

Impact Report



Peninsula
Community
Legal Centre

July 2025- June 2026

Rooming House Outreach & Support Program South East Region

Rooming house visits

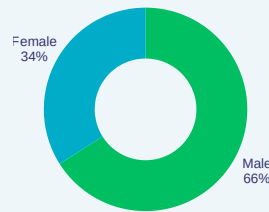
including multiple visits

436



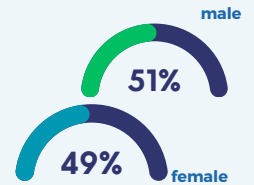
Rooming house residents contacted

362



Residents referred to housing services

51



Reports/enquiries made to regulators

19



Health packs delivered

105



Vouchers supplied

288



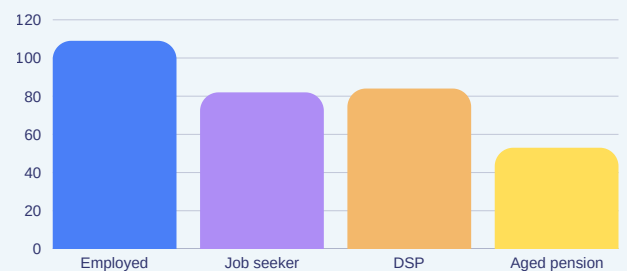
Average length of stay

2.5
years



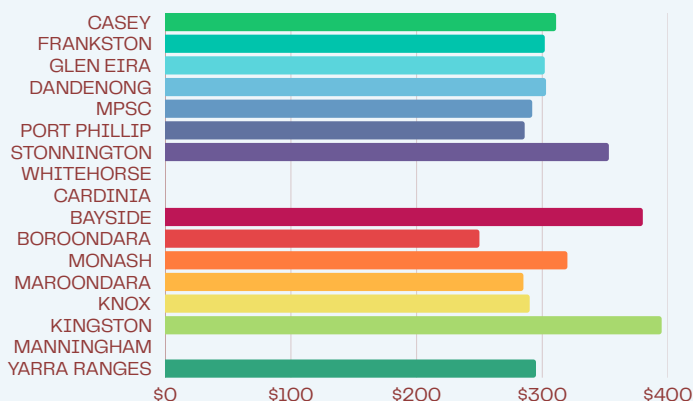
Income Sources

(Self-Reported)



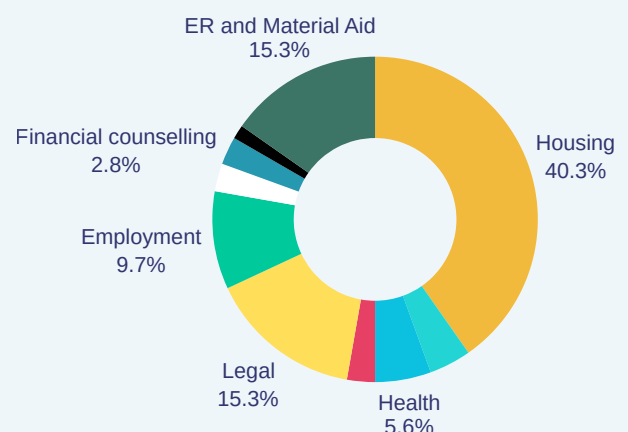
Average weekly rent over 17 LGA's

\$303 / week



Rooming house referrals + support / other

RHOP facilitated direct referrals within its network for residents seeking health, mental health, and other legal services



Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP)

Annual Report | Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP) Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) | TAAP July 2025 – June 2026

Program Overview

PCLC's Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP), funded by Homes Victoria provides dedicated outreach, tenancy support, and systems advocacy to residents of rooming houses across Melbourne's south-east and inner suburbs. This brief presents key findings from the 2025–2026 program year and makes the case for sustained and increased investment in rooming house outreach as a critical component of Victoria's homelessness and housing response.

Across 436 visits and 362 resident engagements, RHOP has identified a sector characterised by entrenched disadvantage, systemic operator misconduct, and for many vulnerable rooming house residents a lack of formal support. The majority of residents engaging with RHOP this past year were male (239, 66%), with female residents comprising 123 (34%) of those engaged. This gender breakdown reflects the broader demographic profile of the rooming house sector, where single men are disproportionately represented.

The Rooming House Sector: A Hidden Housing Crisis

Rooming houses are frequently described as a form of transitional or emergency accommodation. RHOP's data tells a different story. The average length of stay among residents engaged this year was 30.09 months (approximately 2.5 years) underscoring that rooming house living is not a short-term or transitional arrangement for most residents, it is their long-term home. This finding reinforces the importance of sustained outreach and tenancy support rather than crisis-only intervention.

Yet the conditions in which these residents live, and the protections afforded to them, remain wholly inadequate for long-term occupancy. RHOP documented broken windows and doors (28 instances), pest infestation (16), and water leaks and mould (16) across visited properties this year alone. Three residents were found to be living in sheds or caravans on property grounds. These are not isolated maintenance failures — they are the lived reality of a sector operating with insufficient oversight and accountability.

At an average rent of \$303 per week, rooming house accommodation is far from cheap. For the 82 households engaged receiving Newstart Allowance/JobSeeker, this figure represents approximately 79% of their fortnightly income— leaving virtually nothing for food, medication, transport, or other essentials. The financial precarity of rooming house residents is extreme, and the risk of homelessness upon eviction is immediate.

Housing Conditions

Properties visited by RHOP were broadly categorised as either traditional rooming houses or contemporary rooming houses. Traditional properties, typically characterised by shared facilities, older housing stock, and higher levels of disrepair, accounted for the majority of visits and were associated with the greatest concentration of compliance and safety concerns. Across visited properties, most recorded rooms were private rooms (91%), with shared rooms accounting for 9%. However, reported room type did not always reflect actual occupancy. Overcrowding and informal sleeping arrangements meant that the number of people living at a property often exceeded the formal room allocations recorded. Residents in shared rooms also reported limited understanding of their rights and obligations under these arrangements. In some cases, each resident was paying approximately \$200–\$300 per week, raising concerns about transparency, affordability, and whether residents were receiving clear information about shared-room occupancy and tenancy protections.

Tenancy-related issues were prominent with 65 residents supported with matters relating to rent increases, notice to vacate, bond disputes, and residents' rights — a warm referral service into the Centre's Tenancy Assistance & Advocacy Program (TAAP) ensured that residents were supported to exercise rights.

Safety & Risks

RHOP identified a range of safety and risk factors across visited properties. Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use was the most frequently recorded risk factor (25 instances), followed by resident conflict (14) and the presence of children under 16 (11). Overcrowding (9) and the presence of weapons (5) were also recorded. These findings highlight the complex and at times dangerous environments in which rooming house residents live, and the critical importance of trauma-informed, outreach-based engagement.

Who Lives In Rooming Houses?

RHOP's engagement data challenges the assumption that rooming house residents are a homogeneous group. Income information was recorded at visited properties where at least one resident disclosed their income source, providing a snapshot of the diverse financial circumstances present across the rooming house sector. This year, RHOP recorded:

- 109 households reported employed residents — the single largest reported income group, representing the working poor who cannot access private rental markets
- 84 households reported a fixed income of Disability Support Pension (DSP) — many with complex physical and mental health needs, often disengaged from appropriate disability supports
- 82 households reported a fixed income of Newstart Allowance/JobSeeker — among the most financially vulnerable, with limited capacity to advocate for themselves
- 53 households reported a fixed income of Aged Pension — older Australians living in shared accommodation with no access to aged care services or age-appropriate housing

Across case studies, residents consistently presented with multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities: chronic illness, acquired brain injury, mental health conditions, family violence, AOD issues, and legal problems occurring simultaneously. This complexity is not the exception — it is the norm in rooming house settings. Single-issue referrals are rarely sufficient. What residents need is sustained, coordinated, trauma-informed support, and RHOP is structured to provide exactly that.

Disproportionately represented within the rooming house population are cohorts who face compounded risk and reduced access to justice:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women, including sole parents with infants, living in female-gender properties with inadequate safety protections
- International students and working holiday visa holders, who often have limited knowledge of tenancy rights and fear of visa implications
- Older Australians, living in traditional rooming houses with no formal aged care support and significant barriers to navigating housing and legal systems

Partnerships

RHOP's impact in 2025–2026 was made possible through strong collaborative relationships with a range of community, health, and housing sector partners, including:

BETTER HEALTH NETWORK – WAYSS – MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING LOCAL (Frankston) – HOUSING for the AGED ACTION GROUP – WINTRINGHAM – MELBOURNE CITY MISSION – BOLTON CLARKE

These partnerships enabled RHOP to provide warm referrals, joint outreach, coordinated case management, and systemic advocacy on behalf of residents — ensuring that individuals with complex and intersecting needs were connected to the right supports at the right time.

Conclusion

The 2025–2026 program year has demonstrated both the critical need for dedicated rooming house outreach across Melbourne's south-east and inner suburbs, and the measurable impact of RHOP's proactive, relational, face-to-face model. Rooming houses are home to some of Victoria's most vulnerable residents: people experiencing financial hardship, poor housing conditions, health complexity, social isolation, and exclusion from private rental markets, social housing pathways, and mainstream service systems, yet these residents rarely walk into community legal centres or housing services on their own. They are reached through consistent, trusted engagement over time, across multiple visits, through the slow building of rapport; this is not a model that can be replicated by a hotline or a website.

These outcomes — from securing stable, pet-inclusive housing and preventing unjust financial penalties, to resolving urgent pet welfare issues and supporting access to age-related income — demonstrate the impact of sustained, skilled, relationship-based outreach. Without this investment, preventable harm continues: evictions, unsafe living conditions, rough sleeping, and increased pressure on crisis, health, and justice systems. The 2025–2026 evidence is clear: rooming house need is significant, the risks are real, and outreach works.

Rooming House Intelligence Function

Entry points and housing services often rely on outdated or incomplete rooming house information, creating referral risks for vulnerable people. RHOP helps fill this gap through regular outreach and trusted relationships with operators, residents, and partner services, providing current intelligence on property status, registration, compliance, and suitability for referral.

This function is a critical but under-recognised contribution to the housing system. RHOP's on-the-ground knowledge supports safer, more informed referral decisions and cannot be replicated without sustained outreach presence.

Key Trends Identified Across RHOP Data

Repeat Operator misconduct and Systemic Harm

A clear pattern of predatory operator behaviour has emerged across multiple properties, including consistent reports of Centrepay deductions being reactivated without consent, rent increases implemented through Centrepay, unsafe appliances, retaliatory evictions, and ongoing failure to address maintenance issues. Repeated and historical conduct by the same operators shows near-identical patterns of overcrowding, misclassification of properties as hostels, intimidation of residents, and avoidance of regulatory obligations. Taken together, these issues indicate that a small number of operators are causing disproportionate harm across the rooming house sector.

Long-Term Residency

The average length of stay of 30 months is reflected in individual cases, including residents who had lived in rooming house accommodation for approximately 4 years and one long-term resident who had lived in the same property for several decades. These examples demonstrate that rooming houses are functioning as permanent homes, not transitional accommodation, yet conditions and protections remain inadequate for long-term residents.

Complex and Intersecting Needs

Across client case studies —residents consistently present with multiple compounding vulnerabilities: chronic health conditions, disability, mental health, AOD, family violence, legal issues, and financial hardship simultaneously. Single-issue referrals are rarely sufficient; sustained, coordinated case management is consistently required.

Vulnerable Cohorts

- Older residents are living in traditional rooming houses with no formal aged care support.
- International students and WHV holders are being deliberately targeted due to limited legal standing.
- Women face compounded risk in mixed-gender rooming house environments.
- Employed residents are increasingly affected by rising rental costs, demonstrating that employment alone does not provide a secure pathway out of housing insecurity. For individuals on low or modest wages, escalating private rental prices create a bottleneck that keeps residents locked out of affordable, stable housing options.

Safety Risks

AOD was the most frequently recorded risk factor (25 instances), with resident conflict (14) and weapons (5) also common. These risks are compounded in rooming house settings, particularly where operators are usually the first to be notified of safety concerns but fail to intervene or take protective action. This inaction leaves residents vulnerable and often forces them to manage dangerous situations themselves.



Housing Support Overview – Financial Year 2025–2026

KPI Achievement – Housing Pathway Supports

- **KPI Target:** 50 housing supports
- Housing pathway supports recorded this year include:
 - DFFH Victorian Housing Register (VHR) applications
 - Private rental support letters
 - DFFH support letters
 - Bond, HEF (Housing Establishment Fund), and entry point referral work
 - Direct social housing referrals + support

Soft Referrals to Entry Points

In addition to formal housing pathway supports, a significant volume of soft referral activity was undertaken throughout the year:

- Total individual engagements: 300+
- Estimated soft referrals provided: ~150+ (approx. 50% of all engagements)

Soft referrals involved encouraging residents to attend entry points for housing support and directly referring individuals where appropriate. This type of support was provided consistently across almost every resident engagement, representing a substantial but largely uncounted contribution to housing access outcomes.

Sector Intelligence Function

A distinctive and underrecognised contribution this year has been RHOP's live property intelligence for entry points and housing services. In the absence of other dedicated rooming house outreach, RHOP provides current, on-the-ground information about property status, registration, and compliance, supporting safer referral decisions for vulnerable people.

Housing Compliance & Advocacy

Through regular outreach, the program has identified and responded to issues of unregistered rooming houses and non-compliance with minimum standards, engaging local government and Consumer Affairs Victoria where appropriate.

Partnerships & Referral Pathways

Strong working relationships with key organisations — including Launch Housing, Wayss, Salvos, Uniting, DFFH, and local councils — have underpinned the program's ability to connect residents with appropriate housing assistance and ensure warm, supported referrals and reconnections to entry points.



Case Study: From Rooming House to Secure Housing

When RHOP first met Krysia, she was 75 years old and had been living in a rooming house for six years. She shared a bathroom with male residents, had limited privacy, and was largely invisible to the services that might have helped her. She was not in crisis in the way that services often recognise — but she was quietly enduring a living situation that no older woman should have to. Behind a closed door in a shared house, Krysia was ageing without the safety, comfort, or dignity she deserved. For many people, a rooming house is a last resort. For Krysia, it had become simply her life.

At first, Krysia was hesitant to engage. This is not uncommon — many rooming house residents have learned, through experience, that services come and go, and that trust is something to be guarded carefully. Promises are made and not kept. Workers change. Support disappears. RHOP kept showing up anyway. Through consistent, patient, and person-centred outreach, a relationship slowly formed. Workers took the time to listen without agenda, to be present without pressure, and to let Krysia set the pace. Over time, she began to trust that RHOP would follow through — and she started to reach out, not just for housing support, but for legal assistance and social connection too. Each small step forward was built on that foundation of trust.

As the relationship deepened, Krysia's circumstances became more complex. A fall left her with more significant health needs, adding urgency to what was already a concerning housing situation. An older woman, managing increasing health challenges, sharing facilities with strangers in a property never designed for someone with her needs — the gap between where Krysia was living and where she deserved to be living had never been clearer. Her situation was a quiet emergency, unfolding slowly and without fanfare. Without ongoing support and advocacy, it could easily have gone unnoticed by the systems designed to help people like her.

RHOP connected Krysia with a specialist housing advocacy service and continued to advocate alongside them, ensuring her voice and her needs were heard within the housing system. Navigating that system is rarely straightforward — it requires persistence, knowledge, and someone willing to stay the course. RHOP provided all of that. The team worked to ensure Krysia was not just another name on a list, but a person whose history, needs, and hopes were understood and communicated clearly to those with the power to make decisions.

That persistence paid off. Krysia received a Social Limited housing offer — and when she heard the news, she was overjoyed. The offer meant more than just a safe home. It meant she would finally be closer to her younger brother — her only living family — after years of isolation. It meant privacy, stability, and the chance to live her later years with the dignity she had always deserved. It meant belonging.

Krysia's story is a reminder of who is living in rooming houses, and what is at stake. Six years is a long time to wait for safety, dignity, and belonging. RHOP is proud to have walked that journey with her.

Case Study: From Rough Sleeping to Stable Housing:

Marcus and his partner Josephine were referred to a partner organisation in February 2026, following Josephine's discharge from hospital. The couple had been sleeping rough in their vehicle at a local oval for approximately one month, and had previously been sleeping rough on the Rosebud foreshore. This was their first experience of homelessness after six years in a private rental, which they lost due to rental arrears after Marcus left employment to care for Josephine.

Josephine presented with multiple complex health conditions including significant chronic physical health needs, severe mobility impairment, a history of serious illness with permanent sensory impacts, and multiple hospital admissions. The couple had no family, no informal support, and no appropriate housing options. They also had an elderly cat & dog who was their sole source of emotional support. Their combined Centrelink income was approximately \$1,800/fortnight (Client B: Carer Payment; Client C: DSP).

RHOP Intervention & Outcomes

RHOP undertook sustained, intensive case management across multiple weeks, including:

- Outreach & Assessment – Joint visits with partner organisations to assess needs, provide health packs, food vouchers, blankets, and socks, and build rapport with the couple.
- Referrals & Advocacy – Referrals for rough sleeping support and a detailed support letter advocating strongly for the couple's suitability, including Josephine's medical needs and the importance of pet-inclusive housing.
- Housing Pathways – Supported the couple to attend private rooming house inspections, assisted with online applications, followed up on their DFFH priority housing application (submitted November 2025), and explored SAR (Special Accommodation Requirements) pathways.
- Coordination Meeting – Meetings with housing and support partners in early March 2026, addressing barriers and highlighting Marcus's goal to return to work as a carpenter.
- Emergency Accommodation – Application for urgent emergency accommodation funding to bridge the gap until the confirmed property was ready, given Josephine's critical health risks from sleeping in a vehicle.
- Confirmed Housing Outcome – In March 2026, a housing provider confirmed acceptance of the couple for a property in Dandenong. Crisis accommodation was funded from mid-to-late March, with the couple supported through to sign-up and payment arrangements clarified.

This outcome: stable, self-contained, pet-inclusive housing — was achieved through sustained, coordinated effort across RHOP and multiple partner organisations, and represents a significant and hard-won result for a highly vulnerable couple experiencing homelessness for the first time.

**Identifying details have been changed to protect privacy.

