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Media release

## Demand for homelessness services soars in Victoria

The number of Victorians seeking support from homelessness services has risen dramatically, from 86,000 in 2011-12 to 92,000 in 2012-13, according to data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare this morning.

Although part of the rise has been attributed to new homelessness programs funded under the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan (VHAP), the Council to Homeless Persons in Victoria says that this is only part of the picture.

“The Victorian Government’s VHAP funding has delivered innovative new services to help people experiencing homelessness and is a welcome investment in the sector. However the AIHW data tells us what homeless services have been saying for some time now; they are seeing a dramatic increase in people seeking their help” said Ms Jenny Smith, CEO of Council to Homeless Persons, Victoria’s peak homelessness body.

“Victorian homelessness services are doing their absolute best to operate in a system that is ultimately not designed to end homelessness.

“With the State Government planning to release its blueprint for major reform of the homelessness sector in 2014-15, we hope to see serious investment in programs that end homelessness.”

With Federal Government reviewing its spending, the AIHW figures also point to the critical need for continued investment at the highest levels of government.

“Now is the time for the Federal Government to recommit to the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness before it expires on 30 June 2014,” said Ms Smith.

42 per cent of people presenting at homelessness agencies pointed to financial difficulty as one of the reasons they sought assistance and 15 per cent citing housing affordability stress. Family violence remains the leading cause of homelessness with 27 per cent citing it as the *main* reason they were seeking help.

“Driving the growth in homelessness is a lack of affordable, appropriate housing for people on low incomes. There are currently 37,000 people on waiting lists for public housing.”

“With the festive season upon us, we want to highlight the fact that not everyone has a safe, secure and affordable place to call home this Christmas – 22,000 people in Victoria will be homeless this Christmas, and the new AIHW data indicates that demand for homelessness services is increasing rapidly.”

“The private rental market is competitive and rents are so high, so people on very low incomes have almost no chance of securing affordable housing. Increasing the pool of social housing will mean that more people will have a place to call home.”

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September rental affordability data shows that of all private rentals in Melbourne, only 0.5 per cent are affordable for a single person on Newstart allowance, and only 3 per cent are affordable for a single parent with one child.

“Individuals can help by donating to organisations that give immediate assistance, like crisis accommodation or meals, but the main problem is finding people homes, and for that we need government action,” said Ms Smith.

**Note to editors:** Jenny Smith, CEO of CHP is available for interview.

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**Sources:**

AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Report 2012-13 <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129545629&tab=3>

DHS Rental Affordability 2012-13 <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/research,-data-and-statistics/rental-reports-2013>