



Media release – 14 March 2018

Victoria calls for better funding deal, as Census shows surge in older people's homelessness, couchsurfing, severe overcrowding

The State's peak body for homelessness says new Census data showing an 11% increase in Victorian homelessness is a "wake-up call" and urged the Federal Government to release a housing and homelessness plan.

"The increase in homelessness is no surprise given that as a country we've failed to tackle the housing affordability crisis, and our homelessness services continue to be chronically underfunded," said Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons

The ABS today released the 2016 Census data, showing that 24,817 Victorians were counted as homeless in 2016, up from 22,306 in 2011.

"The Census simply puts a number to what Victorian homelessness services have long been reporting – that they're groaning under the weight of demand," said Ms Smith.

"Homelessness is not a lifestyle choice, it reflects systems failure, and most critically, a shortage of affordable housing.

"In our State Budget we've called for 14,500 more social housing properties, tripling the commitment already made by the State Government. However, without Federal government investment in social housing and homelessness support, we're just bucketing water on the Titanic," said Ms Smith.

Amongst the Census trends about which the Council to Homeless Persons is most concerned:

- 23% increase in homelessness among people aged 55+
- 2-in-5 Victorians counted as homeless were under 25 years of age
- 1,123 Victorians rough sleeping (rough sleepers represent 5% of Victoria's homeless)
- Couchsurfing, living in rooming houses and severe overcrowding increasing

"It has been 10 years since the Rudd Government made a commitment to halve homelessness by 2020. While the housing crisis that underpins homelessness has worsened – a housing crisis that ironically is driven by Federal housing policy – Federal political interest in solving homelessness has waned.

"Australia currently does not have a plan to address our housing and homelessness crisis, and we are seeing the symptom of that neglect in every city, suburb and town.

"Victorian homelessness services are turning away 91 people every day because of a lack of resources and affordable housing," said Ms Smith.

The Council to Homeless Persons says that the solutions include:

- a monumental boost to social housing stock, which has fallen national to just 5% of all housing. There are 36,000 Victorians waiting for social housing,

- reform of the housing taxation system which encourages investors to own many properties while thousands don't have a roof over their head
- An increase to Centrelink incomes, especially the Newstart income, which leaves people just \$20/day after they've paid for housing
- Proper funding of our homelessness services so they're not turning people away, and can intervene earlier to prevent homelessness happening in the first place

The Federal Government's new National Homelessness and Housing Agreement, is before the Senate and likely to come into effect on 1 July.

"The legislation currently on the table brings not a single extra dollar of homelessness or housing funding to Victoria in real terms." Says Ms Smith.

"Our homelessness crisis has been growing for a long time, and it will not be solved overnight. It needs concerted effort from every level of government. The solutions that will make homelessness a brief, once off and supported experience, are at our fingertips; we just need the political will to make it happen."

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ABS 2016 Census – Victorian homelessness data snapshot (The full data is available at <http://abs.gov.au/>)

There has been an **11.3% increase in the number of Victorians experiencing homelessness over the last five years**, greater than the population growth. Twenty percent of Australia's homeless population live in Victoria. Of the Victorian homeless population, 58% were male, and 42% were female. On Census night, 42 Victorians in every 10,000 were experiencing homelessness.

	2011	2016	Percentage change over last 5 years
Total number of Victorians counted as homeless	22,306	24,817	11.3% increase*

** Increase is not explained by population increases alone. Population growth over the same period in Victoria was 10.7%*

Victorian women's homelessness

On Census night, 10,432 Victorian women were recorded as being homeless, up 8.3% since 2011. Females made up 42% off Victoria's homeless population.

Homelessness funding is still inadequate to meet demand from women – last year Victorian homelessness services turned away 60 women each day.

	2011	2016	Percentage change over 5 years
Number of Victorian women experiencing homelessness	9,631	10,432	8.3%

Victorian children and young people's homelessness

Children and young people make up 2-in-5 of all people experiencing homelessness in Victoria; 39% of the Victorians counted as homeless on Census night were under 25 years of age.

Age	2016	Percentage of the homeless population in this age group
Under 12	3,372	14%
12–18	2,010	8%
19–24	4,360	18%

What does Victorian homelessness look like?

Rough sleeping makes up only 5% of all Victoria homelessness. Other major forms of homelessness include:

Type of homelessness in Victoria	Proportion of the homeless population
Rough sleeping	5%
Shelters / refuges / crisis beds (supported accommodation)	29%
Couchsurfing	12%
Rooming houses	18%
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	36%

Older people and homelessness in Victoria

There has been a significant rise in the number of older Victorians who are recorded as homeless. There has been a 23% increase in Victorians aged 55+ experiencing homelessness. Although over 55s do not represent the largest demographic of the homelessness population (about 13% of homeless Victorians are 55+), they are a rapidly growing age bracket.

	2011	2016	Percentage change since 2011
Number of Victorians aged 55+ experiencing homelessness	2,689	3,311	23% increase

How old are people experiencing homelessness in Victoria?

People under 25 make up 40% of Victoria's homeless population. People aged 55+ make up 13% of Victoria's homeless population.

Age bracket	Proportion of Victorian homeless population in this age bracket
Under 12	14%
12–18	8%
19–24	18%
25–34	22%
35–44	14%
45–54	12%
55–64	7%
65–74	4%
75 and over	2%