

Southern Homelessness Services Network

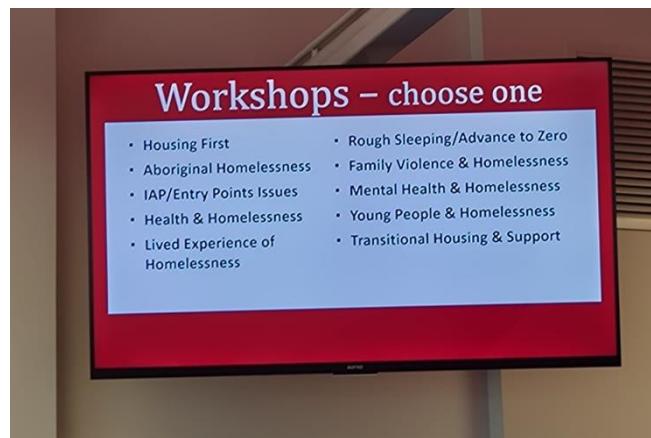
***2025 SHSN Networking
Forum and Expo***



SHSN

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1. About the Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN)

The **Vision** of the Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) is an end to homelessness in Southern Region of Melbourne.

The **Mission** of the “Victorian Homelessness Networks is to facilitate, inform and support regional homelessness services and stakeholders to work together to co-ordinate services to people who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness.”

The Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) comprises all funded Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in the Southern Region of Melbourne including services providing crisis, transitional, long term, family violence and youth support and accommodation. Our members include Launch Housing, the Salvation Army, NEAMI, Wayss and Sacred Heart Mission. The SHSN also supports allied service sectors working in homelessness. The SHSN is a resource for the homelessness sector in the South.

The key strategic SHSN objectives are:

1. Working together to end homelessness
2. Acting as a conduit between the DFFH and the regional services sector on issues and trends to inform policy
3. Strengthening the coordinated homelessness service system in the best interests of clients

2. About the SHSN Networking Forum and Expo 2025

On 29 October, the SHSN hosted a Networking Forum and Expo at No.1 Events at the Malvern Valley Golf Course. The purpose of this report is to document the activities of the Forum and the feedback received to inform SHSN advocacy and the planning for future forums.

The purpose of the SHSN Networking Forum and Expo was to

- To foster networking and information sharing among members –through speed networking, workshops and expo tables/displays.
- To gather feedback/input about the SHSN and issues of interest such as training, communication/newsletter feedback, ideas for future forums, etc.

The audience for the Forum was homelessness agencies in Melbourne’s Southern Region and agencies working with the same target group (allied services) such as health, mental health, legal, youth, material aid as well as local, State and Federal Governments. The Forum was promoted through the SHSN and associated networks including the SHSN newsletter and email list.

The program for the day was based on the successful interactive format used at previous events. The program highlighted key themes from the SHSN Strategic Plan 2025-26 as well as providing ample opportunities for networking and agency information sharing.

The Forum Program was organised into six parts (see the Agenda at Attachment A) –

1. **SHSN 2025 Review (Network Coordinator)**
2. **Keynote speaker – Zach Biggin, Launch Housing, Jenny Smith Scholarship 2024, Housing First insights: Implementation and fidelity**
3. **Keynote speaker – Jess Richter, Southside Justice, Local laws impacting people experiencing homelessness**
4. **Speed Networking**
5. **Workshops**
6. **Expo stalls (held before and after the main program)**

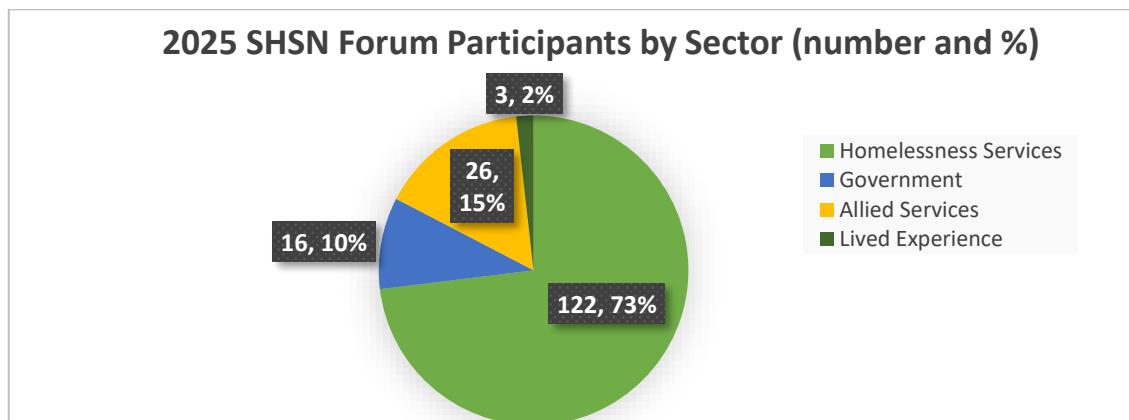
Forum registration was online using Humanitix.

2.1 Forum Attendance

Over 200 forum registrations were received with 170 attendees on the day (including speakers and facilitators). A waitlist was also held showing additional demand from about 10-12 extra people. The 2025 Forum was fully booked and was the largest forum that the SHSN has run.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of forum participants were from the homelessness sector and SHSN member agencies (73%, 122 people). The remainder of the participants were from allied services, predominantly health and mental health, and local and State Government. 16 SHSN member agencies participated in the 2025 Forum.

Figure 1. SHSN 2025 Networking Forum Participants



2.2 Expo Stalls

Participating agencies were invited to hold an expo stall to provide information to participants about their agency and programs. The following 14 agencies held an Expo stall:

- Launch Housing
- Melbourne City Mission
- wayss
- Better Health Network/RHED
- MOIRA LTD
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Local
- Olive's Place, VincentCare
- Safe Steps
- The Salvation Army Youth
- The Salvation Army Homeless
- Services Australia
- Victorian Electoral Commission
- Bayside Peninsula Family Violence Integrated Partnership
- Windermere Child and Family Services

2.3 Forum Presentations

Ruth Gordon, SHSN Coordinator, provided an overview of the activities of the SHSN over the last year. Ruth's presentation is at Attachment B. Zach Biggin from Launch Housing, presented on his research trip to Canada as the Jenny Smith Housing First Scholar 2024. Zach's presentation is at Attachment C. Jess Richter from Southside Justice presented on local laws impacting people experiencing homelessness, Jess' presentation is at Attachment D.

2.4 Lived Experience Participation

The SHSN Lived Experience members participated in the 2025 Forum by two members taking on the role of co-facilitator, facilitating the entire Forum, instead of the SHSN Coordinator who usually performs this role. The lived experience members also co-facilitated two of the workshop sessions – one on Rough Sleeping/Advance to Zero and the other on Lived Experience. This worked well and a question was included in the feedback survey on Lived Experience involvement (see Section 4.5).

3. Forum Workshops

On registering online for the Forum through Humanitix, participants were asked to nominate their top three workshop preferences from a list of workshop topics and nine topics were selected. Each workshop was facilitated by someone with specific expertise in this area with a prepared set of workshop questions. The workshops could not have been run without the support and assistance of the facilitators and volunteer scribes.

The Workshop topics were:

- Family violence
- Mental health
- IAP/Entry points issues
- Rough sleeping/Advance to Zero
- Housing First
- Young people
- First Nations homelessness
- Lived experience
- Transitional Housing & Support
- Health and Homelessness

Below is a summary of the workshop discussions. (See Attachment E for detailed notes from the workshops).

3.1 Summary of Workshop Discussions

System-Wide Themes

- Severe housing shortages across all cohorts, with crisis, transitional, and long-term options all critically insufficient.
- Rigid program structures and siloed systems (FV, mental health, AOD, child protection, homelessness) creating barriers to coordinated care.
- Workforce strain, including high turnover, vicarious trauma, and inadequate funding for staffing levels.
- Access barriers such as digital exclusion, lack of transport, fixed-address requirements, and inconsistent service availability across LGAs.
- Growing complexity of client needs, including mental health, AOD, disability, and intergenerational trauma.
- Need for culturally safe, Aboriginal-led responses and stronger partnerships with ACCOs.
- Importance of lived experience leadership, with calls for paid roles, structural support, and genuine power-sharing.



Mental Health Workshop



Advance to Zero/Rough Sleeping Workshop

Key Issues Identified Across Workshops

- Family Violence: Lack of safe housing, gaps for older people and teens, and poor cross-sector understanding.
- Mental Health: Limited outreach, closed waitlists, exclusion of rough sleepers, and hospital discharge blockages.

- Entry Points (IAP): Under-resourced, unrealistic expectations, interpreter challenges, and limited housing pathways.
- Rough Sleeping: Inconsistent outreach, digital barriers, predatory housing providers, and lack of Housing First.
- Housing First: Insufficient appropriate stock, outdated funding models, and clogged transitional housing.
- Young People: Very limited under-18 housing, service access barriers, and restrictive eligibility rules.
- Aboriginal Homelessness: Systemic discrimination, lack of culturally safe services, and need for Aboriginal-led strategies.
- Lived Experience: Engagement without support or remuneration, limited representation, and mistrust.
- Transitional Housing: Inadequate and inappropriate stock, short leases, and poor continuity of support.
- Health & Homelessness: Barriers to primary care, cost, transport, lack of Medicare cards, and trauma-related avoidance.

Solutions and Opportunities

- Multidisciplinary, flexible support models embedded in community settings (libraries, hubs, health centres).
- More public housing, Housing First programs, and crisis accommodation.
- Improved collaboration, shared frameworks, and cross-sector data systems.
- Culturally safe, Aboriginal-led pathways aligned with existing strategies.
- Youth-friendly and trauma-informed service models with integrated supports.
- Investment in workforce wellbeing, training, and sustainable funding.
- Better access to health services, including outreach, bulk-billing GPs, and embedded clinicians.
- Meaningful inclusion of lived experience, with paid roles and structural support.

Advocacy Priorities

- Large-scale public housing investment.
- National awareness campaigns highlighting the housing crisis.
- Cross-sector advocacy to State and Federal governments for long-term planning and funding for adequately resourced homelessness services.
- Legislative reform, including access to perpetrator superannuation and rooming house regulation
Community education to reduce stigma and build support for homelessness solutions.
- Support for Treaty and ACCO-led reforms.



Aboriginal Homelessness Workshop



Young People Workshop

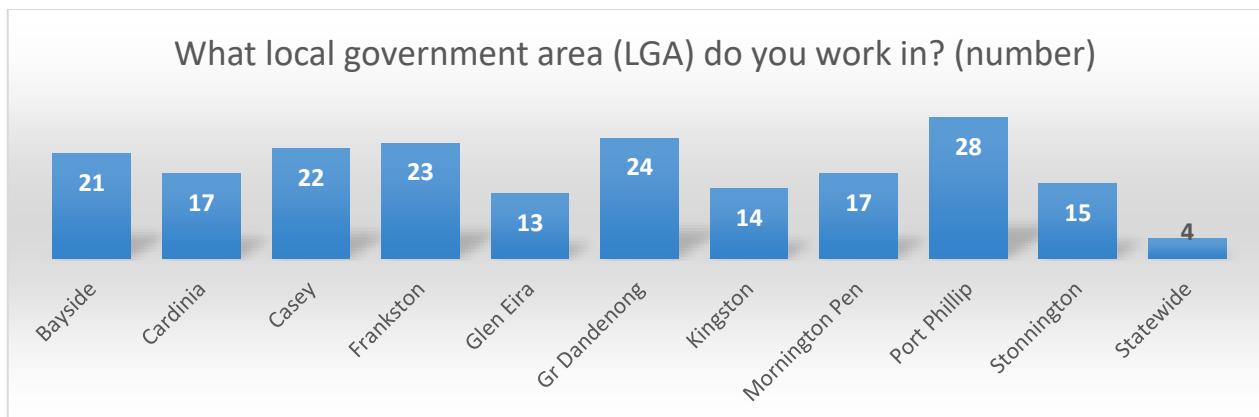
4. SHSN Forum Feedback

Forum participants were invited to complete an online forum feedback form using Microsoft Forms. 73 forms were completed representing a response rate of 34%. Quotes from the surveys are included in this section. The respondents were from:

- Homelessness agencies (66%)
- Allied agencies (19%)
- Government (11%)
- Lived Experience (3%)

Survey respondents worked across the whole Southern region with higher representation from the City of Port Phillip, Greater Dandenong, Frankston and Casey and lower participation from Kingston and Glen Eira (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2 2025 SHSN Forum participants – areas worked in

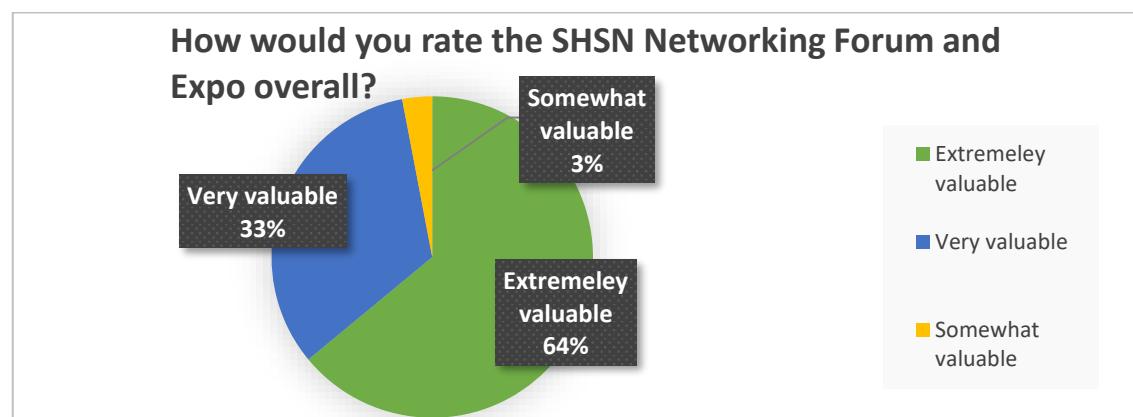


4.1 Overall Forum Feedback

98% of respondents said they would attend another SHSN Forum in the future with only one respondent saying they might attend.

The majority of respondents rated the SHSN Networking and Expo “very or extremely valuable” (97%) with no respondents finding the event not valuable (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Overall rating for 2025 SHSN Forum and Expo

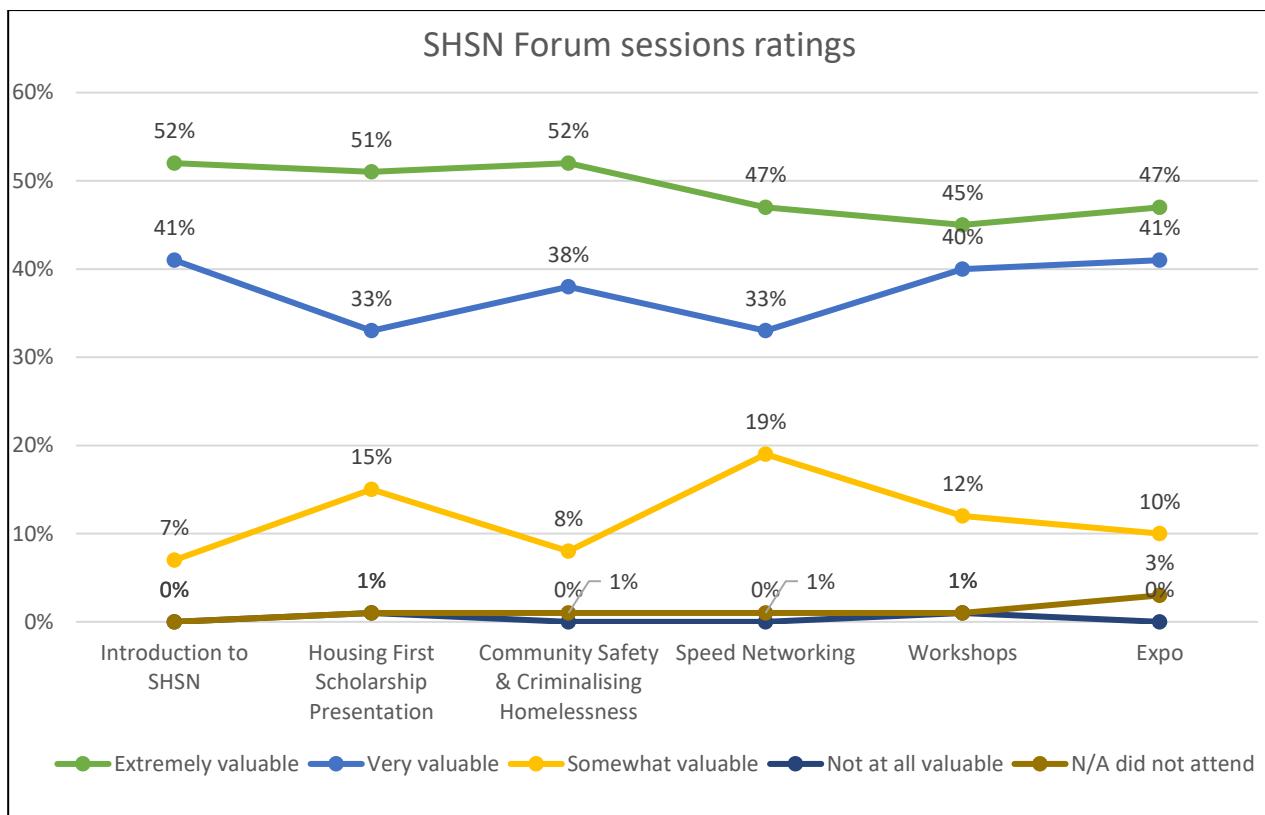


The Forum length was generally agreed to be about right for most survey respondents, tending towards a request for slightly more time rather than less.

The majority of respondents found all of the forum sessions extremely valuable or very valuable (see Figure 4). Only two respondents found two sessions not so valuable with no sessions rated not at all valuable by any respondents.

The Introduction to the SHSN was rated the highest with 93% finding it extremely or very valuable. The Community Safety and Criminalising Homelessness Session was rated extremely valuable or very valuable by 90% of respondents and the Housing First Scholarship presentation was rated extremely valuable or very valuable by 84% of respondents.

Figure 4 2025 SHSN Forum ratings



4.2 Most useful aspects of the Forum

Many of the respondents mentioned that networking was the most useful aspect of the Forum. The speakers, workshops, expo, updates and learning about other agencies and services were also important aspects of the Forum for respondents. Respondents enjoyed the variety of activities offered with “something for everyone” and found it well-organised and smoothly run.

Respondents highlighted the following key themes in what they found most useful about the 2025 Forum. Quotes from the survey responses are in *italics* -

Networking Opportunities

- Participants valued the chance to connect with other services, practitioners, and colleagues.
- Speed networking was highlighted as a structured and effective way to meet new contacts.
- Many appreciated reconnecting with previous contacts and learning about new roles and programs.

The networking opportunities were really helpful for me – having the chance to hear from others in the workshop I was in was the most helpful thing for connecting me to others and starting conversations.

Loved the speed networking as I felt it was really beneficial to have conversations with people in order to work more together rather than working in silos.

Meeting workers from other services that may meet needs of our clients and offer opportunities for partnership in the future.

Sometimes it's good to see and speak to people you are already working alongside but don't always have time to talk to and share info with.

Presentations & Speakers

- the presentations received strong praise for being insightful, informative and thought-provoking, especially regarding sector direction, Housing First models and community safety and rough sleeping

Great speakers and presentation of information.

Jess's presentation was amazing

I found Zac's presentation incredibly valuable, insightful and the knowledge of Housing First model on a global scale was an area of interest rarely shared within the day-to-day work we engage in.

Ruth's details on the SHSN is always a great refresher and reminder!

Lived Experience Integration

- Participants valued the facilitation and contributions from people with lived experience, noting it was integrated throughout the event rather than tokenistic.
- This approach set a positive tone and added depth to discussions.

The inclusion of lived experience – integrated throughout, rather than as a token.

Loved that it was facilitated by such great hosts with lived experience – it set a good tone for the event.

Expo & Information Sharing

- Expo stalls and information stands were seen as useful for learning about services and building networks.
- Many attendees discovered programs and services they were not previously aware of.

The expo and being able to network with the other agencies in attendance.

I enjoyed the information stands as they were a great way to introduce yourself and learn about a service which is a great way to build networks

Finding out more about SHSN, the expo and networking provided invaluable service and referral information.

Workshops

- Workshops were considered informative and engaging, though some suggested they could have been longer.

Overall Impact

- The forum was described as relaxed, inclusive, and motivating.
- Attendees valued taking time away from frontline work to reflect, share ideas, and collaborate.
- Some expressed interest in having more speakers and possibly a full-day forum in the future.

Everything! I value the use of lived experience within the forum including the presentations.

Furthermore, I found Zac's presentation incredibly valuable, insightful... The opportunity to take a day out of frontline work and explore networking opportunities, engage in critical reflective conversations and come together as a sector was extremely motivating.

A dedicated event for the homelessness sector is very valuable.

4.3 Suggested Improvements

The main suggestions for improvement were longer/shorter sessions and comments about the venue in terms of accessibility, noise levels and parking. Note that it is challenging finding an appropriate venue that is within budget, without charging participants which has been the SHSN approach to holding forums.

Several respondents mentioned that a break during the program would be an improvement.

Some respondents asked for more speakers and longer sessions whilst some asked for shorter sessions

I wish there were more speakers from other organisations and would have been happy with a full-day forum.

I liked the workshops but felt they could have been longer!

Some participants wanted more time to connect beyond structured speed networking. Some recommended having a full day forum rather than the half day.

Larger space.

Audio – was hard to hear at times.

The room was a bit cramped.

Parking.

A break midway would have been good.

Greater access to State/Federal updates

It is a well thought out and executed event.

It was just right. Don't change it.

I think it was a fantastic mix of listening to working together, so nothing to add from me.

4.4 Use of information from Forum

Respondents highlighted the following ways that they plan to use the information from the Forum -

Improving Client Support

- Apply new knowledge about services and programs to better assist clients.
- Use referral information gained from networking and the expo to connect clients with appropriate resources.

Use the information to improve service delivery and support for clients.

Networking & Collaboration

- Strengthen partnerships with other organisations.
- Follow up with contacts made during speed networking and workshops to explore joint initiatives.

Follow up with contacts made during speed networking to explore partnerships.

Connect with other organisations to share resources and collaborate on client support.

Use networking opportunities to reduce siloed working and improve sector integration.

Practice Improvement

- Incorporate insights from presentations (e.g., Housing First model, sector updates) into service delivery.
- Reflect on evidence-based approaches and lived experience perspectives to enhance practice.

Apply Housing First principles and ideas from Zach's presentation to our work.

Incorporate evidence-based strategies shared during the forum into our programs.

Sharing Knowledge

- Disseminate information within their teams and organisations.
- Use sector updates and workshop learnings to inform colleagues and influence internal processes.

Share what I learned with my team to inform practice and decision-making.

Bring back ideas from the forum to influence internal processes and planning.

Strategic & Service Development

- Use insights and approaches from the Forum in future planning, policy and program design

Consider innovative approaches discussed for future service planning.

Use insights from lived experience facilitation to shape policy and program design.

Reflect on sector trends and adapt our strategies accordingly.

4.5 Feedback on the inclusion of Lived Experience in the Forum

Participants were asked for feedback on the inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness in the forum. The feedback included -

Strong Appreciation for Inclusion of people with lived experience

- Lived experience involvement was consistently described as critical, valuable, and impactful.
- Participants felt it set the right tone for the event and made discussions authentic and meaningful.
- Many called it the highlight of the forum.

Benefits of Lived Experience Inclusion

- Provided unique insights that service providers often lack.
- Helped inform best practice and service development.
- Made the forum feel inclusive and collaborative, moving away from tokenism.

Suggestions for Improvement

- More lived experience voices: Participants want additional speakers and deeper engagement.
- Diverse perspectives: Include lived experience of homelessness and mental health.
- Longer opportunities for discussion: Allow time for Q&A and storytelling.
- Recognition and remuneration: Acknowledge lived experience as expertise and compensate accordingly.
- Collective voice: Combine individual stories with broader systemic insights.

Overall feedback about Lived Experience Inclusion

- Unanimously positive: Lived experience participation is seen as essential, not optional.
- Future focus: More voices, deeper engagement, and systemic integration.

Important element of the forum to have lived experienced people who can work alongside service providers to inform change.

Absolutely valuable to have people with lived experience in these spaces and for services to understand their relationships with our services to assist with best practice and service development.

Highlight of the forum. Please embed this as practice for these events.

It is great that people with lived experience are included. The forum is a great platform for the industry to engage with and witness the value of LE insight and input.

It was refreshing to see people with lived experiences of homelessness invited to present at the forum, their voices matter and deserve to be heard.

The integration of lived experience into service delivery and policy development is an area I deeply value and hope to see further expanded in the future.

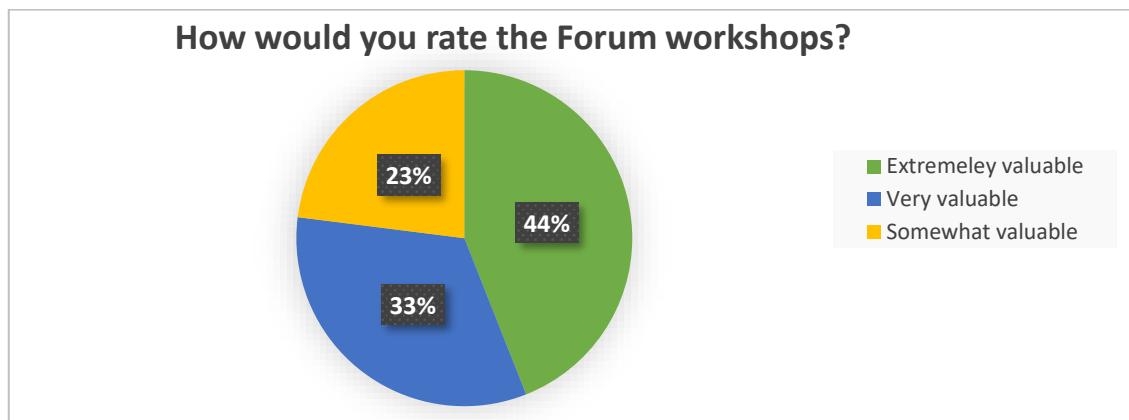
It was great to have them involved in all aspects of the forum.

Loved this important inclusion. As stated, it set the right tone for the event.

4.5 Workshops Feedback

49 respondents rated the workshops with 96% of respondents finding the workshops valuable. 80% of respondents rated the workshops extremely or very valuable and only two respondents rated the workshop not so valuable (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Forum Workshop Rating 2025



The majority of feedback on the workshops was very positive and the workshops were generally well-received and considered informative. The workshops were seen as a valuable part of the forum and suggestions for improvement included extended duration, smaller groups, and more variety in topics. Positive feedback was received about the workshop facilitators. Some participants found it too noisy and difficult to hear, particularly in the larger workshops.

Feedback

- Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in smaller group discussions.
- Many found the content relevant and useful for their work.
- The interactive nature of workshops was highlighted as a strength.

Suggested Improvements

- More Time - Several comments requested longer workshop sessions with additional time for discussion and Q&A.
- Smaller Groups - Feedback suggested smaller groups for more meaningful interaction as some of the topics were popular resulting in larger groups of participants than other workshops.
- Additional Topics - Requests for more workshops covering diverse subjects and practical strategies.
- Breaks - A few comments mentioned the need for short breaks between sessions.

Great to have smaller groups and great discussion.

Very useful and informative.

Listening to others' experiences was valuable.

Great conversations and good ideas shared.

Extremely helpful and relevant.

Good to hear different perspectives.

Mental health workshop was really useful – more like this would be great.

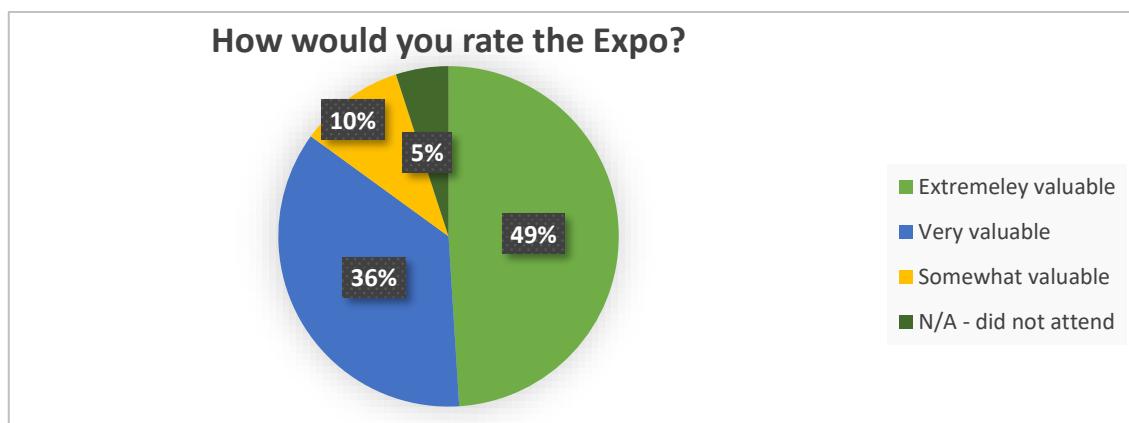
There was ongoing robust conversation and Q&A between the group and facilitators.

many great ideas on future advocacy were shared, as well as valuable discussions, and information between the many different services that attended.

4.6 Expo Feedback

92% of respondents reported visiting the Expo stalls. 92% of survey respondents found the expo valuable. 78% of respondents rated the expo extremely or very valuable and only no respondents rated the expo not valuable (see Figure 6). Four respondents did not attend the expo.

Figure 6 Expo Rating



Feedback on the Expo was positive with most respondents finding it useful and highly valued for networking and information sharing. Ideas for improvements included having a greater variety of stalls and more time for the Expo. Note that all participants were invited to hold stalls on registration.

Participants appreciated the Expo as a way to meet other organisations and learn about services. Many noted it was useful for discovering programs they were not previously aware of. The Expo was seen as a great opportunity to build networks and strengthen collaboration. The Expo stalls were praised for being easy to approach and providing clear service details.

The expo stalls are wonderful. A great wealth of knowledge shared amongst the stall holders and almost acts as an ice breaker activity. It was good that all stalls were together in the one location.

Meeting other organisations, finding out about other programs.

Walking around meeting the faces behind the orgs we work alongside. Especially for me who works mostly behind the scenes!

It was a great opportunity to network and find out about the programs that other services are running that I can refer my clients into!

got to meet the faces behind a couple of names and discuss what they actually do rather than reading a flyer or website

The expo provided insight into programs I wasn't familiar with.

It was great to see the wide scope of the sector through the expo.

A good selection of mostly relevant services.

The expo was great. Layout was good with a range of different organisations.

100% Valuable

Expo stall holders were asked to provide feedback on holding an Expo stall. They found it useful to hold the stall to promote their services and were generally happy with the organisation of the stalls.

Set up was easy, no issues

Good engagement with a range of workers and stakeholders and lots of flyers taken from sector members to learn more about our programs and offerings.

Great discussions with other orgs. Great networking and information sharing opportunities.

Great networking and service promotion opportunity

Everything went well. Happy with the space we were allocated

It was great exposure for our programs and services to the other agencies in the room.

Always lots of good interaction with people. Just more time to allow people to look around

Was very useful to have a stall to explain/educate other agencies/members of council on roles within the organisation.

It was my first experience with running an expo stand and I found the feedback on the day very valuable.

Excellent opportunity to connect with people

Everything was smoothly coordinated. No issues or problems.



4.7 SHSN Practitioner Group Feedback

The SHSN Practitioner Group is an online group that meets several times per year. The SHSN Practitioner Group offers a way to connect and learn between the annual SHSN Forums. Some questions about the Practitioner Group were included in the survey.

50% of survey respondents were aware of the SHSN Practitioner Group, whilst 39% were unaware of the Group. 11% of respondents were unsure. One third of respondents said they are interested in the Practitioner Group and 40% said they might be interested. 26% of respondents said they would not be interested in the Practitioner Group.

Respondents offered the following topics for consideration by the Practitioner Group (which could also be considered for the 2026 Forum):

- Exploring challenges and solutions for people with lived experience of mental health, health, AOD and homelessness.
- Lived experience in the workforce
- How to establish lived experience groups
- Housing stock availability, updates on allocations, replacement, big build etc
- Residential Tenancies Act impacts on THM & Public housing tenancies
- Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework

4.8 Final Comments

Survey respondents described the forum as well-organized, informative, and valuable. Respondents enjoyed the catering and venue, despite some issues with the venue parking.

It opened my mind to how people are passionately working together to end Homelessness in Victoria

Thanks for organising and all your effort putting it together. Great job!

Always a great forum which has a good mixture of guest speakers, expo's, workshops and speed networking. It's very informative and insightful. Well done.

A fabulous and worthwhile event! Thanks so much for all your work putting it on!

So professionally run - a credit to you

Very informative conference

Great to be part of it.

Venue and catering were amazing, event was well organised

Overall, I had a great experience. It was run very smoothly, food was great and so was the company.

Thank you for providing a forum for the sector

Well done to all, lots of great work putting it together, great information sharing and presentations, group work and the expo side was great for resources. Upton St coffee stand was great, snacks were helpful, lunch was delicious and having a bit of sugar around was also good for keeping energy up and location was beautiful. Again, well done, big effort.