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39,000 Australian schoolkids sought homeless help last year

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As Youth Homelessness Matters Day (5 April) approaches, new data shows an 80% increase in the number of Australian school students presenting at homelessness services over the past three years. The Council to Homeless Persons warns that the situation will get worse if Federal funding for public housing is depleted in the May Budget.

Victoria's peak homelessness body analysed Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data and found that 39,155 kids enrolled in pre-school, primary and secondary school were amongst the 279,000 people who sought help from homelessness services nationally last financial year. This number had jumped 83% from 21,400 in 2012-13.

CHP warns that student homelessness will get much worse if the Federal Government follows through with threats to redirect funding away from a \$1.3 billion affordable housing agreement with the States that provides 320,000 homes with social housing, many of them families with school-aged children, and also funds homelessness services.

"That \$1.3 billion is working very hard to keep tens of thousands of vulnerable young people in stable housing with their families so that they can keep going to school," said Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons.

"Having a strong public and community housing safety net funded by the Commonwealth helps ensure kids from low income families can focus on studies, rather than worrying about where their family is sleeping that night."

"If you don't have a proper home, how can you get a proper education?"

Table: No. of Australians enrolled in school who sought help from homelessness services (AIHW)

AUSTRALIA	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	% 3-year change
Preschool student	2,618	2,495	1,950	1,449	81%
Primary school student	20,087	18,184	14,175	10,441	92%
Secondary school student	16,450	13,950	11,467	9,511	73%
TOTAL (students clients)	39,155	34,629	27,592	21,441	83%

"High rents in the private rental market combined with public housing shortages push families into dodgy accommodation, or forced to live in poverty with rent swallowing up 50% of their incomes."

"Homelessness isn't just the rough sleeping we see on the street. Kids from disadvantaged families who aren't fortunate enough to be in social housing are often forced to chop and change schools as they cycle in and out of temporary accommodation or as their parents move around to find cheaper housing. It's a tragic reality that students are living in overcrowded and inadequate housing such as rooming houses and caravan parks, which are forms of homelessness," she said.

This Youth Homelessness Matters Day, youth and homelessness agencies are calling on the Federal Government to release a national plan to tackle youth homelessness and address the housing affordability crisis. – ENDS -