Catholic Social Services Victoria

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Victorian Catholic Social Housing: A report

Melbourne Archdiocese

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Summary

This report is part of a broader initiative to assist and encourage the Catholic Church in Victoria to further address the housing needs of vulnerable people, particularly by the utilisation of Church land.

In particular, the reports details the findings of a social housing survey conducted by Catholic Social Services Victoria's Social Housing Working Group across the Archdiocese of Melbourne. It details the social housing provided through the church and identifies potential developments for additional low-cost housing.
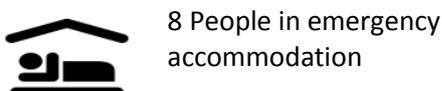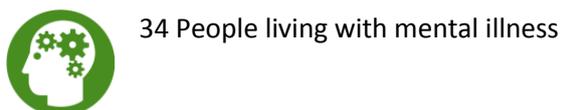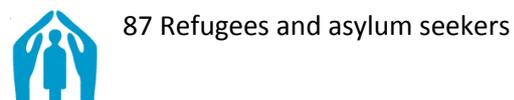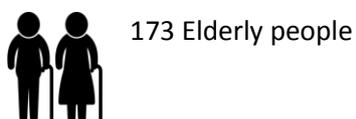
It finds that , at present, one in five parishes across the Archdiocese provide housing at low cost in their local community to fulfil the gospel mission to assist the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised.

42 parishes   and   4 Religious orders

Provide housing to

404 people   in   201 dwellings.
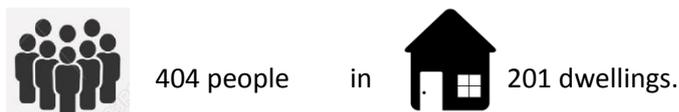
Forty two parishes and four religious orders are providing housing at low cost for approximately 404 people in 201 dwellings. This effort by many volunteers is good news and should be celebrated.

173 Elderly people

87 Refugees and asylum seekers

34 People living with mental illness

8 Aboriginal people

8 People in emergency accommodation

94 Others

There are approximately 38 properties that could be considered for social housing development projects. The Social Housing Working Group is working to engage parishes and religious orders with Catholic social housing providers and support services in order to develop proposals that can be funded to build social housing that is well managed and supported. Parishes want to have a voice in decision making around decisions that affect them, their neighbourhood and their community as part of any proposals developed.

The broader project sees scope to increase the priority of social housing for the Catholic Church in Australia.

Contents

Introduction

This reports details the findings of a housing survey conducted by Catholic Social Services Victoria's Social Housing Working Group. The survey was conducted across all parishes and religious orders in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.   The aim of the survey was to assess the following:

- what low cost housing is currently being provided by parishes and religious orders
- whether there are any buildings or land that could be potentially used to develop social housing.

The aim of the project was to gain a clear picture of the housing provided through the church across Victoria and identify potential developments for additional social housing. The Ballarat diocese is completing the survey and the Sale and Sandhurst dioceses will be undertaking the survey over the coming months.

Background

The provision of secure and affordable housing is a critical element in addressing disadvantage and vulnerability. Poor access to housing is strongly linked to poor health, education and justice outcomes.

Disadvantaged and vulnerable households are increasingly facing significant challenges to access affordable and appropriate housing. Buying a home in many parts of Australia is out of reach even for those with jobs. This has increased the number of people seeking housing within the rental market, escalating rentals beyond the means of many households. In turn this has placed greater pressure on the social housing sector. Among those who are particularly vulnerable are those living with chronic illness, drug and alcohol dependency, long-term unemployment, physical or intellectual disability, and re-integration into community after release from prison.

In Victoria, the existing supply of public and community housing stock has fallen far below demand[1]. There are approximately 76,113 households[2] living in social and community housing –provided at an affordable price to people in need – but more than 24,000 Victorians experience homelessness on any given night, and the number is growing[3].

Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy (December 2016) estimates that that up to 100,000 vulnerable low income households require better access to affordable housing[4] and that 'the provision of approximately 30,000 new affordable dwellings within 0-10 years could be an appropriate infrastructure response to contribute to the current unmet demand for access to housing.'[5]

The lack of realistically and available accommodation options is a major problem for people in need, and a constant source of frustration for service providers and their clients.

In March 2017, the Victorian Government released a **Homes for Victorians[6]** strategy; a range of initiatives to assist all Victorians with housing. The strategy recognises the need to remove barriers

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[1] Victorian Auditor General, Managing Victoria's Public Housing report (June 2017), page x.

[2] Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2018 – Housing, Table 18A.4

[3] Council to Homeless Persons – Facts about Homelessness

[4] Infrastructure Victoria, Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy (December 2016), page 99. Affordable housing is defined as rental housing that is provided at a subsidised rent to households through access and affordability requirements set by government, - as defined by the Commonwealth Council on Federal Financial Relations, Affordable housing working group: Issues paper, 2016.

[5]Ibid. page 104.

[6] Victorian Government, Homes for Victorian Strategy (March 2017)

to affordable housing and increase the number of public and community based social housing dwellings. Specifically, the strategy included a social housing fund to generate $70-$80 million annually for social housing projects, and a social housing loan guarantee and $100 million revolving loan fund, aimed at decreasing the cost of borrowing by community housing agencies for new social housing developments. Using this funding in partnership with a housing provider, parishes or religious orders could use current land or property to develop social housing while preserving ownership of the asset, for future generations and changing needs.

Responding to the current need for low cost social housing

In early 2017 the Australian's Bishop's conference was appraised of homelessness and the need for additional low cost housing options. Archbishop Hart encouraged Catholic Social Services Victoria to explore opportunities for the church to support social housing. A social housing working group, formed in mid 2017, includes representatives from Catholic housing providers, the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the Catholic Development Fund. The aim of the group is to develop social housing projects that utilize Church land and/or underutilised properties in Victoria, to increase the level of social housing in Victoria for vulnerable cohorts in need.

The working group identified the following tasks to inform this work, which includes:

- development of a discussion paper about social housing for parishes
- a survey to identify the volume of social housing currently provided through parishes and identify any excess land or buildings that could be developed into social housing
- facilitate meetings and discussions between potential partners and parishes or religious orders to develop a consultation process for the development of a social housing development proposal.

This report provides details, results and findings of the survey undertaken and explores how the results will be used to develop social housing development proposals for consideration for funding through the State Government social housing fund.

This initiative encourages parishes and religious orders to consider the future use of property, the social housing needs of people in their local community and how the parish could partner with Catholic social service agencies to address housing for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Low cost housing by Catholic agencies in Victoria

The Catholic Church in Victoria is a significant provider of low cost housing for people who struggle to secure adequate housing through the private market. Much of this accommodation is provided by larger social services agencies, including VincentCare, Sacred Heart Mission, Villa Maria Catholic Homes and Centacare Ballarat, and others that provide social housing on a smaller scale. Some agencies already work collaboratively with local parishes to provide housing and support. Aged care providers and health providers are another cluster within the Church that provide accommodation outside of the market system: Corpus Christi Community, St Vincent's Health's Prague House, and St John of God are among those who focus on those in most need and often those who have experienced homelessness. **Appendix 1** provides a list of links to the housing and support services provided by Catholic social services and health bodies in Victoria. A glossary of housing definitions is provided in **Appendix 2**.

In addition, a number of the agencies deliver programs that provide support that enables people to remain living in their home or accommodation. This includes some Victorian Government owned property. The number of people assisted through these support programs is an important part of helping to reduce the number of people at risk of becoming homeless.

Over the past year, Catholic social service agencies have provide low cost transitional or permanent housing for approximately 1,738 people (many for older people) and emergency or crisis accommodation for approximately 1445 people[7]. This does not include the number of people supported through non-residential housing support programs.

Methodology

A social housing discussion paper title [The Catholic Church in Victoria working to increase social housing – discussion paper](#) was sent to parishes in October 2017 to encourage discussion about the issue. In addition a short survey was developed to generate information about current social housing provided and potential developments. The following definition of social housing was provided in the discussion paper and survey:

> *The term social housing is used to describe housing for people who would struggle to secure adequate housing through the private market. It is housing that is provided at a low or reduced cost or according to the recipient's income or ability to pay. Social housing can provide diverse housing options to address family circumstances, diverse backgrounds and varying levels of support. It includes:*
>
> - *crisis accommodation (emergency housing and refuges etc.);*
> - *transitional accommodation (usually are for a fixed period; 1-2 year and provide support);*
> - *public housing (long term low-cost State Government managed housing);*
> - *community housing (usually long-term low-cost housing managed by community housing organisations); and*
> - *dedicated affordable private rental housing.*

The discussion paper and a request to complete the survey were sent to all parishes in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and 30 religious orders on 1 November 2017. Follow up emails and an electronic version of the survey were sent in November and again in December, with follow up telephone calls to all parishes occurring from mid-January until the end of April 2018.

It is worth noting that the survey asked respondents to indicate only property that are currently in use for social housing and other property that could be considered for development of social housing. The results of the survey do not represent a full audit of all properties owned by parishes and religious communities.

Results

Housing currently being provided

The survey identified 42 parishes (approximately 21% of parishes in the Archdiocese) and 4 religious orders[8] across the Archdiocese are providing low cost housing for approximately 404 people in 201 dwellings.

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[7] This figure is based on information from the following agencies: VincentCare, Sacred Heart Mission, CatholicCare Melbourne and Sale, CentaCare Ballarat, Villa Maria Catholic Homes, Corpus Christi Community Care and St Vincent's Hospital.

[8] The survey was sent to 30 religious orders and 13 responses received. Four responses identified 11 dwellings that provide accommodation for approximately 20 people; including Aboriginal people, refugees and elderly people. Due to limited resources, there was no further follow up with the seventeen responses not received.

The parishes engaged in providing housing is spread across inner and outer suburbs of the metropolitan area. Anecdotally, respondents said that the older parishes that were able to acquire property in previous decades when there were more people regularly attending and regularly contributing money and the price of property was more affordable, are more likely to have property available than the newer parishes established in growing outer suburbs.

The buildings include:

- houses previously used as presbyteries or for the housing of religious communities
- additional housing bought over time for different purposes such as investment, additional office space, bequests etc.
- elderly public housing units built on church land by State government.

Categories of people being housed include:

Elderly people
15 parishes and 2 religious orders house 173 elderly people in 117 units
(equal to 43% of people housed in 58% of all dwellings)

Refugees and asylum seekers
13 parishes and 1 religious order house 87 refugees or asylum seekers in 19 dwellings
(equal to 22% of people housed in 9% of all dwellings)

People living with mental illness
2 parishes house 34 people living with mental illness in 28 units
(equal to 8% of people housed in 14% of all dwellings)

Aboriginal people
1 religious order houses 8 Aboriginal people in 1 dwelling
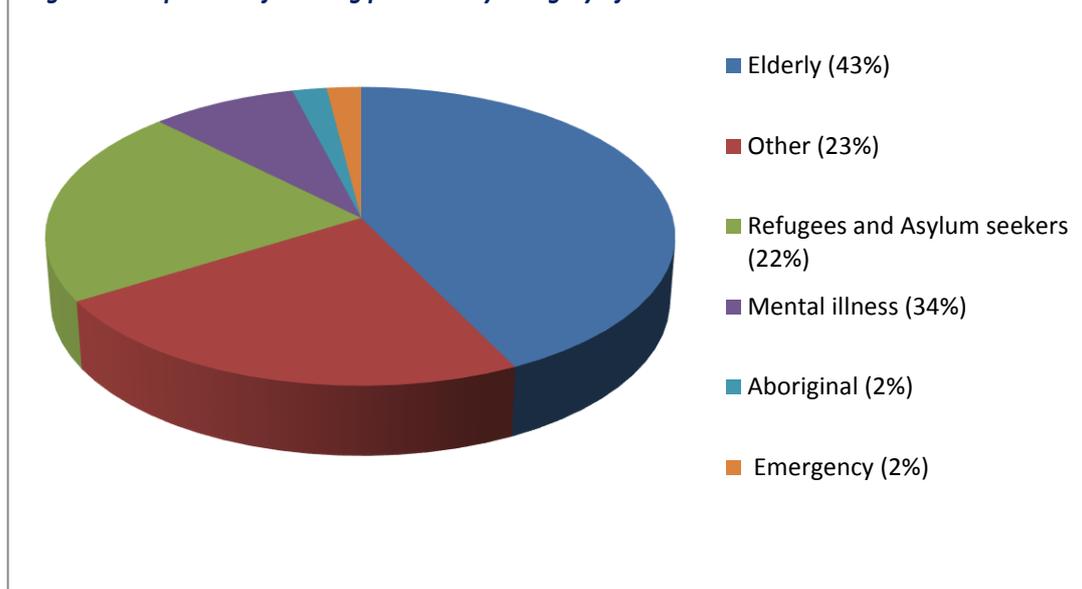(equal to 2% of people housed in 0.5% of all dwellings)

Emergency accommodation
2 parishes house 8 people seeking emergency accommodation in 3 dwellings
(equal to 2% of people housed in 1.5% of all dwellings)

Other
10 parishes house 94 people comprising of families, students or single people on low income with low level of support needs are housed in 33 dwellings
(equal to 23% of people housed in 16% of all dwellings).

Respondents who completed the survey by phone indicated that housing tends to be provided to those in need known within the parish, such as; those involved in the parish school, church or linked to the parish through services provided by other catholic social service agencies. Figure 1 below shows the proportion and range of people being housed.

Figure 1: Proportion of housing provided by category of residents

Legend:
- Elderly (43%)
- Other (23%)
- Refugees and Asylum seekers (22%)
- Mental illness (34%)
- Aboriginal (2%)
- Emergency (2%)

All those housed have low or no income and need varying levels of support. The largest cohort housed is elderly people (43%), largely due to the public housing constructed on parish land by State Government. The remaining is mostly spread across housing for refugees and asylum seekers (22%) and families, students or single people on low income with low level of support needs (23%).

Property management arrangements

The survey did not investigate the management arrangements for the provision of housing currently provided, however some insights from the telephone surveys conducted are described below.

Elderly public housing units built on church land

State governments have partnered with parishes in the past to construct low cost housing on church land. There are approximately 10 parishes with lease arrangements with the Office for Housing for approximately 98 elderly units that have been built on church land. In these arrangements, the Office of Housing determines the social housing clients allocated properties. Where the lease has expired, the parish either renegotiates a lease with the Office for Housing or takes over the management of the properties. The Archdiocesan property department is responsible for the lease arrangements.

Parishes partnering with social service organisations

Some parishes have partnered with Catholic social service agencies to provide housing. The agencies provide support around the management of tenancies and support for tenants. For example:

- CatholicCare's Asylum Seeker Support Program partners with 6 individual parishes which provide a house or rent a suitable house for the family or individual or individual seeking asylum. CatholicCare provides support to build a family's capacity to manage and maintain rental agreement obligations. Parish volunteers offer practical support to help the residents settle and establish networks so they can move on to other housing.
- The Elwood parish rents out a number of their buildings to Sacred Heart Mission to support the work of the mission. The accommodation accounts for 44 people housed in three properties managed and supported by Sacred Heart Mission.

Property generating an income stream

There are some parishes and religious orders that have properties that are being used to generate income for running expenses of the parish or other mission activity. The range of arrangements include church owned property that is:

- rented out at a reduced or market rent to social services agencies for the provision of social housing
- rented out at market value or reduced rent to generate income for other parish activities (this includes renting to other religious organisations for broader church activities and to individuals seeking housing in the private rental market).

Properties for potential social housing developments

The second purpose of the survey was to assess whether there is any property across the Archdiocese that could be used to develop social housing. Overall, 56 properties were identified:

- 54 parishes have property (28 - land, 17 - dwellings and 9 - other buildings or land)
- 2 religious orders have potential properties.

The social housing working group assessed the likely suitability of property using the following criteria:

- location – is there a high demand for social housing in the area?
- suitability of site in terms of size, configuration and other site purposes
- willingness of the parish to engage in a project and availability of property.

The 56 properties were assessed resulting in:

- 38 potential properties requiring further investigation
- 18 properties deemed unsuitable and no longer under consideration.

The Social Housing Working Group is determining next steps in a consultation between parishes or religious orders and Catholic social housing providers for the 38 properties. The aim is to achieve a number of collaborations between parishes, Catholic housing providers, support services and the Archdiocese, that result in successful proposals for State Government social housing funding and the building of additional social housing that is well managed and supported in each local community.

Other issues emerging

Approximately 114 telephone surveys were completed, in most cases with the parish priests and in a few instances with either a pastoral associate or the parish secretary. During the telephone surveys, respondents raised a number of issues that are listed and discussed below.

Low cost or social housing placed next to a school

A few respondents stated that given the high and complex support needs of many people living in low cost or social housing and the need to ensure the Child Safe Standards are met, it would be inappropriate to place social housing adjacent to a school.

High support needs of tenants

In addition, a number of respondents were wary of housing developments because of the high and complex needs of most social housing tenants and demands for support this represents for parishes already struggling to support current parishioners and communities. This involved concerns about competing priorities of parish time, resources, energy and the expertise required to support a social housing project. These issues need to be addressed before viable proposals can be made.

Nomination rights for accommodation

The nomination rights for elderly unit public housing on church lands varies; some parishes have nomination rights to a small proportion of the units while other parishes have none. Some parishes are quite involved with tenants from the units while others had very little or no engagement. A number of respondents said they would not agree to future social housing development unless nomination rights could be guaranteed. Parishes tend to want to have a voice in decision making around decisions that affect them, their neighbourhood and their community.

Consultation and involvement in decision making with neighbours and parishes about the type of social housing and the support to be provided are important elements that need to be addressed in development proposals.

Property needs of parish schools

As centres of service, Catholic parishes have served both the spiritual and educational needs of the local community. There has been a long standing relationship between the establishment of churches and parish schools. A number of respondents in both new and established parishes stated that the needs of the parish school are a current priority.

In order for the church to address the spiritual needs of those in their community, each local church has a role to play in assisting to meet other basic needs. The Catholic education system is a good example of this; where educational needs are attended to within a spiritual framework. This nexus is also applicable to the meeting of housing needs.

Financial demands within parishes

Many respondents agreed that low cost housing was badly needed in their parish. One respondent stated that most churches struggle to operate on the resources currently available. Some older parishes have been able to acquire land or dwellings over time that they have been able to use to generate income for parish operational costs. Some parishes are using property to develop early learning centres, elderly accommodation or office space to create a rental revenue stream to meet parish expenses. These financial issues limit the development of social housing.

Conclusion

One in five parishes across the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne are engaged in the provision of low cost housing in their local community as part of their gospel mission to assist the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. This is good news that should be celebrated. This report aims to raise awareness of this important contribution.

This survey has demonstrated that there are significant resources across parishes that could be used to develop social housing. But parishes are also struggling financial to meet costs; an important consideration in this discussion. Parishes need the input, support and resources from a range of contributors, both within the church and externally.

The Social Housing Working Group is working to align church and parish property owners with housing providers so that a number of social housing developments proposals can be developed as bankable propositions. Work has also commenced on a broader social housing policy, to inform future decisions.

The demand for social housing and the significant Church investment in land would indicate that housing should remain a significant priority of the Catholic Church in Australia. This will require change that prioritises resources for housing. It requires a continuing challenge to societal expectation about the place of housing in our society, and will be a continuing challenge to financial paradigms both within the church and in society more broadly.

Appendices

Appendix 1   List of links to the social housing and support services provided by Catholic social service agencies and health bodies in Victoria

Social Services:

CatholicCare - www.ccam.org.au

Centacare Ballarat - www.centacareballarat.org.au

Don Bosco Hostel – www.donbosco.org.au

Good Samaritan Inn - www.goodsamaritaninn.org.au

McAuley Services for Women – www.mcauleycsw.org.au

Sacred Heart Mission - www.sacredheartmission.org

St John of God Accord - www.accorddisability.org.au

St John of God Horizon House - www.sjog.org.au/our-services/community-and-youth-services/st-john-of-god-horizon-house

VincentCare – www.vincentcare.org.au

The Way Community - www.thewaycommunity.com.au

Aged care and health providers of social housing:

Assisi Centre – www.assisicentre.com.au

Cabrini Residential Care - https://bit.ly/2m9Gm6n

Corpus Christi Community - www.corpuscc.org.au

Mercy Health Residential Aged Care – https://residential-care.mercyhealth.com.au/

Sisters of Nazareth, Nazareth House Camberwell and Ballarat – www.sistersofnazareth.com

St Joseph's Home for the Aged Little Sisters of the Poor - www.littlesistersofthepoor.org.au

St Vincent's Health Melbourne Prague House - www.svhm.org.au/health-professionals/aged-and-community-care/aged-care-facilities/prague-house

Villa Maria Catholic Homes –   www.vmch.com.au/services/affordable-housing

In addition to this list, some catholic agencies and organisations provided housing and homelessness support services and programs for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Appendix 2   Glossary

Definitions from Australian [Housing Urban Research Institute Glossary](#) unless otherwise indicated:

Affordable housing	A dwelling available through a housing assistance program that provides for a specified level of below market rent price (e.g. public housing, community housing, National Rental Affordability Scheme, shared equity scheme for home ownership).
	Households in the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution paying more than 30 per cent of their gross income on mortgage or rent payments are considered to be in housing affordability stress.
	Formal affordable housing programs set rent as a discount on market rent, thus the subsidy provided is lower and rental revenues higher. This requires eligible households to have higher incomes.
Community housing	Rental housing managed by community-based organisations that have received a capital grant or recurring subsidy from government in order to provide housing for households with low to moderate incomes or special needs. Community Housing providers include housing associations, registered housing providers, housing cooperatives, and not-for-profits such as welfare agencies that have established housing arms.
Private rental	Housing that is rented through a real estate agent or direct from private landlords. Leases are often for 12 months and may be renewable but not guaranteed.
Public housing	A system of dwellings owned (or leased) and managed by State and Territory government housing authorities with the aim of providing affordable rental accommodation. Rents are subsidised for eligible low income households. Public housing offers security of tenure.
Social housing	Rental housing that is provided and/or managed by government or non-government organisations, including public housing, Indigenous housing, community housing, crisis and transitional housing.
Social mix	A combination of diverse shares of social groups in a neighbourhood: a social group has one or more factors in common, such as similar economic resources, ethnicity, household structure or the same housing tenure.
Supported accommodation	Supported accommodation is a type of housing that provides higher level care and support for people with particular needs. It includes: Supported accommodation that is in the community, for people with a disability and aged care homes for older people who can no longer live independently at home.[9]
Transitional housing	A form of social housing delivered by community-based housing providers that offer short to medium term accommodation (3 months to one year) and support to specific groups in need (e.g. youth, those escaping family violence, people tackling their drug or alcohol addictions, the homeless).

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[9] [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services](#)