

Submission to the Vic Govt. Inquiry into Homelessness Summary & Recommendations

The Need

The lack of affordable housing for people on pensions and low income is the essential underlying problem. The market is not providing this and the public and community housing services are not meeting the need.

The appearance of homeless people in Frankston and surrounding suburbs continues. We estimate there is currently between 800-1000 people identifiable as homeless in Frankston each night. We meet them in the streets and meal centres and read about them in the housing agency reports and the waiting lists for public housing. It is a diverse range of people, some are staying with friends or family or sleeping in their cars or sleeping rough in bush reserves and unused buildings. Many are staying in commercial Rooming Houses. The majority are single and most are without a car. Once housed many will stay far longer than the crisis period. Some stay many months, even years. With no savings and no likelihood of public housing most have no better prospect. This situation has been apparent for over twenty years but the work to establish effective responses is yet to occur.

The Problem of commercial Rooming Houses as the dominant crisis housing referral option

There is virtually no accommodation on the market in Frankston affordable to people on low income apart from in commercial Rooming Houses. The Frankston 3199 postcode currently has 69 registered commercial Rooming Houses, up from 28 in 2014. Frankston has the fifth highest number of commercial Rooming Houses for a municipal area in Victoria. Most residents are unemployed and on centrelink benefits.

Frankston's commercial Rooming Houses are commonly ordinary domestic houses refurbished to have 6, 7 or more bedrooms. There is no in-house manager, bedrooms are independently leased for around \$250/rm/wk and residents share the kitchen and bathroom facilities. The homeless who seek accommodation assistance from the housing agencies in Frankston are commonly referred to commercial Rooming Houses.

Reviews and surveys by housing agencies and Frankston City Council into the local Rooming House sector consistently report they are crowded, expensive and frequently unsafe. They provide little capacity for low income residents to establish savings or progress their life and are unsuitable for most people needing crisis accommodation. The conclusion is they should be a last resort for crisis accommodation rather than the main option or only option.

Successful Local Responses for Crisis Housing

There are two local services that provide far better crisis accommodation. These services are superior because they have better facilities, are safer and better managed. These facilities are made available for homeless on pensions or very low income who need special care.

- the superior Rooming Houses run by WAYSS, a registered non-profit Housing Agency. They operate 3 Rooming Houses, are gender separated and charge \$130/room/wk.
- the Cabin Park at Seaford Beach, a small, well managed commercial park with 70 cabin units.

These services have existed for many years and are well known as preferred ahead of commercial Rooming Houses. They offer more reasonable rental price, better connection to support services, more dignity and importantly better life prospects for residents. A better service for the homeless individual and better service for the community outcome. Unsurprisingly vacancies in these facilities are rare.

Recommendations

1. Radically improve the options for Emergency Accommodation in Frankston.
 - a. Scale-up the two locally successful service models - Cabin Parks and non-commercial Rooming Houses.
 - b. Retain the existing cabin park which support permanent residents and accept crisis accommodation referrals.
 - c. Remove from its lease the requirement that Seaford Beach Cabin Park vacate its crown land.
 - d. Analyse housing agency data for usage rates of commercial Rooming Houses for crisis accommodation.
 - e. Re-establish the Rooming House Standards Taskforce
2. Significantly increase accommodation options affordable to those on low income.
 - a. Encourage development of small single bedroom units that will sell/rent at an affordable price.
 - b. Assist an increase in secondary dwellings by removing the 'dependant relative' restriction on Granny Flats.
 - c. Provide a substantial increase in capability and portfolio for both the public housing and the community housing programs. With increased focus on single person units.
 - d. Identify potential government owned land for new public/social/mixed housing, particularly those parcels scheduled for sale. Support its development in collaboration with local services and community.
 - e. If this Inquiry does not have the capability to significantly reduce the public housing waiting list, it consider recommending a Royal Commission into Public and Community Housing.