousingAffordability)

¹² Housing affordability in Victoria No. 6, December 2017 Dr Kate Raynor Post-Doctoral Research Fellow The University of Melbourne Igor Dosen & Caley Otter Research & Inquiries Officers Parliamentary Library & Information Service, Parliament of Victoria

One local caravan park proprietor asks for 2 weeks rent in advance, 2 weeks bond, an application form to be completed and references. There is a waiting time of 2-3 days to find out if the person's application is successful. Whilst waiting for advice people are generally accommodated in a motel thus impacting on the Entry Point's Housing Establishment Funds (HEF).

The Miner's Rest Caravan Park and the Capital Motel in Wonthaggi have also been utilised for emergency / crisis accommodation. Both facilities have been sold to Bunnings for site redevelopment. Residents have been given six months' notice to vacate. 60 people are living in these facilities and all agencies including Bunnings are working together to locate suitable accommodation, there are no guarantees that this will happen.

In regional, rural and remote communities emergency/crisis accommodation is sourced on the back of the reputations and the personal connections of workers. If there are incidents of bad behaviour by clients it can become very personal, particularly for workers who live in the town.

During holidays, events and festival times people flock to the coast to places like Philip Island, Inverloch, Wilson's Promontory, Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota... the population explodes and this is the time when emergency crisis accommodation options can disappear altogether.

In Bass Coast and South Gippsland the lack of crisis accommodation and the limited availability of affordable housing for low income earners were causes attributed to 769 people being turned away from service in 2018/19.¹³

Transitional Housing

There are 178 Transitional Housing properties in Gippsland. Transitional Housing is intended to be a supported, short-term accommodation program. It acts as a stepping stone to more permanent housing in public housing, community housing or the private rental market.¹⁴

Individuals are referred to a support provider that offers advice and planning in the identified areas of need. A key element of transitional housing is that it's a temporary option, and tenants must be actively working with their support provider to apply for long-term housing (for example, public housing or private rental).¹⁵

Transitional Accommodation cannot work in the way it is intended when there are so few exit points. It is impossible for people to be housed in public or community housing given the long waitlist. Private rental is either unavailable, unacceptable or unaffordable for people on low incomes. The supply of affordable private rental in Gippsland¹⁶ (DHHS Private Rental Report, December, 2019) is limited with the greatest availability in Latrobe; 34 out of 38 one bedroom units affordable in Latrobe and nothing available for singles in Bass Coast, Baw Baw and South Gippsland.

¹³ Salvation Army database SAMIS 2018/19

¹⁴ <https://chiavvic.com.au/thm/>

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ DHHS Rental Report <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>

Consequently people stay in Transitional Housing longer than intended creating a bottle neck with minimal throughput.

Community Housing Limited (Vic) manages 130 Transitional Housing properties in Wellington, Latrobe and East Gippsland. Over a three year period the number of tenancies has decreased by 22%.

	East Gippsland	Wellington	Latrobe	Total
2016 - 17	70	10	109	189
2017 -18	48	5	99	152
2018 -19	50	6	98	154

Support

Workers describe the multiple and complex circumstances of consumers who experience homelessness and the need for a multi-service/wraparound response to ensure that the person and their children have their needs appropriately assessed and responded to. Workers say that there is nowhere to refer people to. Community Service Organisations, Alcohol and other Drug services, Counselling and Community Health services all have waitlists and cannot respond as they would like.

Workers say that every time people come back to service their situation is worse for them because they bounce from one service to another without ever getting their needs met. The co-ordination of care and services for people with multi-service needs is essential to achieve a continuum of care to address the complexity of presentations.

Support should be tailored, flexible, scalable and increase or decrease as per the needs of the client and be outcome focused. To achieve this specialised level of understanding of support needs and capabilities will require skilled, individualised and regular assessment and review.

Overall, a review of the recent literature on supported housing for correctional populations highlights the importance of flexible and individually oriented approaches to delivering housing support. Good practice in housing support focuses on individual needs and on the provision of appropriate degrees and types of individual choice and control. Holistic, integrated wraparound services, delivered through collaborative, multi-agency approaches and spanning a range of individual support and treatment needs, remain an integral part of good practice for housing support interventions¹⁷.

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Criminology | Research Report Supported housing for prisoners returning to the community: A review of the literature. Matthew Willis, 2018 (Commissioned and funded by Corrections Victoria)

Family Violence

The rate of Family Violence in Gippsland is one of the highest in the state. Gippsland LGA's are rated 1st, 2nd, 6th, 29th and 30th out of a total of the 79 LGA's in Victoria for the highest incidence of Family Violence.

There has been no increase in housing supports and options in response to the long term demand identified in the Royal Commission into Family Violence nor the resulting impact of the increased demand on services due to women and children actively seeking safety.

Family violence is now the biggest contributor to homelessness in Gippsland affecting women, young people, children and men. Inner Gippsland (Latrobe, Baw Baw, Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires) has an Orange Door that has been operational for 12 months. In January, 2020 alone there were 605 referrals made to the Inner Gippsland Orange Door.¹⁸

The safety of victim survivors and the wellbeing of children is of the highest priority and as such accommodation is made available as soon as possible, however private rental in the main is unaffordable for those on pensions and benefits. There is insufficient safe housing options for women and children experiencing family violence in Gippsland. This places women and their children at ongoing risk either by having no choice but to remain in a violent home environment or unsafe housing options.

Rural women and children are often faced with having to leave their homes, extended families, their local communities, their source of income as well as their access to local housing services where they are known in order to maintain distance from their abuser.

Perpetrators also need to be housed but this is often very challenging in rural communities after an incident of family violence.

Children and Young People

One in 5 people under the age of 18 present at Gippsland homelessness services.¹⁹

There are two Youth Refuges in Gippsland; one in Morwell and one in Bairnsdale. Both have limited capacity to meet the demand for service. During the young person's six week stay they learn basic living skills to prepare them for independent living; nutrition, shopping, cooking, cleaning, personal hygiene, washing their clothes and how to manage money while they continue to go to school or work.

For those young people who live in towns other than Bairnsdale and Morwell, they have to relocate to access the refuges and leave their families, friends and natural supports behind and move to a place that is unfamiliar to them, that's if there is a vacancy available in a refuge. This displacement

¹⁸ The Orange Door monthly Report – January, 2020.

¹⁹ AIHW 2015 -16

can lead to the breakdown of the placement and a career of homelessness; couch surfing and rough sleeping.

Young people have none or very limited accommodation options or the financial means to exit refuges. There are limited Youth Transitional properties and nowhere to exit to once in a Youth Transitional property. The sharing model in youth properties is difficult to implement and maintain given the competing interests of young people and the influences of significant others, the arrangement can fail and the young person then gets lost to the service.

The Youth Allowance is insufficient to rent privately if in fact a landlord would rent to a young person. Sometimes workers have no option but to keep the young person in the refuge, even though they are ready to leave, until suitable accommodation with support can be sourced thus leading to a bottle neck and no throughput

Young people leaving care:

43-65% of care leavers have poor mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, PTSD, panic attacks, sleep disorders), 35% of care leavers will be homeless within the first year of leaving care, 46% of male care leavers will be in the juvenile justice system and 29% of leavers will be unemployed.²⁰

18 year olds leaving care need somewhere to live. While there may be funding available there are few housing options, particularly options that provide ongoing emotional support, education and training.²¹

When homeless young people disengage from education, they have increased susceptibility to mental illness, substance misuse, criminal activity, violence and can become victims of financial, emotional and sexual abuse. People who have been through the care system who become homeless before the age of 18 represent the largest group of recurring homelessness and recurring incarceration.²²

Single People

Locating accommodation for single people is near impossible. There is only 3 long term public housing dwellings for singles under 55 years old from Bairnsdale to the New South Wales border. Properties for singles on the private rental market are scarce and unaffordable to recipients of income support. The only available, affordable accommodation options are caravan parks, rooming

²⁰ Relationships Australia, October, 2017

²¹ Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home; The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Overview, March, 2020

²² Council to Homeless Persons: 2018 Election Platform

houses and Supported Residential Services (SRS). Some SRS's cost in the vicinity of \$350 per week for a single room with meals provided, this is only affordable to people who receive a Disability Support Pension.

Women

58% of consumers of homelessness services in Gippsland are women.

Homelessness in older single women is increasing. Many of these women have had no experience of homelessness in the past. Relationship breakdown, family violence, forced out of employment due to ill health, age or changes in skill requirements and with little or no superannuation. Private rental is unaffordable to them, and public housing waiting lists are extensive. Women 55 and over are the fastest growing homelessness cohort.²³

Some cohorts of women are more likely to experience homelessness than others. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability, women who are culturally and linguistically diverse and women with a mental illness are all more vulnerable to homelessness.²⁴

According to Gender Equity Vic; <https://www.genvic.org.au/resources/gender-equity-statistics/>

In 2015 -16 on average women earn \$253.70 a week less than men. Women in the helping industries such as health and social services are paid significantly less than employees in male dominated industries.

Women are more likely to be in casual employment; 25.5% of all female employees in Australia compared to 19.7% of male employees.

Victorian women are over-represented as part-time workers in low paid industries and in insecure work and continue to be under represented in leadership roles in the public and private sector.

In Australia women's superannuation balances at retirement are 47% lower than men's. As a consequence women are more likely to experience poverty in retirement and be more reliant on the Age Pension.

Women who have had their children removed by Child Protection have their income reduced and can no longer afford private rental. This can force them into homelessness and that impacts on having their children returned because they don't have stable housing.

Aboriginal People

Across the region Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's) play a central role in the delivery of services and the promotion and protection of Aboriginal people's rights. This includes health, housing, law and justice, child and family welfare, child development, education, land

²³ Council to Homeless Persons; Women and Homelessness Fact Sheet, Updated January, 2019

²⁴ ibid

management and heritage protection services and assistance. The Aboriginal population across Victoria is growing rapidly creating significant demand pressures on Aboriginal and other services in the Region.²⁵

The number of Victorian Aboriginal people assessed by homelessness services is growing faster than anywhere else in Australia. Around half of those requiring help are under 25. In 2018 17% of Aboriginal people in Victoria sought assistance from a homelessness service. 44% were already homeless and the remainder were at risk of homelessness. Those in need of homelessness services has grown by 34% in 4 years.²⁶ Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to be victims of family violence²⁷ and are 7 times more likely to have their children removed than their non-Aboriginal counterparts²⁸

***In 2018-19 Aboriginal people accounted for 12.2%
of Community Housing Limited 's new clients in Gippsland.***

Aboriginal families are more likely to care for Elders at home. There is often pressure to 'take people in' leading to overcrowding which places a strain on household members and is known to contribute to family violence and also places tenancies at risk. Aboriginal people experience poor health outcomes and are over represented in parent and child separations, family violence and incarceration.

Some Aboriginal people report that they experience discrimination when applying for private rental properties despite being in secure employment and having good references.

Mental Health

The relationship between mental health and homelessness is complex. Becoming homeless causes considerable stress and leads to mental ill health and for those with a pre-existing mental health problem; being discharged from an inpatient unit into homelessness or inadequate housing leaves little opportunity for rehabilitation and recovery and perpetuates trauma and a revolving door. A safe, secure and affordable home is inextricably linked to mental wellbeing.

The period post discharge from an inpatient unit is fraught with the risk of suicide and it is essential that people are discharged into an environment that is safe, supported and conducive to rehabilitation and recovery.

The defunding of the Community Managed Mental Health sector by the Victorian government to support the funding of the NDIS has meant that the provision of psychosocial rehabilitation is no

²⁵ AITHER | Report iv Gippsland Regional Profile, March 2019

²⁶ Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home; The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework Overview, March, 2020

²⁷ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), 2014 p.5

²⁸ Australian Government, 2018.

longer available as part of the mental health service system in Victoria. This has severely affected the recovery of people with severe and enduring mental illness²⁹

45.7% of Clients identified as having a mental health diagnosis

35.4% currently receiving mental health support

453 Clients exited hospital or an inpatient unit during

the past 12 months.³⁰

People leaving Prison

Gippsland is the home of Fulham Prison, a medium security prison located near the town of Sale in the Shire of Wellington that will soon have capacity for 1,100 prisoners. The lack of appropriate, affordable accommodation reduces the likelihood of prisoners being offered parole. The numbers of people leaving prison on parole has been reduced because of risk which means when they do leave prison they will not receive the support required to reintegrate into community.

There are no Transitional housing properties available for Prison releases in East Gippsland

The lack of support and accommodation options for those wishing to stay in the local area is a contributing factor to reoffending. For those who have no alternate accommodation returning to the family home can result in a prison term.

Studies have reinforced findings on the association between housing stability and reduced recidivism. Evaluations of supportive and supported housing programs have shown they have the potential to deliver positive outcomes for clients including physical and financial security, greater social inclusion, stronger feelings of stability and control, and increased wellbeing³¹.

Community Housing Limited provides service to Fulham Prison and delivers the Enhanced Housing Pathways program. 563 clients have exited prison in the past 12 months.

²⁹ AHURI: Mental Health and Housing – Policy Issue

³⁰ Community Housing Limited Gippsland

³¹ Australian Institute of Criminology | Research Report Supported housing for prisoners returning to the community: A review of the literature. Matthew Willis, 2018 (Commissioned and funded by Corrections Victoria)

Rural and Remote Communities

In January, 2020 The Rental Vacancy rate in Rural areas was 1.7% with a median rental of \$350 per week as compared to 2.2% vacancy rate and median rental of \$450 per week in Metropolitan areas³²

A vignette from Far East Gippsland:

Orbost is the hub of Far East Gippsland and is surrounded by many very small isolated communities. The township has a population of 2,227 and a median age of 52.

Private rental properties are scarce and expensive due to a large transient workforce taking up availability and putting upward pressure on affordability, increasing private rentals to more than \$400 per week leaving very few affordable housing options for people on a low income. The standard of affordable private rental properties is often poor, no insulation, poor heating options and old appliances adding considerable cost to utilities. Outer communities such as Cann River very rarely offer private rentals causing people to leave their home communities and supports.

Public housing is non-existent for single people under 55. Much of the stock is old with inefficient heat banks still in commission. Orbost has 5 Transitional Housing properties; one two bedroom property is dedicated to young people (16 – 24). The sharing model in youth properties is difficult to implement and maintain given the competing interests of young people and the influences of significant others.

Crisis response is limited. The local caravan park will not accept referrals from the homelessness service. During holidays and the peak season tourist rates are applied which makes accommodation cost prohibitive. There is a local hotel that provides an option but is unsuitable for families and people with alcohol/substance abuse issues. The only option in Orbost for families is a motel but this can only be made available until the next business day. There is one motel in a smaller town nearby that is less costly but difficult to access.³³

The 2019-20 Bushfires

The East Gippsland bushfires raged for 3 months.

East Gippsland communities experienced multiple evacuations, hundreds of homes and buildings were lost including farms, businesses, livelihoods, schools, hundreds of thousands of hectares burnt, thousands of livestock and millions of native fauna dead and the community traumatised; many without a home and displaced. The losses have still not been fully quantified.

Recovery is slowly happening, we are seeing regrowth on the trees and, *BlazeAid* are rebuilding fences and people are coming forward for assistance.

DHHS has funded 30 full time positions to assess, triage and provide case management for those affected by the fires. In late February around 500 assessments had been made and referred for triaging. Six THM's had been made available for accommodation and various measures initiated to

³² Real Estate Institute of Victoria – Rental Rates <https://reiv.com.au/property-data/residential-rental>

³³ Orbost Regional Health Homelessness Service

assist in gaining private rental; including 12 weeks free rent and bond assistance without the usual eligibility testing. A freeze has been placed on public housing allocations in the areas of Bairnsdale, Orbost and Sale. This presents problems for those waiting to be housed on the Victorian Housing Register desperately seeking housing.

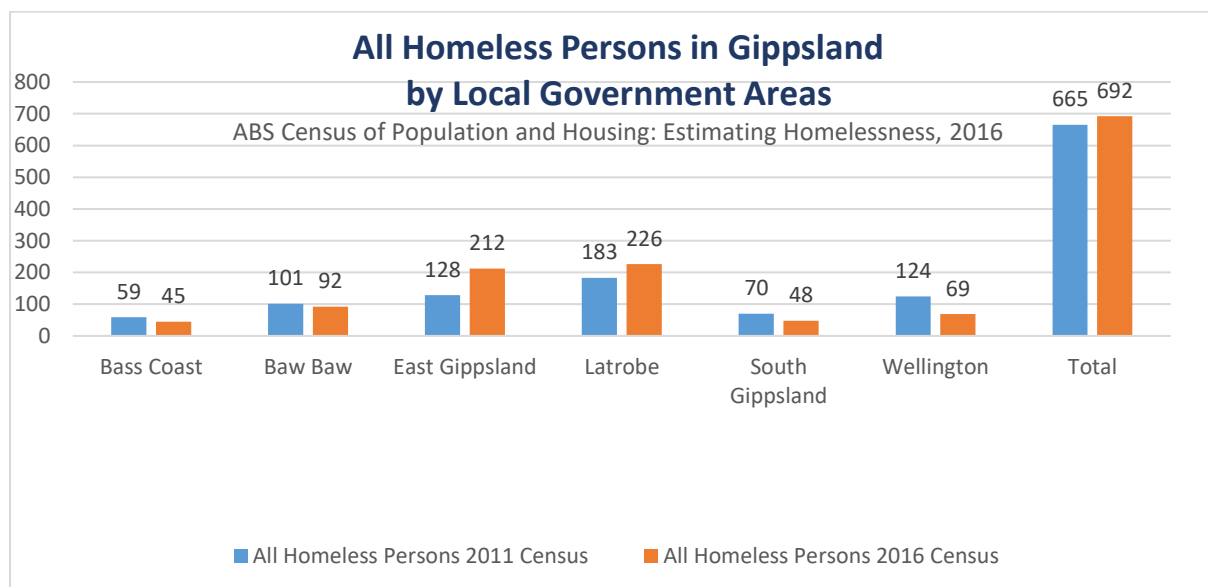
Grocon has been engaged to cleanup burnt houses and buildings, they say that it will take around 9 months to complete the work. This will mean 9 months before people can begin to rebuild their homes.

The rebuild will take a long time and the individual and community recovery from trauma even longer.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria has been established to focus on the needs of local communities, to ensure their rehabilitation from health and wellbeing to helping communities get back on their feet.

Gippsland Data

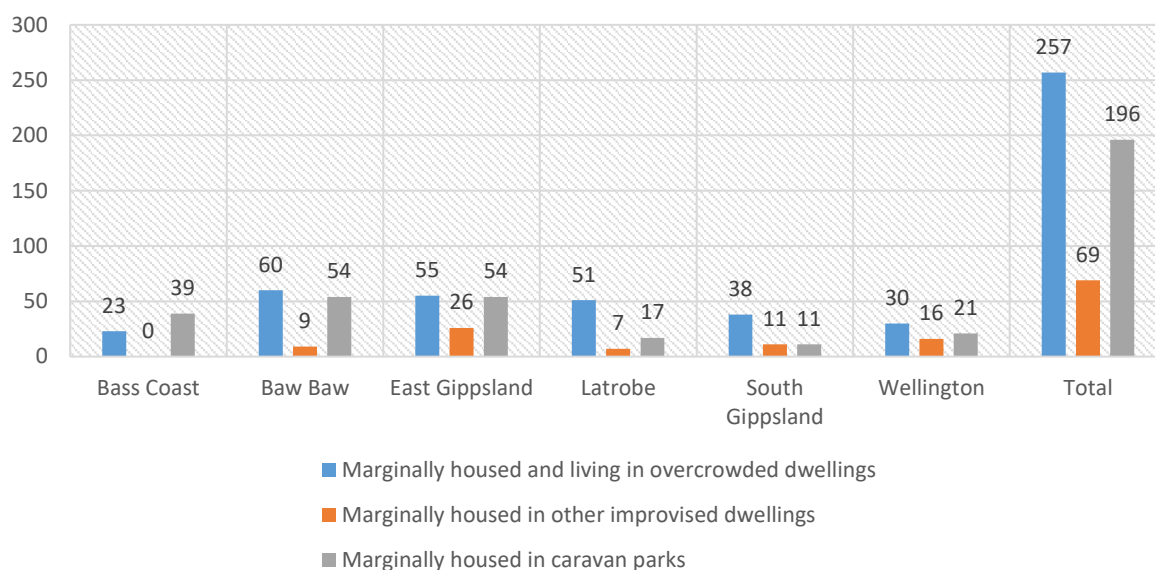
In 2016 the Australian Bureau of Statistics undertook a specialist homelessness count and 692 Gippslanders were found to be homeless.



A further 522 were not counted as homeless but at risk of homelessness; living in marginal housing; in overcrowded dwellings, improvised dwellings such as tents and in caravan parks.

Risk of Homelessness

ABS Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2016



At the 2016 Census count 38 in every 10,000 people in East Gippsland electorate were homeless as compared to the Victorian Regional average of 27 in every 10,000. East Gippsland has the 6th highest level of homelessness in Regional Victoria. Morwell electorate was the 8th highest with 31 people in every 10,000 homeless.³⁴

Gippsland has a high proportion of rough sleepers 10.3% as compared to 7.2% for Victoria³⁵

A high proportion of people had no income at all (one in every seven people)³⁶

³⁴ Council to Homeless Persons – Data from ABS, Analysis by CHP www.chp.org.au

³⁵ ABS Census 2016

³⁶ *ibid*

Local Area Service Network (LASN) Data Snapshot Quarter 4, 2018 -19

The latest data available, collected from Gippsland Homelessness services (LASN's) and analysed by Council to Homeless Persons for Quarter 4, 2018 -19 reveals that a total of 6,701 households (8,612 individuals) presented to homelessness services from 1 April – 30 June, 2019.

Outer Gippsland LASN (Wellington and East Gippsland Shires) 1262 households and 1567 individuals presented for service. **30% were first time clients to a Specialist Homelessness Service** (since 2015-16). 17% were young people presenting alone, 41% experienced family violence, 26% were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 1% were exiting custody. (NB Clients may be represented in more than one group)

2,081 support periods were provided during the reporting period, including 36,691 nights of accommodation. **At the end of support 20 per cent of households (223 households) were homeless**; 3% in improvised or inadequate dwellings, 5% in Temporary Accommodation, 11% Couch Surfing and 1% Other. 73% (827 households) were housed/at risk of homelessness; 15% in Social Housing (Public/Community Housing), 54% in Private Rental, 1% in Institutions and 3% in Other Housed/at Risk. The housing situation of 7% of households was unknown at the end of support.

Inner Gippsland LASN (Latrobe, Baw Baw, Bass Coast, South Gippsland Shires) 5439 households and 7075 individuals presented for service. **54% were first time clients to a Specialist Homelessness Service**. 15% were young people presenting alone, 40% had experienced family violence, 14% were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 9% per cent were exiting custody. (NB Clients may be represented in more than one group)

10,673 support periods were provided during the reporting period, including 88,652 nights of accommodation. **At the end of support 35% of households (1,773 households) were homeless**; 8% in improvised or inadequate dwellings, 10% in Temporary Accommodation and 17% Couch Surfing. 60% (3,023 households) were housed/at risk of homelessness; 10% in Social Housing (Public/Community Housing), 41% in Private Rental, 5% in Institutions and 5% in Other Housed/at Risk. The housing situation of 4% of households was unknown at the end of support.

Social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness and service delivery in Gippsland

Homelessness is not just about poverty and rental availability and affordability although to address this would go a long way to improve lives. It's also about access to services and community supports, adequate funding of services, infrastructure, transport, lack of education, unemployment, family breakdown, trauma, family violence, no superannuation, systems failure, health issues, addiction, mental illness, poor choices, bad luck and no back up.

- Long term neglect of the investment in Public and Community Housing across the spectrum – Emergency Crisis Accommodation, Transitional and Long Term housing

- Failure to increase wages in line with the cost of living
- Failure to ensure adequate income support for young people, the unemployed, the elderly and people with a disability
- No default service for those that are ineligible or do not wish to be assessed for an NDIS package or who are unable to navigate the complexities of assessment for NDIS and simply give up
- System failures ending with people cycling through mental health inpatient units and prison and exiting into homelessness.
- Inadequate response to the long term needs (housing, education, physical and psychological health, employment) and wellbeing of young people who experience homelessness
- Lack of person centred, cross sectoral service co-ordination for people with complex and multi-service needs.
- Local responses are required to avoid people having to leave their communities and supports
- Additional housing stock is not provided when new programs and initiatives are rolled out.

Recommendations to end homelessness in Victoria

Homelessness in Victoria is at crisis point. It is shameful that in a prosperous state like Victoria that successive governments, both State and Federal have turned their backs on the most vulnerable in our communities.

Homelessness will not end but with the right settings it will be rare, brief and a one-off event.

Build more Public and Community Housing:

Victoria has the lowest percentage of public and community housing of any state, 3.5%. At the very least this must be brought up to 4.4% to meet the National average. 6,000 properties should be built each year to keep up with a projected demand of 101,592 eligible households in 2031.³⁷

- We need to build more Public and Community Housing that is located close to amenities and public transport. One and two bedroom properties for singles and couples should be built as a matter of priority. This could then free up family housing that is occupied by singles and couples.
- In Gippsland and other rural regions Emergency and Crisis accommodation options are limited. Emergency Crisis accommodation is an essential component of the homeless service system, the private sector cannot be relied upon to provide accommodation of a good standard that is affordable that meets the needs of consumers. Emergency Crisis accommodation should be built through government funds and managed and supported by Specialist Homelessness Services. As a matter of urgency this needs to happen in Bass Coast where there are no Emergency Crisis Accommodation options.
- Rural areas
- Building more public and community housing will stimulate the economy and address unemployment issues. It will bring down the cost of private rental, provide exits points from Transitional housing so that it can function as intended. Additional Public and Community housing should be built to correspond with demand when there are newly funded initiative such as family violence, youth refuges, mental health, corrections, Housing First (Permanent Supportive Housing)... so that these programs can achieve their intended outcomes.
- That the Victorian government commit to build public housing based on a percentage of new arrivals into Victoria.

The building of public and community housing should take place in rural and regional areas, not restricted to Metro.

Increases to Income Support and the Commonwealth Rent Assistance:

The Victorian government to continue to advocate for the increase of NewStart, the Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Early Intervention

Preventing tenancies from breaking down. Evictions contribute to approximately 40% of homelessness in Victoria³⁸ 95% initiated by landlords, 80% tenants fail to appear at VCAT hearings.³⁹

- It is recommended that Consumer Affairs Victoria initiate a public information campaign to educate tenants about their rights and the available advocacy and advice programs such as Aboriginal Tenants at Risk (ATAR) and the Tenants Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP) and employ Tenancy Focussed Legal Support

³⁷ Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program, Legal and Social Issues Committee, June, 2018

³⁸ AIHW, 2018 Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Vic 2016-17

- Increase funding to Tenancy Plus. This program offers assertive outreach, case management and interim intervention support to prevent homelessness and assist tenants to maintain housing.

Housing First (Permanent Supportive Housing)

Housing and support for as long as it takes

People experiencing chronic housing need housing and intensive and or long term support in relation to disability, mental illness and recovery from childhood trauma so that they can feel like they're part of the community and participate fully in community life.

- Roll out targeted social housing across Victoria for those experiencing chronic homelessness. The Victorian Rough Sleeper Action Plan, 2018 includes assertive outreach, intensive case management and multi service supports but we need the social housing to go with it and the flexibility to scale support services up and down as the need requires.

Flexible Tailored Individualised Support

Flexible, tailored, individualised support for those with multiple and complex needs. This also means tailored in duration; 6 weeks in a youth refuge and 13 weeks in a Transitional Housing property is clearly not enough and not working.

- Support to be wrap around and flexible enough to scale up and down in type and duration with the focus being on outcomes. The *Better Futures* program is an example of one such model.

Young People

We need a system that incorporates the needs of children and young people which includes education, family reconciliation and support, counselling, guidance, living skills, financial support and the opportunity for employment.

- Out of home care should be extended from 18 to 21 and the *Home Stretch* program should be funded on a needs basis. Young people leaving care should have housing and support/mentoring linked until they are 25.
- We need to keep children in schools, it is a protective factor against chronic homelessness, it raises self-esteem, a positive social identity and leads to employment. By extending youth accommodation options to initiatives such as Youth Foyers we will reduce the number of young people cycling through the housing and homelessness system, Increase the number of young people completing education qualifications and increase the number of young people productively employed.

Youth Foyers should be funded and located in the communities of

Bairnsdale, Leongatha, Morwell and Sale.

Family Violence

Acknowledgement of the challenges for women living in rural and remote communities and the need for investment in the structures that support women and their children to remain safely in their local communities.

- That the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness take into consideration the learnings from the Royal Commission into Family Violence and its resulting recommendations.

It has been established that homelessness for women and children is directly linked to family violence.

When we tell women to leave and that we will help them we have a responsibility to provide accommodation and the relevant and appropriate support structure.

Aboriginal People

Self-determination facilitates strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

- The Victorian government to commit to all the recommendations of the Victorian Housing and Homelessness Framework: **Mana-na worn-tyneen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has A Home.**

Mental Health

People should never be discharged from a Mental Health Inpatient Unit into homelessness

- Improve policy integration between housing, homelessness and mental health. This could have the potential to contribute to better housing and health outcomes for people with lived experience of mental ill health.⁴⁰
- Development of a dedicated mental health, housing and homelessness strategy that addresses the need for psychosocial rehabilitation and supported living environments

People released from Prison

People should never be released from Prison into homelessness

- Transitional Housing properties dedicated to prison releases to be made available in Outer Gippsland

Developers to build accommodation for their workers

In rural areas when negotiating contracts with developers it should be stipulated and written in to contracts that accommodation for the developer's workers should be built at the cost of the developer and be transferred to public or community housing stocks when the project is completed. . This will ensure that the local rental market will not be impacted by local developments and the community will benefit in the longer term

Planning controls

⁴⁰ AHURI 2018

Inclusionary zoning – Local Government Areas to commit to a percentage of new developments dedicated to social housing. This can alleviate local pressures in a municipality-based approach and make a positive contribution to affordable housing

Inclusionary zoning Another key mechanism used extensively in SA and internationally is inclusionary zoning. Inclusionary zoning is a land use planning intervention by government that either mandates or creates incentives so that a proportion of a residential development includes a number of affordable housing dwellings. Despite being used extensively in San Francisco, London, New York and Vancouver,¹⁵⁶ inclusionary zoning is not commonly applied in Australia. In SA a 15 per cent affordable housing policy has been in place since 2005, resulting in certainty for the property industry and over 5,000 affordable housing commitments.¹⁵⁷ In Sydney's Ultimo Pyrmont District an inclusionary zoning program has yielded 450 affordable rental dwellings.¹⁵⁸ Victoria's Planning and Environment Act 1987 is currently being revised to include a definition of affordable housing and to designate affordable and social housing as a legitimate planning concern. These changes are intended to empower local councils to negotiate inclusionary housing contributions on private developments.

Case Studies

PRAP

In March we assisted a 50 year old male who was experiencing family violence. Our Client was on a lease with a family member who was emotionally and physically abusive. Despite this he had maintained a positive rental history and good relationship with his real estate agent.

Our Client was linked with a mental health support worker who advised he was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, our Client disclosed that due to the situation he was in he had felt suicidal recently.

After discussions with our Client around his safety and mental health, it was discussed that relocation was the best option for him. At this stage, he was \$352.27 in arrears at his current property and given the rent amount of \$230 per week he has unable to contribute towards the arrears with his newstart payments.

Negotiations with the real estate enabled us to find a mutually beneficial outcome for both the Client and real estate to maintain our Client's positive rental history. In order to have his name removed from the lease and be offered an alternate property CHL agreed to cover the cost of his arrears and pay his new bond (\$720) through the PRAP program as his current bond was tied up in his current property. CHL agreed to fund the required two weeks rent in advance (\$360) through HEF enabling him to access a safe, more affordable property.

At the three month follow up point our Client has reported feeling safer, improved mental health and is maintaining his new rent amount.