



Media release – Friday 23 November 2018 (EMBARGOED UNTIL SUNDAY 25 NOVEMBER)

70% increase over four years in number of women seeking homelessness assistance due to family violence

To coincide with [International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#), the state's peak body for homelessness has released data showing that the number of Victorian women seeking homelessness assistance due to family violence has increased 70 per cent over the last four years. The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) is calling for the incoming Government's to prioritise increased supply of social housing for people on very low incomes.

In 2016-17, 25,755 women (aged 15+) approached homelessness services due to family violence, up from 15,090 in 2012-13. CHP cites increased reporting of family violence and a shortage of affordable housing (both private and public) for the trend.

'These figures provide an understanding of the scale of the problem that our sector is facing. We've had a tidal wave of new people needing help, but we haven't seen a tidal wave of low-cost housing or funding. There certainly hasn't been a 70 per cent increase in social housing built over the past four years,' said Ms Jenny Smith, CEO, CHP.

'In the midst of the housing crisis, agencies face the formidable task of finding affordable housing for women on low incomes fleeing violence. The most recent DHHS rent report shows that just three per cent of all two-bedroom rentals in Melbourne were affordable for a single mother on a low income in the June quarter,' said Ms Smith.

Of the 25,755 Victorian women who were seeking accommodation last year, around 75 per cent of them were able to be permanently housed, or to have their existing tenancies saved if they were at risk of homelessness.

However, due to the lack of permanent housing available, more than 6,000 of the 25,755 women were living in crisis accommodation, shelters and motels or couchsurfing, and in some cases rough sleeping *after* they had sought assistance.

'Every day our agencies use their tenacity and wits to find homes for women and children who are facing homelessness due to family violence, in a private housing market that has nothing for them, and in the absence of a social safety net. It's thankless and exhausting work, and at the end of the day many women still don't get the housing they need,' said Ms Smith.

'Workers are brokering deals with real estate agents, advocating for urgent clients to be prioritised up the social housing wait list and providing short-term loans to help women pay the rent after they've made the brave decision to banish a partner from the home.'

'More housing for people on the lowest incomes, including women fleeing violence, must be the first point of order for the new state government,' said Ms Smith.

'We saw many pioneering and significant reforms and investments flow from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, but our broken housing system, and dearth of social housing, continues to undermine efforts to break the relationship between family violence and homelessness.'

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