

# Reimagining Social Housing for Young People

MCM Submission to 10 Year  
Social and Affordable  
Housing Strategy  
April 2021

**mcm.**  
melbourne city mission  
*your future, your way*

# ABOUT MCM

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) is a community service organisation that provides a range of supports to people who are experiencing different forms of disadvantage across Melbourne.

Our vision is to contribute to a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources. We work alongside people and communities to provide long-term, sustainable pathways away from disadvantage.

MCM has more than 80 programs which span multiple service systems, including homelessness, disability, early childhood education and care, health (home-based palliative care), mental health, and education and training. MCM also run the Hester Hornbrook Academy, an independent specialist school providing education and wrap-around supports to over 240 students across campuses in the CBD, Sunshine and Prahran.

MCM has made the commitment to implement a systems-level, whole of organisation approach to trauma informed healing-oriented care. A 'Healing Oriented Framework' has been developed by MCM to promote the physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual health and wellbeing; cultural inclusion and ongoing safety of people in contact with MCM. MCM maintains a holistic view of individuals, families and communities in their ongoing process of healing.

MCM provides a range of homelessness supports to young people, and adults and families, through a workforce of over 185 frontline case managers. Services provided by MCM include:

- Frontyard Youth Services – provides a range of integrated supports to young people aged 12 to 24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including support with housing, health, mental health, legal issues, Centrelink, employment and living skills. Frontyard operates the only State-wide specialist access point for young people aged 16-24 seeking to access the Homelessness Services system, including an 18 bed CBD-based crisis accommodation service for complex young people experiencing rough sleeping.
- Four Youth Refuge programs across the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne which provide short-term accommodation to over 600 young people each year.
- Youth Foyer Programs that provide intensive case management and fully furnished medium term accommodation to young people for up to 2 years.
- Early intervention programs in Sunshine, Frankston and Shepparton supporting over 594 young people to remain connected to family, school, and their community, and in housing each year.
- Short and long-term support to assist over 848 adults and family households to find and keep long-term housing each year.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF OUR LAND



Melbourne City Mission acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and note that this document was developed on the lands of the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the culture, dreams, and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are the true custodians of the land upon which we live and work.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Never has the need for a safe, secure and affordable home been so pressing than during the COVID crisis. Our collective health has been reliant on finding appropriate housing for everyone, and the lack of social housing has been acutely felt. Having a home is critical for people's mental and physical health, their education and employment opportunities, and their ability to fully participate in society.

MCM welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Victorian Government's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy (**Strategy**) Discussion Paper and congratulates the Victorian Government's significant investment of \$5.3 billion in social and affordable housing.

Despite the significant injection of stock under the Big Housing Build, the overall scale of the challenge facing homeless young people in Victoria will be broadly unchanged unless a supported housing system is created for young people that ensures access to a home that is safe and secure with appropriate supports in place, providing them with a pathway to independence.

## The Challenge

The social housing system is designed for adults and adult problems. Young people have different experiences of homelessness and support needs and they regularly fail to benefit from adult focused services. The current system in Victoria is funded with a focus on responding to the initial crisis by providing short-term support and accommodation, leaving a young person with very few exit pathways out of homelessness.

***“Mental illness, trauma and family violence create homelessness. Unaffordable housing maintains it.”*** – MCM Homelessness Support Worker

Homelessness during adolescence means

disconnection from supportive and nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers that enable young people to build the confidence and capability to transition to an independent adulthood. The absence of these supports in early adulthood creates a high pressure environment in which young people are forced into survival mode, and don't have the luxury of years to develop coping strategies, emotional regulation and problem-solving skills.

That said, most housing options and support services provided in Victoria assume that a person has developed independent living skills and are experiencing a momentary crisis, and as a result, young people's ability to sustain their housing remains highly problematic.

Nationally, young people experiencing homelessness are only 2.9% of main tenants in social housing, despite that they make up about half (54%) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services. The current business model of mainstream social housing means that providers are often reluctant to accept young people because of their low and insecure incomes (including Centrelink and entry level wages) and because they are regarded as risky tenants.

Housing placements available to young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Victoria are not meeting the current level of demand. It is estimated that there are 7,000 young people in Victoria experiencing or at risk of homelessness seeking medium to long-term housing, whose needs are not being met. Without effective intervention, this group will go on to require a high level of support across a range of public services.

Through the delivery of Victoria's Big Housing Build and Strategy, the government has a real opportunity to create a supported, youth-specific housing system that is transitional, to ensure young people can access social

housing with the levels of support that they need to transition from crisis to independence. This includes reform to Victoria’s outdated transitional housing system – a system that is still operating as it was in the 1990s.

## The Solution

This submission aims to conceptualise a supported, youth-specific housing system that

moves away from an adult system with ad hoc youth elements and provides a pathway to independence. This submission does not attempt to comment on all areas of the social housing system (including transitional housing) but seeks to draw the government’s attention to some of the challenges and opportunities that MCM believe should be prioritised.

MCM recommends 9 overarching Actions to be included in the Strategy:

PATHWAYS	COMMUNITIES	GROWTH	PARTNERSHIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adjust the social housing rent model for young people</li> <li>● Quarantine 1,120 dwellings from Big Housing Build for supported youth housing</li> <li>● Make available integrated housing and therapeutic support for young people</li> <li>● Expand the number and variety of medium-term supported housing models (2-4 years) for young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthen place-based networks and pro-social connections</li> <li>● Design social housing properties for young people based on a therapeutic framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a shared Housing Outcomes Framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish a Social Housing Youth Advisory Group</li> <li>● Improve transparency and access to shared data</li> </ul>

MCM also strongly recommends that the Strategy be underpinned by a whole of government early intervention into youth homelessness strategy to improve diversion pathways away from the housing system that ensures all young people across Victoria can access supports before their situation escalates to crisis. In Victoria, there are several place-based early intervention programs in select locations, such as Reconnect, the Geelong Project and Detour, however, these are not available to all young people across the state.

Victoria’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan only provides support for early intervention for young people in the Out of Home Care system. To date, early intervention across the youth homelessness cohort has never been invested in as a policy setting in Victoria.

This submission has been developed in consultation with young people. MCM would like to thank and acknowledge the young people who showed incredible resilience and allowed us to share their stories. MCM policy submissions to Royal Commissions into Mental Health and Family Violence, and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness should be read in conjunction with this submission.

MCM provides endorsement of the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance paper ‘Make Social Housing Work: A Framework for Victoria’s Public and Community Housing 2020 – 2030’. MCM also recognises the right to self-determination and provides endorsement of submissions made by Aboriginal housing organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations.

# SECTION 1: PATHWAYS TO ACCESSING, SUSTAINING AND MOVING BETWEEN DIFFERENT HOUSING

## Remove young people’s financial barriers to accessing housing

Housing in Victoria is particularly difficult for young people to access due to their low incomes. Young people, whose incomes, whether from Centrelink payments, or from entry level wages, are considerably lower than that of an adult.

Anglicare Australia’s Rental Affordability Snapshot 2018 identified that there were no properties available that would be affordable for a single person on Newstart. This makes affordability for young people particularly pertinent – the Unable to Live at Home Youth Allowance for a young person is \$512.50 per fortnight which is approximately 20% less than those on Newstart Allowance.

A constant challenge of the Youth Housing sector is young people’s capacity to pay the

amount of rent required to run and maintain a property under the current social rent models. Social housing, provided by registered Housing Associations and Community Housing Providers, is not geared toward providing housing to young people as rent is calculated based on tenant or household income and is generally set at 25% of income. Social housing providers have reported that they struggle to house young people for financial reasons, as young people’s lower incomes make them less financially viable for providers, as a result, very few young people are housed compared to other community cohorts.

The below table outlines the maximum rate of Unable to Live at Home Allowance (UTLAH) for a single person per fortnight and compares this amount to the amount considered to be in poverty<sup>1</sup>.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE		SOCIAL HOUSING RENTAL CHARGES (25%)	MONEY IN POCKET AFTER RENT	HENDERSON POVERTY LINE – MAR QUARTER 2020 – ‘OTHER THAN HOUSING \$ PER F/N’
Single person – Youth Allowance (UTLAH) rate per f/n	\$512.50	\$128.13	\$384.00	\$739.34
Single person – Youth Allowance (UTLAH) rate per day	\$36.61	\$9.15	<b>\$27.43</b>	<b>\$50.91</b>

1 Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic and Social Research, Poverty Lines Australia, March Quarter 2020 [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/3450025/Poverty-Lines-Australia-March-2020.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3450025/Poverty-Lines-Australia-March-2020.pdf)



Young people's rental contributions are constrained by their income. Calculations of what they can feasibly pay, should consider their unique financial circumstances and how payment will position them in relation to the poverty line.

The Victorian government should develop a strategy to remove young people's financial barriers to accessing social housing, including reconsideration of the percentage level of income-based rent a young person should pay based on their lower incomes. This could be done by adjusting the social housing subsidy model so that the gap between the young person's contribution and the rent that is required by the landlord (Community Housing Provider or private landlord) is covered by a youth homelessness or housing subsidy paid by the Victorian government.

Subsidy models have been in use in Victoria most recently as part of the 'Housing Blitz' and were employed to rapidly house women and children escaping family violence, and adults who had experienced chronic homelessness. The NSW My Foundations and Rent Choice models, that are targeted specifically to young people, also employ subsidies that reduce over time (however, more research needs to be

undertaken to evaluate the 'step-down subsidy' model in terms of sustained outcomes for young people).

The Victorian government should also consider the provision of fully funded rental models to support young people with complex needs, to access and sustain social housing. Fully funded models, whereby a young person is not required to contribute rent, will support sustainable housing outcomes (including pathways to independence and transition to the private rental market) for arguably Victoria's most vulnerable individuals.

### **ACTION 1: Adjust the social housing rent model for young people**

**The Victorian government should adjust the social housing rent model for young people in order to remove the financial barriers to accessing and sustaining housing. This could be done by the introduction of a youth homelessness or housing subsidy and/or provision of fully funded rental models to support young people with complex and multiple barriers to housing.**

## Quarantining stock for supported youth housing

While removing financial barriers for young people to access and sustain social housing is critical, there is a further need to quarantine a proportion of housing stock for young people as they are often regarded as risky tenants due to their lack of experience and rental history and an assumption that they will not care for the property.

### Youth homelessness in Victoria

6,373 young people were counted as homeless in Victoria on 2016 Census night. This represents 25% of the total 24,817 Victorian people counted as homelessness, making young people over-represented in homelessness statistics relative to other age groups<sup>2</sup>.

However, a considerably higher number of young people access homelessness services each year than is captured in the snapshot Census homelessness figures. In Victoria, 13,800 young people aged 15-24 presented alone (i.e. not as part of a family group) seeking assistance

from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2018-2019<sup>3</sup>, which made up more than 12% of all SHS clients.

### Supply of and demand for housing placements in Victoria

The Victorian government's \$5.3 billion commitment to build over 12,000 units of social and affordable housing over the next four years is a significant investment that will go a long way in addressing Victoria's housing challenges and unblocking the homelessness system. The planned increase in housing stock however, represents less than 10% of the estimated shortfall in social and affordable housing in Victoria.

Table 2 below provides estimates of the housing needs for young people in Victoria. The AIHW defines a young person as any client aged 15-24 who presented to a specialist homelessness agency alone in their first support period. The estimates below are based on the proportion of Australia's homeless population that reside within Victoria.

	<b>Need identified</b>	<b>Provided or referred</b>	<b>Gap</b>
Short-term housing	5,800	3,800	2,000
Medium-term/transitional housing	5,300	2,400	2,900
Long-term housing	5,800	1,600	4,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,900</b>	<b>7,800</b>	<b>9,100</b>

Source: AIHW 2018-19, Supplementary Data Table YOUNG.<sup>3</sup>

2 [https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Victoria\\_-\\_updated\\_Jan\\_2014.pdf](https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Victoria_-_updated_Jan_2014.pdf). It is noted that Census data provides a snapshot of the homelessness numbers on a given night and most likely underestimates young people couch surfing or staying with friends.

3 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/client-groups-of-interest/young-people-presenting-alone>

4 SVA estimate. 32% of Australia's homeless population is in Victoria and it is assumed the proportion of homelessness is consistent across age groups.



Approximately 3% of social housing in Australia is allocated to young people aged 15-24<sup>5</sup>. If this allocation is applied to the Big Housing Build, the initiative will increase the supply of long-term housing for young people by approximately 370 dwellings, filling ~9% of the long-term housing gap for this age group<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the welcome injection of stock under the Big Housing Build, the overall scale of the challenge facing young people experiencing homelessness will be broadly unchanged unless a proportion of the new social housing stock is quarantined for young people. The proportion of stock allocated to young people should be in line with Victorian SHS data (which currently shows young people make up at least 12% of all SHS clients<sup>7</sup>). Victorian SHS data has been selected as a benchmark rather than the significantly higher percentage of young people counted on the 2016 Census night (being 25%), to acknowledge other early intervention programs to address youth homelessness (e.g. family reconciliation). It is important to note, that a 12% allocation (being 1,120 dwellings) represents approximately 16% of the estimated shortfall of medium to long-term housing for young people in Victoria.

As discussed earlier in this submission, it is envisaged that a social housing system for young people comprises a stable medium-term tenure (up to 5 years) and wrap-around support,

with the intention that the young person be supported within that period to build up the skills to live independently and transition into private rental. This medium-term or transitional housing model differs from the longer-term or 'permanent' social housing model, designed for adults. A medium-term housing model for young people also sits outside the outdated 12-week transitional housing model that exists in Victoria.

In order to ensure that young people benefit from the 9,300 new social housing stock that will be delivered by Victoria's Big Housing Build, at least 12%, or approximately 1,120 social housing dwellings should be quarantined for young people and matched with appropriate support. The Victorian government could identify 1,120 dwellings and put them in a youth specific transitional housing system.

### **ACTION 2: Quarantine stock for supported housing for young people**

**In order to ensure that young people benefit from Victoria's Big Housing Build, at least 12%, or approximately 1,120 social housing dwellings should be quarantined for young people and matched with appropriate support. The Victorian government could identify 1,120 dwellings and put them in a 'youth specific' medium to longer term transitional housing system.**

5 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/hou/296/housing-assistance-in-australia-2018/contents/social-housing-dwellings>

6 370 dwellings might accommodate up to 900 young people, assuming dwellings are 2.5 bedroom on average and that young people share houses.

7 The 2018-2019 year has been selected given the impact of COVID-19 on 2019-2020 data

## An integrated housing and therapeutic support framework

While making more social housing available is a critical first step, there's a further need to connect young people with models of supported housing that are appropriate for their needs. In other words, while housing may end an individual episode of homelessness, good case management and support breaks the cycle and provides a pathway to independence.

It is therefore important to recognise the characteristics of youth homelessness, and how it differs from adult homelessness. Young people who become homeless at an early age are forced to take on a range of adult responsibilities, without having been given the time and support to develop the knowledge and skills required, including how to maintain a property and their tenancy rights and responsibilities.

Young people are being supported for extended periods of time in models of care that are designed for brief periods of crisis, and are unable to access the continuity of supports that they need to exit homelessness permanently. There is a clear and significant gap in the service system for young people experiencing homelessness with medium to high support needs.

A youth housing program must provide integrated, sustained support comprising housing, case management and therapeutic support in order to address the complex personal and structural causes of their homelessness. Case management must respond to the social, cultural and political determinants of health by providing culturally safe and responsive healing-oriented care<sup>8</sup>. This framework aims to build the independence and resilience of young people experiencing homelessness and their capacity to sustain social housing and successfully transition into the private rental market.

Case management and 'coaching' aims to provide young people with the necessary skills to break the cycle of homelessness. Key elements of support include education and employment support, living skills development, community connections and health and wellbeing.

Therapeutic support to help young people heal from trauma is lacking in most homelessness and housing program design, despite 54% of the young people who are experiencing homelessness in Victoria presenting with a mental health diagnosis<sup>9</sup>. Further, research has shown that 97% of Victorians experiencing homelessness have been exposed to four or more traumatic events in their lifetime.<sup>10</sup> Therapeutic support focuses on supporting young people to develop positive strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety, emotional regulation and building strategies for healing and recovery. Therapeutic support will also lay the foundations for young people to successfully sustain their tenancies and move between different housing options including transition into private rental.

### MCM'S HEALING ORIENTED FRAMEWORK

MCM has made the commitment to implement a systems-level, whole of organisation approach to trauma informed healing-oriented care.

A '**Healing Oriented Framework**' has been developed by MCM to promote the physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual health and wellbeing; cultural inclusion and ongoing safety of people in contact with MCM. MCM maintains a holistic view of individuals, families and communities in their ongoing process of healing.

8 MCM Healing Oriented framework; available at <https://www.mcm.org.au/about/our-publications?publicationtype=Framework&topic=Trauma+and+healing#content-filters>

9 Likely underestimated due to young people not having a diagnosed mental health issue; AIHW 2018-19, Supplementary Data Tables MH.3

10 MCM Healing Oriented framework; available at <https://www.mcm.org.au/about/our-publications?publicationtype=Framework&topic=Trauma+and+healing#content-filters>

### **ACTION 3: Make available integrated housing and therapeutic support for young people**

The Victorian government should fund integrated, sustained support for young people experiencing homelessness comprising housing, case management and therapeutic support, with the capacity to step-up and step-down support depending on a young person's needs.

#### **Medium-term supported housing models for young people**

For many young people experiencing homelessness, a form of medium-term supported housing is needed as a pathway to independent living at the conclusion of an eight-week stay in a refuge.

However, young people reveal a strong sense of frustration with the housing and homelessness system, as many experience significant transience between short-term stays and support from different services. Some young people report spending years moving between refuges.<sup>11</sup>

*“We’re just stuck here on waitlists. We’ve got nothing to do all day long because we’re just sitting and waiting and waiting on lists. It’s a trap.”* – Young person in refuge

It is imperative that there is an expansion of the availability and models of medium-term supported housing options that is paired with step-up step-down long-tail support<sup>12</sup>. With appropriate supports in place, a youth specific transitional housing model is an important setting to grow the practical and emotional skills necessary for a transition to shared housing in the private rental market.

It is important to note, that not all young people are ready to live independently, and for many,

living independently increases their vulnerability. Medium-term, therapeutic, staffed congregate facilities can help young people to not just remain housed, but to be cared for in a means similar to that available to young people who are not experiencing homelessness.<sup>13</sup> These supported housing models (including Youth Foyers) achieve other goals such as education, employment and support young people to transition from social housing to private rental.

The Youth Foyer model has gained increasing traction as a response to youth homelessness in Australia. The recently released Report Card on Youth Homelessness shows that ‘over the past decade, 15 Foyers or Foyer-like projects have been developed to support about 500 16 to 25 year olds at-risk of homelessness or recovering from homelessness.’<sup>14</sup>

*“We have a high tolerance to be able to support and accommodate young people with multiple and complex needs—the model is designed to provide supported housing and goal-orientated programs that lead into education and/or employment focussed programs, and our work is underpinned by our Trauma Informed Healing Oriented framework, which ensures a therapeutic, healing approach to each individual.”* – Wayne Merritt, General Manager, Homeless Justice and Family Services at MCM<sup>15</sup>

The Foyer model achieves positive outcomes for young people who are ready and capable of engagement with education and employment. The evidence shows however, that for young people who do not ‘fit the mould’, the Foyer model is not suitable to meet their housing and support needs and a new model of medium-term supported housing must be developed.

11 Melbourne City Mission, Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria (2019), p4

12 Youth Homelessness in Victoria, ‘Submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy’ (2021), Council to Homeless Persons

13 Youth Homelessness in Victoria, ‘Submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy’ (2021), Council to Homeless Persons

14 Youth Development Australia 2019, A National Report Card on Youth Homelessness

15 Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021), Volume 2, p66

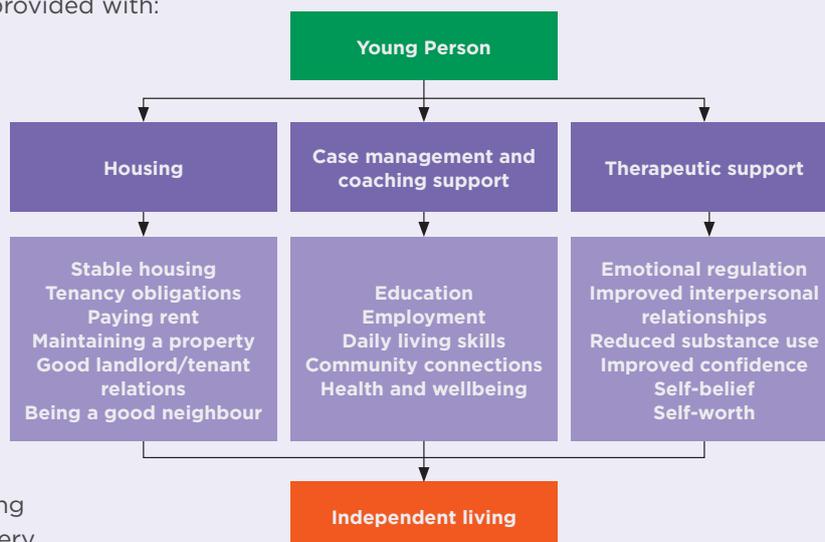
## MCM'S YOUTH HOUSING INITIATIVE

In 2020, MCM designed a new housing program for young people, the *Youth Housing Initiative* (YHI), to support young people to transition to independence and permanently exit homelessness. MCM is currently in the process of seeking funding from government to implement the YHI pilot as a state and national first.

The program is designed to build the independence and resilience of young people experiencing homelessness who are falling through the gaps in the current service delivery landscape, addressing the complex personal and structural causes of their homelessness over a sustained period. The program is based on the Housing First for Youth principles.

The YHI aims to provide integrated, sustained support comprising housing, case management and therapeutic support. If funding is secured, its implementation during an initial pilot phase will be targeted to support approximately 70 young people over four years in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne. Young people will be provided with:

- stable housing and integrated support for up to four years
- different types of dwellings (share houses, congregate sites, studios)
- coaching to provide young people with the necessary skills to break the cycle of homelessness including access to employment and education
- therapeutic support to develop positive strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety, emotional regulation and building strategies for healing and recovery.



The program design recognises that young people require access to a range of different accommodation models to thrive, depending on their needs at the time. These models are known as Congregate, Cluster and Shared housing. If funding is procured, the aim is that movement between the housing types will be fluid as required.

**Trauma-informed healing-oriented framework:** Working from MCM's overarching trauma informed and healing oriented framework, therapeutic care will support the young person by developing positive strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety, developing skills for emotional regulation and focussing on strategies for healing and recovery.

**Rent-savings and incentives model:** Participants will pay a small percentage of their income as rent which will be returned to the young person at the end of the program to help build their financial capacity. Other incentives and milestone rewards will be incorporated into the model and tailored to the individual to foster engagement, future focus and achievement.

**Shared tenancies:** The program is overtly aimed at supporting young people to move into shared private rental housing as the most available and affordable housing option. The model is designed to support young people to develop the skills to be able to manage a shared tenancy. This is key to ensuring a smooth and sustained transition out of homelessness.

In developing the YHI model, MCM engaged Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to analyse the financial costs of the program against the expected fiscal savings to governments. The YHI cohort are high consumers of government services and support across a range of expenditure areas. By providing young people with an enhanced service and housing stability over 4 years, the expected government savings generated during and beyond the direct four-year measurement period are estimated to be \$222,000 per person, which is an average 29% reduction in the baseline costs. 57% of costs are incurred by the Victorian Government. The total estimated savings to be generated by the Pilot is **\$15.6m**.

## EXPANSION OF YOUTH FOYER PROGRAMS

The Foyer model is based on addressing two issues in conjunction: homelessness and education. Common to all foyer models is a focus on providing safe, secure and affordable accommodation, alongside support to access education, training and/or employment.

Multiple models of youth foyers exist in Australia and have been developed by individual agencies and government departments. There are several types of youth foyers in Victoria, including those delivered by MCM and Education First Youth Foyers.

### MCM's Youth Foyer Program

MCM is a leader in the provision of youth foyers and brought the foyer program to Australia in 2004 as an innovative response to youth homelessness. MCM currently operate 4 Youth Foyer programs across Melbourne:

- The Precinct – located in North Fitzroy
- Lion Garden – located in Melbourne CBD
- Hoddle Street – located in Collingwood
- H3 – located in Werribee (currently under construction, opening July 2021)

MCM's Youth Foyer Program (Foyer), underpinned by MCM's Trauma Informed Healing Oriented Framework, offers young people aged 16 to 25 safe, stable and affordable accommodation for up to 3 years, alongside integrated case management support that is holistic, client-centred and strength-based. An additional 6 months of after-care support post-foyer is also embedded in the MCM model.

Foyer offers young people facing homelessness a chance to change their path, explore and move through barriers to employment and education toward their desired goals.

Throughout their journey, young people are offered opportunities to develop and build on their skills and prepare to live independently. Support is adaptable, non-judgemental and flexible to needs; young people are encouraged to develop positive and productive relationships and to connect with their wider community.

The program aims are:

<b>Holistic approach</b>	Providing wrap around support to young people to meet their goals
<b>Living skills</b>	Helping young people become independent
<b>Breaking cycle</b>	Providing a pathway out of housing crisis
<b>Strength based</b>	Seeing young people's strengths and skills
<b>Stability</b>	Providing safe and stable housing with workers meeting the young people where they are at
<b>Cultural awareness</b>	All our services respect culture
<b>Client centred</b>	Young person at the centre of support has control of their decision making
<b>Modelling</b>	Role modelling positive adult relationships and boundaries.

Accommodation is fully furnished, self-contained apartments and units, with co-located staff support and program delivery. Two models also have a Residential Support Volunteer living onsite.

The Mental Health Royal Commission has identified the gap in the service system for young people living with mental illness and experiencing unstable housing or homelessness and has recommended investment in 500 new medium-term supported housing places for young people aged between 18 to 25.

MCM applauds the decision by the Andrews government to accept these recommendations and encourages delivery of additional medium-term, supported housing models for young people through Victoria's Big Housing Build.

### **ACTION 4: Expand the number and variety of medium-term supported housing model for young people**

**The Victorian Government should expand the number and variety of medium-term supported housing models for young people who are transitioning to adulthood and independence. Therapeutic support must be a core component of the service provision.**

# SECTION 2: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL HOUSING COMMUNITIES

## Community connections

Young people experiencing homelessness become disconnected from family and friends, which often means losing connections to peer groups and supportive adults outside the home. Young people experiencing vulnerability often lack social capital, which can reinforce disadvantage through structural and system inequalities.

In order to strengthen social housing communities for young people, a comprehensive and planned approach to developing place-based networks and pro-social connections based on the young person's aspirations and interests must be implemented.

*“There’s a lot of assumptions made in the system about what support networks mean to a young person. For example, some young people prefer to live close to where they grew up, but others prefer not to be placed in housing close to their families and friends. Currently, housing allocation isn’t aligned with their support networks.”*

– MCM Peer Support Worker

Different community connections have different benefits for young people. Recreational activities, local infrastructure (i.e. Transport) and services, sports programs, community social events, education and employment opportunities should be considered before housing is allocated to a young person.

*“We should have access to sport and social events, so we can have fun as if we were in school. We don’t get those opportunities. There should also be community cooking spaces, so we can learn to cook healthy and affordable food instead of eating 2-minute noodles everyday.”* – Young Person in transitional housing

## ACTION 5: Strengthen place-based networks and pro-social connections

In order to strengthen social housing communities for young people, a comprehensive and planned approach to developing place-based networks and pro-social connections based on the young person's aspirations and interests must be implemented.

## Therapeutic social housing design – Healthy homes

MCM supports Homes Victoria's plan to create social and affordable housing communities that are built for the future, with well-maintained, well-designed and environmentally sustainable properties. The design of social and affordable housing properties should also consider therapeutic elements in order to meet the needs of different people, including young people with poor mental health. Design elements such as access to natural light, access to nature such as indoor plants, air quality including access to fresh air (e.g. functioning windows), open spaces and reduction in intermittent sounds such as traffic noises improve people's mental health and assist people to regulate their emotions. Numerous studies have also shown that spending time in a garden (including vegetable gardens) has significant positive impacts on mental health.

*“MCM is committed to delivering all programs and services via its trauma informed Healing Oriented Framework which includes designing safe, physical, psychological and relational environments.”*

– MCM Healing Oriented Framework

## ACTION 6: Design social housing properties for young people based on a therapeutic framework

In order to ensure that the foundations of the Victorian social and affordable housing system are 'healthy homes', properties should include therapeutic design elements such as access to fresh air, natural light and green spaces.

# SECTION 3: DELIVERING GROWTH IN SOCIAL HOUSING

## Creation of a shared Housing Outcomes Framework

The Strategy provides Victoria with the opportunity to deliver further growth in housing through the development of a range of partnership models between government, community housing, support providers and private sector. However, with the move towards marketisation and transition into community and social housing models, it is critical that resident housing outcomes are not diminished.

The creation of new policy and funding settings in the social housing system that support sustained growth, must also ensure sustained housing outcomes, including health and wellbeing outcomes, for residents in social housing. Young people in the homelessness and housing system are most in need of whole-of-government thinking and there is a risk that marketisation, including the reliance on private finance, will create further barriers for young people to access and sustain social housing.

In order to ensure a social housing system that is safe, secure and financially viable, Homes Victoria should develop and implement a shared Housing Outcomes Framework, including wellbeing outcomes, for residents living in social housing.

### **ACTION 7: Development of Housing Outcomes Framework for social housing**

**In order to ensure a social housing system that is safe, secure and financially viable, Homes Victoria should develop and implement a shared Housing Outcomes Framework, including wellbeing outcomes, for residents living in social housing.**



# SECTION 4: STRENGTHENING OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH HOMES VICTORIA AND PLACING YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

## Social Housing Youth Advisory Group

MCM applauds Homes Victoria for recognising the importance of placing ‘people at the centre’ and its commitment to hearing and responding to the voices of people who live in social housing or who are waiting to access the system.

In order to create a youth appropriate social housing system, young people must be given the opportunity to be heard directly by government. It is essential that young people be provided the platform to have their voices heard, and not as an additional component of an adult consultative process.

Homes Victoria should establish a dedicated Social Housing Youth Advisory Group or Steering Committee to better understand the views, experiences and needs of young people over the course of the 10-year Strategy. This can include partnering with existing youth groups such as MCM’s *Youth Advisory Group* facilitated by Peer Support Workers at Frontyard.

MCM’s *Youth Advisory Group* would welcome the opportunity to discuss a partnership with Homes Victoria over the course of the Strategy.

### **ACTION 8: Establish Social Housing Youth Advisory Group**

In order to create a youth appropriate social housing system, Homes Victoria should establish a dedicated Social Housing Youth Advisory Group to directly hear the voices, experiences and needs of young people over the course of the 10-year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.

To discuss this submission please contact Shorna Moore at [shmoore@mcm.org.au](mailto:shmoore@mcm.org.au)

## Improved access to shared data and information sharing

Trusted partnerships include working closely to design solutions and evaluate outcomes. For MCM and all community housing and homelessness organisations to improve service planning and client outcomes, there must be systemic improvements to the access of shared data and information sharing across a range of sectors including homelessness, mental health, Out of Home Care and youth justice.

Data sharing initiatives implemented in the health, family violence and education systems in Victoria and Australia, including client identifiers that travel with a person across different services, should also be considered in the context of homelessness.

In order to inform best practice service delivery that is client centred and holistic, Homes Victoria and the Victorian government should improve transparency by increasing access to shared data sets and exploring information sharing opportunities across public sectors including homelessness and housing. This will ensure a consistent approach to a person’s care and will ultimately lead to improved wellbeing outcomes. The development of an information sharing system must be done within a human rights framework.

### **ACTION 9: Improve transparency and access to shared data**

In order to inform best practice service delivery that is client centred and holistic, Homes Victoria and the Victorian government should improve transparency by increasing access to shared data sets across a range of public sectors including homelessness, mental health, Out of Home Care and youth justice. Learnings from data sharing initiatives in the health, family violence and education systems should also be considered in the context of youth homelessness.