



Press Release – 18 October 2004

Report Calls for End to Discrimination Against the Homeless

A major report to be released on 22 October 2004 calls on the federal and state governments to amend the law to prohibit discrimination on the ground of 'social status'.

The report, entitled *Little Piece of Heaven: Recommendations of the Housing is a Human Right Project*, was prepared jointly by the Victorian Council of Social Service, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, Women's Housing Ltd and Shelter Victoria. It has been endorsed by the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic and the Council to Homeless Persons.

The report is based on extensive consultations conducted from March to August 2004 with people who are homeless or experiencing housing rights violations in Victoria. The consultations disclosed that discrimination against people who are homeless, unemployed or social security recipients is widespread but lawful across Victoria, particularly in the area of housing and accommodation.

According to Philip Lynch, Coordinator of the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, amendment of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)* is imperative to enable the homeless, the unemployed and social security recipients to enjoy the same freedom from unwarranted discrimination as people with homes, jobs and means.

Mr Lynch said that there are five key reasons to protect people from discrimination on the ground of social status, including homelessness:

1. Discrimination is a major cause of homelessness. Discrimination can systemically exclude people from housing, health care, education, employment and other things which can result in homelessness.
2. Discrimination can diminish self-esteem and self-reliance and maintain a state of homelessness.
3. Discrimination costs all of us money. A recent study in the *Medical Journal of Australia* found that discrimination has detrimental effects on people's health and quality of life, and also has significant social and economic costs. People are most likely to be productive members of society when they are protected from discrimination and their rights to adequate housing and an adequate income are realised.
4. The failure of federal and state governments to prohibit discrimination on the basis of social status is a violation of Australia's obligations under international human rights law. Both the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, ratified by Australia almost 30 years ago, require that federal and state governments effectively protect people from discrimination, including on the ground of social status.

The PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic and the Council to Homeless Persons also support the key recommendations of the Report that:

1. The human right to adequate housing should be recognised in law by both the Federal and Victorian Governments.
2. The Federal Government should develop and implement a National Housing and Taxation Plan that increases resources to public and community housing and that includes strategies to align the supply of affordable housing with demand.

The Report and the Charter of Housing Rights for Victoria will be formally launched on the steps of Parliament House, Spring Street, Melbourne, at 1.00pm on Friday, 22 October 2004.

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