

DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2024–2030

Executive summary

Homelessness is something that people experience; it is not who they are. Being without secure and affordable accommodation can devastate a person's life, whether it lasts a very short time, several months, or years.

Homelessness affects people from all sections of the community. It can occur when people experience a crisis such as job loss, grief, or family violence, or to those who may have struggled with disadvantage all their lives. Everyone's experience of homelessness is unique, and it can happen to anyone at any point in their lives.

In our city, we are facing a housing and homelessness crisis, a situation mirrored across Australia and the world. Visible homelessness, people sleeping rough on the streets, is just the tip of the iceberg in our homelessness crisis. Many more women, children and families are part of the hidden problem – sleeping in their cars, on other people's couches and in severely overcrowded or temporary accommodation.

Housing is a fundamental human right – everyone has the right to safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing. We know people can reclaim control of their lives when appropriate housing is available. However, without access to safe, secure housing, people become caught in a loop of homelessness and continue sleeping on our streets.

Homelessness in the City of Melbourne

This strategy prioritises Aboriginal peoples and people experiencing chronic homelessness. Both these groups are over-represented in our homeless population. We also prioritise women and young people because they have unique unmet needs within Melbourne's homelessness system.

Snapshot of homelessness in our city

- 130 people sleeping rough, 1163 people experiencing homelessness in total
- 5 per cent were Aboriginal peoples (Aboriginal peoples only comprise 0.5 per cent of our population)
- 15 per cent were young people aged 15 to 25
- 36 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness were women, and 20 per cent of women were young women aged 20 to 24

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 Census, released March 2023

Our role

Our community expects us to act. We have an explicit legislative, moral, ethical and leadership responsibility to create a city where every person has a home. We are also responsible for providing support to break the cycle of homelessness.

Adequate housing is a fundamental human right and essential infrastructure critical to health and wellbeing. Over the past two decades, we have invested in housing solutions and coordinated and funded services for people in need. In early 2022, we established Homes Melbourne, recognising that the complexity and extent of the housing crisis needed a comprehensive, targeted response.

Yet despite all our work, the lack of affordable housing in the city undermines our efforts to get people into long-term, safe and secure housing. Without access to safe, appropriate housing, people get caught in a cycle of homelessness.

Working with our community

We cannot do it alone. Everyone has a role to play in tackling this housing crisis: all levels of government, the private, property and development sectors, community and housing organisations and the broader community.

We are part of the Melbourne Zero Network – an alliance of diverse Melbourne-based businesses, organisations and community groups publicly calling for change to make zero homelessness a reality and taking practical actions to end street homelessness in our city. Melbourne Zero Network is a coalition of what could seem to be unlikely partners, uniting to advocate for real change to end the stigma around street homelessness and position Melbourne as one of the most liveable cities for everyone.

Advocating for action

In addition to direct action and working in partnership, we advocate for others to act. The Victorian and Australian Governments have legislative responsibility for providing public, social and affordable housing and funding specialist housing and homelessness organisations. We will advocate for new and ongoing investment in social, specialist and affordable housing stock. Urgent change is also needed in the complex administrative processes of the housing, homelessness, justice, welfare and health systems.

Consultation and research

Our strategy is underpinned by a robust evidence base and extensive engagement with people who have lived experience of homelessness. We have consulted housing, health and homelessness sector organisations we fund or partner with to deliver services. We also engaged with the broader community – people who operate a business or live, work, study in or visit Melbourne.

Guiding principles

We have developed five principles to inform our approach through research and engaging the community, partners, and experts. These principles underpin our vision, goals and priorities:

1. Person-centred approach

- Informed by people with lived experience of homelessness
- People are treated with dignity and respect
- Services are accessible and tailored to the unique needs of each person
- People are empowered to make their own choices (self-determination)

2. Health and wellbeing service response

- Trauma-informed
- Culturally safe
- Health-focused
- Adequate housing is a social determinant of health

3. Housing is a fundamental human right

- Housing is essential infrastructure
- Everyone has the right to safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing
- Homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring
- Housing must be appropriate for individual needs
- Different cohorts may require specialist housing stock

- Government has the primary responsibility to guarantee the right to adequate housing

4. Safety and security

- All people have access to our public spaces
- Everyone has a sense of belonging, inclusion, and participation
- The City of Melbourne is a welcoming, accessible, vibrant city

5. Measure outcomes and impact

- A qualitative and quantitative data-led approach
- Evaluate impact
- Adapt to improve outcomes
- Open data and transparency.

Our vision

An inclusive city where every person has a home and support to break the cycle of homelessness.

Our goal

To end homelessness in Melbourne by securing sustainable and affordable housing for all.

Priorities

Under three priority areas, we will deliver outcomes to achieve our vision of an inclusive city where every person has a home and gets the support they need to break the cycle of homelessness. Our priorities will be reviewed every two years and updated in response to the changing nature of homelessness and social, political and economic changes. We will develop a costed action plan to implement this strategy. The table below outlines our implementation timeframes. 'Immediate' means within the first two years, 'medium' means within two to four years, and 'long-term' means within the lifetime of the strategy, seven years.

Priority 1: A city where everyone has a home.		
We take a person-centred approach, supporting each person on their pathway out of homelessness. People with lived experience of homelessness inform our work. Our priority cohorts are Aboriginal peoples, young people, women, and people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough.		
Outcomes	Our role	Timeframe
1.1 Aboriginal peoples at risk of homelessness have access to culturally safe health, homelessness support and housing services in our city.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Medium
1.2 People experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough are provided with coordinated housing, health and homelessness support services.	Partner and deliver	Medium
1.3 Young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are supported with prevention, intervention and housing services.	Advocate, partner, deliver	Immediate
1.4 Women at risk of or experiencing homelessness are supported to access secure, affordable homes and services.	Partner and deliver	Medium

Priority 2: A city where no one is left behind

We will create an inclusive city where everyone is supported. We will ensure coordinated services, collaboration and advocacy through partnerships with our communities, governments, corporates and the homelessness sector.

Outcomes	Our role	Timeframe
2.1 Strategic partnerships established through the Melbourne Service Coordination Project will deliver timely and tailored support for people experiencing homelessness.	Partner and deliver	Immediate
2.2 Homelessness and health services in the City of Melbourne meet the needs of our specific homeless community.	Advocate, partner and deliver	Immediate
2.3 Our advocacy will operate effectively across different levels of government and systems to end homelessness.	Advocate	Medium

Priority 3: A city unified to end homelessness

We will support our community to be informed, respectful, empathetic, and united to end homelessness. Our public spaces will be designed and managed to be safe, welcoming and inclusive.

Outcomes	Our role	Timeframe
3.1 Our community is informed and united to create tangible and enduring change to end homelessness. Through collective community initiatives, we will reduce stigma and foster respect, empathy and understanding of homelessness.	Advocate, partner and deliver	Medium
3.2 Our services, programs and public spaces are thoughtfully designed to be safe, accessible and welcoming for everyone.	Partner and deliver	Immediate
3.3 Our organisation supports, trains and equips all staff members to contribute to our shared goal of ending homelessness.	Deliver	Medium