

# Public perceptions of homelessness

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**Prepared for:** Launch Housing

**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020

# Background

Launch Housing, previously Hanover, has been providing various services to people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne since 1964. A well-established, local not-for-profit organisation, Launch Housing offers transformative housing initiatives to provide continual support and care for those experiencing homelessness.

Forethought and their partner agency Pure Profile offered its services to Launch Housing on a pro bono basis to investigate perceptions of homelessness within Melbourne. The objective of the research was to gather insight on the perceptions of homelessness and homeless people in Melbourne, and measure how these perceptions have changed in the context of COVID-19.

# Research Approach



**10 minute online  
questionnaire**



**Fieldwork dates**  
1<sup>st</sup> July– 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020



**Addressable market**  
n=1000

- 18+ years of age
- Melbourne metro

# Executive summary



**Melburnians had a very narrow view on what homelessness looks like.** The typical perception of a person experiencing homelessness remained a single male, who through drug abuse, family violence or mental illness, was sleeping on the streets. The reasons for this perception, however, had changed slightly since 2016, with significantly more Melburnians selecting factors that were out of an individual's control (including personal tragedy, lack of opportunity and bad luck) as contributors towards homelessness.



**Despite the narrow view of homelessness, there was a high level of empathy,** with 76% of Melburnians agreeing that homelessness could happen to anyone. COVID-19 made solving homelessness an issue with personal relevance. Two thirds agreed that the rates of homelessness will impact the safety of all Melburnians.



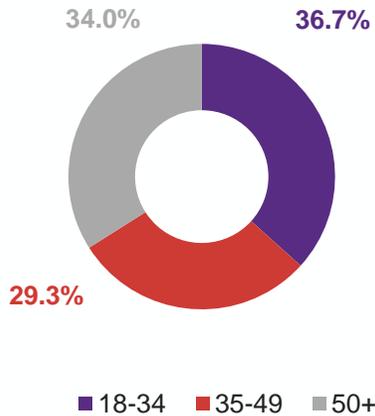
**The vast majority of Melburnians said it is the government's responsibility to solve homelessness. Over 80% said the government should be doing more.** While there was low overall awareness of the recent initiative to move people experiencing homelessness off the street and into temporary accommodation (e.g. hotels), 85% of Melburnians supported this type of initiative. There was also a high level of support for providing food and affordable social housing, and a desire for the government to commit to a national plan to end homelessness.



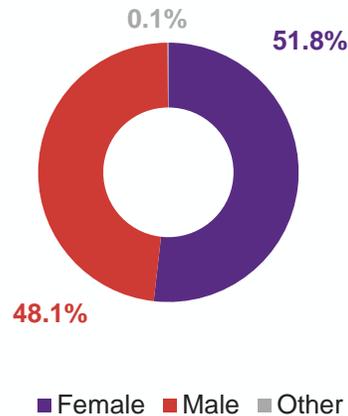
## Who responded to the survey?

# Respondents were a representative sample of the people who live in Melbourne

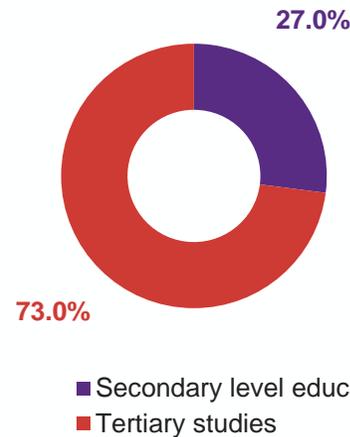
### Age



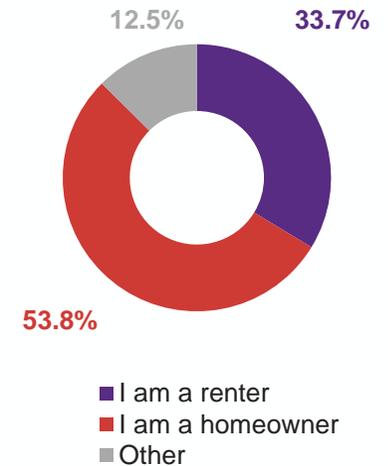
### Gender



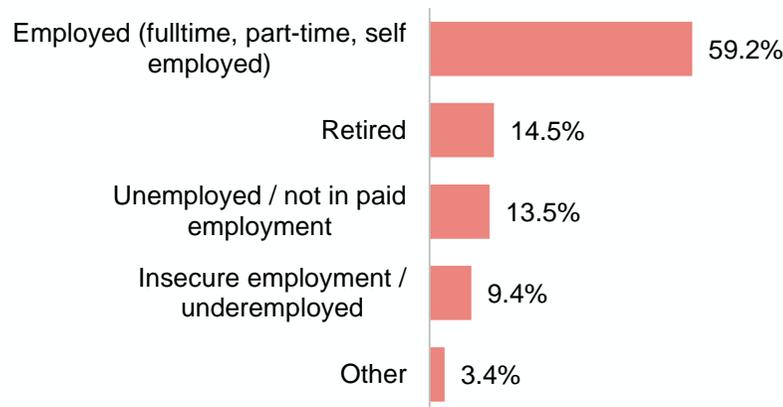
### Education



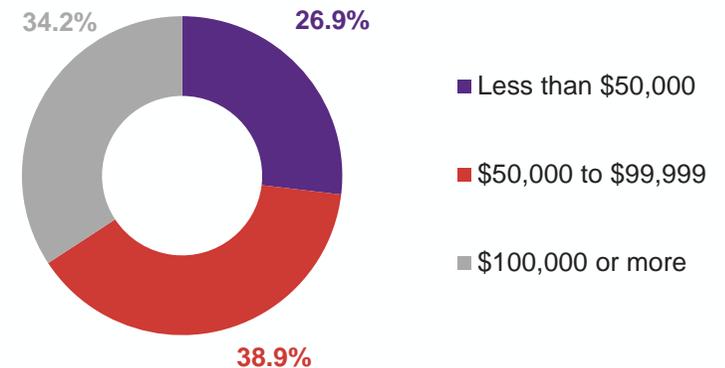
### Owner / Renter



### Which of the following best describes your work status?

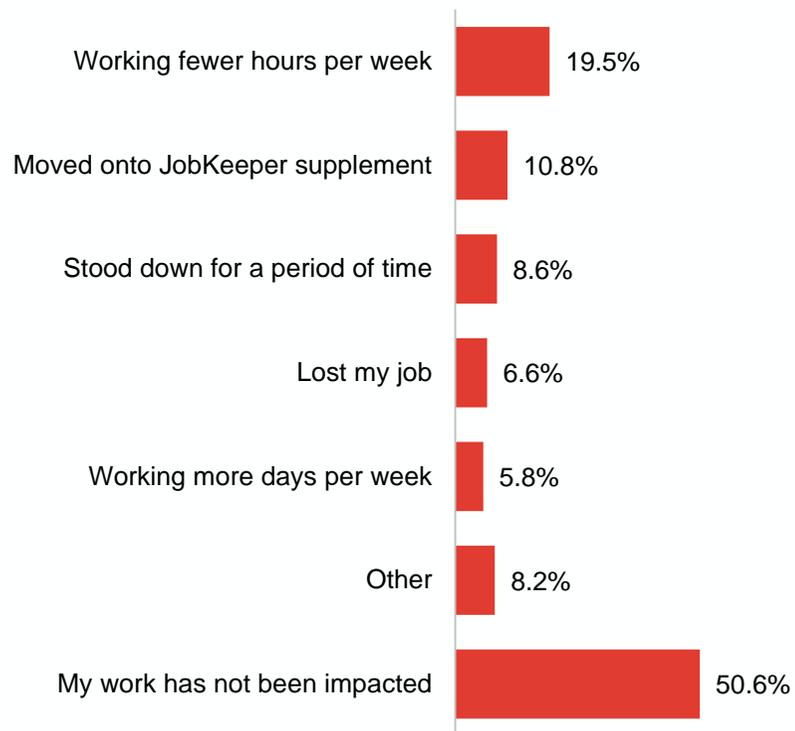


### Income

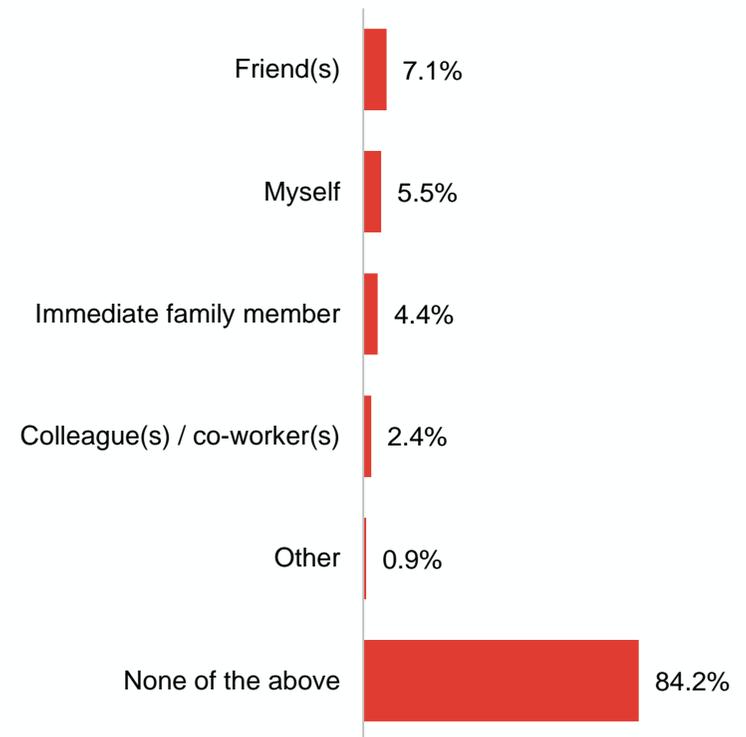


# Almost half of respondents reported that their work had been impacted by COVID-19

Has your work status changed as a result of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak?\*

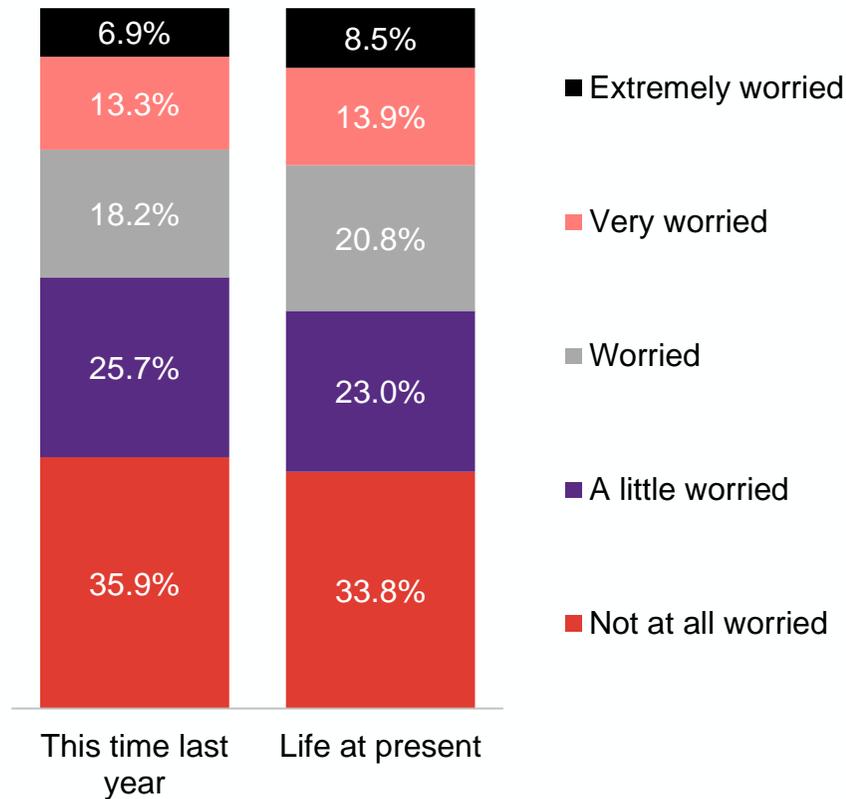


Are you, or is anyone around you, currently or previously affected by homelessness?\*

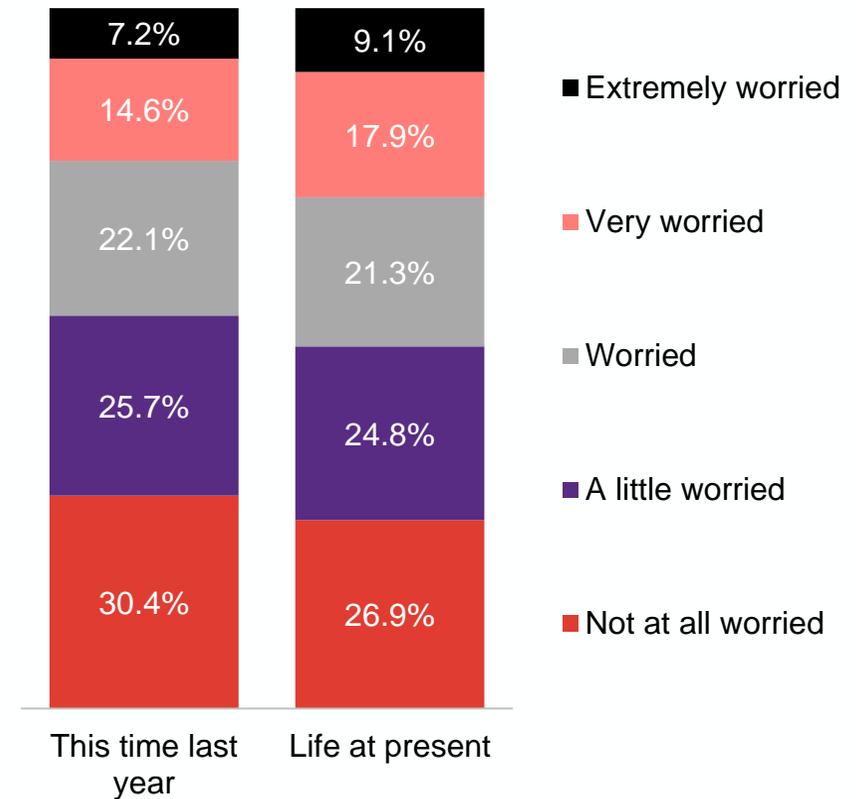


# However, overall the level of worry for personal housing and living costs only increased marginally

How worried were you about meeting the **costs of your housing**?



How worried were you about meeting **general living costs**?



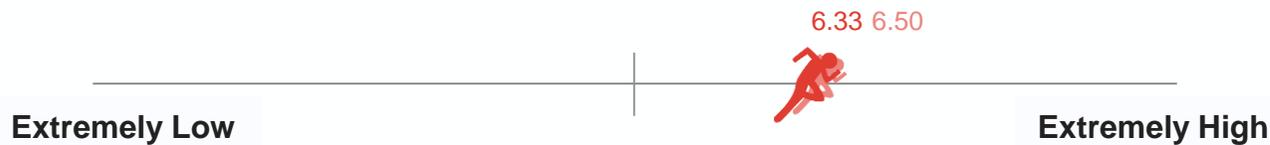


# What does homelessness look like in Melbourne?

# Perceived rates of homelessness remained high

## How would you rate the current state of homelessness of the following?

Melbourne Year-on-Year



While we may have expected to see an increase in the perceived rates of homelessness as a result of COVID-19, it was not evident amongst Melburnians yet

Melbourne vs. Sydney and Other Countries



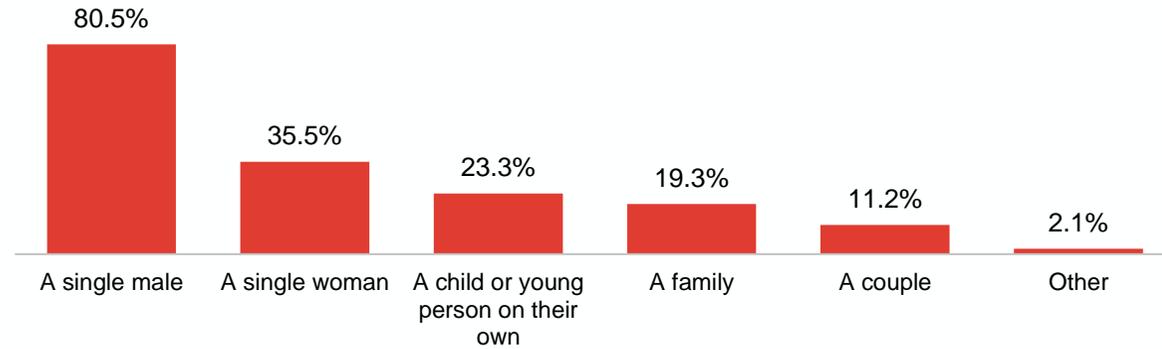
- Melbourne
- Melbourne (this time last year)
- Sydney
- Scandinavian Countries
- USA
- New Zealand

# The typical person experiencing homelessness was perceived to be a single male

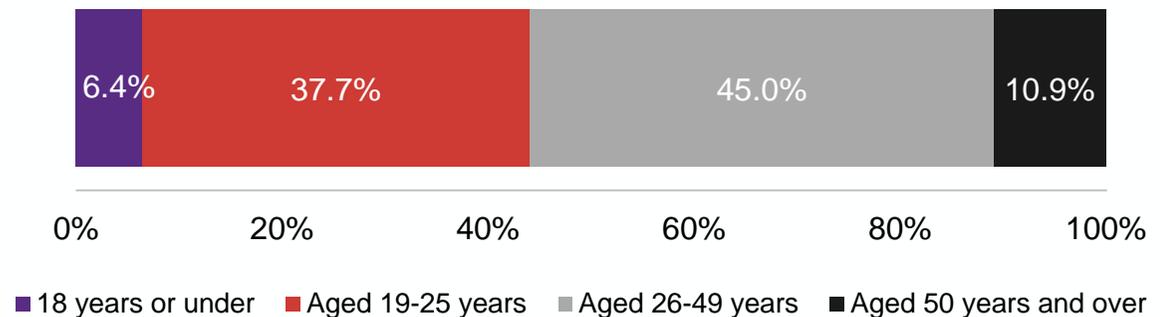
While the typical profile was quite narrow, we observed Melburnians were more likely to see a reflection of themselves when describing homelessness (e.g. a respondent in their 50s is more likely to picture a homeless person in their 50s).



## When you think of a typical person affected by homelessness in Melbourne, who do you picture?\*

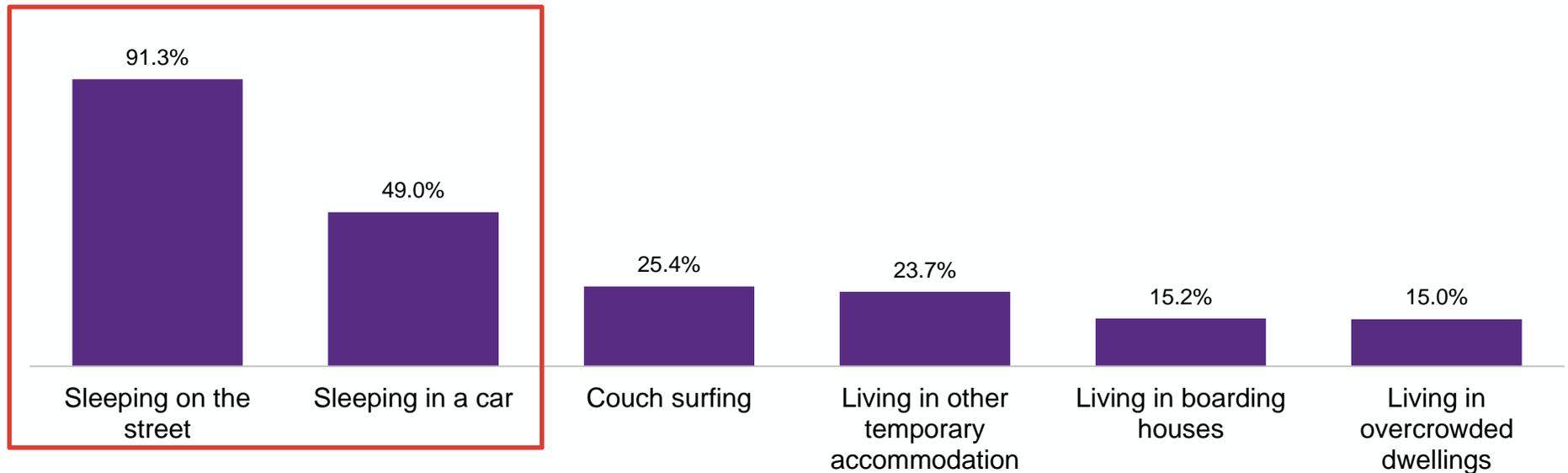


## What do you think is the typical age of someone affected by homelessness in Melbourne?



# While homelessness can come in many forms, Melburnians had a very narrow understanding

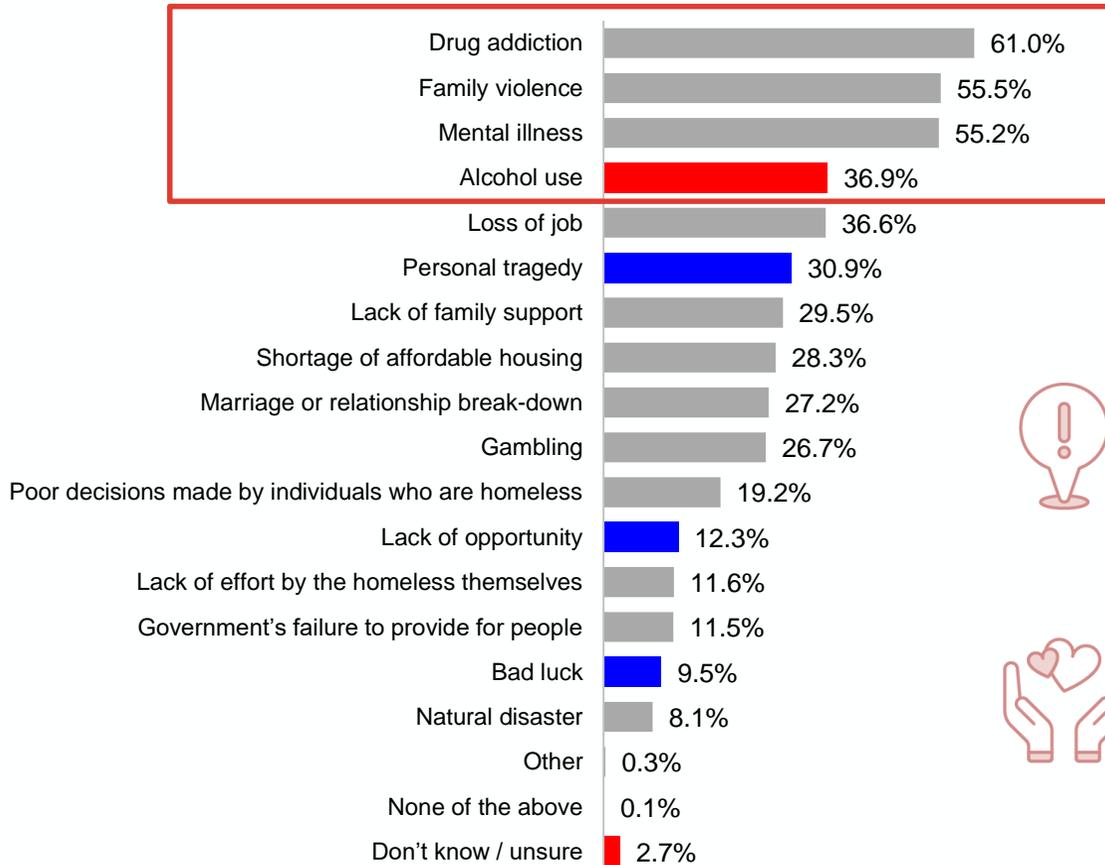
When you think of homelessness in Melbourne, which of the following come to mind?\*



There appears to be a defined set of perceptions based on the presence or absence of a house, with another based on the permanence of the housing arrangement.

# Drug addiction was still perceived as the main cause of homelessness

## Key reasons why some people experience homelessness\*



While the perceived impact of alcohol use has significantly reduced, the key perceptions of what drives homelessness (drug addiction, family violence and mental illness) have remained stable vs 2016.

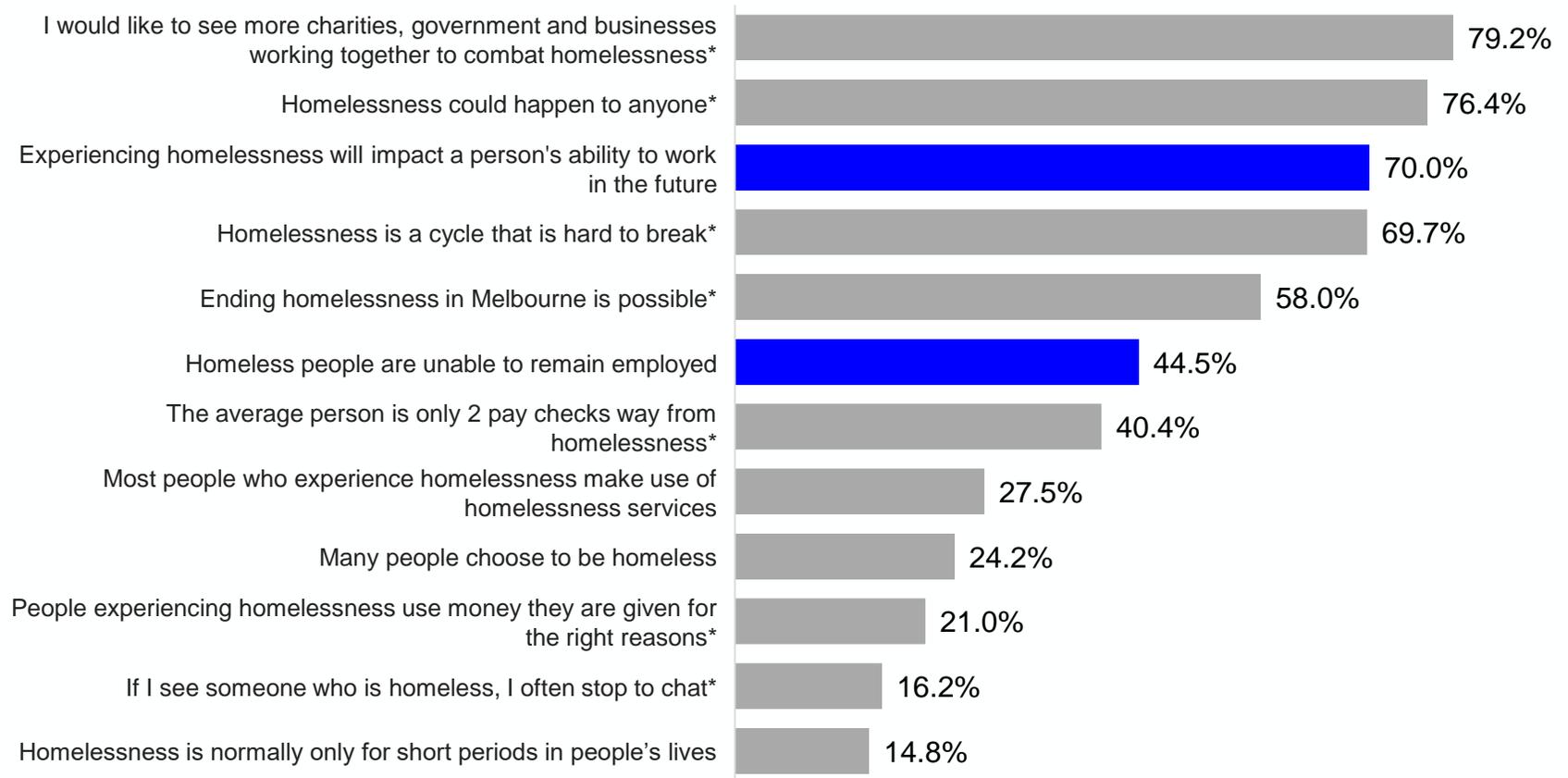


An increased level of empathy for those experiencing homelessness can be inferred, as significantly more Melburnians cited factors such as personal tragedy, lack of opportunity and bad luck as drivers of homelessness.

Note: Significance testing was conducted between 2016 and 2020 results at the 5% level of significance. Blue bars indicate the 2020 result was significantly higher than the 2016 result, and red bars indicate it was significantly lower. \* indicates multiple responses were allowed for this question, so these results may not sum to 100%.

# Despite the narrow view of homelessness, there was a high level of empathy in the community

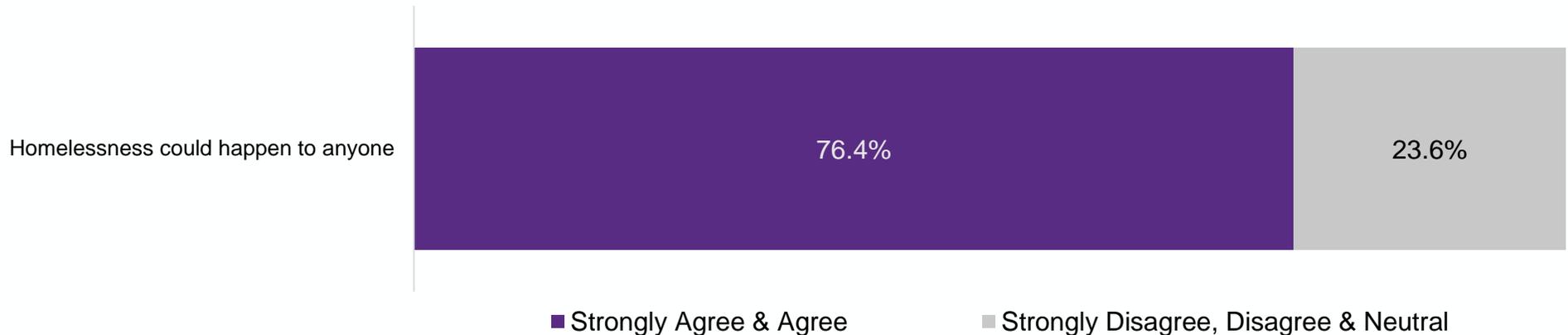
## Percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree to the following statements:



Note: Significance testing was conducted between 2016 and 2020 results at the 5% level of significance. Blue bars indicate the 2020 result was significantly higher than the 2016 result. \* indicates this question was not asked in 2016, so change in sentiment cannot be measured.

# There was a clear divide in those who believed homelessness could happen to anyone

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement below:



## Those who agreed were significantly more likely to:

- Be female
- Attribute the main cause of homelessness to marriage or relationship breakdown, family violence, and shortage of affordable housing
- Believe government funding to support homelessness is more important than ever (since COVID-19)



## Those who disagreed were significantly more likely to:

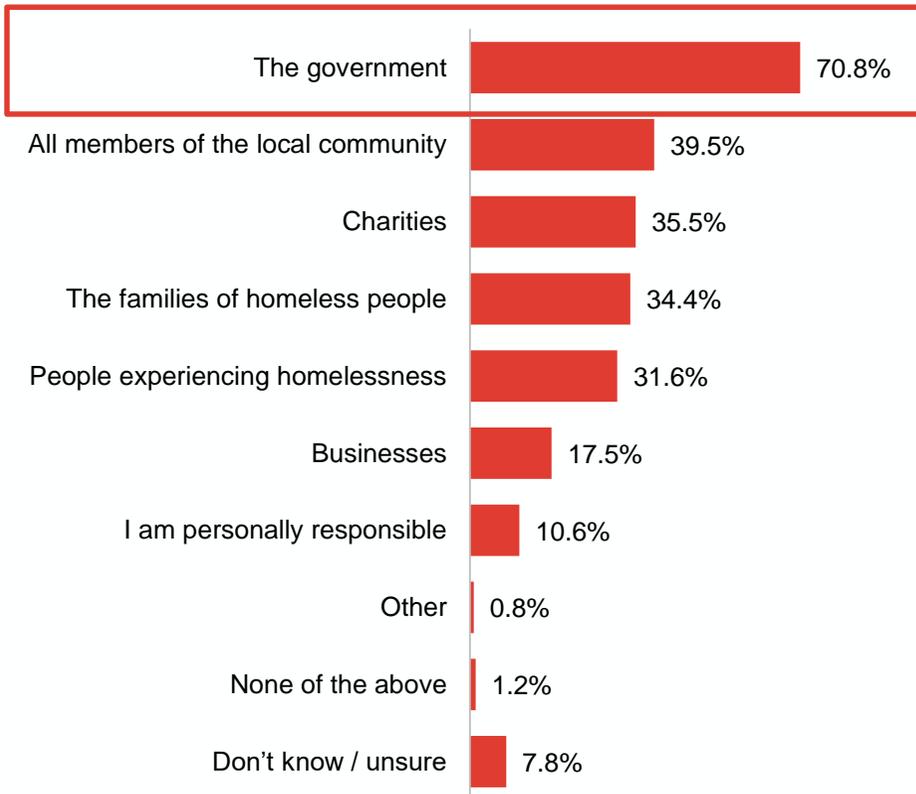
- Be male
- Attribute the main cause of homelessness to poor decisions made by people who are affected by homelessness (e.g. drug addiction and gambling)
- Have not done anything to help combat homelessness in Melbourne in the past 3 months



# Whose responsibility is it to solve homelessness?

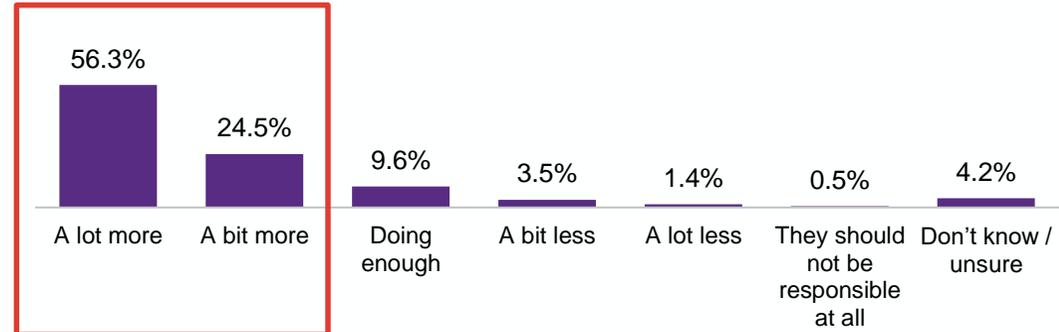
# A large proportion of Melburnians said it is the government's responsibility to solve homelessness

Of these groups, who do you think should be responsible for solving homelessness?\*

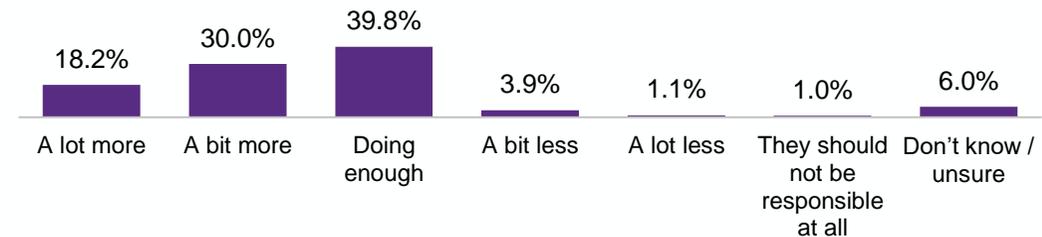


Thinking about the following groups, how much do you think they should be doing to help housing and homelessness?

## The government



## Charities



# Women were more likely to think the government should be doing more to combat homelessness



## People who said the government should be doing more to combat homelessness were more likely to be:

- Female
- Less worried about the costs of their housing and general living
- Unimpacted in their working situation by COVID-19



## People who said the government should be doing more to combat homelessness were more likely to believe that:

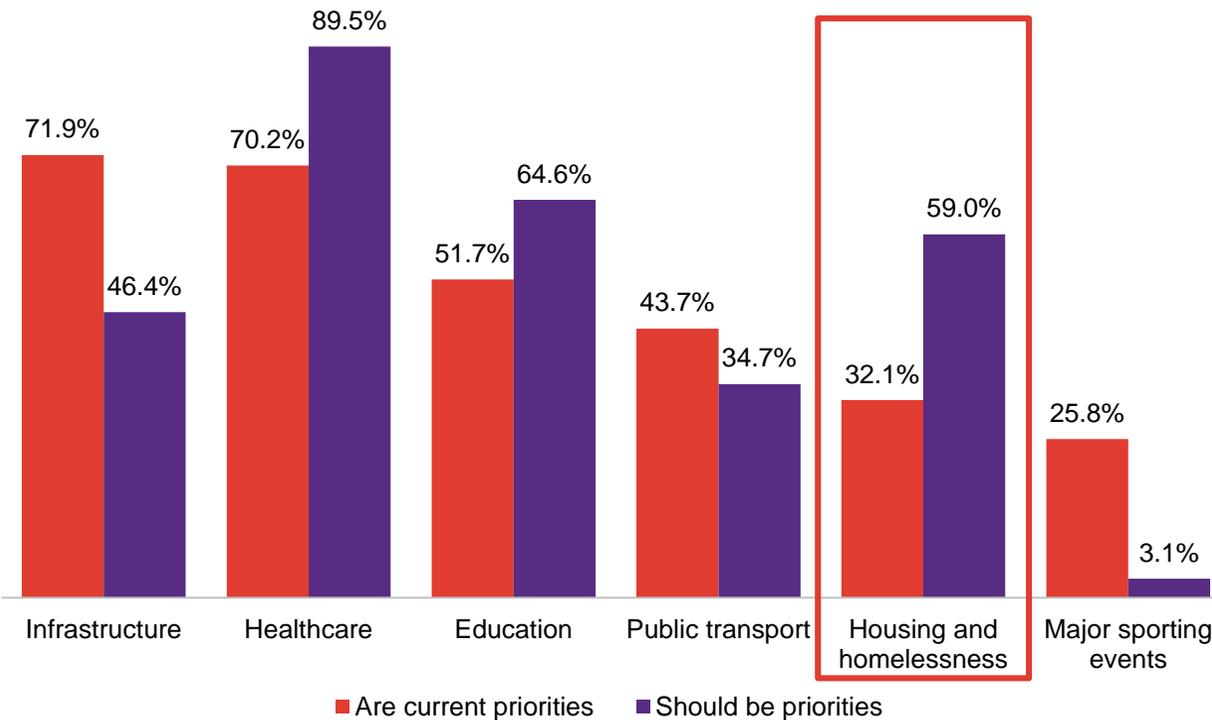
- Ending homelessness in Melbourne is possible
- Combatting homelessness is currently more important than ever
- Housing and homelessness should be a funding priority of the state government
- Those most deserving of funding are **families**
- The main causes for homelessness are **mental illness, family violence** and a **shortage of affordable housing**
- The government should commit to a **comprehensive plan to solve homelessness**



This group is likely to be more responsive to government initiatives that provide a multi-faceted and compassionate approach to solving homelessness.

# Melburnians said that homelessness should be a higher priority for the state government

Which of the following do you believe are / should be the state governments' current funding priorities?\*



## Which of the following should be the state government's first priority?

Healthcare	48.6%
Housing and homelessness	16.2%
Infrastructure	13.2%
Education	12.8%
Public transport	6.9%
Major sporting events	0.5%
Other	1.8%

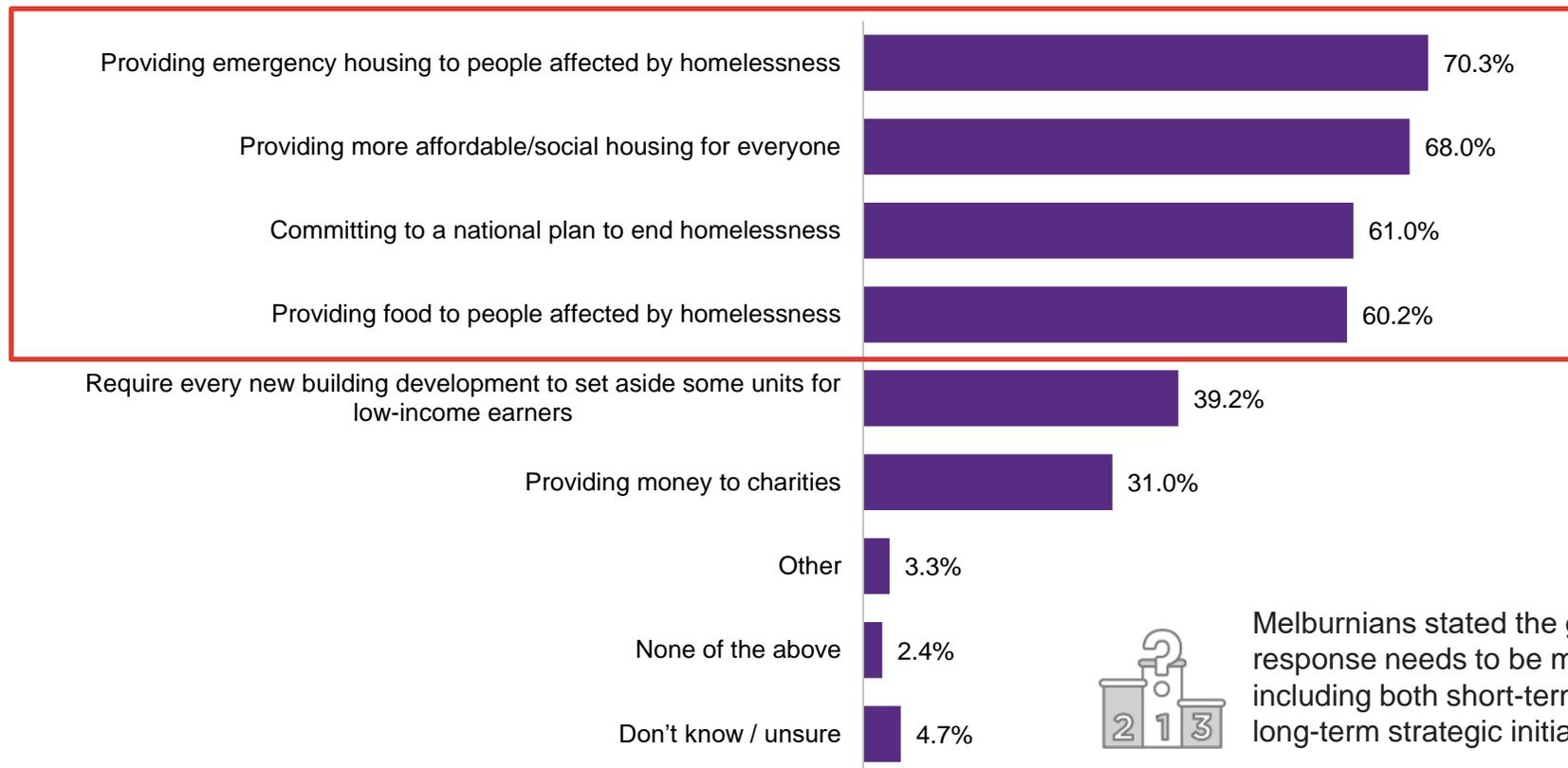


32.1% of Melburnians believe the state government currently prioritises housing and homelessness, while 59.0% believe it should be a priority.

16.2% believe housing and homelessness should be the government's **first** priority.

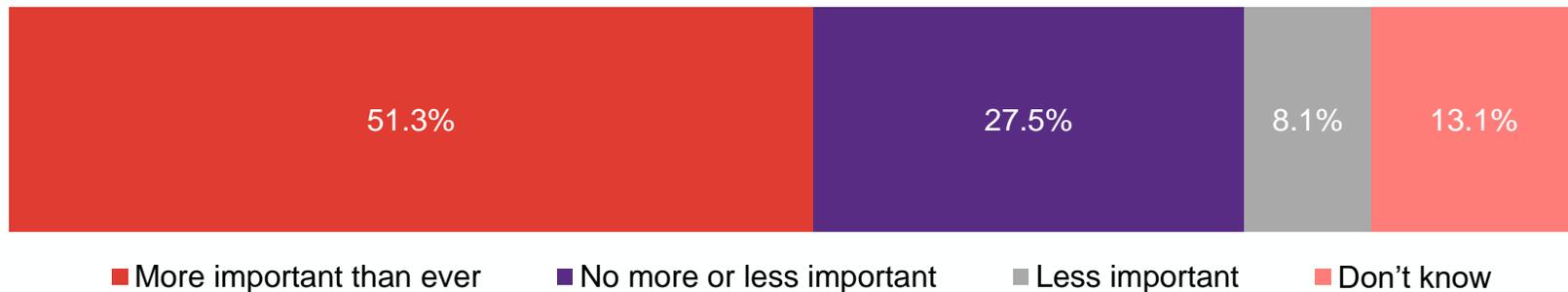
# Melburnians understood the need for a coordinated effort to end homelessness

## What should the government be doing to help housing and homelessness?\*



# COVID-19 highlighted that it is more important than ever to reduce the rate of homelessness

Since the spread of COVID-19, would you say government funding to combat homelessness is...



## Percentage of participants that Agree or Strongly Agree with the following statements

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that one person's health can have an impact on my health	82.4%
Homelessness will increase during COVID-19	68.7%
Rates of homelessness will impact the safety of all Melbournians during COVID-19	67.9%

# Awareness of the emergency hotel housing initiative was fairly low, but support was high

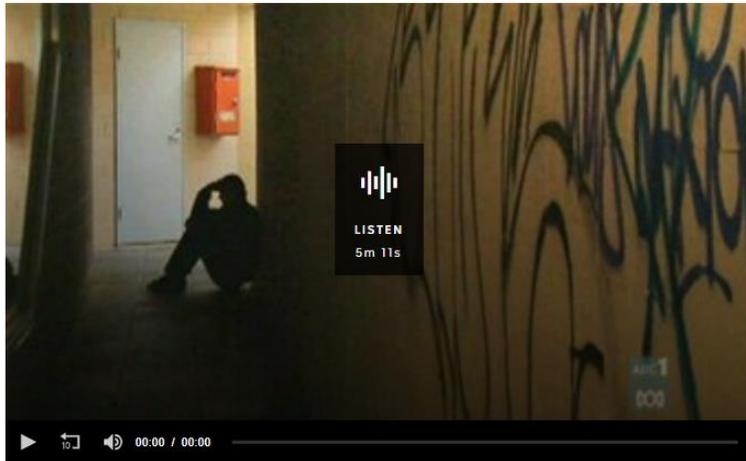


Image: File photo: ABC News

## Homeless Melbourne man "very lucky" to be off the streets during pandemic

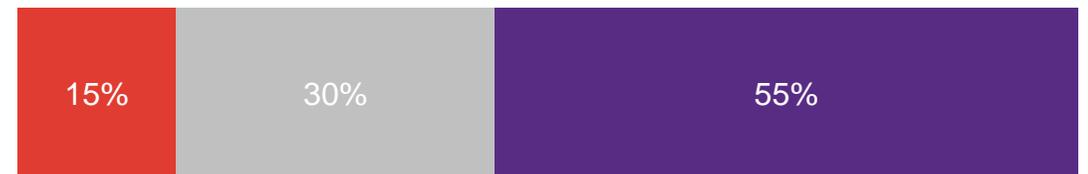
On Mornings with Virginia Trioli

Prior to today, had you heard of this initiative?



■ Yes ■ No

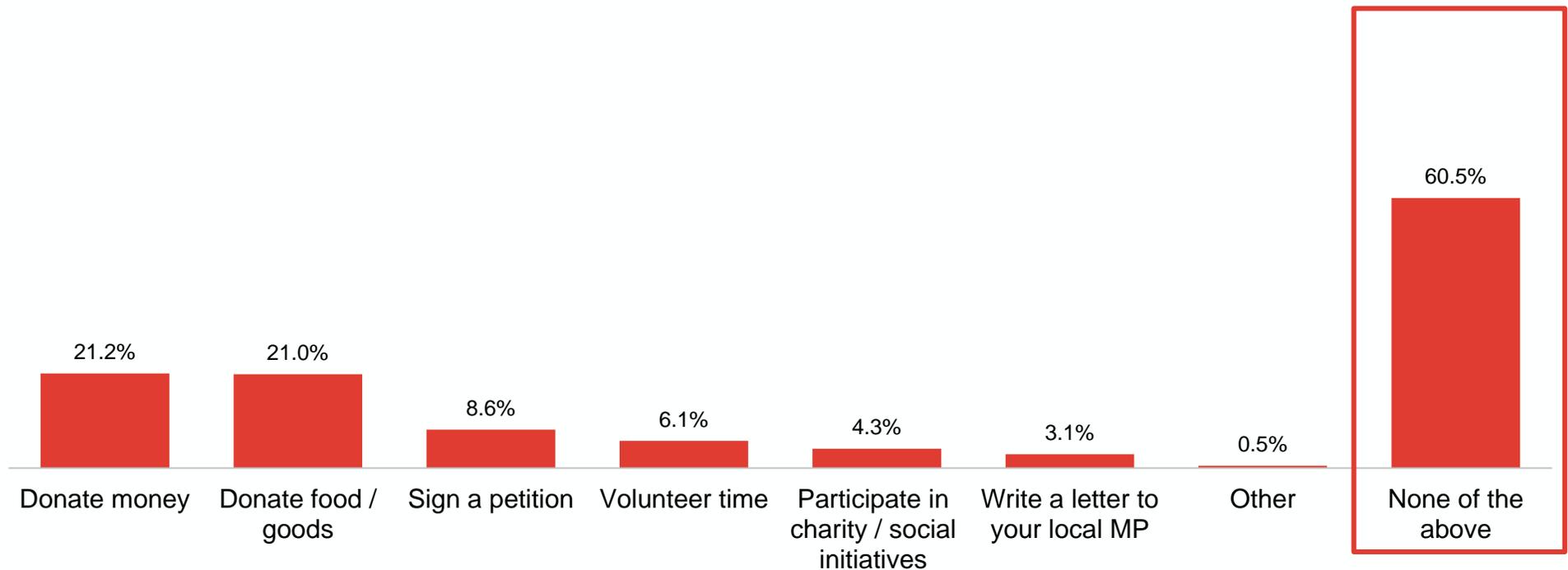
If government funding were required, to what extent would you support the initiative to find permanent and affordable housing for these people?



■ Don't Support (0 to 5) ■ Somewhat Support (6 to 7) ■ Fully Support (8 to 10)

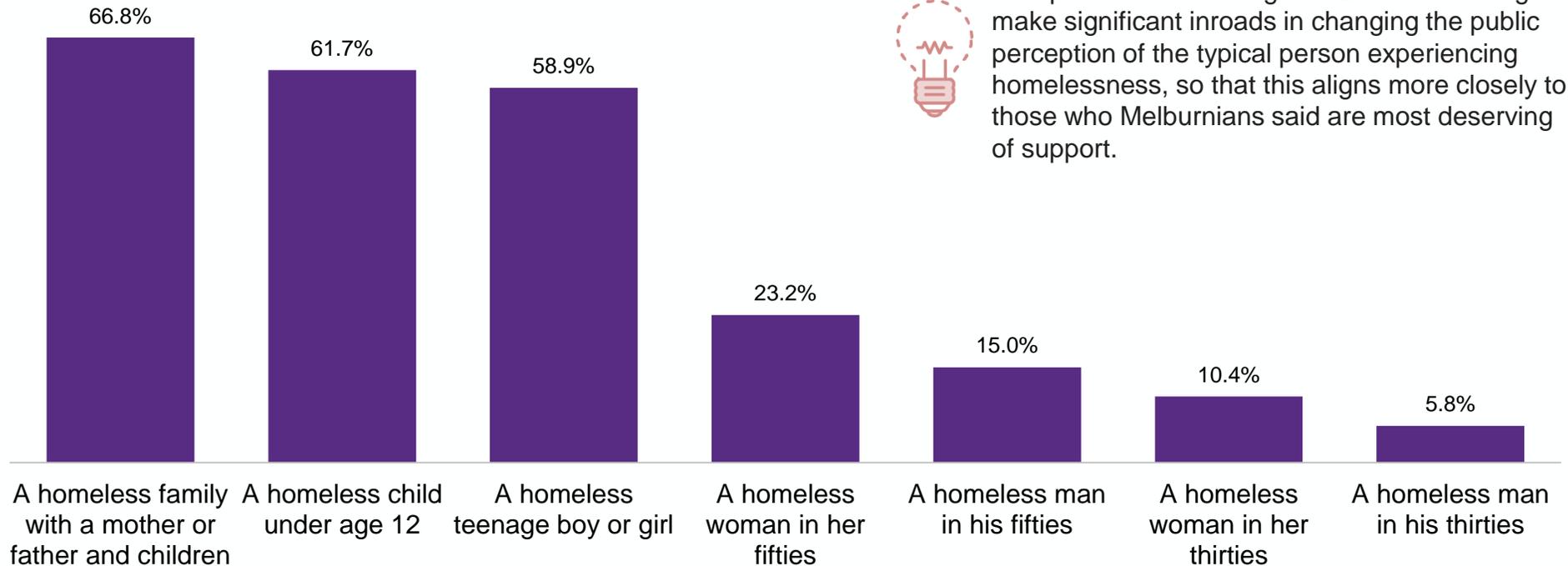
# While Melburnians believed it was important to solve homelessness, personal apathy was high

In the time since we went into lockdown (March) what actions have you undertaken to help combat homelessness?\*



# Families and children were perceived to be the most deserving of support

Which of these people are most deserving of financial support?  
(ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>)



This provides a challenge for Launch Housing to make significant inroads in changing the public perception of the typical person experiencing homelessness, so that this aligns more closely to those who Melburnians said are most deserving of support.

# Contact Us

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# Contact Us

## Launch Housing

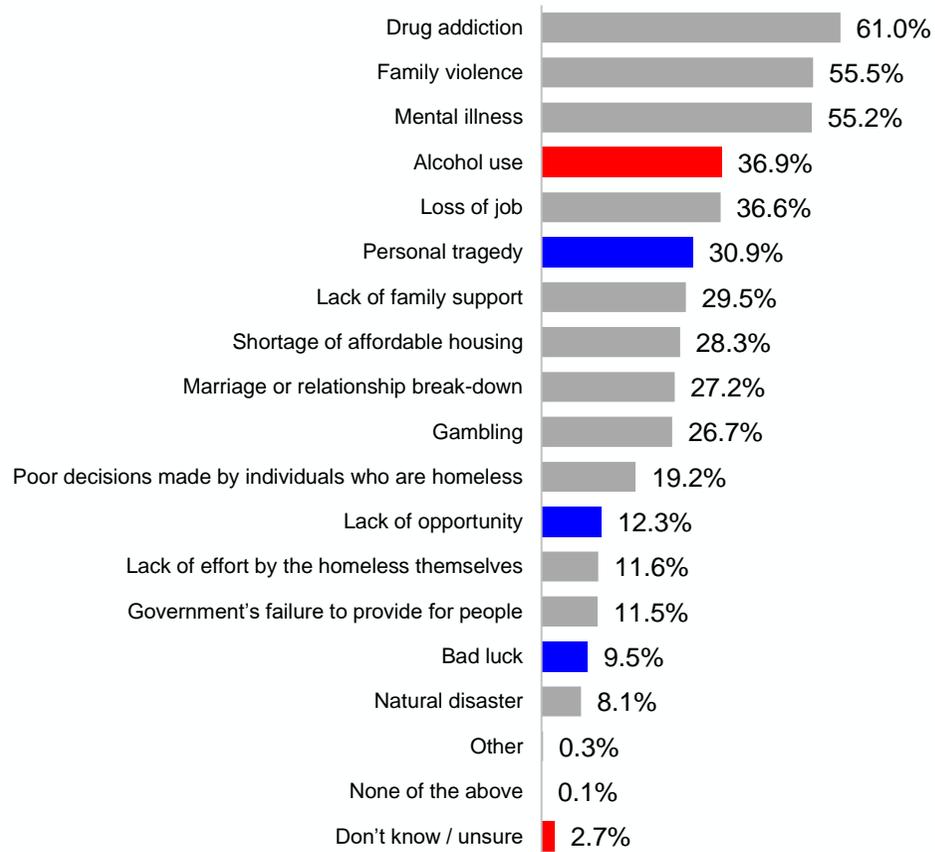
Launch Housing is a Melbourne based, secular and independent community agency whose mission is to end homelessness. It provides high quality housing, support, education and employment services to thousands of people across 14 sites in metropolitan Melbourne. [www.launchhousing.org.au](http://www.launchhousing.org.au)

## Contact

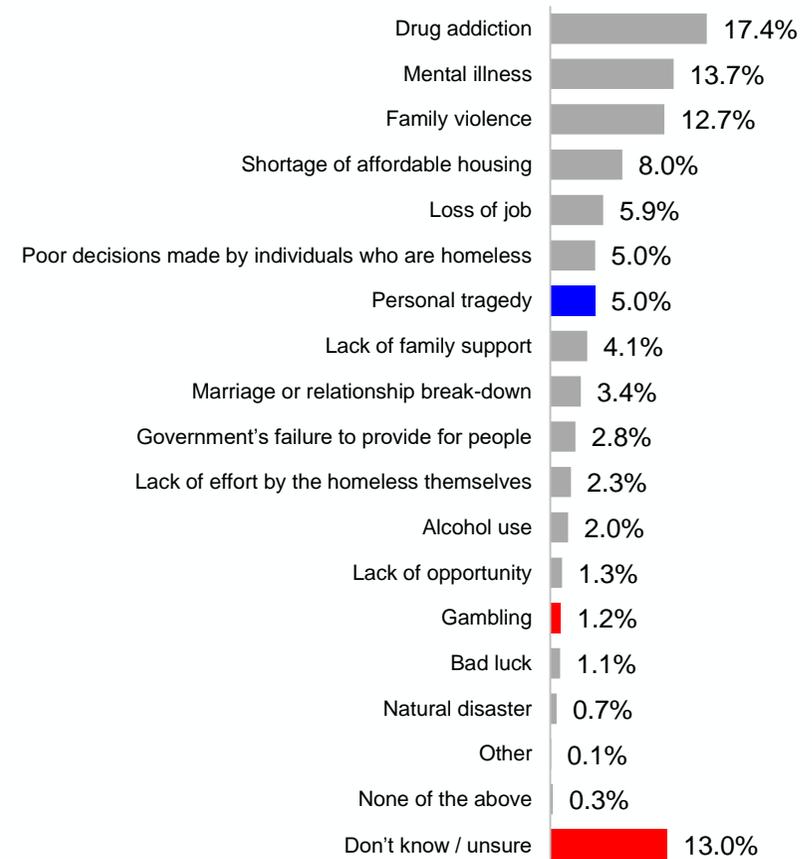
For media queries or further information contact Luisa Saccotelli (0447) 964 899.

# Appendix

## Key reasons why some people experience homelessness\*

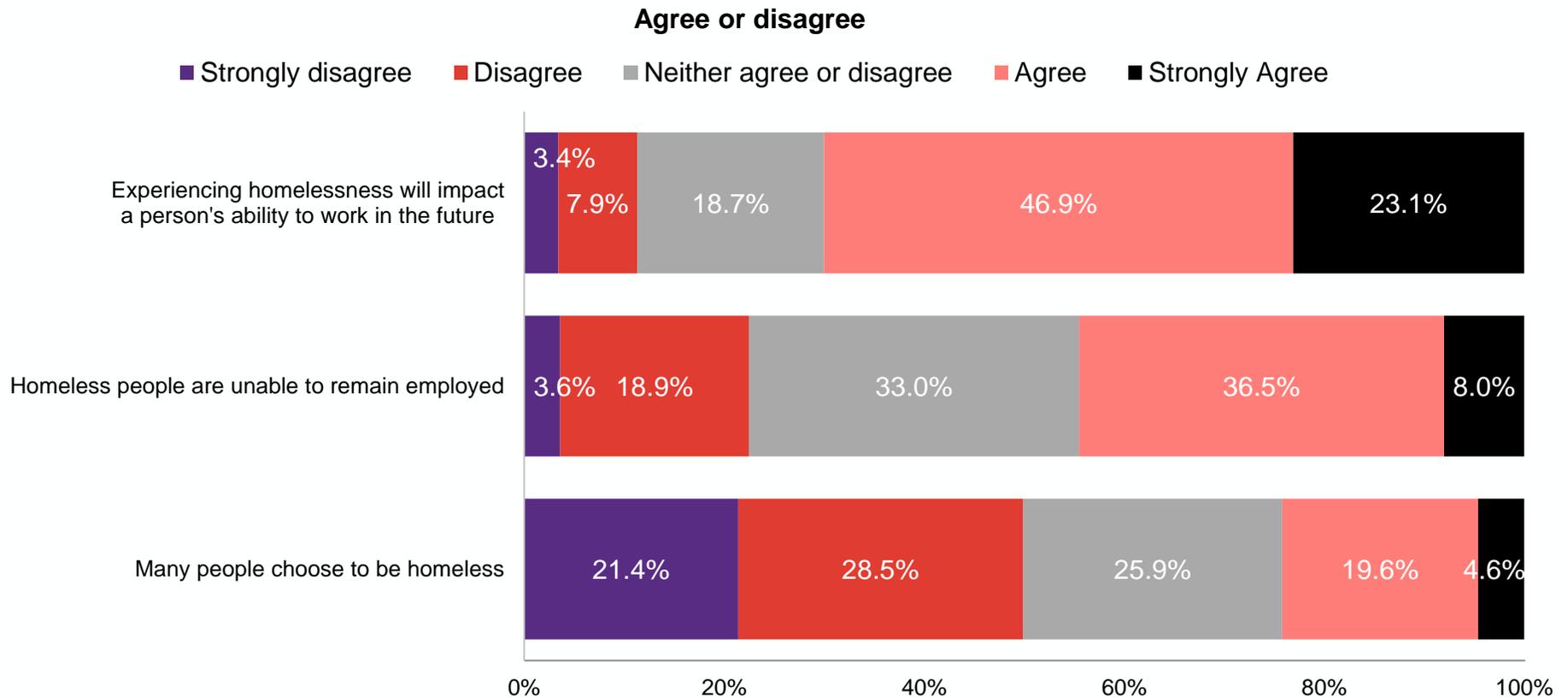


## Main reason why some people experience homelessness

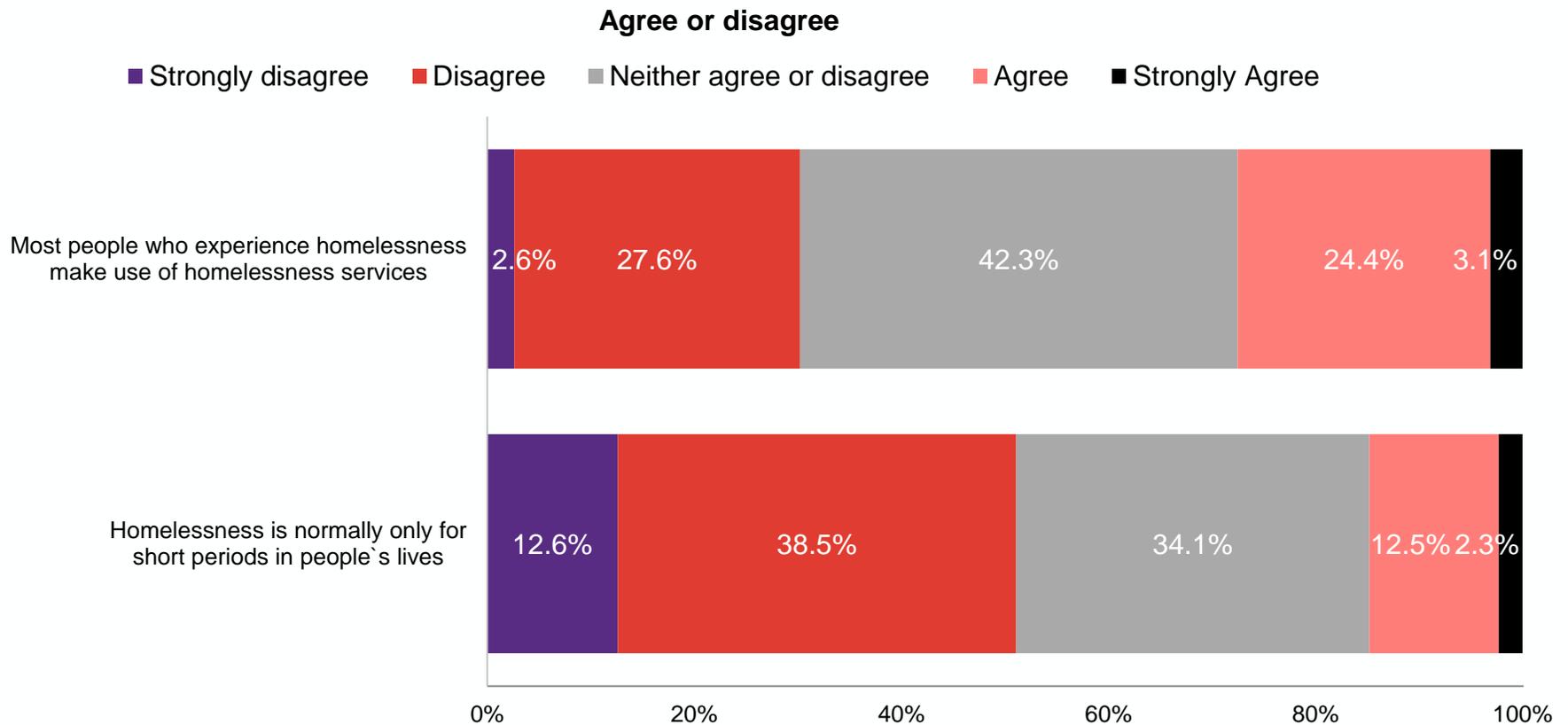


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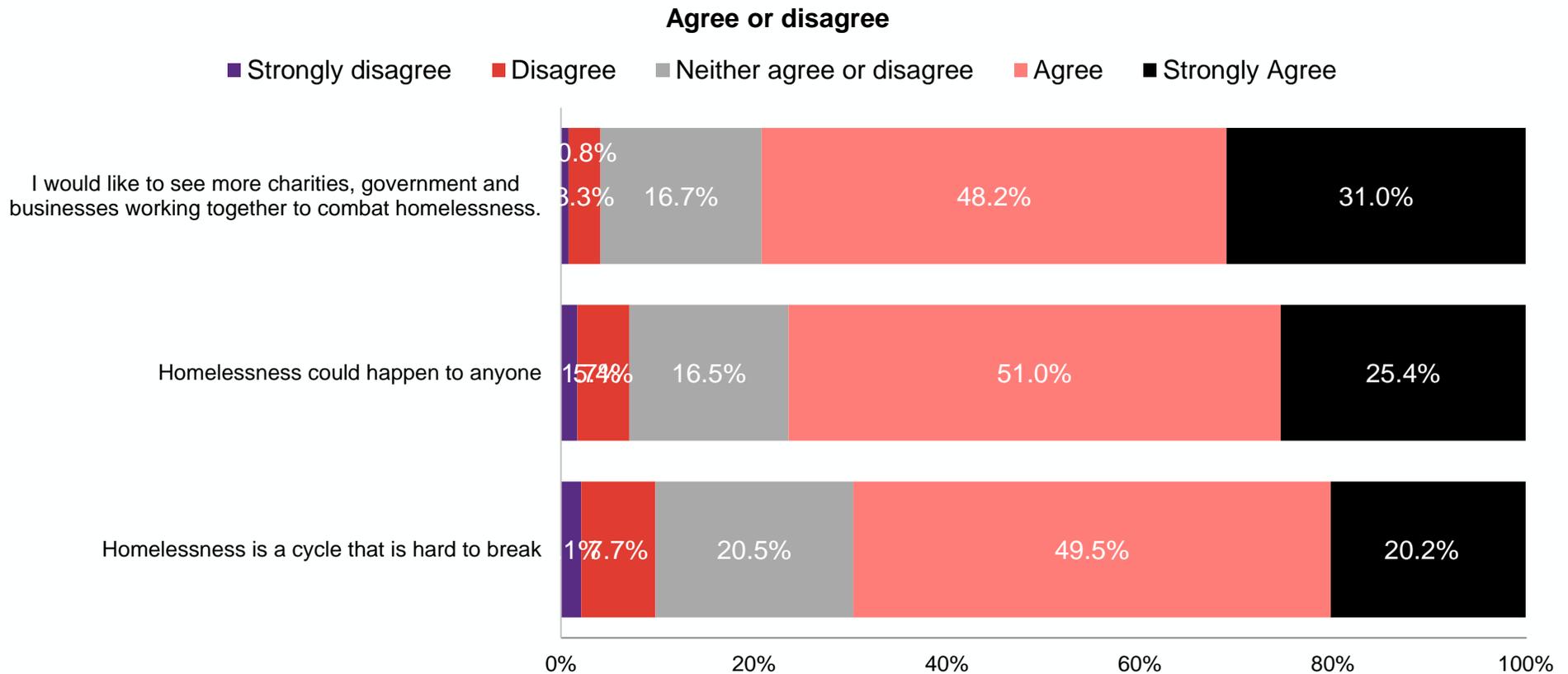
# Appendix



# Appendix



# Appendix



# Appendix

