

\$47m to build 400 homes for needy

MORE than 400 families will benefit from a \$47.7 million community housing program unveiled yesterday.

Fifty new housing projects will be built under the scheme, which draws on funding from state and local governments, community organisations and the private sector.

Housing Minister Bronwyn Pike said the program would generate 1800 new jobs and another 3150 indirectly, mainly in the construction industry.

Low-income families, children at risk of homelessness, the elderly and the disabled will be housed under the program.

But Opposition housing spokeswoman Helen Shardey said the housing would do little to help those in immediate need.

She said Victoria's public housing waiting lists rose by 524 between June and September last year, despite an overall drop in applications since 1999.

The funding is the first instalment of

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the Bracks Government's \$94.5 million social housing program. It allocated \$34.4 million towards stage one of the scheme, while community groups, local government and the private sector contributed \$13.3 million in funds and land.

Building will begin soon on housing projects in Port Melbourne, Croydon and Prahran, while Wonthaggi, Wangaratta, Seymour and Bairnsdale are among the regional communities to benefit.

"For many people, this housing is a vital part of getting their lives back on track," Ms Pike said. "This is the first major step in a new way of delivering affordable housing to the people of Victoria."

But Ms Shardey criticised the strategy for ignoring immediate housing needs, saying the southern metropolitan region was promised an extra 60 transitional houses by the end of last year.