

BLESSING BAGS

IMPACT

REPORT

2023-2024

Blessing Bags would like to acknowledge the many sacred lands and waterways we work on. While our work is predominantly on Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung lands, we know our bags travel far and wide across the many traditional lands in what we now call Victoria.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that First Nations people are shamefully over-represented in the population of those experiencing homelessness, and accessing homelessness services in Victoria.

Our aim is to help those experiencing homelessness, and our ability to provide meaningful change naturally extends to joining the struggle for true and meaningful reconciliation with First Nations peoples. This was and always will be Aboriginal land.

OVER 18,000

Hygiene packs distributed since 2015

3,112

Hygiene packs distributed this year

25

Partner Organisations

\$13,475.46

Raised this year

5

Schools participated in our outreach program

4

Community Day events

1,139

Instagram followers

**OUR YEAR IN
NUMBERS**

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SNAPSHOT HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA

The homelessness crisis in Australia, particularly among children, demands immediate and sustained action. With increased funding for services, more affordable housing, and targeted support, Australia can work toward ending homelessness and ensuring every child has a safe place to call home.

Homelessness remains a significant and growing issue in Australia, affecting thousands of individuals, particularly children. In 2022-2023, more than 76,000 children under the age of 18 sought assistance from homelessness services. This number includes children who fled their homes due to violence or neglect, with almost 16,000 seeking help on their own, unaccompanied by a parent or caregiver (Homelessness Australia, 2024). These statistics underscore a troubling reality—Australia's failure to address child homelessness, which is exacerbated by a severe shortage of affordable housing and insufficient funding for homelessness services.

Despite seeking help, many children remain without stable housing. Over 25,000 children were still homeless at their last contact with services in 2022-2023, and in some states, this number rose by as much as 20% compared to the previous year (Homelessness Australia, 2024). The growing homelessness crisis is

compounded by limited resources in homelessness services, which have resulted in nearly 20,000 children being turned away without any assistance in 2022-2023 (Homelessness Australia, 2024). These figures point to an urgent need for systemic changes, including increased investment in homelessness services, the expansion of social housing, and targeted support for children, especially those without family support.

The broader homelessness crisis in Australia is also on the rise. A recent report from the Australian Homelessness Monitor reveals that homelessness has increased significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2023-2024, more than three-quarters of homelessness service providers reported a significant rise in demand, with many agencies struggling to meet the need for housing assistance (Australian Homelessness Monitor, 2024). One key challenge is the difficulty in securing appropriate housing, with 76% of services reporting that finding suitable homes for clients had become much harder compared to the previous year (Australian Homelessness Monitor, 2024). This situation has led to longer periods of homelessness for many individuals, with support services stretched thin and unable to provide timely solutions.

SNAPSHOT

HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA

The rising rates of homelessness are not limited to those traditionally at risk. Increasingly, employed individuals are also seeking crisis assistance due to the growing unaffordability of housing in Australia. The affordability crisis, coupled with limited social housing options, has forced many people into homelessness, including those who previously may have been able to maintain stable living situations (Australian Homelessness Monitor, 2024). This shift highlights a troubling trend where housing instability is no longer confined to the most vulnerable populations but is extending to a broader cross-section of society.

Addressing homelessness in Australia requires urgent action. It is not simply a result of individual circumstances but a systemic failure driven by a lack of affordable housing, inadequate social safety nets, and insufficient funding for homelessness services.

To resolve this crisis, Australia needs a comprehensive strategy that includes immediate investment in housing, support services, and long-term planning. A dedicated Homelessness Action Plan focused on ending child homelessness and reducing overall homelessness could be a step in the right direction, ensuring that both children and adults have access to the care and housing they need (Homelessness Australia, 2024).

In closing, homelessness is a growing crisis in Australia, with children and increasingly diverse groups of people bearing the brunt. It requires a concerted effort from governments and society to address the root causes and provide lasting solutions to end homelessness for good.

References:

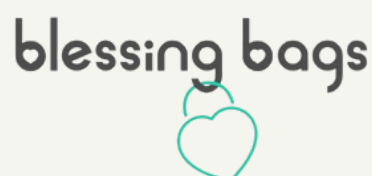
Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., Moore, J., Hartley, C., Aminpour, F. and Eagles, K. (2024) Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024; Sydney: UNSW City Futures Research Centre <https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/>

Homelessness Australia. (2024) 2024 Child Homelessness Snapshot. <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/>

Read the full reports:

[Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024](#)

[2024 Child Homelessness Snapshot](#)



OUR STORY SO FAR

OUR PURPOSE

Our organisation's mission is to provide people experiencing homelessness with essential items that we often take for granted.

Blessing Bags' vision is to see people experiencing homelessness treated with compassion while receiving the appropriate support, and for these individuals to have access to safe, affordable and secure housing.

We recognise the need to advocate for the rights of those facing hardship including those experiencing homelessness.

The concept of community informs everything we do as our efforts look to strengthen and support people accessing our services

OUR IMPACT

Blessing Bags have the privilege of providing bags to a wide range of individuals and communities across Melbourne and surrounds. We partner with organisations, crisis centres, schools, community groups and businesses who reach out to us for support.

We supply bags of toiletries containing: a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, tissues a muesli bar and a note of hope and encouragement.

These bags are regularly distributed to individuals and groups who are facing disadvantage and/or homelessness.

18K

BLESSING BAGS FULL OF
HYGIENE ESSENTIALS
HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED
SINCE 2015

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

This year has been one of the most challenging yet for those of us working to combat homelessness in Australia. The housing and cost of living crises have pushed homelessness services across the country to the brink. As we reflect on the past 12 months, it is clear that the demand for our services has reached unprecedented levels, with more individuals and families seeking support than ever before.

Although it is encouraging to see our service being increasingly recognised in the community, the significant increase in requests reflects an alarming trend. The growing number of people, particularly children, turning to us for help highlights the severe impact of housing insecurity. In response to the rising demand from school-aged children, we began providing hygiene packs directly to schools. Unfortunately, this increase is part of a broader issue—over 76,000 children under 18 sought help from homelessness services across Australia in 2022-23. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for better public policy solutions.

Despite the challenges, our team continues to rise to the occasion. One of the year's highlights was being named a finalist in the 7NEWS Young Achievers Awards in the Connecting Communities category. This recognition is a testament to the incredible effort our volunteers have put in, as well as the tremendous growth of our organisation over the past year.

Reflecting on the goals we set out in last year's annual report, I am proud to share that we made significant strides in offering more community days, growing our capacity.

We made community pop-up events a priority this year, holding them every three months to engage the public in packing items and deepening our community connections. We expanded our teams in research, policy, fundraising, and communications, allowing us to distribute more hygiene packs and strengthen partnerships across Victoria.

Looking forward, our focus remains on sustainable growth. We've been actively exploring diverse fundraising models, including engaging with grant opportunities, to establish stable and long-term funding for our organisation. Our policy and research team has been developing a sustainability checklist, reaffirming our commitment to operating in an environmentally responsible manner.

This year has also been a time of reflection for us as an organisation. We have been reviewing our practices to ensure we are as effective and efficient as possible. The growth we've experienced is a direct result of these efforts, and I couldn't be more proud of the work our team has accomplished.

To our volunteers and supporters, thank you for your unwavering dedication to Blessing Bags Melbourne. It is because of your kindness and support that we continue to expand our reach and help those most vulnerable in our community. As we move into the next year, we remain committed to building on this momentum and further strengthening our impact in the fight against homelessness.

Monique Murray
Director, Blessing Bas Melbourne

THIS YEAR'S OUTREACH

With the help of volunteers at our community days and through our school outreach program, we made and distributed a total of 3,131 Blessing Bags in the year ending 30 June 2024.

This takes our grand total to 18,355 Blessing Bags distributed since 2015.

COMMUNITY DAYS

For the first time since the COVID pandemic, quarterly Community Days were held

One of the key goals outlined in our 2022/23 Annual Report was to host more community day events, and we're excited to see progress in this area.

A significant factor in this improvement has been incorporating the planning and organisation of Community Days into our first meeting of the year.

Partnering with the Nook Gallery in Mornington and securing the space well in advance has also streamlined our process, helping to reduce the workload throughout the year. Looking ahead, we aim to continue refining the logistics of our Community Day events, with a particular focus on finding ways to reduce the challenges associated with transporting stock to and from the gallery.

SCHOOL OUTREACH

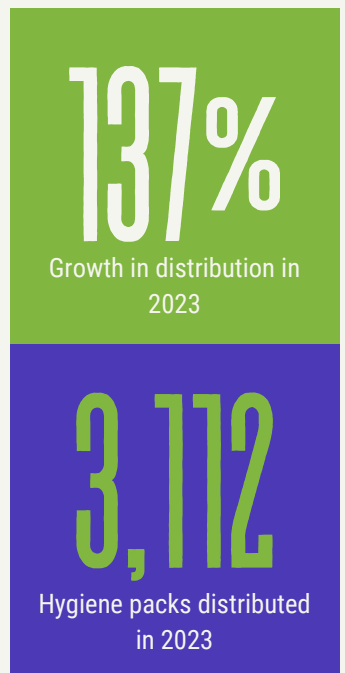
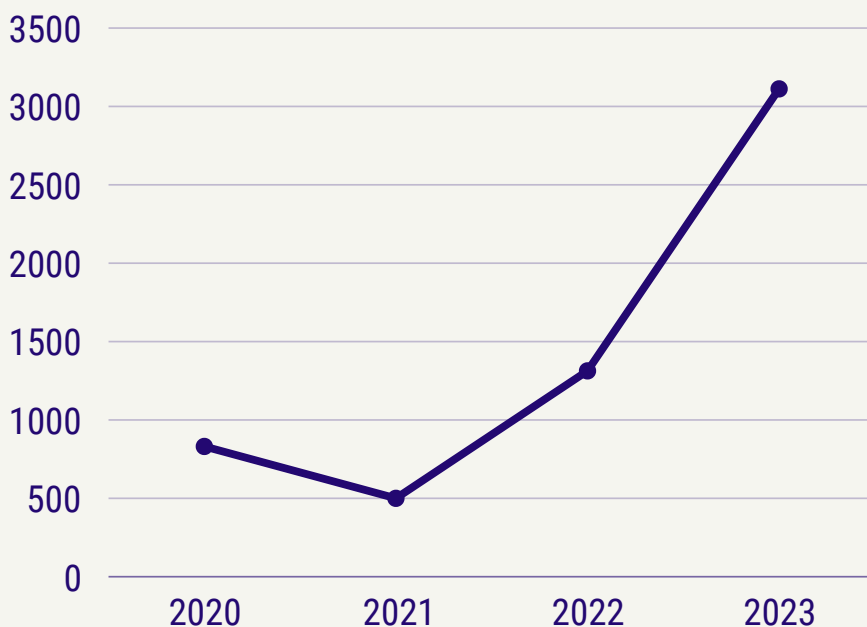
Five schools participated in our outreach program!

This year, our school outreach program continued to grow as we partnered with several schools, including Toorak College, Frankston High School, Bayside Christian College, Peninsula Specialist School, and Junior PCCI Catalyst Group. These schools engaged in various activities, from running donation drives to packing hygiene items and writing personal notes for our Blessing Bags.

Together, their efforts contributed to a significant number of Blessing Bags, making a meaningful impact on those experiencing homelessness. The enthusiasm and support from the students, staff, and wider school communities have been incredibly encouraging, and we look forward to expanding these partnerships in the coming year.

OUR DISTRIBUTION OVER THE PAST 4 YEARS

Since 2020, we have steadily increased the number of hygiene packs distributed per year.

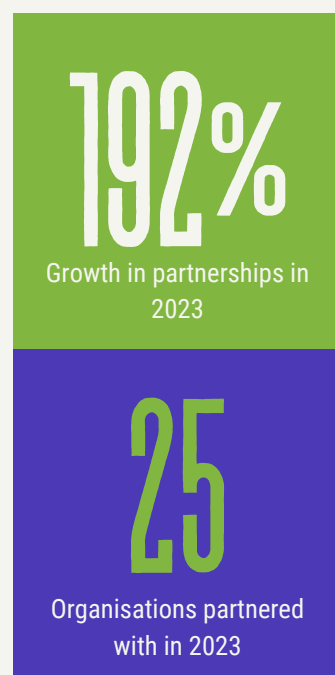
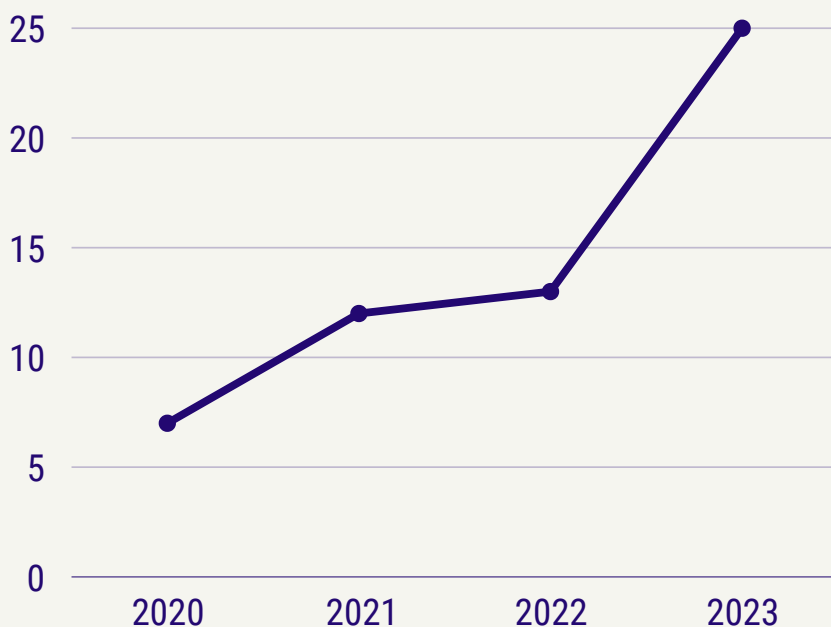


The graph above makes it clear that 2023 saw a huge growth in the number of Blessing Bags distributed. Whilst growth and expansion is generally an exciting goal for most organisations, in our case it sadly reflects the growing demand for hygiene packs from those experiencing homelessness and/or disadvantage as the homelessness crisis across Victoria continues.

We are honoured to be in a position to provide free hygiene packs to those in need and we strive to help as many people as we can; however, an ideal world would see an end to homelessness and disadvantage and therefore no need for our service.

OUR PARTNERS OVER THE PAST 4 YEARS

Since 2020, we have steadily increased the number of organisation we distribute to per year.



The graph above shows a significant increase in the number of organisations we partnered with throughout the year. These partner organisations receive our hygiene packs in bulk and distribute them directly to the people in need who access their services.

The types of organisations we partner with varies greatly and includes schools, kindergartens, domestic violence agencies, employment services, drug and alcohol support services, health clinics, community support groups and other charities.

POLICY AND RESEARCH

This year Blessing Bags Melbourne welcomed its new policy team, who embarked on some key projects.

Peoples commission into the housing crisis

The policy team prepared a statement for the People's Commission in the Housing Crisis. The Commission collated submissions from over 1500 individuals and 100 organisations. Presented to the government, their final report highlights key recommendations to addressing the severe lack of affordable, safe, adequate housing Australia-wide.

The commission asked us to demonstrate the impact of the Housing Crisis on our organisation's work. We sought out contributions and insights from Blessing Bags volunteers. Blessing Bags fastest growing demographic appeared to be children and teenagers, with internal statistics showing that approximately 30% of our hygiene packs went to this cohort. Volunteers reported that students are often unable to access hygiene at home due to poor and inadequate housing, with supplies from Blessing Bags enabling students to shower at school.

Drawing relevance to Blessing Bags' mission to provide essential hygiene products, we chose to contextualise the housing crisis from a public health perspective. Housing is a crucial social determinant of health, with a well-established relationship

between housing security and physical and mental well-being (AIHW,2022, p.7).

Government statistics paint a picture of the demographics supported by Blessing Bags. Single parents and low and middle income families are being hit hardest by the crisis. In turn this has impacted the ability for households to spend on other necessities, such as food, clothing, utilities, and preventive healthcare. (AIHW, 2022) Having adequate and affordable housing significantly decreases a child's risk of material deprivation, social exclusion, and enabled access to health and educational resources (AIHW, 2021, p 92).

We also conducted a broader analysis of the mechanisms at work affecting housing affordability. We noted that there is an increased demand for housing support services overall, against a lack of real increase to funding.

Our team identified measures already being taken to address the crisis. We made recommendations for policy solutions, including tax reforms, improved government investment in affordable housing, and funding for adjunct support services.

POLICY AND RESEARCH

Environmental Sustainability Commitment

The policy team recognises that environmental sustainability as one of BB's key values and commitments. The team is in the process of developing the already existing environmental sustainability checklist.

We have consolidated this list and identified numbers-specific, measurable outcomes. For example, evaluating what percentage of our suppliers have a formal policy commitment to environmental sustainability, and setting the goal of moving towards 50% of suppliers who have this commitment.

With this structure in place, Blessing Bags will be able to identify and achieve these goals as well as demonstrate these tangible achievements to stakeholders.

2025 and beyond

In 2025 the team will develop a proposal to research the link between homeless youth and gambling. This is pertinent to Blessing Bags as we engage with youth experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. We will also produce a Sustainability Training Module for team members, and examine the possibility of formulating a First Nations policy.

Impact and achievements

Our submission contributed to a report discussed by respected news outlets such as SBS. We formed a part of more than 120 frontline organisations and charities in this report, highlighting the top impacts of the housing crisis on people who use services like Blessing Bags.

The research we have gathered is significant not only for the Peoples' Housing Commission, but also as an evidence base informing Blessing Bags, as we seek to understand the social and economic context that we operate within. Data may inform future organisational decisions, identify demographics in need, and inform bids for future funding.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OUR GOALS 2025

SMALL STEPS TO SUCCESS

Apply for a community grant.

To explore different funding models and reduce our reliance on donations, we aim to apply for a community grant to help sustain our organisation.

Hold quarterly Community Day events.

We will continue to host regular events that engage the public and encourage them to get involved in our work.

Implement a sustainability checklist to assess the environmental impact of our Hygiene Kits.

By tracking the environmental impact of our Hygiene Kits, we aim to better understand our current practices and identify ways to improve our sustainability efforts.

KEY MILESTONES

Distribute 20,000 Hygiene Kits to the community.

Achieving this milestone would be a significant accomplishment for us and a major step toward meeting the needs of our community.

Develop a First Nations Policy for Hygiene Kit distribution.

In response to the over-representation of First Nations people in homelessness statistics, we aim to create a policy that ensures a proportionate number of our Hygiene Kits are allocated to First Nations organisations.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

FY 2023 - 2024

INCOME

Donations - Individual Contributors	\$12,039.26
Fundraising Income	\$1,436.20

TOTAL INCOME	\$13,475.46
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GROSS PROFIT	\$13,475.46
AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL INCOME	100.00%

OPERATING EXPENSES

Fundraising Expense	\$25
Liability Insurance	\$496.23
Product for Blessing Bags	\$8,810.09
Storage Expense	\$1,136.25
Venue Hire	\$710.60
Website	\$511.56

TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	\$11,689.73
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NET PROFIT	\$1,785.73
AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL INCOME	13.25%

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the people who worked tirelessly on the projects mentioned within. Additionally, the amazing contributions and donations from the community is what makes everything we do work.

Monique Murray Director

Tess Farmer Secretariat

Monique Meade Distribution

Vanshika Agarwal Social Media

Sarah Jones Fundraising

Nayana Vikhale Fundraising

Matthew Terhes Treasurer

Sam Narayanan Research

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WE THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF
BLESSING BAGS