

Young People's Legal Rights Centre (Youthlaw) submission the Victorian Social Housing Review

Youthlaw is Victoria's state-wide community legal centre for young people under 25 years.

Youthlaw provides an outreach legal service to Frontyard Youth Services ('Frontyard') in central Melbourne. Frontyard is a group of co-located services providing for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, including crisis housing support, Centrelink, legal and health services.

Priority issues for Youthlaw's clients:

1. Ability to access social housing

The vast majority of clients who access Youthlaw's service through Frontyard are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and despite the changes made by the government, this has not made social housing more accessible to this cohort of young people.

The process and documentary requirements are often too onerous for our clients to navigate on their own. Especially young people with various accessibility barriers, including those from CALD backgrounds whose ability to fill out the lengthy paperwork is limited.

Often our clients will receive assistance from Frontyard Youth Services caseworkers to assist in navigating the application process.

2. Waitlist for priority housing

We are constantly reminded by our clients that there are lengthy delays in accessing social housing. We have many clients who fit the priority criteria, as they are experiencing homelessness due to family violence, mental health and/or substance abuse, but despite this these clients are still on the waitlist and if lucky are in transitional housing for several years. We report that different housing agencies have different rules and asks of people in transitional housing and there is no consistency in the response from region to region.

We have experience assisting young people coming out of residential care-settings who, regardless of the support offered until the age of 25, are still experiencing homelessness and are not able to access timely, stable social housing. In a program for out of home care leavers run by Youthlaw, almost all of the young people we have assisted have exited the out of home care system into unstable housing or homelessness. This compounds the difficulties already faced by this cohort.

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Client experience #1

Young person was removed by Child Protection at the age of 5/6 due to sexual abuse from her step-father and was placed in various foster care and residential care settings. As a result she developed significant mental health issues and was linked in with CAHMS until she turned 18. There were then issues with transferring her into the adult housing system. She was placed in various transitional housing properties up to the age of 22, when she took her own life. She was never granted her own property and had been on the priority list for those 3 years.

Client experience #2

Young adult was living in a private rental with her partner and their infant child. The young person and her child experienced family violence from her partner and he was subsequently excluded from the property. As a single mother her only income was Centrelink payments and she was unable to continue to pay for the private rental on her own. Her partner also had failed to pay utility bills and she was therefore left with significant other debts. However as is the case for many young people she was not able to make an application for social housing whilst she remained in the private rental, despite her not being able to continue with the payments and the impending eviction that would occur. This meant that her only option was to become homeless with her baby in order to be eligible to apply for social housing.

Our asks:

1. Additional Social Housing to address the shortage and long wait times for long term social housing;
2. Support services to assist young people to stay in their housing

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