

21 October 2020

The Hon. Tim Pallas
Treasurer
Level 4, 1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Vic 3002

By email and post: tim.pallas@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Treasurer,

State Budget 2020-21

We write with respect to the impending State Budget and to highlight two matters of critical importance to Mallee Family Care that we believe should receive considerable investment in this years' Budget.

Safe and secure housing is a privilege for many and the Victorian Government must act to ensure this basic human right is extended to all Victorians. You can do this by:

- 1. Committing to an immediate and ongoing investment to build enough social housing to end the waitlist; and**
- 2. Installing air-conditioning in all public housing in North West Victoria.**

Mallee Family Care

By way of background, Mallee Family Care is a not for profit agency managing more than sixty Commonwealth and State funded programs supporting thousands of vulnerable community members in regional, rural and remote areas of the Mallee region of Victoria and South West New South Wales. We work in the fields of family, youth and children, disability, mental health, housing, legal, financial, research and education. Our clients derive from a diverse population, the majority of which experience vulnerability and social and economic disadvantage. Many have also experienced family violence, are people with a disability or mental illness, or are either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds.

Invest in social housing

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the acute vulnerability that comes with experiencing, or being at risk of, homelessness. Housing is the frontline defence against Coronavirus and Government policies aimed at fighting the spread of the virus, such as proper sanitation and social distancing, are predicated on the assumption that everyone has a home which would enable adherence to such measures.

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The Victorian Government has shown a willingness to act quickly and to support vulnerable people by providing interim investment in housing measures, which should be commended, but now is the time to focus on ongoing permanent solutions.

As an organisation that offers a Specialist Homelessness Service in Southern Mallee, we are acutely aware of the impacts homelessness has on some of our most vulnerable community members and the difficulty in regional areas of securing permanent housing for our clients. As of June 2020, Mallee alone had a deficit of 883 social housing properties. This means there were at least 883 vulnerable people, many with families, who are without a home. We foresee that number will only rise given the current economic recession we find ourselves in.

Compounding this long waitlist is the fact that in many regional towns there are very low vacancy rates which means many of our clients are locked out of the private rental market. By way of example, in Swan Hill there is currently a 0.29% vacancy rate, this circumstance is not unique to Swan Hill and extends to many regional towns. Given the very limited private rental market and low social housing stock it is imperative that the Government invest in building new social housing to ensure that every Victorian has a safe and secure home, particularly when facing a pandemic.

The Victorian Government must commit to an immediate and ongoing investment to build enough social housing to end the waitlist.

Adequate cooling in public housing in North West Victoria

Mallee Family Care is deeply concerned about the impending summer, which will bring prolonged periods of extreme heat, and the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on our most vulnerable community members who reside in public housing and who do not have access to adequate cooling systems in their homes.

Research undertaken by Mallee Family Care with the University of Sydney's School of Public Health has found that the absence of adequate cooling systems in Public Housing in Mildura is having a detrimental impact on the resident's physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. Please find enclosed a copy of our research entitled "Extreme heat driven by the climate emergency: impacts on the health and wellbeing of public housing tenants in Mildura, Victoria".

Our research indicates that without adequate cooling systems many public housing residents are left with no choice but to congregate in public spaces or overcrowded homes of family members or friends who are fortunate enough to have adequate cooling systems in order to escape the extreme heat their homes foster.

In a number of months these vulnerable residents will be forced to contravene Government policies aimed at fighting the spread of Coronavirus, such as social distancing, because their homes, provided by the Victorian Government, do not enable adherence to these measures and are unfit for habitation.



We urge the Victorian Government to immediately install air-conditioning in all public housing in North West Victoria.

We trust you will give due consideration to the aforementioned matters and hope to see this years' Budget commit to providing all Victorians with a safe and secure home.

Yours sincerely


Teresa Jayet,
CEO, Mallee Family Care

