PATHWAYS: HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

City of Melbourne 2014–2017

DRAFT

melbourne.vic.gov.au

CITY OF MELBOURNE

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness affects people and communities worldwide and Melbourne is no exception. The City of Melbourne has made it a priority to address the issue of homelessness and we remain firmly committed to this aim.

People from all sections of the community including families, young people, seniors, international students, refugees and those seeking asylum can find themselves facing or experiencing homelessness. Whether it lasts for a very short time, or for a number of months or even years, it is important that as a community we understand that being without safe, secure and affordable accommodation can have devastating effects on a person's life. Addressing homelessness then is much more than just providing accommodation.

It is an issue that is made more acute by Melbourne's attraction as a capital city with a relatively large concentration of community services. This draws people to the city in their search for information, support and services including health, education and housing.

The City of Melbourne recognises that the significant diversity of homeless people demands a range of responses to ensure the particular circumstances of each person are addressed. As part of our commitments through the Council Plan 2013–2017 it is City of Melbourne's objective to:

Contribute to developing sustainable pathways out of homelessness

Through consultation to develop this strategy, Melbourne's homelessness sector suggested City of Melbourne could extend this objective to create sustainable pathways to *end* homelessness.

In order to deliver this strategy City of Melbourne recognises a whole of community response is required. We will work with our partners in the homelessness sector, the health sector, state and federal government, local communities and businesses, and with people experiencing homelessness to ensure they have the best chance of moving as quickly as possible out of homelessness.

We will show leadership by addressing the issue across four key themes:

1. **Know our City** –research, consult, refresh and share our knowledge of homelessness in Melbourne.

2. **Be inclusive** - respect, hear, welcome and include those who are homeless in our services, activities and events.

3. **Develop skills** - provide opportunities to enhance personal resilience, develop skills and strengthen social inclusion in order to avoid long term hardship.

4. **Create pathways** - work with our partners to courageously advocate for change and create sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Pathways: Homelessness Strategy 2014-17 (draft) was developed in consultation with over 100 of our partners including people who have experienced homelessness in the City of Melbourne. We examined current and emerging trends in homelessness and more broadly, best practice in homelessness responses. The City of Melbourne and other key partners have been involved in undertaking and developing an extensive research and evidence base which has helped to build the foundation of this important Strategy.

Our united response to the themes we have articulated will make a difference in the lives of people who are homeless over the coming years. Through this work with a whole of community approach the City of Melbourne hopes to achieve enduring outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in our city.

2. OVERVIEW AND EMERGING TRENDS

INTERNATIONAL

The international response to homelessness is guided by the United Nations Human Rights covenants and legislation of which Australia is a signatory. The core tenet of the Human Rights approach is that safe, secure housing is central to ensuring social inclusion.

Recent responses to homelessness have focussed on the need to end rather than manage homelessness. This approach requires understanding and consideration of the underlying issues related to homelessness in different age groups and categories, strengthening prevention initiatives, increasing access to low cost housing and ensuring services and support are integrated with accommodation.

The results of this approach in places such as Britain and the USA indicate highly successful outcomes for the people concerned and improved cost effectiveness.

However there are a number of global economic, social and environmental shifts that are affecting cities across the world and ultimately having some impact on Victoria and more specifically Melbourne.

These include changed refugee and migration patterns with increased population pressure on Australian cities, impacts of climate change, economic changes including changes to manufacturing, mining and farming industries which together create broader migration patterns and increasing population diversity within Melbourne.

Increasing technological changes and increased accessibility to digital media pose new challenges and opportunities to create pathways out of homelessness.

NATIONAL

At the federal level the Australian Government Policy White Paper *the Road Home 2008* outlines a strong commitment to ensuring that no one in Australia is homeless and sets an ambitious target to halve homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020. A change in the political landscape has created some uncertainty in the determination to realise these previously outlined objectives at the national level and it is currently unclear as to the future National Homelessness Policy direction and strategy.

VICTORIA

The Victorian State Government is currently developing the new Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2020. The strategy will shift the focus of homelessness policy and service delivery to achieving tangible and lasting outcomes – including substantial reductions in homelessness. The strategy aims to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, minimise the harm caused by homelessness and assist people to move out of homelessness permanently.

OTHER CAPITAL CITIES

The Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) has identified addressing homelessness as a priority and has a stated commitment to work with other levels of government and the community in addressing homelessness. The CCCLM has established the Homelessness Sub Committee which has a national focus on a range of projects such as Homeless Connect which supports an annual homelessness festival held in each Capital City. In Melbourne the *Where the heart is …community festival* supports and acknowledges people who are homeless within the community.

3. DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

Definitions of homelessness in the Australian context focus on a lack of social connectedness; social and family supports and networks as well as a lack of 'a conventional home' (Council to Homeless Persons, Melbourne 2006). Homelessness is about people rather than merely shelter and is often exacerbated by a number of other issues including poor health and/or mental health, disability, drug and alcohol issues, and financial problems. It is widely accepted that safe, appropriate, affordable and secure housing with well organised support contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

Three categories of homelessness were developed to assist in counting the number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992, in Chamberlain 1999:1).

PRIMARY HOMELESSNESS

People without conventional accommodation such as people living on the streets, sleeping in derelict buildings, or using cars for temporary shelter.

SECONDARY HOMELESSNESS

People who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. This category covers people accommodated in homeless services, people residing temporarily with family and friends and those using rooming/boarding houses on an occasional basis.

TERTIARY HOMELESSNESS

People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis. This type of accommodation typically does not have self-contained rooms and residents share bathroom and kitchen facilities. Rooming house residents do not have the security of tenure provided by a lease.

4. OUR FOCUS IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE

The City of Melbourne will focus its efforts on supporting people who are in the primary or tertiary categories of homelessness, that is, people sleeping rough and people living in boarding/rooming houses in the City of Melbourne. This is where we can make a difference. Other levels of government provide a robust and sustainable response to people in secondary homelessness, that is those in temporary and crisis accommodation.

In taking this approach Council will minimise duplication with other levels of government and focus on the people with the most complex needs as well as those at risk of homelessness.

ROUGH SLEEPERS

People sleeping rough or in improvised accommodation form the smallest category per night of people experiencing homelessness. In the City of Melbourne this group numbers approximately 100 but can be as high as 133 people as indicated in the ABS Census 2011. There is considerable evidence that people in this group have significant health and other complex issues, and most have been homeless for well over five years. This is the most vulnerable group and requires specifically tailored and coordinated responses to ensure sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Table 1: StreetCount Data Summary

Year	Male	Female	Unknown Gender	Total
2012	87	14		101
2011	81	13	11	105
2010	72	14	15	101
2009	51	13	11	75
2008	78	16	18	112

ROOMING HOUSE RESIDENTS

Rooming house residents form the largest group of people experiencing homelessness in the City of Melbourne. Currently available data and information indicates that there are approximately 872 rooming house residents in Melbourne and that this group has shown the largest increase in the past three years. There are several possible reasons for this including changes in rooming house legislation. Further work is needed to better understand this population to determine their needs and reasons for being in this type of accommodation.

WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

 We will work to better understand and respond to the gender difference in the homelessness population. Through our consultation, research and feedback we are aware women predominantly enter homelessness as a result of family violence and are far more likely to experience secondary homelessness. Staying with friends, sleeping in cars, and moving through a range of temporary settings characterises homelessness for women.

In implementing this strategy we aim to expand our knowledge and understanding of women and children's experience of homelessness to better respond to women at risk of homelessness as well as those women experiencing homelessness.

5. NARRATIVE

In developing our approach the City of Melbourne has worked hard to include and respond to the personal accounts, stories and perspectives of people who are currently or recently homelessness. It is important that their voice directly informs our work. Here are some of the things we have been told.

Research Project: Needs and Characteristics of Rooming House Residents February 2012

'I would definitely use a doctor more if I could pay less. I have been sick a lot since I came over here and I always worry that my insurance will rise if I overuse it. Doctors are very expensive if you have to pay with no subsidy.'

'I had a hernia operation …and was pretty uncomfortable for a while... I just lay in bed and ate things out of packets and tins that I could get without moving around. I thought I could do with a hand but I hadn't a clue about how to find any - it would have been good to have a visiting nurse.'

'There are people in here who are mentally ill and they're locked away in their rooms all day, no one ever sees them. Someone should come to visit them and make sure they are ok.'

Research StreetCount 2013 Living Rough in Melbourne

'I went in to get a drink of water from a café and he said to me to get out of the café – you're just a scumbag.'

'Supports… (are needed) at night cos when the sun goes down no one can help you.'

'Mum just really couldn't handle it all so she drank.. a lot.. but it was really just because she couldn't handle not having any money or anything and not being able to look after us..'

'Things were pretty tough, I suppose, we didn't really have a lot of things or money, so I left home as soon as I could to get work ...'

What's important to me?

'A photo of my son.. (is important to me) I didn't think I had a photo but I found one and had it laminated.'

'A letter from my brother that I always keep with me, it's the only letter that I've ever had from anyone'.

My family's phone numbers, I never ring them, but I keep them as kind of good luck charm.'

'You just can't do anything at all without having a place to stay... you can't get work, can't get healthy, can't get money, and can't get anything. But if you have a good place…you can come back to... you can start to get things and start to get (things) together.'

Safe Daytime Spaces – Pilot Project WIRE Women's Lunch Program

'Thank you for taking us to the Art Gallery. I didn't know you could just walk in here.'

'There aren't any other places out there just for women.'

'Here is a nice warm comfortable place.'

Evaluation report: Programmed Activity Group (PAG) – Drill Hall

'When I first got to (housing) I didn't know anyone, the only people I knew were street people. Now joining PAG and going the library and now the choir, I am getting to meet more people who are outside the street situation and hopefully I can make some friends.'

'I've started drawing again, and writing a book. I would never have done that sort of stuff if I hadn't started coming to something like this. I was in limbo and worried but after (attending the group) I felt great... and the worry left me for that bit of time....'

'The Drill Hall is my cement ... on so many levels! Strong structure that makes me strong because I have faith in the structure and the structure has respect for me. Yes, its strengthened my life ..'

Safe Daytime Spaces feasibility study

"Sometimes it's just about working through the reasons why it's difficult dealing with travel costs, storing stuff, and access to clean clothes, showers and a haircut. These things don't cost much but can make it impossible for people to come along to groups.

'Everyone will tell you that the worse time for people who are homeless is the nights and the weekends – they are incredibly lonely.'

'I'm pretty alright really, but there's not much to do here. I just sit and watch the telly most of the time. Don't talk to anyone much. I can go days and days without talking to anyone.'

'Now I need to think about what's going to happen next, I suppose. I've lived here five years now and I suppose I'll just keep living here. But I will need more help one day, I suppose.

6. WHO IS HOMELESS IN MELBOURNE?

Obtaining clear and reliable data around the number of people experiencing homelessness is difficult because of the transient nature of homelessness, point in time measures compared to longer timeframes and challenges in defining homelessness.

DATA SUMMARY

The ABS Census data for 2011 indicates that the City of Melbourne had the third highest number of homeless people (1,232) in Victoria after Dandenong (1,634) and Port Phillip (1,562). In the 2011 ABS census data for the City Of Melbourne 68% of the homeless population were male and 32% were female. The 2011 census data also showed that 65% of people counted as homeless in City were aged between 19 and 44 years old.

Figure 1: Overview of the 2011 Homelessness Census data for City of Melbourne.
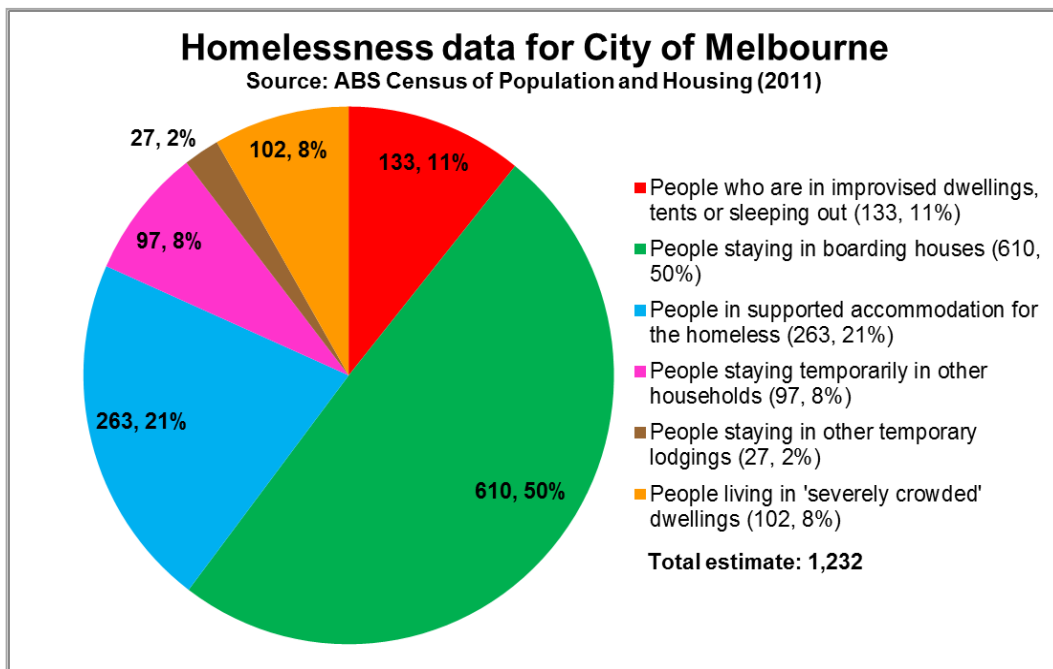
7. WHAT WE WILL DO

OUR APPROACH

In developing our approach, a range of national, state and local government responses to homelessness were reviewed including how other Australian councils are responding to homelessness.

This strategy is directly related the Council Plan and more specifically the first goal - A city for people and the objective to 'Contribute to developing sustainable pathways out of homelessness'

The Pathways: Homelessness Strategy 2014-17 also has links to a number of other Council strategies including Housing Strategy; Beyond the Safe City Strategy 2014-17; the International Student Strategy, Preventing Violence Against Women Strategy 2013-16, Open Space Strategy, Melbourne Arts Strategy 2014-17 and the draft Melbourne for All People Strategy.

THEMES

The key themes identified below provide a focus for the City of Melbourne's response to homelessness. Council will develop an annual implementation plan for each of the themes.

1. Know our City

It is essential we continually research, consult, refresh and share our knowledge of homelessness in Melbourne:

- Undertake research projects on emerging trends in the City including:

  - gaps in responding to homelessness amongst migrant and refugee communities
  - impacts of the drug 'ice' on service access and safety
  - responding to people with complex needs including chronic mental health issues
  - food security/meals provision for low income households

- As a capital city host, forums to explore the issue of homelessness across greater Melbourne in partnership with other local, state and federal government, the corporate sector and the homelessness sector.

- Share our knowledge of trends with community organisations, businesses, traders, churches and philanthropic groups to develop new initiatives.

- When examining or developing data sets ensure that gender is considered and where possible obtain data sets for men and women and develop responses accordingly.

- Conduct qualitative research to investigate successful and sustainable pathways out of homelessness for rough sleepers, by consulting directly with individuals who have experienced homelessness and successfully moved out of homelessness and agencies who have worked with people sleeping rough.

- Continue to hold an annual StreetCount research project with a qualitative data collection program every second year to assess needs and continue to build a picture of homelessness in our City.

- Increase our knowledge of service gaps for men and women through our continued involvement in local service networks and with our partners advocate for new services to other levels of Government.

- Establish a network of service providers working in rooming houses to share information and improve service access and delivery.

- Conduct research with peer educators for improved and streamlined provision and distribution of service information targeting those arriving in the city as 'newly homeless', and explore options such as partnerships with Centrelink and other mainstream services.

2. Be Inclusive

Respect, hear, welcome and include those who are homeless in our services, activities and events to ensure these are easily accessible for homeless and vulnerable people. This will help us lead by example and encourage businesses, community organisations and other levels of government to do the same.

- Develop innovative solutions to ensure appropriate and inclusive support is provided in heatwave periods and other extreme weather events to people experiencing homelessness.

- Work with the corporate and property sector to explore their interest in addressing homelessness and in developing new and innovative ways to increase the availability of safe, secure housing in our city.

- Work with our partners to develop appropriate 'safe day and night time spaces' for people experiencing homelessness based on outcomes of City of Melbourne research and feasibility studies related to this issue.

- Continue with inclusive and participatory decision-making processes by having those who have experienced homelessness involved in the City of Melbourne Homelessness Advisory Committee and in the planning and delivery of relevant strategies, policies and programs.

- Develop a three year community education campaign on homelessness based on input from consumers, Council to Homeless Persons and partner agencies with a different focus each year such as women's experience of homelessness; youth homelessness; older people's experience of homelessness and promote this through Homeless Person's Week.

- Evaluate and ensure resources such as the 'Helping Out' booklet are readily available and presented in an accessible electronic and hard copy format.

- Undertake an audit of City of Melbourne facilities and services to ensure they are accessible and inclusive of people experiencing homelessness.

- Continue to support meals programs that provide low cost nutritious food to people experiencing homelessness and expand programs to increase access to women.

- Continue to support programs that actively engage with marginalised rooming house residents such as "Where the heart is community festival', café meals program and activity groups such as the Wintringham over 50's club at Central City Community Health Service and the Women's Information and Referral Exchange 'Amica' women and children's lunch program.

3. Develop Skills

We can provide opportunities to enhance personal resilience, develop skills and strengthen social inclusion in order to avoid long term hardship.

Linking people to education, training and income, as well as health services, good nutrition and social inclusion programs are all key factors in helping to prevent homelessness or to develop pathways out of homelessness.

- Promote the Social Enterprise and Micro Business Grants to businesses and people experiencing homelessness.

- Expand the café meals program which provides access for homeless people to a dietician and low cost meals in cafes throughout Melbourne.

- Work with organisations providing training programs to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness to build our knowledge of successful initiatives and training gaps. This will assist us to know where to focus programs such as our community grants, and community services funding agreements in future years.

- Work with our youth service providers to link and support young people into youth specific development and training opportunities to improve their chances to be employed.

- Explore supportive work opportunities for those sleeping rough to build self-confidence, develop networks and supports and develop alternate sources of income.

- Continue to provide groups that focus on strengthening parenting skills and improving confidence of families vulnerable to homelessness.

- Through Maternal and Child Health and Family services continue to assess, inform and support women and their children in family violence situations to make informed and protective decisions regarding their safety and accommodation.

4. Create Pathways

Homelessness is likely to be a constant part of our community. We will work with our partners to courageously advocate for change and create sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

- Work with our partners to establish and facilitate a new Rough Sleepers Service Coordination feasibility and pilot project for all agencies working with this target group to provide a better response and create effective and sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

- Continue to support and promote Central City Community Health Service to mainstream health and community service workers to engage high risk clients at the earliest possible point in time, particularly women and children at risk of or experiencing homelessness as a result of violence.

- Identify how we can support housing initiatives in the central city both for young people and adult target groups including:

    o short term accommodation
    o Housing First/Supported Housing
    o women specific housing

- Support the new HomeGround Real Estate Agency as a source of affordable private rental stock, some of which is targeted at ending homelessness.

- Work with specialist homelessness services, Centrelink, Travellers Aid and other local governments across Melbourne and regional Victoria to develop working protocols to prevent homelessness and improve assistance to people experiencing homelessness.

- Continue our commitment to fund youth services to ensure those young people 'at risk' of homelessness have every chance of avoiding it.

- Continue to provide a range of services and subsidies across Council which keep people out of homelessness by supporting people to be independent and healthy including aged care, family, children's, youth services and recreational services. Ensure these services are targeted and inclusive of vulnerable groups.

- Continue to actively support and contribute to the Melbourne Metropolitan Rooming House Group to work on improving rooming house accommodation.

- Ensure all rooming house providers and premises are formally registered and comply with State Government minimum standards for privacy, security, safety and amenity and foster joint work on rooming house compliance and enforcement issues with relevant agencies.

- Explore supply incentives for increasing affordable housing options within City of Melbourne's Housing Strategy.

- Identify partnership opportunities with developers and social housing providers to increase the availability and accessibility of social housing within the municipality

- Advocate to State and Federal Government on key structural issues including:

    o increasing supply of affordable housing
    o more effective measures to prevent homelessness
    o continuing reforms to the rooming house sector
    o financial and economic factors impacting on vulnerable population groups

8. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Our key aspirational measures over the life of this strategy:

Housing people

Consistent StreetCount figures indicate over the past three years approximately 100 rough sleepers are located in the CBD and surrounding areas. Secure supported housing such as the Housing First model is critical to improving the lives of those experiencing homelessness.

- Work with our partners to provide long term supported housing for 100 people including those sleeping rough.

Rough sleepers

A number of health, welfare and housing services outreach to those sleeping rough and a range of Council services link rough sleepers to services and supports. Coordination of these combined resources could improve service delivery and increase pathways out of homelessness.

- Demonstrate we have improved service coordination for 100 people experiencing homelessness.

Women and their children

ABS and other research data in Melbourne demonstrates that family violence is the largest cause of homelessness for women and children and there is a critical need for safe accommodation linked to services and supports.

- Support 50 women and children at risk of, or escaping family violence to secure services and safe accommodation.

An annual implementation plan for the *Pathways Homelessness* Strategy 2014-*17* with clear timelines, targets and responsibilities will be developed to implement this strategy.