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## Rough sleeping action plan a ‘critical turning point’ in solving homelessness crisis, says peak

The Council to Homeless Persons has hailed the newly announced Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan as a “critical turning point in homelessness policy in Victoria” that will begin to turn off the tap of homelessness.

The plan, announced by Minister for Housing, Martin Foley, includes eight new assertive outreach teams across metro Melbourne and regional cities to engage rough sleepers in suburbs and regional areas, reducing the ‘drift’ of rough sleepers to the inner city and CBD.

To complement outreach efforts, teams of mental health professionals, housing workers and nurses located in Inner Melbourne, Port Phillip, Dandenong, Frankston, Geelong and Ballarat will work closely with rough sleepers for as long as they need after they are housed to prevent them cycling back onto the street, and into hospitals and the justice system. The package also includes 106 new homes for rough sleepers and other vulnerable client groups.

“This is the piece of the puzzle we’ve been calling for, for a long time. It puts a wedge in the revolving door between homelessness, prison and hospitals,” said Ms Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons.

“Moving rough sleepers into a home is futile if they don’t have the ongoing support they need to keep a home and stay on track. This plan recognises that those who have been homeless long term, need very intensive support, sometimes for years, to overcome their mental health issues, addiction, isolation and childhood trauma.”

“Getting to appointments, managing mental health, treating the physical impacts of years on the street, dealing with crises, adjusting to their new lives and neighbours, learning to cook and manage budgets, continuing medication – for people with complex issues, these can be the stumbling block that tips them back into homelessness,” she said.

“We’re saving tax payers money in the long run, as we’ll see less people cycling through hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters.”

Ms Smith also said that the approach will reduce the trend of people moving to the CBD seeking services. “The assertive outreach teams will target rough sleepers where they were living and will reduce the drift to the city,” she said

CHP says that ramping up efforts to support rough sleepers is a far more productive than punishing rough sleepers by slapping them with fines and confiscating belongings.

“The past 12 months have been some of the darkest times for Melbourne’s homeless and for those who work with them. Demonizing of the homeless at an all-time high.

“Today’s announcement is a light at the end of the tunnel.”

“This comprehensive package is a line in the sand for homelessness in Victoria and it’s time for the federal government to come to the party and guarantee the pipeline of social housing needed to make it foolproof.” **Media enquiries: Lanie Harris, Council to Homeless Persons, 0418 552 377 or [lanie@chp.org.au](mailto:lanie@chp.org.au)**