

**IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION  
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

**STATEMENT OF ARTHUR ROGERS**

Date of document: 20 July 2015  
Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria  
Prepared by:  
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I, ARTHUR ROGERS, Director of Housing and Deputy Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services, SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I am the Director of Housing (**Director**) appointed under the *Housing Act 1983 (Vic.)* (**Housing Act**). I have held this office since December 2012. I am also a Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (**Department**). I have held these positions since 2012.
2. As the Director, I have legislative responsibilities under the Housing Act, which include the delivery of public housing within Victoria.
3. As Deputy Secretary and as the Director, I am responsible for developing policy directions for social housing in Victoria. I am leading the work within the Department for the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme in Victoria. My responsibilities in relation to the delivery of social housing include determining future arrangements for social housing to ensure it assists the maximum number of Victorians, in line with the objectives of the Housing Act. In relation to the implementation, delivery and promotion of the Department's social housing programs and services, I am responsible for negotiating with senior officers from the Commonwealth and other State government and non-government agencies.
4. Prior to my appointment, I was acting as Executive Director of Housing and Community Building for six months. Prior to this, I was the Executive Director of Disability Services in the former Department of Human Services for ten years. In this role I had the responsibility for leading the ongoing development of a support system for people with a disability, to enhance their independence, choice and

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community inclusion. This was achieved through individualised planning and supports, which included access to supported accommodation.

5. It is in my capacity as the Director and Deputy Secretary that I make this statement.
6. I have a Bachelor of Arts (University of Melbourne) and Bachelor of Health Administration (University of New South Wales).
7. I have received a notice from the Royal Commission into Family Violence pursuant to s 17(1)(d) of the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Vic.) requiring me to attend to give evidence at the Royal Commission and to provide a written witness statement.

### **SCOPE OF STATEMENT**

8. In this statement I respond to a request by the Royal Commission into Family Violence for information regarding matters the subject of the public hearing for Module 7 (Homelessness).
9. I understand that the Royal Commission is interested in:
  - 9.1 the various forms of housing assistance available for people experiencing family violence, including social housing and homelessness assistance;
  - 9.2 the type of crisis accommodation and housing available for victims of family violence, with particular regard to women's refuges;
  - 9.3 the type of crisis accommodation and housing available for perpetrators of family violence;
  - 9.4 some of the challenges in providing housing options for victims and perpetrators of family violence; and
  - 9.5 the extent of any reform contemplated for social housing and homelessness assistance, with particular regard to addressing the housing needs of those experiencing family violence.

### **ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR**

10. The Housing Act vests powers in the Director to:
  - 10.1 acquire, dispose of, develop and manage land;
  - 10.2 lend money;

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- 10.3 make grants of money;
  - 10.4 enter into agreements; and
  - 10.5 execute documents and act as an agent for performance of the Commonwealth agreements.
11. As a statutory entity that earns rental income, the Director's budget is accounted for separately to the Department's finances, as the Director is a public non-financial corporation.
  12. The Director's budget currently includes funding for homelessness assistance. Under the Housing Act, the Director is established as a separate entity to the Crown.
  13. The Director is empowered to lease properties subject to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic.) (Residential Tenancies Act)*.

#### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE**

14. The roles and responsibilities for delivering housing assistance and homelessness assistance are shared between:
  - 14.1 myself, as the Director, and the Secretary of the Department;
  - 14.2 community service organisations, including registered housing providers and registered housing associations; and
  - 14.3 the Commonwealth government.
15. Funding housing and homelessness assistance is the joint responsibility of the Victorian and Commonwealth governments. I attach a document setting out the relevant funding arrangements for housing and homelessness assistance at **Attachment AR-1**.

#### **HOUSING ASSISTANCE**

##### **Social housing**

16. Social housing comprises all short, medium and long-term housing in Victoria which the Director generally owns or has an interest in. Social housing is targeted to low-income Victorians or those who are homeless.

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17. In Victoria, there were 85,199 social housing properties available as at 30 June 2014.
18. The table below depicts the number of social housing properties available in Victoria, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 and estimates the number of social housing properties that will be available in 2014-15 and 2015-16 (Victorian Government, Budget Paper 3, p.61, Summary of Housing Assistance 2004 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report, supplementary data 2013-14).

	30.6.05	30.6.06	30.6.07	30.6.08	30.6.09	30.6.10	30.6.2011	30.6.2012	30.6.2013	30.6.2014	Exp O'come BP3	BP3 target
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Total number of social housing dwellings	76,702	77,048	77,456	78,004	78,646	80,955	82,974	83,789	84,863	85,199	85,279	85,195

### Long-term social housing

19. In this part of my statement, I address long-term social housing. I address other forms of social housing, including crisis accommodation and transitional housing, under the heading "Homelessness assistance" from paragraph 58 below.
20. Long term social housing includes housing options in the form of:
- 20.1 public housing;
  - 20.2 community housing; and
  - 20.3 Indigenous community housing.

### Public housing

21. As at 30 June 2014, there were 64,886 public housing properties in Victoria. These properties were largely owned and managed by the Director, noting some properties are leased to the Director from private property owners. The Department supports the Director in the delivery of the public housing program.

The following table depicts the number of public housing properties between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (Summary of Housing Assistance 2004 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report, supplementary data 2013-14).

	30.6.05	30.6.06	30.6.07	30.6.08	30.6.09	30.6.10	30.6.2011	30.6.2012	30.6.2013	30.6.2014
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Total public housing dwellings (incl leases)	65,133	65,244	65,307	65,167	65,207	65,437	65,352	65,183	65,031	64,886

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22. Public housing includes separate housing and medium-to high-density dwellings and flats. Tenure in public housing is governed by the Residential Tenancies Act.
23. Public housing is a major form of long-term rental assistance offered to low-income people in need of public rental assistance. Eligibility for public housing is set out in the Director's Allocations Manual (see page 9), which is attached to this statement at **Attachment AR-2**.
24. Public housing tenants are not required to pay more than 25 per cent of their combined household income in rent. The rent payable is formally determined by calculating market rent value and applying a rebate when requested by tenants to ensure rental payments do not exceed the maximum percentage.
25. Public housing is in high demand. As at 30 June 2015, there were 34,464 approved applications on the public housing waiting list in Victoria. In addition, there were 7,503 existing public housing tenants wishing to transfer to another property. I attach a breakdown of the Director's waiting list across the State as at 30 June 2015 as **Attachment AR-3**.
26. The waiting list is segmented. Those people in greatest need receive housing in priority over others who do not have the same level of need.
27. The segmented waiting list was introduced on 1 February 1999.
28. There are four segments of the waiting list in priority order:
  - 28.1 Homeless with support (highest priority segment);
  - 28.2 Supported housing;
  - 28.3 Special housing needs;
  - 28.4 Wait turn (lowest priority segment).
29. Segments one to three are known as the 'early housing' categories and they have priority over the fourth 'wait turn' segment.
30. Out of the 34,464 approved new public housing applications (to which I refer in paragraph 25 above), there were 9,798 households (28 per cent) on the waiting list in the early housing categories.

31. Originally, people experiencing homelessness on a recurring basis and those at risk of homelessness on a recurring basis were allocated to segment one of the waiting list and were accorded the highest priority. On 2 April 2012, the 'Homeless with Support' segment was introduced for segment one which replaced the recurring homelessness segment for segment one.
32. The Homeless with Support segment is for clients who:
- 32.1 are homeless (including due to family violence);
  - 32.2 have no alternative to public housing; and
  - 32.3 are receiving support through a designated support program.
33. A history of homelessness is no longer required to be eligible for segment one.
34. Family violence was previously a criterion under the third (Special Housing Needs) segment, but has also been included in the 'Homeless with Support' segment since 2 April 2012.
35. People experiencing family violence who are in need of public housing, but yet to access support, remain in the 'Special Housing Needs' segment. Upon accessing support, they enter the first segment.
36. People who are living in crisis accommodation arranged by family violence services (for example, refuges) are among the eligible groups for early housing via the 'Homeless with Support' segment.

### ***Long Term Community housing***

37. As at 30 June 2014, there were 14,344 long-term community-housing properties in Victoria.
38. The table below depicts the number of long-term community-housing properties available in Victoria, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (Summary of Housing Assistance 2004 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report, supplementary data 2013-14).

	30.6.05 2004-05	30.6.06 2005-06	30.6.07 2006-07	30.6.08 2007-08	30.6.09 2008-09	30.6.10 2009-10	30.6.2011 2010-11	30.6.2012 2011-12	30.6.2013 2012-13	30.6.2014 2013-14
Total long term community housing	6,484	6,741	7,035	7,756	8,347	9,831	11,606	12,537	13,820	14,344

*\*Data in this table does not include crisis and transitional housing and Indigenous community housing.*

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39. Community housing is rental housing for people on low incomes or with special needs. Some organisations specialise in helping specific groups, like people with a disability, women, singles and older people.
40. Community housing is delivered by registered housing agencies in accordance with the Housing Act. Organisations are registered under the Housing Act as either:
  - 40.1 housing associations; or
  - 40.2 housing providers.
41. The Registrar of Housing Agencies regulates housing associations and housing providers through a set of performance standards. I attach the current performance standards for housing associations and housing providers at **Attachment AR-4**.
42. The Registrar is established under the Housing Act to regulate this sector and is a separate entity to the Director.
43. The Director has an interest under section 107 of the Housing Act in the titles of most properties managed or owned by registered housing agencies (housing associations or housing providers) where the Director has provided funding.
44. Registered housing agencies are required to:
  - 44.1 own, manage and develop affordable rental housing;
  - 44.2 provide a range of housing support and assistance to clients;
  - 44.3 be viable businesses partnering with both government and the community;
  - 44.4 have met registration criteria; and
  - 44.5 meet ongoing regulatory compliance against performance standards.
45. Renters of community housing generally pay no more than 30 per cent of their combined household income by way of rent. One of the performance standards relates to affordability. Tenants of long-term community housing are also eligible to receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
46. Eligibility for long-term community housing is similar to public housing and is targeted to Victorians on low incomes. However, there are higher income and asset limits may be higher in community housing than public housing.

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47. Each organisation has its own access and waiting list arrangements for its portfolio of long-term community housing.
48. Some housing providers and housing associations also deliver crisis accommodation and emergency housing, and/or transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness, which is outlined below.

#### *Housing associations*

49. Housing associations are expected to grow social housing by leveraging government funding and existing property portfolios.
50. As at June 2015, there were eight housing associations operating in Victoria. The list of housing associations as at July 2015 is attached at **Attachment AR-5**.

#### *Housing providers*

51. In addition to managing Director-owned properties, housing providers may also manage and own other properties. Housing providers can be companies limited by shares or guarantee, incorporated associations or co-operatives.
52. The list of housing providers as at June 2015 is attached at **Attachment AR-6**.

#### ***Indigenous community housing***

53. As at 30 June 2014, there were 1,995 Indigenous community housing properties in Victoria.
54. The table below depicts the number of Indigenous community housing properties available in Victoria, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (Summary of Housing Assistance 2004 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report, supplementary data 2013-14).

	30.6.05 2004-05	30.6.06 2005-06	30.6.07 2006-07	30.6.08 2007-08	30.6.09 2008-09	30.6.10 2009-10	30.6.2011 2010-11	30.6.2012 2011-12	30.6.2013 2012-13	30.6.2014 2013-14
Total Indigenous community housing	1,281	1,295	1,334	1,361	1,387	1,294	1,859	1,923	1,924	1,995

*\*In June 2009 Victoria assumed responsibility for the Commonwealth's community infrastructure program (Indigenous community housing) under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. This explains much of the growth in Indigenous community housing between 2009-10 and 2010-11 as existing properties which were previously the responsibility of the Commonwealth formed part of the Victorian Indigenous Community Housing portfolio.*



55. Eligibility for Indigenous community housing is for Aboriginal households on low incomes. Eligibility for Indigenous community housing for properties managed by Aboriginal Housing Victoria is in line with eligibility requirements for public housing, where households have one or more Aboriginal member.
56. Indigenous community housing is delivered by Aboriginal community controlled organisations in Victoria. Of these organisations, one is a registered housing provider - Aboriginal Housing Victoria. Another two organisations partner with other housing associations to deliver Indigenous community housing to Aboriginal people in Victoria.
57. Aboriginal Housing Victoria manages the largest portfolio of Indigenous community housing in Victoria. As at 30 June 2014, Aboriginal Housing Victoria reported managing 1,522 properties, 1,451 of which were owned by the Director.

## **HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE**

### **Homelessness in Victoria**

58. Homelessness is not just the result of too few houses. Its causes are many and varied. Family violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse all contribute to the level of homelessness in Australia.
59. For some people, homelessness is an isolated event, it happens once and for a short time. For others, homelessness is part of a chaotic and uncertain life of poverty and disadvantage. These people tend to cycle in and out of homelessness and, when they do find housing, it can be short term.
60. Under the Australian Bureau of Statistics statistical definition of homelessness, when a person does not have accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:
- 60.1 is in a dwelling that is inadequate;
  - 60.2 has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
  - 60.3 does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

61. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has developed six homeless operational groups in assessing whether people enumerated in the Census were likely to have been homeless on Census night. These groups are:
- 61.1 persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out;
  - 61.2 persons in supported accommodation for the homeless;
  - 61.3 persons staying temporarily with other households;
  - 61.4 persons living in boarding houses;
  - 61.5 persons in other temporary lodging; and
  - 61.6 persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.
62. Using these groups, in the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics report *Estimating the Homeless from the Census of Population and Housing*, it was estimated that 22,789 Victorians were homeless on Census night in 2011. This is a 30.9 per cent increase on the 17,410 Victorians who were homeless in 2006.
63. This increase is partly driven by an 80.6 per cent increase in the number of people living in overcrowded dwellings (from 3,345 people in 2006 to 6,041 people in 2011).
64. There was also a 38.9 per cent increase in the number of Victorians sleeping rough (from 786 people in 2006 to 1,092 people in 2011). Over the same period the number of Victorians in Supported Accommodation for the homeless also increased.
65. In 2013-14, 99,892 clients were supported by homelessness services in Victoria. This represents an increase of eight per cent from the 92,462 clients that were supported by homelessness services in 2012-13. It also represents a 15.9 per cent increase from the 86,150 people who were supported by homelessness services in 2011-12.
66. Among Victoria's homeless population, Aboriginal people are more likely to be homeless. While less than one per cent of Victoria's population identify as Aboriginal, 7.2 per cent of homelessness service clients identified as Aboriginal in 2012-13.

### Homelessness assistance

67. When someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness, they are eligible to access crisis and emergency accommodation and transitional housing in Victoria.
68. The Department funds organisations to provide support to people to stabilise and rebuild their lives and access long-term housing or remain in housing.
69. Homelessness accommodation assistance in Victoria is provided in the following forms:
- 69.1 crisis and emergency accommodation;
  - 69.2 transitional housing;
  - 69.3 longer-term homelessness assistance models linked to support.

### Crisis and emergency accommodation

70. Crisis accommodation and emergency accommodation is short-term housing linked with support. This accommodation is managed by community service organisations across the State and funded by the Director. As at 30 June 2014, there were 307 crisis properties that formed part of social housing.
71. To be eligible for crisis accommodation, a family or person must be homeless or at risk of homelessness. This criterion guides access to all forms of homelessness assistance, of which crisis accommodation is one part. The criterion operates regardless of income status. I attach the Homelessness Services Guidelines which contain eligibility criteria for crisis accommodation as **Attachment AR-7**.
72. People residing in crisis accommodation are not subject to the rights and responsibilities afforded to tenancies through the Residential Tenancies Act.
73. People who live in crisis accommodation do not pay rent, though some facilities may charge a small service fee to cover non-support provisions such as cleaning or meals.
74. All crisis supported accommodation services focus on stabilising people's immediate crisis situation and assisting them to transition to stable medium to longer-term housing involving, for instance, transitional housing, public housing, private rental or to safely return to their homes.

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75. The Policy and Funding Plan activity description for 2015-18 (attached at **Attachment AR-8**) outlines the expectations of community service organisations who deliver crisis accommodation.
76. There are three main types of crisis supported accommodation. They are:
- 76.1 women's refuges, which are premises across the State to keep women and children safe and stabilise their circumstances when they experience family violence;
  - 76.2 youth refuges, to get young people outcomes in education, employment and parenting skills, and to connect them with family where appropriate; and
  - 76.3 mainstream adult and family crisis accommodation.
77. I refer to each type of crisis accommodation in the next part of my statement.

#### ***Women's refuges***

78. As at 30 June 2015, there were 31 women's refuge sites across Victoria, made up of 54 individual properties/units.
79. Women's refuges can accommodate around 105 households at any given time, depending on the needs of families. Sites are dispersed in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.
80. Women's refuges are managed by community service organisations and are largely owned by these agencies (with the Director holding a mortgage or lodging a caveat on the title).
81. The service description for women's refuges forms part of the crisis accommodation activity description of the Policy and Funding Plan 2015-16 (see **Attachment AR-8**).
82. At paragraph 125 below and following, I refer in detail to women's refuges in the context of family violence.

#### ***Youth refuges***

83. Youth refuges are funded by the Department to deliver immediate accommodation and support to young people aged 16-25 years who are homeless or at risk of

homelessness. Refuges provide a period of stabilisation and support and have a key role in assisting young people to avoid and move beyond homelessness.

84. As at June 2014, there were 20 youth refuges in Victoria. Fourteen of the refuges are owned by the Director and the remainder are owned by community housing or community service providers. All youth refuges are managed by community service organisations.
85. These youth refuges contain around a combined total of 159 beds (as at July 2015).
86. Additional resources are allocated under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (currently a two year agreement from 2015-16 to 2016-17) for seven youth refuges to deliver an enhanced model of service delivery that focuses on specialist support, family reconciliation and follow-up support.

***Mainstream adult and family crisis accommodation***

87. There are large, medium and smaller crisis facilities and properties that are available for adults and families in crisis.
88. Congregate style accommodation includes:
  - 88.1 a facility at Southbank, which provides around 45 rooms for single males and females and some couples;
  - 88.2 Ozanam House, North Melbourne, which provides around 50 rooms for single males; and
  - 88.3 Flagstaff, West Melbourne, which provides around 64 rooms for single males.
89. Medium size crisis facilities are located in Ballarat, Dandenong, South Melbourne, St Kilda, St Kilda East and Croydon. There are other dispersed crisis accommodation properties across the state. Women's refuges have access to some of these properties.
90. People who are accommodated in crisis housing might, on exit from this accommodation, move to transitional housing, long-term public or other social housing, move to a boarding house or rooming house, gain private rental or return to their previous living arrangement. Others may cycle in and out of homelessness due to a lack of suitable exit options or because their support needs are not met.

### Transitional housing

91. As at 30 June 2014, there were 3,667 transitional housing properties across Victoria. These properties are owned or leased by the Director and managed by around 13 transitional housing managers in 2015-16 who are also registered community housing providers under the Housing Act 1983. A list of transitional housing managers is at **Attachment AR-9**.

92. The table below depicts the number of transitional housing properties available in Victoria, between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (Summary of Housing Assistance 2004 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report, supplementary data 2013-14).

	30.6.05 2004-05	30.6.06 2005-06	30.6.07 2006-07	30.6.08 2007-08	30.6.09 2008-09	30.6.10 2009-10	30.6.2011 2010-11	30.6.2012 2011-12	30.6.2013 2012-13	30.6.2014 2013-14
Total transitional housing (including leases)	3,586	3,548	3,545	3,486	3,470	3,703	3,867	3,866	3,737	3,667

93. The transitional housing program commenced in 1997 and was introduced as a way to help stabilise people and families who experience homelessness, before they gained long-term housing. Someone in crisis may be able to access transitional housing in lieu of, or after living in, crisis and emergency accommodation.

94. The aims of transitional housing are to:

94.1 provide housing assistance to individuals and families in crisis as a result of homelessness or impending homelessness; and

94.2 assist individuals and families in housing crisis to establish or maintain appropriate, secure and sustainable housing through the provision of transitional housing, initial assessment and planning, and support.

### Longer-term homelessness assistance – 'Housing First'

95. In addition to the more traditional forms of homelessness assistance, the Department has invested in longer-term housing options such as Youth Foyer and supportive housing models.

96. These options are based on the principle of 'housing first', which is about rapidly securing longer-term housing for someone experiencing homelessness and wrapping the right supports around the person or household to keep them in their housing. Housing first means that households do not need to journey through crisis and transitional housing, on their way to longer-term housing.

**Youth Foyers**

97. There are around 198 units in Youth Foyer models in Victoria.
98. Youth foyers are integrated learning and accommodation centres providing up to two years of safe and secure housing, support and training for young people aged 16-25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Youth Foyers are a transformational model that actively address homelessness and disadvantage to enable young people to have improved educational attainment and employment outcomes, improved relationships with their family and improved housing outcomes.

**Supportive Housing**

99. Supportive Housing provides safe, permanent, affordable housing combined with support services for people who have experienced chronic homelessness caused or exacerbated by multiple, complex needs such as mental illness, substance misuse, chronic disease or a history of incarceration.
100. The Department funds supportive housing in the form of 66 beds in the Elizabeth Street Common Ground program and the High Street Preston Supportive Housing.
101. Supportive Housing aims to end homelessness quickly for chronically homeless people, by providing them with a permanent place to live with a range of linked or onsite supports to help them maximise their future prospects, in terms of health and mental health, management of substance misuse issues and community and economic participation.

**OTHER FORMS OF HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE**

102. There are other forms of housing and homelessness assistance available in Victoria, which include supports to maintain social housing or services to assist people gain and maintain private rental housing.
103. There are three main categories:
- 103.1 the Housing Establishment Fund;
  - 103.2 support to access and maintain housing; and
  - 103.3 private rental housing and home renovation assistance.

### The Housing Establishment Fund

104. In addition to the delivery of crisis and emergency accommodation, a person or family in crisis on any given night will be generally eligible to access assistance through the Housing Establishment Fund.
105. The Housing Establishment Fund can be used to pay for:
- 105.1 crisis accommodation in motels, hotels, rooming houses and boarding houses;
  - 105.2 practical assistance such as transport;
  - 105.3 housing establishment costs, such as rent in advance to establish a tenancy for a household; and
  - 105.4 paying rental arrears to avoid a household becoming homeless.
106. The 2015-16 Policy and Funding Plan (attached at **Attachment AR-10**) outlines the parameters of the fund.
107. Housing establishment funding will be delivered through 70 community service organisations funded in 2015-16.
108. In 2015-16, it is expected that 40,000 households will be assisted through the Housing Establishment Fund.
109. The table below depicts expenditure on the Housing Establishment Fund between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (Summary of Housing Assistance 2004 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report, supplementary data 2013-14).

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual
Housing Establishment Fund	6.686	6.884	7.086	8.316	8.377	8.953	8.767	9.058	9.364	11.005

### Support to access and maintain housing

110. The Department funds a number of activities to support a household to access and maintain housing and meet their goals in life. Activities include:
- 110.1 initial assessment and planning, which provides an initial assessment of needs and risks for people who need homelessness services. This



provides, information and responses including providing information and referral about access to housing, safety planning or referrals to other support services. In 2015-16, \$11.828 million is budgeted to be spent on this service (not including employment remuneration order or indexation related increases);

- 110.2 a Statewide telephone information and referral service for clients experiencing a crisis. This Statewide 1800 number and after-hours service assists all people experiencing housing crisis, including assistance in accessing the Housing Establishment Fund or forms of accommodation. In 2015-16, \$2.193 million is budgeted to be spent on this program (not including employment remuneration order or indexation related increases);
- 110.3 transition support, which provides assessment, referral and case-managed support beyond crisis, with casework activities matched to a person's goals and case plan. These activities may include counselling, crisis resolution, life-skills training, and advocacy and assistance with accessing appropriate long-term housing, training and employment opportunities. Transitional support can be provided irrespective of clients' living situation or location. In 2015-16, \$72.3 million is budgeted to be spent on this service (not including employment remuneration order or indexation related increases);
- 110.4 social housing advocacy and support program, which provides case management to help people in social housing maintain their tenancy and prevent homelessness. In 2015-16, \$5.130 million is budgeted to be spent on this program (not including employment remuneration order or indexation related increases); and
- 110.5 Indigenous tenancies at risk of eviction program, which provides support and advocacy for Aboriginal households at risk of eviction to maintain their tenancy and prevent homelessness. In 2015-16, \$1.378 million is budgeted to be spent on this program (not including employment remuneration order or indexation related increases).

#### **Private rental and home ownership assistance**

- 111. There are also a range of other forms of housing assistance that focus on helping Victorians access and maintain private rental and maintain home ownership as detailed below.

***Bond loan program***

112. A bond loan program is funded and provided by the Director to assist households to meet the cost of paying a bond on a private rental property. I attach the Director's Bond Loan policy at **Attachment AR-11**.
113. In 2015-16, it is expected that 12,000 bond loans (Budget Paper 3 2015-16, p. 260) will be provided in the financial year at a budget of \$13.191 million.

***Accommodation Options for Families program***

114. The Accommodation Options for Families program is funded from the Victorian Property Fund (which is administered by the Department of Justice and Regulation) to assist households who are at risk of entering private and unsuitable rooming house accommodation to be diverted into more appropriate forms of accommodation, including private rental. This program includes private rental brokerage assistance.
115. In 2015-16, the Department is aiming to assist 800 households with this program at a budget of \$4.885 million.

***Home renovation and inspection loan scheme***

116. The Director funds a Home Renovation service that provides a free property inspection to determine any modifications and repairs required to assist eligible people to remain living independently in their own homes. There is also a low interest loan available to assist eligible people who are unable to fund the cost of the identified modifications and repairs.
117. The aim of the program is for households to maintain their existing housing.
118. This program has a budget of \$1.5 million for 2015-16.

***Commonwealth government assistance***

119. At the Commonwealth level there is the provision of Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

## **HOMELESSNESS AND FAMILY VIOLENCE**

120. In 2013-14, 35 per cent (32,290 clients) of clients accessing homelessness assistance cited family violence as one of the reasons for seeking this assistance. This represents an increase of 39.9 per cent or 9,925 clients who cite family violence as a reason for seeking assistance since 2011-12 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Specialist Homelessness Data Collection (based on non-re-weighted 2011-12 figures).
121. Indigenous Australian women are 35 times more likely to experience domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous Australian women. (Spinney, AHURI, *Home and Safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless*, p.51).
122. Women and women with children who are homeless are not a homogenous group and have a variety of service needs. Some are able to rely on family and friends when they are in crisis. Others require quick practical support to keep them in their home or to obtain alternative housing in the private market. Some require more deeply subsidised longer-term accommodation (social housing). Women and children who experience family violence and experience homelessness, also require a range of different supports and services.

## **FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES**

123. Family violence services are available in Victoria to meet the various needs of people experiencing family violence, including victims and perpetrators.
124. These services are delivered in addition to the general housing and homelessness assistance described above, and sometimes form discrete service responses within these types of housing and homelessness assistance. For example, women's refuges are part of crisis and emergency accommodation.

### **Services to respond to the accommodation and housing needs of women and children**

#### ***Women's refuges***

##### *Communal and cluster style*

125. There are two main types of women's refuges in Victoria:

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- 125.1 communal refuges, which are generally one property where women and families share facilities; and
  - 125.2 cluster-style refuges, where there might be several properties on the one site or across dispersed sites with women and children residing at these refuges supported by one community service organisation.
126. As at 30 June 2015, there are:
- 126.1 18 communal refuge sites representing 18 separate units/properties; and
  - 126.2 13 cluster or dispersed-style refuge sites, representing at least 36 individual properties/units.
127. More recent refuge builds are of the cluster style. The Director commenced building cluster properties to provide women and children with separate properties. Separate properties afford privacy and provide a more 'normal' living environment for women, particularly women with children and women with additional support needs.
128. Between 2011 and 2014, six refuge sites have been built, re-built or redeveloped, including three Aboriginal specific refuge sites. These have included 28 separate properties/units.

### *Security*

129. Twenty of the refuge sites in Victoria are "high security" refuges, meaning their addresses are not disclosed on the Department's housing database. Women and children who enter these services are asked to maintain the security of the refuge's address. This may mean that women entering the secure refuge service are advised about using different ways to enter and leave the refuge service, as well as disabling mobile devices, such as phones and tablets, to prevent perpetrators locating the women and children. Women are provided with individualised security PIN, swipe card or keypad access.
130. The remaining 11 refuge sites are disclosed on the Department's database. They are not considered high security refuges. The shift in building refuges that are not high security reflects changes and strengthening in justice responses to family violence following the introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic.), which put a greater focus on perpetrator accountability. Despite this, these refuge facilities still maintain a high level of security through design features such as 24/7

surveillance and staffing and security access arrangements. Women and children are still required to exercise caution when entering and leaving the refuge service, and take necessary precautions with mobile devices.

*Domestic Violence Victoria: Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children 2006*

131. The *Domestic Violence Victoria: Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children 2006* (attached as **Attachment AR-12**) guides practice for Department-funded services that provide specialist family violence responses, including refuge services.
132. It states the objectives of women's refuges include, but are not limited to:
- 132.1 providing women and their children with secure accommodation and support;
  - 132.2 assisting women to make informed choices for themselves and their children about their circumstances;
  - 132.3 assisting women and their children to enhance the safety of their previous accommodation or establish safe accommodation (alternate to the temporary accommodation of the refuge service) whilst maintaining connection with friends, family and other community support;
  - 132.4 minimising disruption to children's lives by ensuring they are linked into communities and schools;
  - 132.5 providing confidential, professional and relevant services to women and their children;
  - 132.6 increasing awareness of issues facing women and children who experience family violence; and
  - 132.7 participating in an integrated response to family violence.

**Access**

133. Refuges are generally funded to operate their support models within business hours. However, increasingly the Department is funding refuges to deliver 24 hour per day, seven day per week onsite support to women and children.

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134. The Department has not specifically funded refuges to operate a 24 hour, seven day per week intake service. Some refuges may admit clients into their refuge after hours. However, I do not believe this to be a common practice.
135. Each refuge runs their own intake process and there is no centralised access arrangement to refuge vacancies. I understand that referrals after hours are generally through the Statewide crisis service Safe Steps, to which I refer at paragraph 146 below.

*Women's refuge policies relating to accommodating adolescent boys*

136. Family violence services, including women's refuges, are expected to provide support and accommodation services to women and dependent children of all ages (up until 18 years of age). I understand guidelines for the assessment of male adolescents are included in relevant organisational policies and procedures and reflect the principles of equity and accessibility.
137. It has been reported to me that a small number of refuge services - particularly in communal settings - may restrict access to refuges for women with adolescent boys.
138. Communal refuge services make assessments of families and individuals, based on household dynamics and the safety and wellbeing needs of individuals and families. Issues considered include assessments about:
- 138.1 complexities and needs of individuals and family units;
  - 138.2 cultural considerations in regard to older male children in the communal refuge setting;
  - 138.3 individual assessments of children and the mother's assessment of her children's willingness to stay in communal refuge settings;
  - 138.4 physical features of the refuge, such as the number of shared bathrooms;
  - 138.5 alternative options, including supporting families with adolescents or older male children in dispersed crisis accommodation properties or transitional properties.
139. The bedroom sizes of available dwellings can limit who can be accommodated. This will particularly affect large families.

**Safe at Home**

140. The Safe at Home program is funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to keep women and children safe in their home. The program provides case-managed support to enable more women and children to stay safely in the family home where appropriate.
141. The program is targeted to women who have been referred by police, courts and other services following a family violence incident and wish to remain in the family home. Services also consider the needs of accompanying children when assisting women who have experienced violence. It also funds minor works on properties, such as lock changes to support the safety of victims. There were 877 funded targets in 2014-15 for this program, at a total investment of \$1.84 million, delivered through 24 family violence services.
142. A \$900,000 security pilot is commencing in 2015-16 to trial additional security measures to keep women and children safe in the home. This pilot will operate in four locations across the State with a competitive expression of interest process to commence shortly. The initiative will trial methods like CCTV and safety cards to further enhance women and children's safety and keep them in their homes and community.

***Private rental brokerage programs and flexible person centred funding packages***

143. A private rental brokerage program is available for eligible families experiencing family violence and is delivered by community service organisations. This program aims to connect women and children experiencing family violence with appropriate private rental. There were 611 funded targets in 2014-15 for this program, delivered through 13 family violence services, at a total cost of \$1.13 million.

***Other family violence services***

144. Flexible packages of support are being introduced so that women and children get the support they need to overcome crisis and achieve safe outcomes. These packages are going through an expression of interest process at the present time. In 2015-16 there is \$3 million available for this initiative and 1,000 packages are available.
145. Funding of up to \$7,000 per family will be available to family violence service providers to do what it takes to keep women and children safe and get them beyond

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crisis, in line with a clear case plan. Attached at **Attachment AR-13** is a specification for this initiative.

146. The Department funds Safe Steps which is the Statewide family violence crisis service. Safe Steps provides a telephone information and referral service which operates 24 hours per day, seven days per week and supports women and children in crisis to access the Housing Establishment Fund or other forms of assistance, such as refuges and other supports.
147. Outreach services (funded as part of homelessness assistance, transition support), also known as case management services are specifically targeted to women and children experiencing family violence. Services include court support and other casework assistance for women and children. Outreach and case management services support agencies to manage incoming referrals following a police call out to an incident of family violence. After hour's responses form part of this service.
148. Intensive case management support is available for women and children experiencing family violence with complex needs, such as Aboriginal women and children and women with a disability.
149. The Department funds Families at Home, a homelessness innovation action project, which operates in the northern part of Melbourne. The project takes an early intervention approach to prevent women and children becoming homeless due to family violence.
150. The project has recently been evaluated. The evaluation shows that around 63 per cent of Families at Home participants were housed on accessing the service, which is in line with the early intervention approach. Around 23 per cent of participants were homeless, while data was not recorded for a further 14 per cent of participants.
151. Upon exit from the service, around 86 per cent of participants either maintained their housing status or move from being homeless (sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation) to not homeless. Around 6 per cent of participants were still recorded as homeless on exit from the program but includes participants who had moved from sleeping rough into emergency accommodation. For a further 9 per cent of participants the outcome is not recorded. (Note: does not add to 100 per cent due to rounding)



*Services for Aboriginal women and children*

152. Aboriginal women and children who experience family violence are also eligible to access accommodation through three Aboriginal-specific refuges across the State (included in the 31 refuge sites referred to earlier in this statement).
153. One refuge site is in metropolitan Melbourne and two refuge sites are in regional and rural areas.
154. All of the three Aboriginal-specific refuges have been recently built as part of the Department's commitment to the ten-year plan *Strong Culture, Strong People, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities: ten year plan*. This plan sets the policy direction for the delivery of services to Aboriginal people experiencing family violence.
155. These refuges are of a contemporary standard. They are cluster style and contain 15 independent living units between them. Two of these services are funded by the Department to offer 24 hour, seven days per week support for Aboriginal women and children. The Department funds the other services to provide extended after hours of support.
156. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, the Department has funded additional case management for Aboriginal women and children, matched with appropriate legal services.

**Services for perpetrators of family violence**

157. This next part of my statement addresses and summarises some of the crisis accommodation and other options available for:
- 157.1 adolescents, who might be perpetrators of violence or victims of family violence; and
- 157.2 adult male perpetrators.

***Accommodation and services for adolescents***

158. Adolescents can be both victims and perpetrators of family violence. Increasingly, adolescents are perpetrating violence. In 2014, Victoria Police recorded 68,134 reports of family violence. Of these reports, 5,744 family violence reports involved a perpetrator aged 13 up to 18 years of age (representing eight per cent of all reports).

This was an increase of 416 reports from the calendar year 2013, where the total number of family violence reports involving a perpetrator aged 13 up to 18 years of age was 5,328.

#### *Youth Refuges*

159. In 2013-14, there were 20,170 young people aged between 15 and 24 years who sought assistance from homelessness services (Specialist Homelessness Data Collection). In total, there were 159 youth refuge beds available on any given night in Victoria during that time.
160. Young people approach services directly. However, adolescents mainly access crisis accommodation through homelessness access points located across the State. Melbourne Youth Support Service (located in the city) is the main Statewide specialist homelessness access point service.

#### *Transitional housing*

161. The Department also funds transitional housing that is dedicated for young people, particularly young people leaving care.

#### *Adolescent Family Violence Program*

162. The Department has developed the Adolescent Family Violence Program based on a comprehensive review of existing adolescent family violence programs and identified risk and protective factors for adolescent family violence. The overarching aim of the program is to reduce adolescent family violence and increase the safety of affected family members through provision of a family-based, integrated model of case management support.
163. Young people who are eligible for the program are those engaged in frequent and ongoing violence, are at risk of family breakdown or homelessness, currently reside at home, have not yet been charged with a family violence offence, and consent to participate in the program. Within this target group, priority for engagement in the program is given to families being parented by a sole female parent or carer, Indigenous families, and families in which the young person has younger siblings.
164. Specifically, the program aims to:
- 164.1 increase the safety of all family members by preventing the escalation of adolescent family violence;

- 164.2 promote the stability of young people who are at risk of a range of negative consequences as a result of their use of violence and other co-occurring issues;
  - 164.3 strengthen parenting capacity;
  - 164.4 strengthen the young person's emotional well-being, communication and problem-solving skills;
  - 164.5 increase the young person's (and their family's) connection to their culture and community; and
  - 164.6 promote positive parent-adolescent relationships and attachment.
165. The program is targeted at young people aged between 12 and 17 years and their families who reside in the City of Ballarat, the City of Greater Geelong and the City of Frankston.

***Accommodation for adult male perpetrators of family violence***

166. Male perpetrators of family violence may be excluded from their home as a result of a family violence intervention order or a family violence safety notice under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic.). If the perpetrator is not held in custody, he might be to stay with other relatives and friends, or seek crisis assistance from a homelessness access point or the 24 hour per day, seven day per week, homelessness Statewide crisis service.
167. The male perpetrator may be accommodated, subject to availability, in one of the singles accommodation facilities or the Housing Establishment Funding may be used to pay for short-term accommodation at a hotel or motel.
168. A male perpetrator may also be accommodated in supportive housing models (see from paragraph 99 above). Male perpetrators also have access to the full range of housing assistance outlined above in this statement.
169. In the recent past, the Department has funded case management responses for men who use violence. There are five programs for Aboriginal men and four for non-Aboriginal men who use violence, in an effort to promote appropriate behaviours and to address a range of other issues relating to men's use of family violence. These are funded under the time limited National Partnership Agreement

on Homelessness. The Department funded 274 targets for men's case management in 2014-15.

## **CURRENT CHALLENGES IN RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

170. I identify below a number of challenges that impact on the ability to deliver the right housing, homelessness and family violence services, at the right time, to victims and perpetrators of family violence.

### **Demand for services exceeds available supply**

171. A significant challenge in delivering appropriate housing and related services to respond to family violence is demand for services exceeding the available supply.
172. The growth in people seeking homelessness services (namely a 15.9 per cent growth between 2011-12 and 2013-14) and the growth in homelessness as identified by the Census (namely a 30.9 per cent growth between the 2006 and 2011 census periods), has not been matched by an increase in accommodation and housing.

### ***Demand for crisis and transitional housing***

173. Transitional housing was intended to be a medium-term housing option. Increasingly households are staying for much longer periods due to reduced long-term housing opportunities. These increasing length of stays make it difficult to exit people from crisis accommodation such as women's refuges.
174. Lengths of stay in transitional housing should be from three months, generally up to 12 months, with stays of up to 18 months for young people, where required. The Department undertook a recent audit of transitional housing lengths of stay. Initial analysis of the data has indicated that over one third of transitional housing properties are tenanted for more than one year, with 4.3 per cent of properties tenanted for over five years.
175. The same audit found that approximately 80 per cent of crisis properties in the transitional housing management programs are tenanted for more than three months, with some properties tenanted for over two years. Stays in crisis properties are intended to be between two and six weeks.
176. Safe Steps, who responds to the crisis needs of women and children experiencing family violence, reports that on any given night, they accommodate around 40

families in hotel or motel rooms through the Housing Establishment Fund (Safe Steps Royal Commission submission). Safe Steps reports in its submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, that they will receive over 55,000 calls in 2015. In 2014-15 Safe Steps were funded to respond to 30,000 calls and provide 21,000 episodes of support.

177. In addition, Safe Steps were initially allocated funding of approximately \$304,000 in 2014-15 from the Department to provide Housing Establishment Funds for women and children who need an emergency housing response. Given demand pressures on the Statewide crisis service, the Department provided an additional one-off \$1.09 million in 2014-15 to enable crisis accommodation service needs to be met for women and children through the Housing Establishment Fund.
178. In 2013-14, 21 refuges exceeded an average length of stay of six weeks (as audited in March 2013). In 2014-15, nine refuges experienced an average length of stay in excess of six weeks (as audited in July 2015) (noting this information is based on sample data as some services did not respond to both or either audits).

***Demand for long term social housing, including public housing***

179. Social housing increased by 11 per cent from 2004-05 to 2013-14. During this period, long term community housing has increased by 121 per cent and public housing has declined by 0.38 per cent. The State's Budget Paper 3 notes that social housing is expected to total 85,195 units at the end of 2015-16, which is four units less than 85,199 units at the end of June 2014 (Budget Paper 3, p. 261).
180. The Australian Bureau of Statistics notes 2.8 per cent of all Victorian households were in state housing authority tenure (public housing) in 2011-12. In 2011-12, the Australian Bureau of Statistics noted the Australian average for housing managed by state or territory authorities was 3.9 per cent (ABS: Housing and Occupancy Costs, p.1).
181. I note that out of the 34,464 approved applications on the public housing waiting list at 30 June 2015, 9,798 households (28 per cent) on the waiting list were in the early housing need segments. In addition, there were 7,503 existing public housing tenants wishing to transfer to another property.
182. The average waiting time for public housing for those clients who have received early housing allocation is estimated to be 10.5 months in 2015-16 (Budget Paper 3,

p. 261). This estimate is based on the households who are expected to be housed in public housing in 2015-16.

183. There is also diminished capacity to allocate public housing. The number of allocations to public housing has declined over the last decade due to fewer vacancies being available as tenants are staying in properties longer. For example, in 1999-00, 11,051 new households were allocated public housing. In 2004-05, 8,125 households were allocated public housing. In 2013-14, this number was 5,715 allocations, representing a decline of almost 30 per cent since 2004-05 (Summary of Housing Assistance 1999-2000 to 2012-13 series and Departmental Annual Report supplementary data 2013-14).

### ***Services for Aboriginal families***

184. The Department has focussed on increasing and improving services for Aboriginal families in line with the *Strong Culture Strong Peoples Strong Families 10 Year Plan*. Recent improvements include the building and re-building of three-purpose built family violence refuges between 2012 and 2014 and the introduction under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in 2009 of the men's case management program and support for Aboriginal legal services to deal with the legal and support needs of women and children holistically.
185. Between 2006-07 and 2012-13, the number of police family incident reports where the affected family member identified as Aboriginal almost tripled from 794 to 2,143 incidents. The number of repeat attendances also almost tripled over the same period to 1,644 attendances. I outline below the availability of specialist family violence and homelessness services for Aboriginal families, which is in addition to mainstream assistance.
186. Aboriginal specific refuges can accommodate around 15 families on any given night.
187. There are no specific Aboriginal youth housing services that are funded to deal with the holistic needs of Aboriginal youth who experience family violence or may be perpetrators of violence.
188. There are no specific crisis accommodation facilities matched with support for Aboriginal males.

## **Design, asset issues and service delivery within refuges**

### *Design and asset issues*

189. Delivering additional social housing is constrained by the need to ensure existing assets and properties are a contemporary standard. This is a challenge across the social housing portfolio and improving the liveability of social housing for residents has been a focus.
190. I note there are some challenges remaining in providing suitable accommodation in our existing refuges. Since 2011, the Department has built, redeveloped or replaced six refuges, which have delivered 28 individual units of accommodation.
191. As Director I also initiated a condition audit of all women's refuges in 2014 to determine the need for capital works at these sites. An estimated \$900,000 program of works to contemporise refuge facilities; improve access for women and children with a disability; and create appropriate play spaces for children is currently underway.
192. It is essential women's refuges create a safe and de-stressing environments for women and their children and have a normalised environment. There is a need to focus on building independent units that allow for a diverse mix of clientele to be housed on the one or dispersed sites. This should include units that are built to accessible housing standards and that are able to readily accommodate women with complex needs such as mental health conditions or drug and alcohol issues.
193. Refuge building programs need to consider demographics and be as 'modular' and 'flexible' as possible. For example, when building independent units, there are opportunities to build in a way that promote different family sizes being accommodated. The Department has tested, on its high-rise public housing estates in North Melbourne, methods that allow two units to be used separately, or as one. This has enabled the building of six bedroom units within high-rise towers. Building in such a way will allow more large families to be accommodated in refuges.

### *Refuge service models*

194. More recently I have funded refuges to deliver 24 hour per day support arrangements, however, many of these services do not operate 24 hour per day intake arrangements. This reduces the capacity to house women and children in a refuge on any given night.

**Responses that deal with crisis rather than intervene earlier**

195. Given the demand pressures I refer to above, the weighting of investment in service delivery is largely about responding to crisis and acute needs. Services are challenged in being able to intervene early to prevent a crisis in a family's life by these demand pressures.
196. Intervening early also requires effective linkages with 'first to know' and universal services to identify and respond to emerging signs of family violence. The Department's investment in programs like Families at Home (referred to from paragraph 149) demonstrates approaches that can make a difference early in the trajectory of homelessness. This program highlights the need to connect with 'first to know' agencies to identify family violence and the stressors in households early. Other innovation action projects funding through homelessness assistance, are also working to prevent homelessness among a number of cohort groups in the Victorian population, including women and children experiencing family violence (a full list of funded projects is attached at **Attachment AR-14**).
197. Programs like Families at Home also highlight the need for service integration and a focus on outcomes to address the needs of families. Early intervention services need to focus on harnessing all service offerings (for instance children and families services, disability services, mental health supports, drug and alcohol treatment services, Commonwealth employment services and justice responses) in the interests of meeting the needs of families.

**A need for further integration with justice responses and creating responses that keep the perpetrator in view**

198. The historical response to family violence in the homelessness assistance system was to move women and children, not the perpetrator.
199. In my view, this approach shifts the focus away from the perpetrator being accountable for their violence and causes disruption in the lives of women and children. It is my assessment that better management and accountability of the perpetrator will assist in alleviating housing shortages among women and children.
200. As I refer to earlier in my statement the Department has introduced a number of programs to keep women and children safe in their home or to prevent further escalation of matters that lead to women and children being in crisis. However, these models and services would be significantly enhanced through more



coordination and engagement between services operated and funded by the Department and justice responses, such as police, the courts and corrections.

201. In addition, the housing, health and human services needs of male perpetrators need to be given close attention, if we are to 'keep the perpetrator in view' and therefore minimise risk to women and children.
202. Housing options for male perpetrators are largely confined to larger scale crisis facilities and rooming houses and boarding houses. They lack connection to supports for men to address and be accountable for their behaviour.

**Complexity in funding and access arrangements which make it difficult for families to access the right service at the right time**

203. The Department funds around 22 separate services and activities and around 130 community organisations to deliver services for people experiencing homelessness. Of these activities some are solely targeted at responding to family violence. In addition, families may need to access other services funded by the Department such as housing assistance, or disability supports, or child and family services; or they might need services from other parts of the Victorian government; or by the Commonwealth government. For instance, a woman and child who want to maintain their private rental may need to receive private rental brokerage from a family violence support agency; a bond loan from a local departmental office; rent assistance from the Commonwealth government; support to address her children's trauma and wellbeing issues from Child FIRST/integrated family services; an intervention order through the courts; and assistance from the police to keep her safe.
204. There are a many access and application arrangements that the family would have to navigate when they are vulnerable and trying to recover from family violence (I attach information about how such assistance is accessed at **Attachment AR-2**). For example:
- 204.1 housing assistance is accessed either directly from over 33 Departmental housing offices across the State (for public housing) or from a range of community housing providers through differing access arrangements. There is no common register to record and allocate available property vacancies across public and community housing;

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- 204.2 homelessness assistance is accessed through local area access points that were consolidated and reformed in the recent past. Crisis and transitional housing (aside from access to women's refuges) forms part of a shared register, from which accommodation assistance is allocated; and
- 204.3 family violence services can be accessed either through the Statewide crisis service – Safe Steps – who might on refer clients, directly to the organisation providing the service, or via the police or another referrer into a family violence service.
205. In my role as Director I am aware that our service providers who operate these systems seek to create a seamless service response for families. However, it is my view that access arrangements and funding arrangements could be simpler to support the work of these providers, particularly access arrangements for homelessness and housing assistance. Consideration should be given to access to refuges. The model might benefit from a single, or a series of locational, gateways operated by family violence services, along the lines of the example in South Australia.
206. Funding models do not facilitate choice for the person deciding what they need. In my experience with disability services, this approach has encouraged choice and control among people who previously had little ability to exercise choice and control because of the way our services were funded. The movement towards individualised funding and supports, while taking account of the spectrum of support required by existing service providers, is, in my view worthy of active exploration. The provision of more flexible supports would give women and children more choice and control over their lives should they wish to exercise this choice. It would also allow support workers to work in the way they want to, to deliver what a family needs and help to create a plan for the family based on their life goals, rather than to be confined by the Department's existing funding arrangements.
207. Services also need to be connected and integrated when this best helps the person/family who needs the service. I am aware that many local service providers undertake a range of initiatives that coordinate and integrate services, on their own initiative.

### **Private rental housing market supply**

208. Commonwealth Rent Assistance plays an important role in helping low-income Victorians access private rental housing. Rent assistance has grown by 12 per cent between 2007-08 and 2011-12. At the same time the median rent in Melbourne has grown by 17 per cent. The proportion of low-income households in rental stress in Victoria has increased from 32.4 per cent of all low-income households in 2007-08 to 44.5 per cent of all low-income households by 2011-12 (Report on Government Services, p. 1 of Table GA 5).
209. The Department's Rent Report for the 2014 December quarter shows that only 11 per cent of rental properties in metropolitan Melbourne and 22 per cent of rental properties across Victoria were affordable to Centrelink recipients. Almost all of these properties were in areas far from the city centre and distant from transport and employment opportunities.
210. The Australian and Urban Research Institute has reported there was an estimated shortage of 66,000 affordable and available rental properties for very low-income (in the lowest 20 per cent of household income distribution) Victorian households in 2011. The greatest shortages of affordable and available stock for this group are in inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne (37,500), where employment opportunities are located (Yates et al, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Changes in the supply of affordable housing in the private rental sector 2006-2011).

### **REFORMING HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE**

211. There are a number of things that the Department has done and should continue to pursue to improve the response to family violence and address the challenges I have identified. In the following section of my statement I note some improvements the Department is making, is pursuing and areas of larger scale reform that could be considered going forward to address the challenges I have identified.

#### **Demand for services exceeds available supply**

212. In the immediate term the Department is implementing additional services to respond to key and critical demand pressures in 2015-16. These initiatives include implementing:
- 212.1 additional crisis accommodation and transport services, which include more assistance to get long term housing outcomes through private rental;

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- 212.2 some additional outreach/case management services for mainstream family violence providers to respond to growing referrals to services and support women and children to find housing and deal with their needs;
  - 212.3 additional case management services for Aboriginal women and children in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations;
  - 212.4 a safety pilot to keep more women and children safe at home;
  - 212.5 more men's services and behaviour change programs to address the behaviours of perpetrators and encourage the safety of women and children;
  - 212.6 a pet welfare program so that women and children who have to leave their home have somewhere safe for their family pet to reside; and
  - 212.7 increasing the capacity of the peak body – Domestic Violence Victoria – to conduct its work in improving the family violence service response in Victoria.
213. I am currently considering a range of options to increase the supply of social housing, utilising the asset base of the Director and partnerships with registered housing providers and other organisations, to generate funds and opportunities for growth.
214. I am also considering options to improve pathways to private rental.
215. As part of that growth strategy I will expand the service response to be more about 'housing first' and ending crisis quickly in women and children's lives. This could mean more rapid re-housing and supportive housing options for family violence victims. In addition, consideration will be given to the transitional housing management program and its role in assisting people out of homelessness and crisis.
216. I am working in partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria and the Department of Justice and Regulation to deliver additional housing for Aboriginal offenders post release, including women.

**Design, asset issues and service delivery models within refuges**

217. I will be enhancing the women's refuge response by continuing to upgrade properties and complete the building of a new refuge in a regional location.
218. I will investigate options for delivering new service models within women's refuges, such as new access and intake arrangements, in collaboration with the family violence and refuge sector.

**Responses that deal with crisis rather than intervene earlier**

219. There is a need to increase training opportunities to identify and respond to family violence among the public housing workforce. This is so when women contact a local housing office seeking housing due to family violence, they receive a more consistent and appropriate service that takes account of their, and their children's, needs. I will be implementing training for all departmental public housing staff who interact with people in how to identify and respond to family violence as appropriately as possible.

**A need for further integration with justice responses and creating responses that keep the perpetrator in view**

220. There are some immediate opportunities to improve the collaboration with justice and policing agencies in delivering the existing Safe at Home program.
221. It will also be important to better respond to housing and behavioural change needs of perpetrators to keep women and children safe at home. Work will occur within the Department to seek opportunities to connect homelessness, drug and alcohol, mental health and men's behaviour change services.
222. Work is occurring with sector partners to reinvent congregate crisis facilities as engagement centres that help to deal with all issues in a person's life, as well as their housing issues. This platform could also serve to improve perpetrator accountability.

**Complexity in funding and access arrangements which make it difficult for families to access the right services at the right time**

223. The Department is implementing new flexible packages of support to provide outcomes for women and children in line with their goals in life. These packages will test flexible service delivery.

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224. Overwhelmingly, it is important that services can be accessed in a way that makes sense to people who need them, and that service providers make this as seamless as possible for people who need assistance. Work is planned to consider housing and homelessness assistance access arrangements, to try and bring services together, as best as possible and make them simple for people to access. This includes consideration of a common housing register so that all long-term social housing is available through the one process.
225. Housing and homelessness access arrangements should be best connected to broader social care services, so people can get access to the services they need in the most convenient way possible. The Department is currently considering options.

### Conclusion

226. In addition to my thoughts on future reforms I wish to acknowledge the innovation and dedication of service providers we fund, who on a daily basis, find new and improved ways to assist people experiencing family violence.
227. I am also committed to working with the dedicated professionals in housing assistance, homelessness assistance and family violence sectors, as well as with people who use these services.
228. I look forward to the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission. I will critically analyse and consider the best way to improve housing and homelessness assistance for Victorians impacted by family violence in light of those findings and recommendations.

Signed by **Arthur Rogers**


at Melbourne

this 20th day of July 2015

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**DIRECTOR OF HOUSING**  
**DEPUTY SECRETARY**

Before me



  
 An Australian legal practitioner  
 within the meaning of the  
 Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)