

# Better addressing homelessness among Aboriginal people in Victoria

Dr Duncan Rouch

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## Executive Summary

### Issues

Substantial numbers of Aboriginal households remain on the Victorian Housing Register, 5,611 in June 2024, which remain substantially over-represented on the waiting list compared to the proportion of Aboriginal people in the Victorian population.

Further, given that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Victorian population was 1.0 percent in 2021 (up from 0.8 percent in 2016), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are strongly over-represented on the waiting list, and have been more heavily affected by homelessness than non-Indigenous people.

Aboriginal Housing Victoria has been chronically underfunded, so unable to meet the substantial demand for social housing for socioeconomically disadvantaged Aboriginal households in Victoria.

Governments have failed to address persistent and intergenerational poverty for socioeconomically disadvantaged Indigenous people and other socioeconomically disadvantaged people, that increase the risk of homelessness for these people.

### Recommendations

The government shall make public annual targets for social housing investment to house all Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register within the next five years.

I have elsewhere published recommendations to better address persistent and intergenerational poverty (Rouch 2024). Aboriginal people, and other people, in long-term poverty, shall be aided to reach their full potential, including social and financial independence, whenever possible.

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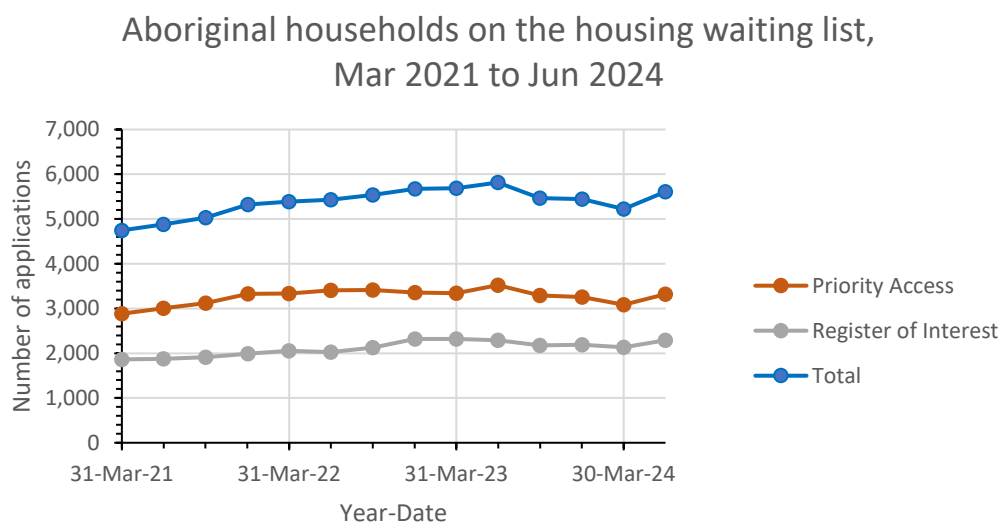
## Introduction

In this report I discuss key issues related to homelessness of Aboriginal people; the number of Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register, the number and nature of homeless Indigenous people, and chronic underfunding of Aboriginal Housing Victoria. I then briefly discuss how to do better, and present key recommendations.

## Key issues

### Aboriginal households on the waiting list

The number of Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) increased from 4,747, in March 2021 to 5,815 in June 2023, an increase of 22.5 percent, while slightly decreasing to 5,222 by March 2024, then increasing to 5,611 in June 2024, Figure 1.



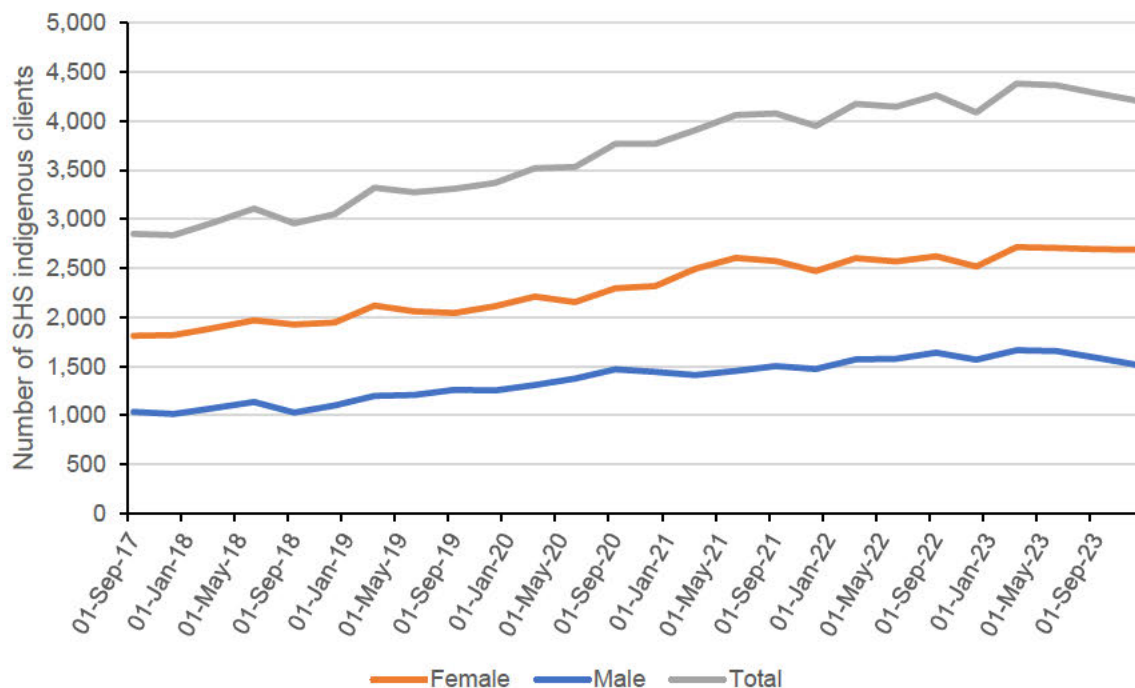
**Figure 1. Number of Aboriginal households on the housing waiting list, Mar 2021 to Jun 2024.**

Data: (Homes Victoria 2016-2024).

Critically, the proportion of Aboriginal households in the waiting list has continued to increase since March 2021. In March 2021 the number of Aboriginal households was 9.3 percent of the total waiting list, rising to 10.9 percent of the total waiting list in June 2024. Similarly, the number of Aboriginal households was 10.5 percent of the priority access list in March 2021, rising to 11.9 percent of the priority access list in June 2024. These rising numbers indicate the failure of the government to effectively fund Aboriginal Housing Victoria, to provide sufficient dwellings to meet the ongoing demand.

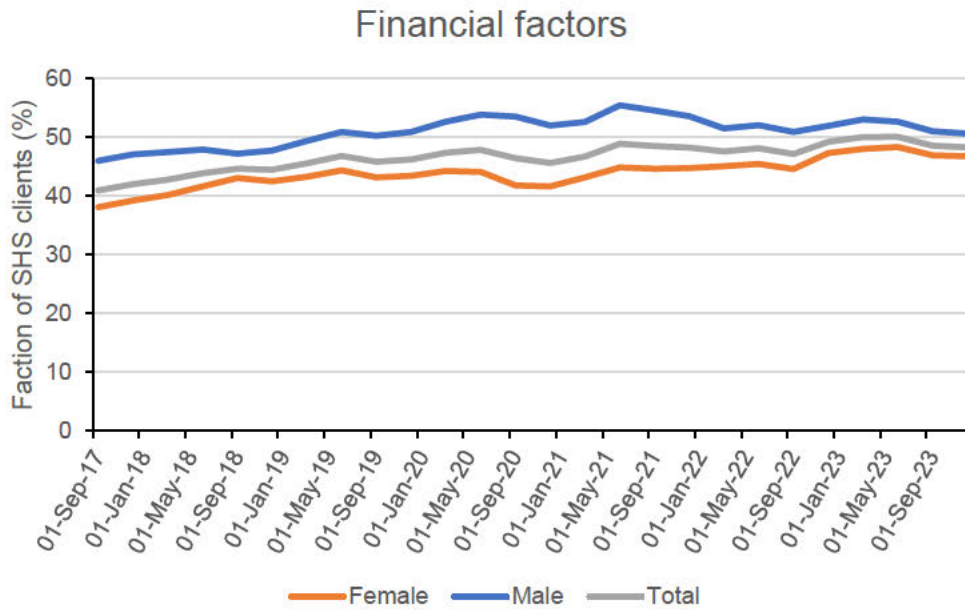
### Homeless Indigenous people

Critically, the number of Indigenous people in Victoria that are homeless or substantially at risk of homelessness has significantly increased since September 2017, from 2,850 to 4,206 in December 2023, an increase of 47.6 percent, Figure 2. Further, the fraction of Indigenous SHS clients among all SHS clients has increased from 9.3 percent in September 2017 to 13.4 percent in December 2023. This trend correlates with increasing numbers of Indigenous people on the housing waiting list, Figure 1. Also, Indigenous women are the majority proportion, 63.9 percent (2,689), of Indigenous clients, compared to 36.1 percent (1,517) of Indigenous men, in December 2023, Figure 2.

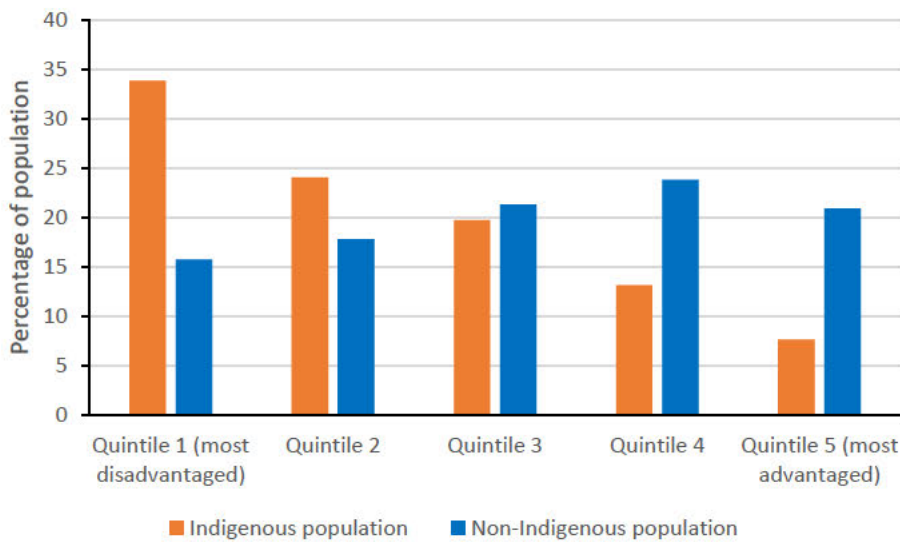


**Figure 2. Numbers of Indigenous clients for Specialist Homelessness Services in Victoria, by gender, September 2017 to December 2023.** SHS; Specialist Homelessness Service. Data plotted for the month at the end of each quarter. Data source (AIHW 2024).

It is most likely that the trend for increasing financial risk factors, Figure 3, has more heavily impacted on Indigenous communities in Victoria, compared to other social groups at risk of homelessness, due to having more disadvantaged members compared to non-Indigenous communities. Consistent with this conclusion is that there are substantially more Indigenous people with low socioeconomic backgrounds than for non-Indigenous people, in Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) quintiles, 1 and 2, in Victoria, Figure 4. In SEIFA quintile 1, most disadvantaged, there are one third (33.8 percent) of members of the Indigenous population, compared to only around one sixth (15.7 percent) of members of the non-Indigenous population.



**Figure 3. Fractions of SHS clients at risk of homelessness due to financial factors, by gender, Victoria, September 2017 to December 2023.** SHS; Specialist Homelessness Service. Data plotted for the month at the end of each quarter. Data source (AIHW 2024).



**Figure 4. Population distribution by SEIFA advantage/disadvantage quintiles, by Indigenous status, Victoria, 2016.** SEIFA, Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas. Data source (AIHW 2020).

**Chronic underfunding of Aboriginal Housing Victoria**

The Aboriginal Housing Victoria organisation is supposed to provide community dwellings for disadvantaged Aboriginal households that need low rental payments, commonly 30 percent of income, and well below market rates. Yet, there has been a trend of increase numbers of Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing register and increasing numbers of Indigenous people requiring homelessness services.

Critically, the proportion of Aboriginal households in the waiting list has continued to increase since March 2021. In March 2021 the number of Aboriginal households was 9.3 percent of the total waiting list, rising to 10.7 percent of the total waiting list in December 2023. Similarly, the number of Aboriginal households was 10.5 percent of the priority access list in March 2021, rising to 11.8 percent of the priority access list in December 2023. Therefore, Aboriginal Housing Victoria has been chronically underfunded, so unable to meet the substantial demand for social housing for socioeconomically disadvantaged Aboriginal households in Victoria.

Further, given that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Victorian population was 1.0 percent in 2021 (up from 0.8 percent in 2016), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been more heavily affected by homelessness than non-Indigenous people, and so have a greater need for public or community housing.

### Analysis

The rising numbers of disadvantaged Aboriginal households waiting for Aboriginal community dwellings indicate the failure of the government to effectively fund Aboriginal Housing Victoria, to provide sufficient dwellings to meet the ongoing demand. However, as Aboriginal Housing Victoria has been some level of funding by the government, there has not been any public requests by Aboriginal Housing Victoria for increased funding to address actual needs. The managers of Aboriginal Housing Victoria appear to have been kept quiet on needs due to some level of funding by the government. That is, having a degree of government funding means they may feel they should support the government, and so be reluctant to publicly complain about the lack of funding to fully meet needs. Also, likely the government has said to the managers something like that funding for public and community housing remains tight, with an ambiguous promise that increasing funds may be available some time in future.

### Doing better

I have estimated that an around \$1,287 million investment is required to house all Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register, Appendix A.

The government shall also address all factors that keep socioeconomically disadvantaged Indigenous people and other socioeconomically disadvantaged people in persistent and intergenerational poverty (Rouch 2024), that increase the risk of homelessness for these people. Instead, these disadvantaged people shall be aided to reach their full potential, including social and financial independence, whenever possible.

### Recommendations

The government shall make annual targets for social housing investment to house all Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register within the next five years.

I have elsewhere published recommendations to better address persistent and intergenerational poverty (Rouch 2024). Aboriginal people, and other people, in long-term poverty, shall be aided to reach their full potential, including social and financial independence, whenever possible.

## Acknowledgement

This report was assembled on the country of the Aboriginal tribes Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung (Wurundjeri) of the Kulin Nation. I acknowledge the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung (Wurundjeri) peoples as the first human custodians of the land, each with their own culture, language, law, and sustainable society.

## References

- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2020) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2020 online data tables, 2.09 Index of disadvantage, viewed 8 February 2024, <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-09-index-disadvantage/data>.
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- Homes Victoria (2016-2024) Victorian Housing Register, <https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/applications-victorian-housing-register-vhr>.
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## Appendix A Estimating construction costs to house all Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register

Dr Duncan Rouch

Construction costs per dwelling were estimated from construction costs per metre for different types of houses and apartments (BMTQS 2024). Costs per metre were then multiplied by the average areas for each type of house (Taylor 2022) and apartment (NSW Department of Planning and Environment 2015). For simplicity, further estimations shown here were based on apartment buildings.

The number of bedrooms, so size of apartment, required by households on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) were taken for June 2024, latest data, and converted to percentages, Table A1. Then the percentages of each number of bedrooms required was multiplied by the number of Aboriginal households on the VHR, 5,611, to determine the number of Aboriginal households requiring each size of home. These numbers were then multiplied by the costs for each size of apartment.

For building 4-8 storeys apartment buildings, to house all Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register, the estimated construction cost was \$1,287 million. Land costs are not included as it assumed that the government will provide crown land for this purpose.

**Table A1 number of bedrooms required by households on the VHR, June 2024**

Number of bedrooms	Number of households	Percentage
1 bedroom	32328	62.6
2 bedrooms	10096	19.6
3 bedrooms	6731	13.0
4 bedrooms	1893	3.7
5 or more bedrooms	554	1.1
Total	51602	100.0

Data source (Homes Victoria 2016-2024).

**Table A2 Estimating total costs to house all Aboriginal households on the Victorian Housing Register in apartment buildings**

Number of bedrooms	Proportional need (percent)	Number of households	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Cost per apartment			4-8 storeys Total cost
				3 storeys	4-8 storeys	8 or more storeys	
				(Cost per m <sup>2</sup> \$3,315)	(Cost per m <sup>2</sup> \$3,717)	(Cost per m <sup>2</sup> \$4,154)	
1	62.6	3,515	50	\$165,750	\$185,850	\$207,700	\$653,303,729
2	19.6	1,098	70	\$232,050	\$260,190	\$290,780	\$285,636,483
3	13.0	732	90	\$298,350	\$334,530	\$373,860	\$244,843,396
4	3.7	206	102	\$338,130	\$379,134	\$423,708	\$78,039,968
5	1.1	60	114	\$377,910	\$423,738	\$473,556	\$25,525,891
Total	100	5,611					\$1,287,349,467

## References

BMTQS (2024) How much does it cost to build a house in 2024? Viewed 3 October 2024, <https://www.bmtqs.com.au/construction-cost-table>.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment (2015) Apartment Design Guide, Part 4 Designing the building, viewed 3 October 2024, <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/apartment-design-guide-part-4-designing-the-building.pdf>.

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