



27 February 2024

Commissioners  
Yoorrook Justice Commission  
Locked bag 7777  
Collingwood VIC 3066

Dear Commissioners,

The Council to Homeless Persons welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission Inquiry into Housing and Homelessness.

Council to Homeless Persons is the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with a commitment to ending homelessness.

As an organisation, we long acknowledged that the significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the numbers of people without a home is a direct and enduring consequence of colonisation.

We envisage an Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is meaningfully achieved and where the structural forces that can lead to homelessness do not impact disproportionately on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our vision requires strong and well-resourced Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) that are empowered to develop and deliver unique, responsive solutions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples without a home.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in conjunction with the Victorian Government and the Specialist Homelessness Services sector, are aligned in their consensus: self-determination stands as the essential pathway to mitigating the alarmingly elevated homelessness rates experienced by this community in Victoria.

The most recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare release of its specialist homelessness services annual report summarises the experience of service users receiving support from specialist homelessness services throughout 2022–23 highlights a record rate of Aboriginal Victorians seeking help for homelessness as frontline services hit breaking point.

Last year, one in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians attending a homelessness service each year, in comparison to one in every 80 non-Aboriginal Victorian. This sadly is a record high and completely unacceptable.



While the Australian Bureau of Statistics have identified higher rates of homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in other States and Territories (see Figure 1 below), homelessness service data shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria are far more likely to access homelessness assistance, at a rate of 1,837 people using homelessness per 10,000, compared to a national figure of 812 per 10,000.

**Figure 1. Rate of homelessness per 10,000 people, by Indigenous status, ABS Census**

	NSW	vic	ld	SA	A	T	CT	ust	
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander(d)	0.2	168.9	201.0	326.8	380.9	81.8	1,864.5	140.8	306.8
Non-Indigenous	37.6	38.5	33.2	30.2	22.4	36.5	68.5	30.5	34.9
Not stated	120.3	203.1	79.7	143.2	64.6	107.5	351.6	211.4	129.6
Total homeless persons	173.4	471.4	435.5	417.7	366.6	425.7	563.6	391.1	412.2

This administrative data, comprising information from every homelessness service user in Victoria shows that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience homelessness younger than the general homelessness service user cohort. 21 per cent of Aboriginal homelessness service users are aged 15-24 (compared with 15 per cent of non-Aboriginal consumers). 52 per cent are under the age of 30, compared to 43 per cent of non-Aboriginal service users.
- A greater share of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness service users present as part of a lone-person household (72 per cent, compared to 67 per cent for non-Aboriginal service users).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using homelessness services are more likely to have already been made homeless by the time they seek homelessness assistance (44 per cent compared to 37 per cent for non-Aboriginal service users).
- The main reason Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers identify as behind their presentation to homelessness services are the same. The top 5 reasons for presenting (in order: domestic and family violence, housing crisis / eviction, inadequate or inappropriate accommodation, financial difficulties, and housing affordability stress) all have less than 2 per cent difference in the share of presentations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients.
- While a slightly smaller share of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness service users identify domestic and family violence as the main reason behind their presentation to a homelessness service (31 per cent compared to 33 per cent for non-Aboriginal consumers), a greater share of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers



identify family violence as contributing to their homelessness – 51 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers disclose family violence, compared to 45 per cent for other consumers.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness service users are more likely to identify having complex needs concurrent with their homelessness, including Alcohol or substance misuse (15 per cent, compared to 8 per cent for non-Aboriginal clients), and mental health needs regardless of diagnosis (39 per cent compared to 33 per cent).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness service users are slightly more likely to attend homelessness services directly from exiting care (2.6 per cent, compared to 2.0 per cent), or directly from exiting incarceration (5.6 per cent, compared to 3.9 per cent). These numbers are likely under-representations for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients, as many people find a temporary solution after leaving care or custody, prior to seeking homelessness support.

As you have acknowledged in your issues paper, in 2022, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum (VAHFF) consisting of Aboriginal community-controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Traditional Owner groups (TOs) and Aboriginal Trusts with an interest in housing and homelessness released the Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system in Victoria. The Blueprint sets out a compelling case and builds on *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort*: the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework.

As the peak body for homelessness services in Victoria, we want to see the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort* Every Aboriginal Person has a home be adopted, funded and implemented in full.

Greater funding and support to empower ACCOs to deliver homelessness services will not only result in more homelessness support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians, but also better outcomes. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are shown to be highly effective not only at tailoring services to clients, but at improving outcomes for their consumers.

Sincerely,



Deborah Di Natale  
Chief Executive Officer

