

**Submission by Tenants Victoria to the Legislative  
Council Legal and Social Issues Committee**

**Homelessness in Victoria**

January 2020



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## Who we are and what we do?

Tenants Victoria was founded over 30 years ago to promote and protect the rights of tenants and residents in all forms of residential accommodation in Victoria. We aim to inform and educate tenants about their rights and work for social change to improve conditions for all tenants.

In 1974, a group of disgruntled tenants in Royal Court, Parkville formed a tenants' association to do something about their landlord: Rents were continually rising despite the landlord's failure to carry out repairs. The tenants at Royal Court soon realised that the basic problem was the archaic tenancy laws that still existed in Victoria at the time. They took their story to the media and in the process, raised awareness of tenancy law reform in Victoria. Tenants Victoria was formed as a result of the support and momentum from this brave undertaking.

By the mid-1970s, consumer rights had gained acceptance and the idea that tenants, as consumers, are entitled to basic consumer protection became easier to support in public policy. Once formed, Tenants Victoria – with a number of other community organisations – was instrumental in having the Community Committee on Tenancy Law Reform established, which ultimately led to the Residential Tenancies Act of 1980.

Since its inception, Tenants Victoria has worked to provide advice to as many individual tenants as possible while working towards long-term change for the benefit of all tenants. We successfully campaigned to have caravan park residents included in the 1987 legislation and rooming house residents covered in 1990. After a protracted campaign of more than ten years, an independent Residential Tenancies Bond Authority was established in 1997.

Tenants Victoria was a leader of the "Make Renting Fair" campaign in 2018 which resulted in amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act. These landmark changes which include minimum standards for all rental properties to be implemented by 1 July 2020. We work in partnership with other Community Legal Centres, housing sector organisations, and strategically with government departments to inform policy development and enhance service delivery.

We have assisted more than half a million tenants since that first informal advice service of 30 years ago. The need for basic advice and advocacy for residential tenants is as strong as ever, and we are now assisting more than 16,000 public and private tenants each year.

Tenants Victoria is an incorporated charity that works to improve the standing and legal rights of public and private tenants, rooming house and caravan park residents in Victoria. Tenants Victoria takes a keen interest in homelessness and housing insecurity. Our role as a community legal centre is to provide advice and assistance to those at risk of homelessness or suffering housing insecurity. We advocate and lobby for improvements to tenancy law and practise to support the nearly 1/3 of Victorians who are tenants at any one time. We work with other organisations in the housing sector to increase funding and support for public housing, and improve accessibility and conditions for tenants in community and privately owned housing. Our experience as a source of advice to tenants and to tenancy advocacy providers puts Tenants Victoria in a unique position, as we see the effect of economic and policy changes over time on tenants and would be tenants of all ages and in all types of residential accommodation. We seek to draw on this experience to strengthen the rights of tenants, and to establish a fair and equitable legal framework for tenancy in Victoria.

## Victoria's tenants and their homes

Tenants live a public housing, in community housing and in properties owned by private landlords, as well as in caravan parks and rooming houses. While all of these tenancies are governed by the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the policies applied by the landlord have a significant bearing on the security of tenure and rights of the occupant. For example, tenants in public housing have greater protections against eviction due to the Director of Housing's policies on absence, and their policies on rent arrears. As a social landlord, the Director of Housing's policies recognise both the vulnerability of its tenants and the importance of maintaining secure housing, and prioritise this relationship over commercial considerations.

A more insecure form of housing is caravan park accommodation, where sites are rented for the occupant to live in their own van or to rent an onsite cabin or van. This type of accommodation has been used as an alternative to retirement villages, but also houses people who are transient, families, those leaving prison and hospitals as well as victim survivors of family violence and young people.

Rooming House accommodation has been specifically regulated to create protections for residents. This includes the requirement that rooming house operators be fit and proper persons<sup>1</sup>, and maintain registration and that the premises themselves be registered by the municipality to ensure maintenance of minimum standards.<sup>2</sup> Despite these regulations, rooming houses remain largely substandard, unsafe and insecure accommodation. Rooming houses have long been regarded, along with couch surfing, as a form of homelessness<sup>3</sup>. Private sector rooming houses are often poorly managed, and expensive. Due to the insecurity of tenure, it is extremely difficult for rooming house residents to advocate for repairs, improvements or their own personal safety.

Tenants Victoria has an outreach service to rooming houses, working in collaboration with a number of support services who provide health and housing assertive outreach responses to vulnerable rooming house residents at risk of homelessness. In the last six months, 71% of rooming house residents visited said they felt unsafe, 92% advised that there were repairs issues. 50% of those interviewed received Newstart payments, and paid substantially more than 50% of their income in rent.

## Factors leading to increased homelessness

A range of economic and social factors have contributed to the large homelessness count in Victoria. Federal taxation policy that advantages capital income (50% capital gains tax reduction) and the ability to offset losses from rental property to minimise tax (negative gearing), have both helped to encourage investment in residential property as an asset class. This has coincided with home ownership becoming increasingly difficult to achieve as property prices have risen compared to

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<sup>1</sup> Rooming House Operators Act 2016

<sup>2</sup> Rooming Houses Act 1990

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of homelessness is where a person's living arrangement "*is in a dwelling that is inadequate, has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable or does not allow them to have control of and access to space for social relations.*", 4922.0 – Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, ABS 2012; ABS counts as homeless, people who are living somewhere temporarily, in a boarding house, living in supported homelessness accommodation, sleeping out (or in things such as tents) and living in 'severely' crowded dwellings. Rough sleeping only makes up around 7% of homelessness while the remainder is 'hidden homelessness', that is, people sleeping in cars, rooming houses, couch surfing, or staying in other temporary types of accommodation.

incomes<sup>4</sup>. Demand for properties has seen investors competing with home buyers, and as investors benefit from subsidy by the taxation system, they can afford to pay more for the property. State governments have tried to ameliorate this cost pressure on first home buyers by stamp duty reduction schemes, but arguably this has worked to increase the price of lower cost properties<sup>5</sup>. The Commonwealth has also recently announced a scheme to provide free mortgage lenders insurance to 10,000 buyers annually with a deposit of 5% -20%<sup>6</sup>.

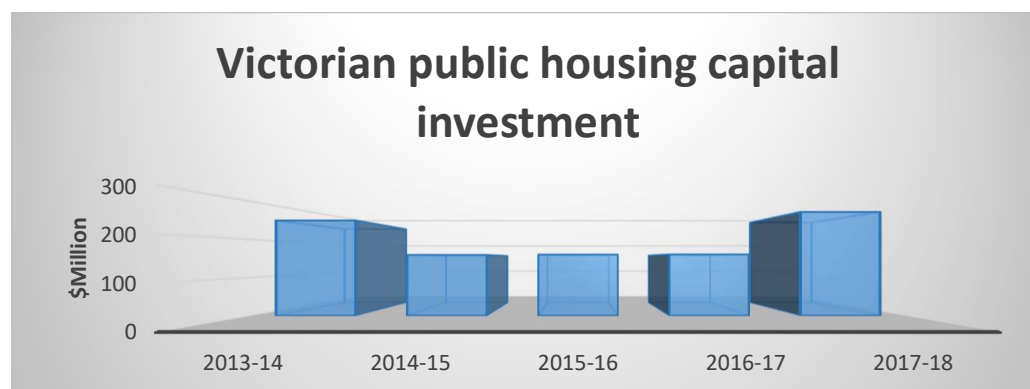


Figure 1 -Victorian public housing capital investment, Productivity Commission, ROGS 2019

Other policies have also played a part. While public housing is provided and funded by the Victorian government, the Commonwealth government supports lower income families to obtain affordable housing through Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). This rent subsidy is payable by the Commonwealth on behalf of tenants to their community housing and private landlords, but not for public tenancies. State governments bear the full capital and running costs of public housing. This Commonwealth rental support has also helped to keep community housing affordable, and has encouraged the policy shift from public housing provision to supporting increased numbers of community housing properties. Arguably it has also encouraged the transfer of public housing to community housing control, as it makes provision of community housing by charitable providers financially viable.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Productivity Commission, 2019, Vulnerable Private Renters, Figure 2a & b, Mean housing costs to income ratio, shows property prices rising 70% since 1995.

<sup>5</sup> "Past first home buyer initiatives by governments, such as the Howard government's \$7000 grant which was doubled for existing homes to \$14,000 by the Rudd government during the 2008-09 global financial crisis, increased bidding pressure at auctions and contributed to price rises", John Kehoe, Financial Review, 11 November 2019

<sup>6</sup> Supporting first home buyers, Josh Frydenberg, MP, Treasurer, Michael Sukkar MP, Minister for Housing, Media Release, 27 October 2019

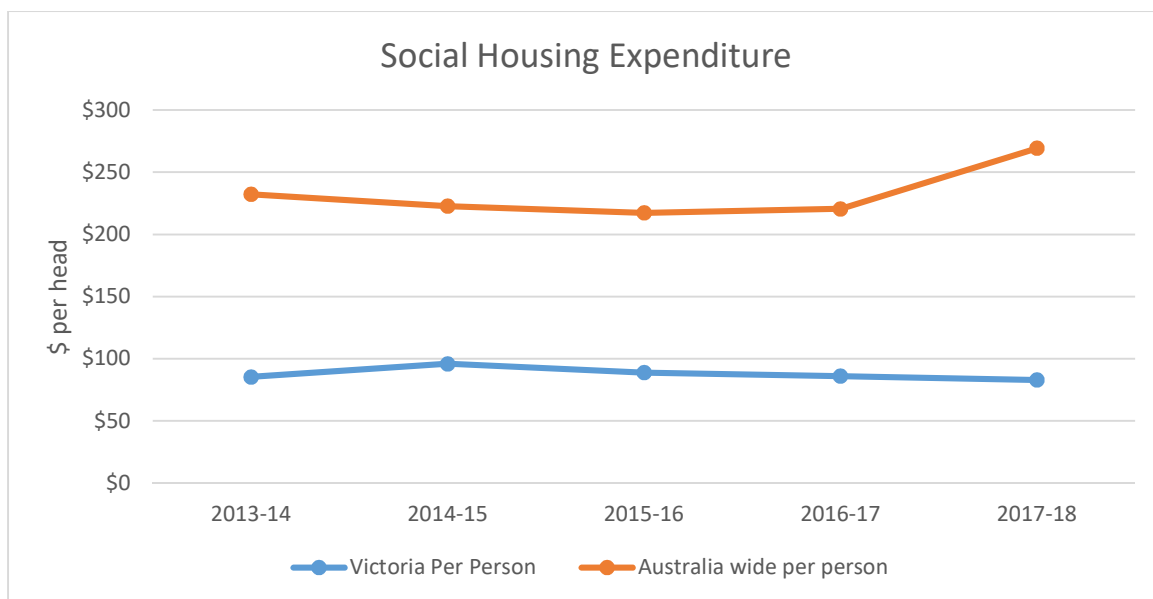


Figure 2 - Housing expenditure per person - Productivity Commission, ROGS 2019

In addition, the Victorian government has reduced its investment in building public housing and Victoria's recurrent social housing expenditure is less than half the national average.<sup>7</sup> To simply maintain the current percentage of social housing in Victoria at 3.2% of properties, 3,500 new public and community housing units would need to be built each year for the next ten years.

Strong competition for the affordable rental properties in Victoria is exacerbated by the low level of benefit income. Newstart has not been increased in real terms for 40 years and is inadequate to fund a rental property. The DHHS Rental Report tracks rental prices in Victoria on a quarterly basis<sup>8</sup>. Figures for the September 2019 quarter, show the median Victorian rental price as \$400 per week, while in Melbourne it is \$420, compared to Newstart income for a single person of \$282 (plus a possible maximum rent assistance of \$69). Low payment level increases vulnerability of tenants to living in unsuitable and crowded conditions. In addition, unexpected expenses (or bill shock) causes fragility of tenancies, as tenants have no resources to fall back on and accrue rent arrears, resulting in homelessness.

In 2016, the 30 year Infrastructure Strategy for Victoria identified that between 75,000 and 100,000 vulnerable low income households are not having their housing requirements appropriately met<sup>9</sup>, and found that approximately "30,000 new affordable dwellings within 10 years could be an appropriate infrastructure response."<sup>10</sup> The waiting list for housing now combines the applicants for public housing with those for approved community housing providers. Approximately 15,000 community housing applications are being transferred over time to the Victorian Housing Register. Reporting from the September 2019 quarter shows 51,551 applications<sup>11</sup> for social housing. If, as

<sup>7</sup> Australian Productivity Commission, 2019, Report on Government Services 2017-18, Part G Housing and Homelessness

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>

<sup>9</sup> Victoria's 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy, December 2016, Infrastructure Victoria, [https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/IV\\_30\\_Year\\_Strategy\\_WEB\\_V2.pdf](https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/IV_30_Year_Strategy_WEB_V2.pdf), p98; The Strategy is currently being updated.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.104

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorian-housing-register>

previously, each application represented 1.8 individuals, there are 92,791 people waiting for housing.

Other drivers of homelessness include mental health issues, and family violence<sup>12</sup>. In 2017-18, one in 54 Victorians received homelessness assistance, with family and domestic violence the reason for reaching out for 47%.<sup>13</sup> In that period out of 10,000 clients, 32.9 had mental health issues, while 23.9 were young people presenting alone, leaving care or children on protection orders<sup>14</sup>. The Productivity Commission has commented that *“whether someone ultimately ends up homeless or living in marginal housing will often hinge on aspects of the housing system, such as the affordability of suitable private rental accommodation and the legal framework governing private rentals.”*<sup>15</sup>

Solutions to homelessness are not solely in the gift of the Victorian government, but its policy actions can in all cases have a significant effect on reducing homelessness. The Victorian government has started to explore improving the State’s mental health services through the Mental Health Royal Commission. The Commission lists the costs of poor mental health, including the economic social and personal costs, as including *“increased likelihood of experiencing other hardships such as homelessness.”*<sup>16</sup>

Recent changes to the Residential Tenancies Act to remove the “no reason” notice to vacate, and to provide greater consumer rights to renters have yet to take effect<sup>17</sup>, but these changes along with a “reasonable and proportionate” test required before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal can grant a possession order evicting a tenant, are expected to help improve security of tenure of tenants. Similarly, minimum standards will be required of rental properties in Victoria for the first time, and it is hoped that this will improve the quality of rental properties for low income renters. Tenants Victoria (among other advocates for renters) has, however been disappointed at the exceedingly low minimum standards proposed for heating and lack of energy efficiency measures. Effective and suitable energy efficiency measures would reduce running costs (energy bills) for tenants, and particularly assist low income tenants or those with health conditions. Tenants Victoria is aware of situations where a tenant preferences payment for energy bills (to keep the heating or hot water on) above rent payments, leading to eviction. Development of long term lease agreements has also been aimed to support longer term tenure by tenants. Unfortunately, there is no evidence about whether these changes have been effective to promote security of tenure.

Other developments such as the federally supported National Housing Finance Infrastructure Corporation (NHFIC) from 2019, and the Victorian Government’s Housing Bond Aggregator, are intended to support “build to rent” by institutional investors and community housing providers. If successful, these measures will help grow the number of rental properties. It is however, not yet what proportion of these type of residences will be made available to the lower end of the rental market and will improve the outlook for low income tenants.

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<sup>12</sup> Mission Australia, Out of the Shadows: Domestic and family violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia, 2019

<sup>13</sup> AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services 2017-18 – Victoria, 2019

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Productivity Commission, Vulnerable Private Renters, Research Paper, September 2019, p34

<sup>16</sup> Mental Health Royal Commission, Interim Report, Nov 2019, p.363

<sup>17</sup> Changed provisions are due to commence on 1 July 2020.

Having a home is important to everyone. Without access to a secure and affordable home, it is not possible to fully participate in education, work, or the community. All of the elements that enable an individual to fully express themselves are supported by secure and affordable accommodation.

### Actions to help reduce homelessness

Tenants Victoria supports actions to increase and secure a pipeline of new housing into the future so that housing is available for those who need it. We support actions to prevent homelessness wherever possible, through a range of interventions to support and maintain tenancies. Ensuring that regulators and VCAT are aware of the needs of those vulnerable to homelessness, and ensuring that appropriate enforcement actions are taken will also help develop a policy environment where homelessness is no longer accepted as the norm, but is actively prevented by all levels of government. The commitments and details of what required to intervene early and provide ongoing support are set out below.

### Build more public housing properties

Tenants Victoria along with other organisations in the housing space has argued for increased investment in public housing, as providing secure homes to the most vulnerable in our society is a vital role of government. To turn around the accumulated deficit in housing supply for our most vulnerable citizens, the Victorian government should increase social housing stock by 6,000 to match the national average of 4.5 per cent of total stock.

### Redevelopment of existing properties, securing and maintaining housing supply – PHRP, inclusionary zoning and appropriate development

Well located public and community housing is vital to support residents' engagement in education, training and employment as well as good access to supportive services. The Victorian government has committed to redevelop and improve a number of public housing estates across Melbourne (the Public Housing Renewal Program). The PHRP should continue redevelopment of existing large-scale public housing estates to improve quality of housing provided and to increase density in well-located areas.

It is important to ensure no net loss of public housing in any estate redevelopments that improve housing density and help meet demand for social housing in Victoria. The current limited trial of inclusionary zoning should become a mandatory requirement for any new larger scale developments, aiming to deliver 10% of new housing in the development being public housing.

Investment in the social housing growth fund is welcomed, as a means to support new investment in affordable housing. The current \$1billion fund should be doubled to \$2billion by 2022, to support more social housing developments in the coming decade.

Support housing development and new supply partnerships through access to government information such as GovMap that shows information about government owned land, and departmental modelling on social housing demand.

### Appropriate community housing policies and controls

Security of tenure once an individual or family is in a rental property is vital. Similarly, being treated fairly by the landlord is a basic requirement. As greater reliance is placed on community housing to make up the deficit in public housing investment, ensuring that the conditions for these tenants are comparable to those of public tenants becomes more important. Community housing tenants are at a disadvantage compared to public housing tenants because of disparity in policies, lack of application of the Charter of Human Rights, and failure to apply the Model Litigant guidelines. This is

not tenable where Government policies continue to transfer its responsibility to provide housing to the community housing sector. Community housing tenants should have the same protections as those afforded to public housing tenants. State government grants or other funding should only go to community housing providers that commit to apply the Model Litigant Guidelines and declare themselves bound by the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. In addition, the Victorian government should mandate adoption of model policies to protect vulnerable tenants. – e.g. policies re absence, abandonment.

#### *Prevention measures to avoid homelessness*

All available measures should be taken to ensure that eviction into homelessness is a measure of last resort. Prevention measures that should be adopted range from advice and assistance through to policies that recognise the importance of maintaining a home. Community housing providers should be required, as a condition of their access to the Victorian Housing Register, to work actively to maintain tenancies where possible, and to ensure that eviction is only used as a last resort.

#### *Information and advice*

All tenants should be provided with easily understood information about their legal rights and obligations in community languages. To avoid homelessness, tenants should have adequately funded legal advocacy readily available to them.

#### *Social landlord principles, and support in action*

Community housing providers, should be required to receive any state government support, funding or access to tenants through the Victorian Housing Register, to adopt and demonstrate their adherence to Social Landlord' principles in their policies and practices.

Director of Housing staff should be trained in the application of social landlord principles to improve their practice and support them to move into tenant support roles where appropriate.

#### *Expanding bond loan scheme*

Consideration should be given to expanding the bond loan scheme to support a greater number of prospective tenants to enter private rental. Access to a lump sum such a bond can be a barrier to a rental that otherwise can be maintained by the tenant. Bond Loans are particularly important to those fleeing family violence or young people attempting to establish a tenancy. This established scheme has been proven to be an effective practical measure to reduce homelessness and should be expanded.

#### *Changes at the Tribunal – information, duty lawyers, appeals process; improvements to encourage enforcement*

VCAT should be made more accessible and accountable, and be required to provide de-identified information on evictions and possession orders, so that the nature of breaches giving rise to homelessness can be better understood by policy makers and regulators.

Duty lawyers should be available for all Residential Tenancy matters at VCAT. The Residential Tenancy Act is long and complex and with the commencement of amendments made in September 2018 and implemented by July 2020 this will become more complex. Given the importance of maintaining a home to sound mental health, investment in duty lawyers is a small price to pay.

A joint housing appeals process should be established for public and community housing, to ensure equitable decision making for these forms of housing for vulnerable tenants, that applies the principles set out in the Human Rights Act.

Currently a VCAT decision must go to the Supreme Court on appeal. This is extremely costly and time consuming and well beyond the resources of most individuals. Tenants Victoria, along with other advocates has long called for an internal appeal mechanism that is accessible to tenants. Poor or illegal practices seen by VCAT are often not subject to prosecution as information about breaches is not ordinarily provided by the Tribunal to the regulator. Information sharing between VCAT and CAV should become mandatory to encourage enforcement of offences under the Residential Tenancies Act.

### Early intervention – Tenancy Plus

Tenants at risk of eviction should receive timely support to prevent homelessness by:

Tenancy Plus type programs, which support social housing tenants to address issues making them vulnerable to eviction, should be expanded to cover tenants in private rental.

Existing early intervention and referral pathways to Tenancy Plus by public and community housing providers should be strengthened, so that tenants do not miss out on this support.

The specific needs of young people should be recognised, and by creating stronger pathways to family reconciliation and mediation interventions for young people experiencing family conflict.

### Specific supports for those with mental illness

#### *Adopt a Housing First approach*

A housing first approach by community housing providers would help maintain vulnerable tenants such as those with mental illness in their homes. This would recognise the ill-effects of disruption and homelessness on those suffering mental illness or psychosocial disability, and the importance of stability to maintain treatment regimes and a healthy lifestyle as well as connection to community supports.

#### *No admission to treatment without investigation of housing circumstances and no discharge from health facility or custody into homelessness; longer term supported accommodation options for those leaving treatment.*

Rooming houses are not an acceptable or appropriate form of housing for those leaving psychiatric treatment. We are aware that Sunshine Adult Acute Psychiatric Unit has been monitoring clients exiting into homelessness, including rooming houses. This has shown that approximately one in three are leaving treatment to enter homelessness. Longer term supported accommodation options for those leaving treatment should be a priority to support these vulnerable individuals to return to the community.

If admission staff asked the housing status of the patient, and asked if the patient had advised their landlord of absence and offered to send an email on behalf of the patient, this could avoid abandonment claims terminating tenancy. Hospital admission processes should include referrals to support services to ensure tenancies are not disadvantaged by a hospital stay.

### Tighter controls for rooming houses

#### *Preventing housing services using Housing Establishment Fund monies for clients to stay in unregistered rooming houses*

The Housing Establishment Fund (jointly funded by Victorian and Commonwealth Governments under the National Affordable Housing Agreement) helps clients pay for crisis, short term or overnight accommodation. Tenants Victoria's experience is that the Housing Establishment Funding has been commonly used to provide initial rent or establishment costs for clients moving into unregistered rooming houses and substandard registered rooming houses run by problem operators. This practice has supported an illegal industry that exploits vulnerable tenants. The contract terms

for housing services should be altered to strictly prohibit this use of housing establishment funding.

*Creating ongoing support mechanisms for clients who are placed in rooming houses, especially privately operated rooming houses*

After a client is helped to find overnight accommodation, the service provider does not maintain any contact with the client placed in these properties. Rooming houses are insecure and commonly house people with mental health conditions, but there is little support for these people to connect them to the medical, financial or tenancy services they need. These premises are often unsafe and trauma creating environments. In addition, the prevalence of mental health issues in rooming houses can cause trauma for residents.

Housing Front Doors should give clients the opportunity to link up with support services so these vulnerable clients can be connected with suitable support services. Assertive outreach by social workers or similar workers into registered and unregistered rooming houses would help support these individuals and promote movement into more stable housing. Similarly, these workers could assist those negatively affected by co-residents with mental health issues.

*Information sharing and joint enforcement actions between CAV and Municipal Councils to reduce the number of unregistered rooming houses and problem rooming house operators*

Failure to share information about rogue rooming house operators or rooming houses puts vulnerable residents at risk of harm. Lack of enforcement efforts in a property market where rental property is in high demand means that unsafe or unsanitary properties continue to be rented to vulnerable tenants. Making sure that Consumer Affairs Victoria and the relevant municipal council are aware of these illegal operations should help eradicate these illegal enterprises, and prevent them preying on vulnerable renters. In addition, Consumer Affairs Victoria should work together with municipal councils to enforce the existing penalties for illegal rooming house operation and breaches of existing legislation.

### **Ongoing Flexible Support**

Ensure vulnerable tenants with ongoing support needs get the support they need to sustain tenancies by:

- Expanding permanent supportive housing teams providing flexible, multidisciplinary, and ongoing support to the scale needed to meet ongoing need and to all of Victoria. When delivered alongside suitable affordable housing options, this would enable a Housing First response to people with complex needs state-wide.
- Supplementing permanent supportive housing teams with specialist mental health staff to provide intensive, recovery focussed support to people exiting acute mental health care.
- Expand the HomeStretch support packages currently funded for 50 young people a year leaving out-of-home care to **all** young care leavers.

### **Tribunal changes to support vulnerable tenants**

*Reviewing VCAT rules and procedures with a “mental health” lens.*

VCAT rules and procedures are complex and difficult for non-lawyers and many others to navigate. These should be reviewed with the aim of simplifying them, and making VCAT more accessible.

*Educating VCAT staff and members on mental health.*

Individuals working in VCAT especially decision makers must be required to undergo training to recognise and deal sensitively and empathetically with parties with mental health issues or where cases are affected by the mental health of others, e.g. nuisance, damage and bond claims, termination and possession matters.

*Providing referral pathways through the VCAT registry.*

Referrals by VCAT staff to appropriate services would help it to better manage matters and support tenants with mental health issues who seek assistance or appear before the Tribunal.

*Best practice real estate agency – encouraging positive practices*

Real estate agents are the first point of contact for renters. Their relationship with the estate agent will establish whether their renting journey is a positive one or not. However, while estate agents are required to exhibit professional conduct, it appears that little (if any) action is taken to enforce this requirement. On the other hand, there is also no encouragement for estate agents to be sensitive to the needs of their tenants. Awareness of the issues facing those with mental health conditions would over time modify estate agent practices to the benefit of all.

Tenants Victoria is not aware of any scheme that would promulgate or promote best practice for estate agents. An award system for innovative practice that promotes and sustains tenancies, as well as greater enforcement effort by the regulator would, over time help to modify the “us and them” attitude exhibited by real estate agents towards tenants, aiding security of tenure.

## Recommendations

1. The Victorian government should increase social housing stock by 6,000 per annum to match the national average of 4.5 per cent of total housing stock.
2. The PHRP should continue redevelopment of existing large-scale public housing estates to improve quality of housing provided and to increase density in well-located areas.
3. Inclusionary zoning should become a mandatory requirement for any new larger scale developments, aiming to deliver 10% of new housing in the development being public housing.
4. The Social Housing Growth Fund should be increased to \$2billion by 2022 to support more social housing developments.
5. Access to government information, such as GovMap and departmental modelling on social housing demand should be made available to support new housing supply partnerships.
6. Community housing tenants should have the same protections as those afforded to public housing tenants. State government grants or other funding should only go to community housing providers that commit to apply the Model Litigant Guidelines and declare themselves bound by the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. In addition, the Victorian government should mandate adoption of model policies to protect vulnerable tenants. – e.g. policies re absence, abandonment.
7. Information and advice on legal rights should be freely available in community languages to tenants. Tenants should have adequately funded legal advocacy readily available to them.
8. Community housing providers must be required to adopt social landlord principles; Community housing providers should be required, as a condition of their access to the Victorian Housing Register, to work actively to maintain tenancies where possible, and to ensure that eviction is only used as a last resort.
9. The bond loan scheme should be expanded to support new private tenancies.
10. VCAT should provide more detailed and more extensive de-identified information to support policy making and regulation.
11. Duty lawyers should be available for all residential tenancy matters at VCAT.
12. A joint housing appeals process should be established for public and community housing to ensure that the Human Rights Act is applied.
13. VCAT should share information about poor or illegal practices with Consumer Affairs Victoria to encourage stronger regulation of tenancy legislation.
14. Tenancy Plus programs to be expanded to tenants in private rental.
15. Strengthening pathways to Tenancy Plus for tenants in public and community housing.
16. Improving access to family reconciliation and mediation interventions for young people experiencing family conflict.
17. Community housing providers should be required to adopt a housing first approach.

18. No admission to treatment without investigation of housing circumstances and no discharge from health facility or custody into homelessness; and longer term supported accommodation options for those leaving treatment.
19. It should be a condition of their contract that housing services do not use Housing Establishment Fund monies for clients to enter unregistered rooming houses
20. Create ongoing support mechanisms for clients who are placed in rooming houses, especially privately operated rooming houses.
21. Information sharing and joint enforcement actions between CAV and Municipal Councils to reduce the number of unregistered rooming houses and problem rooming house operators.
22. Ongoing flexible tenancy support, to enable a Housing First approach to be delivered statewide.
23. Supplementing supportive housing teams with specialist mental health staff to provide intensive support to people existing mental health care.
24. Expanding the HomeStretch support packages currently available to 50 young people a year to all young care leavers.
25. Reviewing VCAT rules and procedures with a “mental health” lens.
26. Educating VCAT staff and members on mental health.
27. Providing referral pathways through the VCAT registry.
28. Duty lawyers should be available for all Residential Tenancy matters at VCAT.
29. Establish internal VCAT appeals process.
30. Information sharing between VCAT and CAV to encourage enforcement of offences under the Residential Tenancies Act
31. Ensure that bond loans are not a barrier to renting.
32. Improved enforcement of professional conduct requirements for estate agents, mandatory mental health sensitivity training for Estate Agents and Property Managers.