

2025

The  
Municipal  
Association  
of Victoria  
Report

# HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA

---

Local government insights

---





**DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT**

This report has been prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). The MAV is the statutory peak body for local government in Victoria, representing all 79 municipalities within the state. © Copyright MAV. For further information, please contact [inquiries@mav.asn.au](mailto:inquiries@mav.asn.au). May 2025

<b>About this report</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction: homelessness in Victoria – a growing crisis</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Local government area statistics at a glance</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Insights from Victorian councils</b>	<b>12</b>
Councils across Victoria observe that homelessness is increasing	15
Councils observe homelessness demographics changing	18
Housing affordability, economic hardships and domestic violence seen as key drivers of homelessness	19
Wide community responsibilities drive local government homelessness response	22
Council support approaches will differ in rural-regional and metropolitan locations	24
Formal council strategies provide a mechanism to articulate councils' response to homelessness	27
Advocacy and policy development are key priority areas of interest to all councils	28
Local government needs a skills boost to improve outcomes	30
Clarifying local government's role and responsibilities in homelessness response: the top information need	31
Drawing on deep local knowledge councils are well placed to articulate community situations and needs	34
<b>Appendix 1: Council categories</b>	<b>36</b>

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The MAV acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live. We recognise their connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

---

# About this report

---

Homelessness is a growing concern for local government across Victoria. Growing numbers of people without safe and secure housing options mean that councils, as public space custodians overseeing roads, parks, footpaths and community facilities, are often called to 'fix' visible homelessness. This work can be complex, challenging and something that councils are neither structured nor funded to do.

As the statutory peak body for local government in Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) has, in recent years, heard more councils from across the state raise concerns about homelessness, a continuing lack of housing options and the growing challenges they face as community expectations and frustrations rise.

In 2024 MAV commissioned a survey and conducted focus group sessions examining local government responses to homelessness. A first of its kind in Victoria, local government officers from around the state were asked to comment on their local homelessness situations, council's response efforts and future needs.

This report presents the survey findings through key themes, highlighting the experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by council officers responding to homelessness. It aims to provide all levels of government with insights that will enable greater support and strengthen place-based approaches to homelessness.



The MAV gratefully acknowledges the contribution from Leanne Mitchell Consulting in guiding this project and preparing this report. She is the author of Churchill Fellowship report "Everybody's Business: What local government can do to end homelessness".

# Introduction: homelessness in Victoria – a growing crisis

# Introduction: homelessness in Victoria – a growing crisis

---

## A changing context

Homelessness in Australia – whether in public places, cars, couch surfing, or in locations of insecure tenure and overcrowded facilities – is a growing concern across the country.

An increasing body of evidence, from the 2021 National Census, regular updates through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), as well as a rising number of anecdotal reports, confirm that rates of homelessness are increasing, and this is no longer an issue confined to capital cities. Outer metropolitan suburbs and regional areas are feeling more pressure than ever before, and with limited funds and response options, many communities are struggling to respond.

In Victoria, the 2021 Census recorded a 24 percent rise in homelessness over five years, eclipsing the national increase of five percent. And as homelessness rates increase, the state's social housing stock is too small to respond – the lowest proportion in Australia – with waiting lists sitting at around 55,000. This reflects a growing and urgent challenge facing communities across the state. People, some even with the highest priority, are waiting years to gain access to permanent housing.

The Victorian Government has recognised the scale of the issue, investing \$5 billion in the Big Housing Build to re-establish the state's social and affordable housing supply. This is a significant and necessary step towards addressing long-term housing shortages, though many within the community note that this is not enough (Council to Homeless Persons Budget submission 2024–25).

Victoria's 2024/25 budget provided \$197 million for accommodation and support services, including \$48 million for the new Homes First program, allowing better access to secure housing, as well as investment into programs that are known to help break the cycle of homelessness, such as mental health, drug, alcohol and financial counselling, and family violence services.

Since 2018, the main strategic framework driving the Victorian homelessness response has been the state's [Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#). This has guided a handful of community-based responses, particularly in Melbourne, including funding for assertive outreach and service coordination but access to funds for councils is extremely limited.

A lack of accurate, real-time data about the situation, scale and severity of homelessness across the state greatly hinders response efforts, with communities unable to articulate their situation or make their case for more action. With few local services available and even less housing options, tensions in many communities are rising.

## The role of local government

As the closest level of government to the community, Victoria's 79 councils possess a unique insight and perspective into the current homelessness crisis.

Well beyond the stereotype of 'rates, roads and rubbish', councils are initiating and driving a wide range of public health and wellbeing responsibilities and responses to issues of concern to their communities. They hold deep connections into communities and have a proven ability to drive collaboration, delivering vital frontline services into communities, offering programs and activities that support people at all life stages and building the capacity and strength amongst the most disadvantaged.

Because of these close connections, councils know their communities better than most others – and many have been witnessing the increasing impacts of economic marginalisation, increasing rates of family violence, rising use of alcohol and other drugs, more mental health needs.

Increasing levels of homelessness are intrinsically associated with these societal changes, but while federal and state and territory governments hold both the responsibility and the funds to respond to homelessness, local government's role remains undervalued and overlooked.

## Responding to communities

In recent years, successive MAV State Councils, comprising representatives from all 79 Victorian councils, have raised concerns about homelessness and a lack of access to housing options.

Resolutions raised by councils have included calls to acknowledge how homelessness impacts a growing number of communities around the state and the greater expectations placed on councils to respond. Councils have asked MAV to advocate for more local services and establish new ways for local government to address changing community needs, while also continuing to enable more social and affordable housing supply.

As a result of growing concern, MAV's 2024–27 Strategic Plan identified homelessness as a priority area of focus, despite the fact that homelessness is not considered a traditional local government responsibility. Master-class sessions for councillors are being arranged, and new partnerships and opportunities for collaboration are being explored.

## Why focus on just homelessness?

MAV's approach responds to the needs raised by local government members and an evolving understanding of the vast differences between homelessness and housing response and responsibility in a local government context.

Victoria's councils vary greatly in size, resources, and focus – and while it is widely understood that an adequate and appropriate supply of housing will ultimately end Australia's homelessness crisis, the immediate pressures and impacts of homelessness are experienced and need to be handled in other ways.

As custodians of the public realm – managing public roads, footpaths, parks and facilities like libraries and community centres, with community safety, street cleansing and animal management responsibilities – councils and council staff often come into contact with and are expected to respond to homelessness in various ways. Often these needs are immediate, when the situation has reached crisis point and few housing options are available.

Rough sleeping, in public places like parks or streets often impacts other members of a community – many of whom look to the public space manager – their local council – to ‘fix’ the situation. These requirements can often be seen as sitting beyond regular business-as-usual activities and with limited capacity, minimal or no budget, and lacking the knowledge and experience to respond to the human complexities they face, many councils – and council officers – struggle to respond.

These on-street scenarios can impact very different parts of a council, and while housing and planning experts do hold responsibilities aligned to an overall goal to end homelessness, their knowledge, skillsets and accountabilities are very different to those who manage public spaces or hold community health and wellbeing responsibilities.

This is why, when it comes to homelessness, councils need more than a housing response and why homelessness is now a MAV priority.

## The survey and this report

In 2024, in response to issues raised by member councils, the MAV commenced a fact-finding activity to understand experiences, responses and opportunities that would support local government in their endeavours to respond to homelessness. This is the first in-depth examination of local government responses to homelessness in Victoria.

Working with Victorian local government homelessness expert and Churchill Fellow, Leanne Mitchell, the project included surveying council officers about the situation they faced, organisational capacity, actions and future needs that would assist them responding to homelessness.

Without consistent means to gather information about Victoria's homelessness situation, it is impossible to fully articulate the problem that the state faces. As most Victorian councils witness homelessness but do not collect or have access to local homelessness data (apart from national census), an initial set of questions was included in the MAV survey asking council officers to estimate incidences and severity of homelessness in their local government areas.

The survey ran from September to end October 2024, and was completed by officers from 71 of Victoria's 79 councils (90 per cent response rate), including all 31 Councils in the greater Melbourne metropolitan area. Thirty-four percent of respondents from metropolitan councils were manager or executive levels, compared with 60% from rural-regional councils. Conversely, more officers/coordinator level seniorities responded in metropolitan councils, most likely due to higher dedicated staffing levels. Appendix 1 sets out the classification categories for councils used for more regional-specific and council-type data analysis.

Two online engagement sessions, attended by 46 of Victoria's 79 councils, were held in November 2024 to explore issues arising from the survey in greater detail.

The survey and engagement activities explored:

- **Current situation:** perceived severity of homelessness, forms of homelessness observed, causes and changes over time.
- **Council response efforts:** how councils track homelessness, strategic positions, planning, response and program delivery, factors driving response, opportunities, gaps, and challenges.
- **Skill and capacity development:** staffing, knowledge development, training needs.
- **Future support and collaboration opportunities:** considering future roles for local government aligned to local needs (metropolitan/regional-rural), activities and advocacy opportunities.

Drawing on survey results, engagement findings, and insights from local government workers, this report benchmarks local government's current situation and suggest new ways to enable and support collaborative, place-based efforts to end homelessness in Victoria.



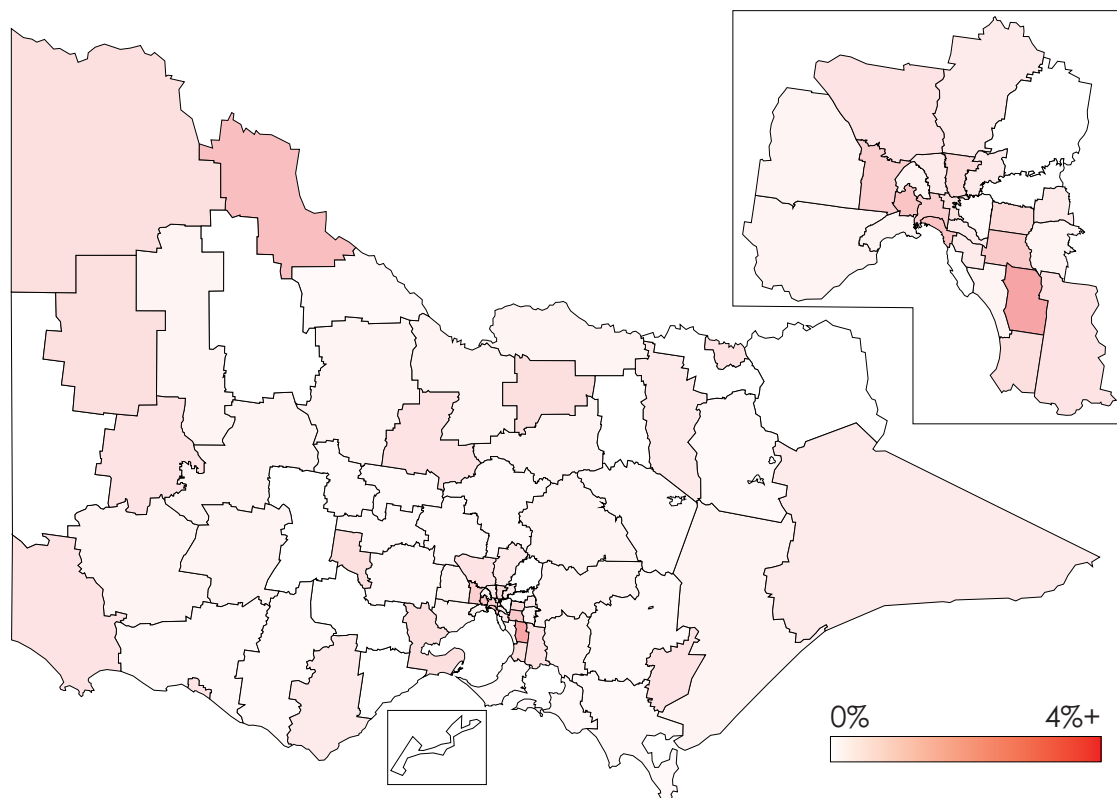
# Local government area statistics at a glance

# Local government area statistics at a glance

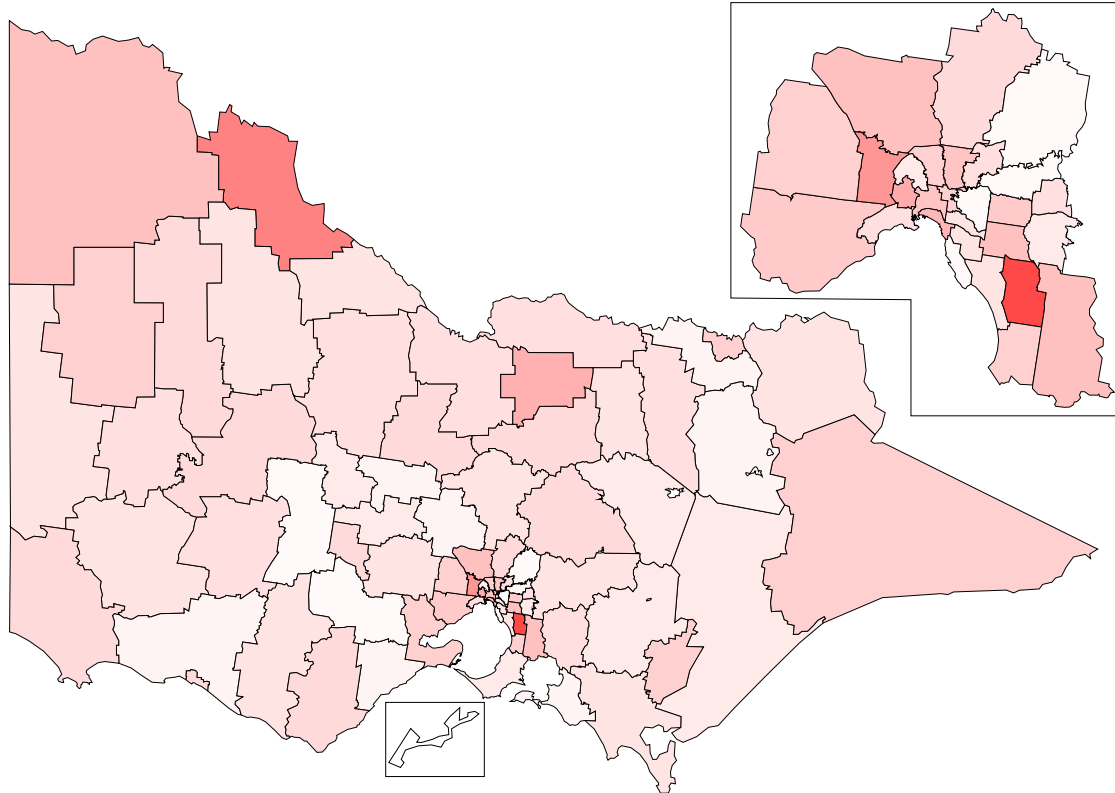
In Victoria, there are over 30,000 people estimated to be homeless across the state. At the end of December 2024, there were over 55,000 new applicants seeking access to social housing on the Victorian Housing Register.

The local government areas with the most incidences of homelessness and overcrowded homes are Greater Dandenong, Swan Hill, Maribyrnong, Monash, Brimbank, Melbourne, Whitehorse, Darebin, Greater Shepparton and Mildura.

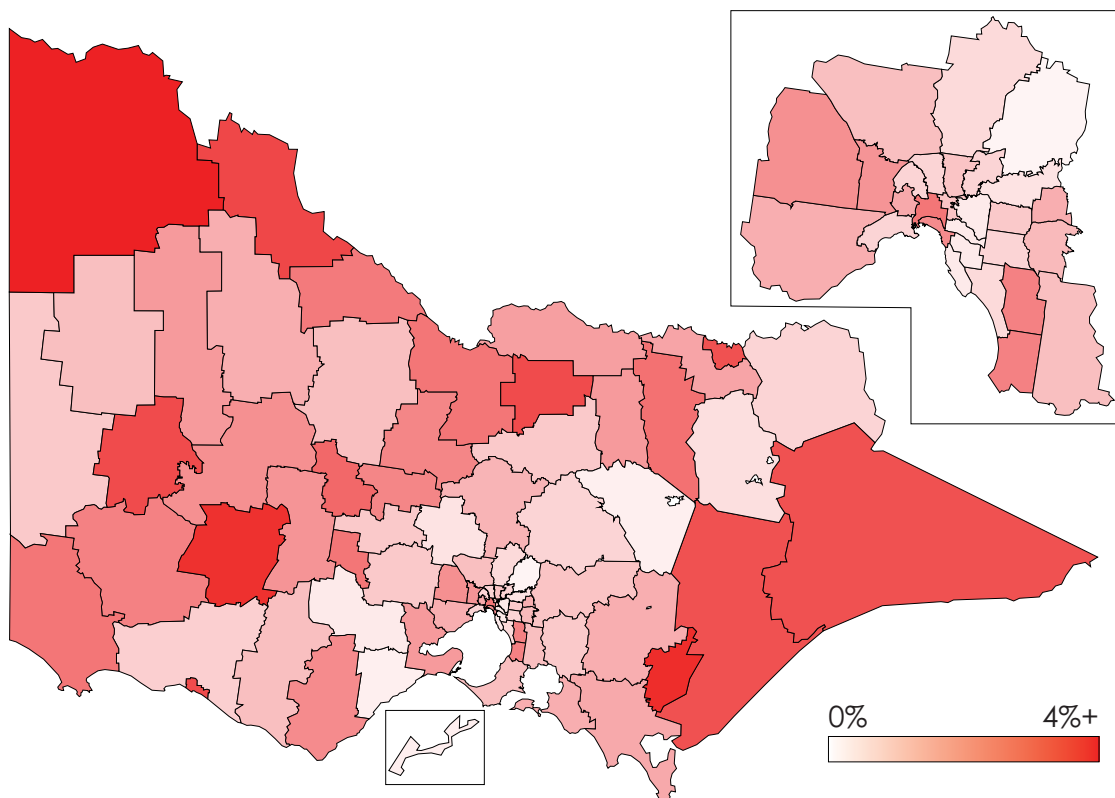
Homeless persons as % of population<sup>2</sup>



## Homeless and marginally housed person as % of population<sup>2</sup>



## Clients accessing specialist homelessness services as % of the population in 2022–23<sup>1</sup>



### Data sources:

1. [Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing \(AIHW\) Specialist Homelessness Service collection](#)
2. [ABS Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021](#)





Photo supplied by Leanne Mitchell



# Insights from Victorian councils

# Insights from Victorian councils

## 1.

### Experience:

**Victorian councils are witnessing more homelessness first-hand. Metropolitan, regional, and rural councils report a sharp rise in homelessness, with more people sleeping rough in streets and parks. Hidden homelessness is also increasing, particularly among families and older women.**

- Eighty-six per cent of councils reported an increase in homelessness. Middle-outer metropolitan councils and large shires noted the worsening situation.
- Most metropolitan councils rated homelessness as acute, with 52% in greater Melbourne rating situations as severe or very severe. 20% of rural-regional councils reported similar.
- Affordable housing shortages, economic issues, and domestic violence are observed as the main causes of homelessness.
- Mental health and substance abuse issues were raised more often by rural-regional councils.

## 2.

### Drivers:

**Homelessness pressure – especially rough sleeping – and community expectations are forcing councils to act. While councils sit on the frontline of Victoria's of homelessness crisis, the responsibility for funding and policy sits almost entirely with Federal and State/Territory governments, which is significantly compromising action and limiting outcomes.**

- Concerns about the health and wellbeing of vulnerable residents, as well as concerns about the impacts of homelessness on the wider community are driving council responses.
- Pressure on budgets, increasing community expectations and needs and few funding channels open to local government make response efforts more difficult.

## 3.

### Activities:

**More councils are stepping up to respond to homelessness, but a significant metro-regional divide remains. City councils are more likely to have dedicated homelessness staff or teams, while those in rural and regional areas face greater challenges due to limited capacity and funding.**

- Thirty of the 31 metropolitan councils tracked homelessness locally, while rural councils were the least likely to collect information about their homelessness situation.
- Metropolitan councils are initiating more homelessness intervention activities, including service coordination efforts and street outreach initiatives.
- Rural-regional councils are more likely to respond through the management of public spaces and youth programs.

## 4.

### Capacity:

**Council officers want to do more to lead and participate in local homelessness efforts, but many lack knowledge and skills. There is a strong demand for training to improve outcomes.**

- Council officers are looking to build a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in homelessness and extend organisation-wide capabilities.
- Ninety-three per cent of survey respondents recognised that councils can play a role in responding to homelessness. Access to training and skills development differed significantly between metropolitan and rural/regional councils, with metropolitan council officers almost five times as likely to receive training in elements of homelessness than their rural-regional counterparts.

## 5.

### Communications and Advocacy:

**Council officers are keen to contribute to efforts that will raise awareness, building empathy, and enabling collaborative responses to end homelessness.**

- Keeping other levels of government in touch with what's happening on the ground was seen as an important role of local government.
- State and Federal Governments continuing their investments and ongoing funding for social and affordable housing options continue to be vital to preventing further people finding themselves homeless.
- Homelessness awareness program being delivered by local government for their communities.

**“The argument is we can sit on our hands and wait for state or feds to do something about homelessness but the reality is that it sits with us.”**

Interface council officer, focus group

# 1.

## Experience:

### Councils are seeing more homelessness first-hand

#### Key insight #1:

As the closest level of government to the community, Victoria's councils are reporting a sharp rise in homelessness. Metropolitan, regional, and rural councils say the situation is worsening, with more people sleeping rough in streets and parks. Hidden homelessness is also increasing, particularly among families and older women.

.....

**"We have very limited social housing and no service provision from within the shire. The lack of homelessness support is dire."**

*Survey response, regional council*

.....

**"Increase in complex and difficult cases, new faces on the street including middle aged couples and people between rentals."**

*Survey response, inner metropolitan council*

.....

**"Currently there are no consistent ways we collect data on homelessness (outside of the Census). However, we are finding there are some challenging and/or complex community members who need support (more so than previously), but there isn't a consistent approach to how we measure levels of homelessness."**

*Survey response, inner metropolitan council*





## Councils across Victoria observe that homelessness is increasing

Without consistent means to gather information about Victoria's homelessness situation, it is impossible to fully articulate the problem that the state faces.

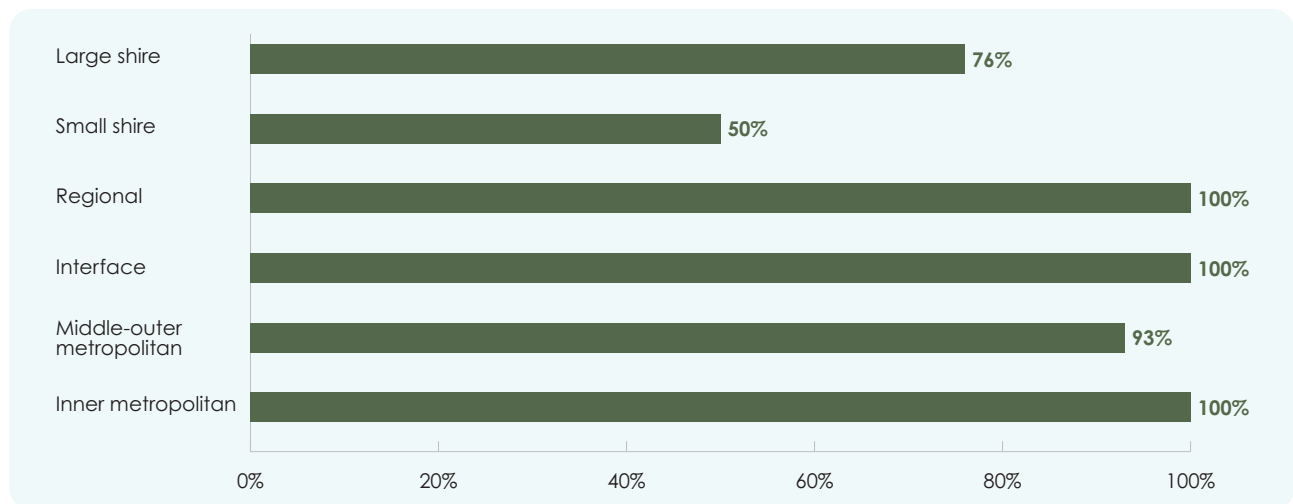
As most Victorian councils do not collect or have access to local homelessness data, apart from national census, an initial set of questions was included in the MAV survey asking council officers to estimate incidences and severity of homelessness in their local government areas.

Responses provided in this section are estimations.

- Most councils in Victoria (86 per cent) reported that homelessness is increasing, with 14 middle-outer metropolitan councils and 13 large shires particularly commenting on the impact for their communities of a worsening situation.
- Most metropolitan councils (81 per cent) rated homelessness moderate or greater, with 52 per cent of councils in greater Melbourne rating it severe to very severe.
- In rural-regional areas, 20 per cent of the 39 respondent councils estimated a severe to very severe experience.

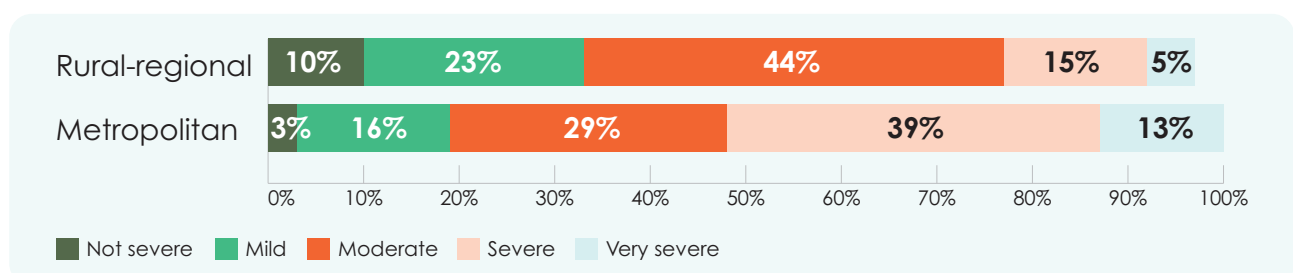
**Figure 1.1 Perceived increases in local homelessness**

Metropolitan + rural-regional responses (n=61)



**Figure 1.2 Perceived severity of homelessness (%)**

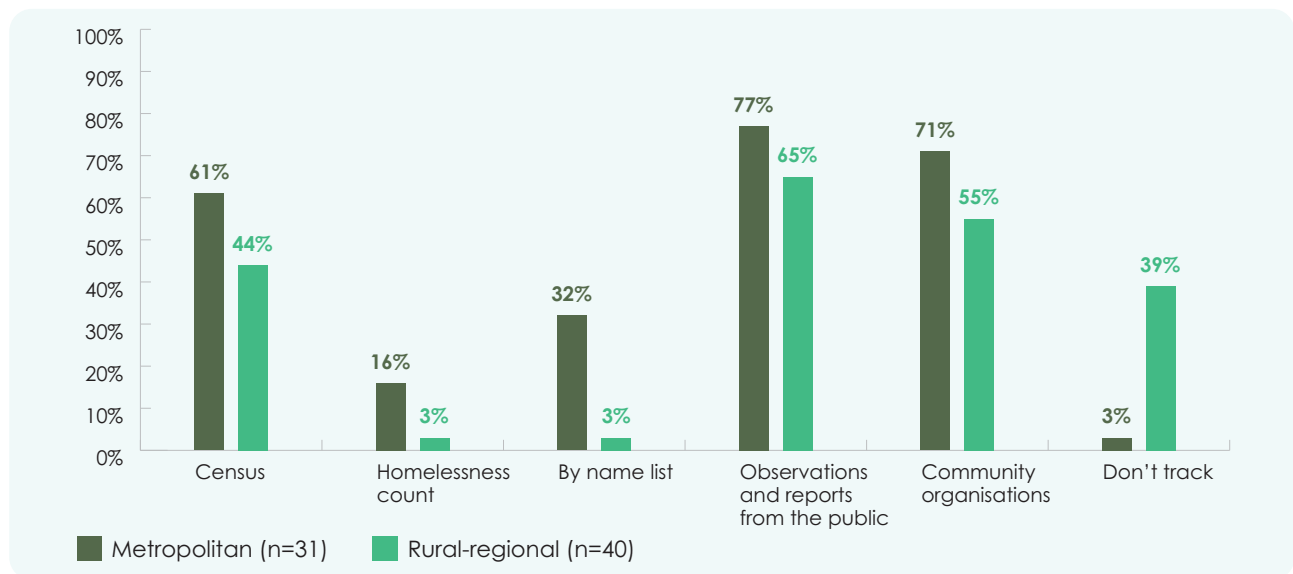
Metropolitan (n=31) vs rural-regional (n=38) – tick as many as apply



**Figure 1.3 Perceived severity of homelessness by council type**

	Very severe	Severe	Moderate	Mild	Not severe	Total
Inner metropolitan	2	2	4	1	0	9
Middle-outer	0	7	3	2	1	13
Interface	2	3	2	2	0	9
Regional	2	4	3	0	0	9
Large shire	0	2	10	2	2	16
Small shire	0	0	4	7	2	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>69</b>

**Figure 1.4 How does your council track homelessness?**



- Council access to real time data is varied. Eleven councils (10 metropolitan plus one regional city) manage by name lists. For most other councils, data is derived from observation and reports received from the community and local homelessness organisations. About two-thirds of Victorian councils rely on the five-year census.
- Officers at 30 of the 31 metropolitan councils reported that they tracked homelessness locally. Rural councils (large and small shires) were the least likely to collect information about their homelessness situation. Around 40 per cent of rural-regional councils said that they did not track homelessness at all.



## Councils observe homelessness demographics changing

**“The predominant group sleeping rough are men although there are some women and families noticed sleeping rough (in their car mainly). Noticeable increase in people entering homelessness for the first time.”**

*Survey response, middle-outer metropolitan council*

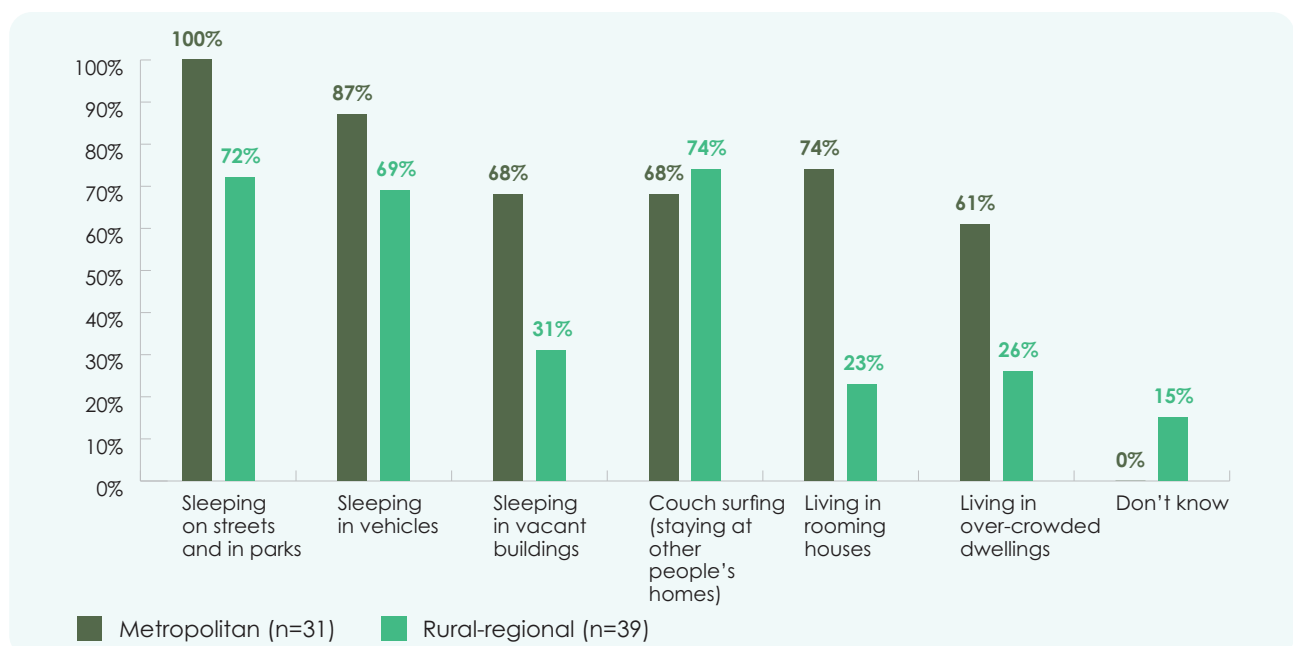
**“Rise in older women and families, rise in young people accessing homelessness entry point, rise in “complex” presentations (i.e. alcohol and other drugs and mental ill health), rise in women escaping family violence experiencing homelessness.”**

*Survey response, regional city*

- Rough sleeping – on streets and in parks – are the most observed forms of homelessness, however councils reported increases in people sleeping in cars and couch surfing.
- While single men remain a sizable demographic, particularly in the rough sleeping category, council officers in metro and rural-regional locations observe a growing number of families and older women experiencing homelessness.
- Homelessness in vacant buildings, rooming houses and overcrowding is more widely observed in metropolitan areas. Parks and caravan parks are of concern in regions.

**Figure 1.5 What forms of homelessness do you observe, or know of, in your council area?**

(select up to three)







## Housing affordability, economic hardships and domestic violence seen as key drivers of homelessness

**“People in housing stress are having to leave due to the lack of housing options. There are much less housing options and assistance available, also meaning people stay homeless for much longer, and having a car is now seen as ‘having somewhere to sleep’.”**

*Survey response, inner metropolitan council*

**“There is a growing need to provide services such as acute care, clinical mental health, primary and community health to people sleeping rough locally in response to the increased complexity of support needs of rough sleepers, particularly chronic health/ mental health presentations. Council is playing a broader role in support coordination to meet this need/service gap and having to identify other support options due to under resourcing of the homelessness sector.”**

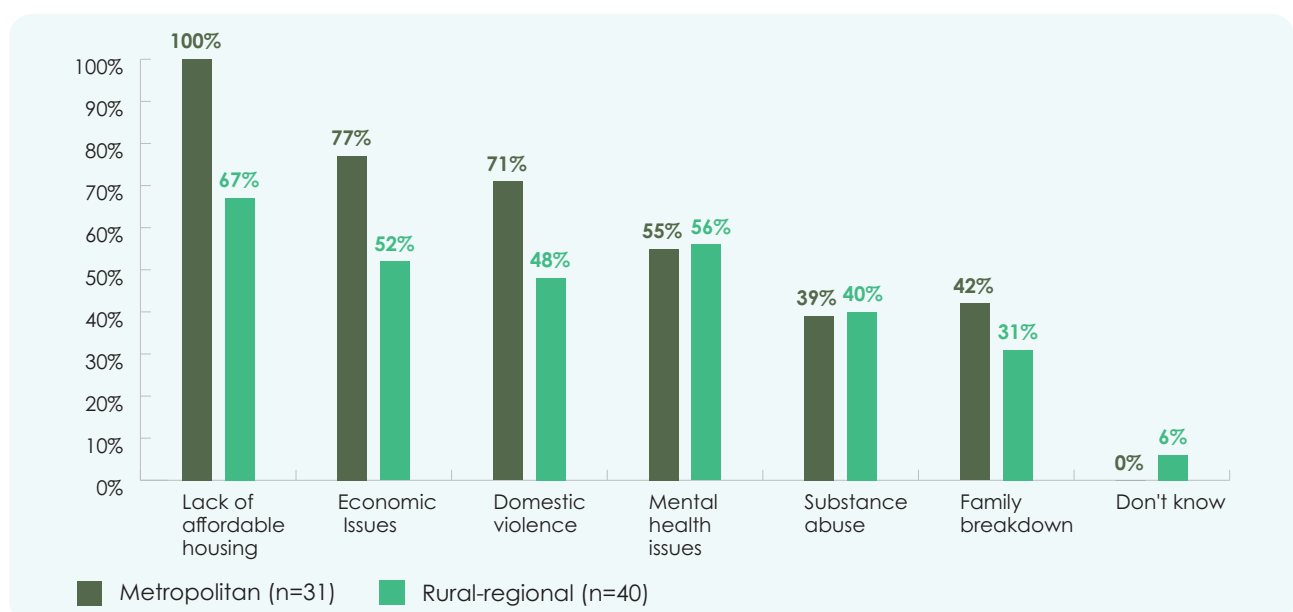
*Survey response, middle-outer metropolitan council*

- Responding officers identified a lack of affordable housing, economic issues and domestic violence as the main causes of homelessness in their municipal areas.
- Mental health and substance abuse issues were raised more often by rural-regional councils than metropolitan.

**“Increase in the incidence of older women experiencing homelessness. Family violence is a strong driver of homelessness. Increase in people experiencing street homelessness and presenting at municipal buildings.”**

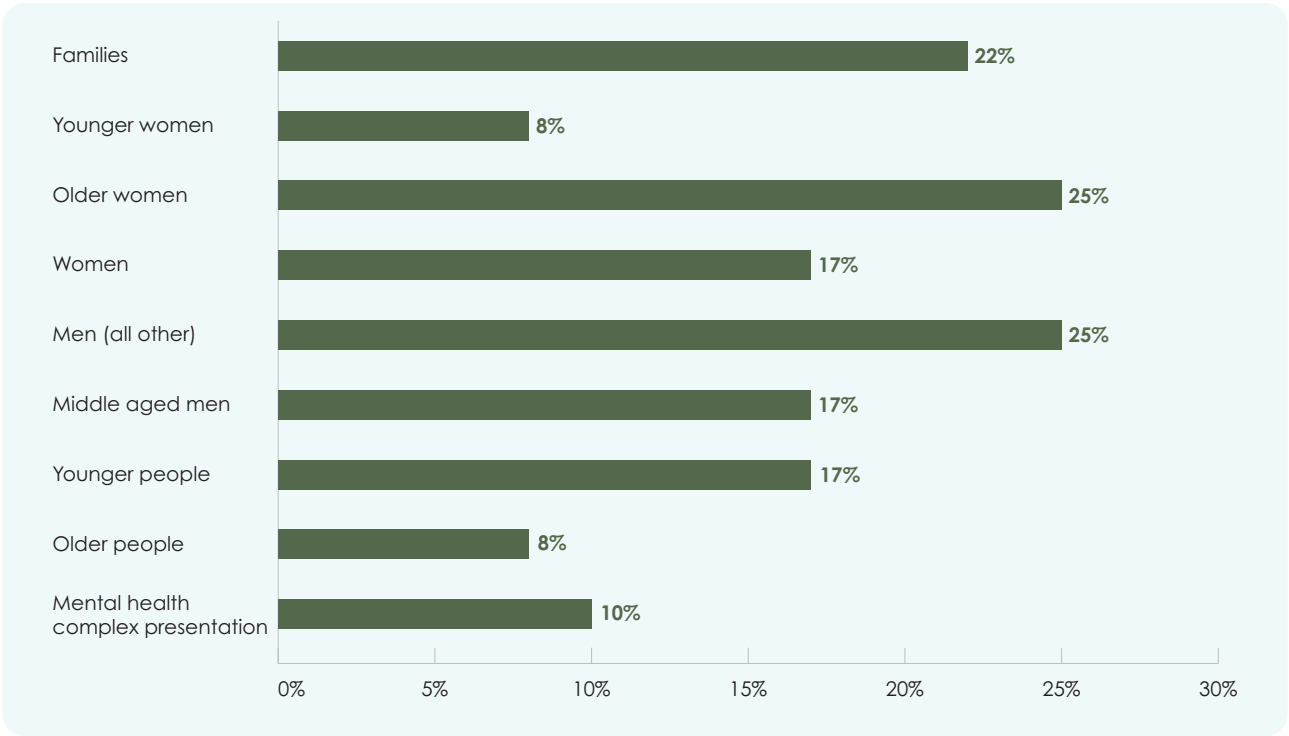
*Survey response, large shire*

**Figure 1.6 What do you think might be the main causes of homelessness in your council area? (Select up to three)**



**Figure 1.7 Are there any noticeable demographic patterns among people experiencing homelessness in your council area**

Metropolitan + rural-regional – multiple responses | n=64



# 2.

## Response drivers:

**Crisis pressures and community expectations are forcing councils to act.**

### Key insight #2:

While councils have a frontline view of homelessness, the responsibility for funding and policy sits almost entirely with Federal and State/Territory governments. With no dedicated mandate, limited resources, and varying strategic direction, Victorian councils are making their own decisions about how, when, and if they respond, particularly when crisis hits.

.....  
**"The expectation from community on Council (is) to respond and manage the more visible forms of homelessness."**

*Survey response, outer metropolitan council*

.....  
**"We are not in direct crisis or homeless service delivery, we engage in compliance through local laws and can influence strategically and advocate for better local service coordination and support."**

*Survey response, large shire*



## Wide community responsibilities drive local government homelessness response

Survey and focus group insights indicated the variety of circumstances that led councils to initiate homelessness responses.

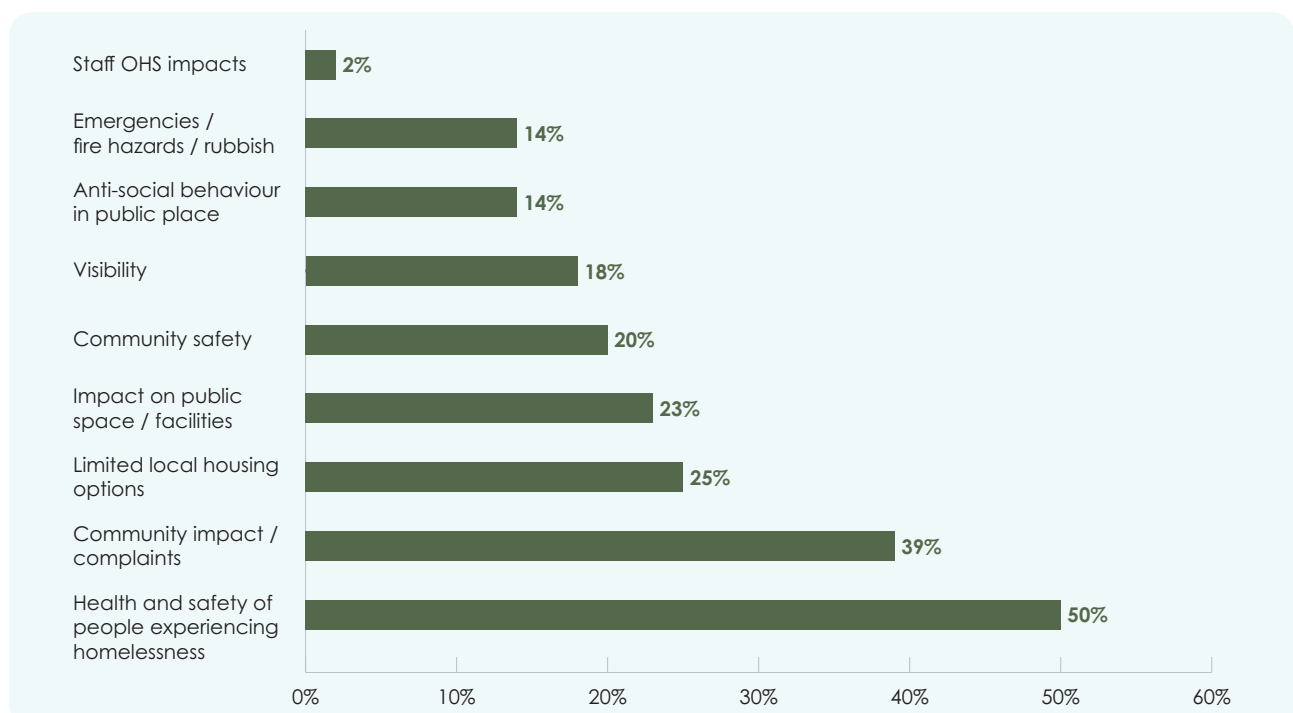
Numerous council officers said that community expectations and complaints were their key drivers in initiating a response to homelessness. This reflected similar findings raised in the [2024 Australian Homelessness Monitor](#), which ranked 'complaints from members of public, community groups or local business owners' as the key factor prompting response.

– Despite taking action on homelessness, many council officers reported feeling conflicted about their position and restrained by a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. Many reported being suppressed by limited budgets, made worse from competing priorities and high community expectations but with few funding channels open to local government.

- Other reasons driving Victorian council response included concerns about the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness 50 per cent (22 of 44), as well as the impact of homelessness on public spaces and community safety. A lack of housing also remained a consistent concern.
- In response to an open ended question, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of the 50 respondents raised 'a lack of funds' as the greatest barrier to involvement. Uncertainty regarding council's mandate/ responsibility (44 per cent) and lack of internal capacity (25 per cent) were also raised.

**Figure 2.1 What factors drive council concerns about homelessness?**

Metropolitan + rural-regional – multiple responses | n=44





# 3.

## Activities:

### **More councils are stepping up, but a metro-regional divide remains**

#### Key insight #3:

As homelessness increases across the state, more Victorian councils are introducing programs and interventions, though many struggle to define their role. While half of Melbourne's metropolitan councils have dedicated homelessness staff or teams, only one regional council has the same. Capacity, priorities, and approaches vary widely between metropolitan and rural-regional councils, highlighting the need for tailored solutions and better knowledge-sharing across councils.

.....

**"We are only really scratching the surface without proper intervention and services review by the State Government."**

*Survey response, interface council*

.....

**"As a small rural council in a rate capped environment, taking on additional services delivery is unlikely without additional funding."**

*Survey response, small shire*



## Council support approaches will differ in rural-regional and metropolitan locations

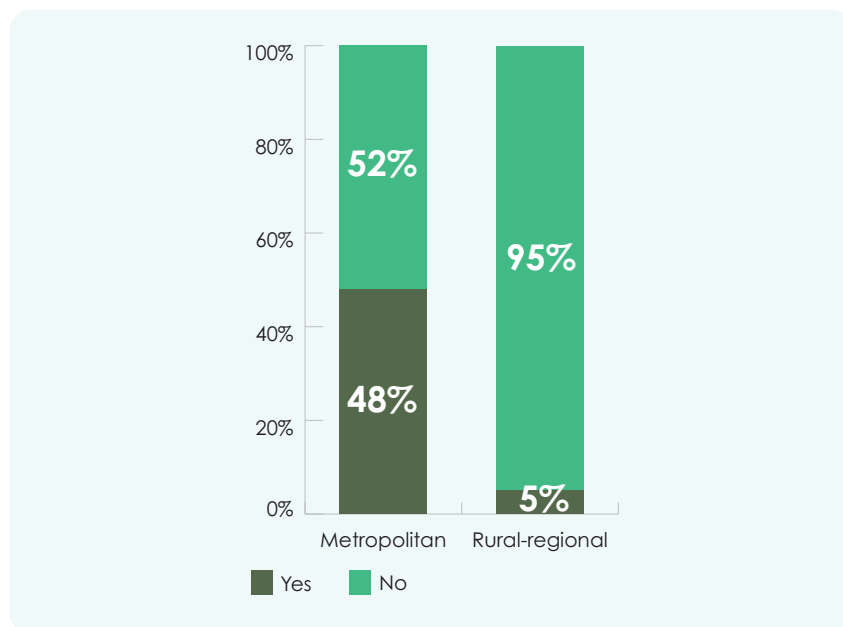
**“The root solution is really about providing appropriate, fit for purpose housing, the Community Housing Providers are stretched, there is only so much land available to develop on, and the bulk of government funding appears to be directed to inner city area, not rural.”**

*Survey response, large shire*

- In line with the scale of situations reported, metropolitan councils are initiating more homelessness intervention activities. These include establishing service coordination efforts (72 per cent) and street outreach initiatives 44 per cent).
- A quarter of Victorian councils (eight of 31 metro and one regional) are also participating in formal initiatives like Advance to Zero, a collective impact model focused on addressing rough sleeping.

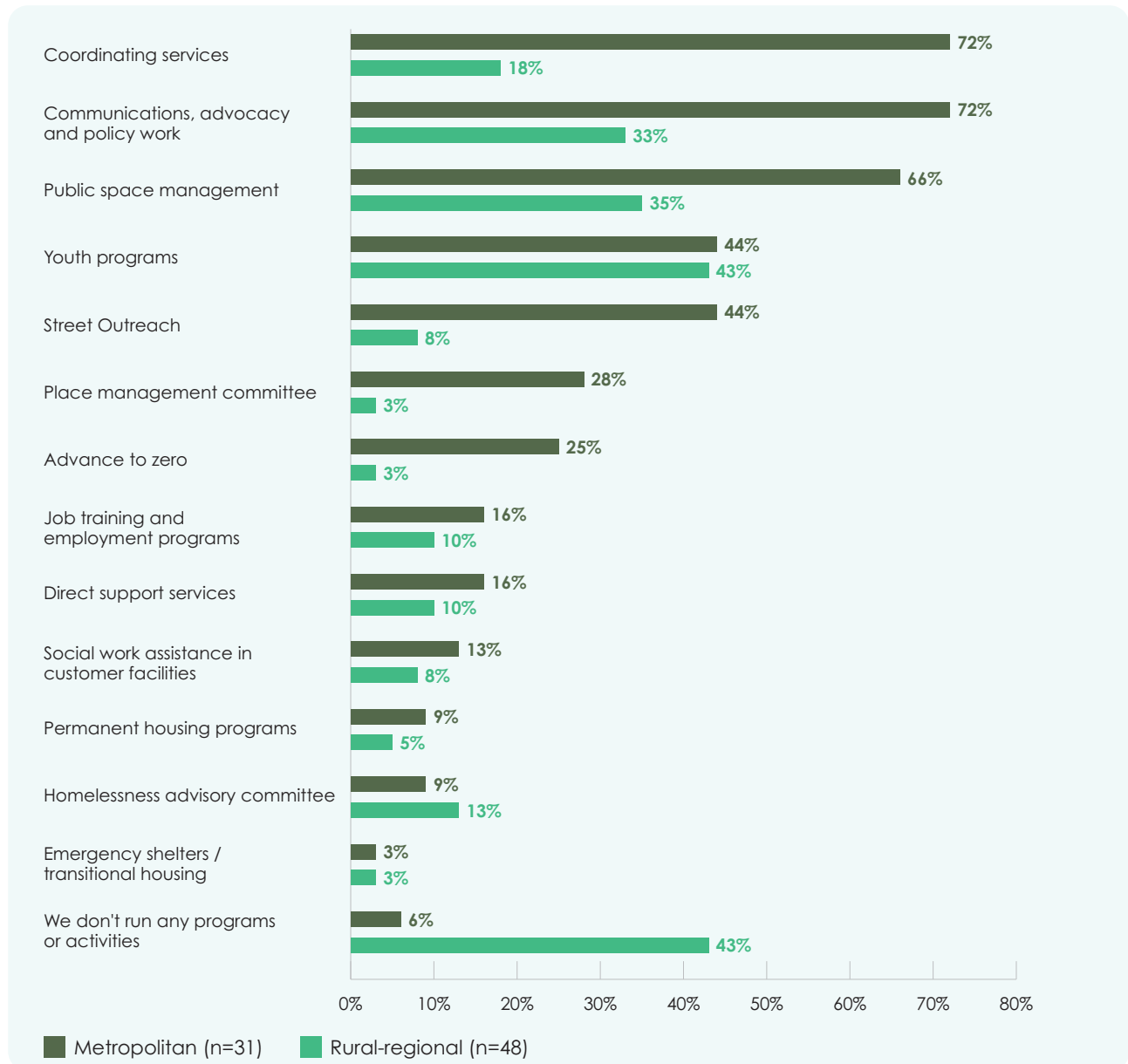
**Figure 3.1 Do you have a dedicated homelessness position or team?**

Metropolitan (n=31) rural-regional (n=39)



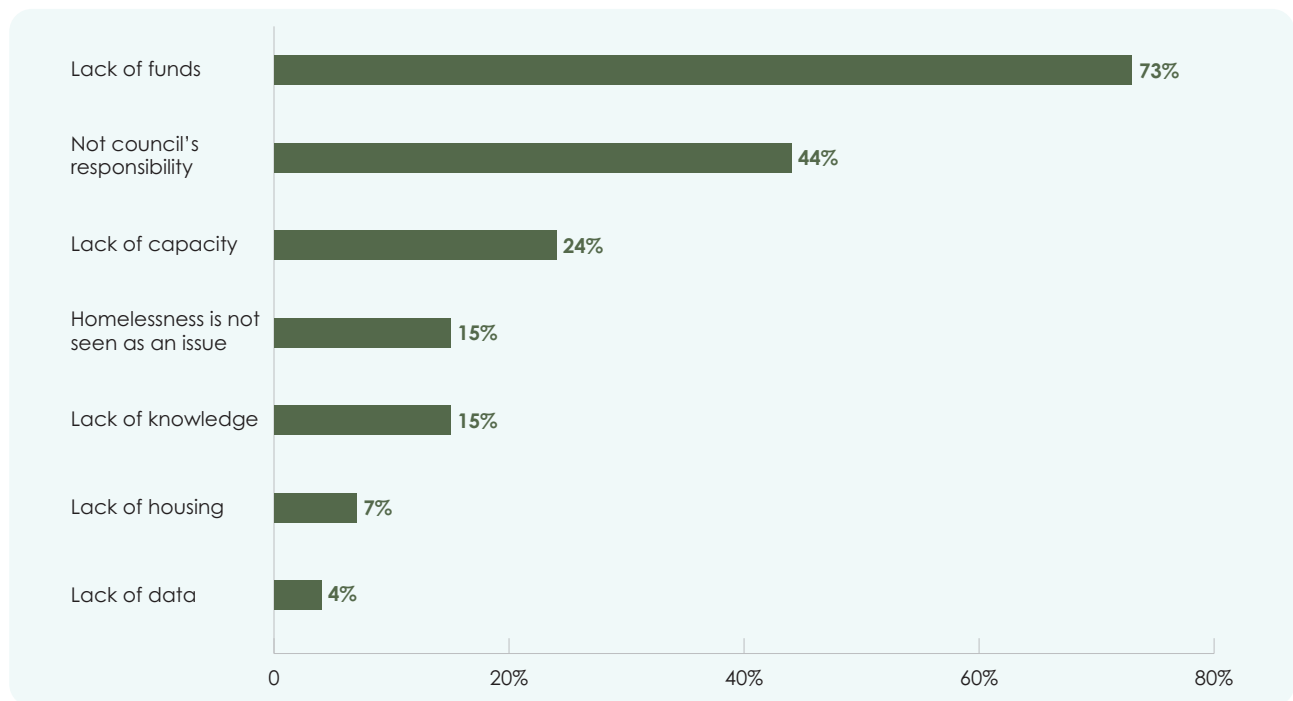
**Figure 3.2 What programs or activities does your council currently have in place to address homelessness?**

Metropolitan + rural-regional – multiple responses | n=68



**Figure 3.3 If your council isn't involved in providing services and support for people experiencing homelessness, what might be the reasons and/or barriers for it not being prioritised?**

Metropolitan+ rural-regional – multiple responses | n=54



**“Historical practice, our role has been strategic, rather than direct service delivery.”**

*Survey response, regional council*

**“Better access to data and research may enable us to consider how we may support within the remit of local government health.”**

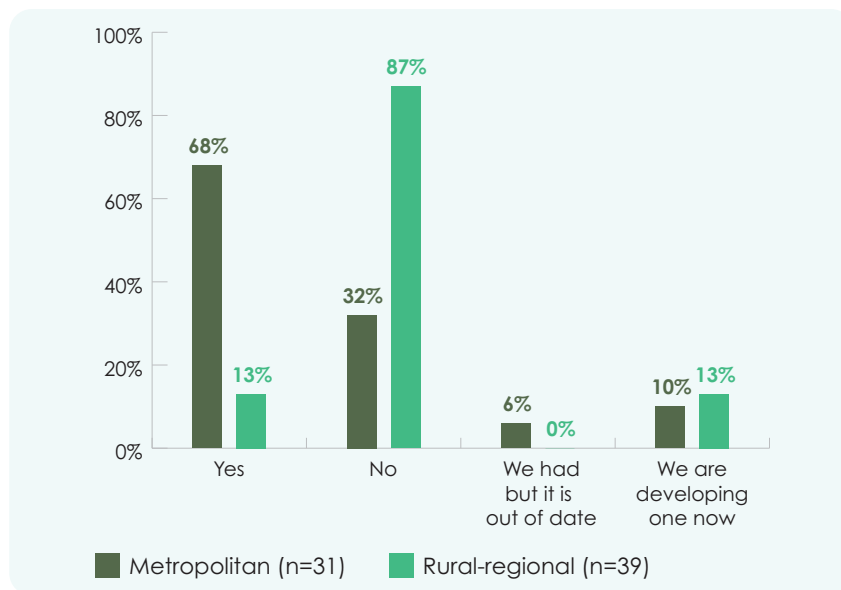
*Survey response, large shire*

- Response in rural-regional councils are somewhat different, with just over 60 per cent responding in ways more aligned to ongoing local government responsibility, including the management of public spaces and through youth programs and employment initiatives.
- Forty-three per cent of regional-rural councils (17 of 48) ran no programs.
- Funding limitations and unclear mandate were the most common reasons why councils did not respond to homelessness.



## Formal council strategies provide a mechanism to articulate councils' response to homelessness

**Figure 3.4 Does your council have a strategy, policy or plan to respond to homelessness?**



- In setting homelessness strategy, the disparities between metropolitan and rural-regional councils was significant. While more than two-thirds of metropolitan councils (21 of 31) indicated they had a strategy, only 13 per cent (5 of 39) rural-regional councils had the same.
- The divide remained when asked if councils included homelessness response in other strategic plans. Two of 39 rural-regional councils (5 per cent) reported homelessness in their Council Plan, and only four of 39 reported inclusion in their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. This contrasted to approximately one quarter of metropolitan councils doing the same for each. Metropolitan councils were also more likely to reference homelessness in other plans and policies (7 of 31 councils).

**Figure 3.5 Is responding to homelessness an identified strategic action in your current council plan, annual plan, municipal health and wellbeing plan, advocacy plan?**

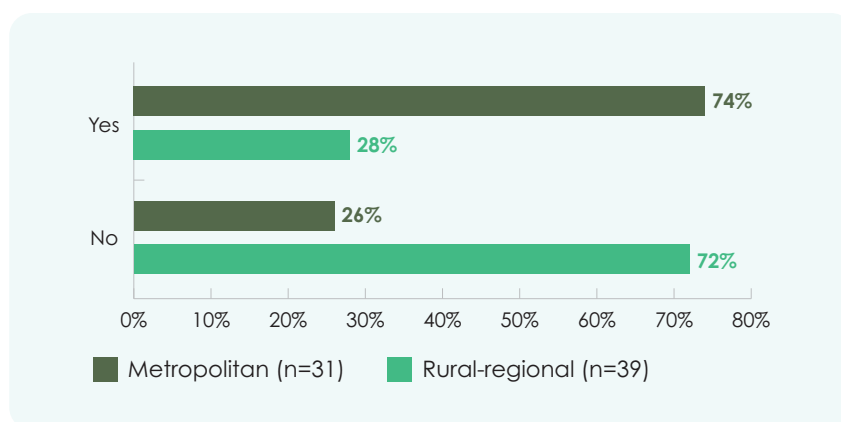
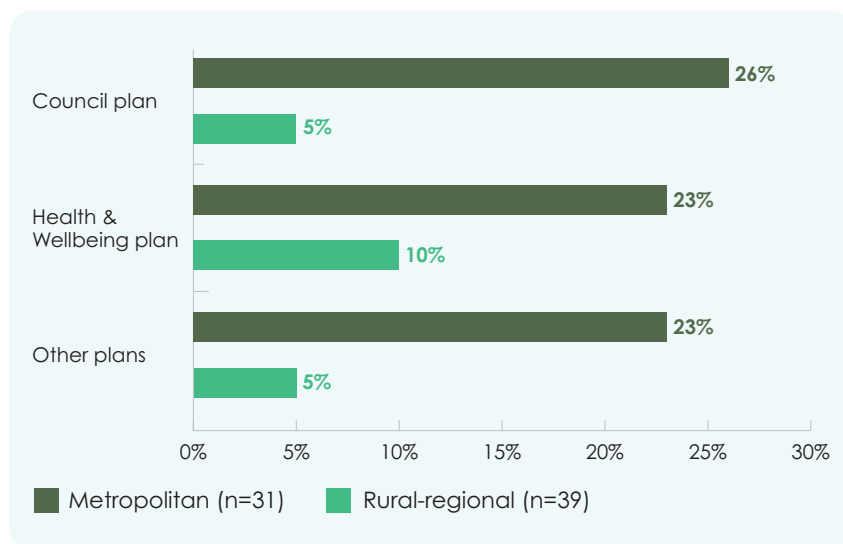




Figure 3.6 Types of plans used by councils to articulate their homelessness response



## Advocacy and policy development are key priority areas of interest to all councils

**“Considering the limited services, I question if this (homelessness response) is a service that Council should provide.”**

*Survey response, rural-regional council*

**“When we talk about statewide advocacy sometimes the rural areas don’t know what to do...those rural councils haven’t dealt with it. We don’t have the teams or the connections into the support services that the metro councils do.”**

*Focus group response, council officer, rural-regional*

Asked what role they thought their council could play in responding to homelessness, the majority of respondents chose advocacy and policy development.

Respondents also identified public education and awareness raising functions, and strategy and planning as activities suitable for council delivery.

Metropolitan officers were more likely than their rural-regional counterparts to see a role for their council in coordinating services and seeking funding and support for community organisations.

Focus group participants backed up survey outcomes in suggesting a range of additional opportunities to reduce and prevent homelessness. These included exploring partnerships and collaboration opportunities with local service providers and initiating programs such as Advance to Zero and social work initiatives in libraries.

# 4.

## Capacity and skills

### Key insight #4:

With homelessness on the rise, more councils are considering how they can respond—but most lack the skills, expertise, and capacity to do so effectively. There is strong demand for training, particularly in understanding roles and responsibilities, building organisation-wide capability, and learning from people with lived experience.

.....

**“In the Chamber we’ve had very mixed opinions and a lot of pushbacks about this being the state government issue and that local government shouldn’t be getting involved. Yet still many discussions about it being a problem so it is quite challenging.”**

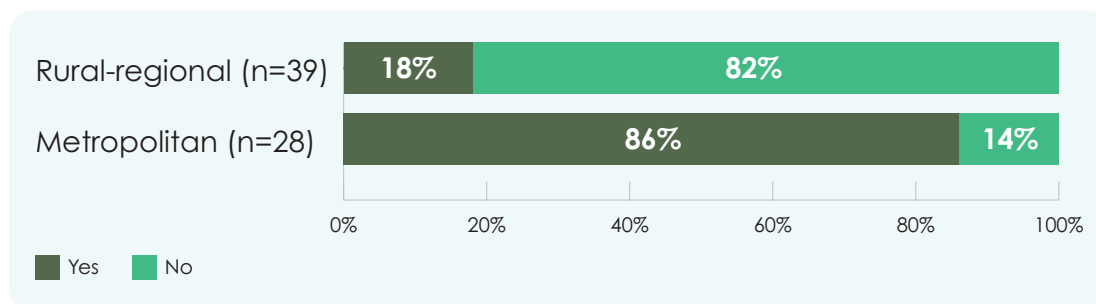
*Focus group, metro council*

.....

**“Focus on early intervention. Ensuring the Councillors know that you can’t wait for it to be in crisis mode. They need to be upskilled. They need to be informed and have a plan in advance.”**

*Focus group, rural-regional council*

**Fig 4.1 Has your organisation participated in any type of training related to homelessness?**



## Local government needs a skills boost to improve outcomes

Offering a diverse range of services and programs across communities, local government can be seen to operate like many businesses in one. This can mean that in responding to homelessness, the touch points within one council may be numerous, including staff whose roles focus on cleansing, safety and amenity as well as community health, wellbeing and service delivery commitments.

In focus group sessions council officers raised concerns that Victoria's growing homelessness crisis is placing extra pressures on a wide selection of local government workers – many of whom operate in frontline roles – on streets, in parks, in neighbourhood houses or libraries. These roles might encounter homelessness regularly but often do not have the knowledge, skills or expertise to adequately respond to what they see and experience.

Access to training and skills development differs significantly between metropolitan and rural/regional councils, reflecting differences in experience and need.

- Across the board, metro councils have accessed more training to support their efforts in homelessness response.
- 86% of metro respondents noted some form of organisational training, compared to 18% of rural/regional respondents. Details regarding the type and quality of training and who received that training are unclear.

- Metropolitan based respondents also indicated a higher level of interest in local government focused homelessness training. Almost all (86%) favoured more training in homelessness response. Half of regional-rural respondents were interested in training. An additional 25 percent said they did not know.

**“There's lots of existing work undertaken by metro councils – it would be good to see details of these so they can be locally adapted as needed.”**

*Focus group participant, large shire*



## Clarifying local government's role and responsibilities in homelessness response: the top information need

### Future training for Councillors

- Among metropolitan councils the greatest training interest was in councillors understanding roles and responsibilities (28 respondents, 90%). Next highest priorities were understanding the root causes of homelessness (27 councils, 87%), followed by enhancing communication and advocacy (24 councils, 77%).
- Five councils (across each of the council types) did not provide insight into their requirements, with two querying the need for councillors to receive education given that homelessness is a Victorian Government responsibility.

### Future training for Council staff

- Among metropolitan councils, the area of most interest for staff skill and capacity development was understanding roles and responsibilities (27 councils, 87%), followed by understanding its root causes (25 councils, 81%), building organisation-wide response skills (25 councils, 81%) and learning from people with lived experience (25 councils, 81%).
- For rural-regional councils the greatest training need identified was understanding the root causes of homelessness (23 rural-regional councils (58%), followed by building partnerships with community organisations (29 councils, (73%).

.....

**“Understanding the costs associated with not responding to homelessness and working in partnership with services to community and staff. Understanding homelessness through a culturally diverse lens, understanding the long road to recovery following experiences of homelessness and how local governments work in social cohesion and connected communities is instrumental in journeys of recovery.”**

*Survey response, interface council*

.....

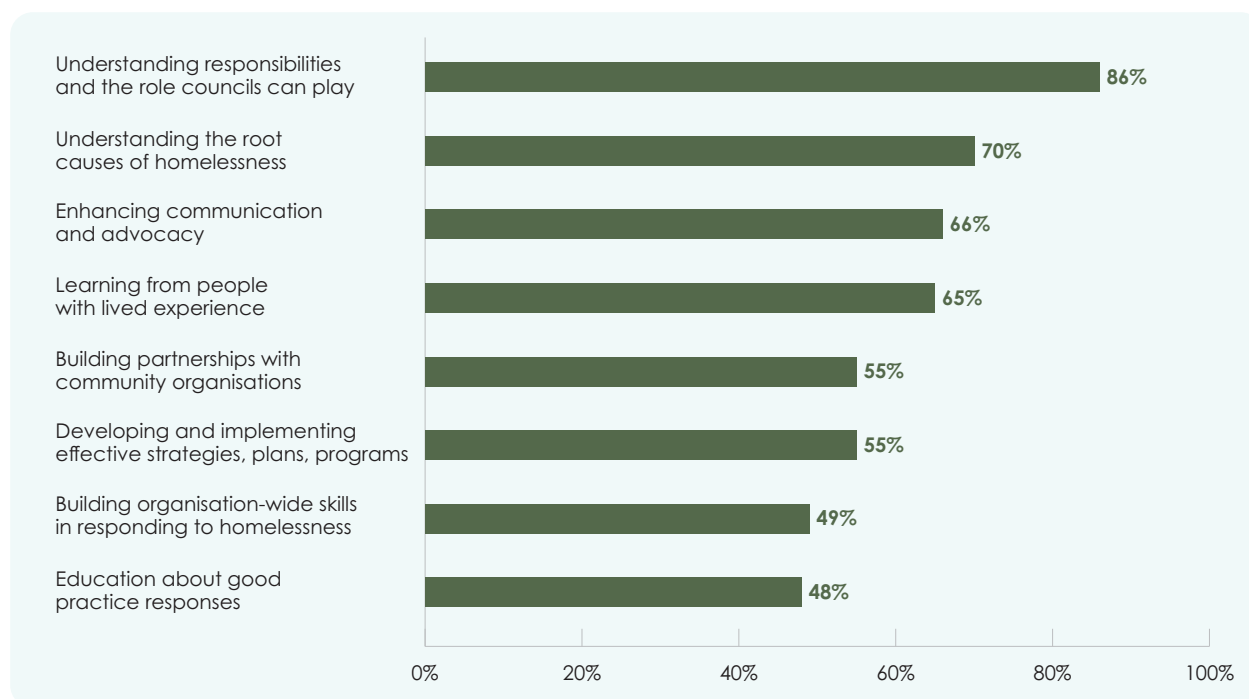
**“Balance between supporting those sleeping rough and managing community safety and amenity – for example under the Local Law – camping on public land is illegal and local laws teams are required to issue notices to comply.”**

.....

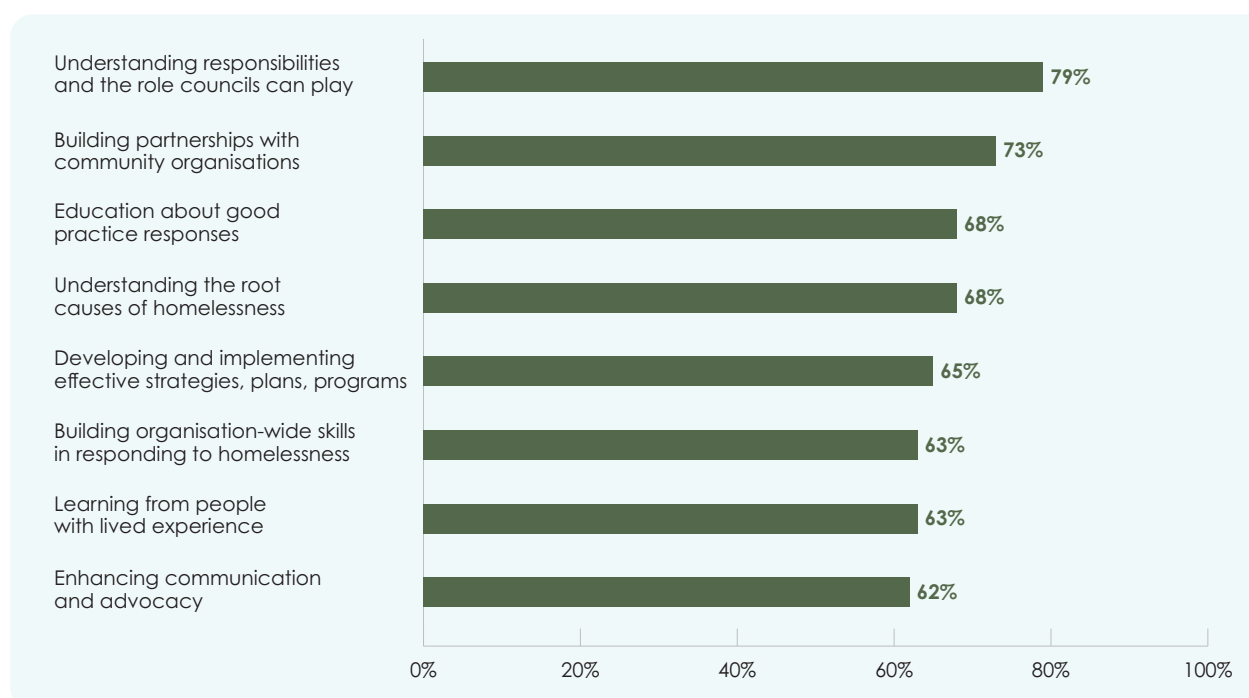
**“Advocacy to state and federal government is a very important part the work that needs to be conducted. Without broad reform to the housing sector we will not be able to resolve this problem.”**

*Survey response, large shire*

**Fig 4.2 What areas of training or knowledge would most benefit your elected Councillors in addressing homelessness and social housing service system?** (Select all that apply | n=71)



**Fig 4.3 What areas of training or knowledge would most benefit your Council staff in addressing homelessness?** (Select all that apply | n=69)



# 5.

## Communications and advocacy

### Key insight #5:

Councils are ready to lead local advocacy and communications:

Across the state, councils identified local government's position and ability to raise awareness, extend empathy and enable collaborative responses to end homelessness. This included drawing on local knowledge to make the case for housing and highlighting local needs to challenge negative perceptions and increase community based funding.

.....

**"We may not have the money to change the work or build partnerships but we can be the voice for community."**

*Large shire officer, focus group*





## Drawing on deep local knowledge councils are well placed to articulate community situations and needs

Officers attending MAV focus group sessions identified the following points:

### **Housing: shortages, needs and impact**

- Officers suggested focusing on emergency housing shortages and needs, rental reforms, mandatory inclusionary zoning, key worker and affordable housing as essential infrastructure.

### **Homelessness: experiences and limitations faced by local government and need for funding to support ongoing efforts**

- Most significant issue and barrier is a lack of funding. Budget pressures limit the ability of councils to respond. Corresponding lack of staff and capacity to dedicate to homelessness response.
- A chronic lack of housing and a service system that is stretched to capacity impacts every effort that councils make.
- Highlight the specific barriers experienced by smaller regional/rural councils.

### **Building knowledge and compassion in communities.**

- Councils are ready to educate and lead the narrative but may need assistance.
- Ninety-three percent of respondents (66 of 71) consider councils can play a role in responding to homelessness.

# Appendix 1: Council categories

# Appendix 1:

## Council categories

---

The following categories were used to classify council types in MAV's analysis:

### Inner metropolitan:

Darebin City Council  
Hobsons Bay City Council  
Maribyrnong City Council  
Melbourne City Council  
Merri-bek City Council  
Moonee Valley City Council  
Port Phillip City Council  
Stonnington City Council  
Yarra City Council

### Middle-outer metropolitan:

Banyule City Council  
Bayside City Council  
Boroondara City Council  
Brimbank City Council  
Frankston City Council  
Glen Eira City Council  
Greater Dandenong City Council  
Kingston City Council  
Knox City Council  
Manningham City Council  
Maroondah City Council  
Monash City Council  
Whitehorse City Council

### Interface:

Cardinia Shire Council  
Casey City Council  
Hume City Council  
Melton City Council  
Mornington Peninsula Shire Council  
Nillumbik Shire Council  
Whittlesea City Council  
Wyndham City Council  
Yarra Ranges Shire Council

### Regional city:

Ballarat City Council  
Greater Bendigo City Council  
Greater Geelong City Council  
Greater Shepparton City Council  
Horsham Rural City Council  
Latrobe City Council  
Mildura Rural City Council  
Wangaratta Rural City Council  
Warrnambool City Council  
Wodonga City Council

### Large shire:

Bass Coast Shire Council  
Baw beck Shire Council  
Campaspe Shire Council  
Colac Otway Shire Council  
Corangamite Shire Council  
East Gippsland Shire Council  
Glenelg Shire Council  
Golden Plains Shire Council  
Macedon Ranges Shire Council  
Mitchell Shire Council  
Moir Shire Council  
Moorabool Shire Council  
Mount Alexander Shire Council  
Moyne Shire Council  
South Gippsland Shire Council  
Southern Grampians Shire Council  
Surf Coast Shire Council  
Swan Hill Rural City Council  
Wellington Shire Council

### Small shire:

Alpine Shire Council  
Ararat Rural City Council  
Benalla Rural City Council  
Buloke Shire Council  
Central Goldfields Shire Council  
Gannawarra Shire Council  
Hepburn Shire Council  
Hindmarsh Shire Council  
Indigo Shire Council  
Loddon Shire Council  
Mansfield Shire Council  
Murrindindi Shire Council  
Northern Grampians Shire Council  
Pyrenees Shire Council  
Queenscliffe Borough Council  
Strathbogie Shire Council  
Towong Shire Council  
West Wimmera Shire Council  
Yarriambiack Shire Council







**mav.asn.au**