



## Media release

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# People who are homeless living on our streets need support not vilification

While the story in today's Herald Sun calls for a tougher police response [get-tough-call-on-aggressive-beggars-jeopardising-melbournes-reputation](#), the evidence shows that housing and support is what is needed, says Jenny Smith, CEO of Council to Homeless Persons.

"Time and again evaluations of programs, both internationally and locally, have demonstrated that with safe housing and the right support, people with challenging behaviours, even in the most difficult circumstances, can live successfully as part of the community.

"We are in the midst of a homelessness crisis, where there are very few options to house people, particularly those with mental illness or chronic ill health, including addictions.

"While availability of safe housing options is so limited, the few available are mostly prioritised for families. Single men, like the man depicted in the Herald Sun story, are most often referred to rooming houses or turned away from services without accommodation.

We know that in 2014-15 Victorian homelessness data identified that at least:

- 530 people exited inpatient mental health care into homelessness; up 50% from 2013-2014, and
- 2,174 people entered the homelessness system from correctional facilities

"We also know that people in Victorian prisons experience mental health issues at a rate of two to three times that of the broader community; are 10 to 15 per cent more likely to have a psychotic illness; and that 42 per cent of male prisoners and 33 per cent of female prisoners has an Acquired Brain Injury."

"Research has clearly shown that people exiting prisons are more likely to reoffend if they are homeless, and it that homelessness significantly worsens people's mental health.

"And yet resources are not allocated to address these issues. In two years between 2013-14 and 2015-16 the Victorian Government increased spending on prisoner supervision and support by \$273.5 million, and decreased spending on housing and homelessness by \$14.3 million.

"The last state budget included some welcome increases to address housing issues that are primarily focused on women and children exiting homelessness, but a far greater investment into permanent supportive housing is needed to properly address these issues.

[Ends] **Media enquiries:** contact Kate Colvin on 0418 103 292 or [kate@chp.org.au](mailto:kate@chp.org.au)  
Jenny Smith, CEO Council to Homeless Persons is available for interview