

VICTORIAN ombudsman

Social housing complaint handling – progress report

March 2024

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The Victorian Ombudsman pays respect to First Nations custodians of Country throughout Victoria. This respect is extended to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge their sovereignty was never ceded.

Letter to the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly

To

The Honourable the President of the Legislative Council

and

The Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Pursuant to sections 25 and 25AA of the *Ombudsman Act 1973* (Vic), I present to Parliament my *Social housing complaint handling – progress report*.



Deborah Glass OBE
Ombudsman

20 March 2024

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Foreword

Nearly two years ago, I tabled a lengthy report into Victoria's social housing complaint system. I described it as complicated, confusing and under-resourced, to the point where some of the most disadvantaged people in our society felt their health and safety were at risk.

I acknowledged the Victorian Government is making a substantial capital investment in social housing, the impact of which will be years in the making. I said a tiny percentage of that investment, in good complaint handling, would reap huge rewards far sooner, for renters, social housing providers and the Government alike.

But while the responsible Department and the Housing Registrar took action to address the recommendations made to them, the major recommendations were for Government. Letters to a succession of responsible Ministers went unanswered, until a draft of this report elicited the response that the recommendations remain 'under active consideration'.

Meanwhile, social housing complaints to the Ombudsman have risen 83 per cent over the past two years.

The systemic issues are not going away. Change is now even more critical, as Victorians grapple with dual housing and cost-of-living crises, increasing homelessness and an evolving social housing landscape, including the looming redevelopment of public housing towers.

People consulted in the preparation of this report universally expressed support for the yet-unfulfilled recommendations. They stressed the urgent need for these reforms in the current housing climate.

There was particularly strong support for the recommendation for a Social Housing Ombudsman, which I noted in 2022 could be established quickly and cheaply within the Victorian Ombudsman's office. Our office's conciliation team has already successfully resolved many complex social housing disputes.

Like a Royal Commission, I cannot enforce my recommendations. Unlike a Royal Commission, I can monitor and table a follow-up report. So, I am doing so.

I acknowledge social housing issues are complicated and inter-related. But the complaints issue can be fixed, and the time is now.

Deborah Glass
Ombudsman

Introduction

1. In February 2022, the Ombudsman launched an investigation into complaint handling in the Victorian social housing sector. The resulting report to Parliament was tabled in July 2022.
2. Social housing plays a vital role in society, providing homes for people unable to afford private rents and shielding them from homelessness. In Victoria, social housing includes:
 - **public housing** operated by Homes Victoria, an entity of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing ('the Department')
 - **community housing** operated by publicly funded not-for-profit organisations, registered and regulated by the Housing Registrar within the Department of Treasury and Finance.
3. Most social housing in Victoria is public housing – making up about 75 per cent, with the remaining 25 per cent community housing.
4. People can apply for social housing through a shared waiting list known as the Victorian Housing Register. There were almost 51,500 outstanding applications for a home in September 2023.

Figure 1: Victorian Government social housing bodies



Source: Victorian Ombudsman based on information supplied to Productivity Commission and data from the Department and Housing Registrar

Our previous investigation

5. Our [July 2022 report to Parliament](#) found the social housing complaint system was not working and had not worked for years.
6. We launched our investigation off the back of complaints to our office from renters, many of which related to poor complaint handling by social housing providers. Similar concerns were raised with us by community advocates and other stakeholders.

“—
| *All too often we receive complaints about basic needs such as running water and electricity, and reasonably maintained, clean and safe premises.* —”
—”

- Victorian Ombudsman in 2022

7. At the time, the Victorian Government had announced its 'Big Housing Build' – a \$5.3 billion investment in social and affordable housing, aimed at delivering more than 12,000 new homes across metropolitan and regional Victoria.
8. As part of the Big Housing Build, the Government commissioned a Social Housing Regulation Review ('Social Housing Review') to identify future regulatory arrangements to best support the long-term interests of social housing renters and communities. We liaised closely with the Review team, and our investigation report was intended to complement its findings.
9. Our investigation looked at whether complaint handling processes for public and community housing renters were:
 - effective, fair and equitable
 - sufficiently renter-focused.

10. We found the different complaint systems for public and community housing were complex, confusing, under-resourced, and in many places, ineffective and inconsistent. In particular, the Department's complaint handling systems were sometimes failing to resolve simple matters, prompting frustrated and desperate renters to contact local Members of Parliament to resolve simple maintenance issues.

“—
| *Regularly and repeatedly renters in public housing reported a broken complaint system. They spoke of experiencing delays and ... sometimes, they reached the point where they felt their health and safety were at risk. The report confirmed this has been a longstanding problem that requires urgent reform.* —”
—”

- Victorian Ombudsman in 2022

11. We also found that community housing renters had fewer options to escalate their complaints. While the Housing Registrar is responsible for registering and regulating community housing organisations, we noted its complaint handling function was limited and its role uncertain.
12. We also highlighted discrepancies in other safeguards for renters, such as those within the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) ('Charter of Human Rights Act') and *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Vic) ('FOI Act') which protect the rights of public housing tenants, but not necessarily all of those in community housing.
13. We concluded there was a pressing need for a fairer, more consistent, and simpler complaint process for all social housing renters.

14. We made a total of 17 recommendations aimed at improving and simplifying social housing complaint processes and addressing inconsistencies between public and community housing systems. This included six recommendations to the Department, four to the Housing Registrar and seven to the Victorian Government.
15. One of our key recommendations was that the Victorian Government adopt a single, two-tiered system for all social housing complaints, based on the principle of 'local resolution, central escalation'. The proposed new system included the establishment of a Social Housing Ombudsman as a single external escalation point for all social housing renters. We noted this could be quickly and efficiently established as a new specialist function within the Victorian Ombudsman's office.
16. Figure 2 provides a high-level summary of the 17 recommendations we made and the progress since. Appendix 1 to this report lists the recommendations in full, and outlines in detail what has been done so far to implement them.

This report

17. While the Department and Housing Registrar accepted our recommendations and have made good progress implementing them, the Victorian Government is yet to take any clear action, including on some of the most-needed reforms to improve renters' experiences.
18. We have continued to receive an increasing number of complaints about social housing. The wide range of stakeholders we consulted – including community legal centres and other organisations advocating for and supporting social housing renters – told us not enough has changed and systemic reform, such as that recommended by the Ombudsman almost two years ago, is needed now more than ever.
19. This report sets out the progress made so far in implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations, and highlights the urgent need for further reform to protect the rights of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Case studies are drawn from complaints made to our office after our previous report. (Names have been changed and other details removed to protect the privacy of these people.)

Figure 2: At a glance - recommendations implementation progress

The Department	
Appoint onsite managers at key tenancies	IN PROGRESS
Improve advice to renters making complaints	IN PROGRESS
Record and monitor local housing office phone calls	IN PROGRESS
Upskill and recruit complaint-taking staff	IN PROGRESS
Review complaint processes	IMPLEMENTED
Improve approach to serious anti-social behaviours	IN PROGRESS
The Housing Registrar	
Develop Best Practice Guidelines for community housing complaints	IN PROGRESS
Strengthen Performance Standards	NOT STARTED
Develop model complaint policy	IMPLEMENTED
Explore further analysis and public reporting of complaints	IN PROGRESS
The Victorian Government	
Fund advocacy services for social housing renters	NOT STARTED
Clarify Ombudsman's role in community housing complaints	NOT STARTED
Include all community housing organisations in Charter of Human Rights Act	NOT STARTED
Consider including right to housing in Charter of Human Rights Act	NOT STARTED
Extend FOI legislation to cover community housing providers	NOT STARTED
Adopt new two-tiered social housing complaint model	NOT STARTED
Create and fund new Social Housing Ombudsman function	NOT STARTED

Source: Victorian Ombudsman, based on Minister for Housing, Department and Housing Registrar responses

What has changed

Recent developments

20. A number of things have changed since our July 2022 report, and there is now more pressure on the social housing system than ever before.
21. Victoria – along with the rest of Australia – is facing a growing housing crisis, made worse by a broader cost of living crisis. Homes and rental properties are becoming progressively less affordable, and homelessness is on the rise. The most recent available data, from the 2021 Census, shows Victoria has the second highest rate of homelessness in Australia, behind only the Northern Territory.
22. The Big Housing Build and other initiatives such as the Victorian Government’s \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund will provide a welcome boost to social and affordable housing. However, a recent Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry (‘Inquiry’), found Victoria has the lowest proportion of total housing stock allocated to social housing in the nation. Its report – [The rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria](#) – cautioned that this issue remained ‘glaringly unresolved’ and that a major increase in social housing supply was urgently needed.
23. The Inquiry report made 34 recommendations to the Victorian Government, including that it commit to building 60,000 new social housing dwellings by 2034, with 40,000 completed by 2028. It also recommended the Government investigate enshrining the right to housing in the Charter of Human Rights Act – something the Ombudsman also recommended in our 2022 report. The Victorian Government has until May 2024 to respond to the Inquiry’s recommendations.
24. Recent data published by the Productivity Commission aligns with the Inquiry’s findings and shows that Victoria’s net recurrent social housing spending per person is lower than any other state in Australia (see Figure 3), and well below the national median.

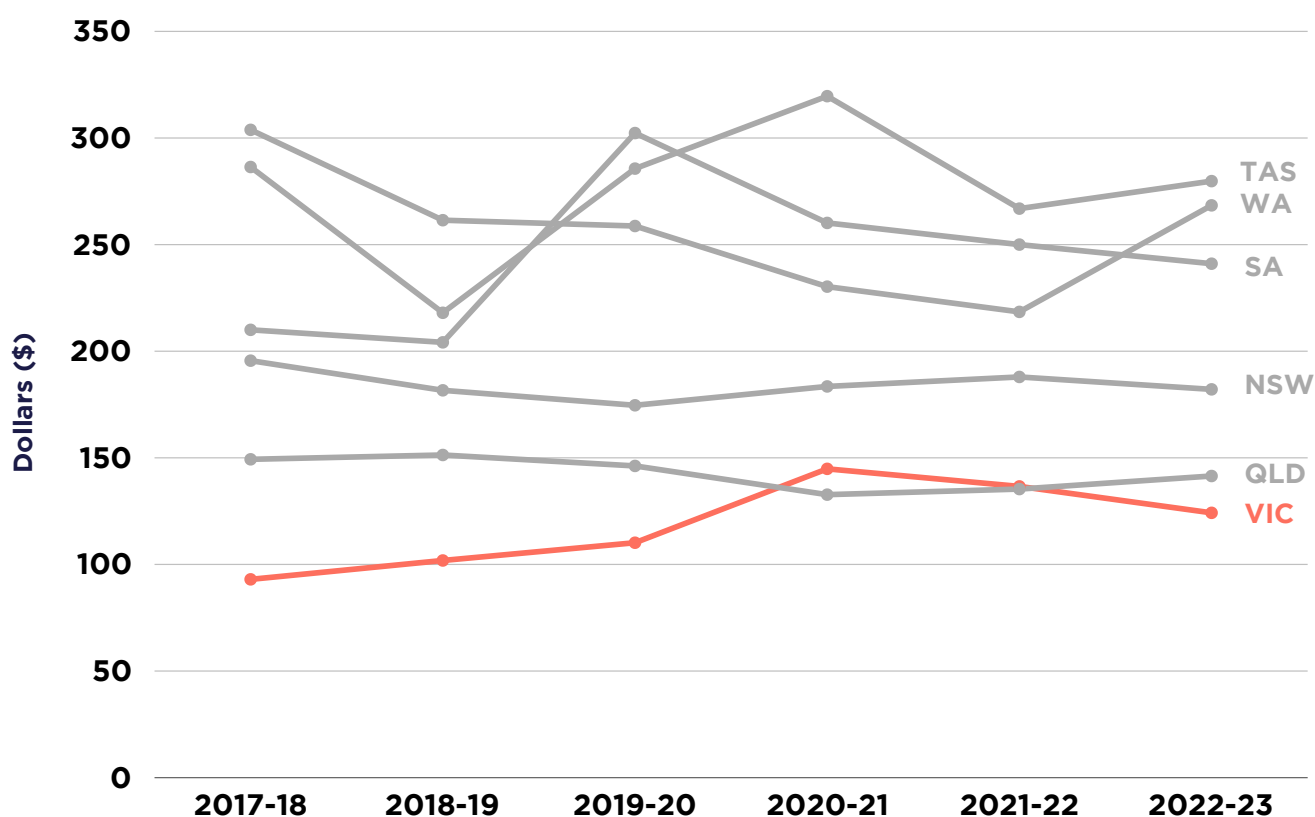
“—
| *This is the most important moment in living memory to get housing policy right.*

—”
|
- Submission to Inquiry

“—
| *Victoria lags the rest of the country meeting the needs of its most vulnerable people, with the lowest proportion of total housing stock allocated to social housing in the country.*

—”
|
- Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry Report
(November 2023)

Figure 3: Net recurrent social housing expenditure per person in population (\$)



Source: Victorian Ombudsman based on Productivity Commission data. Spending reported in 2022-23 dollars.

25. The Victorian Government released a [Housing Statement](#) in September 2023 outlining its plan to tackle the housing crisis over the next decade. The Statement included commitments to:
 - build up to 769 homes through the Commonwealth’s *Social Housing Accelerator* – in addition to 12,000 homes in the Big Housing Build pipeline
 - demolish and redevelop all of Melbourne’s 44 high-rise public housing tower estates by 2051.
26. The plan to demolish and redevelop the public housing towers has drawn significant comment, with some stakeholders voicing concerns about impacts on displaced residents and the possible ‘destruction’ of communities.
27. Other concerns raised by observers about the planned redevelopment include:
 - the minimal increase in public housing stock resulting from it, which falls well short of the number of homes needed to meet demand
 - the potential that public land will be sold to private developers
 - the socio-economic costs of temporarily displacing so many renters.

28. In response to a draft of this report, the Department noted there is support for the redevelopment plan, with some people (including renters) welcoming the opportunity for 'more and better homes'. The Department noted renters participating in the first of the tower redevelopments had shown a 'high level of engagement'. It said the first two towers to be redeveloped would remain public housing.
29. Further social housing system changes are also pending, with the Government yet to act on the final report of the Social Housing Review, which was completed alongside our previous investigation.
30. Although delivered to the Minister for Housing in May 2022, the Review's final report has not been publicly released. We are advised it remains under consideration.
31. Key findings of [the Review's interim report](#), which was released publicly in December 2021, aligned with the conclusions of our 2022 investigation, including that:
- barriers prevent renters from making a complaint, with some unable or unwilling to exercise their rights, or unaware of them
 - complaints and dispute resolution processes are complex and can be confusing
 - some examples of good practice exist, but there are opportunities to improve complaint and dispute resolution processes
 - neighbour disputes and maintenance complaints are key issues.
32. The Department of Treasury and Finance declined to provide a copy of the Social Housing Review's final report to the Ombudsman while relevant Ministers were still considering it.

Complaints to the Ombudsman

33. Our public reports often lead to more complaints to our office, and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect numbers. Yet the increase in social housing complaints to the Ombudsman in recent years has been particularly pronounced and shows no sign of dropping off (see Figure 4). This suggests renters are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with how complaints are being handled by social housing providers.

“—
Every time I'll try talking to them, they just ignore my phone calls, never call me back, [I] send emails [and] they don't reply back ... [They] are just dragging and dragging.

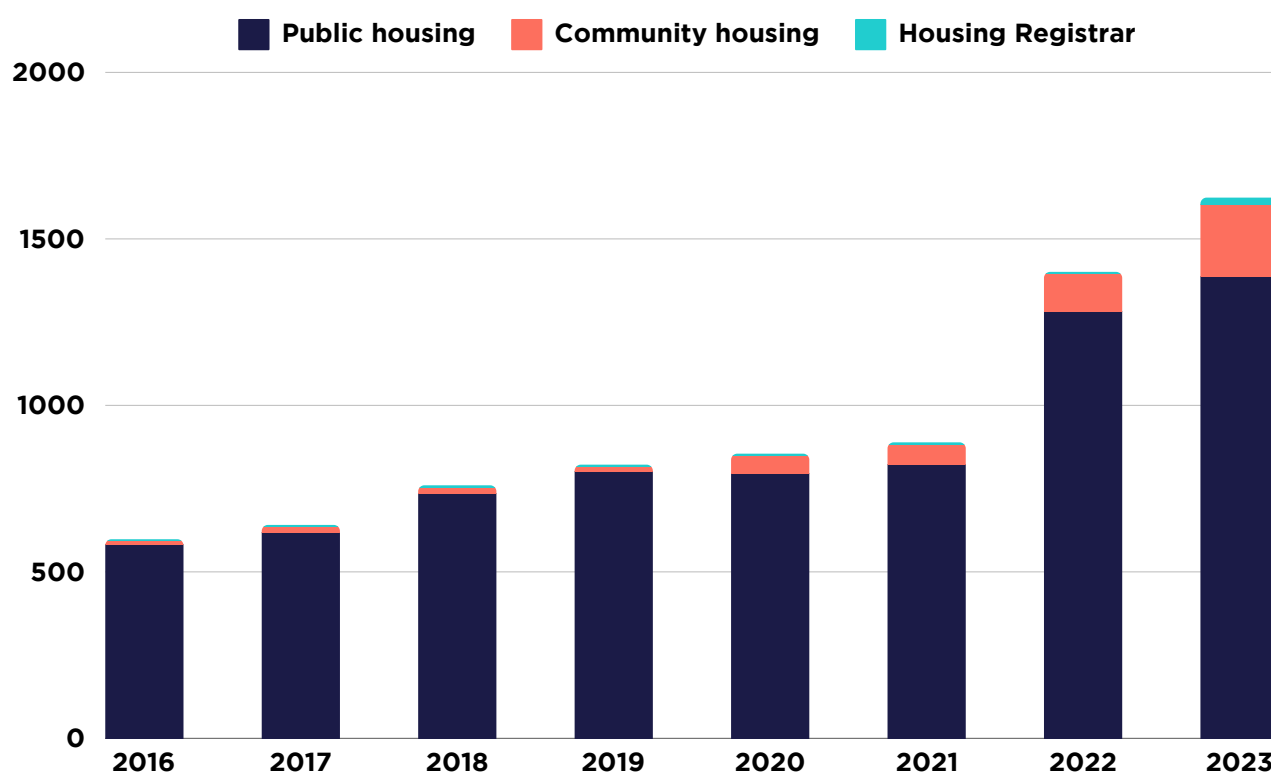
—”
 - Community housing renter

“—
The property is derelict ... My rent is never late ... I try and keep the home as tidy and as nice as I can. I have contacted maintenance several times. I've sent emails ... I'm at wit's end. My son has a serious heart condition, and my mental health is declining rapidly.

—”
 - Public housing renter

34. Since December 2021, complaints to the Ombudsman about public and community housing have risen notably, even allowing for the 8 per cent increase in households living in community housing over that time.

Figure 4: Number of social housing complaints to Ombudsman between 2016 and 2023



Source: Victorian Ombudsman

35. In response to a draft of this report, the Department noted relatively fewer complaints were escalated by our office to it for a response – particularly for housing maintenance issues.
36. Our records nonetheless show public housing renters continue to face challenges trying to resolve complaints through internal pathways, even with the Department’s progress in implementing our recommendations (discussed in the next section of this report). This indicates further systemic reform is still needed.
37. The simplified two-tiered social housing complaint model recommended by our 2022 report would streamline and improve existing systems. The following stories, from Amelia and Jasmine, show the importance of accessible internal and external review pathways for social housing renters.



Case study 1: Renter plagued by mice for weeks despite multiple requests for help

Public housing renter Amelia contacted us after spending weeks waiting for the Department to arrange removal of mice at her property.

Amelia described the property as ‘not fit for human living’, telling us that her clothing, furniture and the carpets smelled like mouse urine, that she had been bitten by mice in her bed, and that there was ‘mouse shit through everything’.

Amelia told us she had repeatedly reported her concerns to her local housing office and a Department call centre. Despite assurances from staff that a contractor would soon inspect the property, Amelia said nothing had been done. Amelia also said she had tried calling the Department’s maintenance and repairs line, but reached voicemail. (In response to a draft extract of this report, the Department noted it operates a 24-hour Housing Call Centre.)

Three days after we made enquiries, Department staff phoned Amelia and confirmed a pest controller would attend her property the next day. Staff apologised for the delay and encouraged her to contact her local housing office with any further concerns.



Case study 2: Renter waits more than 18 months for bathroom maintenance before contacting Ombudsman

A public housing renter in her 60s, Jasmine, contacted our office after feeling that her maintenance complaints had gone unheard.

Jasmine was no stranger to maintenance delays. She had previously contacted the Department after her front door handle broke, trapping her inside with her dog. An urgent works order was raised for a contractor to attend that day, but the Department said the contractor likely went to the wrong address – resulting in a two-day wait for the door to be fixed. During this time, Jasmine was unable to leave her home which left her feeling ‘traumatised’.

Some months later, after waiting more than 18 months for the Department to arrange separate repairs to her bathroom, Jasmine phoned us. She said tiles were falling off the wall, allowing water to seep in, which was causing mould and a rotting smell. She also reported other plumbing issues and leaks and was fearful of slipping. Jasmine told us nothing had been done despite repeated calls to the Department’s maintenance line and described feeling ‘miserable’ about the situation.

Days after we made enquiries, Department staff met with Jasmine and inspected the property. They identified a water leak in the bathroom requiring the replacement of some flooring and wall tiles. The Department raised a works order, apologised to Jasmine for the delay and applied a rental subsidy in recognition of the wait.

A short time later, Jasmine told us the contractors arranged by the Department temporarily removed her toilet without providing a replacement. Jasmine did not feel comfortable asking her neighbours to use their toilet and said she resorted to using ‘a bucket in the backyard’ for several days, which she had ‘never done ... in my life’. In response to a draft of this report, the Department acknowledged a contractor’s ‘lapse in project coordination’ and said a portable toilet should have been provided. It said it had raised the issue with the contractor to ensure Jasmine’s experience was not repeated. Jasmine said the ‘worst bit’ is being made to ‘feel like we’re whingeing’. She said renters like her were reluctant to complain to local housing offices – particularly those who are older or speak another language – as they worry they will ‘get in trouble and have to move out’. Jasmine thanked us for helping resolve her complaint, telling us we ‘really made a difference’ and ‘gave me my voice back’.

38. Our ability to proactively engage with community housing providers about complaints and share information in the same way we do with the Department remains somewhat hampered, despite our 2022 recommendation to put to rest uncertainties about the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction to receive community housing complaints. This ongoing uncertainty can also sometimes delay or hinder the resolution of complaints from vulnerable renters, as the next case study shows.



Case study 3: Complaints delayed by Ombudsman's unclear jurisdiction over community housing organisation

Following our 2022 investigation, several renters separately complained to us about a particular community housing organisation ('CHO'), referring to alleged maintenance delays, accessibility problems, evictions, and other issues.

The restrictive definition of 'public body' in the *Ombudsman Act 1973* (Vic) requires us to be satisfied that a community housing organisation is 'performing a public function on behalf of the State or an authority' before we can get involved. Often, we must examine the service types identified in the complaint, their connection to public functions set out in legislation or regulations, contractual arrangements, and whether public funding is involved.

We identified that the CHO was approved by the Department to provide community housing to people through the Victorian Housing Register. Although it received government grants to help build social housing and transfers of housing stock from the Government, its community housing programs were not publicly funded. Despite this, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ('VCAT') had declared it to be a 'public authority' for the purposes of the Charter of Human Rights Act when providing community housing for low-income renters, applying a similar test to the 'public body' test often used to determine our jurisdiction under the Ombudsman Act.

When we made enquiries about some of the complaints, the CHO pointed to continued uncertainty surrounding the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and noted the Government had not yet addressed our 2022 recommendation to clarify this. It indicated it was keen to resolve the complaints, but preferred to do so through the Housing Registrar.

We conducted detailed legal assessments on several occasions, and generally agreed to let the Housing Registrar consider the complaints before taking further action. In some cases, we followed up by requesting information from the Housing Registrar to see how matters were resolved. In others, the CHO agreed to respond to our enquiries, or consented to us conciliating the complaint using our conciliation powers.

While the CHO and Housing Registrar took a collaborative approach to resolving the complaints, the uncertainty surrounding the Ombudsman's jurisdiction sometimes frustrated our ability to offer practical solutions, and added a layer of complexity for complainants. Some matters were delayed while we considered our jurisdiction and negotiated with the CHO - with one renter waiting almost two months for our decision. Adding community housing organisations to the list of 'specified entities' subject to the Ombudsman's jurisdiction in the Ombudsman Act, as previously recommended, would provide a more consistent external complaint process for all social housing renters.

In response to a draft of this report, the CHO said the Ombudsman does not have jurisdiction over its decisions but that it regularly reports incidents and complaints to the Housing Registrar as part of its regulatory obligations.

Progress on our recommendations

39. Our monitoring shows both the Department and the Housing Registrar have made good progress implementing the Ombudsman's previous recommendations, some key examples of which are highlighted below.
40. Some recommendations have been implemented in full, and others are on target for completion. Full details are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
41. One important step taken by the Department was to commission an external review of its complaint handling in May 2023, completed in October 2023. This was the first such review of the Department's complaint processes in six years, and our office appreciated the opportunity to participate. The review found that while the current approach had some strengths, it did not align with best practice. It made 25 recommendations for improvement, which the Department has started implementing.
42. The Department has also made efforts to improve its response to complaints about anti-social renter behaviours, including:
 - developing tools and providing training to staff to help them better manage anti-social conduct
 - establishing a 'Managed Rental Response' pilot in December 2023, to provide supported transfers of some renters and reduce impacts on neighbours.
43. Nevertheless, anti-social renter behaviours continue to feature prominently in complaints to our office. Concerns range from harassment, verbal abuse and other inappropriate behaviour to criminal activity, including illicit drug use, assaults and property damage. The following story, about Xavier's experience, is at the extreme end. It illustrates the challenges involved in handling these complaints and the need for the Department to proactively manage anti-social conduct. It also highlights the importance of an independent, accessible external complaints pathway for renters.



Case Study 4: Enquiries improve information flow and help ease renters' security fears

Public housing renter Xavier contacted our office about safety concerns after several serious incidents at a housing estate, including the deaths of two people in recent years. Xavier complained on behalf of not just himself but also other renters. This was because many of them did not speak English. He told us renters felt 'very unsafe' and 'abandoned', as the local housing office had not been able to resolve the issues. Xavier said they 'don't have anybody else to complain' to and had been advised to ring the Ombudsman. Xavier understood that the Department met monthly with Victoria Police and wanted to be part of these discussions as a spokesperson for the renters. He also wanted a fob entry system and more security.

Xavier contacted us after there had been no change to the situation and no response from the Department to his concerns.

After our enquiries, the Department confirmed it was aware of incidents at the estate involving physical altercations, drug use and property damage, which had been reported to police. It advised that a fob key entry system had been implemented, and patrol hours recently increased to ensure security staff were present at the building for all but two hours a day (5am-7am). The Department also told us that housing staff now communicate regularly with Xavier to give him opportunities to discuss his concerns and provide him the outcomes of the Department's monthly meetings with Victoria Police and other stakeholders regarding security.

Xavier thanked us for our assistance, telling us we had helped the residents find 'common ground' with the Department. Xavier said, 'I'm so grateful [to] the Victorian Ombudsman because you answered very quick, very swiftly ... I understand it's a government organisation, paid by government but you are still independent ... I'm very satisfied'.

44. In response to a draft of this report, the Department said local housing offices 'work to balance the sometimes competing needs and rights of renters to support tenancies and mitigate anti-social behaviours'. The Department noted it has introduced initiatives since our 2022 report aimed at improving its management of anti-social behaviours, which focus on early intervention, social landlord principles and being a model litigant.
45. Along with anti-social behaviour, maintenance issues continue to be another major source of complaints to the Ombudsman. Since our investigation, the Department has taken steps to improve maintenance services for renters, including establishing a 12-month 'local maintenance crew' pilot in January 2023. The Department said the local crews, staffed in part by renters, had responsibilities including completing low-level maintenance jobs and overseeing the quality of contractors' work.

46. The Department told us the pilot had achieved positive outcomes and feedback, with 4,500 maintenance jobs completed between January and September 2023, an average two-day turnaround, and 98 per cent satisfaction among renters surveyed. The Department said the geographic reach of the pilot had expanded in both metropolitan and regional areas and would continue to be monitored closely, with further consideration and planning for a longer-term operating model.
47. The Housing Registrar has also taken steps to implement our recommendations, including the development of a model complaint policy for community housing organisations. This policy was developed in consultation with key stakeholders, alongside our office, and has been in effect since July 2023. The Registrar reported that it has also developed complaint handling templates and guides in partnership with the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria ('CHIA Vic'), with further work underway.
48. The Housing Registrar has also worked collaboratively with our office to resolve community housing complaints. The following story, about James and Sean's experience, provides an example of a complaint the Housing Registrar referred to the Ombudsman for conciliation to avoid unnecessary escalation to VCAT.



Case Study 5: Renter and community housing organisation resolve a complaint through Ombudsman conciliation

The Housing Registrar contacted the Ombudsman for assistance using our conciliation function to resolve a community housing complaint from James and his partner Sean.

Sean's health was deteriorating, and he relied on a wheelchair for mobility. For the most part, James and Sean enjoyed their ground-floor community housing property because it had an accessible bathroom, a garden, and a private exit via a gravel path to the carpark.

James contacted the Housing Registrar over his community housing organisation's response to several issues. This included problems accessing the property via the private exit using Sean's wheelchair in heavy rain. Although another sealed pathway led to their unit, James and Sean found this route, through the main building, inconvenient.

The Housing Registrar made multiple enquiries and spoke with James, who said he would be keen to meet with the community housing organisation to try and resolve the issues. After consulting us, the Housing Registrar referred James's complaint to the Ombudsman for conciliation, stating this might avoid the issue escalating, potentially to VCAT.

James and the community housing organisation confirmed they were interested in attempting to resolve the dispute through our conciliation function. James then sent us information about his and Sean's circumstances and a summary of the issues he was seeking to resolve. We also arranged a pre-conciliation discussion with staff at the community housing organisation to get a better understanding of its perspective. Before conciliation, James told us, '[Sean] and I are independent and we have supports and positive options in place to help maintain that independence. ... This unit is our home and ... we don't want to fight for every little thing'.

During the process, our conciliators assisted James and the community housing organisation to discuss the issues. With our active support and advice, the parties agreed to a list of actions the community housing organisation would take to address James's concerns - noting some factors were outside the organisation's control, such as local planning requirements, building laws, stormwater drainage systems, and budget constraints. Agreed steps included a commitment from the community housing organisation to further consider making improvements to the private path leading to James and Sean's unit, carrying out maintenance, and reviewing parking arrangements at the complex. In response to a draft of this report, the organisation told us it had also offered to explore opportunities for James and Sean to transfer to a more suitable property for their current needs, which had potentially changed over time.

James told us that he found the experience helpful. The community housing organisation welcomed the opportunity to discuss the long-standing issues in the structured and guided session, and also to participate in further conciliations.

The need for further change

49. The Department and Housing Registrar have taken positive steps to implement the recommendations of our 2022 investigation, with further work ongoing. This is pleasing to see, but more needs to be done to enhance and protect the rights of social housing renters.
50. The Victorian Government has taken no clear action in response to any of the seven Ombudsman’s recommendations addressed to it. For more than a year and a half, the Government failed to provide any response to the recommendations. Correspondence from the Ombudsman following this up went unanswered by the several ministers holding the Housing portfolio over recent years.
51. Only when the current Minister received a draft of this follow-up report was a response provided. This indicated the recommendations remain ‘under active consideration’, alongside the recommendations of the Social Housing Regulation Review’s final report (which, as noted earlier, is yet to be published). A full copy of the Minister’s response is included in Appendix 3 of this report.
52. Key outstanding recommendations include:
- adopting a single, two-tiered social housing complaint model to simplify the complaint process for renters
 - clarifying the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction to consider community housing complaints
 - considering amendments to the Charter of Human Rights Act to enshrine a right to housing and clarify its application to community housing organisations.
53. Until the outstanding recommendations are implemented – aimed at systemic rather than ad hoc improvements – we are unlikely to see significant change in the way social housing complaints are handled.
54. Importantly, the systemic issues identified in the Ombudsman’s 2022 report are not going away. Change is now even more critical, as Victorians grapple with dual housing and cost of living crises, increasing homelessness and an evolving social housing landscape – including the looming redevelopment of public housing towers and increasing reliance on community housing.
55. Stakeholders consulted during the preparation of this report – including community legal centres and other organisations advocating for and supporting social housing renters – universally expressed support for the yet-unfulfilled recommendations, stressing the urgent need for these reforms in the current housing climate.
- “—
| *For us we think it’s never been more important, both in terms of ... the acute shortage of social housing in the state, but then also, this change process that’s going to happen [with the public housing tower redevelopment], which means more than ever we need those kind of improved policies, practices, complaint handling mechanisms and bodies for people in public and community housing.*
—”
- **Community legal centre**
56. Stakeholders remain concerned about the unaddressed inequities for community housing renters – particularly in light of increasing reliance on this sector as an alternative to public housing. One stakeholder, noting the combined waitlist for both sectors, said it was ‘really important that whether people are placed into community housing or public housing, they’re not left worse off’.

“—
| *[T]here's never been more need for public and community housing ... the housing crisis has drawn attention to it, but we've seen that growing need for a number of years, and I think what we want for renters is for their rights to be equal, whether in public or community housing, equally protected and supported.*

—”

- Community legal centre

57. Among the inequities continuing to face community housing renters are the fewer avenues available to them to escalate complaints. Some stakeholders expressed continuing frustration with the Housing Registrar's limited ability to get involved in community housing matters.
58. One stakeholder told us they observed some positive changes in the Housing Registrar's approach immediately following our report, but said in their view this had not 'yielded any permanent outcomes' in the way it handles complaints. Another stakeholder described the differing policies of each community housing organisation as 'frustrating' and said in terms of escalating complaints, 'residents don't feel as though the Registrar has any real power to do anything'.
59. In response to a draft of this report, the Housing Registrar said it has 'fundamentally changed its complaints approach' which had 'resulted in tangible outcomes', adding that it was doing as much as it could within the limitations of the existing regulatory framework.

60. Stakeholders expressed particularly strong support for our recommendation to establish a dedicated Social Housing Ombudsman as a single external escalation point, which they felt would help create a more consistent and equitable system for both public and community housing renters. As noted in our previous report, this could be established quickly and efficiently as a new specialist function within the Victorian Ombudsman's office. Our office also has powers to resolve complaints using conciliation, which has proven successful in resolving many complex social housing disputes.
61. The new two-tiered complaint model would also simplify processes for renters and eliminate unnecessary double-handling of community housing complaints by the Housing Registrar and our office. Under this model, the Housing Registrar would retain its role monitoring systemic community housing issues that might need to be addressed through regulatory action. (In response to a draft of this report, the Housing Registrar said the current process is 'very simple' and asserted there is no double-handling of complaints 'unless [the Ombudsman] elects to do so'.)

“—
| *[E]ven though there have been some really genuine improvements and engagements in the sector around complaint handling, we do need a body like the Ombudsman recommended that can effectively deal with complaints, keep matters out of VCAT and work to keep people safely housed.*

—”

- Community legal centre

62. Most stakeholders consulted generally felt public housing tenants are better off than those in community housing and some reported seeing improvements in the Department's complaint handling practices since our previous report. However, as the Housing Registrar noted in response to a draft of this report, overall satisfaction levels generally tend to be higher among surveyed community housing renters.

“—
| *[F]or things that are quite urgent ... [tenants] are literally being bitten and bleeding from bed bugs and they're told 'a fortnight, someone will come'.*
—”
- Advocate

63. Many stakeholders described recurring issues in public housing – similar to those frequently seen in complaints to our office – including delays in resolving urgent health and safety issues, maintenance jobs being left 'half-completed', and accessibility issues impacting complaints processes.

“—
| *What we generally see is that our public housing residents are treated like they should be grateful for anything that they are given. And that's really distressing for our clients and our residents but it's really distressing for our workers too.*
—”
- Community legal centre

64. In response to a draft of this report, the Department said 'a concerted effort had been made by operational staff to improve their responsiveness to complaints'. It also said Department staff are committed to the Victorian Public Sector values and 'strive to demonstrate these values across all interactions with ... clients and renters'. The Department said initiatives were underway to promote cultural safety and ensure staff deliver a culturally safe service.

“—
| *The sentiment and the feeling from residents around the lack of respect, how the Housing Office treats them and how their complaints are either handled or not handled is relatively similar ... residents feel really fobbed off, they're still experiencing high levels of ... racism.*
—”
- Advocate

65. We also heard stakeholder concerns that the planned redevelopment of public housing towers was already affecting the Department's handling of some maintenance complaints. Representatives of one community legal centre observed:

“—
| *It's just heartbreaking sometimes to hear about the conditions that people live in and just the way that they're expected to wait ... [and] in conditions that [private renters] would never have to live under.*
—”
- Advocate

[B]ecause those buildings are going to be knocked down, [the Department] will do very basic repair work, but the client will continue to come back and make complaints.

...

[The Department] have said ... to me a couple of times ... 'well, the building needs to be demolished', and I'm just like 'well, there's still people living in it'.

“—
| *[Renters] feel fairly powerless so [they're] unlikely to complain unless the matter is extreme or unless [they] have an advocate to assist [them].*
—”
- Advocacy and support organisation

66. In response to a draft of this report, the Department denied making any changes to maintenance service delivery across the towers and said it was 'continuing to invest' in them. The Department said this included the operation of Local Maintenance Repair Crews, which continued to support renters at these sites.

67. Stakeholders reported better and more timely resolutions when complaints are escalated to external bodies such as our office or local Members of Parliament. This further highlights the importance of an accessible and independent external escalation pathway such as the recommended Social Housing Ombudsman.

“—
| *[I]t seems like [the Department] still need[s] that kind of umpire [like the Ombudsman] to progress it in a lot of matters.*

—”

- Community legal centre

68. Advocacy and support organisations we spoke with described unprecedented demand for their services, in part driven by the housing and cost of living crises, as well as concerns arising from the planned redevelopment of public housing towers. They underscored the importance of accessible advocacy and support services for social housing renters, some of whom are unable to access complaint processes without assistance.

69. Funding to ensure the availability of advocacy services at all stages of the complaint process, as previously recommended, would help social housing providers better understand the needs of renters and ensure complaints are followed through.

70. The Department agreed in its response to a draft of this report that advocacy and support services are an important part of the complaint system. The Department said it is compiling advocacy information for renters, which it will upload to its website and intranet by the end of March 2024.

71. Many stakeholders we consulted also said they had encountered clear disrespect from social housing providers in how they talked about and treated renters, in turn affecting how complaints are handled. Several expressed strong support for enshrining a right to housing in the Charter of Human Rights Act – another outstanding recommendation of our 2022 investigation, and a shortcoming previously recognised by the Government almost 10 years ago.

72. Overall, the strong sentiment shared by all stakeholders we consulted, and backed by the complaints our office continues to receive every day, is that a pressing need remains for more to be done to improve the experiences of social housing renters.

The Department's response

In response to a draft of this report, the Department said it was pleased to see acknowledgement of its progress towards implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations. It said it remains focused on good complaint handling through early and local responses, and on learning from complaints to improve renter experiences. The Department noted it is currently considering improvements to its complaint process based on the findings and recommendations of the external review it commissioned in 2023.

The Department said it would always prefer that complaints be resolved directly with local housing offices, but appreciated that renters may complain to the Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the way the Department handles their complaint.





The Housing Registrar's response

In response to a draft of this report, the Housing Registrar emphasised its efforts to work more collaboratively with the Ombudsman in the interests of both renters and community housing organisations.

The Registrar noted it had worked very closely with the Ombudsman to implement the recommendations addressed to it. The Registrar said this had resulted in significant improvements to the way the community housing complaint system works, and it was grateful to see this reflected in our report.

Appendix 1 – Progress of recommendations implementation

Recommendations to the Department

Status of recommendations			
Accepted 	Accepted in principle 	Implemented 	In progress 



Recommendation 1

Appoint onsite managers at tenancies with large numbers of renters, complaints and neighbour disputes.

Accepted in principle (subject to funding) | In progress

The Department reported that in January 2023 it established a 12-month ‘local maintenance crew’ pilot aimed at improving maintenance services provided to renters and reducing a backlog of jobs. The Department said data and feedback on the pilot to date was positive – with 4,500 jobs completed between January and September 2023, an average turnaround of two days for job completion and 98 per cent satisfaction among renters surveyed. The Department said the pilot also provided employment for public housing renters, with half of the staff being renters.

The Department said the geographic reach of the pilot had been expanded in both metropolitan and regional areas and would continue to be monitored closely, with further consideration and planning for longer term operating model options.

We acknowledge and welcome the success of the Department’s pilot program, but note it only partially addresses the intent of the recommendation.

The Department also advised that significant progress had been made through the ‘Supporting Safe and Productive Communities’ project, which has included:

- supporting neighbours to have their voices heard at VCAT through community impact statements, following changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) effective from June 2023
- developing an anti-social behaviour toolkit to assist staff in managing complex tenancies
- developing a digital tool to support staff in intervening early to identify triggers and address issues before they escalate

- delivering updated dispute training to housing staff
- establishing a 'Managed Rental Response' pilot in December 2023 for supported transfers in certain cases of anti-social behaviour, designed to mitigate impacts on neighbours.

The Department said the Managed Rental Response pilot includes employment of a Key Transition Worker to work closely with housing staff, renters and providers. It said the pilot's key aims include promoting more effective inter-agency cooperation at a local level.



Recommendation 2

Ensure renters are routinely advised of the next step in the complaint process.

Accepted | In progress

The Department reported it has reviewed feedback systems used by other agencies which feature real-time communication to complainants about the status and progress of their complaint. The Department said it would shortly commence consultation about a proposed new communication approach to renters. The Department said information on its website about how to make a complaint would be updated in 2024.

The Department also said the implementation of this recommendation would be considered in the context of an external review of its complaint processes which was finalised in October 2023. The Department advised a number of improvements would be made based on the review's findings and recommendations (discussed in more detail below in relation to recommendation 5).

The Department has developed an implementation plan and started implementing the first 10 recommendations of the review.



Recommendation 3

Record and monitor calls between local housing officers and renters to enable quality assurance activities.

Accepted in principle (subject to funding and industrial relations consultation) | In progress

The Department reported it has significantly progressed the implementation of new telephone technology to enable call monitoring and recording. The Department said that prior to enabling the technology, significant staff and industrial consultation was required, in addition to developing a call monitoring and recording policy. The Department said it expects this recommendation will be implemented in full by July 2025.



Recommendation 4

Prioritise upskilling and recruitment of frontline staff at local housing offices and Feedback Teams in Executive Services and the Community Services Operational Division.

Accepted in principle (subject to funding) | In progress

The Department reported it is committed to the upskilling and recruitment of frontline staff at local housing offices. The Department reported that Homes Victoria was developing a complex anti-social behaviour training program, including induction, refresher and on the job training; sharing of lessons learned and insights; case study 'deep dives'; development of an anti-social behaviour toolkit to assist staff managing complex tenancies; and developing a digital tool to support staff in intervening early to identify triggers and address issues before they escalate. The Department said the new digital tool has been rolled out to operational staff and is being refined based on feedback received.

The Department also referred to training for new starters and existing staff about early dispute resolution; workshops and presentations for housing staff delivered by subject matter experts such as the Victorian Public Tenants Association, VCAT and Consumer Affairs Victoria; and enabling staff to be part of targeted sessions to workshop issues with complex tenancies and behaviours of concern.



Recommendation 5

Review its complaint processes to ensure:

- they are consistent with *Australian Standard Guidelines for complaint management in organisations* (AS 10002:2022)
- they require fewer steps by the renter.

Accepted | Implemented

The Department reported it engaged an external consultant in May 2023 to review its complaint processes, which was finalised in October 2023. This was the first such review of the Department's complaint handling since 2017. It concluded that while the Department's current approach had a range of strengths, it did not currently align with best practice. The review echoed our previous report in the issues it identified:

Clients often find it difficult to make a complaint, there is a lack of clear oversight and accountability for addressing issues raised through complaints and feedback, no systematic approach to reporting on issues raised, inconsistent use of complaints and feedback information for service improvement, and the FMS, the current [feedback management] system, does not support effective processes or provide data insights.

The review made 25 recommendations aimed at enhancing the Department's approach to align with best practice, including the Australian Standard Guidelines. The Department said it has developed an implementation plan for the review's recommendations and is prioritising those that can be implemented using existing resources. It said the first 10 recommendations are underway and will be implemented in 2024, with a further tranche to be explored in 2024 and delivered in 2025. The Department said the remaining recommendations can only be implemented with additional funding.



Recommendation 6

Engage with renters, rental providers, advocates and community service organisations to improve policy and practice, and strengthen the Residential Tenancies Act to address serious anti-social rental behaviour.

Accepted | In progress

The Department referred to changes made to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) as part of the 'Supporting Safe and Productive Communities' project led by Homes Victoria. The Department said these were intended to strengthen responses to serious and criminal anti-social behaviour in public housing and better protect renters and the communities in which they live.

The two changes were:

- expanding the definition of 'common area' for public housing estates
- embedding a requirement for VCAT to consider community impact statements when considering if it is reasonable and proportionate to allow an eviction.

To support this legislative change, the Department said it was also strengthening policy and practice around managing behaviours of concern in public housing. The Department said that key aspects of this reform had been developed in response to feedback from renters, advocates and community service organisations. It indicated that policy improvement included reforms to suspicious fire management, undeclared occupancy and squatting, as well as behavioural tenancy breaches.

We note that the amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act were introduced into Parliament prior to our investigation report and did not appear to address all of the issues raised. In response to further queries, the Department advised it was closely monitoring the implementation of the legislative changes (which came into force in June 2023), and that Homes Victoria had engaged with key stakeholders to design operational procedures and templates and plan the operational roll-out of community impact statements.

Recommendations to the Housing Registrar

Status of recommendations			
Accepted 4	Implemented 1	In progress 2	Not started 1



Recommendation 7

Develop Best Practice Guidelines for Complaint Handling for current and future community housing providers including:

- compliance with *Australian Standard Guidelines for complaint management in organisations (AS 10002:2022)*
- clear complaint processes
- internal reviews with clear timelines
- referrals to external advocates when complaint is made or escalated
- upskilling and training frontline staff in complaint handling and dispute resolution
- complaint data including issues and outcomes to be reportable to the Housing Registrar for deidentified public reporting on trends
- continuous improvement by analysis of complaints data and implementation of changes in response to findings
- consistency in naming conventions, definitions and use of model complaint policy.

Accepted | In progress

The Housing Registrar reported that the model complaint policy it developed in response to recommendation 9 (discussed below) addressed this recommendation. The Registrar reported it is now finalising a new guidance note for best practice complaint management and will be circulating this to registered community housing agencies by the end of April 2024.

The Registrar also said it participated in a panel discussion at the CHIA Vic annual forum in 2023 about best practice complaint handling, which provided guidance to frontline staff in attendance. The Registrar said it has also developed, in partnership with CHIA Vic, other templates and guides, including a new rent-setting policy and an additional property costs calculations guide.



Recommendation 8

Strengthen Performance Standards by identifying and incorporating further principles of good complaint management.

Accepted | Not started

The Housing Registrar said it anticipated this recommendation would be considered alongside the Victorian Government's wider agenda for reforming the regulatory system in response to the Social Housing Review's final report. This report remains under consideration by the Government.



Recommendation 9

Develop a model complaint policy.

Accepted | Implemented

The Housing Registrar reported it had developed a model complaint policy in consultation with key stakeholders including CHIA Vic, community legal centres and our office.

The Registrar advised the model policy is a CHIA Vic branded document due to CHIA Vic's capacity to provide training and additional resources to community housing organisations. The Registrar said the policy had a 'soft launch' at the annual CHIA Vic forum in May 2023, and was officially released to the sector in July 2023.



Recommendation 10

Identify options for additional analysis and the public reporting of complaints as part of the monitoring and reporting framework.

Accepted | In progress

The Housing Registrar reported that a full review of key performance measures, including complaint management, had been completed and publicly released. The Registrar advised that it had also reviewed its reporting framework in 2023 and had made subsequent changes to how it reports compliance by providers.

Annual compliance outcomes for individual providers were published on the Housing Registrar's website in February 2024. The Housing Registrar has also started publishing aggregate data on complaint resolution times and tenant satisfaction, among other things.

The Housing Registrar said it is conducting further analysis of the complaint data it collects, with work scheduled for completion next year.

Recommendations to the Victorian Government

Status of recommendations			
Accepted	Implemented	In progress	Not started
0	0	0	7



Recommendation 11

In consultation with the Victorian Public Tenants Association, other Victorian housing advocacy bodies and relevant community legal centres, provide funding to ensure advocacy services are available to public and community housing renters at all stages of the complaint process.



Recommendation 12

In order to avoid doubt, amend Schedule 1 to the *Ombudsman Act 1973* (Vic) to include community housing organisations as 'specified entities' subject to the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.



Recommendation 13

Amend the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) to apply to all community housing organisations.



Recommendation 14

Consider including a right to housing in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) to give effect to the Government's acceptance of Recommendation 52 of the 2015 *Access to Justice Review*.



Recommendation 15

Amend the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Vic) to cover community housing organisations.



Recommendation 16

Adopt the Victorian Ombudsman's proposed social housing complaint model.



Recommendation 17

Further to the above and pursuant to an appropriately evidenced bid, allocate the necessary funding to the Victorian Ombudsman to create a new Social Housing Ombudsman function.

Not started

The Victorian Government has not taken any clear action to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations. In response to a draft of this report, the Minister for Housing said the recommendations are 'under active consideration' by the Government.

Appendix 2 – Procedural fairness

73. This report includes comments and opinions that may be considered adverse to the Department, the Housing Registrar and the Minister for Housing. In accordance with section 25A(2) of the Ombudsman Act, we provided these parties with a reasonable opportunity to respond to the material in the draft report and have fairly set out their responses.
74. In accordance with section 25A(3) of the Ombudsman Act, any other persons who are or may be identifiable from the information in this report are not the subject of any adverse comment or opinion. They are named or identified in the report as the Ombudsman is satisfied that:
- it is necessary or desirable to do so in the public interest
 - identifying those persons will not cause unreasonable damage to those persons' reputation, safety or wellbeing.
75. This report includes case studies describing social housing renters' experiences. Names have been changed and other details have been removed to protect the privacy of these people.

Appendix 3 – Minister for Housing response



Hon Harriet Shing MP

Minister for Housing
Minister for Water
Minister for Equality

GPO Box 1774
Melbourne Victoria 3001

BAC-CO-43901

Dr Deborah Glass
Victorian Ombudsman

Dear Ombudsman

Thank you for your letters of 7 February 2024 and 30 November 2023 regarding the recommendations you made to the Victorian Government arising from your Investigation into complaint handling in the Victorian social housing sector (Investigation). Thank you also for the opportunity to review your Social Housing Complaint Handling Progress Report.

Your Investigation contained seven whole-of-Victorian Government recommendations (Investigation recommendations), which precedes my time in this portfolio. I understand that the Secretary to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) met with the Deputy Victorian Ombudsman on 6 December 2023, to discuss the Investigation recommendations, and will be responding separately to your Progress Report on recommendations directed at the department.

The recommendations made to the government are under active consideration alongside recommendations from the Social Housing Regulation Review (the Review) Panel's Final Report. Responding to the Review and your recommendations requires time to evaluate how best to enable a greater focus on renter outcomes, and support the growth and transformation of the social housing sector. The government's consideration also needs to incorporate developments that have occurred since receiving the Review's Final Report and your Investigation Report, including Commonwealth announcements relating to the Housing Australia Future Fund.

As you would appreciate, some of the larger reforms proposed by your Investigation Report and by the Review cut across numerous portfolios and will have wide-ranging impacts. The Government believes that a cohesive and comprehensive approach to reform, involving all relevant portfolios, will ensure the best possible outcomes for renters. It is important that government takes the time to ensure that all reforms are future-proofed and underpinned by engagement with stakeholders and renters, including through our newly formed Public Housing Renter Consultative Committee. Any reforms will also involve Cabinet decision-making processes which are subject to confidentiality conventions.

At the same time, the government is implementing improvements as new programs come on board. In December 2023, the government commenced early engagement with renters to co-design a set of Community Values and Principles that will underpin the retiring and redevelopment of all 44 public housing towers. This early consultation identified what was most important to renters, and identified mechanisms for renter voice to remain central to the program. A draft set of values and principles will be provided to the renter community in April



2024 for further consultation and input, before being embedded by mid-year. I welcome any feedback your office might have on these principles and will ask my department to reach out to your office in this regard.

I can also inform you that I have approved an allocation of \$2.5 million for community agencies to also support renters who are impacted by the redevelopment. These community agencies will complement the support offered by departmental staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to review your Progress Report. Please contact [REDACTED] via email at [REDACTED], should you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely



Hon Harriet Shing MP
Minister for Housing

22/02/2024



Victorian Ombudsman's Parliamentary Reports tabled since April 2014

2024

**Investigation into healthcare provision for
Aboriginal people in Victorian prisons**

March 2024

2023

**Investigation of a matter referred from the
Legislative Council on 9 February 2022 -
Part 2.**

December 2023

**Investigation into a Building Permit
complaint**

November 2023

**Watchdog for the people: 50 years of the
Victorian Ombudsman**

October 2023

**Investigation into the Department of
Transport and Planning's implementation
of the zero and low emission vehicle
charge**

September 2023

**Joint investigation with IBAC
Operation Watts Progress report**

September 2023

**Misconduct in public organisations: A
casebook**

August 2023

**WorkSafe 3: Investigation into Victorian
self-insurers' claims management and
WorkSafe oversight**

June 2023

**Complaint handling casebook: Resolving
issues informally**

May 2023

**Councils and complaints: Glen Eira City
Council's approach to contractor work**

April 2023

**Good Practice Guide: Complaint handling
in a crisis**

February 2023

2022

**Ombudsman's recommendations - fourth
report**

September 2022

**Investigation into a former youth worker's
unauthorised access to private information
about children**

September 2022

**Investigation of a matter referred from the
Legislative Council on 9 February 2022
Part 1**

July 2022

**Joint investigation with IBAC
Operation Watts, a joint investigation into
allegations of serious corrupt conduct
involving Victorian public officers,
including Members of Parliament**

July 2022

**Investigation into complaint handling in
the Victorian social housing sector**

July 2022

**Report on investigations into the use of
force at the Metropolitan Remand Centre
and the Melbourne Assessment Prison**

June 2022

**Investigation into Environment Protection
Authority decisions on West Gate Tunnel
Project spoil disposal**

May 2022

2021

Investigation into decision-making under the Victorian Border Crossing Permit Directions

December 2021

Investigation into allegations of collusion with property developers at Kingston City Council

October 2021

The Ombudsman for Human Rights: A Casebook

August 2021

Councils and complaints - A good practice guide 2nd edition

July 2021

Investigation into good practice when conducting prison disciplinary hearing

July 2021

Investigation into Melton City Council's engagement of IT company, MK Datanet Pty Ltd

June 2021

Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship

May 2021

Investigation into the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions' administration of the Business Support Fund

April 2021

Outsourcing of parking fine internal reviews - a follow-up report

March 2021

Investigation of protected disclosure complaints regarding the former Principal of a Victorian public school

February 2021

2020

Investigation into the detention and treatment of public housing residents arising from a COVID-19 'hard lockdown' in July 2020

December 2020

Investigation into complaints about assaults of five children living in Child Protection residential care units.

October 2020

Investigation into corporate credit card misuse at Warrnambool City Council

October 2020

Investigation into review of parking fines by the City of Melbourne.

September 2020

Investigation into the planning and delivery of the Western Highway duplication project

July 2020

Ombudsman's recommendations - third report

June 2020

Investigations into allegations of nepotism in government schools

May 2020

Investigation of alleged improper conduct by Executive Officers at Ballarat City Council

May 2020

Investigation into three councils' outsourcing of parking fine internal reviews

February 2020

2019

Investigation of matters referred from the Legislative Assembly on 8 August 2018

December 2019

WorkSafe 2: Follow-up investigation into the management of complex workers compensation claims

December 2019

Investigation into improper conduct by a Council employee at the Mildura Cemetery Trust

November 2019

Revisiting councils and complaints

October 2019

OPCAT in Victoria: A thematic investigation of practices related to solitary confinement of children and young people

September 2019

Investigation into Wellington Shire Council's handling of Ninety Mile Beach subdivisions

August 2019

Investigation into State Trustees

June 2019

Investigation of a complaint about Ambulance Victoria

May 2019

Fines Victoria complaints

April 2019

VicRoads complaints

February 2019

2018

Investigation into the imprisonment of a woman found unfit to stand trial

October 2018

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers at Goulburn Murray Water

October 2018

Investigation of three protected disclosure complaints regarding Bendigo South East College

September 2018

Investigation of allegations referred by Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee, arising from its inquiry into youth justice centres in Victoria

September 2018

Complaints to the Ombudsman: resolving them early

July 2018

Ombudsman's recommendations – second report

July 2018

Investigation into child sex offender Robert Whitehead's involvement with Puffing Billy and other railway bodies

June 2018

Investigation into the administration of the Fairness Fund for taxi and hire car licence holders

June 2018

Investigation into Maribyrnong City Council's internal review practices for disability parking infringements

April 2018

Investigation into Wodonga City Council's overcharging of a waste management levy

April 2018

Investigation of a matter referred from the Legislative Council on 25 November 2015

March 2018

2017

Investigation into the financial support provided to kinship carers

December 2017

Implementing OPCAT in Victoria: report and inspection of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre

November 2017

Investigation into the management of maintenance claims against public housing tenants

October 2017

Investigation into the management and protection of disability group home residents by the Department of Health and Human Services and Autism Plus

September 2017

Enquiry into the provision of alcohol and drug rehabilitation services following contact with the criminal justice system

September 2017

Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions

August 2017

Report into allegations of conflict of interest of an officer at the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

June 2017

Apologies

April 2017

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers at the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Resort Management Board

March 2017

Report on youth justice facilities at the Grevillea unit of Barwon Prison, Malmsbury and Parkville

February 2017

Investigation into the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages' handling of a complaint

January 2017

2016

Investigation into the transparency of local government decision making

December 2016

Ombudsman enquiries: Resolving complaints informally

October 2016

Investigation into the management of complex workers compensation claims and WorkSafe oversight

September 2016

Report on recommendations

June 2016

Investigation into Casey City Council's Special Charge Scheme for Market Lane

June 2016

Investigation into the misuse of council resources

June 2016

Investigation into public transport fare evasion enforcement

May 2016

2015

Reporting and investigation of allegations of abuse in the disability sector: Phase 2 – incident reporting

December 2015

Investigation of a protected disclosure complaint regarding allegations of improper conduct by councillors associated with political donations

November 2015

Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria

September 2015

Conflict of interest by an Executive Officer in the Department of Education and Training

September 2015

Reporting and investigation of allegations of abuse in the disability sector: Phase 1 – the effectiveness of statutory oversight

June 2015

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers of VicRoads

June 2015

Investigation into Department of Health oversight of Mentone Gardens, a Supported Residential Service

April 2015

Councils and complaints – A report on current practice and issues

February 2015

Investigation into an incident of alleged excessive force used by authorised officers

February 2015

2014

Investigation following concerns raised by Community Visitors about a mental health facility

October 2014

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct in the Office of Living Victoria

August 2014

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