



Peninsula  
Community  
Legal Centre

# OPEN THE DOOR!

THE RESIDENT'S VIEW OF LIFE  
IN A ROOMING HOUSE

PCLC ROOMING HOUSE  
OUTREACH PROGRAM

Research report | May 2020



## FOREWORD

In the course of providing specialist tenancy services for over two decades, PCLC has seen a dramatic increase in the number of Victorians who cannot access or afford housing in the open market and who are forced to live in inadequate or unsafe marginal housing such as rooming houses.

This experience led us to identify rooming house residents as a priority group and to set up an assertive rooming house outreach program covering Melbourne's south east in 2012.

Since then, our outreach team has been connecting rooming house tenants and residents to health, housing and legal services and reporting breaches of minimum standards to regulators. 'Open the Door! The Resident's View of Life in a Rooming House' reflects the voices of the people we have met through this work, and sheds light on the little known conditions of their daily life on the margins.

The report paints a picture of vulnerable people who are struggling with unaffordable rents, entrenched poverty and sub-standard accommodation that is in desperate need of repair. These challenges must be viewed in the context of a long-term housing crisis and severe shortages of social and affordable housing.

The report highlights that there is still a considerable way to go to achieving the objectives of almost a decade of legislative reform to ensure that rooming houses meet community standards of decency and amenity.

The COVID 19 pandemic and the threat to public health posed by overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions mean that the need for more action towards achieving this objective is ever more urgent.

**Jackie Galloway**

*Chief Executive Officer,*  
Peninsula Community Legal Centre

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PCLC would like to acknowledge the significant contribution by Aldo Taranto, Rooming House Outreach Worker, Chris Tudor, Social Worker and Kirsten Young, Community Engagement Officer to the research project.

We extend our warmest gratitude to the fifty individuals who participated in this research and who so generously shared their lives, thoughts and experiences with us. Our hope is that this work will inform and educate others about the lives of rooming house residents and provide opportunities to improve their situation.

We would also like to acknowledge those residents who did not participate in this research but, through their involvement and participation in the Rooming House Outreach Program over the last two years, have inspired and informed this work.



Peninsula Community Legal Centre acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of country, recognizes their continuing connection to land, waters and communities, and pays respects to Elders past and present.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## REPORT AIMS

In 2009 the Victorian state government set up a Rooming House Standards Task Force to review the many problems in rooming house accommodation regarding safety, standards, and exploitative practices by operators. The review led to a series of legislative reforms, commencing with amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act in 2012.

This report was developed to consolidate the learnings from the Peninsula Community Legal Centre's (PCLC) experience of running a rooming house outreach program in south east Melbourne since 2012. A key aim was to conduct a comprehensive survey to gather information about residents' personal experiences to evaluate how well the current rooming house regulation and support system is serving them.

Based on this research, the report highlights areas in the system that we believe need improvement based on our clients' and workers' experiences. It contains a number of practical, legislative and policy recommendations to government, rooming house operators and community organisations working in the sector.

Many of these recommendations are made by residents in their own voices. The report provides a unique insight into life inside a rooming house from the perspective of the residents themselves, and offers them a rare platform to speak directly to the broader community. The report also sheds light on the fact that, despite reforms in the sector in recent years, rooming house residents continue to lead lives of quiet desperation.

The ultimate aim of the report is to advocate for the change that continues to be necessary to improve the daily living conditions of some of the most profoundly disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the Victorian community who reside in rooming house accommodation.

## Research Methodology

In order to determine the current state of rooming houses and to profile their residents, the following research steps were undertaken:

### Survey of residents

- PCLC's rooming house outreach program conducted a detailed survey of 50 residents of rooming house located across the south east Melbourne region from July to December 2019. The survey covered a wide range of matters to identify: residents' pathway into rooming houses and their hopes about future housing options; their experience of the 'system', including rooming house operators, regulatory agencies, and community organisations providing referrals and support; and their daily experience of living in rooming houses, including matters such as affordability, living conditions, health and safety and security.
- Apart from data gathering, a key aim of the survey was to give rooming house residents a voice. Like many marginalized people, rooming house residents are largely excluded from policy and other decision-making frameworks regarding matters which have a direct impact on their lives. We believe this is a major gap in the system. The survey provides unique information regarding residents' lived experiences and their recommendations for systemic reform.

### PCLC data

- PCLC's rooming house outreach program (RHOP) conducts a visiting outreach service to residents of private rooming houses across a vast catchment of 17 local government areas in the south east region of Melbourne where there are over 800 registered rooming houses. Data was consolidated from the RHOP and our Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program, together with submissions made to various state and local government reviews on legislative and policy matters, and forms the basis of some of the key findings and recommendations of this report.

## KEY FINDINGS OF REPORT

### General

Rooming houses are often used as crisis accommodation by emergency housing services due to a lack of any affordable alternatives. More often than not rooming house accommodation is seen as a last resort for people who have no other options.

Rooming house accommodation is intended to be short-term and transitory while people wait to be housed in social housing, or for those temporarily visiting or studying in another city. However, due to the severe shortage of public housing and lack of affordable private rental housing, residents are living in rooming houses for increasingly longer periods. PCLC's RHOP data indicates a thirty month average occupation period.

Rooming houses have been characterized as the “interface between homelessness and low- cost housing”.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the perception that rooming house accommodation provides a more affordable option, excessive rents are becoming an increasing problem. Traditionally rooming houses provided a low-cost alternative to private rentals, but in recent times the lack of affordable housing has facilitated the growth of the private rooming house sector as a profitable business.

A high proportion of rooming house residents have complex needs, including mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependence, or a history of family violence. Many receive government pensions or work in low-income employment. A large number of vulnerable international students also live in rooming house accommodation. The 2009 Rooming House Standards Task Force was established in recognition of the fact that ‘some of the most vulnerable members of our community’ live in rooming houses.<sup>2</sup> As such they are disproportionately at risk from the impacts of substandard conditions of safety, health protection, amenity and exploitation.

The reforms instituted in the wake of the Rooming House Task Force's 2009 report have arguably led to some improvements in rooming house conditions.<sup>3</sup> However, many of the problems and concerns that led to the creation of the Task Force persist. Our research demonstrates that there remains a significant and growing issue with unscrupulous and exploitative rooming house owners, and rooming houses that are unsafe, unclean and overcrowded.

As this report reflects, many residents seen by our RHOP workers consistently request more suitable housing options, citing concerns about safety, poor hygiene, sub-standard conditions, excessive rents, overcrowding, and social isolation.

### Poor Conditions:

#### Lack of Compliance with Regulatory Framework

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) has reported a high degree of compliance with the current prescribed minimum standards in registered rooming houses.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, our research indicates that breaches of the regulatory framework are commonplace and poor conditions continue to be a real concern in a significant number of rooming houses across Melbourne's south east.

In our survey, 48% of residents surveyed described their living conditions as ‘very poor’, ‘bad’ and ‘unsafe’. According to our RHOP data, over 40% of privately registered rooming houses operate in a significant state of disrepair and lack of maintenance.

Residents report broken locks, broken doors and windows, a lack of working smoke alarms and dirty or unusable shared facilities such as toilets, showers and kitchens. They also complained about mould, pests, a lack of heating, and non-working power points, stoves and toilets. The lack of adequate hygiene in crowded shared living conditions has become an even more acute concern since the advent of COVID-19, with residents routinely reporting filthy conditions. Our RHOP data also

1 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, AHURI Final Report No. 54, Boarding houses and government supply side intervention, Queensland Research Centre, March 2004 p7

2 Rooming House Standards Taskforce, Chairperson's Report, 2009

3 While a majority of AHURI panel members agreed with the CAV position that the minimum standards were ‘the most important part of the reforms introduced since 2012’, a majority also agreed that ‘minimum standards have made little difference to the quality and amenity of rooming houses’. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, AHURI Final Report No. 245, *Rooming House futures: governing for growth, fairness and transparency*, August 2015, p39

4 CAV Alternate forms of tenure: parks, rooming houses and other shared living rental arrangements, Issues Paper, 2016, p34

indicates many repairs are left unattended for lengthy periods and are not carried out by qualified personnel, for example electrical repairs carried out by operators rather than electricians.

On safety, residents reported major concerns related to drug use and the associated behaviours of other residents which often resulted in conflicts and violence and contributed to an environment that was unpredictable and unsafe. Noise was also considered to be a major issue for many. On average, most rooming houses have around six to eight people in residence at any one time. The majority are standard suburban homes that have been built to house families. They have been modified (often crudely and cheaply) to function as rooming houses to accommodate more people and maximise profit. This 'new model' of profitable private rooming houses has emerged in response to a competitive rental market and rising house prices. Overcrowding and excessive profit seeking by operators combine to contribute to difficult and unsafe living environments, with numerous residents living in very close quarters in conditions of high stress and anxiety.

Residents commented that they would like rooming house operators to be more responsive to resident concerns, to improve general conditions and attend to repairs in a timely manner. Some residents requested better security, including security cameras, proper locks on external doors and individual rooms, as well as lockers in the kitchen to safely store their food and cooking utensils. Others felt that they paid too much for a relatively small space and requested rent reductions. Others also reported that they were not issued with receipts for their rent payments as required under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA).

Most residents feel unable to advocate on their own behalf for improved living conditions. They are reluctant to report breaches for fear of retaliatory action by the operator. Residents' reluctance is also due to their complex needs, which make them highly vulnerable and often lacking capacity to assert their rights. This situation, along with the substantial power imbalance currently inherent in the market between residents and rooming house owners, means that residents are more

susceptible to exploitation by unscrupulous operators than other groups in the community.

It is therefore critical that vulnerable resident's rights are properly protected by stringent standards and effective compliance and enforcement action by regulators. As noted in a recent review, however, the current system is failing them.<sup>5</sup>

#### Regulation and Enforcement: More Coordinated and Consistent Approach Required

There are numerous legislative frameworks that regulate different aspects of rooming houses and residential tenancies, making compliance and enforcement of the legislation confusing and complex. The primary responsibilities for enforcement are shared between Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) and local government. This makes it difficult to implement a cohesive and coordinated approach since regulators have limited opportunities to interact and harmonise the way they regulate.

It is also worth noting that community organisations like ours form a key element of the regulatory system. Due to the severe lack of resources in the sector, very often our workers are the only representative of the 'system' to have ever visited a property. In practice, reports from our RHOP and that run by similar organisations<sup>6</sup> often provide the main trigger for compliance activity by regulators. However, there is no mechanism for regulators, owner operator organisations, and community organisations working in the housing sector to systematically discuss regulatory arrangements and accountabilities.

Given the multiplicity of agencies, legislation and regulations involved, strategies to improve co-ordination and communication between state regulators, local government, operators and the non-government sector are needed to improve the coverage and enforcement of regulation, and to identify areas where change is required. We endorse AHURI's recommendation that the establishment of a state level consultative or advisory council made up of all key stakeholders would be one strategy to achieve this.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> AHURI Final Report No. 245, August 2015, *op cit* p39

<sup>6</sup> Tenants Union of Victoria has a rooming house outreach program in Melbourne's north, for example.

<sup>7</sup> AHURI Final Report No.245, August 2015, *op cit*, p40



Lack of enforcement action taken against rooming house owners in breach of the legislation is a significant issue. We acknowledge that there are competing demands on resources and it is often not possible to take action due to limited capacity and the intensive resources that are required. However, PCLC and other community organisations working in the area have significant knowledge about rooming house operators who are breaching the laws who could be targeted for enforcement action. We therefore recommend that CAV conduct consultations with local councils and other community organisations to work out how best to direct the limited resources that are available. Based on these consultations, CAV could develop a compliance strategy to take enforcement action against rooming house operators who are notorious in the industry for breaches of the legislation.

As our catchment covers 17 different local government areas, we have also experienced widely differing practices among the different councils in relation to interpretation of legislation and regulation and compliance practices.

As noted in previous submissions by the community legal sector<sup>8</sup>, Local Government Victoria needs to play a greater role in the coordination of compliance activity between councils and ensure a consistent approach to regulations, standards and compliance practices across the State. Compliance efforts by all local councils should achieve consistent, best practice standards.

CAV and local councils also need to do more to make it easier for residents to report any problems or regulatory breaches at their rooming houses, as this is one of the key triggers for inspections to take place. In our survey, less than one third said they had contacted the local council or CAV in relation to concerns about their rooming house. Most knew little about their rights and had never seen the CAV guide<sup>9</sup> on rights and responsibilities which operators are obliged to provide them under the legislation.

In relation to communicating to residents how they can report problems, local councils should provide accessible and clear information in plain English for residents on the council's oversight responsibilities and the process for residents to make reports. CAV inspectors should routinely investigate whether the CAV guide was provided to residents and take disciplinary action against operators when this has not been done. The inspector should also provide the guide to residents who have not received a copy.

As noted in previous submissions by the community legal sector<sup>8</sup>, there are also a number of ways that the reporting and follow-up system could be simplified. Residents should not have to make written requests to rooming house operators or CAV about non-urgent repairs. Given the literacy barriers that many residents face, the ability to verbally communicate repair requests would increase the likelihood that they would actually be made. Tenants should also be able to seek a CAV inspection where repairs have been performed but are unsatisfactory. Section 131 of the Residential Tenancies Act and CAV's practices should be amended to allow this.

In addition, to reduce fragmentation between state and local government responsibilities and streamline the system, CAV inspections should be broadened to include repair breaches under the RTA and breaches of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Building Act 1993.<sup>10</sup> CAV should make referrals to the relevant councils based on their findings.

Our research also revealed that many residents reported that when operators are given advance notice of inspections they often instruct residents to clean up the property prior to the visit. Residents also commented that inspectors tend to engage primarily with the operator and seek little or no input from them. Where possible, inspectors should make efforts to consult with residents to get their feedback during inspections.

<sup>8</sup> Submission in response to 'Alternative Forms of Tenure Issues Paper' Tenants Union of Victoria, 2016, p22

<sup>9</sup> Consumer Affairs Victoria. (2019). *Rooming Houses: A guide for residents and operators*

<sup>10</sup> Submission in response to 'Alternative Forms of Tenure Issues Paper' Westjustice, 2016, p22

<sup>11</sup> Submission in response to 'Alternative Forms of Tenure Issues Paper, Tenants Union of Victoria, 2016

## Current Minimum Standards are Too Low

One of the findings of the 2009 Taskforce was that 'government must take action to prevent vulnerable Victorians living in circumstances which do not meet community expectations of decency and amenity'.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the properties that we visit that are deemed compliant under the current prescribed minimum standards are unsafe, unclean and overcrowded. In our assessment, the current minimum standards do not meet community expectations and are too low.

The minimum standards should be strengthened to include the following:

- A minimum of one toilet for every five residents
- A minimum of one shower for every five residents
- Weekly cleaning of communal areas and residents' rooms
- External secure mailboxes for each room
- Adequate communal social space
- Secure current Australian Standard entry door locks
- 24-hour access to adequate heating, cooling, cooking and washing facilities.

### Affordability:

#### Lack of Protection from Profiteering and Exploitation

Rooming house residents are often forced to pay excessive rents for relatively small rooms in substandard, overcrowded housing with little or no communal areas. Most rents in rooming houses we visit far exceed 30% of income<sup>13</sup>, with 52% of the residents in our survey spending between 50 – 60% of their income on rent.

All of the residents in our survey receive Centrelink benefits, as do a high proportion of the people we see in our RHOP. Many report that rooming house operators set rental prices on the basis of residents' pension amount rather than the quality of the accommodation – the higher the pension, the higher the rent demanded. This means that some residents are paying \$250 a week for what one described as "a room that's smaller than a prison cell" in a property in appalling condition. Not only do the rents not match the quality of the

accommodation, they also force people to live below the poverty line.

It is worth noting that there is a stark difference in housing affordability for individuals receiving government benefits or earning the minimum wage, and those earning an average wage. Even if households earning an average wage are paying close to – or more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, they typically remain above the after-housing poverty line.<sup>14</sup> 46% of our survey respondents reported that they did not eat an adequate amount of food and that there were regular periods where they did not eat at all. Our RHOP workers are regularly approached by residents requesting the most basic of necessities such as toilet paper.

Many rooming house operators are profiteering off residents who are among the most profoundly vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. Profiteering and exploitation were two of the key problems behind the establishment of the Rooming House Standards Task Force in 2009. However, none of the subsequent changes to the regulatory framework have succeeded in properly addressing this aspect, including the licensing system that was established to protect against exploitative practices through the implementation of a 'fit and proper person' test for operators.

In order to bring about meaningful change to excessive rental prices and to protect vulnerable residents from exploitation, we believe a rent control scheme is required. We acknowledge that the recent 2018 amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act go some way towards limiting rent increases, but in our view a comprehensive rent control scheme is necessary.

In light of the extent of profiteering and substandard conditions that persist across the rooming house sector, more rigorous assessment criteria and processes to determine who is a "fit and proper" person under the licensing system to operate a rooming house would also seem to be required.

<sup>12</sup> Rooming House Standards Taskforce Chairperson's Report September 2009 p33

<sup>13</sup> For low-income households, spending 30 per cent or more of household income on rent is considered an indicator of housing stress. Tenants Union of Victoria Private Rental Affordability Bulletin Melbourne (June Quarter 2016)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid



## Insufficient Social and Affordable Housing

The majority of residents seen by our RHOP are on the public housing register, with 22% of survey respondents stating they have been waiting for social housing for five years or more.

Much has been written about the lack of sufficient social housing at the state and national level, as well as the fact that Australia has a very low rate compared to similar OECD countries.<sup>15</sup> There is a clear and urgent need for State and Federal Governments to increase the supply and funding for social and affordable housing.

We reiterate the call made by Victoria's community sector to the state government to invest in the creation of 3,500 extra public and community housing properties, plus 300 Aboriginal community housing properties each year to meet the needs of people who cannot access or afford housing in the open market, or who are forced to live in inappropriate or unsafe marginal housing such as rooming houses or motels.<sup>16</sup>

## Residents Need Increased Support from Social and Community Service Organisations

Most individuals involved in the research were referred to rooming house accommodation by emergency housing providers. 74% of residents reported that more assistance could have been provided at the time of referral.

Many moved in with little or no knowledge of what to expect and often had very few personal belongings or equipment necessary to set themselves up comfortably. A considerable number of residents were relocated from other parts of metropolitan Melbourne due to unaffordability issues or lack of alternative accommodation options in the inner city and almost half of residents surveyed had little or no knowledge of the local area or support services. Residents reported that it would have been helpful if emergency housing providers had provided more detailed information about where they were going and checked to see if there were basic amenities at the residence prior to making the referral.

It would also be helpful if emergency housing providers were able to equip residents with a resource kit including items such as basic toiletries, bedding, local community

information, and information about resident rights and responsibilities.

We also recommend that emergency housing providers should take the opportunity to assist those individuals who wish to apply for Department of Housing (DoH) accommodation, and remind those already on the DOH register to notify the department of their change of address, so that they continue to receive correspondence from the department.

Emergency housing providers often refer people to rooming houses which they are aware are sub-standard and unsafe because there are no other options available. We acknowledge that this is due to the significant and chronic undersupply of adequate and affordable transitional and long-term housing options. However, in the case of rooming houses which are well-known for being unsafe, unclean, overcrowded or otherwise in breach of the law, in our view it would be better to avoid referrals and in some cases boycott rooming houses which are notorious in the industry.

Rooming house residents spend significant amounts of time each week at the rooming house, locked away in their rooms. Their contact with the outside world is extremely limited and is largely focused on the purchase and supply of food and other necessary provisions such as medication. Some residents reported that financial constraints prevented them from going out. However, for many, health issues and low self-esteem were the primary reasons for this lack of engagement with the external world. For those relocated from other parts of Melbourne, the loss of supports, connections and well-established friendships were also contributing factors.

The research found that people are living lonely and isolated lives, staying within the confines of their room for much of the day, only emerging to take care of the most basic requirements of life. They do not participate in broader community activities or access additional support services.

Many residents also reported mental health issues and drug and alcohol dependence. Of particular concern were the significant proportion who said they had multiple or complex health issues but were not accessing

<sup>15</sup> According to the 2006 census, Australia's public housing stock consisted of some 304,000 dwellings out of a total housing stock of more than 7.1 million dwellings, or 4.2% of all housing stock (compared with 20% in Denmark, 46% "low rent housing" in France and 50% public housing in the UK at peak).

<sup>16</sup> Open letter to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System from Victoria's community sector, 10 October 2019

appropriate treatment. The research found that residents have a wide range of skills, experience and expertise, indeed, many are highly skilled in their professional field. Most residents reported that they would prefer to be employed and earning an income, recognizing this as one of the few pathways out of rooming house accommodation. However, over time, living in rooming houses impacts individual emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing and people simply give up hope that life can be any different.

Rooming house residents require better access to social, legal and health support. Very few agencies visit rooming house residents in their homes. Local councils should work together with local support agencies to develop lists of what support is available locally for display in rooming houses. They should also facilitate training to community services workers on working with rooming house residents.

### More Consultation with Residents

A key concern raised by residents is that they want to have a voice and be consulted about their experience of living in rooming houses. As can be seen in the recommendations that they make in this report, they have much to contribute to the policy and decision-making process.

This could be achieved in a variety of ways, for example by the establishment of residents' committees chaired by local councils to provide direct input into council's approaches to rooming house management and oversight, or by the establishment of better processes for direct consultation with residents during CAV or local council inspections without the operator standing over them.

Similarly, emergency housing and other community support organisations could also establish consultation mechanisms with rooming house residents to work out what support services residents might require after they have been referred in to the rooming house.

## CONCLUSION

The reforms instigated by the Rooming House Task Force report in 2009 have led to improvements in the regulatory framework for the rooming house sector. However, many of the problems and concerns that led to the creation of the Task Force persist to this day, with the standard of accommodation in many rooming houses remaining extremely poor for the significant proportion of vulnerable people who have no option but to live in them.

This report gives a unique insight into life inside Victoria's rooming houses in the residents' own voices. By providing a platform for residents to speak directly to the broader community, the research sheds light on the fact that most are leading lives of quiet desperation. They want the government and community to act.

Residents would like to see more stringent regulations in place to improve standards and increased enforcement action to ensure that better quality accommodation is provided. They also want better protection from excessive rents and exploitation. They want safe, affordable and adequate housing.

### In the words of one:

*'Rooming houses are a shamble, a mess, an idea gone wrong. The rooming house model is broken.... please fix the housing mess!'*



# PENINSULA COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE:

Peninsula Community Legal Centre is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that has been providing free legal services to Melbourne's south-eastern communities since 1977. The Centre helps people use the law to protect and advance their rights, offering free advice on most legal issues, including Family Law, Family Violence, Civil, Infringements, Crime and Tenancy. Ongoing assistance is targeted to assist clients who are experiencing disadvantage. The Centre undertakes a range of community legal education, community engagement and law reform activities and is active in a number of community and sector networks.

## BACKGROUND

### Rooming houses – a definition

*A rooming house is a building where one or more rooms are available to rent, and the total number of people who may occupy those rooms is four or more. Most rooming house residents share bathrooms, kitchens, laundries and other common areas and separate rental agreements may exist for different residents*

(Consumer Affairs Victoria: 2019, p.8)

## ROOMING HOUSE OUTREACH PROGRAM:

Peninsula Community Legal Centre Inc. has been providing specialist tenancy services for over two decades. In 2012 the Centre identified rooming house residents as a priority group securing funding to undertake an outreach program.

The Rooming House Outreach Program services covered a catchment area of 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the South East Region. The primary purpose of the Rooming House Outreach Program was to assist and support tenants and residents to understand their rights and responsibilities. Prior to October 2017 the program was funded by CAV. PCLC employed two (2) rooming house outreach workers on a part time basis (17.5 hours per week). The program also focused on connecting rooming house tenants and residents to appropriate services such as health, housing and legal services. The CAV funded program focused on visitation of all registered rooming houses in the South East Region. As at 1 July 2017 CAV funding ceased for the PCLC Rooming House Outreach Program.

In October 2017, PCLC secured new funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with a broader set of program objectives. One (1) rooming house outreach worker is employed by PCLC (35 hours per week). PCLC's in-house social worker also supports the program. The newly funded Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP) continues to cover 17 LGAs in the South East Region.

### Objectives of Program:

1. Visit single people living in registered and unregistered rooming houses in the South East Region.
2. Identify and assist residents requiring more suitable housing.
3. Identify and assist residents to connect with health, housing, legal and support services.
4. Offer residential tenancies advice relating to residency/tenancy issues.
5. Report breach of minimum standards to regulators.

# A ROOMING HOUSE SNAPSHOT

## Victoria Southern Metro - VHC Region



## AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE - ALTERNATIVE TO SOCIAL HOUSING

Historically, rooming houses were an accommodation choice for single men in the early twentieth century. This followed with the development of community managed rooming houses introduced in the 1980s. The new model of private rooming houses has occurred in recent times as a result of financial opportunities for private investors in the Victorian rental market.

In October 2006 the deaths of two people in a fire at a Brunswick boarding house raised serious questions about the licencing of rooming houses and private hotels. In order to improve the amenity and safety of rooming houses minimum standards were introduced in 2011 and became enforceable in March 2013.

## Rooming houses in victoria– a snapshot

- Registered rooming houses are predominantly located in the Melbourne metropolitan area.
- Consumer Affairs Victoria 2018/2019 annual report indicates total number of registered rooming houses in Victoria is 1,340, a six (6) percent increase on the 2017/2018.
- There are more than 800 registered rooming houses in the South East region, covering seventeen local government areas and approximately 240 registered rooming houses in the Inner North and North West regions, covering fourteen local government areas
- In regional Victoria, including City of Greater Geelong, there are approximately 200 registered rooming houses.
- The type and age of rooming house stock varies and are not necessarily identifiable as a rooming house from the exterior.



# LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

## ROOMING HOUSE OPERATORS – LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS:

In 2012 the Residential Tenancies (Rooming House Standards) Regulations 2012 introduced rooming house minimum standards applying as at 31 March 2013. The objectives of the regulations was to prescribe privacy, security, safety, and amenity standards within rooming houses.

A state wide rooming house register was also introduced to enable suspected unregistered rooming houses to be checked against a public register. According to Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) there are approximately 900 registered operators in Victoria.

There is a variety of legislative requirements and regulations shared between CAV and local councils. This makes it difficult to implement a cohesive approach to rooming house regulation, in particular where there are differing policies and procedures between agencies in relation to monitoring, education and regulation of operators and stakeholders.

### Regulation

Local councils are responsible for the registration and deregistration of rooming houses. In the event an unregistered rooming house is identified, the local council inspects and requests registration of the rooming house.

Local councils have an ongoing role to monitor certain conditions within rooming houses in relation to the Building Code, Building Regulations, Public Health and Wellbeing Act or Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations.

Building Department	Health and Environment Department
General state of repair, including ventilation and fire hazards.	Register of residents
Display health, building and fire safety measures	Number of bathrooms
Fire prevention systems	General hygiene and room size
Emergency lighting and exits	Rubbish collection and pest control
Health and safety issues	Adequate supply of hot and cold water and issues of overcrowding and noise complaints

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) are responsible for regulating relationships between the regulator and the residents/renters as outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) including lodgement of bonds, unlawful eviction, and in particular, minimum standards.

### List of Minimum Standards:

- Door, power outlets and windows in resident's rooms
- Bathroom and laundry facilities
- Dining, kitchen and food preparation facilities
- Emergency plans and procedures
- Electrical requirements, electrical and gas safety checks

### CAV inspections

CAV inspects all newly registered rooming houses and inspects a portion of currently registered/operating rooming houses. Premises identified for inspection may be as a result of complaints received from renters/residents, support agencies and outreach services.

CAV ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19			
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Rooming House Inspections (including repeat inspections)	621	738	406
Registered Rooming Houses	1184	1256	1340

### The rooming house market

There continues to be a growth in the number of rooming houses in Victoria as demand for private rental grows and affordability declines. The only option for many people seeking accommodation, especially single people on low incomes, is rooming house accommodation.

Generally, rooming houses accommodate the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community, however, in some areas they are also used as short term accommodation for international students, travellers and contract workers.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

## PCLC RECOMMENDATIONS

### Regulation and Enforcement

**Recommendation 1:** Widespread breaches of the regulatory framework in registered rooming houses across south east Melbourne require more concerted action by rooming house operators to comply with the law and for regulators to enforce adequate levels of compliance.

**Recommendation 2:** Improved co-ordination and communication between state regulators, local government, rooming house operators and the non-government sector is required in order to improve the coverage and enforcement of regulation. The Victorian government should establish a state level rooming house consultative or advisory council made up of all key stakeholders.

**Recommendation 3:** Rooming house outreach programs such as that run by Peninsula Community Legal Centre are a key element of the regulatory system and often provide the trigger for compliance action by regulators. These programs cover vast catchment areas with very limited resources and should continue to receive adequate funding from the state government to ensure improved coverage and enforcement of regulation.

**Recommendation 4:** CAV should conduct consultations with local councils and community organisations working in the sector to identify rooming houses that are in breach of the legislation. Based on these consultations, in cooperation with local councils CAV should develop a compliance strategy and take enforcement action against rooming house operators who are notorious in the industry for properties that are unsafe, unclean and overcrowded.

**Recommendation 5:** Local Government Victoria should play a greater role in the coordination of compliance activity between councils and ensure a consistent approach to regulations, standards and compliance practices across the State. Compliance by the local government sector should achieve best practice standards.

**Recommendation 6:** CAV and local councils need to make it easier for vulnerable residents to report breaches of the regulatory framework:

- **6.1** Local councils should provide accessible and clear information in plain English on their rooming house oversight system and how residents can make reports.
- **6.2** CAV inspectors should investigate whether the CAV rooming house guide was provided to residents and take disciplinary action where a breach has occurred. The inspector should provide the guide to residents who have not received a copy.
- **6.3** Residents should be allowed to verbally give notice to a rooming house owner of repairs and to apply to CAV by phone, rather than having to make written requests. Tenants should also be able to seek a CAV inspection where repairs have been performed but are unsatisfactory. Section 131 of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and CAV's practices should be amended to permit this.

**Recommendation 7:** CAV inspections should be broadened to include repair breaches under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and breaches of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Building Act 1993. CAV should make referrals to the relevant councils based on their findings.

### Enhanced Minimum Standards

**Recommendation 8:** Current minimum standards should be strengthened in order to bring them into line with community expectations of decency and amenity, and should include:

- A minimum of one toilet for every five residents
- A minimum of one shower for every five residents
- Weekly cleaning of communal areas and residents' rooms
- External secure mailboxes for each room
- Adequate communal social space
- Secure current Australian Standard entry door locks
- 24-hour access to adequate heating, cooling, cooking and washing facilities.



## Protection from Profiteering and Exploitation

*Recommendation 9:* A formal rent control scheme should be introduced in Victoria in order to bring about meaningful change to excessive rental prices in the private rental market and to protect vulnerable rooming house residents from exploitation.

*Recommendation 10:* To provide better protection from persistent profiteering and exploitation, more rigorous assessment criteria and processes to determine who is a “fit and proper” person under the rooming house licensing system should be introduced.

## More Social and Affordable housing

*Recommendation 11:* The Victorian government should invest in the creation of 3,500 extra public and community housing properties, plus 300 Aboriginal community housing properties each year to meet the needs of people who cannot access or afford housing in the open market, or who are forced to live in inappropriate or unsafe marginal housing such as rooming houses or motels.

## More Social and Community Service Support

*Recommendation 12:* Emergency housing providers should provide as much detailed information as possible to people being referred to rooming houses about where they are going and check to ensure that there are basic amenities at the residence prior to making the referral.

*Recommendation 13:* Where possible, emergency housing providers should equip people being referred in to rooming houses with a resource kit including items such as basic toiletries, bedding, local community information, and information about resident rights and responsibilities.

*Recommendation 14:* Emergency housing providers should seek to assist individuals who wish to apply for Department of Housing (DOH) accommodation and where possible remind those already on the DOH register to notify the department of their change of address so that they continue to receive correspondence from the department.

*Recommendation 15:* Emergency housing providers should avoid referring people to rooming houses which are well-known for being unsafe, unclean, overcrowded or otherwise in breach of the law, and in some cases

boycott rooming houses which are notorious in the industry.

*Recommendation 16:* Given the high level of need for social, legal and health support for many rooming house residents, local councils should work with local support agencies to develop lists of what support is available locally for display in rooming houses. They should also facilitate training to community services workers on working with rooming house residents.

## More Consultation with Residents

*Recommendation 17:* CAV and local councils should establish better consultation channels with rooming house residents. Local council should chair residents’ committees to provide direct input into council’s approaches to rooming house management. Where possible, CAV inspectors should make efforts to consult with residents to get their feedback during inspections without the operator standing over them.

*Recommendation 18:* Community support organisations could also establish better consultation mechanisms with rooming house residents to work out what support services residents might require after they have been referred into the rooming house.

## RESIDENTS' MESSAGES TO ROOMING HOUSE OPERATORS:

*The owners are too keen for the money. You are virtually in jail living in a rooming house.... This house was originally only a four bedroom house. The owner thinks she can stack people on top of each other*

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*Rooming houses need to be run and managed by someone who cares*

---

*You can't afford to live here and eat.  
This life is highly stressful*

---

*It's like living in hell*

---

*Rough sleeping is cheaper and safer*

---

*You could be living with a murderer or rapist.  
As long as the owners get their money they don't care.*

---

*Things are broken and they don't get fixed. The toilet is broken – not flushing. The shower water doesn't drain properly and there's no hot water. It's been like this since I moved in. I've never had curtains and the windows don't close.*

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*When I moved in I couldn't lock the door to my room. I had to repair the lock myself. There is blood on the walls from when I first moved in.*

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*Atrocious and disgusting. The mould is everywhere. The roof is falling apart.*

---

*Antique. Below standard. Poor. There are bed bugs in the mattress.*

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*If (only) repairs were made to the doors and windows, smoke alarms were working and I had a shower and toilet.*

---

*Can't cook here. Only two jets on the stove that work. There is only one letter box and the mail is stolen.*

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## Residents messages to support agencies

*People in rooming houses come from all different echelons of society, but being in a rooming house labels them with a particular societal identity, if not straight away, then over time.... Don't patronize me. Don't tell, but encourage. I need programs to get me out of here.*

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*Understand how residents come to be here... what situations we have left. We need support and someone to talk to. It's a change – a big change!*

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*It has been a complete catastrophe – sending people to opposite side of town from where family and friends are. Isolated, out of sight, out of mind.*

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## RESIDENT MESSAGES TO GOVERNMENT:

### More public housing:

*Rooming houses are a shambles, a mess, an idea gone wrong. The rooming house model is broken... please fix the housing mess!*

*Why hasn't there been an increase in public housing? I don't care who is in government. Who is helping these people?*

### More scrutiny of rooming house operators and their practices:

*Get thorough investigations done on all rooming house owners. They are providing over-priced accommodation. I'm paying \$250 per week for a room that's smaller than a prison cell. I'm forced to live below the poverty line. How is this legal? Rent should be matched to the quality of accommodation.*

*Do something with these owners. They are ruthless people. They are bludging off the tax payers at the end of the day – they're all laughing at the system.*

*Increase requirements for the licensing of rooming house operators.*

*Charitable organisations should not be charging more than 50% of a person's income for rent.*

*Owners turn up anytime they want to – they intimidate people and hit tenants. They go into residents' rooms – things go missing. They have been running rooming houses for a long time. They don't abide by the rules.*

*More government control and more monitoring. Councils and CAV do the minimum. They don't come into the rooms to inspect. There's no power point checks. You can't complain because the owner is standing there with the inspectors.*

*There should be more inspections and don't tell them (Operators) when the inspectors are coming.*

*Residents should be able to advocate on their own behalf and not be threatened or harassed by the owner. If the RTA is followed it would be OK, but this is not the case.*

### More support to residents and more resources to support agencies:

*Pay closer attention to the minority, to the vulnerable and those who aren't visible.*

*Get mental health workers to visit rooming houses. A lot of people are depressed and mentally ill and won't go to the service.*

*Funding and resources are not reaching the homeless.*

*Government doesn't understand what it's like, especially for people who have been traumatised.*

*Put more support services in... people in rooming houses are castaways. We need more support.*

*Housing agencies should be given more funding so they can help more people.*

*It is no way of life in the long term. These places drag you down.*

*People are left (abandoned). People have died in the rooming house and been dead for days before they were found.*

*We are not statistics we are human beings.*

**Most importantly, they want the government to act and make the necessary changes so they may redeem some self-respect and re-gain hope that they will have a better future.**

*This is inhumane, you lose your self-respect. You lose hope!*





## RESEARCH:

The Rooming House Outreach Project has been visiting rooming house residents in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne since October 2012. Throughout this period, some rooming houses were visited on multiple occasions. These return visits have proved to be a major component of effective and successful engagement with rooming house residents and established high levels of trust between residents and RHOP workers. As a result, workers have been privileged to hear the stories and experiences of hundreds of rooming house residents.

This research project aimed to collect those stories and perceptions to give voice to individuals living in rooming houses. It is hoped, as a result of these interviews, the experiences and perceptions of rooming house residents will be communicated to a broader audience to improve the community's understanding of the lived experience of this extremely marginalized and disenfranchised population and to bring about change that will deliver improvements for residents.

This research was undertaken by PCLC with financial assistance provided by Streetsmart.

### Research aims

The aim of the research was to better understand the lives of those individuals living in rooming houses in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne; who were they, where did they come from and what was their experience of life in a rooming house? We also wanted to explore what their visions were for the future, as well as provide them with an opportunity to communicate to both government and non-government agencies about their experiences and inform them as to what would improve their lives.

### Methodology

The questionnaire was developed and approved by PCLC Ethics Committee in July 2019. Rooming house residents already known to the RHOP team were then approached and asked if they would like to participate in the survey. This selection method was chosen because many rooming house residents are extremely distrusting of service providers and as such are difficult to engage. Over a period of time, the RHOP had established trusting relationships with these residents and as a result they were willing to participate and share their experiences. Residents also received a \$30 food voucher in acknowledgement of the time involved in responding to

survey questions. Residents were especially enthusiastic about participating when they were advised that their experiences would be communicated to government, service providers and the general public about the challenges they faced living in rooming houses. They wanted others to be aware of their experiences and the lives they were living in rooming houses. As a result, some rooming house residents recommended others to engage in the research.

The research team consisted of PCLC's RHOP worker Aldo Taranto and social worker Christine Tudor. Over the last two years these workers have contacted hundreds of rooming house residents across the south east metropolitan region and have engaged and supported them, provided access to legal support and advice when necessary, and assistance and referral to local support services as well as food and other forms of material aid as appropriate. As a result of this work, the team has developed significant relationships with many rooming house residents and are considered 'trusted professionals'. These relationships were integral to the willing participation of residents in the survey.

Rooming house residents were interviewed individually. The questionnaire was extensive and asked questions about their background and family relationships. It then focused on the present and asked to describe their current living situation. Following this, people were asked to share their hopes and dreams for the future.

Residents were interviewed in their rooms or in other locations according to their preferences. Each interview varied in length from approximately thirty minutes to one and a half hours.

The following disclaimer was discussed with each resident:

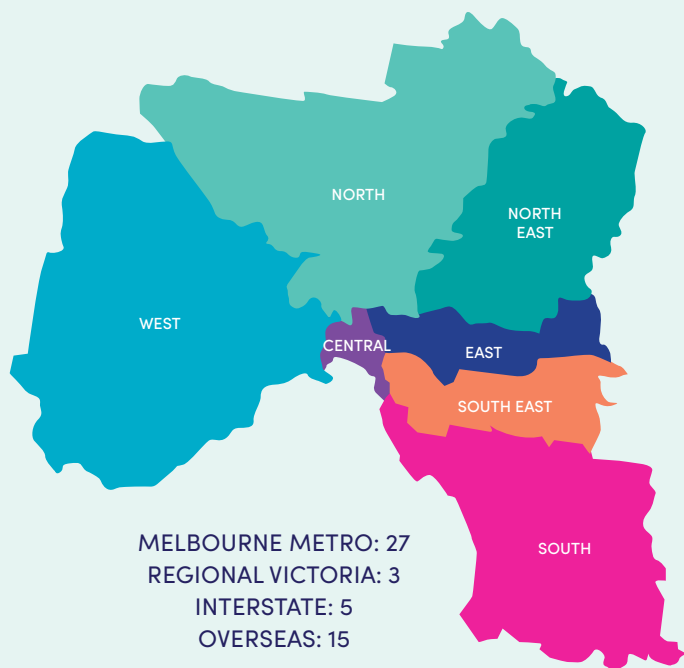
*PCLC strives to improve its services, we ask that you allow us to use this information from the questionnaire to assist us with service planning, lobby for improvements to laws, highlight how laws impact people and education and training. We will take every precaution to protect your privacy; we will remove your name and any facts about you that might identify you. The findings of the questionnaire and case studies will possibly be shared with government departments, non-government organisation, legislators and PCLC annual reports, website and social media platform that may be viewed by the general public.*



## LIMITATIONS

Residents were recruited by the RHOP team from those individuals with whom the team already had relationships. Rooming house residents are extremely suspicious and mistrusting of service providers. The relationship between the RHOP team and the resident had been built over numerous visits to the rooming house and, on the basis of this relationship, individuals were willing to participate in the research. This may have biased the research results, but the intention of the research was to collect a small sample of residents' stories and their experiences of rooming house accommodation. Residents known to the team were willing to engage and share their experience.

Due to time and funding constraints, interviews were conducted with fifty residents only. Given that there are over eight hundred rooming houses in the south east region, each with approximately six to eight residents, this is a small sample size and may not be representative of all rooming house residents.



## RESIDENT INFORMATION:

### Age

Of the fifty residents interviewed, forty eight (48) percent were aged between 41–50 years old. A further thirty two (32) percent were over 51 years old and twenty (20) percent of residents were under 40 years old.

### Place of birth

Most residents (fifty eight percent) were born in Victoria, most in Melbourne. Twelve (12) per cent were born in other Australian states and thirty (30) percent were born overseas. Of those born overseas, countries of origin included: Singapore, Philippines, Macedonia, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, Israel, Poland, Italy, Chile, Austria, Turkey, United Kingdom, Jamaica. Three residents identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

### Income source

Nearly all residents were in receipt of government benefits apart from one resident from New Zealand who had no income at all.

Twenty (20) residents received the Newstart Allowance, nineteen (19) residents received the Disability Support Pension, four (4) residents received the Aged Pension, four (4) residents received the Carers Pension, four (4) residents received the Youth Allowance and one (1) resident received Parenting Payment. One (1) resident reported having no income.

## RESIDENT BACKGROUND:

Generally, the RHOP, like many community services and agencies, engages with individuals around their immediate needs and issues. Whilst addressing immediate needs is important, it does not allow the team to fully understand and know the individuals that we are supporting through our work. The research project provided an opportunity for the RHOP team to develop a better understanding of the people we work with, their backgrounds and experiences.

### Childhood

Residents were informed that one of the aims of the research was to have a better understanding of who they were, where they came from and what their life was like before they became residents in a rooming house. This information provided the research team with a

more holistic view of those who were being interviewed and also provided an opportunity for residents to reflect on their life. Residents were asked to describe their childhood as well as provide information about their family of origin.

Residents were able to easily identify their childhood interests and hobbies, both physically active pursuits such as sports and outdoor activities, or more intellectual activities. Most residents, almost seventy (70) percent, reported that they were active children engaged in sport and other external pursuits. Just over twenty five (25) percent reported they engaged in more intellectual pursuits such as reading, playing cards and chess and a small number of residents did not engage in hobbies and other interests, as they were required to work and support their family.

### School experiences

For more than half the residents, school provided a positive experience. They could identify subjects they enjoyed and/or excelled in, and talked about the opportunities school provided to engage with, and mix with others. A small number of respondents reported that they were academically gifted and excelled in specific subject areas.

*"I was pretty fortunate at school... I was brilliant at maths and science but hated humanities. I never had any ambitions, I just wanted to play sport. I liked to learn, I was reading from age four."*

*"I was very smart and very good with numbers."*

A significant number of residents had negative experiences at school which were generally related to their behavior and/or academic performance. Not surprisingly, few identified ambitions in relation to future careers. A small number were also very ambivalent about their school experience as a result of external influences such as bullying, expectations from teachers and feeling out of place (poorer students at elite schools).

*"Horrible! I hated school. I never read a book and I failed on every report."*

## FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Family of origin refers to the family context in which a person is raised (Collins et al, 2013). Approximately thirty (30) percent of residents described their family of origin in positive terms. They described their early years as positive periods in their lives in which they had many hobbies and interests and grew up in loving and happy families. These individuals detailed descriptions of themselves as young, active, engaged and happy children.

*"I was the youngest of eleven. I had six brothers and four sisters. We were very close growing up. I experienced much happiness."*

However, a significant number of residents described their early childhood years and family of origin as unhappy and troubled, often involving the death, separation or divorce of parents, or dysfunctional and abusive family relationships. For some individuals, this was an extremely traumatic period in their lives.

*"It wasn't a very happy childhood. My parents separated early. My Mum worked all the time and was very physically abusive."*

*"I was always in trouble as a child and put into residential care. It was better than home."*

*"I was a punching bag for my step-father and a pin-cushion for my mother. I was given to my grandmother when I was 11 years old."*

Given the traumatic nature of some responses, residents were supported by the RHOP Social Worker and given permission to stop the interview, or provided with emotional support at the time. In all instances, individuals communicated that they were happy to continue with the interview. At the conclusion, the Social Worker once again checked with individuals to ascertain how they were feeling about the issues discussed and offered additional support if required.

## CONTACT WITH FAMILY OF ORIGIN:

Families of origin can play an important role in supporting individuals in times of difficulty and stress. When significant life events occur such as relationship breakdown, ill health, accidents, disability or job loss, individuals often turn to other family members for support and assistance (Walsh, 2006; Collins et al, 2013). However, histories of abusive relationships and family conflict together with differences in lifestyle choices and substance use, can also cause rifts between family members. Our research found that eighty (80) percent of residents reported that they had limited or no contact with their family of origin, indicating that for most residents, family support was not available, and in some cases, not desired.

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*"I don't see my Mum at all... all the family get together at Christmas, except me."*

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*"My father died. I don't know if Mum is still alive."*

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*"I have minimal contact. I don't get along with them that well."*

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Twenty percent (20) reported that they have regular contact with their family.

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*"Yes, we're all as thick as thieves. We help each other. I have contact with my brothers nearly every day and my sisters regularly."*

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*"My family contacts me. I have responsibilities for my sisters. I am a father figure to them."*

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## Family of procreation

Family of procreation refers to the relationships that are developed as adults and any offspring that may result from these relationships (Collins et al, 2013). Having explored the extent to which residents had contact with their family of origin, our research sought to understand what involvement, if any, individuals had with their family of procreation. Again, the intent was to explore what support and/or responsibilities were associated with these relationships, and whether they offered any additional support or assistance to individual residents.

Ninety (90) percent of residents reported that they had been in relationships but were no longer with their partners and only ten percent of this group reported that they still had contact with their ex-partners. A small group (ten percent) reported they were currently in a relationship.

Sixty four (64) percent reported that they had children and over half of them stated that they continue to have contact with their children, if not all children, at least some of their children.

Most of the children are adult children, although a small number of residents reported they had young children under fifteen (15) years old who, with the exception of two residents who live in a rooming house that provides accommodation specifically for women and their children, do not have their children living with them.

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*"I have a partner - we don't live together. I have a girl (7) and a boy (3.5). I have contact with the kids once a week, or once a fortnight at their Mum's place."*

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*"I was married for 6 months. I have one son who is in his 20s but I have no contact with him."*

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*"I have an ex-partner- we are separated. We have three children - two girls living here with my ex, and my son, who now lives overseas. I have contact now with my ex-partner and the kids."*

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*"I had a partner for seven years. We had one daughter - she's 26 years old - and three grandkids. I don't see my daughter."*

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When asked how they felt about these circumstances in particular, most people expressed feelings of loss and regret for their situation. Overall, they expressed a general helplessness about the way things had worked out but had resigned themselves to the situation.

*"You can't go back. I would never have allowed my kids to be taken away. I wouldn't be in this situation if I thought about what I was doing at the time."*

*"I've had therapy for depression and anxiety since 1973. If you grew up with my mother you were always going to have trouble. I ended up in a rooming house... where I shut the rest of the world out."*

*"It's heartbreaking. I didn't choose this. My children have nothing to do with me. They have been poisoned by their mother...I did everything right for my children. They are all professionals now."*

*"Given another chance I would do things differently. I'd stop working so much (this lead to my depression and our marriage breakdown). I should have found more time for our relationship and ourselves. My in-laws said I was useless. Their involvement was too much."*

*"I wanted to be a mother so I'm pissed off about this (not seeing my daughters) but I'm not stable. I get counselling from SECASA. I went to mediation to have contact with my daughters. It was agreed that I see them twice a week – but arrangements have broken down. There is an IVO (Intervention Order) on me – there is nowhere for me to go."*

A smaller group of people commented that they had reflected on, and learned, from past experience and were taking action, or had made a commitment to improving their personal circumstances. They were future focused and more positive.

*"The marriage breakup was very sad for me but I remain positive and hopeful that I will be able to see my other sons."*

*"We were fighting like children. I had a gambling problem. I went to the Salvation Army for my gambling habit. I went to GA (Gamblers Anonymous). I still gamble but it's not a problem."*

*"I want public housing so that I can have my kids with me (I can't have them here) I hope to have reunification with my kids in six months."*

## Summary

In many situations, strong family connections provide invaluable support to individuals when difficulties or unexpected events arise. Our research found that for many other residents, however, supportive family relationships did not exist, or had been severed at some point, leaving residents in a vulnerable situation; this became the pathway to homelessness and the rooming house sector.

### CASE STUDY – Vivienne

Vivienne has been living in rooming houses for the last fifteen years following the breakdown of her marriage. Vivienne left the family home, her husband and four children, after having an affair with her husband's best friend. Her family ceased all contact with her.

When the new relationship floundered, Vivienne found herself homeless and without any income. She was referred to a crisis housing service who assisted her to move into a rooming house in the south eastern suburbs. Vivienne re-established her life there and met Jack and they lived together in the same rooming house for the next thirteen years.

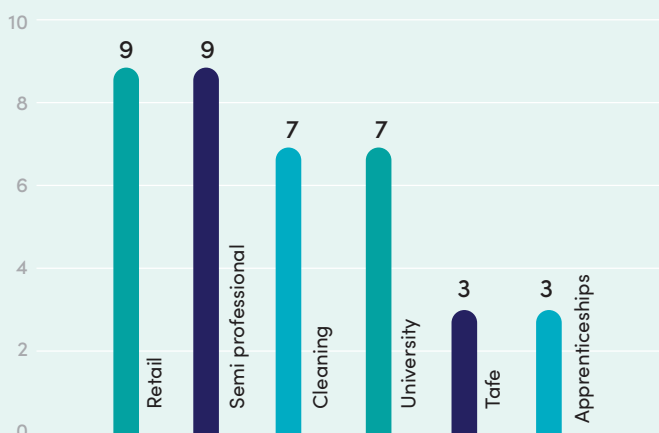
Two years ago, Jack passed away and the rooming house closed as a result of damage by drug affected residents. Vivienne relocated to a women-only rooming house nearby where she pays \$190 per week from her Newstart allowance of \$347 per week. Vivienne has established strong relationships with some of the other residents who have come to see her as a substitute mother figure. Vivienne told us that they are the only 'family' she has now. Vivienne accepts responsibility for her past behaviours and understands her family's reasons for ceasing their contact with her.

# TRAINING AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Residents were asked to identify what training and work experience they had and whether they were in a position to use their skills and experience currently. The research found that amongst the study group there was a broad range of training, skills and work experience and a significant number of people had completed study and training programs in a variety of industries.

Many individuals commented that they had completed training in the hospitality industry including food handling, responsible serving of alcohol, barista training etc. Within this specific cohort there were some individuals with expertise and training of a higher order who reported that they were qualified chefs, restaurant owners and managers.

WHAT WORK AND TRAINING HAVE YOU COMPLETED?



Others reported having had experience as senior executives in large well-known national companies. A number of people also reported on their experience within the building industry, not just as labourers but some having had their own construction businesses, whilst others reported having highly specialised skills in particular areas such as working with marble, for example.

Professional occupations were also well-represented with individuals reporting that they had trained and worked as teachers, qualified as medical professionals, been members of the defence forces and previously been employed in social and community services.

When asked to consider whether they had an opportunity to use these skills currently, sixty four

(64) percent reported that as a result of health issues (mental health, physical health, disability, accidents and trauma) they were no longer able to engage in these occupations. Fourteen (14) percent reported they were looking for work in their specific field while another eight (8) percent reported they were engaged in training/ studying or retraining. A small number of individuals were engaged in volunteer work, and eight (8) percent had retired. At the time of interview only one resident was employed on a casual basis.

## SUMMARY

People who live in rooming houses come from a diverse range of backgrounds. For many, family breakdown, or lack of supportive family relationships, often represents the start of the journey into homelessness and the rooming house sector.

All residents reported their sole source of income is government benefits and due to the spiraling cost of rents in Melbourne, and lack of available public housing, rooming house accommodation has become their only accommodation option. Many residents spend more than fifty percent of their income on rent.

The research found that residents have a wide range of skills, experience and expertise. Indeed, many are qualified and highly skilled in their fields. However, at the time of interview, all residents were in receipt of government benefits; low incomes together with the spiraling cost of rents in Melbourne, means that they have no option but to rent a room in one of the many rooming houses across Melbourne's south eastern suburbs. In such settings, they live marginalized and unsatisfactory lives, in extremely poor quality, unstable, unhealthy and insecure environments, predominantly with individuals with whom they have few, or no, common interests.

## CASE STUDY – *Fabio*

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Fabio is a sixty seven year old Italian man who came to Australia as a boy in the 1960s with his family. He followed his father into the building and construction industry and eventually established a successful business of his own. He married and had four children who were all educated in private schools, attended university, and are successful professionals in their chosen field. Fabio has five grandchildren.

Once the children had all moved away from home, Fabio began to visit the casino on a regular basis and became addicted to playing the pokies. Within a short period, he had lost most of his savings and he and his wife were forced to sell the family home. His wife left him and moved in with her sister. His children have disowned him and he has not had any contact with his family for several years.

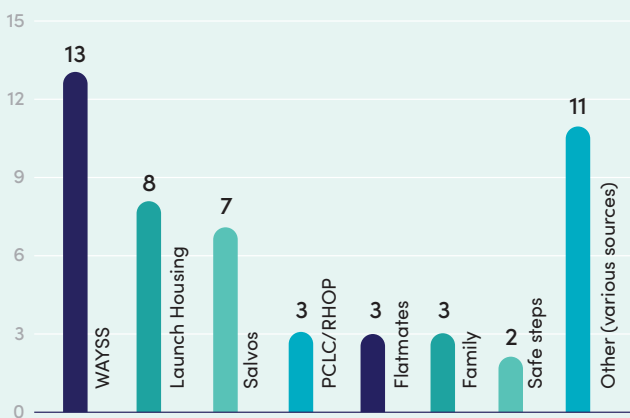
Fabio had no money and nowhere to live. He approached a crisis housing service and was referred to a rooming house in Chadstone where he has been living for the last two years. He has no friends and says he is very lonely. He has a number of complex health issues and only leaves the rooming house to attend medical appointments, or to shop for food.



# THE ROOMING HOUSE EXPERIENCE

There are a number of emergency housing providers in Melbourne. The research found that emergency housing providers such as LAUNCH, WAYSS and the Salvation Army are the major referral sources for most residents living in rooming house accommodation.

REFERRAL SOURCES TO ROOMING HOUSE ACCOMMODATION



## Assistance provided at time of referral

Twenty six (26) percent of residents reported that they were satisfied with assistance provided by referral agencies (generally housing providers). It was also noted that in a small number of cases, people received assistance from family members, friends or the rooming house operator. However, seventy four (74) percent of residents reported that more assistance could have been provided at the time of referral. When asked to specify what assistance would have been more helpful, some key themes emerged:

- more information for those individuals without any previous experience of rooming house life. These individuals reported they required better information about what to expect within the rooming house environment, for, given their lack of experience, they were completely unprepared for what they found. They stated that it would have been useful to know how many other residents lived in the house, what the general condition of the rooming house was etc
- more practical assistance especially in regard to transporting their personal belongings to the rooming house.
- more information about local support services and agencies in the area. This was considered particularly pertinent especially for those individuals who were offered rooming house accommodation some distance from areas that they were familiar with. For example, it is not uncommon for residents who have grown up and lived in Melbourne's western suburbs for most of their lives, to find themselves living on the outskirts of the south eastern suburbs, with limited or no knowledge of key commercial and service centres, transport services and health and community service agencies etc.
- Some residents commented that at the point of referral to a rooming house, they needed more counselling and support. This highlights the change in circumstances that rooming house residents often experience. They have been referred to a housing provider for assistance because they have no other accommodation options. For some it is due to a relationship breakdown, family disagreements, or a significant change in their financial situation such as a job loss or business failure, or they have left a previous rooming house due to conflict in the house or behaviour of other residents. Such residents are in distress as a result of these circumstances, but need to address the immediate issue of shelter.

## CASE STUDY - Angelo

Angelo grew up in Lalor and has significant mental health issues. After another admission to the mental health unit at a major public hospital, Angelo was discharged to a rooming house in East Brighton. Nobody was at home when he arrived.

For the first twenty four hours of his residence, he had no belongings, no money and no idea of the street address of the property in which he found himself. His family also had no idea where he was, and he had no way to contact them. He slept on a dirty mattress on the floor with one blanket for warmth in the middle of winter.

The RHOP found him at home the next day, provided a food voucher and directed him to the local shops, advised him of his address and assisted him to contact his mother to let her know where he was living.

They commented that additional emotional support at that time would have been of benefit.

- e. As a result of some of these circumstances, some residents reported that they had very little in the way of belongings when they first arrived at the rooming house and found that the rooming house was poorly equipped for a new resident.

Some residents reported that the only equipment in their room was a mattress on the floor. They suggested that at the point of referral, residents be offered a 'Starter Pack' which could include a blanket or quilt, sheets, towel, toiletries, food voucher and an information list of local support services and agencies and the CAV Rooming House booklet.

## BEST ASPECTS OF LIVING IN A ROOMING HOUSE:

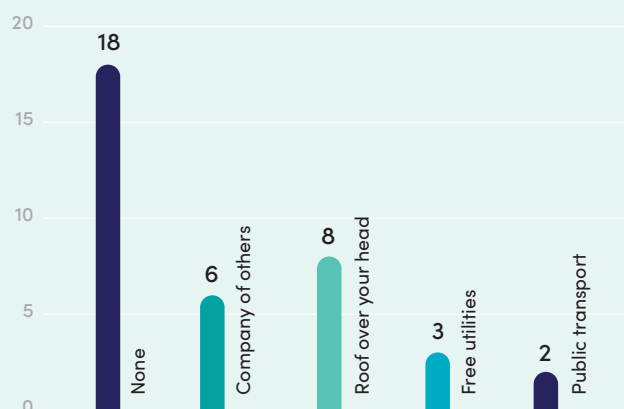
Thirty eight (38) percent of respondents identified that there were no 'best aspects' of living in a rooming house. Sixteen (16) percent identified that at least it was a 'roof over your head' and preferable to living on the streets, whilst forty six (46) percent identified a number of positive qualities.

Primarily, these included the advantages of living with and being around others, and in a few cases, making friends. This response surprised researchers as so many people reported concerns about the violence and unpredictable behaviours of other residents that it was considered a difficult environment in which to make friends or engage in regular positive social interaction. Clearly, for some people, this is a possibility and one of which they take advantage.

Location of rooming houses, especially those within close proximity to public transport was also considered an advantage.

Additionally, the fact that the cost of utilities is generally included as part of the rental fee, was also considered favourably, and as was the issue of privacy afforded to individuals by having their own room.

WHAT ARE THE BEST ASPECTS OF LIVING IN A ROOMING HOUSE?



## MAJOR CONCERNS WITH LIVING IN A ROOMING HOUSE:

Residents reported that their major concerns were related to drug use and the associated behaviours of other residents which often resulted in disagreements, conflicts and violence and contributed to an environment that was unpredictable and unsafe.

*"People's drug habits... when they are doing drugs, trouble starts happening."*

*"People that are let in (move in) – druggies and alcoholics – they want to argue and fight and tell you what to do."*

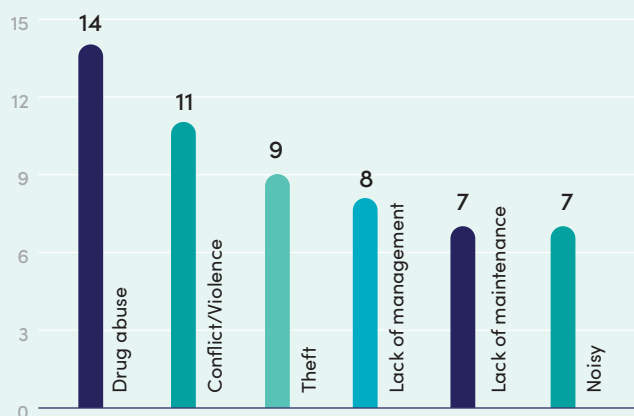
Other identified areas of concern were in relation to the overall lack of cleanliness and poor hygiene practices in the rooming house environment. Not surprisingly, this was a major issue in relation to the state of kitchens and bathrooms especially.

*Other residents are messy in the toilet and the shower. One resident urinates on the floor.*

*I clean up around the house only to come back in half an hour and find it's messy again.*

Noise was also considered to be a major issue. On average, most rooming houses have at least six to eight people in residence at any one time. Most rooming houses are standard three or four bedroom homes that have been built to house families. They have been modified (often rather crudely and cheaply) to function as rooming houses and accommodate more people.

## WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES LIVING IN A ROOMING HOUSE?



In order to accommodate additional residents, rooms have been divided (including lounge and dining areas) without any effort to sound proof those rooms. In any household a significant amount of noise is produced as people go about their daily routine, but without adequate soundproofing this noise is heard throughout the house and disturbs other residents.

*"It's noisy. You can hear everything!"*

*"...everyone slams doors ...the wire door bangs and crashes."*

For some residents it's a combination of everything.

*Theft, drugs, depression, desperation, disagreements with others and dealing with confrontation, keeping the kitchen clean, noise!*

*Living with others that you don't know, sharing the bathroom and the condition of the premises. I couldn't have late nights, no lounge room, I couldn't bring my daughters here – they didn't like it.*

When asked to describe the living conditions in the rooming house, forty eight (48) percent commented that they were very poor, bad, and unsafe. Another twenty eight (28) percent described them as tolerable and twenty four (24) percent described them as good, quiet and clean.

*"Very poor. It's a cold, old house and there are draughts."*

*"Antique. Below standard. Poor. There are bed bugs in the mattresses. The furniture is from my great grandmother's time."*

*"Things are broken and they don't get fixed. The toilet is broken – not flushing. The shower water doesn't drain properly and there's no hot water. It has been like this ever since I moved in. I've never had curtains (a blanket covered the window in his room) and the windows don't close."*

*"Atrocious and disgusting. The mould is everywhere. The roof is falling apart. In the cooking area, there is dirt, mould, grit. I had to buy my own appliances. Two jets on the stove aren't working and the heating ducts are filthy"*

*"It's a clean house with eight rooms. It's clean and quiet. Everyone does their own thing."*

*"Not as many rodents and pests as other places. People are OK."*

Residents were then asked to consider what could be done to improve conditions in the rooming house. Many comments related to actions that could be undertaken by the rooming house operator such as making improvements to the house (flooring, carpets, and painting walls) attending to repairs in a timely manner and responding to resident concerns.

*"If repairs were made to the doors and windows; smoke alarms were working and I had a shower and toilet."*

*"The owner could spend some money on the floors and carpets... and paint the bathroom and kitchen."*

*"More government control and more monitoring. Councils and CAV do the minimum. They don't come into the rooms to inspect. There's no power point checks. You can't complain because the owner is standing there with the Inspectors."*

Some residents felt that they paid too much for a relatively small space and requested a reduction in rent. Others requested better security, including proper locks on external doors and individual rooms, as well as lockers in the kitchen to safely store their food and cooking utensils, and security cameras on site.

Others commented that they wanted to be provided with receipts for their rent payments. Many are told to rely on their Centrelink records (rent is deducted automatically and paid directly to the landlord). However, this arrangement is a record of payment, but is not a receipt as required under the RTA and does not provide the



resident with formal notification of when their rent is paid up to. This was raised by residents who had been told by the RHO that they were behind with their rent, even though there were no receipts or paperwork to validate this.

In most cases, they had to accept the RHO's word and make appropriate arrangements to pay outstanding monies. Some residents expressed their fear of being given a notice to vacate (NTV) if they raised issues of concern with the RHO.

Other issues raised were in relation to interactions with other residents.

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*"One resident was washing dishes in the bathroom, cooking in their room and dumping scraps in the toilet."*

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*"If I could stay and the other tenant go. I don't want to move. It's pretty good here."*

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*"If the owner got rid of all the druggies – but he would have to empty the house! "*

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## HEALTH STATUS:

**Residents were questioned about their current state of health and to identify what, if any, were their major health issues.**

Sixty four percent of residents reported that their current state of health was 'poor' or 'not good'. A further twelve percent commented that their health was 'not bad' and twenty four percent stated that their health was 'good'.

When asked to identify what were their major health issues, the most frequently reported were mental health issues which included anxiety, depression, PTSD, paranoia, paranoid schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. In addition to this, many residents reported physical complaints to do with back, arm and leg injuries and/or weaknesses. Drug and alcohol dependence was also identified by a significant number of residents as was cardiac health with several residents reporting high blood pressure and stroke incidents.

Of particular note were the reports from many residents (seventy six percent) who experienced multiple or complex health issues.

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*"I have COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), major depression, my knees need replacing. I have a back condition, I'm on anti-depressants and blood pressure medication. I have high cholesterol and reflux"*

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*"I was a heroin addict and homeless from 1994 – 2000. Now I'm on the methadone program. I fell out of a two storey building at 21 years old. The methadone helps with the back pain."*

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*"I have back problems (accident related) I take medication for pain. I have psych problems – anxiety, depression (not on medication). I have a head injury and memory lapses."*

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*"I had a heart attack at 47, multiple stent replacements and a quadruple bypass, bowel fistula, incontinence, peripheral vascular disease, COPD, emphysema, and multiple lung nodules, depression and anxiety."*

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However, of that population, less than half (forty seven percent) reported that they were receiving treatment for their health issues.

*"I have damage to my shoulder, I have an ankle injury and I walk with a permanent limp. I have anxiety. My Community Corrections Officer offered lots of support but I wouldn't accept it. I just wanted my freedom."*

*"I'm scared to travel by myself – my seizures are unpredictable. I can't feel them coming. I need to have someone with me all the time."*

*"I've had a heart attack, I have a back injury and I'm a diabetic."*

### CASE STUDY – Gerald

Gerald is sixty years old, is married and has four adult children. In his early life he was a professional athlete and later managed a large national company, travelling extensively and developing international markets across the Asian region.

Several years ago he suffered from major heart and lung problems and underwent extensive medical treatment. For a lengthy period he was very dependent on his wife and this eventually resulted in the breakdown of their marriage.

He does not believe in divorce, but he left the family home and moved into an apartment. After six months he was unable to continue paying the rent and was evicted. Too ashamed to ask his family for help, he went to an emergency housing provider and was referred to a rooming house. He has been living there with thirteen other residents for the last twelve months.

His health issues have deteriorated throughout this period and he has had several hospital admissions. Whilst he continues to have contact with his adult children, he feels that he is too much of a burden and will not seek assistance from them.

## RENT AFFORDABILITY AND FOOD SECURITY:

Residents were questioned about their level of income and the cost of their rent. They were also asked to consider the quantity and quality of the food they ate. In addition, they were requested to identify what issues they had, if any, in preparing and cooking it in the rooming house environment.

INCOME SOURCE COMPARED TO AVERAGE WEEKLY RENTAL  
Rooming House Surveys 17 July – 4 December 2019



### Affordability

Overall, fifty two (52) per cent of residents in our survey reported spending between fifty (50) to sixty (60) percent of their income on rent.

We found that out of the twenty residents who reported they were on Newstart Allowance, most spent at least sixty (60) percent or more of their income on rent. Only two (2) residents spent less than fifty (50) percent of their income on rent.

It was assumed that those residents in receipt of Disability Support Pension (DSP) and the Aged Pension (almost double Newstart payments) would be in more advantageous situations. When we analysed the responses by the source of income we found whilst generally they were in a more comfortable position than those on Newstart, there were some individuals who were also paying significant amounts of their income on rent.

We found that over half (10) of the residents on DSP paid more than fifty (50) percent of their income on rent. Another six residents paid over forty (40) percent of

their income on rent and only three residents on DSP paid around one third or thirty three (33) percent of their income on rent. Residents reported that some RHOs determine the rate of rent once they know the income source of the resident, thereby effectively reducing any financial advantage that those on higher incomes may have.

#### PERCENTAGE OF INCOME PAID TOWARD RENT:

52% of clients contributing up to 60% of income towards rent.

48% of clients contributing up to 40% of income towards rent.



There is a nexus between rent costs and what income remains to purchase food and other basic necessities.

*"You can't afford to live here and eat. This life is highly stressful."*

### Food quality

Residents were asked to describe their diet. In response to this question, fifty four (54) percent of residents reported that they ate well, fourteen (14) percent reported that their diet was OK and thirty two (32) percent responded that their diet was poor. The authors acknowledge that the question asks residents to provide a description of their diet and what constitutes a good and poor diet varies considerably from individual to individual. If, for example, their diets were assessed by a dietitian, the results may be significantly different. Additionally, those with more complex health issues may require specific dietary intake and may or may not be achieving that, but they may still consider their diet to be good.

### Food quantity

Whilst the quality of individual diets is still unknown, questions in relation to the quantity of food and the

adequacy of the amount of food eaten, provided better insight into whether people were, in their opinion, consuming enough food. So, a follow up question was asked to determine whether residents thought they ate adequate amounts of food. Once again, fifty four (54) percent of residents reported they ate adequate amounts of food. *"Yes, I eat three meals a day."* Another resident reported they ate adequate amounts of food, *"but only because I go to places where there is free food."*

It was assumed that many residents would find it difficult to ensure they had adequate food supplies due to the fact their rental payments consume significant portions of their income. Forty six (46) percent reported they did not eat adequate amounts and commented there were regular periods when they did not eat at all. As one resident on Newstart Allowance commented, *"I go hungry every fortnight."* Another commented that *"I'm only eating when I can. I won't go to food kitchens – I'm embarrassed and I don't like the people who go there."*

#### Sally

Sally is twenty five years old and has been in her current rooming house for six weeks. She is on Newstart and receives \$307 per week. She pays nearly sixty (60) percent of her income (\$175) in rent each week which leaves her with \$132 per week to live on. She says that she eats adequate amounts of food but *"... can't afford to eat three meals a day."*

#### Richard

Richard is thirty two and has been in his current rooming house for two months. He also spends sixty percent of his Newstart Allowance (\$330) on rent (\$200) which leaves him \$130 per week to cover food and all other expenses. He says that he doesn't eat adequately and that he only has one meal per day. He says, *"I get hungry."*

#### Maria

Maria is sixty three years old. She has been living at her current rooming house for four months. She receives the Disability Support Pension (\$500) and spends forty two percent (\$210) on rent each week. She states that she doesn't eat adequate amounts of food and that in the off pension week *"I eat 2 Minute noodles and bread and get food from the Salvos."*



## PREPARING AND COOKING FOOD:

Residents were then asked if they had any issues preparing or cooking their meals in the rooming house. Thirty six (36) percent of residents said they had no problems preparing meals or cooking in the kitchen. However, the remaining sixty four (64) percent reported they did have problems due to the lack of cleanliness or poor hygiene practices of other residents, or issues in relation to the stealing of food and/or cooking equipment.

*"Some people have no sense of food hygiene or food safety."*

*"I can't cook in the kitchen because of the state it is in."*

Another commented, *"I don't cook when the more volatile people are around in the kitchen."*

Sixteen (16) percent of residents reported they had set up cooking facilities in their own rooms and prepared and cooked food there instead of using communal facilities. They reported that in this way they were able to avoid many of the issues to do with cooking in the kitchen – and some of the residents as well. One resident reported the kitchen was *"overcrowded (with) too many cooking at the same time (and) cooking facilities not working properly. I have a microwave and frying pan in my room."*

*"The kitchen was a slop bowl. It's getting better, but I don't use it."*

## RESIDENT COMPATIBILITY:

Compatibility in any shared housing arrangement is important and the more compatible people are, the more harmonious and better the living environment. Rooming house residents have no choice as to who comes into the house. This is a decision and negotiation between the referring agency (if there is one involved), the rooming house operator and the potential new resident.

Generally, within this context, this negotiation involves the practical arrangements such as determining whether there is a vacancy available in the rooming house, payment of rent and/or bond in advance by the referring agency on behalf of the new resident, sometimes the signing of a lease agreement, and in most cases the completion of paperwork to authorise on-going rent deductions through the new resident's Centrepay account.

Existing residents in the rooming house have no input at any point in this negotiation. The new resident arrives, generally unannounced, and moves into their allocated room.

Given this random, haphazard approach, the research sought to understand how well residents engaged with each other once in their household. Surprisingly, despite the lack of involvement in determining who moves in, the research found that fifty (50) percent of residents reported they got along well or OK with the other residents, although commenting there were some minor issues.

Another twenty (20) percent reported they got along really well and a small number of residents (six percent) reported that it varied depending on who was in the household. Twenty four (24) percent reported that they didn't get along with other residents at all, and avoided them as much as possible.

*"No problems. I try to stay out of any disagreements but I'm never unsociable."*

*"It varies. I have one close friend but not so friendly with the other residents. I don't need their problems."*

*"We don't communicate – they live in their rooms like me or go out."*

Further probing in relation to this issue resulted in over seventy five (75) percent of residents informing the researchers that 'getting on' with other residents was important because it avoided conflict and ensured there was a level of peace in the house.

They recognised that as they were all living together in the same house, a degree of effort was required to try and maintain these relationships. In this way, they were also able to increase their sense of safety in the rooming house environment. Additionally, for some residents, other rooming house residents provided their only social interaction.

This response reflects particularly high levels of emotional intelligence amongst this rooming house cohort and was an unanticipated outcome of the research.

*"You have to get on with others – I've always got on with people in the rooming houses."*

*"Some people keep to themselves, but it helps me if it's like a little community. We share a lot."*

*"Yes, if you don't like them there can be big issues in the household. It helps my state of mind to get along with others."*

*"If something happens, they are there. I want to get along with them, but I don't want to do their dishes and I don't want to step in their urine."*

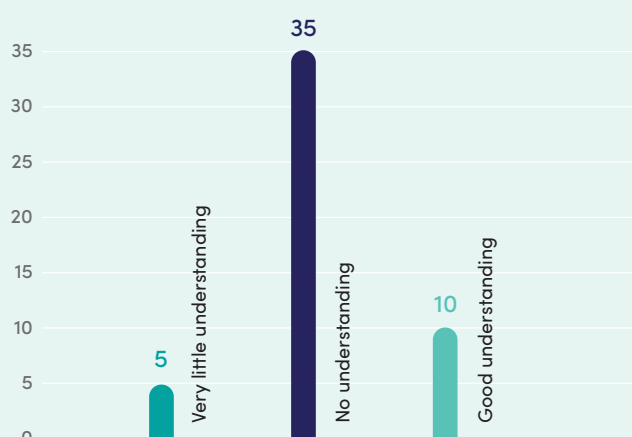
For some others, getting along was not so important. For some individuals, living with others is 'draining' or potentially dangerous especially in relation to people who may have unstable mental health conditions or those who are affected by drugs and or alcohol. These individuals often described themselves as 'self-contained' or needing their 'own space'.

*"I need my own space. I can get too many knocks on the door – people asking for cigarettes, milk and sugar. I've been attacked by an ashtray."*

## Knowledge of rights and responsibilities

Residents were asked what did they know or understand about their rights as a resident in a rooming house. Seventy (70) percent reported having little or no understanding of their rights, ten (10) percent reported having some understanding, but fearing repercussions if they made complaints and twenty (20) percent reported they were confident they understood their rights. When discussing this issue with residents, many individuals referred to their understanding of the house rules rather than their rights.

QB18: WHAT DO YOU KNOW OR UNDERSTAND ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESIDENT/TENANT?



*"I've read the rooming house laws...no visitors here unless you make the request."*

*"There are notices on the wall in a few places – includes topics such as running water, heating and cooking facilities."*

*"I'm very confused. There's a rule book for the house and the CAV booklet was also provided. House rules; no males, no alcohol, not too long in the showers, no cooking after 9:30pm, no swearing, no bullying, no drugs, no sharing medication, no noise after 10:00pm."*

*"Yes – keep clean, don't make noise and clean the kitchen."*

*"I didn't know any of them until PCLC provided the CAV booklet. It wasn't provided by the real estate agent."*

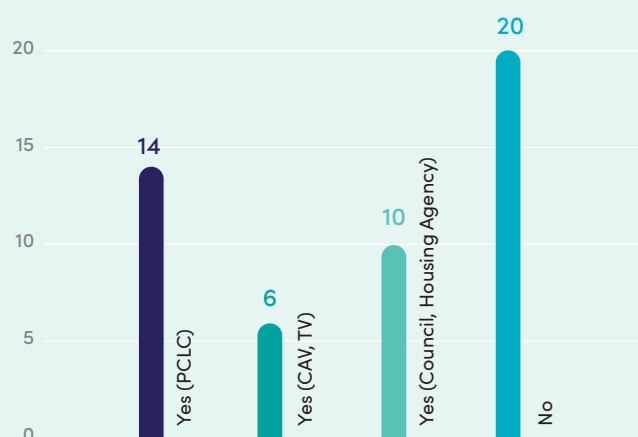
Residents were asked if they had ever made contact with an agency to discuss their rights, or try to resolve an issue. Forty (40) percent responded they had never

contacted any agency, twenty percent (20) reported they had contacted local council or one of the emergency housing providers and twelve (12) percent said they had contacted CAV.

Twenty eight (28) percent of residents reported they had discussed specific issues with PCLC RHOP and, where appropriate, these individuals were referred to PCLC's Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP) or gave permission for PCLC RHOP to report breaches of minimum standards to the regulators.

#### QB19: HAS CONTACT BEEN MADE WITH AN AGENCY?

Rooming House Surveys 17 July – 4 December 2019



In some cases taking action delivered positive changes for the resident or in the rooming house environment.

Inspectors came through and they were forced to do something – made repairs

*"Personal belongings were returned to me."*

*"An abusive resident was removed."*

*"Rent arrears were paid."*

In others, it resulted in residents being able to stay at the rooming house. One resident discussed their concerns with the RHOP and was referred in to PCLC's TAAP Team. As a result, they reported their residency was maintained and they were now 'more informed and... still at the rooming house'.

But in some situations it did not always deliver the desired result or outcome for the resident and at times there was only a partial resolution of the issue.

*"The back door was replaced, the washing machine was fixed, but nothing was done about the windows."*

In some cases, it negatively impacted the relationship between the resident and rooming house operator and made the resident's situation more difficult. When the rooming house operator failed to respond to a resident's complaint about toilets not working properly, they complained to the local council. The resident advised that following their complaint,

*"Council visited and the place was a pigsty. Council put orders on the owner but the owner retaliated with anger. She hates me! Doesn't talk to me! She breaks every rule in the CAV booklet."*

## CONTACT AND RELATIONSHIP WITH ROOMING HOUSE OPERATOR:

The relationship between a resident and rooming house operator plays a significant role in the resident's quality of life in the rooming house. A responsive operator who respects resident's rights and deals with repair and maintenance issues promptly, can make a significant difference to levels of resident satisfaction.

Overwhelmingly, most residents reported they had frequent contact with the rooming house operator. Twenty two (22) percent reported their relationship with the rooming house operator was a good relationship.

Thirty eight (38) percent of residents reported they had regular contact with the operator, but noted that this was predominantly focused on rent collection.

Twenty eight (28) percent reported the contact with the operator was unpredictable, unreliable and in some instances they had daily visits.

A further twelve (12) percent reported they had either infrequent contact, or none at all.

*"Once every couple of weeks. He picks up my rent. I make complaints but they don't listen"*

*"Every two weeks – he wants money. Minimal contact, mediocre contact."*

*"Every fortnight – to pay the rent. She comes across nicely, but she's merciless."*



*"Every day – it's very challenging. As soon as we hear her voice we leave. She tells residents to "do this, do that...you should be out at work!"*

*"She's bossy, irrational and doesn't provide receipts."*

*"Too often – could be every day. Owners turn up anytime they want to – they intimidate people and hit tenants. They go into residents' rooms – things go missing."*

*"They have been running rooming houses for a long time. They don't abide by the rules."*

*"Once a month. He's a good bloke, but at the end of the day they just want you to pay the rent and shut up."*

*"I get on well with the owner. He comes and fixes things"*

*"Regular contact as required. If something needs to be done the owner attends to it right away."*

On the basis of their experience residents were asked to state if they would recommend rooming houses to other people. Forty four (44) percent responded emphatically in the negative.

*"Not to a decent person. It's like living in hell."*

*"No – rough sleeping is cheaper and safer."*

*"No – share a house with people you know."*

*"No – people are left (abandoned). People have died in the rooming house and been dead for days before they were found."*

The other fifty six (56) percent provided qualified and more nuanced responses arguing that rooming houses should not be considered a long term housing option but, in most instances, are better than living on the streets, although a small number of individuals argued that living on the streets was safer than living in some rooming houses.

*"For a short term yes – and for those on low incomes. But it is no way of life in the long term. These places drag you down."*

*"Maybe – there are good and bad ones. It depends on the residents living there."*

*"If they have nowhere to go, it's better than being on the street and homeless."*

*"Yes, you need a roof, you need somewhere to keep warm."*

*"Yes, it's better to get off the streets."*

## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

The majority of residents reported they are currently on the Department of Housing (DoH) register and indeed, since the commencement of the research project some individuals have moved into DoH accommodation. This group of individuals had complex and compounding health issues and had their DoH priority status adjusted following the deterioration of their health condition. In some cases, assistance and advocacy from the RHOP and some very helpful DoH staff expedited this process.

Where residents were not on the DoH register, the research team provided them with the support to complete the appropriate forms and register.

Some residents reported they had been on the DoH register for extensive periods of time with some (twenty two percent) having been on the register for over 5 years or more. For residents who were already on the register, the research team queried them as to whether DoH had their current address and if they were receiving mail from the department.

If people were unsure as to their status on the register, or were not receiving mail, residents were advised to contact the department and update their details.

In relation to their interactions with DoH, responses were varied in relation to how helpful the department had been. For some, they found departmental officers to be helpful, especially over the phone. Others reported that DoH staff are over worked and unable to assist, whereas others reported they were unable to get their issues resolved and were frustrated by the experience.

One resident recommended that specialist housing workers be employed to facilitate their interaction with DoH. In some areas, this already exists and it provides an effective linkage between the department and the individual.

The research team also observed that emergency housing services could facilitate individual applications to DoH and remind those already on the DOH register to notify the department of their change of address, so that they continue to receive correspondence from the department.

## SUMMARY:

Many people move into rooming house accommodation with little or no knowledge of what to expect from the experience. Often, they also have very few personal belongings or equipment necessary to set up their room and with which to feed themselves.

Most individuals we spoke to were referred to rooming house accommodation by emergency housing providers. Residents reported it would have been helpful if these emergency housing providers provided more detailed information about where they were going and checked to see if there were basic amenities at the residence.

Many residents identified some advantages associated with rooming house accommodation. Primarily, this involved living with and being around others, and in a few cases, making friends. This surprised researchers, as many people reported concerns about the violence and unpredictable behaviours of other residents as a major issue. Clearly, for some people, friendships within this environment, are possible.

Location of rooming houses, especially those within close proximity to public transport, was also considered an advantage. Additionally, the fact that the cost of utilities is generally included as part of the rental fee, was also considered favourably, and as was the issue of privacy afforded to individuals by having their own room.

Residents reported that their major concerns were related to drug use and the associated behaviours of other residents which often resulted in disagreements, conflicts and violence and contributed to an environment that was unpredictable and unsafe. Others identified the overall lack of cleanliness and poor hygiene practices in the rooming house environment. Not surprisingly, this was a major issue in relation to the state of kitchens and bathrooms especially.

Noise was also considered to be a major issue. On average, most rooming houses have at least six to eight people in residence at any one time. Most rooming houses are standard three or four bedroom homes that have been built to house families. They have been modified (often rather crudely and cheaply) to function as rooming houses and accommodate more people.

Residents commented that they would like the rooming house operator to make improvements to the house (flooring, carpets, and painting walls), respond to

resident concerns and attend to repairs in a timely manner. Some residents felt that they paid too much for a relatively small space and requested rent reductions. Others requested better security, including proper locks on external doors and individual rooms, as well as lockers in the kitchen to safely store their food and cooking utensils, and security cameras on site. Others commented that they wanted to be provided with receipts for their rent payments. Many are told to rely on their Centrelink records (rent is deducted automatically and paid directly to the landlord). However, this arrangement is a record of payment, but is not a receipt as required under the RTA and does not provide the resident with formal notification of when their rent is paid up to.

Generally, it was found that residents have little or no understanding of their rights. Most residents had a better understanding of the house rules than their rights as a resident. While less than one third of residents said they had contacted the local council or Consumer Affairs Victoria in relation to a property matter, most residents have never contacted an agency to discuss property concerns.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In this section, the aim of the research was to try and understand the lived experience of rooming house residents, not only within the rooming house itself, but to get a better understanding of the levels of engagement residents had with the local community and community support services.

Residents were asked to estimate how much time they spent at home in the rooming house. Whilst many residents reported they were dissatisfied and disliked the rooming house environment, we found that the majority of them (seventy six percent) spent either most, or all, of their time there, predominantly in their rooms. Only, fourteen (14) percent said they spent some time at home, with eight (8) percent reporting they did not spend much time at home and two percent reporting that it varied.

*"I'm here seven days a week. In the last two weeks I didn't go out at all."*

*"I'm in my room most of the time."*

*"All day, every day (at home)."*

People were then asked to identify where they went when they did go out. Over half (fifty two percent) reported they went shopping (generally to purchase food). Others (twenty two percent) said they went out to visit friends and several (eighteen percent) mentioned they went out to walk and/or get exercise. Some (sixteen percent) reported they went out to see their local doctor and a small group (ten percent) said they went out to visit family.

Individuals were then asked to comment on what prevented them from going out. Not surprisingly, lack of money was the most common reason for people not leaving the rooming house, but it was not the only one. Concerns about theft of belongings when people left the house, was mentioned by a few individuals. However, the dominant reason for people not going out appeared to be related to both physical health and mental health including social anxiety and self-esteem issues. For some, it was a combination of all these things.

*"Lack of money, motivation and social anxiety."*

*"My anxiety – stress and excessive sweating... I've been told I'm worthless."*

*"My PTSD – I find it difficult in big crowds."*

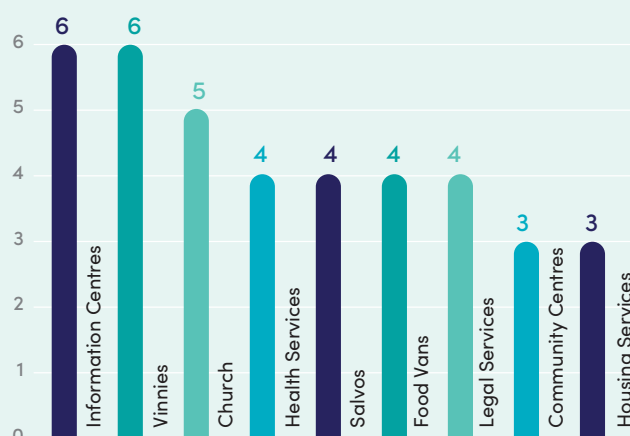
*"Some days I feel like crap. I can't see properly, I stumble and lose my balance. I don't feel confident or safe."*

*"Anxiety, depression, mental health, money."*

Residents were then asked what they knew about the local services and supports available in the area. Almost half (forty-eight percent) responded they did not know what local services were available in their area. This was not surprising as researchers found that many individuals were offered rooming house accommodation in areas which were unfamiliar to them. For example, several residents who had grown up and lived in the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne, found themselves living in rooming houses in the south eastern areas. Not only did they report they had no knowledge of local community supports or transport systems, but many previously established social connections, were lost as a result of their relocation.

Others commented they had some knowledge of services, especially those that provided them with access to free food (either community kitchens, fresh food supplies and/or food vouchers). Predominantly, it was found that residents had contact with those agencies and services that provided food and other material aid such as Community Information Centres, St. Vincents and the Salvation Army.

WHICH SERVICES DO YOU HAVE CONTACT WITH?



Contact with these agencies occurred in accordance within the prescribed arrangements governing each service. People reported they could request assistance from the Salvos four times per year (every three months) and every six weeks from Vinnies.



When asked what assistance was provided and what the experience was like, residents reported that generally they were assisted by the organisation with the provision of food and other forms of material aid and had positive engagement with the service provider. In fact, the majority (sixty percent) of residents felt that they received the help and assistance they needed.

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*"I'm treated well. I get food vouchers and dried food."*

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*"They provide food. They are welcoming and optimistic. Other places you get cross-examined."*

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However, over one third of residents commented that they experienced negative attitudes and judgement from staff and volunteers at some of these services.

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*"(They are) mistrustful and judgemental."*

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*"They don't provide food vouchers, they dole out food. They are very stingy. The services assume I'm a greedy person."*

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*"The agency makes me feel guilty – they treat you like a piece of shit, like a dog."*

---

When asked what additional assistance would support or improve their life, twenty (20) percent responded that better housing was a priority. Others commented that more outreach support would make their lives easier, especially counselling and health services.

---

*"Help me to get out of here. There should be better health services to rooming houses – provide support on site. Some (residents) have on-going trauma and no support."*

---

*"Support to get my own place. Nothing else is going to make any difference."*

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*"Improving my mental health and being able to hold down a job and start a family. I want to be normal."*

---

*"I can't wait to get out of here. I'll have my privacy. I won't have to deal with residents and I won't have to deal with the owner."*

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## SUMMARY

The research found that rooming house residents spend significant amounts of time each week at the rooming house locked away in their rooms. Their contact with the outside world is extremely limited and is largely focused on the purchase and supply of food and other necessary provisions, such as medication. Many reported that financial constraints prevent them from going out. But significantly, health issues and low self-esteem were the primary reasons for this lack of engagement in the external world.

The research found that people are living lonely and isolated lives, staying within the confines of their room for much of the day, only emerging to take care of the most basic requirements of life. They are unable and unwilling to participate in broader community activities or access additional supports.

They are dissatisfied with their living environment but unable to escape it. They are stuck!

# FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

**This part of the research sought to tap into the aspirations and hopes of residents to better understand how they envisaged their future lives. Residents were asked to identify their short term and longer term dreams and goals.**

Not surprisingly, people predominantly identified moving out into a place of their own as a key aspiration. This was followed by desires to obtain work, improve their health, and for those residents with children, to have more contact with them. For this group in particular, better accommodation was seen as necessary to enable them to have more access to their families.

Most parents commented that the rooming house environment was not an appropriate or safe place to have children visit. Others stated they were too ashamed to have their children see them living in such environments.

*"I want to get stable, decent accommodation, so I can have access with my kids again."*

Employment was a key goal for many as it increased individual incomes and provided much needed financial security and provided the pathway to better housing. Additionally, it enabled people to utilise their skills, training and expertise, and improve self-esteem.

*"I want to be back at work and be out of these places and to be able to see my kids."*

For others, their goals were more fundamental.

*"I just want to have a normal bloody life, eat well, a relationship so I can take someone out and buy her stuff. My dreams are other people's normality."*

However, some residents were unable to identify any goals or aspirations. One resident commented she felt there was 'not much to dream about anymore'. She just wanted a 'place of her own' where she didn't have 'to wipe the toilet' (after others). Another resident responded 'I have no dreams anymore, I've lost everyone. I just take it day by day and let it be.'

People were asked to project and describe what they saw themselves doing in the next twelve months and then in the next five years. Once again, a key priority in the short term for the majority of residents was living in their own place. Getting work and improving their health continued to be significant priorities. A smaller

group reported they would probably still be living in the rooming house, although some were more accepting than others with this possible outcome. Over the longer term, people remained focused on work and home as key priorities but spoke more about wanting to establish and/or repair relationships, live with family or partners and generally living stable, normal lives.

However, questions in relation to longer term goals resulted in a number of residents commenting it was too hard to imagine that far ahead. Some residents hoped they would still be alive in five years' time, whilst others reported that it was probably unlikely they would still be here.

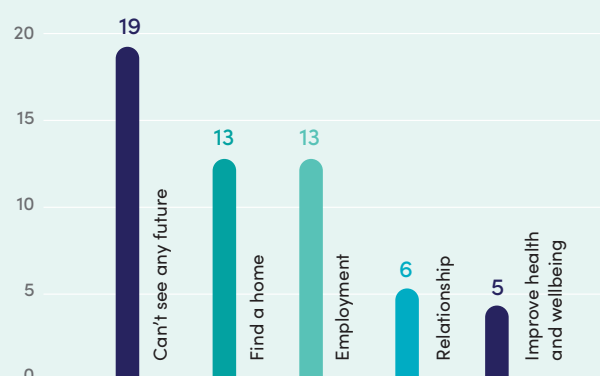
*"I don't know if I'll live for the next five years. It's all unpredictable."*

One female resident responded she didn't want to be around anymore 'unless there's some change'. She has a disability and has had a number of traumatic experiences in her recent past. She has been trying to move out of rooming house accommodation for over twelve months but has been unable to secure alternate accommodation (even with the assistance of a housing worker). She lives in a constant state of vigilance in relation to the aggressive and abusive behaviours of other residents in the house.

When residents were asked what would help them achieve their short and long term goals, many residents identified improvements in their physical and mental health status as key requirements. But significantly, residents identified that belief and hope were also equally important.

## QD3: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE YOURSELF DOING IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

Rooming House Surveys 17 July – 4 December 2019



*"I need hope."*

*"I need to keep my head focused. I can't be drinking. I want to be purposeful. Rooming houses can take that away from you. I don't want to be drifting away."*

*"A stable life and stable background. I've never felt comfortable or at rest in a rooming house. I need to build confidence in myself and other people."*

*"I need a psychologist and psychiatrist so I can get assessed. I want to hold down a job, any job..."*

## SUMMARY:

It was clear from their responses that most residents have ambitions and want to make significant changes to their lives. Residents indicated that, despite their current situation, they have future plans and are highly motivated to achieve them. But for many, achieving their goals within the context of living in a rooming house is extremely challenging. People felt they were disadvantaged by their current situation, were isolated and ignored by the general community and need more support and assistance in order to achieve their goals.

## RESIDENTS' MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY:

When recruiting individuals to participate in the research, the research team emphasised that residents would have an opportunity through this work to convey messages to service providers, government departments and the broader community. Individuals were keen to take advantage of this opportunity as they felt the broader community had very little or limited understanding of what life is really like for people living in rooming houses. The research provided a platform for them to speak directly to the broader community about their experience. This is what they said:

### ROOMING HOUSE OPERATORS

Rooming house operators are perceived by residents to be solely profit motivated individuals with very little concern for the residents or their quality of life. There are a number of key issues residents would like to see addressed:

- Operators provide over-priced accommodation for relatively small rooms and poor quality housing. Residents felt the current regulations do not adequately protect them from exploitation. They would like to see more stringent regulations in place to improve standards and increased monitoring to ensure rooming houses provide better quality accommodation and that rental charges are monitored.
- Operators are required to issue receipts to residents for rent paid. Generally, this does not occur. Without a receipt residents have no idea of when their rent is paid up to and, if accused of being behind in rent, have no way of knowing whether this is correct.
- Operators need to be more responsive in regard to repairs. Some residents reported repairs are left unattended for lengthy periods and some operators undertake their own repair work, whether they are qualified or not e.g. electrical repairs. Repairs should be attended to promptly and carried out by qualified personnel.
- Many operators visit the rooming house just to collect rent. They have no concern for what is happening in the house between residents and do little to manage these situations. Where Operators were more involved and took an active role in



managing the environment, residents reported the living environment was more stable.

- When CAV and local council conduct inspections, residents want to be involved and provided with an opportunity to discuss issues of concern. Residents also requested there be more inspections and that operators should not be informed prior to the inspection.
- Some residents reported if they complained about conditions in the rooming house, it put them in a vulnerable position and they could end up on the streets as a result. They reported they had witnessed evictions that denied the resident their rights under the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA). They requested that licensing requirements for operators should ensure that operators understand their rights, responsibilities and obligations under the RTA.

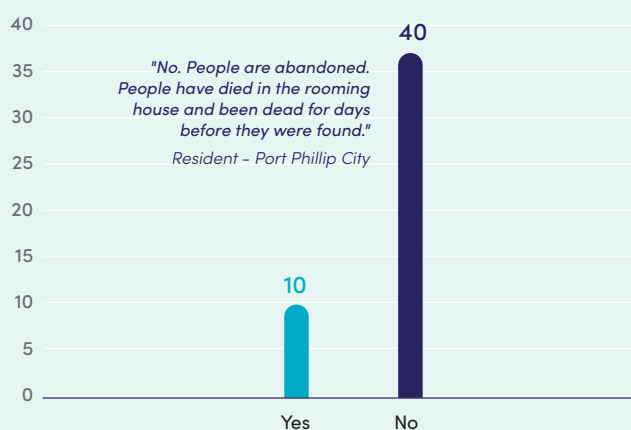
*"The owners are too keen for the money. You are virtually in jail living in a rooming house... This house was originally only a four bedroom house. The owner thinks she can stack people on top of each other."*

*"Rooming houses need to be run and managed by someone who cares...there should be more inspections and don't tell them (Operators) when the inspectors are coming."*

*"Residents should be able to advocate on their own behalf and not be threatened or harassed by the owner. If the RTA is followed it would be OK, but this is not the case."*

#### QB23: WOULD YOU RECOMMEND ROOMING HOUSES TO OTHERS?

Rooming House Surveys 17 July – 4 December 2019



## ROOMING HOUSES:

Rooming houses are standard suburban houses that were originally designed to accommodate a family and have since been modified, altered and/or extended to accommodate between six and eight single adults.

Residents have identified the following key areas that would significantly enhance their living environment:

- Noise is a big issue in rooming houses. Residents have suggested that when modifications are made to convert standard houses into rooming houses, consideration should be given to ensuring better soundproofing between rooms;
- Heating and cooling systems should also be modified to ensure adequate heating and cooling is available and consistent throughout the building;
- More showers and toilets should be built to accommodate any increase in residents;
- Individual rooms should be fitted with solid doors and door locks to prevent breaches of security and theft;
- Conversion of a standard suburban home into a rooming house often results in lounge and dining areas being converted into bedrooms, leaving the residents with little or no common areas. In such cases, residents have no choice but to stay in their bedrooms all day as there is nowhere else to go in the house. Common areas still need to be provided in rooming house conversions;
- Some houses have been adapted to provide self-contained accommodation (individual bathrooms and small kitchen areas). This appeals to many rooming house residents;
- To prevent theft of food supplies and cooking equipment, residents suggested providing individual refrigeration in rooms as well as secure, lockable cupboards for each resident;
- Most rooming houses only have one letterbox and mail is easily lost, misplaced or dumped. Residents suggested a locked letterbox be allocated for each room of the house so mail can be delivered safely.

## SUPPORT

Residents reported that, as part of the rooming house population, they felt invisible, neglected, powerless and unable to successfully advocate on their own behalf. They are struggling with a range of issues that they are unable to address themselves and which are exacerbated by their accommodation in the rooming house environment. They pleaded for assistance and support in the following areas:

- Residents acknowledged many of them had serious mental health issues that were significantly impacted by the rooming house environment and requested outreach support to assist them. They commented that they are immobilised by these problems and are unable to get out to access services. They need mental health support services to access them through better outreach.
- Residents want to undertake employment training and find employment. This is important on several levels. It builds self-esteem, gives them hope for the future and increases their income and provides opportunity to seek alternate accommodation. Once again, complex health issues prohibit them from engaging in many of these activities. Provision of outreach case management services could provide supported linkages to training and job providers.
- Emergency housing services have a key role in referring individuals to rooming house accommodation. Residents felt at the point of contact and referral, that housing providers equip them with more information about the rooming house, the environment and what to expect when they get there. Many residents commented that they were completely unprepared for what they found once they arrived at the house.
- People also commented they needed to better understand their rights as residents and this information should also be provided at the point of referral. PCLC's Rooming House Outreach Program provides this information on visits to rooming houses, but timely intervention with residents when they are first moving into the rooming house equips them with this information up-front.
- Most importantly they asked to be treated with compassion and respect from support services. They commented they are already dealing with significant

complexity in their lives, as well as having to deal with the stress of the rooming house existence. They do not want to have to deal with negative or dismissive attitudes from support services as well.

*People in rooming houses come from all different echelons of society, but being in a rooming house labels them with a particular societal identity, if not straight away, then over time.... Don't patronize me. Don't tell, but encourage. I need programs to get me out of here .*

*Understand how residents come to be here...what situations we have left. We need support and someone to talk to. It's a change – a big change!*

*Put more support services in. People in rooming houses are castaways. We need more support.*

## RESIDENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RESIDENTS:

One of the most challenging areas for rooming house residents is their relationship with other residents in the house. Rooming house residents have no control over who comes into the house and generally are not informed when new residents are arriving, who they are, or what their background might be. Residents told stories of situations where they were trying to stay off drugs but were housed in drug-using households or where women leaving family violence situations were housed alongside men who had been incarcerated for violent crimes and/or sexual assault. They suggested the following changes be made:

- residents be advised when a new resident is moving into the house and given the issues that existing residents may have, some thought or consideration be given to trying to accommodate residents that could potentially fit well together.

*"You never know who you're living with. I've had two sex offenders living with me – child sex offenders and I was sexually abused as a child!"*

*"You could be living with a murderer or rapist. As long as the owners get their money they don't care."*

*"It's difficult to trust other residents, especially those who take drugs."*

*"Tenants introduced in the rooming house are a threat to others."*

## RESIDENT MESSAGES TO GOVERNMENT:

Residents made numerous comments that were specifically directed to government. They are living lives of quiet desperation and they want the government to act on their behalf and do something about their situation.

Residents are asking for more public housing to be provided. They want government to more closely examine and monitor the rooming house model. Residents want government to scrutinise rooming house operators and their practices more closely.

They are asking government to understand that the rooming house population is an extremely vulnerable population which is being exploited by profit-driven individuals and they need the government to do something about that.

### More public housing:

*"Rooming houses are a shambles, a mess, an idea gone wrong. The rooming house model is broken...please fix the housing mess!"*

*"Why hasn't there been an increase in public housing? I don't care who is in government. Who is helping these people?"*

### More scrutiny of rooming house operators and their practices:

*"Get thorough investigations done on all RHOs. They are providing over-priced accommodation. I'm paying \$250 per week for a room that's smaller than a prison cell. I'm forced to live below the poverty line. How is this legal? Rent should be matched to the quality of accommodation."*

*Do something with these owners. They are ruthless people. They are bludging off the tax payers at the end of the day – they're all laughing at the system.*

*Increase requirements for the licensing of rooming house operators*

*Charitable organisations should not be charging more than 50% of a person's income for rent.*

Provide more support to residents and more resources to those agencies working with them:

- Pay closer attention to the minority, to the vulnerable and those who aren't visible.
- Get mental health workers to visit rooming houses. A lot of people are depressed and mentally ill and won't go to the service.
- Funding and resources are not reaching the homeless.
- Government doesn't understand what it's like, especially for people who have been traumatised.
- Put more support services in...people in rooming houses are castaways. We need more support.
- Housing agencies should be given more funding so they can help more people
- Most importantly, they want the government to act and make the necessary changes so they may redeem some self-respect and re-gain hope that they will have a better future.
- This is inhumane, you lose your self-respect. You lose hope!





# APPENDIX A



## Resident Details:

Name *(first name only)*:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Age:   ☐ Under 20       ☐ 20-30       ☐ 31-40       ☐ 41-50       ☐ 51-60       ☐ 61-70       ☐ Over 70  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sex:   ☐ Male       ☐ Female       ☐ Other  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived at this address:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Weekly Rent:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Weekly Income:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Income Source:   ☐ DSP       ☐ Newstart       ☐ Other Government Benefit       ☐ Workers Compensation  
  
                         ☐ Salary       ☐ Other  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Country of Birth:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

ATSI:     ☐ Yes       ☐ No  
\_\_\_\_\_

Languages Spoken:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Section A:

*Can you tell us a little about yourself?*

1. Where did you grow up?

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2. How would you describe yourself as a child?

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3. What were your interests and hobbies growing up?

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4. What were you like at school? What were your dreams/ambitions for yourself?

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5. How would you describe your family?

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6. Do you have any contact with your family now? Who with, and how often?

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7. What work/training have you completed?

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8. What skills do you have? Do you have opportunities to use these skills now? How?

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9. What about your relationships as an adult? Do you have a partner now/previously?  
Any children? Ages? Any contact?

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10. How do you feel about this? What would you like to be different, if anything?

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## Section B:

### *Rooming House Accommodation:*

1. How did you find out about this rooming house?

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2. Who referred you here? What assistance did they provide to help you move in? (Rent, bond, transport etc)

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3. What assistance would have been helpful to you at that time?

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4. Is this the first rooming house you have lived in?

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5. How many other rooming houses have you lived in?

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6. What are the best aspects of living in a rooming house?

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7. What are the major issues you have living in a rooming house?

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8. How would you describe the living conditions in this rooming house?

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9. What would improve your life in this rooming house?

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10. How would you describe your current state of health?

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11. Do you have any major health issues, and if so, what are they?

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12. How would you describe your current diet?

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## Section B: (Cont'd):

### *Rooming House Accommodation (Cont'd):*

13. Do you eat adequate amount of food?

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14. Do you have any issues preparing or cooking your meals in the rooming house?

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15. What are the issues?

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16. How well do you get on with other residents?

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17. Is it important to you to get on with other residents? Why?

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18. What do you know or understand about your rights as a resident/tenant?

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19. Has contact been made with an agency to discuss your rights/resolve an issue?

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20. What was the outcome?

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21. Do you have any contact with the owner/landlord?

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22. How often do you have contact and what is that contact like?

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23. Would you recommend rooming houses to other people?

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24. Are you on the Department of Housing Register for public housing ?

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25. If not, why not and can we assist you?

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26. If yes, how long have you been on the Register?

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27. Do you receive correspondence from the Department of Housing?

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28. Does Department of Housing have your current address?

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29. What interactions have you had with the Department of Housing been like?

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30. Was it helpful?

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### Section C:

#### *Community Engagement:*

1. How much time do you spend at home each day?

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2. Do you go out? How often? Where do you go? Why?

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3. What prevents you from going out?

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4. What do you know about local services and supports available in this area?

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5. Which ones do you have contact with?

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6. How much contact do you have with them?

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7. What do they assist you with? What's that experience like?

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8. Do you get the help/assistance that you need?

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9. What additional assistance or support would improve your life?

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### Section D:

*Future:*

1. What are your dreams/goals for yourself?

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2. What would you like to see yourself doing in the next 12 months?

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3. What about the next 5 years?

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4. What would help you achieve this?

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### Conclusion:

The results of this survey will be provided to government departments and other agencies – on the basis of your experience, is there something you would really like them to hear or understand about you, and/or your experiences?

5. Is there anything else you want to add?

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Thanks for participating in our questionnaire.

I acknowledge supply of gift voucher to the value of \$30.00 for participation in this survey.

Signed:

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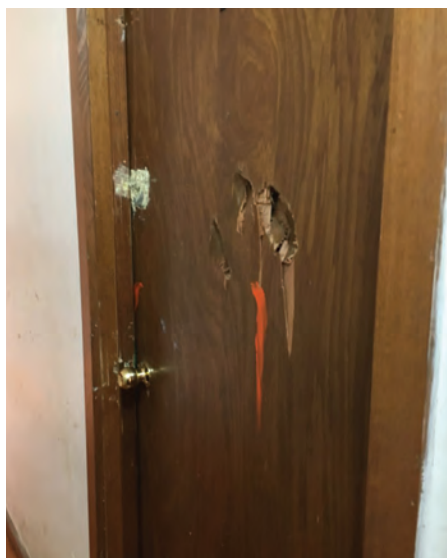
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