Homes fix homelessness, not laws.

At a rough sleeping forum in Melbourne, a persistent theme has emerged that homelessness services' efforts are being hampered by the chronic shortage of public and community housing.

Last week a Parliamentary Inquiry into social housing revealed that there were 82,000 Victorians waiting for social housing, a number which includes nearly 25,000 children.

"Without sufficient affordable housing, we are fighting an uphill battle to end homelessness, because people are forced to cycle through rooming houses, crisis beds and other temporary accommodation," said Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons.

"We need commitment from all levels and sides of government over the long-term – not just one election cycle.

"The homelessness crisis has been growing for many years, and there are no quick fixes," said Ms Smith.

Minister Martin Foley opened the event by saying that the rough sleeping we see on the city streets is the "canary in the coalmine" of a much bigger problem, and one that is not confined to the inner city.

"Homelessness is not a law and order issue. It is a social crisis. We must resist the quick sugar fix of move-on laws designed to make the visible problem of rough sleeping disappear. We need more housing and we need the Federal Government to come to the table to help us deliver it," said Minister Foley.

"The Andrews' Labor Government is proud to be making record investments in housing and homelessness services to find practical solutions in partnership with local government and the sector," said the Minister.

CHP cautioned local councils against trying to solve a systemic problem with local laws that punish rough sleepers. The peak body commended local governments for maintaining a compassionate approach to managing the impacts of rough sleep despite the increasing pressure to make the problem go away.

"Homes fix homelessness, not laws. Local councils cannot be held responsible for solve a problem which is caused by a broken housing system. Local council responses help to manage the impacts of increased homelessness, but don't solve homelessness," said Ms Smith.

Inner city Mayors from City of Melbourne, City of Port Phillip and City of Yarra reiterated that they will continue to work to balance the humanitarian crisis with local needs, but recognise that "moving on" rough sleepers only shifts the problem to neighbouring municipalities.

"Homelessness has no borders," said Mayor of Port Phillip, Bernadene Voss.

Homelessness practitioners at the event emphasised the futility of trying to respond to homelessness in the absence of homes in which to house them, insisting temporary crisis accommodation and rooming houses are not a permanent solution.

"Our outreach workers will keep showing up every day and working with rough sleepers to try and get them housed. The wait time for social housing is many years, and this is a huge challenge," said Leonie Kenny, manager of the Rough Sleeper Project, which is supporting the implementation of some aspects of Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan.

In a Herald Sun report today, property development adviser Rob Praodlin said "The long-term economic cost to our country and unintended consequences of the lack of stable shelter will be extra billions of dollars in the future," he said.

"This requires a national strategy where the private sector and not-for-profits come together to determine a long-term plan."

What is Housing First, and how can it be used to end homelessness in Australia?

[Housing First](#) is an approach that invests in permanent housing for every person who is homeless, plus wraparound support where required. Housing First has been successfully used in Canada and the US to dramatically reduce rough sleeping and in Finland, Housing First was used to end rough sleeping.

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