

Snapshot: : Investigation into complaint handling in the Victorian social housing sector

Social housing plays a vital role for Victorians unable to afford private rents. About 150,000 people live in either public housing provided by the government or community housing run by other registered organisations. The Ombudsman launched an investigation into social housing complaint handling after repeatedly hearing from renters and advocates that current complaint processes can be unfair and ineffective. The investigation found social housing complaint and appeal options are complex and differ depending whether the renter is in public or community housing. A new Social Housing Ombudsman is proposed to improve renter satisfaction and confidence.

Key findings

- Existing complaint and appeal processes can be confusing for renters.
- Community housing renters have fewer complaint options than those in public housing.
- Unresolved complaints, maintenance problems and difficult neighbours are common issues raised by social housing renters.
- Some renters are reluctant to complain, and others are unaware of their rights.
- There is widespread uncertainty about the Housing Registrar's complaints role.
- Social housing complaint handlers need more resources, support and training.
- A new Social Housing Ombudsman could handle all unresolved complaints.

Key recommendations

The report made 17 recommendations including:

- bringing social housing complaint processes in line with best practice
- changing some laws to treat public and community housing renters equally
- strengthening laws and policies relating to anti-social neighbours
- hiring more complaint handlers and improving training
- boosting advocacy services for community housing renters
- creating a dedicated Social Housing Ombudsman to act as the single external point for handling unresolved complaints.

By the numbers



85,969

social housing dwellings in Victoria (June 2021)



2,416

public housing complaints to the Ombudsman 2019-21



150

community housing complaints to the Ombudsman 2019-21



3%

of all Victorian housing is public or community housing

Final word

'While the resolution of individual complaints may not solve the underlying problems, complaints are free feedback, which can lead to systemic improvements. Investing in good complaint handling would reap huge rewards, for renters, social housing providers and the Government alike.'

Deborah Glass, Victorian Ombudsman