

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

From: Nicky Chung, CEO, Australian Vietnamese Women's Association Inc. (AVWA)

Date: 31 March 2025

Introduction: Established in 1983, AVWA employs over 420 staff who provide a range of services to the community, including aged and disability care, playgroups, social support groups, home meal delivery, training, and counselling services.

Background: Our Richmond office, located at 30-32 Lennox Street, is adjacent to the housing towers and the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR). We frequently assist public housing residents with understanding letters they receive in English.

Community Concerns: One of our staff members, a resident of the housing towers, brought to my attention the growing concerns regarding the redevelopment of public housing. They emphasised that there has been a lack of clear and effective communication and consultation with residents, particularly within the Vietnamese community, who feel they have not been given a voice.

AVWA's Mission: As a community organisation, our mission is to assist individuals and families in understanding their rights, responsibilities, options, and opportunities. We recognise that people within some segments of community require additional support to understand their rights and responsibilities, and to improve their health and wellbeing.

Public Housing Forum: To address these concerns, AVWA conducted a Public Housing Forum on 19 December 2024, at our Richmond office. The forum, held entirely in Vietnamese, was attended by 20 community members, 5 AVWA representatives, and facilitated by our Operations Manager. This forum provided a platform for residents to share their experiences and understanding of the proposed changes to their housing.

Feedback Compilation: Following the forum, AVWA compiled the residents' feedback and submitted a summary of their main experiences and concerns to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) on 23 December 2024, as attached/below. We have continued to send monthly email reminders to both the Minister's office and the Department. Despite assurances that a response was forthcoming, as of the submission date 31 March 2025, we have not received any formal reply.

Call to Action: While I have largely appreciated the responsiveness of state departments and their understanding of multicultural communities, this situation highlights a significant gap in transparency, consultation, and communication. Residents continue to express their frustration and lack of trust.

Recommendations: Organisations like AVWA are committed to supporting our community members and are eager to collaborate where we can, with the government, to enhance the wellbeing of residents. We propose a reset in the engagement process, adopting a human-centered approach that considers personal circumstances including factors such as age, health, family situations, community connections, language, and cultural needs. This approach should extend beyond Vietnamese residents to include all residents from the various diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion: Housing insecurity profoundly impacts the wellbeing of our community members, including the many children living in the public housing towers. Immediate action is needed to ensure that all affected residents, are communicated with and cared for appropriately. We urge the state to take decisive steps to rebuild trust and improve communication with residents.

A **Public Housing Forum** was instigated by AVWA to enable community members to share their experiences and understanding of the changes relating to their residences.

The meeting was held at AVWA Offices, 30-32 Lennox Street, Richmond, on 19.12.24, at 12noon, attended by **20 participants**, 5 AVWA representatives, and facilitated by Huy Luu, AVWA Operations Manager.

AVWA has committed to compile residents' feedback to present to the government.

(Translated) Summary of Residents' Main Experiences / Concerns (sent to DFFH and the Minister's Office)

<p>FINANCIAL</p> <p>“concern about higher living expenses after relocation, especially after the first three years.”</p> <p>“worried about the ability to afford rent, utilities, or other expenses during unemployment or when costs rise.”</p> <p>“Will Homes Victoria will continue to provide financial support if they cannot pay in the future.”</p> <p>“concern that doctors and construction contractors might leave after two years, affecting healthcare and maintenance services. “</p> <p>“raised concerns about increased rent and utility costs in private housing.”</p> <p>“expressed concern about moving from public housing to private rental, which could result in higher costs.”</p>	<p>ISSUES WITH PROPOSED NEW HOUSING</p> <p>“Residents are worried about the quality and amenities of the new housing, particularly smaller unit sizes. “</p> <p>“current building 139, which has 223 units might increase to 300 smaller units after reconstruction.”</p> <p>“mentioned that late movers might have to transition to private rentals.”</p> <p>“recommended the government listen to residents’ suggestions for refurbishing existing buildings instead of demolishing and rebuilding.”</p> <p>“Residents proposed more spacious and well-ventilated living spaces.”</p> <p>“raised concerns about bathroom designs without windows, which could impact hygiene and health.”</p> <p>“questioned whether there would be enough housing for all residents, given that the new buildings would be smaller.”</p>
<p>RELOCATION PROCESS AND RESIDENTS' RIGHTS</p> <p>"why does the government want to change from Public Housing to Social Housing? I believe not everyone in this community understands this decision, as there has been no explanation. All I have heard is that the government plans to demolish some buildings, including one high-rise at 139 Highett Street in Richmond and three walk-up buildings on Elizabeth Street."</p> <p>“signing documents they do not fully understand due to language barriers.”</p> <p>“emphasised residents' rights to legal representation, particularly when feeling pressured to sign documents.”</p> <p>“emphasised the importance of meeting current resident needs during the relocation process.”</p>	<p>SOCIAL</p> <p>“suggested prioritising older people due to their specific needs for healthcare and mobility.”</p> <p>“acknowledged that families with young children also face unique challenges that need to be addressed.”</p> <p>“mentioned that most residents prefer to stay where they are and do not want to relocate. “</p> <p>“voiced concerns about the location of a safe injecting room near schools and residential areas, which may pose risks to children.”</p> <p>“emphasised the importance of a unified community voice, beyond just the Vietnamese community“</p>

“highlighted that residents have the right to refuse relocation until they are satisfied with the new conditions.”

“Residents can negotiate the location and size of new housing based on their actual needs.”

“Homes Victoria's current commitments might change after 5–7 years. “

“noted that being too rigid in demands might cause delays or frustrations, and residents might ultimately still have to sign.”