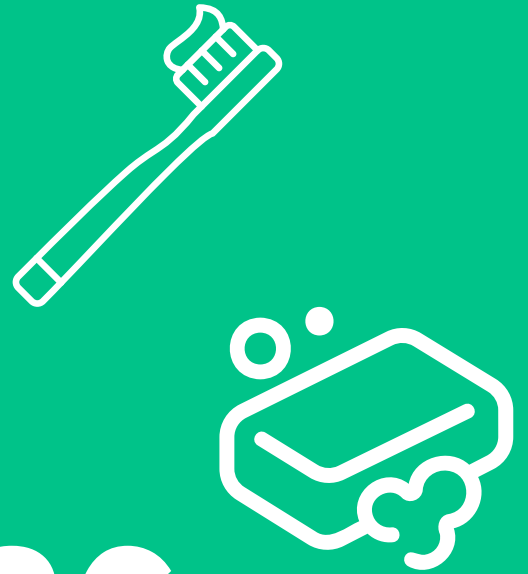


ANNUAL REPORT 2025/2026



OUR ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



BLESSING BAGS MELBOURNE RESPECTFULLY
ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL
CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE LIVE,
WORK AND SERVE, THE BUNURONG PEOPLE OF
THE KULIN NATION. WE PAY OUR DEEPEST
RESPECTS TO THEIR ELDERS PAST AND
PRESENT AND EXTEND THAT RESPECT TO ALL
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
PEOPLES.

WE RECOGNISE THE ENDURING CONNECTION
OF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES TO COUNTRY,
CULTURE AND COMMUNITY, AND
ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOVEREIGNTY WAS
NEVER CEDED. AS WE CONTINUE OUR WORK TO
SUPPORT PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HARDSHIP, WE
ARE COMMITTED TO FOSTERING RESPECT,
INCLUSION AND RECONCILIATION, AND TO
WALKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A MORE JUST
AND COMPASSIONATE FUTURE.





A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

The past year has been one of celebration, growth and transition for Blessing Bags Melbourne.

We began 2026 with our Amazing Race across the Mornington Peninsula, raising vital funds to support people experiencing homelessness and hardship. In July 2025, we proudly celebrated 10 years of Blessing Bags Melbourne—a significant milestone made possible by the dedication of our volunteers, supporters, partners and donors over the past decade. This year also marked the transition of leadership as we said farewell—but not goodbye—to our previous Director, Monique Murray. I would like to sincerely thank Monique for her passion, commitment and outstanding leadership. Her dedication has helped shape Blessing Bags Melbourne into the organisation it is today.

As Director, I am excited for the year ahead. We look forward to building stronger community partnerships, refining our community outreach program, and continuing to provide essential hygiene kits to our partner organisations. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our mission.

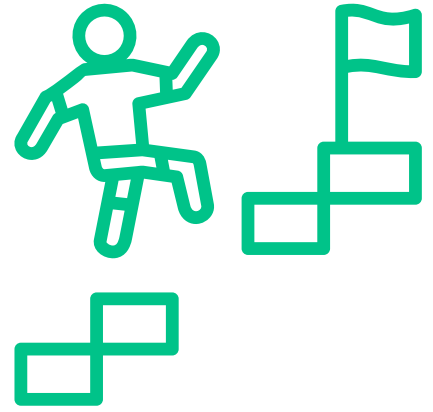
Sarah Jones

SARAH JONES

DIRECTOR

BLESSING BAGS MELBOURNE

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AT A GLANCE

Blessing Bags Melbourne is a volunteer-led charity based in Melbourne's south-east, dedicated to supporting people experiencing homelessness, disadvantage, or financial hardship. We believe that everyone deserves access to essential hygiene products and the dignity that comes with feeling clean, cared for, and valued.

Throughout the year, we bring our community together through quarterly community packing days, where volunteers of all ages assemble care packages filled with essential hygiene items. These bags are distributed through our network of community organisations, support services, and outreach partners to ensure they reach those who need them most.

Education and community engagement are central to our mission. We deliver interactive outreach programs with schools, businesses, and community groups, raising awareness about homelessness and the challenges faced by vulnerable members of our community. These sessions encourage empathy, challenge misconceptions, and provide practical opportunities for people to make a tangible difference through donation drives, volunteering, and community service.

By partnering with local businesses, schools, community organisations, and dedicated volunteers, we continue to grow our impact across Melbourne's south-east. Together, we are creating a more connected, compassionate community—one care package, one conversation, and one act of kindness at a time.

A SNAPSHOT INTO HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA 2025/26



Homelessness in Victoria has become an increasingly complex and persistent issue. For many Victorians, what was once a temporary housing crisis is becoming a prolonged experience of insecurity, with limited pathways back to stable housing. Rising housing costs, persistent family and domestic violence, and a shortage of social and affordable housing continue to push individuals and families into homelessness.

Demand for homelessness assistance remains exceptionally high. The latest complete annual data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows that more than 105,000 Victorians were assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2024/25, representing 36% of the national total of 289,000 clients. This equates to one in 66 Victorians, substantially higher than the national rate of one in 94.

Emerging evidence during 2025/2026 indicates that these pressures have continued. The Victorian Housing Register (VHR) reached 67,950 active applications by March 2026, while May 2026 sector mapping found only 41.9 FTE of assertive outreach workers supporting a rough-sleeping population exceeding 11,000, with 55 LGAs without funded assertive outreach services.

The impacts of homelessness extend far beyond the loss of physical shelter. Prolonged housing insecurity disrupts family stability, physical and mental health, children's education, and long-term employment pathways. For communities, it represents deepening inequality and compounded pressure on emergency and health systems.

Homelessness is not inevitable. It is shaped by housing affordability, the availability of long-term social housing, family violence, and the resourcing of early intervention systems. Victoria's recent experience reinforces the urgent need for sustained investment across the entire housing and homelessness continuum: growing social housing stock, expanding assertive outreach, and adequately funding specialist frontline services.

The Bigger Picture

67,950

Active Victorian Housing Applications

Social housing demand has reached historic levels, with 57,372 new and 10,578 transfer applications.

39,838

Priority Access Households

Over 58% of applicants on the housing register are assessed as having acute, urgent safety and shelter needs.

41.9 FTE

Assertive Outreach Workers

Victoria has fewer than 42 full-time outreach staff to support more than 11,000 people sleeping rough across the state.

70%

Unmet Long-Term Housing Need

Out of all clients assessed as needing permanent, long-term housing, seven in ten received neither the housing nor a referral.



THE REALITY BEHIND THE STATISTICS



Scale and Context

Homelessness in Victoria remains widespread and systemic. The 2021 Census identified 30,660 Victorians experiencing homelessness, representing a rate of 47.1 people per 10,000 population based on place of usual residence. While Census data provides a baseline point-in-time measure, administrative data reveals a far higher level of ongoing demand.

In 2024/25, Victoria's rate of specialist homelessness service provision reached 151.2 clients per 10,000 population, substantially higher than the national rate of 106.3 per 10,000 (representing an increase from Victoria's 2023/24 rate of 150.0 and the national rate of 105.1).

This systemic strain is also evident in outer-suburban areas. In Cranbourne, homelessness increased by 111.1% since 2016, with 506 people without a home on any given night. Notably, 67% were living in severely overcrowded dwellings, highlighting the often-hidden nature of homelessness.

Demand and Unmet Need

Demand continues to outstrip the operational capacity of the homelessness service system:

Accommodation Unmet Need:

Of the Victorian clients who needed short-term or emergency accommodation in 2024/2025, 69% were provided with support, 4% were referred, and 27% did not receive either.

For medium-term transitional housing, the gap is wider: 60% received neither the accommodation nor a referral.

For long-term housing, the shortfall is the most severe: only 4% were provided with long-term housing, 26% were referred, and 70% received neither.

Escalating Rough Sleeping: Frontline sector reports indicate that more than 10,600 Victorians were sleeping rough at the point of first accessing services. By May 2026, sector mapping confirmed the rough sleeping population has exceeded 11,000 individuals, compounding the strain on under-resourced outreach teams.

Who is Affected?

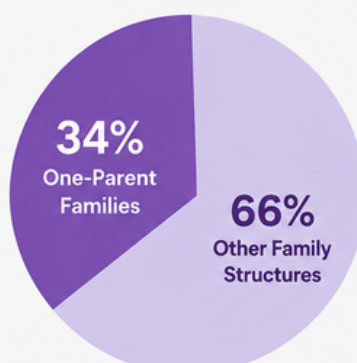
The demographic profile of people seeking specialist assistance highlights broad structural vulnerability.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN



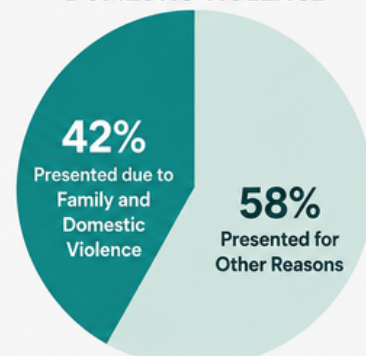
Women represented **59%** of all Victorian clients in 2024/25.

ONE-PARENT FAMILIES



One-parent families represented **34%** of all Victorian clients in 2024/25.

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



In Victoria, **42%** of clients presented due to family and domestic violence.

As of March 2026, there were **4,903** total households approved on the housing register primarily due to family violence, comprising **3,544** new applications and **1,359** transfer applications.

Source: Specialist Homelessness Services – Victoria (SHS), 2024/25; Housing Register Data, Victoria, March 2026.

- **First Nations VHR Pressures:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be severely over-represented, comprising 29% of specialist homelessness clients nationally despite representing less than 3% of the total population. On the Victorian Housing Register, First Nations households face escalating pressures: as of March 2026, there are 6,358 new applications from households where one or more people identify as Aboriginal (an increase from 6,099 in March 2025), with 3,964 of these households on the urgent Priority Access waitlist.
- **The Working Homeless:** 19% of Victorian clients were employed at the time of seeking support, while 38% were not in the labour force, underscoring how private rental inflation and cost-of-living pressures are impacting wage earners.

The primary drivers of homelessness in Victoria remain financial hardship, family violence, and housing affordability stress:

- **Leading Reasons for Presentation:** In Victoria, the top three presentation drivers in 2024/25 were financial difficulties (46%), family and domestic violence (42%), and housing affordability stress (37%).
- **Compounding Pressures:** These factors frequently intersect: an unexpected rent increase or income shock can destabilise a vulnerable household, while a lack of affordable private rentals prevents victim-survivors of family violence from establishing independent, safe homes.
- **Escalating Register Insecurity:** Between March 2025 and March 2026, VHR new applications in the urgent “Homeless with support” category increased from 15,794 to 17,096, reflecting the growing volume of unhoused applicants actively engaged with support services.

SYSTEMIC STRAIN AND OUTREACH DEFICITS

The most critical bottlenecks in Victoria's service system are the structural shortage of move-on, long-term housing, and severe regional outreach gaps:

- **Social Housing Waitlist:** Continued growth in the Victorian Housing Register reflects sustained demand and a severe shortage of available social housing.
- **Assertive Outreach Capacity:** Victoria's 41.9 FTE assertive outreach workers represent a highly constrained ratio of one worker for, conservatively, every 272 people sleeping rough. To address this deficit, sector modelling indicates that Victoria requires an immediate expansion of its assertive outreach workforce to at least 177 FTE workers to deliver comprehensive, statewide coverage across the state's local government areas.
- **Geographic Inequity:** Funded outreach is concentrated in just 28 LGAs, leaving 55 LGAs with no dedicated rough sleeping outreach. In the Wimmera, a single outreach worker covers five LGAs across nearly 34,000 square kilometres, managing a caseload of around 50 people.
- **Youth Outreach Gap:** There is a critical gap for young people: there are currently no dedicated assertive outreach programs anywhere in Victoria tailored specifically for young people sleeping rough alone.

References:

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024–25 (National and Victoria reports), Australian Government, Canberra, 2025.
2. Homes Victoria, Applications on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR), State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 2026.
3. Council to Homeless Persons, Too Short a Lifeline - Mapping Assertive Outreach report, Council to Homeless Persons, Melbourne, 2026.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimating Homelessness: Census methodology, 2021, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2023.
5. Council to Homeless Persons, Homelessness in your area / 2023, Council to Homeless Persons, Melbourne, 2023.

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Key Milestones:

- We've assembled and distributed 24,047 blessing bags since 2015.
- We facilitated two successful fundraisers in the last financial year.
- We celebrated 10 years of Blessing Bags Melbourne and honoured this commitment with a fundraising event and commemoration.
- We conducted 5 community outreach events with corporate organisations and schools across Melbourne.





13

city council areas were supported this year.

30

organisations benefited from our “Blessing Bags” care packages.

3,138

“Blessing Bags” were made in the last financial year.

1,187

Instagram followers on our Blessing Bags Instragram account.

The Amazing Race 2026

Our Amazing Race 2026 began at Belvedere Community Centre, where teams set off across the Mornington Peninsula to solve clues, complete challenges and race against the clock to be crowned the winning team. Participants could even purchase a hint or two, adding to the fun while supporting our fundraising efforts.

Challenges included completing acts of kindness at Cafe La Wheels and filling water buckets at Fishermans Beach, before finishing with a celebratory barbecue at Conifers Picnic Ground.

The event raised \$768.11, with all proceeds supporting the work of Blessing Bags Melbourne. It was a fantastic day of teamwork, community spirit and friendly competition.



10 Year Celebration Event

In 2025, we proudly celebrated 10 years of Blessing Bags Melbourne with a special evening at The Nook Gallery, bringing together our incredible supporters, volunteers, community members and valued partner organisations to reflect on a decade of making a difference.

The celebration was an opportunity to acknowledge the generosity, compassion and commitment of everyone who has supported our mission over the past ten years. Guests enjoyed delicious catering generously provided by The Winey Cow, while sharing stories of the impact Blessing Bags has made across our community.

A highlight of the evening was our silent auction, featuring an amazing range of prizes generously donated by organisations including the Melbourne Storm, Arthurs Seat Eagle and Luna Park Melbourne, along with many other generous supporters. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our guests and donors, the evening raised \$2,136.79, with every dollar helping us continue providing essential hygiene products to people experiencing hardship.

Our 10 Year Celebration was more than a fundraiser—it was a celebration of community, kindness and the thousands of lives touched through the dedication of our volunteers, donors and partners. As we look ahead to the next chapter of Blessing Bags Melbourne, we are excited to continue building strong community partnerships and expanding our impact for those who need it most.



Financial Statement

for the 2025-2026 financial year



Income

Donations - Individual Contributions	\$7,573.22
Fundraising Income	\$3,029.34
Grants	\$7,500
Total Income	\$18,102.56

Gross Profit	\$18,102.56
as a percentage of Total Income	100%

Operating Expenses

Catering	\$46.54
Fundraising Expense	\$1,209.50
Product for Blessing Bags	\$8,744.03
Public Liability Insurance	\$489.21
Stationery	\$4.50
Storage Expense	\$959.13
Vehicle Hire	\$89.67
Venue Hire	\$998.25
Total Operating Expenses	\$12,540.83

Net Profit	\$5,561.73
as a Percentage of Total Income	31%



thank you!



THANK YOU TO OUR INCREDIBLE COMMUNITY

AT BLESSING BAGS MELBOURNE, EVERY HYGIENE PACK, EVERY DONATION, EVERY VOLUNTEER HOUR AND EVERY ACT OF KINDNESS IS MADE POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF AN INCREDIBLE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE DESERVES DIGNITY AND HOPE.

TO OUR SUPPORTERS – THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY. WHETHER YOU'VE DONATED ESSENTIAL ITEMS, MADE A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION, HOSTED A DONATION DRIVE OR SIMPLY SHARED OUR MISSION WITH OTHERS, YOU ARE HELPING US REACH PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND HARDSHIP ACROSS MELBOURNE. YOUR COMPASSION CREATES REAL AND LASTING IMPACT.

TO OUR VOLUNTEERS AND TEAM – THANK YOU FOR GIVING YOUR TIME, ENERGY AND HEART. FROM SORTING DONATIONS AND PACKING BAGS TO ORGANISING EVENTS, DELIVERING SUPPLIES AND WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES, YOUR DEDICATION IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND EVERYTHING WE DO. AS A VOLUNTEER-LED ORGANISATION, WE SIMPLY COULDN'T DO THIS WITHOUT YOU.

TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS, SCHOOLS AND CORPORATE ORGANISATIONS – THANK YOU FOR STANDING ALONGSIDE US. YOUR PARTNERSHIPS, WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING AND ONGOING SUPPORT ALLOW US TO EXPAND OUR REACH AND ENSURE MORE PEOPLE RECEIVE ESSENTIAL HYGIENE ITEMS WITH DIGNITY. TOGETHER, WE ARE BUILDING A STRONGER, MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITY.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUPPORT OF FRANKSTON CITY COUNCIL FOR THEIR FINANCIAL GRANT CONTRIBUTION.

EVERY BAG PACKED REPRESENTS MORE THAN JUST ESSENTIAL ITEMS—IT REPRESENTS KINDNESS, HOPE AND THE REMINDER THAT SOMEONE CARES. THANK YOU FOR BELIEVING IN OUR MISSION AND FOR HELPING US MAKE A MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE, ONE BLESSING BAG AT A TIME.

WITH GRATITUDE,

THE BLESSING BAGS MELBOURNE TEAM



Blessing Bags Committee

Director: Sarah Jones

Deputy Director/Treasurer: Matthew Terhes

Secretary: Lauren Terhes

Grants and Policy Coordinator: Nayana Vikhale

Distribution and Stocktake Coordinator: Sachin Paul

Committee Members: Chloe Reilly, Monique Murray

Providing essential hygiene items

blessing bags
melbourne

