

Housing statement offers roadmap for struggling renters

Renter rights must be strengthened, regularly reviewed and enforced

20 September 2023

Today's housing statement offers a substantial roadmap that aims to address many pain points for our state's renters, according to Tenants Victoria.

‘The Andrews Government has listened – and responded with a constructive plan for change which will cement the state's position as a national leader in rental reform,’ said CEO Jennifer Beveridge.

Although Victoria implemented more than 130 rental reforms in 2021, further changes are needed now.

Tenants Victoria constantly hears from renters who struggle to get repairs done, face unaffordable rent hikes, and wait months – sometimes years – to get problems resolved via VCAT, which was supposed to be an accessible forum for solving rent disputes.

While renters – who number nearly 2 million Victorians – are a growing group in our state, landing a safe, secure and affordable rental home remains tough for people on low incomes, and increasingly also for people on moderate incomes.

‘Housing is an essential service and a human right,’ said Ms Beveridge. ‘The goal to build 800,000 homes in a decade – including boosting much-needed affordable and social housing stock – is certainly bold and hopefully can be achieved on time.’

Tenants Victoria welcomes key initiatives for renters outlined in this package, which include:

- Establishing Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria as a mechanism for early intervention for common rental problems such as repairs and bonds to minimise escalation to VCAT
- Introducing a 7.5% levy on the revenue of short stay accommodation platforms, which will go to Homes Victoria for building and maintaining social and affordable housing across the state
- Banning landlords from raising rents for 12 months after evicting the previous tenant at the end of their first fixed-term lease
- Banning all types of rent bidding, making it an offence to accept bids and strengthening penalties against agents and landlords who break the law
- Introducing a scheme for rental bonds so the bond paid can simply move from one rental to the next
- Extending notification of rent increases from 60 days to 90 days
- Extending the notice-to-vacate period in some cases from 60 days to 90 days
- Standardising rental applications and building privacy safeguards
- Compulsory professional development for agents and property managers
- A renter-stress grant package to support renter organisations worth \$2 million through the Victorian Property Fund

‘The rental housing crisis simply won't disappear overnight, but the combination of these new measures will help address the pain points renters tell us they are facing,’ said Farah Farouque, Tenants Victoria’s Director of Community Engagement. ‘The housing statement acknowledges that renters are a growing sector of our community, and their rights needs to be strengthened, regularly reviewed and enforced.’

As the peak body and statewide legal help service for renters, Tenants Victoria looks forward to working with Consumer Affairs Ministers Danny Pearson and Housing Minister Colin Brooks and their departments to ensure implementation of these proposed changes run smoothly.

Tenants Victoria’s promise to Victorian renters is that we will keep working with the government and other stakeholders to look for further opportunities for reform to address entrenched power imbalances between renters and landlords. In this context, it's critical that renters moving into community housing will have equivalent rights to renters in public housing.

Each year Tenants Victoria helps renters with more than 10,000 rental problems as part of our frontline services and more than half a million people use our website.