

# Herald Sun



📷 A homeless man on the corner of Elizabeth and Flinders Streets.

■ VIC News ■

## Homeless people in Melbourne: Police should take 'hands-on' approach, world expert

# expert says

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VICTORIA Police should take a more “hands-on” role in helping Melbourne’s rising number of homeless escape the streets, says a world expert on solving homelessness.

In 2012, Daniel McDonald was named Tampa Police Department’s first homeless liaison officer with a brief of tackling the city’s homelessness problem.

In the past four years, Mr McDonald says he has helped Tampa, population 350,000, cut its homeless population by half.

He said Victoria Police needed to take a more proactive role if Melbourne was serious about making inroads in cutting its number of rough sleepers.

Mr McDonald, 50, said the police and homeless often had a contentious, adversarial relationship, but “street engagement” was key.

“My model consists of police officers whose sole assignment is to identify the chronically homeless and stay by their side until they are housed,” Mr McDonald said.



📷 Homeless people sleep outside Flinders Street Station.



📷 Tampa Police Department's first homeless liaison officer, Daniel McDonald.

“I assist with their identity cards, disability pensions, mental health and substance abuse issues. “In short – whatever it takes to get them off the street.

“I address their needs, looking for long-term solutions, rather than arresting them.”

Mr McDonald said solving homelessness in Melbourne might seem like an impossible task, but it wasn't.

“My city was in the same predicament as Melbourne but on a much smaller scale,” he said.

“It takes some risk and willingness by stakeholders to try a new approach.

“It's the same as climbing Mount Everest — one step at a time.”

Mr McDonald said tackling homelessness required a combination of local authority support and police intervention.

“The local authorities have to develop and provide the infrastructure to accommodate the homeless such as permanent, support housing, transitional shelters, mental health and substance abuse programs,” he said.

“The police can be the entry point into services provided by the local authorities.”

He said he did not allow the homeless to become complacent.

“One of my most challenging clients has taken me 4.5 years to get off the street,” Mr McDonald said.

“We call this ‘service resistance’ and work constantly to overcome it.”

Victoria Police spokesman Ben Radisich said local police, including community liaison and youth engagement officers, worked closely with people experiencing homelessness.

“Our focus is to work with stakeholders including the City of Melbourne and the Salvation Army to link the people who experience homelessness with support services and accommodation,” he said.

“If people who are experiencing homelessness or are begging become aggressive, rather than being fined, they are often charged and bailed to court where they are usually required to undergo a Salvation Army program.

“Those who are in need of food, shelter and health care are referred to care providers.”

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