



EMBARGOED

7 April 2016

Victorian leaders to secure 200 houses for the hidden homeless

Only .8 per cent of rental properties in central Melbourne are considered affordable and rising numbers of Victorians are finding themselves 'homeless' – a word that business and community leaders are now determined to redefine.

Business and community leaders in Victoria are joining forces to support vulnerable individuals who simply can't secure a stable, safe and appropriate place to live, by sleeping outside in the cold for one night only at the [2016 Vinnies CEO Sleepout](#) on 23 June 2016.

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria (Vinnies) officially launched its annual flagship fundraising event today and is calling on CEOs, politicians, business leaders, and community leaders to sign up either individually or as part of their senior management team, to spend a night out of their comfort zone.

The national event, now in its eleventh year, collectively raises more than \$10m annually to support Vinnies' vital homeless services. One of the most recent changes has been the introduction of teams, so executives can now participate and fundraise together too.

Vinnies Acting CEO, Mr John Blewonski said the Vinnies CEO Sleepout is a unique chance for leaders to see life through the lens of the 105,000+ Australians who are experiencing homelessness every night in Australia.

"The Vinnies CEO Sleepout is an experiential event designed to help participants understand what it's like to live rough for a night and to learn more about the many pathways to homelessness that people far removed from this issue rarely ever see," said Mr Blewonski.

"Due to a housing affordability crisis taking hold in Australia, homelessness is very much on the rise and largely hidden from our view - so we're determined to show the community just how easy it is to fall into this way of living."

Lack of affordable housing options in Victoria is creating a disparate emerging group of people at risk of homelessness. In Victoria, almost 23,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness with half younger than 25 and one in six under 12 years of age.

"In Victoria, the income to house price ratio is one of the worst in the country. The cost of an average house is almost eight to nine times the average annual income and the affordable range is ideally under four times the average income or less. This has a flow on effect to everyone trying to secure a place to live," said Mr Blewonski.

With the help of around 300 CEO Sleepout participants, Vinnies Victoria is aiming to raise \$1.5m to help secure 200 houses for the hidden homeless through a new program called HomeDirect, which will support the acquisition of rental properties for people in need and support a shift to independent living.

"Thousands of people are lining up at housing support services every week in desperate need of accommodation. Their options are largely limited to staying in a hotel, boarding house or other transitional accommodation, or worse still, they will be handed a sleeping bag for the night," said Mr Blewonski.

HomeDirect will help to secure houses in the private rental market across metropolitan and regional Victoria and provide people in need with access to a 12 month head lease and subsidies, as well as a significant contribution towards rent in advance.

The program is designed to benefit those most at risk of homelessness in Victoria including women and children escaping family violence; people who are economically vulnerable or the 'working poor'; and people experiencing chronic or repeated homelessness.

"People experiencing disadvantage deserve better and we simply need to make more houses available to give them access to opportunities. Bricks, mortar, doors and windows – it's the only way."

As part of the event, Vinnies is also aiming to shift perceptions around homelessness, by showing some of the many pathways to housing stress. Only around 6% of the homeless population is 'visible' (sleeping rough) and there are thousands more sleeping in cars, on couches, in rooming houses, caravan parks and other unsustainable housing options.

"We have an ambitious goal to raise \$1.5m to secure 200 houses in Victoria for the hidden homeless – but this is just the beginning. We will also provide vital education and welfare services to ensure these individuals are heard, and have the knowledge, confidence and support to transition into the housing market on their own."

Victoria has the lowest supply of public housing of any state or territory at 3.4 per cent, compared to the national average supply of 5 per cent. The demand for social housing is predicted to increase by 38 per cent in Melbourne and 26 per cent for the rest of the Victoria by 2024, so a solution is needed now.

"Through the introduction and growth of HomeDirect we're aiming to prevent homelessness, not just to provide quick fixes. I'm very proud to invite our community leaders to help drive this initiative as part of the 2016 Vinnies CEO Sleepout. Join me to sleep on cardboard outside in the cold for one night only," said Mr Blewonski.

CEOs, politicians, business leaders, and community leaders are invited to sign up for the [2016 Vinnies CEO Sleepout](http://www.ceosleepout.org.au) on 23 June 2016, either individually or as part of a senior management team. Visit www.ceosleepout.org.au to register now.

- ENDS -

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INTERVIEWEES: Media interviews with Vinnies VIC Acting CEO John Blewonski, CEOs participating in the event (see [HERE](#)), and people identified as the 'hidden homeless' are available to share their stories on request.

EVENT DETAILS: The Vinnies CEO Sleepout will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) at 1 Convention Centre Pl, South Wharf Victoria at 6pm Thursday 23 June – 6:30am Friday 24 June 2016. Participants can register at www.ceosleepout.org.au.

About the St Vincent de Paul Society:

The St Vincent de Paul Society and its wide network of members and volunteers provide practical frontline support, advocacy and friendship for the most vulnerable members of our community. Key services include home visitation; youth programs; soup vans; assistance for asylum seekers and refugees; compeer programs for people experiencing mental illness; education and tutoring; and a range of professional accommodation and health services through the VincentCare network. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has more than 40,000 members and volunteers. Internationally, the Society operates in 149 countries and has over 950,000 members. To find out more visit www.vinnies.org.au.