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Media release

Women and families flood Victorian homelessness services as housing crisis continues: New data

- *1 in 84 Victorians sought homelessness help in 2017-18; 64% female*
- *National demand for help flatlines, while Victorian demand rises*
- *90 people turned away per day from Victorian homelessness services*
- *Parents with children make up majority of Victorian clients*
- *Victoria's economic success has a dark flipside, says peak.*

Victorian women and children are turning to homelessness services in higher numbers than ever before, according to new data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to be released on Friday.

The number of Victorians seeking help from homelessness services last financial year jumped to 116,872, up 6 per cent from 109,901 the year before, with 64 per cent of them female. Conversely, the number of people seeking help nationally stayed static.

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) says that Victoria's economic success is inadvertently driving up homelessness with our rising population, and growing number of people with good jobs, creating more competition for housing. CHP points to Victoria's mid-year budget released on Monday which showed Victoria's economy grew by 3.5 per cent, higher than the 3.25 per cent forecast, and marking the 26th year of uninterrupted growth in Victoria.

'People are coming to Victoria in droves to take advantage of jobs and new opportunities, which is a great thing, said Jenny Smith, CEO, CHP.

'The dark flipside of this success is that there is also greater competition for housing, and the gap between high-wage earners and people on low incomes continues to grow.

'Those on the lowest income rungs are being pushed out of the housing market, and straight to the doors of our services,'

'There's money in the budget to help fix this problem. Revenue from our economic success can be used to build more social housing.'

Table: Number of Victorians seeking homelessness assistance, broken down by gender (AIHW, Specialists Homelessness Services data, 2017-18)

	2016-17	2017-18	Annual % increase
Male	41,122	42,033	2%
Female	68,778	74,839	9%
TOTAL	109,901	116,872	6%

Parents with children made up nearly 40 per cent of the people coming to homelessness services, most often single parents. - continues -

'Victorian families on low incomes have simply run out of options when it comes to finding a home they can afford. When families hit rock bottom and turn to social housing, there are 38,000 applications in front of theirs,' said Ms Smith.

The data shows a deeply gendered problem, with nearly 2-in-3 (64%) homelessness clients being female.

'Women are on lower incomes, they're more likely to be victims of family violence, they're more likely to have children with them – this all means they're at higher risk of experiencing homelessness,' said Ms Smith

Family violence was the leading cause of homelessness, with 38 per cent of clients citing it as the reason for needing help, closely followed by housing issues (e.g being evicted, inability to afford the rent, or being pushed out of severely overcrowded dwellings).

Reasons for seeking homelessness assistance (Victoria, 2017-18)	% of clients who said this was their main reason
Family violence	38%
Housing (including eviction, rental stress, overcrowding)	35%
Financial and employment difficulties	11%
Family / relationship breakdown and interpersonal relationships	3%
Transition from prison	2%
Mental health / drug use / alcohol use	2%
Other	9%

Ms Smith said that the family violence reforms in Victoria had been groundbreaking, but that women leaving violence were still faced with homelessness.

'The Victorian reforms have empowered women to break the cycle of family violence, but there are few rentals they can afford on a single income when they leave.'

'Historically low levels of social housing mean our services are forced to churn women and children through crisis accommodation and refuges instead of just being able to get them into a safe, permanent home,' said Ms Smith.

CHP warned that state efforts continue to be hampered by existing deficient Commonwealth policies, including Centrelink income levels that have fallen behind housing costs, and negative gearing and capital gains concessions which make housing a speculative sport.

'The federal government holds the biggest levers when it comes to tackling homelessness and rent stress, and there does not appear to be an appetite to use those levers to address these complex social problems,' said Ms Smith.

'The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement signed in August doesn't offer a single extra dollar of Federal money to Victorian homelessness services in real terms, despite thousands more Victorians lining up at agency doors every year. As a result we are turning away 90 people every day.'

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