

Unison Housing  
Research Lab



# **Demand for social housing: Characteristics of households on the Victorian Housing Register**

**Prepared for the  
Community Housing Industry Association Victoria**

**by**

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## Unison Housing

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### Preferred citation:

Kavaarpuo, G. & Johnson, G. (2024). *Demand for social housing: Characteristics of households on the Victorian Housing Register*. Community Housing Industry Association (Vic), Melbourne.



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**ISBN: 978-0-6458018-1-1**

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# 1. Introduction

This is the third report in *Housing Singles Successfully* project commissioned by the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria. This report turns its attention to the level of unmet demand for social housing among single person households in Victoria. The report draws on Victorian Housing Register (VHR) data provided by Homes Victoria that contains de-identified information of every **application** on the VHR. The report examines the characteristics of different household configurations on the VHR, looking at the ways they are similar, and the ways they differ. In recognition that singles are not a homogenous group, we also look at how the characteristics of singles vary, with specific consideration given to age, gender, income type, as well as the presence of any disabling conditions. Based on our analysis we then discuss the implications for social housing providers.

In addition to looking at application data, the report also examines **allocation** patterns, again focusing on singles and if allocation patterns vary relative to other household configurations, but also within single person households. It is important to note the VHR provides useful insights into the level of 'expressed' demand for social housing and can provide strong evidence regarding the challenges the Victorian social housing sector face. However, VHR data captures only some of the unmet demand for housing and this caveat should be borne in mind when interpreting our results. Further, the dataset we had access to is limited, which again emphasises the importance of caution when interpreting the results.

The report is structured as follows. In the next section we provide some background information about the VHR, and what information is currently available about VHR applications and also allocations from the register. The next section describes our research approach. Following this we present our results in three sections. The first section looks at changes to the VHR over a 12-month period. Then we look at applications on the VHR at June 2022. Following this we examine allocations data. In each section particular attention is paid towards single person households. In the final section of the report, we discuss the implications of our findings for community housing organisations (CHOs), as well as the implications for the broader housing and welfare sectors.

## 2. Context

The importance of understanding the housing needs of singles is underscored by the fact that the number of single person households continues to grow in absolute terms, and as a percentage of all household types. Whereas 50 years ago one in 10 households were single now one in four are (ABS, 2021). For singles on low incomes there are very few housing options – gentrification of the inner city has seen the loss of many private rooming houses, social housing is limited, and affordable private rental is extremely rare (Anglicare Australia, 2022).

In Victoria, households that want to live in social housing are required to put in a formal application. There are two sorts of applications on the VHR and they have different eligibility criteria<sup>1</sup>. The first category is Priority Access and this is for households considered in ‘greatest need’. There are seven priority subcategories and these are then prioritised in the following order: 1) Emergency Management Housing; 2) Priority Transfer – Stock Management; 3) Priority Transfer – Other; 4) Homeless with Support; 5) Supported Housing; 6) Special Housing Needs; 7) Special Housing Needs 55+. The second category is the Register of Interest (ROI) and this is ‘for people who do not have an urgent housing need but are seeking to live in social housing’<sup>2</sup>. ROI applications are the lowest priority.

In the past CHOs managed their own waiting lists, as did State Housing Authorities (SHA) in Victoria. Around 2019 a single waiting list – the VHR – was implemented to provide eligible renter applicants with access to public and community housing through one simple and effective entry point. The introduction of the VHR saw each CHO and the SHA agree and establish CHO allocation targets based on sector wide principles that considered, amongst other things, the funding used to develop or acquire stock. The allocation target allows CHOs and the SHA to measure access to community housing by VHR priority applicants. Due to the differing treatment of CHO stock onboarded at the introduction of the VHR and stock developed or acquired since that date, there is some confusion as to what CHOs obligations actually are. Further, while the performance indicators set out by the Victorian Housing Registrar include reporting the proportion of allocations CHOs take from the VHR, this information is not available on the Housing Registrar’s website or in their annual reports.

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<sup>1</sup> The eligibility criteria can be found at [Social housing allocations | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/social-housing-allocations)

<sup>2</sup> [Social housing allocations | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/social-housing-allocations)

Despite these issues, there is a considerable amount of publicly available information that covers both applications<sup>3</sup> on the VHR, and also allocations<sup>4</sup> off it. With respect to application data, the following information is easy to access on the internet:

- Application type (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Priority categories (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Family violence applications (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Aboriginal (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Household types (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Number of bedrooms (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Preferred social housing providers (new, transfer and total), over time (12 mths)
- Location preference

Our analysis examines most of these variables, but we do so through the lens of household type, with the aim of highlighting differences between singles and other household configurations. This more granular approach addresses some of the limitations of the publicly available information, which is very general and not amenable to further, more detailed analysis about specific subgroups of applicants.

### 3. Data and analytical approach

Homes Victoria provided the research team with access to three datasets containing all records on the VHR from three different time periods – June 2021, December 2021, and June 2022. The datasets provided to the research team were limited to 23 non-identifiable variables to ensure the confidentiality of applicants was not compromised. Two items considered critical by the research team, and which could potentially be used to identify applicants (Date of Birth and Country of Origin), were recoded into a non-identifiable format by Homes Victoria prior to releasing the datasets (see Appendix Table 1).

After examining the datasets, the research team recoded several variables to facilitate analysis. More specifically, we reduced the number of household types recorded in the datasets from 176 different household types into four household configurations – **Single, Single Plus, Family & Couples (F&C), and Group**. Singles captured households identified as single in the dataset and for whom only a single bedroom was required. Singles Plus captured the same group but differs in that the number of bedrooms required was always two or more. Families & Couples (F&C) captured

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<sup>3</sup> [Applications on the Victorian Housing Register \(VHR\) | Homes Victoria](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Social housing allocations | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](#)

couples and all family types – single parent, dual parent and extended family – while the Group<sup>5</sup> category captures all group households irrespective of the number of bedrooms required. Similarly, there were 117 different income items, and we also reduced this to four items – **Income Support, Pensions & Allowances, Wages/self-employed and Other** (see Appendix Table 2 and 3 for detailed information).

We also received a file from Homes Victoria that contained de-identified allocation records drawn from the VHR for the period July 2021 through to April 2023, a 22-month period. We linked the allocations and applications datasets by matching the Application No<sup>6</sup> held in the allocations database with Application No held in the application data from June 2021. Linking application data to allocations data provide the opportunity to better understand who was allocated housing, what sort of housing they were allocated, and how long they waited for it.

All data provided by Homes Victoria was converted from an excel format into SPSS 26 for analysis. Ethics approval for the project was sought and granted by RMIT's Ethic committee<sup>7</sup>.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Changes over time

Media reports periodically comment on the increasing number of households on the Victorian public housing waiting list, as the VHR is colloquially known. Indeed, a recent story by *The Age* reported the number of 'families waiting for public housing in Victoria has jumped to another record'<sup>8</sup>. The data confirm this with the number of applications on the VHR increasing by 6 per cent from 60,320 to 64,168 over the 12-month period between June 2021 to June 2022.

Changes in the number of households on the VHR is useful but limited information. The reason for this is that the VHR is a dynamic list, with households moving onto the VHR but also moving off it over time. To better understand what is going on we decided to look at the flow of new applications onto the VHR (what we term **inflows**) and flows of households off the VHR (what we refer to as **outflows**). To do this we linked Application Numbers held in two datasets to identify

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<sup>5</sup> Group refers to unrelated adults

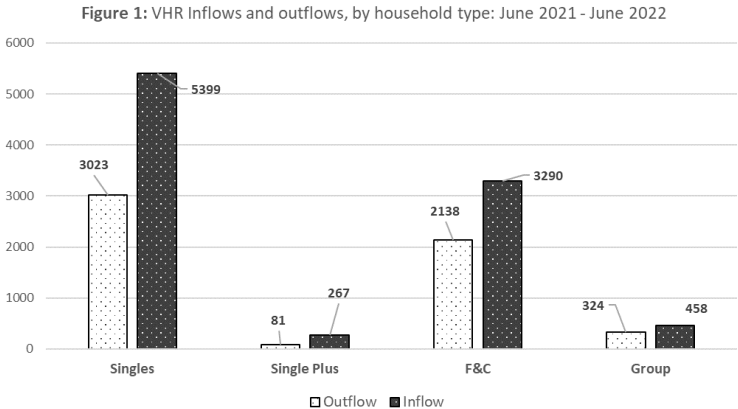
<sup>6</sup> Application numbers are unique to each household. Thus, they provide a robust and convenient way of linking records from different datasets.

<sup>7</sup> Ethics Approval Number: 26196

<sup>8</sup> [Homelessness in Victoria: public housing waiting lists at record highs as social housing stock fails to keep up with demand \(theage.com.au\)](https://www.theage.com.au/news/homelessness-in-victoria-public-housing-waiting-lists-at-record-highs-as-social-housing-stock-fails-to-keep-up-with-demand-20220601). The report made a very basic error in confusing households with families.

applications that remained on the VHR between June 2021 and June 2022, and applications that were on the VHR at June 2021 but were no longer on the VHR at June 2022.

We found 54,755 households (or 91 per cent) that were on the VHR in June 2021 were still on the VHR 12 months later, and that 5,565 households were no longer on the VHR by June 2022 (outflows<sup>9</sup>). We also found there were 9,413 applications on the VHR at June 2022 that were not on it 12 months earlier. The results indicate that **inflows (or new applications) onto the VHR outnumber outflows by 1.7 to 1**. With a ratio of inflows to outflows of nearly 2:1, the amount of new stock required to keep the VHR at its current level of over 60,000 households, is over 4,000 properties each year – fully one third of the total properties to be constructed over the four years of the Big Housing Build program. Reducing the list clearly presents social housing authorities even greater challenges.



Using the same methodology to examine inflows and outflows among our four household configurations, we find the number of inflows and outflows varied between each group (Figure 1), as did the ratio. For instance, for every single person household that left the VHR there were 1.8 new

applications from singles. This compares with a ratio of 1.5:1 for couples and families (F&C), 3.3:1 for the Singles Plus group and 1.4:1 for Group households. In short, while there is variation between different household configurations, the broad pattern is that irrespective of household configuration, **inflows always exceed outflows**. We would argue that measuring flows is an important analytical approach that provides a clear picture of the challenges social housing providers face and should be included in publicly available reports.

We also wanted to know if there were any changes in the composition of the VHR over the 12-month period. When we compared the characteristics of applications in the two datasets we found no significant differences across any relevant variables (see Appendix Table 4) – the proportion of singles households remained much the same, as did the age, gender, and birth location of applicants. We found no meaningful changes in the proportion of application types – Priority and ROI

<sup>9</sup> The allocations data indicated that for the same period there were 5553 allocations, a modest difference of 12.



– but we did find a large jump in the number of applications classified under the Emergency Management category (29 per cent increase), which largely reflects the use of this priority category for the From Homelessness to a Home (H2H) program. There was also a large number of transfers primarily because of redevelopment and/or property management transfers (87 per cent increase). However, despite the large increases reported in these two priority categories the numbers are relatively small, accounting for just under four per cent of all priority applications. Overall, the results did not surprise us a great deal, in part because the observation period of 12 months is relatively short and there would be no reason to see a dramatic shift in the characteristics of households in need. A much longer observation period is needed to identify any changes or trends in the characteristics of households seeking social housing.

While comparing the VHR over a 12-month period provides some helpful insights into the flows onto and off the VHR, next we turn our attention to the characteristics of applicants of the VHR as of June 2022 to identify similarities and differences between singles and other household configurations.

**4.2 Applications: Looking at single person households on the VHR, June 2022**

As of June 2022, there were 64,168 households on the VHR. Table 1 shows that singles comprise a significant source of unmet demand for social housing, accounting for 56 per cent of all applications. Families and couples (F&C) are the next largest, accounting for 36 per cent of all applicants<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 1:** Household type, applicants on VHR June 2022

<b>Households type</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Singles	35787	55.8%
Single plus	1842	2.9%
Other	22933	35.7%
Group	3606	5.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64168</b>	<b>100%</b>

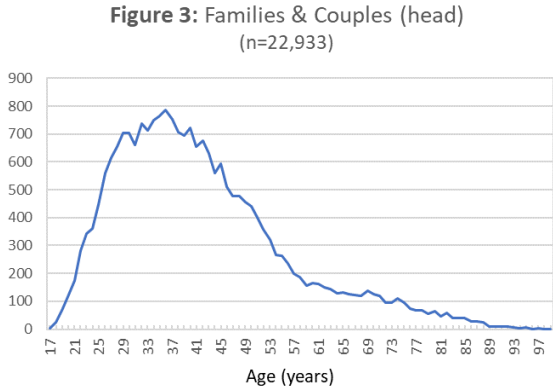
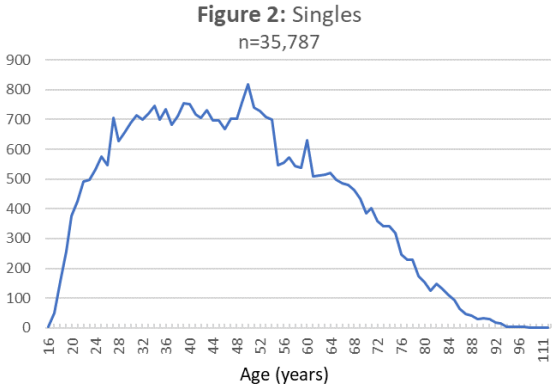
Well over half of all the applications registered on the VHR were from households headed by women (57 per cent), with the remaining 43 per cent from households headed by men. However, when we restricted the analysis to singles the pattern is reversed – men account for 59 per cent of applications and women the remaining 41 per cent.

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<sup>10</sup> If you were to count the number of individuals in each household group, families and couples would account for a majority of individuals on the VHR.

The characteristics of singles differs in other ways – singles are more likely to be born in Australia than families or couples, with 73 per cent of singles reporting they were born in Australia against 62 per cent of families and couples. Singles were also less likely to report they were Indigenous, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, with 8 per cent of singles reporting as such, nearly half the rate reported among families and couples (14 per cent).

Alongside these characteristics, age and income type are also important but for slightly different reasons. As we set out in earlier papers, age at tenancy commencement is a strong indicator of tenancy sustainment/tenancy breakdown with older households more likely to sustain their housing than younger households (Taylor & Johnson, 2021:a,b). The average age of singles on the VHR was 47.4 which was approximately five years older than the average age of couples and the head of families, while the head of Group households was considerably older still, at, on average, 55 years of age. However, averages tend to obscure important differences in age distributions, and this is particularly noticeable across the two most numerous groups – singles and the families and couples group. Figures 2 and 3 below show the age distribution for singles, as well as for families and couples. While the age distribution curves are similar, what stands out is that among singles there is a large number of young people, but in comparison to families and couples, many more older people. Among families and couples, the age distribution is much narrower, starting to decline quite sharply (relative to singles) at around 40 years of age and continuing thereafter. In short, there is much more variation in the ages of singles than families or couples.



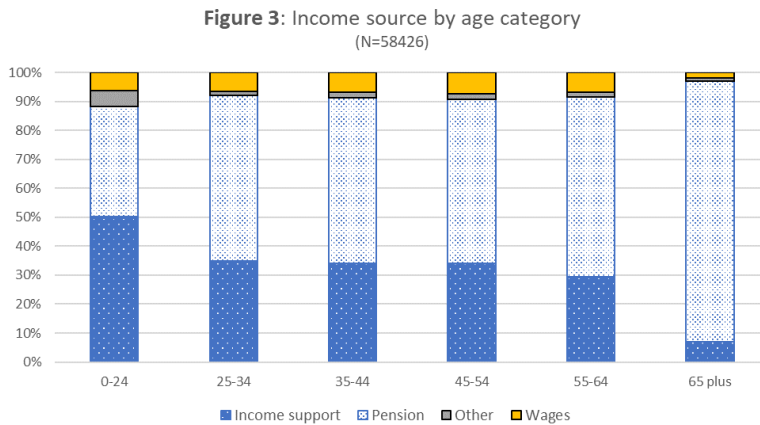
As important an indicator as age, so too is income because CHOs rental revenue is directly and materially affected by benefits tenants receive, a point we made in the earlier report (Scutella, Kavaarpuo & Johnson, 2023). Table 2 shows that over half of singles are on a pension or allowance (54 per cent), which is fully 17 percentage points lower than couples and families, where 71 per cent are on a pension or some sort of allowance. In contrast 40 per cent of singles are on income support payments such as JobSeeker, more than twice the rate reported among families and couples (19 per cent).

**Table 2: Income source by household type**

	Single	Single Plus	F & C	Group
Income support	40%	26%	19%	25%
Pension	54%	67%	71%	68%
Wages/Self employed	4%	5%	8%	1%
Other	2%	2%	2%	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

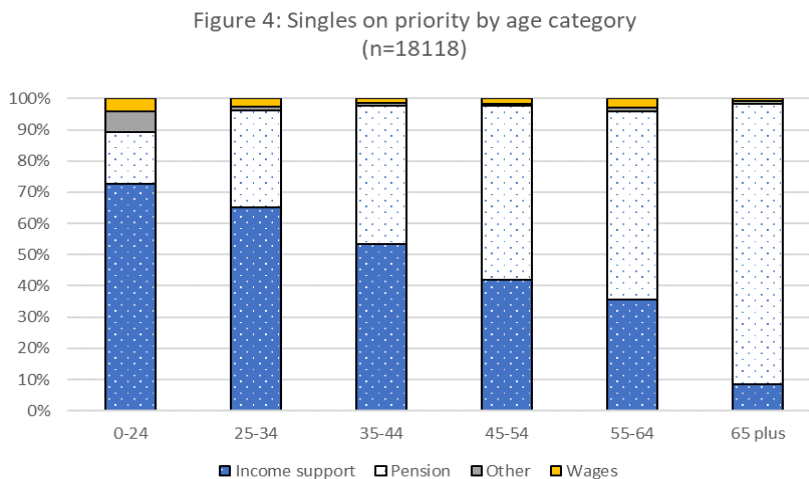
\*Missing information on 5,742 applications

The differences observed in Table 2 relate, in part, to household structure, as families are more likely to be receiving an allowance or pension. However, they also relate to age. Figure 3 shows



that the proportion of households on income support decreases as age increases, while the pattern is reversed among those on a pension or allowance. Again, this is hardly surprising, but the trend is stark and has implications

for CHOs. Among singles on priority the pattern is even more striking with over 70 per cent of singles aged 24 or under on income support payments, whereas fewer than one in 10 of those aged over 65 are. Perhaps more relevant here is that at every successive age group up to and including those over 65, there is a noticeable shift away from income support to pensions/allowances. Given the positive



association between older age and higher levels of tenancy sustainment, and the rental model used by CHOs, there is an inherent danger that younger single people will be overlooked unless existing financial arrangements are changed.

We also had information of the type of application – Priority Access or ROI – and this is useful information as it has a direct bearing on how long people might wait for housing, and is an indicator of what additional support needs they might have. Overall, applications for Priority Access are more

common than ROI applications, at 56.5 per cent and 43.5 per cent respectively (Table 3). The difference is not entirely surprising, but we also found substantial differences when we looked at the type of application by household type. Table 3 shows that nearly two thirds of singles are on the priority list, whereas fewer than half of families or couples are (49 per cent).

**Table 3:** Household type by application type

	Single	Single Plus	F&C	Group
Register of Interest (ROI)	37%	40%	51%	56%
Priority	63%	60%	49%	44%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

As we noted earlier there are seven priority subcategories and priority applications themselves are prioritised, with transfers getting the highest priority and supported housing the lowest<sup>11</sup>. Table 4 shows that that nearly half of all singles (48 per cent) are applying under the Homeless with Support category, a substantially higher rate than observed among other household types and a strong indicator that singles have a range of challenges beyond securing affordable housing. While singles are more likely to apply under the Homeless with Support category than any other household type, about one in five applications from singles (21 per cent) are under the Special Housing Needs for people 55 years of age and older – a proportion that is three to five times higher than reported in any other household configuration. In contrast, singles were far less likely than any other group to be seeking a priority transfer.

**Table 4:** Priority category in priority order by household types

	Single	Single Plus	F&C	Group
Emergency Management	5%	2%	2%	1%
Transfer	8%	38%	23%	32%
Homeless with Support	48%	26%	36%	23%
Supported Housing	3%	10%	3%	11%
Special Housing Needs	15%	18%	29%	29%
<b>Special Housing Needs 55+</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

We drilled down further into the priority data to look at more specific reasons for seeking Priority Access under each of the seven priority subcategories. It is worth noting that there were 49 items listed as reasons and not all were mutually exclusive or clearly defined. Nonetheless, the results were much as we expected – in the Emergency Management subcategory virtually every

<sup>11</sup> We combined the two transfer subcategories into a single subcategory.

application related to COVID-19 and the H2H program (99.4 per cent) with singles accounting for 83 per cent of applications. Similarly, most of those on the Homeless with Support subcategory were homeless (83.7 per cent) but domestic violence was the second most commonly listed reason (13.2 per cent). Unsurprisingly singles constitute the bulk of those where homeless was listed as the reason, but family violence among singles is quite prominent as well. Among those applying under the Special Housing Needs subcategory 46.7 per cent listed insecure housing as the reason they applied, with the rate increasing to 57.8 per cent among singles. Just over one fifth of all applications under this subcategory were for urgent medical needs (22.6 per cent), with the same proportion of singles reporting urgent medical needs (23.5 per cent).

Applications data from the VHR in June 2022 shows that not only do singles represent a source of significant unmet housing demand, but their needs are also quite different to other household types. Indeed, among singles there is more variation in their age, their incomes are typically lower, and if we take priority status as a proxy for complex needs, their social and economic needs are substantially greater and probably more complex than any other household configuration. Whether these factors influence the allocation of limited stock is another question, and one that we address next.

### **4.3 Allocations**

At June 2021 there were 60,320 applications on the VHR and after matching the applications and allocations datasets we found that 6259 (or 10.4 per cent) had been allocated a property by the end of April 2023. In the following analysis we examine these 6259 households.

Most households were allocated public housing (70.5 per cent or 4411 households) while 1848 households (29.5 per cent) were allocated community housing. Indigenous households accounted for 14.5 per cent of all allocations, with just over one third of Indigenous households identified as a single person household. About one third (31.9 per cent) of Indigenous households, single or otherwise were housed in community housing, but most (68.1 per cent) were housed in in public housing.

In Table 5 we can see that just over half of all allocations were made to single person households, but there is some variation with the proportion of singles housed by CHOs, 10 percentage points higher than public housing.

**Table 5:** Household type, public housing or community housing

Households type	Community Housing		Public Housing		TOTAL N=6259
	N	%	N	%	%
Singles	1088	<b>58.9</b>	2140	<b>48.5</b>	51.6
Single plus	42	<b>2.3</b>	187	<b>4.2</b>	3.7
F&C	637	<b>34.5</b>	1798	<b>40.8</b>	38.9
Group	81	<b>4.4</b>	286	<b>6.5</b>	5.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1848</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4411</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Turning attention to household income sources, two important patterns stand out. First, allocations to other household configurations, mainly families and couples, are much more likely to include households on some form of government pension or allowance, and much less likely to be on income support payments such as JobSeeker – indeed nearly 70 per cent of allocations to households other than singles are on a government pension or allowance, whereas just over half of all the singles are receiving a pension or allowance. Table 6 also shows us that single households are nearly twice as likely to be on income support compared to other household configurations (37.7 per cent vs 22.2 per cent). These two differences may well translate into important and potentially critical differences in rental revenue.

**Table 6:** Income source by household configuration, public housing (PH) or community housing (CH), %

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH (n=1088)	PH (n=2140)	TOTAL (n=3228)	CH (n=760)	PH (n=2271)	TOTAL (n=3031)
Income support	40.6	36.2	37.7	22.2	22.2	22.2
Pension	46.6	55.0	52.1	65.0	70.9	69.4
Other	2.3	1.5	1.8	2.6	2.3	2.4
Wages	4.0	1.8	2.5	8.8	3.5	4.8
No Information	6.5	5.6	5.9	1.3	1.0	1.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of age, men who were allocated a property were slightly older on average than women (48.6 vs 42.4), and the difference remained constant irrespective of whether households were allocated public or community housing. Single person households that were allocated a dwelling were slightly older (48.8), with the difference largely driven by an increase in the average age of single women. When we consider the age distribution (Table 7), several patterns stand out. First, a much higher proportion of non-single households were under the age of 34 compared to

singles – 41.3 per cent vs 19.6 per cent. In contrast, 36.8 per cent of singles were 55 or older, whereas only 16.3 per cent of other household types were. While the data show a clear difference between singles and other household configurations, among singles, 40 per cent who were allocated public housing were over 55, whereas only 28.5 per cent of singles allocated community housing were. This likely reflects the fact that a certain amount of public housing stock is specifically set aside for older people.

**Table 7:** Age distribution by household configuration, public housing (PH) or community housing (CH),%

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH (n=1088)	PH (n=2140)	TOTAL (n=3228)	CH (n=760)	PH (n=2271)	TOTAL (n=3031)
0-24	6.3	6.0	6.1	10.4	10.9	10.8
25-34	16.4	12.1	13.5	29.2	30.9	30.5
35-44	24.2	17.2	19.6	28.8	26.6	27.1
45-54	24.7	23.6	24.0	14.6	15.5	15.3
55-64	16.1	23.6	21.0	10.5	9.1	9.5
65 plus	12.4	17.6	15.8	6.4	7.0	6.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The important point to note here is that CHOs are taking on a higher share of single person households, more younger people, and more people on less attractive income sources than public housing authorities. How this might play out in terms of tenancy management is hard to tell, but some insights can potentially be gleaned from the type of applications that were allocated housing. We turn our attention to this next.

Table 8 below shows that of the 6259 allocations, the vast majority (n=5168, 82.6 per cent) were priority applications, with the remaining 17.4 per cent allocated from the ROI. CHOs took on a slightly higher percentage of single person allocations from the ROI than public housing, but the difference is modest.

**Table 8:** Application type, by household configuration, %

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH (n=1088)	PH (n=2140)	TOTAL (n=3228)	CH (n=760)	PH (n=2271)	TOTAL (n=3031)
ROI	21.7	15.2	17.4	36.6	11.1	17.5
Priority	78.3	84.8	82.6	63.4	88.9	82.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Earlier we argued that priority status is a useful (albeit imperfect) proxy for complex needs, based on the likelihood priority applicants' social and economic needs are substantially greater and probably more complex than ROI applicants. However, before we examine priority applications more closely, we distinguish between what Homes Victoria classify as 'new' priority allocations and priority transfers – both are priority categories but they are different. Transfers account for about one quarter (26.7 per cent) of all priority allocations but as Table 9 shows a far larger proportion of community housing allocations to priority singles are new allocations (92.5 per cent), compared with public housing (76.7 per cent).

**Table 9:** New priority allocations and transfers by household configuration, %

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH (n=852)	PH (n=1814)	TOTAL (n=2666)	CH (n=482)	PH (n=2020)	TOTAL (n=2502)
New	92.5	76.7	81.8	90.9	56.9	63.4
Transfer	7.5	23.3	18.2	9.1	43.1	36.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Of the 5168 priority allocations, 3767 were NEW and each of these were classified under one of the five (non-transfer) priority subcategories. More households are allocated housing under the Homeless with Support category than any other (Table 10), but the proportion of singles allocated under this category is markedly lower than other household configurations (50.7 per cent vs 63.6 per cent). Next is Special Housing Needs, where again the proportion of singles allocated housing under this category is markedly lower than other household types (11.6 per cent vs 23.3 per cent). The proportion of priority allocations to singles under the Emergency Management subcategory<sup>12</sup> and also in the Special Housing Needs for people over 55 are notably higher, with some slight differences between public housing and community housing.

**Table 10:** New priority allocations by type, by household configuration, %

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH (n=788)	PH (n=1392)	TOTAL (n=2180)	CH (n=438)	PH (n=1149)	TOTAL (n=1587)
Emergency Management	20.1	23.4	22.0	5.0	7.4	6.7
Homeless with support	47.3	52.6	50.7	50.0	68.8	63.6
Special Housing Needs	13.6	10.4	11.6	36.3	18.4	23.3
Special Housing Needs 55+	16.2	11.9	13.4	5.7	2.3	3.2
Supported Housing	2.8	1.7	2.1	3.0	3.1	3.1

<sup>12</sup> The relatively large number in the Emergency Management category likely reflects the use of that category for the From Homelessness to a Home program, a new 'Housing First' program that targets individuals, primarily singles with complex needs and histories of chronic housing instability.



<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
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Finally, we wanted to examine how long it took before singles and others on the priority list were allocated housing. The data was messy, and we had to make a number of decisions. First, we found that the effective priority date (EPD) on the application data did not always match the EPD in the allocations data – of the 5168 priority applications, the dates matched in 4740 (or 92 per cent) of cases. We excluded cases where the dates did not match and relied on the EPD contained in the allocations database. We then looked at the average wait time for all allocations designated as priority but separated new applications from transfers. Table 11 below shows that on average transfers were housed much more rapidly than new applications (116 vs 178 weeks) and that the amount of time single person households waited for a transfer was considerably less than other household types. As we will see, this is an atypical outcome. More relevant perhaps is that among new priority allocations, singles, on average, wait 190 weeks or just over 3.5 years. While other household configurations do better, priority wait times are long for everyone.

**Table 11:** Average wait time (weeks), household type by application type

	<b>Transfer N=1314</b>	<b>New N=3426</b>
Singles	100	190
Single plus	147	174
Other	119	162
Group	143	166
<b>Average wait time (weeks)</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>178</b>

We then classified the wait time for every new priority application into one of six mutually exclusive categories. Table 12 shows that fewer than one in 10 households, whether single or any other household configuration, are allocated housing within 12 months. For a significant number of households – single or any other household – about half are waiting more than three years, with close to one fifth of all singles (19.1 per cent) waiting five years or more.

**Table 12:** New priority application wait times by household configurations, (%)

	<b>Singles N=1949</b>	<b>Other Households N=1477</b>	<b>TOTAL N=3426</b>
0 – 5 months	1.6	2.0	1.8
6 – 11 months	6.7	5.3	6.1
12 – 23 months	17.9	20.1	18.8
24 – 35 months	22.7	24.3	23.4
36 – 47 months	32.0	35.3	33.4
5 years or more	19.1	13.0	16.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 13 shows there is some variation in wait times depending on the household's income source, with the long wait for housing among singles on a pension or allowance the most notable finding. Table 14 shows that women get housed more rapidly than men, but it takes single women longer to get housing than families, couples or groups headed by women.

**Table 13:** Average wait times (weeks), household configuration by income source (%), N=3426

	<b>Singles</b> <b>N=1949</b>	<b>Other Households</b> <b>N=1477</b>
Income support	171	152
Pension	205	168
Other	157	133
Wages	230	150

**Table 14:** Average wait times (weeks), household configuration by sex (%), N=3426

	<b>Singles</b> <b>N=1949</b>	<b>Other Households</b> <b>N=1477</b>
Female	173	157
Male	203	185

We also found considerable variation depending on both household type and the priority subcategory – on average singles waited longer than other household configurations in each of the five priority subcategories, except for those under the Special Housing Needs for people over 55. However, while the wait times for singles in the Special Housing Needs for people over 55 category is less than other household configurations, the wait times are over five years for both groups nonetheless.

**Table 15:** Average wait times (weeks), household configuration by priority type (%)

	<b>Singles</b> <b>N=1949</b>	<b>Other Households</b> <b>N=1477</b>	<b>TOTAL</b> <b>N=3426</b>
Emergency Management	166	128	
Homeless with Support	182	159	
Special Housing Needs	181	152	
Special Housing Needs 55+	264	356	
Supported Housing	259	215	

Finally, social housing stock is unevenly distributed across the State and demand varies spatially as well. The nett result is that we see significant differences in wait times between areas, and these differences are further amplified by household configuration. For instance, among singles the amount of time it takes to get housed in the fastest local government area (LGA) (Mildura) is 119

weeks, nearly two and a half times faster than it takes to get housed in Glen Ira (291 weeks), the slowest LGA. For other household configurations a similar pattern is evident, but they are always housed faster than singles – in Benalla the waiting time for housing was 91 weeks and this increased to a 269 week wait for a property in Monash.

To summarise, no matter what the income source, what priority application category, whether public or community, male or female, singles always WAIT LONGER.

## 5. Conclusion

The challenges SHAs and CHOs face in terms of housing singles are wide ranging. More households are coming onto the VHR than moving off the list and unless the flow is reversed housing authorities will likely need to ration social housing to the most disadvantaged members of the community, with the social, cultural, and economic complications this inevitably creates. With respect to singles, they constitute significant source of demand for social housing, and the indications are that this will remain so for the foreseeable future. Singles are over-represented on the VHR and on the Priority Access list. More singles are coming onto the VHR than are leaving compared to any other household type. There is also a great deal of variation in the ages of single people on the VHR and they are often on lower paying benefits than other households. However, it is also the case that there are many older singles on the VHR, and they are more likely to be on a pension, which generate higher rents than younger singles who are often on JobSeeker. Given older people are more likely to sustain a tenancy, the obvious danger here is that the way the system is currently structured is systematically biasing selection towards older households.

The move by Homes Victoria to a more transparent approach regarding VHR data is a positive move. We would argue that the next step should be towards making a limited dataset publicly available so that more detailed analysis can be undertaken by either researchers or CHOs themselves. Further, presenting information about the flows into and off the VHR each year (or ideally every six months) would augment existing public reports.

Nonetheless, as it currently stands, and as the allocation data clearly show, single person households present a broader set of challenges to housing providers than any other group. Singles are the largest single group and the most varied. Much of this is well known already, as are the systemic changes required to improve housing outcomes among single person households. What isn't as clear is whether there is the political desire to make the necessary changes that would ensure that outflows exceed inflows for every household that applies to the VHR.

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## Appendix 1

**Table 1:** List of variables provided by Homes Victoria

Application No	Application Type	Priority Category	Priority Type	New or Transfer
Application Status	Bedroom Size	ROI Effective date	Priority Effective date	Is Indigenous
Is Aboriginal	Is Torres Strait	Locational pref(s)	Lodging Organisation	Consented name
Extra Bedroom	Household type	Main Income Type	Year of Birth	Client Age
Gender	Country birth	CRN		

**Table 2:** Intial recoding of income types

<b>Income type - Homes Vic</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Recoded As</b>
Abstudy	72	AusStudy
Abstudy 60+	1	AusStudy
Abstudy Partnered 21+	2	AusStudy
Abstudy Single 21+	9	AusStudy
Abstudy Single Away from Home	1	AusStudy
Age Pension	1588	Pension - Age
Age Pension - Pension Reform	4407	Pension - Age
Austudy	214	AusStudy
Austudy Allowance for Independent	1	AusStudy
Austudy at Home 18+	1	AusStudy
Austudy at Home Normal 16-17	1	AusStudy
Austudy Education Pension Allowance	9	AusStudy
Austudy No Dependants	6	AusStudy
Austudy Partnered with Dependants	2	AusStudy
Austudy Single Special Rate	1	AusStudy
Austudy Single with Dependants	3	AusStudy
Bereavement Allowance	1	Other - Govt
Carer Pension	955	Pension - Care
Carer Pension - Pension Reform	1947	Pension - Care
Carers Allowance	67	Pension - Care
Clean Energy Supplement	15	Other - Govt
Clean Energy Supplement, FTB part A	1	Other - Govt
Compensation Payment	62	Other - Govt
Connected PPL	2	Other - Govt
Coronavirus Supplement	333	Other - Govt
Dad Partner Payment	1	Family payment
Defence Force Income Supplement	1	Other - Govt
Disability Pension	3478	Pension - Disability
Disability Pension - Pension Reform	13246	Pension - Disability
Disability Pension Youth at Home	2	Pension - Disability
Disability Pension Youth Away from Home	5	Pension - Disability
Disability Wage Supplement	2	Pension - Disability
DSP under 21 with Dependants	1	Pension - Disability

Emergency Payment	1	Other- Govt
Family Lump Sum Supplement (A)	3	Family payments
Family Payments	2	Family payments
Family Tax Benefit - Part A	2023	Family payments
Family Tax Benefit - Part B	31	Family payments
Government Housing Authority Concessional amount	1	Other - Govt
GST component of Allowances	9	Other - Govt
Imputed Benefit	74	Other - Govt
Imputed Family Lump Sum Supplement (A)	6	Other - Govt
Imputed Family Tax Benefit - Part A	1	Other - Govt
Imputed income for a subsidy	26	Other - Govt
Imputed income for market rent payers in arrears	28	Other - Govt
Imputed Other Income	21	Other - Govt
Imputed Pension	3	Other - Govt
Imputed Top-up to appropriate Centrelink Rate	10	Other - Govt
Income Stream and Annuities Asset	1	Other
Income Stream and Annuities Income	1	Other
Invalid Pension	1	Pension - Age
Job Search Allowance	1	JobSeeker
Job Search Away from Home 18-20	1	JobSeeker
JobSeeker Payment	8886	JobSeeker
Large Family Supplement	2	Other - Govt
Maintenance Payment	148	Other - Govt
Maternity payment	1	Other - Govt
Newborn Supplement	3	Other - Govt
Newborn Upfront Payment	1	Other - Govt
NewStart Allowance	6729	JobSeeker
NewStart Allowance at Pension Rate	13	JobSeeker
NewStart Allowance Away from Home 16-20	1	Youth allowance
Null value	5742	No information
Other	156	Other
Other-non assessable	3	Other
Over 18 Austudy at Special Rate	1	AusStudy
Over 18 Austudy Away Normal Rate	1	AusStudy
Over 21 Job Search Allowance	5	JobSeeker
Overseas Income (excl Overseas Pensions)	1	Other
Overseas Pension	116	Other
Overseas Pension Special	2	Other
Paid Parental Leave	23	Family payments
Parenting Payment Partnered	448	Family payments
Parenting Payment Single	62	Family payments
Parenting Single Pension	7105	Family payments
Partners Allowance	3	Other - Govt
PAYE Employee Wages	3461	Wages
Pension Basic Supplement	5	Pension
Pension Basic Supplement - Dept Veterans Affairs	1	Pension

Pension Supplement	10	Pension
Pension Supplement - Dept Veterans Affairs	1	Pension
Pharmaceutical Allowance	1	Other - Govt
Real Estate Asset (deemed interest rate)	1	Other
Regular Income	3	Wages
Rent Assistance	47	Other
Savings/Investment Interest	2	Other
School Start Bonus	1	Other - Govt
Self-Employed Adjusted Nett Profit	106	Wages
Service Pension	30	Pension
Service Pension - Pension Reform	37	Pension
Sickness Allowance	36	Special benefit
Sickness Allowance at Pension Rate	1	Special benefit
Sole Parents Pension	10	Family payments
Special Benefit	194	Special benefit
Special Benefit at Pension Rate	1	Special benefit
Superannuation Payments	47	Other
Supplementary income	2	Other
Top-up to appropriate Centrelink Rate	2	JobSeeker
Trust and Companies Income	4	Other
Unemployment Benefit	17	JobSeeker
University Scholarship/Grant & Bursaries	1	Other
Veteran Affairs Disability Pension	25	Pension
War Widow Pension	1	Pension
War Widow Pension - Pension Reform	14	Pension
Widows Allowance	91	Pension
Widows Allowance at Pension Rate	2	Pension
Widows Pension	10	Pension
Widows Pension - Pension Reform	7	Pension
Wife AGE/DSP Pensioner	1	Pension
Wife AGE/DSP Pensioner - Pension Reform	3	Pension
WorkCare Payments	56	other
Youth Allowance	1611	Youth allowance
Youth Allowance at Home	34	Youth allowance
Youth Allowance Away from Home	150	Youth allowance
Youth Allowance Partnered + Dependants	2	Youth allowance
Youth Allowance Partnered no Dependants	2	Youth allowance
Youth Disability Allowance	5	Youth allowance
<b>Total</b>	<b>64168</b>	<b>NA</b>

**Table 3: Secondary recoding of income types**

<b>Income type</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Recoded as</b>
No information	5742	No information
Ausstudy	325	Income support
Pension - Age	6114	Pension/Allowance
Other - Govt	743	Other

Pension - Care	2969	Pension/Allowance
Pension - Disability	16734	Pension/Allowance
Family payments	9711	Pension/Allowance
Other	334	Other
Jobseeker	15655	Income support
Youth Allowance	1804	Income support
Wages	3567	Wages
Pension	238	Pension/Allowance
Special benefit	232	Pension/Allowance
<b>Total</b>	<b>64168</b>	

**Table 4:** Comparison VHR applications 2021 and 2022, select variables

	2021	2022	Difference
<b>APPLICATION TYPE (%)</b>			
Priority	55.1	56.5	1.4
ROI	44.9	43.5	-1.4
New	85.9	85.8	-0.1
Transfer	14.1	14.2	0.1
<b>PRORITY CATEGORY (N)</b>			
Emergency Management	1043	1349	29%
Homeless with support	14151	15525	10%
Null value	27075	27945	3%
Priority Transfers	3994	4203	5%
Priority Transfers - Property Management/Redevelopment	526	986	87%
Special Housing Needs	6636	7223	9%
Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over	5676	5659	0%
Supported Housing	1219	1278	5%
<b>APPLICANT CHARACTERISTICS (%)</b>			
Aboriginal Victorian	9.6	10	0.4
Gender – female	56.9	56.5	-0.4
Born in Australia	66.2	67.6	1.4
<b>HOUSEHOLD TYPE (%)</b>			
Single	56.7	55.8	-0.9
Single Plus	1.5	2.9	1.4
Other	36.1	35.7	-0.4
Group	5.8	5.6	-0.2
Age (Mean)	45.5 (SD 16.1)	45.85 (SD 16.1)	
Bedroom size (mean)	1.67 (SD 0.97)	1.67 (SD 0.97)	
Single bedroom request	35658	38065	7%



## Appendix 2

Raw data for Table 6 – 10

**Table 6:** Income source by household configuration, public housing or social housing, N

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH	PH	TOTAL	CH	PH	TOTAL
Income support	442	775	<b>1217</b>	169	505	<b>674</b>
Pension	507	1176	<b>1683</b>	494	1610	<b>2104</b>
Other	25	32	<b>57</b>	20	53	<b>73</b>
Wages	43	38	<b>81</b>	67	80	<b>147</b>
No Information	71	119	<b>190</b>	10	23	<b>33</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>2140</b>	<b>3228</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>2271</b>	<b>3031</b>

**Table 7:** Age distribution by household configuration, public housing or social housing, N

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH	PH	TOTAL	CH	PH	TOTAL
0-24	68	128	<b>196</b>	79	248	<b>327</b>
25-34	178	258	<b>436</b>	222	702	<b>924</b>
35-44	263	369	<b>632</b>	219	603	<b>822</b>
45-54	269	505	<b>774</b>	111	353	<b>464</b>
55-64	175	504	<b>679</b>	80	207	<b>287</b>
65 plus	135	376	<b>511</b>	49	158	<b>207</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>2140</b>	<b>3228</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>2271</b>	<b>3031</b>

**Table 8:** Application type, by household configuration, N

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH	PH	TOTAL	CH	PH	TOTAL
ROI	236	326	<b>562</b>	278	251	<b>529</b>
Priority	852	1814	<b>2666</b>	482	2020	<b>2502</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>2140</b>	<b>3228</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>2271</b>	<b>3031</b>

**Table 9:** New priority allocations and transfers by household configuration, N

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH	PH	TOTAL	CH	PH	TOTAL
New	788	1392	<b>2180</b>	438	1149	<b>1587</b>
Transfer	64	422	<b>486</b>	44	871	<b>915</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>1814</b>	<b>2666</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2502</b>

**Table 10:** New Priority allocations by type, by household configuration, %

	Singles			Other Households		
	CH	PH	TOTAL	CH	PH	TOTAL
Emergency Management	158	326	<b>484</b>	22	85	<b>107</b>
Homeless with support	373	732	<b>1105</b>	219	791	<b>1010</b>
Special Housing Needs	107	154	<b>252</b>	159	211	<b>370</b>
Special Housing Needs 55+	128	165	<b>293</b>	25	26	<b>51</b>
Supported Housing	22	24	<b>46</b>	13	36	<b>49</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>788</b>	<b>1392</b>	<b>2180</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>1149</b>	<b>1587</b>