FOREWORD

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on existing inequities in Australian society, including the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness. The pandemic, and resultant economic downturn, has made more people susceptible to homelessness through factors such as family violence, job losses, and mortgage and rental stress. Government interventions – such as hotel housing for homeless people and eviction bans – have shown that action is possible, albeit temporarily. This entrenched issue, however, requires long-term solutions both in terms of increasing the supply of suitable housing and in addressing the drivers of homelessness.

Released in conjunction with World Homeless Day, and in partnership with the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Building a Better Future: Housing and Homelessness showcases key research by Monash experts from across disciplines. The collection examines housing and homelessness from multiple perspectives – ranging from construction innovations to facilitate more affordable forms of housing, to responding to the complex housing needs associated with domestic violence. Although diverse in nature, each of the perspectives presented here acknowledge the central role that secure housing plays in the well-being and dignity of all people, and provide salient advice for policy makers charged with building a better future.

PRESS KIT

The Better Governance and Policy Press Kit is a downloadable file containing all content included in relevant Policy Insights collections. The Press Kit provides links to key articles, reports and researchers, and is intended to be an accessible resource for members of the media and for policy makers. The Quick Links page (found on page 5) provides quick access to key collection webpages.

If you have any questions, or would like further information regarding the Press Kit, please contact: better-governance-policy@monash.edu
ABOUT

Building a Better Future: Housing and Homelessness is a collaboration between Better Governance and Policy and the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law.

Better Governance and Policy

Better Governance and Policy at Monash University draws together research strengths from across faculties and disciplines and through external partnerships to advance the design and practice of governance and policy in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. Better Governance and Policy facilitates the output of highly relevant, research-based contributions to discussions of contemporary issues in policy and governance and enables increased knowledge exchange and policy engagement locally, nationally, and internationally.

Better Governance and Policy is also a space for the development of a new approach to structured dialogue at scale between government, industry, and academia. These external partnerships will further enable the translation of excellent research into fair and better societal outcomes.

We value collaboration, innovation, and the utilisation of excellent research to effectively inform governance and policy.

Find out more

Twitter: @MonashPolicy

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Castan Centre for Human Rights Law

The Castan Centre is a world-renowned academic centre using its human rights expertise to create a more just world where human rights are respected and protected, allowing people to pursue their lives in freedom and with dignity. The Centre’s innovative approach to public engagement and passion for human rights are redefining how an academic institution can create important and lasting change.

We work to influence legislation and government policy, improve government officials' understanding of human rights in Australia and elsewhere and nurture the next generation of human rights leaders through our outstanding student programs.

Find out more

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QUICK LINKS
BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE: HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS
PRESS KIT 1 VERSION 1 | 7 OCTOBER, 2020

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RESEARCH AND REPORTS

KEY REPORTS, RESEARCH BRIEFS, SUBMISSIONS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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FEATURED EDITORIAL

HOMELESSNESS AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

An Editorial by Professor the Hon. Kevin Bell AM QC

People without a secure and ongoing home number at least in the tens of thousands in Australia and the hundreds of millions in the world. Homelessness takes many forms and affects individuals in varying and complex ways. Importantly, homelessness does not solely refer to those sleeping rough without a roof over their head. Homelessness includes those with no permanent place of residence, those who find themselves couch surfing, individuals and families packed into crowded rooming houses, and women and children escaping an abusive home and moving into short-term safe housing (VIC Interim Report). Homelessness increases the vulnerability of society’s most vulnerable, and it has been the subject of frequent condemnation by United Nations human rights bodies and mandates for decades. There is currently a Federal and Victorian parliamentary inquiry into homelessness. As the number of individuals facing inadequate housing rise every year, homelessness must be approached as a fundamental human right, and not a privilege, to ensure equality, and to ensure these individuals, and families, do not continue to slip through the cracks.

Human Rights and Homelessness

The human right to adequate housing is one of the most basic human rights. It is recognised, and provided for, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and in a further nineteen international conventions, covenants, declarations, recommendation and resolutions within the United Nations. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Being able to access adequate secure housing is linked to basic human dignity, and to better quality of life, including increased mental and physical health, and lower mortality and morbidity rates. The right to housing, therefore, is foundational to the realisation of other human rights. Human rights law is as universal as the air that we all breath. Homeless people possess the full dignity of their humanity and have the same human rights to life and health as everyone else. The individual who is sleeping rough, or facing the prospect of insecure, short-term crisis housing, is not simply a welfare case or a victim of social injustice. They are a rights bearer, as eligible for the same basic human rights as everyone else.

COVID-19: The Opportunity to End Homelessness

With the onset of a global pandemic, Australia largely heeded the calls of the United Nations to protect all people everywhere from the threat of COVID-19. With citizens restricted to the home in order to curb the spread of the virus, government funding has been made available to ensure the safety of those without a fixed address. In June 2020, very few people were living without a roof over their head. Currently in Victoria, most homeless people are not to be found sleeping rough in motor vehicles, on the streets or in squats. They are in boarding houses, hostels, unused student accommodation, hotels and other such temporary housing at government expense. With a fixed address, and government-issued mobile phones, these individuals and families are able to be properly assessed by support workers. Perhaps for the first time, we have an understanding of the history, and current and future needs of the majority of those facing homelessness. With this vital information, we have an opportunity to end homelessness in Australia.
Currently in Victoria, the legal framework for homelessness is inadequate. The right to housing is not enshrined in the Victorian charter, or elsewhere, and there is no explicit obligation to end homelessness in any legal statute. Over time we have seen withdrawal of government from the area of direct provision of social housing and the gradual privatisation of housing as a commodity, as against a social right. Accessible housing is vital to lowering the numbers of those experiencing homelessness; ending homelessness requires long-term security of shelter, and the benefits associated with it, not merely short-term crisis housing. We are presented now with an opportunity view housing as a human right, and therefore, to ensure the equal right of all people, including the homeless, to lead a dignified life.

Additional Sources


POLICY INSIGHTS & RESPONSES

Short Responses

1. YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING OUT OF HOME CARE NEED EXTENDED CARE AND HOUSING PROGRAMS
   
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5. PUBLIC HOUSING STOCK SHOULD BE EXPANDED, AS SHOULD THE CRITERIA FOR ACCESS TO IT
   
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6. ALLOCATE A SET PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL HOUSING STOCK TO PUBLIC HOUSING
   
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7. WE NEED SPECIFIC CRISIS ACCOMMODATION FOR PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
   
   Associate Professor Silke Meyer

8. CO-DESIGN HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES WITH THOSE WHO WILL USE THEM
   
   Associate Professor Libby Callaway
**POLICY RESPONSE 1: YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING OUT OF HOME CARE NEED EXTENDED CARE AND HOUSING PROGRAMS**

**Associate Professor Philip Mendes**  
*Department of Social Work*

**What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?**

Young people transitioning from out of home care (often called care leavers or care experienced young people) at no later than 18 years of age are highly over-represented in homeless populations throughout Australia. This has been a public policy concern since 1989 when the National Inquiry into Homeless Children (known as the Burdekin Report) found that a large number of homeless young people came from state care backgrounds. That Inquiry censured all governments for failing to provide these young people with the ongoing ‘nurture and support…to which they are legally entitled’ (p.117).

**Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?**

Governments arguably have a moral and legal duty of care as a substitute parent to provide ongoing assistance to young people who grew up in statutory out of home care. Yet currently, there is minimal specific funding allocated to ensure stable and affordable housing for this cohort. Consequently, many care leavers exit care directly into homelessness, and others endure ongoing housing instability.

**Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?**

All States and Territories offer some limited form of post-care support to assist with accommodation, education or training, employment, legal advice, finances and health services. But to date, all legislative provisions for funding and support once young people have left the system at no later than 18 years of age are discretionary, not mandatory. Some young people receive effective ongoing support from carers and workers, and are able to access mainstream social and economic opportunities. Too many receive little if any ongoing support, and become reliant on crisis intervention systems.

**If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?**

Four Australian States and Territories (Victoria, WA, SA and Tasmania) have introduced limited extended care programs in the last two years. These programs were introduced in response to the Home Stretch campaign led by Anglicare Victoria, to urge all Australian jurisdictions to offer extended care programs till at least 21 years. These programs should be offered universally to care leavers in all jurisdictions, whether transitioning from foster care, residential care or kinship care. Those who are unable to remain with existing carers should be provided with a guaranteed housing allowance until they turn 21 years of age.

**Additional Resources:**


https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/327
POLICY RESPONSE 2: EFFICACY OF PAST RESPONSES TO HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS SHOULD INFORM FUTURE POLICIES

Associate Professor Seamus O’Hanlon
Department of History

What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?
Housing affordability and the lack of security of tenure, especially for renters.

Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?
An historical perspective on these issues is necessary, including knowledge on how these issues have been dealt with in the past - for better or worse.

Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?
Organisations such as Common Ground are doing some interesting work in this area, especially in dealing with the collapse of the rooming house market. However, by default they have to deal with the most at risk and vulnerable. Secure shelters for welfare recipients and low paid workers are becoming increasingly important, especially in gentrifying inner city areas and as these cohorts age.

If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?
Invest in public or publicly-funded housing that comes with security of tenure. In many cases the public already own the land, which is always the greatest cost of housing, so use it for the social good, rather than simply selling it off to the highest bidder.

Additional Resources:
POLICY RESPONSE 3: MASS CUSTOMISATION CAN INCREASE ACCESS TO QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Dr Victor Bunster

Future Building Initiative (FBI) Lab, Department of Civil Engineering and Faculty of Art Design & Architecture

What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?

Ensuring universal access to housing is a significant policy challenge. Ongoing population growth and urbanisation rates mean that over the next decades millions of people will continue increasing the current housing demand. Devising strategies to address this issue while ensuring residential quality and sustainable growth is a complex and multi-faceted problem.

Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?

We need cost-effective strategies to enable matching the aspirations of different households to the characteristics of their future homes. The principles of mass production are deeply embedded in the construction industry, but the same economies of scale that enable building efficiency can result in significant residential and environmental quality problems.

Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?

Enabling households to take an active role in the design of their future homes can increase their sense of belonging, reduce project risks, help manage expectations, and result in more sustainable outcomes. However, these participatory schemes are often difficult to scale-up to provide viable alternatives to conventional housing.

If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?

Mass customisation can help to inform policies and programs aimed at ensuring access to quality affordable housing. Mass customisation takes advantage of what is known as economies of scope; efficiencies that are made possible by variety of production rather than volume. Increasing the diversity of a product offering can enhance its ability to meet individual needs without substantially increasing costs or lead times. This means that mass customisation can enable users to participate in the design of their own homes while ensuring that the outcomes will remain within the limits of affordable production.

Additional Resources:


POLICY RESPONSE 4: SUPPORT POPULATION INCREASES WITH STRATEGIC PLANNING IN GREYFIELD SUBURBS

Dr Lee-Anne Khor  
Monash Urban Lab

What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?

The dialogue around housing affordability needs to shift focus from the initial cost of house purchase, to long-term affordable living across different life-cycles. Increasing the diversity, quality and sustainability of medium density housing types in Melbourne is a key factor for achieving more equitable, liveable and secure housing for different households and tenure structures.

Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?

Outside Melbourne’s activity centres and priority development areas, housing redevelopment is low-density, piecemeal and market-led. Precinct-scaled design and planning strategies are needed in Melbourne’s greyfield suburbs to enable a viable range of high-quality housing models to be delivered with sufficient infrastructure, services and amenity to support impending population increases.

Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?

Plan Melbourne 2017: Policy 2.2.4 provides support and guidance for greyfield areas to deliver more housing choice and diversity. Building on a pilot project with Maroondah City Council and DELWP, Swinburne University have developed three 'playbooks' that encompass the following: 1) municipal implementation of precinct-scaled planning at a local level; 2) inputs and processes for developer viability; and 3) legal mechanisms and resident brokerage for precinct redevelopment.

If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?

What armatures were put in place to help provide accommodation for rough sleepers during Covid19? What would be required to sustain these arrangements in the long-term? Prioritising access to secure housing for everyone is not an impossibility.

Additional Resources:


What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?

Our research on Australian households and housing affordability stress has demonstrated that if properly measured as disposal income after housing expenditures have been met, then poverty in Australia is considerably more wide-spread than policy-makers think. Therefore, affordable housing should be one of the key policies for addressing poverty.

Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?

If the shortage of affordable housing is considered as one of the key factors of poverty, then increase in public and social housing stock should be approached in a systemic and structured way. We need to estimate the amount of public and social housing needed, then reconsider eligibility criteria and pricing policies in order to discourage public housing residents from continuing to use public housing if their financial situation improves.

Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?

States and territories have gained considerable experience in managing and allocating public housing stock. This experience can be further improved and fully utilised if public housing stock is considerably expanded, and access to it is given not just to recipients of social security benefits, but also to working people on low incomes, particularly singles and single parents.

If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?

The main reason for homelessness is the shortage of affordable housing. There are several steps that can help solving this problem; 1) A comprehensive program of building new public housing stock, coordinated and financed by the federal and state governments with participation from the private sector, i.e., a public/private partnership; 2) Giving homeless people some priority in obtaining public housing; 3) Constructing a scheme of rent increasing, in time, from $0 to the standard public housing rent; but 4) This rent increase scheme should be based on mutual obligation, similar to and together with, the job seeker benefit, i.e., access to $0 rent would be contingent on looking for a job and/or studying towards a qualification.

Additional Resources:


POLICY RESPONSE 6: ALLOCATE A SET PERCENTAGE OF STATE/TERRITORY HOUSING STOCK TO PUBLIC HOUSING

Associate Professor Lionel Frost  
Department of Economics, Monash Business School

Dr Luc Borrowman  
National Disability Insurance Agency

What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?

Shortages of public housing, and the stigma associated with its use. The hard lockdown of public housing towers in Melbourne highlighted the living conditions in the towers and the needs of tenants.

Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?

A hard target of a set percentage of each State and Territory housing stock to be allocated to public housing, with appropriate Commonwealth incentives for meeting that target. Current shortages of public or affordable housing limit pathways out of crisis accommodation.

Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?

The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation has increased access to low-cost funds for community housing. This is a first step in securing private funding and potentially institutional investments in the social housing sector.

If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?

Prioritize breaking down the boundaries between housing and mental health. Increase the ability of those in need to access support in a timely manner, both in terms of emergency housing and mental health interventions. A housing-first approach that provides vulnerable people with a choice of secure, safe, and stable housing will increase the likelihood of positive mental health outcomes.

Additional Resources:


POLICY RESPONSE 7: WE NEED SPECIFIC CRISIS ACCOMMODATION FOR PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**Associate Professor Silke Meyer**
Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre; Criminology, School of Social Sciences

**What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?**

The current pandemic has further highlighted the ongoing shortage of adequate crisis accommodation for adult and child victim survivors fleeing domestic and family violence (DFV). General crisis accommodation is equally under-resourced and does not adequately meet the needs of victims with recent traumatic experiences and often complex support needs.

**Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?**

A key population missing from the discussion around insufficient DFV related crisis accommodation are alleged perpetrators of DFV. While courts are increasingly holding perpetrators accountable for their abusive behaviour by using exclusion orders that remove the alleged perpetrators from the family home, there is no perpetrator specific crisis accommodation. It is crucial to provide crisis accommodation along with holistic support and risk management that addresses perpetrator needs. Homeless perpetrators are often invisible to the service system and pose an ongoing risk to victims and children. Homelessness further poses a substantial barrier to perpetrators of violence engaging in meaningful behaviour change.

**Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?**

Australian policies have addressed the housing needs of victims and children affected by DFV for the past two decades through a move towards ‘Safe@Home’, ‘Staying home, leaving violence’ and similar initiatives that allow victims and children to remain in the family home while the perpetrator is being removed. So far, these policies and programs are rarely accompanied by holistic perpetrator support and monitoring. Investing in this type of support needs to be seen as an investment in victims and children's long-term safety and housing stability along with family wellbeing more broadly.

**If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?**

In relation to DFV, it is crucial to increase the availability of DFV specific crisis accommodation for child and adult victims to ensure immediate safety along with wraparound support towards recovery and long-term housing stability. Here, investment in crisis accommodation, risk monitoring and wraparound support for perpetrators is equally important. If we don't invest in holistic perpetrator support, we will continue to see perpetrators breaching protection orders, blaming victims for their current homelessness and using retaliatory violence for having been excluded from the home. This is not conducive to perpetrator compliance and behaviour change and deteriorates victims and children's safety and housing stability in the long-run; even where victims and their children are initially able to remain in the family home.

**Additional Resources:**


POLICY RESPONSE 8: SUPPORT SERVICES SHOULD BE CO-DESIGNED WITH THOSE WHO WILL USE THEM

Associate Professor Libby Callaway
Rehabilitation, Ageing and Independent Living Research Centre & Occupational Therapy Department, School of Primary and Allied Healthcare

What is a key policy challenge currently facing governments in relation to housing and homelessness?

Whilst new initiatives like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and My Aged Care offer more timely access to in-home supports and equipment, the lack of accessible housing in Australia remains a major barrier for people with disability or who are ageing to have a choice regarding where they live, and who they live with.

Who (or what) is missing from the discussion of the policy challenge you have described?

People with ageing or disability-related support needs must be consulted on housing and support options that meet both their preferences and needs. The Disability and Aged Care Royal Commissions underway in Australia provide evidenced examples of these people being shut out from policy discussions on home and living options, and how this must change.

Are there currently any policies in place that successfully respond to this challenge? If so, what are some of the positive impacts these policies have had?

The Australian Building Codes Board has provided preliminary options and costings on possible inclusion of a minimum accessibility standard for housing in the National Construction Code, currently under review. The City of Brisbane has shown some policy leadership in this area, introducing a universal housing design incentive for new builds in 2019 – see here.

If a key government decision maker (e.g. a Cabinet Minister) asked you for advice on how to end homelessness, what would you say? Why?

People who are ageing or experience disability are often forced to move into residential aged care when either their support or housing access needs, or both, cannot be met. Government could reduce these negative outcomes using key policy levers, such as:

- Incentivising universal housing design;
- Supporting minimum housing accessibility standards in the National Construction Code;
- Investing in social housing and shared equity models that build housing futures;
- Enacting a National Disability Strategy that facilitates inclusion for all, and;
- Ongoing investment in the NDIS and other social care initiatives like My Aged Care.

Co-design of housing and support solutions with people with lived experience of disability or ageing is imperative.

Additional Resources:


REPORTS & RESEARCH: ENDING HOMELESSNESS

*Research: Ending Homelessness* presents key reports, research briefs, submissions and academic research. Focusing on the current state of homelessness, and providing innovative solutions, the collection provides in depth analysis and key findings by Monash University’s expert researchers.

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**THE RIGHTS OF HOMELESS PERSONS: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AUSTRALIA’S HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS**

The Hon Kevin Bell AM QC | Castan Centre

*Submission to the house of representatives standing committee on social policy and legal affairs inquiry into homelessness in Australia.*

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**BUILDING BACK BETTER FROM COVID-19**

The Hon Kevin Bell AM QC | Castan Centre

*Submission to the house of representatives standing committee on social policy and legal affairs inquiry into homelessness in Australia.*
POLICY IN FOCUS: ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Policy in Focus: Ending Homelessness presents key media reports, blog posts and expert opinions on current policy issues. Providing insight into the current state of homelessness, and presenting evidence-based solutions, the collection provides in depth analysis and key findings by Monash University's expert researchers.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OPENS THE DOOR TO SOLVING THE HOMELESSNESS PROBLEM
The Hon Kevin Bell AM QC and Steven Roberts | Lens

COVID-19, BUILDING BACK BETTER AND ENDING HOMELESSNESS
The Hon Kevin Bell AM QC | Castan Centre

FEAR OF FAMILY VIOLENCE SPIKE AS COVID-19 IMPACT HITS HOUSEHOLDS
Kate Fitz-Gibbon & Silke Meyer | Lens

‘IT FELT LIKE A PRISON’ – TOO MANY YOUNG AUSTRALIANS ARE STILL STUCK IN NURSING HOMES
Libby Callaway and Sue Sloan | The Conversation

FROM CARE TO CUSTODY: THE TRAGIC TRAJECTORY OF CROSSOVER KIDS
Susan Baidawi and Rosemary Sheehan | Lens

WHEN IT'S EASIER TO GET MEDS THAN THERAPY: HOW POVERTY MAKES IT HARD TO ESCAPE MENTAL ILLNESS
Anthony Cichello, Graham Meadows, Anton Neville Isaacs, Frances Shawyer | Insight

ROBIN BOYD HOUSES: SMALL HOMES, BIG IMPACT
Naomi Stead | Lens

STEALTH HOUSING: INCREASING THE RESILIENCE OF AUSTRALIA’S GROWING CITIES
Alysia Bennett | Lens
VICTORIA LEADS THE WAY ON FAMILY VIOLENCE, BUT CANBERRA NEEDS TO LIFT ITS GAME

Kate Fitz-Gibbon, JaneMaree Maher, Jude McCulloch and Sandra Walklate | The Conversation

WHERE THE HEART IS: CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL HOUSING MODELS FOR A GREATER SOCIAL GOOD

Melissa Marino | Lens
Further information

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better-governance-policy@monash.edu

www.monash.edu/research/better-governance-and-policy