Making a difference – effective local government responses to homelessness

Executive Summary

City of Monash have sought Council to Homeless Persons' advice about how local governments in eastern and southern Melbourne can most effectively take action to reduce the numbers of people living in those areas without a home. This report aims to give local governments the tools they need to develop effective homelessness and housing strategies to achieve this objective. It includes:

- a demographic profile of people living without a home in eastern and southern Melbourne
- data about the reasons people are seeking assistance from homelessness services
- local information about the housing market drivers of homelessness, including rental affordability and availability of social housing
- an outline of mechanisms that local government can use to develop the housing people need to end homelessness
- a framework for effective local government responses to homelessness that complement housing responses, and
- local examples of non-housing responses to homelessness.

The report highlights that the main driver of growing homelessness is rising rents in the private rental market, and inadequate supply of social housing[1].

These challenges in the housing market, mean that more Victorians are unable to find a home, and more low income households are cycling between marginal forms of accommodation, like rooming houses and overcrowded dwellings, and homelessness, all of which have serious consequences for health and wellbeing.

The solution to this problem is to create more social housing to provide an effective safety net for people unable to afford private rental housing.

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[1] Social housing refers to housing owned either by the state government or by not-for-profit community housing providers that is rented to low income households at either 25% (public housing) or 30% (community housing) of household income. For more information about housing terms refer to this infographic

This paper explores how local government can support the objective of increasing social housing, as well as how local government can strengthen access to services and attainment of human rights for people without a home.

Homelessness in Eastern and Southern Melbourne

Demographic profile

ABS Census data indicates that homelessness in eastern and southern Melbourne is only slightly less than the Victorian average, with 34 per cent of all Victorians, and 32 per cent of Victorians without a home, living in eastern and southern Melbourne[i].

The nature of homelessness varies across the region, with relatively more people sleeping rough in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, and more people living in severely overcrowded dwellings in Dandenong.

Across Melbourne, people living in severely overcrowded dwellings – where the home needs at least an additional four bedrooms to accommodate residents – represents a growing and very significant proportion of those counted as homeless. This form of homelessness includes both related family groups sharing a home, and properties where multiple unrelated individuals or families all have separate tenancies. Each put significant pressure on residents' health and wellbeing. For more on the impact of overcrowding see CHP's [Blog](#).

### ABS Census 2016, People in each homeless operation group by SA3[2]

	Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	Persons in supported accomm'n for the homeless	Persons staying temporarily with other households	Persons living in boarding houses	Persons in other temporary lodgings	Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	All homeless persons
Dandenong	24	355	65	368	0	1,284	2,103
Casey - South	14	65	57	17	0	679	838
Monash	0	193	76	232	0	256	755
Whitehorse - West	7	124	53	215	3	170	568
Frankston	75	179	89	143	0	59	546
Casey - North	0	107	38	36	0	266	447

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[2] NB. The 2016 Census provides important indicative data for comparison between regions and across time, but does not capture every resident living in every situation, particularly those sleeping rough in locations where they may not be visible to Census takers. Reports of zero people sleeping rough in some SA4s should be understood in this context.

	Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	Persons in supported accomm'n for the homeless	Persons staying temporarily with other households	Persons living in boarding houses	Persons in other temporary lodgings	Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	All homeless persons
Boroondara	4	56	35	250	0	87	426
Knox	12	138	70	39	0	104	365
Yarra Ranges	24	96	115	51	4	77	360
Maroondah	9	173	27	35	4	69	321
Mornington Peninsula	47	121	103	5	0	23	298
Kingston	5	142	52	61	3	12	275
Cardinia	4	39	52	0	0	126	220
Whitehorse - East	0	88	17	16	0	50	179
Manningham - West	0	65	24	28	0	59	176
Manningham - East	0	26	10	0	0	0	39
Total	225	1,967	883	1,496	14	3,321	7,916
Victoria	1,119	7,172	3,080	4,413	108	8,930	24,828
Percentage of Victoria	20%	27%	29%	34%	13%	37%	32%

Another form of data used to understand the local profile of homelessness is the data collected by homelessness services about people who are seeking homelessness support.

Analysis of this data in Melbourne's east and south shows that women and children, and young people are the most common clients of homelessness services.

AIHW Specialist homelessness data 2017-18, People using homelessness services in the eastern and southern local area service network
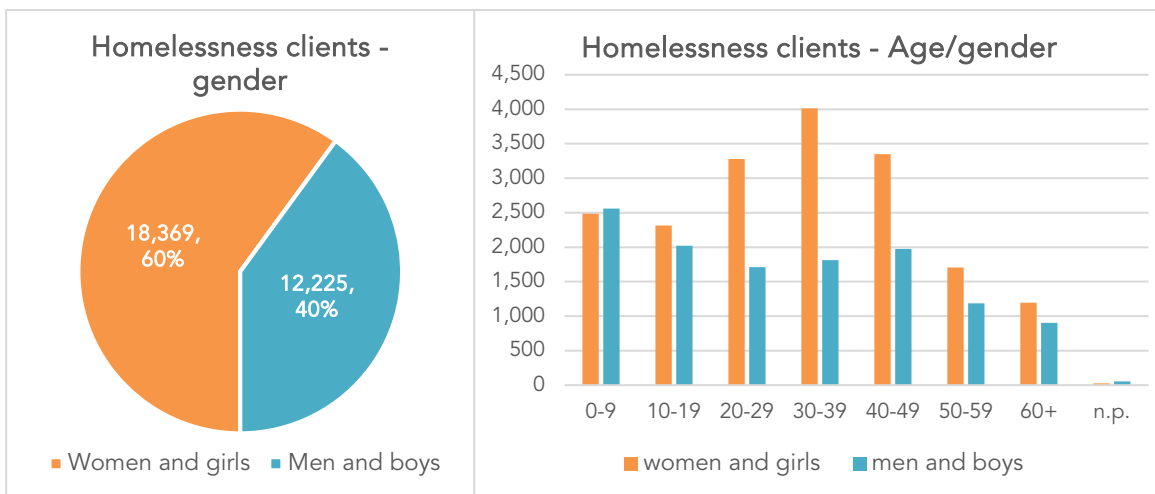
What is driving growing homelessness?

Homelessness services also record information about the reasons people are seeking help. This reveals that the most common reasons for seeking homelessness assistance across Victoria are housing issues[3] and financial reasons[4] (50%), and domestic and family violence (38%).

Main reason for seeking assistance[ii]	Per cent of clients
Housing issues	39
Domestic and family violence	38
Financial	11
Interpersonal relationships	4
Health	2
Other	6

This highlights the significance of lack of access to affordable housing as a driver of homelessness.

Lack of access to affordable housing is also a significant barrier to exiting homelessness, and it results in a bottleneck in crisis accommodation and refuges. These emergency options are intended for short stays, but people often end up staying for months, or even years, with the result that crisis beds are frequently unavailable.

Long stays in congregate crisis accommodation result in poor health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for children. These environments are also highly stressful for adults, both because living in close proximity with many highly vulnerable people creates its own challenges and stress, and because people can't move on with their lives while they don't know where they'll be living longer-term.

The solution to the bottleneck in crisis accommodation is not to make the bottle bigger by creating more unsuitable temporary accommodation options, but to make the neck of the bottle wider by building more housing that people can afford to make their homes.
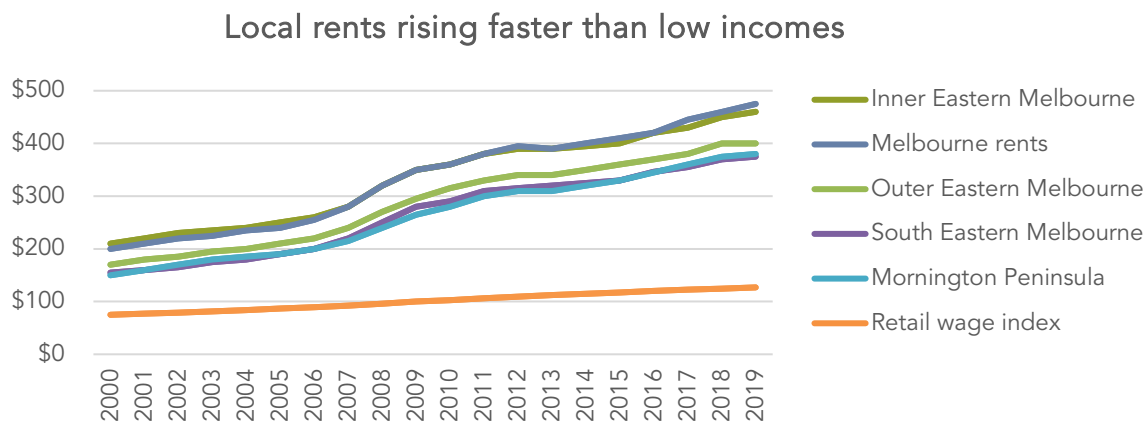
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[3] Housing crisis includes Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions; Housing affordability stress; Transition from custodial arrangements; Transition from foster care and child safety residential placements; Transition from other care arrangements; Discrimination including racial discrimination; Itinerant; Unable to return home due to environmental reasons; Disengagement with school or other education and training; Previous accommodation ended
[4] Financial includes Insufficient money for rent; Employment difficulties, Unemployment

What is the problem of rental affordability?

It has become harder over the past two decades for low income households to find affordable rentals in eastern and southern Melbourne because rents have risen faster than people's wages.

The Chart below uses data from the DHHS Rent Report,[iii] to illustrate that while local rents in eastern and southern Melbourne have more than doubled since the year 2000, low wages (represented by the retail wage index[iv]) have only increased by 70%. This means low waged workers, and people on Centrelink benefits, living in eastern and southern Melbourne are either forced out of the rental market into homelessness or into overcrowded dwellings, or are forced to pay far more than they can afford to secure housing, meaning other necessities of life are foregone.

Local rents rising faster than low incomes

Legend:
- Inner Eastern Melbourne
- Melbourne rents
- Outer Eastern Melbourne
- South Eastern Melbourne
- Mornington Peninsula
- Retail wage index

Most people accessing homelessness services are living on extremely low incomes; 76 per cent are reliant on a Centrelink benefit; and 14 per cent have no income at all. Only 10 per cent of people seeking homelessness support derive their income predominantly from paid employment.[v] For most of these households private rental housing is not affordable. Many households experiencing homelessness are also experiencing discrimination in the rental market, in addition to affordability issues.

Data from the DHHS Rent Report[vi] shows that in the three months to June 2019, just five properties were rented at a price that a single person on a Centrelink income could afford across the entire south and east of Melbourne. More properties were rented at affordable rates for larger households in south eastern Melbourne, but still far fewer than is needed to meet the need from households on very low incomes.
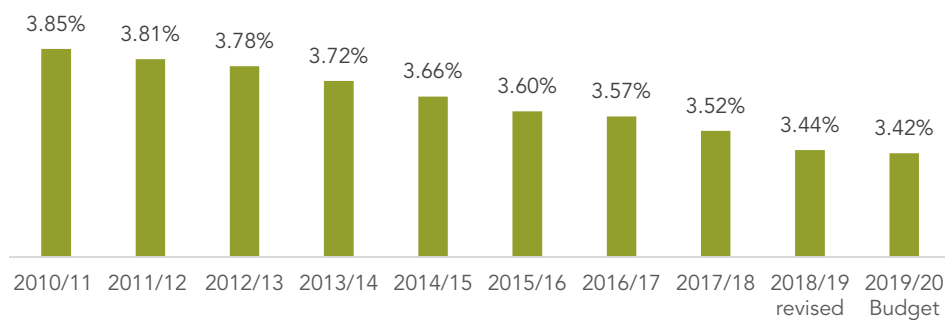
Affordable lettings for indicative households on Centrelink incomes, DHHS rent report June 2019

Region	1 Bedroom		2 Bedroom		3 Bedroom		4+ Bedroom		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Inner Eastern Melbourne	1	0.2%	19	1.1%	18	1.2%	24	2.5%	62	1.3%
Southern Melbourne	1	0.2%	9	0.6%	5	0.5%	4	0.9%	19	0.5%
Outer Eastern Melbourne	2	3.1%	15	2.5%	18	1.9%	20	5.2%	55	2.7%
South Eastern Melbourne	1	0.8%	22	2.9%	144	8.0%	355	28.5%	522	13.3%
Mornington Peninsula	-	0.0%	24	4.9%	88	8.7%	23	7.1%	135	7.1%

In order to provide housing that very low and low income households can afford, it is necessary to provide social housing that is rented at an affordable proportion of income. Housing options delivered as 'Affordable Housing', which are typically rented at a 20 per cent discount to market rent, do not deliver housing that households at risk of or experiencing homelessness can afford, and so do not reduce homelessness.

Despite the critical importance of social housing for prevention of homelessness for low income households, it has become progressively more difficult to get into social housing, because the proportion of all Victorian housing that is social housing has been reducing as Victorian investment in new social housing has not kept pace with population growth. There are now 44,152 Victorian households on the wait list for social housing, including 17,717 households in the South and East of Melbourne.[vii]

Social housing as a proportion of all dwellings

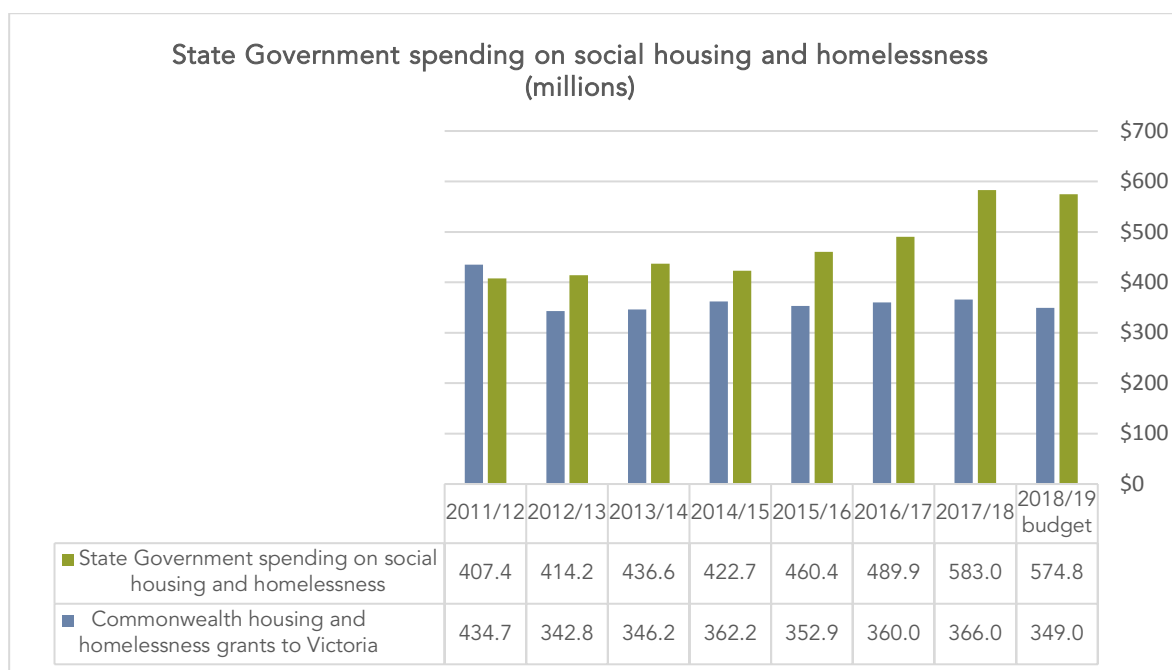| 2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 revised	2019/20 Budget
3.85%	3.81%	3.78%	3.72%	3.66%	3.60%	3.57%	3.52%	3.44%	3.42%

[viii]

Local government and social housing

The most impactful activity that local governments can undertake to reduce homelessness is to support the delivery of homes that people can afford. For the lowest income households most vulnerable to homelessness this means provision of social housing.

Council to Homeless Persons engaged planning academic Professor Carolyn Whitzman to prepare a paper to inform this report on policy options to increase social housing for Councils in southern and eastern Melbourne. The full paper, which also outlines principles to underpin a local government housing policy, is available from the City of Monash.

Current policy context for social housing

The Victorian Government receives funding for social housing and homelessness services from the Federal Government through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. The Victorian Government also contributes additional resources. Funding received by the Federal Government and funds spent by the Victorian Government are illustrated in the Chart below (figures from Victorian State Budget papers).[ix]

State Government spending on social housing and homelessness (millions)

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 budget
State Government spending on social housing and homelessness	407.4	414.2	436.6	422.7	460.4	489.9	583.0	574.8
Commonwealth housing and homelessness grants to Victoria	434.7	342.8	346.2	362.2	352.9	360.0	366.0	349.0

This chart highlights that funding from the Federal Government has been falling, while Victorian Government spending has been increasing. However, it is also the case that the Victorian Government spends only half as much per capita on social housing as the national average.[x] There is both capacity, and an urgent need, for both the Victorian and Federal Government to do more to deliver social housing infrastructure.

Recent research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) identified a shortfall of social housing for Melbourne's south east, outer east and the Mornington Peninsula of 25,700 properties, and projected this shortfall to grow to 42,200 by 2036.[xi]

In 2017, the Victorian Government released a housing strategy Homes for Victorians, and updated the metropolitan planning strategy Plan Melbourne 2017-2050.[xii]

Homes for Victorians committed new funding and loans for social and affordable housing. This includes the $1 billion Social Housing Growth Fund, which makes an annual allocation through a competitive process and prioritises projects that are partnerships between the Victorian Government and other parties including local government. The State Government also committed other funding to bring the total of new social housing units expected to be delivered by 2022 to 6,000 new social housing homes, including the renewal of 2,500 existing public housing residences.

In 2018, the Victorian Government (DEWLP, 2018) introduced a definition of **affordable housing** for use in the planning process, and in 2019, made **provision of affordable housing** a goal of the Planning and Environment Act (DEWLP, 2019b).[xiii]

The Act defines affordable housing as housing affordable at 30% of household income for very low, low and moderate income households. '**Very low**' incomes are defined as less than 50% of Area Median Income (AMI, with Area being Greater Melbourne); '**low**' as 50-80% of AMI, and '**moderate**' as 80-120% of AMI.

The Victorian Government has also provided guidance to local government about how to enact voluntary 'Section 173' agreements for inclusion of affordable housing with developers (DEWLP, 2018). However, very little other guidance – on assessing need, using other mechanisms to create and preserve affordable housing, or measuring success – has been provided by the state government. A Ministerial Advisory Committee on Planning Mechanisms for Affordable Housing has recently (October 2019) been convened to address these problems.

At the local government level, most councils have housing strategies (e.g. City of Monash, 2014). Many have not been refreshed since *Plan Melbourne*, *Homes for Victorians*, to incorporate the new definitions and mechanisms.

Using local government levers to increase social housing

1. Developing a local government housing strategy

Even if State and Commonwealth policy and financing commitments remain inadequate, local governments can lead the way in providing more housing that is affordable to those who need it most, through adopting best practice housing strategy principles and mechanisms. In developing a local government housing strategy there are **five key principles** that should be included:

1. **Housing is a right**: As recognised by international human rights conventions and sustainable development goals. This means that housing for those most vulnerable to homelessness must be prioritised.

2. **Greater Melbourne is an integrated region**: There needs to be a coordinated approach to needs assessments and mechanisms by its 32 local governments, and state and federal governments should also try to align their policies with those led by local government.

3. **Homeless and inadequately housed people's voices must be heard**: Empowering and giving voice to inadequately housed people is vital to raise public understanding about problems and solutions.

4. **Comprehensive whole-of-government approach**: Not only must local governments be aligned, but all levels of government should be coordinating their health, planning, and housing services.

5. **Not-for-profit rental alternatives to speculative housing are prioritised**: Scaling up not-for-profit housing is the only way to meet the unmet needs of lower-income households. The private market cannot provide affordable housing for the poorest households without subsidy.

### 2. Local and state government land for social housing

Well located land is one of the biggest costs of delivering social housing, and is the most powerful tool that Councils can use to increase local social housing availability.

There are four stages to achieve this: (1) local government identifying suitable land; (2) identifying not-for-profit housing and service partners; (3) together with the partners, identifying sources of funding; (4) construction.

Land: The University of Melbourne [Transforming Housing Project](#) has developed an online [Housing Access Rating Tool](#) (HART) for Greater Melbourne. [Maps](#) produced using

this tool, which provide details of government-owned vacant or underutilized 'lazy' land sites, suggest infrastructure-rich areas particularly suitable for affordable housing development (Palm, Raynor and Whitzman, 2018).

In the Southern region, these include Oakleigh South, Dingley Village, Mentone, Mordialloc, Chelsea (Kingston); Springvale, Noble Park, Dandenong; Cranbourne, Hampton Park, Narre Warren; Carrum Downs and Frankston Centre.
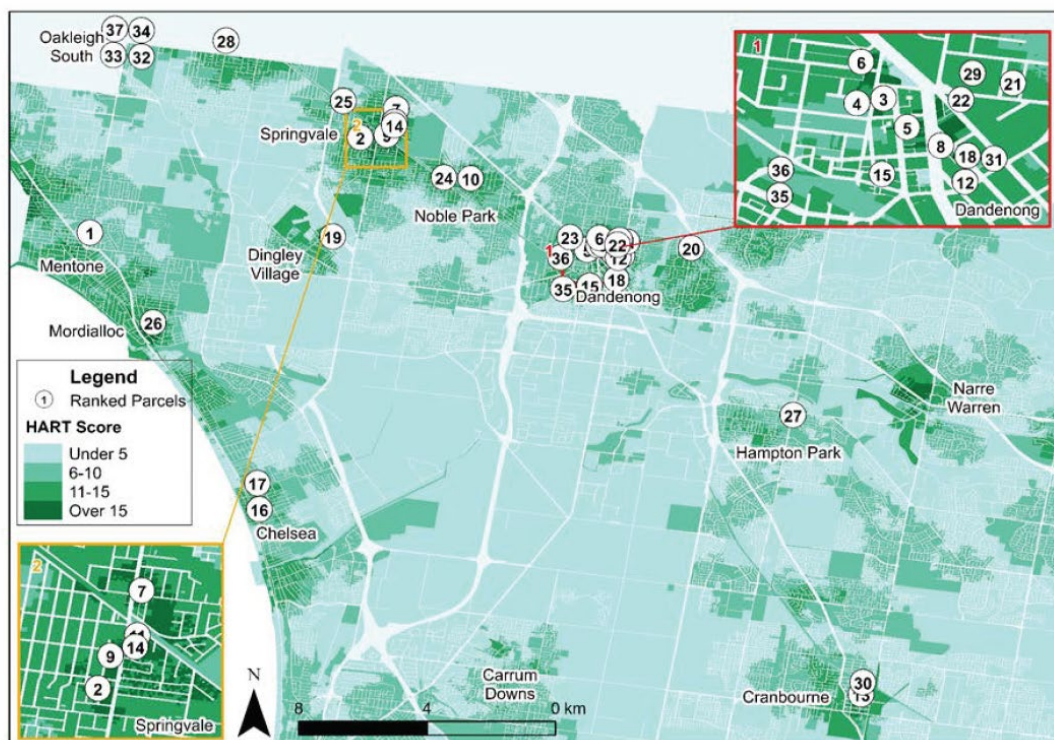
MAP 10: SOUTHERN MELBOURNE SITES

South metropolitan region HART scores and government land sites

In the Eastern region, infrastructure and government land-rich sites include Bulleen (Manningham); Box Hill (Whitehorse); Mount Waverley, Clayton (Monash); Wantirna South, Rowville, Ferntree Gully (Knox); Lilydale (Yarra Ranges).

MAP 11: EASTERN MELBOURNE SITES
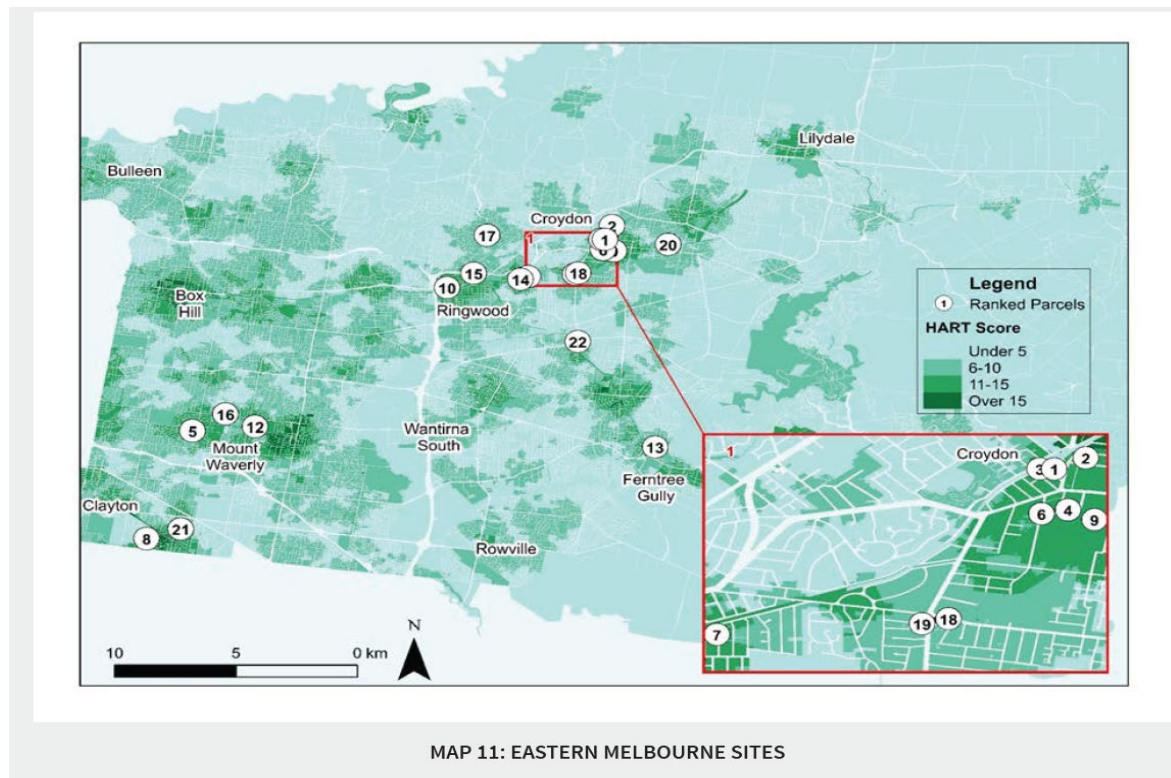
East metropolitan HART scores and government land sites

A number of Melbourne Councils, including Melbourne, Port Phillip and Darebin, have provided council land at a peppercorn lease (that is, a negligible land rent such as $1/year) to social housing providers to support new provision of social housing.

An example of local government land use might be three large (at least 15,531 square metres, according to HART) Monash Council-owned parking lots south and north of Winbourne Road, serving shops just to their east on Stephenson Road and a train station. The sites are less than 200 metres from Mount Waverley Station, close to parkland, a library, a community centre, and Mount Waverley Primary School. Housing could be built above the lot, or part of the lot could be repurposed for residential purposes.

In addition to identifying land owned by Councils that can be used for social housing, local government can also identify 'lazy' state or federal government land in their municipality, and seek to partner with these levels of government to achieve new social

housing supply. Local MPs can be useful allies in the process of advocacy necessary to realise these partnerships.

Council land and redeveloped public housing are not the only sources of free or low-cost land and buildings. In Vancouver, there are also local and senior government supports that build [partnerships](#) with churches with surplus land, including 400 units on four United Church sites (BC Housing, 2018)[xiv]. Working with the State Government to free up as much of their land as possible for not-for-profit development, and encouraging partnerships and 'asset bundling' amongst not-for-profit groups in order to access better financing terms and serve a broader segment of at-risk populations, are within the remit of local government.

Selecting a not-for-profit housing partner or partners: There are 10 registered [not-for-profit housing associations](#) which develop housing in Victoria (DTF, 2019), all with slightly different mandates. There are also 29 registered not-for-profit [housing providers](#) which manage housing, and often provide associated supportive social services. It would be possible to encourage partnerships between housing providers on a larger site, with for instance, an indigenous or women-specific service provider.

Funding: The Victorian Government's $1 billion [Social Housing Growth Fund](#) (2019) prioritises social and affordable housing on donated "non-Victorian government land". Councils can also present options to the Victorian Government for partnerships to deliver social housing independently of the Growth Fund.

The [Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation](#) (2019) provides funding to projects serving very low income households, and is likely to favour projects where local councils contribute land. Financing from the Commonwealth Bond Aggregator or improvements to nearby infrastructure using the federal Infrastructure Contributions fund would also be possible if this vicinity is seen as a Growth Area (as is certainly the case at nearby Monash University).

3. Inclusionary zoning

Local Government can enact [voluntary 'Section 173' agreements](#) for inclusion of affordable housing with developers (DEWLP, 2018). However, these voluntary inclusionary zoning mechanisms are cumbersome to administer, are vulnerable to being overridden by VCAT, and are only able to achieve a small increase in social housing.

Advocating for the State Govenrment to legislate for mandatory inclusionary zoning, at much higher proportions than the current 3-5% voluntary mechanisms, is necessary to obtain a critical mass of social housing. Local government would then be responsible for forming local agreements with developers.

Montreal has recently replaced a weaker and more cumbersome project-by-project negotiated inclusionary zoning regime with a '20/20/20' By-Law for a Diverse Metropolis. In these new inclusionary zoning rules, 20% of any new development over five units must be social housing for very low-income households (the rent is 25% of household income in Quebec), 20% must be affordable rental (at a regulated rent that is affordable to low-income households at 80% of AMI) and 15-20% must be family-friendly (3 or more bedrooms). They expect a cash contribution for developments of 5 to 49-units (which goes into a designated fund for affordable housing) and then a turn-key arrangement in larger developments.

A turn-key arrangement simply means that the developer builds the units (usually on one part of the site) and then hands over the management to a social housing provider (the household is eligible for further rent assistance). The affordable rental apartments can either be managed by the developer (if it is a purpose-built rental building, with rents inspected annually for compliance), or handed over as well to a social housing provider in a turn-key arrangement. The family units can be social or market dwellings but the expectation is that at least half of the larger units will be social and/or affordable. While there are some slightly different requirements outside the central city area (more family-friendly housing), the by-law applies across the City (which has 1.7 million of the metropolitan population of four million).

4. Local government action to preserve low-cost rentals

Local councils can help prevent homelessness using simple low-cost measures. They can publicise emergency loans for renters, such as the state government's RentAssist bond loans (DHHS, 2019a), as well as tenants' rights against steep rent increases. Given that most people interact with local councils in council-owned spaces such as libraries and town halls, information on local low-cost housing and interventions to prevent homelessness can be publicised in these spaces.

The City of Port Phillip (2016), one of the most experienced Greater Melbourne councils when it comes to affordable housing, works with not-for-profit providers (DTF, 2019) which buy up and maintain rooming houses and other low cost accomodation options. The local government role identifies existing rooming houses, especially those that are contravening local health or safety by-laws, and encourages and assists not-for-profit providers to purchase these when they are under threat of sale or demolition.

Local government can also have an impact on the use of rental property for short-term rentals like AirBNB. See work by the West Australian Local Governance Association, which has explored regulation options in detail (WALGA, 2019).

5. Delivery of affordable housing

The focus of this paper is on the delivery of social housing, as this is the housing form needed to reduce homelessness. However, in a broader housing strategy that also aims to ensure that low-moderate income households can afford local housing opportunities, there is also a role for local government to support affordable housing delivery.

Options to achieve an increased supply of affordable housing include:

Community Land Trusts: The Community Land Trust (CLT) model involves creating a not-for-profit entity created to acquire and hold land for the benefit of a community and provide secure affordable access to housing and sometimes commercial and community services for residents. The CLT acquires land in a community—either by purchasing land directly or through donations of land, land and buildings, or money to purchase land. This land is held in perpetuity (for instance, on a 99-year lease) so that it can always be used for affordable housing. Access to this land is often limited to very low- to moderate-income households. The Cities of Sydney and Port Phillip are in the process of developing an Australian model of a Community Land Trust (Crabtree and Twill, 2019)[xv].

Council land and redeveloped public housing are not the only sources of free or low-cost land and buildings. In Vancouver, there are also local and senior government supports that build partnerships with churches with surplus land, including 400 units on four United Church sites (BC Housing, 2018). Encouraging partnerships and 'asset bundling' among not-for-profit groups in order to access better financing terms and serve a broader segment of at-risk populations, are within the remit of local government. A target of 1,200 units over 10 years using this mechanism is feasible for Monash, especially working in concert with other Greater Melbourne councils through establishment of a CLT.

Build-to-rent: With vacancy rates (DHHS, 2019b) well below the 3% required for a healthy rental market (Kerr, 2018), Melbourne needs more well-located affordable purpose built rental dwellings to serve low to moderate-income households, and prevent them from "crowding out" lower cost private rental options.

One idea being tested to scale up build-to-rent in the Greater Vancouver municipality of Burnaby is rental-only zoning in areas close to trains and other frequent public transit (Gawley, 2019)[xvi]. As part of legislative reforms, developers who demolish rental buildings would need to construct low-cost replacement units, and all new multi-unit developments would be required to provide 20% affordable rental. Preserving low-cost rental is much less expensive than building new low-cost rental, so mechanisms to preserve and expand low-cost market rental should be advocated for by local governments as part of planning reform.

Local government reducing the harm of homelessness

Although the most effective way local government can respond to homelessness is by contributing to social housing growth, there are also other levers for local government to reduce the harm of homelessness, and to better include local residents living without a home. This section outlines the stages for local government in developing a homelessness strategy and profiles best practice in responding to homelessness in Melbourne.

Other useful resources include Prance F, Beer A & Horne S. [The Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness: A Tool Kit for Local Government](#), and the October 2013 Local Government and Homelessness edition of [Parity](#), which showcases activity across a range of local government areas.[5]

To take effective action to respond to homelessness, Councils need to:

1. understand homelessness in the Local Government Area
2. identify what Council is doing and could be doing to respond to homelessness, and
3. develop strategies to fill the gaps.

These three themes are explored below with examples.

1. Understand homelessness in the Local Government Area

Developing an evidence base around homelessness in the LGA provides an understanding of the extent of local homelessness and the different target groups affected. The evidence base should include:

- homelessness and housing data to identify how many people don't have a home or are living in marginal or unaffordable housing, the types of accommodation in which they are staying, and trends in homelessness and service usage (refer AIHW and ABS)
- data from services that support people experiencing homelessness, including internal departments and the relevant local area service network, which will have local service data, and qualitative information about local services and service gaps
    - o [Eastern Homelessness Network](#)
    - o [Southern Homelessness Network](#)

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[5] Individual editions of Parity are available to order from Council to Homleess Persons, or can be accessed by subscribers in the online archive.

- input from people living without a home locally
- an analysis of local government's interface points with people experiencing homelessness, including
  - by laws and parks staff or contractors interacting with people sleeping rough using public land and facilities
  - people at risk of homelessness receiving council run services, such as Home and Community Care or Maternal and Child Health
  - people without a home or at risk of homelessness requesting assistance from council staff
  - community members wanting "to do something"
  - local traders
  - councillors, and
  - boarding house and caravan park regulations.

Sometimes, additional research may be needed to fill knowledge gaps.

- Local government can undertake a Street Count to count people sleeping rough. This Street Count counts people sleeping rough in five metropolitan Melbourne councils and was last held in 2018.

2. Identify what Council is doing and could be doing to respond to homelessness

This includes specific activities to address homelessness and broader preventative or early intervention strategies such as in early childhood, youth and aged care. A comprehensive analysis will look at access to Council services and spaces, advocacy and support, affordable housing, implementation issues and monitoring. Starting points include thinking about:

- policies and other processes that affect people without a home, for example, heat wave policies, social justice charters, reconciliation action plans and public health and wellbeing plans
- direct supports that have as part of their target group people who may be marginalised and/or at housing risk, for example, the Commonwealth Home Support Program or a mother's group supporting vulnerable single young mothers
- programs and facilities that homeless people may or can use, such as public libraries or public toilets and shower blocks
- regulation of boarding houses or caravan parks

- by laws, which may exclude homeless people, or which impact negatively on people who are homeless, for example use of public spaces or parking infringements
- consultation processes and how they include or exclude people who are homeless
- Including the experience of homelessness in the evidence base or strategic planning information for Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans. Councils with better housing and homelessness data appear to be more likely to identify people who don't have a home as a priority group and develop actions.

Best practice examples

- [City of Port Phillip Health and Wellbeing Background Report](). This report includes housing and homelessness as part of its health and wellbeing profiles.
- [City of Port Phillip Homelessness Action Strategy 2015- 2020]()
- [Inner West Council (NSW) Homelessness Policy]()

3. Develop strategies to fill the gaps

Ultimately this would result in a homelessness policy or strategy that might include:

Policy, protocols and procedures

- To provide advice and direction for council and council staff to respond to people who are homeless, and ensure that council services are inclusive. For example, designing internal work-flow processes for when people without a home present at council offices or come in contact with council staff, or for when a community member raises a concern.
- Some Councils have a designated staff member or role to coordinate and streamline responses, and/or referral email addresses, on line submission forms and phone numbers.

Best practice examples:

- **Rough sleeping protocols**: these should be informed by the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and promote support and assistance, rather than a penalties/ enforcement, approach.
- [City of Yarra: How to respond to rough sleeping and squatting in Yarra protocol]()
- [City of Port Phillip: Protocol for assisting people who sleep rough]()
- [City of Melbourne: Protocol to address rough sleeping]()
- City of Yarra: Library Services Policy, which actively encourages vulnerable people to use libraries, spaces and services and supports staff to engage with vulnerable library users, including people without a home.

Partnerships and support of local services

Partnerships with, and support to, local services is an effective way to improve the type and level of support for people without a home. While investing in direct service delivery is generally outside the scope of local government responsibility, many larger Councils with significant rough sleeping populations use this as an effective way to immediately strengthen local responses. In areas without a local entry point for homelessness services, local council can play a valuable role supporting people to access the nearest homelessness entry point.

Taking a leadership role in service planning and coordination can reduce duplication, support access and promote better integration and coordination with council services. Working in partnership also supports good advocacy.

Best practice examples:
- Engaging a homelessness support agency to provide first line support to homeless people who are sleeping rough and to whom Council needs to respond in relation to issues of public or personal safety, for example to children who are homeless or adults who are unwell.
- Working with local homelessness support agencies to establish and promote clear referral pathways for people who contact Council for assistance or who Council identify as needing assistance. This might include protocols for sharing information. Eg. City of Melbourne protocol
- Convening relevant groups for planning and advocacy purposes. For example: City of Melbourne Services Coordination Project
- Supporting the targeting of health and community support services to people who are homeless. This could include providing low cost or in-kind use of consulting or community spaces.

Advocacy to other levels of government, business and philanthropy

This can include partnership arrangements to promote and develop options to address homelessness. Good data and a good understanding of homelessness in the municipality will support the development of clear advocacy messages.

For example: Several local governments including the City or Moreland, Melton and Port Phillip have partnered with the national Everybody's Home campaign to advocate to the state and federal government around the need to invest in social housing. The Council of Capital City Lord Mayors have also partnered with Everybody's Home in a series of high profile public events, including in this message to supporters from Federal Parliament.

- The City of Melbourne is partnering with the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to establish a giving account within the Foundation's tax deductible Fund to take pledges and accept donations for a new homelessness initiative to repurpose buildings to provide appropriate accommodation and house essential services.

Increasing community awareness and understanding of homelessness

Councils can develop local projects that aim to build empathy for local residents without a home.

Best practice examples:

- Comprehensive information on website about homelessness, people's rights, homelessness support services and Council's approach to homelessness. Can include links to service providers and Council to Homeless Persons

- Grants programs which resource programs that demystify homelessness or provide a voice for people without a home, such as an art exhibition. Eg: Yarra Grants

- City of Melbourne Connect Respect provides free training to business to build their understanding of, and support, their response to homelessness in the city.

Increase responsiveness of Council facilities and services to the various needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness

This can include:

- providing information to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness about where they can access housing and support

- having a clear contact point of contact within Council for community members to report concerns about homelessness (who can make appropriate referrals and/or address concerns)

- providing facilities which support people who are homeless (such as showers)

- training for staff to improve awareness and understanding of homelessness, to identify a person at risk of homelessness and knowledge of support options for referral.

Best practice example:

- <u>City of Melbourne: Homelessness and extreme weather program</u> identifies people who are homeless as a priority group.

Endnotes

[i] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, *2049.0 – Census of Populations and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016*, Australian Government, Canberra

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[v] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection*

[vi] Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services, 2019, *Rental Report; June quarter 2019*

[vii] Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services, 2019, Victorian Housing Register and Transfer List by local area, September 2019

[viii] Figures for social housing from Victorian Government State Budget Papers, and for 'all housing' from Victorian Government, <u>Victoria in Future</u>, data for occupied dwellings

[ix] Council to Homleess Persons analysis, figures from State Budget Papers

[x] Productivity Commission, 2019, *Report on Government Services, Part G: Housing and Homelessness, Table 18A.1 State and Territory Government real expenditure on social housing (2017-18 dollars)*

[xi] Lawson, J., Pawson, H., Troy, L., van den Nouwelant, R and Hamilton, C. (2018) <u>*Social Housing as Infrastructure: an investment pathway*</u>, AHURI Final Report 306, Australian Housng and Urban Research Institute Limted, Melbourne

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[xiii] DEWLP [Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning, Victorian State Government] (2019b) <u>Planning Mechanisms for Affordable Housing</u>. Retrieved 1 November 2019

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[xvi] Gawley, Kelvin (2019) "Burnaby passes bold rental-only zoning plan to protect, create housing," Burnaby Now, May 28, 2019. Retrieved 8 October 2019 from <u>https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/2019/05/28/rental-only-zoning-housing-burnaby-bc/</u>