

IT TAKES A WHOLE COMMUNITY
TO MAKE A PLACE A HOME



THINKING & ACTING LOCALLY

City of Port Phillip
Draft Homelessness Action Strategy
2015-2020



Foreword from Mayor

We are pleased to be releasing the draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020 for public comment. The City of Port Phillip is a diverse community which has a long standing and enduring commitment to social inclusion for all residents. Council supports the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs. This support includes the ways in which we work with the community to address and reduce homelessness. Council recognises this requires an overarching, coherent framework directing strategic intervention that builds upon the successful implementation of our previous five year strategy which was independently reviewed in 2013.

We want to ensure Port Phillip is a healthy and creative city-one that is resilient, vibrant and well governed for all. The draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020 is aligned to Council's Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan which recognises that "a broad range of social, economic and environmental factors need to be considered to improve health. Factors such as shelter, income, education, environment, social connection, access to services and equity have direct impacts on health, and also influence a person's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing."

Although there are a number of wealthy households in Port Phillip, in 2013, 16% of our households could be classified as low income. In 2011, 8% or over 7000 Port Phillip residents were estimated as living in povertyⁱ. Port Phillip's approach to homelessness encompasses both individual and structural factors. We understand that life circumstances of individuals and the social and economic contexts in the broader community can lead to homelessness.

Private rents in Port Phillip rose by 46% ⁱⁱ between 2006 and 2011 and this municipality is recognised as an area with a very low proportion of affordable housing with over 3000 households living in rental stress. Homelessness places people at harm, impacting on personal safety, health and wellbeing, security of possessions and their ability to engage and connect with employment and education opportunities. In the 2011 Censusⁱⁱⁱ, over 1500 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in Port Phillip.

City of Port Phillip leads by example in pursuing social justice for all people in our community. Our Social Justice Charter promotes principles of participation, partnership, access, respect for diversity, addressing the cost of living and reducing disadvantage and enjoying the city by being connected. We recognise that a broad range of social, economic and environmental factors need to be considered to improve health and wellbeing and that it takes a whole community to make a place a home. Council's role is to be welcoming and inclusive, equipped to connect people to services and partner and advocate on the issue of homelessness.

Glossary

ABS -The Australian Bureau of Statistics

AHURI -The Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute

AIHW - The Australian Institute of Health & Welfare

Public housing - This is housing that is owned and managed by the State Government Authority.

Housing Provider - a community not for profit organisation managing tenancies on behalf of the State Government Housing Authority

Housing Association - a community based, not for profit housing company who manage stock either owned by the company or for State Government Housing Authority; also actively seek to generate new housing stock.

Social housing - refers to public and community housing

Housing stress - refers to the lowest 40% of income groups who are paying more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgage costs.

NATSEM - National Centre for Economic and Social Modelling, (part of Australian National University)

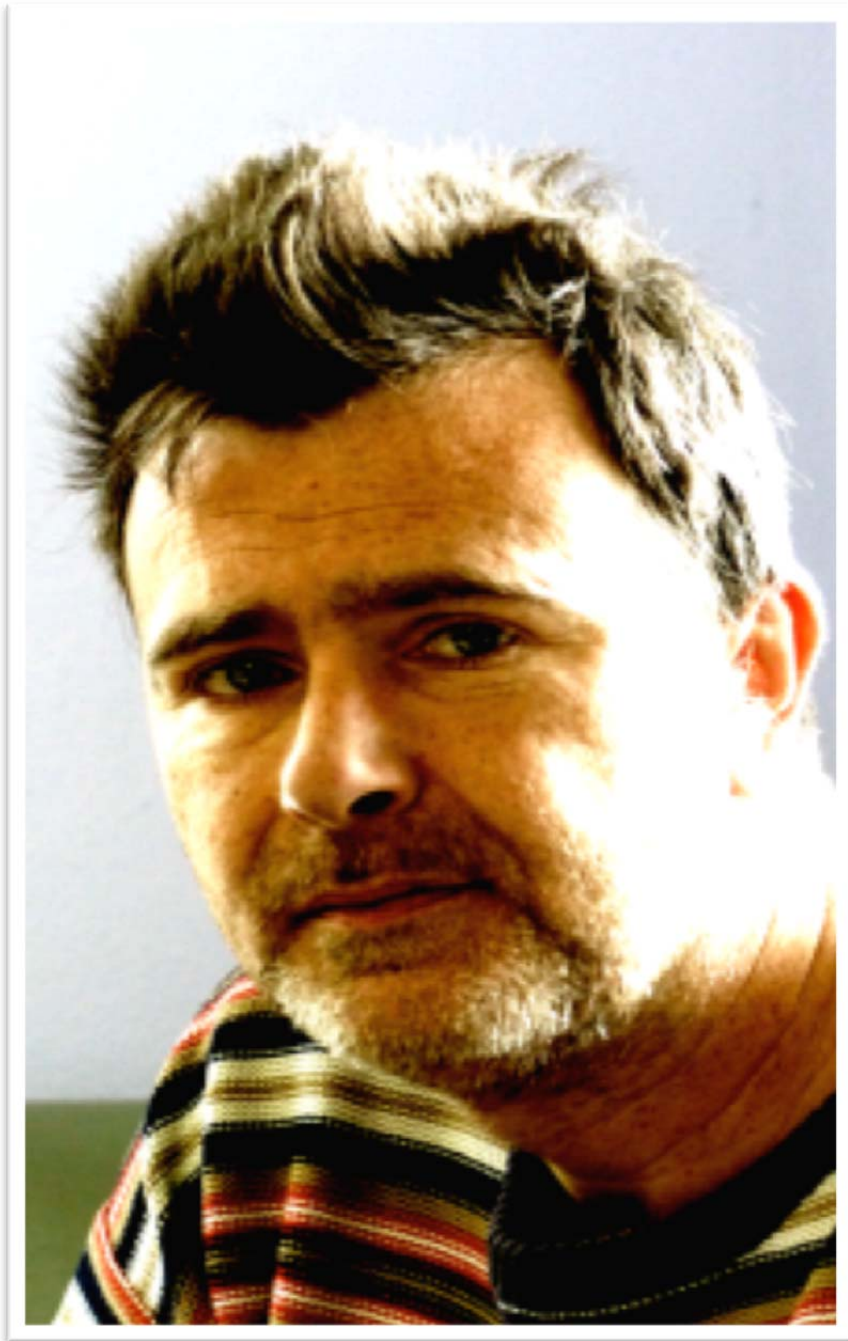
NRAS - National Rental Affordability Scheme- a Federal Government funded scheme designed to generate additional affordable rental housing units

OECD - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which promotes policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world. The OECD provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems.

Poverty Line - a relative concept measuring a point below which people are considered to be in poverty. In Australia, 40% of average weekly income is understood to be the poverty line.

Rooming House - Rooming houses (sometimes also referred to as boarding houses) generally provide housing for single people who (sometimes through disadvantage) find it difficult to access other private rental housing. Traditionally residents rent a bedroom (rather than self-contained flats/units) and use shared common facilities such as bathrooms, lounges, kitchens and laundries. Increasingly community managed rooming houses include partially or fully self-contained bed sitters/studio units.

SEIFA is primarily used to rank areas according to socio-economic advantage and disadvantage based on census data. The census variables used cover a number of domains and include household income, education, employment, occupation, housing and other indicators of advantage and disadvantage. Combined, the indexes provide more general measures of socio-economic status than is given by measuring one of the domains in isolation. A higher score on the index means a *lower* level of disadvantage. A lower score on the index means a *higher* level of disadvantage. In 2011, City of Port Phillip the median score was 1,065.7 on the SEIFA index of disadvantage.



Shane knows 'homelessness is hell'. Although he isn't homeless at the moment, he knows the feeling. There was a time he was the 'night shift' at the Balaclava Station. He slept in this relative shelter. As the trains started in the early morning he would move pre-dawn to spend the very early morning on Grey Street. 'Everyone has to have a routine to keep alive' he says. Sometimes to pass the time he'd get a train or tram ticket and go to sleep in the warm dry relative safety of public transport.

While everyone else is out enjoying café culture, for Shane and his friends the weekends are the worst of it as no welfare or support is available. Shane knows there are lots of people like him sleeping rough. He knows there are things that could happen to make life better. Another safe centre like the St Kilda Drop In catering for people with mental illnesses might be a good start. He'd really like something put in place for younger people. They get bored out there so cause trouble for others that are homeless.

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Executive Summary

Council recognises that homelessness can have complex and diverse origins and that it can happen to anyone. Homelessness can be caused by something outside of a person's control such as not being able to locate secure, safe and affordable accommodation.

Council acknowledges our health is a reflection of the community and environment that we live in, the risk factors we are exposed to and the opportunities afforded to us throughout life. A key action in developing a healthy and inclusive city is ensuring a diversity of housing options is delivering affordable housing to meet our community needs. Council promotes social justice through facilitating inclusive public space and access to community facilities such as libraries, parks, and community centres.

Port Phillip is recognised as an area with a very low proportion of affordable housing. Research has shown that losing the ability to afford housing can have wide ranging impacts on many aspects of life. State Government, Council and a range of housing services are frequently approached by people experiencing housing stress which can ultimately lead to homelessness if suitable accommodation cannot be located.

Housing stress is defined as a household in the lowest 40% of income groups that is paying more than 30% of their income on their rent or mortgage. Despite government investment and the work of many organisations, homelessness and the provision of affordable housing remains a major issue for many people in our community. Widening inequality damages the social fabric of society and creates mistrust. Integrated affordable housing is essential in all communities – exclusionary design is unhealthy for everyone.

The City of Port Phillip supports the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs and pursues social justice for all people in our community.

This can be achieved through a number of actions available to us as a Council:

- leading initiatives with the community as well as with housing provision and homelessness services, community and health sectors, state and federal governments and local businesses to ensure people have the best chance of moving out of homelessness into secure homes,
- focusing on people in our community experiencing homelessness, those with multiple and complex needs and those most at risk of becoming homeless in the next five years such as households experiencing housing stress.

Council's Vision

The *Draft City of Port Phillip Homelessness Action Strategy 2015-2020* seeks to reduce the risks associated with homelessness through the development of agreed actions, continuing Council's role as a leader, advocate, planner, facilitator and service provider. We recognise that homelessness can often remain hidden as many people constantly move around trying to secure housing.

In response to our growing population and the sustained local shortage of affordable housing and low skill entry employment, homelessness is expected to continue to increase. Despite this Council's strategic leadership in this area makes a measurable difference to mitigating the impacts of homelessness. Council recognises that homelessness affects a broad range of people-reducing and preventing homelessness relies on integrating planning and actions across all levels of government, different service sectors, parts of the community and by actively including people with a lived experience of homelessness and/or housing stress. Many of our actions can be carried out within Council's current staffing and budget levels.

This strategy aims to address the complexity of homelessness by focusing on 4 key themes:

- 1. Building a more informed response** – enhancing community awareness, facilitating research and information sharing across all service sectors
- 2. Staying connected** – strengthening integrated responses to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and housing stress through diverse partnerships
- 3. Being inclusive** – listening to and advocating with people who have a lived experience of homelessness
- 4. Focusing on prevention and early intervention** - supporting the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs and improving access to support and information to obtain suitable housing.



Themes and Actions

I. Building a more informed response to addressing and reducing homelessness

Council has fulfilled diverse and effective roles over many years seeking to reduce and prevent homelessness which have included the development of housing, funding of grants and subsidies as well as providing and planning services.

“Any solution to homelessness should be focused and start locally. It has to start at Council level. They should develop a strategy and tactics for advocating for a solution to homelessness. There is a need for clear objectives and measurement of results” (Survey respondent-development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019)

Council is uniquely placed to take a lead role locally in raising community understanding of homelessness. To do this it's essential to expand local knowledge of homeless trends, triggers, issues and needs. This will enhance Council's capacity to facilitate a more integrated, responsive and strategic approach. Council will partner with others to develop and deliver timely, relevant local data collation, interpretation and expand publication capacity.

This will be achieved by the following actions:

- **Supporting** awareness raising programs and events enhancing and promoting understanding of homelessness
- **Developing** a shared framework to document services available to people experiencing homelessness and unmet demand/ turn away
- **Monitoring** the community's access to direct services/ gaps in service responses.
- **Publishing** a local homelessness situation report annually
- **Facilitating** the local homeless count for the 2016 Census and undertaking an evaluation of this strategy at its mid-term in 2017 after release of the homelessness data.

Measures of achievement:

- Annual Homeless Memorial facilitated each June and an initiative related to National Homeless Person's week held each August.
- Forum held 2015 to establish terms of reference and development of shared framework to measure services available and level of turn away –report by end 2015 to demonstrate service capacity and inform advocacy to State and Federal government.
- Homelessness Report presented to Council annually from December 2015 outlining community awareness initiatives.
- Coordinate effective homeless enumeration related to Census in August 2016
- Evaluation of Homelessness Action Strategy completed in 2018.

2. Staying connected

Over many years, Council has advocated and partnered with a range of innovative support services. In terms of homelessness, this includes the local Opening Doors entry point at Homeground Housing Services who deliver Government funded homelessness programs including one aiming to keep families out of rooming houses called the *Accommodation Options for Families* (AOF) and a program targeting the most vulnerable and chronic rough sleepers called *Melbourne Street to Home* (MS2H)^{iv}. Partnering with many local services, these and other programs are successfully targeting the most vulnerable Port Phillip residents who are experiencing homelessness.

Other productive programs have emerged over recent years utilise integrated co-located and partnered programs. These include Centrelink, Hanover Housing Services, Sacred Heart Mission, Royal District Nursing Services Homeless Persons Program HPP, Salvation Army Crisis Services, Alfred Health and Inner South Community Health as well as many specialist community agencies, as well as public and community housing. No one organisation or level of government can address homelessness alone.

These programs highlight the high incidence of trauma and entrenched exclusion experienced by people who remain homeless for long periods, in particular those who have moved from experience of homelessness as a child or young person through to adult homelessness.

“The most important thing is building relationships, building social connections as these allow social inclusion, Social interaction leads to engagement that often sees participants achieve well beyond their expectations and can be transformational” (Local Community Organisation Service worker homelessness, development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019)

Council will work with agencies to develop and implement preferred models for formal collaboration and partnership in Port Phillip.

This will be achieved by the following actions:

- **Annually reviewing and implementing as required** the *Sudden Rooming House Closure Protocol* in event of sudden closures of housing impacting on multiple numbers of residents; update annually in the *Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP)*.
- **Delivering** the *Social Meals in Rooming Houses* in partnership with local agencies.
- **Coordinating** responses to homelessness in public spaces within Council’s services and with external partners through *Council’s Protocol for Assisting People who are Sleeping Rough*.
- **Exploring** feasibility in establishing a Community Partnerships Framework promoting links with business and philanthropic communities.

Measures of Achievement:

- Annual reviews of protocols completed and documented
- Number of Social Meals in Rooming houses reported annually
- Number of responses to homelessness in public spaces reported annually
- Feasibility study of establishing Community Partnership carried out 2015.

3. Being inclusive

Council actively recognises and greatly respects the skill, knowledge and expertise of people with a lived experience of homelessness.

“Council should promote Port Phillip as a community of multiple communities which add to the area’s character. To aid that diversity, housing that caters for low socio-economic groups should be supported and the views and input of those who have experienced homelessness actively sought”
(Survey respondent –development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019).

Council will develop further opportunities for active citizenship enabling those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to engage fully in community life.

This will be achieved through the following actions:

- **Exploring** opportunities to develop a homelessness community reference group seeking to inform the implementation of the strategy.
- **Developing** improved methods of delivering information to hard to reach parts of the community on how to access assistance.
- **Providing** opportunities for social engagement in community spaces.
- **Promoting** low and no cost inclusive events, recreation and activities in parks and public spaces.

Measures of achievement:

- Feasibility study regards development of community reference group carried out in 2015
- Expanded information methods including communications strategy developed in 2015 and reviewed annually
- Documented opportunities for community engagement and inclusion strategies included in Annual Homelessness Report

4. Focus on prevention and early intervention

The City of Port Phillip has facilitated the provision of public and community housing in Port Phillip for the state government's Office of Housing and other community housing organisations. Facilitation can be any assistance required and able to be provided in order to help support or develop community housing projects.

“80% of homelessness can be solved by providing adequate housing. A small percentage of people need some assistance and an even smaller proportion need intensive assistance”

(Local Community housing provider- development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019)

Timely access to safe, secure and affordable housing, and support if required, is the key to preventing homelessness and reducing the time spent in homelessness. Research has also identified that another vital part in preventing homelessness is for an individual or family to be connected to others in their community and have networks to turn to when they first experience difficulties.^v

Council will investigate and expand opportunities to better inform and link the community to available services aimed at preventing homelessness or reducing the time people experience homelessness. It is vital that this incorporates mainstream services we all access and not just specialist homelessness services.

This will be achieved through the following actions:

- **Supporting** the delivery of affordable housing to meet community needs
- **Ensuring** people have access to relevant and timely support and information to access suitable housing and support
- **Delivering** integrated service responses to families via Council's Child, Family and Youth Programs and older people through home support and Council's nominations to local older person public housing ^{vi}
- **Advocating** for and considering strategies to support local community housing organisations including those that address the needs of persons most at risk of homelessness.

Measures of achievement:

- Align actions promoting affordable housing as outlined in *Draft City of Port Phillip Strengthening Community Housing Partnerships Strategy* in 2015 and the review of Council's 10 year Housing Strategy in 2016
- Review Council's online information quarterly regards local housing and homelessness services and document this in Annual Homeless report
- Report numbers of people assisted by Council's Child, Family and Youth programs and Housing & Homelessness Services in annual Local Homelessness report
- Council to submit to the Federal government's future review of housing and homelessness
- Document other submissions and advocacy each year that Council makes to State or Federal government to retain and expand services locally.

Background

The City of Port Phillip has a strong and enduring commitment to address social justice and to recognising homelessness as a priority. Port Phillip's approach is widely acknowledged within Australia^{vii}:

'The City of Port Phillip is renowned for its proactive and innovative approaches to end homelessness. Homelessness is understood as a housing problem. Affordable housing is consequently an important element of the council's strategy to help those experiencing housing stress. A human rights based approach informs the council's approach to rough sleepers and managing public space. Since 2001, the council has worked to protect the rights and interests of vulnerable people sleeping in public space. The City of Port Phillip provides many examples of best practice.'

In developing Council's approach, a range of national, state and local government responses to homelessness have been reviewed. The *Victorian Local Government Act 1989* that requires local government authorities to take into account the diverse needs of their local community in decision making; provide leadership by establishing strategic objectives and monitoring achievements and advocate for the interests of their local community to other communities and governments.

Council is also legally obliged as a public authority within the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* to consider human rights when it makes laws, develops policies and provides services. Council's responses to homelessness are in accordance with this Charter.

Collective action^{viii} creates stronger, healthier communities and requires important contributors from different sectors working to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem such as homelessness. *"A respectful community is one where difference is understood, sought after and celebrated, where people are valued for their individuality and feel free to be themselves. The City of Port Phillip commits to ensuring respect for all members of the community."*^{ix}

In 2008, Council demonstrated its specific commitment to addressing homelessness by releasing *Hope: Homelessness Action Strategy 2008-2013* which facilitated an enhanced understanding of homelessness and led integrated responses to reducing homelessness.

Strong partnerships between Council, housing providers, health and community agencies have improved outcomes for people locally who are experiencing homelessness to assist them to access support and move into secure housing. However, services have consistently reported not being able^x to provide assistance to all who present needing help.^{xi} Hanover Housing Services reported in July 2014 that their agency was turning away nine out of ten housing applicants.^{xii}

Who is Homeless in Port Phillip?

Definitions

Local individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at a high risk of becoming homeless include:

- A person who cannot access affordable and secure housing -there is added vulnerability for households in the private rental market, particularly as one in five local renters^{xiii} receive incomes below the poverty line.
- Women and children who are escaping family violence-40% of family homelessness is attributed to being caused by family violence
- People who lose their jobs and struggle to secure adequate hours of work for an income that can cover the costs of rent, food and heating ending up in their cars-this is often referred to as hidden homelessness
- People previously working and renting or paying a mortgage who become injured or seriously unwell and unable to return to full time work
- People on a Centrelink income such as an Age or Disability Support Pension or Unemployment Benefits and unable to secure affordable housing
- People previously staying temporarily with a friend or family member where they have worn out their welcome.

Homelessness can affect people at any age and life stage. It is currently defined as when:

“a person does not have suitable accommodation and their current living arrangement

- Is in a dwelling which is inadequate; or*
- Has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or*
- Does not allow them to have control of or access to space for social relations.”^{xiv}*

Definitions of homelessness are variably understood across the community. From an individual's own perspective they may see themselves as housed, but they may be defined as insecurely housed or experiencing homelessness by services.

Some people struggle to obtain safe accommodation in terms of their personal belongings and/or their own personal safety and will elect to sleep rough as an alternative even though it is far from safe or secure.

Terms distinguishing between various states of homelessness have been used in this strategy to distinguish between groups and might better explain the experience of homelessness in Port Phillip:

- **Primary homelessness** or sleeping rough-without a shelter of any kind.
- **Secondary homelessness** - living in temporary housing and 'couch surfing' at a friend or family member's home, an institution or refuge.
- **Tertiary homelessness^{xv}** - living in rooming houses and inadequate housing including severe overcrowding; safety concerns; substandard or unsafe dwellings and insecure housing—threatened with eviction and/or having no security of tenure.





Pat feels really safe in the small self-contained space in the award winning K2 Apartment block he inhabits. He's been there since it opened. 'It's really good', he says. Getting to move into a new home was just great.

It was made a big difference no longer being homeless. Pat knows lots of people who are still homeless. When the weather changes it worries Pat, he knows what it is to be exposed to extremes of the heat or cold. 'The worst of it is that you can't trust anyone at all, he said. You can't ever leave your stuff as it gets pinched, even your blankets do'.

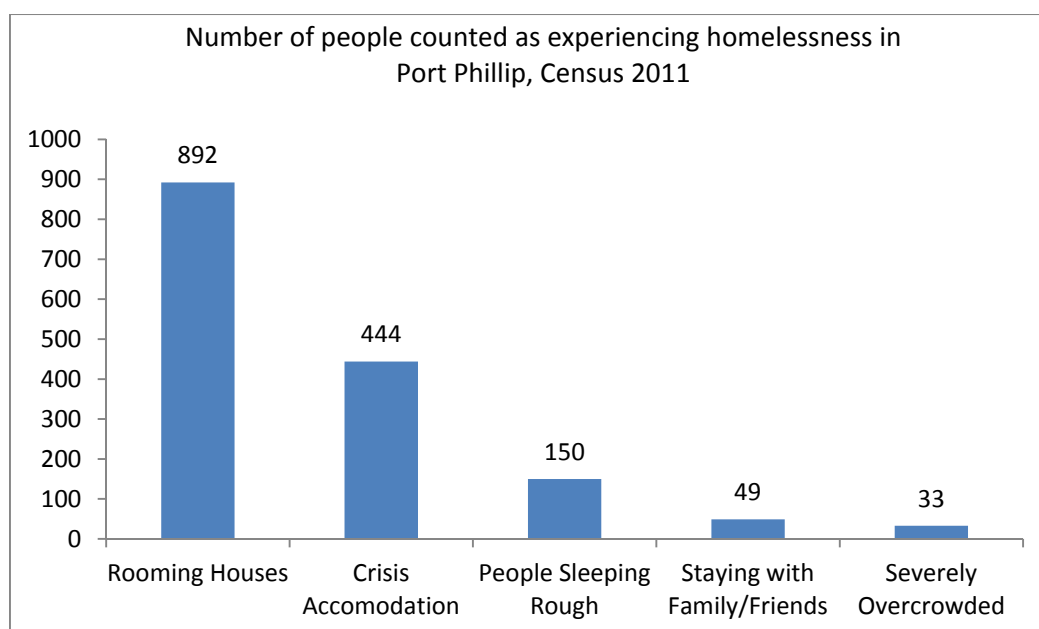
Pat's a Kiwi who has been in Australia for over 30 years. He's been in St Kilda for the last five. By the sounds of it, living in K2 he is the most comfortable he has been for some time.

Data Snapshot

Homelessness is an issue of significant proportion right across Australia. In 2011, more than 100,000 people nationally were experiencing homelessness (105,237). Those experiencing homelessness are as likely to be female as male and as likely to be younger children as those aged between 18-45 years.

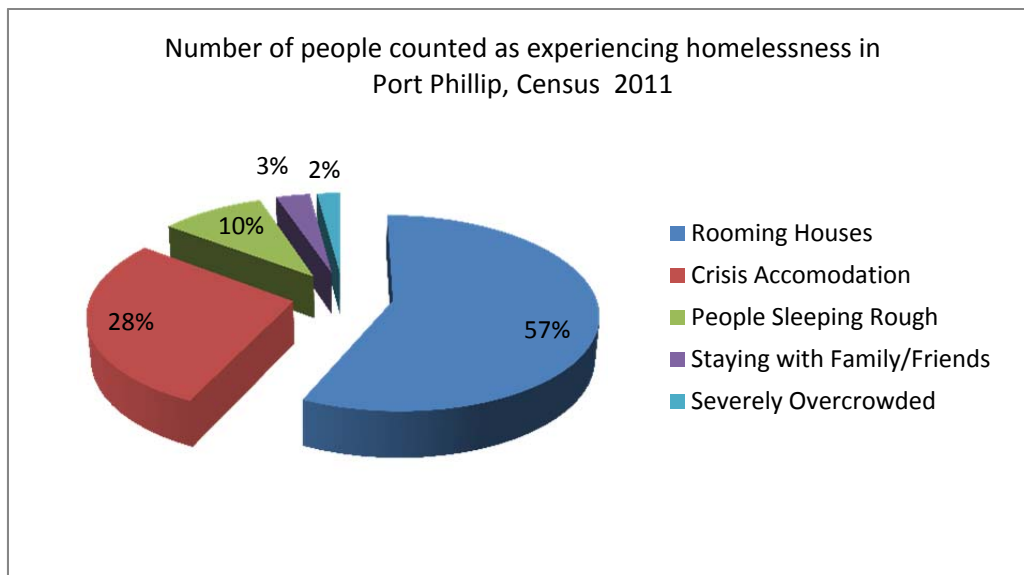
The number of people experiencing homelessness grew across Victoria between 2006 and 2011 when 22,789 Victorians with one in five of those counted in the Census were under the age of 12yrs^{xvi}.

The number of people experiencing homelessness nationally grew by 30.89% between 2006 and 2011 but by 32% in the Port Phillip area over the same period^{xvii}. Current data of homelessness in the City of Port Phillip is derived from the available Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) August 2011 Homelessness Census data^{xviii}. Additional trends are available from the Victorian Government Rental Reports^{xix}.



Port Phillip has a long standing tradition of providing shared accommodation in private hotels and boarding houses. Many community managed rooming houses have been upgraded to meet more modern housing and habitation standards. In addition in 2013, State government legislation required minimum standards for all rooming houses which included the establishment and publishing an online public register of registered rooming houses in Victoria.

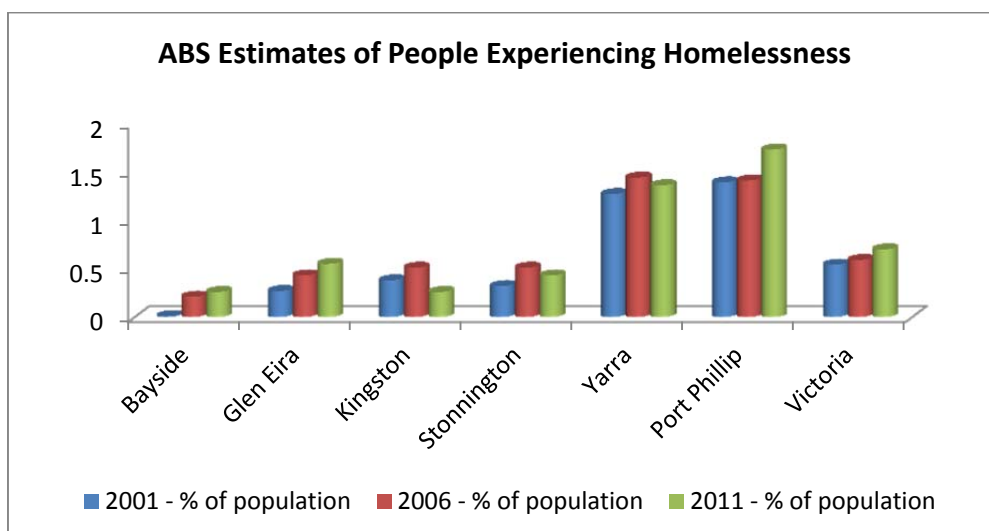
City of Port Phillip has the highest numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the Inner South East region of Melbourne and second highest across the Melbourne Metropolitan area because it has been an area that has sustained a large number of rooming houses. The ABS defines rooming houses as a form of homelessness due to the less secure form of tenure and often limited amenity and private space in this accommodation. The largest group of people experiencing homelessness in Port Phillip live in rooming houses-892 people^{xx}

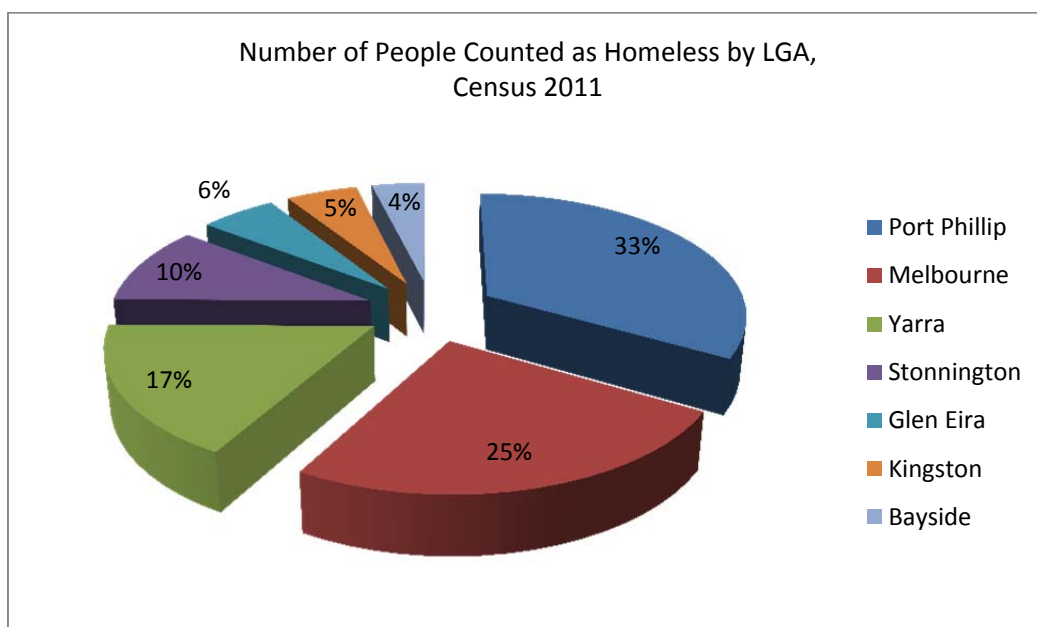
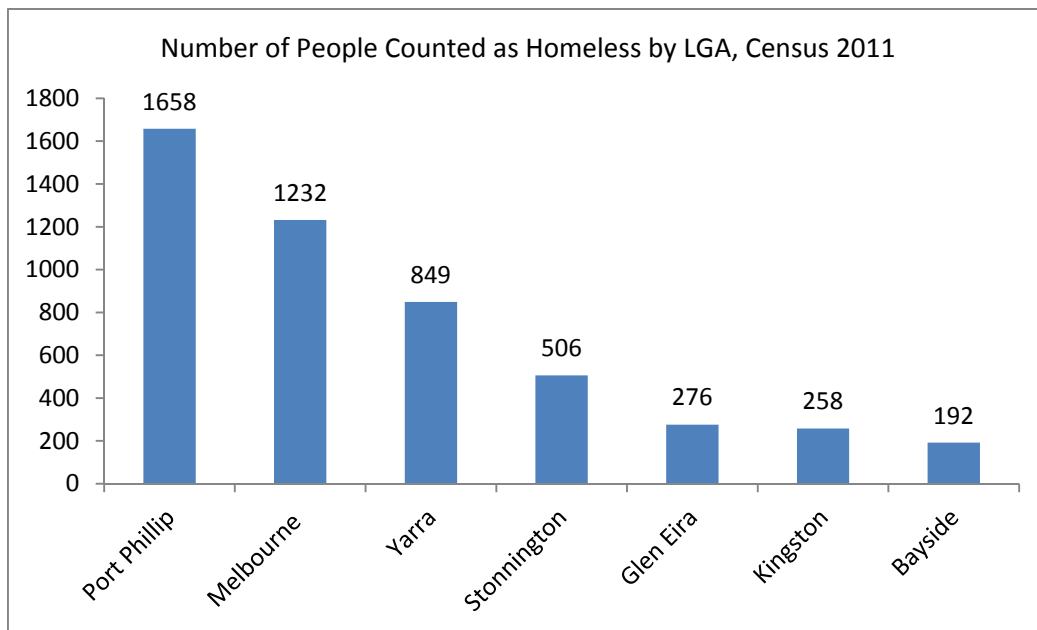


Better appointed and increasingly self- contained community rooming house stock has reduced episodes of homelessness for those living in these houses. Recent sector experience is of a reduction in turnover following rooming house renovations from rooms and communal facilities to small self-contained units. Homelessness services have noted more difficulty in accessing vacancies.

There are complex inter-relationships between rooming houses, homelessness services and the homeless population. Many specialist homelessness services use rooming houses, motels and hotels for short term crisis accommodation for those experiencing homelessness due to there being no available beds at funded crisis services. This can affect families with small children, youth and older people.

For some respondents, the experience has been transformative and established a greater sense of security and home. For others who have experienced the loss of communal areas and courtyards in the renovated properties, more time is spent in public 'third spaces' such as meeting friends in the street, libraries and parks instead of the alternative of sitting alone in their room.





In September 2014, rent for a room in the St Kilda area ranged from between \$180 and \$300 per week. For a recipient of a Centrelink Newstart payment (unemployment benefits) receiving additional maximum rent assistance, rent could represent between 60 to 70% of their income.

The City of Greater Dandenong is the only Melbourne municipality with a greater number than Port Phillip with 1,634 people estimated as homeless in 2011.^{xxi}

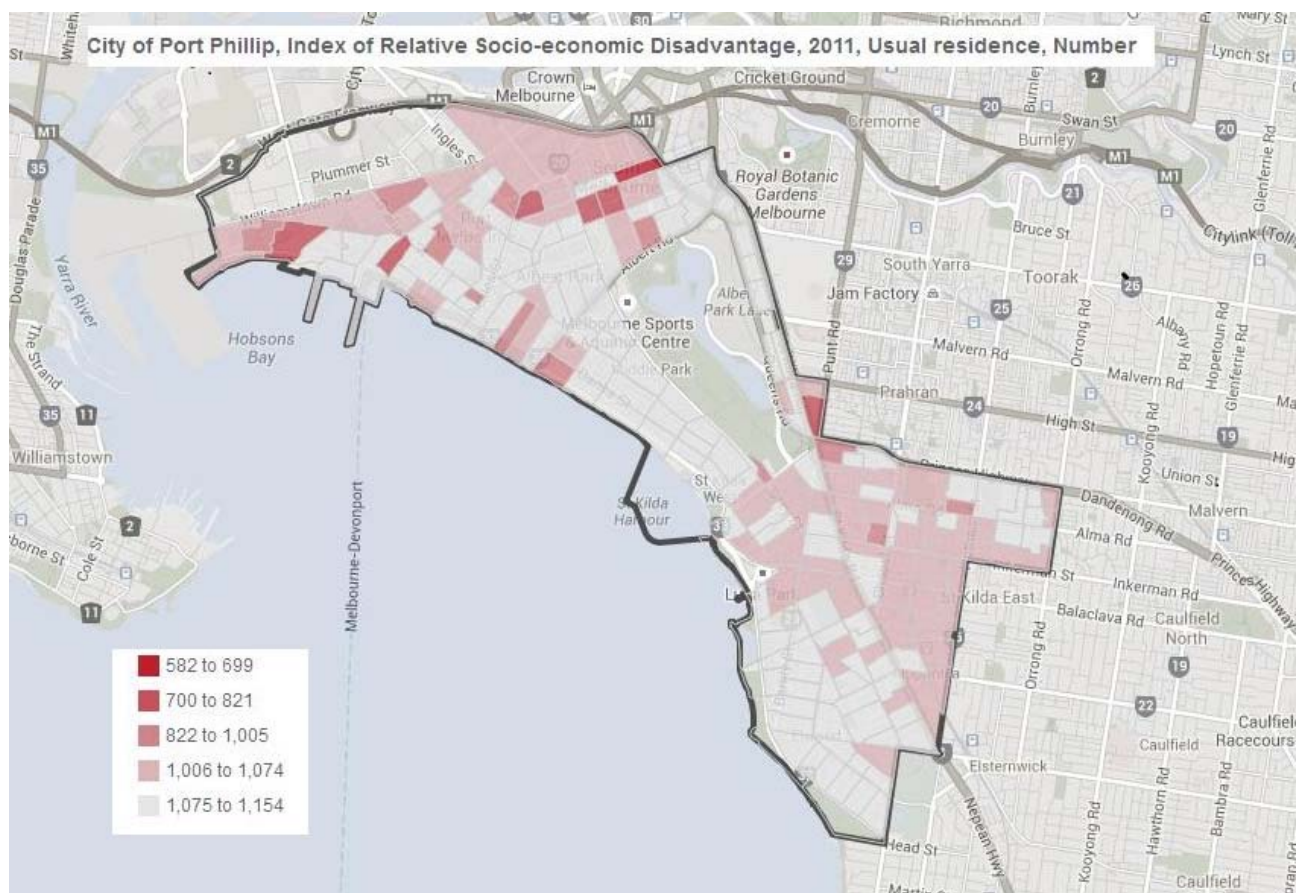
Those at risk of homelessness

Homelessness is caused in part by incomes that do not meet basic need and fuelled by rent levels that are not affordable to those in the lower 40% of income groups. This leaves people with low to medium incomes competing for the very limited and often substandard options remaining^{xxii}

Australia is experiencing a widespread and increasing housing shortage. Particular groups report discrimination in the housing market, particularly sole parent families, young people, people on Centrelink benefits and Indigenous people.

Renters are increasingly the typical form of tenure in the inner city regions and this is particularly evident in Port Phillip. Port Phillip has led the way in being a place of temporary housing, as a community of renters compared to other areas that are predominantly home owners. More than 50% of the population in Port Phillip are renters compared to 20-30% nationally.

Public housing stock in Port Phillip remained constant from 2006 to 2011. There was a small increase in the community housing stock over this time due to new projects bringing the total social housing stock (public and community housing) from 3386 units in 2006 to 3790 units in 2011, however the proportion of social housing within the overall housing stock in the municipality has fallen from 5.42% in 2001 to 4.75% in 2011.



This map depicts the spatial areas of greatest disadvantage in Port Phillip in 2011 using the SEIFA index. This is primarily used to rank areas according to socio-economic advantage and disadvantage based on census data.

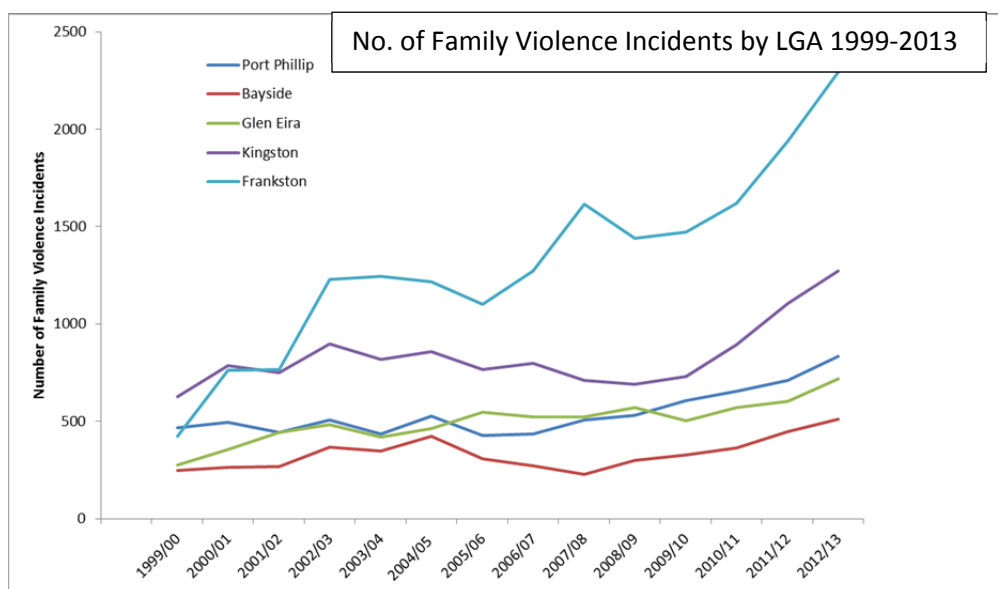
The census variables used cover a number of domains and include household income, education, employment, occupation, housing and other indicators of advantage and disadvantage. Combined, the indexes provide more general measures of socio-economic status than is given by measuring one of the domains in isolation.

In 2011, City of Port Phillip the median score was 1,065.7 on the SEIFA index of disadvantage. A higher score than the median on the index means a *lower* level of disadvantage. A lower score than median on the index means a *higher* level of disadvantage

Families experiencing homelessness:

Poverty impacts on a child's opportunities and increases poor health and education outcomes. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates the risk of living in poverty for single parents and their children is 70%^{xxiii}.

- Sole parent families in private rental households face greatest housing stress, particularly following changes to Centrelink policy early 2013 when a decision was introduced to change the benefits a sole parent is eligible for to the lesser amount of unemployment benefits when their youngest child reaches 8 years of age.
- In Port Phillip in 2011, 55 families consisting of couples with children under 15 were living in social housing and 179 families consisting of a sole parent with children under the age of 15 were living in social housing.^{xxiv}
- In Port Phillip, 34.95% of single parent families are in receipt of parenting payment, it is estimated 7.9 % of all children in Port Phillip live in poverty.^{xxv}
- A range of specialist services for women and children who experience family violence are located in Port Phillip including crisis accommodation and refuges however, services report considerable pressures to accommodate families seeking assistance. It is estimated that 44% of homelessness is caused by family violence.^{xxvi}
- The introduction of the *Enhanced Family Violence Framework in 2011* has started to improve police responses by increasing the number of alleged offenders being removed from the family home across Victoria, rather than letting things escalate to a point at which the victim and children must flee and attempt to find housing. However this is not always safe or possible and numbers of reports of family violence have been steadily increasing.^{xxvii}





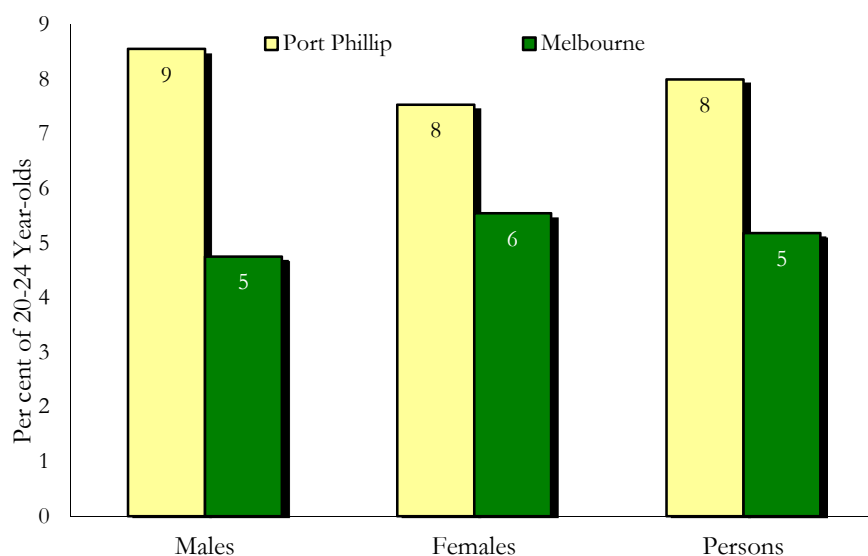
Sharon has been sleeping out for about three years now. Having come to terms with alcoholism, Sharon has set goals and sobered up on the first steps on a brave new journey. She has a plan which she can see and knows the hoops she has to jump through. She has things to look forward to. Her children's company is the most important of these.

But it wasn't always this way. Sharon has lived in St Kilda for more than twenty years now. She used to live in the Housing Commission but one day on the way back from shopping was mugged with an iron bar, wounded and badly frightened. So she entrusted her young son to her mother, it was no place to bring up a child she thought, and decamped from her old life. The violence on the streets worries Sharon now. She says it is not safe out there anymore, particularly for women.

Young people at risk of homelessness



- Youth homelessness is one of the biggest problems facing Australia. Current statistics show that almost half of all homeless persons are less than 24 years of age.^{xxviii}
- Homelessness amongst children and young people is strongly linked to relationship and family breakdown, domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse, anxiety or depression, unemployment and substance abuse. Young people may also find themselves homeless when their families are unable to afford suitable housing or are evicted from their housing.
- Children who are homeless are likely to face constant violation of these rights and are forced to endure conditions which are detrimental to their health and development. Homeless children and young people often suffer from extreme levels of distress, low self-esteem, depression, mental health problems and behavioural problems because they are victims of or witnesses to abuse. They are also at high risk of exploitation and further exposure to violence, and often have difficulty participating in school education.
- Early school leaving has been shown to be a key risk indicator of homelessness.^{xxix} In 2011, Port Phillip 4.6% of 15-19 year olds and 8% of 20-24 year olds were not in paid employment or in education.



Per cent of 20-24 year olds not in paid work or enrolled in education in Port Phillip and Melbourne 2011

Later life homelessness:

- Housing affordability and accessibility is a key structural factor highlighted in the vulnerability of a relatively small but increasing group of older Australians to homelessness in later life. Access to broader range and choice of affordable housing and accommodation options was identified by Council in 2006 in its 10 year positive ageing strategy.^{xxx}
- Older people, who have not achieved home ownership by retirement, are at great risk of significant disruption on retirement. These risks include a greater chance of moving to less secure tenure in low cost and often substandard and inappropriate housing for their needs as they age.
- It has been argued that the highest priority for housing should be accorded to securing housing tenure for older people in rental accommodation when they are approaching retirement.^{xxxi}
- Recent research^{xxxii} found that 68.6% of older people becoming homeless nationally are private renters experiencing homelessness for the first time in older age after decades of managing to secure and sustain accommodation
- National research is indicating that there is an increasing likelihood that households in the pre-retirement 55-64 age group will carry larger housing debts into their retirement than previously has been experienced.
- In 2014, the Centrelink Age pension was \$421.40 per week for an individual and \$635.30 per week for a couple, making the 30% housing stress cut off rent amount \$126 per week for a single person household and \$190 per week for a couple. There are virtually no available properties at this price available in Port Phillip or much of metropolitan Melbourne.^{xxxiii}
- Council has seen a growing number of local older people presenting in acute housing stress and /or homeless. Council's Housing and Homelessness Services assisted 416 individuals aged 50 years and over in 2013/2014 which was a 30% increase from the previous 12 months.
- Port Phillip has the largest percentage (29.9%) of people over 65 years living alone compared to the Inner South East region (26.6%). Data on older people living in lone person households provides an indication of the population living in the community who may require additional support and services.^{xxxiv}



Until recently John lived with his 91 year old mother. Frequently, and without John knowing quite why, despite paying rent, doing chores and odd jobs, his mother would kick him out and then he'd be homeless. But not so long ago, she died quite quickly. So now he has a home all by himself but continues some of the patterns of his old life, passing time at services, meeting friends, hanging out with the company on offer.

He understands from first hand that being homeless is 'disastrous and bad for anybody'. Lots of people he knows are homeless. But at the community centre he drops in to they help people get a place. He wants to see more housing available for people with disabilities.

Having a higher income might help those on fixed incomes under the poverty line. He thought that maybe some people had forgotten how to live in houses and could be supported to relearn these essential life skills

Homelessness Policy Overview

Council's Draft Homelessness Action Strategy is a local Government policy response but must be considered within the broader international, federal, state and local government policy arena.

International

The international response to homelessness is guided by the United Nations Human Rights covenants and legislation of which Australia is a signatory. Homelessness, inadequate housing and forced evictions represent violations of international human rights. The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)* recognises the right to adequate housing which is more than just shelter:

“Adequate shelter means...adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities-all at a reasonable cost. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, older age or lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control.”

Homelessness is more than just a housing issue. Homelessness is about human rights. People experiencing homelessness are not merely objects of charity, seeking help and compassion – like all Australians, they are individuals entitled to the protection and promotion of their human rights. Since human rights belong to everyone, it is in the interests of our community as a whole to ensure that the rights of people experiencing homelessness are respected and protected.^{xxxv}

National

At the federal level the Australian Government Policy: *The Road Home –A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness 2007* outlined a strong commitment to ensuring that no one in Australia is homeless and set an ambitious target to halve homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020.

This strategy established the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) 2009-2013*. The NPAH was initially extended to June 2014, then more recently following widespread advocacy to June 2015. The NPAH contributes funds to a range of homelessness services in partnership with states. Many of these programs are delivered by agencies based in Port Phillip and the inner south region of Melbourne. Nationally the proportion of people sleeping rough has fallen across 2001-2011 from 5 persons per 1,000 to 3 people per 1000. However other categories of homelessness have increased.^{xxxvi}

In May 2014, the Federal Government acknowledged the National Housing Supply Council had estimated the national shortfall in housing stock in 2011 was 228,000 dwellings. Assuming historic demographic and supply trends continue, this gap was estimated to increase to nearly 370,000 dwellings by 2016, and 663,000 by 2031. In late 2014 a Senate Inquiry is exploring housing affordability and a further review of the entire housing and homelessness sector is planned late 2014.^{xxxvii}

In December 2011, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Select Council on Housing and Homelessness was established to take an integrated approach to the related policy areas of housing supply, social and affordable housing and homelessness. The Select Council aims to drive an effective national response to reducing homelessness in Australia, and coordinate housing policy reform to assist COAG meeting its objective of providing all Australians with access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation.^{xxxviii}

State

In 2011, the previous Victorian State Government released the Victorian *Homelessness Action Plan 2011-2015 (VHAP)*^{xxxix} which outlined how it would respond to homelessness. Its overall objective was to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness and decreasing the duration and impact of homelessness.

The VHAP focused on three key areas:

- Supporting innovative approaches to homelessness.
- Investigating models focusing specifically on early intervention and prevention, and
- Better targeting of resources when and where they are most needed and where they will make the biggest difference.

The previous State government was reviewing the VHAP and preparing a future Homelessness Strategy. This was occurring against a background of continuing long term uncertainty about future Commonwealth Government funding for homelessness. The State government also released the New Directions for Social Housing in 2014 which outlined its policy regarding providing quality housing to those in greatest need. This policy could affect state government owned/community managed rooming houses if the State government decided to sell some of the ageing stock. In November 2014 there has been a change of State government, Council will monitor emerging policies in 2015 onwards and work closely within the new policy.

The number of people supported by homelessness services has increased in Victoria from 76,950 in 2011-2012 to 92,462 in 2012-2013^{xl}. The Victorian Homelessness System is organised under what is called the *Opening Doors Framework* which aims to provide an integrated and coordinated response by having a limited number of designated access points into the homelessness system.

The purpose of these access points is to assess needs, prioritise and connect people to the services and resources they need. Each Department of Human Services region has one of these access points.

Homeground Housing Services and the Salvation Army Crisis Services are Opening Doors entry points located in Port Phillip. Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) aim to assist people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to access and maintain stable and secure accommodation. Research has examined the client outcomes of these services and the net costs of these programs for governments. Governments face direct costs for these programs, but greater budgetary savings result from reduced use of non-homelessness services (e.g. health, justice and welfare services).

Local

During 2008-2013 there was additional investment from both the Federal and State governments in the homelessness sector and in the development of new affordable housing initiatives. Despite this, the reported level of homelessness by 2011 continued to increase with data demonstrating:

- A 21% increase in homelessness across Victoria.
- Port Phillip recording the second highest number of people experiencing homelessness.
- Significant increases in women and children seeking assistance from family violence services. Every year local housing services see hundreds of children facing homelessness because of family violence circumstances.
- A 46% increase in private rental costs between 2006 and 2011 within the City of Port Phillip with around 13% of local households estimated to be in housing stress.^{xli}

These figures are evident in the sustained, high unmet demand being reported by local homelessness services and the increasing waiting lists of public and community housing providers.^{xlii} In such an environment, it can be argued that increased effort and greater collaboration between all three levels of government and the service delivery sector is required to develop more effective outcomes.^{xliii}

Changes in the Federal and Victorian Government funded service systems are currently being monitored to gauge what the local impact will be following recommissioned funding arrangements for community mental health services and services regarding alcohol and other drug services mid-2014.

To date, Council has reviewed similar approaches by other local government authorities and has developed a range of strategic responses addressing local challenges:

- *Social Justice Charter 2011* has sought to embed social justice principles across all areas of council and at all points of contact from customer service points at town halls, libraries, community centres and sporting facilities through to specific public place management processes.
- *Housing Strategy 2007-2017* has had widespread success in facilitating the expansion of affordable housing by setting targets for the provision of affordable housing. This has supported well designed affordable housing projects in Port Phillip and establishment of the Port Phillip Housing Trust as well as research such as *Community Engagement and Community Housing in 2009*.
- *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017* incorporates the World Health Organisation's Social Determinants of Health model that recognise the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age shape the health and wellbeing of a community.
- *Hope: Homelessness Action Strategy 2008-2013* framed Council's responses for the most vulnerable members of our community and guided collaboration with welfare services in the region, acting as a point of referral when necessary. It delivered a consistent resource for both Council staff and Councillors, and for the broader community.

When reviewed in the first half of 2013, it was found to have provided a clear and consistent framework to guide Council understanding and responding to the complexity and challenges of homelessness within the local community.

- *Council Local Law No.1 (Community Amenity) 2013 and Protocol for assisting people who are sleeping rough 2012* developed formal and informal processes to ensure an integrated response to public homelessness within Council areas and with local agencies.

Our Strategy

While developing Council's draft strategy for the next five years- 2015 to 2020, many people contributed how to best ensure coordination of a local homelessness response. This strategy draws on the belief that Port Phillip has a strong commitment to respecting diversity, dignity, human rights and social inclusion of all and a refuge for those who need one^{xliv}.

Council has developed this by carefully listening to the Port Phillip community. Over September and October 2013, 158 residents, workers and people experiencing homelessness were interviewed and participated in focus groups and workshops; we also consulted widely in 2013 in developing the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Any strategy needs to engage with people to better understand the issue and develop a well-informed response. In developing Council's approach, the City of Port Phillip has been committed to include the stories and perspectives of people who have a lived experience of homelessness. It is important that their voice directly informs our work. Here are some of the things they told us:

- *"We need more affordable housing that doesn't have associated health risks such as dampness, poor ventilation and lack of heating"*
(Resident response-development of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017)
- *"there are things that could happen to make life better, another safe centre like the St. Kilda Drop in catering for people with mental illnesses might be a good start"* (Resident and someone with lived experience of homelessness, development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019)
- *"Gentrification, rental increases, expensive cost of living pushes people out on to the street"*
(Resident response- development of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017)
- *"It saddens me that people have to live this way in such a prosperous country like ours"*
(Resident, development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019)
- *"Being homeless is very unhappy, you don't feel part of society and you can't enjoy the pleasures of life...Council should talk to people and ask for ideas, also they could provide activities and outings"*
(Resident and someone with lived experience of homelessness, development of Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2014-2019)



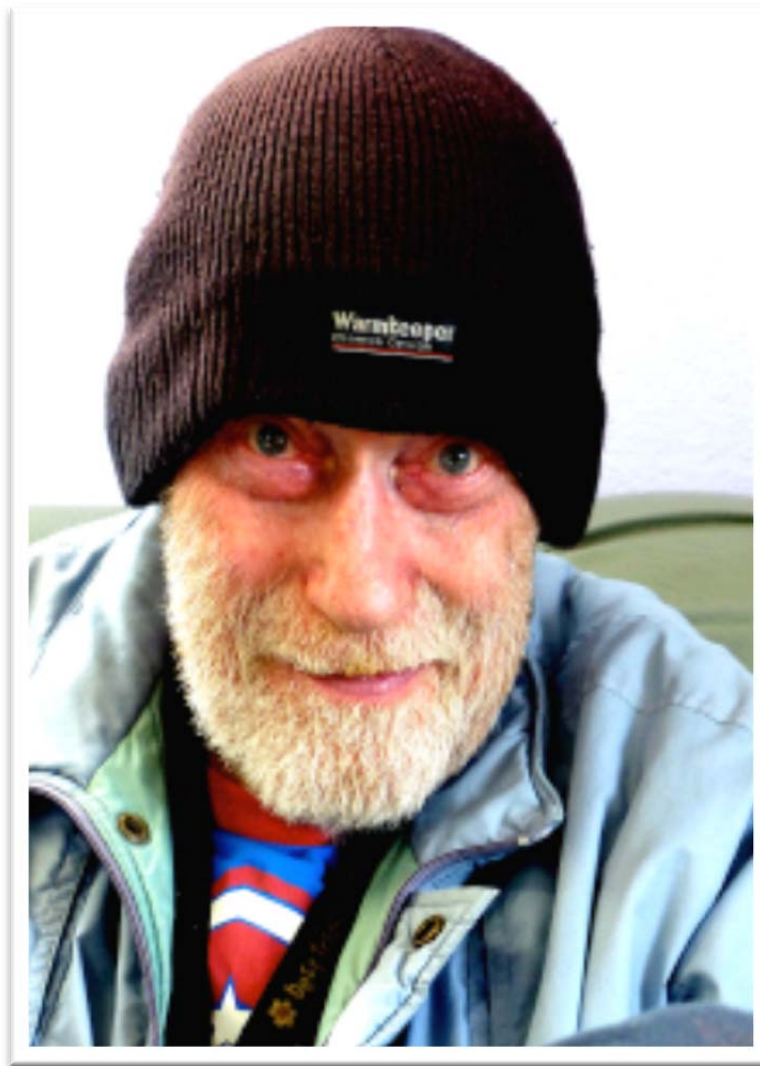
Before his accident Glenn worked at Ngwala Willumbong, a specialist alcohol service for the indigenous community based in St Kilda. A pallet that fell off the back of a truck left him injured with limited options. It was his second major accident. In his first, many years ago now, he came off a motorcycle. Glenn walks with a pronounced limp.

Glenn now lives in self-contained rooming house chosen for him while he recuperated. He didn't think to look first. It was perhaps half the size of the room we were in and contained his bedroom, lounge and bathroom. He can't leave his windows open for air for fear of being robbed. If he cooks, he has to share facilities with the same people that steal from him. If he opens the windows he has no privacy as people can look in as they walk past his front door. Someone even rips his veggies out before they've had a chance to grow. Losing possessions is frustrating. He 'may as well be homeless' he says, he is just as at risk. Glenn's been homeless before. He started life that way. He was taken away at 3 years old from his parents. He was a stolen generation child. When he finally located his mother, it was too late to meet her.

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Osbert, from Northern Ireland, is a very proud Australian Citizen. He arrived 50 years ago, at 18 with his older brother on a free fare paid by the State to keep him out of the troubles. He has been back only once since.

Osbert lives in a public housing flat he is very happy with. He pays for one hour home care assistance per fortnight to help keep it lovely and clean. One of the fantastic things, he said is 'the heating is free'. He does his washing on the weekends when everything else is closed. Osbert had to let go of some self-protective behaviours learnt sleeping rough on the streets a few years earlier. At the time he'd been living in pretty scary rooming houses and being robbed after his marriage fell apart when he was 60. He now attends the Police Gym to tone up and develop muscle tone on his doctor's recommendation. He picks up a box of fresh food every second week which he shares with another resident in his block.