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News

A professor for the homeless

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AUSTRALIA has its first professor of homelessness.

Guy Johnson once worked at a homeless agency and was appalled by the conditions at a St Kilda rooming house.

“There were literally dozens of rooms filled with the most vulnerable people I have ever seen and it changed my views straight away,” he said.

“The traditional view of homelessness is of an old man sleeping on the streets. I suddenly realised this was an issue affecting a wider range of people who were hidden from view in this substandard form of accommodation.” RMIT appointed Prof Johnson to head the new Urban Housing and Homelessness program in a partnership with housing organisation Unison.

It focuses on the causes of homelessness, including failings in the housing system and preventive measures to fix it.

Unison CEO Michael Perusco said homelessness in Victoria increased by 20 per cent between 2006 and 2011, and last year’s census was tipped to reveal numbers higher than population growth. “There is a need to look at this problem in a different way and find housing models that work now and into the future,” he said.

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