



Media release – 14 September 2017

2-in-3 rough sleepers are found outside of Melbourne's inner city and CBD, report shows

With just two weeks until the City of Melbourne votes on its rough sleeping laws, a report released by Tony Nicholson, Chair Coordinating the Strategy on Rough Sleepers has found that 2-in-3 rough sleepers are found in middle and outer suburbs and regional areas.

The report shows over the past two years, 37% of rough sleepers presented at homelessness services in middle and outer suburbs and 28% at regional homelessness services. Only 8% of rough sleepers presented to CBD services.

The findings will be discussed by rough sleeping experts on Thursday at the Melbourne Town Hall as part of the Victorian Homelessness Conference.

Speaking at the Conference international homelessness expert, Professor Eoin O'Sullivan, has warned that laws that punish rough sleepers are ineffective and inhumane.

"Using the criminal justice system to deal with a social issue is a trend we're seeing in parts of Europe, and from experience we know that it's failed to reduce homelessness," said Professor O'Sullivan, Editor of the European Journal of Homelessness, and visiting academic.

"It's archaic and inhumane and just pushes the homeless into darker and less safe places. Laws do nothing to fix the cause of homeless, and that's ultimately a matter of lack of affordable housing."

City of Melbourne Councilors will vote on the proposed bylaws on 26 September.

Professor Guy Johnson, Australia's first homelessness professor at RMIT University, and fellow presenter at the conference, says the City of Melbourne's proposal was a step backwards.

"It's one of the most retrograde moves I've seen for a long time," said Professor Guy Johnson.

"All it does is displace the problem, so other councils will have to deal with it. It's going to criminalise some people. They're going to be lumped with fines they can't pay, and they're going to lose the few possessions they have.

"Such laws suggest that a city is more concerned about how its streets look than the welfare of the people who live on them," said Professor Johnson.

We are gravely concerned that the City of Melbourne is about to take us down a very dark path," said Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons, Victoria's peak body.

"Until there is sufficient, low-cost, housing for people who are very poor, we will continue to see homelessness. It is distressing to see, but sweeping it out of sight helps no-one," said Ms Smith.

The City of Melbourne received more than 2,556 submissions from the public regarding the proposal, with 86% of opposed to the new bylaws.

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