Council rates report

Victorian Ombudsman

Easy English
Hard words

This book has some hard words.

The first time we write a hard word
● the word is in blue

● we write what the hard word means.

You can get help with this book

You can get someone to help you
● read this book

● know what this book is about

● find more information.
About this book

This book is from the Victorian Ombudsman.

This book is about an investigation into the way local councils ask for people to pay their rates.

Investigation means we find out what is happening.

Rates means money people pay to their local council for community services.
Why we investigated

We got complaints from

- people who pay rates

- financial counsellors

- lawyers.

Complaints means people say they are not happy about something.

Financial counsellors help people manage their money.
What we found

We found

- councils in Victoria have different programs to help people who cannot pay their rates
- councils helped people pay their rates during coronavirus but this help has finished
- councils could do more to help people with money problems.
We found many councils

- do not have clear information about programs that help people with money problems

- only tell people about instalment plans
  - an instalment plan is when you pay small amounts of money over time.

- do not tell people they might not have to pay their rates if they have money problems

- charge high interest on unpaid rates
  - interest means you pay extra money

- use debt collectors which can make people feel bad
  - debt collectors make people pay their rates.
What will happen next?

Our report lists ideas about how to fix the problems.

We think the Victorian government should
- get all councils to have the same programs for people with money problems
- make laws so councils must give clear information about these programs
- set a limit on the amount of interest councils can charge
- get councils to work together and talk to other groups to make good programs.
More information

If you want to make a complaint contact the Victorian Ombudsman.

Melbourne call 03 9613 6222

Regional call 1800 806 314

For an interpreter call 131 450

Email enquiries@ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Website ombudsman.vic.gov.au/complaints

If you need help to speak or listen use the National Relay Service.

Call 1800 555 660

Website communications.gov.au/accesshub/nrs

Give the relay officer the phone number you want to call.