

Reporting: unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence

Acquitting against Recommendation 20 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence



Contents

Summary	3
Housing pathways among people affected by family violence	3
Key findings	4
Unmet demand in the homelessness service system	4
Unmet demand in the social housing service system	6
Actions for meeting housing demand	6
Data limitations and caveats	8
Limitations.....	8
Caveats and details	8

Summary

In 2015, the Family Violence Royal Commission (Royal Commission) was established. The role of the Royal Commission was to find ways to prevent family violence, improve support for victim survivors and hold perpetrators to account.

The Victorian Government committed to implementing all the Royal Commission's recommendations to improve Victoria's response to family violence. The Royal Commission provided its report, including 227 recommendations, to the Victorian Government on 29 March 2016.

Recommendation 20 suggested that the Victorian Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing report annually to the Parliamentary Committee on Family Violence on:

- the extent of unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence - including the average and range of current stays by women and children in crisis and transitional accommodation
- progress in meeting the benchmark of six weeks in crisis accommodation
- proposed actions for meeting the continuing housing demand from people affected by family violence.

While the parliamentary governance around the recommendations and their acquittal has evolved since the recommendations were made, the intent is clear.

This report, in conjunction with *Attachment 1: Data showing unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence – June 2021*, is the first instance of reporting against the unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence. As the Royal Commission suggested, this will become an annual report to the public.

This report and *Attachment 1: Data showing unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence – June 2021* should be read in conjunction. Together they cover Victoria's unmet housing demand across the homelessness and social housing system, for people affected by family violence, since July 2015. This report outlines the key findings, current data limitations and the Victorian Government's actions to meet the continuing housing demand from people affected by family violence.

Housing pathways among people affected by family violence

For a person affected by family violence, their ideal housing and associated services varies depending on personal circumstance. A range of housing responses are needed to meet the diversity of the cohort and their support needs. These include housing responses that do not require a built form, like the Safe-at-Home program, where support is provided to victim-survivors to safely remain in, or return to, their own homes and communities.

The demand and unmet demand outlined in this report for housing pathways are for both the built form and the support services that accompany the built form.

This report and *Attachment 1: Data showing unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence – June 2021* outline the unmet demand for four distinct types of housing/accommodation services.

Short-term and crisis accommodation

- This physical accommodation is refuges or crisis shelters, or non-supported emergency accommodation in hotels or rooming houses. Mental health, health and safety support services accompany these. Occupancy in these accommodation types can be for one night, such as in hotels/motels, or up to three months in refuges.

Medium-term and transitional accommodation

- These homes are tenanted for three to 18 months and are likely to take the form of single properties with a subsidised tenancy or occupancy agreement.

Long-term housing

- This housing form delivered by the homelessness system has similar built forms to medium-term and transitional accommodation but serve a different function; intended to enable the household to reside in the home for 18 months or more.

Social housing

- This housing type is delivered by public and community housing providers which own and manage housing, offering affordable rental and sustainability of tenure. These homes are long-term housing solutions that can be tailored to the safety, health and mental health needs of the households residing.

Key findings

Unmet demand in the homelessness service system

Data demonstrating demand and unmet demand in the homelessness service system is split up into that captured by specialist family violence support providers and data gathered by 'Other homelessness and family violence service providers'.

Specialist family violence support providers only provide support to victim-survivors and their dependants. As such, their reported client information only captures this cohort.

The category 'Other homelessness and family violence service providers' captures both general homelessness service providers and family violence services for perpetrators of violence. General homelessness service providers are not specialists in family violence. They provide support to all Victorians experiencing housing issues, including any persons affected by family violence regardless of whether they are a victim-survivor or perpetrator. As such, data reported through this 'Other homelessness and family violence service providers' category provides insight into a broader cohort of people affected by family violence.

Below are summaries of the unmet demand within the homelessness service system from July 2015 to June 2021. Greater detail is available at *Attachment 1: Data showing unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence – June 2021*.

Short-term and crisis accommodation unmet demand

The demand for short-term and emergency crisis accommodation, due to family violence, has varied from July 2015 to June 2021.

For specialist family violence service providers, the rate of unmet demand has fluctuated over this period from a low of 10 per cent in June 2016 and April 2017 to a high of 21 per cent in September 2020.

At the beginning of this period, in July 2015, there were 414 households who had their housing demand met, and 62 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 13 per cent. In June 2021, unmet demand was a similar figure: 14 per cent, but the volume was much higher. There were 642 households who had their housing demand met, and 101 who did not.

For other homelessness and family violence service providers, the rate of unmet demand has also fluctuated for people affected by family violence, from a low of 25 per cent in August 2020 to a high of 41 per cent in July 2017.

At the beginning of this period, in July 2015, there were 348 households who had their housing demand met by other homelessness and family violence service providers, 178 did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 34 per cent. Data in June 2021 shows how unmet demand returned to similar levels, but volume increased substantially. There were 908 households who had their housing demand met, and 423 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 32 per cent.

Medium-term and transitional housing unmet demand

The demand for medium-term and transitional housing, due to family violence, has varied from July 2015 to June 2021.

For specialist family violence service providers, the rate of unmet demand has fluctuated over this period from a low in August 2015 of 30 per cent to a high of 45 per cent in September 2020.

At the beginning of this period, in July 2015, there were 691 households who had their housing demand met, and 302 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 30 per cent. Data in June 2021 shows how unmet demand and volume increased substantially. There were 1,076 households who had their housing demand met, and 738 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 41 per cent.

For other homelessness and family violence service providers, the rate of unmet demand has fluctuated dramatically for people affected by family violence, from a low of 13 per cent in May 2016 to a high of 36 per cent in August 2017.

At the beginning of this period, in July 2015 there were 306 households who had their housing demand met by other homelessness and family violence service providers, and 56 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 15 per cent. Data in June 2021 shows that while demand for these services has decreased, the unmet demand rate is higher. There were 269 households who had their housing demand met, and 82 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 23 per cent.

Long-term housing unmet demand

The demand for long-term housing through the homelessness sector, due to family violence, has fluctuated from July 2015 to June 2021.

For specialist family violence service providers, the rate of unmet demand has changed dramatically over this period from a low in August 2015 of 47 per cent to a high of 80 per cent in March 2021.

At the beginning of this period, in July 2015, there were 109 households who had their housing demand met, and 122 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 53 per cent. Data in June 2021 shows how unmet demand and volume increased substantially. There were 76 households who had their housing demand met, and 280 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 79 per cent.

For other homelessness and family violence service providers, the rate of unmet demand has also varied for people affected by family violence, from a low of 70 per cent in September 2015 to a high of 82 per cent in December 2018.

At the beginning of this period, in July 2015 there were 217 households who had their housing demand met by other homelessness and family violence service providers, and 568 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 72 per cent. Data in June 2021 shows how unmet demand and volume increased.

There were 377 households who had their housing demand met, and 1,348 who did not, the equivalent unmet demand of 78 per cent.

Unmet demand in the social housing service system

Data demonstrating met and unmet demand in the social housing service system is gathered through the Victorian Housing Register (VHR).

Unlike with homelessness system data, we are unable to determine the monthly unmet housing demand of people affected by family violence as a percentage. This is due to the type of data collected through the VHR and the usual length of time spent on the waiting list for social housing.

However, we can discern unmet demand from the number of applications on the VHR in any given month that have remained unhoused as of June 2021. The unmet demand figures are broken down into two groups. The first set of data shows applications that were approved on the VHR priority list for the reason of family violence. The second set of data shows applications approved on the VHR's priority list or register of interest for another reason other than family violence, but where the applicant indicated a potential need for support related to family violence.

The demand for social housing due to family violence has fluctuated from September 2016 to June 2021.

The number of household applications approved on the VHR in September 2016, for reasons of family violence, that were unhoused by the public housing system as of June 2021, is 790. Also, in September 2016, there were an additional 767 applications approved on the VHR for another reason other than family violence, that indicated a need for support related to family violence, that were unhoused by the social housing system.

The volume of applicants on the VHR and those approved on the VHR has grown substantially over this time. As expected, wait times for the social housing system are significant and growing. In May 2021, there were 3,860 applications approved on the VHR where the applicant selected family violence as a reason for applying, that had not yet been housed the month later in June 2021. There were also 4,455 applications approved on the VHR in May 2021 for another reason other than family violence, that indicated a need for support related to family violence, that were unhoused by the social housing system by June 2021.

Greater detail is available at *Attachment 1: Data showing unmet housing demand among people affected by family violence – June 2021*.

Actions for meeting housing demand

Recommendation 20 also asks that the Victorian Government report on the proposed actions for meeting the continuing housing demand from people affected by family violence.

Since 2016, the Victorian Government:

- has acquired 325 social housing dwellings and head leased 401 medium-term tenancies from the private sector
- has prioritised family violence victim survivors and their families for social housing through the Victorian Housing Register
- is redeveloping 17 Homes Victoria owned family violence refuges to the 'core and cluster' model and constructing three new Aboriginal family violence refuges including a new Aboriginal family violence refuge in the Horsham region through a \$9.1 million investment announced in the 2021-22 State budget

- is providing over 6,500 flexible support packages each year to help victim survivors and supporting over 1,800 people with private rental assistance.

In November 2020, the Victorian Government announced the Big Housing Build, a landmark investment of \$5.3 billion into Victoria's social and affordable housing sector. It will deliver more than 12,000 new homes across Victoria including: 9,300 social housing dwellings; replacing 1,100 old social housing dwellings; and 2,900 new affordable homes so that low to moderate income Victorians can access homes close to work and education.

This comes on top of previous investment into social housing. An additional 1,000 public housing homes will be provided for 1,800 Victorians that are escaping family violence, and those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness through the *Building new homes to fight homelessness* program.

More than 1,000 new homes are being delivered through an innovative new Ground Lease Model, which is a partnership between community housing organisations, the private sector and the government. The first of its kind for social housing in Australia – the Government will lease land in Brighton, Flemington and Prahran to a consortium to build, operate and maintain housing on the sites for 40 years. The dwellings will replace 445 outdated social dwellings and be a mix of one, two, three and four-bedroom homes – catering for individuals, couples and families.

But the social and affordable housing challenge will require ongoing effort over many years, extending beyond the Big Housing Build.

That is why the Victorian Government is developing a new 10 Year Strategy for social and affordable housing in Victoria. We are committed to ensuring all Victorians have access to a safe, affordable and appropriate home.

The new strategy will establish the 10-year vision for social and affordable housing in Victoria and build on the success of the Big Housing Build and other investment to date by the Victorian Government. It will establish a view on what success looks like for people, enablers of the overall housing system, and importantly the actions we need to take to get there.

In developing the 10-year vision, the Minister for Housing launched a discussion paper to seek input from the public. We asked people to give us their views on what we should prioritise in the social and affordable housing system over the next 10 years.

We heard from you that housing must provide for the needs of everybody by making sure there are ranges of housing and support services available. We also heard that support and housing need are shaped by experiences, including family violence. We know we need to provide a range of housing pathways that enables people affected by family violence to live safely, securely and well.

The Victorian Government has also been working to ensure victim-survivors of family violence have a safe place to go and the support they need during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The \$150 million Homelessness to Home package aims to help people residing in emergency hotel accommodation due to COVID-19 with assistance to find long-term stable housing and a permanent way out of homelessness. A further \$16.9 million was announced in the 2021-22 Victorian State Budget to ensure all 1,845 households assisted in this program have access to housing and support packages. An additional \$66 million was also announced to support 250 families with children currently in emergency accommodation to secure stable housing and have the support they need to keep it.

The Victorian Government has provided \$40.2 million in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to assist in the response to COVID-19, significantly boosting existing family violence programs and services to keep family violence survivors safe and perpetrators in view including the provision of short-term accommodation for victim survivors.

Data limitations and caveats

Limitations

1. There may not be a standard application of recording 'people affected by family violence'. It is up to the case worker, service provider, support worker, housing officer or applicant to make this assessment. There is currently no way of standardising this across community sector and department-provided services. As such, making comparisons within and across data sets would be inaccurate.
2. The unit of measurement in all sets of data is households. This is to better understand the unmet need for accommodation/housing. This was achieved through proxy's (explained below) and is unlikely to be a true representation of households rather than individuals.
3. The introduction of The Orange Door has changed the way that family violence intake is reported. The first three locations of The Orange Door opened in May 2018 and began providing family violence intake and referral, instead of local homelessness-funded family violence services providing this response. Accordingly, the number of family violence intake clients reported in the Homelessness Data Collection has reduced in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing areas where The Orange Door services have opened, but not to the same degree.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unquantifiable but significant effect on family violence service demand and patterns of support-seeking. This may mean an under-representation or over-representation exists in the data collected on this cohort's housing needs.
5. Households may seek support from multiple agencies in a month to increase their perceived or actual likelihood of getting accommodation. These households would be counted more than once.
6. A household may request all three housing services (short-term/crisis accommodation, medium-term/transitional housing and long-term housing) at the same time from a general housing service or specialist family violence service. Consequently, the data would represent this as demand for three housing arrangements. As such, adding up the data across the three housing services provides an inaccurate picture of current built form housing demand.
7. Increased funding for services that assist people with their housing and family violence needs can also increase the capture and reporting of this cohorts' accommodation needs.
8. Funded agencies in the homelessness and family violence sectors may vary in the practice of recording a persons' needs for accommodation. For instance, whether a crisis family violence practitioner records just the immediate need for accommodation (such as a refuge bed for a victim-survivor in crisis) or also records that client's anticipated needs (for post-crisis medium-term/transitional accommodation or future long-term housing requirements). Consistent training is provided to workers in these agencies around data reporting, but differences are still evident.

Caveats and details

Data showing unmet demand within the homelessness sector

1. The data has been collected from Victoria homelessness-funded agencies through the Homelessness Data Collection. These agencies report the same data to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, a national collection managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Agencies include homelessness entry points, crisis accommodation, case

management, and specialist family violence agencies assisting women and children, as well as family violence agencies assisting men who use violence.

2. All records are from clients who were the head of their family unit (main client), were seeking assistance due to family violence, and needed accommodation or housing; short-term/crisis accommodation, medium term/transitional housing, or long-term housing.
3. These are mutually exclusive categories for each type of accommodation/housing, so can be summed. They indicate whether the need was able to be met *within the calendar month*. If the client presented at the end of the month, the need is more likely to have been unmet. Clients can need more than one service in a support period and month.
4. Only clients for whom agencies reported valid statistical linkage keys (SLKs - accurate and complete letters from name, date of birth, sex) were included.
5. Main clients were excluded if they were under 16 at the start of support. Children, if over 16, are counted as clients if they received a direct service such as assessment or accommodation. This is used as a proxy for counting at the household unit of demand.
6. When people have had 'Referral arranged' selected by a service provider in record data, this demand is counted as met. This may be assistance by the service to submit an application on the VHR or assistance securing tenure in the private rental market.
7. General homelessness service providers usually, but not always, provide support and referrals to housing pathways. However, family violence services for perpetrators of violence very rarely provide support and referrals to housing pathways, as their support focus is on behavioural reform and counselling. As such, some housing demand recorded from 'Other homelessness and family violence service providers' is always going to be unmet – as the provider registering the demand does not provide housing services nor referrals.

Data showing unmet demand in the social housing sector

1. For applicants who have been approved to the VHR for the reason of family violence, we count households who have been approved under 'special housing needs', 'priority transfers' or 'homeless with support'.
2. The data only counts primary applicants who have been approved rather than any applicant within a household who has either been approved for reasons of family violence or part of a household where there was an indication that support for reason of family violence may be needed. This is to avoid counting each member of a household as separate demand – this is a proxy for counting at the household unit of demand.
3. There are many reasons why an application is removed from the VHR. Including that they have been housed by the social housing system, that the applicant has not stayed in touch with the department, the applicant is no longer eligible for social housing or that their housing need has been met in an alternate way.