



Engaging and responsible council

Helping people experiencing homelessness

Merri-bek

Our Ask:

Invest \$500,000 per annum in Merri-bek's Assertive Outreach program.

During the 2021 calendar year, VincentCare recorded 264 people sleeping rough in Merri-bek. Since 2021, demand for homelessness and material aid support has increased, putting unprecedented pressure on local services.

In 2024, Council launched Merri-bek Zero, coordinating local services to improve housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, aiming for homelessness to be rare, brief and non-recurring. Council funds an Assertive Outreach service, providing enhanced access to specialist homelessness and other critical support services for rough sleepers. Assertive Outreach is now an essential part of the local homelessness support system.

The demand on the service has outstripped the resources available and outreach workers are having to choose between supporting new rough sleepers and providing casework to existing rough sleepers. Referral volumes increased 33 per cent from 2024 to 2025. In the first half of 2026 alone, the service received 70 new referrals of rough sleepers from residents, local businesses, sports clubs and service providers.

Council does not have capacity to expand the program to meet the need and cannot sustain the level of funding into the future.

Victorian Government investment is essential to secure this service into the future, ensuring Merri-bek's rough sleepers can gain early access to support, preventing further entrenchment and more easily embark on the pathway to housing and rebuilding their lives.