

Impact Report

July 2024- June 2025

Rooming House Outreach & Support Program South East Region

Rooming house visits
including multiple visits

325



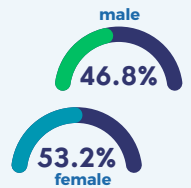
Rooming house residents
contacted

311



Residents referred to
housing services

47



Reports/enquiries made
to regulators

17

Health packs delivered

186



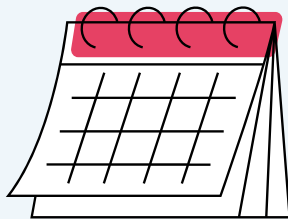
Vouchers supplied

174



Average length of stay

35
months



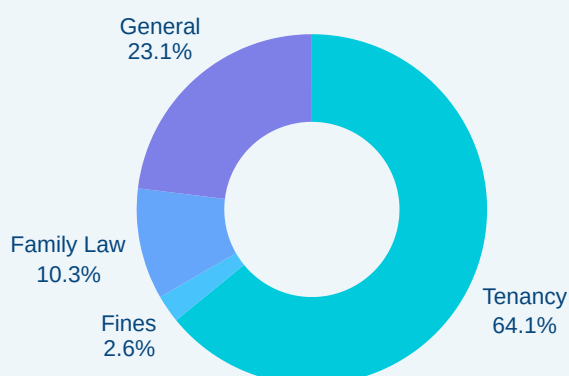
Average weekly rent over 17 LGA's

\$276



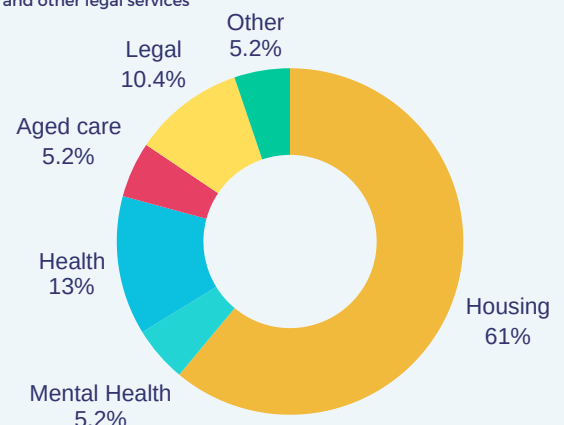
Rooming house referrals to PCLC

RHOP facilitated direct referrals within PCLC for TAAP services and other legal advice



Rooming house referrals + support / other

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



Yearly Impact Report Brief:

Key Collaborations and Partnerships

RHOP: Scope of Outreach

Over the past year, The Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP) visited 325 rooming houses across 17 local government areas, with 73% of visits conducted jointly with key partner agencies. This collaboration has enhanced outreach and strengthened safer housing responses. PCLC continues to engage in council-led working groups, supported by a dedicated network across health, housing, and community sectors.

Barriers and RHOP's Response

The housing crisis has overwhelmed entry-point services, leaving many to navigate a complex and fragmented system alone. For those already facing trauma or instability, this isolation deepens distress and entrenches homelessness.

RHOP bridges these gaps—delivering legal, housing, and wraparound support. By addressing co-occurring issues like poor health, financial stress, and disconnection, we help individuals stabilise and progress toward secure housing.

Health and Housing: A Shared Responsibility

Collaborative, sustained partnerships between health and housing are essential.

- Outreach leads to faster and more effective health responses
- Cross-sector collaboration must be supported and flexible
- Mobile models are key to reaching people where they live

The Power of Outreach

Outreach is more than service delivery—it's connection. RHOP operates across 17 LGAs, from Port Phillip to the Yarra Ranges, conducting both scheduled and cold-call visits. Though 946 rooming houses are registered, many residents remain invisible and unsupported.

Our outreach often provides a first meaningful engagement. In the past year, five residents moved into long-term housing—one through Wintringham, four into community housing. These life-changing outcomes stem from simple acts: turning up, building trust, offering help.

For older residents especially, even small interventions—like assistance with a housing application—can change everything. One conversation at the door can be the first step toward a safer, more stable future.

Trends and Key Insights from RHOP Observations (Past 12 Months)

RHOP has observed significant shifts in the demographics and experiences of rooming house residents. These trends highlight critical service gaps, urgent policy deficiencies, and the need for systemic reform in Victoria's housing response.

Older Australians Left Behind

RHOP has seen a rise in residents aged 55+ living in rooming houses without support. Many were initially placed via entry points but received no follow-up.

Barriers include: low digital literacy, limited internet access, a complex VHR system, and poor health. These factors trap older residents in unsafe, high-rent housing and heighten the risk of chronic homelessness.

Children in Rooming Houses

There's been an increase in children living in rooming houses, often in family violence, shared parenting, or caregiving situations.

Key risks: unsafe environments, disrupted schooling, social isolation, financial stress, and exposure to adult conflict or unvetted residents.

Urgent need: targeted housing for single parents and trauma-informed family support.

Unfair Rents

Many residents pay unsustainable rents—often over 55% of income—for poor-quality housing.

Issues include:

- Rent frequently exceeds \$300/week
- Coerced Centrepay arrangements
- No formal rental agreements or bond processes

Recommendation: enforce transparent rent practices and regulate financial exploitation.

Persistent Non-Compliance

Despite over 325 inspections, many properties fail to meet basic standards.

Common issues: unlawful room sharing, poor maintenance, inadequate facilities, and lack of rent increase notice.

Misuse of PSIOs

There is a growing trend of PSIOs being misused to evict residents without due process, causing immediate homelessness.

Recommendation: clear dispute resolution protocols and legal safeguards to prevent misuse in housing settings.

Conclusion

RHOP's findings highlight critical gaps in affordability, safety, and support for vulnerable Victorians.

Key priorities:

- Outreach case management for older adults and families
- Supported transitional housing pathways
- VHR reform for digitally excluded groups
- Stronger regulation and enforcement in rooming houses
- Review minimum standards with stronger enforcement, penalties, and lived-experience input.

Case Study: Housing Recovery Through Collaborative Support

Background

A 67-year-old Aboriginal man from interstate experienced a significant housing crisis while residing in a rooming house in the City of Casey. Following tenancy issues, he was referred to a legal service and connected with the Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP) for advocacy and support.

Critical Incident: Misuse of PSIO

Soon after seeking legal assistance, the Resident was served with a Personal Safety Intervention Order (PSIO) by the rooming house operator, who also lived on-site. Unlike a Notice to Vacate issued through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), the PSIO bypassed tenancy protections and led to immediate exclusion through the Magistrates' Court. He had no access to tenancy advocacy or a formal hearing. This abrupt eviction appeared to be retaliatory and left him sleeping rough—exposed to significant psychological, physical, and cultural harm.

Immediate and Ongoing Response

RHOP maintained engagement throughout this period of homelessness, facilitating urgent referrals to ERMHA, Bolton Clarke, and Ngwala. Ngwala quickly secured a crisis placement through Open Doors in North Melbourne, offering 3–6 months of stable accommodation and the opportunity to focus on long-term housing options.

Supporting Access to Aboriginal Housing Pathways

To progress his Victorian Housing Register (VHR) application with Aboriginal priority, RHOP supported the resident to obtain formal proof of Aboriginality via the Aboriginal Land and Sea Council. With this documentation, his VHR application was strengthened, increasing access to culturally appropriate housing.

Collaboration and Positive Outcome

RHOP worked closely with the Open Doors case manager and other support services to ensure the resident's immediate safety and cultural needs were met. The outcome—secure, supported crisis accommodation—marked an important step forward following his unjust exclusion.

Conclusion

This case highlights the vulnerability of older Aboriginal men in non-traditional housing and the misuse of legal processes to undermine tenant rights. It also demonstrates the impact of culturally responsive, coordinated support in preventing long-term homelessness.

Case Study: Rent Affordability Crisis in Rooming Houses

Rent affordability continues to be a critical issue for residents in rooming houses across Victoria, particularly for those receiving JobSeeker payments. Updated figures indicate that individuals are paying between \$250 to \$350 per week for accommodation. For a person receiving JobSeeker payments (approx. \$981.40 per fortnight-inclusive of rent assistance and other supplements), this means rent consumes between 50.93% to 71.3% of their total income—well beyond the 55% ceiling used by services as an affordability threshold, which is already an unreasonably high benchmark. This underscores a worsening crisis in housing access for vulnerable populations.

RHOP engaged with a resident in a rooming house who is currently surviving on JobSeeker. After paying \$500 per fortnight in rent, the Resident is left with just \$481.40 per fortnight—or \$240.70 per week—to cover every other expense. This leaves him with very little financial breathing room, increasing the risk of food insecurity and hardship.

The financial pressure is so severe that the Resident often goes without food for several days before his next payday. There is also a lack of clear and accessible information about local soup kitchens or food support services, leaving him without reliable access to basic nutrition and emergency relief.

Although Resident is paying rent at the lower end of the scale, the reality is that most rooming house residents are paying closer to \$300 per week, which represents around 61% of a JobSeeker recipient's income. The Resident was placed in his current housing after completing a 12-month residential treatment and support program, with initial assistance from a local housing entry point service, which paid two weeks' rent through the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF).

While HEF is a vital resource intended to prevent homelessness and assist with short-term housing costs, current funding guidelines state that support should not be provided when housing costs exceed 55% of a person's income. Yet in practice, people are routinely referring to accommodation that is well above this threshold—not because it's appropriate, but because it's the only option available. Even though Resident's rent is just under this cut-off, it still leaves him in significant financial distress. For many others paying more, the situation is even more dire.