

Senate Economics

References Committee

Inquiry into Social

Housing Submission

October 2026

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Safe and Equal is based on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.

Honouring Victim Survivors

Safe and Equal acknowledges the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognises that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who have not survived and acknowledge the lasting impacts of this preventable violence on families and communities.

About Safe and Equal

Safe and Equal is the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence across the continuum, including primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. Our vision is a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence.

As a peak, we work with and for our members to prevent and respond to violence, building a better future for adults, children and young people experiencing, at risk of, or recovering from family and gender-based violence. While we know that most family violence is perpetrated by men against women and children, we recognise that family violence impacts people across a diversity of gender identities, social and cultural contexts, and within various intimate, family and other relationships. We apply an intersectional feminist lens in our work to address the gendered drivers of violence, and how these overlap and intersect with additional forms of violence, oppression and inequality.

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Introduction

Safe and Equal welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into social housing. Access to social housing – which includes public housing and community housing – is vital for victim survivors who are escaping family violence.

A shortage of safe and affordable housing is not simply a housing issue; it is a serious safety issue. Victim survivors are far too often faced with the impossible choice of leaving violence and becoming homeless or remaining with a perpetrator. Victim survivors need immediate access to refuge, emergency accommodation and longer-term housing so they can leave safely and rebuild their lives. We have to ensure that when a victim survivor is ready to leave, there is somewhere safe for them to go.

We commend the Federal Government for introducing key Commonwealth initiatives such as the *Housing Australia Future Fund and Social Housing Accelerator*, which are investments that will contribute to social housing uplift.¹ This includes the most recent announcement from the Federal Government of \$300 million in new grant funding for crisis and transitional housing, which will support the delivery of 500 additional homes and supporting 19,000 Australians. However, the demand for safe and affordable housing continues to exceed supply and more investment is needed.

Social housing in Australia is in a state of permanent crisis. As Australia's social housing waitlists grow, the supply of social housing has stagnated.² Nationally, there are approximately 206,000 households on public and community housing waitlists, and 43% of households on this list are labelled as 'greatest need' across four factors, which includes risk from family violence.³ In Victoria alone, the current wait for social housing is on average around 17 months for those on priority wait lists.⁴

Due to declining supply, growing waitlists and chronic underinvestment in social housing over decades, victim survivors of family violence are bearing the brunt of this crisis. The current shortage of affordable, fit for purpose and secure housing is having negative economic and social consequences for victim survivors of family violence. It limits victim survivors' ability to safely leave violence, increases their risk of homelessness and housing instability, prolongs trauma and increases reliance on overstretched crisis services.

Social housing must be recognised as a critical component of family violence response. This requires sustained investment to increase the supply of safe, affordable, fit-for-purpose and secure housing. Investment in social housing will help reduce the significant social and economic costs of family violence by preventing housing insecurity and homelessness, supporting victim survivors' safety, recovery and wellbeing, as well as reducing reliance on crisis services and temporary emergency accommodation.

¹ National Housing Supply and Affordability Council (2026) *State of the Housing System 2026*, Australian Government.

<https://nhsac.gov.au/reports-and-submissions/state-housing-system-2026>

² Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Housing Insecurity Index 2025*; CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/2025-housing-insecurity-index/>; National Housing Supply and Affordability Council *State of the Housing System 2026*, Australian Government. <https://nhsac.gov.au/reports-and-submissions/state-housing-system-2026>

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026) *Housing assistance in Australia*, AIHW.

⁴ Department of Family, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) (2025) *Annual Report 2024-25*, Melbourne: Victorian Government. <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/annual-report>

Housing is critical to family violence safety and recovery

Social housing is one of the strongest protective factors against preventing homelessness for family violence victim survivors,⁵ and can improve physical safety by providing environments that reduce the greater risk of violence and harm.⁶ Unfortunately, there is a current lack of long-term affordable housing available.⁷

Family violence, housing affordability and homelessness

In Australia, family violence is the main reason that women and children leave their home in an effort to obtain safety away from the person using violence (PUV).⁸ Access to safe, affordable housing is fundamental to the ability to leave violence and remain safe. However, many victim survivors cannot afford to enter the private rental market on a single income or if they are receiving income support. The lack of affordable housing therefore creates a significant financial barrier to leaving violence.

This barrier is particularly acute for victim survivors reliant on income support. Approximately 36-40% of victim survivors of intimate partner violence receive any type of government payment.⁹ Yet the private rental market offers very few affordable options for people living on low incomes.

According to the *2026 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot*, of the 49,000 total rental properties available nationwide, only 255 (0.5%) could be afforded by a single person earning minimum wage, without entering housing stress.¹⁰ For a single person receiving Jobseeker and/or Parenting Payments, this drops to just 54 total properties nationwide and worsens to 17 affordable properties in the entire country for a person on the Disability Support Pension.

The situation is particularly acute for young people on Youth Allowance, which provides the lowest level of income support. The *2026 Rental Affordability Snapshot* revealed that there are *zero* affordable rental options available nationwide for a person receiving Youth Allowance.¹¹ Young victim survivors face particular difficulties in accessing housing due to low incomes, limited rental histories and financial insecurity. Young people aged 15-17 face additional barriers to accessing housing, as parental consent is required to access services such as Centrelink, impacting young people's ability

⁵ Prentice, D., & Scutella, R (2018) *What are the impacts of living in social housing?* Melbourne: Infrastructure Victoria. <https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/resources/what-are-the-impacts-of-living-in-social-housing> ; Johnson, G., Scutella, R, Tseng, YP & Wood, G (2019) How do housing and labour markets affect individual homelessness? *Housing Studies*, 34(7), 1089-1116. doi: 10.1080/02673037.2018.1520819

⁶ Taylor, S, Johnson, G, Watson J & Tyrrell, E (2023) *Healthy, happy and housed? 12-month outcomes from a longitudinal study of new tenants in social housing*. RMIT University. <https://unison.org.au/cms/uploads/docs/healthy-happy-and-housed-report-feb-2023.pdf>

⁷ Flanagan K, Blunden H, Valentine K & Henriette J (2019) *Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/311>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Note: This statistic does not include family violence committed by family members and would likely be higher if the full definition of family violence was measured; The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2025) *2025 Report to Government*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2025-report>

¹⁰ Anglicare (2026), *Rental Affordability Snapshot* (2026), <https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/research/victorian-rental-affordability-snapshot-2026/>; The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute defines *housing stress* as when a household's income level is in the bottom 40% of the national income distribution and they pay more than 30% of their income on housing.

¹¹ Anglicare Australia (2026) *Rental Affordability Snapshot: National Report 2026*, Anglicare Australia <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2026-rental-affordability-snapshot/>

to afford suitable housing.¹² Consequently, young people who cannot live at home due to family violence are at increased risk of violence, homelessness and poverty.¹³

Victim survivors who receive government payments are also less likely to be able to afford to leave, and to remain separated long-term, without the risk of poverty. Research shows that 45% of wage earners permanently leave a PUV the first time they leave, while only 26% of people receiving income support do,¹⁴ highlighting the relationship between financial security and a victim survivor's ability to leave violence.

The *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee* has reported on the inadequacy of income support payments.¹⁵ The Committee found that increases to the adequacy of the JobSeeker payment would create long-term benefits to the Australian economy, with a benefit of \$1.24 for every dollar invested.¹⁶ The long-term economic benefits of increasing the JobSeeker Payment are significant, including reducing poverty and spending on Government services, as well as growing human capital and output. It would also produce intergenerational benefits by improving positive educational outcomes for children in recipient households, with long-term benefits for the productivity of Australia's workforce.¹⁷

For victim survivors who cannot access or sustain private rental housing, social housing provides an essential alternative pathway to safety. However, Australia's social housing shortage is forcing women and children to stay in or return to violence, exposing them to escalating violence, serious harm or even death.¹⁸ Where a victim survivor is unable to secure safe and affordable housing after leaving, they may be forced to return to the PUV. Evidence shows that the risk of ongoing violence is even greater upon returning home to a PUV.¹⁹ Leaving the home – either temporarily or permanently – often results in housing insecurity and/or homelessness due to a lack of housing options or barriers in accessing housing.²⁰ Additionally, homelessness itself poses its own additional risks of violence, with women who are homeless experiencing higher rates of sexual assault than housed women.²¹ Homelessness often leads to a lifetime of disadvantage and poverty, and children who experience homelessness are more likely to become homeless as adults.²² Housing insecurity and homelessness can have severe physical health impacts, such as poor sleep quality, nutritional deficiencies, chronic

¹² Azize M (2024) *Priced Out: An Index of Affordable Rentals for People on the Lowest Incomes*, 2nd ed., Everybody's Home, Melbourne. <https://everybodyshome.com.au/resources/priced-out-an-index-of-affordable-rentals-for-people-on-the-lowest-incomes/>

¹³ McHale R, Brennan N, Freeburn T, Rossetto A, Richardson E, Boon B, and Christie R (2023) *Youth Survey Report 2023*, Sydney: Mission Australia, Sydney. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/youth-survey/youth-survey-reports/youth-survey-2023/>

¹⁴ The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2025) *2025 Report to Government*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2025-report>

¹⁵ The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2026) *2026 Report to Government*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-and-panels/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2026-report>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services*, Melbourne: CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

¹⁹ Lahav, Y (2023) Hyper-Sensitivity to the Perpetrator and the Likelihood of Returning to Abusive Relationships, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(1-2), 1815-1841. doi: 0.1177/08862605221092075

²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026) *Family, domestic and sexual violence: Housing*, AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/responses-and-outcomes/housing>

²¹ Goodman, L, Fels, K, Geln, C & Benitez, J (2006) No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the lives of homeless women, VAWnet. <https://vawnet.org/material/no-safe-place-sexual-assault-lives-homeless-women>

²² Flatau, P, Conroy, E, Spooner, C, Edwards, R, Eardley, T & Forbes, C (2013) *Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/200>

physical health issues and even premature death.²³ The co-occurrence of homelessness and family violence can also have significant impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of victim survivors, resulting in trauma, significant stress and mental health issues.²⁴ Housing insecurity and homelessness has also more recently been identified as a risk factor for suicide,²⁵ including suicidal thoughts and behaviours.²⁶

Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, victim survivors should be supported to remain safely in their home, while the PUV is held accountable and required to leave.²⁷ This is particularly relevant for victim survivors who have managed to obtain social housing, as the average wait time for a priority transfer is 17.3 months in Victoria.²⁸ Victim survivors cannot afford to wait without safety interventions, nor can they risk losing the security of their existing social housing tenancy.

To assist in victim survivors remaining safe in their homes, including in social housing, the *Keeping Women Safe in their Homes* (KWSITH) program, provides funding for home security upgrades for victim survivors and is funded until 2027.²⁹ Remaining safely at home is imperative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders victim survivors and marginalised victim survivors, who face additional structural challenges in finding appropriate accommodation, such as culturally safe or accessible properties. For people with disability, including children with disability, home is familiar, and more likely to be adapted for specific disability needs and accessible to supports and services.³⁰

Social housing is an essential part of family violence response, providing a secure and affordable housing option for victim survivors who cannot access or sustain housing in the private rental market.

Recommendations

1. Increase the base rates of JobSeeker and related working age payments, to improve access to safe and affordable housing, consistent with Recommendation 1 of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee* 2026 report. This includes the Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment and Youth Allowance

²³ Gordon, SJ, Baker, N, Marin, TS & Steffens, M (2024) [Health Status of People Who Are and Are Not Experiencing Homelessness: Opportunities for Improvement- external site opens in new window](#), *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(10), 1313. doi:10.3390/ijerph21101313; Tuson, M, Vallesi, S & Wood, L (2024) [Tracking deaths of people who have experienced homelessness: a dynamic cohort study in an Australian city – external site opens in new window](#), *BMJ Open*, 14(3), 1-8. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2023-081260. Vallesi, S, Tuson, M, Davies, A & Wood, L (2021) [Multimorbidity among People Experiencing Homelessness – Insights from Primary Care Data- external site opens in new window](#), *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(12), 6498. doi:10.3390/ijerph18126498.

²⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026) *Family, domestic and sexual violence: Housing*, AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/responses-and-outcomes/housing>

²⁵ Vasil, S, Fitz-Gibbon, K, & Segrave, M (2025) *Family violence and women's deaths by suicide: A Victorian study*, Australian Catholic University, Seque Consulting and University of Melbourne. doi: 10.24268/acu.914zx.

²⁶ Brackertz, N (2020) *The role of housing insecurity and homelessness in suicidal behaviour and effective interventions to reduce suicidal thoughts and behaviours: a review of the evidence*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/services/evidence-review/case-studies/suicide-prevention>

²⁷ Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee (2023) *Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria*, Parliament of Victoria. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/490daa/contentassets/90eeac3a41ca4c498ca4e1cffe125eb/committee-final-report.pdf>

²⁸ Department of Family, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) (2025) *Annual Report 2024-25*, Melbourne: Victorian Government. <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/annual-report>; Note: DFFH combines wait times for those waiting to obtain social housing, and those already in social housing waiting for a transfer. The average waiting time for long-term social housing for clients who have received priority access to housing or priority transfer allocation due to family violence is approximately 17.3 months.

²⁹ Department of Social Services, Australian Government (2026) *Keeping Women Safe in their Homes*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/safety-programs-prevention-and-evidence/keeping-women-safe-their-homes>

³⁰ Tapnell, A (2026) *State Disability Plan and the Victorian Autism Plan 2027-2031 submission*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/DOC-20260731-State-Disability-Plan_Submission_FINAL_.pdf

2. Ensure the continuation of funding for Safe at Home responses particularly for social housing dwellings, including the *Keeping Women Safe in their Homes* program and the *Personal Safety Initiative* in Victoria³¹

We need effective housing options and a service delivery continuum

When victim survivors leave home because of family violence, they may require access to a range of options from crisis accommodation and refuge through to transitional and long-term housing. A functioning housing continuum is critical to ensuring that victim survivors can move from immediate safety options to stable, long-term housing.

Specialist family violence refuges provide secure crisis accommodation, risk assessment and a range of supports for victim survivors. Importantly, they also offer a safe environment in which the early stages of recovery can begin. However, refuges are only an interim form of housing and need effective pathways into longer-term housing. The availability of social housing is therefore critical to the functioning of the refuge system, providing victim survivors with a pathway out of crisis accommodation and into secure, long-term housing without delays.

The supply of refuge accommodation for victim survivors is limited, due in part to low availability alongside few exit pathways.³² For victim survivors who are able to obtain a refuge space, the lack of long-term housing options results in victim survivors remaining in refuge accommodation for extended and prolonged periods. This is often the case for victim survivors without permanent residency, who face additional systemic barriers created by the migration system.³³ Safe and Equal's 2026 *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity* report (2026 Demand and Capacity Report) indicates that victim survivors without permanent residency continue to experience longer stays in refuge than those with permanent residency or citizenship.³⁴ Victim survivors without permanent residency, including temporary visa holders, refugees, and asylum seekers, represented approximately 10% of victim survivors in refuge and accounted for around 17% of all refuge bed-days.³⁵

When refuge accommodation isn't available, services often have to rely on motels as an alternative form of crisis accommodation.³⁶ Due to demand on the refuge system, victim survivors are often placed in unsafe and unsuitable motels. For example, in Victoria the 24/7 statewide service³⁷ places 80 victim survivors in motels per night across Victoria, 40 per cent of whom are children,³⁸ with even more victim survivors being housed in motels statewide by local specialist family violence services.

³¹ The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) is a non-crisis support program providing home security audits, tailored technology upgrades, and case management to help family violence victim survivors remain safely in their homes.

³² Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services*, Melbourne: CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

³³ Segrave, M (2026) *How the government's new immigration policy will cause more trauma for victim-survivors of domestic violence*, The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/how-the-governments-new-immigration-policy-will-cause-more-trauma-for-victim-survivors-of-domestic-violence-292352>

³⁴ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services*, Melbourne: CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

³⁷ Safe Steps provides statewide 24/7, inclusive and confidential, family and domestic violence crisis support service.

³⁸ Safe Steps (forthcoming) *2025-26 Annual Impact Report*, Melbourne: Safe Steps.

In Safe and Equal's submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs *Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) and suicide*, we highlighted member services concerns about victim survivors being placed in motels for crisis accommodation, and the risk this poses to victim survivors' safety, including poor mental health.³⁹

Motels are not therapeutic spaces,⁴⁰ and victim survivor advocates similarly raised the risks and harms associated with prolonged periods spent in motel accommodation. Victim survivors are likely to be kept in a holding pattern of trauma, as they are often disconnected from suitable support services and social networks.⁴¹ Motels also pose an increased risk of the PUV locating women and children.⁴²

The lack of long-term housing means victim survivors are staying in crisis and emergency accommodation – such as motels – for longer periods of time. This, in turn, makes it impossible to move people through the system.⁴³ With the lack of access to social housing, victim survivors have limited pathways to transition out of refuges and other forms of crisis accommodation. As a result, many victim survivors are confronted with the possibility of returning to a PUV or facing ongoing housing insecurity or potential homelessness.

At least 83,000 additional social homes are needed for family violence victim survivors

The scale of the social housing shortage requires a significant increase in supply. Modelling undertaken by the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance estimates that an additional 83,000 social homes are required by 2051 to meet existing demand for victim survivors alone, with 377,000 social homes required to meet current demand for all Victorians.⁴⁴ While these figures represent Victorian need, they illustrate the scale of social housing investment required, and which should be considered at a national level.

Recommendation

3. Commit to delivering at least 83,000 new social housing dwellings specifically for family violence victim survivors over the next 25 years, as part of the broader expansion of social housing required in Victoria. This must be extrapolated at a national level

³⁹ Tapsell, A (2026) *Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) and suicide*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SUB-20260226-Inquiry-into-the-relationship-between-DFSV-and-suicide_Final.pdf

⁴⁰ Safe Steps (2024) *Safe Steps submission to the Strong Foundations: Building on Victoria's work to end family violence* online consultation, Melbourne: Safe Steps. <https://www.safesteps.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Safe-Steps-response-to-Strong-Foundations-Consultation-Feb-24.pdf>

⁴¹ Vasil, S, Fitz-Gibbon, K, & Segrave, M (2025) *Family violence and women's deaths by suicide: A Victorian study*, Australian Catholic University, Sequire Consulting and University of Melbourne. doi: 10.24268/acu.914zx; Safe Steps (2024) *Safe Steps submission to the Strong Foundations: Building on Victoria's work to end family violence* online consultation, Safe Steps. <https://www.safesteps.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Safe-Steps-response-to-Strong-Foundations-Consultation-Feb-24.pdf>

⁴² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2024) *Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence*, Australian Government. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/unlocking-the-prevention-potential>; Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services*, Melbourne: CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

⁴³ Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services*, Melbourne: CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

⁴⁴ SGS Economics and Planning, (2025) *Growing Social Housing: Data, insights and targets*, The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance. https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Growing-Social-Housing_Final.pdf

The impact of inadequate social housing on underserved communities

For systemically marginalised victim survivors, the shortage of safe, affordable and appropriate housing is often compounded by intersecting barriers, limiting their pathways to safety and recovery. Housing injustice is not experienced uniformly,⁴⁵ and therefore housing issues must always be considered through an intersectional lens.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait victim survivors

Due to compounding forms of discriminations and inadequate appropriate housing options, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim survivors and victim survivors from marginalised groups face higher rates of homelessness and additional barriers to housing, compared to victim survivors who do not face these additional systemic barriers.⁴⁶

Aboriginal victim survivors are also more likely to have experienced homelessness as a result of family violence than non-Aboriginal people.⁴⁷ The general lack of affordable housing is heightened for Aboriginal victim survivors due to systemic barriers including racism and discrimination in the housing market. With family violence a major driver for child protection involvement and entry into out of home care for Aboriginal children,⁴⁸ the lack of culturally safe and affordable housing not only increases family violence risk, but it also increases the risk of Aboriginal children being removed from their family and culture.

Children and young people victim survivors

Experiences of family violence are a key pathway into homelessness for many children and young people.⁴⁹ The 2025 *Victorian Youth Homelessness Snapshot* found that four in five young people had experienced family violence before becoming homeless,⁵⁰ and in Victoria, family violence is the single biggest driver of homelessness for young people.⁵¹

Children and young people represent a growing cohort presenting to specialist homelessness services (SHS).⁵² In 2024-25, around 40,500 children and young people were receiving support alone, comprising 14% of all SHS clients.⁵³ While children and young people are at a greater risk of homelessness due to a combination of factors – including difficult family relationships, family violence,

⁴⁵ Dunning, R & Moore, T (2025) Housing intersectionality – there is no other, *Housing and Society*, 52(2), 109-111. doi: 10.1080/08882746.2025.2550920

⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2019) *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story*, AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2026) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: 2.12 Child protection*, AIHW. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-12-child-protection>; Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report – Volume 3*, <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports/yoorrook-for-transformation-third-interim-report-volume-3>

⁴⁹ Melbourne City Mission (MCM) (2025) *2025 Victorian Youth Homelessness Snapshot*, MCM. <https://www.mcm.org.au/news/2025-victorian-youth-homelessness-snapshot>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) (2025) *Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services*, Melbourne: CHP. <https://chp.org.au/publication/bridging-the-gap-between-homelessness-and-family-violence-services/>

⁵² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25: Children and young people receiving support alone*, AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary>

⁵³ Ibid.

trauma, discrimination and mental health issues, the most common reason that children aged 12-17 seek assistance from SHSs is related to relationship or family breakdown.⁵⁴ Homelessness for children and young people reduces engagement in study or work, has detrimental impacts on their mental health and increases the risk of self-harm and suicide.⁵⁵

Young people who cannot live with their families due to family violence require youth-focused services that provide tailored supports including specialist family violence case management, access to appropriate housing, and engagement with study or employment. There are examples of successful youth-focused programs and services, such as *Amplify* and *Aspire*. We note these programs remain geographically limited with limited capacity.⁵⁶

Recognising children and young people as victim survivors in their own right means acknowledging that safe, appropriate and affordable housing is essential for their wellbeing, recovery and long-term outcomes.

Victim survivors on temporary visas

Victim survivors on temporary visas have no legal access to income, while visa processes are drawn out. Accommodation options are highly limited, as victim survivors on temporary visas are ineligible for social housing. Families often become stuck in crisis or transitional housing for months, and at times, this can last for years.

The 2026 Demand and Capacity Report shows that victim survivors with permanent residency spent an average of six weeks in refuge. For victim survivors with non-permanent residency, this rose to an average of eleven weeks, with one refuge provider recording an *average* of forty-four weeks (310 days) across their clients without permanent residency. This is despite the intended average length of stay in refuge of four to six weeks.⁵⁷

This demonstrates the additional pressure that limited long-term housing options can place on the refuge system, and the need to ensure that victim survivors on temporary visas can access social and public housing, as found in the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence *Blueprint for Reform*.⁵⁸

LGBTIQ+ victim survivors

While there is inadequate data to measure homelessness rates for LGBTIQ+ victim survivors, anecdotally, we know that LGBTIQ+ victim survivors are at an increased risk of homelessness, with stigma and discrimination being the two main drivers of homelessness for the community.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Orygen and Melbourne City Mission (MCM) (2025) *Home in Mind: Improving mental health support for young people experiencing homelessness*, MCM. <https://www.mcm.org.au/news/no-home-no-healthcare>

⁵⁶ Melbourne City Mission (MCM) (2025) *Amplify Program*, MCM. <https://www.mcm.org.au/news/amplify-evaluation-confirms-family-violence-program-is-changing-lives>; Meli (2026) *Aspire Program*, Meli. <https://www.meli.org.au/youth-services/aspire-program/>.

⁵⁷ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

⁵⁸ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2026) *Blueprint for Reform: Securing Safety for Victims Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence on Temporary Visas*, National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence *Blueprint*.

⁵⁹ Victorian Government (2021) *Snapshot: LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Victoria*, Victorian Government. <https://www.vic.gov.au/snapshot-lgbtq-homelessness-victoria>

Victim survivors with a disability

For adult and child victim survivors with disabilities, finding affordable, appropriate and accessible housing is difficult⁶⁰, meaning that victim survivors are pushed into homelessness, living in unsuitable accommodation or continuing or returning to live with the PUV where the chance of serious injury, disability and death can be high.

Older women

Older women are the fastest growing group of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.⁶¹ Increasing numbers of older women in Australia are precariously housed, living in insecure private rental housing, with limited tenure security and unaffordable rent.⁶² Evidence suggests that this may reflect the cumulative impacts of disadvantage and violence experienced over the life course – including family breakdown – or the need to escape from violence in later life.⁶³ However, current data on older women experiencing homelessness likely understates the full extent of the problem.⁶⁴ Many older women who experience homelessness are not captured in data collection, avoiding services due to mistrust or shame, or because they are cycling through various temporary accommodation options.⁶⁵

Rural and regional communities

Victim survivors across rural, regional and remote regions of Australia face compounding and unique family violence⁶⁶ and housing risks. This includes isolation and the availability of affordable housing. Victim survivors may be forced to move out of their local community to find affordable housing nationwide, the geographic distance between regional communities means that the time, cost, and lack of public transport options make maintaining previous community connections harder, including access to family supports, friends, employment and education for children. Rural and regional areas often lack emergency accommodation due to demand from tourism or extreme weather events. Some areas also lack refuges, however for those that do, the locations are often known to the local community.

⁶⁰ National Centre for Disability Advocacy 2025, *Systemic Advocacy Insight Report: no. 2*, National Centre for Disability Advocacy, viewed 28 September 2026, <https://ncda.org.au/advocacy-resources/public-reports/>

⁶¹ Department of Social Services (2022) *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032>

⁶² Lester, L & Faulkner, D (2020) At risk: Understanding the Population Size and Demographics of Older Women at Risk of Homelessness in Australia, *Social Venture Australia*. https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/at_risk_final_report_web.pdf

⁶³ Petersen, M & Tilse, C (2024) Women's life course and precarious housing in older age: an Australian qualitative study, *Housing Studies*, 39(12), 3245–3267. doi: 10.1080/02673037.2023.2254721; Sutherland G, Bulsara C, Robinson S & Codde J (2022) Older women's perceptions of the impact of homelessness on their health needs and their ability to access healthcare, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 46(1), 62–68. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.13156

⁶⁴ Sutherland G, Bulsara C, Robinson, S & Codde, J (2022) Older women's perceptions of the impact of homelessness on their health needs and their ability to access healthcare, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 46(1), 62–68. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.13156; Sutherland G (2021) *Study of the health needs of older women experiencing homelessness in the Perth metropolitan area*, Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons (CHP). <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/275/>

⁶⁵ Sutherland G (2021) *Study of the health needs of older women experiencing homelessness in the Perth metropolitan area*, Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons (CHP). <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/275/>

⁶⁶ Such as geographical isolation and close-knit communities.

Recommendations

4. Ensure that social housing investment and housing design responds to the diverse needs of victim survivors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children and young people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, older people and people living in rural, regional and remote communities
5. Expand access to social and public housing, and Safe at Home programs for victim survivors on temporary visas, in line with recommendation 3.1 of the *Blueprint for Reform*.⁶⁷ This includes:
 - Equal access without any migration restrictions
 - Investment in affordable, longer-term accommodation so that women on temporary visas can move out of crisis accommodation despite a lack of rental history

Impact for specialist family violence services

Family violence and homelessness are inextricably linked, driving significant social and economic costs through increased demand and pressure on specialist family violence services.

In Victoria, specialist family violence services are already having to prioritise higher-risk victim-survivors with more urgent needs due to ongoing capacity constraints. This means that victim survivors assessed as being at a lower level of risk may experience delays or be unable to receive support. Amidst this, other services are increasingly turning victim survivors away or can only provide partial support. Victim survivors may in turn, end up relying more on crisis and response services in future, as well as making greater use of other government services such as the health and justice systems.⁶⁸

Challenges facing the specialist family violence sector are exacerbated when victim survivors are unable to secure or remain in safe long-term housing,⁶⁹ of which social housing is often the only viable option. Low levels of rental affordability in the private market and a shortage of social housing across Victoria limit victim survivors' ability to recover. Housing challenges can also mean people require assistance from specialist family violence services over a longer period,⁷⁰ including where victim survivors are unable to secure the housing they need before their support is closed, and victim survivors are more likely to re-present to services.⁷¹

The 2026 Demand and Capacity Report⁷² indicates that:

- 78% of member services had at least one victim survivor re-present for support during the reporting period, revealing that 1,770 victim survivors returned to a service at least three months after their last period of support. Concerns about safety and risk were the most

⁶⁷ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence 2022, *Blueprint for reform: path to safety for women on temporary visas experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence*, 2nd edn, National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, viewed 28 September 2026, <https://iarc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Blueprint-for-reform-2022-v071222.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Equity Economics (2026) *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for specialist family violence services*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Final-report-Costs-and-benefits-of-fully-meeting-demand-updated.pdf>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Tassone, J (forthcoming) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2026*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

⁷² Ibid.

commonly identified drivers of re-presentation, with services also frequently identifying housing needs as a key factor contributing to victim survivors returning for support

- following support with family violence risk, housing and homelessness was the most frequently cited need for victim survivors of family violence, with *all* services (100%) reporting it as a pattern presented by victim survivors within the reporting period

Sustainable and increased investment in specialist family violence services

Specialist family violence services are experiencing higher levels of demand than ever before. A report commissioned by Safe and Equal estimates that each year around 3,750 victim survivors seeking help from Victorian specialist family violence services are unable to receive support, with a further 5,000 victim survivors unable to be provided with services they need.⁷³

For Victoria alone, it is estimated that specialist family violence services received about \$286 million in government funding in 2025-26, increasing to approximately \$300 million in 2026-27 to keep pace with inflation and population growth. However, this funding is insufficient to meet current known unmet demand. An additional \$187 million in annual government investment is required to meet demand, increasing the total funding for specialist family violence services to \$487 million. This increased investment would ensure specialist family violence services can meet existing demand – to support more clients and, for existing clients, to deliver all supports they need when they are needed.⁷⁴

Recommendation

6. The Commonwealth should increase ongoing core funding for specialist family violence services to meet current unmet demand. For Victoria alone, this investment is currently estimated at \$187 million per year

Conclusion

We need structural housing system-change and continued investment to achieve a well-functioning social housing system for victim survivors of family violence. Housing is a human right,⁷⁵ and victim survivors of family violence should be able to access safe and affordable housing as a safety issue, in both short and long-term recovery to rebuild their lives.

⁷³ Equity Economics (2026) *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for specialist family violence services*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Final-report-Costs-and-benefits-of-fully-meeting-demand-updated.pdf>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2024) *Brief: What does 'Housing as a human right' mean in Australia?* AHURI.

Summary of recommendations

1. Increase the base rates of JobSeeker and related working age payments, to improve access to safe and affordable housing, consistent with Recommendation 1 of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2026* report. This includes the Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment and Youth Allowance
2. Ensure the continuation of funding for Safe at Home responses particularly for social housing dwellings, including the *Keeping Women Safe in their Homes* program and the *Personal Safety Initiative* in Victoria
3. Commit to delivering at least 83,000 new social housing dwellings specifically for family violence victim survivors over the next 25 years, as part the broader expansion of social housing required in Victoria. This must be extrapolated at a national level
4. Ensure that social housing allocations and housing design responds to the diverse needs of victim survivors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, children and young people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, older people and people living in rural, regional and remote communities
5. Expand access to social and public housing, and Safe at Home programs for victim survivors on temporary visas, in line with recommendation 3.1 of the *Blueprint for Reform*.⁷⁶ This includes:
 - Equal access without any migration restrictions
 - Investment in affordable, longer-term accommodation so that women on temporary visas can move out of crisis accommodation despite a lack of rental history
6. The Commonwealth should increase ongoing core funding for specialist family violence services to meet current unmet demand. For Victoria alone, this investment is currently estimated at \$187 million per year.

⁷⁶ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence 2022, *Blueprint for reform: path to safety for women on temporary visas experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence*, 2nd edn, National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, viewed 28 September 2026, <https://iarc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Blueprint-for-reform-2022-v071222.pdf>.