

Build social housing for the future

**VCOSS submission to the Victorian Parliamentary
inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program**

November 2017



About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups, and individuals interested in social policy. In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in policy debates and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. This submission was prepared for VCOSS by Llewellyn Reynders with the input of VCOSS member organisations.

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VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays its respects to Elders past and present.

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Executive Summary

VCOSS welcomes this opportunity to provide information to the Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program.

A secure, affordable home forms the foundation of a person's life. Everything else – good health, a decent education and a steady job – is impossible without it. Providing secure, affordable housing is the Victorian Government's most effective intervention against poverty. It ensures people can build meaningful, productive lives and live with dignity.

In preparing this submission, VCOSS consulted with our member organisations, hearing from tenant advocates, housing and homelessness providers, community legal centres, and social support services. VCOSS is also a non-government member of the Victorian Government's Public Housing Renewal Advisory Group, along with the Victorian Public Tenants Association and the Municipal Association of Victoria.

Victoria is facing an unprecedented housing affordability crisis. Rental stress in Victoria has jumped by 25 per cent in just 2 years, with over 140,000 low income households now affected.¹ Just 5.7 per cent of private rental properties are affordable for people on income support.²

This is causing demand for social housing to increase. About 30,000 additional public and community housing properties are needed by 2031 just to keep pace with population growth.³ More than 50,000 additional homes are needed for those eligible for priority access. Recognising this, Infrastructure Victoria has listed affordable housing growth among its top three priorities, with a call for 30,000 additional dwellings to be built in the coming decade.⁴

Social housing is an essential component of a well-functioning society, safeguarding people's basic right to a home. Many people cannot access the private rental market, due to high costs, an inability to compete against other prospective tenants, discrimination and lack of accessible or appropriate housing. For many Victorians, social housing is all that stands between them and homelessness.

In this context, VCOSS believes that proposals for building new social housing should proceed as quickly as possible. Delaying or blocking the Public Housing Renewal Program will simply reduce the social housing supply, and delay future action on building more.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2015-16*, Data cube: Proportion of low income rental households paying more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing costs, 2007-08 to 2015-16, 2017

² Department of Health and Human Services, *Rental Report – March Quarter 2017*, p.18

³ T Bourke, *The Social Housing Numbers Challenge*, Community Housing Federation of Victoria, 2017, p.7

⁴ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, December 2016, p.43

Recommendations

Build more social housing

- The Victorian Parliament and Victorian Government should ensure the Public Housing Renewal Program proceeds without delay
- The Victorian Government should maximise the social housing growth achieved through the Public Housing Renewal Program
- The Victorian Government should continue to invest in constructing social housing beyond the Public Housing Renewal Program
- The Victorian Parliament should legislate for inclusionary zoning to generate more social housing.

Support and engage tenants

The Victorian Government should:

- increase tenant information and engagement resources
- increase funding and support for tenant advocates and community organisations working with affected tenants
- maintain its commitment that all current tenants have a 'right to return' to renewed estates if they wish
- give tenants maximum choice in selecting the appropriate property for relocation
- provide maximum support and information for relocating tenants

Design for inclusive communities

The Victorian Government should:

- involve tenants in the building design for renewed estates
- ensure the building design can accommodate all tenants seeking to return to estates after renewal
- ensure the building design does not differentiate social housing from private housing
- use site-specific allocation policies to ensure a cohesive mix of tenants in the renewed estates
- consider incorporating community facilities into the building design
- ensure all new social housing is universally designed
- consider including Specialist Disability Accommodation in the renewed estates
- ensure all new social housing achieves a 6 star energy efficiency rating
- consider installing energy efficient reverse-cycle air conditioning into new social housing properties
- require employment of public housing tenants and disadvantaged jobseekers as part of the Public Housing Renewal Program

Build more social housing

Urgently construct new social housing

Recommendation

The Victorian Parliament and Victorian Government should ensure the Public Housing Renewal Program proceeds without delay

VCOSS welcomes the Public Housing Renewal Program, believing that replacing old, inappropriate and unliveable housing and growing social housing is precisely the direction Victoria needs to move in. The Victorian Government and Parliament should ensure that new social housing should be delivered as quickly as possible, due to a chronic shortage and dire need. Victoria has the lowest proportion of social housing of any Australian State or Territory.

Most of the housing proposed to be demolished are 'walk-up' estates: low-rise multi-dwelling apartment buildings only accessible by stairs. In 2012, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office found that 10,000 public housing dwellings will reach 'obsolescence' by 2016.⁵ We understand the 'walk-up' estates were chief among them. These homes are decades old, in poor repair, and expensive to maintain. They are energy inefficient, and vulnerable residents find them difficult to heat and cool, with no air-conditioning present. They are also inaccessible, unable to house people with mobility difficulties, and difficult to access for even able-bodied people, especially families, who climb several flights of stairs multiple times daily to use their homes.

It is not appropriate to merely refurbish these estates, as the poor access, deteriorating quality and energy performance is deeply embedded in their age and design. We reject the idea that public housing tenants should be content to live in dilapidated estates, and should not have the same access as other Victorians to contemporary homes with modern energy efficient and accessible design.

The nine estates in the Public Housing Redevelopment program are well-located in inner Melbourne, with good access to jobs, transport, educational opportunities and health and community services close by. We believe they are suitable sites for more intensive development, allowing for growth in the number of social housing dwellings. Given the estates are in 'gentrified' or 'gentrifying' suburbs with the best access and already undergoing substantial change, this can sometimes cause concerns for local community members.

VCOSS members repeatedly report uncertainty about the redevelopment of the estates is deeply distressing for tenants. The sooner the Victorian Government can provide concrete designs based

⁵ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Access to Public Housing*, March 2012, p.viii

on clear planning decisions, the more able they can provide certainty for tenants about their futures, including firmer timelines for their relocation and return, and develop detailed building designs so people can know what their homes might look like. VCOSS is concerned that attempts to delay or block the redevelopments will add to the uncertainty and distress tenants' experience.

VCOSS supports opportunities for people to engage with and provide their views on planning decisions. However, these processes need to be managed carefully and respectfully and conducted in a timely manner. Planning consultation should not be unnecessarily drawn out, given Victoria's acute shortage of social housing. VCOSS understands there are many examples of estates being demolished, and then simply standing vacant for many years while planning, building and financing decisions were made. For example, large parts of the Huttonwood estate in Preston were demolished in 2011. However, planning delays and disputes prevented new homes being constructed, with the project only being given planning approval this year. Long delays would be an unacceptable outcome for estates in the Public Housing Development Program.

Engagement on planning issues should also be carefully managed. VCOSS is aware that some discussion on planning issues are ill-informed, and draw upon incorrect and hurtful stereotypes to malign social housing tenants. Planning consultation should not provide a platform for discrimination and prejudice. It is deeply distressing for people to be made to feel they are unwelcome in their own communities. Healthy communities are those that embrace diversity and access for all.

While sometimes social housing developments cause debate and concern in communities, research finds "once projects had been completed, the opposition faded away."⁶

Maximise social housing growth

Recommendations

- The Victorian Government should maximise the social housing growth achieved through the Public Housing Renewal Program
- The Victorian Government should continue to invest in constructing social housing beyond the Public Housing Renewal Program
- The Victorian Parliament should legislate for inclusionary zoning to generate more social housing.

In commissioning and design processes, the Victorian Government should maximise the number of social housing dwellings provided, on a site by site basis. The potential return on each site is variable, and it is not appropriate to set an arbitrary target on a blanket basis across all sites.

⁶ G Davison, C Legacy, E Liu, H Han, P Phibbs, R Nouwelant, M Darcy, and A Piracha, *Understanding and addressing community opposition to affordable housing development*, AHURI Final Report No.211, 2013, p.2

Currently, the Victorian Government has set a 10 per cent minimum increase in social housing on each site. VCOSS believes that there is potential for more dwellings to be created on many of the sites. However, the different estates vary in their available land, appropriate density and land value that can be extracted to contribute to growth. We do not believe it is appropriate to set an arbitrary benchmark for growth, and applying it on a one-size-fits-all basis.

The land has considerable value. It is appropriate for the Victorian Government to maximise the potential social housing yield on existing sites by seeking to leverage the best possible returns on high value land, and use private contributions towards the construction of public assets. The growth should be maximised taking into account the potential for each site, the contribution extracted from development partners, and the needs of returning residents.

VCOSS also notes that the return generated from the projects depends on a number of factors, including the risk taken on by a development partner. If greater uncertainty about the projects are introduced, this will reduce the value that can be extracted. Delaying the process, or introducing planning uncertainty, may reduce the amount of public housing that can be generated.

However, given the scale of the shortfall in social housing in Victoria, it is unfeasible and unrealistic to expect these nine sites, representing less than 1.5 per cent of Victorian social housing stock, can somehow provide all growth necessary for the future. With at least 30,000 new homes required in coming years,⁷ the Victorian Government will need to look beyond estate redevelopments to provide for growth.

VCOSS welcomes the Victorian Government's *Homes for Victorians* policy, which provides the most comprehensive response to Victoria's housing needs for some time. This includes funding for a \$1 billion Victorian Social Housing Growth fund, to be capitalised over coming years to fund increases in social housing. It also includes \$1.1 billion in financing for an expansion in community housing. The Victorian Government has also funded acquisition of many hundreds of homes through its response to the Royal Commission on Family Violence. Building on these initiatives, the Victorian Government will be required to continue to invest in broader opportunities, including beyond existing public housing land assets, to expand social housing growth.

This includes producing social housing through private sector housing construction. VCOSS advocates adopting inclusionary zoning to mandate that a proportion of social housing is included in multi-dwelling developments. In 2016, private developers began construction of around 30,000 apartments.⁸ If only a few per cent of these were reserved for social housing, thousands of social housing dwellings could be created.

⁷ Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Taskforce, *Victoria's Social Housing Requirements to 2036*, May 2017

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Building Activity, Australia*, Time Series Spreadsheets Table 34: Number of Dwelling Unit Commencements by Sector, States and Territories, March 2017

Support and engage tenants

Improve tenant information and engagement

Recommendation

The Victorian Government should increase tenant information and engagement resources

VCOSS members consistently report they feel engagement with tenants and the community organisations supporting them has been inadequate. We understand that relocation teams are now on the ground, and more information for tenants is becoming available in a variety of formats, as well as in face-to-face meetings. However, the process could have improved by investing in communication and engagement activities earlier in the process, so that information, staff and advice was available as early as possible after the redevelopments were announced. VCOSS members report some early communications caused deep anxiety among tenants.

As the renewal process proceeds, information and engagement resources should be boosted, so tenants have access to timely advice and can speak directly to fully informed staff. VCOSS members stressed consultation process needs to bring all tenants on the journey, and not be seen to handpick a few representatives for input.

Tenant engagement also needs to be designed with a specific understanding of the complexity and diversity of public housing tenants on each estate. Some do not have strong English language skills, and others may distrust government officials due to past difficulties with authority.

VCOSS observes that the process of redevelopment does not always easily lend itself to clear community consultation and engagement. Of necessity, planning decisions need to be made before final building designs can be determined. However, the often intangible and esoteric nature of planning decisions, such as setbacks, heights and building mass, does not directly address the major concerns of tenants, such as the building design, features, fittings and facilities. The involvement of a plethora of different organisations, including the Department of the Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP), local government, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and local community organisations can be confusing and disorientating for tenants, especially when they produce a variety of different and sometimes inaccurate information.

VCOSS members generally report that while it is important to reach out to surrounding communities to build community relationships, and help inform the estate renewals, the needs of tenants should be paramount in decision-making, and they should be protected from prejudice, and being shamed and embarrassed by their neighbours.

VCOSS members have advised that some tenants are receiving misinformation about the proposed renewal process. For instance, that the new developments will be managed by community housing, their rent will increase, they will have fewer rental rights or there will be no properties available for larger families. VCOSS understands no such decisions have been made.

Expand tenant advocacy and support services

Recommendation

- The Victorian Government should increase funding and support for tenant advocates and community organisations working with affected tenants

The Victorian Government should fund trusted local community organisations who work with public housing tenants to provide support, advocacy and advice. This includes tenants' associations, community legal centres, local neighbourhood houses and community centres, and support services working directly with tenants. These local services can provide trusted and accurate information and advice to tenants who are reluctant or fearful of attending larger engagement activities or directly approaching government officials. They can also provide support through the changes tenants face through temporary or permanent relocations.

Tenant advocates can also provide frank feedback to the Victorian Government about the responses of tenants that they may be reluctant to provide directly. VCOSS members suggest helping empower and nurture emerging tenant leaders on estate, and not expect this work to be done voluntarily or without training and assistance. VCOSS members suggest that tenant consultation is too frequently only engaging a small group of tenants, or a small number of volunteer tenant representatives invited to meetings. While including tenants is welcome, representatives need the support and resources to consult with other tenants, to receive training, such as in cultural awareness, and to be paid for their labour.

VCOSS member reports local community legal centres near the proposed renewal estates are experiencing a significant increase in requests for legal assistance with tenant advocacy matters.

Protect tenants' right to return

Recommendation

The Victorian Government should maintain its commitment that all current tenants have a 'right to return' to renewed estates if they wish

Where an existing social housing estate is renewed, the existing tenants should have the right to move into to a redeveloped home on the new estate, appropriate to their needs, as soon as possible.

The Victorian Government should clarify what is meant by the 'right to return'. In particular, tenants should be given time to decide whether they wish to return, including after they have relocated to another home. Tenants may wish to see the new estate after completion before deciding whether to return, or decide after they have had time to settle into a relocation property whether they wish to undertake the stress and dislocation of a second move.

VCOSS is advised that some tenants on the existing estates wish to leave, and indeed have had transfer applications pending for some time. Others wish to stay in the local area, but may not necessarily want to return to the estate. We understand from previous redevelopment projects that having moved once a re-established in a new home, many tenants do no longer wish to return to an estate after redevelopment. They may, however, wish to keep that option open, and reassess depending on their circumstances.

For the 'right to return' to be meaningful, building designs must include dwellings that are suitable for the household size and composition of returning residents.

To empower tenants to make fully informed decisions about their future home, the Victorian Government needs to provide as much information as possible about their options. This includes the time they are likely to have to relocate, the likely design and features of redeveloped homes, and the likely time the new buildings are completed and available for tenants. VCOSS members suggested tenants should be able to view similar recent redevelopments, such as the West Heidelberg estate, to get an indication of what redeveloped dwellings might look like.

VCOSS notes that this information is not likely to be available if the planning and design processes are delayed or disrupted.

The availability of independent tenant advocates, including legal services, improves the ability of tenants to understand their rights and make informed decisions about their future.

Minimise relocation disruption

Recommendations

- The Victorian Government should give tenants maximum choice in selecting the appropriate property for relocation
- The Victorian Government should provide maximum support and information for relocating tenants

Demolition of existing housing stock necessarily requires tenants to relocate. The challenge for the Victorian Government is to ensure relocation can proceed with as little disruption as possible to people's lives.

VCOSS understands that tenants in the proposed redevelopment sites have been prioritised on the Victorian Housing Register to receive priority allocations. Many tenants have already left the estates, and many more are preparing to leave. We understand DHHS is no longer tenanting vacant properties on at least some of the sites.

VCOSS members believe tenants should be given maximum choice in selecting a new home. They should be able to refuse as many offers as they wish until they find a suitable home, and ideally be able to relocate to a nearby property if they wish to maintain their connection to local communities, such as maintaining children's schooling. Disruption of early childhood education and school can be harmful for children's engagement and development.

Because tenants are being relocated from so many inner Melbourne estates at a similar time, there is a shortage of public housing vacancies in these areas to re-house tenants. VCOSS members suggest considering broader options to find suitable homes, such as temporary head-leasing of private rental properties, or staging developments to allow tenants to transfer to redeveloped properties in the same estate before demolishing the remaining buildings.

VCOSS members report that some tenants are deeply suspicious and distrustful of promises made to them. People want to know they won't be worse off by relocating, or somehow lose their right to return at a subsequent time. Providing independent and trusted advisors, and publishing clear information about people's legal rights during the transition can help reduce this distrust.

VCOSS members advise that there has been limited information and engagement with local community organisations working with public housing tenants. This means they have been unable to assist with planning for relocation, or able to advise people of their rights during the transition. VCOSS members suggest DHHS improve engagement with local community organisations and provide greater information so they can provide accurate information to their service users, including about the role of relocation teams, tenant rights, relocation options, and streamlining service transition and referrals if tenants are moving to a different area.

VCOSS members advise that the particular circumstances of tenants need to be carefully considered during the relocation process. For instance, some public housing tenants are single women with children. They may have experienced family violence in the past, and their new home may be the first time they have been settled, with children attending school, and families making

connections with the local community. Relocation options must be carefully considered to ensure the family's safety and to support maintaining community and education connections. Similar nuances may be required for people with disability, older tenants, or people experiencing mental health difficulties.

VCOSS members suggested relocation plans need to include a realistic estimate of total moving costs. Moving has costs beyond the physical relocation of a person's belonging. There are costs of school relocation, such as new text books and uniforms, finding affordable new services in the local area, and potentially people experience increased transport costs if they are moving to outer suburbs or regional areas. VCOSS members suggests additional funds are available to cover these costs so people can maintain the same standard of living after their move.

Design for inclusive communities

VCOSS understands the Victorian Government has not yet commenced the tender process for determining development partners for the estates in the Public Housing Renewal Program. DHHS has undertaken a registration of capability process for potential development partners, closing on 22 June 2017. At the time of writing, we understand the results of this process are not complete.

At the same time, the Minister for Planning has appointed the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee to consider planning amendments for the proposed estates. The Panel has been considering proposed planning changes, including through a public consultation process.

However, we understand that only after potential development partner is selected and planning changes completed can final building design be determined. This includes final determination of the stock configuration, the amount of social housing growth delivered, and the facilities included.

Engage tenants in building design

Recommendation

The Victorian Government should involve tenants in the building design for renewed estates

The Victorian Government should engage tenants in the building design for the renewed estates, especially those wishing to return. Tenant expertise and lived experience is valuable for detailed understanding of how estates function and the features tenants value. VCOSS members highlight tenants should be involved in designing new homes – just as they would be if they owned a home and were planning a renovation. This can include extensive consultation opportunities with tenants and a design panel including tenant representatives.

VCOSS members are concerned the tender process does not unnecessarily restrict the design options available and or excludes tenant input. They suggested tenders include criteria for the development partner to liaise with tenant advisory groups and understands tenants' needs.

Ensure returning tenants are accommodated

Recommendation

The Victorian Government should ensure the building design can accommodate all tenants seeking to return to estates after renewal

For the 'right to return' to be meaningful, tenants need to be assured there will be homes available in the redeveloped estates suitable for the returning households. This includes larger families currently living on the estates. VCOSS members are concerned that indicative proposals for the estates do not contain sufficient family dwellings to allow larger households to return to the estates if they wish. The Victorian Government should ensure that there are sufficient homes of appropriate sizes for every tenant wishing to return to the estate. This will likely vary between estates, and so the determination of appropriate stock composition will need to occur on a site-by-site basis.

At the same time, VCOSS is aware that the highest demand for social housing is for single-person households. This has been repeatedly stressed by the Victorian Auditor-General, finding that 80 per cent of applicants require one- or two-bedroom dwellings.⁹ This concern is repeated by VCOSS member organisations, who report that single people are the most difficult to house in Victoria's high cost housing markets.

However, these two objectives need not be in conflict with good design. It is possible to design for connecting dwellings, for example, where two smaller apartments can be joined together to accommodate a larger family. When the family no longer requires such a large home, the dwellings can again be separated to accommodate smaller households.

Design for community cohesion

Recommendations

- The Victorian Government should ensure the building design does not differentiate social housing from private housing
- The Victorian Government should use site-specific allocation policies to ensure a cohesive mix of tenants in the renewed estates
- The Victorian Government should consider incorporating community facilities into the building design

⁹ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, Managing Victoria's Public Housing, June 2017, p.x

VCOSS members advise a primary concern of tenants is that they are not discriminated against or experience prejudice as a result of being a public housing tenant. Tenants do not wish their address to be easily identified as public housing, nor their home to obviously be distinctly public housing, or different from the surrounding private housing. They want their children to be confident in inviting their friends home from school free of stigma or embarrassment.

This can be achieved in different ways. Some VCOSS members support a 'salt and pepper' mix, where public and private housing is interspersed and mixed communities are created. Successful examples of this model have been undertaken with community housing providers in Victoria. Alternatively, it has been proposed that public and private buildings are interspersed, adopting similar design so as to be indistinguishable. We understand DHHS prefers to have public housing tenants in the same building, as it avoids complications with owners' corporation structures and potential additional costs of using private building managers.

VCOSS observes that the desirability of socio-economic diversity in social housing estates is currently unclear from the research literature.¹⁰ Much of the international research examines the negative consequence of entire suburbs of entrenched disadvantage, often with a significant racial dimension. It is not certain that this translates to an inner Melbourne environment of relatively small social housing estates in areas that are otherwise affluent with good amenities.

VCOSS members are keen for the Victorian Government to avoid problems encountered in past estate redevelopment projects. Examples of poor outcomes include the strong divisions between social and private housing in a Carlton redevelopment, where a large wall was constructed between the buildings, with social housing tenants excluded from common garden areas. Another example to be avoided was the Kensington estate, which resulted in a reduction in social housing on the site.

In establishing a renewed estate, caution may need to be applied in ensuring the new tenants have the capability to form the links and relationships for a cohesive community. New entrants to social housing are often in, or have just recovered from, a recent crisis. Immediately filling an entire estate with new allocations may not be a strong foundation on which to base a cohesive community. VCOSS believes that care needs to be taken in selecting an appropriate group of tenants to establish a strong and resilient community. To achieve this, we recommend the renewed estates adopt estate-specific allocation policies to ensure an appropriate mix of suitable tenants, including returning tenants, those transferring from other public housing, and new tenants with a diversity of backgrounds and life experiences.

VCOSS members also see opportunities to incorporate community facilities into the design of renewed estates. These facilities can provide local support services to estate residents and surrounding communities, and increase tenants' access to local employment and services.

¹⁰ R Atkinson, Housing policies, social mix and community outcomes, AHURI Final Report No. 122, p.22

Design fit-for-purpose homes

Recommendations

- The Victorian Government should ensure all new social housing is universally designed
- The Victorian Government should consider including Specialist Disability Accommodation in the renewed estates
- The Victorian Government should ensure all new social housing achieves a 6 star energy efficiency rating
- The Victorian Government should consider installing energy efficient reverse-cycle air conditioning into new social housing properties

Replacing old, dilapidated stock provides an opportunity to make sure future housing of a high standard, lasting for the needs of the community for decades to come.

The most common sources of income of public housing tenants are the disability and aged pensions.¹¹ Like the rest of the community, public housing tenants are ageing, and VCOSS members report rising housing need among older Victorians. The NDIS will provide many Victorians with the services they require to live independently, also increasing demand for accessible, affordable homes. Accessible housing meets the broad needs of people across their lifespan, including parents with prams, older people with shopping trolleys, and allows people to age in place.

Very simple housing features, such as requiring adequate door widths, a clear access path to the front door, and a stepless shower recess, can make homes more easily adaptable to accommodate people's changing abilities. Adapting a home can be 22 times cheaper with these basic features in place.¹²

VCOSS understands new public housing will be constructed to modern accessibility standards, achieving a 'gold standard' of accessibility according the Liveable Housing Australia guidelines. VCOSS encourages the Victorian Government to incorporate this standard into tender specifications to extend it to all new public housing properties.

Around 6 per cent of NDIS participants will be funded to live in Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA), equating to around 7,000 Victorians. This requires an expansion in SDA in Victoria, and will also require the replacement of thousands of existing group homes, with many not meeting new SDA standards, and being phased out over the next decade.

New models of SDA incorporate specialist housing into larger housing developments. This helps include people with disability into communities, rather than requiring them to live in homes isolated

¹¹ Victorian Government, Pathways to a Fair and Sustainable Social Housing System

¹² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Dwelling, Land and Neighbourhood Use by Older Home Owners*, 2010, p.282

from other Victorians. The Public Housing Redevelopment Program provides a unique opportunity to incorporate new, purpose-built SDA, forming part of a larger community.

The Victorian Government is the dominant provider of SDA housing in Victoria, and VCOSS believes the Victorian Government should continue to have a role in contributing to supply in the future. Including SDA in the renewed estates also provides an additional revenue stream for social housing, helping maintain its financial sustainability.

Many existing public housing tenants do not have separately metered energy and water, but rather pay a service fee for utilities on top of their rent. VCOSS understands newly constructed social housing will be separately metered, with tenants paying for their individual use. Given social housing tenants have very low incomes, the Victorian Government should ensure their homes are as energy and water efficient as possible, minimising their costs.

VCOSS understands the new estates will meet a 6 star energy efficient rating. VCOSS welcomes this, and supports this requirement being included in tender specifications for all new social housing.

Many older public housing buildings were built without insulation, passive cooling or heating considerations, with air vents that allow uncontrolled air movement, and increasingly have gaps and cracks that develop with age. Ceiling fans are generally not installed in public housing, few have external window shades, and air conditioners are not installed except in the case of medical advice. These factors make public housing residents less able to moderate temperatures during consecutive days of extreme heat or cold.

Air-conditioning is now incorporated as standard into new private housing developments, with around 80 per cent of private homes with air-conditioning installed. With the number of hot days increasing as a result of climate change, vulnerable tenants will find it increasingly difficult to stay healthy during the summer. An energy-efficient reverse cycle air conditioner is now the least expensive way to heat a home.¹³ VCOSS believes the Victorian Government should consider installing air conditioning as standard in new social housing, to protect the health of tenants, minimise energy costs, and allow them the same standard of comfort as other Victorians.

¹³ Alternative Technology Association, *Are we still cooking with gas?*, 2014.

Create jobs for tenants

Recommendation

The Victorian Government should require employment of public housing tenants and disadvantaged jobseekers as part of the Public Housing Renewal Program

As with other major government procurement programs, the Public Housing Renewal Program provides the opportunity to achieve broader social outcomes, including for employment. In particular, VCOSS believes opportunities should be explored to provide employment opportunities for people locked out of the labour market, especially for tenants themselves, by incorporating social procurement principles into the program.

VCOSS understands the Victorian Government is already looking at opportunities to employ tenants in relocation and demolition activities. VCOSS believes the Victorian Government should include requirements for employing public housing tenants and disadvantaged jobseekers as part of the program.

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