

Discussion topic 5:

Reducing homelessness

Building partnerships to reduce and prevent homelessness and support equitable access to safe, secure and affordable housing

Over 24,000 Victorians will be homeless on any given night (ABS, 2016), including families with children, young people, older people, single adults and people with disabilities.

Between 2011 and 2016 the homelessness rate grew at more than twice the rate of overall population growth (14.7% compared to 6.7%).

Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2016

Rough sleeping is the fastest growing form of homelessness in the municipality, and in 2017 the Victorian Government officially recognised Frankston City as a rough sleeper hot spot in Victoria (one of nine).

Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeper action plan, 2018

Between 2011 and 2016 rental stress increased from 29.8% to 33.2%, which is higher than the Metro Melbourne average. One-parent families and lone person households are the most likely household type to experience stress.

Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2016

Homelessness rates in Frankston City are growing and impacting different groups of people, resulting from a range of complex and intersecting social, economic and housing market factors. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows the main causes of homelessness as being the lack of affordable housing, escaping family violence, poverty and financial hardship, relationship/family breakdowns and mental or physical illness and/or addiction. This means a 'one size fits all' solution won't solve this issue and a range of tailored solutions are required, including increased access to affordable housing and a more effective homelessness service system.

The experience of homelessness is not just about not having a home. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines someone as homeless if their current living arrangement is in a dwelling that is inadequate, has no tenure, has a short and not extendable tenure, or does not allow them to have control of, or access to, space for social relations. Whereas rough sleeping the most visible form of homelessness, it is estimated that rough sleeping only makes up around 7% of homeless. The remainder of homelessness is 'hidden', and includes those in supported accommodation for the homeless, rooming houses, sleeping in cars, severely overcrowded dwellings, couch-surfing or staying in other temporary types of accommodation. People sheltering in vacant buildings can create safety risks for the people sheltering in them and impact perceptions of safety in the community.

The 2021 Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia highlighted that homelessness can have a profound and long-term impact on a person's safety and security, physical and mental health, on their connection to the community and on their ability to thrive in school or in the workplace. Research shows that compared to the general population, people who are homeless experience significantly higher rates of death, disability, mental health conditions and chronic illness and are 13 times more likely to have experienced violence and 47 times more likely to have been victims of theft.¹⁹

In Australia, rates of homelessness are higher for men, but 61% of people using homelessness services are female²⁰. Older women are the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness²¹.

¹⁹Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) 2008 'Homeless people: their risk of victimisation' AI Crime reduction matters No. 66, AIC, Canberra.

²⁰Council to Homeless Persons 2019 Women and Homelessness, Council to Homeless Persons, Melbourne.

²¹ABS 2016 cited in Mercy Foundation (undated) Older women and homelessness, Mercy Foundation, Wollstonecraft.

Housing is considered to be a basic human right, however many Victorians are not able to find stable and secure housing. Rapidly rising housing costs and inadequate supplies of social and affordable housing mean that many households are living in housing stress (which occurs when property costs exceed 30 percent of household income among those on a low income), which increases their risk of homelessness.

Emergency and crisis accommodation provides immediate, and temporary assistance for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and are managed by funded homelessness providers. There is no crisis support accommodation located within Frankston City, with people needing to travel outside of the municipality to access these services.

Homelessness policy, funding and programs are delivered across all three tiers of government, although the primary responsibility and resource allocation lies with state and federal governments. The Victorian Government receives funding for social housing and specialist homelessness services from the Federal Government through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Services funded through this include assertive outreach, case managed support, crisis and transitional accommodation, supported housing and help to enter the private housing market. The Victorian Government also builds, owns and manages public housing.

Council's role

Local government has a supporting role in preventing and responding to homelessness through education, advocacy and working in partnership with service providers. For Frankston City Council, this includes:

- Collaborative partnerships with service providers and other tiers of government to understand local issues, advocate and coordinate effective prevention and early intervention strategies in response to homelessness. For example, Council:
- Coordinates the Frankston City Strategic Housing and Homelessness Alliance to raise awareness, build capacity and better respond to homelessness and housing affordability.
- Is an active member of the Frankston Zero project introduced in 2021 to support local community services to deliver a coordinated response to minimize the time spent 'experiencing homelessness' for individual rough sleepers and reduce homelessness.
- Partnerships with outreach services so Council services that engage with people experiencing homelessness can make referrals to local homelessness and outreach services and other supports.
- Advocacy to other levels of government, for example Council is an active member of:
- The Regional Local Government Charter for Homelessness and Social Housing which highlights regional homelessness and housing issues and advocating for reform to prevent homelessness.
- The Y2 Campaign, a youth homelessness campaign seeking homelessness solutions for young people in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region.
- Provision of community infrastructure for services, including the Comfort Station shower facility and Community Support Frankston, a not-for-profit community support agency providing services including emergency food, grocery vouchers, help with utility bills and advocacy for people experiencing hardship, including homelessness.
- Building regulation safety and compliance, playing a role in the regulation of rooming houses and other accommodation used by homeless persons.
- Land use and planning policies to support the provision of affordable housing. Council is developing an Integrated Housing Strategy to manage housing growth and change across all residential and activity centres in the municipality.