

overgrown grass and graffiti.

In Tecoma, single mother of three Kelly Travers has been on public housing waiting lists for eight years and is frustrated government-owned properties are sitting vacant.

She said a three-bedroom house 10km away in Sapphire Ave, Boronia, had been empty for more than a year.

"The house is next to a family friend's house. There is nothing wrong with it and I would love to live there," she said. "I can't understand how it can just sit there when there are so many people on waiting lists."

Residents in Beachley St, Braybrook, said a four-

bedroom house previously home to a family of 10 had been vacant since July. The property's garden is now overgrown.

Peta Duke, spokeswoman for Housing Minister Richard Wynne, said several projects were in progress to address a high turnover of tenants at Mitchell Cres and other Portland properties.

Mr Wynne had requested a major upgrade of the Braybrook house become a priority, she said.

She said the Boronia property had been vacant for about a month after the death of the previous tenant and expected a new tenant to move in as soon

HOUSING BY THE NUMBERS

500 empty public houses in Victoria.

40,000 family applications for public housing.

70,000 existing public houses.

180,000 people in public housing (estimated figure).

4500 new homes budgeted for (\$1.17b).

600 existing public homes to be upgraded.

as next week. But Victorians say more needs to be done, with public housing waiting list cases including:

A GRANDMOTHER, 63, sleeping on the floor of her one-bedroom unit, which she shares with her two grandsons;

A SINGLE mother who has to share her bed with her son, 15, in a boarding house;

A FAMILY of nine, with a baby due in March, sharing a three-bedroom flat in Fitzroy; and

CANCER survivor Dean Ludlow and his four children,

including one with leukaemia, waiting for 14 years.

Opposition housing spokeswoman Wendy Lovell said 2000 families had joined the public housing waiting lists in the past year.

Waiting lists hit a seven-year high for the June quarter, before another 960 applications in the September quarter.

"Yet the Brumby Government is selling off public housing properties at record rates," Ms Lovell said.

The Office of Housing website lists nine major building and redevelopment projects underway at Carlton, Kensington, Dandenong,

Norlane, Northcote, Footscray, Westmeadows and Bacchus Marsh.

Statewide, there are more than 70,000 public housing properties.

Mr Wynne said the Government was investing \$1.17 billion to build 4500 new homes across Victoria.

"We are also spending an additional \$99.2 million (to upgrade) 5600 existing homes and we are building 3000 new homes under the National Rental Affordability Scheme that will be let at 20 per cent below local rents to help Victorians in need access affordable housing," he said.

No bed for grandma

CASE 1

GRANDMOTHER Jennifer Petrie sleeps on the floor of her lounge room so she can provide shelter for her two grandsons while they wait for public housing.

Ms Petrie, 63, has lived in her Caulfield unit for 18 years and has looked after the two boys — Kareem, 21, and Jason, 20 — for most of their lives.

"One sleeps in the bedroom, the other on the couch," she said.

"The boys are both studying and they're trying their best to set up their lives, so I'm trying to do my best for them.

"They need their rest more than I do. It's important for their studying."

Ms Petrie suffers from chronic asthma and struggles to sleep most nights.

Kareem has been waiting for public housing since April



Waiting for housing: Jennifer Petrie shares a one-bedroom unit with grandsons Jason, 20, and Kareem, 21. Picture: JAY TOWN

2008. He was given priority status six months later, but continues to wait for a home. He has applied to study Japanese and international business at Swinburne University.

Jason will this year start a TAFE course on community welfare.

Ms Petrie said her grandsons' ability to study at home was

hampered by the family's cramped living conditions.

"Sharing the lounge room as a bedroom makes it almost impossible," Ms Petrie said.

"He can't study when I'm asleep because there isn't enough room to sit at a desk.

"These boys are trying their hardest to get ahead in life."

TRENT EVANS

Existing in one room

CASE 2

JANE Butcher pays \$175 a week for a single room in an Oakleigh East boarding house.

The room fits little more than a double bed, which the single mother shares with her eldest son, 15.

Her younger son, 13, lives in a foster home and would like to move back with the rest of the family — but there is no room.

Ms Butcher said she was upset she could not provide the 15-year-old with a bedroom.

"The fact that my son doesn't have any privacy is wrong," Ms Butcher said.

"He's a good kid trying to get ahead in life and I'm doing the best I can for him."

Ms Butcher said she was still paying the price of a drug habit — kicked more than a decade ago — that saw her relinquish her two sons to her



Cramped conditions: Jane Butcher has to share her bed with her son, 15, in the room where they live. Picture: JAY TOWN

former partner and his mother. That had made finding private rental properties tough.

"I've overcome my problem and 10 years on I'm still having so much trouble," she said.

Ms Butcher said that at one stage she was told there was a 40-year waiting list for public housing.

"I was told I was not the only one and that I will have to wait," Ms Butcher said.

In the final week of Parliament last year, the Opposition's Wendy Lovell raised Ms Butcher's situation.

She has since been allocated a case worker, but continues to wait for an offer of housing.

TRENT EVANS