

Responses to the 10-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing

Submissions summary report

Every Victorian deserves a safe and secure home. From February to April 2021, we sought your feedback on what was important to you in developing a 10-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing for Victoria. We received over 180 submissions from a range of stakeholders from across Victoria, including community housing providers, local governments, industry and advocacy groups. The following paper summarises the key themes identified in your feedback.

People at the centre

You told us to focus on the people who most need access to safe and secure housing and to work on expanding the stock of affordable and social housing to support a broader proportion of the population over time.

These are the groups you told us to focus on:

Young people require housing and services that are focused on their long-term development. Options that build independence (such as Youth Foyers¹) and support transitions from out-of-home care are required throughout the state.

Older Victorians require stable, fit-for-purpose accommodation to allow for aging in place. The private rental market is insecure and unaffordable. The social and affordable housing system needs to consider accessibility.

People with disabilities require a range of social, affordable and market housing options. Specialist Disability Accommodation is important and welcome but will only account for 6% of those accessing the NDIS. Crisis accommodation and rooming houses are particularly inappropriate for people with disabilities as they do not provide specialised support and can be unsafe.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians have rightfully been identified as a priority group in the Big Housing Build. However, housing targets need to be supported by culturally appropriate systems, practices and accommodation types. Submissions called for the 10-Year Strategy to build on the key objectives and priority areas outlined in the *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-tarkoort: Every Aboriginal Person has a Home, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework*.

Women urgently require housing and services. Older women, survivors of family violence, single mothers and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are particularly vulnerable and need greater access to crisis and long-term housing.

People with mental health issues need access to appropriate and supportive housing options with wrap-around support services. This is essential as poor mental health is a risk factor for homelessness and homelessness can deteriorate a person's mental health.

Periods of transition are critical moments and are often where people need the most support. Relationship break-downs and transitions from the justice system, out-of-home care and health facilities leave people particularly vulnerable.

Low-income and key workers require access to social housing, affordable rental and affordable homeownership options. A lack of affordable housing is detrimental to a household's health and well-being and causes labour shortages, particularly in regional areas.

Regional Victorians urgently need more affordable housing. Regional Victoria requires investment in both transitional/crisis housing as well as long-term rental accommodation to support key workers, seasonal workers, and people experiencing homelessness.



Focus Area 1: Pathways

What actions will enable people to access social housing, sustain their tenancies, and move between different housing options? What are the most important features of affordable housing?

Support services are essential

You told us that wrap-around services are central to supporting people to access and sustain housing and live well.

The 10-Year Strategy should embed Housing First principlesⁱⁱ. Housing First extends beyond ensuring the provision of adequate housing stock to the provision of the connection and support required by people to settle into and maintain new tenancies over time. It emphasises rapid access to housing without requiring other health or behavior expectations to be met first.

Support services should be person-centric.

Support services should acknowledge that people experiencing homelessness often have histories of deep trauma. Recommendations included allocating one case manager or team to work with someone throughout their journey through housing and integrated services, especially when that person has complex needs.

Expand services that focus on homelessness prevention. Programs like Tenancy Plusⁱⁱⁱ, community legal services, financial counselling and housing access services need to be resourced to support people before they reach a crisis.

Housing and service systems

You told us that housing and systems for services like mental health, alcohol and other drug and legal support are currently complex, inconsistent and difficult to navigate.

More consistent information and integrated systems that match available housing and support services with the needs of applicants is necessary.

Whether applicants are moving within social housing, applying for social housing for the first time, navigating crisis accommodation or accessing mental health or alcohol and drug support, the 10-Year Strategy should emphasise streamlining and simplifying access points, information and support options.

Important housing features

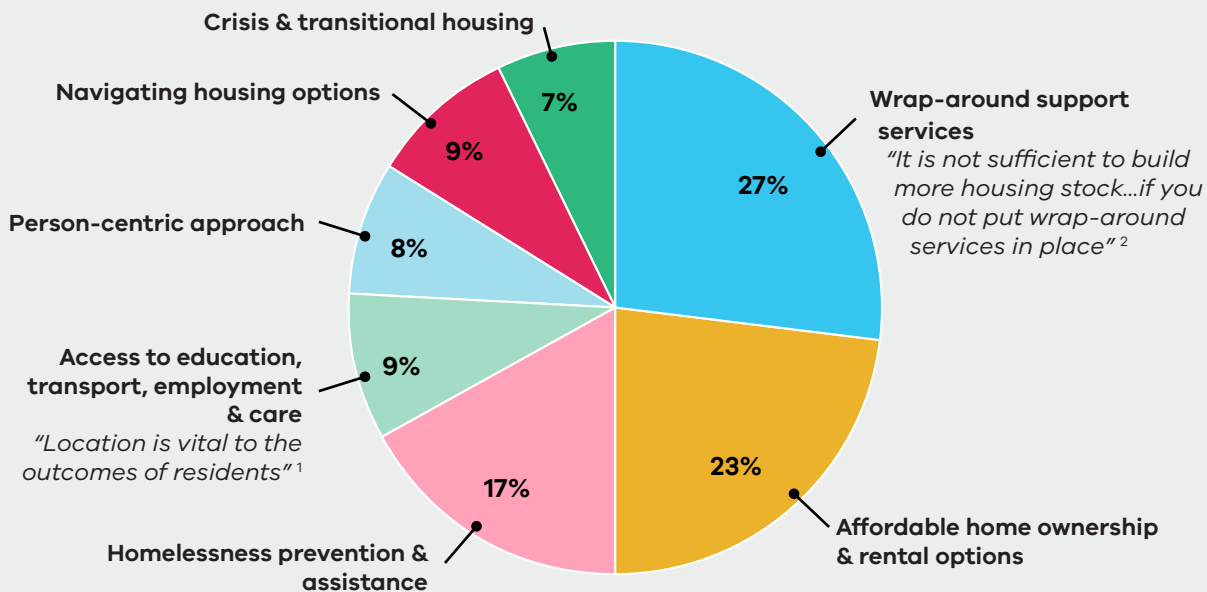
You told us that the quality and diversity of housing must reflect the needs of the people that live within it.

Expanding the amount of social and affordable housing will allow for more choice. There are currently limited options to move homes within social housing. Allocation policies and lack of household matching systems often discourage households from moving as their circumstances change. A larger social housing system would allow people to remain in social housing with housing cost and service provision adjusted as an individual's needs and income changed over time.

Accessibility, location and sustainability are key. Stock should meet universal design, Livable Housing Australia^{iv} guidelines and national sustainability standards such as NatHERS^v. Several submissions also noted the need for healthy housing that protects residents from mould and intense heat or cold. Locating housing close to daily and social amenities reduces household costs, minimises disadvantage, prevents isolation and enables residents to maintain tenancies and build supportive communities.



Pathways: Top 7 Themes



Focus Area 2: Communities

What actions will strengthen social and affordable housing communities?

Integrated communities

You told us that for social housing to work, it must involve and be understood by the whole community.

Social housing should be mixed-tenure and integrated into communities. There is a need for high-quality housing and shared spaces that are well-integrated and are a source of pride. Submissions recommended mixed-tenure developments as well as a 'salt and peppering' approach to increase social diversity, and health and wellbeing of communities.

Social housing is frequently stigmatised. There is a need for communications campaigns and shareable material to raise awareness of the economic, social and cultural benefits of social and affordable housing to vulnerable groups and the wider community.



The size of the social housing sector is a barrier to addressing stigma. Responses often pointed to the positives of larger social housing sectors that are accessible to bigger proportions of the population.

*"Community pride in their place of living is furthered when there is enough social, public and affordable housing for all. In contrast, when such housing is scarce social housing is allocated to those in highest needs... it then becomes marginal and stigmatised"*³

Strong, resilient communities

You told us to recognise the resilience of communities and find ways to support their strengths.

Recognise that current public housing estates are already vibrant, multicultural and dignified communities, which are well located and connected.

Communities need to be supported with security of tenure to encourage a sense of place and protect against community dysfunction.

Co-housing and deliberative development^{vi} should be considered. These approaches emphasise community-building and could respond to social isolation and build networks with the broader community, while creating responsive and sustainable accommodation.

Sustainable, well-maintained housing

You told us that sustainability should be encouraged in all social housing, both old and new.

Environmentally sustainable design and energy efficient features should feature in all new housing.

Submissions praised the commitment to at least 7-star NatHERS for new housing stock. Solar power, insulation, heating and cooling systems, and effective building materials can reduce the cost of living and protect people in social housing against extreme weather events.

The 10-Year Strategy should include a plan to retrofit, restore and maintain existing social housing stock. Submissions proposed a state-backed, large-scale retrofit program, to improve the thermal performance of existing social housing properties, build the capacity of the energy/building performance sector, generate new 'green' skills and jobs and improve health.

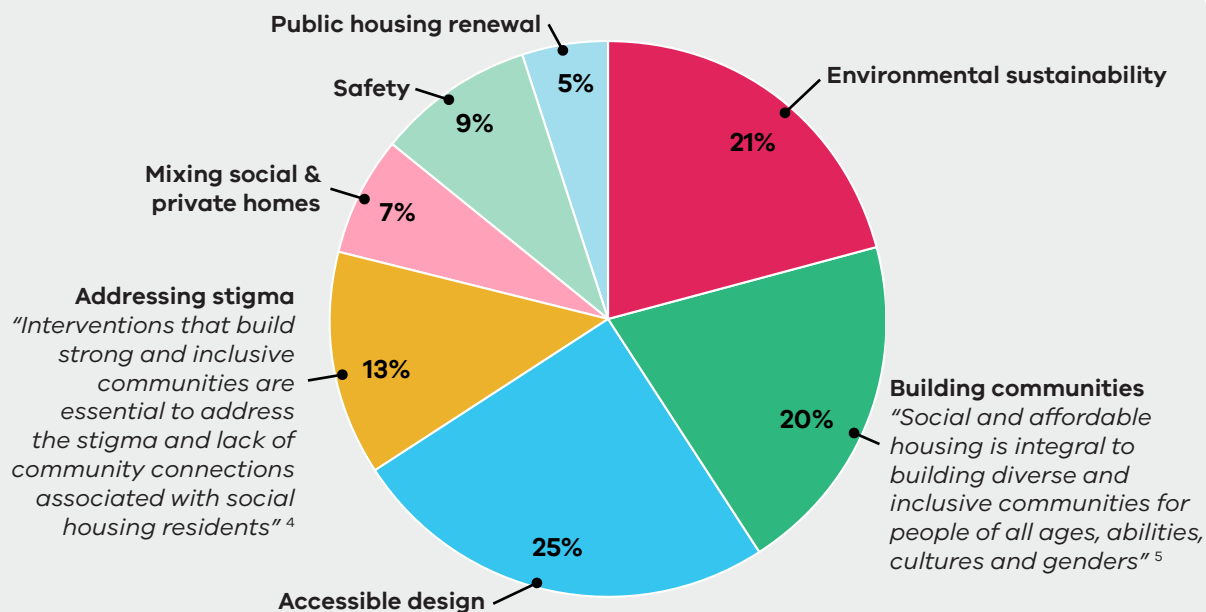
Accessible, adaptable and safe

You told us that housing must be adaptable and safe.

Housing should reflect differing needs and preferences. Flexible floorplans, minimum design standards and accessibility ratings for social housing properties all featured in recommendations. These design elements support both residents with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities and older residents to live safely. They also contribute to a more adaptable and responsive housing system.

Safety should be considered holistically. Security of tenure, safety from neighbours or perpetrators, as well as design and environmental factors like night lighting, security cameras and smoke alarms must all be considered.

Communities: Top 7 Themes





Focus Area 3: Growth

What actions will enable and deliver growth in social housing and ensure housing supply meets the needs of people with specific needs? What do we need to do to enable a well-functioning affordable housing system?

Policy context and consistency

You told us a successful Strategy needs strong targets, shared data, consistent funding and robust monitoring.

Targets: The 10-Year Strategy needs specific and clear targets. The most commonly cited figure was 60,000 social housing dwellings over the next decade. Submissions also called for cohort-specific targets and a goal of 'functional zero'^{vii} homelessness.

Shared data: 'A lack of accurate and timely data is a significant barrier to fixing the most urgent problem of housing insecurity'^{vi}. There is a need for shared data for housing needs assessments and evidence-based solutions and decisions.

Consistent funding: Submissions called for predictable and ongoing funding for social and affordable housing. Portfolio funding^{viii} and ongoing and secure funding for housing support programs were popular solutions to this problem.

Monitoring and evaluation: Monitoring housing need, provision and targets, as well as evaluating projects and programs is central to accountability, planning and ensuring value-for-money. Submissions called for post-occupancy evaluations, a focus on evidence-based decisions and best practice case studies.

Dwellings should suit demand. There is current and future demand for more one- and two-bedroom units, although there will always remain a need for a diversity of housing to suit different household types.

Growth mechanisms

You told us that Victoria needs to focus on growing our stock of social and affordable housing, and to pursue multiple channels to get there.

Amendments to planning policy – including inclusionary zoning, development levies and zoning changes – should be implemented. While not unanimously supported, many submissions called for mandatory inclusionary zoning state-wide to provide social and affordable housing that is 'salt and peppered' throughout communities.

Local, state and federal land are opportunities for social housing provision. Submissions proposed the development of existing, underutilized government- or council-owned land assets, however, several respondents also expressed concern about the loss of public assets and cautioned that ownership should be retained by the public.

Subsidies are a consistent funding stream for growth. Recommendations included an adapted National Rental Affordability Scheme^x or small subsidies for private sector actors to provide housing at below market rates.

Support build-to-rent, rent-to-buy, shared equity schemes, co-housing, house share programs and social enterprise solutions. Innovative models were pitched as an opportunity to boost supply, provide pathways to ownership, and a means to deliver a diversity of dwelling and tenure types.

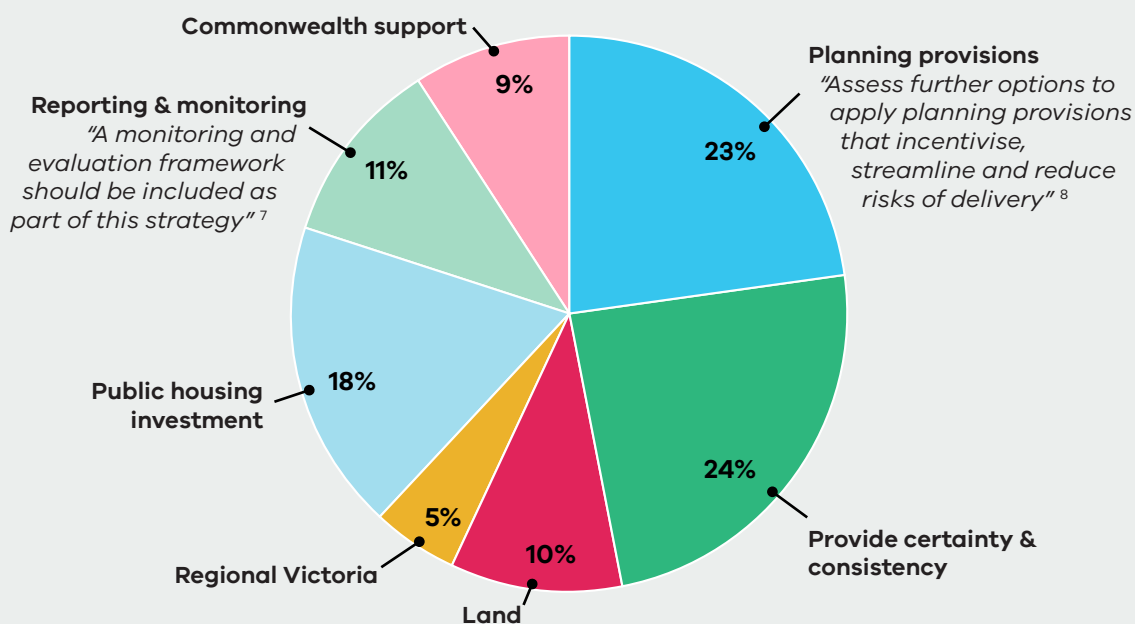
Public housing should remain a large, sustainable and growing housing system. While most submissions supported the growth of community housing, many felt this should be accompanied by equal or greater investments in public housing.

Growth in the workforce

A well-trained and adequately remunerated workforce is central to the 10-Year Strategy.

Multiple submissions referenced low wages, casual contracts, vicarious trauma and high stress work situations as key barriers to attracting and retaining a workforce to support vulnerable households and people experiencing homelessness.

Growth: Top 7 Themes



Focus Area 4: Partnerships

How do we strengthen our partnership approach to build a stronger and more effective social and affordable housing system?

Partnering with people living in social or affordable housing or in need of support

You told us that the experience of people living in social housing must be at the centre of our Strategy.

Lived experience perspectives should be embedded in design, delivery and evaluation of housing and services. Many submissions advocated for co-design processes and the use of reference groups and inclusion of people living in social housing on the boards of housing associations, in policy design and in program evaluation processes.

Feedback should be acknowledged and actioned.

Surveys that gather data are not enough.

“People will need to have a say in what would improve their social housing experience and this should be supported by adequate funding to address responses, for example maintenance and/or refurbishment of existing aged stock”⁹

There should be a variety of options and mechanisms for engagement. ‘This may mean a mix of surveys, submission platforms and use of direct service providers to connect with those that are considered “hard-to-reach”’¹⁰.

Engaging with Aboriginal communities and supporting self-determination should be central goals. The Strategy should align with *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-tarkoort: Every Aboriginal Person has a Home, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework*^x.

Partnering with housing and homelessness networks

You told us that there is a wealth of existing networks to tap into across homelessness service networks, local council forums, sub-regional networks, and industry action groups.

Partnering with the community housing sector

Consistency is key. Community housing providers highlighted the need to reduce the sector’s dependence on ad hoc funding rounds that require intensive investment of resources. Submissions highlighted that both community housing organisations and private sector actors require long-term funding and policy certainty to plan, partner and commit to pipelines of housing supply.



Partnering with the private sector

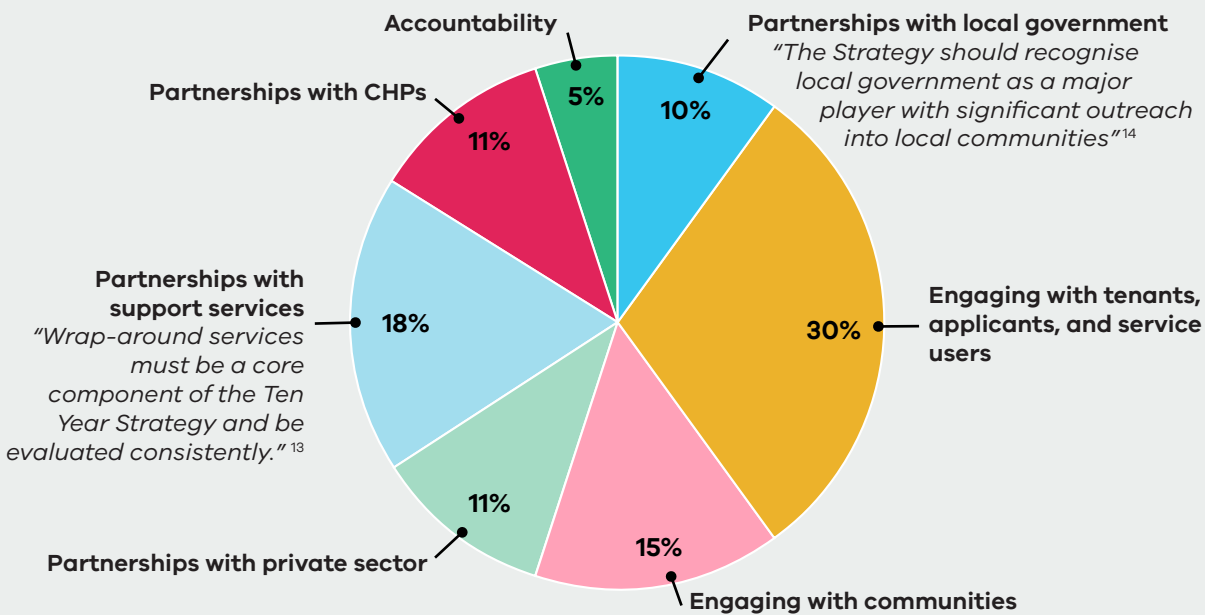
The private sector is willing to collaborate but feasibility is key. One submission highlighted,

"Industry is ready, willing and able to deliver affordable housing in partnership, but not at the expense of investment certainty and project feasibility. [...] There must be flexibility to consider and accommodate private sector models for the delivery and management of affordable housing beyond registered housing associations or providers" ¹¹

Partnering with local government

Local governments are interested in being part of the Social and Affordable Housing Compact but want to know more. Some expressed a desire for increased staffing resources to respond to greater housing responsibilities in their municipalities. Others expressed concern about 'the change to effectively remove the ability of Councils to make decisions in accordance with their local Planning Schemes'¹². Others highlighted the need for shared data and housing targets.

Partnerships: Top 7 Themes



Endnotes

- ⁱ Youth Foyers provide integrated accommodation and education support for young people (typically 16 – 24) who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. For more information visit: Foyer Foundation, 2018, <<https://foyer.org.au/foyers-in-australia/>>.
- ⁱⁱ Housing First is an international model that supports strategies to end homelessness. Housing First principles for Australia can be found at Homelessness Australia, 2021, <<https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/what-you-can-do/housing-first/>>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tenancy Plus is a Victorian Government program that supports social housing tenants to establish and maintain their tenancy. For more information visit: Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 2021, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/tenancy-plus-support-program>>.
- ^{iv} Livable Housing Australia guidelines define best practice for livable housing in design and construction. For more information visit: Livable Housing Australia, 2020, <https://livablehousingaustralia.org.au/>
- ^v The Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) is a star rating system that rates the energy efficiency of a home. For more information visit: Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, 2019, <<https://www.nathers.gov.au/owners-and-builders/home-energy-star-ratings>>.
- ^{vi} Deliberative development allows occupants to be involved in the design of their housing from the outset. The Nightingale Model is an example of this. For more information visit: <<https://www.theurbandeveloper.com/articles/uberisation-housing-markets-deliberative-development>>
- ^{vii} Functional zero is a milestone that indicates a community has measurably ended homelessness for a population.
- ^{viii} Portfolio funding refers to funding that applies to a community housing provider's entire housing and service portfolio rather than individual built-form outcomes.
- ^{ix} The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) issues financial incentives to housing providers to make affordable rental housing available at least 20% below market rates. For more information visit: Department of Social Services, 2021, <<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programmes-services>>.
- ^x For more information, see *Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-taarkoort: Every Aboriginal Person has a Home, the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework*, 2020, < <https://vahhf.org.au/>>.

References to submissions

- [1] City of Greater Geelong, 2021, *10 Year Strategy Social and Affordable Housing Submission*.
- [2] Australian Services Union Victorian and Tasmanian Authorities and Services Branch, 2021, *10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy for Victoria ASU Submission*.
- [3] Community Information & Support Victoria, 2021, *Submission to Victorian Government 10 year social and affordable housing strategy consultation*.
- [4] City of Greater Dandenong, 2021, *Response to the Victorian State Government discussion paper: Establishing a Ten-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing*.
- [5] HousingFirst, 2021, *Establishing a 10-year strategy for social and affordable housing: Submission to discussion paper*.
- [6] Victorian Trades Hall Council, 2021, *Victorian Trades Hall Council submission on Victorian Government 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy*.
- [7] City of Greater Bendigo, 2021, *City of Greater Bendigo submission to Homes Victoria's 10 year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy Discussion Paper*.
- [8] Affordable Housing Industry Advisory Group, 2021, *Submission to inform a development of a 10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy*.
- [9] HousingFirst, 2021, *Establishing a 10-year strategy for social and affordable housing: Submission to discussion paper*.
- [10] City of Greater Geelong, 2021, *10 Year Strategy Social and Affordable Housing Submission*.
- [11] Urban Development Institute of Australia, 2021, *Submission to the 10-year strategy for social and affordable housing discussion paper*.
- [12] City of Stonnington, 2021, *City of Stonnington submission: Discussion paper – Homes Victoria 10-year social & affordable housing strategy*.
- [13] Australian Services Union Victorian and Tasmanian Authorities and Services Branch, 2021, *10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy for Victoria ASU Submission*.
- [14] Banyule City Council, 2021, *Banyule City Council Submission to Homes Victoria Ten-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy*.