

Housing Deficit Report

November 4, 2002

**From the Northern Residential
Mental Health Services Reference Group
Covering the Municipalities of
Darebin, Whittlesea, Banyule and Nillumbik**

Acknowledgments

The report was undertaken by the Northern Residential Mental Health Services Reference Group. Thank you to the following organisations and programs:

ARAFEMI

Carer Links North

Neami

Northern AMHS including MST, CATT and Clinics

Northern CCU

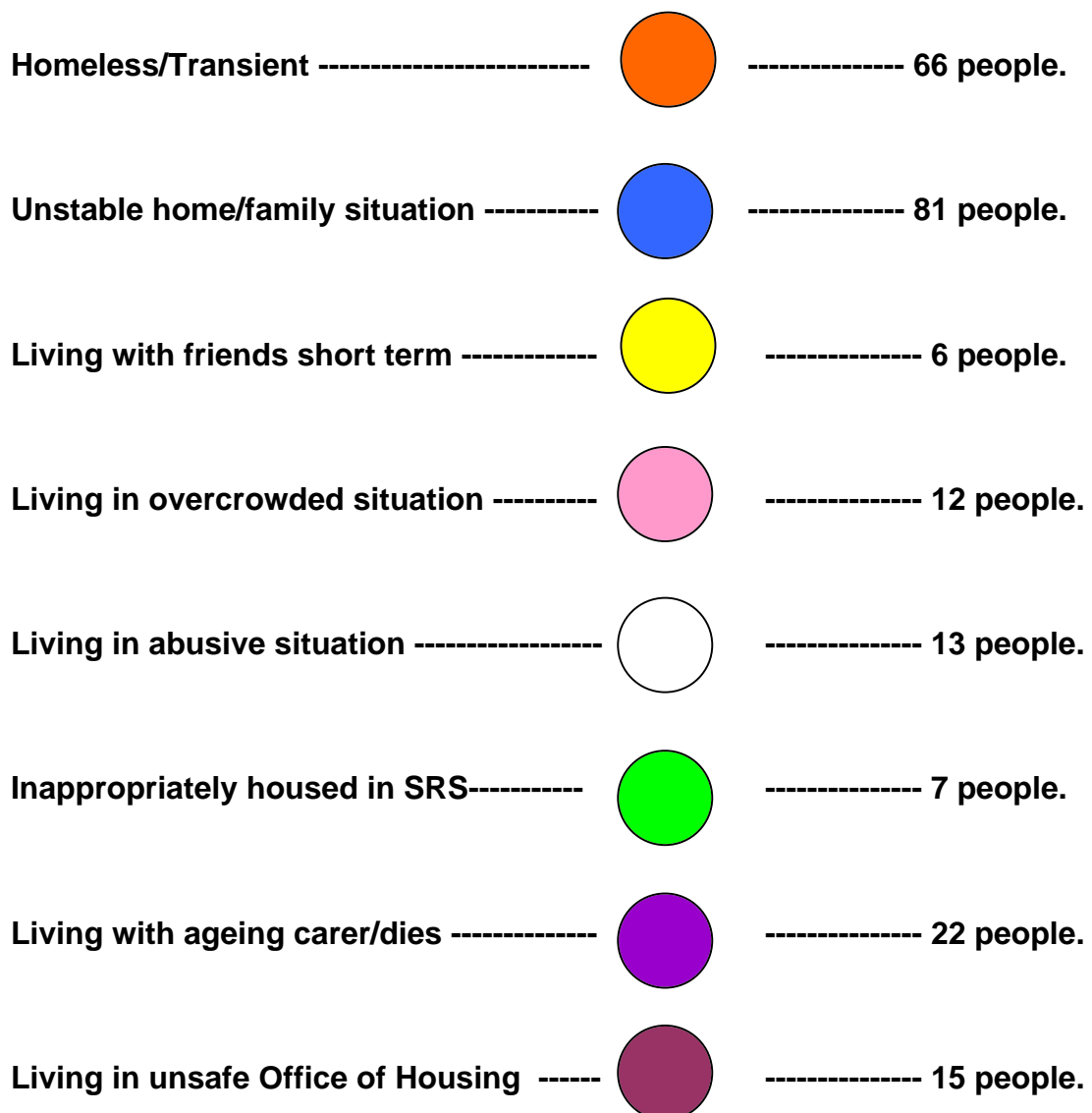
North East AMHS including MST, CATT and Clinics

Richmond Fellowship of Victoria Rosa Gilbert , Apollo and Chiron Program

Northern Hospital and Austin Hospital's Psychiatric Inpatients Units

Women's' Information, Housing and Support In the North

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Report Summary:

Australia is currently experiencing a crisis in affordable housing and the Victorian Homelessness Strategy document states that people with a mental illness are over-represented in the homeless numbers. It is therefore an inevitable consequence that housing and support services for people with psychiatric disabilities are feeling the burden of large waiting lists and few vacancies. This report highlights that people with a mental illness in the municipalities of Darebin, Banyule, Whittlesea and Nillumbik (Northern and North East Area Mental Health Services in Melbourne) are currently facing a critical lack of supported accommodation.

This report is authored by the Northern Residential Mental Health Services Reference Group (NRMHSRG), a collaboration of Psychiatric Disability Support Services (PDSS's) and the Northern Area Mental Health Service and North East Area Mental Health Service (NAMHS & NEAMHS). This report identifies that 220 people with a mental illness in this region are in acute need of permanent supported housing. 147 of these 220 people are homeless/transient or living in unstable family or home situations. 29 of these 147 people have children.

Research has shown that long-term housing and support for people with a mental illness drastically reduces inpatient stays (Vic Homelessness Strategy, 2002). The provision of housing and support therefore, provides a greater quality of life, ensures effective care in the community, and reduces the cost to Government of frequent and/or extended hospital stays.

This report recommends that adequate funds be allocated to meet the housing and support needs of those who are most in need. Of the 220 people, 66 people are homeless or transient and 81 people are living in unstable family or home situations. It is therefore proposed that 70 two to three bedroom properties and 40 one bedroom properties be provided by the Department of Human Service over the next two years. The two to three bedroom properties would meet the needs of the 29 families and another 82 people in shared accommodation. The one bedroom properties would house a further 40 people who are either unable or unwilling to share. It is also proposed that negotiations between the NRMHSRG and DHS commence regarding the additional support funding that would be required. This report outlines the housing and support resources required to meet the needs of these families and individuals through single and shared accommodation options.

Methodology:

Of the 220 people 102 have been identified through the Living Options service. The Living Options Project (LOPS) is a central information, assessment and referral service for people with a mental illness seeking permanent supported accommodation in the Northern and North East Area Mental Health Regions. The project is a partnership of PDSS's, the NAMHS and NEAMHS. The PDSS's include Richmond Fellowship of Victoria, ARAFEMI, WISHIN and Neami. The LOPS database holds information on all people registered who are seeking housing and support and Residential Rehabilitation in this region.

The NAMHS, NEAMHS and Neami identified the other 118 people by ascertaining those who are not on the LOPS database but still have supported housing needs. Support Workers and Case Managers did not refer these people to LOPS due to the critical lack of vacancies. These 118 people were cross-referenced to make sure there were no duplications. The 220 people identified were categorised into levels of need agreed by the NRMHSRG. This describes an overall picture of who is in need of supported housing. The 220 people have been assessed either through the Living Options Service or clinical services as being able to participate in ongoing housing and support.

The people identified are those who are connected to the public mental health system only and does not include people with a mental illness who are not registered with an Area Mental Health Service or PDSS. We therefore assume that the actual need will be greater than represented by this report.

"Research shows that up to 47 per cent of those in crisis accommodation and Supported Residential Services or boarding houses have significant mental health problems".¹

The Need:

220 people who have a mental illness in the North and North East Area Mental Health Regions are in acute need of safe, secure long-term accommodation with adequate support.

The following table describes the need of the 220 people by gender and cultural background.

Category	Men	Women	NESB	Koori	Children
A-Homeless/Transient	47	19	15	5	16
B-Unstable home/family situation	58	23	31	2	13
C-Living with friends short term	2	4	1	-	3
D-Living in overcrowded situation	5	7	6	1	7
E-Living in abusive situation	4	9	3	-	1
F-Inappropriately housed in SRS	3	4	2	-	3
G-Living with ageing carer	12	10	11	-	-
H-Living in unsafe OoH property	10	5	5	-	2
Total	141	81	74	8	45

Of the 220 people 67 per cent are either homeless/transient or living in an unstable family or home situation. More than half of the women and three quarters of the men are in category A and B. Of the 220 people identified 33.5 per cent are from Non

¹ Victorian Homelessness Strategy: Action Plan and Strategic Framework, Department of Human Services, State Government of Victoria, February 2002.

English speaking backgrounds and 4 per cent are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. 45 of the 220 people have children and 65.5 per cent of these 45 people are in categories A and B.

The above statistics do not include individuals living in short term rehabilitation programs. The North and North East Area Mental Health Regions include one adult residential rehabilitation service and two youth residential rehabilitation services through the Richmond Fellowship of Victoria (RFV). These services provide short term (2 years) program specific rehabilitation for 32 people. The Northern Community Care Unit is a clinical service that provides residential treatment, rehabilitation and support for 20 adults with a serious mental illness. It is staffed on a 24-hour basis, and the average length of stay is approximately 2 years. Consumers in these mental health rehabilitation services require appropriate housing and support once they no longer require a specialist treatment service. Potentially, every two years there are 52 people looking for long term supported housing options in the community.

The blockages in the acute wards of the Northern Hospital and the Austin Repatriation Medical Centre (ARMC) are not represented in the above data. It is estimated by managers and clinicians of these inpatient units that 30-40 per cent of individuals have no safe, secure long-term accommodation to return to when ready for discharge. The effect of illness for these people jeopardises their accommodation prior to admission. There is little or no emergency accommodation available through generic housing services and more individuals are seeking emergency options through the Living Options Service and other supported housing providers. There is therefore great pressure on inpatient units due to the emphasis on decreasing the length of hospital stays yet no where safe and secure for people to go.

"The incidence of people in the community with a mental health issue who are unable to access secure, supported housing options continues to place costly demands on acute services, which could be avoided".²

Community Housing Context:

PDSS's in the municipalities of Banyule, Whittlesea, Nillumbik and Darebin provide 125 people with permanent housing and support. Neami represents 90 places, Northern Housing and Support (RFV) 16 places, WISHIN 10 places and Arafemi 9 places. Properties have been provided through a number of housing programs including the Housing and Support Program, Community Housing Program and Group Housing Program. One off funding has also contributed to the purchase of properties. Properties include single and shared houses with outreach support attached to the accommodation. Support is determined by level of need and involves rehabilitation programs in daily living skills, community networking and daytime activities. There have been no increases in safe, secure and long term housing stock for the PDSS sector in this area in the last three years.

² Victorian Homelessness Strategy: Action Plan and Strategic Framework, Department of Human Services, State Government of Victoria, February 2002.

"We need stable and affordable housing with support to allow us to get our lives back on keel and pursue our recovery".

Consumer Quote: Consumer of Mental Health Services

Local Government Context:

The Housing Strategies for all four local government regions highlight the lack of public affordable housing options for people living in their municipalities.

The City of **Darebin** Housing Strategy, June 2000 - June 2002 states the current facts and trends:

- limited funding in the community housing sector,
- no addition dwelling being purchased, public housing stock is being redeveloped,
- no increase, lack of security in tenure,
- transitional homelessness is increasing,
- long waiting lists for public housing, low income household needs are not being met by the public/private housing sectors.

The City of **Whittlesea** Housing Strategy: Summary & Recommendations, August 2001 states "there is demonstrated hardship for people on low incomes...placing added pressure on an already tight rental market and will see rents increase along with demand. These factors together with decreasing availability and accessibility of public housing will see more people facing severe hardship. This will increase demand for social support services". (page 12)

The **Banyule** Housing Statement, Banyule City Council, revised April 2002 explains that:

- demand for affordable private rental housing is high across the region yet the supply of cheaper properties is diminishing,
- there is a need for large public housing properties across the region to cater for larger families who have few private rental options,
- observations by the Heidelberg Emergency Housing Group also indicate that there is a lack of public housing and low cost private rental housing in the Banyule area.

The Housing Strategy Background Report, **Nilumbik** Council, March 2001 states that:

- The Regional Housing Needs Analysis conducted by the former North East Regional Housing Council (NERHC, 1997) identified a shortage of all types of suitable accommodation for aged and disabled residents in the region. The lack of options for long term accommodation for people with disabilities was also identified (NERHC, 1997: 28)
- Accessing the public housing sector is difficult as, not only is there a limited supply, but the eligibility requirements have resulted in fewer people being able to apply or more being forced onto the longer "Wait Turn" list (page 39)
- Emergency housing is no longer "transitional" as residents have nowhere else to live (page 39)
- There is no crisis accommodation in the Shire. (page 39)

The Housing Strategies for the four local government regions are all experiencing the effects of increasing private rental prices and decreasing availability of affordable housing for people on low incomes.

Victorian Government Policy Context

In the Victorian Department of Human Services Annual Report 2000 - 2001, the Key Objectives for Office of Housing are to expand and improve social housing and improve the response to homelessness. The total social housing stock numbers in 2000-2001 grew by 566 units. The Annual Report does not say in which areas. The Annual Report explains that additional funding was granted for crisis centres in Dandenong, Geelong, eastern suburbs, western suburbs and Wodonga. It describes a number of key initiatives that are currently in place to address homelessness and mental illness. These include:

- New Intensive Support Service for Homeless People with a Mental Illness
- Community Connection Program
- Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Service (HOPS)
- Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) Pilot Project - SAAP, AMHS and PDSS partnership

The above objectives and initiatives have had little impact on meeting the housing and support needs of the 220 people identified in the Northern and North East Area Mental Health catchments (Darebin, Whittlesea, Banyule and Nillumbik). These areas have had no VHS funding, no increase in social housing stock and no increase in stock for PDSS's.

Cost Implications:

Six years ago there was a major housing and support relocation for people in long term psychiatric hospital care into the Northern and North East Area Mental Health catchments. 30 people were relocated into their own homes, spot purchased by Ministry of Housing, with clinical and disability service support. After two years only 2 people returned to long term care.

The CCU bed day rate is substantially more than the cost for one person, per day to live in permanent community housing with clinical and psychiatric disability support. The inpatient bed day rate is higher still. 30 per cent of the total individuals admitted to the Northern Hospital Inpatient Unit per year have a housing and support issue, which doubles their length of stay (28 days compared with the average of 14 days). The annual cost this 30 per cent of longer stays is estimated at \$984, 300 conservatively. Therefore, the provision of housing and support will reduce inpatient unit hospital stays creating substantial savings.

A major reduction of hospital admissions and an overall reduction of costs as a result of the provision of supported housing has been highlighted recently. "A study undertaken by the Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research, The New York/New York Agreement Cost Study: *The Impact of Supportive Housing on Service Use for Homeless Mentally Ill Individuals* at the University of Pennsylvania tracked 4679 homeless people with psychiatric disabilities over a 7 year period who were placed in affordable housing and supported with clinical and social services.

This study found a supported housing environment for the group meant:

- Admissions to state psychiatric centres reduced by 50 per cent.
- Admissions to publicly funded hospitals reduced by up to 21 per cent.
- Use of lower cost outpatient services showed a 75 per cent increase.
- Incarceration rates reduced by up to 85 per cent."

"You have no idea how vital stable and affordable housing and support is....it is the life line and without it the human cost is indescribable".
Consumer Quote: Consumer of Mental Health Services

Recommendation for Action:

This report has identified that at least 220 individuals are seeking long term, safe and secure supported housing options. 147 of these people are homeless, transient or living in unstable situations. This report does not represent the wider need of those people who have a mental illness and housing and support needs but are not linked to the public mental health system.

Research shows that affordable, safe and long term housing is not only cost effective but provides people with the foundation they need to improve their quality of life and actively participate in the community. The Victorian Homelessness strategy clearly indicates that long term supported housing reduces hospital admissions, decreases length of hospital stay and reduces the effects of homelessness on the community. The Living Options Service and partners are working towards the most efficient use of housing and support resources. In partnership with the AMHS's, we have been able to accurately define the need for housing and support for people with a mental illness

We recommend that:

- 1. 70 two to three bedroom properties and 40 one bedroom properties be provided over the next two years. These properties will start to address the housing needs of the 147 people who are homeless, transient or living in unstable situations. The two to three bedroom properties will meet the needs of families and provide shared housing opportunities for single people. The single properties will provide further options for those who prefer not to or cannot share.**
- 2. Support funds be negotiated with the PDSS agencies in the area to ascertain what level of support is required.**

The Northern Residential Mental Health Services Reference Group requests a written response to this document and is eager to work in partnership with the Department of Human Services on these critical housing and support needs.

"Living in my group home has given me a new start. I now have a home, friends, support and hope for the future".
Consumer Quote: Consumer of Mental Health Services

NRMHSRG
PDSS

Northern Residential Mental Health Services Reference Group
Psychiatric Disability Support Services

NAMHS	Northern Area Mental Health Service (Darebin and Whittlesea LGA's)
NEAMHS	North East Area Mental Health Service (Banyule and Nillumbik LGA's)
AMHS	Area Mental Health Service
LOPS	Living Options Project
ARAFEMI	Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill
WISHIN	Women's Information Support and Housing
NCCU	Northern Continuing Care Unit
ARMC	Austin Repatriation and Medical Centre
VHS	Victorian Homelessness Strategy
SRS	Supported Residential Service
NERHC	North East Regional Housing Council
RFV	Richmond Fellowship of Victoria

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|-----------|--|---|
| A. | Homeless/Transient | Those who are currently homeless or have been moving regularly due to no stable accommodation |
| B. | Unstable family/home situation | Those who are currently living in a family or home a situation which is tense and/or dysfunctional. |
| C. | Living with friends short term | Those currently living with friends and are unable to stay but have no long term stable accommodation to go to. |
| D. | Living in overcrowded situation | Those currently residing in a place where the number of people outweighs the number of bedrooms. |
| E. | Living in abusive situation | Those currently living in an environment where there is systemic physical, emotional or psychological abuse. |
| F. | Inappropriately housed in SRS | Those who are living in SRS where their level of support differs from the support they are currently receiving. |
| G. | Living with ageing carer | Those who are living with a carer who is becoming unable to provide ongoing support and accommodation. |
| H. | Living in unsafe OoH property | Those currently housed in an Office of Housing Property but are facing regular abuse or harassment. |