

Draft M2050 Vision and Council Plan 2025-2029

Youthlaw Submission to the City of Melbourne

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft M2050 Vision and Council Plan 2025-2029. Our submission focuses on the potential impacts on young people experiencing homelessness and the importance of ensuring the City of Melbourne's future plans uphold their rights.

Our clients: Young people in the City of Melbourne

Youthlaw works with some of the most marginalised young people in Melbourne - many of whom are rough sleeping, couch surfing, or in unsafe and unstable housing. In 2023/24, 93% of Youthlaw's clients were experiencing financial disadvantage, and 56.2% disclosed being homeless or at risk of homelessness. These young people are part of the City of Melbourne community and directly affected by how safety, public space, and justice are managed by the City of Melbourne.

Support for increased housing and services

We strongly support many of the principles outlined in the Draft Vision and Plan, including principles for a people-first city, creating opportunities for the next generations, inclusive growth that supports wellbeing, and being grounded in First Nations knowledge and culture.

We also support several proposed initiatives, including:

- Increasing access to support services for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Increasing awareness of and access to family violence support and prevention initiatives.
- Increasing community access to programs, services and initiatives that support mental health and wellbeing.
- Affordable housing with a focus on increasing the supply of social and affordable housing that meets the needs of our community.
- Advocacy for drug rehabilitation services and more on-the-street mental health services.

Concerns about over-policing of young people in public spaces

However, we are concerned about the City of Melbourne's proposed expansion of policing and surveillance of marginalised young people in public spaces, including activities to:

- Expand the visible safety presence in the city through community safety officers.
- Upgrade and expand the Safe City camera system with 100 new cameras including an additional 40 cameras to our network and 60 from partner networks.
- Advocate to other levels of government and key agencies for more police presence to enforce state laws.

In practice, we see through our legal and social work services and advocacy with Smart Justice for Young People how over-policing of young people in public spaces disproportionately and negatively impacts young people experiencing homelessness, who often don't have access to private spaces.

Smart Justice for Young People's [Working Together Action Plan](#) highlights how five of the most over-represented groups in Victoria's criminal justice system as a result of over-policing and under-servicing are First Nations and multicultural children and young people, children in out-of-home residential care, 18-25 year olds, and girls and young women with complex needs.

The City of Melbourne's proposed approach to increase the use of security/safety officers and police presence as first responders is not evidence-based, and will lead to increased harmful criminalisation and stigmatisation of young people experiencing homelessness in the City of Melbourne. The proposed expansion of CCTV and surveillance technologies also raises concerns about infringements of young people's rights to privacy, free assembly and non-discrimination.

Recommendations

We recommend that the City of Melbourne:

1. **Immediately suspend the use of security/safety officers** for enforcing local laws against people experiencing homelessness, including young people.
2. **Embed lived experience** into planning, by consulting directly with young people with experiences of homelessness in shaping Council plans and policies.
3. **Shift to a preventative, health-based model** – investing more resources into early intervention, outreach, support services, harm reduction, and trauma-informed responses.
4. **Conduct a human rights assessment** – e.g. engaging an independent body to evaluate the impact of security/safety officers on marginalised young people under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.
5. **Improve training and oversight** – require all council staff and contractors engaging with young people in public spaces to undertake de-escalation, cultural safety, and trauma-informed care training, including with a focus on youth homelessness.

Please contact our CEO Lee Carnie at lee@youthlaw.asn.au if you have any questions.

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About Youthlaw

Youthlaw is Victoria's statewide specialist community legal centre that supports thousands of young people under 25 facing complex challenges such as homelessness, mental health issues, substance use, and family violence, to resolve their legal problems. Youthlaw's main office is based in the City of Melbourne, and we work closely with young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness who live in, access services in, or have strong cultural and social ties to the City of Melbourne. Youthlaw is a co-convenor of Smart Justice for Young People.