

## Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

31 March 2025

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## **Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners**

### **Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

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**

At Safe and Equal, we work towards a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence.

We are 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. We are an independent, non-government organisation.

Our work prioritises the safety of all people experiencing, recovering from or at risk of 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.

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.

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# Family Violence and Housing Need in Regional Victoria

## Statewide context

The current housing crisis has a significant impact on Safe and Equal's members and victim survivors of family violence across the state, with some specific challenges experienced in regional and rural areas.

In the 2024 Demand and Capacity Survey, 98 per cent of Safe and Equal's members who participated identified housing and homelessness as the most common issue impacting victim survivors seeking support from their services, after addressing their initial family violence risk. In addition to exacerbating family violence risk, insecure and unstable housing has significant impacts on a range of social outcome measures across health, mental health, education and employment.

In Victoria in 2023-24, women constituted 58 per cent of overall clients seeking specialist homelessness services support.<sup>1</sup> Of all clients engaged with specialist homelessness services, 42 per cent of clients experienced family and domestic violence, 47 per cent experienced financial difficulties and 37 per cent experienced housing affordability stress.<sup>2</sup> This data highlights the intersection of family violence and housing stress in the context of the cost-of-living-crisis and is indicative of the need for significant investment in stable, affordable housing.

Across the state, lack of access to crisis accommodation and affordable long-term housing are two of the many barriers that victim survivors face when trying to leave violent situations and be safe. The lack of appropriate, affordable housing options means that when victim survivors are unable to safely stay in their own homes, there are very few alternative affordable housing options in the private sector.

For victim survivors who need protective hiding in family violence crisis accommodation such as refuge, there are no pathways for victim survivors in crisis accommodation to transition into safe housing. Consequently, victim survivors are staying in crisis accommodation far longer than they need to due to the lack of suitable and available accommodation. This limits crisis options for other victim survivors experiencing family violence, placing considerable strain on family violence service providers and, most importantly, delaying recovery for victim survivors.

Due to the lack of appropriate crisis accommodation many victim survivors are being placed in motels. Motels are not fit-for-purpose for crisis accommodation and usually have limited facilities and access to specialist family violence support. This increases the chances of a victim survivor returning to the perpetrator, as it can seem easier to deal with

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<sup>1</sup> Australia Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025) '[Specialist homelessness services 2023–24: Victoria.](#)'

<sup>2</sup> Australia Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025) '[Specialist homelessness services 2023–24: Victoria.](#)'

a known situation, even if it is high risk, than the ongoing uncertainty of being in time-limited emergency and crisis accommodation with the risk of becoming homeless.

### **Specific challenges in regional and rural areas**

Consultation with member agencies in rural and regional areas indicates that there are compounding effects of living in these areas that create additional barriers to victim survivors wanting to leave violent relationships. These include:

- **There is a lack of any form of crisis or emergency accommodation (including motels) in some regional and rural areas.** This results in victim survivors leaving their local area to access safe accommodation, and in doing so they need to leave their employment, children must change schools, and moving away from their local support networks. In the most extreme cases, homelessness services have reported having no option to offer victim survivors leaving family violence except for tents.
- **There can be limited availability of emergency accommodation due to tourism, which many rural and regional areas rely on.** As such motels and caravan parks, frequently relied on as emergency accommodation for victim survivors, have no or limited availability in periods of peak demands. Available accommodation may also become extremely expensive during peak periods, impacting the amount of emergency accommodation that specialist family violence services are able to provide within their budgets.
- **The impacts of extreme weather events** such as flooding and fires on rural and regional areas. This creates additional demand for emergency accommodation, as people are forced from their homes, often for extended periods of time before they can return, leaving no accommodation available for people who were already homeless prior to the extreme weather event.

The lack of emergency and crisis accommodation for victim survivors of family violence is a critical problem in the context of growing homelessness across the state, and particularly in regional and rural areas.

According to the Council for Homeless Persons, 13 000 working people sought assistance from homelessness services in Victoria in the 2023/24 financial year- an increase of 23% over the previous year.<sup>3</sup> An analysis of the 2021 census data shows that across Victoria, there were significant spikes in homelessness, where only 24 electorates saw a decrease in homelessness with 20 of those being in metropolitan Melbourne. Regional electorates such as Barwon saw an alarming increase of 465 per cent over 5 years (2016-2021), followed by Melton (134 per cent) and Eureka (113 per cent).<sup>4</sup> While

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<sup>3</sup> Council to Homeless Persons website. (2025). *Infrastructure body's recommendation for 60,000 new social homes welcomed by CHP - Council to Homeless Persons website.* [online] Available at: <https://chp.org.au/article/infrastructure-bodys-recommendation-for-60000-new-social-homes-in-victoria-welcomed-by-council-to-homeless-persons/> [Accessed 6 Mar. 2025].

<sup>4</sup> Council to Homeless Persons (2023) *Analysis Report, Victoria's Top 20: Areas with surging homelessness*, Council to Homeless Persons.

this data is nearly four years old, we know that rates of homelessness and housing precarity has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2023-2024 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist Homelessness Services 2023–24 Annual Report, 22 per cent of clients in Victoria were from inner regional areas, 6 per cent from outer regional areas and less than 1 per cent were from remote areas. While this is less than in metropolitan Melbourne, these rates are stark if applied to rates of homelessness per capita.

Given at least 42 per cent of the people looking for support from a specialist homelessness service are victim survivors of family violence, as articulated above, the increase in homelessness and the absence of emergency and crisis accommodation means that more victim survivors are becoming homeless and not able to find any emergency, crisis or long-term housing.

The current housing affordability crisis is also impacting on the availability of affordable accommodation in the private rental market. According to a recent report by the Everybody's Home campaign, while housing affordability is slightly better in regional Victorian areas compared to Melbourne, renters in regional areas on incomes as high as \$80,00 to \$90,000 are still consistently in housing stress.<sup>5</sup> Due to income inequality, the fact that women are more likely to be working in lower paid industries, working part time to balance caring responsibilities and that victim survivors may have experienced financial abuse and are likely to be leading single parent households<sup>6</sup>, it can be assumed that a large proportion of victim survivors in regional and rural areas will be on low or very low incomes, meaning private rental is likely to be unaffordable.

The high cost of housing in the private market is also affecting community services', including specialist family violence services', workforces. Feedback from member agencies is that the lack of housing is significantly impacting recruitment of specialist family violence staff to rural and regional areas. This is amplified in the current context of significant workforce shortages for the sector.<sup>7</sup>

In metropolitan areas, staff are often recruited after they have completed student placements at an organisation. In rural and regional areas, the lack of affordable student accommodation creates an additional barrier to attracting students on placement to the area. In other regional areas, members have reported that they have successfully recruited practitioners from metropolitan areas to work in regional communities. However, these practitioners have ultimately had to reject the offer of employment upon finding that they could not find an affordable place to live in that area. The inability to recruit because staff cannot find an affordable place to live means that regional and rural services may

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<sup>5</sup> Everybody's Home (March 2025) *Priced Out: An index of affordable rentals for Australian voters*. Third Edition. p10

<sup>6</sup> Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (2025) *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2025 Report to Government*; Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2025) *Employer gender pay gaps report*. WGEA, Sydney.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *FDSV workforce*. [online] Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/responses-and-outcomes/fdsv-workforce>.

sustain vacancies for prolonged periods which affects their ability to offer support to victim survivors in need.

## **Recommendations**

### **Safe and Equal recommends a significant investment in crisis, social and affordable housing across rural and regional Victoria.**

No one housing solution will address the rise of homelessness among victim survivors. Increased accommodation options are required in regional and rural areas across the spectrum of housing from emergency and crisis accommodation, through to social housing and affordable housing in the private rental market. Critically, the role of public and community housing cannot be overlooked, as for many victim survivors and their families, this type of housing will be the only type of housing that is financially viable in the long-term.

Specifically, as stated in our 2025/26 budget submission we recommend the Victorian Government:

- Commit to increasing the amount of social housing in Victoria to meet the national average at a bare minimum and put in place a strategy to achieve this.
- Commit to doubling specialist family violence refuge capacity to at least 340 households, to reduce reliance on inappropriate motel accommodation for victim survivors in crisis.

The critical lack of safe, affordable housing options is having a devastating impact on individuals and communities across rural and regional Victoria. Without significant and structural change to the housing market to support access to safe and affordable housing across the spectrum from crisis accommodation, social housing and affordable housing people facing barriers to stable accommodation, including victim survivors of family violence, will continue to experience entrenched disadvantage.