

Snapshot:

# **LGBTIQ+ Homelessness in Victoria**

Current approaches and  
framework for evaluating  
future initiatives

**VICTORIA**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

In 2017, a Gay and Lesbian Foundation of Australia Report on LGBTQ Homelessness in Victoria (McNair, Andrews, Parkinson, and Dempsey 2017)<sup>1</sup> (GALFA Report) contributed to growing evidence in Australia that:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse and queer (LGBTQ) people are more likely to experience homelessness compared to the general population;
- Stigma and discrimination are major drivers of homelessness within this population;
- The impacts of stigma, discrimination, and family rejection contribute to more complex pathways and barriers within the homelessness system for LGBTQ people;
- LGBTQ people experience specific safety risks within mainstream homelessness services;
- There are significant gaps in knowledge and inclusive practice among mainstream homelessness service providers; and
- Current data collection systems in the homelessness system are inadequate.

Building on the GALFA Report, the Department of Premier and Cabinet commissioned the authors to research and evaluate current LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Victoria and to prepare recommendations to guide potential future Victorian Government policy and investment to support LGBTIQ+ Victorians who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, as well as homelessness services (both LGBTIQ+ and mainstream) that support LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

**This snapshot provides a summary from the LGBTIQ+ Homelessness in Victoria report, prepared by Dr Cal Andrews and Prof David Dunt (the authors) for the Department of Premier and Cabinet, State Government of Victoria. The report highlights the current approaches, needs and gaps in efforts to address LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Victoria and provides a framework for evaluating future initiatives.**

*We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this work has taken place, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, and pay respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging.*

Reports on LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Australia emerged in the 1990s; the bulk of Australian research since then has been unpublished and qualitative, with little peer-reviewed, longitudinal and systematic research produced in Australia.<sup>2</sup> As is the case overseas, the majority of existing literature in Australia has concentrated on young LGBTQ people experiencing homelessness. Less is known about LGBTIQ+ adults, people with an intersex variation and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness.

For various reasons, including the inadequacy of current data collection systems and practices, it remains difficult to accurately determine the prevalence of LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Victoria and, at this stage, to draw clear conclusions about the situation within this State. However, key findings in the literature from Victoria and internationally (predominantly from North America) still provide a strong case for funding services and programs that are oriented to LGBTIQ+ people.

This is because LGBTIQ+ people, when compared to the general population:

- Are more at risk of homelessness, and over-represented within homeless populations;
- Often become homeless at a younger age;
- Are specifically at risk of homophobic and transphobic violence, harassment, and discrimination while on the streets and while accessing services; and
- Often have specific safety and support needs which are not being met within the mainstream homelessness system.

To explore current and proposed activities and approaches in responding to LGBTIQ+ homelessness within Victoria, the authors consulted with selected services, community organisations and government departments.

Key findings from these consultations include that:

- Many current and planned initiatives in Victoria are relatively recent and focus on working with victim survivors of family violence;
- There is a need for more LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice training that is tailored to specialist homelessness services and links in with current capacity building frameworks, considers different priority subpopulations and reaches services in rural and regional areas; and
- There is a need to provide more specialised services and workers who can support housing pathways for LGBTIQ+ people, to provide more support for community programs focused on marginalised groups and simultaneously support best practice and systems change in mainstream services so they are more inclusive, safe and accessible for LGBTIQ+ people.

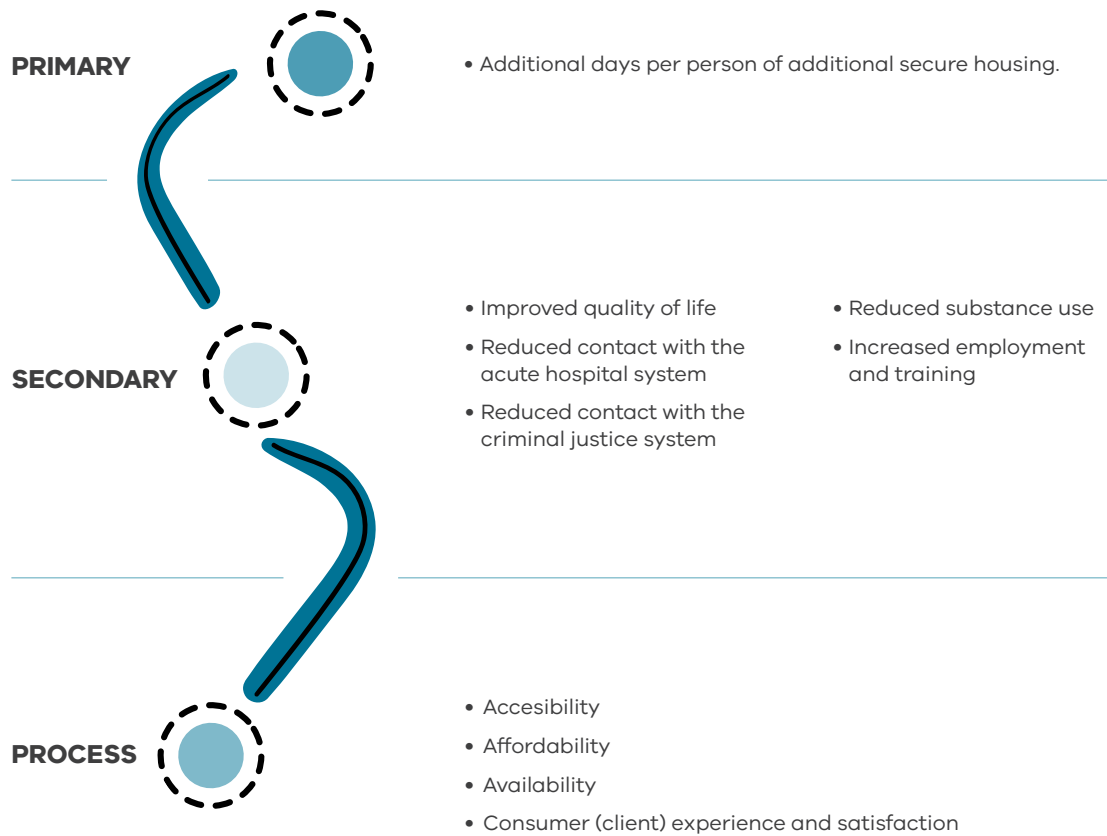
<sup>1</sup> McNair, R., C. Andrews, S. Parkinson, and D. Dempsey. 2017. LGBTQ Homelessness: Risks, Resilience, and Access to Services in Victoria – Final Report. Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Bletsas, A., and S. Oakley. 2013. Understanding the circumstances and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender questioning people who are homelessness in Australia: A scoping study. Positioning Paper. University of Adelaide, National Homelessness Research Partnership Program.

# FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING FUTURE INITIATIVES

There is some existing research literature focused on the economic analysis of Housing First homelessness programs;<sup>3</sup> however, the authors are not aware of any such analysis on LGBTIQ+ specific homelessness programs. To evaluate future initiatives, a two-stage value for money approach is proposed that involves:

**1. Establishing the value of the program**, including through a range of primary outcome, secondary outcome and other process measures, such as:



<sup>3</sup>Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritises providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues. Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation and that exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining housed and improving their life.

**2. Collecting cost data** to determine which initiatives constitute the best value for money within the Government's priority areas, focused on improving outcomes for LGBTIQ people who access homelessness services.

Based on analysis of the literature, the most commonly cited priorities are:

	<b>30-40%</b>	
<b>SPECIALISED LGBTIQ+ SERVICES</b>		Short, medium, and long-term accommodation for LGBTIQ+ people, with wraparound support, and responses tailored to specific and complex needs.
	<b>15-20%</b>	
<b>COMMUNITY PROGRAMS</b>		Address multiple layers of minority stress and discrimination, and support housing stability. Priority LGBTIQ+ subgroups: CALD, ATSI, disability, rural/regional, exiting care/institutions, TGDNB, bisexual, intersex, multifaitth, youth, aged/elder, HIV.
<b>LGBTIQ HOUSING WORKERS</b>		Support housing pathways through homelessness and housing systems, transitions between systems, and referrals to other supports. Located in mainstream services and community organisations.
<b>INCLUSIVE MAINSTREAM SERVICES</b>		LGBTIQ+ programs/resources, wholeof- organisation change, and facility re/development in short, medium, and long-term accommodation.
	<b>&lt; 10%</b>	
<b>RESEARCH AND EVALUATION</b>		Address critical and emergent knowledge gaps and build the evidence base for effective interventions and policy.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are categorised into i) services and programs, ii) research and iii) additional recommendations.

## Services and programs

1. Priority should be given to initiatives that clearly specify the value (based on primary, secondary and process outcomes), overall cost and evaluation/monitoring linked to objectives and measurable indicators.
2. Funded services should identify LGBTIQ+ people as a priority group in their strategies and have policies that explicitly address stigma and discrimination affecting LGBTIQ+ people.
3. Funded services should provide mandatory ongoing LGBTIQ+ cultural competency training for all staff and maintain inclusive data collection systems to systematically record relevant information for LGBTIQ+ people.
4. Funded services that are gender-specific or have gender-specific spaces should be inclusive of trans, gender diverse and non-binary people, and people with an intersex variation.
5. Initiatives should be prioritised that increase safety, privacy, accessibility and choice for LGBTIQ+ people in short, medium, and long-term accommodation.
6. Priority should be given to initiatives that are led by and/or developed in consultation with LGBTIQ+ people.
7. LGBTIQ+ housing workers should be recruited who have strong knowledge of LGBTIQ communities, specific needs and existing support, complex mental health, trauma, homelessness and housing sectors and who can facilitate referrals and housing pathways.
8. Priority should be given to initiatives that consider intersectionality and target priority subgroups (for example, LGBTIQ+ people who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, of a faith background, young, old, living with a disability, living with HIV, living in rural or regional areas or exiting care or institutions).
9. Funding should be distributed to initiatives across all age groups.
10. Funding should be distributed to different housing models.
11. Priority should be given to initiatives that provide wraparound support.
12. Initiatives focused on working with families should apply an inclusive understanding of family.

## Research

13. Funded research should include data on sexual orientation, gender, and intersex variation.
14. Priority should be given to research that is:
  - a. Focused on experiences of homelessness among LGBTIQ+ people who have an intersex variation, are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders, are culturally and linguistically diverse, have recently arrived in Australia, are living with a disability, are exiting care or institutions, are of a faith background, are older adults, are international students, live in rural or regional areas or fall into other vulnerable subgroups;
  - b. Led by or collaborating with the target group;
  - c. Intersectional in its approach;
  - d. Combining qualitative and quantitative data;
  - e. Evaluating experiences and outcomes of different models or interventions;
  - f. Focused on early intervention, and pathways through the homelessness system, including transitions between short-, medium- and long-term housing; and/or
  - g. Focused on State-wide, national, and longitudinal trends.

## **Additional recommendations**

15. **Recommendation:** Additional government funding should be allocated to increase support for LGBTIQ+ people within and exiting the child protection and criminal justice systems.
16. **Recommendation:** Additional government funding should be allocated to providing ongoing opportunities for diverse LGBTIQ+ representation to inform homelessness policy development (options could include a working group or sub-committee and annual state forum).

