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Sex-for-rent a worrying trend as women run out of housing options

Ads offering accommodation in exchange for sexual or 'personal' services are targeting vulnerable women who are struggling to find a place to live, says Victoria's peak body for homelessness.

As Homelessness Week (6-12 August) approaches, the Council to Homeless Persons has released analysis of DHHS showing that median one-bedroom apartment rents were out of reach for a woman on the minimum working wage (\$719 / week) in all of Melbourne during the March quarter. CHP argues that the tight rental market is creating a market for unscrupulous landlords to offer free accommodation to women with an overt or implicit demand for sexual services in return.

"It's the ultimate sign of a broken housing market when women on low incomes face the choice between homelessness or trading sex in exchange for shelter," said Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless persons.

Termed 'survival sex' by researchers and the welfare sector, people on low incomes, particularly women and those in the LGTBIQ+ community, are vulnerable to being coerced into sex-for rent arrangements in order to avoid homelessness.

"When the private rental market has squeezed you out completely, it's understandable that women take desperate measures to avoid homelessness," said Ms Smith.

"Homelessness services have long reported that women in insecure accommodation, such as couchsurfing, can feel an implicit expectation to 'put out' in order to avoid being kicked out. But the emergence of sex-for-rent ads is a more overt way of exploiting women who've run out of options," said Ms Smith.

"These women are left without legal tenure or rights, as there is no lease agreement in place. Effectively they are simply couchsurfing in exchange for sex, and the threat of being kicked out is constantly hanging over their heads," said Ms Smith.

According to CHP's analysis of the most recent DHHS rent report, median one bedroom apartment rents were out of reach of a woman on the minimum working wage (\$719 / week) in all of Melbourne during the March quarter. A woman earning minimum wage should be aiming to pay no more than \$216/week in rent to avoid rent stress.

Seven suburbs did not have any one-bedroom rentals on the market.

Even traditionally affordable suburbs such as Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Sunshine and Ringwood failed to offer any relief from soaring one-bedroom rents in the March 2018 quarter.

Table: What proportion of the minimum wage (\$719/week) would be spent on median one-bedroom rents in Melbourne's suburbs? (Source: CHP analysis of DHHS Rent data, March 2018)

	Median one-bedroom rent	Proportion on income spent on rent
Docklands	\$450	63%
Southbank	\$440	61%

Port Melbourne	\$430	60%
CBD-St Kilda Rd	\$420	58%
Fitzroy	\$420	58%
South Melbourne	\$410	57%
Collingwood-Abbotsford	\$400	56%
East Melbourne	\$400	56%
Brighton	\$400	56%
Armadale	\$390	54%
Richmond-Burnley	\$390	54%
South Yarra	\$385	54%
Balwyn	\$380	53%
Carlton-Parkville	\$376	52%
North Melbourne-West Melbourne	\$375	52%
Kew	\$375	52%
Glen Waverley-Mulgrave	\$370	51%
East Brunswick	\$370	51%
Flemington-Kensington	\$365	51%
St Kilda	\$365	51%
Canterbury-Surrey Hills-Mont Albert	\$365	51%
Ivanhoe-Ivanhoe East	\$363	50%
Bulleen-Templestowe-Doncaster	\$360	50%
Doncaster East-Donvale	\$360	50%
East Hawthorn	\$360	50%
Williamstown	\$360	50%
Albert Park-Middle Park-West St Kilda	\$350	49%
Carlton North	\$350	49%
Fitzroy North-Clifton Hill	\$350	49%
Prahran-Windsor	\$350	49%
Blackburn	\$350	49%
Camberwell-Glen Iris	\$350	49%
Chadstone-Oakleigh	\$350	49%
Mount Waverley	\$350	49%
Malvern	\$350	49%
Brunswick	\$350	49%
Hampton-Beaumaris	\$345	48%
Cheltenham	\$340	47%
Keilor East-Avondale Heights	\$340	47%
Wantirna-Scoresby	\$340	47%
Elwood	\$335	47%
Toorak	\$335	47%
Northcote	\$335	47%
Nunawading-Mitcham	\$330	46%
Elsternwick	\$330	46%

Heidelberg-Heidelberg West	\$330	46%
Melton	\$324	45%
East St Kilda	\$320	44%
Coburg-Pascoe Vale South	\$320	44%
Essendon	\$320	44%
Preston	\$315	44%
Moonee Ponds-Ascot Vale	\$313	44%
Hawthorn	\$310	43%
Bentleigh	\$305	42%
Ringwood	\$305	42%
Box Hill	\$300	42%
Aspendale-Chelsea-Carrum	\$300	42%
Carnegie	\$300	42%
Reservoir	\$300	42%
West Brunswick	\$298	41%
Boronia	\$298	41%
Fairfield-Alphington	\$295	41%
Thornbury	\$295	41%
Mentone-Parkdale-Mordialloc	\$294	41%
Caulfield	\$290	40%
Murrumbeena-Hughesdale	\$290	40%
Eltham-Research-Montmorency	\$290	40%
Mill Park-Epping	\$290	40%
Thomastown-Lalor	\$290	40%
Vermont-Forest Hill-Burwood East	\$285	40%
Malvern East	\$285	40%
Bundoora-Greensborough-Hurstbridge	\$285	40%
Newport-Spotswood	\$280	39%
Yarraville-Seddon	\$280	39%
Clayton	\$279	39%
Craigieburn	\$275	38%
Altona	\$270	38%
Footscray	\$270	38%
Oak Park-Glenroy-Fawkner	\$270	38%
Whittlesea	\$270	38%
Croydon-Lilydale	\$270	38%
Cranbourne	\$270	38%
Werribee-Hoppers Crossing	\$260	36%
Springvale	\$260	36%
Broadmeadows-Roxburgh Park	\$258	36%
Yarra Ranges	\$255	35%
Gladstone Park-Tullamarine	\$253	35%

Sunbury	\$253	35%
West Footscray	\$250	35%
Dandenong	\$250	35%
Dandenong North-Endeavour Hills	\$250	35%
Narre Warren-Hampton Park	\$250	35%
Pakenham	\$240	33%
Burwood-Ashburton	\$235	33%
St Albans-Deer Park	\$230	32%
Sunshine	\$230	32%
Noble Park	\$225	31%
Pascoe Vale-Coburg North	\$219	30%
Brighton East	Nil one-bedroom properties avail	
Sydenham	n/a	#VALUE!
Keilor	n/a	#VALUE!
Bayswater	n/a	#VALUE!
Ferntree Gully	n/a	#VALUE!
Rowville	n/a	#VALUE!
Berwick	n/a	#VALUE!

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