

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan



To receive this publication in an accessible format,
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Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait
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Premier's foreword



People sleep rough for many different reasons.

They might have lost their job, or had an important relationship break down.

They might be the victim of family violence. Or be dealing with addiction or impairment.

Or, perhaps, they just can't make ends meet.

Whatever the cause – and it's usually more than just one – it's never simple.

But the fact is, many Victorians are sleeping rough.

If we are to break this cycle of homelessness, we must understand the many different issues at play and be willing to tackle those underlying causes.

It's why we're increasing and upgrading emergency accommodation, improving our family violence response, and delivering better mental health care.

We're also making sure that our words are backed up by actions – and funding.

Through our \$799 million record response to additional housing and homelessness support, we're helping more Victorians find the security and safety of a home.

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan represents the next step in this work.

A long-term strategy to tackle homelessness across our state, the plan provides the foundations to improve how we partner with communities and agencies, businesses and police, to ensure dedicated support for Victorians experiencing hardship.

This work goes beyond government, and beyond arbitrary jurisdictions.

Because breaking the cycle of homelessness in Victoria, and minimising the number of Victorians sleeping rough, requires many different people and organisations working together.

I would like to thank all those from across the sector, and our state, who gave their time and their knowledge to inform this action plan.

Their dedicated work will help to provide safety, support, and a brighter future for the Victorians who need it the most.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Andrews'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent 'D' and 'A'.

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria

Minister's foreword



In Victoria on any given night there are approximately 1,100 people sleeping rough, making up around five per cent of the state's homeless population. Rough sleeping is an unsafe situation for anyone to be in – whether that involves sleeping in a car, on the street, in a park, or in a derelict building. It has many complexities that multiply over time. Every day, dedicated workers in the homelessness and allied sectors assist Victorians who are caught in a deepening spiral of disadvantage from which it can be difficult to escape without help.

This Government is working hard to better support the homelessness sector to assist people in ways that are backed by evidence of success. Through our \$9.8 million Towards Home package we've provided supportive pathways to permanent housing and wellbeing for many of the most vulnerable people who are sleeping rough in the City of Melbourne.

This is alongside a \$109 million package to prevent homelessness and a \$152 million package to provide greater housing options to women and children escaping family violence. This includes flexible packages of support and rental brokerage to assist vulnerable Victorians to establish and maintain stable housing in the private market. This is all part of the \$2.1 billion in financial backing as part of *Homes for Victorians* that will deliver significantly more social housing stock.

Homelessness and rough sleeping are not unique to Victoria. Despite evidence of rising numbers of people experiencing homelessness across the country, the Turnbull Government has pursued savage cuts to welfare and axed the National Rental Affordability Scheme. These cuts must be reversed and the Commonwealth needs to finalise the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement with states and territories and return vital funding to the sector.

I would like to thank Mr Tony Nicholson of the Brotherhood of St Laurence for his extensive work to provide me with his advice for a long-term strategy to reduce rough sleeping in Victoria. This complements the work of the Rough Sleeping Response Taskforce chaired by Dr Ruth Vine.

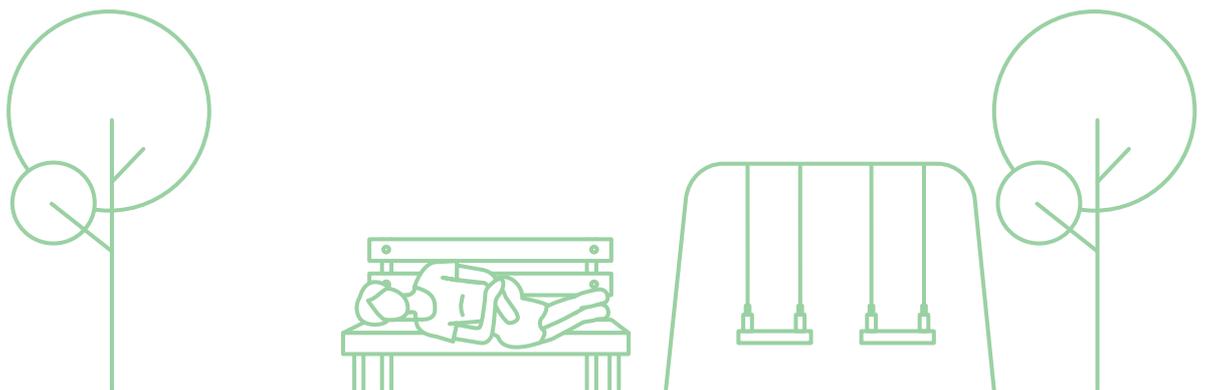
This action plan is a comprehensive response to rough sleeping and the foundation of the Andrews Labor Government's long-term strategy to reduce and prevent homelessness. This is about working towards a Victoria where we can all realise our potential and everyone has a safe home.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Foley', written in a cursive style.

Martin Foley MP
Minister for Housing, Disability and the Ageing

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Introduction

Rough sleeping is the most extreme and literal form of homelessness. It includes all kinds of living without access to conventional dwellings such as sleeping in cars, derelict buildings, tents, swags and other types of improvised shelter.

Over the course of a year, many thousands of Victorians find themselves sleeping rough, including on city streets and in parks/gardens, carparks, sporting grounds, bushland areas and coastal reserves. Approximately 8,600 people in these circumstances seek help from government-funded specialist homelessness services.

Rough sleeping is a statewide issue. While it is more visible in Melbourne's central business district, just as many people are sleeping rough in suburban Melbourne and country Victoria, where it may also be experienced and perceived differently.

Rough sleeping can be experienced by anyone – single adult men and women, and families with dependent children – with some groups more vulnerable such as Aboriginal Victorians, young people, older people and LGBTIQ+ people. Those who sleep rough are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community. They experience a range of harms – such as violence, extreme weather conditions and poor diet – with lasting impacts on their health and wellbeing that can worsen over time.



People can find themselves sleeping rough for many different reasons and for different periods of time. Three groups affected by rough sleeping – each with different housing and support needs – are:

- **those who are recently homeless and sleeping rough** due to personal crises such as eviction, job loss, family violence or relationship breakdown – many of whom will successfully resolve their homelessness, either independently, or with the help of specialist homelessness services
- **those who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time** (that is, longer than 12 months) who have multiple related issues – such as mental and physical illness, alcohol and other drug use issues and past trauma – and are unlikely to successfully negotiate and sustain a pathway out of chronic homelessness without intensive resources and ongoing support
- **those at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping** following their release or discharge from institutional settings including prisons, youth justice centres and inpatient health facilities, as well as young people leaving out-of-home care.

It is difficult to accurately quantify rough sleeping given it is highly dynamic and often hidden. However, the available evidence suggests the number of people sleeping rough in Victoria has increased significantly in recent years.

Over the five years to 2016–17, there was a 72 per cent increase in the number of clients sleeping rough when first seeking support from specialist homelessness services. This trend is consistent with a wider increase in homelessness – both in Victoria and nationally – and an associated increase in demand for help. In Victoria, the number of clients assisted by specialist homelessness services has grown to more than 100,000 each year.

Escalating issues have driven the increase in rough sleeping in Victoria, including increasing housing costs, lack of affordable housing, the inadequacy of Centrelink income support, and family violence. Service systems trying to respond to this crisis often don't have capacity to successfully resolve chronic homelessness or intervene earlier and prevent people from sleeping rough in the first place.

The Victorian Government announced Towards Home in January 2017 – a two-year \$9.8 million emergency response package to provide housing and support to the growing number of people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne.

Mr Tony Nicholson, the Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, was appointed as Chair of the Rough Sleeping Strategy (the Chair) to oversee the delivery of the Towards Home package and to develop recommendations for a long-term strategy to reduce rough sleeping in Victoria.

In October 2017, following eight months of extensive stakeholder consultation, data analysis and other research, the Chair presented his advice to the Minister for Housing, Disability and the Ageing, together with a detailed situation appraisal setting out the extensive evidence base underpinning his recommendations.¹

This action plan provides the framework for the Victorian Government's response. With the initiatives in this document, we can help more Victorians find the safety and security of a home.

¹ Both documents can be viewed or downloaded from the Towards Home website: <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/towards-home>

The bigger picture

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan builds on the significant reform efforts already underway as part of the Victorian Government's \$799 million investment and \$2.1 billion in financial backing through Homes for Victorians to support the most vulnerable in our community, create 6,000 new and permanent homes and provide the necessary wrap-around support services for people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This includes:

- the \$9.8 million Towards Home package to provide housing and support to the increasing number of people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne
- a \$109 million homelessness package to assist people who are homeless or at risk by intervening earlier to prevent homelessness, improving responses to people in crisis and supporting people to sustain their housing and achieve independence
- a \$120 million investment to increase the supply of social housing, including upgrading of the Flemington Estate, and partnering with housing associations to buy and lease 173 more houses across Victoria
- a \$185 million investment to upgrade nine low-rise estates, which will deliver modern redeveloped social housing
- a \$152 million Family Violence Housing Blitz to redevelop refuges, and build and buy more housing for women and children escaping family violence
- \$33.2 million to extend private rental brokerage for a further two years to assist people to secure and maintain accommodation in the private rental market as a long-term housing option.

Through this investment we have acquired, leased or developed 486 new units across Victoria to date, while more than 1,800 people have been supported to maintain or enter private rental accommodation through the Private Rental Assistance Program. A further 472 new or redeveloped units will be delivered in the near future through community-sector led projects to grow the supply of long-term housing options and upgrades of community-sector owned rooming houses.

On any given night

1,100

people sleep rough throughout Victoria

including on city streets and in parks/gardens, carparks, sporting grounds, bushland areas and coastal reserves

'Rough sleeping is a statewide issue'

Recently homeless and sleeping rough

*Steven's story

Steven is 47 years old and has been sleeping rough for the past three weeks since he left a small unit, where he had lived for the past four years. He has never experienced homelessness before. Steven was happy in his unit as it felt like home, however he suffers from anxiety and some days did not feel like he could go to work, so would call in sick.

Eventually this led to Steven losing his job, running out of money to pay for his rent and subsequently being evicted from the unit. Steven's anxiety affected his ability to quickly organise Centrelink payments in time to prevent his eviction. Even once he starts receiving the Newstart Allowance, it will not be enough to cover rent and other living costs.

Specialist homelessness services have been offering support and accommodation options to Steven while he has been living on the street for the last three weeks. However, he has been reluctant to accept these offers due to concerns about sharing with other people (such as a rooming house, share house or crisis supported accommodation) and feeling that there are other people who need help more than him.

Specialist homelessness services will continue to build trust with Steven and provide persistent assertive outreach with dedicated case management to help him into a suitable form of accommodation.

Sleeping rough for an extended period of time

*Jen's story

Jen, a 34 year-old women, slept rough on and off for more than eight years before she found a home. In her mid-20s Jen had a partner, a son and stable accommodation but after suffering family violence and developing a substance abuse problem, everything changed for her. She had to leave her accommodation after her son was removed from her care and placed with his grandmother. Jen started living on the streets where she would sleep in dumpsters because she could close them so no one could attack her during the night. Jen moved in and out of refuges and even prison just to have a roof over her head. Her mental health deteriorated over the years and she reported being at breaking point before she found help.

Jen was staying at a refuge when specialist homelessness services helped her to get back on track by providing stable accommodation and wrap-around support services. She received drug and alcohol counselling, family violence counselling, a psychologist and medication to improve her mental health. Jen was provided with a one-bedroom apartment, with her case workers and support services close by. She reported feeling safe for the first time in years and simple things like being able to shower and having a mail box made a huge difference in her life. Jen believes that if it weren't for her home and her case workers, she wouldn't be here today.

*Names have been changed to protect identities.

Victoria's specialist homelessness service system

Victoria's specialist homelessness services – funded through a combination of Commonwealth and state government funding of approximately \$200 million annually – are delivered by a network of 131 agencies that collectively provide assistance to more than 100,000 people per year.

Specialist homelessness services include assertive outreach, case managed support, brokerage and flexible funding to provide personalised and flexible responses, crisis and transitional accommodation, supportive housing for tenants with complex needs and help to enter the private housing market through headleasing and private rental assistance.

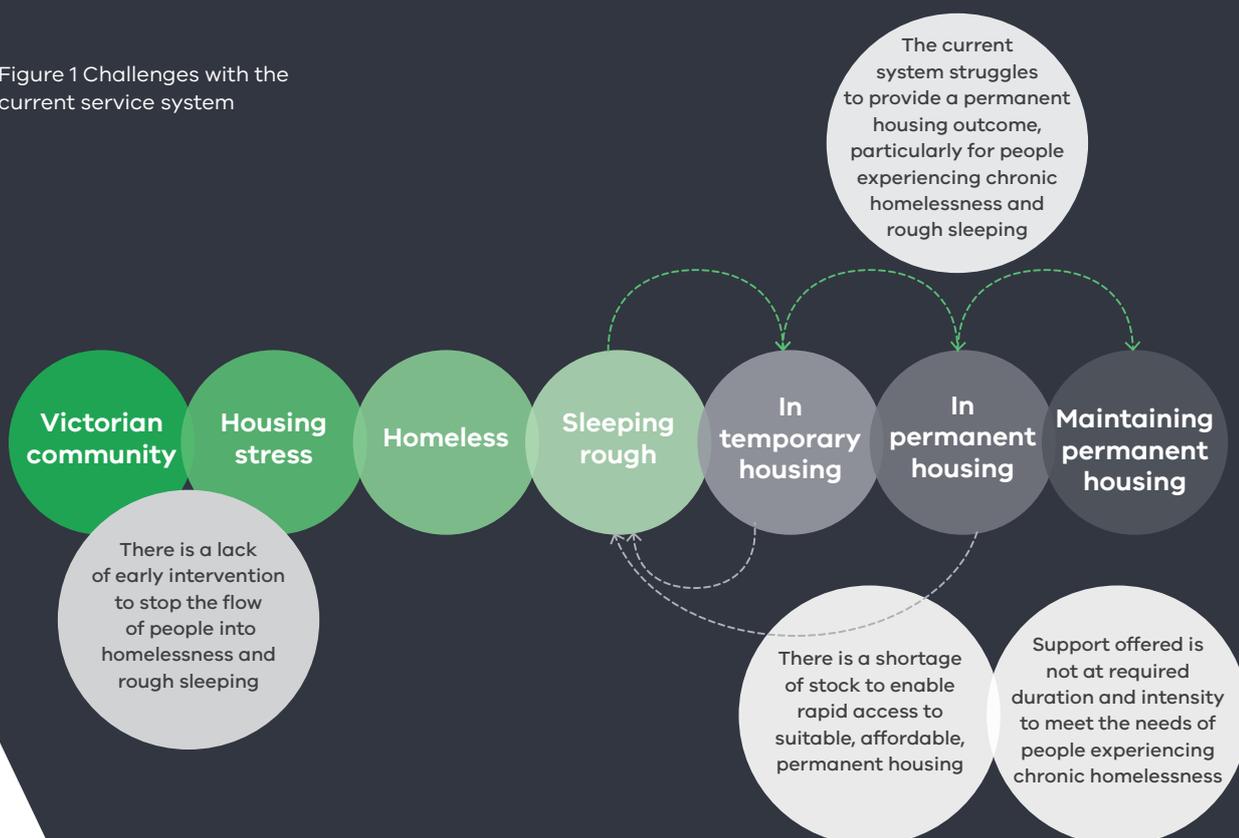
Specialist homelessness services are accessed via 75 entry points across the state, including specialist entry points to assist young people, Aboriginal Victorians and women and children experiencing family violence. A full list of

entry points by location is available on the Department of Health and Human Services website at www.services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/getting-help. Complementing face-to-face services, two statewide phone lines – for people in housing or family violence crisis – operate around the clock, linking to the local entry points, so that people can access assistance whenever and wherever they need it.

However, with a growing number of people facing homelessness across Victoria, demand for specialist homelessness services continues to grow. This is placing significant pressure on the system – particularly at the crisis intervention end – and highlighting a range of service gaps.

As identified by the Chair, the specialist homelessness service system struggles to provide a permanent housing outcome for people who are sleeping rough – particularly for those experiencing chronic homelessness. This is due to a shortage of suitable housing in which clients can be placed as well as the limited support that can be offered to clients once housed.

Figure 1 Challenges with the current service system



The action plan

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan represents the Victorian Government's response to the Chair's recommendations and is the first phase of a broader reform of the specialist homelessness service system. Informed by the advice of the Chair, the action plan provides a framework for **reducing the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping** within the context of four key themes guiding broader homelessness reforms in Victoria:

Figure 2: Four themes guiding homelessness reforms



Intervening early to prevent homelessness



Providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible



Support to maintain stable accommodation



An effective and responsive homelessness service system

The action plan also focuses on the three distinct groups of people affected by rough sleeping – (a) those who are recently homeless and sleeping rough, (b) those who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time and (c) those at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping – to ensure that our responses are tailored to meet the differing housing and support needs of each.

Significantly, the action plan progresses the reform of Victoria's specialist homelessness service system, building on current strengths and moving towards prevention and early intervention. This includes investing in approaches that better meet the needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness, who have not been served well by the social services system to date. The action plan outlines a suite of initiatives to be delivered over the next four years aligned with the four homelessness reform themes. It also includes a number of future directions to build on these initiatives over the medium to longer term.

The framework underpinning the action plan, which illustrates the different housing and support needs of the three rough sleeping cohorts, is illustrated in Figure 1 on page 10.

Figure 3: Overview of Victoria’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan



Intervening early to prevent homelessness

Rough sleeping exposes people to a range of harms – including violence and extreme weather conditions – with lasting impacts on both their physical and mental health and their capacity for social and economic participation.

Rough sleeping reduces life expectancy, and in the most catastrophic circumstances, it directly results in death. Although many people sleep rough for only a short time, the longer a person remains without shelter, the more serious the effects on their health and wellbeing become and the more difficult it is to successfully resolve their homelessness.

To reduce the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping in Victoria, we must stop the flow of people into homelessness. This requires prevention across the Victorian community aimed at the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping – such as housing stress and family violence – as well as early intervention with those who are recently homeless and sleeping rough or who are at risk.

In his advice to the Minister for Housing, the Chair identified two priority areas for prevention and early intervention: (a) locations beyond central Melbourne where many people first experience crisis leading to homelessness and rough sleeping and (b) justice, health and human service systems that have contact with people who are at greater risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Ultimately, we need to find, engage and assist people who are sleeping rough more rapidly to prevent any escalation of their situation and minimise risk of harm. This includes allied services – such as jobactive employment assistance providers – proactively referring their clients who are sleeping rough to specialist homelessness services for assistance. We must also ensure that we routinely assess people's risk of homelessness prior to their release or discharge from settings that are known pathways to rough sleeping – including prisons, youth justice centres, inpatient health facilities and out-of-home care – and provide suitable housing and support to those who need it.

What are we currently doing?

Expanding assertive outreach services

Assertive outreach is the most effective way to find and engage people who are sleeping rough.

We have provided \$1.1 million for additional assertive outreach services through the Rough Sleepers Initiative and Melbourne Street to Home. With the additional capacity in the City of Melbourne, assertive outreach teams are actively engaging with around 50 rough sleepers in the central business district each month including many people who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time. Through persistent engagement and mobile assessment, these responses have assisted more than 185 people into temporary or permanent accommodation since January 2017.

Extending homelessness assessment and planning capacity across Victoria's prison system

Routine assessment combined with pre-release planning for housing and support can prevent people in prison from exiting into homelessness and rough sleeping.

We have provided \$5.5 million to expand homelessness assessment and planning services across Victoria's adult prison system to ensure people are provided with housing information and support, including referral to specialist homelessness services before they exit prison. This is delivering additional coverage across both men's and women's prisons, including to the increased number of people on remand – a significant driver of demand.

We will also trial an enhanced model providing targeted intensive support and case coordination to assist people to access and maintain housing post release.

Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care or the youth justice system

Intervening early by providing housing to vulnerable young people as they leave out-of-home care is vital. It can decrease their risk of experiencing chronic homelessness and increase their opportunities to find a job or continue their education.

At the same time, we also need to ensure that young people leaving the justice system have access to appropriate case management, so that they do not return to rough sleeping, or reoffend.

We have provided \$10.1 million to design and test new medium-term housing options for vulnerable young people. This includes board payments, housing subsidies and leasing arrangements until the age of 21. These will be targeted at areas of highest need including regions with large numbers of out-of-home care leavers combined with high-cost housing.

Complementing this, we are working with a consortium led by Anglicare Victoria to develop a Social Impact Bond to deliver improved outcomes for young people leaving out-of-home care. The two year program will provide individualised case management, specialist support and safe and secure housing to enable young people to develop the independent living skills they will need as adults.

What will we do to build on this?

Establish assertive outreach teams in suburban, regional and rural areas

Despite the relatively even distribution of people sleeping rough across the state, there are currently few assertive outreach services operating beyond inner Melbourne.

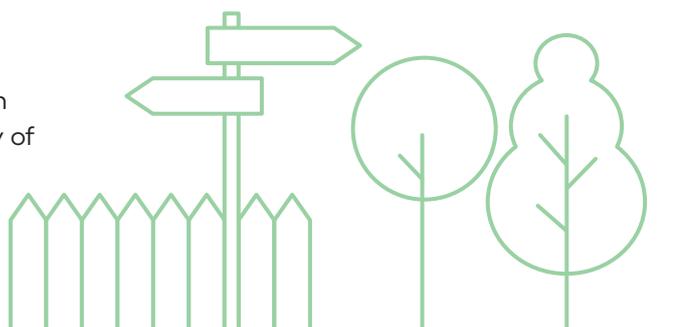
We will provide \$19 million to extend the Rough Sleepers Initiative to the City of Yarra and City of

Port Phillip and to establish eight new assertive outreach teams with dedicated brokerage funds in the areas of highest incidence of rough sleeping throughout the state – three outer suburban and five regional/rural locations. These are Dandenong, Frankston, Maroondah, Geelong, Swan Hill, Warrnambool, Ballarat and Bendigo. Each team will have the capacity to provide assertive outreach to up to 120 people sleeping rough each year, including rapid access to emergency accommodation, health services, ongoing case management and housing support.

Lobby the Commonwealth Government regarding levels of income support

An adequate level of household income is essential to both accessing housing and avoiding housing stress and subsequent housing loss that can lead to homelessness and rough sleeping. Once people are sleeping rough, many lose access to income support due to their difficulty in meeting Centrelink requirements.

We will continue to highlight the impact of inadequate levels of Commonwealth income support on Victorians struggling with housing affordability and the cost of living. We will also work with the Commonwealth Government regarding the provision of flexible, individualised employment assistance services for Victorians who are sleeping rough.



What will we do in the future?

Explore ways to provide people who are sleeping rough with more immediate access to help

People who are recently homeless and sleeping rough are often unaware of how to access help.

We will explore ways to harness different technologies as a means of providing people who are sleeping rough with more immediate access to services, including after-hours. As part of this work, we will also examine ways in which to acknowledge and engage public concern for people who are vulnerable and sleeping rough.

Work with allied services regarding client referrals to specialist homelessness services

Allied services such as jobactive employment assistance providers may be 'first to know' that a client is recently homeless and sleeping rough. As such, through timely proactive referral to specialist homelessness services, these providers have a key role to play in facilitating early intervention.

We will canvass opportunities to improve referral processes to ensure that people are referred to specialist homelessness services at the earliest opportunity.

Expand early intervention initiatives targeting people exiting settings that are known pathways to rough sleeping

Through routine screening coupled with dedicated pathways to housing and support, we can prevent people being released or discharged from settings such as prisons, youth justice centres, inpatient health facilities and out-of-home care into homelessness and rough sleeping.

We will continue to build on current reforms such as the expansion of assessment and planning in prisons to lead to sustainable housing outcomes and the development of dedicated housing options for young people leaving out-of-home care or the youth justice system to bolster early intervention for those at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping.

Future directions

In the context of the broader reform of the specialist homelessness service system, we will intervene earlier and more rapidly to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, or minimise the duration or impact of homelessness when it occurs. We will look at ways to achieve this by:

- providing support and assistance to tenants in private rental to avoid housing breakdowns and evictions
- prioritising those most vulnerable to homelessness including people exiting institutions
- assist people to avoid homelessness by providing more flexibility in the way funding is used to meet their needs
- improving our partnerships with agencies who are often 'first to know' when people are at risk of homelessness.



Providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible

Rough sleeping cannot be resolved without housing. There are many different pathways into homelessness and rough sleeping, yet all people sleeping rough share the same fundamental need for housing. Housing provides an essential foundation from which to build a healthy and productive life.

For people who have been sleeping rough, housing not only prevents further harm and deterioration in health and wellbeing, but also offers a safe and stable basis from which to begin their process of recovery, addressing the underlying issues contributing to their homelessness.

To reduce the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping in Victoria, we must provide people sleeping rough or who are at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping with rapid access to housing that is permanent, affordable and suited to their needs and circumstances.

The current housing market – with unprecedented levels of demand for affordable and social housing – fundamentally constrains the capacity of Victoria’s specialist homelessness services to provide people sleeping rough with rapid access to permanent housing. We have invested \$799 million in housing and homelessness and \$2.1 billion in financial backing to increase the supply of affordable and social housing through Homes for Victorians, yet there is a need for complementary strategies to improve access to housing in the short-term.

The Chair proposed two key strategies to establish more immediate housing options for people sleeping rough – (a) greater utilisation of the private rental market, particularly to rapidly rehouse those who are recently homeless and sleeping rough and (b) making more effective use of temporary forms of housing to provide a pathway to permanent housing, especially for those who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time.

The successful resolution of rough sleeping must begin with housing. Fundamentally, we must increase access to suitable, affordable, permanent housing for people sleeping rough or who are at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping. But action at the state level can only achieve so much. There is an urgent need for national leadership and Commonwealth Government stimulus to grow investment in affordable housing.

‘The successful resolution of rough sleeping must begin with housing.’

What are we currently doing?

Establishing modular housing for vulnerable people sleeping rough in central Melbourne

The limited supply of supported one-bedroom housing is a significant barrier to housing people who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time.

As part of the Towards Home package, we have provided \$5.5 million to establish 30 modular one-bedroom homes to provide supported transitional housing for vulnerable people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne for up to two years. Construction of the modular homes, which are being established across five sites in metropolitan Melbourne, will be completed in early 2018. The first site, located in Preston, was tenanted in November 2017.

Providing people sleeping rough with dedicated access to transitional housing

With the current shortfall in affordable and social housing, transitional housing has a key role to play in providing pathways to permanent housing.

Complementing the construction of dedicated modular housing, through Towards Home we are also immediately prioritising 40 transitional housing properties to provide people sleeping rough in central Melbourne with dedicated access to medium-term accommodation.

Growing the supply of long-term housing options for people experiencing homelessness

Partnerships across all levels of government, the not-for-profit and private sectors are essential to increase the supply of social housing and reduce homelessness.

Building on \$25 million allocated under the Family Violence Housing Blitz to establish a dedicated supply of housing for women and children fleeing family violence, we have allocated a further \$27 million in capital grants and support funds to build long-term housing options for a range of vulnerable client groups, including people experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping. Eight community-sector led projects funded under this initiative will deliver significant new or redeveloped housing that leverages other service delivery opportunities to provide a pathway out of homelessness.

Assisting people experiencing homelessness to access and maintain private rental

The private rental market affords significant opportunity to provide people who are recently homeless and sleeping rough with rapid access to affordable, permanent housing.

We have invested in a range of measures to help people who are experiencing homelessness to access and maintain private rental accommodation. This includes \$33.2 million over the next two years to expand the Private Rental Assistance Program (building on \$16 million allocated as part of the Family Violence Housing Blitz) to secure housing in the private rental market and provide flexible support to 4,000 vulnerable and disadvantaged clients. To date, 1,800 clients have been supported to establish or maintain private rental accommodation.

Funding from this investment has also been allocated to engage landlords to help achieve sustainable private rental housing outcomes for households that are vulnerable to homelessness. We have also allocated \$2.9 million to facilitate rapid rehousing of people experiencing homelessness through the headleasing of 124 properties.

Providing housing and support to people experiencing homelessness in the City of Wyndham

We have invested \$15.2 million in the H3 Wyndham Alliance, a partnership of health, housing and homelessness agencies in the western Melbourne area. This funding is being used to purchase or build 20 new properties and lease up to 50 properties to provide housing for people experiencing homelessness in the City of Wyndham. This includes the purchase of up to 12 one-bedroom units for people who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time.

What will we do to build on this?

Build more modular housing for people sleeping rough

Building on the Towards Home package, we will provide \$2.2 million to establish a further 20 one-bedroom modular homes across three locations. This will be complemented by \$2.6 million for intensive multi-disciplinary on-site support, providing two-year supportive housing for people with complex needs who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time.

Harness community sector capacity to grow long-term housing options

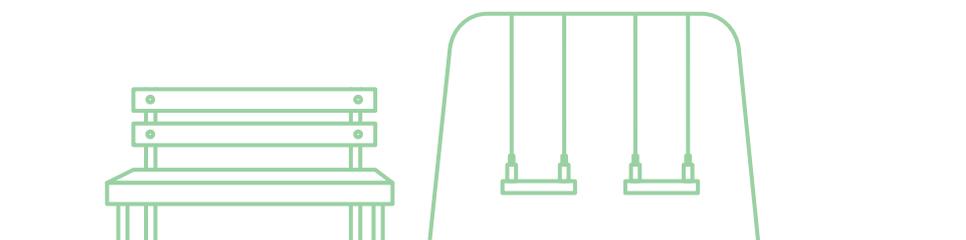
We will allocate a further \$8.2 million to fund three community-sector projects that will build long-term housing options for vulnerable client groups including women and children escaping family violence and young people leaving out-of-home care. This will deliver an additional 86 units of accommodation.

Prioritise and improve access to social housing for people who are sleeping rough

Providing access to suitable, affordable, permanent housing is integral to sustaining long-term housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. Social housing offers a permanent tenancy at an affordable rent to those Victorians who are most in need, providing a foundation to stabilise their lives and increase social and economic participation.

We will continue to ensure that people supported by Housing First initiatives receive priority access to the full spectrum of social housing options on offer under the Victorian Housing Register.

This vulnerable cohort will also benefit from the increase and renewal of social housing stock through Homes for Victorians, designed to meet the requirements of Victorians in housing need.



What will we do in the future?

Continue to grow the supply of long-term housing for people experiencing homelessness

We will explore ways to build on commitments made in Homes for Victorians to expand the supply of long-term housing options for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping, including the \$1 billion Social Housing Growth Fund and the \$341 million investment to renew and expand public housing stock. For people sleeping rough, we will particularly focus on the creation of one-bedroom properties. This could be achieved through a range of models such as dispersed or cluster-style crisis accommodation that provides an environment conducive to minimising the duration, impact and recurrence of homelessness, supportive housing models targeted at people experiencing chronic homelessness and innovative accommodation models for those with complex needs.

To contribute to housing supply further the Commonwealth Government needs to urgently resolve the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and make funds available to the sector to grow social housing.

'You're worried about where you're going to be in the next couple of weeks, because I'll get kicked out of here by then. Am I going to be on the streets or what's happening? I try and calm down but it's kind of out of my control.' (client).

Future directions

In the context of the broader redevelopment of the specialist homelessness service system, we will seek to provide appropriate accommodation and support options to resolve crisis and avoid ongoing homelessness. We will look at ways to achieve this by:

- using the evidence of 'rapid rehousing' approaches to ensure people receive appropriate accommodation and support to resolve crisis and avoid risk of further homelessness
- providing support packages that are flexible in the intensity and duration required to assist each individual
- utilising the private rental market through the use of incentives and support
- making pathways to economic participation more accessible to ensure people are financially able to maintain their housing choices.



Support to maintain stable accommodation

Rough sleeping is not just a housing issue. It is often the result of a number of interrelated issues and many people who sleep rough remain vulnerable to homelessness even after they are housed.

People who are recently homeless and sleeping rough may require limited assistance to resolve their homelessness. However, others – particularly those who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time – require varying levels and forms of support to assist with interrelated physical and mental health, alcohol and other drug use, family and relationship, employment, tenancy and financial issues. Also vital to sustaining stable housing is developing a sense of purpose, belonging and community away from the streets. This can be achieved through assistance to improve daily living skills, participate in social and recreational activities and access services in the local community.

To reduce the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping in Victoria, we must provide those who have experienced rough sleeping with the support they need to sustain their housing. We must also ensure that this support is tailored to individual needs, circumstances, capabilities and aspirations, recognising the diverse range of people who experience rough sleeping throughout the state.

The specialist homelessness service system is currently geared towards the provision of short-term support to clients up until or shortly after the point of being housed. Noting this, the Chair recommended that all people with a history of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping continue to receive the support they need once housed – to self-manage their tenancy, access mainstream services and establish connections in their local community.

Providing rapid access to permanent housing is only one part of the solution to rough sleeping. We must also provide those sleeping rough with the support they require not only to resolve their immediate crisis, but also to prevent their return to homelessness and rough sleeping in the future.

What are we currently doing?

Offering flexible longer-term support to assist people sleeping rough to transition to housing

Flexible support packages enable specialist homelessness service providers to combine the delivery of services to complex clients who are difficult to engage with standard service offerings – including those who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time – in a way that is tailored to their individual needs, circumstances, capabilities and aspirations.

We have allocated \$2.4 million to provide flexible support packages to people experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping to help them to transition to stable and sustainable housing. The flexible support packages will deliver assistance in a tailored continuum of care featuring choice and control for individuals while also facilitating more timely access to services for which there are lengthy wait times so that services can be better co-ordinated to support a person's journey of recovery.

Providing intensive ongoing support to complex clients once housed

The provision of intensive multi-disciplinary support can allow temporary and transitional forms of housing to provide a pathway to permanent housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping who have previously been unable to successfully transition into housing.

We have allocated \$3.68 million to deliver intensive multi-disciplinary support to the tenants of the 30 modular homes currently being built as part of the Towards Home package as well as to people housed in dispersed settings. Elements of support may include access to community and clinical mental health services, alcohol and other drug treatment services and primary and community health services, as well as tenancy support, with the overarching aim of helping people to develop life skills, maintain or work towards best possible social and emotional wellbeing, meet their personal recovery goals and participate in the life of their local community.

Improving outcomes for people experiencing chronic homelessness and harmful alcohol and other drug use

Complementing our investment in flexible and intensive models of support to assist people experiencing chronic homelessness to transition into and sustain housing, we are working with a consortium led by Sacred Heart Mission to develop a Social Impact Bond to improve outcomes for people experiencing chronic homelessness and harmful alcohol and other drug use. This initiative will expand the delivery of Sacred Heart Mission's successful Journey to Social Inclusion program to an additional 180 participants, providing them with rapid access to stable housing combined with intensive case management, service coordination and tenancy support.

Providing pro-active assistance to vulnerable social housing tenants

The provision of tailored tenancy support is a critical early intervention strategy to assist vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancy and reduce their risk of homelessness. It also acts as a form of tertiary prevention for those tenants who have experienced rough sleeping in the past and remain persistently vulnerable to homelessness even when securely housed.

Tenancy Plus provides assistance to more than 3,800 social housing tenants each year including providing new tenants with high levels of complexity with the support they need to successfully establish and maintain their tenancy, intervening to stabilise social housing tenancies that are at risk and providing support and advocacy to tenants whose tenancies are at risk due to unsuitable housing or coming before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

We have provided \$1.5 million to boost the Tenancy Plus program by shifting its emphasis from crisis intervention to proactive early intervention, broadening its scope to include all social housing tenants under the Victorian Housing Register and strengthening the program's response to tenants who have experienced homelessness or family violence.

What will we do to build on this?

Establish multi-disciplinary supportive housing teams

Permanent supportive housing programs are the most effective means of sustaining long-term housing for people with histories of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping who often present with significant mental and physical health and alcohol and other drug use issues as well as past trauma. Permanent supportive housing combines rapid access to permanent housing with support to access and engage with a range of services matched to individual needs.

We will provide \$9 million to establish six multi-disciplinary supportive housing teams to deliver

individualised support to complex clients once housed. Each team will consist of six full-time equivalent staff with a range of complementary skills and relevant disciplines such as case managers, community health nurses and psychiatric nurses. Each team will be co-ordinated with an assertive outreach team (which will proactively engage clients and assist them into housing) in areas of highest incidence of rough sleeping across inner suburban, outer suburban and regional locations. These are inner Melbourne, Port Phillip, Dandenong, Frankston, Geelong and Ballarat. The level of support provided to clients once housed will be tailored to individual needs and could range from ongoing intensive support to low level monitoring and intermittent case management.

As part of this initiative we will also develop a model for the delivery of peer-led support – an emergent area of homelessness service delivery. This program will involve people with lived experience of homelessness supporting participants to integrate into their local community, including help to access resources and supports.

What will we do in the future?

Consider ways to bolster tenancy support for people with histories of chronic homelessness

The withdrawal or scaling back of tenancy support can present a risk for people with histories of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping who may delay seeking help until it is too late to prevent housing breakdown and who are also at high risk of tenancy abandonment at times of personal crises.

Complementing Tenancy Plus, we will explore options to deliver a flexible longer term support response for tenants with histories of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping across all tenure types – including private rental – as a further measure to prevent recurring homelessness and rough sleeping. This type of tenancy support could be delivered via telephone, assertive outreach and/or brief interventions to enable swift re-engagement of vulnerable clients.

Provide tailored support to groups who are vulnerable to chronic homelessness

Rough sleeping is experienced by a diverse range of individuals and groups within the Victorian community, all of whom may require modified forms and levels of support to successfully negotiate and sustain a pathway out of homelessness. We will explore opportunities to build on current best practice approaches to ensure support programs are tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of different client groups and where possible, take these to greater scale.

Future directions

In the context of the broader reform of the specialist homelessness service system, we will ensure a Housing First approach is delivered to ensure people experiencing chronic homelessness or who are at risk of doing so become resilient to future housing loss. We will look at ways to achieve this by:

- improving the accessibility of our entry points, and offering outreach services where and when people are most receptive to receive assistance
- assisting people to end their homelessness experience through support services that are integrated, flexible and multi-disciplinary
- offering permanent housing with support that is flexible to respond to people's changing needs over time
- connecting people into their community once housed to prevent social isolation.

'We must provide those sleeping rough with the support they require not only to resolve their immediate crisis, but also to prevent their return to homelessness and rough sleeping in the future.'



An effective and responsive homelessness service system

Rough sleeping requires a multi-agency response. Many of the issues that contribute to rough sleeping, and in turn, the range of individual needs that must be addressed to resolve it, extend beyond the specialist homelessness and housing service systems.

Other service systems – such as acute care, clinical mental health, primary and community health, disability, family violence, employment services and income support – may all play a role in supporting individual recovery. People sleeping rough frequently struggle with an array of co-occurring issues that reinforce one another in complex ways. Accordingly, their homelessness is unlikely to be resolved when separate service systems address single issues in isolation, or exclude or delay assistance to people because of the complexity of their needs.

To reduce the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping in Victoria, we must recognise the inter-dependencies between the various types of assistance, treatment and support that people require and therefore work to provide that help in a holistic, multi-disciplinary manner.

In his advice to the Minister for Housing, Disability and the Ageing, the Chair outlined a range of initiatives to improve integration, coordination and collaboration between the range of agencies that provide services to people sleeping rough. This includes specialist homelessness and allied services, local government, Victoria Police and volunteer-run services. Key areas of recommended reform include service access, information sharing, governance, evidence-based practice and research and evaluation.

If we are to tackle rough sleeping effectively, we must improve the way services are delivered to people sleeping rough or who are at risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping. Ultimately, we must recognise rough sleeping as a cross-sectoral responsibility and ensure that the services people need to exit homelessness are delivered in an integrated, coordinated and client-centred manner.

What are we currently doing?

Implementing a framework to improve service coordination in central Melbourne

In July 2016, we established the Rough Sleeping Response Taskforce to explore and recommend practical solutions and systems change to better target and deliver housing and support to people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne. The Taskforce, which was chaired by Associate Professor Ruth Vine and included representatives from across government as well as specialist homelessness services, Victoria Police, and the

‘When we know we are making ground with someone, when putting them back out on the street is going to create more trauma, we look at ways of moving people around so they can stay in supported accommodation longer. We are seeing more positive results by being flexible and focusing on outcomes.’ (service provider).

City of Melbourne, has been instrumental in reviewing and enhancing the coordination of support for people sleeping rough in Melbourne’s central business district. A key achievement of the Taskforce has been the development of an agreed framework to coordinate the work of multiple agencies, ranging from housing, health, police and other justice agencies to peak bodies, philanthropy, volunteer-run services and the private sector, to help people out of homelessness and keep them housed.

As a first step in the implementation of the framework, we have jointly funded a position with the City of Melbourne to lead the coordination of services in Melbourne’s central business district. The next stage, which is currently underway, is to strengthen the existing governance and operating structures, to confirm that the right stakeholders are at the table and their roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated. This will ensure we are working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne.

Measuring outcomes in congregate crisis accommodation facilities

Congregate crisis supported accommodation provides short-term accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness who would otherwise be in unsafe or unstable temporary accommodation or sleeping rough. There are three large congregate crisis accommodation facilities in inner Melbourne (Ozanam House, Southbank Crisis Accommodation and Flagstaff Crisis Accommodation) that collectively provide assistance to around 1,900 people a year.

We have provided \$2.8 million to kick-start the re-design of the service delivery model for these three facilities with the aim of supporting innovative practice frameworks, introducing outcome measurements and streamlining funding and reporting requirements. Each provider has developed new initiatives that incorporate trauma-informed and recovery orientated approaches to respond to the multiple and often complex needs of people using their services, and put the client firmly at the centre. These initiatives will provide improved health, wellbeing and housing outcomes, which will be measurable in line with the Department of Health and Human Services outcomes framework.

This work will complement the outcome measures developed in two Social Impact Bond projects currently being implemented to support young people leaving out-of-home care and for people experiencing chronic homelessness and harmful alcohol and other drug use.

What will we do to build on this?

Formally recognise drop-in centres as access points to specialist homelessness services

Open access approaches such as drop-in centres can offer a means of engaging people experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping who are reluctant to access specialist homelessness services via the existing shop front entry points.

As part of the reform of the specialist homelessness service system, we will formally recognise and integrate drop-in centres as an alternative and complementary point of entry to services, by ensuring clients have access to, and are appropriately prioritised for, the full range of available assistance.

We will also explore opportunities to harness the role of drop-in centres in fostering stable tenancies among clients who choose to continue to connect with these services once housed, including by providing support to develop living skills and opportunities for social connection.

Evaluate new initiatives to engage, house and support people experiencing homelessness

Research and evaluation is integral to understanding the impact of interventions designed to reduce the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping and identifying best practice.

We have allocated funding to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of a suite of initiatives funded as part of the Towards Home and \$109 million homelessness packages in order to determine their effectiveness in resolving chronic homelessness and reducing the prevalence of rough sleeping in Victoria. A key objective of the evaluation will be to find evidence of what works for whom and why. It is intended that emerging practice within funded initiatives will inform and influence progressive design of policy, program and service delivery.

Implement a therapeutic model for crisis supported accommodation

Building on work completed to date, we will allocate an additional \$4.5 million to test, review and refine reforms that create a therapeutic service delivery model in Ozanam House, Southbank Crisis Accommodation and Flagstaff Crisis Accommodation. Clients will be supported to develop short, medium and long-term goals, access appropriate services and address issues that may prevent them from maintaining stable housing. Subject to evaluation, the new service delivery model will be adapted for use in other other crisis accommodation across Victoria, tailored to the needs of local communities.

This funding will also be used to deliver wider system innovations that aim to overcome barriers experienced by crisis accommodation clients in accessing other specialist services as well as housing.

What will we do in the future?

Explore options to more effectively engage with and assist clients with challenging behaviours

People experiencing homelessness often present to services in states of extreme stress and anxiety. It is essential to provide a continuum of strategies to identify, engage and assist clients with complex needs whose challenging behaviours would otherwise directly contribute to and prolong their homelessness and associated risks of harm.

We will explore ways to enhance the capacity of specialist homelessness service entry points to better understand and respond to clients experiencing undue stress or exhibiting challenging behaviours. By de-escalating situations of risk and successfully engaging people with behavioural issues, services can then assist them to successfully negotiate the assessment and planning process, resolve their homelessness and prevent a return to rough sleeping.

Continue to support improved service coordination at the local level

Building on the success of service coordination efforts in Melbourne's central business district over the past 18 months, we will explore opportunities to apply this approach in other geographic locations across the state to facilitate coordination of housing, health and other support services to better meet the needs of people who are sleeping rough.

Explore opportunities to facilitate more timely information sharing

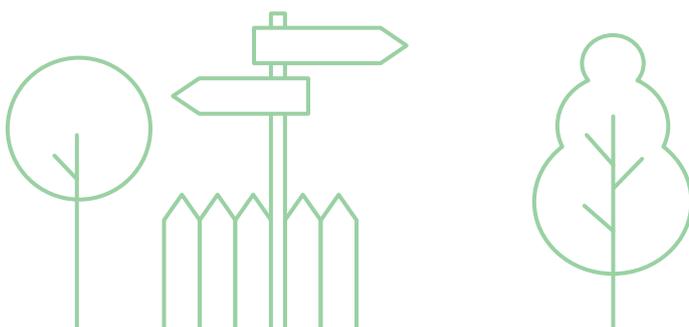
Coordinated service delivery is underpinned by integrated information management. Essential client information must be shared between service providers in a way that is consistent, timely, up-to-date and respects the privacy of the client.

Learning from work to establish a family violence information sharing scheme, we will investigate a similar co-ordinated approach for people sleeping rough. This will enable opportunities for a common data set to ensure that key data is consistently collected, reviewed and maintained. This will be supported by clear privacy protocols to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the confidentiality of the client and ensuring service providers have access to the information required to operate efficiently and effectively to best support their clients.

Future directions

In the context of the broader reform of the specialist homelessness service system, we will ensure a coordinated, sustainable and informed sector is enabled to work flexibly with each individual to resolve and prevent future homelessness. We will look at ways to achieve this by:

- sharing data with service providers to better understand trends and work towards outcomes
- streamlining the entry and assessment process to better enable people to receive tailored responses that meet their needs
- ensuring the homelessness sector continues to build on integration and collaboration opportunities with the wider social services sector, voluntary groups and the community
- supporting the development of a workforce transition strategy to ensure staff and agencies are empowered with knowledge and support
- building upon our evidence base of best practice and welcoming consumers to add to our knowledge.



Next steps

It is clear that homelessness – including rough sleeping – can present lasting and detrimental impacts for individuals, their families and the wider community. Through the initiatives outlined in this action plan, we will work to minimise the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping in Victoria by:

- intervening early to stop the flow of people into homelessness and rough sleeping
- providing rapid access to suitable, affordable, permanent housing
- offering tailored support to assist people to sustain their housing
- delivering services in an integrated, coordinated and client-centred manner.

Rough sleeping is a complex issue. It cuts across jurisdictions, portfolios and service systems – and clearly requires a whole of government response.

This action plan builds on key reform agendas that seek to improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, including *Ending family violence – Victoria’s plan for change*, *Victoria’s 10-year mental health plan*, *Roadmap for reform: strong families; safe children* and the recently released *Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social emotional wellbeing framework 2017–2027*.

This action plan cannot be delivered by the Victorian Government alone. It requires whole of community effort, involving stakeholders from all levels of government, specialist and universal service sectors, volunteer and philanthropic organisations and of course, the dedicated specialist homelessness services sector.

Delivery of the action plan also requires the Commonwealth Government to provide funding certainty for core homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness

Agreement. This action plan demonstrates the Victorian Government’s commitment to proactively respond to rough sleeping and homelessness more broadly, and requires an equivalent commitment from the Commonwealth Government to address this critical issue.

Structured around the four key themes underpinning homelessness reforms, the action plan represents the first phase in the reform of Victoria’s specialist homelessness service system.

Many aspects of the service system have remained largely unchanged for decades. As a result, the sector – although highly skilled and professional – is often overwhelmed by demand, particularly for crisis interventions and with limited capacity for early intervention. Recent investments in innovative approaches to engage, house and support people experiencing homelessness have shown promising results – robust evaluation is now required to identify what is working for whom and to bring these new approaches to greater scale. Future homelessness reform is intended to build and improve the existing service system, acknowledging its many strengths and achievements and offering an opportunity to build upon contemporary service design principles relevant to homelessness responses and programs.

The Victorian Government is committed to transparency and accountability to the community in the delivery of this action plan and the future reform of the specialist homelessness service system. To assist in this, we will establish an advisory committee with expressions of interest to be opened in early 2018. The advisory committee will oversee the progress of our commitments both in this action plan and in the development of broader directions for the future of homelessness service delivery across the state.

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan – summary of initiatives

Rough sleeping cohorts



Intervening early to prevent homelessness

	Recently homeless and sleeping rough	Sleeping rough for an extended period of time	At risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping
Expanding assertive outreach services	●	●	
Extending homelessness assessment and planning capacity across Victoria's prisons system			●
Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care or the youth justice system			●
Establish assertive outreach teams in suburban, regional and rural areas	●	●	
Engage with the Commonwealth Government regarding levels of income support	●	●	●
Explore ways to provide people who are sleeping rough with more immediate access to help	●		
Work with allied services regarding client referrals to specialist homelessness services	●		
Expand early intervention initiatives targeting people exiting settings that are known pathways to rough sleeping			●

Providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible

	Recently homeless and sleeping rough	Sleeping rough for an extended period of time	At risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping
Establishing modular housing for vulnerable people sleeping rough in central Melbourne		●	
Providing people sleeping rough with dedicated access to transitional housing		●	
Growing the supply of long-term housing options for people experiencing homelessness	●	●	
Assisting people experiencing homelessness to access and maintain private rental	●		
Providing housing and support to people at risk of homelessness in the City of Wyndham	●	●	
Build more modular housing for people sleeping rough		●	
Harness community sector capacity to grow long-term housing options	●		●
Prioritise and improve access to social housing for people who are sleeping rough	●	●	●
Continue to grow the supply of long-term housing for people experiencing homelessness	●	●	●

Rough sleeping cohorts



Support to maintain accommodation

	Recently homeless and sleeping rough	Sleeping rough for an extended period of time	At risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping
Offering flexible longer-term support to assist people sleeping rough to transition to housing		●	
Providing intensive ongoing support to complex clients once housed		●	
Improving outcomes for people experiencing chronic homelessness and harmful alcohol and other drug use		●	
Providing pro-active assistance to vulnerable social housing tenants		●	●
Establish multi-disciplinary supportive housing teams		●	
Consider ways to bolster tenancy support for people with histories of chronic homelessness		●	
Provide tailored support to groups who are vulnerable to chronic homelessness			●

An effective and responsive homelessness service system

	Recently homeless and sleeping rough	Sleeping rough for an extended period of time	At risk of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping
Implementing a framework to improve service coordination in central Melbourne	●	●	●
Measuring outcomes in congregate crisis accommodation facilities	●	●	●
Formally recognise drop-in centres as access points to specialist homelessness services	●	●	●
Evaluate new initiatives to engage, house and support people experiencing homelessness	●	●	●
Implement a therapeutic model for crisis supported accommodation	●	●	●
Explore options to more effectively engage with and assist clients with challenging behaviours	●	●	●
Continue to support improved service coordination at the local level	●	●	●
Explore opportunities to facilitate more timely information sharing	●	●	●

