

# Anti-Poverty Week

## Reframing Housing as a Human Right

As rising housing insecurity intensifies across Victoria, we'll explore how to prioritise children's needs and advocate for housing as a fundamental right.

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# Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the owners of the lands that we are meeting on today.

We are hosting this meeting on Wurundjeri Land, on the Kulin Nations. We would like to pay respect to the ancestors of this Country, elders past and present, and to any First Nations people who may be joining today.

This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



Illustration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags by **Nakia Cadd**, Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Bunitj, Boon Wurrung, Taungurung woman.



**Deb Tsorbaris**

CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and  
Family Welfare

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# Member Survey: Housing Insecurity

- 85% regularly provide support to families experiencing housing insecurity
- More working families seeking assistance
- More families experiencing homelessness due to:
  - Cost of living
  - Unable to secure private rentals
  - Limited social housing and long waitlists
- Impacts on families:
  - Mental health – depression & stress
  - Unsafe living environments
  - Parent's capacity to provide for children
  - Going without meals
  - Children not attending school
- Fear of Child Protection involvement

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# Dr. Heather Holst

## Commissioner for Residential Tenancies

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Q&A

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Tanya Corrie

CEO, Juno

Chair, Women's Housing Alliance

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**GENDERED LENS ON  
HOUSING AS A HUMAN  
RIGHT**

**ANTI-POVERTY WEEK**

**OCT 2024**



**WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE**



# ABOUT THE WOMEN'S HOUSING ALLIANCE



The Women's Housing Alliance (WHA) came together in early 2019 to help address the systemic barriers and housing crisis being faced by women and children facing homelessness across Victoria.

## Purpose:

To advocate for and address Victoria's chronic housing shortage across the whole spectrum of housing needs for trans women, cis women, non-binary people and their children who are escaping family violence and experiencing homelessness in growing rates.

## Vision:

Adequate safe and secure housing solutions which provide timely, accessible and affordable homes for women, children and young people.



# THE NEED



## GENDERED HOMELESSNESS IS A GROWING CRISIS IN AUSTRALIA

- Women accounted for 81.7% of the increase of people experiencing homelessness in the 2021 Census.
- 58% of clients seeking support from Specialist Homelessness services in Victoria in 2022-2023 were female and 70% of employed people seeking assistance are women.
- While not much data is collected about homelessness for trans, non-binary and gender diverse people, they experience higher rates of homelessness than cis-women.

## GENDERED HOMELESSNESS IS HIDDEN

- Women's homelessness is often hidden or less visible as it is less likely to involve sleeping in public spaces.
- Women are more likely to present to homelessness services sheltered but unsafe and at risk of homelessness.
- Women will often self-manage their homelessness and avoid presenting to services for help, relying instead on their own resources and networks to secure accommodation.

# PART OF THE SOLUTION...



## DEFINITIONS MATTER

- Need to include women's experiences and include safety and suitability of home in definitions of homelessness
- Need to shift the mindset that housing is a means of wealth generation and not a right
- Need to understand and address the different drivers of women's homelessness which is **gender inequity**

## NEED TO MAKE THE SYSTEM MORE ACCOUNTABLE

- People who are marginalised by the system are burdened with managing the response
- Too many system barriers in accessing support, and not enough focus on prevention
- Need a systems responsibility, including government and the private sector



Jay Church

Statewide Children's Resource Program  
Coordinator, Uniting Vic.Tas

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# The Statewide Children's Resource Program

Children experience the world very differently to adults.

This includes potentially traumatic experiences such as family violence and homelessness.

Family violence and homelessness may have a detrimental effect on a child's:

- **Relationships with families and friends**
- **Education**
- **Physical and Mental Health**

Each year more children access homelessness services, alone or with a parent or caregiver than any other age group in Victoria.

The Statewide Children's Resource Program supports the Specialist Homelessness Services to engage with children to address the impacts of homelessness and family violence.

[Statewide Children's Resource Program \(statewidechildrensresourceprogram.com.au\)](http://statewidechildrensresourceprogram.com.au)



Hon. Bronwyn Pike AO  
CEO, Uniting Vic.Tas

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## THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF POVERTY

Given that the majority of the very poor families in Australia are dependent on pensions or benefit, one of the first steps in the abolition of poverty in this country should be the raising of the basic rates of pension and benefit to the poverty line.

In addition, it is most important that pensions and benefits be updated frequently and regularly by an amount that prevents the beneficiaries falling behind the rest of the population. This can be done by using either an index of average earnings or an index of gross domestic product per head of population.

The consumer price index rises more slowly, however, and if pensions and benefits were linked to this index the old and the sick would fall far behind the more active members of the population. It is not even true that by linking pensions to the consumer price index the real income of pensioners would be maintained. 'The consumer price index is a quarterly measure of variations in retail prices for goods and services representing a high proportion of the expenditure of wage earner households.'<sup>6</sup> As we have shown in Chapter 3, such wage earner households are much better off than pensioners; their pattern of expenditure is therefore not the same. A rise in food prices, for instance, will be much more serious for pensioners than its weighting in the consumer price index indicates.

There is, moreover, a rather more subtle and pervasive reason why poor people will become more deprived if their incomes are not raised in line with those of the rest of the population. As the majority of the population grow richer, production and marketing are updated to satisfy their needs. In convenient locations near public transport, cheap weatherboard houses in good repair are pulled down to be replaced by \$40 000 'town houses'. So the supply of housing available for poor people contracts.

## The extent and nature of poverty in Australia

The committee acknowledged the significant evidence provided on the dehumanising experience of poverty, the rates and impacts of poverty, and the long-standing calls to increase income support payments to allow for basic living standards for many Australians.

According to the department, all income support payments are indexed to 'ensure that payments maintain their purchasing power when the cost of living increases'. For example, adult allowance rates, including JobSeeker Payment, and Rent Assistance rates are indexed in March and September to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).<sup>11</sup>

The department told the committee that due to a large CPI increase in the six months to June 2022, the JobSeeker Payment base maximum rate for single recipients without children increased by \$25.70 to \$677.20 a fortnight (including the Energy Supplement).<sup>12</sup>

On 18 April 2023, the Commonwealth Government released the first report of the Interim Advisory Committee. The report concluded that 'all indicators available' showed that the current rates of payment for JobSeeker and related working-age non-pension payments were 'seriously inadequate', regardless of whether measured relative against National Minimum Wages, in comparison with pensions, or against a range of income poverty measures.<sup>92</sup>

It further observed that people receiving the payments faced the highest levels of financial stress in the Australian community, and that:

Indexing JobSeeker Payment and related income supports only in line with the consumer price index has resulted in their relative base rates falling significantly below existing benchmarks such as the Age Pension. Increasing their rate to 90 per cent of the Age Pension would improve adequacy and return them to payment relativities of 1999.<sup>93</sup>



**Dr. Heather Holst**  
Commissioner for  
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Women's Housing Alliance



**Jay Church**  
Children's Resource Program



**Hon. Bronwyn Pike AO**  
Uniting Vic Tas

# Panel Discussion

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Please share your thoughts

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Thank you for joining us

Visit: [www.cfecfw.org.au](http://www.cfecfw.org.au)

LinkedIn: @CFEFCFW

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