



Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan 2023

Gippsland Homelessness Network

306 Main Street, Bairnsdale

E: chris.mcnamara@quantum.org.au

M: 0400 600 068

www.ghn.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

The Gippsland Homelessness Network acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land that we work and live on, the Gunaikurnai and Bunurong people and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
About the Gippsland Homelessness Network (GHN).....	4
About Gippsland.....	6
Homelessness.....	7
Census 2021.....	7
Young People.....	8
Family Violence.....	10
Rough Sleeping.....	10
Women.....	10
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.....	11
Housing Availability and Affordability.....	12
Social Housing.....	13
Private Rental.....	15
Homelessness Services.....	17
Support.....	17
Emergency Crisis Accommodation.....	18
Transitional Housing.....	18
Prevention and Early Intervention.....	19
Planning, Zoning and Development.....	20
Recommendations.....	21

Introduction

The Gippsland Homelessness Network commends the Albanese Federal Government for the incredibly complex undertaking of developing and delivering a National Housing and Homelessness Plan and welcomes the opportunity to make a submission outlining the current housing and homelessness crisis in the Victorian region of Gippsland and our recommendations to end homelessness.

The 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan must be ambitious and courageous with the aim of ending homelessness rather than managing it. Homelessness is a hugely complex issue and one that requires structural, systems and policy change across all levels of government. Not only do we need more social and affordable housing stock with multi-service co-ordination to support those with complex needs, but we also need structural change to address home ownership, private rental affordability and Centrelink payments to be increased to alleviate poverty. A major review of the resourcing of the Specialist Homelessness Services sector must also be included in the Plan. The Plan must commit to setting, monitoring and reviewing targets to end homelessness and should include rough sleeping, overcrowding, people living in inadequate housing and people experiencing rental and mortgage stress. The progress to meeting targets should be widely reported and a revised action plan developed every 2-3 years.

The Gippsland Homelessness Network (GHN)

The GHN is one of nine Homelessness Networks in Victoria. The Networks work together across the State and are members of the Victorian Homelessness Network (VHN). The VHN provides a mechanism for strategically progressing issues of common concern across all Regional Homelessness Networks, with a focus on operational issues relating to the management of a statewide homelessness service system.

The GHN has a membership of 11 Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) funded Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS's) which provide crisis, transitional, long term, family violence, youth support and accommodation. The Network's aim is to end homelessness and work together to deliver a co-ordinated homelessness response to the community of Gippsland. Our belief is that **housing is a basic human right and that homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring**. 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 GHN is governed by a Steering Committee that determines and oversees the strategic direction of the Network. It has two Local Area Service Networks (LASN's) that identify local trends, address issues of concern and share information. The Inner Gippsland LASN covers the Local Government Areas of Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Latrobe and South Gippsland Shires and the Outer Gippsland LASN covers the Local Government Areas of East Gippsland and Wellington.

The Network develops an annual Strategic Plan based on the following three strategic objectives:

Objective 1: Working together to end homelessness

Objective 2: To act as a conduit between the Department of Families Fairness and Housing and the regional services sector on issues and trends to inform policy

Objective 3: Strengthen the coordinated homelessness service system in the best interests of clients

Issues of concern are elevated to the Victorian Homelessness Network via the Local Area Service Networks (LASNs) annual survey and strategic objectives.

The Network runs and participates in advocacy campaigns such as *Everybody's Home*¹ and *Houses at Parliament*² and facilitates linkages and collaboration with allied service sectors and shares professional development opportunities.



Houses at Parliament Campaign - 2 August, 2023

Campaign asks:

An ongoing pipeline of at least 6,000 new social houses in Victoria per year, and
A National plan to end homelessness.

¹ <https://everybodyshome.com.au/>

² <https://www.vhn.org.au/>

About Gippsland

Gippsland, a Victorian rural region covers 41,556 square kilometers and extends from Philip Island in the South West to the New South Wales border in the Far East of Victoria. It has a longitudinal population distribution totalling 300,664 (ABS 2021), representing 4.6 per cent of Victoria’s population. Gippsland’s principal population areas are Warragul, Latrobe Valley, Sale and Bairnsdale and it has many small and remote communities particularly in East Gippsland. The most populated Local Government Area (LGA) is Latrobe City making up 26% of Gippsland’s population.

The Gippsland area includes the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai; and Bunurong people. Aboriginal people account for 2% (ABS 2021) of the population of Gippsland.

Gippsland is best known for its primary production in mining, power generation, farming, and in tourism. Over recent years Gippsland has experienced hard times through drought, the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires, the impact of the COVID pandemic and job loss through the closure and impending closure of all coal fired power stations in Latrobe Valley and the recent Victorian Government announcement that native timber harvesting in Victoria will cease by the end of 2024.

East Gippsland has been significantly impacted as a result of the 2019-2020 East Gippsland bushfires which resulted in the loss of 237 principal places of residence and displaced over 500 people.

Three of Gippsland’s six Local Government Areas are in the top five highest rates of Family Violence in Victoria.

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 and employment opportunities.



Homelessness

Homelessness in Gippsland could once be described by the person in the street as nonexistent because of its lack of visibility. Now rough sleepers can be found in back lanes, by the rivers, in tents, at the beaches, under bridges, staying with friends or family, in overcrowded dwellings, squats and cars. We have no way of knowing the true number of people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Many people don't bother accessing Homelessness Entry Points because they know there is no affordable housing. The options if available are, rooming houses which are not widely available, becoming increasingly unaffordable, often of a poor standard and not necessarily safe for women, the alternative is a caravan park, many of which are closing, being upgraded for the tourist market and not taking on permanents and unsuitable for families.

The supply of private and social housing rentals does not meet demand. There is simply not enough housing. The cost of living is rising, the cost of private rentals is rising and unaffordable and unattainable to those in receipt of Centrelink payments.

'I think homelessness and poverty go hand in hand, the high cost of living is putting so much pressure on those lucky enough to have housing but are constantly at risk of homelessness as a result which will just add to the current mess we already have. Those that are currently homeless are just finding it impossible to find housing as they are competing with people with higher incomes and will pay the unrealistic price being asked for rent.' Comment from a survey respondent

The five most common reasons people seek homelessness assistance in Gippsland;

- Housing Crisis
- Family Violence
- Financial Difficulties
- Inadequate/inappropriate dwelling
- Transition from custody and reflects engagement with Fulham Prison in Sale

Census 2021³

1,728 Gippslanders identified as experiencing homelessness and overcrowding.

Age	Bass Coast	Baw Baw	East Gipps	Latrobe City	South Gipps	Wellington	Total Gippsland	%
0 -14	26	44	73	175	52	35	405	23.5%
15 - 24	32	41	65	151	28	28	345	20%
25 - 64	55	127	192	260	63	104	801	46.5%
65+	27	24	49	31	18	28	177	10%
Total	140	236	379	617	161	195	1728	100

- Almost half of the 1,728, **43.5% were under 25 years old**
- Of the 1,728, 168 or **9.6% identified as indigenous.**
- Of the 1,323 people aged 15 and over 387 or **29% described themselves as being employed.**
- Of the 1,728, 119 or **7% identified as having a disability.**

There are 24,654 renters in Gippsland with 7,405 or 30% experiencing rental stress, paying more than 30% of their income in rent..

³ ABS Census Data 2021

38,164 properties are owned with a mortgage with 4,172 or 11% experiencing mortgage stress.

Private rental vacancy rates are low at 2.0% with median rentals at \$450 per week. There are examples of key workers who have accepted employment in Gippsland who have not been able to find a private rental for months and have had to resort to taking up a short-term rental.

Young People

On Census night 2021 345 or 20% of those that described themselves as homeless in Gippsland were young people aged between 15 -24 a further 405 or 23.5% were aged between 0-14.

159 young people were referred to the two Gippsland Youth Homelessness Refuges and 282 received outreach support in the community.

There are two Youth Refuges in Gippsland; one in Morwell that has six beds and one in Bairnsdale with 10 beds. That's a **total of 16 youth refuge beds**. That is clearly not enough for a region the size of Gippsland. Both refuges 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 access services and 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 must relocate to access the refuges and leave their families, friends and natural supports behind and move to a place that is unfamiliar to them, providing there is a vacancy available in a refuge. This displacement can lead to the breakdown of the placement and the beginning of a career in 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 from 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.

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 abuse⁴.

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 system bottle neck and no throughput.

Leaving Care

Available data shows at least one-third of young people leaving care experience homelessness, almost half will present or be admitted to hospital with acute mental health problems and one-quarter will be involved in the youth justice system. Outcomes are poorer for young people who have lived in residential care; half are

⁴ Council to Homeless Persons: 2018 Election Platform

homeless within three years. In December, 2019 almost a quarter of young people in care aged 15 and older were Aboriginal⁵.

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.⁶

The high levels of homelessness can be directly attributed to the lack of dedicated housing set aside for young people post care. In 2019 there were over 2,500 young people under 21 eligible for leaving care supports in Victoria, yet there were only about 300 housing options (including reserved housing, supported accommodation or allowances) available to them⁷.

Young people aged from 15 years and 9 months until their 21st birthday can access support if they have been on an eligible Child Protection Order. The Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing's (DFFH) **Better Futures**⁸ program in Gippsland currently supports more than 200 young people and has an active hold waitlist. Support is focused on the **Advantage Thinking**⁹ model (developed by Colin Falconer for the UK Foyer Federation for use in Youth Foyers). The 5 key support service offerings include Education, Employment, Health and Wellbeing, Connections and Housing and Living Skills.

Despite the support of Better Futures and funds available to assist young people through the HomeStretch program there was never any provision or allocation of social or affordable housing made for this cohort leaving these young people to compete on the private rental market. In Gippsland, Better Futures, the Specialist Homelessness Services, Child Protection and DFFH Housing Services are working in partnership and have developed collaborative workplans to optimise the housing opportunities for these young people.

Youth Foyers¹⁰

Youth Foyers are seen as an ideal solution to youth homelessness. A dedicated accommodation and support facility for young people aged 16-24 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness with stays of up to two years. The **Advantage Thinking** approach is utilised to tap into goals and ambitions of young people and nurture their talents while building skills for life.

The aim of the Youth Foyer is to

- 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

Gippsland homelessness services and community have been working together to establish two Youth Foyers over the past 3 years.

⁵ Commission for Children and Young People, Keep Caring: Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care (Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People, 2020).

⁶ Council to Homeless Persons: 2018 Election Platform

⁷ Commission for Children and Young People, Keep Caring: Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care (Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People, 2020).

⁸ <https://quantum.org.au/programs/sed-ut-perspiciat-unde-omnis-iste-natus-error-sit-voluptatem-accusantium-3/>

⁹ <https://www.foyer.net/pages/advantaged-thinking-Submission-to-the-National-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan>
<https://foyer.org.au/foyers-in-australia/>

Village 21¹¹

Village 21 provides studio accommodation for six young people giving them a stable home, wrap around supports and communal living elements for up to three years'. The Kids Under Cover program was designed specifically for young people leaving Out of Home Care to interrupt the high probability of homelessness. Six young people aged 18-21 and two professional mentors live on site. The program is delivered in partnership with a support agency with expertise in employment and study pathways.

Family Violence

The rate of family violence in Gippsland is consistently high due to gender inequality, economic conditions, education opportunities and inter-generational poverty¹². According to the Crime Statistics Agency¹³ of the 79 Local Government Areas in the period June 2022 - July 2023, Latrobe City is Number 2, East Gippsland Shire is Number 3 and Wellington Shire is Number 4 in Victoria per 100,000 in family violence call outs by Police.

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 to maintain distance from their abuser. The difficulty of locating affordable accommodation and with no other options can lead to a return to the perpetrator. Similarly when perpetrators leave the family home they too often return because there is no available singles accommodation.

Rough Sleeping

In 2022-2023 the largest Gippsland Homelessness Entry Points in Inner and Outer Gippsland reported that 330 people identified as rough sleepers.

There is no prevention or early intervention, Entry Points have no assertive outreach programs and must wait until a person who is sleeping rough turns up to the Entry Point usually because of a critical incident or through police intervention or that of a charity. Rough sleeping is becoming more prevalent, women and families are sleeping in cars and tents. We have no way of knowing the full extent of rough sleeping.

Women

44% of those that identified as homelessness on census night in Gippsland were women¹⁴.

Some cohorts of women are especially vulnerable to homelessness, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women, women who are culturally and linguistically diverse or those with a disability or mental illness. 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, and public housing waiting lists are extensive. Women aged 55 and over are the fastest growing homelessness cohort¹⁵

¹¹ <https://www.kuc.org.au/what-we-do/village-21/>

¹² <https://gippslandfamilyviolencealliance.com.au/family-violence-in-gippsland/>

¹³ [Family Violence Data Portal | Crime Statistics Agency Victoria](#)

¹⁴ ABS Census 2021

¹⁵ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/older-clients>

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

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 underrepresented 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 and Torres Strait Islander 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 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to be victims of family violence¹⁸ and are 7 times more likely to have their children removed than their non-Aboriginal counterparts¹⁹

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 overrepresented in parent and child separations, family violence and incarceration.

*'About 20% of Aboriginal children reported to authorities over concerns for their safety before birth were removed from their mothers within the first three months of life in Victoria in 2021. For Aboriginal children the rate was 21.5% compared to 13.5% for non-Aboriginal children'*²⁰ (National Indigenous Times - May 12, 2023)

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

The Victorian Government supports Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home; The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework. The Framework sets out five key objectives to develop a homelessness service system that is culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people

¹⁶ AITHER | Report iv Gippsland Regional Profile, March 2019

¹⁷ Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home; The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, March, 2020

¹⁸ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), 2014 p.5

¹⁹ Australian Government, 2018.

²⁰ <https://nit.com.au/12-05-2023/5942/high-rate-of-aboriginal-babies-taken-from-mothers#:~:text=About%2020%20per%20cent%20of,cen%20for%20non%2DAboriginal%20children.>

experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Victoria to improve health, wellbeing, education and employment outcomes of Aboriginal. This includes the piloting of dedicated Aboriginal Homelessness Entry Points.

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. This unaffordability drives people into homelessness and prevents people in social housing from moving on to private rental.

Morwell had the highest annual increase in median rent in Regional Victoria for 3 bedroom houses at 14.8%, Bairnsdale was 3rd highest in Victoria at 10.5% and Sale-Maffra was 5th at 9.2%²¹.

Melbourne's growth and the migration to Gippsland of those who continue to work from home post the COVID pandemic has placed considerable pressure on housing in Gippsland. Anecdotal information from homelessness services reveals that there can be 50 -100 applicants for any one private rental property and to secure rentals potential renters are offering 3 months and more rent in advance; seeking long leases and offering rent in excess of the listed rent. People on low incomes cannot compete. This squeezes the local housing supply, drives up house prices and the cost of private rental making it unaffordable for people on low incomes, particularly young people and those on Newstart.

Of the top 10 internal migrations in Australia 5 years prior to the 2021 Census Latrobe City was number 5 with a net population movement of 17,525.

Unmet need by Local Government Area

The University of New South Wales City Futures Research Centre²² *Quantifying Australia's Unmet Housing Need Research*²³ shows the estimated number of households that were not living in appropriate housing on census night in 2021. These households were either experiencing homelessness, including severely overcrowded homes, or spending over 30% of their income on rent.

LGA	Unmet Housing Need estimated	As a proportion of all Households
Bass Coast	1,300	7.2%
Baw Baw	1,200	5.2%
East Gippsland	1,200	5.7%
Latrobe	2,100	6.5%
South Gippsland	600	4.7%
Wellington	1,100	5.7%
Gippsland	7,500	5.8%

²¹ Homes Vic Rental Report June, 2023 p10

²² [Housing Need Dashboard | City Futures Research Centre \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

²³ [Social and affordable housing: needs, costs and subsidy gaps by region | City Futures Research Centre \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

Social Housing

Social Housing consists of both public and community housing. Public housing is owned and managed by the Victorian Government. It provides long term housing to eligible disadvantaged Victorians. Community Housing also provides long term housing to eligible disadvantaged Victorians. Public Housing is generally more affordable than Community Housing.

Public Housing plays an important role in the health and wellbeing of marginalised people. It provides shelter, safety and security and importantly, is affordable for people on Centrelink benefits in the midst of a housing crisis.

Community Housing has the ability to access Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which makes it an appealing social housing tenure for the Victorian Government. This means that community housing has a higher income stream from rent than public housing. As such, the Victorian Government appears to be removing itself from the management of public housing and is setting up Community Housing Providers to take up an even greater share and role in the management of social housing in Victoria. The dominant method for enabling this greater share is a process of stock transfers.

If Community Housing Providers were to take on a more significant role in the provision of social housing, there is concern that given their need for financial viability, that households in most need will not be securely accommodated. Community Housing Providers don't have the financial capacity as Governments do and rely on rental income to continue to be financially viable. As a result, they can't afford to be as tolerant of tenants who fall behind in rent and move through to the eviction process more quickly.

The cost of renting through a Community Housing Provider is also greater than Public Housing. Public Housing rentals are capped at 25% of household income. Community Housing providers generally charge 30% with tenants required to claim Commonwealth Rental Assistance that is paid directly to the Community Housing provider.

Public Housing Renewal Program (PHRP)²⁴

The current renewal agenda of the Government of Victoria represents a clear acceleration of neo-liberal economic and social policy. The public-private-partnership model is based upon an economic principle of outsourcing risk and recurrent expenditure, the result of which is a major devaluation of the public good. Recent research (Davies & Engels, 2021) into the public housing renewal program in Victoria, compared three models of redevelopment which are private, community housing, and government led. In determining which model represented the best value for money method of redevelopment, the study found “that the government is best placed to deliver social housing, due, in part, to lower borrowing costs and no requirement for making profit” (2021, p. 63).

Broadly speaking, the GHN oppose the sale and privatisation of public land used for public housing and supports the retention and improvement of all public housing on public land. The Public Housing Renewal Program is particularly concerning because of the widespread displacement of a vulnerable cohort, who will be displaced to more regional areas of the state. These positions follow the academic literature in demonstrating that public housing renewal, in the format advanced by the Government of Victoria, does not meaningfully address the scarcity of social housing stock, does not represent good value for money, and negatively impacts people at risk of homelessness (Arthurson, Levin & Ziersch, 2016; Kelly & Porter, 2019; Wynne & Rogers, 2020).

²⁴ Gippsland Homelessness Network – *Establishing a 10 Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing*, April 9, 2021

The Victorian Housing Register

Gippsland has 7,883 households on the Victorian Housing Register (Public & Community Housing waitlist). Preference Locations, June, 2023²⁵ for Priority Access. Applicants for social housing can nominate up to 5 broadband areas.

These people are deemed most needy and

- Are homeless and receiving support
- Are escaping or have escaped family violence
- Have a disability or significant support needs
- Need to move for health reasons

A further 6,059 eligible Gippsland household have applied for social housing and are listed on the Register of Interest for social housing.

Those with Priority Access households will be housed before Register of Interest.

A total of 13,942 households are waiting for social housing in Gippsland.

²⁵ The Victoria Housing Register Preference Locations, June, 2023

Private Rental

The demand for private rental is greater than the supply and as such there is fierce competition for private rentals. There are examples of key workers who have secured employment in Gippsland who have not been able to find a private rental for months and have had to resorted to renting a short term rental.

Homes Victoria produce the *Rental Report*²⁶. It gauges private rental affordability, availability, median rentals, vacancy rates etc., in the June, 2023 quarter there was only 1 one bedroom private rental property that was affordable in Gippsland for singles in receipt of a Centrelink income.

DFFH Private Rental Report June, 2023 – Affordable Gippsland Lettings for households on Centrelink incomes

LGA	June, 2023 1 br	June, 2023 2 br	June, 2023 3 br	June, 2023 4 br	June, 2023 LGA Total
Bass Coast	0	4	17	7	28
Baw Baw	1	5	9	20	35
Latrobe	0	44	142	26	212
South Gippsland	0	1	20	10	31
Inner Gipps Total	1	54	188	63	306
East Gippsland	0	15	34	13	62
Wellington	0	12	34	20	66
Outer Gipps Total	0	27	68	33	128
Gippsland Total	1	81	256	96	434

Rental Vacancy Rate

According to SQM Research, the Rental Vacancy rate in Gippsland in September 2023 was 2.0% with the weekly median rental of \$450.²⁷

The Bond Loan Scheme

To be eligible for the Victorian Bond Loan Scheme²⁸ the weekly rental should be no more than 55% of income. The take up of the bond loan scheme is driven by the availability of affordable rentals and the clients' capacity to pay rent. Recipients of government pensions, benefits or allowances in many cases are paying more than 55% of their income in rental and therefore ineligible for the Bond Loan Scheme. Hence, **in 2020-21 demand for assistance decreased by 28.4 per cent** during 2020-21.

Victorian Bond loans issued

Description	2019-20	2020-21
Number of Bonds Issued	9,256	6,630

²⁶ Homes Vic Rental Report June, 2023 <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>

²⁷ https://sqmresearch.com.au/graph_vacancy.php?region=vic-Gippsland&type=r&t=1

²⁸ Housing Assistance Additional Service Delivery Data 2020–21

The Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP) PRAP Plus

PRAP and APRAP assists households who can sustain private rental housing with time limited financial support. The program is funded by the Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing and is intended to prevent or end homelessness and housing crisis.

The brokerage can be used for the payment of rent in advance to secure a tenancy or the payment of rent arrears, to establish a tenancy, alleviate debts or one-off financial assistance in times of crisis or life skills training in budgeting, house maintenance or tenants' rights.

PRAP Plus provides households with practical support in accessing, establishing and maintaining private rental tenancies. It supports those that are tenancy ready through advocacy and utilizing relationships with real estate agents.

The PRAP program has been one of the most useful tools in assisting households into sustainable private rentals.

Unoccupied Dwellings

Census 2021 identified that **Gippsland has 29, 081 unoccupied dwellings. An average of 19.76 % of total dwellings across the region.** Of East Gippsland's total dwellings 18.8% are unoccupied, Bass Coast 39.4% unoccupied, South Gippsland 25.7% unoccupied, Wellington 21% unoccupied, Baw Baw 8.2% unoccupied, Latrobe 8.8% unoccupied.

The recently announced Victoria's Housing Statement: the decade ahead 2024-2034²⁹ will apply a 7.5% levy on short stay bookings these funds will be spent exclusively on "building and maintaining social and affordable housing" with 25% of the money raised will be earmarked for regional Victoria.

Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2018

The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2018 whilst improving the rights of Renters has led to some unintended consequences. Some Property Investors unhappy with the amendments to the Act have opted to sell or place their properties on the short-term rental market thus further reducing the supply of private rentals.

²⁹ <https://www.vic.gov.au/housing-statement>

Homelessness Services

The Homelessness Service system in Victoria is ready and in need of reform. The Opening Doors Framework, 2008 has served the sector well but needs to be updated, better resourced and modernised to support the demand for service and the complexity of presentations to Homelessness services in order to alleviate the pressure on the workforce. The Unit Price for the delivery of Specialist Homelessness Services has not been reviewed since 2000/2001. This review should be undertaken along with the changes to the new Activity Structure and the Reform of the service delivery model.

People who are at risk or experiencing homelessness require early intervention; an interim response or brief intervention to limit the amount of time people are without or waiting for assistance or support.

The Homelessness sector is experiencing worker fatigue and burn out – long-term employees are leaving the sector due to the increased demands on staff, the complex nature of presentations, few resources, lack of housing options and lengthy waitlists for case management support. This is exacerbated by decreased referral options to other sectors such as mental health, youth services, alcohol and other drug services who also feel the strain of the demand for service.

There are concerns for the sustainability of services, particularly the smaller services given the recent increases in CPI, the National Minimum Wage and the 2023 Superannuation Guarantee. This is despite the recent announcement of the new DFFH funding formula for indexation. For agencies to balance budgets without further funding the only alternative is to cut worker hours or redundancies.

The very small Homelessness Entry Points in Gippsland like Mallacoota, Orbost and Yarram in the main have less than a full-time position and these workers often have other add on responsibilities such as Centrelink and NDIS information provision and Generalist Social Worker responsibilities. They have even less emergency/crisis, transitional, long term accommodation options and their response can be to advise the person experiencing or at risk of homelessness to go out of area to a larger community for assistance.

In 2022/23 Homelessness Entry Points provided Intake Assessment and Planning to 3,733 households, an increase of 15% from the previous year. One Entry Point is well on track to exceed their targets with some annual targets already met after only 3 months into the financial year.

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.

'More now than ever in our organisation and in particular the homelessness stream we are seeing clients being referred in for homelessness/housing support who are presenting with multiple complex needs. Quite often the housing needs are unable to be immediately addressed due to the other needs being a significant barrier to being able to seek an appropriate housing option. We are seeing lots of clients with significant mental health and/or AOD concerns which they do not seem to be getting the right/or tailored support for. This really impacts the work we can do with these clients and the outcomes we can achieve. I think targeted strategies for these clients is certainly required and is something that is lacking.' Comment from a survey respondent

Emergency Crisis Accommodation

Homelessness Entry Points primarily fund Emergency Crisis Accommodation through their limited Housing Establishment Fund. In the main Emergency Crisis accommodation will be provided for two or three nights for those that have an identified exit plan.

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. During peak holiday periods this resource is unavailable.

Rooming Houses are few and predominantly for men. There are stories about '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.

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.

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 906 people being turned away from service in 2022/23.³⁰

Transitional Housing

Transitional Housing is intended to be a supported, short-term accommodation program. It acts as a steppingstone to more permanent housing in public housing, community housing or the private rental market. 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).

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

³⁰ Salvation Army database SAMIS 2022/23

Prevention and Early Intervention

Preventing tenancies from breaking down is a first step in preventing homelessness. Evictions contribute to approximately 40% of homelessness in Victoria. 95% initiated by landlords, 80% tenants fail to appear at Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) hearings.

An ethic of tenacious assertive engagement through outreach with clients results in better outcomes for them, this needs to be supported by matching expenditure to client-focussed needs.

'There needs to be significant uplift to support our homelessness services to meet demand. We talk about prevention being better than the cure, however agencies are not able to work with even all those who are in high need, let alone doing any work that could be deemed preventative.' Comment from a survey respondent

Planning, Zoning and Development

A more co-ordinated approach by State and Local Governments should be taken for consistent planning and regulation to ensure the efficient delivery of housing developments.

Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning should be legislated to ensure that Local Governments and property developers commit to a percentage of social and affordable housing in each new development. This will make a positive contribution to affordable housing.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the primary goal of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan is to end homelessness rather than manage it.

Recommendation 2

That targets to end homelessness be set for the life of the plan and the progress to achieving these targets to be widely reported and a revised action plan developed every 2-3 years.

Recommendation 3

That Governments, Federal, State and Local collaborate in the delivery of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and include business and the private sector.

Recommendation 4

That the Plan include a pipeline of public housing that meets future social housing needs

Recommendation 5

Provide incentives for property investors to remove their properties from short term rentals to long term leases.

Recommendation 6

That the Private Rental Assistance Program be considered as a national approach to alleviate homelessness

Recommendation 7

That adequate income support be made available for young people, the unemployed, the elderly, people with a disability and women over 55 years old to lift them out of poverty.

Recommendation 8

That State Governments continue to take responsibility for public housing and discontinue the transfer of public housing to community housing providers.

Recommendation 9

That evidence based *Housing First* programs form a key strategy to ending homelessness in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

Recommendation 10

That Assertive Outreach funding to made available to all Homelessness Entry Points

Recommendation 11

That the Advance to Zero model to end homelessness be funded and a biannual allocation of public housing stock set aside for this purpose.

Recommendation 12

That support services be individualised, *Person Centred*; co-ordinated across sectors, tailored, flexible, scalable and increase or decrease as per the needs of the client and be outcome focused.

Recommendation 13

That sufficient dedicated emergency crisis accommodation is built for Victim Survivors of Family Violence that provides comfort and care so that families don't have to be accommodated in motels and caravans.

Recommendation 14

That facilities are available for perpetrators of Family Violence to prevent them returning to the family home

Recommendation 15

That a specific section of the Plan be committed to Young People and it should detail a comprehensive pathway of accommodation options and support including an increase in youth refuge beds, the funding of *Youth Foyers* and *Village 21* with dedicated public housing stock as a Housing First strategy.

Recommendation 16

That *Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home; The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, 2020* be integrated into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Recommendation 17

That funding of services and resources is allocated based on need not just on population

Recommendation 18

That mandatory Inclusionary Zoning is legislated.