



The Need for Further Housing Reforms in Victoria

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“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great.

Luke 6:32-35

The Uniting Church in Australia has understood that the Gospel calls us to seek the well-being and flourishing of all people and the natural environment.

Having a roof over your head is essential to well-being and flourishing. Housing impacts the ability of people to participate in their community. Access to jobs, education, and health care services are all affected by whether a person has affordable, appropriate, safe and secure housing.

At the end of 2024, 55,024 families in Victoria were on the social housing waiting list. That was an 8.4% increase in 2024. People on the list include the elderly, survivors of family violence, people living in unsafe situations and children. Social housing means a combination of housing run by community service providers and public housing owned directly by the government. Approximately 40% of people on the social housing waiting list wait more than two years before they are allocated a home.

In 2020, the Victorian Government announced \$5.3 billion for a Big Housing Build, which, as of January 2025, had built or is building 10,000 new homes.

In 2023, the Victorian Government committed to building 12,000 affordable and social housing dwellings. However, the definition of affordable housing does not mean people on low incomes can afford to buy or rent the homes. “Affordable housing” can mean the rent is 10% below market rates, which for inner Melbourne could mean rents that only those on higher incomes can afford.

Social housing has increased by 4,400 homes since 2020 to reach 89,500 dwellings by the middle of 2024. Victoria had the lowest level of social housing in 2023 of all other states and territories, being 2.8% of all housing. By contrast, the Australian average was 4.1%, with NSW at 5% and South Australia and Tasmania at 6%. Public housing in Victoria has declined from 4% of all homes in 1994 to 2.4% now.

A recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability crisis recommended that the Victorian Government construct an additional 60,000 social housing dwellings by 2034. In March 2025, Infrastructure Victoria recommended constructing an additional 60,000 social housing dwellings over the 15 years in its draft 30-year strategy. It was recommended that the Victorian Government spend up to \$30 billion to build new social housing over the next decade.

Public Housing Towers

On 20 September 2023, the Victorian Premier, Dan Andrews, announced that between 2023 and 2051, it would, in stages, relocate the current 10,000 residents currently living in 44 public housing towers that have 7,000 units. The sites will be used to build a mix of new private housing and housing run by community service providers. The new housing will accommodate 30,000 people, of which 11,000 will live in the community service provider



housing. At this stage, only the public housing towers in Elgin Street Carlton will be rebuilt as public housing due to a \$2 billion Federal Government grant.

Rents for public housing are capped at 25% of the tenants' income, while rents in housing run by community housing providers are often set at 30% or higher. It is argued that housing run by community housing providers has advantages over public housing because it is GST-free, and tenants are eligible for Commonwealth Government rent assistance. Also, it is argued to be closer to tenant needs. Public housing supporters argue that public housing is more secure for tenants and targets lower-income people.

Uniting Church minister Rev Brian Howe, a former Labor Government minister and Deputy Prime Minister, told *The Age* in February that he was concerned that the redevelopment of the public housing towers would send the current tenants out of inner Melbourne, far from jobs and services. "I worry about that because you're pushing low-income people out to the fringe and securing valuable sites for higher-income people."

The public housing towers have been allowed to run down over decades due to underinvestment in maintenance and repairs. The Productivity Commission has found that Victoria has the lowest per-person spending in Australia on social housing maintenance.

The public housing tower tenants were not notified of the Premier's announcement about their future. The announcement left many tenants fearful for their future. Beza Gizaw told *The Age* that her response was, "Dear god, why are they moving us in the first place? What is wrong with the building?" Beza is a 40-year-old single mother living in a two-bedroom flat with her son Yeabsira, aged four. Given the length of the project, we are in a position to call on the Victorian to engage with tenants and give them a genuine say in their future rather than imposing changes on them with no input from the tenants.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters or emails to:

The Hon Jacinta Allen
Premier
1 Treasury Place,
East Melbourne VIC 3002

The Hon Harriet Shing
Minister for Housing and Building
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street East
Melbourne VIC 3002

Salutation: Dear Premier

Salutation: Dear Minister

E-mail: jacinta.allan@parliament.vic.gov.au

E-mail: harriet.shing@parliament.vic.gov.au

Points to make in your letters:

- Welcome the Victorian Government's commitment to facilitate building additional homes in the state.
- Ask the Victorian Government to build at least 60,000 social housing dwellings over the next decade for low-income people. Some of the homes should be public housing.
- Ask the government to increase funding for the maintenance of social housing so that properties are not left empty for unreasonable lengths of time awaiting repairs.
- Ask that, concerning the current public housing towers, the Victorian Government engage in a genuine co-design process with residents about their future. They should have the option of having the redevelopment happen in stages on their existing sites so that they do not need to relocate to other locations and have existing communities broken up if that is their collective preference.
- Ask for the redevelopment of the public housing towers to remain public housing.