

2.6 JOINT SUBMISSION - FEDERAL INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA, PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorses the joint submission to the Federal Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia prepared by the Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness & Social Housing Group.

INTRODUCTION

On 11 February 2020, the Australian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs resolved to conduct an inquiry into homelessness. On 31 March 2020, in response to COVID-19, the inquiry was temporarily suspended and re-opened in May 2020.

The Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness & Social Housing Group [the Charter Group] representing thirteen Eastern and South-Eastern Councils* and 2 million residents, has prepared a joint submission to the inquiry [**Attachment One**].

The Charter Group is led by the City of Monash which initiated its establishment in late 2019. Please refer to the attached Charter which represents the group's regional commitments which was endorsed at Council's July 2020 meeting [**Attachment Two**].

The joint submission details the complex challenges of homelessness and lack of housing options in the East and South-East region of metropolitan Melbourne. It includes emerging research on the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness, as sought by the inquiry.

The submission advocates for a series of reforms required at Federal and State level to prevent homelessness, to increase social housing and to achieve an improved homelessness service system which is supported, effective and integrated.

It is recommended that Council endorse the joint submission to the Federal Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia.

DISCUSSION

The joint submission to the Federal Inquiry into Homelessness prepared by the Charter Group proposes fundamental service improvements and major reform to support the most vulnerable members the community who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The Charter Group articulates that the Australian Government has multiple levers available to create and resource the conditions necessary for an effective and systematic response to reduce homelessness, including:

- Developing an Australian Housing and Homelessness Strategy with the appointment of a dedicated Minister.
- Recognition that a 'one size fits all' solution is not appropriate to address homelessness in Australia. A range of tailored solutions must be developed to respond to the diverse needs and patterns of people experiencing homelessness.
- Increasing the focus on homelessness prevention.
- Committing to national, State and regional targets to increase the provision of social housing in Australia to meet the current shortfalls as well as incentivising investment in affordable and social housing;
- Inclusionary zoning made mandatory nationally.
- Immediate review of the ongoing JobSeeker payment level and the Jobkeeper payments to minimise impacts of housing stress and increased risks of homelessness.

The joint submission proves a foundational piece for the recently established Charter Group, which provides detailed statistics and a powerful narrative around the distinct experiences of homelessness in the East and South-East region and the lack of homelessness service system support and social housing.

Findings from the experience of homelessness in the East and South-East region as documented by the submission include:

- There are 7,196 people experiencing homelessness, representing one-third of all homelessness in Victoria (p.4).
- 40% of people in Victoria on the social housing waiting list are from this region (p.4).
- Early intervention is almost impossible in the region as there is only *one* emergency accommodation service that supports 2 million residents and the estimated 7,916 experiencing homelessness.
- Patterns of homelessness differ across the region with variances including people sleeping rough, people living in severely overcrowded dwellings, couch surfing and boarding houses (pp.4-5).
- Domestic and family violence rates in the region are among Melbourne's highest (p.9) and have increased by 40% since COVID-19 lockdowns (p.9).

- Women and children experiencing homelessness are over-represented in the region with the causal factor of family violence. 61% of people accessing specialist housing support services were women and children (p.5).
- First-time homelessness is also a gendered issue in this region with large numbers of women and children contacting homelessness services for the first time, entering a highly traumatising 'homelessness system' (p.5).
- 20% of rough sleeping in Victoria is in this region and is on the rise (p.6);
- The region lacks suitable forms of housing and shelter for single person households (p.6).
- The reliance on rooming houses as a form of accommodation is dominant in the region. Rooming houses can be unsafe, traumatising and do not represent a long-term option for people to break the cycle of homelessness (p.7);

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The joint submission supports Council's leadership in advocating for the prevention of homelessness and the increased provision of social housing as prioritised in the recently adopted Monash Council-led *Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness & Social Housing* and the Council's new *Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025* [draft].

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is envisaged that the joint submission to the Federal Inquiry into Homelessness will contribute to urgent and fundamental service and housing provision improvements required to achieve better outcomes for the most vulnerable members our communities experiencing homelessness across Australia.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The joint submission and the Charter that represents the Charter Group recognises that housing is a human right for every person. It endorses a 'Housing First' approach as a key foundational principle which is a strategic response to homelessness that priorities permanent and stable housing for people experiencing homelessness.

CONSULTATION

There is no consultation associated with the joint submission to the Australian Parliament.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the joint submission to the Australian Parliament.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Council endorse the joint submission to the Federal Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia which advocates for urgent, national reforms to prevent homelessness and to increase the provision of safe, stable and long-term social housing.

*Thirteen East and South-East Councils

City of Casey, City of Cardinia, Frankston City Council, City of Greater Dandenong, Knox City Council, City of Kingston, Manningham City Council, City of Monash, Maroondah City Council, Mornington Peninsula Shire, City of Whitehorse, Yarra Ranges Council and Bayside Council.