

Darebin City Council submission Legislative Council inquiry into homelessness in Victoria

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Introduction

Darebin City Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee (Legislative Council) inquiry into homelessness in Victoria.

Council is pleased to see the Legislative Council tasked to make an inquiry into the state of homelessness across Victoria. Council is committed to addressing health inequalities and disadvantage across Darebin, more recently this has included direct responses to the growing local visibility of homelessness and the health and wellbeing of rough sleepers. Notably, in the past five years there has been a significant and visible increase in homelessness and rough sleeping across the municipality. The nature and scale of homelessness in Darebin is detailed in the attached submission.

Local councils across Victoria are increasingly responding to local homelessness issues, in part due to the unmet demand across inner and outer Melbourne for emergency accommodation and short and long-term affordable housing. Currently this work is taking place in an ad-hoc approach without a state or national approach to homelessness and housing affordability.

It is noted that there has been an extraordinary commitment from the Victoria Government into a number of homelessness and affordable housing programs over the past five-years and Council is encouraged to see this level of funding allocated. However it is detailed throughout this submission that a big picture view of responding to homelessness is timely in Victoria and across Australia.

This submission therefore advocates strongly for state and federal governments to increase strategic and coordinated commitments and investments in housing and homelessness responses. In summary Council's submission makes the following recommendations:

1. Invest in targeted homelessness prevention programs and support services for groups at heightened risk of homelessness, notably young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with a disability and women over 55.
2. Advocate to the Federal Government for the development of a National Housing Strategy that aligns projects and dialogue between local, state and federal governments.
3. Introduce mandatory controls for affordable housing in the planning scheme and meaningfully engage with council's in determining and implementing the planning mechanisms for affordable housing for 10 percent inclusionary zoning and up to 28 percent in Darebin.
4. Increase the supply of public housing and commit to the delivery of 3,000 public housing dwellings every year for the next 10 years.
5. State government commitments and funding increased significantly to maintain current public housing stock.
6. Ensure all public housing land remains in public ownership, and be used only for public housing.
7. Advocate to the Federal Government to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

8. Commit to extending Victoria's out-of-home care age policy to extend the leaving care age from 18 until 21 years, in line with the Home Stretch campaign beyond the five-year trial
9. Advocate to Federal Government and provide a government response to emergency accommodation in Victoria, as identified in Crisis in Crisis advocacy
10. Reinstate extreme weather brokerage funds for homelessness access points across Victoria
11. Review Victorian homelessness sector funding to adequately meet the demand of intake assessment planning, case management and emergency accommodation

Council is encouraged by the Legislative Council's inquiry into homelessness in Victoria and would welcome further consultation relating to this submission or the inquiry more broadly.

Response to Legislative Council Terms of Reference 1: *Provide an independent analysis of the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Victoria*

The 2016 ABS census¹ noted 972 people in Darebin experiencing homelessness. However due to the nature of homelessness, this figure is estimated to be closer to 1500 on any given night, which is made of:

- 972 counted in the ABS census
- 200 young people 'couch surfing' (those who drift in and out of rough sleeping)
- 180 – 300 people living in rooming houses²
- 80 people sleeping rough in 20 sites ³around Darebin where people are sleeping in tents, in cars or sheltered on the street or in 'squats'.

Within the municipality, there are no 'clusters' of homeless people in Darebin, however there has been an increase in the number of people 'sleeping rough' in the last four years. There is also an unknown number of women (and children) living in emergency accommodation such as refuges, and short stay hotels rooms to escape family violence.

Research shows a high rate of homelessness in capital city central business districts and adjacent areas, however 'moderate to high' rates of homelessness are also dispersed across the metropolitan areas in middle to outer suburbs⁴.

These figures and the nature of homelessness in Darebin are similar to those across Victoria. Data collected by the 2016 Census and Council to Homeless Persons ⁵and local homelessness agencies (anecdotal) identify a number of notable changes in the past five years in the nature and scale of homelessness:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are significantly overrepresented, with 4% of people experiencing homelessness, despite making up less than 1% of the Victorian population
- 42% of Victorians are homeless due to family violence and 39% are homeless due to financial hardship or housing crisis
- Youth homelessness is increasing, of the number of Victorian's counted as homeless in the 2016 Census, 39% were under the age of 25

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, Estimating Homelessness cat no. 2049.0, 2016

² Tenants Victoria, Rooming House Project, 2018

³ Launch Housing Assertive Homelessness Outreach Program, 2018

⁴ AHURI, The Changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016, 2019

⁵ Council to Homeless Persons, Homelessness in Victoria, 2018

- Women over 55 years are the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Australia
- There is an unknown number of women (and children) living in emergency accommodation such as refuges, and short stay hotels rooms to escape family violence
- Anecdotally, local homelessness services have noted an increase in complex mental health among their clients and the impact this has on providing suitable homelessness services and supports.
- Increase in the number of community concerns about the welfare of rough sleepers have been made to Council, this includes the complex mental health and wellbeing needs of rough sleepers.

The above data is not intended to be comprehensive, but to give a snapshot of the recent change in nature, levels and complexity of homelessness locally in Darebin and across Victoria. Currently, there are challenges in accessing comprehensive and timely data about rough sleepers. For example, in the North East Melbourne Area, data is collected by local homelessness access points and agencies, however there is not a consistent outreach or data collection method across services to count actual numbers. As such, Council will be participating in a homelessness StreetCount in 2020 to better understand the nature, scale and needs of rough sleeping across Darebin. It is acknowledged that whilst the Census collects data on rough sleeping and homelessness, the instrument of collection is a barrier to a significant cohort of people experiencing homelessness on census night.

Response to Legislative Council Terms of Reference 2: *Investigate the many social, economic and policy factors that impact on homelessness*

People experiencing homelessness and the term rough sleeping is used throughout this submission, however it is acknowledged that homelessness represent enormous diversity across age, culture – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures – ethnicity, race, socioeconomic and (im)migration status, geographic location, sexuality, dis/ability, and religion. Furthermore, it is noted that these factors can contribute to people experiencing additional barriers to accessing safe and secure housing or homelessness supports.

As noted in response to TOR 1 of this submission, there are a number of key social factors and social determinants of homelessness that have an impact on individuals. Homelessness can be thought about as affecting only mature men (and they are indeed among the most affected), in terms of rough sleeping. However this misses a big part of the picture as statistics reveal a significant number of people affected by homelessness are women experiencing violence, including women from CALD backgrounds, as well as older women living in sole households. Young people who identify as LGBTIQ, particularly trans and gender diverse young people, and young people transitioning from out-of-home care (including young Aboriginal people) are also at increased risk of experiencing homelessness.

People experiencing homelessness not only experience personal and economic hardship they also frequently face discrimination and exclusion because of their housing status. This can also be noted for the discrimination faced by people in public and social housing or accessing emergency relief such as food and material aid.

Family violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Victoria and Australia. In Victoria, there has been significant investment in responding to family violence, following the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down it's findings in 2015, yet none of the

227 recommendations has contributed to increase investment in the homelessness service system to meet the demand of women and children escaping family violence. Gender inequality and violence against women continues to make women, especially women over 55 at risk of homelessness, who are noted as the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

Aboriginal women are overrepresented in both homelessness and family violence. Recent research found that Indigenous women who have experienced family violence are at greater risk of losing children due to lack appropriate, safe and affordable accommodation and housing. This research also highlighted the ongoing systemic discrimination faced by first nations, and in this case, Aboriginal women⁶.

Responses to homelessness therefore must reflect the diverse needs of those experiencing it and ensure that services and programs are nuanced and individualised.

Housing Affordability

The scale of need for affordable housing in Darebin, and across Melbourne, is significant. There are increasing numbers of persons sleeping rough on the streets, parents are sleeping in cars with their children and renters in the community are facing a lifetime of insecure and unaffordable housing, including high levels of housing stress and inability to enter home ownership. The links between housing and health are well understood. Internationally, it has been shown that providing housing first to the most vulnerable members of our community may generate cost offsets for other services, such as frequent use of emergency medical and psychiatric services, prevent long and unproductive stays in other forms of homelessness services and lessen rates of contact with the criminal justice system.

There has been a structural affordability problem for the past 50 years across Australia. Australian dwelling prices have grown much faster than incomes, with average prices increasing from around 2-3 times average incomes in the early 1990s, to around 5 times more recently. Furthermore, supply has failed to keep pace with demand. Concessions and tax exemptions have increased demand, and incentives for housing supply have been limited⁷. Rapid migration and population growth has further increased demand for housing. The problem is felt most acutely in larger cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne. Across Victoria, there are more than 80,000 people waiting for social housing, including 25,000 children on this waitlist⁹. The increased price of housing means renting for low and very low income earners is becoming increasingly difficult – currently only 1.9% of total rental properties are affordable for those on Centrelink benefits.

Lack of Social and Affordable Housing

The demand for social housing in Darebin reflects the need for affordable rental and ownership properties. In 2016, it was estimated that 6,275 very low and low income households in Darebin required Social Housing, representing over 10% of all households¹⁰. There is a Social Housing shortfall in Victoria of 102,800 dwellings, with the Victorian Homelessness Council

⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2019, The missing link—housing and Indigenous domestic and family violence: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/45239/PES-320-The-missing-link-housing-and-Indigenous-domestic-and-family-violence.pdf

⁷ AHURI (2018), [Executive Summary: The income tax treatment of housing assets: an assessment of the proposed reform arrangements](#). Inquiry into the pathways to housing tax reform, March 2018.

⁸ The Australia Institute (2015), [Top Gears: how negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount benefit the top 10 per cent and drive up house prices](#). April 2015.

⁹ The Guardian (2019), [Victoria criticised for \\$2b prison spend while neglecting social housing](#)

¹⁰ Assuming all homeless persons (972 persons), [50 per cent](#) of low income households in rental stress (paying more than 30% of income on rent) and all households residing in Social Housing require a Social Housing response. 'City of Darebin Social Housing Supply Requirements (unmet need and forecast demand), Mortgage Stress Assessment and Affordability Gap Assessment', Affordable Development Outcomes. August 2018.

setting a target of 3,000 social and public dwellings to be built every year for the next 10 years in Victoria. Unfortunately, these homes are not being built at the rate needed, with the Victorian Government committing to building 1000 social housing dwellings in the next 3 years - a significant shortfall of the 3,000 per year required to keep up with demand. Demand for affordable housing is growing, and far exceeding supply, resulting in higher rates of homelessness across the State.

Over the past several decades, both State and Federal Government have failed to adequately fund both new public housing and the maintenance of existing public housing. Substantial, ongoing investment, in the order of billions of dollars per year, is needed to address the shortfall in social housing.

Insufficient financial support for renters

In the last 20 years, the proportion of people in home ownership and social housing has fallen, leaving more people in the private rental market, including those on very low incomes. The number of low-income households in rental stress has doubled, and more than 600,000 households in Australia are in rental stress (spending more than 30% of their income on rent). Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) improves affordability and is the clearest path to lowering rental stress¹¹. Maximum CRA payment rates have however fallen behind average rents over the past two decades, resulting in more and more individuals and families experiencing rental stress over time. ACOSS advocates for an increase in CRA, and call on 'an absolute minimum' of 30%, or around \$20 per week, as a first step and pending a review of CRA and what is needed¹².

Policy factors that impact on homelessness

While the Victorian Government made some changes to the planning system - including a specific definition of 'affordable housing' under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* – to increase the supply of affordable housing, these shifts in policy and objectives are minor and have not been effective in meeting the need for affordable housing in Victoria. There is a lack of institutional investment in Australia's rental and social housing market in part because of the lack of tax concessions and low investment returns. Superannuation funds in Australia have invested in the housing market in Europe and the US, but to a very limited extent in Australia. Furthermore, there have been reductions in capital and operational funding of public and community housing across Victoria, and no increase to funding at a national level.

At a State level, the current voluntary contributions framework has resulted in no additional affordable dwellings being built in Darebin and is not effective in meeting the need for affordable housing in Victoria. The inclusion of affordable housing as part of new developments is not mandatory. Council cannot enforce this as a requirement in new developments, with the value and quantum of affordable housing contributions being currently open for debate in Council and applicants negotiations.

"Inclusionary zoning" would be one important step towards ensuring affordable housing is actually being built. The term describes mandatory contributions to affordable housing. It refers to approaches where a portion of dwellings within a development (for example, 20 per cent) are required to be affordable. Such approaches have been implemented successfully in other jurisdictions, most notably the United Kingdom, but also in other States and Territories in

¹¹ Productivity Commission, [Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options](#), 2019

¹² ACOSS, 2019: https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/productivity-commission-highlights-need-to-increase-rent-assistance-and-invest-in-social-housing/

Australia¹³. A key part of this success is that the requirements are applied consistently across all development. This provides a ‘level playing field’ and ensures that affordable housing is considered by all developers in determining site feasibility.

At its meeting on 2 December 2019, Council moved to write to the Minister for Planning and Housing to request that the State Government introduce mandatory controls for affordable housing in the planning scheme and meaningfully engage with council’s in determining and implementing the planning mechanisms for affordable housing for 10 percent inclusionary zoning and up to 28 percent in Darebin.

A national strategic framework is another necessary step to coordinate the investment and effort required to address the severe shortfall of social and affordable housing across Australia. Homelessness and affordable housing advocates, peak bodies, representative bodies, research organisations and Councils have called on the Federal Government to commit to a National Housing Strategy that aligns projects and dialogue between local, state and federal governments. A National Housing Strategy must take a holistic approach to improving the housing crisis, and give consideration to financial levers, policy reforms and changes to the planning system in a cohesive and collaborative way.

A National Housing Strategy and further changes to the Victorian Planning Scheme would go some way in supporting the active work Council is already undertaking in this sector, and have a positive impact on reducing homelessness overall. Council has long advocated for more affordable housing in Darebin recognition and recognise that housing is inextricably linked to social justice, health and wellbeing. Council urges minimum levels of affordability for new developments, is engaging in the redevelopment of Townhall Avenue as social housing and is funding an assertive outreach program targeting people experiencing homelessness in Darebin (outlined further in the case studies below). These initiatives go some way to addressing the housing and homelessness crisis, however, require State and Federal support to have a broader impact.

At a state government level, Victoria’s out-of-home care age policy and leaving care age of 18 is problematic and puts young people at risk of homelessness as soon as they turn 18. There is evidence that for young people exiting the out-of-home care program at 18 years old, 35% are homeless in the first year of leaving care; 46% of boys are involved in the juvenile justice system; and 29% are unemployed¹⁴. These statistics are appalling and identify the immediate need to extend the out-of-home-care leaving aged to be extended from 18 to 21 years old. This should be accompanied with housing pathways for the final three-years of the program.

It is heartening to see the Victorian Government undertake a five-year pilot with 250 young people, with an extended leaving age of 21, in line with the Home Stretch campaign. However it is apparent that this policy should be extended to all young Victorian’s in the Out-of-Home Care program.

Affordable Housing examples in Darebin

Council has been exploring how its own assets can be used for affordable housing to ensure that Darebin is an inclusive, diverse and affordable place to live. While selling public land is a common approach for councils wishing to develop Affordable Housing on council-owned sites, Darebin have chosen to initiate projects based on a lease model which would ensure the land is kept in public hands into the future. Two projects are currently underway – Kids Under Cover and the Town Hall Avenue project.

¹³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Unit, Planning mechanisms to deliver affordable homes, 2018: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0021/17274/PES-006-Planning-mechanisms-to-deliver-affordable-homes.pdf

¹⁴ Home Stretch, CREATE foundation survey, 2010

Kids Under Cover

Council is working on a lease for a currently vacant Council-owned site at 1 Spring Street, Preston, for a pilot project aimed at preventing youth homelessness. The three-year pilot program will be led by Kids Under Cover, a not for profit organisation dedicated to preventing youth homelessness by providing a unique combination of studio accommodation in family backyards and education scholarships. Kids Under Cover work with Government, community and philanthropic organisations to progress their work.

Through the Victorian State Government Accommodation for the Homeless Program, Kids Under Cover were successful in obtaining funding for the pilot program called 'Village 21', and approached Darebin to partner in the project. Council agreed to provide Kids Under Cover with Council-owned land at 1 Spring Street to establish the village through a peppercorn lease arrangement.

The pilot project aims to house six young people who are leaving the formal Out of Home Care system and are at risk of experiencing long term homelessness. This project speaks to Council's commitment to supporting young people and ensuring Darebin is an inclusive and affordable place to live. The project is expected to commence in 2020.

Townhall Avenue

Council has begun a tender process for a lease arrangement for an affordable housing project on Council-owned land. In 2016, Council endorsed the *Darebin Social and Affordable Housing Program on Council Owned Land – Pilot Project*, which identified three sites to further explore the possibility to facilitate affordable housing. One of these sites, 52-60 Town Hall Avenue (currently a Council-owned car park) will be the site for Council's first affordable housing project through a leasing model. After statutory and community engagement processes, Council determined to lease the land to a tenant, being a registered housing association or other charitable organisation capable of delivering and managing affordable housing on the site. Following extensive community consultation and consideration of all 309 submissions received, Council decided to proceed with leasing the land at 52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston for affordable housing.

To trial innovative affordable housing models, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation (LMCF) has made a grant of \$1 million available and can help facilitate access to a \$2 million low interest loan for an affordable housing provider (should the tenant's proposal meet the LMCF's criteria). A process is currently underway to select a registered housing association to build and manage affordable housing at the site.

Recommendation 1: Invest in targeted homelessness prevention programs and support services for groups at heightened risk of homelessness, notably young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with a disability and women over 55.

Recommendation 2: Advocate to the Federal Government for the development of a National Housing Strategy that aligns projects and dialogue between local, state and federal governments.

Recommendation 3: Introduce mandatory controls for affordable housing in the planning scheme and meaningfully engage with council's in determining and implementing the planning mechanisms for affordable housing for 10 percent inclusionary zoning and up to 28 percent in Darebin.

Recommendation 4: Increase the supply of public housing and commit to the delivery of 3,000 public housing dwellings every year for the next 10 years.

Recommendation 5: *Commit to and adequately fund the maintenance of existing public housing stock.*

Recommendation 6: *Ensure all public housing land remains in public ownership, and be used only for public housing.*

Recommendation 7: *Advocate to the Federal Government to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance.*

Recommendation 8: *Commit to extending Victoria's out-of-home care age policy to extend the leaving care age from 18 until 21 years, in line with the Home Stretch campaign beyond the five-year trial*

Response to Legislative Council Terms of Reference 3: *Identify policies and practices from all levels of government that have a bearing on delivering services to the homeless*

In response to TOR 2, this submission notes the vital need for state and commonwealth shared responsibility and investment in all forms of housing, including rental, social, community and public housing. In addition to this, to respond to the significant increase in homelessness in Victoria and Australia, it also needs adequate investment in homelessness services and emergency accommodation.

Adequate funding for homelessness services

The current Victorian Government has made unprecedented investments in homelessness and housing, but what is still missing is a comprehensive approach to the homelessness system. In Victoria, there has been little to no extra funding provided to homelessness intake and assessment since the commencement of the opening doors framework in the mid-2000s. Yet over the same 10-year period, the Census data shows there to be an 43% increase in homelessness in Victoria. Whilst there are other necessary funding types that have been introduced, such as the *Housing Establishment Fund (HEF)*, funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), they do not provide resources for the initial access points that all people experiencing homelessness enter through.

HEF has unintentionally created blockages in access points, as intake and assessment points are now also required to manage private rental brokerage without enough additional workers to do so. If there was a rollout of HEF across Victoria that was accompanied with workers to implement and support services to follow the person accessing rental, this would be beneficial to both the system and the person. Currently, the jump between a refuge or access point to private rental is too big. People accessing this funding also often require support to manage the transition and the complexities in their lives.

The example of HEF provides insight into the complexity of responding to homelessness, especially at the first point of entry and the time required to respond to the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. Furthermore, it notes the need for different options of housing at different times in peoples lives, which is accompanied with support that follows the person.

In 2017, Victoria launched its Extreme Weather Policy and initiative which included brokerage funds available to access points for rough sleepers in extreme weather periods.

Sometime during 2019, these funds were cancelled without explanation or evaluation of the benefit. Feedback from NEMA services noted these funds to be invaluable and provided an identified pool of funds for rough sleepers, who are an incredibly vulnerable cohort of people experiencing homelessness during extreme weather. Reinstatement of these resources through the extreme weather policy are vital to ensure the wellbeing of rough sleepers in an environment of increasing extreme weather events/periods, however ultimately if the system were to be adequately funded to meet the demand of homelessness, as stand alone program of funds would not be required.

Government response to crisis accommodation

It is apparent that a government response to crisis accommodation is desperately needed in Victoria. In 2018, led by the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks in response to consumer feedback launched their report *A Crisis in Crisis* which highlights the crisis in crisis accommodation in Melbourne’s north and west. This report highlights the appalling conditions that people are required to live in while they wait for more secure accommodation to become available, if at all. The report identified that:

“The Homelessness Service System is experiencing an increased demand for emergency accommodation as a result of increasing rates of homelessness, which is inextricably linked to Melbourne’s housing crisis, particularly to the severe and growing lack of affordable housing. This has led to an increase in the number of people presenting to the Specialist Homelessness Service System for assistance, but also an increase in the length of time people are requiring financial support to pay for emergency accommodation, due to a lack of longer-term accommodation options. There is also a corresponding reduction in available options, with many low-cost rooming houses, caravan parks and hotels having closed over the past few years. The result is that some of the worst private accommodation providers continue to flourish in an environment of high demand and low competition”¹⁵.

The report is accompanied by a campaign to boycott unsafe, substandard crisis accommodation, such as hotels and rooming houses that put rough sleepers and people experiencing homelessness in extreme danger. As a sector it was committed that they will no longer be prepared to refer people to substandard crisis accommodation, nor are we willing to participate in continuing to harm vulnerable people seeking our assistance.

It is an important commitment from the sector to boycott these unsafe and substandard condition of accommodation, but there should be a response from government to manage and respond to the vital need for crisis accommodation as one part of a housing supply continuum.

Responding to homelessness examples in Darebin

In June 2019, Council committed to increase its investment and responses to homelessness locally, following consultation with local homelessness and emergency relief agencies to better understand the current status of homelessness and service system gaps in Darebin. Council explored its role in increasing its prevention and early intervention efforts and contributing funds to respond to homelessness.. It was acknowledged that locally there were gaps programs and services to respond to the varied needs of rough sleepers and people experiencing homelessness more broadly. There are three projects underway – establishing

¹⁵ North & West Homelessness Networks, *A Crisis in Crisis*, 2018

Darebin Assertive Outreach Support Program, Community Shower Access Program and participating in a Darebin homelessness StreetCount.

Darebin Assertive Outreach Support Program

Council has funded Merri Outreach Support Services (MOSS) to establish and deliver a two-year assertive outreach program across Darebin. The program will see two outreach workers engage with rough sleepers and people experiencing homelessness and facilitate improved access to support services and housing. MOSS was appointed through a public tender process and commenced the new outreach program in January 2020.

The program will facilitate improved access to support services and housing for people experiencing homelessness in the City of Darebin and provide early intervention activities to support people who are newly homeless to exit homelessness. It will be a service that responds to the diverse needs of rough sleepers and people experiencing homelessness, including Aboriginal people, refugee and asylum seekers, women experiencing family violence, people with a disability and take a trauma-informed approach to supporting these population groups.

The two-year program is a pilot and the first to be funded in Darebin to provide outreach to rough sleepers. Therefore, the program is being evaluated and implemented with an outcomes framework.

Community Shower Access Program

The Community Shower Access Program (CSAP) will be undertaken as a six-month pilot at Reservoir Leisure Centre (RLC) and Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (NARC) beginning December 2019. The program aims to provide a dignified and respectful response to people experiencing homelessness who experience barriers to bathing and showering, recognising that bodily hygiene is critical to the maintenance of good physical and mental health. Facilitating access to shower and locker facilities also upholds peoples' right to privacy and dignified treatment, as well as protection from discrimination.

The program will provide access for people experiencing homelessness to each Centre's shower, locker and aquatic areas free of charge. The program has been designed to be safe and inclusive and respond to the diverse needs of rough sleepers. Participants are referred to and assessed for program suitability by a local homelessness service (IAP and case management) to ensure that the program suits the needs of the person accessing homelessness support services.

StreetCount

Council is currently preparing to participate in a homelessness StreetCount in 2020 to better understand the nature, scale and needs of rough sleeping across Darebin. It is acknowledged that whilst the Census collects data on rough sleeping and homelessness, the instrument of collection is a barrier to a significant cohort of people experiencing homelessness on census night.

Council is working with local homelessness providers to deliver the StreetCount which has not been done in Darebin before. The data collected from the count will contribute to better understanding the nature and scale of rough sleeping across Darebin and inform future programs and initiatives.

Recommendation 9: Advocate to commonwealth and provide a government response to emergency accommodation in Victoria, as identified in Crisis in Crisis advocacy.

Recommendation 10: Reinstate extreme weather brokerage funds for homelessness access points across Victoria.

Recommendation 11: Review Victorian homelessness sector funding to adequately meet the demand of intake assessment planning, case management and emergency accommodation.