



8 March 2020

The Hon Daniel Andrews, Premier daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon Tim Pallas, Treasurer tim.pallas@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon Richard Wynne, Minister for Housing

richard.wynne@parliament.vic.gov.au

The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence

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Dear Premier, Treasurer and Ministers,

Social housing is unfinished business on International Women's Day

It is now almost four years since the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its report on 30 March 2016, which highlighted how 'a lack of housing options can exacerbate the trauma and dislocation of the violence, disrupting social and economic participation and education and adversely affect health and wellbeing. In some cases it forces women to choose to return to a violent partner.'¹

The initial significant commitment of the Family Violence Housing Blitz, saw a range of initiatives including investments in social housing, and successful subsidy programs to rehouse women in private rental housing.² However, this investment has proven insufficient to address the systemic problem of family violence driven homelessness. Unfortunately the core findings of the Commissioners remain as relevant today as they were in 2016:

"There is clear evidence that housing pathways are 'blocked up' and not flowing as intended. There is a lack of viable long-term housing options that allow people to 'exit' the system and get on with their lives. There are simply not enough short-term or long-term accommodation options for victims in metropolitan and regional Victoria."³

¹ State of Victoria, 2016, *Royal Commission into Family Violence; Summary and recommendations*, Parl Paper No 132 (2014-16), p.37

² State of Victoria, *Family Violence Housing Blitz Package Evaluation*, July 2018

³ State of Victoria, 2016, p.75





In Victoria, the reality is that women and children are still fleeing family violence into homelessness, and that this homelessness is less able to be resolved in 2019 than it was in 2016.

Homelessness data shows that 62% adults and children experiencing domestic or family violence who were **already homeless** when they sought homelessness assistance **were still homeless after receiving support in 2018-19**; compared to in 2015-16, when 59% remained homeless.

The critical reason for these poor outcomes is the inadequate supply of social housing, which continues to create blockages in and out of family violence refuges and crisis accommodation.

We know that women and children remain in violent homes because they do not have a safe place to go. Becoming homeless is also one of the most common reasons women and children are forced to return to violent relationships.

As leaders of homelessness and family violence services and other concerned organisations, we are calling on you to fully implement the Royal Commission recommendations as promised, and invest in adequate social housing to break the link between family violence and homelessness in Victoria.

The specific Royal Commission Recommendations that remain to be fully delivered include:

Recommendation 018 - Give priority to victims gaining stable housing as quickly as possible

The Victorian Government give priority to removing current blockages in refuge and crisis accommodation and transitional housing, **so that victims of family violence can gain stable housing as quickly as possible and with a minimum number of relocations, are not accommodated in motels** and other ad hoc accommodation, and spend on average no longer than six weeks in refuge and crisis accommodation.

Progress: While welcome investments in the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) and Flexible Support Packages (FSP) have succeeded in supporting many families into temporary accommodation or private rental housing, many women fleeing violence cannot afford to sustain private rental. This creates blockages in temporary and crisis accommodation options, which then constrains access to these options for new households in crisis. These



programs are also not ongoing, with PRAP funded to July 2021 and FSPs only funded to July 2020.

Motels, which often don't provide a suitable level of safety or amenity for families fleeing violence, have also continued to be a significant source of emergency accommodation. The state-wide family violence crisis service, Safe Steps reports that each night they accommodate an average of 60 women and 55 children in either motels or other community crisis accommodation.⁴ Motels also continue to be a necessary option for women and children coming to homelessness access points.

Recommendation 019 - Establish a Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Task Force

The Victorian Government establish a Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Task Force which should:

- ...
- **quantify the number of additional social housing units required for family violence victims who are unable to gain access to and sustain private rental accommodation**
- **plan for the statewide rollout of ... the social housing required**

Progress: While this Taskforce was appointed, and commissioned both [this research](#) on the shortage of long-term social housing in Victoria, and “a [long term housing assistance demand and supply model](#) [to] further aid decision making on housing assistance interventions into the future”, the social housing need that was identified has not been funded.

The initial research conducted by Dr Judy Yates showed that around 1,700 new long-term social housing dwellings per year for 20 years were needed just to sustain the current proportion of social housing, with more needed to meet unmet demand.

Since 2015-16, the Government has made welcome investments in social housing, but stock has grown by only 638 properties a year, far less than the amount needed to sustain the current proportion of social housing.⁵ While a

⁴ Safe Steps, Submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria, February 2020

⁵ In 2015-16, Victoria had 85,195 social housing dwellings, and in 2019-20, this has increased to 87,749 dwellings. (Victorian Government, State Budget Papers 2015-16 and 2019-20)



further 1,000 new properties were committed in the 2019-20 Budget for the next three years, this is still significantly short of the identified need.

We know that inadequate investment in social housing is putting women and children at risk, and causing significant harm to some of Victoria's most vulnerable families.

This International Women's Day we ask you to finish the great work that was started by the Government's commitments to the Royal Commission into Family Violence process, and the many significant reforms and investments made so far, by delivering the social housing supply needed for women to have safe options to escape violence and to recover.

We also ask that you continue to invest in the successful Private Rental Assistance Program and Flexible Support Packages.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Smith'.

Jenny Smith
CEO
Council to Homeless Persons

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alison Macdonald'.

Alison Macdonald
Acting CEO
Domestic Violence Victoria

On behalf of :

Alex Haynes, CEO, **Whittlesea Community Connections**

Bevan Warner, CEO, **Launch Housing**

Bronwyn Pike, CEO, **Uniting Vic.Tas**

Catherine Musico, Team Leader FV Case Management, **The SAFV Centre**

Celia Adams, CEO, **BeyondHousing**

Chris McNamara, Coordinator, **Gippsland Homelessness Network**

Chris Povey, CEO, **Justice Connect**

Chris Wombwell, Team Leader - South West Services, **Bethany Community Support**



Christofer Beal, Operations Manager, **Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative**

Cindy Pullar, Executive Director, **Quantum Support Service**

Colin Bourke, Senior Social Worker, **Broadmeadows Acute Adult Psychiatric Inpatient Unit**

David Conway, Program Manager SHS Service, **Coastshelter**

David Spriggs, CEO, **Infoxchange**

Debra Wadwell, Manager, **Southside Community Care Inc**

dianne Hill, CEO, **Women's Health Victoria**

Donna Bennett, CEO, **Hope Street Youth and Family Services**

Elisa Buggy, Executive Officer, **Flat Out Inc.**

Elizabeth Jewson, Executive Officer, **WRISC Family Violence Support Inc**

Emily Maguire, CEO, **Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria**

Emma King, CEO, **Victorian Council of Social Service**

Felicity Rorke, Executive Director, **Good Samaritan Inn**

Gillian Clegg, Southern Area Manager, **Whitelion Youth Agency Ltd**

Halime Aldemir, NW program leader, **Statewide Children's Resource Program**

Hang Pham, Manager, **Women's Health West**

Heather Clark, Manager, **Northern Centre against Sexual Assault**

Helen Bolton, CEO, **The Sexual Assault & Family Violence Centre**

Jade Blakkarly, CEO, **Women's Information Support & Housing in the North - WISHIN**

James Pullar, Homelessness Program Coordinator, **Rotary Melbourne**

Jan Berriman, Director National Housing and Property Development, **YWCA Australia**

Jane Barnes, Chief of Staff, **Wintringham**



Janene Evans, General Manager Safety and Resilience, **Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand**

Jeanette Large, CEO, **Women's Property Initiatives**

Jennifer Weber, CEO, **Caroline Chisholm Society**

Jenny Davidson, CEO, **Council of Single Mother and their Children**

Jo Swift, CEO, **Kids Under Cover**

Jocelyn Bignold, CEO, **McAuley Community Services for Women**

Judy Line, CEO, **Women's Housing Limited**

Julie Oberin, CEO, **Annie North Inc. Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Service**

Kellyanne Andy, CEO, **Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service Inc.**

Kerry Ashley, Director, Homelessness, Acquisition and Development, **Haven; Home, Safe**

Kim Adams, Principal Strategic Adviser for Family Violence in Gippsland, **Gippsland Family Violence Alliance**

Leeann Lenane, Gippsland Regional Coordinator, **Statewide Children's Resource Program**

Lisa Dunbar, CEO, **Georgina Martina Inc**

Lisa-Maree Stevens, Executive Director, Mallee Sexual Assault Unit Inc., **Mallee Domestic Violence Services**

Lorrinda Hamilton, General Manager Family Violence Services, **The Salvation Army**

Louise Daniel, National Housing Operations Manager, **YWCA National Housing**

Lucy Pearce, Family Program Coordinator, **Albert Park Flexible Learning Centre**

Margaret McDonald, CEO, **Cobaw Community Health Services Ltd**

Marita Romano, Manager, **Tableland Community Housing**



Mark Goodie, CEO, **Merri Outreach Support Service Ltd**

Melanie Brown, A/CEO, **Gippsland Women's Health**

Melinda Lawley, CEO, **The Bridge Youth Service**

Meredith Gorman, Coordinator, **Northern Metropolitan Region Homelessness Network**

Michael Perusco, CEO, **Berry Street**

Nicole Bartholomeusz, Chief Executive, **cohealth**

Paula Westhead, Executive Officer, **Emerge Women and Children's Support Network**

Pauline Pearce, Team Leader, **Colac Area Health**

Quinn Pawson, CEO, **VincentCare Victoria**

Rebecca Callahan, Coordinator, **Barwon South West Homelessness Network**

Renee Cumming, Principal Strategic Advisor, **Western Integrated Family Violence Committee**

Rita Butera, CEO, **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre**

Roberta Buchanan, Chair, **Community Housing Industry Association Victoria**

Robina Bradley, CEO, **St. Mary's House of Welcome**

Ruth Gordon, Coordinator, **Southern Homelessness Services Network**

Ruth Isbel, Executive Officer, **Emma House Domestic Violence Service Inc**

Sally Parnell, Acting CEO, **Jesuit Social Services**

Sam Biondo, Executive Officer, **Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association**

Sam Hearn, Mayor, **Mornington Peninsula Shire**

Sarah Johnson, Principal Strategic Advisor, **Northern Integrated Family Violence Services Regional Integration Committee**

Sarah Langmore, Coordinator, **Western Homelessness Network**

Shirlene Hart, Coordinator, **Wayss**

Simon Benjamin, CEO, **Lighthouse Foundation**



Sue Carlile, CEO, **Family Access Network**

Teresa Jayet, CEO, **Mallee Family Care**

Veronica Coleman, Manager, **Kara House Inc**

Vicki Sutton, CEO, **Melbourne City Mission**

Yvette Jaczina, Acting CEO, **Centre for Non-Violence**