



IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS

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Independent Panel
Social Housing Regulation Review
Engage Victoria
Via: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/social-housing-regulation-review>

9 July 2021

Dear Panel Members,

RE: SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION REVIEW – Consultation Paper 1

Launch Housing welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper 1, Background and scoping paper, Social Housing Regulation Review. We broadly support the scope of the Social Housing Review; but are particularly heartened to see the specific emphasis placed on including the voice of residents, current and prospective, and their outcomes.

As a member of the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic), Launch Housing notes and supports the overall points made in their submission. In our response, we wish to highlight the issues specific to our work with people experiencing homelessness. Accordingly, we outline Launch Housing's approach to including the voice and expertise of people who are directly impacted by homelessness and the services they use. Additionally, we highlight a couple of points in relation to national regulation.

As members of the Independent Panel of the Social Housing Regulation Review will likely be aware, Launch Housing is an independent Melbourne-based community organisation working with people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We are one of Victoria's largest providers of housing and homelessness support services. We provide flexible, specialist services that directly assist thousands of individuals, couples and families every year.

During the height of the pandemic in 2020, Launch Housing directly supported around 2,000 people, many of whom were sleeping rough and in desperate need of help, into purchased emergency hotel accommodation. Formal assessments of this group revealed an alarming picture of highly vulnerable people with a long history of homelessness and sleeping rough:

- 72% assessed as high housing need (i.e. were previously sleeping rough, in a car, or squatting);
- 50% assessed as high support needs (i.e. needs multiple supports for major physical or mental health issues);
- 46% assessed as high vulnerability (i.e. is experiencing a significant level of crisis, at risk of standover/abuse, is at high risk of harm to self or others);
- A further 40% have medium vulnerability (no access to support safety net and the situation is unlikely to improve without support and will likely escalate).

Housing is the frontline defence against the COVID-19 health crisis, and is especially critical for recovery for those who are highly vulnerable and typically present with high acuity, mental health, substance use and trauma. With additional funding from the Victorian State Government, many will be transitioned into social housing.

Evidence from a new longitudinal study has brought into sharp focus the extent of vulnerability and disadvantage among residents in social housing. For example, among a sample of 170 new residents, 84% had a past history of homelessness, and 66% were homeless right up to the start of their new tenancy. Further, a majority had previously had a tenancy in social housing.¹

It is imperative that the needs of vulnerable groups are given special consideration in the reform of the regulation framework, ensuring that changes support residents to maintain tenancies. It is especially important that the 'right to housing' is a fundamental principle guiding any consideration regarding residents and their tenancy. Indeed, as recommended by the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness, the 'right to housing' should be included in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic).²

Recognising and privileging lived experience

At Launch Housing we are committed to embedding the voice of lived experience throughout our services, policy, advocacy and organisational planning. People with lived experience of homelessness have valuable knowledge, insights and expertise, and are the experts in talking about the individual and collective impacts of policies, practices and systems.

Launch Housing's current Lived Experience Participation Strategy 2020-24 (Strategy) builds on the 2015 Consumer Participation and Leadership Strategy, which led to the formation of the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) and the recruitment of a person with lived experience of homelessness as the Lived Experience Coordinator.

The LEAG was a group of 12 consumers with a lived experience of homelessness. The group had representation of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the trans and gender diverse community, parents, young people and older people.

While the LEAG have been an important mechanism for incorporating lived experience into Launch Housing services, policy, advocacy and business planning, they could not be the only source of expertise.

In the early stages of the Strategy, the structure of participation model was altered to become the Lived Experience Advisory Program (LEAP), thereby enabling us to hear from a wider and more diverse client group. LEAP takes clients' voices beyond a small group and provides opportunities for potentially hundreds of current service users to contribute their unique lived expertise, learn new skills and be empowered.

Four key pillars form the foundation to enable genuine participation for clients at Launch Housing including: amplifying voices, walking with clients, planning for impact, and pathways. These pillars build on current practices and broaden participation opportunities, so that more people with lived experience can contribute to and drive our mission to end homelessness. Please refer to the attachment for examples of how these four pillars are operationalised.

Additionally, the Lived Experience Participation Toolkit was developed to provide guidance for staff around practical ways to implement the Strategy. It includes tips on ethical story-telling, case studies, interview techniques, informed consent, facilitating group work, and remuneration.

¹ Taylor, S., Johnson, G., Watson, J. & Tyrrell, E. (2020), *Maximising Impact: Baseline results from a longitudinal study of new tenants in social housing*. Melbourne: Unison Housing, Available at https://unison.org.au/cms/uploads/docs/maximising-impact-report_final.pdf

²https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry_into_Homelessness_in_Victoria/Report/LCLSIC_59-06_Homelessness_in_Vic_Summary_Booklet.pdf

Peer Support Workforce

At Launch Housing, peer support is an integral component of *Melbourne Street to Home* (MS2H). A partnership between Launch Housing, the Salvation Army and Bolton Clarke, MS2H explicitly targets the most vulnerable people sleeping rough. Alongside three case managers and a nurse, the peer support worker helps to connect with and provide intensive support to those hardest to reach. They are an important part of the ongoing support that is provided to clients for up to 12 months after housing has been secured.

Founded by Shery Mead in America in the early 2000s, peer support is now practised around the world in community and human service settings. In the health, alcohol and other drugs, and mental health sectors, peer support has long been an adjunct to clinical care, and has been informed by a national and international evidence base.³

One of the best ways to improve people's experiences and outcomes is to provide a workforce of peer support. Peer support workers can deliver better outcomes through their ability to engage clients.⁴ A simple declaration of lived experience immediately brings down barriers and establishes strong, trusting, experience-based relationships.⁵ Peer support services can be particularly beneficial for people who have experienced chronic homelessness who have been newly housed, by helping to sustain tenancies and assisting people to connect with local communities.

The power of peer support has been acknowledged and elevated in the final deliberations of the Royal Commission into the Mental Health System, for what a reformed mental health system should look like. As noted by the Commission: 'Social connection and peer support are key protective factors for mental illness' (emphasis added).⁶

Major recommendations include the participation of people with lived experience in roles across a reformed system, as well as a new agency that is led by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress.⁷

We are enthusiastically supportive of any reforms to social housing regulations that empower and strengthen the voice of residents and enhance resident outcomes, especially in terms of sustaining tenancies, improving health and wellbeing, and social inclusion. Opportunities for residents to participate in meaningful ways offers hope for the future, a chance to learn new skills, improve self-esteem to become engaged and connected to the local community.

In the spirit of resident-centred approach to the regulation of social housing, we strongly encourage the Social Housing Regulation Review to include the voice of residents to inform current and future consultations.

National regulation

We believe that the time for national regulation is long overdue, and would strongly support a move to a national regulatory system. National coordination would be particularly important in the context of a national housing strategy, and would encourage the states and territories to

³ Center for Peer Support, Mental Health America, *Peer support in behavioural health, the evidence is in* <https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Evidence%20for%20Peer%20Support.pdf>

⁴ Health Workforce Australia, *Mental Health Peer Workforce Study*, <http://www.mhcsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/HWA-Mental-health-Peer-Workforce-Study.pdf>

⁵ Barker, S. Maguire, N. Bishop, F and Stopa, L. (2018). *Expert Viewpoints of Peer Support for People Experiencing Homelessness: A Q Sort Study*, p.408

⁶ https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RCVMHS_FinalReport_Vol2_Accessible.pdf, pg.382

⁷ https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RCVMHS_FinalReport_Vol3_Accessible.pdf,

work together. In general, we are pleased that the Social Housing Regulation Review has included a focus on national regulation in the Terms of Reference. Specifically, we recommend that the Review make clear what criteria are needed to become a Housing Association.

On behalf of Launch Housing, I look forward to the deliberations of the Social Housing Regulation Review and can provide further information as required.

Yours sincerely,



Bevan Warner
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment:

AMPLIFYING VOICES	WALKING WITH CLIENTS	PLANNING FOR IMPACT	PROVIDING PATHWAYS
Speakers Bureau - people who are trained in media and public speaking and available for media opportunities, external speaking opportunities, etc.	Residents' meetings	Staff interview panels	Peer meet and greet
Stories for campaigns and fundraising, advocacy.	Peer Support Workforce	Staff inductions	Peer to peer opportunities
	Client Reference Groups (eg. First Nations, LGBTQ+, Family Violence, Older People)	Research interviews	Traineeships
		Working groups for projects (eg. Program evaluations)	
		Business and strategic planning	