Homelessness in Barwon South West Region
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The Barwon South West Homelessness Network (the Network) is a Network of agencies in Barwon and South West region who work collaboratively for the achievement of an integrated system providing support and accommodation to people experiencing or at risk of Homelessness in our region.

The Network provides opportunities for agencies, Housing, Support services and the broader community to address and resolve issues of Homelessness and its prevention in the Region.
Who’s homeless & where?

Who’s homeless?

Under the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition, a person can be considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

The ABS presents its estimates of homelessness using these groupings:

- People living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
- People in supported accommodation for the homeless
- People staying temporarily with other households
- People living in boarding houses
- People in other temporary lodgings, and
- People living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings.

On the night of the 2016 Census, more than 116,000 people were counted as being homeless in Australia. This includes both children and adults.

This is considered to be a conservative count, because some groups of people are often under counted in the Census.

For example, the ABS notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ are ‘more likely to be both under counted and over represented in the homeless population’ and that people sleeping rough and people staying in supported accommodation for the homeless are also at risk of being under counted or not counted at all in the Census.

One in every 56 Victorians sought support from a homelessness service in the 2016-2017 financial year. A quarter of these people live outside our two major cities.

(Source: AIHW fact sheet Specialist Homelessness Services 2016-2017 Victoria)

From the 2016 Census The following graph shows the number of people experiencing homelessness in our region by LGA

ALL HOMELESS PERSONS BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY (LGA)
Where are they staying?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Improved dwelling, tents or sleeping out</th>
<th>Supported accommodation for the homeless</th>
<th>Staying temporarily with other households</th>
<th>Living in boarding houses</th>
<th>Living in other overcrowded dwellings</th>
<th>Living in other temporary lodgings</th>
<th>Living in other improvised dwellings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colac Otway</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corangamite</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenelg</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater Geelong</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>315</td>
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<td>Moyne</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queenscliff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Grampians</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf Coast</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrnambool</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Audrey’s story

Young resident Audrey* says that prior to living at Brophy Family and Youth Service's Foyer Warrnambool campus she had experienced homelessness in various forms.

“I’ve done the couch surfing. Staying until I have outgrown my welcome; feeling like you are imposing.”

“I felt helpless and isolated, in a constant state of dread waiting for the tap on the shoulder telling me it’s time to move on.”

“I slept in my car for three nights at one stage. Not only are you at risk of physical and emotional harm, you are in a constant state of anxiety.”

Since moving into Foyer Warrnambool in February Audrey has returned to education and completed her Certificate 1 in Developing Independence at SWTAFE. She also holds down casual employment. As a motivated young person she has developed a leadership role and brings a positive influence in the communal culture.

Audrey describes what ‘home’ means to her.

“For me a home is a place you identify as your own. The Foyer has supported me by providing me with a safe and comfortable place to live.”

“So yeah, I would call the Foyer my home.”

*named changed to protect identity

Causes of homelessness are complex

The causes of homelessness are complex, with no single trigger. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role – and interact with each other.

This chart shows the four most common reasons that people were seeking homelessness assistance in 2015-2016 AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing). This chart reflects what all people seeking assistance identified as their main reason for seeking support. This information is collated by workers in agencies.

- **33%** Family violence
- **19%** Housing Crisis
- **14%** Other
- **7%** Transition from custody
- **7%** Other
In 2011 the Australian Bureau of Statistics undertook a specialist homelessness count, which included our region. The total number of people counted as being homeless during the count was 924.

In 2016 after the homelessness count was conducted this number was 1137.

In the Barwon South West Region the number of males seeking assistance was 38% and females 65%

2011: 38% male 65% female

2016: 38% male 65% female

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing)
Sam & Lilly’s story

Sam and Lilly both came to BCYF for support in finding stable and secure accommodation in early March this year. Both had a considerable history of transience and an unstable childhood.

Sam had been homeless and couch surfing throughout all of his teenage years both in and outside of the Geelong region. Sam stated that he left his mother’s due to her mental health being too difficult to manage and that things have also broken down with his stepfather due to stepfather’s drinking and aggressive behaviours. Sam had become dependent on alcohol and marijuana when he was 14-15 years old. Sam is no longer using substances. Although now 21, Sam had been in quite a few Youth Refuge’s throughout his teenage years. Before coming to Geelong, Sam was homeless in Melbourne and was receiving support from Hope Street. It was here that he met Lilly, now his girlfriend, who was also seeking support from Hope Street. Lilly’s accommodation with her father’s ex-partner had fallen through. Sam and Lilly returned to live with Lilly’s father for a brief period last year, after he was released from prison. Lilly and Sam had said her father was very volatile and aggressive towards them and that things deteriorated to the point where the police became involved as Lilly’s father was threatening Sam’s life.

After living at Lilly’s father’s house, the couple then went to Point Lonsdale and lived in a very small, dilapidated trailer/caravan. The caravan was on the property of Lilly’s sister’s partner’s father. The van was a barely liveable space, with no toilet or fridge facilities and the exterior was coming apart due age and damage. After a short time, Lilly and Sam began to feel as though they were no longer wanted there, and were not allowed access to the main house (to use shower or toilet facilities) at night.

Throughout their short period of support with BCYF so far, both Sam and Lilly have been proactive in their support and engagement with their workers. Both have attended the ‘Ladder Empower’ program and have shown themselves to be mature and insightful young people. They have both been a model of respectful behaviour, which they are currently demonstrating in the program. They have also at times given positive feedback to BCYF throughout support and thanking their workers for the support they have received. BCYF have assisted them with accessing crisis motels/holiday parks, linking in with mental health services, advocating for them with job service providers, linking in with medical services, referring them to medium and long term housing options (i.e. community housing, Office of Housing, THMs) accessing HEF brokerage to sustain housing, linking Lilly with further education, whilst maintaining good relationships and providing avenues of emotional and physical support.

Sam and Lilly have now been successful in obtaining a long term property through Unison. This is close to town, and both Sam and Lilly are very excited to be finally moving into stable housing for the first time.

This will also be an opportunity for them to establish other support links they may need in the local area. Lilly and Sam seem to be a strong and supportive young couple who have maintained a positive relationship in quite difficult circumstances.

Lilly and Sam frequently talk about the future they want to create for themselves. They have spoken on a number of occasions about dreams of one day buying a van and travelling around Australia. Once settled into their new property, Sam and Lilly’s Journey will only have just begun.
As in all places in Australia we face a significant problem between demand for housing and adequate supply. A recent report by Anglicare Victoria ‘Rental Affordability Snapshot’ has found the affordability of the Victorian rental market remains extremely low.

The rental snapshot found that, when broken into regional and metropolitan areas, there are virtually no affordable properties with sufficient rooms to prevent overcrowding available within metropolitan Melbourne for individuals and families subsisting on income support payments or pensions.

The affordability of appropriate rental properties in regional Victoria for such people is somewhat better, though the rental market is still overwhelmingly out of reach.

Of the top 10 affordable regional, rural and coastal LGAs for households on the minimum wage, there are no affordable regions listed for the Barwon South West Region.
What is it to be in housing stress?

Housing stress in the private rental market has been identified as a growing concern. It is well established in Australia that households paying 30% or more of their income on housing are regarded as likely to be experiencing housing stress. In its report ‘Housing Assistance in Australia’, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2014) identified that the proportion of low-income households experiencing housing stress had increased from 37% in 2007-08 to 44% in 2011-12. For the households in the lowest 10% of income, the proportion was highest at 60% in 2011-12. In Victoria, the figure rose from 32% to 47% over the decade.

It is important to recognise however that housing stress is not simply about inadequate income (though that is a major issue in itself for the majority of households) but also of lack of access due to there not being enough affordable rental properties available. Even where affordable properties are nominally available in the market, they are occupied by households with higher incomes.

Leyla’s Story

Leyla survived family violence perpetrated by her ex-partner in Sydney. Leyla has two children aged 12 and 13 years. Leyla knew that she had to leave Sydney in order for her and her children to be safe. Leyla moved in with her sister and her four children in a 3 bedroom house in Geelong. The house was overcrowded and placed stress on everyone. Four months later Leyla called the 1800 state wide number and spoke to a worker at the access point in Geelong.

Four months later Leyla was offered a transitional housing property in Colac and support was provided by the housing worker at Colac Area Health. Leyla soon found part-time work whilst her children were at school. Leyla was not able to continue to work as she did not have any support to care for her children whilst she was at work over the school holidays.

Leyla has applied for twenty-five private rental properties and has not received a response from any of the agents for the applications she has made. These applications were for properties in Colac and Geelong.
The Anglicare ‘Rental Affordability Snapshot’ confirms what we are already experiencing, that those who rely on income support are excluded from the private rental market. The overall rental stock available in the region can be quite low resulting in increased competition for a scarce resource. Low income earners are increasingly being faced with a range of unacceptable choices; pay more than you can afford or live in inappropriate housing for your needs. This is particularly true for the increasing number of older persons living in private rental in the region.

### AFFORDABLE LETTINGS FOR INDICATIVE HOUSING ON CENTRELINK INCOMES JANUARY TO MARCH 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1 Bedroom</th>
<th></th>
<th>2 Bedroom</th>
<th></th>
<th>3 Bedroom</th>
<th></th>
<th>4+ Bedroom</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
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<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colac - Otway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.06%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corangamite</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenelg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater Geelong</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>.25%</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>452</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moyne</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queenscliffe</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Grampians</td>
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<td>71.4%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
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<td>.55%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>118</td>
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This table depicts the number of affordable lettings for indicative households on Centrelink incomes. However, the occupation of affordable stock by households with higher incomes has caused a “mismatch between supply and demand leading to increased competition for the few affordable properties currently in the market, with the remaining households forced to compete for more expensive/less affordable properties. If successful, low-income tenants are likely to have little choice but to spend an increased proportion of their incomes on rent, placing them at higher risk of housing stress.

The Barwon South West Region has the least number of affordable rental properties compared to all other regional areas in Victoria.

The highest rental rates for a 2 bedroom flat in regional Victoria are all in Geelong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIONAL VICTORIA</th>
<th>Rental Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>$330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Geelong</td>
<td>$310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean Grove-Barwon Heads</td>
<td>$310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belmont-Grovedale</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong-Newcomb</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest rental rates for a 3 bedroom house in regional Victoria are all in Geelong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIONAL VICTORIA</th>
<th>Rental Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>$460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean Grove-Barwon Heads</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belmont-Grovedale</td>
<td>$370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herne Hill-Geelong West</td>
<td>$360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>$360</td>
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</table>


There is an extreme shortage of affordable 1 bedroom private rental properties (14 one bedroom properties Jan-March 2018).

In Jan-Mar 2018, there were 903 affordable properties available across the region.

There were 3,246 households waiting for social housing.
What more could we do?

Recently Council to Homeless Persons, the peak body for the Homelessness Services Sector in Victoria, conducted local consultations to assist identify what more can be done to improve our response to people experiencing homelessness. Their report ‘Barwon South West Homelessness priorities’ identified some of the things we need to do better.

FOR LGAs
- Increase Inclusionary zoning
- Identify vacant land to build more social housing
- Reduce application fees to enable and build more social housing
- Introduce rate reductions for providers of Social Housing

FOR STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
- Expand the Education First Youth Foyer model to Geelong. This very successful model of offering up to two years accommodation in a supported environment to young people to allow them to complete their education currently only operates in Warrnambool. The outcomes for young people overwhelmingly demonstrate the success of this model
- Recognise the support needs of rural and regional communities by providing additional outreach capacity in homelessness prevention support teams.
- Young people exiting out of home care should be entitled to funded supports to the age of 21 (currently 18) to ensure that they are supported to avoid homelessness
- Provide funding flexibility for support

FOR THE BARWON SOUTH WEST REGION
- Work with Communities at the local level to reduce homelessness
- To work with communities to reduce the stigma of homelessness
- Improve cross sectoral and community collaboration to reduce homelessness

FOR COMMUNITY
- Build dedicated crisis accommodation for very vulnerable clients
- Join the Council to Homeless Persons campaign calling on our leaders to fix Australia’s housing system now. Visit everybodyshome.com.au to watch our video, and then take a moment to sign up.

We need more housing

Victoria needs 3,000 new social/community housing properties every year to contribute to current unmet housing needs. (Source: Infrastructure Victoria 30 year Infrastructure Plan. Victoria needs 30,000 new affordable dwellings over 10 years)

In the end, increasing access to affordable, safe, long term housing is the key to addressing homelessness in our community. Only by doing this, all our efforts, commitment, work and energy will not prevent any one of us becoming homeless at any stage in our lives. It can happen to anyone, at any time and often when it is most unexpected.
For more information please contact
Barwon South West Homelessness Network Coordinator
2-22 Connor Street, Colac
M 0418 522 800
T 0352 325 176
E rcallahan@cah.vic.gov.au