

Working together on the homelessness crisis on the Mornington Peninsula

Peninsula Voice August 2023



PENINSULA VOICE
Learning • Conversation • Engagement



Peninsula Voice would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the Bunurong People, who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and to their elders past and present.

Cover image courtesy of Yanni

Inside front cover: Rosebud foreshore – courtesy of Yanni.

Page 3 image – courtesy of Canva

A photograph showing a person in a dark jacket standing with their back to the camera, looking towards a bright blue building with a red door. The building has a corrugated metal roof and white bird decorations. In the foreground, there are several tents, including a green and white one and a blue one. The ground is sandy and there are some bushes and trees around the building.

'We urge our community to work together to do all we can and to challenge those in positions of power to prioritise funding for homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula.'

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Peninsula Voice
August 2023



Preface

Homelessness and housing unaffordability is not unique to the Mornington Peninsula. It is a significant challenge nationwide. Notable economic inequality is emerging, which is particularly evident in the supply of adequate housing for Australia's growing population.

Peninsula Voice has delivered events to the Mornington Peninsula community since 2014 to help shine a light on issues impacting our community. Deciding to focus on the homelessness crisis became urgent as the depth and extent of the issue became obvious. As we looked at the data and worked with the sector to understand the root causes, we also identified some truly innovative approaches working elsewhere and some incredible work being done locally by charities, churches, volunteers and our three community support centres.

This document is a summary of those conversations and the three events held by Peninsula Voice over 2022 and 2023.

Homelessness and housing affordability is certainly a confronting and all encompassing issue. We've seen almost uninterrupted growth in house values for nearly 30 years. While housing investment has created immense wealth for some, it has also driven a widening inequality wedge between those who have access to housing assets, and those who do not. It's a reality that negatively impacts the very foundations of our social infrastructure. Home ownership is increasingly unaffordable for a growing proportion of the population. The issue is compounded by trends such as short term holiday rentals, rapidly increasing rents, inflation, wage stagnation and insecure contractual work in the gig economy.

The situation is now critical. Census data, local support centres and sector stakeholders tell us that approximately 1,000 people couch surf, sleep in their car or sleep rough every night on the Mornington Peninsula. An increasing number of these people are women and children fleeing family violence, yet emergency accommodation is non-existent here.

In addition to the human and social cost, businesses on the Peninsula are struggling to find sufficient staff because suitable housing is either unavailable or unaffordable. Clearly, urgent action is needed.

The final homelessness event held by Peninsula Voice in May 2023, gathered leaders from the support sector as well as members of the community to identify strategies summarised in this report we believe can make a real difference.

We urge our community to work together to do all we can and to challenge those in positions of power to prioritise funding for homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula.

Peninsula Voice would like to thank the key stakeholders, sector leaders and the local community who have contributed to this discussion. We also acknowledge the support of our Mornington Peninsula Shire Councillors along with committed council staff.

This work would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of the Peninsula Voice volunteer team who ensure that we continue to build a strong and healthy community in this place we're privileged to call 'home'.

Peter Orton,
Convenor,
Peninsula Voice Inc.



Homelessness Affordable Housing + Poverty



ON THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA!



EVERYBODY'S
HERE



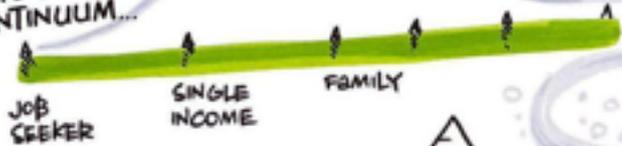
PENINSULA VOICE

SPREAD the WORD!



WHAT VALUE DO YOU PUT on a **HOME?**

IT'S A CONTINUUM...



IS THIS OKAY for YOUR NANNA?



SHELTER SIT'S HERE

IT FLOWS DOWNWARD...

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Introduction

Homelessness is experienced by many, including people:

- without conventional accommodation
- with improvised dwellings and sleeping rough, staying in accommodation that falls below minimal community standards (for example, boarding houses, caravan parks)
- who move frequently from one temporary shelter to another (for example, emergency accommodation, youth, refugees, couch surfing).

The housing issue broadly

The commodification of the home as an asset investment class is proving to be a trend with unintended consequences. Instead of a home being viewed as a basic human right and cornerstone of social infrastructure, housing has been used as a macro economic lever to prop up productivity for the past 30 years.

While initially successful in increasing supply, leveraging homes as an asset class over time has reinforced intergenerational inequality and exacerbated the fragility of our economic model, revealing an imbalanced economic model with wealth in property now several times larger than superannuation. This leaves us disproportionately exposed to the slightest headwind affecting property and entrenched social divides, all of which does nothing to build social capital.

The housing issue on the Mornington Peninsula

While the Mornington Peninsula is well known for its beautiful beaches and wineries, we also have a housing crisis, with one of the highest rates of homelessness in Victoria.

What does the data tell us?

Some recent data indicates the disparity between demand and supply on the Mornington Peninsula.

26%
of dwellings are unoccupied

Demand

- There has been a 25% increase in the priority waiting list for the Victorian Public Housing register since 2019.¹
- There are approximately 4,000 applications on the public housing waitlist.²
- Anyone under 55 years of age on the priority list for the housing register now has an 'indefinite' wait, which translates to between 15 and 20 years.
- 3,000 homes are needed just to meet the current demand on the peninsula, with 2,934 people already in desperate need of a home.³
- 16% of our homeless population 'sleep rough' - the fourth worst rate in Victoria.⁴
- At least 1,000 people experience homelessness here every day.
- There are NO emergency relief or supported crisis accommodation options.

Supply

- The number of affordable and appropriate homes in Victoria available for rent halved from 2021 –2022.⁵
- Only three individual properties on the Mornington Peninsula were classed as affordable for people on very low incomes for 12 months to December 2022.⁶
- There are 1,437 public housing properties on the Mornington Peninsula.
- The state government is spending more than \$11.5 million in housing on the Peninsula – this is ongoing, with 21 new properties completed and a further 13 underway.⁷
- One in four rental homes (approximately 4,000) on the Mornington Peninsula are only available for tourism (short term) stay.
- Rents have increased 31 per cent over the past year, causing significant rental stress.⁸
- 31% of dwellings on the Mornington Peninsula were unoccupied in 2016, representing 27,729 dwellings. During lockdown in 2021, this figure declined to 26.2 per cent.

In light of this, Peninsula Voice has undertaken to work with the community to understand how we can work together to bring about change.

Imagine not having access to a shower or laundry. To help the many people experiencing homelessness who are facing this challenge in the Rosebud area, the Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre set up the **SPLaSh** program. They provide free access to showers, washing machines and dryers, together with toiletry packs, towels and access to other material aid including tents, swags and bedding.

A simple lunch is also provided and other support services attend SPLaSh to offer a chance to contact services that may not otherwise be easily accessible.

A mobile version is being introduced to extend the reach of this vital service, which is entirely dependent on donations to exist.

Photo page 6, courtesy of Merrin Munro

Our response

Peninsula Voice Homelessness forums

Peninsula Voice hosted the first homelessness forum to focus on unpacking the definitions of and key drivers to homelessness and the impact it has on individuals. Peninsula Voice provided the opportunity for local support organisations to showcase their work and the challenges being faced to meet demand, while continuing to provide hope and care wherever possible. We also sought to build a common understanding of the terms and language used when discussing what is happening, and why.

The focus of the second forum was on housing affordability, one of the key drivers that leads to homelessness. The combined need for increased advocacy, government funding and community support were identified as the core drivers for change, which were then discussed at the third and final forum.

The final homelessness forum provided the opportunity for the community and organisations to come together to discuss, review and share ideas on how and who needs to advocate for change, provide resources and/or funding and to garner broader community support to deliver on practical and supportive solutions.

Six high level themes were reflected in the feedback and are the basis of the headings used in this report. They are:

- **Education**
- **Health**
- **Planning and land use**
- **Capital investment**
- **Rental/home share**
- **Advocacy**

We have also provided some areas which require further consideration before embarking on change, solutions and/or advocacy.

We encourage any local initiatives to be reviewed in line with changes occurring in federal and state policy and the sector to allow for this to be a supported and evidence-based process. Aligning community understanding with the broader issues of increasing interest rates and cost of living pressures are important factors to consider as part of ongoing homelessness support.

In addition, Peninsula Voice calls for a review of homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula based on the diverse needs of the community, including our First Nations community, to advocate for self-determination and supported change.

'We're providing more meals, financial assistance, and housing support than ever before but the demand just keeps growing. We're all exhausted and feel overwhelmed. Why isn't more being done to help us help these people?'
David,
community support worker

⁴ https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/49f006/contentassets/2c7b55f952294c039cceeefb59fa6db4/submission-documents/s145---mornington-pen-shire_redacted.pdf

⁵ <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/rental-affordability-snapshot-2022/>

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ <https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/whats-happening-my-area#mornington-peninsula>

⁸ <http://insideairbnb.com/mornington-peninsula>

⁹ www.realestate.com.au

¹⁰ <https://profile.id.com.au/mornington-peninsula/dwellings>



Recommendations

1. Education

Supporting our community to understand the issue of homelessness based on evidence, not misinformation, on the Mornington Peninsula is an important first step to change the narrative and stigma surrounding this issue. There is also a need to recognise the innovative opportunities that community members can create for practical and sustainable change in prevention and early intervention as well as broader policy and funding decisions.

Proposed actions:

- Develop an evidence-base about homelessness, how it affects diverse communities on the Peninsula, and information about local services and any gaps in support.
- Continue positive community conversations to correct misinformation and reduce stigma in our own networks.
- Promote the need and encourage volunteering with agencies providing support to those experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

One big idea ...

Develop a broad community education campaign to raise awareness of the homelessness crisis and those who are impacted, the critical need for prevention and early intervention, the services and supports available and the role we can all play in addressing this crisis in our community.

What would success look like?

The community would be better informed about the drivers behind homelessness and would use this knowledge to challenge perceptions, reduce stigma and contribute by making changes to the way their investment properties are utilised.



16%
of our homeless
community 'sleep
rough' each night

What difference would it make?

Our community would understand the key drivers and the role they can play to make a difference. The community narrative would be strong on compassion. Support and volunteer participation would increase as we move from passive concern to action.

As we release vacant investment properties and increase room utilisation within current dwellings to increase housing stock, we would become louder in our expectations of decision-makers to provide enablers such as funding, legislative change and support.

Who is involved and how?

Who	Role	Outcome
Local agencies and charities	Participation	The campaign is locally informed and evidence-based.
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Advocacy	The awareness campaign is fully funded and supported.
State Government	Funding	Funding is received for crisis housing on the Mornington Peninsula.
Community	Facilitate	Awareness of homelessness and the campaign.

2. Health and Wellbeing

Implementing a health and wellbeing model to the existing homelessness issue is critical, particularly for those individuals who are experiencing homelessness and those who are supporting them in the community. Connecting to services and supports in the community will require additional funding and resources to encourage other services to provide permanent arrangements or outreach to the region.

Linking with existing services and community services/initiatives including the state-funded Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs, the Orange Door (Family Violence and Child Safe agencies) and other prevention and early intervention services will provide a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of those who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless.

**At least
1,000**
people experience
homelessness here
every day.

It's hard to think about anything else when you're hungry, but finding the next meal is a constant challenge for those facing homelessness.

The **Mornington Community Support Centre (MCSC)** offers several food programs to meet this most basic need.

A fresh food pantry provides a wide range of items and the extremely popular community café produces over 500 lunches Monday to Thursday every week, with food donated from local businesses and food collection services such as Second Bite.

A team of extraordinary volunteers work their magic to turn the food into a nutritious and delicious meal, which for many, is the only meal they have each day. It can also be the only social connection they have, so these volunteers provide a listening ear as well as a meal, and help connect people to the Centre's other services including clothing, accommodation and financial support.

This Centre services Mornington, Mt Martha, Mt Eliza and Moorooduc. It is a registered charity almost entirely staffed by volunteers and receives little state government funding.

Proposed actions:

- Provide a health and wellbeing model to support homelessness and connection to new and existing services on the Peninsula
- Reduce the immense pressure on existing support staff and carers to avoid burnout and the significant loss of experience and knowledge from the sector by providing additional State Government funding for provision of adequate resourcing
- Increase early intervention and prevention supportUpdate and share data on the social and health care needs of those experiencing housing instability to inform and improve service delivery.

One big idea ...

Intervention and Homeless Support Workers, funded by the State Government.

What would success look like?

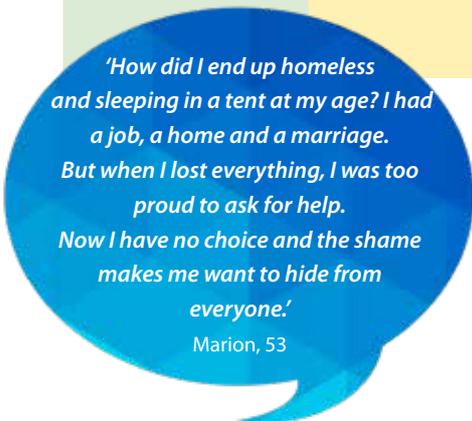
A well supported, funded, support system of place-based workers who are tasked with supporting those experiencing homelessness.

What difference would it make?

Having State funded workers will allow a more holistic response, with the ability to scale where appropriate.

Who is involved and how?

Who	Role	Outcome
Local agencies and charities	Advocacy/ action	Place-based workers are fully funded.
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Advocacy	Council advocates to state government to fund these positions.
State Government	Funding	Funding is received for support workers on the Mornington Peninsula.



3. Planning and Land use

Learning from international and national strategies is important to understand how public housing can be incorporated into existing communities and how historical and large-grouped public housing can perpetuate disadvantage. The impacts on house pricing, investors and tourism in the region will need to be explored in line with any state government review of rental assistance caps and short term rental regulations.

Proposed actions:

- Identify opportunities to increase social housing availability on the Mornington Peninsula by expanding and expediting council approvals for multiple (alternative) accommodation types (for example, granny flats, tiny houses)
- Remove council red tape and encourage developments/ subdivision and construction where they support integrated public housing
- Support more options for dependency units (tiny homes and granny flats)
- Place cap on short term rentals on the Mornington Peninsula
- Utilise caravan/camping grounds over winter (off-peak) with free tents/ caravans

One big idea ...

Amending council's planning guidelines with the view to incentivise increased housing stock

What would success look like?

Applications are expedited where
(i) social, affordable housing is the promise;
(ii) applicant has partnered with support services.

What difference would it make?

- An increased housing stock is available
- Accelerated investment in social housing builds
- The type of accommodation provided is aligned with individual requirements.

Who is involved and how?

Who	Role	Outcome
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Advocacy	Council advocates state government amend planning regulations.
State Government	Legislation	Planning regulations are amended.



4. Capital Investment

The Mornington Peninsula needs:

- Crisis accommodation
- More long-term social and affordable accommodation / housing
- An increased percentage of social housing in new developments to provide housing for those in need.
- Allocation of Council land for not-for-profits (NFP's) to develop social housing

A shift in legislation and policy for the use of existing land and housing would require substantive support at the state and federal level. It is a question of advocacy and how we, as the Mornington Peninsula community, can be a voice in how the current legislation, policy and planning is being implemented.

Creating a space for conversations between philanthropic and funding agencies and individual lived experience will need to occur to meet the specific needs of the region.

Proposed actions:

- Review existing and unoccupied public housing to support renovations through job programs (making use of existing stock)
- Provide more usable housing stock in place - ie an increase in 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings
- Use revenue from Capital Gains Tax to purchase transitional housing and fund charities to be in place to support tenants.
- Promote philanthropic investments to buy more existing motels and housing (potential) spaces for crisis accommodation.

One big idea ...

Increased provision of crisis and long-term social housing/ accommodation on the Mornington Peninsula.

What would success look like?

The Peninsula will have:

- Crisis accommodation/housing including safe spaces for women and children escaping domestic and family violence.
- Long-term social and affordable housing to decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness with dedicated developments for women and children.
- An increase in the percentage of social housing in new developments and affordable housing stock to increase housing stock and options.

- Increased land for social housing provided by Council for not-for-profit organisations (NFPs) to develop.

What difference would it make?

- Homelessness on the Peninsula would be reduced, giving people hope, opportunity for their future and that of their family.
- The ability for people to secure rental properties, purchase homes, and find other forms of housing would be increased.
- Liveability of the Peninsula would be increased, allowing those who wish to live here the opportunity to do so, regardless of their financial situation.

Who is involved and how?

Who	Role	Outcome
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Advocacy	Council advocates to state and federal government for more funding.
State Government	Funding	Funding is received for crisis housing on the Mornington Peninsula.
Federal Government	Funding	Investment on the Peninsula is increased to meet needs.

5. Rental/home share

Implementing change in the rental and short-stay accommodation market will require a community voice to influence state and federal policy decision-making.

Proposed actions:

- Encourage owners of second (and vacant) properties to place them in the rental market.
- Investigate and increase scope for Not-for-profit agencies (such as Home Ground Real Estate) to facilitate leases for people below market rate.
- Encourage room sharing on the Mornington Peninsula.

One big idea ...

Trial a program to match those looking for a room to rent with those who require one.

Receiving a Notice to Vacate your home is a growing reality for families and individuals on the Mornington Peninsula as rents continue to escalate and become unaffordable.

Western Port Community Support in Hastings provides the only dedicated housing caseworker on the Peninsula with a strong focus on prevention. By providing the essential advocacy on behalf of the client and making time to understand how the housing crisis has occurred, checking the general well being of the household, providing emotional support, and in some cases,

providing financial support, many evictions and the trauma associated with being homeless is prevented.

Over the last four years, the Housing and Homelessness Support Program at WPCS has case managed 670 clients with 392 clients (plus 287 dependants) who now reside in more stable and secure housing situations. This program receives no State Government funding and is entirely dependent on philanthropy and community support. The demand is continuing to increase.

What would success look like?

More people with affordable accommodation, increased sense of community.

What difference would it make?

- There would be a reduction in those in housing stress
- Homelessness would be reduced.
- The quality of life would be improved for many people.

Who is involved and how?

Who	Role	Outcome
Home owners	Participation	Vacant rooms are filled by those in need.
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Advocacy	Council provides leadership, supports and promotes the trial.
State Government	Funding	The trial is properly funded and ongoing costs of the program are met.

6. Advocacy

The overarching idea of advocacy intersects each of the five high level ideas and is an integral part of how community and local organisational perspectives need to be engaged in all ongoing discussions and decision-making.

Proposed actions:

- Advocate for change and support within existing state and federal legislative change, funding and planning processes to increase social housing supply.
- Connect to existing services and advocate for improved permanent and outreach options on the Mornington Peninsula.
- Utilise the Big Housing Build, federal homelessness plan and other state or local planning for local Mornington Peninsula support.

One big idea ...

Set up a collective group who advocate for affordable housing on the Mornington Peninsula, utilising the information that is provided to them by various groups within the community.

What would success look like?

The Housing Advocacy for Mornington Peninsula is up and running by December 2023

A number of housing options are established and up and running by December 2024.

What difference would it make?

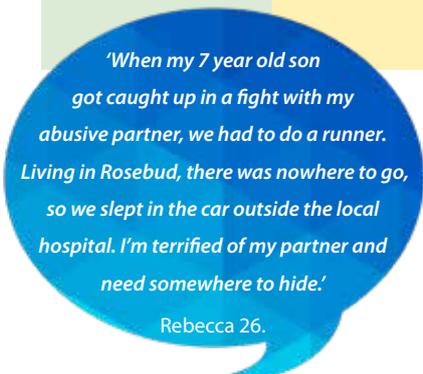
It would build a coalition of interested and invested participants to work together on long and short term goals, keep the topic live and maintain action with the ultimate goal of providing more crisis accommodation locally.

Who is involved and how?

Mornington Peninsula community – advocacy, voting
Mornington Peninsula Shire – advocacy and support for community led group.

State Government – Treasury to provide access to the ‘Big Housing Build’ funds?

Who	Role	Outcome
Local agencies and charities	Participation	The Housing Advocacy group is active and effective.
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Participation	Council supports and promotes the Housing Advocacy group.
State Government	Funding /support	Legislation is amended and funding provided to increase social housing supply on the Peninsula.
Community	Accountability	The Housing group remains active and effective.





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Next steps

This report will be presented to participants from the three forums, including the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, State and Federal government (including local members) and other key organisations who can take the recommendations forward. It will also be promoted broadly to our community, governments and media, and available on the Peninsula Voice website at www.Peninsulavoice.org.au

Our sponsors and partners

Sponsors:

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
Bendigo Community Bank Mount Martha

Partners:

Service providers

Mornington Community Support Centre
Western Port Community Support
Southern Peninsula Community Support
Bolton Clarke
Fusion Housing Service
Salvation Army
Anglicare
Victorian Public Tenants Association

Faith and community groups

Mornington Church of Christ
New Peninsula Baptist Church
Mount Martha Rotary Club

Event supporters

Yanni Creative
(special thanks for supplying the photographs in this report)
Mosaic Lab
Creative Sweat Graphic Design Solutions
Ed Wischer Productions
Mornington Peninsula News
RPP Community Radio.

'I've been volunteering at the Mornington Community Support Centre serving meals to those in need. Their stories break my heart but I know at least I'm making a small difference to their lives.' -

Ruth 62.



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The quality and strength of a community can be seen, felt and measured by how it comes together to care for its members, particularly the most vulnerable.

We connect with each other to stimulate community education, awareness, and advocacy on public policy, social justice, ethics, wellbeing and health in all its forms; because after all, together, "we are greater than the sum of our parts".

To learn more about Peninsula Voice and how you can join us to make a positive difference to our community go to www.peninsulavoice.org.au

facebook.com/peninsulavoice/