

SMASHED

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AT **BREAKING POINT**

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THE CASE FOR
BETTER RESOURCING
VICTORIA'S
HOMELESSNESS
ENTRY POINTS.

OCTOBER, 2026



www.vhn.org.au

ABOUT THE VHN



The Victorian Homelessness Network (VHN) is a statewide partnership committed to ending homelessness in Victoria. It comprises senior representatives from the nine regional homelessness networks, aligned with Department of Families, Fairness and Housing regions, and the Victorian Indigenous Statewide Homelessness Network. The VHN provides a mechanism for strategically progressing issues of common concern across all Regional Homelessness Networks.

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- The VHN Entry Points Project Working Group;

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- Homelessness Australia and Impact Economics for their report *Call Unanswered: Unmet Demand for Specialist Homelessness Services*, 2024 which inspired this research project and the research design.

WHAT IS AN ENTRY POINT?

Entry points are the first point of contact for people accessing the homelessness service system and are also known as access points or IAP (Initial Assessment and Planning) services. It is where individuals and families at risk or experiencing homelessness participate in an initial assessment of their needs conducted by a skilled worker who will assess their eligibility and priority for other Specialist Homelessness Services.

A plan to meet needs is developed, as well as provision of urgent practical assistance to meet needs. This may include crisis and emergency accommodation, assistance with rental arrears or referrals to case management support and specialist services.



PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

The scale and impact of unmet demand for housing and homelessness support services are not fully captured within the Victorian entry point context, particularly in relation to how these pressures are experienced and managed at the frontline. This report shines a spotlight on the experiences of staff and managers across

Victorian entry point services, highlighting the complexity and volume of demand, the pressures created by limited housing and support options, and how unmet need is navigated and managed within an increasingly complex, under-resourced and overwhelmed Specialist Homelessness Service system.

BACKGROUND

Research such as **Call Unanswered: Unmet Demand for Specialist Homelessness Services** (Jackson and Blane - Nov, 2024), **Inside the Front Door: A seven-year study longitudinal study of six high volume homelessness services in Melbourne** (Kavaarpuo and Johnson - May, 2024) and **Workplace Trauma on the Social Housing and Homelessness Frontline** (Batterham, Barnes, Hartley, Flanagan, Veeroja, Robinson, Mackelprang - Feb, 2026) shows that:

- Our entry points have been operating well beyond capacity for some time.
- Systemic issues including chronic under-resourcing of a crisis-driven system, insufficient investment in social housing creating significant bottlenecks and disrupting system flow, and persistent staffing and infrastructure deficits are contributing to unmet demand for housing and essential allied services.
- Client presentations are becoming more complex over time and require additional resources to fully address.
- Unmet demand remains under-captured, particularly at the first point of contact. Unmet demand is an increasing problem. It's when people experiencing or at risk of homelessness contact an entry point for assistance but the entry point either cannot respond at all (calls/emails go unanswered or doors are closed) or cannot provide the assistance required.
- The inability for entry point staff to meet demand is reducing effective client outcomes and traumatising staff.

PROJECT APPROACH

The Victorian Homelessness Network aimed to better understand the extent and impact of demand for homelessness entry point services in the Victorian context and collaborated to conduct the Statewide Entry Point Snapshot to produce this research report.

The methodology consisted of:

- An online survey completed by staff across 50 entry points in two fourteen-day periods (one in Summer and one in Autumn/Winter) with participation from over 95% of all Victorian entry points.
- Survey data was collected from 50 entry points. Entry points provided one submission per service day across the two survey periods. The complete dataset included survey responses for a total of 925 service days across these entry points.
- In some of the analysis we provided data per entry point, in some cases per service day, and in some cases as an overall proportion of total responses.
- A series of five online focus group discussions were held with over 50 staff and managers from entry points in rural and metropolitan Victoria representing 25 entry point services.

50 ENTRY POINT
SERVICES ACROSS
VICTORIA PARTICIPATED
IN THE RESEARCH.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings point to a homelessness service system under significant and growing pressure, with entry point staff increasingly supporting clients with complex and acute needs while operating in an environment where demand routinely exceeds available capacity. As housing and support options become harder to access, clients are encountering closed doors, unanswered phone calls and emails, and limited pathways to immediate assistance, often leaving entry point workers to manage the resulting distress and frustration. This environment increases the likelihood of critical incidents, including aggression, threats and violence towards staff, while also contributing to heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout across the workforce.

The cumulative impact is significant: staff are not only managing increasingly complex client presentations but are also absorbing the consequences of broader system failures, with implications for staff wellbeing, retention, service capacity, and the sustainability of the homelessness response.

INCREASING CLIENT COMPLEXITY

Entry point workers have been consistently reporting that the amount and severity of these interconnected issues have been increasing over the past five years, and that this is impacting the work that they are able to complete within their limited resourcing and funding. Dealing with complex issues takes time, and the more of these issues the client presents with the longer it takes to find appropriate supports for them, holding them in interim response.

"We are like... a triage and then refer to specialised [services]. However, if specialised services are not available then we are just... collecting more people on that triage."
- (Metro Entry Point worker - January 2026)

"Our role is to do a thorough assessment and then refer them to other services... But because of increased complexities and the high demand, we are [holding] those clients because there is a long wait time for [specialist] programs. We are holding on to that interim [response] support work...and that is impacting staff."

(Metro Entry Point worker - January 2026)

CLOSED DOORS AND UNANSWERED CALLS AND EMAILS

THE MAJORITY OF ENTRY POINTS (69%) HAD TO CLOSE THEIR FRONT DOORS AT LEAST ONCE DURING THE SURVEY PERIODS.

CLOSURES CAN OCCUR FOR A RANGE OF REASONS; INSUFFICIENT STAFFING WAS THE PRIMARY DRIVER, ACCOUNTING FOR 58% OF CLOSURES ACROSS BOTH SURVEY PERIODS.

FOR REMOTE ENTRY POINTS, INSUFFICIENT STAFFING DROVE 73% OF CLOSURES.

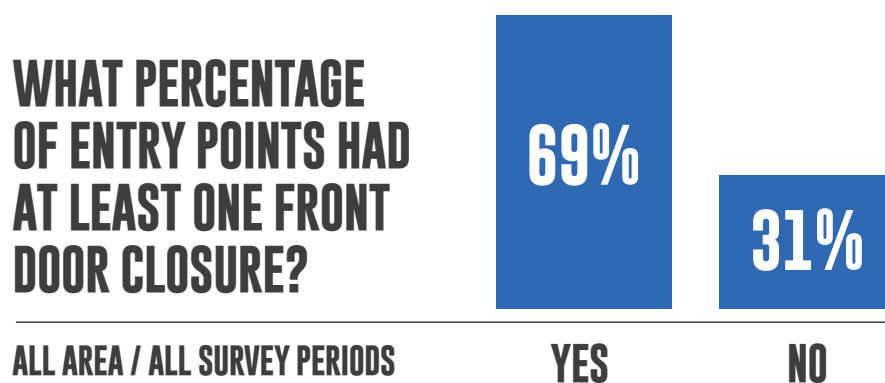
A key contributor to front-door closures is the lack of funding for staff backfill. Current funding arrangements do not adequately provide for backfill when staff are absent, meaning entry points may be unable to maintain minimum staffing levels and keep services operating safely and consistently.

“[There is] not enough FTE [staff] to keep doors open ... only 1 funded FTE for [our] area, if [someone is] sick, on leave, training, [at a] function or not available, there is no staff to step in.”

(Rural Entry Point worker - June, 2026)

Entry points often have to close their doors when they reach capacity or due to critical incidents. One entry point needed to do this almost every day of the two-week December 2025 survey period.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF ENTRY POINTS HAD AT LEAST ONE FRONT DOOR CLOSURE?



ALL AREA / ALL SURVEY PERIODS

YES

NO

When front doors are closed, access is available by phone and email contact.

Across the survey periods, entry points reported that:

- on 540 service days (58%) staff had periods where they were unable to answer the phone because of resourcing issues, with 17% of entry points unable to answer the phone for more than four hours.
- on 38% of service days entry points could not answer emails received from people seeking assistance.

UNMET NEED

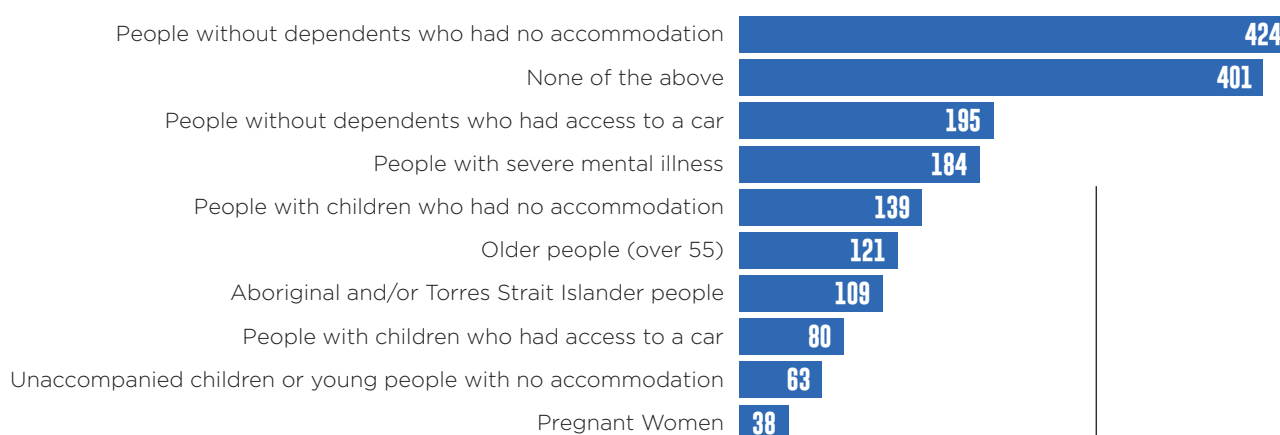
People experiencing homelessness may approach an entry point expecting an immediate solution, such as emergency accommodation, transitional housing, or a stable long-term housing arrangement. These expectations are understandable, particularly when individuals are presenting in crisis and may have exhausted other avenues of support. However, entry points operate within a highly constrained service system, where accommodation and housing resources are limited and immediate placement cannot be guaranteed. When these expectations cannot be met, the resulting frustration, distress, and sense of urgency can sometimes escalate into verbal abuse, aggression, or violence towards entry point workers, further increasing the pressure on an already overstretched workforce.

Entry point services were unable to assist the following groups of people at some point during the survey periods:

- **76% of entry points were unable to assist people with children who were at risk of homelessness.**
- **80% of entry points were unable to assist people without dependents who were at risk of homelessness.**
- **41% of entry points were unable to assist unaccompanied children/young people who were at risk of homelessness.**

WERE THERE ANY INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES FROM THESE GROUPS IN NEED OF EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION IN THIS SERVICE DAY WHO COULD NOT BE PROVIDED FOR?

ALL AREA / ALL SURVEY PERIODS



Multiple groups of people had their needs unmet per service day. For example, there were 121 service days on which at least one older person (aged over 55) in need of emergency accommodation did not receive it.

Rural services face heightened challenges due to lone-worker risks, limited access to emergency accommodation, transport barriers and seasonal pressures.

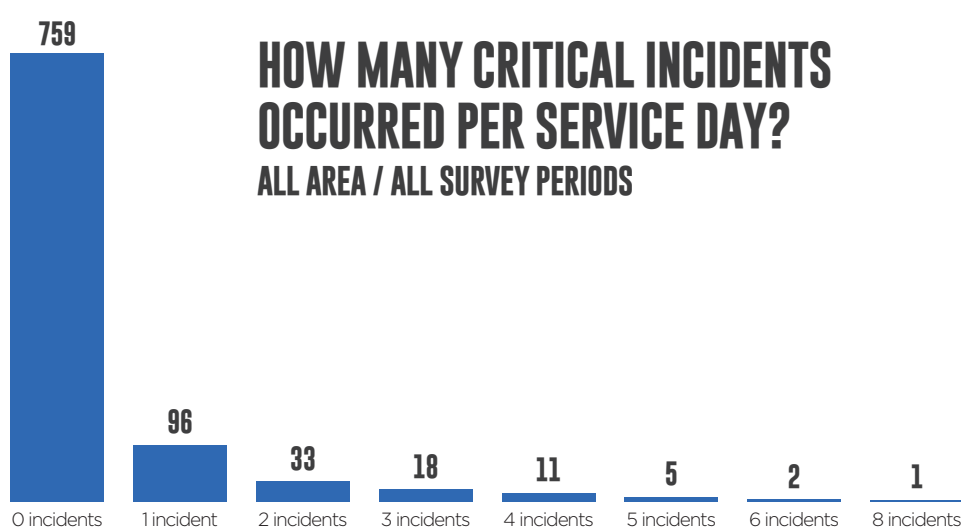
Supported emergency accommodation managed by homelessness services will improve client safety and outcomes.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

A critical incident is a situation that may result in disruption, an emergency, crisis, injury, threat of violence, or damage to property, affecting clients, staff, or members of the public. In many cases at homelessness entry points critical incidents arise from desperation and distress, where people have urgent and complex needs but are unable to access timely assistance.

Dealing with critical incidents is a daily reality for our entry points. These incidents can present challenging, and at times dangerous, situations for staff to manage. They can also have a significant flow-on effect on our ability to deliver services, requiring staff time to respond to the incident, support those affected, debrief, and repair any damage to premises.

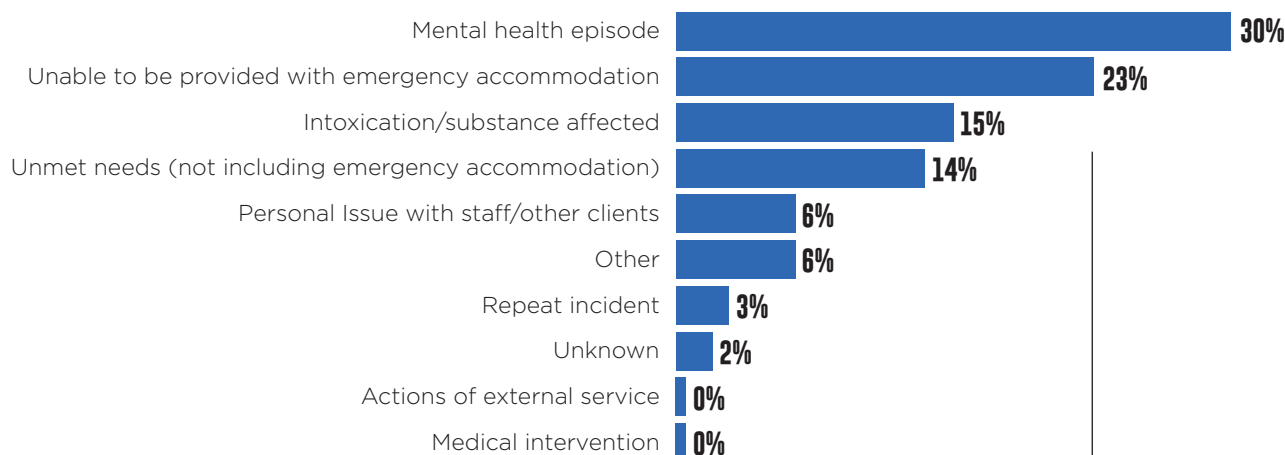
- **Over the course of the two survey periods, entry points experienced 305 critical incidents. One entry point dealt with 8 critical incidents within a single day.**
- **51% of entry points had at least one critical incident across the survey periods.**
- Entry points deal with abuse and violence to both staff and clients, with 60% of incidents across both survey periods involving verbal abuse and discrimination.
- **Being unable to meet client needs were the reasons identified for 37% of critical incidents across both survey periods** with 23% of critical incidents caused by clients not being given emergency accommodation and 14% caused by other unmet needs.
- **Client mental health episodes were a large driver of critical incidents, causing 30% of the critical incidents reported.**
- **Across the two survey periods entry point staff had to call emergency services 72 times.** 47% of these callouts involved the police, and ambulances were involved 30% of the time.
- Entry Points have had to redesign workplace entrances, interview spaces, in some instances hire security guards and install CCTV to keep clients and staff safe. All without any additional funding.





WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR CRITICAL INCIDENTS EXPERIENCED TODAY?

ALL AREA / ALL SURVEY PERIODS



Several incidents can be reported per service day, and multiple reasons can be provided for each incident.

"Quite often the clients trying to break in, so they're kicking down the door. We also had a client throw a hammer through a window like just lots of crazy things that go on here"

- (Metro Entry Point worker - January 2026)

"Over the last four or five years, we've seen quite a large increase in aggression. We've had clients present with weapons, with knives, with horse clippers. We've had staff significantly affected and it's becoming a real issue. We don't have the money to put a security guard at the office to protect our staff"

(Rural Entry Point worker - January 2026)

IMPACT ON STAFF

Working at a homelessness entry point can have a profound and cumulative impact on workers, largely shaped by persistent systemic resource constraints, repeated exposure to workplace trauma, and significant emotional demands. As the “front door” to crisis services, workers are at the forefront of clients’ immediate distress, with limited resources, access to emergency accommodation and sustainable, long-term housing solutions.

As the primary point of contact for people in crisis, entry point workers absorb the consequences of broader systemic failures, increasing the risk of burnout, workforce attrition, and turnover. Batterham, Barnes, Hartley, Flanagan, Veeroja, Robinson, Mackelprang (Feb, 2026) found that *Among survey participants, 90% reported moderate-to-high vicarious trauma (trauma resulting from exposure to others’ traumatic experiences), 61% reported symptoms of burnout and 43% reported post-traumatic stress symptoms that warranted further assessment.*

Inadequate wages and demanding working conditions further intensify this pressure, making it difficult for organisations to retain experienced staff. High turnover then creates significant financial and operational costs for non-profit organisations, including ongoing recruitment, onboarding, training, and overtime expenses, which drain already limited resources and cost the sector millions of dollars each year.

The Council to Homeless Persons and RMIT’s Workforce Information and Development Institute (2024) found that *Turnover in key SHS roles reached 26% in recent years, while baseline turnover has hovered around 20% since 2011 and estimate that workforce churn drains over \$20 million a year from the sector.*

As experienced workers leave and are replaced by less experienced staff, continuity and service capacity is disrupted, placing additional strain on an already overstretched system. Ultimately, persistent turnover at the initial point of contact weakens the stability, effectiveness, and capacity of the broader homelessness response system.

“And it is a big factor in the entry point workers, burning out because they want to help, but they’re so restricted on what they can do.”
- (Rural Entry Point worker - January 2026)

“We had a worker leave recently who described [the job] as ‘death by a thousand cuts’. She loved the job and the team but it was constant. It does build up and.... she couldn’t take it anymore”

(Metro Entry Point worker - January 2026)

Entry point workers are being pushed to unsustainable limits despite their extraordinary commitment and resilience. Immediate and decisive action is urgently required to address the systemic pressures placing staff under such immense strain and to prevent further harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the extensive knowledge and frontline expertise of entry point staff and managers across Victoria, this statewide research provides compelling evidence of urgent and systemic challenges facing entry point services. The findings highlight the significant and growing pressures on the workforce and service system, and demonstrate the need for targeted, sustained investment and meaningful reform to ensure entry points can respond effectively to increasing demand.

The Victorian Homelessness Network therefore calls on the Victorian Government to adopt the following recommendations to strengthen entry point services, address the systemic pressures identified through this research, and ensure these critical services have the resources, capacity, and support required to meet growing demand and provide effective pathways out of homelessness.

STRENGTHEN VICTORIAN ENTRY POINT SERVICES SO THEY CAN MEET RISING DEMAND SAFELY, CONSISTENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY BY:

Recommendation 1: providing additional funding for increased staffing to expand service capacity (including backfill) in recognition of the essential nature of these services.

Recommendation 2: investing in multidisciplinary teams and hub/co-location models to provide more integrated and effective support for clients with complex and diverse needs, while strengthening coordination between entry-point services and allied service systems, particularly mental health, family violence, corrections, and alcohol and other drug services.

Recommendation 3: funding to manage critical incidents, including property repairs, security measures, staff training and support and consistent critical incident reporting to Government.

Recommendation 4: investing in increased supported crisis accommodation managed by homelessness services to improve client safety and outcomes.

Recommendation 5: upgrading the classification for entry point roles to reflect their complexity and importance and ensure consistent staff competencies with appropriate remuneration

Recommendation 6: providing education to reset expectations of clients, allied services and the general community about the role and capacity of entry point services.

Recommendation 7: improving standardised data collection for entry point services to better capture client complexity, brief interventions and unassisted clients in high volume fast-paced entry point services, including better reporting of data to Government and entry point agencies.

SYSTEM-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Build public and community housing at the scale required to house people experiencing/at risk of homelessness

Governments need to commit to a long-term pipeline of at least 80,000 new public and community homes across Victoria, with clear targets, timelines, and sustained investment. This must include delivery in outer metropolitan, regional, and rural Victoria to meet growing and unmet need across the state.

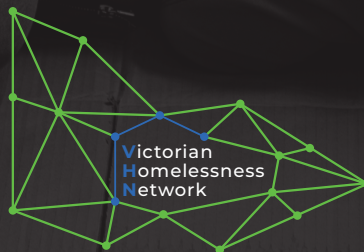
Develop a Victorian Homelessness Strategy and associated reform to ensure a sustainable and effective homelessness service system.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy should guide service system reform and invest in prevention and early intervention, ensure people experiencing homelessness and family violence have priority access to secure, permanent housing, informed by Australian Housing First principles, and backed by appropriate, ongoing homelessness support programs.

SMASHED

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AT **BREAKING POINT**

**THE CASE FOR BETTER RESOURCING
VICTORIA'S HOMELESSNESS ENTRY POINTS**



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