

# Homelessness

## PILCH Victorian Election Priorities 2010



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**U**rgent steps are needed to reduce homelessness in Victoria and minimise related harms.

Rates of homelessness in Australia have increased steadily over the past decade. There are currently over 105,000 Australians without access to, and enjoyment of, a safe and secure home, where they can live with dignity. This includes over 20,500 Victorians, who are homeless on any given night.

The increase in rates of homelessness has coincided with a period of unprecedented prosperity in this country. This 'poverty gap' has led to a serious national housing crisis.

The Victorian Government must play a leadership role in this area, by taking steps to ensure the realisation of the right to adequate housing for all Victorians.

### Homelessness, poverty and disadvantage...

The causes of homelessness are intersectional and related, although **the common connecting factor tends to be poverty**. Poverty makes people more susceptible to homelessness, especially in situations of crisis, or unforeseen setbacks. The breakdown of a relationship or the loss of a job might only represent a temporary setback to most people, while for a person living in poverty these events may trigger homelessness.

### Homelessness and justice

People experiencing homelessness and disadvantage are often subject to intersectional and interrelated human rights abuses and barriers to accessing justice.

Through the work of the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, we have recognised a number of areas that disproportionately and unfairly impact on people who are homeless.

*The right to housing goes further than the right not to be subjected to arbitrary or forced eviction. It also involves a duty on the State to take effective action to enable its people to meet their need for a safe and secure home where they can live with dignity. That is not achieved easily or overnight, but... it is now internationally recognised that States must take appropriate action to ensure the realisation of this right*

- Nelson Mandela

#### Claire's story

After my parents split up, Mum worked really hard to keep us from living on the street but it wasn't easy. We slept on couches of friends (and friends of friends) and family. ..

I was pretty much born into homelessness. I was abused as a child and I moved around a lot with my mum. ... I think I once counted it was about 20 times or something...

Then after a while we'd be back to sleeping rough. We stayed in a friend's backyard for awhile. A friend of ours was sleeping in a bungalow but there wasn't enough room for us so we just stayed in the backyard. We didn't have a sleeping bag or tent or anything...

## Call to action

The Victorian Government must address the areas that most impact on people who are homeless. This includes the key issue of housing supply, but also related legal and human rights issues such as fines and infringements, poverty and debt, tenancy laws and regulations, access to services (eg, health, social security and welfare services).

### Improve housing options and services

In accordance with the 'It takes a home...' campaign ([www.ittakesahome.org.au](http://www.ittakesahome.org.au)):

- ▶ commit to the federal government target to halve homelessness by 2020;
- ▶ deliver affordable homes;
- ▶ ensure a better start for children and young people experiencing homelessness;
- ▶ end the cycle of homelessness by providing support where and when it's needed;
- ▶ invest in the homelessness workforce delivering services to those in need.

### Improve infringements systems

Reform the *Infringements Act* 2006 (Vic) to:

- ▶ reduce the number of infringeable offences;
- ▶ recognise the significant financial hardship that results from infringements; and
- ▶ be more responsive to clients with special circumstances.

### Repeal public space offences

Repeal summary offences that criminalise the use of public spaces.

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## Background resources

1. Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie, *Counting the Homeless 2006* (2008)
2. Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie, *Counting the Homeless 2006: Victoria* (2009)
3. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living*, Miloon Kothari, Mission to Australia, UN Doc. A/HRC/4/18/Add.2 (2007)
4. Philip Lynch & Jacqueline Cole, 'Homelessness and Human Rights: Regarding and Responding to Homelessness as a Human Rights Violation' (2003) 4 *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 139
5. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living*, Miloon Kothari, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/48 (2005)