

Ten-Year Social and
Affordable Housing Strategy
for Victoria

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Introduction

The Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) together with McCormack Housing welcome the opportunity to respond to the *Ten-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy for Victoria*. ACSO delivers evidence-based multidisciplinary support and intervention in the community and in justice settings; the individuals we support are those who are engaged in the criminal justice system or at risk of engagement. Our vision is *for a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, and prison truly is the last resort*.

ACSO was established in 1983 as a volunteer-driven 'drop-in centre' for ex-prisoners (*The Epistle Centre*), providing material aid, advice, and companionship. Due to the lack of other available accommodation options, the centre quickly came to serve as improvised accommodation for prisoners upon their release, as secure housing was a common need of people using the service. ACSO was officially incorporated in 1984 and received its first substantial government funding grant through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in 1987. This allowed ACSO to set up a 13-bed halfway house for people leaving prison, including those with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities. From our small beginnings, ACSO has grown to support over twenty thousand people involved, or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system annually, across New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria.

Over almost 40 years of ACSO's service delivery, housing has remained a critical need for people involved in the criminal justice system. Despite this, ACSO has consistently faced barriers to securing suitable accommodation with this issue continuing to be the primary challenge for our clients, workers and organisation. Where secure, stable and appropriate housing cannot be sourced, efforts to improve the wellbeing and social integration of our clients and reduction of harmful behaviours that lead to offending are exceedingly challenging.

ACSO works with individuals at all stages of their intersection with the criminal justice system, as well as with those whose behaviour places them at risk of involvement. We deliver programs across alcohol and other drugs, reintegration casework, disability residential, youth residential, NDIS outreach, mental health, employment and housing services. In the last decade ACSO has established new, flexible models of supportive housing to address the unique needs of people leaving custody and those whose risk of engagement in the criminal justice system is intertwined with long-term homelessness.

A key element in the ACSO housing strategy has been to establish a specialist housing subsidiary, McCormack Housing, with the mandate to provide sustainable social housing prioritising people in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system with the aim to break the cycle between homelessness and offending. McCormack Housing was our response to the extremely high need for suitable housing for individuals with offending histories. Traditionally those we service experience high levels of exclusion from a range of public and private housing markets.





The link between housing insecurity and recidivism is well established in the literature; yet the number of persons exiting correctional custody into homelessness remains high in Victoria. There were 7,151 prisoners in the Victorian prison system on 30 June 2020, representing an increase of 57.6 percent since June 2010. Victoria has seen an increase in unsentenced (remand) prisoners over recent years, coupled with a stark increase in the imposition of 'time served' sentences (a sentence of imprisonment equal to the time that the offender has already spent on remand). Time served sentences now account for twenty per cent of all prison sentences in Victoria. This phenomenon, alongside the tightening of parole restrictions in the State, sees many individuals released from prison into unsuitable accommodation without access to pre-release or specialist reintegration supports. The Victorian Legislative Committee's Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria recently noted that 50% of prison leavers use a homelessness service in the year following their release, and the number of exits from correctional custody directly into homelessness has grown by 317 per cent since 2011–12. Through the development of McCormack Housing and in combination with our other behavioral and reintegration support programs, ACSO is actively working to address the current gap in the housing market whilst addressing the key drivers of homelessness for people engaged with the justice system.

Stable housing and tailored supports are crucial to the reintegration of persons in custodyⁱⁱ and the evidence is very clear that the provision of housing, coupled with aftercare support; produces the most effective outcomes, particularly for medium- and high- risk offenders.ⁱⁱⁱ Failure to provide this support incurs significant ongoing costs for governments. In Victoria, 43.3% of persons released from custody during 2016–17 returned to prison within two years (to 2018–19).^{iv} at a cost of \$323.45 per prisoner per day.^v This submission asserts that the provision of adequate social housing supply, coupled with appropriate wraparound support services for those involved with the justice system, is essential to protect the human rights of those involved in the justice system, to promote desistance from crime, and is economically cost-beneficial.

This submission will explore why the current social housing system is unsustainable for people leaving custody, particularly those who are long-term homelessness and those who are high risk (persons with violent and/or sexual offending histories) and discuss the support initiatives developed and delivered by ACSO to address the gap in housing and the drivers of homelessness for this cohort.

Access Pathways

Pathways out of custodial environments

Pathways to social housing are inaccessible to many of ACSO's clients, whose journeys frequently end at crisis housing or other forms of homelessness. Only a select few clients are able to access the housing options developed by ACSO or through the Corrections Victoria Housing Program (CVHP). For many of our clients, particularly those on short sentence or remand, the only option available upon release is short-stay hotel or crisis accommodation in caravan parks and rooming houses. While our case workers





make every effort to link clients with housing providers for ongoing support and longer-term accommodation, waitlists are exceedingly long; and, released to unsuitable environments, many clients return to prison before they can progress along any of the existing pathways towards secure and stable housing.

Those accessing crisis housing are faced with associations with negative peers, the presence of violence, drug use, isolation and disconnection, lack of supports and insecurity of ongoing shelter. Not only do these conditions have a detrimental impact on a person's reintegration and recovery; failure to succeed in these environments significantly increases the risks of further incarceration and causes 'black marks' against a person's tenancy record; making it increasingly more difficult for a person to secure adequate housing in the private rental market. This is particularly common among ACSO clients released from remand or short sentences, where minimal time is available to plan for housing, and shortages of housing supply mean that little other than crisis options are available. Even a very short period on remand can drastically disrupt a person's housing stability, employment and supportive relationships, all of which serve as protective factors against further contact with the criminal justice system.

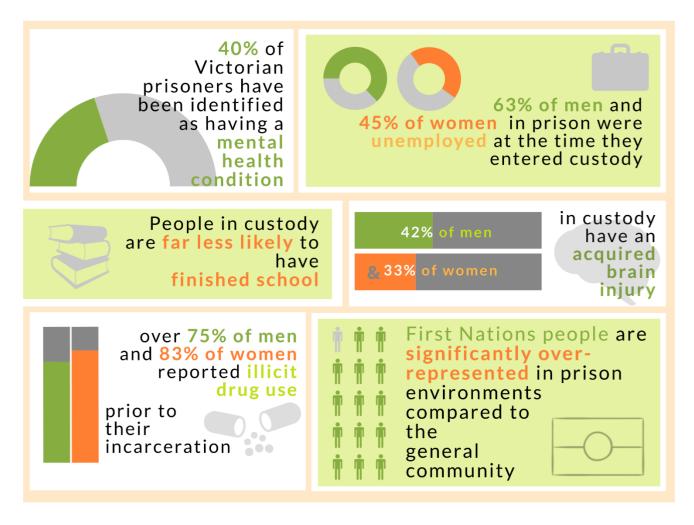
Difficulties with bail accommodation, as well as bail conditions themselves, regularly limit released prisoners' access to established supportive relationships (e.g. GP's, methadone dispensers, counsellors, case workers) and often the lack of certainty around a person's release address requires them to travel great distances from where they reside to access treatment services or other supports. For others, without secure accommodation, access to treatment services is also frequently denied; particularly treatment in residential settings which typically exclude clients without a fixed term address.

For ACSO's more complex clients, including those with histories of serious violent and sexual offending; access to adequate housing is even more challenging. Many shared and individual housing options are unacceptable due to their proximity to parks, schools or neighbours. Housing stability is further challenged by the changing dynamic of environments surrounding these persons and their accommodation. Often individuals can be forced to re-locate at short notice due to changes in the neighbourhood makeup or the arrival of new neighbours. Many of these ACSO clients are forced to return to post-sentence correctional facilities for stable accommodation, resulting in further gaps in their rental history. In collecting information for this submission, ACSO identified clients who were being forced to relocate from their private housing due to their post-sentence restrictions, but who were required to continue paying rent for the duration of the tenancy in order to build up a rental history that may be palatable to real estate agents and landlords in the private market. For other clients, access to suitable housing pathways is hampered by individual complexities including mental illness, addiction, disability, ageing and other challenging behaviours. It is well known that those from backgrounds of trauma and disadvantage experience a range of complexities and co-morbidities and are significantly over-represented in Victoria's correctional system.





In 2015 the Victorian Ombudsman noted that people in custody are far less likely to have finished school; that sixty three percent of men and forty five percent of women in prison were unemployed at the time they entered custody; forty per cent of all Victorian prisoners have been identified as having a mental health condition; that forty two per cent of men and thirty three per cent of women in custody have an acquired brain injury; over seventy five percent of men and eighty three per cent of women reported illicit drug use prior to their incarceration; and that First Nations people are significantly over-represented in prison environments compared to the general community.^{vi}



As noted by the Royal Commission into Mental Health in Victoria, mental illness increases a person's likelihood of experiencing housing instability or homelessness, and homelessness increases a person's likelihood of experiencing a mental illness. Similarly, research has found that experiencing homelessness increases the risk of criminal justice system contact, and experiencing imprisonment increases the likelihood of homelessness. Where the basic human need for shelter is not met, it is unreasonable to expect that individuals could improve their economic or social participation in any other area. To meaningfully improve outcomes for this cohort, it is critical that individuals have access to appropriate housing models alongside coordinated, tailored and integrated person-centered





supports. People leaving custodial settings may need support to readjust to a non-institutional setting. Failure to do so can result in those that have left custody experiencing homelessness, difficulty reintegrating into the community and higher risk of reoffending.

Stigma and Human Rights

While with the right support and adequate income, private rental may be accessible to many of our clients; many are not in the labour market and unable to sustain the cost of housing through social security income alone. ACSO supports the concerns noted in the *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria* (2020) that the rate of Newstart payments is inadequate to maintain housing and a significant factor contributing to homelessness.^{ix}

For those fortunate enough to have a stable income, they are commonly faced with suspicion, stigma and discrimination in navigating private rental markets. This is heightened by the absence of any rental history, as well as gaps in housing history due to transience, homelessness, incarceration and limited options available aside from crisis accommodation. It is ACSO's firm assertion that that adequate social housing models should be available to assist individuals facing significant barriers to build positive rental histories and confidence in sustaining accommodation. These models should be diverse, as are the needs of the forensic cohort; allowing for supported models during transition and graduation to independent accommodation through initiatives such as head leasing models.

ACSO has experienced similar discrimination from housing providers, even those funded to assist vulnerable groups. Often this is based on a lack of understanding around offending behaviour and the complex intersecting needs of such persons which has led to the behaviour driving their contact with the criminal justice system. Many housing services will not accept persons with offending histories who present with challenging behaviours. This is even more prevalent when these behaviour stem from complex mental health presentations.

Concerns highlighted to ACSO service staff by housing providers include:

- Fear of the person resulting from generalized stigma associated with criminality;
- Concern for the safety of staff and others receiving service;
- Lack of expertise (or a perception of deficiency) in supporting high-risk and complex persons and a belief that this is a role for specialist staff; and
- Prior negative experiences working with persons with offending behaviour tarnishing perceptions of incoming and different clients.





As asserted by the Legislative Council's *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*^x, the right to adequate housing is a human right; and lack of housing has impacts across a range of other human rights, including the right to health, life, liberty and security. It was recommended by the authors of the inquiry that the right to housing be enshrined in the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic), a position strongly supported by ACSO.

Unfortunately, the absence of suitable housing and housing pathways in Victoria means that many of our clients are not afforded this right, instead, cycling back through the prison system and further reducing their chances of obtaining stable housing in the long term. The complex needs of ACSO's clients, and individuals involved in the justice system generally, has resulted in prisons themselves becoming a housing solution in Victoria. It is not uncommon for ACSO clients to express a desire to return to prison, whereupon they are guaranteed to receive food, shelter, and structure not otherwise available in the community. At the cost of \$118,000 per prisoner per year^{xi}, custodial centres represent expensive and inefficient housing solutions for the management of complex and challenging behaviours driven by poor health, social capacity and wellbeing of the persons involved. Evidence on cost-benefits strongly support integrated supported housing solutions, noting they reduce the use of and costs to criminal justice, health and public housing systems. Xii, Xiii, Xiii

To build sustainable pathways into social housing for this complex group, the pathway should **not** begin with crisis housing as a graduated step into (rarely attained) secure suitable accommodation. People leaving custodial environments should be supported with holistic person-centred support and comprehensive and timely transition planning, coupled with a supply of adequate social and affordable housing stock to meet demand. As noted by the *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria (2020)*, people who are housed in long-term accommodation are much more likely to sustain this housing for a longer period than those in short-term rooming house accommodation.^{xv} It is increasingly acknowledged that short service periods for support are unsuitable for many people with varying and complex needs, and ACSO strongly supports the recommendation from the *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria (2020)* that the Victorian Government embed flexibility in its approach to the funding of homelessness services; allowing for providers to tailor the amount and duration of support required by each individual to ensure successful housing is maintained.^{xvi}

Housing Suitability

For those clients fortunate enough to access secure tenancies through the support of ACSO and other housing providers, significant concerns remain with the suitability of this housing; which is often located in regional or remote areas where rental prices have been historically more attainable. In the face of the current pandemic and mobilisation of people out of Australia's capital cities, median rental prices have increased in regional as well as metropolitan areas^{xvii}, leaving only housing of the poorest condition 'in reach' of our clients.





Of the private market housing that is deemed affordable for our clients, most is cramped; in very poor condition (often squalor); isolated from services and support networks; and surrounded by few employment or other meaningful activities. In the face of such conditions, clients are far more likely to fail, creating further barriers to their future access to appropriate housing.

With few exceptions, most pathways to social housing only take consideration of broad geographic preferences and limited disability modification requirements. There is little scope to nominate for other individualised facets of housing which may be required to ensure successful tenancies. ACSO clients and workers are regularly faced with the attitude that (due to housing supply issues), if a person is fortunate enough to obtain a 'roof over their head'; that they are unable to be 'picky' or make requests regarding the suitability of accommodation available to them. The result of unsuitable placements has been demonstrated to be failure to sustain tenancies, which pushes individuals back to crisis housing or other forms of homelessness, including incarceration.

In the provision of social housing supply, consideration should be given to the range of complexities typically faced by people in the criminal justice system, including mental illness and disability, and a range of housing options should be available to cater for individuals' unique needs. For example, those experiencing anxiety-related mental health concerns may require open, outdoor spaces. Others may forego accommodation options where this would mean separation from pets or supportive companions. Some individuals fare better in shared supportive accommodation, while others (including those with restrictive post-sentence orders) require stand-alone housing in carefully chosen locations. While there is no one size fits all' solution; connection to families, public transport, support services and employment opportunities are deemed by our staff to be crucial to the success of many individuals in social housing placements. The integration of accommodation with supports designed to build tenancy skills, encourage prosocial behaviours and foster meaningful activities is similarly crucial for many, and such services play an important role in maintaining housing success in the short, long and medium term.

Sustaining Tenancies

As discussed above, many of our clients face sometimes insurmountable barriers to accessing tenancies and are forced to cycle repeatedly through prison and unsuitable crisis housing solutions. ACSO strongly believe that individuals involved in the criminal justice system must be supported to access individually suited long-term housing and supports at the earliest opportunity; bypassing those environments which serve to destabilise their wellbeing and prospects of future housing security.

The majority of at-risk people entering the criminal justice system present with a number of 'social vulnerability indicators', this premise is supported by strong evidence and also aligned with the Victorian Government's Data Reform, Common Clients and Crime Prevention Strategies. Social vulnerability refers to the inability of people, organisations, and societies to withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed. Multiple and unsupported social vulnerability





indicators is the key factor in failed tenancies of people involved in the justice system living in social housing programs and private rental. If people living with multiple forms of disadvantage are not adequately supported, they may enter the criminal justice system or may not successfully reintegrate back into the community from prison or institutional settings. These 'social vulnerability indicators may include:

- Homelessness and unsafe housing
- Behavioural problems, including
 - Harmful substance abuse
 - o Untreated mental health conditions
 - o Antisocial behaviours including offending and family violence
- Limited education including poor literacy
- Cognitive impairment including intellectual disability and ABI conditions
- Limited employment and vocational opportunities
- Generational poverty
- History of childhood trauma
- Chronic and/or congenital physical health problems
- Decreased levels of cultural safety including discrimination
- Connection with family/family violence
- Lack of social, pro-social connections and limited social capital

As with the provision of appropriately designed and located housing, there is no universal 'one size fits all' model for the housing support needs of people involved in the criminal justice system. While some individuals may require minimal support to access and maintain tenancies, others require supportive skill-building environments. As noted by the Australian Institute of Criminology,

'...recent literature on supported housing for correctional populations highlights the importance of flexible and individually oriented approaches to delivering housing support. Good practice in housing support focuses on individual needs and on the provision of appropriate degrees and types of individual choice and control. Holistic, integrated wraparound services, delivered through collaborative, multi-agency approaches and spanning a range of individual support and treatment needs, remain an integral part of good practice for housing support interventions.'*xviii

A number of methods are noted as best practice in ensuring successful reintegration of people from correctional environments into housing in the community, including:

• The employment of a 'Housing First' approach, ascribing safe and permanent housing as the first priority in recovery and reintegration to the community.





- Throughcare models which incorporate engagement with people as early as possible, prior to release from correctional facilities, allowing time for planning and to build respectful, trusting relationships.
- Long-term consistent and highly individualised support which builds trust and engagement and
 is essential to building and maintaining partnerships between support and housing providers. xix

In order to build trust and engagement over a longer period of time, housing and support providers undertake a journey with clients, which; for those with many complexities and barriers to social inclusion, is frequently not linear. On the journey to success, backwards and sideways steps are often taken. Where not constrained by limited funding models, ACSO strives to journey with our clients, demonstrating patience, hope and a non-judgemental approach. Unfortunately, where a person is unable to sustain their housing (due to e.g. an admission to residential treatment services, return to custody, loss of employment or failure to pay rent), it can be insurmountable to return to the progress they have made. Return to custody (even for short periods) can profoundly impact a person's ability to maintain their housing, as well as employment, connection to services and other valuable social and family networks. To ensure that complex disadvantaged individuals can maintain gains in sustaining tenancies, greater provisions should be applied amongst both public and community housing providers, to ensure temporary periods of absence do not result in unmanageable debt or eviction.

In addition to suitable housing coupled with appropriate, individualised and long term supports, ACSO strongly argues that ongoing housing can only be maintained where it is underpinned by an income which meets a persons' basic needs. For many without access to employment (or those in insecure employment or underemployed), it is simply not possible to sustain rental costs alongside the basic costs of living; including transport, food, healthcare and utilities.

Supportive Housing Model Options

It is ACSO's fundamental and strongly held position that people with offending histories require judgement free, flexible supportive housing models. These models must provide a 'stepped approach', focused on improving social vulnerability outcomes, behaviour change AND on the provision of safe, secure and sustainable tenancies through the development of personal skills. The models need to provide a continuum of care balancing offending risks; from residential intensive therapeutic programs designed to decrease the harms associated with substance use and untreated mental illness and then 'stepping down' to developing social and vocational skills with less intensive support provided in independent housing through transitional housing and head lease programs. Ideally, these models would fill the 'missing link' in the eligibility of the current social housing system as most people with complex needs and poor tenancy histories are excluded because their 'support needs' cannot be met by social housing alone.





In addition to these models, ACSO has previously piloted a bail support accommodation service, in partnership with the Magistrates Court of Victoria and other specialist community service providers. As discussed in this submission, barriers to accommodation for those released on bail and from short sentences are compounded; and ACSO strongly asserts the need for such services. The Service Delivery Model for this program is attached at **Appendix A**.

A Specialist Justice Housing Provider - McCormack Housing

In 2014 ACSO established our subsidiary company *McCormack Housing* to fill this gap and build a social housing response appropriate to our client group. McCormack Housing owns and manages several transitional houses in outer and regional Victoria. We work in partnership with Corrections Victoria to identify suitable candidates for the housing and to manage potential risks (e.g. ensuring the location of a property is suitable for the person based on their offending type and any conditions imposed).

McCormack Housing works with participants to identify and address their housing needs whilst an ACSO support worker focusses on sourcing sustainable housing, addressing practical needs and linking the person into appropriate specialist and mainstream support. In additional to our transitional housing model, ACSO has developed a Head Lease model which is reported by clients and staff to be very effective in overcoming barriers to access the private rental market, including lack of rental history and skills to navigate relationships with landlords and real estate agents.

The program helped me and is still helping me with learning about myself and who I truly am. Who I want to be and being able to support myself mentally and emotionally without hiding behind any masks. I was able to pick up all my instruments again and begin to play music like I used to, and anyone that knows a musician will know how important that was for me I've been able to get a house and now have signed a 12-month lease, I have a job and am Studying a Diploma of Drug and Alcohol counselling.

With all of this I've been able to work on all relationships in my life with my family and also in my personal life, they are in the best place they could be all round. I have the most amazing girlfriend, and I'm on amazing terms with my family, I speak to them every single day as I used to speak to them maybe once every 2 years or when I needed drug money.....

Now I have 3 units left of my course, I'm wanting to finish that and start a brand-new career and be able to give back to the community in the best way I know how to. Stay in this home I'm currently in, continue to save money and keep pushing through my everyday life of staying clean and happy with who my sober self actually is.

ACSO believes that Head Leasing models are cost effective and supportive of rehabilitation outcomes for persons exiting custody. For this model to be successful, ACSO invest in developing relationships with real estate agents; the agents are aware that persons with criminal histories will live in the property, but with assurance that the rent in the first twelve months will be paid. ACSO may also cover the high upfront costs involved with accessing rental properties (e.g. rental bonds) which are prohibitive





for most persons exiting custody. Over time the client gradually increases their rental contribution paid to ACSO. When the client can demonstrate capacity and capability to maintain a lease, the lease is transferred to the person – with agreement of the landlord and leasing agent. Often this model is also useful. Over time, the support provided by ACSO allows a client to develop their own positive rental history removing a barrier to future housing stability.

The program has helped me with a lot of things but most of all, I now have trust in workers whereas in the past I never sought help as I didn't want to bother anyone.

The entire program has given me great advice and help, I never felt judged by the program all the staff were professional and supportive and i felt like if I went off in my own world it was ok to dust ya self-off and start again and ATRIUM/McH were there to help, I didn't feel pressure just really encouraged to keep trying.

I am now living in Frankston where I have always wanted to be, I am reconnecting with my daughter which has always been my main goal, when I told her I was moving to Frankston she replied that she is proud of me, she has never said that before my Wife is visiting me next week as we are also reconnecting, and I am hopeful to gain employment again in the building industry

I am feeling very settled.

ACSO's housing models, whether Head Lease Transitional Housing or Supported Housing, are cognizant that sustainable housing means having the skills, knowledge and self-advocacy to manage all aspects of keeping a tenancy, including paying rent and bills on time, good neighbour behaviour and managing relationships. As Parsell, Moutou, Lucio and Parkinson (2015) assert, supportive housing is 'more than helping tenants successfully make the transition into housing... support is a deliberate means to help tenants become good tenants.xx ACSO is also funded to provide a range of behavioural support programs across areas as diverse as disability, mental health, addiction, and positive behavioural support. ACSO's expertise in these areas allows it to provide a well-rounded response to the complex and intersecting needs common to persons in contact with the criminal justice system.

While McCormack Housing has delivered immense gains to ACSO participants in its limited time of operating, all models suffer from a lack of funding available to develop the supply of both private and social housing. Land tax reductions or stamp duty concessions or removal would allow organisations like McCormack Housing to make ongoing investment in land and infrastructure that would greatly assist in increasing the overall supply for its target cohorts. Furthermore, well intentioned policies to ensure equitable supply of social housing to those most in need, have hampered the efforts of organisations like ACSO to provide a specialist and wraparound response to complex groups, requiring registered providers to cede management of their intake and allocation criteria to the Victorian Housing Register. Participants of Head Leasing programs lacking secure income could be supported in maintaining long term accommodation through adequate private rental subsidies and ongoing access to supports and advocacy where required.





Conclusion

The lack of access to adequate housing is a primary contributor to (and the result of) adverse involvement with the criminal justice system. ACSO applauds the proposed strategy of Homes Victoria to invest significantly in Victoria's social housing supply, as well as the acknowledgement that sustaining tenancies requires the provision of long-term and flexible supports.

ACSO further recommend that a portion of funding available be allocated for the provision of *specialist* housing to groups of the highest need, including those involved in the criminal justice system and exiting custody. This funding should be coupled with initiatives to incentivise and discount purchases of land and development, as well as changes to policy to ensure registered housing providers are able to specialise in the provision of housing and support in their areas of expertise.

ACSO is currently engaged with Homes Victoria and the Department of Justice and Community Safety in relation to our development of a supported housing model for such clients that addresses most, if not all of, the issues raised by the Department of Justice and Community Safety arising from their (2020) sector consultation on Justice Housing.**

To facilitate a whole-of-system approach to ending homelessness, greater coordination and integration is required across all departments of the Victorian Government; including those responsible for Corrections, Health and Mental Health, Disability Services and Housing. The benefit of successfully housing complex individuals represents significant cost savings across multiple departments. As echoed by the *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, ACSO strongly believes that no person should be exited from custody into homelessness or unsuitable crisis accommodation. This can be achieved through greater coordination between and amongst government and community service providers, supported by formalised service structures and underpinned by adequate supply of suitable housing and supports.

From our position as an experienced provider of supports to people involved in the criminal justice System, ACSO firmly believes that there is an urgent need for a range of specialised housing and integrated support models to successfully house such complex individuals and to keep them housed. A mix of options is recommended, including supported housing, head leasing and private rental access programs and subsidies. Support to clients involved in the criminal justice system should be holistic, flexible and person-centered, and, for those transitioning from custodial environments, should be commenced at the earliest available opportunity.





ⁱ State Government of Victoria, *Corrections Statistics: Quick Reference*, https://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/prisons/corrections-statistics-quick-reference

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- xiState Government of Victoria, *Corrections Statistics: Quick Reference*, https://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/prisons/corrections-statistics-quick-reference
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- xv Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*, March 2021
- xvi Ibid
- xvii State Government of Victoria (2020) *Rental Report,* https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report
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- xix Russell, S. & Sotiri, M (2018) 'Pathways Home: How can we deliver better outcomes for people who have been in prison?', Community Restorative Centre NSW.
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HOUSING AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

Service Delivery Model

OVERVIEW

The Housing and Support program provides a wraparound support model that delivers a range of accommodation options and additional drug and alcohol treatment choices to people who would ordinarily be unlikely to receive bail due to lack of housing and/or alcohol and drug misuse. The Housing and Support program provides a short-term transitional housing placement (where required) and referral and access to services that are relevant to participant's offending and short/medium term needs.

The Housing and Support program provides intensive case support, drug and alcohol treatment options and accommodation to participants.

AIMS

- To provide housing and support to individuals who do not have stable accommodation.
- To provide a support response that is tailored to the participant's assessed need and strengths.
- To provide a support environment that is conducive to stabilisation and rehabilitation.
- To build the participant's capacity and resilience to self-manage their own needs.

OBJECTIVES

The key objectives are to:

- Provide an alternative housing pathway for participants with complex needs.
- Provide supervised accommodation and intensive tailored support to people on bail, especially in relation to their housing and problematic alcohol and drug use needs.
- Connect people with community supports and services that assist the person to address their individual criminogenic needs and divert people from further involvement in the criminal justice system.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Short Term Accommodation (Phase 1), Assessment and Planning

All program participants are transported to the short-term accommodation once they have been accepted into the program, they are asked to participate in comprehensive assessment, planning and development of their support plan within their first two days in the house. Participants can be accommodated in these properties for up to 60 days. However, it is intended that the majority of participants will transition out of the short-term accommodation within 30 days (unless it is identified that a longer period of support is required in order to transition the participant appropriately).

Assessment:

The short-term accommodation properties provide a safe place for participants to manage immediate needs and undertake assessment. Assessment of the clients' support needs are completed by a skilled Residential Case Worker using a structured Support Needs Questionnaire (SNQ) assessment tool which covers the following domains:

- Functional adaptive behaviour
- Social activity
- Education
- Purposeful activity
- Mental health
- Physical health
- AOD
- Motivation
- Personal Wellbeing

Comprehensive AOD assessments are conducted by an AOD Clinician within two days of receiving a referral. This assessment ascertains treatment needs and where indicated, in-reached alcohol and drug brief interventions are to be facilitated immediately to assist in stabilising participants. The participants then have access to more intensive alcohol and drug treatment. Referrals by Residential Case Workers to AOD assessment and treatment occurs:

- Verbally: let the AOD clinician working at the property know about the clients' needs
- Formally: lodge a referral form (via OSCA) to the AOD Clinician.

Support Plan:

A comprehensive support plan is then developed by the Housing Case Workers, AOD Clinician and the participant. The participant's goals and the required steps to achieve stated goals are outlined in the plan. It encompasses responsivity factors, criminogenic and prosocial life needs.

The plan seeks to build the capacity and capability of the person. The plan identifies:

- Participant's strengths and adaptive skills deficits,
- Suitable and realistic strategies for achieving goals,
- Barriers and articulates mitigation strategies,
- External community-based and mainstream options to ensure an over-reliance on the Housing and Support program and other specialist services does not occur.

In implementing the support plan, the Housing and Support program team:

- Employ motivational engagement to increase uptake of the plan and seek to engender ownership from the participant,
- Coordinate a range of supports offered to the participant,
- Assist participants with access to education, training and employment and enhance living skills,
- Facilitate access to health services, individual and group therapies, family mediation and conferencing,
- Build participants' resilience to self-manage their own needs,
- Facilitate communication between providers and Courts/Corrections Victoria where required,
- Oversee and provide follow-up of agreed goals and activities and ensure that participants are linked to other services,

- Support participants who are returning to court for bail hearings and sentencing, and provide transport if required,
- Provide program progress and exit reports to appropriate external agencies.

Post Short-Term Accommodation Case Support (Phase 2)

Following the participant's stay in the short-term accommodation (Phase 1) the Housing and Support Outreach Case Worker support is provided for a further four-five months leading up to the participant's sentencing hearing (Phase 2).

Initial engagement with the participant is higher for all streams but reduces as a person demonstrates capacity to attend critical appointments, engage in other services and re-establish themselves in the community. The level of support is flexible and can be scaled up or down depending on individual need and circumstance.

Intensive: Participants who require intensive support and housing receive a placement of up to six months in a Housing and Support Transitional Property. This involves intensive case co-ordination and wraparound support to address AOD, Mental Health and other co-occurring needs. The participant receives access to a dedicated caseworker, specialist housing support to secure sustainable housing and specialised drug and alcohol programs.

Please note: participants residing in the intensive component may receive moderate to intensive case work support hours; this is approximately 5-8 hours per week.

Moderate: A range of housing and support options for participants who need only moderate support to access housing and maintain engagement with relevant agencies and treatment. Example housing support includes; access to a rental property via a Head Lease option, support within an existing housing placement or support to maintain own accommodation. The participant is offered between 3-5 case work hours per week, reducing as support needs are met.

Light: For participants who are assessed as having minimal needs and have access to mainstream, family, social or community housing, but may require access to establish a property. Support can be provided through assistance with bonds and furniture, moving truck or advocacy. Support may also include family support, mediation or behavioural contracting to place the participant into the home of a relative or friend. The participant is offered between 1-3 case work hours per week, reducing as support needs are met.

In addition to case support and AOD treatment, participants have access to Local Support Hubs and/or can be referred to ACSO support services as required.

Independent Accommodation Case Support (Direct to Phase 2)

For participants who are assessed as having minimal needs and are able to live independently in an independently sourced or head leased property, an option to move directly into phase 2 of the program is available. Those participants are supported to move into an appropriate property with regular outreach supports available to them. Those participants are required to meet 2 additional criteria:

- Referrer has worked with client for 1 month or more (desirable)
- Client has maintained a tenancy agreement in the past.

Aftercare

It is recognised that some participants may still require some level of support at the end of the program period. Participants continue to be able to access hubs and limited case support after participation in the program if they require intermittent support.

Where necessary, the Housing and Support program also facilitates additional referrals to other support services to assist in maintaining tenancies and achieving identified goals.

Housing Support

A key feature of the Housing and Support Program is a choice of multiple pathways to secure housing, supported by Tenancy Officers based within McCormack Housing. Assessment of participant's capacity to maintain housing and access to other housing options commence in the first week of entry into the program (short-term accommodation phase) to enable maximum time to secure appropriate pathways. Whilst in the Short-Term Accommodation caseworkers undertake the following:

- Identifying barriers to housing and implementing solutions.
- Providing support to seek housing and providing advocacy.
- Assertively seeking housing and developing relationships with agents and providers.
- Leveraging the Housing and Support Program's own housing services and existing relationships to deliver housing solutions.
- Sourcing Head Lease properties.

Whilst the approach to addressing housing needs remains flexible, the following outlines the broad housing options available to participants.

Option 1: Head Lease Housing

Housing in a rented property with a transferable lease. The participant is supported to develop capacity to live independently and maintain a property. When they have developed the ability to maintain the property and rent successfully, lease can be transferred into the person's name where appropriate. The providers then source a new property to lease for new program participants.

Option 2: Private rental or reconnection to family

Light support and advocacy around housing matters and access to a furniture and bond package for those assessed as requiring this resource.

For participants returning to the family home or a home secured of their own volition, the Housing and Support program works with the participant to ensure a smooth transition.

The Housing and Support program provides advocacy services and skill building exercises to the participant in relation to maintaining their tenancy. The Housing and Support program continually seeks to match the dwellings it provides with the current and future needs of its participants.

McCormack Housing Referrals

McCormack Housing play a large part in the transition of a participant in the Housing and Support Program. An initial plan around plans for medium to long term housing is made during the first few weeks of a participant commencing with the program. The plan is adjusted according to the participants needs and actions around transitioning throughout each phase of the program are developed in consultation with the program team and participant.

Specialist Drug and Alcohol Treatment

Specialist drug and alcohol treatment is a key component of the Housing and Support Program, acknowledging the significant role that alcohol and drug use plays in first time offending, reoffending and homelessness. A range of individual and group-based interventions as outlined below are offered, depending on the level of assessed need and participant engagement.

- Comprehensive AOD Assessment using a specialist Forensic Alcohol, and Other Drugs Assessment Tool (FAxT)
- Brief Interventions
- Forensic AOD Counselling
- Facilitation of forensic AOD group sessions

STAFFING

Team Leader

The Team Leader provides the day-to-day leadership of operations, rostering, regular feedback, and supervision, whilst providing regular staff and service updates to management and key stakeholders.

The Team Leader participates in Residential Case Worker performance appraisal/development conversation, counselling, disciplinary and recruitment processes, with the ACSO Program Manager.

Residential Case Worker

Residential Case Workers staff the accommodation, and they hold the primary responsibility for ensuring a safe and supportive space for clients and staff, updating records and for managing the accommodation building and physical environment.

Residential Case Workers are expected to respond appropriately to the support needs of clients as they arise, to respond to clients presenting with difficult and challenging issues in a way that respects them and upholds their dignity, and to ensure clients receive high quality care in our accommodation.

Community Case Worker

Community Case Workers provide an effective reintegration pathway for eligible clients who are exiting the Housing and Support Program. This is achieved through addressing the individual and complex transitional needs of each client through a responsive, tailored and flexible support approach, and providing intensive in reach (phase1) or outreach (phase 2) assistance to aid the transition of clients from intensive supports into living independently within in the community.

Forensic AOD Clinician

The onsite Forensic AOD Clinician undertakes AOD and mental health assessments and treatment of participants who are referred to the program. Interventions may be short term, episodic, individual or group based. Further duties of this position include report writing, referral to other services and liaising with other professionals and services located at the residence and within the community where appropriate (Mental Health, Non-Mental Health, Community-Based and Prison-Based, Forensic and Non-Forensic, Courts).

TRANSITION OUT PLANNING

Participant transitions through the different phases of the program involve a planned and documented process which is outlined at the commencement of placement and is reviewed regularly thereafter. Any Transition Plan includes the Housing and Support Program's role in the transition, and is based on the resident's skills, needs and participation in service activities and their achievement in agreed goals. Service links to housing, support, legal aid, mental health, life skills, and community-based support for sustainable solutions for independent living is facilitated.

After-care and crisis support post placement

The Housing and Support Program recognises that some participants may require a short-term intensive support model to allow a range of supporting treatment/referral and assessments to occur prior to reintegration back into the community. Such intensive programming aims to:

- Assist in mental health recovery.
- Work toward reduced risk of mental health relapse.
- Assist participants to develop the skills necessary to enable integration back into their communities and for independent living,
- Support maintenance of their housing tenancy.

Where exits are planned, the Team Leader coordinates maintenance support for exited clients for the first three months' post-service exit, in order to assist the transitional process from supported accommodation to independent living.