The big question: Should homeless people be banned from camping in the CBD?

During 2016, there was a sharp increase in the numbers of people sleeping rough in Melbourne’s CBD. As well as raising issues of concern for the reasons people are homeless, many people are concerned with the appearance of these people.

During the Australian Open tennis tournament, many tourists come to Melbourne and Melbourne City Council tried to ensure that the city looked at its best during this time. As part of these efforts, the police and council officers asked many of the homeless people in Flinders St Station and other part of the CBD to move away.

Various charity groups have spoken up for these people, pointing out that the growing number of homeless people is due to the lack of affordable housing.

On the other side, however, are a number of citizens who argue that the city is being inundated with homeless people which ruins the appearance of the CBD. Many retailers have commented upon the adverse affect homeless people have upon their sales.

At the moment, it is illegal to set up a camp in the city, but many homeless peoples’ bedding does not come under this law. In order to be classified as a camp, there must be a tent, caravan, vehicle or other structure. Melbourne City Council are calling for a change to these laws to include people sitting on a blanket, or to make it illegal to leave belongings unattended in a public space.

Quick facts:
- During 2016, around 250 people were recorded as being homeless in the city, a sharp increase from previous years
- Melbourne City Council regularly monitors areas where homeless people congregate, clearing up litter and keeping the area tidy
- Around eight people are newly made homeless each week
- Mayor Robert Doyle is under pressure from retailers and tourists who want Melbourne to be free of homeless people
- Charity agencies have suggested that homelessness has always been a problem, it is just that increasing numbers have made the public angry.
Arguments that...  
Melbourne City Council should change laws about camping

• The council currently spends $3.5 million cleaning up after homeless people
• There are concerns about public drug use, begging and the safety of other citizens in the CBD
• Melbourne City Council receives thousands of complaints every year about the homeless problem
• Without stronger laws, police are not able to deal with homeless people in a manner that many people would like
• The state government is providing $600 million dollars to help with transitional housing
• Unless people are forced to move on, they will not address their issues

Snap perspectives
A sugar tax should be introduced

Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton raised concerns a large group of rough sleepers camped outside Flinders Street Station were not actually homeless, but beggars in town to 'shake down' tourists for money.

City council acting CEO Martin Cutter said the council had received almost 1000 complaints in recent years about aggressive begging, open drug use and concerns about walking and amenity on city streets.

A council spokeswoman said "we don't want to see people setting up camps that affect the safety, amenity and accessibility for everyone using public spaces".

Housing Minister Martin Foley said, "The culture of rough sleeping and homelessness in some people is a deeply embedded one. If you've been homeless and on the streets for some time, that's your life."

There should be no sugar tax

A joint statement from Council to Homeless Persons, Launch Housing, Melbourne City Mission, The Salvation Army, VincentCare and Justice Connect Homeless Law states, “This will expose them to greater risk of assault, and will make it more difficult for homeless services to locate and engage people to support them into housing.”

Lucy Adams, the principal lawyer for Justice Connect, said the measure “effectively criminalises sleeping on the street”.

Chief executive of Inner Melbourne Community Legal, Dan Stubbs says, “This is criminalising the homeless instead of trying to do something about homelessness.”

Ms Walker, a co-chair of the Law Institute of Victoria's Criminal Law Section said there was a perception it was "unsavoury" to be homeless "when in actual fact it's a terrible tragedy"