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More Australian workers turning to homelessness services

More and more working Victorians are turning to homelessness services as the cost of housing catapults and wages stagnate, analysis of Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data reveals.

CHP analysis of AIHW data show that there has been 23 per cent increase in the number of Victorian workers needing homelessness assistance over the last four years. NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia had the greatest increases in numbers of workers needing homelessness assistance.

Table 1: People in full-time and part-time employment approaching homelessness services (AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services data)

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	% increase
NSW	3,491	5,120	5,587	5,705	63%
Vic	7,738	7,836	8,547	9,550	23%
WA	1,545	1,552	1,511	1,786	16%
SA	1,118	1,216	1,333	1,327	19%
NATIONAL	17,631	19,268	20,422	22,075	25%

'It's a misconception that having a job is a safeguard against homelessness. Rents are rising fast, but wages aren't keeping up with housing costs, and as a result our homelessness services are seeing more people who simply can't afford the rent,' said Ms Jenny Smith, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons (CHP).

CHP will soon release its State Budget Submission, which outlines how taxpayer money could be directed to eliminate homelessness. Victoria's number one priority, CHP says, is to significantly boost public and community housing stock so that low-income earners, including working households, have a safety net.

'In the May state budget, we want to see funding for 3,000 public and community housing units per year for the next 10 years so people aren't forced to live in poverty in the private rental market, or worse still in rooming houses and refuges,' said Ms Smith.

Victoria's social housing wait list has blown out to 38,700 applications (DHHS, September 2018), as population increases, and the impact of the housing crisis take hold. A recent Productivity Commission report reveals that the number of social housing properties in Victoria has declined over the past four years.

'When rent swallows up most of the budget, even people who have a job are unable to put aside savings. A life crisis, such as a car breaking down or an unexpected medical cost is enough to tip them into homelessness, and at the moment our services simply can't house those people.'

'By building and buying 3,000 social housing units per year, the Victorian government would rescue thousands of families, women, children from poverty, overcrowded living and dangerous rooming houses.'

CHP warned that the State and Federal governments must pull together to turn the tide on the housing and homelessness crisis, and that the Commonwealth held many of the major levers, including housing taxation mechanisms, and setting the funding levels under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

Media Enquiries: Lanie Harris, 0418 552 377 or lanie@chp.org.au

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