
Victoria's Homelessness Response

Tabled 17 September 2020



This audit looked at whether the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has reduced the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping through its *Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan* (or HRSAP).

We focused on three key components of HRSAP that DHHS funded for two years and were to be delivered by specialist homelessness services—assertive outreach, supportive housing and modular housing programs.

The audited entities represent 60 per cent of the HRSAP spend for the audited elements.

We found that while the audited entities have achieved some positive outcomes for clients, DHHS does not know whether HRSAP programs are reducing the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping. This is due to a lack of planning and agreed goals, and limited performance monitoring by DHHS.

People experiencing homelessness are some of our community's most vulnerable members. They often experience disadvantage and health-related issues, which can worsen over time.

On Census night in 2016, 24 800 Victorians were homeless, with 1 100 sleeping rough. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated government initiatives, it was estimated that this year approximately 8 600 Victorians would sleep rough at least once.

Since 2014, the Victorian Government has invested over \$1.4 billion to address homelessness. Despite this, Victoria spends less on social housing per capita than the national average, and there has been a 42 per cent increase in Victorians sleeping rough when first seeking support from specialist homelessness services between 2011–12 and 2018–19.

In January 2018, the Victorian Government announced the HRSAP, which is part of broader reforms in this sector. It is based on the 'housing first' approach, where people receive housing first and then address other issues.

DHHS funded new HRSAP programs in three outer suburban locations, five regional or rural locations and extended funding for programs in inner Melbourne.

Issue 3



Only 44% of clients at the audited entities were assessed using a formal tool



No entities were meeting the target for 90% of clients to have a case plan



Only 13% of clients had physical or mental health care plans



Modular housing units were not made available in a timely way.

DHHS did not set clear roles and responsibilities and governance arrangements prior to program commencement and did not develop a risk management plan to anticipate and mitigate risks.

DHHS's service agreements with the audited entities do not clearly identify HRSAP program deliverables or performance measures that can allow DHHS to know whether the entities are achieving the HRSAP objective of reducing the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping. Also, when HRSAP began, DHHS did not establish baseline numbers of rough sleepers in each service location to be able to understand if HRSAP initiatives are making a difference.

We also found that the audited entities are not meeting DHHS program requirements:

- only 44 per cent of clients at the audited entities were assessed using a formal tool
- none of the entities were meeting the target for 90 per cent of clients to have a case plan, with the best performer at 65 per cent and the worst at 0 per cent
- only 13 per cent of clients had physical or mental health care plans
- modular housing units were not made available in a timely way.

More broadly, only 31 of 429 clients were provided with long-term housing, which largely reflects the lack of available housing options.

There is a lack of transparency and accountability over HRSAP programs. While entities report a range of data to DHHS, there has been no reporting on HRSAP programs to DHHS's executive board. DHHS is undertaking a broad evaluation of homelessness initiatives but notes it will need Ministerial approval to release the results of this publicly. The government said in the HRSAP it was 'committed to transparency and accountability to the community in the delivery of this action plan' and noted the establishment of an advisory committee to do this. A Ministerial Advisory Committee was established which holds confidential meetings and reports only to the Minister for Housing.

We made 13 recommendations to DHHS:

- 6 to improve planning and implementation for future homelessness initiatives
- 1 to improve guidance and compliance with program requirements it has set, and
- 6 to improve performance monitoring.

For further information please view the full report on our website www.audit.vic.gov.au