



Council to Homeless Persons Submission to the Family Violence Royal Commission



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## Executive summary and recommendations

Family violence is closely linked to homelessness. Many women and children face homelessness as a result of family violence, as leaving violence has often meant leaving the home. However it is not just this immediate loss of shelter that causes damage, but the ongoing trauma that violence brings with it.

While not all family violence results in homelessness, it is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Victoria. Recent research shows us that 90 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness have witnessed family violence in the home. Many of those who go on to experience long term homelessness have experienced physical violence in the home or some form of abuse as a child.

CHP strongly supports community wide efforts to prevent family violence, and the legal and justice interventions needed to hold those who use violence to account. However, this submission will focus on the immediate material needs of both the 25,104 women and children who sought help from homelessness services as a result of family violence, and on the men who use violence who experience homelessness as a result of being excluded from the home.

Disability, rurality, ageing, English language skills, cultural differences and caring responsibilities all add layers of complexity to family violence and the interventions required to keep individuals safe. CHP anticipates that these specific issues will be addressed by organisations with specialist knowledge in these areas.

### Recommendations for the Specialist Homelessness Service System

The homelessness service system is a central part of the response to women and children experiencing family violence, in the short, medium and long term.

Homelessness and family violence services face similar challenges of increasing demand and limited services. The recommendations below seek to expand specialist responses to enhance the capacity of the SHSS to assist those in need to gain and sustain a home free of violence.

CHP suggests that the Royal Commission investigate:

- the capacity of the crisis and refuge response across the state and expand resources in areas with significant gaps, both geographically and for particular groups
- the feasibility of a capital upgrade program for refuges to ensure disability access

- the training needs of allied sectors such as Specialist Homelessness Services to identify and respond to people experiencing family violence
- ways in which the transitional housing system can be delivered to minimize the disruption to families and in particular schooling
- the quantity of resources required to assess and support *all* children affected by family violence, including the provision of the most effective therapeutic responses and programs that help to establish and reinforce bonds with the non-offending parent.
- adequate resourcing of family violence services to provide responses to young women and women without children.

In order assist women to remain connected to *employment* CHP suggests that the Royal Commission consider the following recommendations:

- Family Violence Leave to be included in the National Employment Standards, in order to support women experiencing family violence to maintain a connection to the workforce and an adequate income
- policies that require women to cease employment on entering a refuge to be reviewed, and alternative safety measures to be investigated, such as a period of family violence leave, while securing alternative accommodation and developing a safety plan
- investigate ways in which employers are supported to improve workplace culture to both provide family violence leave and participate in safety planning for women.

#### Recommendations to reduce homelessness as a result of family violence

The suite of housing options for people affected by family violence must be dramatically expanded to reduce the incidence and impact of homelessness and housing insecurity. The funding recommended below represent an initial investment and over time it may be necessary to further scale up these kinds of responses.

CHP suggests that the Royal Commission make the following recommendations to Government to:

- expand Safe at Home programs to provide people affected by violence with the choice to remain in the home at an initial cost of \$7.6 million per annum
- expand programs to prevent homelessness by supporting tenants across public, community and private rental housing with legal advice, social work support and advocacy at an initial cost of approximately \$4.8 million per annum
- review VCAT procedures in relation to the transfer of tenancies in family violence matters and the timeliness of final intervention orders to support people affected by family violence to remain in their home
- review public housing allocation policies for property transfers to ensure faster transfers for women fleeing family violence

- expand existing Private Rental Brokerage programs that help people affected by violence secure housing in the private rental market at an initial cost of \$1 million per annum
- establish a Rapid Rehousing Program to provide support and short to medium term rental subsidies to 1000 households at an initial cost of \$10 million per annum
- introduce minimum access features in the National Construction Code to increase the range of housing accessible to women with disabilities
- develop a Statewide affordable housing strategy, to expand the suite of affordable housing options available, including targets for the provision of new social housing, and affordable housing growth fund with an initial investment of \$200m.

#### Recommendations for accommodating men who use violence

Accommodation is one part of the challenge of holding those who use violence to account. The response of police and the justice system, legal assistance for those affected by violence and community attitudes all play a part. CHP has restricted its comments to accommodation options for those who use violence.

CHP recommends that the Royal Commission:

- Establish the extent of the demand for crisis and long term affordable accommodation for those excluded from the home for the use of violence.

CHP suggests that the Royal Commission make the following recommendations to Government:

- Invest in therapeutic crisis accommodation interventions specifically designed for men who use violence
- Develop a statewide affordable housing strategy, to expand the suite of affordable housing options available, including targets for the provision of new affordable housing, and affordable housing growth fund with an initial investment of \$200m.





## Introduction

Family violence is closely linked to homelessness. Many women and children face homelessness as a result of family violence, as leaving violence has often meant leaving the home. However it is not just this immediate loss of shelter that causes damage, but the ongoing trauma that violence brings with it.

Family violence is a complex set of actions and behaviors that causes victims to fear for their own wellbeing and safety and/or that of others. As it often occurs in the home, family violence undermines the psychological dimensions of 'home' that include a place of privacy, refuge and safety.

While family violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Victoria, not all family violence results in homelessness. In 2013-13 there were 65,393 family violence incidents reported by police (Victoria Police 2014), while there were 25,104 people in Victoria who sought assistance from homelessness services as a result of family violence and a further 7,186 who identified homelessness as a contributing factor (AIHW 2014b). Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) however suggest that this may not reflect the full extent of family violence amongst those experiencing homelessness.

Recent research into youth homelessness found that 56 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness had to leave the home at least once due to violence, and 90 per cent had witnessed violence in the home (Flatau et al 2015). Australia's first longitudinal study of people at risk of and experiencing homelessness found that of those who have experienced homelessness long term (four or more years), 64 per cent had experienced physical violence in the home, and 72 per cent had experienced some form of abuse as a child (Scutella et al 2014 p.82).

It is clear that early childhood experiences of violence have long lasting effects. Prevention of family violence will contribute to the prevention of homelessness, both in the short and long term.

CHP strongly supports community wide efforts to prevent family violence, and the legal and justice interventions needed to hold those who use violence to account. However, this submission will focus on the immediate material needs of both the 25,104 women and children who sought help from homelessness services as a result of family violence, and on the men who use violence who experience homelessness as a result of being excluded from the home.

Disability, reality, ageing, English language skills, cultural differences and caring responsibilities all add layers of complexity to family violence and the interventions required to keep individuals safe. CHP anticipates that these specific issues will be addressed by organisations with specialist knowledge in these areas.

## Intersections of the homelessness and family violence systems

While legal assistance and support is provided through the justice system, the majority of family violence support services are funded through the housing and homelessness services portfolio of the Department of Health and Human Services.

This is a historical legacy from the emergence of the women's refuge movement in the 1970s. When these refuges became government funded services they were funded from within the homelessness service system. Today, a range of family violence services continue to be funded under homelessness service agreements, for example the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. This historical legacy has had an impact on service delivery with many Family Violence Support Services operating with a similar case management framework to Specialist Homelessness Services.

While there are clear overlaps between family violence services and homelessness services, the two sectors have distinct specialist foci: safety and shelter. While in case management both will seek to secure safety and shelter, the fundamental rationale for each system is different and informs an appropriately distinct approach.

Many women will come into contact with the homelessness services system as a result of family violence. This contact can be early in the process of leaving their home, or many years down the track as a result of the trauma caused by the experience, as an alternative to seeking a specialist family violence service or because they do not identify mental, emotional, psychological, and/or financial abuse as family violence.

Indeed the Western Local Area Service Network reports that 63 per cent of those receiving case management from homelessness services in the region had experienced family violence, and 33 per cent of those seeking assistance from a Homelessness Access Point in one day had experienced family violence. Often the homelessness service system is faced with family violence as just one of many co-occurring and complex issues.

Other reasons that women may access homelessness rather than family violence services are: safety restrictions in some family violence refuges that require women to cease employment while in the refuge; curfews; where the woman has adolescent male children in her care, as some refuges will not admit teenage boys; where they have arrived from interstate and are thus categorized as not being in immediate danger and not in need of refuge accommodation, or upon leaving refuge accommodation.

Homelessness services are in effect large providers of family violence services and should be equipped with the expertise and resources to ensure these needs are identified and appropriate referrals made. Many services report difficulties in accessing specialist services such as counselling and therapeutic supports, limiting the capacity of the SHSS to effectively respond to people affected by family violence.

The psychological instability caused by family violence is often combined with material deprivation of some kind. This includes actions by the person who uses violence to undermine 'efforts to be financially independent' or financial abuse (Macdonald 2012, p.ii). This affects a woman's capacity to plan for and/or to secure her material wellbeing after leaving violence. The lack of financial resources compounds the risk of homelessness and limits housing options. For this reason CHP believes that every effort should be made to assist women who have experienced family violence to retain a connection to the workforce. Supportive and well informed workplaces and family violence leave, are central to making sure women can safely remain employed, and reduce their risk of homelessness.

#### Case study: Homelessness services and family violence

Jenny\* and her two young children, John and Sarah, presented at an inner-Melbourne SHSS Access Point seeking emergency accommodation. Jenny is from a CALD background and migrated to Australia with her partner Jim, a little over four years ago. Jim has always seen himself as the head of the family and has controlled the family's finances and Jenny's day-to-day life. From time to time Jim has had violent outbursts, which he directed at Jenny, but recently his anger had become more frequent and aggressive. Jenny was fearful for her and her children's safety but also concerned that if she fled, Jim would trace her. Jenny decided that her best option would be to flee interstate, so that Jim would be less likely to follow. Jenny did not approach specialist family violence services in Adelaide for support before she made the decision to flee.

Jenny and her children made the journey to Melbourne, taking only what they could carry. The family had no access to money, friends or other supports in Melbourne. Although Jenny has escaped the immediate threat of violence, she was now homeless and no longer eligible for intensive support from specialist family violence services. Jenny presented at an Access Point seeking assistance to address her housing crisis and although she disclosed a history of family violence to an assessment worker, she declined a referral to a family violence counselling service. The Access Point worker found hotel accommodation for Jenny and her children and assisted in covering the cost, but was unable to provide immediate safe, secure and affordable long-term housing.

*\*Names have been changed*

Case study provided by the Northern Local Area Service Network



### The Specialist Homelessness Services System (SHSS)

The homelessness service system, was designed to secure housing for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness through meeting immediate material needs and working with people within a case management model to address any issues that have contributed to their homelessness. The model trajectory through the SHSS includes an immediate crisis response, in either crisis accommodation or more often emergency accommodation purchased in a motel, rooming house or caravan park. The SHSS then offers case management, with or without access to transitional housing, intended to stabilize households, complete housing applications, and finally move into social housing.

Unfortunately this model trajectory is no longer the norm as the capacity of both housing and social services to meet demand has diminished. As a result fewer people are able to get in to a refuge or crisis accommodation and have longer stays when they do. Many women will not secure a place in refuge or homelessness crisis accommodation and instead use emergency accommodation such as hotels or motels.

In rural and regional areas even being able to secure an emergency response is challenging. There are no specialist crisis accommodation facilities in many areas, including South Gippsland and the Bass Coast, and little recourse to other emergency options such as rooming houses or motels. The Barwon region also reports a severe shortage of crisis accommodation, both for people experiencing homelessness in general and women affected by family violence.

For women with disabilities, finding crisis accommodation is even more challenging. Many family violence refuges were purchased by community organisations in the 1970s, and as such, few are built for purpose and only three are accessible for women with disabilities. Funding constraints mean that it is also more challenging for refuges to meet any additional needs that women with a disability may have, and a congregate model of accommodation also might not be suitable.

In the past, transitional housing provided a pathway out of refuge and crisis accommodation, however the average tenancy is now 12 months rather than the intended 3 month stay, as fewer households exit into social housing. The transitional model can also be extremely disruptive and prolong crisis for women and children leaving violence. For children, long stays in refuge or crisis accommodation can mean prolonged absence from school or up to three new schools. While services make every effort to limit this disruption, the structure of the SHSS means that these are individual "work arounds", rather than systemic interventions.

Despite these challenges, interventions by the SHSS are effective in preventing or reducing homelessness. Recent research based on data collected from homelessness services (including family violence specific services) Australia wide, found that women seeking assistance from homelessness services were more likely to be currently

housed (65% housed, 35% homeless) than other groups seeking assistance, and most retained or found housing (AIHW 2014a) .

There were however challenges faced by particular groups. Those that lost their housing when previously housed, or remained homeless after seeking assistance were more likely to be:

- young
- indigenous
- unemployed
- not have accompanying children
- less likely to have accessed crisis accommodation.

This group was also less likely to be engaged with services for a long period of time (28 days on average compared to 134 days).

This data may indicate number of things. In Victoria, those with long periods of support are likely to be accommodated in transitional housing or having a long stay in refuge or crisis accommodation. The short support periods highlighted in this research may mean that these women have not been successful in securing a crisis accommodation vacancy, rather than indicating unwillingness to access services.

Women with children are often prioritized for access to crisis and transitional housing, in order to reduce the impact and harm of homelessness on the children. While these priorities are, in CHP's opinion, the right judgments, they nonetheless leave a gap in the service system for single women experiencing family violence. Indeed during CHP's consultations with consumers one participant noted 'I felt I became a person [to the service system] once I had children'.

Analysis of SHS data from 2012-13 shows that of those with an identified need for family violence services, it is young women aged 18 to 24, who are most likely to not have that need met. Thirteen per cent of those aged 18-19 and 10 per cent of those aged 20-24 with an identified need, did not get a service. This is in contrast to a total of seven per cent for all age groups (AIHW 2015).

**2012-2013**

	DV assistance needed and provided	DV assistance needed and not provided	% of instances where assistance needed and not provided
<b>0-9</b>	1,164	84	7%
<b>10-14</b>	422	37	8%
<b>15-17</b>	431	62	13%
<b>18-19</b>	662	74	10%
<b>20-24</b>	2,358	213	8%
<b>25-29</b>	2,788	154	5%
<b>30-34</b>	2,953	188	6%
<b>35-39</b>	2,837	181	6%
<b>40-44</b>	2,554	180	7%
<b>45-49</b>	1,699	125	7%
<b>50-54</b>	987	69	7%
<b>55-59</b>	553	42	7%
<b>60-64</b>	315	23	7%
<b>65+</b>	460	35	7%
<b>n.p.</b>	135	14	9%
<b>total</b>	<b>20,317</b>	<b>1,481</b>	<b>7%</b>

Source: AIHW, *SHS Support Services National Datacube*

### Children, family violence and homelessness

In 2012-13, 3,594 children under 14 years, accessed homelessness services with an identified need for assistance due to family violence (AIHW 2015). These children may not meet the threshold for the involvement of Child Protection or ChildFIRST, however can still be experiencing significant issues as a result of exposure to family violence, and the parental stress of homelessness. Indeed research suggests that “children who witness violence experience the same level of negative psychosocial outcomes as children who directly experience physical violence” (Australian Domestic Violence Clearing House, 2011, p.3 ). In order to prevent the lifelong impacts and intergenerational transmission of homelessness and violence the needs of children exposed to family violence, should be paramount.

Homelessness services place a strong emphasis on the need to assess children as clients in their own right. However, demand within the homelessness service system and the pressures to meet the immediate material needs of the parent, often means that the developmental needs of the children are a secondary focus. This can be

exacerbated by some workers feeling under-equipped for working specifically with children and a lack of available pathways for accessing child specific services such as psychologists.

There are specialist homeless children's and family violence programs delivered across the state, however they are under resourced given the demand. One service reported a program in a major regional centre funded for 1 full time equivalent position. Over the course of the year this position was expected to see 23 children in a region where almost 600 children were known to be present at incidents of family violence during 2013-14.

CHP believe that the Royal Commission should consider the resources required to assess and support *all* children affected by family violence, including the most effective therapeutic responses and programs that help to establish and reinforce bonds with non-offending parent.

After leaving violence, the structures of the SHSS can exacerbate the disconnection of children and young people to social supports and connections. Children may face two or three school moves within a year due to their changing housing circumstances: firstly on entering a refuge, then on exiting refuge into transitional housing, and then exiting transitional housing into either private or public housing. There have been efforts to minimize this disruption, by swapping a transitional housing property to a public housing property in some regions, or investing in private rental brokerage programs. However these practices are not routine, and are limited by the availability of public housing properties to swap and private rental brokerage packages to deliver.

### Recommendations for the Specialist Homelessness Service System

The homelessness service system is a central part of the response to women and children experiencing family violence, in the short, medium and long term.

Homelessness and family violence services face the similar challenges of increasing demand and limited services. The recommendations below seek to expand specialist responses to enhance the capacity of the SHSS to assist those in need to gain and sustain a home free of violence.

CHP suggests that the Royal Commission investigate:

- the capacity of the crisis and refuge response across the state and recommend the allocation of resources in areas with significant gaps, both geographically and for particular groups
- the feasibility of a capital upgrade program for refuges to ensure disability access
- the training needs of allied sectors such as Specialist Homelessness Services to identify and respond to people experiencing family violence

- ways in which the transitional housing system can be delivered to minimize the disruption to families and in particular schooling
- the quantity of resources required to assess and support *all* children affected by family violence, including the provision of the most effective therapeutic responses and programs that help to establish and reinforce bonds with the non-offending parent.
- adequate resourcing of family violence services to provide responses to young women and women without children.

In order assist women to remain connected to *employment* CHP suggests that the Royal Commission consider the following recommendations:

- Family Violence Leave to be included in the National Employment Standards, in order to support women experiencing family violence to maintain a connection to the workforce and an adequate income
- policies that require women to cease employment on entering a refuge to be reviewed, and alternative safety measures to be investigated, such as a period of family violence leave, while securing alternative accommodation and developing a safety plan
- investigate ways in which employers are supported to improve workplace culture to both provide family violence leave and participate in safety planning for women.

## The housing problem

Family violence services report that many women will not leave a violent situation as there are few affordable accommodation options available. In CHP's consultation with consumers who have experience family violence, they reported that a lack of options contributed to them remaining in the situation longer than they feel they should have.

### "I knew how to function in a house, I just needed one"

#### *Consumer interview*

Housing affordability also becomes a problem when women are ready to move from refuge or crisis accommodation but cannot find suitable affordable long-term accommodation.

In most cases family violence results in a single household becoming two, with the subsequent increase in need for housing. Ensuring that both households have secure accommodation is critical in preventing homelessness, preventing recidivism and ensuring that perpetrators can be held accountable. Unfortunately there is currently a shortage of housing affordable to those on low incomes, both for those affected by and those who use violence.

#### **The private rental market**

The private rental market plays a central role in both resettlement and in providing medium term housing options for women affected by family violence. However, people affected by family violence may face a number of barriers to private rental housing, including:

- Low income due to lower female wages, greater part time work or not being in the labour force due to caring responsibilities
- Lack of rental history where they have been in home ownership, not on a rental lease
- A poor rental history due to damage to the rental property caused by family violence
- Financial abuse, where access to money has been restricted by the person using violence.

The AIHW reports that just 19 per cent of women seeking help from homelessness services due to family violence are employed, and that the majority are not in the labor force (AIHWa 2014 p.9). For these women, relying on Centrelink incomes just 3 in 100 two bedroom homes would be affordable to a single parent with one child, and less than one in two hundred would be affordable to single women on Newstart (DHS 2015).



However Victoria Police report that two thirds of women reporting family violence are employed. Unfortunately employment does not guarantee housing will be affordable, due to casual and part time employment and lower female earnings. Just over half of the women in the Australian workforce (51 per cent) are employed full time (ABS 2015 table 5). The total female earnings (which takes into account full and part time work) in Victoria is \$843 a week. This income would only secure affordable housing (under 30% of weekly income) in seven out of thirty municipalities in Melbourne for a one bedroom property. For every other housing type a woman would be paying more than a third of her income on rent.

The table below highlights the financial pressures of securing affordable housing for women earning the average total female wage. It highlights not only the challenge of finding housing, but the challenge of sustaining it.

<b>Median rent as a proportion total female earnings</b>				
<b>LGA</b>	<b>1bdr</b>	<b>2bdr</b>	<b>3dr</b>	<b>4bdr</b>
Banyule	34%	40%	45%	54%
Bayside	37%	50%	77%	117%
Boroondara	35%	46%	69%	107%
Brimbank	26%	33%	38%	45%
Cardinia	NA	31%	38%	43%
Casey	28%	34%	40%	46%
Darebin	33%	40%	51%	59%
Frankston	26%	33%	38%	49%
Glen Eira	32%	44%	63%	89%
Greater Dandenong	26%	33%	40%	48%
Hobsons Bay	31%	37%	45%	50%
Hume	27%	36%	39%	44%
Kingston	31%	40%	51%	59%
Knox	35%	39%	44%	54%
Manningham	41%	45%	50%	60%
Maribyrnong	30%	40%	50%	57%
Maroondah	30%	38%	44%	53%
Melbourne	45%	59%	73%	100%
Melton	39%	33%	37%	41%
Monash	33%	43%	48%	57%
Moonee Valley	31%	43%	51%	75%
Moreland	34%	41%	51%	70%
Nillumbik	NA	40%	41%	45%
Port Phillip	40%	53%	89%	124%
Stonnington	40%	53%	86%	118%
Whitehorse	28%	44%	49%	60%
Whittlesea	31%	35%	39%	45%
Wyndham	29%	32%	36%	42%
Yarra Ranges	41%	57%	81%	101%

Source: ABS 2015 Table 13B, incomes, DHS 2015

### Rural and regional areas

Rates of family violence are particularly high in rural and regional areas, which face different housing problems to metropolitan areas. While rental properties in regional areas are more affordable, there are few available. Rents in regional Victoria have also increased above inflation in recent years. With few crisis accommodation options in regional areas, women may be forced to move out of a region temporarily, but find it difficult to return.

For safety reasons it may be more challenging for women from rural and regional areas to remain in their local community, with many women leaving for crisis or refuge accommodation in the city. In these instances the safety of available transport becomes a key issue.

### Public housing

Current long wait times for public housing (10 months on average for priority housing) mean that it rarely provides a timely exit from refuge or crisis accommodation. However some women managing multiple traumas, who have other complex needs, or have been unemployed for some time may not be able to sustain housing in the private rental market. For these women, public housing and community housing is, and should continue to be, the most appropriate housing option. Unfortunately the construction of social housing hasn't kept up with demand or population growth. Victoria added just 10,000 social housing dwellings between 2004 and 2014, while the population grew by almost 1,000,000 people (SCRGSP 2015, ABS table 4 2014). We must reverse this trend in order to provide long term affordable housing for women escaping family violence.

People currently residing in public housing also experience family violence. Leaving violence in this instance may mean leaving secure tenure and affordable rent, into great uncertainty. While legislation allows the person affected by violence to remain in the home, in practice this may present safety issues and many women may prefer to transfer to another property or enter refuge accommodation. When women enter refuge accommodation they should be able to maintain their tenancy at a reduced rate of \$15 a week, as is charged for other temporary absences.

The practice of transferring between public housing properties can be a lengthy one as the Public Housing transfer waiting list is managed in the same way as the general waiting list. That is, transfer applicants are allocated properties in turn with those currently on the waiting list, depending on the date of their application. In practice this means that many women abandon their properties.

An alternative way to manage transfers requested due to family violence could be to allocate vacancies to transfer applicants first, and then allocate to the vacated property from the waiting list. This would essentially give transfers priority, but would not disadvantage those on the waiting list overall.

Family violence in public housing can result in property damage. If it is not notified about the family violence in a timely way, the Office of Housing holds the resulting maintenance charges as a debt against the tenant. This can restrict people's future access to public housing. Since the guidelines for the Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program were amended in 2012, these services have been unable to advocate for tenants about maintenance or damage issues. In the case of family violence this can have serious implications for tenants retaining their homes and CHP believes that this function should be restored.

### Housing solutions for people affected by violence

Like the broader population, people affected by violence will have a range of both housing needs, and resources to draw on to secure adequate housing. However if they

are on a low to moderate income, their housing options will be limited in all sectors: in social housing, in the private rental market and in home ownership.

In the long term, further attention is needed to delivering housing options that will meet the needs of people leaving violence across a range of incomes.

In 2012-13, over 3,931 adults accessed homelessness services, who were in need of accommodation and citing family violence as the main reason for needing assistance (AIHW 2015). A further 13,824 adults did not need accommodation but were at risk of homelessness. While many of these households will have their needs met within the current service system, reports from both services and consumers suggest that many do not have their need for housing met in a timely or adequate way.

### Safe at home

Family violence does not have to result in homelessness. Safe at Home programs, both in Australia and internationally (Spinney 2012, Crinall et al 2013, Edwards 2004) have shown promise in preventing homelessness by ensuring that people affected by family violence can remain safely in the home by removing the person who uses violence.

The success of these programs relies on effective support services, financial and legal assistance, and the financial capacity to maintain housing costs on a single income. Also crucial are proactive police response to enforcing intervention orders and responding to breeches, accommodation for perpetrators and access arrangements for children to be able to occur outside the home (Crinall et. al. 2013, Edwards 2004). The Bsafe Personal Alarm System is one example of interventions that help women remain safely in the home.

These programs avoid the trauma of homelessness, reduce the impact of the disruption of multiple moves and housing instability on women and children, and allow those affected by violence to maintain their place in the home and community. These programs should be expanded to offer women who wish to remain in the home the choice and support to do so. This requires investment in specialist support services, police responses and financial support for property modification for safety and short term housing costs.

Central to remaining safely in the home is the legal right to do so. Law reforms in 2008 allowed for a lease to be transferred into the name of the 'protected person' where a final intervention order has been issued.

Anecdotal reports suggest that it has been challenging to use these provisions due to delays in securing final intervention orders. There is also an anomaly in the law that means that people seeking to end a periodic tenancy do not have a legal mechanism to do so.

CHP suggests that the number of lease transfers by protected persons be requested from VCAT and these processes be reviewed.

### Preventing homelessness

While initiatives such as Safe at Home are important for the immediate prevention of homelessness, the longer term impacts of family violence, such as trauma and financial abuse, can affect housing stability long after the person who uses violence has been removed or the person affected by violence relocated.

The Social Housing Advocacy and Support Service (SHASP) works to prevent evictions from public housing, however this program had its capacity reduced in 2012. Further, there are few programs that are targeted to working with tenants in the private rental market to help sustain their housing.

The Women's Homelessness Prevention Project run by Homeless Law provides an innovative example of integrating legal services, financial assistance and support services to assist women to sustain their housing.

CHP recommends that programs to prevent homelessness be expanded to support tenants across public, community and private rental housing.

### Rapid rehousing and rental brokerage

Where remaining in the home is neither possible nor desired by the person who is affected by violence, a short stay in refuge or crisis accommodation should be followed by rapid rehousing, a housing response that minimizes the disruption of multiple moves on women and children. This can be done with public housing, community housing or in the private rental market.

In the United States 'rapid rehousing' programs move people into private rental housing within weeks rather than months, provide a short term (but up to 18 month) rental subsidy, and support services to improve the household income to sustain the tenancy in the long term.

In Victoria, Private Rental Brokerage Programs, such as 'Linking to the Private Rental Market' and the earlier pilot 'Housing Options for Women' have used a similar approach, however these are not widespread. In fact the initial 2005 guidelines state that service funding for private rental brokerage anticipates that rural and regional areas will provide support for 25 households and metropolitan areas will support 50 households a year (DHS, 2005). CHP does not believe that this program funding has grown significantly in the intervening decade. One regional service that received 25 packages of funding for family violence private rental brokerage in the 14-15 financial year, had allocated them all by January. An expansion of private rental brokerage programs will assist more people into secure long term accommodation.

While private rental brokerage programs have proven effective for many families, the ongoing costs of rent can prove a significant barrier to entering or maintaining housing in the private rental market. To overcome this barrier, CHP proposes that the Victorian Government establish a Rapid Rehousing Program initially to assist 1,000 individuals and families a year to find and pay for accommodation in the private rental market. This would include: assistance to search for suitable properties, incentives for landlords to participate and medium term rental subsidies (of up to six months) to ensure the rent remains affordable. Support services would work to improve the household income to sustain the tenancy in the long term.

### A housing strategy

The above programs provide short term workaround solutions in a housing market that is fundamentally flawed. In order to provide a suite of housing options, across a range of income types and need, the Government should to bring together all of the policy levers at its disposal to develop an affordable housing strategy.

This strategy should review our housing mix and identify targets for a range of housing types to: grow public housing, fill in the gaps between the private rental market and the public housing system, through discount to market rent properties, rent reforms for more secure tenure and shared equity and land trust schemes to provide entry into the housing market after separation, as well as building standards to make more homes accessible for people with a disability.

Sub market housing should be supported through an affordable housing growth fund to encourage social housing development, with a clear annual allocation of funds. Further, the introduction of inclusionary zoning provisions into the Victorian Planning Provisions would allow local councils to require a contribution of future development to affordable housing, as part of their response to family violence in the community.

CHP proposes that this strategy be supported by an initial investment of \$200m per annum in an affordable housing growth fund.

### Recommendations to reduce homelessness as a result of family violence

The suite of housing options for people affected by family violence must be dramatically expanded to reduce the incidence and impact of homelessness and housing insecurity. The costs recommended below represent an initial investment required and over time it may be necessary to further scale up these kinds of responses.

CHP suggests that the Royal Commission make the following recommendations to Government to:

- expand Safe at Home programs to provide people affected by violence with the choice to remain in the home at an initial cost of \$7.6 million per annum



- expand programs to prevent homelessness by supporting tenants across public, community and private rental housing with legal advice, social work support and advocacy at an initial cost of approximately \$4.8 million per annum
- review VCAT procedures in relation to the transfer of tenancies in family violence matters and the timelines of final intervention orders to support people affected by family violence to remain in their home
- review public housing allocation policies for property transfers to ensure faster transfers for women fleeing family violence
- expand existing Private Rental Brokerage programs that help people affected by violence secure housing in the private rental market at an initial cost of \$1 million per annum
- establish a Rapid Rehousing Program to provide support and short to medium term rental subsidies to 1000 households at an initial cost of \$10 million per annum
- introduce minimum access features in the National Construction Code to increase the range of housing accessible to women with disabilities
- develop a Statewide affordable housing strategy, to expand the suite of affordable housing options available, including targets for the provision of new social housing, and affordable housing growth fund with an initial investment of \$200m.

## Working with men who use violence

Workers in the Specialist Homelessness Services system may come into contact with men who use violence, either as a result of them being excluded from the home, where housing has broken down after separation, or on release from jail where they have been incarcerated.

Providing accommodation to keep men who use violence ‘in sight’ of the justice system and other service interventions is in the interest of both victims and the broader community, as highlighted in the Centre for Innovative Justice report on preventing family violence.

*“it is in the interest of victims and the overall goal of perpetrator accountability to ensure that, where possible, perpetrators are found accommodation on a reasonably ongoing basis.” (CIJ 2015, p.51),*

Providing accommodation reduces the incentive of the person who uses violence to attempt to return to the home or to re-partner as a means of securing accommodation. It increases the ability of police to enforce intervention orders and can reduce the danger presented by the indignant sense of entitlement of a perpetrator who has been removed (CIJ 2015). Knowing that the person who uses violence has a place to go has also been identified as an element of successful programs that assist women to remain in the home (Edwards 2004).

However the current crisis accommodation and medium to long term housing response available for single men is very limited.

There are two crisis accommodation facilities for single men in Melbourne and two that take men, women and families. In one of these male only facilities, there are 63 beds and approximately 3 vacancies a week. These facilities are targeted to men who have multiple and complex needs and have slept rough, and deliver a service model that is based on addressing long term homelessness. With few vacancies and a specific target group, current crisis accommodation facilities are neither readily available nor provide the right solution for people who have been removed from the home due to violence.

In addition to the limitations of the crisis accommodation system, the SHSS prioritises access to services and accommodation based on risk and vulnerability. While CHP believes this is an appropriate allocation method, in a stretched service system this leaves single men with very little access to accommodation or ongoing support.

With limited crisis accommodation available, the solution most often turned to by homelessness services for single men, is private rooming house accommodation. Despite some improvements through regulation and reform in recent years, many private rooming houses continue to house people with a range of complex needs, and very little ongoing outreach is able to be provided within current resources. Violence is not uncommon in private rooming houses and can reinforce violent behaviours.

Single men on statutory incomes face similar financial barriers to single women accessing private rental accommodation as outlined above. However many men who use violence will have the financial and social resources to secure alternative accommodation.

The St Kilda Crisis Centre reports 42 instances in the 2013-14 financial year where afterhours emergency accommodation was purchased for a person who uses violence in the north west metropolitan region of Melbourne. This equates to 0.2 per cent of all family violence incidents in that area. If this very conservative estimate was replicated across the state there would be a need for accommodation assistance for 131 men across the year. However CHP suggests that the Royal Commission seek further

information as to the socioeconomic characteristics of those who use violence in Victoria in order to establish the extent of the need for both immediate and long term accommodation.

Rather than redirecting resources from homelessness responses to provide housing assistance to people who use violence, the Royal Commission should consider recommending further development of specialist accommodation options, attached to therapeutic behaviour change programs. Breathing Space is a 12 bed facility run by Communicare in Western Australia that provides an accommodation service targeted to men who use violence. More information on Breathing Space can be found here: <https://www.communicare.org.au/index.php/Accommodation-Services/communicare-breathing-space.html>

#### Recommendations for accommodating men who use violence

Accommodation is one part of the challenge of holding those who use violence to account. The response of police and the justice system, legal assistance for those affected by violence and community attitudes all play a part. CHP has restricted its comments to accommodation options for those who use violence.

CHP recommends that the Royal Commission:

- Establish the extent of the demand for crisis and long term affordable accommodation for those excluded from the home for the use of violence.

CHP suggests that the Royal Commission make the following recommendations to Government:

- Invest in therapeutic crisis accommodation interventions specifically designed for men who use violence
- Develop a statewide affordable housing strategy, to expand the suite of affordable housing options available, including targets for the provision of new affordable housing, and affordable housing growth fund with an initial investment of \$200m.

## A note on data

This submission relies heavily on data sourced from the Specialist Homelessness Service System, collected in the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform and reported by the AIHW. This platform is also used by homelessness funded family violence services.

While it is the best data available there are some significant issues with the quality of data collected, due to challenges inherent in: the consistency of data entry between different service types (eg intake vs case management); consistency of definitions; and the sheer volume of the data collection task. CHP believes a dedicated data integrity strategy is required in order to improve the quality of data collected in SHIP.

It is also challenging to distinguish between services provided by homelessness specific services and family violence specific services. However, data collected by two Homelessness local area service networks (North and Western Metro), that did not include family violence services showed trends of family violence presentations consistent with that reported by the AIHW.

In order to determine the quantum of assistance, and kinds of interventions needed better data is critical. The Victorian Family Violence Database draws together a wealth of information; however the last published edition was released in 2012. Maintaining the currency of this data collection will help to measure progress on family violence into the future.

## Conclusion

The complexity of family violence cannot be under-estimated. Preventing violence rests on changing societal attitudes to women and gender inequality, as well as the provision of community education about the forms of family violence and what to do when we see it. Effective responses require access to justice, continued education of police and the courts about the impact of family violence, and the ready availability of both material and psychological support.

Within this complexity, CHP has focused its comments on the material resources required to prevent homelessness for those who are affected by violence, support for children and efforts to keep perpetrators in the sight of the justice system.

This submission has had a deliberately narrow focus on the interventions that will support a more effective response to people affected by violence, and prevent that violence extending to the experience of homelessness.

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