

# The Victorian Government Response to the Social Housing Regulation Review

The Victorian Government has invested more in improving social housing than any other state in Australia's history. This includes commissioning this independent review, and we thank the panel for their extensive work.

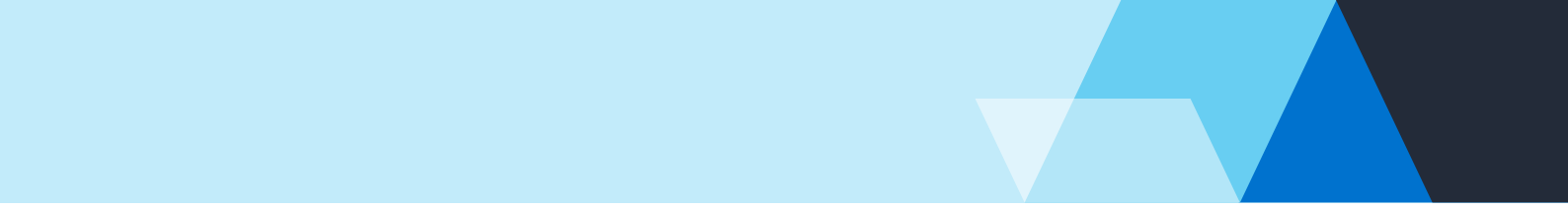
We initiated the Social Housing Regulation Review to strengthen the regulatory framework governing social housing in Victoria, ensuring it better supports social housing renters, community housing providers, and public housing operations.

Social housing provides a foundation for some of our most vulnerable Victorians, including people who have experienced trauma and disadvantage. It is important that social housing continues to provide sanctuary and meets the standards that social housing renters deserve.

The review acknowledges the significant strides the Victorian Government has already taken to meet the housing needs of Victorians, while also identifying areas for improvement to enhance fairness, efficiency, and accountability across the social housing system.

The Victorian Government is working hard to ensure social housing renters and people who need housing support have greater access to safe, secure and stable housing. This includes:

- the delivery of more and better homes across the State with \$6.3 billion of investment in new social and affordable housing through the Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund
- upgrading and improving the comfort and liveability of more than 25,000 social housing homes through the \$528 million Building Works Stimulus package, exceeding the target of 23,000 homes
- testing and refining effective ways to bring renter voice into the design and delivery of housing services and get input into specific reform directions such as through the Statewide Public Housing Renters Consultative Committee.
- supporting Aboriginal organisations to become registered community housing providers under the regulatory system and participate in the Big Housing Build Program
- supporting a more renter-centric response to maintenance through piloting four Local Maintenance Repair Crews across five locations in Victoria
- establishing a community consultation committee for the Carlton Elgin high-rise project where Carlton renters directly shaped the conceptual design of the new Carlton high-rise due for completion in 2028
- conducting the largest-ever engagement of high-rise renters to shape a set of community principles and values that underpin how the Department interacts with high-rise renters throughout a redevelopment project
- funding a transformational maintenance initiative that allows renters to raise jobs electronically, upload videos and photos and track the timeliness of maintenance jobs
- operational reforms to improve complaints handling, renter safety and amenity
- further capital investments to improve the quality, comfort and liveability of social housing.



The review, led by an independent panel, examined the current system to identify opportunities to modernise regulation and improve outcomes. Through widespread consultation with renters, providers, and other stakeholders, the review highlights opportunities for improvement and strengthens the benefit of existing work contributing to a modern regulatory framework, ensuring:

- Renters are supported and empowered to thrive in secure and affordable housing.
- Housing providers operate under clear, consistent, and fair regulations.
- Victoria's social housing sector continues to grow and adapt to the State's evolving needs.

## **Three key streams of reform**

The Victorian Government has developed a set of reforms and a long-term implementation approach to deliver on the Review's recommendations. These reforms are split across three streams of work.

### **Reform stream one: Strengthening accountability, transparency and performance measures for community and public housing**

The Victorian Government will establish, and publicly report on, consistent performance measures across social housing to promote transparency and accountability. We will consult with renters to ensure the measures reflect what is important to them.

We will continue to explore options to respond to the Final Report's recommendation of an independent social and affordable housing regulator.

### **Reform stream two: Creating a renter-centred system**

The best outcomes are achieved when we involve people in the decisions that affect them. We have already established a Statewide Public Housing Renter Consultative Committee and Renter Review and Improvement Panels to facilitate constructive two-way conversations with renters, strengthen renter voice and enable the government to test specific reform directions.

Building on the strength of this initiative, the Victorian Government will establish a community housing renter roundtable to better capture feedback from renters. This will also provide an opportunity for community housing renters to hear from the Victorian Housing Registrar.

We will build on work underway by the Housing Registrar and continue to simplify and strengthen complaints processes and address the largest sources of complaints.

## **Reform stream three: Prioritising and supporting self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians to deliver Aboriginal housing outcomes**

We are committed to working with Aboriginal organisations to promote self-determination and meet the housing needs of Victoria's First Peoples.

Reform stream three will promote Aboriginal self-determination and cultural safety by embedding the goals of the Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort: Every Aboriginal Person Has a Home – The Victorian Housing and Homelessness Framework.

We are working with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCO) to support ACCOs to leverage opportunities through Victoria's housing investments, including the Big Housing Build.

In keeping with our commitment to self-determination, Aboriginal organisations will be engaged as part of further implementation of the Review's recommendations.

## **Review recommendations**

In response to the 44 recommendations in the expert panel's final report, the Victorian Government:

- supports 20 recommendations in full, meaning the reforms proposed by the recommendations are either in progress, soon to commence or have a strong commitment from the government to pursue
- supports 20 recommendations in principle or in part, meaning the government agrees with the underlying reasoning, but elements of the recommendations may be too restrictive, implemented differently, or require budget consideration
- does not support three recommendations, with no further action from the government proposed
- defers consideration of one recommendation to allow time for further analysis on suitability of a single social housing regulatory to drive accountability, transparency and performance in the current environment.

## **Next steps**

The Victorian Government will work with stakeholders to implement a reform package. This reform work will be driven by the Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer, with the experience of renters at the centre of the reforms.

## The Social Housing Regulation Review

The Victorian Government commissioned an independent review into social housing regulation. The Review aimed to identify regulatory arrangements to support the long-term interests of social housing renters and position the social housing sectors for growth and transformation over the coming decades.

The SHRR identified three key areas of improvement to the social housing system. These included:

- Improving outcomes for renters across both public and community housing through increased accountability, transparency and stronger performance standards.
- Making the system more renter centred.
- Prioritising and supporting self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians to deliver Aboriginal housing outcomes.

The panel made 44 recommendations to the Victorian Government.

The Interim Report outlined three areas for immediate action, which have since been addressed.

An expert panel was appointed to the Review, comprising:

- Dr David Hayward (Chair) – Emeritus Professor of Public Policy and the Social Economy at RMIT University
- Dr David Cousins AM – social policy specialist
- Dr Heather Holst – policy and consumer affairs advocate, and Victoria's Residential Tenancies Commissioner.

The Review consulted broadly, including social housing renters, community housing providers (CHPs), peak bodies, community services, investors, regulators and academics. The panel met with over 120 stakeholder organisations and commissioned research to ensure direct input from current, past, and prospective social housing renters. The Review provided advice to the Victorian Government on regulatory reforms to support the long-term interests of social housing residents.

The Victorian Government acknowledges and appreciates the substantial work of the Review panel and all agencies, organisations and individuals who contributed to it, particularly those with lived experience.

## Summary of Government’s response to the Review recommendations

The Allan Government has responded to each recommendation of the Review with one of the following indicators:

- **Support in full** — Government supports all elements of the recommendation
- **Support in part** – Government supports some elements of the recommendation
- **Support in principle** – Government generally supports the intent or merit of the policy underlining the recommendation, but implementation requires additional, currently unsecured, funding
- **Not support** – Government does not support the recommendation
- **Under consideration** – further work is required prior to a Government decision.

No.	Recommendation	Victorian Government response
1.1	Create a clear objective for social housing regulation in legislation	Support in full
1.2	Develop a customer charter of social housing service standards	Support in principle
1.3	Decisions about regulation should be informed by tenants	Support in part
1.4	Strengthen the requirement for tenant involvement in housing providers’ activities and operations	Support in principle
1.5	Support tenants and providers to engage	Support in principle
1.6	Create a single advocacy body for social housing tenants	Support in principle
1.7	Commissioner for Residential Tenancies to consider public housing	Support in full
2.1	Establish common performance standards for social housing	Support in part
2.2	Assess registered agencies’ allocation practices against their allocation strategies	Support in full
2.3	Strengthen the transparency of financial performance information for public housing provision	Support in part
3.1	Monitor and report on energy efficiency in social housing	Support in principle
3.2	Require social housing properties to comply with minimum standards prescribed by the <i>Residential Tenancies Act 1997</i> by January 2027	Support in principle
3.3	Review maintenance systems and processes for public housing	Support in full
3.4	Regulator to monitor fire safety in social housing properties	Support in full

No.	Recommendation	Victorian Government response
3.5	Ensure needed accessibility modifications to social housing properties are made promptly	Support in principle
3.6	Enhance the measurement of tenancy sustainment	Support in full
3.7	Require registered community housing agencies to apply human rights principles in decision making	Support in full
3.8	Strengthen tenancy sustainment practices in social housing	Support in principle
3.9	Require social housing providers to provide culturally safe services	Support in full
3.10	Create a workforce development strategy for the social housing sector	Support in full
3.11	Require providers to embed a culture of ongoing professional development	Support in full
4.1	Streamline public housing complaints management processes	Support in principle
4.2	Strengthen complaints management processes for registered community housing agencies	Support in full
4.3	Establish a support and referral service for complaints and disputes	Support in principle
4.4	Establish a specialist external dispute resolution service	Support in principle
4.5	Provide restorative justice services for neighbourhood conflicts and disputes	Not support
5.1	Enable effective regulation in an environment that is increasing in complexity	Support in principle
5.2	Regulation of affordable housing	Not support
5.3	Develop rules and a mechanism for allocating affordable housing and a methodology for evaluating the Victorian Affordable Housing Rental Scheme	Support in full
5.4	Develop a uniform performance reporting framework for social housing	Support in full
6.1	Amend the wind-up provisions to ensure the assets of a specialist housing agency are transferred to another registered agency that shares its mission, and that Aboriginal housing remains in Aboriginal hands	Support in full
6.2	Facilitate the registration of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations	Support in full
6.3	Reduce duplication where registered community housing agencies report to multiple regulators	Support in full

No.	Recommendation	Victorian Government response
6.4	Reduce duplication and confusion in regulatory and contract reporting	Support in full
6.5	Expedite land transaction approvals as a step towards enabling a portfolio management approach	Support in principle
6.6	Registered agencies to develop and maintain an up-to-date assets and liabilities register	Support in full
6.7	Strengthen the regulator’s role in supporting growth	Support in part
6.8	Create a pathway for Victoria to join the National Regulatory System for Community Housing	Support in full
7.1	Establish an independent social and affordable housing regulator	Under consideration
7.2	Resource a program of inspections and enhance the regulator’s inspection and audit powers	Support in principle
7.3	Remove the statutory distinction between housing association and housing provider	Support in principle
7.4	Enhance the tools available to the regulator to allow for a more graduated approach to enforcement	Support in full
7.5	Transfer eligibility and allocations powers to the Minister	Not support
8.1	Offer support to applicants on the Victorian Housing Register	Support in principle