



Victoria's rapid housing response to extreme weather events

Lessons learned from Victorian Emergency Responses

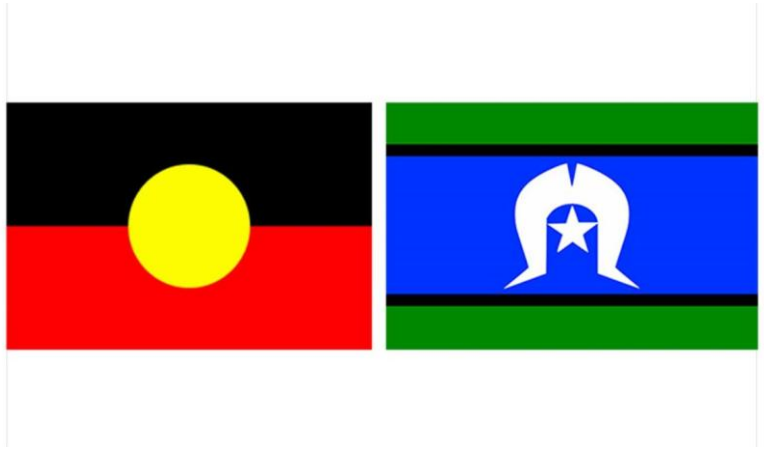
homes victoria

VICTORIA State Government

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge the Larrakia peoples, who are the Traditional Custodians of the Darwin Region on which we meet today.

I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend my respect to First Nations peoples with us today.



Victoria's Homelessness Response



Growing numbers of new and complex clients

+300mil

Victorian Government investment in addressing the growing and complex needs of homelessness people

Victoria delivers:

- **targeted prevention and early intervention measures to avoid homelessness wherever possible** through financial assistance and brokerage
- **a wide network of entry points** for intake into specialist responses for those experiencing homelessness
- **short-term, crisis accommodation or medium-term housing** options based on individual or household support and recovery needs, including specialist youth and family violence responses, and
- **long-term housing with wrap around support** for people who have experienced chronic or recurrent homelessness, including those who have been sleeping rough

Emergency Management Events are Major Housing Instability Events

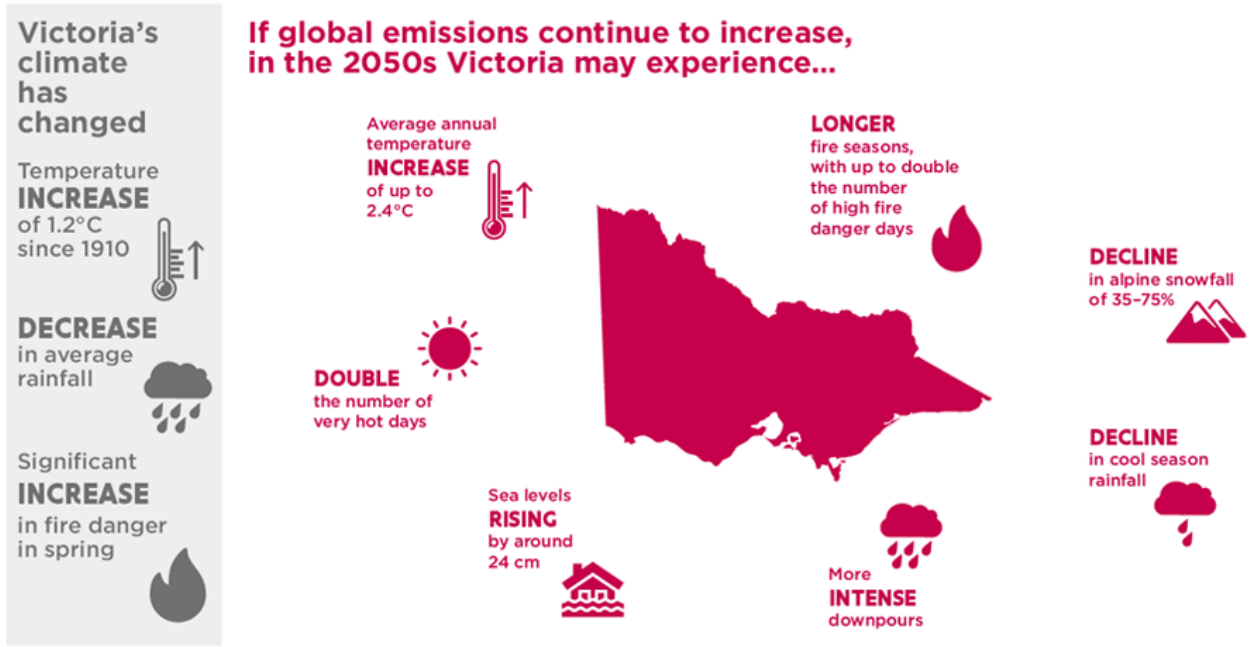


Source: October 2022 Flooding - Image via Greater Shepparton Council website

- Bushfires, floods, storms and extreme weather are not just emergency-management events. They are housing instability crises.
- Emergencies disrupt housing security, damage housing condition, dislocate support networks and cause displacement.
- For people who are already experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity the effects of an emergency is intensified.

Victoria Changing Emergency Landscape

- Victoria is experiencing increasingly complex and overlapping emergencies.
- It is anticipated that climate change will lead to more natural disasters in the future.
- These natural disasters like floods and fires cause structural damage and place strain on an already strained housing market.
- In the face of increasing and more frequent emergencies, it is critical that governments and all relevant industries take appropriate actions and support mitigation and resilience building initiatives.



Under high emissions, compared to 1986–2005. Updated from Victoria's Climate Science Report 2019

Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2021, Victoria's Climate Change Strategy.

Gaps in Conventional Emergency Management Model for Homeless People

	Emergency Event	Relief + Recovery	Post-Emergency Event
Person A	• Owns a house • Unable to live in their house due to the emergency • Has ID, insurance documents, bank account phone and internet	Receives emergency accommodation and financial assistance for the evacuation costs.	Returns to safe and secure following the emergency.
Person B	• Lives in a tent near a river. Tent and possessions are destroyed • No fixed address & no reliable phone access • Limited ID and not connected to a homelessness provider	Unable to prove their primary place of residence was affected by the emergency. Not provided financial assistance and housing assistance.	Returns to insecure housing or homelessness following the emergency.

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Gaps in Emergency Recovery Programs

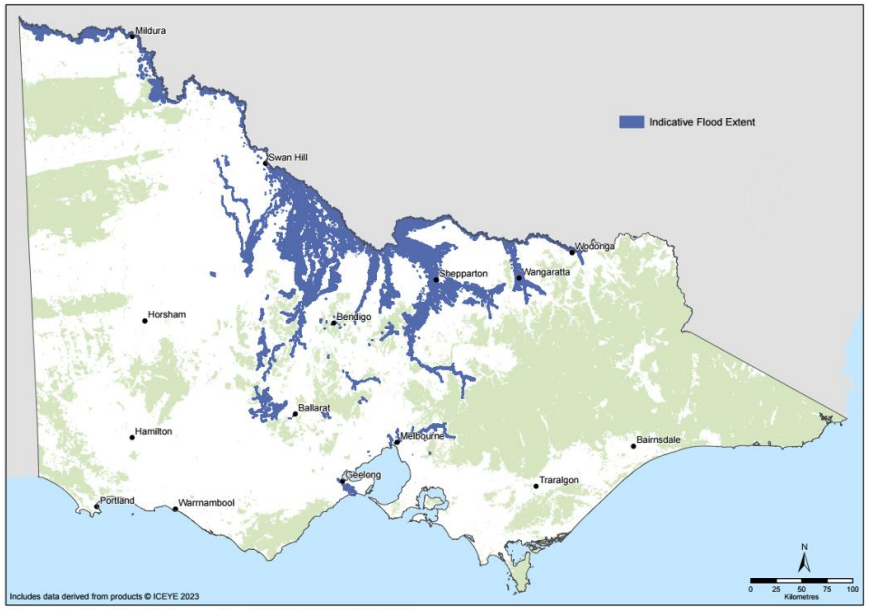
To protect public funds, programs use rigid definitions of "loss" and "residency" that create administrative obstacles for homeless people:

- **Unrecognized Loss:** Standard policies require proof of damage to a primary residence or formal asset. This fails to recognise non-traditional losses like tents, vehicles, or casual property.
- **Invisible Displacement:** Relief and recovery programs often require formal proof of primary residency in an impacted area, which unhoused individuals cannot provide.
- **Administrative Barriers:** Applying for aid typically requires formal identity documents (e.g., utility bills, registered rental agreements) and income verification can exclude cash-in-hand or casual workers who lack documentation.

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The October 2022 Victorian Floods & The January 2026 Victorian Fires

- The October 2022 Victorian floods impacted 63 Local Government Areas and Falls Creek Alpine Resort.
- 34 councils reported damage or destruction to over 4,023 residences. An estimated 6,190 people were displaced from their primary place of residence.
- The January 2026 fires over 400,000 hectares burnt, and at least 300 homes destroyed or significantly damaged across the state amid record heat and extreme fire conditions.



Source: eMap flood observation SES/FRB19/05/2023

Figure 1 Initial flood extent mapping



Recovery snapshot for 2022 Victorian Floods

10,000+
Calls to the Flood Recovery Hotline

2,500+
Clean-up and structural assessment registrations

13,000
Tonnes of flood debris removed

2,000+
Housed in temporary accommodation

3,800+
Households connected with a recovery support worker

+$24 million
In emergency relief payments were made directly to individuals to help them buy essential emergency items

The Recovery Program is **ongoing**

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Recovery snapshot for 2026 January Fires

- **Dedicated recovery pathways:** The January 2026 fires established an Emergency Recovery Support Program with a single recovery hotline and support officers able to connect people to services, financial assistance, legal assistance, wellbeing support and other programs.
- **Recovery Workers:** The model recognises that people sometimes need someone to **navigate the system with them**, rather than simply being given a phone number.
- **Emergency Management Housing:** Victoria now has dedicated operational guidance recognising emergency management housing as a pathway where housing becomes unsafe or uninhabitable following a bushfire, flood or storm

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Lessons Learned

- Before an emergency it is essential we:
    - Identify people at higher risk who are sleeping rough or in unstable accommodation
    - Remove barriers by establishing online and in-person relief directories
    - Establish local outreach arrangements and leverage existing community networks
    - Develop individual emergency or evacuation plans for known vulnerable people
    - Ensure service providers know the important partnership role they have in emergency responses
- An emergency does not create vulnerability equally
- Our emergency response should not simply restore people to where they were before the emergency
- It is an opportunity to move people toward safety, stability and housing



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What is the risk if we don't have a homelessness lens to emergency management?

Client Risk

- Injury or death
- Inability to evacuate
- Loss of essential belongings
- Trauma
- Prolonged homelessness
- Disengagement from services

System Risk

- Duplication
- People falling between emergency and homelessness systems
- Increased demand on homelessness services
- Delayed recovery
- Avoidable repeat homelessness

Inequity Risk

- Inconsistent access to assistance
- Perception that emergency assistance is inequitable
- Violations of the Charter of Human Rights

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