



Legislative Council
Legal and Social Issues Committee

Redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers

Inquiry

December 2025

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About the Committee

Functions

The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee will inquire into and report on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with community services, education, gaming, health, and law and justice.

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Terms of reference

Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne’s public housing towers

On 20 March 2024, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That this House requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquire into, consider and report by December 2025 on:

- (a) the rationale and cost modelling for the decision to demolish and redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing buildings and associated sites (‘the plan’), including alternatives to demolition, such as refurbishment and renovation;
- (b) the impact of the plan, including the compulsory relocation and displacement of public housing residents on the future net availability of public community housing and the existing decanting plans and the department estimates on the number of people who will permanently leave the area being developed;
- (c) the findings and adequacy of consultations with:
 - (i) public housing tower residents and their representatives;
 - (ii) relevant local stakeholders, such as health, community and education service providers, residents and councils;
 - (iii) state and federal government departments and agencies;
- (d) the efficacy of the proposed financial, legal and project delivery models (including the ground lease model) to be used for the plan, versus alternative models to improve and increase the number of public and community homes on the sites in question and in Victoria;
- (e) building standards for the developments, including whether there will be the same standards for public, community and private housing;
- (f) how different development and ownership models will be integrated within each site to enhance community integration and achieve a diversity of tenants;
- (g) the likely impacts of the plan on:
 - (i) the number of bedrooms currently at each location versus the proposed number of new bedrooms per site;
 - (ii) the number of public and community housing homes at each location and how remaining public land will be used;
 - (iii) the Victorian Housing Register and homelessness while the plan is being delivered;
 - (iv) the future of public housing in Victoria; and
- (h) any other related matters.

Chair's foreword

Melbourne's public housing towers have shaped the city's skyline for generations. Built in the Bolte era, they have provided secure homes for thousands of Victorians across the 44 sites, supporting people from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

On 20 September 2023, the Victorian Government released *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–34*, announcing its intention to progressively 'retire' and redevelop all 44 towers by 2051.

In March 2024, the Legislative Council asked the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into this redevelopment, including the Government's decision to demolish the towers rather than pursue alternative options.

A central obstacle to the Committee's work was the Government's ongoing refusal to release the technical evidence underpinning its decision. Despite repeated attempts, the Parliament has not received the documents required to properly scrutinise this policy.

In November 2023, the Legislative Council ordered the production of all documents relating to the redevelopment. The Government produced 12 and claimed Executive Privilege over 146 others.

In August 2025, the Committee again sought the material—excluding Cabinet documents—to allow proper assessment. The Housing Minister, Harriet Shing, was also asked during public hearings to provide the technical basis for demolition. The Government again refused.

The Government maintains that it alone determines the scope of Executive Privilege and seeks to narrow the Parliament's clear powers under section 19(1) of the *Constitution Act 1975*.

Section 19 affirms the Parliament's authority—including the Legislative Council's power—to order the production of documents. Like the NSW Legislative Council and the ACT Assembly, Victoria has codified this power in its Standing Orders. The process requires the Government to first produce documents (including those subject to privilege claims) so that an independent arbiter can assess any claim of Executive Privilege.

This arbiter process has never been allowed to operate in Victoria because the Government routinely withholds documents altogether. In doing so, it prevents proper scrutiny and withholds important information from the community. This is contrary to the Standing Orders, a barrier to parliamentary oversight, and a technical contempt of Parliament. The Council has previously suspended Ministers for similar non-compliance.

But this issue extends beyond parliamentary procedure. Residents repeatedly told the Committee that they simply want to see the evidence about the buildings they live in. These technical assessments should not be secret. The Government has no legitimate basis for withholding them, and stakeholders rightly expect the Legislative Council to insist on transparency.

The Committee also examined how the redevelopment program affects residents. We held public hearings in and around towers in North Melbourne, Flemington, South Yarra and Richmond. Some residents expressed optimism about new homes; others raised serious concerns about whether relocations would meet their needs.

One message was consistent: these towers are more than buildings—they are communities. Homes Victoria recognises this, but significant work remains to rebuild trust. While consultation has occurred, the quality of engagement has too often been poor. In the early stages especially, inadequate and inaccurate communication allowed confusion and anxiety to spread. There have been some improvements, however more needs to be done.

I thank my fellow Committee Members for their work throughout the Inquiry and acknowledge the contribution of the Secretariat: Sylvette Bassy, Julie Barnes, Fred Toll, Alyssa Topy, Kieran Crowe and Patrick O'Brien.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joe McCracken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" and last name "McCracken" clearly distinguishable. The signature is positioned above the printed name and title.

Joe McCracken MLC
Chair, Legal and Social Issues Committee

Executive summary

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 begins with a short summary of how the Committee carried out this Inquiry, including: submissions received and hearings held by the Committee; how the Committee engaged with residents; and some of the issues faced by the Committee during the Inquiry process. In particular, the Committee struggled with the Victorian Government's ongoing refusal to publish the documents it relied on making its decision to redevelop all 44 public housing towers.

The Chapter then provides a brief overview of the history of public housing in Victoria, including a focus on the context and timeline of the establishment of Melbourne's public housing towers. The Committee also introduces some of the key laws and regulations that govern the provision, maintenance and standards of public housing.

Chapter 1 concludes by summarising recent Inquiries and reviews that have commented on public housing in Victoria. These include:

- Previous Inquiries undertaken by the Legal and Social Issues Committee, including by its previous iterations in earlier Parliaments
- The Social Housing Regulation Review undertaken by the Victorian Government
- Other inquiries undertaken by independent bodies, including the Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 introduces the Victorian Government's program to redevelop Melbourne's 44 public housing towers.

The Chapter begins by outlining Victoria's Housing Statement, which details the Government's plan to redevelop the towers, and provides some detail on the progress of the plan. The Chapter goes on to discuss how the Government announced this plan, with a brief presentation of the impact the announcement had on residents.

The Chapter continues by providing a summary of the Government's previous redevelopment projects, including the public-private partnership model used on the Kensington and Carlton estates and the Public Housing Renewal Program.

The Chapter concludes by outlining the Government's current model for redevelopment. This includes an explanation of the Big Housing Build more generally, and a discussion of the Government's use of the Ground Lease Model and the Social Housing Growth Fund.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 focuses on the Government's rationale for redeveloping Melbourne's public housing towers, examining whether alternative approaches may be more appropriate.

The Chapter begins by introducing the production of documents motion passed by the Legislative Council, requiring the Victorian Government to table all documents relating to the redevelopment of the 44 public housing towers.

The Chapter continues by outlining the Government's rationale for redevelopment, which focuses on the following reasons:

- The towers have reached the end of their 'useful life'
- Redevelopment is the most cost-effective option
- Restrictions caused by the towers' structural and design features
- The towers cannot accommodate growing demand for social housing.

The Chapter then turns its focus to presenting arguments from stakeholders regarding potential alternatives to redevelopment: refurbishing or retrofitting.

Central to the evaluation of alternatives to redevelopment is the refusal of the Government to release the documents that underpin its rationale for redeveloping the towers. The Government's refusal to provide these documents means that the Committee has been unable to perform an independent review into the appropriateness of redeveloping the housing towers as required by the Legislative Council.

Chapter 3 concludes by summarising some of the attempts from residents to halt the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers. Particular focus is given to the class action undertaken by residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington estates against Homes Victoria and the final judgement from the Supreme Court.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 outlines and examines the process Homes Victoria has undertaken thus far in redeveloping Melbourne's 44 public housing towers.

The Chapter begins by explaining the main differences between public and community housing. It goes on to discuss the value of public housing in supporting vulnerable people and building strong communities. It then presents the two main concerns expressed by residents around moving to community housing: protections for residents; and affordability.

The Chapter then turns its focus to the relocation process. This includes a discussion of how Homes Victoria has engaged and consulted with public housing residents throughout the redevelopment process to date and Homes Victoria's relocation policy.

Chapter 4 continues by presenting evidence from residents regarding Homes Victoria's engagement and consultation processes. The Committee found that there has been a lack of high-quality consultation with residents with the Committee hearing that:

- Communication from Homes Victoria was insufficient and unclear
- Some residents felt pressured into signing relocation forms.

This was mainly experienced by residents in the first tranche of redevelopment. The Chapter notes that some improvements have been made in Homes Victoria's approach since.

Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion on residents' human rights, how Homes Victoria engaged with local councils and problems with the social mix approach proposed by the Victorian Government as part of the towers redevelopment program.

Findings and recommendations

1 Introduction and background

FINDING 1: The privileges, immunities and powers conferred on the Legislative Council and its Committees by Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975* include the right to require the production of documents. The Victorian Government has refused to provide requested documents to the Legislative Council and the Legal and Social Issues Committee. As such, the Victorian Government has failed to comply with:

- Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03; and
- requests under Legislative Council Standing Order 23.16 (1).

6

FINDING 2: The Victorian Government's refusal to produce all evidence supporting the demolition of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers means it is impossible for the Government to justify that decision.

6

FINDING 3: The Victorian Government's refusal to produce all evidence supporting the demolition of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers means it is impossible for that evidence to be publicly tested.

6

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government, as a matter of priority, implement all Recommendations in the Social Housing Regulation Review it has supported or deferred.

13

2 Redeveloping Melbourne's public housing towers

FINDING 4: Significant trauma, distress and anxiety were experienced by many residents of the public housing towers due to the poor communication of the program's announcement.

20

FINDING 5: The Government engaged with public housing residents only after announcing plans to demolish all 44 public housing towers, falling short of accepted standards of inclusive and fair community consultation.

20

FINDING 6: One of the main concerns around the Ground Lease Model is the potential loss of public land. 27

FINDING 7: At the time of writing this Report, the Victorian Government had neither discussed nor made any decisions regarding future use of the Ground Lease Model in the public housing towers redevelopment program. 27

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government ensure the redevelopment process retains public ownership of the land at the 44 high rise estates, as is the case with the Ground Lease Model sites. 27

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government increase the target of social housing to be achieved at the redeveloped high-rise tower sites from the current ‘at least 10 per cent’. 27

FINDING 8: The Victorian Government’s Ground Lease Model is opaque and lacks accountability and transparency in governance. It has the potential to expose the state to significant financial risk. 27

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government publish documentation that led to its rationale for selecting the Ground Lease Model over other non-profit models of delivering affordable housing. 28

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government cease pursuing the Ground Lease Model and consider other options of non-profit models. 28

3 The rationale behind the Victorian Government’s decision to redevelop the towers and possible alternatives

FINDING 9: The Victorian Government, including Departments and the Minister, have made it difficult for the Committee to access documents the Government relied on to make the decision to demolish the public housing towers. 33

FINDING 10: Without access to documents the Victorian Government has used to justify the demolition of the public housing towers, it is extremely difficult for the Committee to assess if demolishing the towers was the best option available. **33**

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government ensure all documents that have a claim of Executive Privilege be submitted to an independent arbiter to determine whether a legitimate claim of Executive Privilege exists in accordance with Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03. **33**

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government halt all work associated with the redevelopment program until it provides condition reports for each building, feasibility reports into alternatives to demolition, and the cost-benefit analysis for each site which demonstrate evidence that demolition was the best and only feasible option. **33**

FINDING 11: There is evidence of failing sewer systems in some high-rise towers and this is causing mould in the walls. **38**

FINDING 12: There is evidence of concrete cancer in some of the 44 public housing towers. **40**

FINDING 13: 95% of elevators across all 44 towers cannot physically fit a stretcher, so if a resident needs an ambulance, they cannot be taken out on a stretcher. **41**

FINDING 14: Based on the evidence provided by the Victorian Government to this Inquiry, some of Melbourne's public housing towers do not meet the National Construction Code. However, the severity and extent cannot be verified without the Victorian Government publishing all relevant documents. **42**

FINDING 15: It is probable that the cost of maintaining Melbourne's 44 public housing towers has increased overtime, however without further documentation this cannot be verified. **44**

FINDING 16: The impact of the Victorian Government's refusal to disclose documents that justify the demolition and redevelopment of the 44 towers can be summarised into the following themes:

- The Victorian Government did not comply with standing orders 10.03 and 23.16.
- The Victorian Government is worsening distress among residents.
- The Victorian Government is denying experts the opportunity to: a) test the technical evidence behind the redevelopment decision; and b) test their own proposed alternatives.

52

FINDING 17: This Inquiry would have been an independent review of the decision to redevelop all 44 of Melbourne's public housing towers as required by the Legislative Council had the Victorian Government acted reasonably to provide the technical documents as requested and required.

52

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government publish all technical documents justifying demolition and redevelopment of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers.

52

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government publish a case-by-case approach for Melbourne's 44 public housing towers, justifying why redevelopment is preferable for each tower to refurbishing or retrofitting.

52

FINDING 18: There were conflicting views among experts and residents for retrofitting and refurbishing the towers, over demolition.

58

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government publish all documents showing evidence supporting the feasibility of the redevelopment project and demonstrate that alternative options of retrofitting and refurbishment were reasonably examined.

58

FINDING 19: The Victorian Government has engaged in the process of managed decline of its public housing properties, failing to conduct repairs and maintenance in a timely and adequate way. This failure has become more pronounced since the announcement of the demolition in September 2023.

58

FINDING 20: The Supreme Court of Victoria found that:

- Homes Victoria gave proper consideration to the human rights of the residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington towers.
- Home's Victoria's decision limited human rights.
- The limitation of human rights was justified.
- There was no realistic possibility that Homes Victoria could have made a different decision if it had heard from group members beforehand.
- Hearing from group members could not have changed Homes Victoria's assessment that residents must be relocated to address the age-related issues with the towers; whether they were redeveloped or retrofitted.
- A substantial increase of housing on the sites could only be achieved by demolishing the towers and redeveloping the sites.
- Cabinet confidentiality should be upheld.

The decision has been appealed.

66

4 Relocation concerns and how Homes Victoria has engaged with residents

FINDING 21: Public housing construction and maintenance costs are 10% higher than comparable community housing costs due to different treatment under the Commonwealth Government's GST laws.

74

FINDING 22: Homes Victoria's initial communication to residents around the differences between public and community housing, in particular the differences in rental payments and utility bills, was insufficient to prevent confusion among residents.

74

FINDING 23: The Victorian Government has relied on the umbrella term 'social housing' to transfer public housing tenants into a privatised model of housing.

74

FINDING 24: Homes Victoria failed to ensure public housing residents were meaningfully informed about the implications of the distinctions between community housing and public housing.

74

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government cease using the term 'social housing' when it is aware an estate will be community housing only.

74

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government confirm whether any further tower redevelopments will be rebuilt as public housing.

74

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government amend the *Housing Act 1983* to remove the umbrella term ‘social housing’ and provide clear and separate definitions of ‘public housing’ and ‘community housing’.

74

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to remit the GST payable on public housing construction and maintenance costs, to bring public housing costs into line with community housing costs.

74

FINDING 25: Any approach to remedying the serious and systemic issues at the towers will require either relocations, disruption to resident amenity, or a combination of both.

85

FINDING 26: To date, all residents who have relocated as part of the public housing towers redevelopment program have moved to where they requested.

88

FINDING 27: Some residents of the Tranche 1 and 2 sites are confused about their right of return to their estates following redevelopment. This includes whether they will be able to return to public housing.

90

FINDING 28: Under the Public Housing Renewal Program, residents were not provided a right of return to public housing. They were, however, provided with a right of return that guaranteed a home in the redeveloped estate where all public housing settings would apply. The right of return was also legally binding.

90

RECOMMENDATION 15: That Homes Victoria provide residents of the redeveloped towers and walk-ups with a legally binding Deed guaranteeing the same right of return as that guaranteed under the Public Housing Renewal Program.

90

FINDING 29: Public housing residents in the Tranche 1 development group reported:

- Frustration at not being engaged with in a way that met their needs and expectations
- Pressure to sign relocation forms.

98

FINDING 30: The Victorian Government and Homes Victoria relocation process engaged in significant coercive and misleading practices to relocate residents within an arbitrary deadline, causing deep harm to social, emotional and physical wellbeing of the residents.

98

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government engage the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to provide independent oversight of the relocation process to ensure the human rights and wellbeing of residents are prioritised and respected.

98

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government provide strict parameters around the code of practice in the relocation process to prohibit coercion being applied to residents, including a single contact point offering independent advice to residents who have been issued a notice to vacate.

98

FINDING 31: A lack of full information and clarity provided by Homes Victoria staff to residents of Tranche 1 of the public housing towers redevelopment program created a space that was filled by rumours and misinformation. Homes Victoria should have been better prepared to prevent this happening.

103

FINDING 32: The Victorian Government would improve trust among public housing towers residents that it is acting in their best interests by publishing the evidence it believes justifies its decision to redevelop all 44 public housing towers.

103

FINDING 33: Homes Victoria has disappointed some residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing towers, and eroded trust, by creating an expectation of partnership regarding important decisions that Homes Victoria knows it will not always have to meet.

105

FINDING 34: Homes Victoria has significant work to do to engage safely and respectfully with public housing residents and recognise the power imbalances that exist during engagement.

105

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government inform public housing residents that will be affected by future tranches of redevelopment about the redevelopment before announcing it to the broader public.

106

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government ensure Departmental staff engaging with public housing tenants in future tranches of redevelopment can answer residents' questions about their rights in relation to the program. **106**

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government make clear the renters right of return following redevelopment and a Deed similar to that used for the Public Housing Renewal Program be adopted for all 44 high rise estates. **106**

FINDING 35: The Victorian Government's plans for the high-rise towers redevelopment program should have involved local councils much earlier than it did. **108**

RECOMMENDATION 21: That Homes Victoria commit to working closely with Melbourne 9 (M9) throughout the high-rise towers redevelopment program. **108**

FINDING 36: Studies provided to the Committee indicate that social mix developments such as those contained in the Ground Lease Model do not deliver improved outcomes for low-income residents. **110**

What happens next?

There are several stages to a parliamentary inquiry.

The Committee conducts the Inquiry

This report on the Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers is the result of extensive research and consultation by the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

The Committee received written submissions, spoke with people at the public hearing, reviewed research evidence and deliberated over a number of meetings. A range of stakeholders expressed their views directly to us as Members of Parliament.

A Parliamentary Committee is not part of the Government. The Committee is a group of members of different political parties (including independent members). Parliament has asked us to look closely at an issue and report back. This process helps Parliament do its work by encouraging public debate and involvement in issues.

You can learn more about the Committee's work at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/committees/legislative-council-legal-social-issues>.

The report is presented to Parliament

This report was presented to Parliament and can be found at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/publichousingtowers/reports>.

A response from the Government

The Government has six months to respond in writing to any recommendations made in this report.

The response is public and put on the inquiry page of Parliament's website when it is received at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/publichousingtowers/reports>.

In its response, the Government indicates whether it supports the Committee's recommendations. It can also outline actions it may take.

Chapter 1

Introduction and background

1.1 An overview of the Inquiry

1.1.1 Scope of the Inquiry

The Committee's Terms of Reference required it to examine the Victorian Government's plan to demolish and redevelop Melbourne's 44 public housing towers. This included:

- the Government's rationale and cost modelling for the plan
- the impact of the plan on:
 - public housing residents
 - social housing
 - homelessness
 - the future of public housing in Victoria.
- the adequacy of findings and consultations with residents and other stakeholders
- the efficacy of the proposed financial, legal and project delivery models
- alternatives to demolition such as refurbishment and renovation.

1.1.2 Inquiry process

Submissions

The Committee called for submissions on 30 September 2024. It advertised via social media and wrote directly to stakeholders, including:

- resident and housing advocacy groups
- councils and government agencies
- community legal centres
- community housing organisations
- health, community and education service providers
- academics.

To help reach cultural and linguistically diverse communities, the Committee made the Terms of Reference available on its website in Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Somali and Vietnamese.

To maximise the number of submissions it received, including from public housing tower residents, the Committee kept submissions open until 31 March 2025. It also accepted late submissions.

Information sessions

Early in the Inquiry, the Committee Secretariat held information sessions near the first five public housing estates scheduled to be demolished:

- Carlton
- North Melbourne
- Flemington
- Prahran (South Yarra)
- Richmond.

Secretariat staff explained to attendees, most of whom were residents:

- who the Committee is
- what the Inquiry would look at
- how residents could get involved.

The Secretariat provided interpreters at all five information sessions. The Secretariat also used translated versions of posters to advertise the sessions (Appendix B) and provided information to attendees in their languages (Appendix C), including:

- Arabic
- Hakka Chinese
- Indonesian
- Mandarin
- Russian
- Somali
- Ukrainian
- Vietnamese.

Site visits

The Committee conducted site visits at several social housing estates.

On 26 March 2025, Committee Members visited Carlton's red brick towers. Homes Victoria representatives highlighted to the Committee the state of the towers and explained that residents were relocated after the failure of the building's sewer risers in 2022 and why the buildings need to be demolished.

On the same day, the Committee travelled to the public housing towers at 95 Napier Street, Fitzroy. A resident of one of the towers, Elena Soares, showed the Committee around her building as well as her apartment.

On 9 May 2025, representatives from Homes Victoria showed Committee Members around the towers at 33 Alfred Street, North Melbourne, and 12 Holland Court, Flemington. As with the Carlton towers, the Committee noted the state of the towers and heard why Homes Victoria believes demolition is preferable to ongoing maintenance. Reasons provided included:

- the presence of irreversible concrete cancer
- inadequate emergency conditions, including irresolvable issues with fire escapes
- ageing services such as electrical infrastructure beyond its service life
- inherent accessibility issues that cannot be readily overcome
- failing sewer stacks.

On the same day, Committee Members visited the site of the Victoria Street, Flemington redevelopment project, which was completed in 2024. The site contains a mix of community, affordable and specialist disability housing but no public housing. Representatives from Building Communities—the not-for-profit housing group partnering with Homes Victoria—gave Members a tour of the project, including a specialist disability unit.

The unit shown in the redevelopment site in Victoria Street was much smaller in their footprint compared to the larger unit shown in the previous public housing towers in 33 Alfred Street, North Melbourne and 12 Holland Court, Flemington.

Public hearings

The Committee conducted five days of public hearings. It held its first three days of hearings in or around the North Melbourne / Flemington, South Yarra, and Richmond public housing estates, and prioritised hearing from residents and organisations from around these areas. It also heard from residents from Carlton and South Melbourne.

The Committee then held two days of hearings at Parliament House, hearing from resident groups, housing advocates, academics, human rights experts, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the Minister for Housing and Building, Harriet Shing.

As with the information sessions, the Committee made interpreters available to witnesses who requested them.

1.1.3 Definitions

The following is a list of common terms used throughout this Inquiry:

- **Social housing:** Rental housing owned and managed by government or not-for-profit agencies, including public and community housing, for people on low incomes or with special needs (e.g. homelessness, family violence).
- **Public housing:** Long-term rental housing managed by Homes Victoria for those most in need, available via the Victorian Housing Register.
- **Community housing:** Long-term rental housing managed by not-for-profit organisations, regulated by government, often serving specific groups (e.g. people with disabilities, seniors).
- **Affordable housing:** Part of government programs offering rental homes at least 10% below market rent with capped rents and three-year leases for greater security.¹
- **Private rental:** Housing available on the private market, including various housing types like houses, apartments and caravan parks.

1.1.4 Issues faced by the Committee

The Committee faced two major challenges in conducting its Inquiry. These included:

- the Government's refusal to provide important evidence
- the timing of the Inquiry, which coincided with Homes Victoria's ongoing development of the public housing towers.

The two issues are touched on briefly below, as well as throughout this Report.

The Victorian Government's refusal to provide important evidence

On 15 November 2023, the Legislative Council agreed to a production of documents motion requiring the Victorian Government to table all documents relating to the redevelopment of the 44 public housing towers.

The Government responded to the Order by letter dated 19 June 2024, producing 12 documents and making a claim of Executive Privilege in relation to 146 others. In a further letter dated 29 July 2024, the Government provided descriptions of the 146 documents over which Executive Privilege was claimed. These included:

- consultant and other reports prepared by:
 - Aurecon
 - Approval Systems

¹ This is the definition of affordable used by Homes Victoria: <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/homes-victoria-affordable>> accessed 10 September 2025. Other stakeholders use a different definition.

- Creo
- Beca
- Cushman & Wakefield
- Donald Cant Watts Corke
- Delta Group
- Ernst & Young
- Office of Projects Victoria
- Prowse Quality Surveyors
- massing and yield assessments
- reviews by the Office of Projects Victoria
- letters from the Victorian Building Authority
- briefings, Cabinet submissions, draft Cabinet submissions and Cabinet Subcommittee submissions by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and the Department of Treasury and Finance
- Minister briefings by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- a proposal to the Premier by the Minister for Housing
- a briefing to the Premier by the Department of Premier and Cabinet
- a letter from the Premier to a Minister
- meeting minutes, agendas and papers by Homes Victoria and the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The earliest document over which Executive Privilege was claimed—a Consultant Report from Donald Cant Watts Corke—is dated 20 April 2022. The most recent document over which Executive Privilege was claimed is dated 9 November 2023. The Government’s response only related to documents in existence when the motion was agreed to on 15 November 2023.

The Committee also wrote to Minister Shing on 7 August 2025 requesting the documents—with the exception of actual Cabinet and other briefing documents over which Executive Privilege can be claimed—citing Legislative Council standing order 23.16 (1)² together with the inherent privilege to summons witnesses and documents under Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*.³ The Minister replied to the Committee on 11 September maintaining the claim of Executive Privilege.

² Legislative Council Standing Orders 23.16(1).

³ *Constitution Act 1975* (Vic) s 19.

Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03 outlines how the Government must act when making a claim of Executive Privilege. It states that the documents should be provided to the mover of the motion and, if the mover disputes the claim, the Clerk should provide the documents to an independent arbiter to report on the validity of the claim.

The Government's refusal to provide these key documents meant the Committee could not make any definitive conclusions about key Terms of Reference, including:

- the rationale and cost modelling for the decision to redevelop
- the efficacy of the proposed delivery models.

As stakeholders and members of the public continue to point out, it is impossible for the Committee—or anyone—to conclude whether the Government's decision to redevelop all of the towers is justified. Nor can that evidence be publicly tested by other architecture and engineering experts. As such, several of the Committee's Recommendations relate to the Government's refusal to disclose these key pieces of information.

The Government's claim of Executive Privilege and its negative impact on residents and the redevelopment process is discussed in further detail at Section 3.5.1.

A summary of the 12 documents provided to the Parliament is included in Appendix D.

FINDING 1: The privileges, immunities and powers conferred on the Legislative Council and its Committees by Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975* include the right to require the production of documents. The Victorian Government has refused to provide requested documents to the Legislative Council and the Legal and Social Issues Committee. As such, the Victorian Government has failed to comply with:

- Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03; and
- requests under Legislative Council Standing Order 23.16 (1).

FINDING 2: The Victorian Government's refusal to produce all evidence supporting the demolition of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers means it is impossible for the Government to justify that decision.

FINDING 3: The Victorian Government's refusal to produce all evidence supporting the demolition of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers means it is impossible for that evidence to be publicly tested.

Timing of the Inquiry

The Government released its Housing Statement, including a reference to the Government's plan to demolish and redevelop all of Melbourne's public housing

towers, in September 2023.⁴ The Legislative Council agreed to establish the Inquiry in March 2024 with a reporting date of December 2025. By this point, Homes Victoria will have relocated the vast majority of the public housing residents in the first five public housing towers slated for demolition and begun pre-demolition works on these towers.

Some stakeholders the Committee heard from believe the Government's decision to continue its work restricts the Committee's ability to make worthwhile Findings and Recommendations. The Committee acknowledges this limitation. However, it notes that the redevelopment program spans 40 years and hopes the Findings and Recommendations contained in this Final Report improve the program in the future for all public housing residents in the towers.

1.2 History of public housing in Victoria

Victoria's history of public housing goes back more than a century to the 1913 Legislative Assembly Inquiry into the condition of housing in Victoria. While the first housing estate started development in 1926, it was in the post-World War II era that the major expansion in public housing began.

Melbourne's public housing towers were mostly built from the 1960s until the mid-1970s, typically using pre-cast concrete methods. The construction, primarily by the Housing Commission of Victoria, had the aim of creating cost-efficient, mass-produced housing close to jobs, services and transport.

The towers were mostly located in inner-Melbourne suburbs across 28 separate estates, including Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Richmond, North Melbourne and Flemington.

In the 1960s, the Housing Commission of Victoria proposed a sweeping redevelopment of Carlton that would have demolished over half the suburb, including the Lygon Street shopping strip.

The plan aimed to replace existing housing and commercial areas with high-rise public housing, private estates, government buildings and major road infrastructure, including a freeway. This vision of modernist urban renewal was met with fierce community resistance, as residents, planners and other agencies argued that Carlton was not a slum but a vibrant, evolving neighbourhood undergoing spontaneous regeneration.

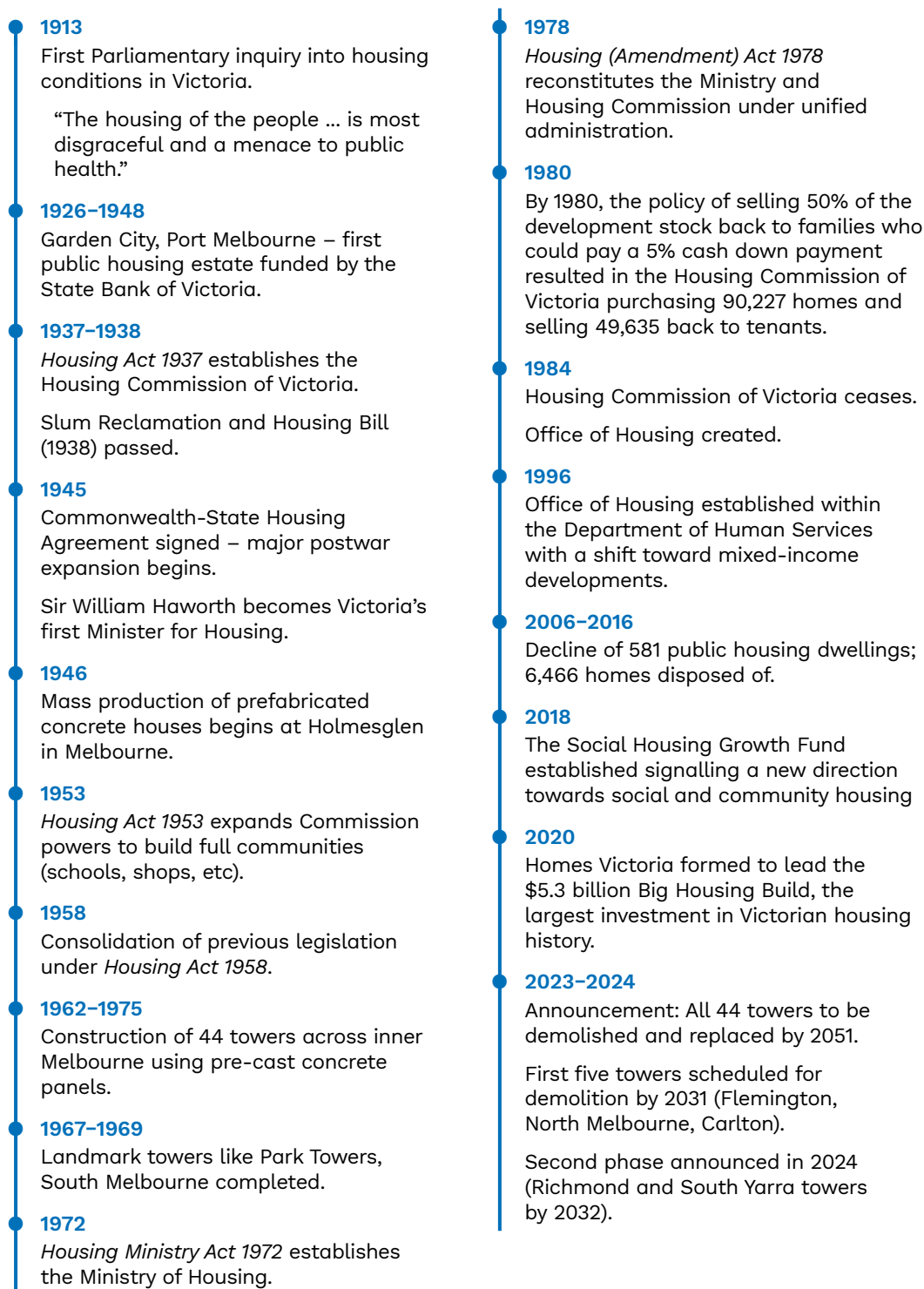
Critics feared the loss of heritage, disruption to local businesses and displacement of communities, ultimately leading to the plan being significantly scaled back and only partially implemented.

Up until recently, the 44 towers were home to more than 7,000 apartments ranging from 27m² bedsits to 96m² three-bedroom units. Roughly 10,000 people lived in the towers at the time the redevelopment program was announced in 2023.

⁴ Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, Victorian Government, 2023.

While they are the most visible symbol of public housing, they only represent a minority of the approximately 86,000 public housing dwellings across the state.

Figure 1.1 Timeline of public housing in Victoria



Source: Legal and Social Issues Committees

1.3 Relevant laws and regulations

1.3.1 Housing Act 1983

Obligations relating to the provision of public housing are largely governed by the *Housing Act 1983*. The Act's objectives include:

- encouraging the provision of:
 - well maintained public housing of suitable quality and location
 - the participation of non-profit bodies in the provision of well maintained, affordable rental housing of suitable quality and location
- expanding and developing the role of the public sector in the provision of housing
- promoting the integration of public and private housing
- providing a variety of housing types in various locations
- promoting consultation on major housing policy issues with all persons involved in housing.

The *Housing Act 1983* establishes Homes Victoria and gives it certain powers, including to:

- acquire and dispose of land
- develop and manage land.

1.3.2 Residential Tenancies Act 1997

The *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* requires residential providers, including the Government through Homes Victoria, to meet a number of general duties.⁵ These include obligations to ensure:

- renters have quiet enjoyment of rented premises
- rented premises are provided and maintained in good repair and in a reasonably fit and suitable condition for occupation
- rented premises comply with prescribed minimum standards on or before the day renters occupy the premise.

⁵ *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (Vic) pt 2 div 5A.

1.3.3 Standards set by the Department

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing maintains a set of public housing policy and practice manuals that cover, among other things:

- allocations
- business practice
- emergency management
- maintenance
- relocation
- rental rebate
- tenancy management.

1.3.4 *Public Administration Act 2004*

The *Public Administration Act 2004* guides the values and code of conduct of public sector employees and Directors when providing high quality services to the Victorian community. This includes values of

- using powers responsibly
- implementing Government policies equitably
- ensuring freedom from discrimination and using their views to improve outcomes
- making decisions and providing advice consistent with human rights.

1.4 Recent Inquiries and reviews

1.4.1 Parliamentary Inquiries

The Legal and Social Issues Committee—including previous iterations in earlier Parliaments—has conducted several Inquiries in the last few years that commented on public housing in Victoria.

Rental and housing affordability crisis

On 28 November 2023, the Committee tabled its *Final Report into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria*. In it, the Committee discussed social housing, finding that '[m]aking owning more affordable and increasing social housing will reduce demand, and therefore prices, in the rental market'.⁶ It noted the Government's

⁶ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria Final Report*, September 2024, p. 125.

redevelopment program and recommended the Government ‘commit to building 60,000 new social housing dwellings by 2034, with 40,000 completed by 2028’.⁷

In its response, the Government supported this Recommendation in principle, recognising ‘the need for new social housing’.⁸ However, it did not make a firm commitment to build 60,000 new social housing dwellings by 2034.

Homelessness

On 4 March 2020, the Committee tabled its *Final Report into homelessness in Victoria*. In it, the Committee stressed that ‘[t]he provision of affordable, stable, long-term housing is key to reducing the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in Victoria’, including social housing.⁹

Despite the Big Housing Build being ‘expected to produce the largest addition to social housing stock in Victoria’s history’, the Committee highlighted a number of issues with the Government’s approach. This included an increased reliance on community housing as a source of long-term housing and a corresponding decrease in the amount of public housing.

Responding to the need for more social housing, the Committee recommended ‘That the Victorian Government, in alignment with its own findings, ensure that social housing dwellings are reflective of the current and projected needs of applicants on the Victorian Housing Register, including by ensuring an adequate proportion of dwellings are 1- and 2-bedroom properties.’¹⁰

The Victorian Government accepted this Recommendation in full.

Public Housing Renewal Program

On 6 June 2019, the Committee tabled its *Final Report into the Public Housing Renewal Program*, a program designed to redevelop existing public housing and increase the number of social housing units by at least 10 per cent.

The Committee made numerous Findings, including that:

- continuous under-investment in public housing has failed to maintain public housing properties to an adequate level and has led to increasing, unmet demand for public housing
- the poor condition of many public housing estates in Victoria makes refurbishment of some, but not all, unviable

⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

⁸ Victorian Government, *Response to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into the Rental and housing affordability crisis In Victoria Final Report*, November 2023, p. 9.

⁹ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the homelessness in Victoria Final Report*, September 2024, p. xxiv.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 287.

- research has found it is not clear that creating a social mix of tenants alone leads to social mixing or improves outcomes for tenants.

Recommendations in the Committee's report included that the Government:

- tie the program to a targeted decrease in the Victorian Housing Register
- be precise in explaining what is involved in future consultation sessions for the program
- involve public housing tenants in the design process for the redeveloped sites
- review and improve collaboration with tenants
- provide tenants an opportunity to review and access independent relocation advice before being required to sign relocation agreements
- resource organisations that are well placed to provide tenants with independent legal advice
- identify which public housing estates are suitable for refurbishment and which are not
- conduct a study on social mix and social outcomes on public housing estates and allow the results to influence future social housing policy.¹¹

The Public Housing Renewal Program and its similarities to the public housing tower redevelopment program are discussed in greater detail at Section 2.4.2.

1.4.2 Social Housing Regulation Review

As part of the Big Housing Build, the Government commissioned an independent Social Housing Regulation Review.¹² In May 2022, the Review's Independent Panel released its Final Report, the 'main finding' of which was that 'the voices of current and prospective tenants should be placed at the centre of the system'.¹³

The Independent Panel explained this means 'the interests of current and prospective tenants should be front and centre, and tenants should be involved in decisions about how their interests are best served'.¹⁴ It went on to make 44 recommendations, including that the Government:

- consult with current and prospective tenants to develop a customer charter of social housing service standards
- include public housing in the remit of the Residential Tenancies Commissioner

¹¹ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program Final Report*, June 2018.

¹² Department of Treasury and Finance, *Social Housing Regulation Review*, <<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/social-housing-regulation-review>> accessed 10 September 2025.

¹³ Independent Panel of the Social and Affordable Housing Regulation Review, *Final Report*, Melbourne, May 2022, p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid.

- establish common performance standards for public and community housing activities through a consultative process with stakeholders
- require social housing properties to comply with minimum standards prescribed by the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* by January 2027
- require registered community housing agencies to apply human rights principles in decision making
- establish an independent social and affordable housing regulator
- transfer the Director of Housing's power to make legislative instruments determining rules for social housing eligibility and allocation to the responsible Minister
- link the Victorian Housing Register applicants to services and accommodation-related assistance.

Dr David Hayward, who Chaired the Review, made a personal submission to this Inquiry. In it, he expressed hope that the Government's support of the core proposition of the Review—'that social housing renters be made the centre of the regulatory system'—would 'trigger a reconsideration by Government of the best way to undertake major reforms like the decision to redevelop the public housing towers'.¹⁵

Many submitters urged the Government to implement some or all of the Recommendations in the Social Housing Regulation Review.¹⁶ In its response to the Review, the Government agreed to 20 Recommendations in full and 20 in principle or in part. It did not support three Recommendations—including regulating affordable housing and transferring the Director of Housing's eligibility and allocations power to the relevant Minister (and another on neighbourhood disputes)—and deferred consideration of the Recommendations to establish an independent social and affordable housing regulator. It explained it 'will work with stakeholders to implement a reform package ... with the experience of renters at the centre of the reforms'.¹⁷

The Government has not provided any updates about its implementation of the Review's Recommendations. Given the relevance of these Recommendations to the outcomes of public housing tower residents throughout the redevelopment process, the Committee urges it to do so as a matter of priority.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government, as a matter of priority, implement all Recommendations in the Social Housing Regulation Review it has supported or deferred.

¹⁵ Dr David Hayward, *Submission 527*, p. 4.

¹⁶ See, for example, Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 17; Tenants Victoria, *Submission 682*, p. 5; Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, p. 6; Merri-bek City Council, *Submission 613*, p. 6; Joint Community and Legal Services, *Submission 723*, p. 2; Social Housing and Legal Program, *Submission 726*, p. 6; Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 4; Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 526*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Victorian Government, *Response to the Social and Affordable Housing Regulation Review*, Melbourne, p. 3.

1.4.3 Other reviews

Other relevant inquiries and reviews include:

- 2017: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Managing Victoria's public housing*¹⁸
- 2012: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Access to public housing*¹⁹
- 2010: Family and Community Development Committee, *Inquiry into the adequacy and future directions of public housing in Victoria*.²⁰

1.5 Structure of this Final Report

The remainder of this Report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 explains the redevelopment program, including its announcement and how it builds on previous housing programs.
- Chapter 3 looks at the Government's rationale for redeveloping all 44 towers and provides analysis of alternatives to redevelopment provided by stakeholders.
- Chapter 4 outlines problems with the program to date—the loss of public housing, the impact on communities and how residents were informed of the program—as well as where Homes Victoria has improved and Recommendations for further improvements for the program.

¹⁸ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Managing Victoria's Public Housing*, 2025, <<https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/managing-victorias-public-housing>> accessed 29 September 2025.

¹⁹ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Access to Public Housing*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2012.

²⁰ Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee, *Inquiry into the adequacy and future directions of public housing in Victoria*, Melbourne, 2010.

Chapter 2

Redeveloping Melbourne's public housing towers

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter introduces the Victorian Government's program to redevelop Melbourne's 44 public housing towers. It begins with an explanation of *Victoria's Housing Statement*, the plan that details the redevelopment decision. The Chapter discusses how the program was announced and how the announcement caused significant concern among some residents.

The Chapter continues by providing a summary of previous redevelopment projects, including at Kensington and Carlton and the Public Housing Renewal Program. It concludes by explaining the Big Housing Build and the Government's use of the Ground Lease Model and Social Housing Growth Fund.

2.2 What is the towers redevelopment program?

On 20 September 2023, the Victorian Government released *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–3034*.¹ The Housing Statement set out the Government's plan for 'tackl[ing] housing supply and affordability in Victoria', including by 'build[ing] 800,000 homes ... over the next decade'.²

The Statement focussed on five key areas:

- good decisions, made faster
- cheaper housing, closer to where you work
- protecting renters' rights
- more social housing
- a long-term housing plan.³

Under the fourth of these key areas, 'more social housing', the Government outlined its intention to progressively 'retire' and 'redevelop' Melbourne's 44 high-rise public

¹ Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne, 20 September 2023.

² Victorian Government, *Announcing Victoria's Housing Statement*, 25 June 2025, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/announcing-victorias-housing-statement>> accessed 11 September 2025.

³ Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne, 20 September 2023, p. 5.

housing estates by 2051. The Government stated that this will increase the number of social homes by a minimum of 10% and the number of residents from 10,000 to 30,000.⁴

The first towers to be redeveloped are in Carlton, Flemington and North Melbourne, known as Tranche 1 of the program.⁵ In September 2024, the Victorian Government announced the redevelopment of towers and walk-ups in South Yarra and Richmond, known as Tranche 2.⁶

Homes Victoria states that when a tower is redeveloped:

- renters are supported to relocate to suitable homes
- buildings are carefully deconstructed (1–2 years)
- construction starts following consultation (2–3 years)
- new and returning renters are welcomed to new homes (6–8 years following the first announcement).⁷

Figure 2.1 Progress so far



Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 10.

At the time of writing this Final Report in October 2025, Homes Victoria is redeveloping towers (and walk-ups) at five sites.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶ Tim Pallas, *Biggest urban renewal project delivering even more homes*, media release, Victorian Government, 20 September 2024.

⁷ Homes Victoria, *More information on redeveloping older high-rise*, <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/high-rise-redevelopment>> accessed 11 September 2025; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 19.

**Table 2.1 Tranche 1 – demolition and rebuild announced
20 September 2023**

Tower	Status	Intended outcome
Elgin Towers (Red brick towers at 20 Elgin Street and 141 Nicholson Street)	Demolition commenced February 2025.	248 new homes (up from 196), including 1-5-bedroom apartments. Expected to be completed by 2028.
Flemington (12 Holland Court)	Resident relocation currently underway and due to finish in September 2025.	Expected to be completed by 2031.
Flemington (120 Racecourse Road)	Resident relocation currently underway and due to finish in September 2025.	Expected to be completed by 2031. The combined redevelopment of Flemington and North Melbourne expected to deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a 39% increase in social housing • a 198% increase in the overall number of homes.
North Melbourne (33 Alfred Street Y Tower)	Over 60% of households relocated in accordance with their preferences and departmental policies. Resident relocation had finished in September 2025.	Approximately 800 homes planned. Expected to be completed by 2031.

Source: Peta McCammon, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 11, 15–16.

**Table 2.2 Tranche 2 – demolition and rebuild announced
20 September 2024**

Tower	Status	Intended outcome
Richmond (139 Highett Street)	Relocation expected to be completed by February 2026.	Due for completion in 2032.
South Yarra (259 Malvern Road)	Relocation expected to be completed by February 2026.	Due for completion in 2032.

Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 15–16.

Other towers

Homes Victoria states on its website that it has no plans to start developing other sites before July 2026.⁸

⁸ Homes Victoria, *More information on redeveloping older high-rise*, 2025, <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/high-rise-redevelopment>> accessed 10 September 2025.

2.3 Announcing the towers redevelopment program

2.3.1 How did the Government announce the redevelopment program?

As noted at Section 2.2 above, the Government announced its intention to redevelop all of Melbourne's public housing towers on 20 September 2023, with the release of *Victoria's Housing Statement*. Redeveloping the two Carlton red brick towers had been announced in 2020 as part of the Big Housing Build but became part of this program.

Victoria's Premier at the time, Daniel Andrews, also made the announcement in a televised press conference about the Housing Statement. The Committee heard this was the first time many tower residents heard about the redevelopment.

The Department's submission states that following the announcement, Homes Victoria doorknocked every tower resident, providing information in 14 languages.⁹ Homes Victoria has since confirmed that information was initially provided in 11 languages:

- Arabic
- Chinese Simplified
- Chinese Traditional
- Dinka
- Indonesian
- Oromo
- Russian
- Somali
- Turkish
- Ukrainian
- Vietnamese.¹⁰

At the time of writing this Report, the number of languages had grown to 19.¹¹

Residents reported Homes Victoria staff placing fliers under their doors or handing them leaflets with chocolates and biscuits.¹² Homes Victoria also hosted pop-up stalls in the foyer of every tower for three days and distributed a newsletter with information

⁹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Correspondence between Homes Victoria and the Committee Secretariat, 16 October 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² OFFICE, *Submission 102.1*, p. 37; Rachael Dexter and Cara Waters, 'Wholesale destruction of public housing': Fears raised over tower knockdowns, 21 September 2023, <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/wholesale-destruction-of-public-housing-fears-raised-over-tower-knockdowns-20230920-p5e670.html>> accessed 22 September 2025.

about the program.¹³ Homes Victoria's Chief Executive Officer also hosted information sessions for the North Melbourne and Flemington towers.¹⁴

The extent and adequacy of Homes Victoria's engagement with residents is considered in greater detail in Chapter 4.

2.3.2 Use of the Ground Lease Model

On 11 March 2025, the Government revealed that it would be using the Ground Lease Model to redevelop the North Melbourne and Flemington estates. This is considered at Section 2.4.3 below.

2.3.3 What impact did the announcement have on residents?

The announcement has caused significant anxiety and stress, particularly for vulnerable groups: elderly people, children, people with disabilities and non-English speakers were all mentioned as cohorts who would struggle most with this process.

Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

Box 2.1 collates examples of how the announcement affected residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington towers according to evidence presented to this Inquiry.

Box 2.1 Residents' reactions to the Government's announcement

The idea of demolition of our homes gives us no power, we feel really bad we couldn't stop this, this home for us, for our kids and all for us and even how they announce they didn't prepare us and heard it like everyone else on the news, it was shocking.

Name withheld, *Submission 66*, p. 1.

The Department says that they have involved residents about the demolition but we did not hear anything before the announcement ... This made me feel very angry and sad that I was not looked at as a human being because it's my house and I can't decide where I want to go.

Name withheld, *Submission 118*, p. 1.

(Continued)

¹³ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 20.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Box 2.1 Continued

I heard a little about the plans 12 months ago when Andrews announced it on TV. It caused a massive panic among residents. The government sent around people to reassure residents.

Leanne McKibben, *Submission 138*, p. 1.

Since the announcement of rebuild plan I have frequently been getting sick. This unsettling situation has caused a great deal of shock, stress and anxiety for me. The fear of homelessness or being resettled in a foreign community has impacted my mental health. I am unable to sleep at night and feel withdrawn from everyday life.

Quang Bui, *Submission 505*, p. 1.

One resident claimed, “the Government “failed to properly consider” his and other residents’ human rights when it announced the policy without consulting them first.” And “He’s said if he were consulted, he would be able to explain how demolishing the building would uproot his life.”

Flat Out, *Submission 528*, p. 18.

The impact and re-triggering of trauma in December 2023 when the public announcement was made was immediately voiced by tenants in the older person high-rise communities.

Kate Incerti, *Submission 590*, p. 4.

Before announcing the Victorian Government’s intent to demolish and redevelop all high-rise public housing, there was no consultation with public housing residents or relevant local stakeholders, including councils. Upon hearing the announcement, the confusion, uncertainty and misinformation experienced by public housing residents in Yarra caused considerable distress.

Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*, p. 5.

FINDING 4: Significant trauma, distress and anxiety were experienced by many residents of the public housing towers due to the poor communication of the program’s announcement.

FINDING 5: The Government engaged with public housing residents only after announcing plans to demolish all 44 public housing towers, falling short of accepted standards of inclusive and fair community consultation.

2.4 Previous redevelopment projects

The towers redevelopment program follows other public housing redevelopment programs, most recently the redevelopments at Kensington and Carlton and the Public Housing Renewal Program. The program coincides with the Government's Big Housing Build and draws from its use of the Ground Lease Model to redevelop public housing.

2.4.1 Public-private partnerships in Kensington and Carlton

Between 2000 and 2024, the Victorian Government redeveloped two estates in Kensington and Carlton using a public-private partnership model.

Kensington

The first redevelopment program occurred in Kensington between 2000 and 2012. The Victorian Government sold two-thirds of the land on the estate to a private developer, Becton, and partnered with the developer to replace walk-ups and high-rises with a mix of public and privately-owned units.¹⁵ It sold Becton its share of the land below market value and allowed it to sell the newly developed private housing at market rate.¹⁶

In 2012, the former Department of Human Services commissioned academics from the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Architecture and Building to conduct a review into the Kensington redevelopment. The review explained the project was the first in Victoria to emphasise public-private finance mix, housing mix and social mix, and recommended that the 'redevelopment model at Kensington should not be reproduced in the same arrangement on other estates'.¹⁷

The University of Melbourne report also said 'There were 512 private units built, of which 15 were sold for community housing. The finished project therefore has 497 private units, 15 community housing units and 429 public units – a total of 941 dwellings.'

According to the report, the redevelopment resulted in a decrease of 260 public housing units on the estate. Of the 486 public housing tenants relocated from the estate, 20% returned, and internal and external communal spaces were maintained to different standards, in favour of the privately-owned buildings.¹⁸ Moreover, there was little evidence of social interaction between different tenure groups and claims of the benefits of social mix were not supported.¹⁹

Social mix of residents in redeveloped estates is discussed further in Section 4.8.

¹⁵ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, Attachment 1, p. 3.

¹⁷ Kate Shaw, Peter Raisbeck, Chris Chaplin and Kath Hulse, *Evaluation of the Kensington redevelopment and place management models: Final Report*, University of Melbourne, January 2013, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Carlton

Between 2009 and 2024, the Victorian Government partnered with the 'Living Carlton Consortium'—comprising Citta Property Group and Frasers Property Australia—to redevelop three public housing sites in Carlton at Drummond Street, Cardigan Street and Elgin Street.²⁰ The estates' walk-ups were replaced with:

- 246 public housing units
- 874 private units
- a 160-bed aged care facility
- 180 independent living units.²¹

The Carlton estate was the second major estate to undergo redevelopment in Melbourne adopting the 'Kensington model'.²²

2.4.2 Public Housing Renewal Program

In 2017, the Victorian Government launched the Public Housing Renewal Program (PHRP) as part of the broader Homes for Victorians strategy, an initiative aimed at improving housing affordability and supply across the State. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was responsible for delivering Initiative Four of the strategy: increasing and renewing social housing stock.

The program focused on redeveloping public housing estates and expanding social housing in both metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. It had three key goals: increasing the number of social housing units; modernising and improving existing stock to ensure it was fit for purpose; and reducing concentrated disadvantage by encouraging a socially mixed housing environment.

Phase One of the PHRP was backed by \$185 million in seed funding from DHHS. It included the relocation of residents and the demolition of nine inner-city housing estates.

These properties are managed by private not-for-profit housing providers, classifying them as community housing rather than public housing.

²⁰ Citta Property Group, *Living Carlton*, <<https://citta.com.au/portfolio/livingcarlton>> accessed 15 September 2025.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kate Shaw, Peter Raisbeck, Chris Chaplin and Kath Hulse, *Evaluation of the Kensington redevelopment and place management models: Final Report*, University of Melbourne, January 2013, p. 28.

Table 2.3 PHRP project status

Site	Status
Abbotsford Street, North Melbourne	Completed: Sept 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 127 new social homes (up from 112), 17 market townhouses. • 13% increase in social housing. • Total: 340 new homes.
Dunlop Avenue, Ascot Vale	Completed: 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 new social and affordable homes.
Bangs Street, Prahran	Completed: Feb 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaced 120 homes with 434 new dwellings: 228 social homes, 206 market rentals. • 90% increase in social housing. • Delivered via 40-year Ground Lease Model (public land retained).
Bills Street, Hawthorn	Completed: 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 206 social and affordable homes. • 98% uplift in social housing. • 30-year lease to Housing Choices Australia (social) and another manager (affordable).
Gronn Place (Harvest Square), Brunswick West	Completed: 2024 (market townhouses by 2027) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaced 82 homes with 198 new ones. • 119 social, 50 market homes. • 45% increase in social housing.
New Street, Brighton	Completed: 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 291 new homes (151 social, 140 market rentals). • 19% increase in social housing. • Delivered via 40-year Ground Lease Model.
Tarakan and Bellbardia Estates, Heidelberg West	Completed: 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaced 60 homes with 130 new ones. • 67 social, 63 affordable homes.
Walker Street, Northcote	Completed: mid-2025 with residents to move in before the end of the year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 250 new homes (99 social, 151 market). • Replaces 87 old homes. • 14% increase in social housing.
9 Noone Street, Clifton Hill	Removed from PHRP. Now being redeveloped with funding from the Housing Australia Future Fund, with 114 dwellings to be constructed amounting to a more than 280% uplift to social housing on the site.

Source: Homes Victoria, *projects*, 2025, <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/projects>> accessed 28 August 2025.

As the CEO of the Community Housing Industry Association told the Committee:

The Victorian government has already demonstrated across the redevelopments of 13 public housing sites now, that they can achieve an uplift of between 11 per cent and 110 per cent. On average across those 13 sites there has been a 49 per cent increase in social housing.²³

Inner Melbourne Community Legal stated:

More public housing is needed. The Housing Statement commits to only a 10 per cent uplift of social housing. In the middle of a housing crisis, the plan to redevelop the public housing tower estates will displace thousands of people, putting more pressure on rents and the Victorian Housing Register waitlist. An increase of 440 social homes over 28 years is not enough.²⁴

The Public Housing Renewal Program Inquiry

The PHRP was the subject of an Inquiry by a previous iteration of this Committee. That Inquiry tabled its Final Report on 5 June 2018.

The *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program* found that while the number of Victorians seeking public housing had continued to rise—reaching more than 82,000 people in early 2018—the PHRP was not designed to significantly reduce the growing housing waitlist. Instead, the program focused on upgrading existing public housing stock, particularly walk-up estates, by partnering with private developers to deliver mixed housing developments.

The Inquiry found that the decision to fund the upgrades through the sale of public land raised strong concerns about the permanent loss of land for public housing. The State's declaration of the PHRP as a project of statewide significance enabled it to override local council planning controls and remove appeal rights, prompting opposition regarding increased building heights and densities.

The Inquiry also found a lack of transparency in the program's implementation. Key details such as the final mix of public, private and affordable housing, as well as bedroom counts and project timelines, were unclear due to the confidentiality of the procurement process.

Community consultation was found to be flawed and confusing, involving separate and inconsistent processes for tenants and planning stakeholders. There were also reports of tenants being pressured into signing relocation agreements without independent advice, and of documents failing to guarantee the right of return initially promised by officials—only being corrected after public scrutiny.

²³ Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 34–35.

²⁴ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 6.

Inconsistent information and shifting timelines further contributed to public uncertainty and concern. The Committee concluded that without greater transparency and clearer reporting on program outcomes, it would be difficult to assess whether the PHRP achieved its stated goals. The Inquiry made several recommendations aimed at improving transparency, community engagement and accountability in future stages of the program.²⁵

2.4.3 Big Housing Build and the Ground Lease Model projects

In 2020, the Government announced the Big Housing Build, assigning \$5.3 billion to deliver social, affordable and private rentals in Victoria.²⁶ As part of the Big Housing Build Homes Victoria is delivering social housing under the Ground Lease Model.

The Ground Lease Model

Under the Ground Lease Model, the Government leases public land to a project company. The project company for the first two Ground Lease Model projects is a consortium of private and community housing organisations (outlined below).²⁷ The term of the lease is 40 years.²⁸

During that period, the project company designs, constructs, finances, maintains and manages all dwellings and tenancies on the site, subject to the terms of their agreement with Homes Victoria.²⁹ In return, it receives payments from the Government and collects rents from tenants.³⁰

The Government payments are divided into a one-off capital payment and ongoing quarterly service fee payments.³¹ The quarterly service payments are constituted of a static capital works component and a refurbishment and replacement component that rises in line with the Consumer Price Index.³² At the end of the lease period, the land and all dwellings on it will purportedly be returned to the Government.³³

Projects so far

So far, there have been two Ground Lease Model projects:

- Ground Lease Model Project 1, which redeveloped public housing sites at
 - Victoria Street and Holland Court, Flemington

²⁵ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program Final Report*, June 2018.

²⁶ Homes Victoria, *About the Big Housing Build*, <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/about-big-housing-build>> accessed 15 September 2025.

²⁷ Homes Victoria, *Homes Victoria Ground Lease Model Project: Project Summary*, Victorian Government, p. 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 21–22.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 5.

- New Street, Brighton
- Bangs Street, Prahran.³⁴
- Ground Lease Model Project 2, which is still in the process of redeveloping public housing sites at
 - Simmons Street, South Yarra (Horace Petty)
 - Essex Street, Prahran
 - Bluff Road, Hampton East
 - Barak Beacon, Port Melbourne.³⁵

Both projects involved Homes Victoria (or its predecessor the Director of Housing) contracting private consortiums consisting of:

- Community Housing Victoria Limited (equity provider and operator)
- Tetris Capital (bid lead and financial advisor)
- Icon Kajima (builder).³⁶

Academics from the Housing@RMIT told the Committee they consider the Big Housing Build to be 'by-and large a continuation of the [Public Housing Renewal Program]', the main difference being use of the Ground Lease Model.³⁷ At a public hearing, Dr David Kelly referred to the Ground Lease Model as a 'repackag[ing]' or 'variation' of the public-private partnership model, which research shows 'results in poor returns to the public, permanent loss of land and housing capacity, and minimal tenant return'.³⁸

This evidence reflects concerns that the land will not be returned to the public after the 40-year lease period runs out. Although the model is 'a response to the critique from the public around the loss of public land and is a correction that has been made in order to retain, at least in appearance, a public tenure over the land', stakeholders identified a lack of transparency around governance and funding arrangements.³⁹

According to Homes Victoria, the Ground Lease Model operates as follows:

Public land will be leased to the not-for-profit project company (Project Co) who will finance, design, construct and manage the sites for 40 years, before handing all dwellings back to Homes Victoria.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 6–7.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 9–11.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁷ Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, Attachment 1, p. 3.

³⁸ Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 31–3; Also: Dr Iris Levin, Senior Lecturer, Sustainability and Urban Planning, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Homes Victoria, *Ground Lease Model Project*, <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/Ground-Lease-Model-Project-Summary_1.pdf> accessed 10 September 2025.

Minister Shing told the Committee that the Victorian Government has not 'contemplated or made' any decisions regarding the redevelopment of towers in the future, including whether the ground lease model will be used or not.⁴¹

2.4.4 Social Housing Growth Fund

Established in 2018, the Social Housing Growth Fund allows Homes Victoria to partner with the community housing sector to build homes. Community housing organisations, also known as CHOs, provide social and affordable housing to eligible Victorians. On its website, Homes Victoria states:

Working with community housing organisations helps us deliver housing where it's needed. A partnership approach means our projects benefit from their experience and knowledge. This includes designing and building the homes, as well as managing and supporting renters once they've moved in.⁴²

FINDING 6: One of the main concerns around the Ground Lease Model is the potential loss of public land.

FINDING 7: At the time of writing this Report, the Victorian Government had neither discussed nor made any decisions regarding future use of the Ground Lease Model in the public housing towers redevelopment program.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government ensure the redevelopment process retains public ownership of the land at the 44 high rise estates, as is the case with the Ground Lease Model sites.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government increase the target of social housing to be achieved at the redeveloped high-rise tower sites from the current 'at least 10 per cent'.

FINDING 8: The Victorian Government's Ground Lease Model is opaque and lacks accountability and transparency in governance. It has the potential to expose the state to significant financial risk.

⁴¹ Hon Harriet Shing, Minister for Housing and Building, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 96.

⁴² Homes Victoria, *Social Housing Growth Fund*, <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/social-housing-growth-fund>> accessed 10 September 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government publish documentation that led to its rationale for selecting the Ground Lease Model over other non-profit models of delivering affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government cease pursuing the Ground Lease Model and consider other options of non-profit models.

Chapter 3

The rationale behind the Victorian Government's decision to redevelop the towers and possible alternatives

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter outlines the limited evidence released to date by the Victorian Government supporting its decision to redevelop all 44 public housing towers. It begins with a brief summary of the 12 documents provided to the Legislative Council in June 2024, including assessments of estates in Prahran and Carlton.

The Chapter then identifies the key reasons given by the Government to justify redevelopment over suggested alternatives:

- The towers have reached the end of their 'useful life'
- Redevelopment is the most cost-effective option
- Restrictions caused by the towers' structural and design features
- The towers cannot accommodate growing demand for social housing.

The Chapter presents arguments from stakeholders regarding two alternatives to redevelopment: refurbishing or retrofitting. Key to this discussion is the problems caused by the Victorian Government's refusal to reveal the technical reports it relied on when deciding to redevelop all of the towers. The Committee also discusses examples of similar towers in other countries and whether they are comparable or not to Melbourne's towers.

Chapter 3 ends with a section on attempts by residents to challenge the program. The most notable of these is the ongoing class action from North Melbourne and Flemington residents challenging Homes Victoria's decision to demolish the towers.

For the purposes of this Report the Committee uses definitions from the Collins Dictionary for the following terms:

- **Refurbishment** refers to the act or process of cleaning, decorating or providing a building with new equipment or facilities.
- **Retrofitting** refers to putting new parts or new equipment in a building after it has been in use for some time, especially to improve its safety or make it work better.
- **Redevelopment** refers to the act of knocking a structure down and a building a new one in its place.

3.2 Evidence provided by the Government: 12 documents produced from the production of documents motion

As discussed in Chapter 1, on 15 November 2023, the Legislative Council agreed to a production of documents motion requiring the Victorian Government to table all documents relating to the redevelopment of the 44 public housing towers. The Government responded to the Order on 19 June 2024, producing 12 documents and making a claim of Executive Privilege in relation to 146 others.

The 12 documents that were produced provide insight into the Government's rationale to redevelop the towers. Examples of the documents include:

- A high-level assessment of the high-rise estate at 259 Malvern Road, Prahran found that regulations mean that if any works were to be undertaken the whole building would need to be made compliant.
 - It also states that Homes Victoria will need to undertake a cost-benefit analysis to establish if upgrading the building is feasible.
- Particularly with respect to the more complex works relating to:
 1. Structural provisions and in particular seismic loading.
 2. Access to and within the building, including within sole occupancy units for people with disabilities.
 3. Lifts and lift landing doors (fire separation, emergency lifts and accessibility).
 4. Energy efficiency.
 5. Condensation.
 6. Fire separation of service risers from sole occupancy units and public corridors.
 7. Performance of the hydrant system".
- A feasibility study and option testing on the red brick buildings at 20 Elgin Street and 141 Nicholson Street, Carlton indicated that a whole site retrospective upgrade is needed to achieve compliance with current regulations. It concluded that this would not be feasible or practicable for some building features.
- Estimates valuations and commercial/retail demand studies concluded that various estates could achieve 'the Highest and Best Use' by:
 - considering levels of supply for commercial and retail assets
 - subdividing the lots into smaller units to attract a larger client/rental pool
 - determining potential unmet levels of demand.
- A document on how to increase the supply of social and affordable homes without government grants or availability payments.

See Appendix D for a detailed overview of the 12 documents.

The Minister for Housing and Building, The Hon Harriet Shing MLC, appeared before the Committee on 6 August 2025. There were multiple attempts made by Committee Members to give the Minister the opportunity to provide documents. Box 3.1 contains extracts from the transcript that reveal the evasive language the Minister used on several occasions:

Box 3.1 Three examples of evidence provided by the Minister for Housing and Building regarding the request for documents

Example 1

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: How can the public believe the government, Minister, has made the best economical decision with taxpayer money and public land if the government only released 12 of the 158 documents it has detailing this plan?

Harriet SHING: The best use of taxpayer money, Ms Gray-Barberio, relates to meeting our obligations to providing people with safe, secure and dignified housing.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Minister, would you agree that involves transparency?

Harriet SHING: I might just continue my answer, if I may.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I would like for you just to answer that side question, which is really important, Minister, for the committee and for the Victorian public. Is transparency a paramount value when it comes to taxpayer money and public land? The Victorian public deserve to know from their government transparency and accountability. Is that part of your decision-making?

Harriet SHING: Let me be as transparent and as clear as I can possibly be: the 44 towers have exceeded their operational life.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Where are the documents to substantiate that, Minister?

Harriet SHING: The 44 towers were built with a lifespan of 50 years. At the time that they were built it was made abundantly clear they were built with a lifespan of 50 to 70 years. That time is now. What I would suggest to you, Ms Gray-Barberio, is that the responsibility of government is to make decisions that contemplate changing needs of communities and that also contemplate risk, that contemplate amenity, that contemplate the way in which we are supporting vulnerable people.

(Continued)

Box 3.1 Continued

Example 2

The CHAIR: I will say this again, Minister: we do not have that evidence.

Harriet SHING: It is constant, Mr McCracken.

The CHAIR: You talk about going through the building, but I am looking for an engineer's report that justifies your government's decision, which is what we are seeking, to understand the justification of the decision that you made as a minister to demolish the towers.

Harriet SHING: What I would invite you to do, Chair, is perhaps go back and very carefully look at the evidence that Mr McCurry gave earlier this afternoon. He is an expert. He has provided you with the context, with the technical detail.

The CHAIR: Minister, I am not asking for Mr McCurry's evidence.

Harriet SHING: You were.

The CHAIR: I am asking for a report from you. I am asking you to provide a report here.

Example 3

The CHAIR: You have asserted that the towers have exceeded their operational life, but we are lacking evidence of that. So we would like something for you to justify that that is actually the case.

Harriet SHING: They were built between 68 and 75.

The CHAIR: I know when they were built. I am asking for an engineer's report.

Renee HEATH: Not your opinion.

Harriet SHING: They had a life span of 50 years. These are not opinions; they are facts.

Source: Hon Harriet Shing, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 93, 99; Anasina Gray-Barerio, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 93; Joe McCracken, Chair, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 99; Renee Heath, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 99.

The Committee notes that the claims of Executive Privilege are yet to be tested through the arbiter process. It encourages the Government to fully cooperate and participate in that process to ensure the claims of Executive Privilege can be assessed independently and fairly.

FINDING 9: The Victorian Government, including Departments and the Minister, have made it difficult for the Committee to access documents the Government relied on to make the decision to demolish the public housing towers.

FINDING 10: Without access to documents the Victorian Government has used to justify the demolition of the public housing towers, it is extremely difficult for the Committee to assess if demolishing the towers was the best option available.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government ensure all documents that have a claim of Executive Privilege be submitted to an independent arbiter to determine whether a legitimate claim of Executive Privilege exists in accordance with Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government halt all work associated with the redevelopment program until it provides condition reports for each building, feasibility reports into alternatives to demolition, and the cost-benefit analysis for each site which demonstrate evidence that demolition was the best and only feasible option.

3.3 Large panel system construction methodology

The public housing towers were built using a unique and innovative construction typology developed specifically for the tower construction. It is not possible to make an assessment of the ability of retrofitting or refurbishment without first understanding the unique nature of the construction typology of the towers, and the structural limitations it creates.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's submission states:

The towers are predominantly constructed using a modular construction method, the Large Panel System (LPS). This system was drawn from overseas examples. The construction system enabled the Commission to respond to the post war shortage of housing and scarcity of materials.¹

Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing stated 40 of the 44 towers were constructed using this Large Panel System method.²

¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 8.

² Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

The OFFICE submission contains an attachment that provides some of this historical information:

In 1964 the first high-rise tower was completed using the prefabricated large panel concrete technology produced at Holmesglen. The Holmesglen Factory was a concrete housing factory operated by the Housing Commission of Victoria from 1946–1962. The factory adopted a system of precast concrete building named the “Fowler” System and produced a range of precast concrete homes from single storey dwelling to four storey mid-rise estates (e.g. Barak Beacon). All walls and floors were trucked to site and craned into configuration, allowing for efficiency in construction time. Wall panels are connected together via steel dowels and bolted connections, with floor panels welded together by steel tie bars. While this approach offered efficiency of construction, the load bearing walls make any future alterations or spatial reconfigurations difficult.³

According to Heritage Victoria's assessment of the tower at 120 Racecourse Road, Flemington:

The Concrete House Project's method of construction using precast concrete load bearing panels was the most economical (compared with in situ concrete or steel frame construction) and these towers became the first of the Commission high-rises to be constructed using the LPS⁴

The system utilised a standard set of pre-cast concrete panels, including load-bearing walls and floor panels. The public housing towers gain their uniformity of appearance thanks to the construction methodology and the restrictions imposed by the factory production. The same set of standard panels were rearranged in different configurations to create the various tower floorplans across six major types, the most common of which was the Z-plan, found at multiple locations across inner Melbourne.⁵

Again, from the Office submission's appendix:

These structures have the ability to resist lateral earthquake loading, but structural alterations would require testing to ensure this has not been compromised. When the buildings were designed, the code of practice outlined a 50-year life span for these structures.⁶

The construction typology of the towers is important for this Inquiry to understand. They differ from standard types of high-rise construction methods used elsewhere in residential and office buildings.

3 OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 24.

4 Heritage Victoria, *Reasons for making an Exclusion Determination under s.36D(3) of the Heritage Act 2017*, Heritage Victoria, Melbourne, July 2025, p. 11.

5 Ibid.

6 OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 24.

The methodology is relevant to the consistency of the construction, and the applicability of issues common across the 44 towers. As the Office submission appendix notes 'The housing commission flats adopted standardised building forms and geometry which were replicated across multiple sites.'⁷

In addition to the construction methodology, the large concrete panels used were coated with solution during fabrication 'in order to accelerate the removal of those panels from the moulds, they put a chloride on that, which speeds up the initial hardening of the concrete and allows them to strike the mould and lift it.'⁸ This process is relevant to the discussion of concrete cancer below at Section 3.4.1.

3.4 The towers' 'useful life'

I always thought I would live out my life there, so I would say keep them ... because I have lived there so long and I am 79, and I just thought that would be where I would be for the rest of my life. And I do not want to start somewhere else.

Dianne Chauser, Public housing tower residents, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp, 65–66.

As noted in *Victoria's Housing Statement*, the Victorian Government considers the public housing towers to be 'reaching the end of their useful lives and no longer fit for modern living'.⁹

The Minister for Housing and Building, Harriet Shing, stated to the Committee that the 44 towers 'are ageing; they have exceeded the lifetime for which they were originally developed'.¹⁰ The Minister explained that the Government's 'predominant reason for and rationale for the towers redevelopment is their very condition and the typology of their construction'.¹¹

Likewise, the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Peta McCammon, told the Committee at a public hearing that the towers are 'passing their use-by date'.¹² Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer for Homes Victoria, also affirmed that 'Not only are there inherent design and construction flaws; they have reached the end of their designed life. They were designed to run for about 50 years.'¹³

⁷ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 129

⁸ Martin McCurry, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

⁹ Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne, 20 September 2023, p. 36.

¹⁰ Hon Harriet Shing, Minister for Housing and Building, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹² Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

¹³ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

The 50-year effective life of the buildings was confirmed by the appendix to the OFFICE report which stated that the code of practice used at the time of construction 'outlined a 50-year life span for these structures'.¹⁴

Overall, the Committee received evidence from the Government that the towers need to be redeveloped for the following reasons:

- They do not and cannot meet modern minimum standards and building codes.¹⁵
- The cost of retrofitting, repairing or maintenance outweighs the benefits.¹⁶
- The towers' structural and design features complicate retrofitting options.¹⁷
- They cannot accommodate the future demand for housing.¹⁸
- Retrofitting the towers would still require residents to relocate.¹⁹

The Committee discusses each of these issues in the following Sections.

3.4.1 The towers do not and cannot meet the National Construction Code (NCC)

Victoria's Housing Statement says that the 44 towers were designed and built during 'a time that pre-dates current building codes'.²⁰ The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's submission states that the most important factor to consider is that the towers were constructed using a modular construction method known as the Large Panel System. This meant they could be built relatively quickly and cheaply.²¹

The Housing Statement says that due to their age, the 44 towers, which were built between 1962 and 1975, 'no longer meet the minimum standards Victorians expect'.²² The Statement adds that the towers' historic design means that they 'would never be able to meet contemporary codes, nationwide energy rating schemes or accessibility needs for many households'.²³

¹⁴ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, p. 36; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 16; Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 3; Hon Harriet Shing MLC, Minister for Housing and Building, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 90.

¹⁶ Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 62.

¹⁷ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59; Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 61–62.

¹⁸ Hon Harriet Shing MLC, Minister for Housing and Building, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 90.

¹⁹ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

²⁰ Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, p. 36.

²¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 8.

²² Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, p. 36.

²³ Ibid.

At a public hearing, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing told the Committee that the towers fail against the following standards:

- Noise
- Sustainability
- Seismic
- waste and recycling
- ventilation
- access to private open space
- accessibility
- minimum amenity standards.²⁴

Peta McCammon explained to the Committee that '[e]ven with modifications, many tower buildings would never be able to meet contemporary codes, nationwide energy-rating schemes or accessibility needs for many households'.²⁵ The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Homes Victoria explained that bringing the towers up to modern building standards and codes would be difficult for the following reasons:

- The sewer stacks are failing and present a growing risk.²⁶
- Concrete cancer is 'inherent and cannot be reversed' in the towers' panels.²⁷
- The elevators, doorways and wet areas have accessibility issues that are structurally difficult to resolve.²⁸
- The 'electrical infrastructure is beyond service life' as the 'main switchboards are original and unable to handle peak load' in some towers.²⁹
- The towers' structural and design features mean that various emergency and fire current code issues cannot be resolved, creating risk for emergency conditions.³⁰
- The towers have ventilation systems that trap moisture and cause mould.³¹

²⁴ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 16; Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

²⁵ Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024-2034*, p. 36.

²⁶ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 5.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 7; Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

³⁰ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 6.

³¹ Ibid.

Sewers

The Department informed the Committee that partial replacements are currently underway in higher-risk towers to address failing sewer stacks and pipes but clarified that this is only a temporary measure.³² The Department provided the following details:

- The pipes in larger family towers 'have eroded down from 2.0mm to between 0.6mm and 0.2mm thick'.³³
- 52 temporary patches have been installed recently, but 3,000 homes are still at risk of pipe failure.³⁴
- A full replacement is needed but it 'is difficult given the pipe and connections complexity' and it may require partial bathroom demolition.³⁵

The Approval Systems 'Existing Conditions Review and Report' into the Elgin Street towers completed in April 2022, and tabled in the Legislative Council on 20 June 2024, reported failing sewers causing mould:

- 'evidence that the sewer risers/stacks were failing and were subject to significant leaks throughout'.³⁶
- 'evidence of dampness in walls throughout the building and the formation of efflorescence and mould within sole occupancy units. The sewer stacks appear to be the source of internal dampness'.³⁷

The Approval Systems report on the tower at 259 Malvern Road South Yarra completed in December 2022, also tabled on 20 June 2024 found:

- 'evidence that the sewer risers/stacks were failing and were subject to significant leaks throughout'.³⁸

FINDING 11: There is evidence of failing sewer systems in some high-rise towers and this is causing mould in the walls.

³² Ibid., p. 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Approval Systems Pty Ltd, *Existing Conditions Review and Report 20 Elgin Street & 141 Nicholson Street, Carlton*, report for the Homes Victoria, Melbourne, 2022, p. 4.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Approval Systems Pty Ltd, *Existing Conditions Review and Report 20 Elgin Street & 141 Nicholson Street, Carlton*, report for the Homes Victoria, Melbourne, 2022, p. 5.

Concrete cancer

The Department highlighted the presence of concrete cancer in some tower panels and the way in which this impedes efforts to lift the towers to modern minimum standards:

- Concrete cancer has resulted from the panels' thin design, lightweight porous aggregate, low cement content, insufficient reinforcement cover and the use of calcium chloride during original casting.³⁹
- Reinforcement has debonded from the concrete in some areas, reducing structural integrity. Repairs involve breaking back concrete and replacing reinforcement, 'but [this] cannot reverse the concrete cancer'.⁴⁰
- Panel conditions are monitored externally every five years and internally during upgrades with repairs performed as needed, which adds to maintenance costs.⁴¹

The concrete mix used to make the large concrete panels in the 1960s does not meet current standards. The structural engineering report attached to the Office report says that 'the concrete specification for the building indicates that a light-weight concrete mix was used throughout the entire super-structure' and that the compressive strength of the concrete used of '20 MPa is significantly less than standard concrete mixes used today which are generally around 40MPa on average'.⁴²

The Committee heard that chloride, used in the concrete panels for the Elgin Street towers, degraded the reinforcement over time, particularly in exposed areas.⁴³ Martin McCurry emphasised that despite ongoing maintenance and safety inspections every five years, repairs are temporary, as chloride infiltration continues causing frequent damage to the buildings.⁴⁴

Mr McCurry stated that 'it is the variability which is a problem' as it is increasingly difficult for the Department to predict the sites of concrete exposure which pose a significant risk to the structural integrity of the building.⁴⁵

Professor Brendon McNiven stated 'Probably the biggest threat to a building structurally is concrete cancer. Concrete cancer is where there were alkalis included into the concrete mix, so it did not give proper protection to the reinforcement. You get a depth of carbonation over time where eventually it is going to end up rusting.' Professor Brendon McNiven emphasised 'that happens over time'.⁴⁶

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 134.

⁴³ Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Professor Brendon McNiven, The Retrofit Lab, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 44.

The Approval Systems report on the Elgin St towers finds ‘evidence of extensive corrosion of concrete reinforcement’.⁴⁷

When the committee undertook a site inspection at 33 Alfred St, North Melbourne, members were shown evidence of concrete spalling on internal walls where concrete was falling off the walls, crumbling, and rust in the steel reinforcement.

FINDING 12: There is evidence of concrete cancer in some of the 44 public housing towers.

Disability access

The Department emphasised that disability access is ‘one of the most significant reasons why the towers are not suitable’ for current and future residents.⁴⁸ Peta McCammon explained that the ‘design and structural concrete also prevent significant modifications ... needed for wheelchair access and other accessibility requirements’.⁴⁹ Table 3.1 contains a detailed overview of the Department’s evidence on challenges resolving the towers’ accessibility issues.

Table 3.1 Accessibility issues

Accessibility issues	Evidence from the Department of Families Fairness and Housing
Elevators/lifts are unreliable, non-compliant with limited stretcher access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘5% of elevators are stretcher compliant, 68% are opening compliant as per National Construction Code 2022 (NCC) Part E3 and AS1735.12.’• The older persons lifts have narrow lift openings (705–740mm).• ‘Colocation of elevators in shared riser and pit means both lifts are not serviceable if the lift shaft is flooded.’• Elevators are serviced fortnightly due to heavy reliance (twice as frequently as comparable).• The lifts cannot be widened ‘because they are built inside the existing structure’ or the Department would ‘have to go and physically add lifts’, requiring a ‘deep retrofit’ at towers such as 12 Holland Court Flemington.
The showers in the towers are not accessible. Some towers have been fitted with 1 step showers to reduce fall risk, but they are still a trip hazard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The towers’ design features low ceilings, which limits disability modifications like the installation of hobless showers and impacts the ability of ‘renters to age in place’.• The tower at 33 Alfred Street in North Melbourne has a ‘2.6-metre floor to soffit [material that makes up the underside of a part of a building] height’. As a result, the tower has ‘not got the space’ for disability access features and the Department is ‘not able to get the stepless showers you would have in new buildings ... So we put in place the next best thing, which is a one-step shower. It is still a trip hazard.’
Doorways in the towers’ apartments are not accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘Doorways in apartments are not wide enough to be <i>Disability Discrimination Act</i> compliant and cannot be readily widened because all internal walls are load bearing.’

Source: Peta McCammon, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Martin McCurry, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 71, 81; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Approval Systems Pty Ltd, *Existing Conditions Review and Report 20 Elgin Street & 141 Nicholson Street, Carlton*, report for the Homes Victoria, Melbourne, 2022, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 81.

⁴⁹ Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

FINDING 13: 95% of elevators across all 44 towers cannot physically fit a stretcher, so if a resident needs an ambulance, they cannot be taken out on a stretcher.

Electrical infrastructure

The Department described problems with the towers' electrical infrastructure. An example provided was load shedding of laundries to manage peak periods of electricity use for the North Melbourne and Flemington towers during Ramadan.⁵⁰ The Department also explained that externally rated switchboards are used when high-rise cooling upgrades occur.⁵¹ The Department outlined other challenges improving the towers' electrical infrastructure to meet modern standards and building codes:

- Evacuation routes from switch routes cannot be provided.
- Under NCC AS3000 and AS61439 'original cabling, fuses and switchboards are non-compliant'.
- Many of the towers meter panels are 'located in cupboards in each floor [containing] asbestos'.⁵²

At its site inspection at 33 Alfred St, North Melbourne, the committee was shown the main electrical board for the building that is so old it requires specialist electricians to undertake repairs.

Safety

The Department stated that 'multiple emergency [and] fire current code issues cannot be resolved' for the towers. The Committee heard that 'smoke doors at the lifts and sprinklers have been retrofitted to improve the fire safety for residents' but other issues remain unaddressed.⁵³ The Department described the following issues:

- Under the more recent NCC, many tower's stairwells are not fire isolated, upgrades 'would require the reconfiguration ... [or loss of] stock'.
- Ceiling heights are non-compliant under the more recent NCC Clause D2D7 and F5D2.
- Floor slabs are thinner meaning evacuation times are shorter for smoke inhalation and structural reasons.
- Travel distances between alternate exits are non-compliant under the more recent NCC Clause D2D6.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 6; Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Overall, the Department expressed concern that undertaking works to upgrade the towers to comply with building codes and modern minimum standards is prohibitively expensive and does not improve the fundamentally poor design of the towers.⁵⁵ Martin McCurry cited mould as another example, stating: 'One of the main issues we had around Elgin Towers was not just the cost of remediating all that, but the question is: will you be able to actually address the underlying mould issues?'⁵⁶

FINDING 14: Based on the evidence provided by the Victorian Government to this Inquiry, some of Melbourne's public housing towers do not meet the National Construction Code. However, the severity and extent cannot be verified without the Victorian Government publishing all relevant documents.

3.4.2 Redevelopment is the most cost-effective option

The Committee considered the question of whether more rigorous maintenance and repair regimes would improve the towers' conditions. However, the Department informed the Committee that although modifications 'may well be possible to address many of these issues ... the cost would far exceed the benefit'⁵⁷ as the towers 'require substantial investment for retrofitting'.⁵⁸

Along with the issues discussed above, the Department outlined several examples where the towers require significant investment:

- additional lifts and paths of egress need to be installed at some precincts⁵⁹
- addressing the tower's low ceilings and lack of fire-isolated stairwells⁶⁰
- implementing a CCTV system, foyer upgrades, fire services projects and the high-rise cooling project⁶¹
- spalling [where parts of materials such as concrete break away] replacements on the buildings' facades.⁶²

55 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 17; Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58; Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 60–62.

56 Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 72.

57 Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

58 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Presentation*, supplementary evidence received 6 August 2025, p. 3.

59 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 17; Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 61, 70–71.

60 Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 61.

61 Ibid., p. 70.

62 Ibid.

Martin McCurry explained that the towers have 'an escalating maintenance regime', which is a result of 'their age and their inherent building characteristics'.⁶³ He raised the question to the Committee: 'if you have got a structure which has got durability issues, then is it prudent to continue to invest in a structure that has got a remaining life of a limited number of years?'⁶⁴

Mr McCurry detailed the towers' current maintenance schedule, emphasising that their condition 'is not an issue of maintenance'.⁶⁵ The towers are subject to the following maintenance schedule:

- Lift services occur fortnightly
- Gas boiler system checks occur annually (in line with manufacturer recommendations)
- Automatic doors are checked two-monthly
- Exit lighting is done two-monthly
- Sewer stacks are checked six-weekly.⁶⁶

Mr McCurry stated:

The projections I have are showing an increase in frequency where I will be recommending we are checking that every two to three years to ensure that I have got adequate funding to make sure that we can address the public safety issues of concrete spalling off the facades. So yes, we know it will increase, and we will have to increase our frequency of inspection.⁶⁷

Mr McCurry added, 'These are just to maintain and carry out the critical works. We are not addressing some of the fundamental issues other than the public safety issues we have around spalling.'⁶⁸

The Committee heard that the current annual maintenance cost is about \$10,600 per apartment, but this is projected to rise sharply due to building deterioration and lifecycle renewals.⁶⁹ The Department stated that over the next 20 years, the cost per apartment is expected to average \$17,300 annually (\$22,200 including security), and this could increase to about \$35,000 in the following 20 years.⁷⁰

⁶³ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp 70–71

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

In comparison, Mr McCurry explained that the Department 'would spend about \$2000 in maintenance a year and about \$4000' for distributed housing stock.⁷¹ Further, these increasing costs are specifically for critical works and do not cover more fundamental issues.⁷²

The Department estimated that critical capital repairs and maintenance for the 44 public housing towers would cost Homes Victoria '\$2.3 billion over the next 20 years—roughly \$55 million per tower'.⁷³

Minister Shing stated that the Victorian Government invests approximately \$110 million annually in maintenance for the towers.⁷⁴ However, she stated that maintenance can only slow their deterioration.⁷⁵

Annual spending on property maintenance is publicly reported in the DFFH Annual Report.

FINDING 15: It is probable that the cost of maintaining Melbourne's 44 public housing towers has increased overtime, however without further documentation this cannot be verified.

3.4.3 How the towers' structural and design features affect the feasibility of retrofitting

The Department stated that even if retrofitting the towers were economically preferable, structural and design barriers make retrofitting unfeasible. The Department indicated that Homes Victoria had undertaken an assessment of retrofit options for the towers, which lead to the conclusion that 'retrofitting the existing structures is not feasible'.⁷⁶ The Department's submission outlined several barriers to retrofitting caused by the towers' structural and design features:

- The abundance of load-bearing structural concrete wall panels limits refurbishment options.
- It is not possible to cut large holes into the panels which any refurbishment option requires for changes.
- The structures were not designed or built to accommodate balconies.

71 Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70.

72 Ibid., p. 71.

73 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 16; Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 69.

74 Hon Harriet Shing, Minister for Housing and Building, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 94.

75 Ibid.

76 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 16.

- The structures were not designed to support additional elevator shafts required to support improved amenity.
- The difference in cost and time between refurbishment and redevelopment is likely to be minimal due to the above factors.⁷⁷

The Department also gave evidence that 'all refurbishment options require the relocation of residents due to the substantial impact on their amenity in any substantial renovation.'⁷⁸

In particular, the Department called the Committee's attention to the 20 Elgin Street, Carlton towers. Martin McCurry explained that these towers 'were failing and leaking raw sewage down the walls of the apartments, down into the electrical substation at the base'.⁷⁹ He added that retrofitting those towers would have involved accessing pipes that were:

contained internally at the back of bathrooms. The only way to actually access those to repair those pipes is to partially demolish the bathrooms. Doing so would incur a cost of about \$8 million per tower to break in and replace those.⁸⁰

Remodelling (also referred to as retrofitting) of the towers was also considered by Hayball in its feasibility study and option testing for the Elgin St 'Red brick' towers tabled in the Legislative Council in June 2024:

This option was declared non-viable following the result of Option A analysis. The low, pre-existing, floor to floor heights from the existing towers could not be replicated in the new street wall development as 2610mm is inadequate for new construction. This will result in a doubling of circulations and lifts, in addition to blocking the natural light and outlooks for the first 3–4 levels of the existing development. This option would require a significant investment and will result in a substandard outcome.⁸¹

3.4.4 The towers have reached their capacity to accommodate population growth and demand

The Department maintained in its submission that the current approach to demolish and redevelop the towers will 'deliver the ambitious plan to tackle the root of the problem: housing supply'.⁸² The Department's submission asserts that 'the High-rise Redevelopment Program seeks to deliver on the Victorian Government's goal of more and better housing for Victorians'.⁸³ The submission added that the Government's

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 16–17.

⁷⁸ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 16–17.

⁷⁹ Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 62.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Hayball, *Redbrick Towers 20 Elgin & 141 Nicholson Street, Carlton Feasibility Study*, Report for Homes Victoria, Melbourne, January 2022, p. 17.

⁸² Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 7.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 10.

current approach will provide 'housing for three times as many Victorians ... where they are needed close to services, transport and jobs, including a minimum 10 per cent increase in social housing'.⁸⁴

At a public hearing, Minister Shing stated that the Government's decision to redevelop the towers is underpinned by the need for 'more housing to accommodate the growth in population and the acuity of demand'.⁸⁵

3.5 Alternatives to demolition and redevelopment

The Committee heard evidence from a range of stakeholders calling on the Government to consider alternatives to the redevelopment of the 44 towers. These stakeholders were strong in arguing for the Government to release the evidence it is relying on for its decisions.⁸⁶

In calling for alternatives to redevelopment, stakeholders consistently cited OFFICE's *Retain, Repair, Reinvest* report. OFFICE is a Melbourne-based 'not-for-profit design and research practice' that consists of 'architects, landscape architects, urban designers and researchers who assist community groups in advocating for better outcomes within the built environment'.

The Committee also heard evidence from stakeholders who cited international examples of refurbishment and retrofitting that prove there are alternatives to the Government's approach of redevelopment.⁸⁷

These points are all discussed in greater detail below.

3.5.1 Stakeholders questioned the lack of evidence to justify the redevelopment of all 44 towers

We want you to call for the release of the cabinet submission documents relied on to justify this policy – make them public. Without these documents, how can this Inquiry be expected to fulfil its terms of reference, especially the obligation to examine the rationale and alternatives to demolition?

Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 3-10; Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Richard Cameron, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Stephanie Bullock, Architect, AIA Victorian Chapter President and Sustainable Architecture Committee Chair, Australian Institute of Architects, Melbourne, public hearing, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47; Hobsons Bay City Council, *Submission 125*, p. 6; Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 8; Smart Justice for Young People, *Submission 531*, p. 4; Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*, p. 7; Dennis Southton, *Submission 612*, p. 6; Merri-Bek Council, *Submission 613*, p. 2; Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, p. 5; Per Capita, *Submission 710*, p. 2; Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Office, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 2.

Why can't we see the documents? If everything is aboveboard, then there should be open and vigorous debate and discussion about the pros and cons, the triple bottom line, everything. We should be making decisions together. The internet exists now. We can all have a say very easily with the click of a button. But it seems now we have got to have these levels of unaccountability put in place.

David Fidel, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

Stakeholders consistently called on the Victorian Government to publish the evidence informing its decision to redevelop all 44 of Melbourne's public housing towers. These include engineering reports and assessments, business cases, and cost-benefit analyses.⁸⁸

Stakeholders questioned the Government's refusal to release documents, pointing out that the refusal makes any discussion on the subject incredibly difficult. Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor of Yarra City Council, echoed widespread concerns that the Committee heard during the Inquiry when he said '[we] have got to have this hypothetical debate about issues that people at Spring Street literally know the answer to. Will they release that paperwork?'⁸⁹

Several prominent construction and architecture associations and organisations expressed concern in their submissions over the Government's failure to publicly release critical assessments and reports.⁹⁰ The Committee heard from Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, Housing@RMIT Network, RMIT University, who told the Committee:

Our central concern is that this Inquiry has been asked to assess a redevelopment program without access to the information required to do so. Government has not released the evidence base that underpins its decision to demolish all 44 of Melbourne's remaining public housing towers. There is no publicly available cost modelling, no comparative assessment of refurbishment options and no clear plan for how residents will be housed throughout this process. In short, it is not possible for this committee to make a fully informed assessment of a plan that has not been disclosed.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, p. 3; Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 3–10; Lloyd Murphy, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Richard Cameron, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Stephanie Bullock, Architect, AIA Victorian Chapter President and Sustainable Architecture Committee Chair, Australian Institute of Architects, Melbourne, public hearing, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47; Hobsons Bay City Council, *Submission 125*, p. 6; Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 8; Smart Justice for Young People, *Submission 531*, p. 4; Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*, p. 7; Dennis Southton, *Submission 612*, p. 6; Merri-Bek Council, *Submission 613*, p. 2; Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, p. 5; Per Capita, *Submission 710*, p. 2; Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 7.

⁸⁹ Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, Housing@RMIT Network, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29; Simon Robinson, Managing Director and Architect, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Stephanie Bullock, AIA Victorian Chapter President and Sustainable Architecture Committee Chair, Australian Institute of Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 51; OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 9; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 615*, pp. 1–2; Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, pp. 3–4.

⁹¹ Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, Housing@RMIT Network, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

Dr Kelly said that without the evidence 'confidence in the process for tenants and the broader public cannot be restored [and] the lack of publicly available information about how the Government intends to proceed in a way that is fair, equitable and sustainable is alarming'.⁹²

Similarly, Richard Cameron, an architect who was part of the design and architectural team involved in the construction of the towers, including working with the architect Peter McIntyre who designed the Carlton towers, stated:

we believe that a business case should be made and all of the assumptions which have been prepared by the Government at the present time tested by independent people, because at the moment we have grave difficulties in understanding the logic and the rationale as to why this particular course is being done.⁹³

OFFICE called on the Government to publicly release evidence for an independent review, stating that the 'second tranche of towers included low-rise properties, where the justification for their necessary demolition has not been provided'.⁹⁴ Speaking about its own report, OFFICE stated:

there is a lack of transparency around the High-Rise Redevelopment Project ... This has both limited the evidence available to draw upon in this feasibility study, while simultaneously highlighting the necessity of a publicly available report that details either the necessity for demolition or potential for retrofitting.⁹⁵

Housing@RMIT also reinforced that the Government's 'lack of transparency regarding the rationale for demolition raises concerns about other factors motivating the choice to redevelop the tower estates'.⁹⁶ Its submission asserted that 'Homes Victoria has not made public any cost modelling or comparative analysis underpinning the decision to proceed with redevelopment'.⁹⁷ As a result, Housing@RMIT emphasised the difficulties in properly assessing the exact condition of all 44 rise towers.⁹⁸

The Australian Institute of Architects raised similar points, stating that it 'understands that assessments have been undertaken of these public assets'.⁹⁹ The Institute called on the Government to release the following pieces of information:

- Geotechnical Engineering
- Structural Engineering (including seismic and wind)
- Civil Engineering including stormwater management and drainage
- Mechanical, Electrical, Hydraulic and lift Engineering

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Richard Cameron, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

⁹⁴ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁶ Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 615*, p. 1.

- Fire engineering
- Acoustic engineering
- Inclusivity and Accessibility
- Hazardous materials assessment
- Building Surveying assessment detailing existing conditions that might compromise compliance with existing current building.¹⁰⁰

The Australian Institute of Architect's submission explained that as the towers vary in age and typology 'and likely different suitability for retrofit/repairs, the Institute strongly recommends that the Victorian Government adopt a case-by-case review of the towers'.¹⁰¹

Stephanie Bullock, Victorian Chapter President for the Australian Institute of Architects, stated:

it would be highly unlikely that every single one of those buildings is actually identical to the others. So we would suggest that you do need to look at each of them, if only to prove the case ... There would have been differences depending on exactly when they were constructed and by whom, so you cannot actually take one and extrapolate all of that out.¹⁰²

The Committee asked Simon Newport about what work had been completed regarding analysis of each tower. Mr Newport said: 'In terms of the towers and planning or cost-benefit analysis, it is the case that specific work was undertaken.'¹⁰³

However, it is not clear if a cost-benefit analysis has been completed on all 44 towers. Mr McCurry told the Committee that work was done 'on a set of towers by typology, by sampling'.¹⁰⁴

Mr Newport was clear, though, that the Victorian Government has evidence on why all 44 towers need to be redeveloped, it is only the exact redevelopment timeframe that has yet to be determined:

Renee HEATH: Does the government have a list of all the towers and why they need to be knocked down in the stated timeframes?

Simon NEWPORT: Of course we have a list of the towers. The order in which we will do the redevelopment, the government has announced the first two tranches.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰² Stephanie Bullock, AIA Victorian Chapter President and Sustainable Architecture Committee Chair, Australian Institute of Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁰³ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁴ Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 64.

Renee HEATH: It is a yes or no, sorry.

Simon NEWPORT: So the answer to your question is: the entire program has not been developed over the 28 years in terms of exactly which towers. That is being developed as each tranche is announced.¹⁰⁵

The Australian Institute of Architects' submission went on to call for a public review that lays out 'public criteria for the review of each tower individually'.¹⁰⁶ The Institute stated:

This review should set out public criteria for the review of each tower individually.
This review should include:

- Suitability for retrofit
- Heritage value of the towers including cultural and built
- Value of existing communities
- Carbon, material and energy accounting
- Material Waste and Recycling
- Site density/making the most of existing footprint
- Impact and opportunity of green spaces.¹⁰⁷

The Committee notes that the Legislative Council intended for this Inquiry to be such an independent review of the program.

Building maintenance, repairs and neglect

During in-person hearings, the Committee heard evidence of public housing residents describing their experiences with maintenance, repair and neglect, including the following testimonies:

- 'They have deliberately tried to create ghettos. Then they use the seemingly dilapidated state of the public housing stock, which they have deliberately allowed to deteriorate, as a rationale for dismantling the communities ... by neglecting its lawful duty as landlord.'¹⁰⁸
- The Government has engaged in managed decline 'waiting for the places to deteriorate to justify demolition'¹⁰⁹ [whereas previously] 'there was a 12-year cycle of structural refurbishments'.¹¹⁰
- 'the housing stock is being allowed to run down in order to justify redeveloping it.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 615*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Walpole, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Kerrie Byrne, Save Public Housing Collective, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Fiona York, Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

3.5.2 The professional and personal impact of the Victorian Government's refusal to publish evidence to justify the redevelopment program

The Committee stresses that it does not accuse Homes Victoria of 'hiding' anything, nor does it question the integrity nor the expertise of architecture and engineering experts within the organisation. The Committee understands that it is not Homes Victoria's decision to keep important information from the public.

Instead, the Committee has been left frustrated by the Victorian Government's refusal to publish technical information and reports that it believes justifies its decision to redevelop all 44 of Melbourne's public housing towers. This frustration exists for several reasons.

Firstly, as noted in Chapter 1 of this Report, the Victorian Government is in breach of the Legislative Council Standing Orders, which require documents that the Government wishes to claim Executive Privilege over to be provided to an independent arbiter to adjudicate on the claim. The Government's continued flaunting of Standing Orders is troubling.

Secondly, the Victorian Government's decision to redevelop all 44 towers is disrupting the lives of tens of thousands of Victorians. The Committee does not believe the Government has done this lightly. Yet, as is discussed throughout this Report, the public housing residents the Government claims to care so strongly about continue to ask to see the evidence proving that their homes must be taken down. To deny residents information that they have a right to know has caused—and continues to cause—unnecessary distress.

Finally, a redevelopment project of this magnitude is obviously a hugely technical process. Again, the Committee does not question the expertise of Homes Victoria's architects and engineers. It simply acknowledges the principle that projects such as this must be tested publicly. As so many experts have stated to the Committee, it is impossible to confirm the conclusions reached by the Government without seeing the evidence. It is equally impossible to test proposed alternatives without having the Government's evidence to compare and contrast with.

The Committee however notes that in the Supreme Court decision on the class action against the tower redevelopments, Justice Richards upheld the confidentiality of cabinet documents and said that unavailability of these documents publicly did not create a danger of unfair prejudice to the residents.¹¹²

¹¹² *Berih v Homes Victoria (No. 4)* [2025] VSC 169, p. 54.

FINDING 16: The impact of the Victorian Government's refusal to disclose documents that justify the demolition and redevelopment of the 44 towers can be summarised into the following themes:

- The Victorian Government did not comply with standing orders 10.03 and 23.16.
- The Victorian Government is worsening distress among residents.
- The Victorian Government is denying experts the opportunity to: a) test the technical evidence behind the redevelopment decision; and b) test their own proposed alternatives.

FINDING 17: This Inquiry would have been an independent review of the decision to redevelop all 44 of Melbourne's public housing towers as required by the Legislative Council had the Victorian Government acted reasonably to provide the technical documents as requested and required.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government publish all technical documents justifying demolition and redevelopment of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government publish a case-by-case approach for Melbourne's 44 public housing towers, justifying why redevelopment is preferable for each tower to refurbishing or retrofitting.

3.5.3 Some stakeholders believe that cost-effective compliance via retrofitting and refurbishment can be achieved

Since releasing the report, there has been some feedback from the Government in things that we have not addressed. This is the beauty of releasing information publicly: others are then able to comment on it.

Simon Robinson, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

The Committee heard from many stakeholders who believed that cost-effective compliance via retrofitting or refurbishment is possible with Melbourne's 44 public housing towers.¹¹³

¹¹³ CFMEU, *Submission 101*, p. 7; Bower Insight, *Submission 530*, pp. 12–13; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 615*, p. 3; Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 6.

Richard Cameron told the Committee:

we can refurbish the existing, we can increase the width of access for disability and we can provide all of the requirements under the *Disability Act* for the refurbishment, and it costs one-fifth of what it costs to build in the new ones.¹¹⁴

The Committee also received evidence from Gerry Noonan, an engineer who completed work for the Victorian housing commission in the early 1960s on soil foundation investigations for the public housing towers.¹¹⁵ The Committee heard that Mr Noonan had inspected one of the Atherton Gardens flats in Fitzroy, telling the Committee:

it was absolutely in perfect condition. Then I walked down the stairwell, and because you have got the bare walls of the concrete walls and all that, you can see if there is any cracking or faulting; there was nothing at all.¹¹⁶

When questioned about this, Mr McCurry explained to the Committee that the insides of the towers are in much better condition without any signs of decay than the outsides and any other part exposed to the elements. This is because of the construction approach taken with the concrete—such as it being thinner, the use of chloride etc—discussed above in Section 3.4.1.¹¹⁷

Witnesses from the Australian Institute of Architects also told the Committee that retrofitting and refurbishment could be economically and technically viable alternatives to redevelopment. Jacinda Sadler, Founder of Jacinda Sadler Architects, said that ‘Rather than pursue blanket demolition, we urge serious consideration of renovation and retention as a progressive alternative.’¹¹⁸

Gavin Salt, Architect and Engineer from the Australian Institute of Architects, explained to the Committee that it ‘would be a deep retrofit solution, in which case you would have to address all of the liveability and safety concerns’.¹¹⁹

In response to whether retrofitting is more cost-effective, Mr Salt referred to the lack of evidence provided by the Victorian Government, stating ‘transparency is the piece here. I would have assumed that that study had been undertaken to understand that cost-benefit analysis ... All the reports that I have read from other associated practices have suggested that it would be cheaper to do a retrofit.’¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Richard Cameron, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025 *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ Gerry Noonan, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 1–2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

¹¹⁸ Jacinda Sadler, Architect, Jacinda Sadler Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

¹¹⁹ Gavin Salt, Architect and Engineer, Australian Institute of Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 51.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

The Committee also received a submission from Peter Hirst, owner of Environmental Design. He submitted a concept plan for retrofitting the towers by pin-jointing a structural frame against the tower, forming a framework within which the perimeter of the tower could be extended. This would allow renovations to happen without damaging the structural integrity of the towers. According to Mr Hirst this approach would cost '30% less than a demolition and reconstruction of equivalent accommodation and [would] retain the social fabric of place and community'.¹²¹

The Retrofit Lab, a research collaboration between The University of Melbourne and RMIT, provided evidence to the Committee outlining its understanding of the costs and benefits of different renewal approaches: demolition and rebuild; retrofit; retrofit and infill. It did so addressing the following factors:

- Built outcome
- Climate resilience
- Health, wellbeing and community
- Economic impacts.¹²²

Most stakeholders arguing for alternatives to redevelopment cited OFFICE's *Retain, Repair and Reinvest* report.¹²³ Attached as part of its submission to the Committee, OFFICE's feasibility study examined 'whether a Retain Repair Reinvest (RRR) refurbishment study can achieve the same objectives as the High-Rise Redevelopment Project (HRRP)'.¹²⁴ Box 3.2 provides a summary of the RRR feasibility study.

¹²¹ Environmental Design, *Submission 120*, p. 3.

¹²² The Retrofit Lab, *Submission 47, Attachment 2*, pp. 3–4.

¹²³ Cr Stephen Jolly, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Grace Bell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 65; Professor Brendon McNiven, The Retrofit Lab, public hearing, Melbourne 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39; Kerrie Byrne, Save Public Housing Collective, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 69; Gavin Salt, Architect and Engineer, Australian Institute of Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 48; Dr Duncan Rouch, *Submission 2a*, pp. 2, 9, 13; Hobsons Bay City Council, *Submission 125*, p. 5; Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 5; Bower Insights, *Submission 530*, p. 13; Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*, p. 3; Merri-Bek City Council, *Submission 613*, p. 4; Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission 679*, p. 13; Renter's and Housing Union, *Submission 654*, p. 6; Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 680*, p. 9; Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 2; Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 5.

¹²⁴ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 1.

Box 3.2 OFFICE's feasibility studies *Retain, Repair, Reinvest*

OFFICE produced the *Retain, Repair, Reinvest* (RRR) report to demonstrate an alternative approach to the Victorian Government's demolition and rebuild strategy. OFFICE has previously produced RRR reports for Ascot Vale and Barak Beacon Estates. OFFICE states that RRR has three key objectives:

- 'Retain existing communities by not relocating residents
- Repair existing buildings to reduce environmental impacts of construction
- Reinvest savings to improve comfort and upgrade public housing.'

OFFICE developed the Flemington RRR as a 'site-specific strategy' that aims 'to understand whether it is both technically and economically feasible to retain the existing public housing via refurbishment.' Simon Robinson, Managing Director for OFFICE explained that at 'the end of 2023 we began working with residents from the Flemington estate. This was again due to refurbishment being stated as unviable, despite Homes Victoria providing no evidence.'

The RRR 'identifies the uncaptured costs associated with demolition and rebuild renewal programs' and addresses criteria that Homes Victoria used 'to justify a state demolition, including energy efficiency, liveability standards, structural capacity and the additional housing need'.

The RRR strategy focuses on refurbishment and infill to upgrade the buildings and increase housing capacity without displacing residents, siting 'new housing above existing car parks, preserving open space and trees'. OFFICE states that the 'approach matches the same amount of density of the 2023 Ernst & Young development study for the site commissioned by the Government'.

The RRR feasibility estimates that refurbishing the existing public housing would save 'the government \$227.7 million in direct relocation costs'. OFFICE estimates that the social costs of relocating residents from the Flemington Estate under the Government's current approach:

- Health Costs (1500 people): \$2,088,000.
- Education Cost (380 children): \$2,492,724.
- Total Social Costs: \$4,580,724.

(Continued)

Box 3.2 Continued

The RRR report suggests that refurbishment and infill are technically and economically viable alternatives. It provides detailed architectural, structural and sustainability plans for the retrofit, along with a comparative financial analysis that underscores the value of the RRR strategy. For example:

- 'ESD engineers Makao Group showed we can achieve a 7.5 NatHERS rating, a minimum five-star Green Star rating and a 30% energy reduction, lowering residents' bills through solar panels, water reuse, double glazing and insulation.'
- 'Nicolas Building Surveyors indicated that we can achieve the liveable housing design guidelines for accessibility, meet the majority of the better apartment standards and also upgrade the units to achieve acoustic and fire requirements.'
- 'Sheer Force Engineering reports that the buildings can be made to meet current seismic standards, and the facade panels are able to be removed for new balconies.'
- Refurbishing existing public housing and adding new social infill costs \$519M (\$400k/unit), avoiding relocation impacts. Demolishing and rebuilding would cost \$883M (\$680k/unit).
- 'Refurbishment and infill could have a \$364 million cost saving across the whole estate (costed by Melbourne Quantity Surveyors, with input from SGS economics modelling).'
- 'The RRR proposal also provides a 55% reduction of global warming potential compared with the HRRP approach.'

Source: OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, pp. ix, 1–171; Simon Robinson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Steven Mintern, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

The Committee received submissions from professionals and organisations that used the OFFICE RRR report to substantiate the case for refurbishment and retrofitting, as well as from numerous individuals who claimed the report 'proved' retrofitting was a feasible alternative to demolition.¹²⁵ The Committee notes that OFFICE's RRR report is a feasibility study that is limited in its ability 'prove' the viability of different approaches due to the Victorian Government's refusal to publicly release evidence justifying its commitment to redevelopment.

The Committee discussed the RRR report with OFFICE's Managing Directors Simon Robinson and Steven Mintern at a public hearing. Both were open in acknowledging the limitations of the study, in particular the lack of publicly available evidence.

¹²⁵ CFMEU, *Submission 101*, p. 7; Bower Insight, *Submission 530*, pp. 12–13; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 615*, p. 3; Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 6.

Mr Mintern noted that 'freedom-of-information requests for existing drawings and structural assessments have been denied', which limited the organisation's ability to investigate alternative options.¹²⁶ The RRR report relied on 'publicly available information and the experience of the consultants involved'¹²⁷ with Mr Robinson stating that the report was produced 'with the information we have available' and OFFICE 'can only work with what we have available'.¹²⁸

Mr Mintern emphasised that 'Across these three reports we have engaged the services of a structural engineer, an environmentally sustainable design engineer, a quantity surveyor, a building surveyor, an economist and housing researchers to produce accurate feasibility studies'.¹²⁹

Another limitation noted by Mr Robinson was that the structural engineer was only able to conduct a visual inspection of the towers.¹³⁰ Mr Mintern added that 'building-specific investigations would be required to further support any of our findings'.¹³¹

Mr Robinson elaborated on how OFFICE produced its report, stating 'We held two community engagement sessions and worked with our consultants to understand the feasibility of refurbishment and increasing the number of new homes through infill'.¹³²

The Committee heard that OFFICE would be able to provide more robust alternative models if structural assessment and other key documents were publicly available.¹³³

Simon Newport voiced some concerns to the Committee about the OFFICE report, stating 'Not only did it not allow for the physical relocation of residents, it did not allow for the costs of those relocations'.¹³⁴

Martin McCurry added 'Over the last 20 years we have been renovating apartments across 40 towers' and that even standard upgrades require relocating tenants.¹³⁵ He argued that OFFICE's retrofitting proposal is far more intrusive, stating that it would require relocation on a large scale and would be impractical to perform while allowing residents to remain in their homes.¹³⁶

¹²⁶ Steve Mintern, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹³⁰ Simon Robinson, Managing Director and Architect, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹³¹ Steve Mintern, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹³² Simon Robinson, Managing Director and Architect, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

¹³³ Steve Mintern, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

¹³⁴ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 80.

¹³⁵ Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 80.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

The Committee notes that it is difficult to assess the viability of OFFICE's report and other alike examples, or compare it with the Government's approach, without the Victorian Government publishing the relevant evidence for independent review.

The Committee further notes the different approaches taken between OFFICE—which has published its research and conclusions for public comment—and the Victorian Government—which has made public comparatively little evidence.

The Committee believes that any ambiguity surrounding the viability of alternatives would be cleared by the Victorian Government releasing its evidence.

FINDING 18: There were conflicting views among experts and residents for retrofitting and refurbishing the towers, over demolition.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government publish all documents showing evidence supporting the feasibility of the redevelopment project and demonstrate that alternative options of retrofitting and refurbishment were reasonably examined.

FINDING 19: The Victorian Government has engaged in the process of managed decline of its public housing properties, failing to conduct repairs and maintenance in a timely and adequate way. This failure has become more pronounced since the announcement of the demolition in September 2023.

International examples for successful retrofitting and refurbishment

The Committee learnt of international examples of towers that were successfully refurbished or retrofitted, with stakeholders arguing the same process can be applied to Melbourne's 44 towers.¹³⁷

For example, Jacinda Sadler told the Committee:

The towers are inspired by modernist housing designs and share architectural similarities with housing towers across Europe ... Importantly, there are successful precedents for renovating such buildings, including Cité du Lignon in Geneva, Switzerland; Rozemaai Housing in Antwerp, Belgium; and Cité du Grand Parc in Bordeaux, France. These projects have extended the life and improved the amenity of similar housing tower buildings, proving that renovation can be both feasible and highly successful.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Bower Insights, *Submission 530*, p. 13; Australian Institute of Architects, *Submission 615*, p. 3; Professor Brendon McNiven, The Retrofit Lab, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 40–41; Associate Professor Rory Hyde, Retrofit Lab, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 40–41; OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, pp. 28–32.

¹³⁸ Jacinda Sadler, Architect, Jacinda Sadler Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

Stephanie Bullock reaffirmed one of the Australian Institute of Architect's recommendations, 'to prioritise where possible retrofit and adaptive reuse, drawing on both local and international precedents to retain embodied value and reduce waste wherever possible'.¹³⁹

OFFICE's submission also drew attention to several international examples where buildings had been retrofitted:

- Cedar Court, Glasgow, Scotland – Collective Architecture
- Telli Row B and C, Aarau, Switzerland – Meili, Peter and Partner Architekten
- Wilmcote House, Portsmouth, England – ECD Architects
- Gueterstrasse 30, Pforzheim, Germany – Freivogel Architekten.¹⁴⁰

Similarly, the Retrofit Lab from the University of Melbourne highlighted two international examples where refurbishment and retrofitting has been successful:

- Cite du Grand Parc, Bordeaux, France (mentioned by Jacinda Sadler above)
- Ellebo Garden Room, Copenhagen, Denmark.¹⁴¹

Professor Brendon McNiven from the Retrofit Lab explained that while 'we are never going to get an exact like-for-like comparison', the point of highlighting these examples is 'to demonstrate the different aspects to ... set the goalposts'.¹⁴²

Homes Victoria's Martin McCurry challenged assertions that Melbourne's 44 public housing towers can be retrofitted in the same way as the international examples mentioned above. He told the Committee that the towers in Melbourne are taller than the towers in the UK and Denmark they are based on and use a lower cement content with less reinforcement.¹⁴³

Mr McCurry cited the precedent of demolition for such towers, pointing to recent decisions in Glasgow and Northern Ireland to take down their towers. He argued that the debate should reflect this:

What we are seeing with these large-panel constructions in places like Broadwater Farm in London and Somerstown in Portsmouth – we have just seen, in Glasgow, North Lanarkshire council commit to demolishing all 48 of its high-rise towers; Northern Ireland Housing Executive are taking down all 33 – is that the precedent is not to retain.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Stephanie Bullock, AIA Victorian Chapter President and Sustainable Architecture Committee Chair, Australian Institute of Architects, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁰ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, pp. 28–32.

¹⁴¹ The Retrofit Lab, *Submission 47, Attachment 2*, p. 5.

¹⁴² Professor Brendon McNiven, The Retrofit Lab, public hearing, Melbourne 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

¹⁴³ Martin McCurry, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

3.6 Building standards for the developments

Terms of Reference (e) requires the Committee to investigate 'building standards for the developments, including whether there will be the same standards for public, community and private housing'.

The Law Institute Victoria (LIV) considered the Ground Lease Model, under which Project Co will be contracted to finance, design, build, and manage sites for 40 years (see Section 2.4.3), 'an attractive and potentially efficient project delivery model'.¹⁴⁵

On the point of whether standards will differ depending on the dwelling type, the LIV said that it is a requirement for Project Co to comply not only with the NCC but also with additional standards, including:

- The Liveable Housing Design Guidelines (Gold Level for 1-2 bedroom dwellings, Silver for 3-4 bedroom)
- High energy efficiency ratings (NatHERS 6 Stars minimum and a 7-star average for social housing; Green Star 5 Stars for all dwellings)
- The Better Apartment Design Standards
- Various site-specific requirements for design, accessibility and communal space.

The LIV further recommended that the project ensure that:

- disability accommodation adheres to NDIS design standards
- housing is culturally appropriate
- developments meet high standards for noise and other amenities
- all housing achieves high environmental sustainability.¹⁴⁶

The LIV emphasised the need for consistent building standards across public, community, and private housing at each project, stating that this integration is crucial to prevent the identification of different housing types and to promoting social cohesion.¹⁴⁷

It is difficult for the Committee to speculate whether building standards will differ for public, community and private housing. However, it is evident that there are mechanisms in place to prevent critical differences between energy efficiency and liveability.

¹⁴⁵ Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 680*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

3.7 Attempts by residents to challenge the towers redevelopment program

The Victorian Government's decision to redevelop Melbourne's public housing towers has met with strong opposition by residents and public housing advocates. One way in which residents have challenged the program is by directly advocating to Homes Victoria. Another way is by engaging with this Inquiry, making submissions and attending public hearings urging the Government to abandon the program.

The most notable challenge, though, came via a class action in the Supreme Court of Victoria.

3.7.1 North Melbourne and Flemington residents' class action

On 24 January 2024, Barry Berih, a resident of the North Melbourne public housing towers, commenced a representative proceeding (or 'class action') on behalf of himself and other residents.¹⁴⁸ Represented pro bono by Inner Melbourne Community Legal, Mr Berih sought judicial review of the Victorian Government's decision to demolish the 44 public housing towers, including those at:

- 33 Alfred St, North Melbourne
- 120 Racecourse Rd, Flemington
- 12 Holland Ct, Flemington.¹⁴⁹

At first instance, Mr Berih sought to take action against the State of Victoria, the Minister for Housing and Homes Victoria for Cabinet's decision to demolish the towers.¹⁵⁰ He also sought an interlocutory injunction restraining the Government from proceeding with the redevelopment.¹⁵¹

On 10 May 2024, the Court dismissed Mr Berih's case, agreeing with the Government defendants that Cabinet's decision to demolish the towers was a policy decision rather than an exercise of statutory power and was therefore not able to be challenged in court.¹⁵² Despite this, the Court allowed Mr Berih to reformulate his case.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ *Barry Berih v State of Victoria & Ors Summary Statement*, Supreme Court of Victoria, 2024, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Berih v State of Victoria* [2024] VSC 156.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16 [46].

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 25 [79].

What did the residents argue?

Mr Berih's reformulated claim omitted the State of Victoria and Minister for Housing as defendants, instead challenging Homes Victoria's decision to demolish the towers.¹⁵⁴ He sought from the Court:

- a declaration that:
 - the decision failed to observe the requirements of procedural fairness
 - the decision failed to observe the requirements of the Empowered Renter Decision Making Model¹⁵⁵
 - Homes Victoria acted incompatibly with residents' human rights
 - the decision failed to give proper consideration of residents' human rights
- an injunction:
 - restraining Homes Victoria from taking any future steps to implement the decision
 - requiring Homes Victoria to engage in a process of consultation and decision making in accordance with the Empowered Renter Model before making any further decisions to develop or demolish the towers.¹⁵⁶

Mr Berih argued that Homes Victoria's decision was invalid on the basis that it:

- denied residents procedural fairness, Homes Victoria having failed to give residents prior notice or an opportunity to be heard; and/or
- failed to take into account the Empowered Renter Model, which required Homes Victoria to undergo a consultation and decision-making process with residents.¹⁵⁷

Mr Berih also contended that the decision was incompatible with residents' human rights under the Victorian Charter, because:

- By failing to give residents prior notice or an opportunity to be heard, the decision unlawfully interfered with residents' homes and families.¹⁵⁸
- By failing to accord with the consultation and decision-making process set out in the Empowered Renter Model, the decision arbitrarily interfered with residents' homes and families.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ In her final judgement, Justice Richards noted that the Empowered Renter Decision Making Model emerged from the Victorian Government's Paving the Way Forward Local Action Plans for the Flemington and North Melbourne estates. He Honour explained that the plans 'were developed in the aftermath of the lockdown of the Flemington and North Melbourne towers during the COVID-19 pandemic [...] were published in 2022, and included a commitment to involve residents in key decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods'. In particular, Homes Victoria committed to using empowered renter decision making models (p. 42 [120]).

¹⁵⁶ Barry Berih, 'Amended Writ', pp. 8–9.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Barry Berih, 'Amended Writ', p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

- The decision also deprived residents of their property other than in accordance with law.¹⁶⁰

Moreover, Mr Berih claimed the decision did not give proper consideration to the following Charter rights:

- the right not to have a family or home unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with
- the right to the protection of family
- the right of children to the protection of their best interests
- the right not to be deprived of property other than in accordance with law
- the right to security.¹⁶¹

Did the Government have to produce documents about the redevelopment to the Court?

Over the course of the trial, the Chief Executive Officer of Homes Victoria, Simon Newport, made reference to a Cabinet Submission about the redevelopment program and other related documents.¹⁶² Mr Berih called for the production of these documents.¹⁶³ In accordance with the *Evidence Act 2008* (Vic), Homes Victoria refused to produce them on the basis that the public interest in admitting the evidence was outweighed by the public interest in preserving secrecy or confidentiality in relation to the information, as production would prejudice the proper functioning of the Victorian Government.¹⁶⁴

The Court agreed with the Government that the documents were immune from disclosure in this case. It held that, while Mr Berih had a legitimate forensic purpose in having the documents available to him, the immunity of the documents should be maintained because:

- disclosure was likely to reveal Cabinet deliberations and the position taken by Ministers and senior government officials in submissions to Cabinet committees, and could inhibit the candour of public servants and ministers in relation to future policy development
- the documents were not important to the outcome of the proceeding, as they were only peripherally relevant to the procedural fairness claim and Mr Berih had the opportunity to gather other evidence to support his Charter claim.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *Berih v Homes Victoria (No 3)* [2025] VSC 30, p. 1 [1].

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ *Evidence Act 2008* (Vic) s 130.

¹⁶⁵ *Berih v Homes Victoria (No 3)* [2025] VSC 30, pp. 31–33 [88]–[93].

What did the Court decide?

In April 2025, the Supreme Court dismissed the class action, concluding that:

- Homes Victoria did not have to give residents an opportunity to be heard before making the decision
- there was no realistic possibility that Homes Victoria could have made a different decision if it had heard from residents beforehand
- Homes Victoria gave proper consideration to relevant human rights
- the decision limited residents' human rights, but was lawful, reasonable and justified under the Charter.¹⁶⁶

The Court also accepted Homes Victoria's evidence that addressing the problems with the towers via renovation would require the relocation of residents. In particular, the Court found:

[The CEO of Homes Victoria] was aware of, and considered, the significant disruption that the Redevelopment Program would cause existing renters, 'by disrupting their home life, their connections to local supports and services, and their links to their communities in the towers and the surrounding area'. I am not persuaded that a better understanding of these impacts could realistically have changed the decision.

In particular, it would not have affected Mr Newport's assessment that any of the options available to address the problems with the Towers would involve relocating residents.¹⁶⁷

The Court's reasoning included that Homes Victoria was not obliged to give residents an opportunity to be heard, that it gave proper consideration to human rights and that while its decision limited humans rights this limitation was justified. The Court was satisfied that the limitation was justified on the basis that:

- the right to home is not an absolute right under international human rights law
- the program's two main purposes—to address the issues that rendered the towers unfit for modern living and to increase the supply of housing on the estates—were important to achieving the objectives of the Housing Act and in their own right
- the program has diminished residents' security of tenure and is dispersing the community around the towers, however Homes Victoria is taking steps to ameliorate the impact of dislocation on residents (e.g. by providing a right of return)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 3–4 [9].

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 44–45 [126].

- the limitation will enable Homes Victoria to deliver the purposes of the program—to deliver more and better homes for current and future residents
- there are no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purposes of the redevelopment program, with Homes Victoria having concluded that retrofitting the towers would not be feasible in light of evidence it commissioned that showed relocation would still be required and retrofitting would not increase the supply of housing.¹⁶⁸

The media reported that the Victorian Government would be pursuing Mr Berih for legal costs.¹⁶⁹ However, soon after, the Government and Mr Berih agreed there should be no order as to costs.¹⁷⁰

Appealing the Court's decision

According to Inner Melbourne Community Legal's website, on 13 June 2025, '[a]fter a lengthy consultation with the impacted residents, [it] lodged an application to appeal the Supreme Court decision'.¹⁷¹ Flemington resident and disability pensioner Jason Mallard will act as a lead plaintiff in the case and the appeal will be made on six grounds.¹⁷² These include that 'the judge erred in finding that Homes Victoria had discharged its responsibilities under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act*, and that it wasn't required to provide residents with an opportunity to be heard'.¹⁷³

The issue of residents' human rights is further discussed in this Report in Section 4.6.

¹⁶⁸ *Berih v Homes Victoria (No 3)* [2025] VSC 30, pp. 80–87 [239]–[262].

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, Rachael Dexter, 'Public housing residents vow to resist eviction as lawsuit thrown out', *The Age*, 4 April 2025, <<https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/public-housing-residents-vow-to-resist-eviction-after-lawsuit-thrown-out-20250403-p5lp0u.html>> accessed 26 May 2025.

¹⁷⁰ The Honourable Justice Richards, 'Order', S ECI 2024 00280, 11 April 2025.

¹⁷¹ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Class Action*, <<https://imcl.org.au/class-action>> accessed 22 September 2025.

¹⁷² Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Appeal lodged over housing towers demolition*, 17 June 2025, <<https://imcl.org.au/news/media-releases-1/appeal-lodged-over-housing-towers-demolition>> accessed 22 September 2025.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

FINDING 20: The Supreme Court of Victoria found that:

- Homes Victoria gave proper consideration to the human rights of the residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington towers.
- Home's Victoria's decision limited human rights.
- The limitation of human rights was justified.
- There was no realistic possibility that Homes Victoria could have made a different decision if it had heard from group members beforehand.
- Hearing from group members could not have changed Homes Victoria's assessment that residents must be relocated to address the age-related issues with the towers; whether they were redeveloped or retrofitted.
- A substantial increase of housing on the sites could only be achieved by demolishing the towers and redeveloping the sites.
- Cabinet confidentiality should be upheld.

The decision has been appealed.

Chapter 4

Relocation concerns and how Homes Victoria has engaged with residents

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 begins by addressing the issue of the Victorian Government's announced plans at the first redevelopment sites in Carlton, North Melbourne and Flemington. The Chapter explains the differences between public and community housing, before presenting evidence on the important role public housing plays supporting vulnerable people and creating strong communities. It then explains the two main concerns residents expressed around community housing: affordability; and protection for residents.

Chapter 4 moves to an in-depth discussion on how Homes Victoria engages with public housing residents, including evidence on:

- the actions taken to date with residents at the Tranche 1 and 2 redevelopment sites
- Homes Victoria's 'renters first' approach to relocation
- residents' right of return.

The Committee addresses the issue of relocation by discussing fears in the community about how relocation can permanently change an area—thereby breaking connections and disrupting social networks—and possibly harm residents' health.

Chapter 4 continues with evidence on residents' views on Homes Victoria's approach to engagement and consultation. It finds that although Homes Victoria acted quickly following the program's announcement, residents at the Tranche 1 site in particular reported issues around inaccurate and inconsistent information and being pressured to sign relocation forms. Overall, a rushed process allowed rumours and misinformation to spread quickly, exacerbating an already stressful situation for residents. Despite this, there has been improvements in Homes Victoria's approach, which Chapter 4 notes.

The Chapter ends with a further discussion on residents' human rights, how Homes Victoria engaged with local councils and problems with the social mix approach proposed by the Victorian Government as part of the towers redevelopment program.

4.2 Replacement of public housing with public, community and private housing

The Victorian Government has yet to release plans for all 44 public housing towers that are to be redeveloped.¹ Plans for the Elgin St towers in Carlton (the red bricks) are for 248 new units of public housing, ranging from 1 to 5-bedroom units, replacing 196 old dwellings. This is an increase of 18% public housing at this site. The project is a partnership between the Australian and Victorian governments. Plans for North Melbourne and Flemington include the construction of:

- 400 social homes, accompanied by 300 affordable homes at Racecourse Road, Flemington; and
- 800 homes at Alfred Street, with at least 300 social homes.²

The plan for Flemington will replace 360 existing public housing units with 400 community homes. At Alfred Street, North Melbourne, 143 public housing units will be replaced by at least 300 community housing units.³

This plan represents a 10% increase in social housing at Flemington and will more than double the stock of social housing at North Melbourne. However, at Flemington and Kensington there is a 100% decrease in public housing, with public housing replaced with community housing.⁴

This section explains the differences between public and community housing and explores the appropriateness of replacing public housing with community housing.

4.2.1 Types of housing

As discussed in Section 2.2, *Victoria's Housing Statement* outlined the Government's intention to progressively 'retire' and 'redevelop' Melbourne's 44 public housing towers, with the aim of providing 'more social housing'.⁵

The term social housing refers to any rental accommodation that either the Government or not-for-profit agencies manage and that is provided to people on the Victorian Housing Register.⁶ It includes both public and community housing.

¹ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 68.

² Premier of Victoria, *Landmark Renewal Project Delivering Hundreds of Homes*, <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/landmark-renewal-project-delivering-hundreds-homes>> accessed 19 September 2025.

³ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 6.

⁴ Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 7; Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; OFFICE, *Submission 102.1*, pp. 19–20.

⁵ Victorian Government, *Victoria's Housing Statement: The decade ahead 2024–2034*, 20 September 2023, Melbourne.

⁶ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 4–5.

Public housing

Public housing is a form of long-term rental social housing that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and, more specifically, Homes Victoria manage.⁷ Public housing rent is capped at 25% of a household's income or at the market rate, whichever is the lower.⁸

As per Housing Victoria's website, public housing is for individuals on the Housing Register who are on low incomes and are most in need, including those experiencing homelessness, escaping family violence or that have other special needs.⁹

The Victorian Government has a responsibility to provide public housing of a suitable quality and location under the *Housing Act 1983*. Further, the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* sets obligations for rental providers to ensure minimum standards for public housing, including maintenance.

Community housing

Community housing is a form of long-term rental social housing that is managed by non-profit organisations that are recognised as a Community Housing Organisation (CHO).¹⁰ These organisations are registered under the *Housing Act 1983* and are regulated by the Victorian Government.¹¹

Under the housing regulatory system, community housing rent is capped at 30% of a household's income.¹² Community housing residents are also obliged to apply for and obtain Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which is to be provided in its entirety to CHOs.¹³

Community housing is provided to those on the Victorian Housing Register.¹⁴ However, unlike public housing, tenant approval is at the discretion of the CHO.¹⁵ CHOs must not discriminate against protected characteristics.¹⁶

CHOs are under the same obligations to provide and maintain quality social housing as public housing providers (i.e. the Government).¹⁷ The rights of public housing renters are secured under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 2.

⁹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Public Housing*, <<https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/public-housing>> accessed 19 September 2025.

¹⁰ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 4–5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹³ Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 4–5.

¹⁵ Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, *Submission 717*, p. 4.

CHOs are held to the same scrutiny as other public entities by VCAT.¹⁸ All long-term social housing tenancies have the same tenancy protections as provided under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*.¹⁹

Further discussion of community housing can be found below in Section 4.2.5.

Affordable

The term affordable housing describes housing available to rent at below 'market rent'.²⁰ The Government subsidises this form of housing and it is provided to those who may not be eligible for social housing but still face barriers to finding suitable housing.²¹

The Committee consistently heard from stakeholders that a clear and specific definition of affordable housing does not exist in Victoria.²² The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* defines affordable housing and this definition is used by the Victorian Government across all planning policy and planning permit negotiations.

Sarah Toohey, CEO of Community Housing Industry Victoria, told the Committee that several different affordable housing programs currently exist in Victoria, all with different definitions of affordable housing and rent calculations.²³

The Community Housing Industry Association told the Committee that the lack of a definition causes confusion for potential tenants, who have difficulty knowing where or how to access affordable housing.²⁴ This extends to affordable housing providers, who need clearer direction or targets.²⁵ Ms Toohey argued that this makes Government investment in this space less effective.²⁶

This Committee's Inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria recommended: 'That the Victorian Government set a consistent and clear definition of 'affordable housing' in legislation that is required to be adopted across all government departments, policy and agreements with the private sector.'²⁷

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

²⁰ Market rent is defined by Homes Victoria as "what the property could be rent[ed] for in the private market"; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 4–5.

²¹ Homes Victoria, *Affordable Housing*, <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/affordable-housing>> accessed 22 September 2025>.

²² Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, *Submission 717*, p. 3.

²³ Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

²⁴ Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, *Submission 717*, p. 10.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

²⁷ Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria Final Report*, p. 62.

The Victorian Governments responded as follows: ‘Under review pending a decision on a nationally consistent definition.’²⁸

4.2.2 Understanding the differences between public housing and community housing

The Committee heard that some public housing residents who relocated to community housing did not fully understand the difference between the forms of housing.²⁹

Community and legal groups told the Committee that they were often left responsible for explaining these differences to affected residents.³⁰ Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead for Southside Justice, a community legal centre, told the Committee, ‘No, I do not believe the residents understand the difference between public housing and community housing.’³¹ He went on to explain the legal centre has ‘done a lot of work on that issue’.³²

Ana Ruffatt-Ruiz, Chairperson of the South Yarra Public Tenants Association, described how some residents remained confused by the differences, despite information being provided by Homes Victoria.³³

Homes Victoria circulated information to residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington towers in 2023 which detailed facts about community housing, including rental rights. It stated: ‘Community housing renters have the same rights as public housing renters and are protected under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*.’³⁴

At a public hearing, Ms Toohey confirmed that there is no difference in renters’ rights between public and community housing.³⁵

The Committee understands that the differences between public and community housing primarily exist in relation to rent and utility bills. Several stakeholders expressed concern that the Government’s lack of communication around these

²⁸ Victorian Government, *Response to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into the Rental and housing affordability crisis In Victoria Final Report*, p. 2.

²⁹ Moonee Valley Legal Service, *Submission 616*, pp. 10–11; Ayan Mohamud, Food Security Coordinator, CAN Community Support, Church of All Nations Community Support, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 30–31; Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33; Ana Ruffatt-Ruiz, Chair, South Yarra Tenants Association, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 62; Nicky Chung, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, public hearing, 22 July 2025, Richmond, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24; Maurya Bourandanis, Southern Homelessness Services Network and Port Phillip and Stonnington Zero, public hearing, 1 July 2025, South Yarra, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 15–16.

³⁰ Dr Sebastian Sharp, Acting Manager, Policy, Advocacy and Projects, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15; Nicky Chung, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, public hearing, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 24; Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

³¹ Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ana Ruffatt-Ruiz, Chair, South Yarra Public Tenants Association, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 62.

³⁴ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623.1*, p. 58.

³⁵ Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

differences, and the subsequent confusion for residents around the differences between the two types of housing, was intentionally misleading.³⁶

Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer of West Heidelberg Community Lawyers, argued that this communication ‘wilfully relied on an obfuscation’ by not fully explaining the differences.³⁷ In its submission, the Social Housing Legal Program told the Committee that Homes Victoria’s communication material ‘tended to minimise or obfuscate the differences [between community and public housing]’ by only discussing rights without mentioning the differences in expenses.³⁸

Many stakeholders expressed concern about the nature and quality of the Government’s efforts to communicate the difference between housing types.³⁹ The Committee understands that some residents were unaware of the differences between forms of housing stock when they agreed to relocation, raising issues of informed consent.⁴⁰ In some cases, residents regretted the decision to relocate made without full information. Dr Sebastian Sharp, Acting Manager of the Fitzroy Legal Service, told the Committee:

We heard several reports of residents stating that they had been told that they [community and public housing] were essentially the same and agreeing to the relocation on that basis. It was only once we explained those crucial distinctions in our information sessions and in our advocacy that they expressed the desire to rescind the relocation agreements that they had already made.⁴¹

The Committee has not seen any communication from Homes Victoria to residents that explained the cost differences between community and public housing. However, it acknowledges that the information provided by Homes Victoria guaranteed residents would not pay more rent ‘during relocation’.⁴²

At a public hearing, Dannii de Kretser, Homes Victoria’s Deputy Chief Executive Officer, told the Committee that to date around 65% of Tranche 1 and 2 residents expressed no preference between community or public housing.⁴³

It is also notable that throughout its communication with residents and the Committee, Homes Victoria constantly used the term ‘social housing’ to describe future redevelopment, rather than specifically identifying public or community housing.

³⁶ Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, p. 2; Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 15; Mr Max Ryan, *Submission 798*, p. 2.

³⁷ Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

³⁸ Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, p. 2.

³⁹ Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2–3; Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, pp. 28–29.

⁴⁰ Ayan Mohammed, Food Security Coordinator, Church of All Nations Community Support, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37; Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32–33.

⁴¹ Dr Sebastian Sharp, Acting Manager, Policy, Advocacy and Projects, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

⁴² Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623.1*, p. 58.

⁴³ Dannii de Kretser, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 88.

Ms Price contends that Homes Victoria selectively uses the terms ‘public’ and ‘social’ housing to hide ‘the retreat and diminishment of public housing in Victoria and the growth and elevation of community housing’.⁴⁴

4.2.3 The public housing penalty under Commonwealth law

One of the big cost disadvantages faced by public housing compared with community housing is treatment under Commonwealth law. This comes in two main forms: Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Public housing providers are an input-taxed supply for GST purposes, which means they do not receive an input credit for any GST paid on construction and maintenance costs.

As Homes Victoria CEO Simon Newport explained to this committee in 2023:

We are treated – Homes Victoria – and in most of the jurisdictions around Australia they are treated the same as a mum-and-dad property investor. We are what is called ‘input taxed’. When we pay the plumber \$110, we do not get the \$10 back from the federal government. That in itself is probably worth somewhere in the order of \$50 million to \$60 million a year to Homes Victoria.⁴⁵

Mr Newport described this ‘a 10 per cent penalty by the federal government, because we are naturally 10 per cent more expensive than someone who delivers it outside of government, because I am not able to claim the input tax credit on the construction cost of those towers. So, in some instances that is in itself a factor.’⁴⁶

Therefore, the cost of construction of public housing is 10 per cent more expensive for the build than community housing.

In its evidence, the Community Housing Industry Association noted that its GST-exempt status as a charity means it can reduce delivery costs by not paying GST.⁴⁷ In addition, community housing tenants are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance, public housing tenants are not.

Mr Newport estimated in 2023 that the value of both the GST input tax, and the lack of Commonwealth rent assistance, are worth in the order of \$150 million a year to Homes Victoria.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025 *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 October 2023, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 80.

⁴⁶ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 October 2023, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Sarah Toohey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 10 October 2023, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 80.

FINDING 21: Public housing construction and maintenance costs are 10% higher than comparable community housing costs due to different treatment under the Commonwealth Government's GST laws.

FINDING 22: Homes Victoria's initial communication to residents around the differences between public and community housing, in particular the differences in rental payments and utility bills, was insufficient to prevent confusion among residents.

FINDING 23: The Victorian Government has relied on the umbrella term 'social housing' to transfer public housing tenants into a privatised model of housing.

FINDING 24: Homes Victoria failed to ensure public housing residents were meaningfully informed about the implications of the distinctions between community housing and public housing.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government cease using the term 'social housing' when it is aware an estate will be community housing only.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government confirm whether any further tower redevelopments will be rebuilt as public housing.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government amend the *Housing Act 1983* to remove the umbrella term 'social housing' and provide clear and separate definitions of 'public housing' and 'community housing'.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to remit the GST payable on public housing construction and maintenance costs, to bring public housing costs into line with community housing costs.

4.2.4 The importance of public housing

The Committee heard consistent evidence from residents and other stakeholders that public housing plays a key role in providing secure and affordable housing to those who are most in need.⁴⁹

The Victorian Public Tenants Association argued that in terms of affordability, equity of access, and access to complaints mechanisms and independent advocacy, public housing is the superior form of social housing.⁵⁰ Tenants Victoria told the Committee that for individuals who are on low incomes, escaping homelessness or have other special needs, the private market cannot provide appropriate housing.⁵¹

Combatting disadvantage and inequality

The Committee heard from various stakeholders of the role of public housing in breaking cycles of disadvantage for vulnerable groups, including:⁵²

- Financially disadvantaged people⁵³
- People escaping family violence⁵⁴
- People experiencing homelessness⁵⁵
- People experiencing disability⁵⁶
- Older people⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, pp. 1–2; Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025 *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2–3; Alicia Lay, Kylie Peterson, Diirshe Mohamed, R-Coo Tran, 44 Flats United, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 81–84.

⁵⁰ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 586*, p. 4.

⁵¹ Tenants Victoria, *Submission 682*, p. 12.

⁵² Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3.

⁵³ South Port Community Housing Group, *Submission 134*, pp. 4–5; Ria Pillai, *Submission 679*, p. 1; Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 6; Flat Out, *Submission 528*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3; Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 4; Flat Out, *Submission 528*, pp. 7–8; Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 2; South Port Community Housing Group, *Submission 134*, p. 6; Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3; Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator – Southern Region, Southern Homelessness Network, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15; Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 55–56; Hamish McLachlan, Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4; Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Ka Wah, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Ekaterina Yurha, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 67; Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29; Ms Anita Hirmiz, *Submission 121*, p. 1; Isobel Yates, *Submission 155*, p. 1; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 5; Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 771*, pp. 2–3; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17; Louisa Bassini, Managing Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8; Jess Richter, Legal Director, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35; John Lowndes, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 54; Lauren Alberico, *Submission 229*, p. 2; Moonee Valley Legal, *Submission 616*, p. 12.

- Carers⁵⁸
- Vulnerable women and their children⁵⁹
- Migrants and refugees⁶⁰
- First Nations Peoples.⁶¹

In particular, stakeholders stressed the importance of public housing in combatting homelessness.⁶² The Committee heard that public housing provides both an affordable and accessible form of housing for people escaping homelessness⁶³ and a safeguard to prevent vulnerable people from falling into homelessness (for example, providing housing to people escaping family violence).⁶⁴

Strong communities

The Committee heard about the significance of public housing in the creation of strong communities. Dr David Kelly, an RMIT Research Fellow, described Melbourne's public housing towers as 'spatially distinct neighbourhoods' that over time have developed high levels of informal social bonds between diverse groups of residents.⁶⁵

R-Coo Tran an advocate from 44 Flats United explained 'community provides a sense of safety', which the towers have helped to foster.⁶⁶

Elle Morell, from the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, stressed the significance of these community networks, and described them as impossible to replicate by community groups.⁶⁷ In addition to the informal supports created by public housing

⁵⁸ Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 3; Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 492*, pp. 4–5; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17; Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49; Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 3; Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 492*, pp. 4–5; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17; Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49; Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Name Withheld, *Submission 18*, p. 1; Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3; Drummond Street Services, *Submission 676*, p. 2.

⁶¹ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3; Flat Out, *Submission 528*, p. 7.

⁶² Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 2; South Port Community Housing Group, *Submission 134*, p. 6; Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3, Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator – Southern Region, Southern Homelessness Network, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15; Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 55–56, Hamish McLachlan, Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁶³ Fiona York, Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, *Submission 741*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ R-Coo Tran, 44 Flats United, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

communities, the towers are centres around which important local services and businesses form.⁶⁸ These include:

- Places of education and employment⁶⁹
- Public transport⁷⁰
- Social work support⁷¹
- Disability programs⁷²
- Culturally appropriate places to eat and buy food⁷³
- Places of worship⁷⁴
- Multicultural learning centres⁷⁵
- Sporting clubs⁷⁶
- Other community groups, including theatre, writing and art groups.⁷⁷

Box 4.1 collates examples of how residents described to the Committee the value of their public housing communities.

⁶⁸ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Katherine Ceballos, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46; Heaven Waters, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Thi Mai Tran, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32; Dr Bill Swannie, Member, Human Rights Committee, Law Institute of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16; Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 51.

⁷⁰ Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Ka Wah, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Thi Mai Tran, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31; Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Fiona York, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

⁷¹ Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 53.

⁷² Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

⁷³ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3; Ian Symmons, Program Manager, Volunteers, Consumers and Connected Communities, Better Health Network, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

⁷⁴ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3; Drummond Street Services, *Submission 676*, p. 2; Tenants Victoria, *Submission 682*, p. 7; Joint Community and Legal Services Submission, *Submission 723*, p. 1; Inner Melbourne Community Legal, *Submission 772*, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 2; Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Maurya Bourandis, Southern Homelessness Services Network and Port Phillip and Stonnington Zero, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

Box 4.1 What public housing residents have told us

My community is a community who have been living together for a long time. We help each other. We know each other. We have been looking after each other for a long time. Our children play together. Our older people visit each other. We look after our elderly people. We look after young women who have no relatives or extended family here. We support each other. We go funding together. We have our own cultural activities in this high-rise, which are free for us.'

Sarah Aden, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

Men, women, children and large families, young and old, have put their differences aside, broken down cultural barriers and put religious views aside to build a holistic community and to build a rich and diverse community where our children can play safely without any stigmas.

Katherine Ceballos, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

My experience living in these flats was that it really gave me a sense of community, identity and understanding of the world as bigger than myself. I would not be the woman I am now, I would not be so grounded in my values and principles of care, compassion, justice and love, if it was not for the way the people, specifically black women, raised me in these flats

Reem Yehdego, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

What I want to say is the public housing is part of our life, our community and our mental health, because we are together and feeling home and supporting each other, community, and a lot of activity we do is with the part of the aged, elders, mothers and children.

Ruth Eyakem, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

We are more than buildings. We are a community. You cannot quantify the relationships, the safety nets, the informal supports, the access to services and the cultural precincts. This is a place of belonging. It is more than bricks and land. There is a large Aboriginal community here too and there is great trust between residents and workers and the local organisations, and dismantling our community erodes this invisible infrastructure. I do not know how you are going to rebuild it.

Heaven Waters, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

(Continued)

Box 4.1 Continued

Public housing has been a cornerstone of my community, supporting people from diverse backgrounds, including low-income families, migrants, and individuals with disabilities. It has fostered a sense of solidarity and mutual support that is difficult to replicate elsewhere... My community is enriched by its diversity—neighbours looking out for one another, children playing together, and shared experiences creating bonds that go beyond housing.

Name Withheld, *Submission 58*, p. 1.

Having lived in many suburbs of Melbourne, Flemington is by far the place with the most community spirit of anywhere I have experienced. It is a place where you know your neighbours and feel safe to talk to people on the street. The residents of the housing towers are an integral part of our close-knit, multicultural community in Flemington. I often walk through the park and community areas surrounding the towers and it is always full of families, kids playing sport, and neighbours catching up with one another.

Name Withheld, *Submission 386*, p. 1.

It feels like I was born here. It feels like my family. My community is here. Many of the elderly people here know each other. I know that if I'm sick, I have someone to help me, we are there for each other as a community. When people don't have enough, we help each other. My neighbour knows that they can ask me for help, for food and I will help them.

Leila, Moonee Valley Legal Program, *Submission 616*, p. 41

How these concerns have been addressed is explored below in Section 4.4.1.

4.2.5 Concerns around community housing

Affordability concerns

As outlined in Section 4.2.1, community housing rental payments are at 30% of a tenant's household income, representing a 5% increase on public housing rental payments. A number of stakeholders flagged to the Committee that this increase raises concerns about affordability for public housing residents, who are in the bottom 40% of income earners.⁷⁸ At a public hearing, Cr Stephen Jolly estimated that residents would pay \$1,680 more per year in community housing than in public housing.⁷⁹ Community housing residents are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance, however public housing tenants are not.

⁷⁸ Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 6; Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator – Southern Region, Southern Homelessness Network, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

⁷⁹ Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

The Committee also heard concerns that community and affordable housing models were not appropriate for residents receiving income supports, including Youth Allowance, JobSeeker, and aged and support pensions.⁸⁰

As well, stakeholders noted that utility providers are chosen by the community housing provider, unlike in public housing, which can result in larger utility bills.⁸¹

Protection concerns

The Committee heard doubts around community housing residents' legal protections compared to public housing residents.⁸² In particular, the Committee received evidence about higher rates of eviction in community housing.⁸³ At a public hearing, Damien Patterson from Tenants Victoria reported a higher proportion of community housing residents reaching out for assistance with eviction matters than residents of public housing.⁸⁴

Dr Sebastian Sharp of the Fitzroy Legal Service told the Committee:

What we do see in our casework is that in public housing eviction is treated as a last resort, and in community housing we do tend to see community housing providers using eviction as a first step to respond to rental issues like rental arrears and complaints about tenancy behaviours.⁸⁵

The Committee was told of fears from residents that the move to community housing has exposed potential tenants to discrimination in the application process⁸⁶ and less secure tenancies.⁸⁷

These concerns around differences in legal protections were addressed by Sarah Toohey in a public hearing. As noted in Section 4.2.1, public and community housing residents have the same rights under law, including with regards to eviction and tenant approval.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator – Southern Region, Southern Homelessness Network, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

⁸¹ Ana Ruffatt-Ruiz, Chair, South Yarra Public Tenants Association, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 63; Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36; Ekaterina Yurha, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 69; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

⁸² Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 5; Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, pp. 4–5; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁸³ Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, p. 5; Flat Out, *Submission 528*, p. 6; Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Lousia Bassini, Managing Lawyer, Inner Melbourne Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3; Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Damien Patterson, Director of Policy, Advocacy and Engagement, Tenants Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Dr Sebastian Sharp, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁸⁶ Arundhati Lekshmi, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50, Multicultural Centre of Women's Health, *Submission 741*, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁷ Dianne Chauser, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 66; Thi Mai Tran, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32; Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 529*, p. 5; Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, pp. 4–5; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

⁸⁸ Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

Ms Toohey explained to the Committee that CHOs must comply with anti-discrimination laws.⁸⁹ She added that that some CHOs have missions to house particular groups (such as older people and people who have experienced homelessness).⁹⁰ As such, applicants not being approved for certain housing types 'is not a discrimination issue; that is an eligibility challenge'.⁹¹

Ms Toohey also stated that while community housing residents are offered periodic leases, residents 'can stay as long as they need'.⁹²

4.3 How Homes Victoria engages with public housing residents

4

Homes Victoria told the Committee of the range of approaches it has been taking to engage with public housing residents.⁹³

State-wide Public Housing Renter Consultative Committee

- Established in 2024 to facilitate discussions between Homes Victoria and public housing renters.
- The Committee can have between 12–16 renters selected and runs for an 18-month term.
- The first meeting took place in November 2024 with subsequent meetings following every two months.

Review and Improve Panels

- Allowing renters to contribute to improving the quality of housing services.
- Focus on a specific part of the business or service delivery area.

Our Communities: Our Values

- A charter that outlines renters' 'values' and how Homes Victoria will use them when redeveloping precincts.
- Involved 30 workshops across 21 tower locations, over 700 renter conversations across 400 hours of engagement.

Onsite community engagement

- Workshops with renters and the local community at 'key touchpoints' during redevelopment.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Sarah Toohey, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 43.

⁹³ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 24–30.

- In June and July 2024, Homes Victoria asked residents, property owners, the community, the City of Melbourne and other stakeholders what was important to them regarding the Carlton redevelopment.
- In December 2024, Homes Victoria asked for feedback on the conceptual designs for Carlton.
- A similar process was held in North Melbourne and Flemington during November and December 2024 and will be held in Richmond and South Yarra ahead of redevelopment.

Community Consultative Committees

- Considered an ‘additional measure to ensure community input to establish a vision for the future development of the local site’.
- They provide advice to Homes Victoria on communication and establishing community connections.
- Are open to renters, as well as neighbours, community members, people working in the community and people interested in housing.
- Three sessions were held for Carlton and influenced the approach to bedroom numbers, security and communal spaces.
- They have been established for North Melbourne and Flemington and will be established for Richmond and South Yarra precincts in 2025.

Engage Victoria

- The Engage Victoria website invites feedback on redevelopment projects under way during visioning engagement periods for specific sites.⁹⁴

4.3.1 Actions taken by Homes Victoria following the announcement of the towers redevelopment program

According to Homes Victoria, it took the following actions following the redevelopment announcement:

- door-knocked all 6,700 renters across the 44 towers and provided them information about support available in 14 languages,⁹⁵ and how they could access further information and key protections, such as right to return
- provided pop-up stalls with interpreters in each tower foyer for three days, to ensure renters could talk to staff or ask questions

⁹⁴ See: Homes Victoria, *Flemington Precinct*, <<https://engage.vic.gov.au/flemington-precinct>>; Homes Victoria, *North Melbourne Precinct*, <<https://engage.vic.gov.au/north-melbourne-precinct>>; Homes Victoria, *Elgin Towers, Carlton*, <<https://engage.vic.gov.au/elgin-towers-carlton>> accessed 2 October 2025.

⁹⁵ As noted in Section 2.3.1, information was initially provided in 11 languages. At the time of writing this Report, information was available in 19 languages.

- sent letters to all households in the towers identified for redevelopment at the time of the announcement on 20 September 2023
- held information sessions hosted by Homes Victoria's CEO and senior housing officials at North Melbourne and Flemington in October 2023
- sent letters on 17 November 2023 to renters that outlined a range of questions that had been asked at the community information sessions, and provided answers to these questions
- distributed a 'High Rise Newsletter' to all towers in November 2023 that included information about the program, renter rights and protections, and directed renters to the website for more information
- sent an additional flyer to renters at North Melbourne and Flemington, focused on new homes located near the towers as relocation options.⁹⁶

On 20 September 2024, Homes Victoria advised renters across North Melbourne, Flemington, South Yarra and Richmond of timelines for the first stage of the redevelopment of their precincts. The announcement was delivered through:

- more than 330 direct contacts with renters by phone or door-knock at Richmond and South Yarra
- pop-up stalls held on 20–23 September at four locations, speaking to over 300 renters
- letters to impacted households
- 6,100 letters delivered to all other public housing high-rises
- 700 letters delivered to surrounding social housing
- phone calls / emails to the M9 (metropolitan councils) CEOs, the housing, community, homelessness and health sectors.⁹⁷

4.3.2 Necessity of resident relocations for any works

Homes Victoria advised in their evidence that all approaches to remedying the serious issues at the towers would require the relocation of residents. For instance, Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, said 'It may well be possible to address many of these issues, but the cost would far exceed the benefit. It would deliver no new homes, and the residents would still need to relocate.'⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21. See Attachment A of the submission for a selection of material provided by Homes Victoria.

⁹⁸ Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

The Victorian Government's submission to the inquiry also states: 'All refurbishment options require the relocation of residents due to the substantial impact on their amenity in any substantial renovation.'⁹⁹

One option proposed in the OFFICE Report *Retain, Repair, Reinvest* is that 'refurbishment works would occur five floors at a time with residents of those floors relocated during the works. Once completed to those floors tenants would move back, and construction would continue to the five floors above until the tower was full [sic] refurbished.'¹⁰⁰

Associate Professor Rory Hyde of the Retrofit Lab, University of Melbourne confirmed that this option would impact resident amenity '[One option would be] to move people out on four or five levels while they get repaired. And yes, you are going to have people living upstairs and downstairs hearing drilling in their building.'¹⁰¹

Another option proposed in the OFFICE Report was to move residents into infill developments on site.¹⁰² Again, it was acknowledged that this would significantly impact resident amenity, with Steve Mintern, OFFICE, acknowledging: 'While they will be living next to a construction site, it is not ideal, but in our opinion it is a better outcome than relocating them off the estate.'¹⁰³

Simon Robinson of OFFICE acknowledged that this on-site relocation of residents would still require residents to move out of their homes and later move back.¹⁰⁴ He further noted that OFFICE's proposal amounted to a choice between a significant impact to amenity (through living on a construction site) or relocation, saying: 'I think you would hope that they would be given the choice to either live on that site or be rehoused in the new housing provided'.¹⁰⁵

The final option proposed in the OFFICE Report was relocation of tenants off the estate: 'Due to some tenants wanting to be relocated off the estate a tower could be completely decanted and refurbished.'¹⁰⁶ This option is identical to the Homes Victoria approach, except for the fact that OFFICE claims relocation cost savings in excess of \$200 million if its approach to relocations is adopted.¹⁰⁷

It is also worth noting that Homes Victoria is already offering an 'infill-and-move' approach to relocations with its new homes at Abbotsford Street, North Melbourne

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰⁰ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 83.

¹⁰¹ Associate Professor Rory Hyde of the Retrofit Lab, University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

¹⁰² OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*.

¹⁰³ Steve Mintern, Managing Director and Landscape Architect, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Simon Robinson, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. ix.

and Victoria Street, Flemington which have been offered to towers residents, both of which are located a short distance from the respective towers estates.

In relation to the OFFICE Report and other alternative approaches to relocating residents, Simon Newport, CEO, Homes Victoria, stated:

Not only did [the OFFICE Report] not allow for the physical relocation of residents, it did not allow for the costs of those relocations, which we know can add up. So there is an issue there. [...] It was not [...] viable to do the extent of the work that is being considered, or could even be considered, for a refurbishment and leave people in those buildings. Whether it is just the noise, the dust, the dislocation, the elevator access – I know that they are a hot topic here today, but the fact is when you have got limited elevators and they are small, you cannot be shutting those down so the tradies can get up and down. How are people going to get in and out of their building?

No witness to the inquiry was able to provide an approach to refurbishing or retrofitting the towers which would not either: (1) require the relocation of residents; or (2) substantially impact resident amenity and quality of life during the construction period.

FINDING 25: Any approach to remedying the serious and systemic issues at the towers will require either relocations, disruption to resident amenity, or a combination of both.

4.4 The relocation of public housing tower residents and its impact

4.4.1 Homes Victoria's 'renters first' approach to relocation

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing stated in its submission that 'every precinct redevelopment commences with the relocation of renters'.¹⁰⁸ Homes Victoria follows a 'renters first' approach for its relocation processes, which consists of five steps, shown in Figure 4.1.¹⁰⁹

The Committee also heard that many public housing tenants are vulnerable elderly people in no position to be bargaining with a government department, and how important it was that this redevelopment project builds in guardrails to recognise the inequality and power imbalances that exist.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Honourable Kevin Bell AO KC, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

Figure 4.1 Homes Victoria's relocation steps and timing for each step

	Relocation step	Timing
1	Learn more: even if not relocating right now, renters can learn about the process and opportunities as they happen in other neighbourhoods.	Under way, including 20 September 2024 announcement of Big Housing Build next big step
2	Getting ready: renters start thinking about what they need in their new home. The Homes Victoria relocations team will help find them a suitable home.	From announcement of relocation date for each site, over several months for each household.
3	Relocating: Homes Victoria will help renters with every part of the move from providing packing materials to covering costs and booking the removalist.	Throughout 18-24 month relocation period.
4	Staying connected: Homes Victoria will stay in touch throughout the redevelopment with project updates and opportunities to provide input on the design of new homes.	Throughout six to eight year redevelopment period for each site, with design input predominantly commencing as relocations approach completion.
5	Coming back: renters have the right to return, depending on their needs, eligibility, and the suitability of the new homes.	Six to eight years following announcement of redevelopment (starting with Elgin Towers, Carlton in 2028 and concluding with the last of 44 towers in 2051).

Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 19.

As noted in Section 2.2, the Department has commenced relocating residents of the public housing towers across five estates. At a public hearing in early August, Peta McCammon, Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, told the Committee:

- In Carlton, the empty towers are being demolished and residents have been relocated.¹¹¹
- In Flemington, relocation is 'well underway, with well over 70 per cent of households relocated in accordance with their preferences and departmental policies'.¹¹²
- In North Melbourne, relocation is 'well underway, with over 60 per cent of households relocated in accordance with their preferences and departmental policies'.¹¹³
- In Richmond and South Yarra, '25 per cent of households have been ... [relocated] in line with their preferences and our policies'.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Peta McCammon, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Ms McCammon said ‘In each of these projects we have been able to utilise newly built local homes to provide many renters with local options for their relocations’.¹¹⁵

Homes Victoria told the Committee how it works with renters to understand their needs and preferences, including:

- preferred location
- preferred tenancy management
- healthcare, age related and disability supports/services
- schools, childcare and jobs
- accessibility needs
- social, cultural and community connections
- transport links and connections.¹¹⁶

Its submission to this Inquiry states: ‘Renters will have dedicated support to relocate from their home and remain close by or choose a different neighbourhood in Victoria.’¹¹⁷

Homes Victoria also said it encouraged renters when meeting with Homes Victoria staff to bring support people, such as:

- a friend/family member
- a representative from either the Victorian Public Tenants Association or Tenants Victoria
- legal representation, with community legal services (including interpreters where needed) or the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service available to provide this service
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are being engaged to provide information to First Nations renters, alongside cohealth, Better Health Network and North Richmond Community Health.¹¹⁸

The Committee notes with concern cohealth’s decision to stop providing GP and counselling services at its Kensington, Fitzroy and Collingwood clinics by December 2025.¹¹⁹

Ms de Krester emphasised that Homes Victoria tries to meet all disability needs and location requests, adding ‘If a child needs a special school, we will absolutely be taking

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, pp. 21–22.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 22–23.

¹¹⁹ See for example: <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/vulnerable-to-be-cut-off-from-free-medical-checks-as-melbourne-clinics-axe-services-20251016-p5n2xe.html>> accessed 18 October 2025.

that into account'.¹²⁰ She informed the Committee 'that to date 100 per cent of people that have had a locational requirement have had that met in where they have been housed'.¹²¹

Ms de Kretser added that Homes Victoria has set up mechanisms for residents to provide feedback if they feel they have been treated poorly or unfairly. She encouraged residents to use those mechanisms and committed to ensuring they will be taken 'extremely seriously'.¹²²

The Committee heard that close to '78% in Tranche 1 want to remain pretty much within North Melbourne or the Flemington broadband or are being housed within the Flemington and North Melbourne broadband'.¹²³

The Department's submission also stated that 'Renters will have a chance to inspect the property before making a decision to accept an offer of a new home'.¹²⁴

FINDING 26: To date, all residents who have relocated as part of the public housing towers redevelopment program have moved to where they requested.

What the Department says about the right of return

A commonly cited concern that the Committee heard about the relocation policy was the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the right of return' after redevelopment.¹²⁵ The Committee heard that residents are anxious about the conditions applied to the right of return.¹²⁶

For example, Louisa Bassini noted that 'Homes Victoria representatives state in interviews and publicly that residents will have a right to return to the estates. However, this is not a guarantee, and it is conditional'.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Dannii de Kretser, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 88.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 22.

¹²⁵ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 403*, pp. 11–12; Louisa Bassini, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7; Hamish McLachlan, Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 12–13; Dr Bill Swannie, Member, Human Rights Committee, Law Institute of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 17, 20; Kerrie Byrne, Save Public Housing Collective, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70.

¹²⁶ Louisa Bassini, Managing Lawyer, Inner Melbourne Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Kerrie Byrne, Save Public Housing Collective, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 70; Clare Hanson, Save Public Housing Collective, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71; Moonee Valley Legal Service, *Submission 616*, pp. 11–12, 31, 40, 44, 55, 59, 63, 67; R-Coo Tran, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 89; Katelyn Butterss, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Public Tenants Association, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

¹²⁷ Louisa Bassini, Managing Lawyer, Inner Melbourne Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

Similarly, Fitzroy Legal Service explained that residents were ‘unaware that Homes Victoria would only offer them a single option of a return to the redeveloped property, and that this offer would be conditional’.¹²⁸

According to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, following the completion of a site’s redevelopment:

relocated renters will have a right of return to the neighbourhood depending on their ongoing needs, eligibility and suitability of new homes at that time. Redevelopment of each site will take six to eight years. They can also choose to stay in their relocation home if this suits them better at the time.¹²⁹

The submission emphasised that this aligns with the Public Housing Allocations operational guidelines and specifically the ‘Move Back’ section of the Department’s Relocation Manual.¹³⁰ The ‘Move Back’ section states:

Tenants can choose to remain in the property they have been relocated to, or move back to the redeveloped site. This is where there are suitable homes that meet their needs and eligibility.

Where there are not enough redeveloped homes available for tenants to return to, they are offered a property at a location in close proximity to the redeveloped site or in alternative locations if tenants agree.¹³¹

The *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program* considered the issue of tenants’ right of return following the completion of redeveloped estates. The Final Report included the following pledge from the Department:

You will be provided with a legally binding Deed guaranteeing your right to return to the estate on completion of the redevelopment; security of tenure and that your rent will be set by the Director of Housing.

For residents who have already moved, the attached legally binding Deed guarantees:

- a right to return to a property upon completion of the redevelopment;
- If you choose to return to a property in the redeveloped estate, your tenancy will continue; and,
- If you choose to return to a property in the redeveloped estate, your rent will be calculated in accordance with the rent calculation policies of the Director of Housing current at that time.¹³²

¹²⁸ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 11.

¹²⁹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 23.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Relocation manual, accessed 16 October 2025, <<https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/relocation-manual>> accessed 10 September 2025.

¹³² Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program Final Report*, p. 170.

Within the context of the current redevelopment policy, Simon Newport responded to criticisms that Homes Victoria has been unclear about residents' right of return to estates following redevelopment, stating:

I wrote to each of the residents of Tranche 1, and in it is a very clear statement about their right of return I know there have been repeated calls for it to be in writing. It has been done in writing ... The right to return is very clearly stated in that letter and in our policies.¹³³

The Committee received a copy of the letter which Homes Victoria sent to residents of the Flemington and North Melbourne towers (see Appendix E). The letter outlined the following information about the right of return:

- Renters will have the right to return to a new apartment on the estate, 'if [they] choose to do so'.¹³⁴
- Homes Victoria will work with residents to understand their housing needs and preferences such as whether '[they] wish to stay close to or move' to a new area.¹³⁵
- Renters' 'out-of-pocket rent will not change' during relocation. Renters who decide to move to community housing may receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance. This is 'generally expected to be paid to the housing provider' and it may lower your out-of-pocket costs.¹³⁶
- Renters 'will maintain [their] current rights to a home and [their] out-of-pocket rent will not change'.¹³⁷

FINDING 27: Some residents of the Tranche 1 and 2 sites are confused about their right of return to their estates following redevelopment. This includes whether they will be able to return to public housing.

FINDING 28: Under the Public Housing Renewal Program, residents were not provided a right of return to public housing. They were, however, provided with a right of return that guaranteed a home in the redeveloped estate where all public housing settings would apply. The right of return was also legally binding.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That Homes Victoria provide residents of the redeveloped towers and walk-ups with a legally binding Deed guaranteeing the same right of return as that guaranteed under the Public Housing Renewal Program.

¹³³ Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 87–88.

¹³⁴ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, public hearing, Melbourne, 19 August 2025, *Question on Notice*, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

4.4.2 Stakeholders' views on the relocation policy

I fear for the residents of this public housing and the inherent destabilisation demolishing these towers will have on a tight knit community.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 335*, p. 1.

Destroying these homes will fracture these relationships, making it harder for people to access the informal networks of care that help them thrive.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 391*, p. 1.

Many stakeholders who challenged the Government's rationale for redeveloping Melbourne's 44 public housing towers also raised concerns about the impact of the relocation policy.¹³⁸ Examples of the concerns the Committee heard include:

- Relocation will lead to permanent dislocation of residents from public housing estates.¹³⁹
- Relocation will disrupt decades of community connection, safety and support.¹⁴⁰
- Relocation will have negative impacts on residents health and wellbeing.¹⁴¹

Relocation leads to permanent change to communities

The Committee heard evidence from academics and advocates that, in the previous relocation in the Kensington and Carlton estate, many residents did not return to the area, making changes in those communities permanent.¹⁴² A study on the Kensington and Carlton redevelopment found return rates between 14–21%, as well as a large loss of diversity.¹⁴³

OFFICE's RRR feasibility study stated that 'Evidence from previous Estate renewals include the findings from the Kensington Estate, which saw only 20% of residents

¹³⁸ Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Housing@RMIT, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29; Arundhathi Lekshmi, Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50; Delaram Ansari, Research, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 51; Kerrie Byrne, Save Public Housing Collective, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 64–65.

¹³⁹ Ruth Gordon, Homelessness Network Coordinator – Southern Region, Southern Homelessness Network, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Hamish McLachlan, Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12; Dr Sebastian Sharp, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Somali Community Inc, *Submission 49*, p. 1; Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17; Name withheld, *Submission 74, Attachment 1*, p. 1; Lauren Alberico, *Submission 299*, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Joanna Langdon, *Submission 8*, p. 1; OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 43; Name withheld, *Submission 260*, p. 1; Lauren Alberico, *Submission 299*, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 311*, p. 1.

¹⁴² Dr Iris Levin, Senior Lecturer, Sustainability and Urban Planning, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35; Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Housing@RMIT, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Submission 752*, pp. 7–9; OFFICE *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 43; Clare Hanson, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71.

¹⁴³ Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Housing@RMIT, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Submission 752*, p. 8.

return to the newly built dwellings.¹⁴⁴ The study provided several reasons why this was the case:

- some residents were happy with their new accommodation
- some residents wanted to avoid ‘the disruption of a second relocation’
- the time taken for new units to become available
- the reconfiguration of dwelling styles on the redeveloped sites meant not all households were able to be reaccommodated¹⁴⁵

Disruption of community connection and social networks

As noted above in Section 4.2.4 the public housing towers are places of community connection that support longstanding social networks.

Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow at Housing@RMIT, explained that many residents of Melbourne’s public housing towers are long-term residents and ‘nearly half of public housing households have lived in public housing for more than 10 years’. Similarly, OFFICE’s RRR report stated that ‘Many residents have formed deep roots in Flemington, with over half (57%) having lived there for six or more years.’¹⁴⁶

Consequently, the Committee heard concerns from residents and organisations that relocation risks fracturing these networks and community support.¹⁴⁷ Stakeholders expressed that relocation will be highly disruptive to residents’ sense of community, safety and support if residents are ‘forced to leave behind their trusted local providers and seek new ones in unfamiliar areas’.¹⁴⁸

Hamish McLachlan, Chief Executive Officer for Fitzroy Legal Service, said that ‘the current plan ... [risks] dismantling decades of connection, safety and support’.¹⁴⁹

Likewise, Mooney Valley Legal Service’s submission stated that many of the residents they had consulted with expressed concern about losing the ‘strong sense of community, and community identity ... in the relocation process’.¹⁵⁰ The submission highlighted the concern of one resident who stated ‘We have a mosque in North Melbourne, and everyone accesses that, once we are moved, it will be hard for people to pray there.’¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p.43.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴⁷ Simon Robinson, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2, 6; Dr Bill Swannie, Member, Human Rights Committee, Law Institute of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁸ Pei Ting Tham, *Submission 330*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Hamish McLachlan, Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ Moonee Valley Legal Service, *Submission 616*, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 17.

Ilo Diaz, Community Lead for Moonee Valley Legal Service, reaffirmed to the Committee that ‘There is a deep fear and a sense of the loss of the strong sense of community and mutual support and the cultural/ identity built over decades.’¹⁵²

Council of Single Mothers and their Children stated the impact of relocation on children who will have to change schools and this ‘may involve loss of friends and reduced confidence in, and engagement with, learning’.¹⁵³ This point was reinforced by several other stakeholders.¹⁵⁴

The Victorian Council of Social Service echoed a recurring theme that the Victorian Government needs to ‘mitigate the disruption’ of relocation.¹⁵⁵ This includes ensuring that communities remain ‘together and, where requested, keeping public housing residents close to the services they use including health services, schools and work; as well as community spaces such as places of worship’.¹⁵⁶

The Committee understands the concerns raised by stakeholders about the potential impact of relocation on residents. The Committee notes the Department’s evidence that 100% of people with location requirements have received housing which meets this need. The Committee also notes that a significant portion of Tranche 1 have been housed within the North Melbourne or the Flemington broadband. Indeed, many Flemington residents moved only across the road to their new homes. This reflects the Department’s work to minimise and mitigate disruption to residents’ community connection and social networks.

Relocation has negative impacts on individuals mental and physical health

The Committee considered international evidence suggesting that the physical and mental health of residents relocated during urban renewal schemes can suffer.¹⁵⁷ Fitzroy Legal Service stated: ‘Academic studies have found the impacts of this type of displacement to be comparable to that of grief, highlighting the serious ramification it can have on peoples’ mental health and wellbeing.’¹⁵⁸

One submission stated:

Forced relocation will have severe mental and physical health impacts on residents. Being uprooted from one’s home causes stress, anxiety, and disruption to daily life,

¹⁵² Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

¹⁵³ Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 492*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Dr Bill Swannie, Member, Human Rights Committee, Law Institute of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16; Simon Robinson, Managing Director, OFFICE, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2, 6; Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Housing@RMIT, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 28–29.

¹⁵⁵ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 526*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ OFFICE, *Submission 102, Attachment 1*, p. 43; Joanna Langdon, *Submission 8*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Fitzroy Legal Service, *Submission 443*, p. 4.

particularly for vulnerable groups like seniors, people with chronic illnesses, and children.¹⁵⁹

Another submission described witnessing ‘firsthand the trauma that public housing relocation elicits’, detailing how a relative’s ‘dementia symptoms worsened’ after relocation.¹⁶⁰

Kerrie Byrne, a public housing resident, provided the following examples where residents’ mental and physical health had suffered during relocation:

- ‘One older woman ended up in hospital following her relocation as she was so traumatised by having to sever the ties with her home of many years.’
- ‘Another older woman died due to health complications, most likely brought on by the sudden announcement and then the relocation stress.’¹⁶¹

The Committee understands the concerns raised about the health impact of relocation on residents. Section 4.5.2 discusses how the Government’s decision not to release all the documents informing its plan to redevelop Melbourne’s 44 high-rise towers has damaged community confidence. For residents whose lives are directly affected, the lack of evidence makes it more difficult to understand the rationale behind such a significant decision, intensifying the stress associated with relocation.

The Committee heard evidence that alternatives to redevelopment – such as retrofit or refurbishment – could also have negative impact on individuals’ mental and physical health, particularly from the noise and discomfort that might be created from building works such as the noise from drilling through concrete.

Therefore, it is clear to the Committee that all options to remedy the issues at the towers require disruption to tenants’ lives and communities, or relocation, which may have negative impacts on residents’ mental and physical health.

The Committee encourages residents to access health and other support services provided by the Department and referred to in Section 4.4.1 above.

4.5 How residents viewed Homes Victoria’s approach to engagement and consultation with residents

There is a special, extra importance on consultation when many of the people on the public housing estates have come to Australia from countries where there has been war, where there has been civil unrest and where the governments are not democratic and they are fearful of government.

Cr Stephen Jolly, Mayor of Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Lauren Alberico, *Submission 299*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 403*, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Kerrie Byrne, Save Public Housing Collective, public housing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 68.

There was a significant volume of evidence to suggest that there was not effective consultation with residents of the public housing towers. Discussing how residents were informed, Cr Meca Ho stated:

A piece of paper under the door. You go there and there is no interpreter. They just say, 'Oh, this is where you're going to move. This is where you're going to – you have two choices. If you don't do it, then we're going to evict you in some way.' That is what they told me.¹⁶²

Residents noted similar concerns:

when they first moved people over to Bangs Street, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds did not know they were going to community housing, did not know it was a three-year contract. They were not told anything, because that was very early on.¹⁶³

The main problems the Committee heard about Homes Victoria's approach to engagement and consultation with residents was that: it was insufficient and unclear; and some residents felt pressured to sign relocation forms.¹⁶⁴ This is particularly the case for Tranche 1 residents.

Clearly, as shown in Section 4.3, there was not an absence of consultation, rather there was a lack of high-quality consultation. This can partly be explained by different expectations around what consultation involves. One view, as in the discussion about the residents' human rights in Section 4.6 below, is that residents should have been consulted about the decision to knock down the buildings.

It is difficult to conceive of a way in which this could have happened. The Committee is aware of examples such as London, where social housing landlords requesting funding to demolish homes and construct more than 150 new homes have to show support among the residents.¹⁶⁵ However, such a process could not apply in the case of Melbourne's public housing towers. As the Supreme Court found, the decision is a technical decision, not something that could have been changed by residents' views.

However, the Committee stresses that this does not mean that the Victorian Government should not provide the technical evidence it believes justifies its decisions to redevelop all 44 towers. On the contrary, this lack of evidence made a difficult situation even worse, as is discussed in the following Sections.

¹⁶² Cr Meca Ho, City of Yarra, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁶³ Dianne Chauser, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 66.

¹⁶⁴ Council of Single Mothers, *Submission 492*; Flat Out, *Submission 528*; Smart Justice for Young People, *Submission 531*; Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*; Moonee Valley Legal Service, *Submission 616*; Southern Homelessness Network, *Submission 662*; Tenants Victoria, *Submission 682*.

¹⁶⁵ The Retrofit Lab, *Submission 47*, p. 12.

4.5.1 Involving residents – where Homes Victoria fell short

If it is accepted that Homes Victoria could not engage with residents about the decision to knock down the towers, it then becomes even more important to involve residents as much as possible in decisions about their future. Evidence shows this did not happen to the extent it should have.

For example, Ilo Diaz from Moonee Valley Legal Service told the Committee that how Homes Victoria engaged with residents at North Melbourne and Flemington came across as ‘information sessions rather than genuine consultations’.¹⁶⁶

Sahra Aden, a Flemington resident, told the Committee: ‘Nobody ever told us or consulted with us and said to us, ‘This is why we are doing it.’¹⁶⁷

Drummond Street Services acknowledged that consultation with residents did take place. However, residents reported being confused ‘particularly those from culturally diverse backgrounds, suggesting that not enough has been done to reach out to those likely to be most impacted by this move’.¹⁶⁸

Somali Community Inc told the Committee that residents had complained to it about the lack of opportunity to discuss redevelopments plans and were not provided legal advice.¹⁶⁹

The submission from the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association contains a summary of a forum it held at its Richmond office on 19 December 2024, including quotes from residents of the towers. Residents at that meeting also acknowledged that consultation happened, but not enough was done. The Association said: ‘Residents continue to express their frustration and lack of trust’.¹⁷⁰

At a public hearing in Richmond, Nicky Chung, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, explained to the Committee that language and cultural barriers can prevent some people from asking questions to authorities. For example, residents from the Vietnamese community may consider it impolite to speak without being asked or, worse, fear being ‘blacklisted’ as punishment.¹⁷¹

Ms Chung suggested a human-centred approach design process, focusing on equity:

One size does not fit all. Having a town hall and having police officers attending, you are not going to necessarily have people ready to raise their hand and ask questions. There are a lot of cultural barriers in that kind of a setting. I have worked in a lot of

¹⁶⁶ Ilo Diaz, Community Lead, Moonee Valley Legal Service, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ Sahra Aden, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁸ Drummond Street Services, *Submission 676*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ Somali Community Inc, *Submission 49*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, *Submission 658*, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Nicky Chung, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

non-Vietnamese workplaces, and certainly that would be the normal process that we would do in order to communicate with community at a broader level. But certainly thinking about those specific communities that are in place at those public housing towers from the outset, from the take-off – that would have probably been my recommendation.¹⁷²

The Salvation Army's submission added that along with culturally and linguistically diverse communities the towers are home to residents with complex physical and mental health needs. Its concerns about the initial consultation include that information was only provided on A4 posters with small print. This made it inaccessible to older residents, people with impaired eyesight and residents with cognitive impairment or decline.¹⁷³

The Committee was also concerned to hear about public housing residents being forced to sign relocation papers out of fear. Somali Community Inc reported residents filling out 'confusing relocation forms' not because they wanted to move but because they were worried about becoming homeless.¹⁷⁴

Reem Yehdego, a resident of the 33 Alfred Street tower, described the relocation process as feeling 'rushed and confusing. It has also been coercive and lacked consultation'. Further:

We are being pressured to accept housing that does not meet our needs, far from our doctors, our schools, our mosques and our community-based support networks. There is no consistency and no transparency, and it leaves many of us feeling anxious and pressured.¹⁷⁵

Evidence of this from the Richmond community include Mecca Ho,¹⁷⁶ Thi Mai Tran¹⁷⁷ and Nicky Chung.¹⁷⁸

The Committee was unable to determine how widespread this problem has been. However, it believes Homes Victoria needs to be aware of evidence provided by organisations such as Friends of Public Housing, who told the Committee:

Tenants in the towers have complained of undue pressure put on them to sign papers they don't understand. The tenants on the whole have signed relocation papers on the basis of verbal promises with no written guarantees. They have been told repeatedly that they have no choice but to sign and have felt harassed and bullied.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷³ Salvation Army, *Submission 611*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴ Somali Community Inc, *Submission 49*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Reem Yehdego, public hearing, Melbourne, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁷⁶ Cr Mecca Ho, Yarra City Council, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Thi Mai Tran, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

¹⁷⁸ Nicky Chung, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁹ Friends of Public Housing, *Submission 699*, p. 4.

The Committee also heard that residents in the North Melbourne and Flemington towers were triggered by memories of the hard lockdown of their estates during the COVID-19 pandemic. The submission from Moonee Valley Legal Service contained a quote from Sarah, a former Flemington resident with family still living at the site. Sarah said:

I thought the Government would have learnt their lesson after the hard lockdowns of North Melbourne and Flemington during COVID. I didn't think they would put this community through something like this again. It really feels like they don't care about this community.¹⁸⁰

FINDING 29: Public housing residents in the Tranche 1 development group reported:

- Frustration at not being engaged with in a way that met their needs and expectations
- Pressure to sign relocation forms.

FINDING 30: The Victorian Government and Homes Victoria relocation process engaged in significant coercive and misleading practices to relocate residents within an arbitrary deadline, causing deep harm to social, emotional and physical wellbeing of the residents.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government engage the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to provide independent oversight of the relocation process to ensure the human rights and wellbeing of residents are prioritised and respected.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government provide strict parameters around the code of practice in the relocation process to prohibit coercion being applied to residents, including a single contact point offering independent advice to residents who have been issued a notice to vacate.

4.5.2 A rushed process created an environment ripe for rumours to take hold

You can see from our submission that the speed at which the announcement of the housing statement occurred and the rapid attempt to communicate the intent of the housing statement to residents meant that the people on the ground trying to communicate the messages really did not have the answers to the very first questions that people asked: 'What will be rebuilt?' and 'Where will I go?'

Stephanie Price, Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, public hearing, Djerring Flemington Hub, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Moonee Valley Legal Service, *Submission 616*, p. 8.

Really the first time I ever heard was from the news, when Daniel Andrews left the job and decided. I always listen to the news, and I heard that 44 high-rise houses would be demolished, and that struck me. I was confused. And in the morning I was walking. Exactly the day I heard from the news, around 3 or 4 o'clock I was walking in the park and someone from the news, a lady, stopped me and said to me, 'Do you live here?' I said, 'I live here, yes.' And she said to me, 'Are you aware that these houses are going to be demolished?' I said, 'I heard from the news, but why? And who?' And she did not say, 'How do you feel?' She asked me some questions, and I said to her, 'I have no idea. Nobody came to us. Nobody told us.'

Sahra Aden, Public Housing Tower Resident, public hearing, North Richmond Community Health, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

To have residents express to us when 259 was announced as being relocated that they were finding out about it on the news as opposed to having been communicated with directly from housing support workers was disappointing. It is not where you want your quality engagement with community to be at.

Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

A major problem with the towers redevelopment program arose from the way in which many residents learnt about the program, either from Premier Andrews' announcement or from their neighbours.

The Committee appreciates that there is no easy way of informing thousands of residents across 44 towers of a decision such as this, where every resident is informed by a Homes Victoria staff member at the same time.

However, the Committee is concerned about the clear lack of readiness from Homes Victoria to engage effectively with residents once the decision had been announced. From the evidence provided to this Inquiry, Homes Victoria, despite trying to inform residents about the program as quickly as possible after the announcement, was effectively playing 'catch up'. This created a space that allowed rumours and misinformation to grow. This in turn further distressed residents already concerned about their futures.

For example, Yarra City Council said that the announcement caused 'confusion, uncertainty and misinformation'.¹⁸¹

Speaking about the announcement, Louisa Bassini from Inner Melbourne Community Legal observed a 'great haste' in the process.¹⁸² The Social Housing Legal Program (a specialist service comprised of Inner Melbourne Community Legal and West Heidelberg Community Legal) submission said: 'Haste is rarely associated with a genuinely consultative process; indeed, it is generally regarded as counterposed.'¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*, p. 8.

¹⁸² Louisa Bassini, Managing Lawyer, Inner Melbourne Community Legal, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

¹⁸³ Social Housing Legal Program, *Submission 726*, p. 2.

The sense that the process was rushed is further supported by evidence that Homes Victoria staff were not fully informed themselves about the program. This meant that they were unable to answer all of the questions asked by residents, allowing the information vacuum to develop further.

The Social Housing Legal Program told the Committee that while Homes Victoria was ‘demonstrably eager’ to speak with Tranche 1 residents, the information it provided was ‘lacking clarity and specificity about key associated questions’.¹⁸⁴

At a public hearing held at the Djerring Flemington Hub, Elle Morrell from the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre explained to the Committee that ‘rumours are coming from the Government not giving information and so people are filling in the gaps’.¹⁸⁵

Similarly, at South Yarra, Lloyd Murphy from Southside Justice told the Committee that not enough information being provided by Homes Victoria created an opportunity for ‘those gaps to be filled up in different ways’.¹⁸⁶

Speaking at the Committee’s public hearing at Flemington, Hamdi Ali, Secretary, Carlton Housing Estates Residents Services said:

For example, I do Somali radio, and someone called me and said, ‘Their towers are already being built and being sold to foreign buyers.’ That is literally what the person was saying to me. And therefore, yes, definitely that thing of when someone says some sort of thing like that or those assertions, and someone who is a little bit better positioned does not tell them, ‘No, actually, that is not at the moment; maybe it might happen, but it is not happening,’ then it will continue and spread.¹⁸⁷

Another example came from resident Ka Wah, who said: ‘I was not very happy to move, but I heard that the Government said everyone had to move by September, otherwise we would have to move at our own cost.’¹⁸⁸

The Committee notes the evidence in the Government’s submission referred to in Section 4.3.1 that it sent a letter to North Melbourne and Flemington residents on 17 November 2023 answering initial questions. However, the volume of evidence received by this Inquiry from across Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 estates—combined with the staff feedback in the Homes Victoria May 2024 ‘Panel report #2: Relocation process for high-rise development’ document (see Box 4.2 below)—illustrates how Homes Victoria’s approach to consulting and engaging with residents was flawed.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Elle Morrell, Community Development Manager, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹⁸⁶ Lloyd Murphy, Housing Justice Lead, Southside Justice, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

¹⁸⁷ Hamdi Ali, Secretary, Carlton Housing Estates Residents Services, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹⁸⁸ Ka Wah, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

Moonee Valley Legal Service reported residents' concerns about a lack of clarity around the program's timescale and that although Homes Victoria organised meetings with residents these meetings did not provide enough information. Its submission quotes a towers resident, Yusuf, who said: 'Yes, we were able to ask questions, but no, they didn't actually answer them properly for us. Didn't give us a proper answer.'¹⁸⁹

And North Melbourne resident Reem Yehdego said: 'People are being told different things from different Homes Vic staff.'¹⁹⁰

Again, the Committee stresses that the Victorian Government's ongoing refusal to publish the evidence justifying its decision to redevelop all 44 towers continues to exacerbate an already difficult situation for public housing residents. This directly contradicts Minister Shing's assertion that the Victorian Government is providing public housing tower residents with 'empowerment and autonomy'.

Other stakeholders complimented the efforts of Homes Victoria staff, albeit while still noting a lack of information. For example, the Victorian Public Tenants Association told the Committee:

We acknowledge the best efforts that Homes Victoria staff have provided, but the issue remains that they are not properly equipped with sufficient information to answer questions from renters in detail. At times, this has resulted in a further, unnecessary, deterioration in trust from renters towards Government.¹⁹¹

The South Yarra Public Tenants Association quoted a resident saying: 'We had four meetings, but nothing is clear. These people are very polite, can't complain and it's their job, but they can't promise anything.'¹⁹²

Homes Victoria is undoubtedly aware of this problem. Its May 2024 'Panel report #2: Relocation process for high-rise development' collated feedback from staff working at the North Melbourne and Flemington towers.¹⁹³ Box 4.2 includes examples of that feedback.

¹⁸⁹ Moonee Valley Legal Service, *Submission 616*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Reem Yehdego, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

¹⁹¹ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 586*, p. 5.

¹⁹² South Yarra Public Tenants Association, *Submission 718*, p. 9.

¹⁹³ The Review and Improve Panel investigated communications and engagement related to the relocation process for the high-rise redevelopment program. The purpose of the panel and its investigations was to gather evidence, critically review, and make recommendations for improvement.

Box 4.2 Examples of feedback from Homes Victoria staff working with residents at the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing towers.

One of the key challenges in this area was the timeline for the Department's Communications team, i.e. the nature of the project and the way it was announced, created short time frames.

We would have loved more time to develop drafts and check in with community leaders, but the nature of the project, the way it was announced meant we didn't have that time.

We have had to work very quickly and did not have much notice from the Government.

We have to work with a lot of internal areas – and this was a new situation – so we really were scrambling to ensure information was correct.

We didn't have a lot of information – this made it really difficult to confirm that information was correct.

Source: Homes Victoria, 'Panel report #2: Relocation process for high-rise development', May 2024.

The Committee found it difficult to know exactly how this situation arose. On the one hand, it seems from the quotes above that the process was rushed so much that Homes Victoria did not have enough time to prepare its engagement program. Yet, as the request for documents motion discussed in Section 1.1.4 shows, background work on the program began as far back as 2022.

This atmosphere of uncertainty and rumour allowed fear to grow through people hearing about terrible things happening to other residents, albeit without necessarily experiencing it themselves. While it is of course impossible to verify or otherwise every single rumour flowing through a community, the point is clear that fear can be strong enough to have a detrimental impact on residents.

This is shown in the exchange below from the public hearing at the Djerring Flemington Hub:

Ryan BATCHELOR: It is one thing to talk about fear of retribution. Have you got any examples of where people have actually felt or seen retribution?

Ayan MOHAMUD: For me personally, I know that my mum would be very afraid to come to a [public hearing], because she would be afraid that her tenancy could be at risk, and she has told me this. She does not want to rock the boat.¹⁹⁴

The Committee was surprised to learn of such feedback from Homes Victoria staff. No organisation should need a review to know its staff must be fully informed before engaging with the public.

¹⁹⁴ Ayan Mohamud, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

FINDING 31: A lack of full information and clarity provided by Homes Victoria staff to residents of Tranche 1 of the public housing towers redevelopment program created a space that was filled by rumours and misinformation. Homes Victoria should have been better prepared to prevent this happening.

FINDING 32: The Victorian Government would improve trust among public housing towers residents that it is acting in their best interests by publishing the evidence it believes justifies its decision to redevelop all 44 public housing towers.

4.5.3 Improvements in Homes Victoria's engagement with residents

It is difficult to know what to recommend to the Victorian Government. Firstly, and most obviously, the program has been announced and all residents of the towers are aware of it. Therefore, the challenges are around how to engage and inform residents throughout the remainder of the program.

Secondly, many recommendations around consultation and engagement made to the Committee used subjective words such as 'meaningful', 'genuine' and 'actively'.¹⁹⁵ The Committee understands the intent behind this language. However, the language it chooses to use when advising the Victorian Government and its agencies has to be as specific as possible.

Homes Victoria seems to be improving its engagement with residents—in particular because it is no longer 'playing catch up'. Ideally, it will learn from the problems identified both in this Inquiry and its own work. Hobsons Bay City Council—the site of two public housing towers in Williamstown, Nelson Heights (235 Nelson Place) and Floyd Lodge (63 Hamner Street)—spoke about this in terms of the need for 'continuous improvement'.¹⁹⁶

The Committee has some concerns based on the fact that the mistakes very closely mirror those made during the Public Housing Renewal Program. Further, recent engagement by Homes Victoria with the residents at North Melbourne and Flemington have not always borne fruit.

¹⁹⁵ For example: Jesuit Social Services, *Submission 533*, pp. 4–5; Darebin City Council, *Submission 591*, p. 4; Juno, *Submission 617*, p. 3; Drummond Street Services, *Submission 676*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁶ Hobsons Bay City Council, *Submission 125*, p. 6.

For example, to improve relations with residents after the COVID-19 lockdowns lifted Homes Victoria developed the Paving the Way Forward (PTWF) initiative. Following community feedback in 2021–2022, Local Action Plans were developed for the estates. These included a commitment from Homes Victoria to work with resident action groups on important decisions that affected their community. It described this as a ‘partnership approach with residents and the Department’.¹⁹⁷

During the class action case, Barry Berih referred to PTWF in his court case, arguing Homes Victoria did not take a partnership approach with residents. Judge Richards concurred:

In those circumstances, residents of the Towers might reasonably have expected Homes Victoria to seek their input through the PTWF ‘empowered resident decision-making model’ before making a decision to demolish the Towers. It did not do so, and there was no evidence that explained this failure. Mr Berih was entitled to feel that Homes Victoria had broken faith with the community when it made the Decision without seeking community input...

Homes Victoria had engaged in a process over several years to rebuild trust with the communities of the Flemington and North Melbourne estates through the PTWF initiative. It then, capriciously and unpredictably, let those communities down by making the Decision without notice or consultation.¹⁹⁸

The Committee agrees with the Court’s decision that there was no legal obligation on the part of Homes Victoria to afford procedural fairness to the residents, nor were the PTWF Local Action Plans legally binding.

However, the Committee also agrees with the Court’s view that it was bad practice on the part of Homes Victoria to create an expectation of partnership when it knows it does not have to be held to that expectation. This has disappointed some residents and damaged trust in Homes Victoria.

Regardless, the Committee notes Tenants Victoria’s evidence that engagement with Tranche 2 residents has included ‘improved availability of timely information for impacted renters’.¹⁹⁹

Ana Rufatt-Ruiz, Chairperson, South Yarra Public Tenants Association told the Committee that feedback from tenants at South Yarra was ‘very favourable of the consultations’.²⁰⁰ This view was reinforced by current resident Ekaterina Yurha, who spoke approvingly of the meetings held with Homes Victoria, including the information leaflets that were provided in languages other than English.

¹⁹⁷ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Paving the Way Forward Initiative*, <<https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/paving-way-forward-initiative>> accessed 2 September 2025.

¹⁹⁸ The Honourable Justice Richards, ‘Order’, S ECI 2024 00280, 11 April 2025.

¹⁹⁹ Tenants Victoria, *Submission 682*, p. 8.

²⁰⁰ Ana Rufatt-Ruiz, Chair, South Yarra Public Tenants Association, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 58.

The Committee also heard from Janice McCall, a former resident of South Yarra who recently moved into a unit in South Caulfield. She said: 'It is lovely, actually. I am very happy with it even though I would have liked two bedrooms, but they are big rooms, so I am happy.'²⁰¹

And Richmond resident Kai Ng told the Committee that he felt he had been treated fairly and given enough time to sign the relocation form.²⁰²

Hamdi Ali, Secretary, Carlton Housing Estates Residents Services, told the Committee that:

This is what I would like the committee to take into account to ensure transparency and continuous consultation with the residents throughout the redevelopment process. In Carlton it did happen, and we are relatively happy of what the department did.²⁰³

The Committee also notes Danni de Kretser's evidence to the Committee that many residents have thanked the relocations team 'for the home that they have moved to – that it has suited their family, that it has alleviated overcrowding ... the team take pride in that as well'.²⁰⁴

The Committee commends the swiftness of Homes Victoria's on-the-ground response in the days following the announcement, which sought to clarify and provide further information to residents. However, as discussed in Section 4.5.2 this was still too late to prevent negative impacts on residents who first became aware of the redevelopment through the announcement and came with its own issues.

Although the Government cannot change how it announced the high-rise redevelopment program, it can ensure it does not announce any further tranches before first engaging with the public housing residents on those estates. Furthermore, it can ensure staff from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Homes Victoria are equipped to answer questions from residents about their rights.

FINDING 33: Homes Victoria has disappointed some residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing towers, and eroded trust, by creating an expectation of partnership regarding important decisions that Homes Victoria knows it will not always have to meet.

FINDING 34: Homes Victoria has significant work to do to engage safely and respectfully with public housing residents and recognise the power imbalances that exist during engagement.

²⁰¹ Janice McCallm, public hearing, South Yarra, 1 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71.

²⁰² Kai Ng, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 71.

²⁰³ Hamdi Ali, Secretary, Carlton Housing Estates Residents Services, public hearing, Flemington, 24 June 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

²⁰⁴ Danni de Kretser, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 6 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 86.

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the Victorian Government inform public housing residents that will be affected by future tranches of redevelopment about the redevelopment before announcing it to the broader public.

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the Victorian Government ensure Departmental staff engaging with public housing tenants in future tranches of redevelopment can answer residents' questions about their rights in relation to the program.

RECOMMENDATION 20: That the Victorian Government make clear the renters right of return following redevelopment and a Deed similar to that used for the Public Housing Renewal Program be adopted for all 44 high rise estates.

4.6 Have the North Melbourne and Flemington residents' human rights been breached?

The Committee considered the issue of whether the residents of the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing towers had their human rights breached by the Victorian Government.

Section 3.7.1 of this Report summarised the class action brought against the State of Victoria, the Minister for Housing and Homes Victoria. As noted, the Court found that the residents' human rights were given proper consideration and that although their rights had been limited the limitation was justified.

The Committee also received evidence addressing the residents' human rights from the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) and Kevin Bell KC. It is important to note that the LIV's submission was made prior to the April 2025 decision handed down by the Supreme Court.

The LIV submission refers to the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter). In its submission, the LIV argued that the Victorian Government was

required to take a human rights-based approach during the decision-making process, as required by section 38 of the Charter ... Particular consideration should have been given to the right not to have the home or family unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with, protected by section 13 of the Charter and grounded in international law.²⁰⁵

The LIV stated that the residents should have been consulted before the decision to redevelop the towers was made and by not doing so, the Victorian Government breached the residents' human rights.

²⁰⁵ Law Institute of Victoria, *Submission 680*, p. 5.

Dr Bill Swannie from the LIV's Human Rights Committee spoke with the Committee at a public hearing. He expanded on what a human right-based approach would look like, including:

- Providing full information to the residents
- Ongoing consultation
- All government entities using residents' feedback to reconsider decisions where appropriate.²⁰⁶

The Committee also spoke with Kevin Bell KC. Justice Bell explained that he did not necessarily disagree with the Victorian Government's decision to redevelop the towers and believes that the Government is acting in good faith. However, he argued that the approach taken by the Government is flawed by not involving the residents in the decision-making process.

Both witnesses agreed that the human rights in the Charter can be limited. However, as Mr Swannie stated, 'only if this decision is demonstrably justified and proportionate'.²⁰⁷ While Justice Richards stated in the class action decision that Home's Victoria's actions were properly justified, Justice Bell argued for a pause in the program because not all the relevant information guiding the Victorian Government's decision has been made public.

Justice Bell told the Committee that 'information should be shared with those interested about the rationale for the project, whether there are alternative means for achieving the same end, and that information should be shared with the representatives of the tenants and the broader community'.²⁰⁸

Justice Bell also informed the Committee that he is working with the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University and Inner Melbourne Community Legal to take a complaint about the redevelopment program to the United Nations.²⁰⁹

4.7 How Homes Victoria engaged with local councils

The Committee received evidence from the local councils that house the high-rise towers, both individually and collectively as M9.²¹⁰ Similar to evidence from residents, the common theme from this evidence was disappointment at the lack of information and consultation provided by the Victorian Government.

²⁰⁶ Dr Bill Swannie, Member, Human Rights Committee, Law Institute of Victoria, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.16.

²⁰⁸ Justice Kevin Bell, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

²¹⁰ City of Melbourne, *Submission 675*; Darebin City Council, *Submission 591*; Hobsons Bay City Council, *Submission 125*; Merri-bek City Council, *Submission 613*; Moonee Valley City Council, *Submission 593*; Port Phillip City Council, *Submission 685*; City of Stonnington, *Submission 618*; Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*.

Local councils should have been appropriately engaged by the Government to deliver its redevelopment program. This is because local councils:

- Are experienced in planning issues and delivering services, including housing, to the community
- Are the level of government closest to the community.

However, the Committee heard that Councils only heard about the program when it was announced by the Government.²¹¹ Further, Merri-bek Council wrote to the Minister for Housing in November 2023 requesting information about the program but did not receive a response.²¹²

In fact, it took one year for Homes Victoria to contact the M9 alliance of relevant councils in September 2024.²¹³ The M9 submission to this Inquiry requested enhanced engagement with the Government, through:

- Representation on Department reference groups, stakeholder forums and steering committees
- Involvement in redevelopment plans, including the ability to review plans
- Being a 'key point of contact across relevant government portfolios'.²¹⁴

FINDING 35: The Victorian Government's plans for the high-rise towers redevelopment program should have involved local councils much earlier than it did.

RECOMMENDATION 21: That Homes Victoria commit to working closely with Melbourne 9 (M9) throughout the high-rise towers redevelopment program.

4.8 Issues with the social mix approach

Terms of Reference (f) for this Inquiry instruct the Committee to examine 'community integration and diversity'.

As noted, the North Melbourne and Flemington redevelopments are being delivered under the Ground Lease Model, providing community housing with a mix of other affordable and private housing.

²¹¹ For example: Yarra City Council, *Submission 592*, p. 8; Moonee Valley City Council, *Submission 593*, p. 5; City of Stonnington, *Submission 618*, p. 3.

²¹² Merri-bek City Council, *Submission 613*, p. 5.

²¹³ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 21.

²¹⁴ Melbourne 9, *Submission 702*, p. 3.

A social mix approach was used in the past to deliver new social housing under the Public Housing Renewal Program (see Section 2.4.2). This mechanism delivers a mix of housing types in the same estate, with each type intended to be indistinguishable from one another and integrated into the local neighbourhood.²¹⁵ In its submission to this Inquiry, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing outlined that a social mix approach aims to achieve two main goals:

- Reduce ‘place-based disadvantage’ that is assumed to occur on public housing estates
- Socially integrate public housing tenants with private residents on the estate and in the surrounding neighbourhood.²¹⁶

The Committee heard from academics arguing that this social mix approach fails to deliver improved outcomes for residents.²¹⁷ Iris Levin, a Senior Lecturer at RMIT University, told the Committee that studies into the approach indicated that it ‘simply does not work’.²¹⁸

Dr David Kelly told the Committee in a submission:

International and Australian research shows that social mix, as a policy framework, consistently fails to deliver improved outcomes for low-income tenants. Instead, it tends to benefit higher-income households, while producing significant negative effects for those on the lowest incomes—particularly in terms of displacement, social cohesion and housing stability.²¹⁹

Stakeholders noted a difference in the quality of amenities between different forms of tenure within estates and that the access to different areas of the facility was sometimes dependent on which form of tenure one lived in.²²⁰ Grace Bell, a resident of affordable housing in a social mix residency, told the Committee that the approach has not established a community or encouraged interaction between tenancy groups.²²¹ Ms Bell told the Committee:

Affordable housing residents are segregated from the community housing residents. We are not invited to participate in community programs, such as a welcome barbecue or the formal garden opening, so there are no invitations to meet your neighbours. You have no opportunity.²²²

²¹⁵ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, *Submission 623*, p. 41.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

²¹⁷ Dr Iris Levin, Senior Lecturer, Sustainability and Urban Planning, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, pp. 21–22; Bower Insights, *Submission 530*, p. 10; Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 14.

²¹⁸ Dr Iris Levin, Senior Lecturer, Sustainability and Urban Planning, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

²¹⁹ Dr David Kelly, *Submission 752*, p. 16.

²²⁰ Bower Insights, *Submission 530*, p. 10; Grace Bell, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 60; Housing@RMIT, *Submission 621*, p. 21; Sheena Colquhoun, *Submission 536*, p. 6; Duncan Rouch, *Submission 2.a*, pp. 7–8.

²²¹ Grace Bell, public hearing, Richmond, 22 July 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 60.

²²² *Ibid.*

The delivery methods for housing under the Public Housing Renewal Program and the Big Housing Build are different. The former utilises a public-private partnership model and the latter the Ground Lease Model. However, Dr David Kelly provided evidence to the Committee that the methods produce similar results:

Research shows that public-private partnerships result in poor returns to the public, permanent loss of land and housing capacity and minimal tenant return. The ground lease model is a variation of the same model, repackaged.²²³

In its Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program, the previous iteration of this Committee reached the following conclusion in a Finding:

Research has found that it is not clear that creating a social mix of tenants alone leads to social mixing or improves the life outcomes of public housing tenants. Rather, such a mix can be a part of a broader policy of creating healthy communities. This is because the social mix of neighbourhoods has a stronger influence on social outcomes.²²⁴

The Committee recommended that the Victorian Government conduct a longitudinal study on the link between social mix and social outcomes at public housing estates. The Committee went on to recommend that all future social housing policy should be influenced by the outcomes of the study. This Recommendation was accepted by the Government in June 2019.²²⁵

The Committee is not aware of any publicly available study of social mix tenures completed by the Victorian Government, nor if it considered this or other studies in its plan to redevelop Melbourne's 44 public housing towers.

FINDING 36: Studies provided to the Committee indicate that social mix developments such as those contained in the Ground Lease Model do not deliver improved outcomes for low-income residents.

**Adopted by the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne
10 November 2025**

²²³ Dr David Kelly, Research Fellow, Housing@RMIT, public hearing, Melbourne, 5 August 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

²²⁴ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program Final Report*, p. 102.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Appendix A

About the Inquiry

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806	Shu'aib Ali
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A.2 Public hearings

6 August 2025

Federation Room, Parliament House, Spring Street East Melbourne, Victoria

Witness	Position and Organisation
Gerry Noonan	
Richard Cameron	
Damien Patterson	Director of Policy, Advocacy and Engagement, Tenants Victoria
Katelyn Butterss	Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Public Tenants Association
Jackson Payne	
Sarah Toohey	Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association Victoria
Stephanie Bullock	Architect, AIA Victorian Chapter President and Sustainable Architecture Committee Chair, Australian Institute of Architects
Gavin Salt	Architect and Engineer, Australian Institute of Architects
Jacinda Sadler	Architect, Jacinda Sadler Architects
Peta McCammon	Secretary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Simon Newport	Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Dannii de Kretser	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Martin McCurry	Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Harriet Shing	Minister for Housing and Building

5 August 2025

Federation Room, Parliament House, Spring Street East Melbourne, Victoria

Witness	Position and Organisation
Simon Robinson	Managing Director and Architect, OFFICE
Steve Mintern	Managing Director and Landscape Architect, OFFICE
Dr Bill Swannie	Member, Human Rights Committee, Law Institute of Victoria
Anne Nielsen	Member, Property Law Committee, Law Institute of Victoria
The Honourable Kevin Bell AO KC	
Dr David Kelly	Research Fellow, Housing@RMIT
Dr Iris Levin	Senior Lecturer, Sustainability and Urban Planning, Housing@RMIT
Dr Akvan Gajanayake	Lecturer, Project Management, Housing@RMIT
Dr Salman Shooshtarian	Senior Lecturer, Housing@RMIT

Witness	Position and Organisation
Associate Professor Rory Hyde	The Retrofit Lab
Professor Brendon McNiven	The Retrofit Lab
Delaram Ansari	Research, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Multicultural Centre For Women's Health
Arundhathi Lekshmi	Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer, Multicultural Centre For Women's Health
Fiona York	Executive Officer, Housing for the Aged Action Group
Kerrie Byrne	Save Public Housing Collective
Clare Hanson	Save Public Housing Collective
Harry Millward	General Secretary, Renters and Housing Union
Jordan van den Lamb	Member, Renters and Housing Union
R-Coo Tran	Founder and Leader, 44 Flats United
Diirshe Mohamed	Core Organiser, 44 Flats United
Alicia Lay	Member Organiser, 44 Flats United
Kylie Peterson	Member Organiser, 44 Flats United

22 July 2025

North Richmond Community Health, 23 Lennox Street, Richmond, Victoria

Witness	Position and Organisation
Cr Stephen Jolly	Yarra City Council
Cr Meca Ho	Yarra City Council
Hamish McLachlan	Chief Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service
Dr Sebastian Sharp	Acting Manager, Policy, Advocacy and Projects, Fitzroy Legal Service
Ms Nicky Chung	Chief Executive Officer, Australian Vietnamese Women's Association
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Ms Thuy Thanh	
Sahra Aden	
Michael Walpole	
David Fidel	
Grace Bell	
Mr Kai Ng	

1 July 2025

Building, 2 Simmons Street, South Yarra, Victoria

Witness	Position and Organisation
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Felicity Symons	Head of Strategic Planning, Port Phillip City Council
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George Hatvani	Head of Systems Change and Advocacy, Launch Housing, Port Phillip and Stonnington Zero
Veena Mishra	Chair, Port Phillip and Stonnington Zero
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Jess Richter	Legal Director, Southside Justice
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John Lowndes	
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Dianne Chaucer	
Katrina Yurha	
Rev Jon Cox	
Teresa Warren	

24 June 2025

Djerring Flemington Hub (Flemington Community Centre), 25 Mount Alexander Road, Flemington, Victoria

Witness	Position and Organisation
Louisa Bassini	Managing Lawyer, Inner Melbourne Community Legal
Michelle Reynolds	Director of Policy and Advocacy, Inner Melbourne Community Legal
Stephanie Price	Principal Lawyer, West Heidelberg Community Legal, Social Housing Legal Program
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Barry Berih	
Hamdi Ali	Secretary, Carlton Housing Estates Residents Services
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Witness	Position and Organisation
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Witness 1	
Witness 2	

Appendix B

Poster advertising information session – multilingual

B

Parliament of Victoria

Information session

Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers

التحقيق في إعادة تطوير أبراج الإسكان العام في ملبورن – برلمان ولاية فيكتوريا جلسة معلوماتية

墨尔本高层公共住房重建项目咨询（维多利亚州议会）信息发布会

Weydiinta dib-u-kobcinta guryeynta dawladda ee Melbourne - fadhiga macluumaadka baarlamaanka Victoria

Cuộc điều tra về việc tái phát triển khu chung cư Melbourne - Phiên họp thông tin của Quốc hội Victoria



Event details

DATE: Wednesday 19 February 2025

TIME: From 4pm to 6pm

WHERE: Djerring Flemington Hub
25 Mt Alexander Road
Flemington

To learn more about the inquiry, visit our website: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publichousingtowers

Appendix C

Two-pager for information session attendees – Arabic

C



Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee

من هي لجنة القضايا القانونية والاجتماعية؟

- لجنة القضايا القانونية والاجتماعية ليست الحكومة.
- إنها لجنة برلمانية تابعة للمجلس التشريعي في برلمان فيكتوريا.
- وتقوم اللجان البرلمانية بالتحقيق في القضايا وتقديم توصيات إلى الحكومة.
- وهي تتألف من أعضاء في البرلمان من مختلف الأحزاب السياسية.

لقد طلب منا التحقيق في إعادة تطوير الأبراج. وهذا يشمل:

- لماذا تعيد الحكومة بناء الأبراج بدلا من تجديدها.
- التأثير على السكان وكيفية استشارة السكان.
- مقدار المساكن الاجتماعية التي سيتم بناؤها.

ما يمكن أن يفعله الاستفسار

- الاستفسار هو منتدى لإسماع صوتك.
- يمكنك القيام بذلك عن طريق إرسال إرسال.
- نستخدم الطلبات للمساعدة في كتابة تقرير مع توصيات للحكومة.

ما لا يمكن أن يفعله التحقيق

- لا يمكننا المساعدة في مشكلات الانتقال أو الصيانة الفردية الخاصة بك.
- ولا يمكننا أن نضمن أن الحكومة ستأخذ توصياتنا.
- قد يستغرق الأمر بعض الوقت لرؤية النتائج.

Parliament of Victoria

Legislative Council Legal
and Social Issues Committee

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parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc-lc
lsc.council@parliament.vic.gov.au

Parliament House
Spring Street, East Melbourne
Victoria 3002 Australia

كيفية تقديم التقديم

- يمكنك تقديم طلب من خلال الانتقال إلى موقعنا على الإنترنت:
<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publichousingtowers>
- أو يمكنك إرسال طلبك بالبريد الإلكتروني إلى: publichousingtowers@parliament.vic.gov.au
- ننشر جميع الطلبات عبر الإنترنت ، جنباً إلى جنب مع اسمك ما لم تطلب منا عدم القيام بذلك.
- يمكن أن يكون التقديم بلغة أخرى غير الإنجليزية.

ماذا سيحدث بعد ذلك؟

- يمكنك تقديم طلب حتى 31 مارس 2025.
- سن عقد بعد ذلك جلسات استماع عامة.
- جلسات الاستماع العامة هي المكان الذي يتحدث فيه الناس مع اللجنة وي طرح عليهم أعضاء اللجنة أسئلة.

مع من سنتحدث في جلسات الاستماع العامة؟

- من المحتمل أن ندعو السكان والمجموعات المجتمعية والمنظمات الخدمية للتحدث في جلسات الاستماع العامة.
- سنتحدث أيضاً إلى الإدارات الحكومية.
- يجب أن تدعوك اللجنة للتحدث في جلسة استماع عامة.
- يمكن لأي شخص مشاهدة جلسات الاستماع العامة عبر الإنترنت أو شخصياً.

ماذا يحدث في نهاية التحقيق؟

- سيتم الانتهاء من التقرير في ديسمبر 2025 وسيضمن توصيات إلى الحكومة.
- سيتم تسليمها إلى البرلمان ونشرها على موقع البرلمان.
- يجب على الحكومة الرد في غضون ستة أشهر فإذا كانت تؤيد التوصيات.

Appendix D

Summary of the 12 documents
provided by the Victorian
Government to the Legislative
Council, 19 June 2024

D

Appendix D: Summary of the 12 documents provided by the Victorian Government to the Legislative Council 19 June 2024

Document	Explanation																									
Document 1: 259 Malvern Road Prahran: existing conditions review and building regulations assessment report – Approval Systems (23 December 2022)	<p>A building assessment report for the high-rise at 259 Malvern Road, Prahran, prepared for Homes Victoria, identified numerous significant compliance and safety issues. Key problems include failing sewer stacks, non-compliant disability access, missing fire-resistant doors and hatches, non-compliant door hardware and windows, a lack of insulation, structural design that no longer meets standards, the use of banned cladding on the canopy, and critical fire safety failures such as hydrants and stairways not being properly isolated.</p> <p>The report concludes that rectifying these issues would require bringing the entire building up to current regulations and recommends that Homes Victoria conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine the feasibility of undertaking the necessary upgrades.</p>																									
Document 2: 20 Elgin Street and 141 Nicholson Street Carlton red brick buildings: existing conditions review and report – Approval Systems (5 April 2022)	<p>A building surveying firm, Approval Systems Pty Ltd, prepared a high-level assessment for Homes Victoria on two red brick apartment buildings in Carlton. The purpose was to identify regulatory non-compliances, assess their impact on redevelopment options, and help guide a redevelopment decision.</p> <p>The site inspection revealed numerous significant issues, including failing sewer pipes, damp and mouldy walls, non-compliant smoke alarms and disability access, incomplete fire safety measures, extensive concrete corrosion, low ceiling heights, and a lack of energy efficiency.</p> <p>The report concludes that the sheer volume of necessary repairs would trigger a regulation requiring a full, costly upgrade of the entire buildings to modern standards. Crucially, it finds that bringing several of these features into compliance would not be feasible or practical, strongly suggesting that redevelopment, rather than renovation, is the most viable path forward.</p>																									
Document 3: Estimates of Value (Commercial) – Project High Rise (Flemington) – EY (15 September 2023)	<p>A valuation report prepared by EY for Homes Victoria estimates the value of the Flemington Precinct as of September 15, 2024. Specifically for 130 Racecourse Road, Flemington, the report concludes that the highest and best use for the properties would be a mix of retail and office purposes. To maximize their value, it recommends subdividing the lots into smaller units to make them more attractive to a wider range of potential tenants and buyers.</p> <p>It provides the following estimates of value, which rely on a number of stipulations and general assumptions:</p> <p>Estimates of Value – Assuming Vacant Possession</p> <table><tr><th>Property</th><th>Building Area (GLAR)</th><th>Adopted 'Low' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)</th><th>Adopted 'Likely' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)</th><th>Adopted 'High' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)</th></tr><tr><td>B01 Ground Floor (Retail)</td><td>3,090</td><td>\$11,000,000</td><td>\$12,500,000</td><td>\$17,000,000</td></tr><tr><td>B01 Level 1 (Office)</td><td>3,090</td><td>\$8,000,000</td><td>\$9,500,000</td><td>\$12,000,000</td></tr><tr><td>B02 Ground Floor (Retail)</td><td>1,909</td><td>\$8,000,000</td><td>\$10,000,000</td><td>\$12,000,000</td></tr><tr><td>B03 Ground Floor (Retail)</td><td>1,213</td><td>\$6,000,000</td><td>\$7,000,000</td><td>\$8,000,000</td></tr></table>	Property	Building Area (GLAR)	Adopted 'Low' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	Adopted 'Likely' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	Adopted 'High' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	B01 Ground Floor (Retail)	3,090	\$11,000,000	\$12,500,000	\$17,000,000	B01 Level 1 (Office)	3,090	\$8,000,000	\$9,500,000	\$12,000,000	B02 Ground Floor (Retail)	1,909	\$8,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$12,000,000	B03 Ground Floor (Retail)	1,213	\$6,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$8,000,000
Property	Building Area (GLAR)	Adopted 'Low' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	Adopted 'Likely' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	Adopted 'High' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)																						
B01 Ground Floor (Retail)	3,090	\$11,000,000	\$12,500,000	\$17,000,000																						
B01 Level 1 (Office)	3,090	\$8,000,000	\$9,500,000	\$12,000,000																						
B02 Ground Floor (Retail)	1,909	\$8,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$12,000,000																						
B03 Ground Floor (Retail)	1,213	\$6,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$8,000,000																						
Document 4: Estimate Valuation as at 1 July 2000 – Project High Rise (Tranche 1 Margin Scheme) – EY (23 July 2023)	<p>Ernst & Young (EY) prepared a desktop valuation report for Homes Victoria, estimating the market value of six specific properties as of July 1, 2000. The purpose of the valuation was for GST Margin Scheme calculations. The properties assessed are located in North Melbourne, Williamstown, Northcote, and Carlton.</p> <p>The report considers that the highest and best use for all sites is residential development. The estimated values provided are contingent on several stipulations and general assumptions outlined in the document:</p>																									

D

Estimates of Value as at 1 July 2000 – Unencumbered Assuming Vacant Possession								
Precinct	Description	Land Area (sqm)	'Low' Estimate Rate (\$/sqm)	'Likely' Estimate Rate (\$/sqm)	'High' Estimate Rate (\$/sqm)	Adopted 'Low' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	Adopted 'Likely' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)	Adopted 'High' Estimate of Value (GST Excl)
Williamstown	63 Hanmer Street, Williamstown	3,808	\$200	\$300	\$400	\$800,000	\$1,100,000	\$1,500,000
Williamstown	235 Nelson Place, Williamstown	6,420	\$200	\$300	\$400	\$1,300,000	\$1,900,000	\$2,600,000
Northcote	1 Holmes Street, Northcote	5,221	\$300	\$400	\$500	\$1,600,000	\$2,100,000	\$2,600,000
Carlton	141 Nicholson Street, Carlton	1,612	\$700	\$850	\$1,000	\$1,100,000	\$1,400,000	\$1,600,000
Carlton	20 Elgin Street, Carlton	1,125	\$700	\$850	\$1,000	\$800,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,100,000
North Melbourne	Precinct - Sulton & Meirose Street	31,900	\$200	\$300	\$400	\$6,400,000	\$9,600,000	\$12,800,000

<p>Document 5: Real Estate, Commercial and Financial Advisory Support Stage 2 – Commercial/Retail Demand Study – EY (19 June 2023)</p>	<p>A draft study by EY for Homes Victoria analyzes the potential for retail and commercial space in the redevelopment of nine public housing estates in inner-Melbourne suburbs.</p> <p>As the second stage of a three-part advisory process, the report's goal is to determine the appropriate amount of commercial and retail space for each site. It does this by assessing local market demand, competition, location, regulations, and the needs of future residents.</p> <p>The analysis is based on case studies, planning permits, agent discussions, and market research. While the document provides specific recommendations on space allocation, EY clarifies that this is a draft meant to inform Homes Victoria's decision-making, not a final directive.</p>
<p>Document 6: Redbrick Towers: 20 Elgin Street, & 131 Nicholson Street, Carlton: Feasibility Study & Option testing – Hayball (January 2022)</p>	<p>A feasibility study by Hayball for Homes Victoria evaluates options for two 1960s-era public housing towers in Carlton, each containing 98 units. Due to failing sewer stacks requiring resident relocation, an opportunity exists to either upgrade or fully redevelop the site. The redevelopment aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain at least the existing 196 public housing units. • Create no new car parking spaces. • Better integrate the site into the neighborhood by reinstating streets, improving permeability, defining new building edges, and optimizing open space and solar access. <p>Three main options were explored:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Option A: Floor Plate Reconfiguration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An internal remodel to upgrade units and address numerous building code and design standard non-compliances (e.g., narrow fire stairs, small apartments, inadequate balconies). • While it could maintain the 98 units per tower, it would result in a significant loss of 64 bedrooms total. • The outcome would still be sub-optimal due to inherent constraints like low floor-to-floor heights. 2. Option B: Remodel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option A plus adding a new exterior "skin" to better blend with the streetscape. • This option was declared non-viable due to the existing tower heights being inadequate for new construction, offering a poor return on investment. 3. Option C: Redevelop (Demolish and Rebuild) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This involves demolishing the towers and constructing new, compliant buildings. • Option C1: Matches the existing number of apartments (196 total). • Option C2: Matches the existing <i>height</i> of the towers, allowing for a maximized yield (more than 196 units) and improved residential amenities. <p>The report suggests that a full redevelopment (Option C) is likely the most favorable path. It would allow for modern, compliant buildings that better integrate with the community and potentially increase housing yield, whereas a renovation (Option A) would be costly, result in fewer bedrooms, and still deliver a substandard outcome. Option B was deemed unfeasible. A full cost plan and further surveys are recommended before a final decision on Option A is made.</p>

<p>Document 7: Evaluation of the Community Connectors Program: Final Report – Urbis (25 July 2023)</p>	<p>A report prepared by Urbis, a consulting agency, for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), evaluating Homes Victoria’s Community Connectors Program (CCP).</p> <p>Homes Victoria announced the CCP to connect residents in high-risk accommodation settings with health and social care services, through teams of health promotion workers and lived experience workers. The programs main findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program far exceeded its targets for connecting with clients and hiring ‘lived experience workers’ (people with personal experience of disadvantage). • It was well-received, improving residents’ access to services, health literacy, and trust in the system. It also provided valuable employment and skills development for the lived experience workers. • Significant barriers for residents included poverty, housing insecurity, mental health, and digital literacy. Hiring lived experience workers was also challenging due to a small candidate pool and past trauma. • As a temporary program, it did not create sustained systemic change or long-term improvements in community services. Its end risked eroding the trust it built. • The report suggests potential economic benefits from avoided healthcare costs and improved economic participation. <p>The report concludes that while short-term, place-based programs using lived experience workers are highly effective for rapid outreach, they are not a substitute for long-term, systemic support. It advises policymakers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in and properly support lived experience roles. 2. Design programs that are flexible and based on deep local understanding. 3. Acknowledge that complex barriers mean some residents will always need supported access to services. 4. Ensure the psychological safety of lived experience workers.
<p>Document 8: Community Connectors Program: Evaluation: Key findings & insights – Urbis</p>	<p>A report prepared by Urbis summarising key findings and insights from their above evaluation of the Community Connectors Program. It outlines the program’s objectives, and summarises the evaluations’ key findings as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program’s success relied on four factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ lived experience workers’ social capital ◆ provider network ◆ place based ◆ flexible approach. • There were numerous challenges, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ residents facing barriers to accessing services ◆ hiring and providing ongoing support for lived experience workers ◆ housing insecurity and poverty making it challenging for residents to engage ◆ limited time for activity to build trust and generate outcomes ◆ short-term programs eroding trust in government and health support services. • The program achieved positive outcomes, including that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Residents were highly satisfied with the program, allowing access to support and services that improved health outcomes for residents, increasing trust in health care providers, and empowering residents to navigate health and social systems themselves. ◆ There were long-lasting benefits for lived experience workers, including improved knowledge and skills, and increased confidence and educational and employment opportunities. • These outcomes were achieved through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ an assertive outreach program ◆ support from providers to eliminate barriers ◆ lived experience workers’ understanding of residents’ needs. • Although there will be lasting benefits for a small subset of residents with less complex needs and lower barriers to engagement, and potentially for resident

	<p>workers, there is no evidence to suggest there will be sustained system level change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">There are material improvements in the health and wellbeing of participants reported, which have economic benefits, namely:<ul style="list-style-type: none">high-value outcomes, including cost savings and individual economic benefitspotential improvement of services, with community services better able to target their service deliveryoverall value for money.																								
<p>Document 9: Proposed Community Service Organisation Funding</p>	<p>A document providing the following table of proposed community service organisation funding:</p> <table><tr><th>Provider Allocations</th><th>No. of High-Rise Sites in Catchment</th><th>Total</th></tr><tr><td>cohealth</td><td>23</td><td>\$910,144.50</td></tr><tr><td>Better Health Network</td><td>10</td><td>\$395,715.00</td></tr><tr><td>NRCH</td><td>5</td><td>\$197,857.50</td></tr><tr><td>MOSS</td><td>2</td><td>\$50,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Salvation Army</td><td>1</td><td>\$50,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Unison</td><td>1</td><td>\$50,000.00</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>42</td><td>\$1,653,717.00</td></tr></table>	Provider Allocations	No. of High-Rise Sites in Catchment	Total	cohealth	23	\$910,144.50	Better Health Network	10	\$395,715.00	NRCH	5	\$197,857.50	MOSS	2	\$50,000.00	Salvation Army	1	\$50,000.00	Unison	1	\$50,000.00		42	\$1,653,717.00
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<p>Document 10: Housing statement: public housing: PAEC brief – Financial and Performance Outcomes – Department of Premier and Cabinet (5 December 2023)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A Department of Premier and Cabinet briefing for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s <i>Inquiry into the 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial and performance outcomes</i>.The briefing contains talking points covering public housing under Victoria’s Housing Statement, including that:<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Housing Statement seeks to build 800,000 new homes over the next ten years and involves the Government accelerating the rollout of social and affordable homes.The Government is retiring and redeveloping all 44 high-rise public housing estates by 2051, and will start out by replacing:<ul style="list-style-type: none">in Flemington and North Melbourne, 503 ‘outdated dwellings’ with 1800 ‘new homes’in Carlton, 196 ‘uninhabitable dwellings’ with 231 ‘homes’.The overall number of social homes will be boosted by 10 per cent, with up to 20,000 additional people housed by 2051.The Commonwealth Government’s Social Housing Accelerator will provide \$496.5 million to Victoria to build 769 social housing homes over five years and support the redevelopment in Carlton.The Victorian Government is investing \$1 billion in the Affordable Housing Investment Partnership program, which provides low interest loans and government guarantees to finance social and affordable housing.The briefing also provides background to the Housing Statement, the Big Housing Build, and regional housing.																								
<p>Document 11: State Government’s Top 5 levers in attracting institutional housing investment – Super Housing Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A document prepared by Super Housing Partnerships, ‘a specialist housing investment manager focused on increasing the housing supply through partnerships with institutional investors’,¹ on how to increase the supply of social and affordable homes without government grants or availability payments.Levers include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">providing fixed government decision-making timeframes for qualifying projects, namely social and affordable housing that meet certain criteriaincreasing site yields for qualifying projects, by allowing for increased floor area ratios and heightexpanding the Treasury Corporation of Victoria’s low-costs program to include affordable housing projectsproviding full land tax relief for qualifying projects for 20 years, in order to incentivise investors.																								
<p>Document 12: Investment in government-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">An agenda for a meeting on investment in government-owned housing towers, co-chaired by Deputy Secretaries from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF).																								


¹ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-12/c2021-458116-super-housing-partnerships.pdf>


owned housing towers: Agenda (20 July 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Attendees included:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Directors from IFM InvestorsCEO of Super Housing PartnershipsCEO of Aware Real EstateGroup Executive from ISPT Super PropertySenior leadership from Homes VictoriaAssistant Deputy Secretary from Social Policy and Intergovernmental Relations in DPCDeputy Secretary of Infrastructure Policy and Assurance from DTFAssistant Deputy Secretary of Planning in the Department of Transport and Planning.Agenda items included:<ul style="list-style-type: none">an overview of social housing revitalisation opportunitiesa workshop on possible delivery models that would enable investment in the revitalisation of social housing towers.
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Appendix E

Renter letter – Flemington and North Melbourne, November 2023





Families,
Fairness
and Housing

DX210081

OFFICIAL

<Title> <Given Name> <Family Name>
<Address 1>
<Address 2>
<SUBURB STATE POSTCODE>

Dear <Title> <Surname>

Thank you to the members of the Flemington and North Melbourne renter communities who were able to attend the recent forums, and to the many hundreds of people who have spoken to us and provided feedback in many ways. It has been very helpful to hear your questions and talk with you over the last few weeks.

Thank you also to renters who have made appointments with our Relocation team. Most of you have now met with our team and have started sharing your needs and preferences. As promised, I am writing to provide you with information about your rights and options through the relocation process.

Respect, care, and support for renters

I want to be clear about our commitment to all renters - our team will always treat you with respect and care. Our intention is to provide you with the information you need to make the best decisions for you and your family.

Better homes for renters

Our goal is to provide our renters with the best homes we can. Our current high-rise apartments are approaching the end of their operational life. We know there are problems with design and the age of the apartments which means maintenance struggles to keep up with everyone's expectations. We want renters to have homes that are comfortable and have private outdoor space and modern bathrooms. We need more homes that cater to families, as well as older people.

Importance of maintaining a strong community

We want to help you maintain the strong community you have built, which is why we are providing housing options that are close by at Abbotsford St and Victoria St.


Tours of new homes at Victoria St and Abbotsford St

For those interested, we will provide opportunities to view these new homes so you can see for yourself the type and quality of the homes that will soon be available.

If you are interested to find out more about these new homes, please talk to the relocation support team.

Need a translated version?

Scan QR Code



or visit
homes.vic.gov.au/high-rise-victoria-renter-updates

50 Lonsdale Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 4057, Melbourne Victoria 3001

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What happens when I meet with the Relocation team?

Your appointment with the Relocation team might take between 30 minutes to one hour. At your appointment:

- You are welcome to bring a friend or support person to the appointment.
- Our team will offer you an interpreter when you book the appointment.
- Our team will ask about your housing needs. This may include:
 - how many people live in your home.
 - the accessibility needs of you and your family.
 - what kinds of health, school or support services you may use.
 - And your local cultural connections including any connection to country First Nations residents may have.
- Our team will spend time to get to know you and go at a pace that suits you.
- Our team will talk to you about relocation timing to minimise any disruption to your life, including consideration of children's schooling needs.
- Ask about any other needs you may have.

Our team will note down your needs in a form that they will sign and ask you to sign.

Your signature confirms we have understood your needs and that we have recorded your information correctly. We have had some questions about this form, and we want to confirm this is **not** a tenancy agreement or a contract and does not change your rights. The form simply allows us to make a housing transfer application on your behalf. This is your application, and you can request it to be changed at any time as your needs or preferences change.

Do I have the right to return to a new apartment on the estate?

Yes - As a renter who needs to relocate, you will have the right to return - if you choose to do so. I encourage you to talk to our team so they can find you housing options that meet your needs.

What will my housing options be?

Our team will spend time to understand your housing needs, such as how many people are in your household, the schools or services you use, and if you wish to stay close to or move to a new location. This information will help our team find you housing options that meet your needs.

Will my rent change?

No – during relocation, your out-of-pocket rent will not change. If you choose to move to community housing, you may receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance. This is generally expected to be paid to the housing provider, but in some instances may lower your out-of-pocket costs.

Will I maintain my current rights and rent?

Yes. You will maintain your current rights to a home and your out-of-pocket rent will not change.

What rights and protections do renters have in community housing?

Community housing renters have the same rights as public housing renters and are protected under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.

What is community housing?

Community Housing providers are not-for-profit organisations that deliver social housing. They are regulated by the government and adhere to strict performance standards set out under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.

50 Lonsdale Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 4057, Melbourne Victoria 3001

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Will the new homes be community housing?

The first site to be redeveloped is Elgin St in Carlton. Planning has started on these towers, and they have been confirmed as public housing.

A decision about whether North Melbourne and Flemington towers will be public, or community housing has not yet been made as we are in the early planning stages. It is important to note the government has committed to 10 per cent more social housing as part of these redevelopments. So, there will be more social housing, not less. We will tell you what will be built at these sites when we know this.

If I relocate to community housing, will I have to pay extra for water?

If you choose to move to Abbotsford St or Victoria St, you will not pay extra for water.

How can I stay with my community?

One of the strongest messages from the forums and other events so far, has been how important community is for many people.

During your individual household discussions with our Relocation team, you should share the people, places and services that are important to you.

First Nation's residents will also have their connection to country considered as part of the relocations process.

The Relocation team will work with you to try and find you a home in the local area if you want one, including the new homes at Abbotsford Street and Victoria Street.

Will moving costs be covered by Homes Victoria?

Yes – moving costs will be covered by Homes Victoria.

Considering your options

We understand you may need some time to consider your options. You may wish to talk to friends or family and talk again with our team.

You are welcome to bring a friend or support person to any conversation, and we will offer you an interpreter before any conversation.

Privacy

As always, we will only ever use or share your information in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 and the Health Records Act 2001

We are here to help

The housing staff that you see every day, and the relocation team that have been meeting with you, are here to provide you with information and support. They will always treat you with respect and care. They have a lot of experience and can help you consider your options.

You can contact your relocation support worker at any time with the contact details that have been provided to you. If you cannot find these contact details, please contact your local housing office to request these.

I encourage you to get in touch if you have any questions.

Thank you again for your feedback, engagement and patience. This is going to take some time and we are committed to working with you to meet your needs and assist you however we can. assist whenever, and wherever we can.

Yours sincerely

50 Lonsdale Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 4057, Melbourne Victoria 3001

OFFICIAL



Simon Newport
Chief Executive Officer
Homes Victoria

17 / 11 / 2023

50 Lonsdale Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000
GPO Box 4057, Melbourne Victoria 3001

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Extracts of proceedings

Extracts of proceedings Legislative Council Standing Order 23.20(5) requires the Committee to include in its report all divisions on a question relating to the adoption of the draft report. All Members have a deliberative vote. In the event of an equality of votes, the Chair also has a casting vote.

The Committee divided on the following questions during consideration of this report. Questions agreed to without division are not recorded in these extracts.

Committee meeting – 7 November 2025

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 1 the following text be added:

The unit shown in the redevelopment site in Victoria Street was much smaller in their footprint compared to the larger unit shown in the previous public housing towers in 33 Alfred St Noth Melbourne and 12 Holland Court, Flemington.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Rachel Payne
Anasina Gray-Barberio	Lee Tarlamis

Question agreed with Chair's casting vote.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 1 the following text be added:

Executive privilege is the right of the Government (executive) not to disclose certain information or documents from public release where it is deemed that such informational should remain confidential. The grounds by which governments may claim executive privilege include the need to protect sensitive information, Cabinet-in-confidence documents or information related to Cabinet deliberations, and the need to avoid jeopardising legal proceedings, diplomatic relationships or the State's financial position.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair's casting vote.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 1 the following text be added:

Nevertheless, the constitutional basis for the determination of claiming executive privilege in Victoria is clear that it is within the power of the executive itself to determine what constitutes executive privilege. Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975* stipulates that the privileges, immunities and powers enjoyed by the Legislative Council (and by extension, any committees formed by the Council) shall be the same as that enjoyed by the House of Commons of Great Britain and Ireland as at the 21st July 1855. Under these provisions, the exercise and application of executive privilege (then termed 'crown privilege') remained a matter to be determined by the executive itself.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 1 the following Finding be deleted:

The Victorian Government refused to provide requested documents to the Legislative Council and the Legal and Social Issues Committee. As such, the Victorian Government is in breach of:

- Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03;
- Legislative Council Standing Order 23.16 (1); and
- Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 1 the following text be deleted:

Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*.

And be replaced by the following text:

However, the Victorian Government is within its rights to do so as per Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 1 the following Finding be deleted:

The Victorian Government's refusal to provide evidence supporting the demolition of Melbourne's 44 public housing towers means it is impossible for the Government to justify that decision.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 1 the following Recommendation be added:

That the Victorian Government amend the Housing Act 1983 to remove the umbrella term "social housing" and separate the definition of "public housing" and "community housing".

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Ryan Batchelor
Renee Heath	Tom McIntosh
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 2 the following Finding be added:

The standardised construction methodology for the high rise towers allows a high degree of comparability regarding common issues faced across the towers.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair's casting vote.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 2 the following Finding be added:

The Government engaged with public housing residents only after announcing plans to demolish all 44 public housing towers, falling short of accepted standards of inclusive and fair community consultation.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Ryan Batchelor
Renee Heath	Tom McIntosh
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 2 the following text be deleted:

This evidence reflects concerns that the land will not be returned to the public after the 40-year lease period runs out.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 2 the following Finding be deleted:

One of the main concerns around the Ground Lease Model is the potential loss of public land.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 2 the following Finding be added:

The Victorian Government has achieved an increase – on average – of 43 per cent in social housing at 13 Homes Victoria sites already developed.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Ryan Batchelor	Joe McCracken
Tom McIntosh	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair's casting vote.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 2 the following Finding be added:

The Victorian Government’s Ground Lease Model is opaque and lacks accountability and transparency in governance. It has the potential to expose the state to significant financial risk.

And that the following Recommendations be added:

That the Victorian Government publish documentation that led to its rationale for selecting the Ground Lease Model over other non-profit models of delivering affordable housing.

That the Victorian Government cease pursuing the Ground Lease Model and consider other options of non-profit models.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following section be added:

Issues with the towers raised by residents

The Victorian Public Tenants Association said in its submission:

Our staff are aware of a number of issues in the existing buildings which appear to be irresolvable while maintaining renters in their current homes. These include safety issues occurring because of building layout, specifically the shared laundries, and serious health and safety issues presented by failing sewer stacks. (VPTA submission p. 3)

The VPTA supports the need for “more homes to be delivered on these sites for the Victorians who need them” and “has not wholesale opposed the High Rise Renewal Program.” However the VPTA has expressed ‘serious reservations’ about the design and practice of the redevelopment program, and want a commitment to a 100 per cent uplift in public housing and no sale of any public land. (VPTA submission p. 3)

A survey of residents undertaken by the VPTA included the following:

“The buildings are so badly built, solid concrete, they are freezing in winter and take days to cool off when its hot. I have a new air con but haven’t tried it yet. My heating is rubbish it doesn’t work well.”

“Like the building, near hospital and trains, neighbours are mostly great. Complicated by some neighbours keep getting visitors late at night that are very noisy and keep leaving large items in the hallway in the way, which is dangerous.”

“It [the Renewal Program] will take a long time, hope they don’t do this one everyone likes the building. We can’t get air-con’s as the electricity needs upgrading. This building did great in the earthquake I was right up the top and it was scary but not even any cracks.”

“I’ve been living here a while [sic] now and it is way different and there is a lot of people fearful and scared in the building. I already had a transfer application as I am over living in this building, I want somewhere safer for my family”

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Micheal Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair’s casting vote.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

Box 3.1 contains extracts from the transcript that reveal the evasive language the Minister used on several occasions

And be replaced by the following text:

Box 3.1 contains extracts from the transcript that cover instances where the Committee requested documents over which Government had claimed executive privilege:

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 Box 3.1 be deleted.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

Harriet SHING: Again, materials have been released, as you have seen. They have been provided publicly, and again, we rely upon those materials. I also just want to be really clear: the claim of privilege in relation to matters the subject of cabinet confidence, cabinet discussions and cabinet deliberations has been upheld by the court. I do not think that anyone is suggesting that the towers are not requiring of development. It is about what that looks like and about how that looks, and this is where as a government we have taken a decision –

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. You have asserted –

Harriet SHING: by reference to a range of considerations, that the towers require development.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Micheal Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived with Chair's casting vote.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

Noting that the Government is within its rights to determine what constitutes executive privilege in relation to this matter,

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

Despite calls from many witnesses for the release of further documents, it was not evident during the course of the hearings that some witnesses had actually read any or all of the documents that were produced. Many were unable to recall reading reports – for example – on the conditions of the towers at Elgin St and Simmons St.

Ryan BATCHELOR: [...]: you said that you were not aware of any evidence about the condition of the sewer stacks in the Elgin Street towers. Have you read the report by Approval Systems that was tabled in the Legislative Council in June last year that went through a condition report on the towers and said (1) that there was evidence that the sewer stacks were failing and were subject to significant leaks throughout and (2) that there was evidence of dampness in walls throughout the building and the formation of efflorescence and mould within sole occupancy units. The sewer stacks appear to be the source of the internal dampness. Is that wrong?

Louisa BASSINI: I mean, I have not read that, but I also have not read any assessments by professionals as –

[transcript, 24 Jun, p. 14]

Michael GALEA: [...] I just want to check on something that you said in your opening remarks that there have been no reports released about the condition of the towers. Are you familiar with the reports by Approval Systems that were tabled in the Legislative Council?

Jackson PAYNE: No, I am not.

[transcript, 6 August, p. 26]

Ryan BATCHELOR: [...] I just wanted to ask, do you believe the reports that have been made publicly available by building surveyors and engineers about the existing condition of some of the buildings? For example, the report that was tabled in June last year from April 2022 from Approval Systems on the Elgin Street towers said that there was evidence that the sewer stacks and risers were failing and subject to significant leaks, dampness in the walls and the formation of mould – the sewer stacks appear to be the source of

that internal dampness – that there was evidence of extensive corrosion of concrete reinforcement, that there were noncompliant ceiling heights in common corridors, that reduced ceiling height is a health and an amenity concern and a consideration for smoke layer in the event of a fire. Do you believe that? Have you read it? Do you believe it?

Jordan van den LAMB: I think it is uncontroversial that RAHU believes in evidence of the government’s managed decline of public housing.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Have you read it?

Harry MILLWARD: I have not got it in front of me, so I am not sure.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You have not read these reports in preparing your submission, your position and the evidence coming before us today.

Jordan van den LAMB: I have seen those reports.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I asked Harry if he had read them.

Harry MILLWARD: I am part of a group of people. I am not the only person required to read reports. That is not my role.

[transcript, 5 Aug 2025, p. 77)

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with the Chair’s casting vote.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be deleted:

The Victorian Government, including Departments and the Minister, have made it difficult for the Committee to access documents the Government relied on to make the decision to demolish the public housing towers.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Recommendation be deleted:

That the Victorian Government ensure all documents that have a claim of Executive Privilege be submitted to an independent arbiter to determine whether a legitimate claim of Executive Privilege exists in accordance with Legislative Council Standing Order 10.03.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

Some witnesses who gave evidence opposing the redevelopments had not read the documents tabled in the Parliament about the condition of the existing towers.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with the Chair's casting vote.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Recommendation be added:

All work associated with the redevelopment program be halted until the Victorian Government can provide condition reports for each building, feasibility reports into alternatives to demolition. The cost benefit analysis for each site which demonstrates evidence for demolition was the best and only feasible option.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Rachel Payne
Anasina Gray-Barberio	Lee Tarlamis

Question agreed with the Chair's casting vote.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

Other witnesses – beyond the government – recognised the need for redevelopment. For example, Mayor of the City of Yarra told the committee that “So there are times when an estate or any building – I mean, obviously sometimes a building has to be demolished – has to come down.” [22 July, p. 5]

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 5
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio
	Rachel Payne

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

The committee heard evidence from witnesses about problems with sewerage in South Yarra

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: [...] Do people in your community think that demolition is the only option?

Ana RUFATT-RUIZ: Well, it depends. Let us say at this building, 2 Simmons Street, we have a lot of problems with the sewerage and all these things. Just to give you an idea. They come to me. They cannot keep investing money repairing and fixing them when there is no point. One day they are going to have to come down.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Have you got evidence that they are structurally unsound?

Ana RUFATT-RUIZ: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Evidence that you can provide to the committee?

Ana RUFATT-RUIZ: If you look just at the back in that square little tower on the ceiling, yes, it is all the things from the water from the pipes, okay, and that is something coming from sewerage from other places. DFFH have tried to fix that hundreds of times, and sometimes the water keeps on running. So I do understand that they cannot keep on fixing that when it is unfeasible. They need to go.

(transcript 1 July, pp. 60–61)

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair's casting vote.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

Advocacy organisations outlined problems with mould in the South Yarra high rise towers. Southside Justice gave evidence of a case where they had been 'advocating quite strongly for a family to be moved out of 259 [Malvern Rd] because of significant mould.' [Lloyd Murphy, 1 July, p. 32).

A resident from Park Towers gave evidence that "they did an upgrade and they took out all the copper piping and waste pipes except for the downpipes and then fused PVC to one copper downpipe through the building. That failed and turned into black mould." (John Lowndes, 1 July, p. 50).

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Rachel Payne	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair's casting vote.

Ms Marie-Hermans moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

Extensive.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Rachel Payne
Anasina Gray-Barberio	Lee Tarlamis

Question agreed with Chair's casting vote.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

There are significant issues with disability access in the 44 towers, many of which cannot be resolved through retrofitting or refurbishment.

Ms Marie-Hermans moved, that the text ‘significant’ be deleted.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 4
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Rachel Payne
Anasina Gray-Barberio	Lee Tarlamis

Question agreed with Chair’s casting vote.

The substantive question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

95% of elevators across all towers cannot physically fit a stretcher, so if a resident needs an ambulance, they cannot be taken out on a stretcher.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 2
Joe McCracken	Ann-Marie Hermans
Michael Galea	Anasina Gray-Barberio
Ryan Batchelor	
Renee Heath	
Lee Tarlamis	

Question agreed to.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

Electrical infrastructure in the towers is clearly insufficient to meet current resident needs.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

There are a number of structural safety issues across Melbourne's 44 public housing towers that are prohibitively expensive to address.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

However, the severity and extent cannot be verified without the Victorian Government publishing all relevant documents.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

‘It is probably that’; and

‘however without documentation this cannot be verified.’

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

Retaining the existing towers would wholly or significantly inhibit any move to increase social housing on the existing sites.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

The Australian Institute of Architect’s submission explained that as the towers vary in age and typology ‘and likely different suitability for retrofit/repairs, the Institute strongly recommends that the Victorian Government adopt a case-by-case review of the towers’.

Stephanie Bullock, Victorian Chapter President for the Australian Institute of Architects, stated:

it would be highly unlikely that every single one of those buildings is actually identical to the others. So we would suggest that you do need to look at each of them, if only to prove the case ... There would have been differences depending on exactly when they were constructed and by whom, so you cannot actually take one and extrapolate all of that out.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

Firstly, as noted in Chapter 1 of this Report, the Victorian Government is in breach of the Legislative Council Standing Orders, which require documents that the Government wishes to claim Executive Privilege over to be provided to an independent arbiter to adjudicate on the claim. The Government's continued flaunting of Standing Orders—and Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*—is troubling.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

The Government's continued flaunting of Standing Orders—and Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*—is troubling.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

The Committee accepts that the Government is within its rights to assert and determine executive privilege in accordance with Section 19 of the *Constitution Act 1975*.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

To deny residents information that they have a right to know has caused—and continues to cause—unnecessary distress.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be deleted:

The impact of the Victorian Government's refusal to disclose documents that justify the demolition and redevelopment of the 44 towers can be summarised into the following themes:

- The Victorian Government is in breach of Legislative Council Standing Orders and the *Constitution Act 1975*.
- The Victorian Government is worsening distress among residents.
- The Victorian Government is denying experts the opportunity to: a) test the technical evidence behind the redevelopment decision; and b) test their own proposed alternatives.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

and the *Constitution Act 1975*.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be deleted:

This Inquiry would have been an independent review of the decision to redevelop all 44 of Melbourne's public housing towers as required by the Legislative Council had the Victorian Government acted reasonably to provide the technical documents as requested and required.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

The Committee also received evidence from Gerry Noonan, an engineer who completed work for the Victorian housing commission in the early 1960s on soil foundation investigations for the public housing towers. The Committee heard that Mr Noonan had inspected one of the Atherton Gardens flats in Fitzroy, telling the Committee:

it was absolutely in perfect condition. Then I walked down the stairwell, and because you have got the bare walls of the concrete walls and all that, you can see if there is any cracking or faulting; there was nothing at all.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

Mr Noonan's credibility was questioned by some members of the Committee:

Gerry NOONAN: But no-one had air conditioning. I have not got air conditioning in my house. I have got hydronic heating. **In Melbourne you get 10 hot days a year, for God's sake. You do not need air conditioning.**

[NB - There was a 3-day heatwave in Melbourne in 2025 where temperatures reached 40 degrees]

Michael GALEA: I would say, based on the evidence we have heard from the tenants, I think many of them do need air conditioning.

Gerry NOONAN: Well, you do because you are a softie, but I was born in the Mallee, mate. Air conditioning was sleeping on the verandah.

The CHAIR: [Michael Galea] asked about what provisions were made for disability access in the building.

Gerry NOONAN: I have no idea, because that word did not exist in our vocabulary in 1960 either. Seriously. It is true.

Michael GALEA: All these things are not suitable for the modern age though. You are acknowledging that these things were not put in place.

Gerry NOONAN: Correct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I might go to my next question, if that is all right. The committee has heard a bit about concrete cancer through the course of the inquiry –

Gerry NOONAN: Well, I did not see any concrete cancer. I looked only in the [...] one building, though.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be deleted:

The Committee believes that any ambiguity surrounding the viability of alternatives would be cleared by the Victorian Government releasing its evidence.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Recommendation be added:

That the Victorian Government publish documents showing evidence supporting the feasibility of the redevelopment project and demonstrate that alternative options such as retrofitting and refurbishment were reasonably examined.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	

Question agreed to.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 3 the following Finding be added:

The Victorian Government has engaged in the process of managed decline of its public housing properties failing to conduct repairs and maintenance in a timely and adequate way. This failure has become more pronounced since the announcement of the demolition in September 2023.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	

Question agreed to.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 3 the following text be added:

The Court also found that:

A further and equally important reason for the Decision is that the Redevelopment Program will substantially increase the amount of housing on the sites of the Towers. This purpose realistically can only be achieved by demolishing the Towers and redeveloping the sites. I am not satisfied that anything that Mr Berih or other Group Members might have said could have changed that reality. [Berih v Homes Victoria (no. 4) at 155]

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following section be added:

The public housing penalty under Commonwealth law

One of the big cost disadvantages faced by public housing compared with community housing is treatment under Commonwealth law.

This comes in two main forms: Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA).

Public housing providers are an input-taxed supply for GST purposes, which means they do not receive an input credit for any GST paid on construction and maintenance costs.

As Homes Vic CEO Simon Newport explained to this committee in 2023: “We are treated – Homes Victoria – and in most of the jurisdictions around Australia they are treated the same as a mum-and-dad property investor. We are what is called ‘input taxed’. When we pay the plumber \$110, we do not get the \$10 back from the federal government. That in itself is probably worth somewhere in the order of \$50 million to \$60 million a year to Homes Victoria. (10 October 2023, transcript of evidence, p. 80)

Mr Newport described this “a 10 per cent penalty by the federal government, because we are naturally 10 per cent more expensive than someone who delivers it outside of government, because I am not able to claim the input tax credit on the construction cost of those towers. So in some instances that is in itself a factor.” (10 Oct 2023, p. 82)

Therefore the cost of construction of public housing is 10 per cent more expensive for the build than community housing.

In their evidence, the Community Housing Industry Association noted that their GST exempt status as charities meant they can reduce delivery costs by not paying GST. (Sarah Toohey, 6 Aug, p. 34)

In addition, community housing tenants are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance, public housing tenants are not.

Mr Newport estimated in 2023 that the value of both the GST input tax, and the lack of Commonwealth rent assistance, are worth in the order of \$150 million a year to Homes Victoria. (10 Oct 2023, p. 80).

And that the following Finding be added:

Public housing construction and maintenance costs are 10% higher than comparable community housing costs due to different treatment under the Commonwealth Government’s GST laws.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 2
Joe McCracken	Ann-Marie Hermans
Michael Galea	Anasina Gray-Barberio
Ryan Batchelor	
Renee Heath	
Lee Tarlamis	

Question agreed to.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Findings be added:

That the Victorian Government has relied on the umbrella term “social housing” to transfer public housing tenants into a privatised model of housing.

That Homes Victoria failed to ensure public housing residents were meaningfully informed about the implications of the distinctions between community housing and public housing.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	

Question agreed to.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Recommendation be removed:

That the Victorian Government cease using the term ‘social housing’ when it is aware an estate will be community housing only.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Recommendation be added:

That the Victorian Government amend the Housing Act 1983 to remove the umbrella term “social housing” and provide clear and separate definitions of “public housing” and “community housing”.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	

Question agreed to.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Recommendation be added:

That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for public housing residents to be treated the same as community housing residents for the purposes of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 4 the following text be deleted:

Concerns around

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Finding be added:

There is no difference in renters rights between public housing and community housing.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Finding be added:

Based on the evidence, redevelopment, relocation, and right of return is the outcome which will minimise ongoing disruption to resident amenity while delivering a significant increase in housing supply across the towers sites.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Finding be added:

That the Victorian Government and Homes Victoria relocation process engaged in significant coercive and misleading practices to relocate residents within an arbitrary deadline, causing deep harm to social, emotional and physical wellbeing of the residents.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 4	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Lee Tarlamis
Anasina Gray-Barberio	

Question agreed to.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following text be added:

Some witnesses noted, however, that third-party individuals and groups appeared to be spreading misinformation and causing confusion at the towers. Ian Symmons and Sally Hoffman of Better Health Network gave the following evidence:

Ian SYMMONS: We are aware of examples where there have been leaflet drops under people's doors that have had false information in them. So when that happens, (a) we try to address it but also then provide 'Here is the right information' and work closely with Homes Victoria around making sure that this is the accurate information as much as there is information available.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Sorry, just to clarify: you are not talking about Homes Vic leaflets with false information.

Sally HOFFMANN: No.

Ian SYMMONS: No.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You are talking about a third party –

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: someone – putting false information under the doors of residents.

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes.

Ian SYMMONS: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Spreading misinformation inside the towers?

Ian SYMMONS: Yes.

Sally HOFFMANN: Yes. And we have heard of people sort of loitering and waiting until the doors are opened to follow people into the building –

Ryan BATCHELOR: To follow people into the building in order to spread false information.

Sally HOFFMANN: which contributes to the sense of the fear of safety and security as part of that as well.

Ian SYMMONS: Yes. And so when we have become aware of that, we have challenged that, and we have then actually made sure residents have the correct information.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negatived.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following text be added:

This was exacerbated by rumour being weaponised and politicised, as Minister Shing articulated at the public hearings:

Harriet SHING: One of the things that has really been evident in the course of community engagement since the announcements were made – since we door-knocked every single resident of the towers, since we moved out with well over 100 interpreters, since we began holding community forums and sessions and writing to people and engaging with people – is that there has been a preparedness from certain actors to commodify and to weaponise and to politicise uncertainty. It has, to my mind, been an absolute disgrace that people, for the sake of cheap political narrative, have been all too prepared to spread mis- and disinformation that has caused residents to come to conclusions that they will be homeless within weeks

following an announcement of the redevelopment of the place that they have called home. It is an absolute disgrace. That notwithstanding careful engagement –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Are you looking straight at me as you are saying that, Minister?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Got a guilty conscience, do you?

(transcript, 6 Aug, p. 95)

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Batchelor moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Finding be added:

Misinformation is being spread by third parties within the towers, designed to cause fear, confusion and distress for residents.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 4
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Renee Heath
Lee Tarlamis	Ann-Marie Hermans
	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated.

Mr Galea moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Finding be deleted:

Some residents of the Tranche 1 and 2 sites are confused about their right of return to their estates following redevelopment. This includes whether they will be able to return to public housing.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 3
Michael Galea	Joe McCracken
Ryan Batchelor	Ann-Marie Hermans
Lee Tarlamis	Anasina Gray-Barberio

Question negated with Chair's casting vote.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that in Chapter 4 the following Finding be deleted:

Homes Victoria is improving its consultation and engagement with public housing tower residents and learning from mistakes it made in the early stages of the redevelopment program.

And be replaced with the following Finding:

Homes Victoria has significant work to do to engage safely and respectfully with public housing residents and recognise the power imbalances that exist during engagement.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 3	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Ann-Marie Hermans	Ryan Batchelor
Anasina Gray-Barberio	Lee Tarlamis

Question agreed with the Chair's casting vote.

Committee meeting – 10 November 2025

Ms Payne moved, that Chapter 1 (as amended) be adopted and stand part of the report.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Tom McIntosh
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Ms Hermans moved, that Chapter 2 (as amended) be adopted and stand part of the report.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Tom McIntosh
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that Chapter 3 (as amended) be adopted and stand part of the report.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Tom McIntosh
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Ms Heath moved, that Chapter 4 (as amended) be adopted and stand part of the report.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Tom McIntosh
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Ms Hermans moved, that Appendices A, B, C, D and E be adopted and stand part of the report.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Tom McIntosh
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Ms Gray-Barberio moved, that the Draft Report (Chapters 1 to 4, including Findings and Recommendations, together with Appendices A, B, C, D and E), be adopted as the Report of the Committee, and that it be Tabled on 2 December 2025.

The question was put. **The Committee divided.**

Ayes 5	Noes 3
Joe McCracken	Michael Galea
Renee Heath	Ryan Batchelor
Ann-Marie Hermans	Tom McIntosh
Anasina Gray-Barberio	
Rachel Payne	

Question agreed to.

Minority report

Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers

Minority report

Summary

This inquiry was an important opportunity for the committee to genuinely engage with the evidence presented and come to views on the future of the 44 public housing towers across Melbourne's inner city.

Instead, the Liberal-Greens majority on the committee rejected the evidence presented and failed the collective responsibility of this Committee to express a considered view on the condition of the ageing towers, their suitability for the needs of residents, and the opportunity to use these sites to build more modern housing for those who need it most.

A plan to replace the ageing towers is needed

The Committee received considerable evidence about the living conditions and ongoing deterioration in the ageing public housing towers.

Built more than 60 years ago with an expected lifespan of 50 years, it is clear that the towers are reaching the end of their expected life.

The towers at Elgin Street in Carlton had to be evacuated in 2022 because sewer stacks failed and flooded apartments with sewage.

Other towers also have ongoing issues with the sewer systems, and there is evidence of mould in walls caused by leaking sewer pipes.

The unique concrete panel construction methodology used consistently across most of the towers makes these towers unique compared to other residential and office buildings. It also makes them uniquely challenging to renovate or retrofit because of the structural nature of the internal concrete walls.

Ceiling heights are too low to allow modifications to meet certain standards, and this inherent design flaw cannot be rectified.

Concrete panels are showing signs of spalling and deterioration caused by concrete cancer, which cannot be reversed.

The concrete used in the panels across the towers has a compressive strength that is half of current standards – 20 megapascals versus 40 megapascals.

Ninety-five per cent of the lifts cannot fit a stretcher, meaning residents in need of medical attention face mobility challenges when calling an ambulance.

The units do not meet disability standards, and are particularly challenging for some older residents, particularly the bathrooms which have step-through showers.

The units are hot in summer and cold in winter, and it is difficult to retrofit better heating and cooling systems given the concrete panel construction.

Fire safety is non-compliant with current standards.

The electrical systems were built for 1960s power needs and are inadequate for current power demands. This is especially problematic during peak energy usage hours.

Maintenance costs are increasing significantly and are expected to continue to rise. These rising costs are just to keep the homes in their current condition, not make any improvements to living conditions or accessibility for residents, nor any increase in the number of homes.

The evidence collected by this inquiry is irrefutable: a plan is needed to replace the ageing public housing towers over the next 25 years.

The documents requests

The Liberal-Greens majority on the Committee' attempted to excuse their failure by arguing that some of the documents requested by the Parliament were not provided by the Government because they were Cabinet-in-Confidence. In responding to the request from the Legislative Council, and subsequently, this Committee, the Attorney-General claimed executive privilege over some of the documents requested, whilst others were released.

Executive privilege is the right of the Government (executive) not to disclose certain information or documents from public release. Section 19 of the Victorian Constitution stipulates that the privileges and powers enjoyed by Parliament, including its chambers and committees, are the same as at applied in the House of Commons in Great Britain and Ireland as at 21 July 1855. These provisions in turn affirm that the determination of where executive privilege applies (then termed crown privilege) were in the domain of the executive itself.

We therefore note our concern at the majority view of the Committee, as demonstrated in the second through to fifth votes in the extract of proceedings, which fundamentally misunderstands the Constitutional basis of executive privilege.

In a class action brought by residents against Homes Victoria, the Supreme Court of Victoria upheld the confidentiality of these Cabinet documents.

Evidence denied

The Liberal-Greens majority report is built on denial of the evidence the Committee received.

The Liberal-Greens majority refused to include evidence in the report about:

- Failing sewer systems
- Mould in walls caused by leaking sewerage
- Concrete cancer

Also silenced by the Liberal-Green majority were the voices of public housing tenants. As the Extract of Proceedings attached to the report shows, these Members voted against evidence from the Victorian Public Tenants Association being included in the final report.

The Victorian Public Tenants Association said in its submission:

Our staff are aware of a number of issues in the existing buildings which appear to be irresolvable while maintaining renters in their current homes. These include safety issues occurring because of building layout, specifically the shared laundries, and serious health and safety issues presented by failing sewer stacks. (VPTA submission p.3)

The VPTA supports the need for “more homes to be delivered on these sites for the Victorians who need them” and “has not wholesale opposed the High Rise Renewal Program.” However the VPTA has expressed ‘serious reservations’ about the design and practice of the redevelopment program, and want a commitment to a 100 per cent uplift in public housing and no sale of any public land. (VPTA submission p.3)

At a public hearing, one resident showed the committee sewage leaking through the ceiling of the room at the South Yarra estate where the public hearings were being held. We turned our heads and saw the issue with our own eyes. The Extract of Proceedings also shows that the Liberal-Green majority refusing to include that evidence in the report.

Also of concern during the public hearings were the witnesses who had not read the documents publicly released by the Government, including condition reports on the towers in Carlton and South Yarra. For example, a solicitor from Inner Melbourne Community Legal admitted to the committee they had not read the condition reports by Approval Systems on the Elgin Street towers. Again, the inclusion of this evidence was rejected by the Liberal-Greens majority.

The announcement and consultation process

The announcement of the redevelopment plan in September 2023 was significant news for Melbourne, and was unexpected for many in the community, especially residents.

The committee heard considerable evidence of the concern felt by residents about their future, which is completely understandable. These towers, despite their ageing condition, are people’s homes.

Homes Victoria have undertaken genuine efforts to engage with residents about the redevelopment process and what it means for them. This includes going door-to-door and larger engagement sessions that commenced the day of the announcement and have continued over the subsequent two years. More needs to be done.

For many residents, relocation is years if not decades away.

Two tranches of redevelopments have been announced for seven of the 44 towers. The remaining towers do not yet have clear timelines, and this is creating uncertainty for some residents, and an opportunity for bad faith actors to prey on their vulnerabilities.

The committee heard evidence from the Better Health Network that they had witnessed outside third parties spreading false information about the redevelopment plans in some of the towers. The Liberal-Green majority on the committee refused to include that evidence in the report. Notwithstanding, the evidence was real and alarming.

It is clear that residents across the estates would benefit from greater communication and clarity from Homes Victoria about future timelines, to provide increased peace of mind and to combat wilful misinformation that is being spread across the estates.

Resident relocation

The task of relocating residents to new accommodation while the redevelopment of each site takes place is significant. Homes Victoria have dedicated teams engaging with residents one on one to find suitable relocation options. Relocating residents have a right of return to the redeveloped estates.

In their communication with residents, Homes Victoria needs to be very clear about their rights and options and work closely with them to find suitable new homes. This takes time and the scale of the task ahead for the remaining towers means there is a lot to learn and improve upon over the life of the redevelopment program.

The Homes Victoria relocation program would benefit from continuous improvement in these practices as this process rolls out across the remaining sites.

What should happen with the towers - retrofit, refurbish, or redevelop?

The evidence from Homes Victoria was very clear that the best option for these towers given their condition was to demolish and rebuild.

This was also the conclusion of the Supreme Court in a class action brought against Homes Victoria by certain residents seeking to halt the redevelopment.

Many witnesses argued that refurbishment or retrofit options could deliver improvements at lower cost. However, under questioning it was clear that even the most referenced option for retrofit – the OFFICE report – had both understated its costs and did not consider several key issues with the condition of the towers. Even then, their retrofit proposals still do not meet

contemporary design standards and fail to explain how they would manage many of the structural issues associated with the concrete construction methodology unique to the towers.

A feasibility study and option testing on the red brick buildings at 20 Elgin Street and 141 Nicholson Street, Carlton – commissioned by Homes Victoria and tabled in the Parliament in 2024 – indicated that a whole site retrospective upgrade is needed to achieve compliance with current regulations. It concluded that this would not be feasible or practicable for some building features.

Even a critic of the Government - the Mayor of the City of Yarra - admitted that there is a case to be made for redevelopment. He told the inquiry on 22 July 2025 in relation to other public housing sites, “so there are times when an estate or any building – I mean, obviously sometimes a building has to be demolished – has to come down.”

Retrofit or renovate options also miss the opportunity that redevelopment brings to increase the number of social homes on the estates, continuing to increase the total amount of social housing in this state. A goal this committee has recognised as being critical in other reports it has released.

Development options should prioritise the retention of the land at the estates in public hands. The application of the Ground Lease Model demonstrates clearly that redevelopment of these estates, and other sites around Melbourne, can be achieved with both an increase in social housing and a retention of land in public hands.

All options – rebuild, retrofit or refurbishment – require resident relocations. Although some suggested that residents could be allowed to remain in the towers while there was extensive drilling through the concrete walls during a wholesale building retrofit and renovation, this is palpably nonsense and in no way respects the rights of residents to quiet enjoyment of their home.

The public housing penalty

The inquiry was able to shed light on a little-known fact about the disadvantages faced by public housing under Commonwealth law.

Public housing is treated as an input taxed supply under the Goods and Services Tax, which means Homes Victoria does not receive an input credit for any GST paid on construction or maintenance of public housing in Victoria.

Community housing providers are treated differently, and do receive an input credit for the GST paid, meaning their construction and maintenance costs are effectively 10% cheaper.

This 10% difference in costs for public housing compared with community housing represents a significant penalty to be paid by the State, and helps explain why community housing providers can be more cost effective than public housing built directly by Homes Victoria.

This public housing penalty under Commonwealth GST laws needs to urgently change.

The other important change that needs to be made is for Commonwealth Rent Assistance to be extended to public housing tenants.

We were perplexed by the Greens refusal to support the inclusion of this factual analysis in the report on the challenges faced by public housing under Commonwealth law.

The Liberal-Greens majority's lack of support for advocacy to the Commonwealth to extend Commonwealth Rent Assistance to public housing tenants is astonishing.

The majority's view on community housing

The Liberal-Greens majority report shows their lack of support for the community housing sector. This is concerning because the community housing sector plays an incredibly important role in providing housing to those who need it most. As the CEO of the Community Housing Industry Association told the committee "One hundred per cent of long-term community housing vacancies are allocated to people off the Victorian housing register,". Different providers can assist different cohorts in a way that meets their unique needs, in a way that Homes Victoria can struggle to achieve given its scale.

There is a role for both public housing and community housing in the redevelopment program, as the announced plans for the first five tower redevelopments show: two will be public housing, three will be community housing.

The demonisation of the community housing sector by the Liberal-Greens majority in this report is unhelpful to the goal of providing a home for those who need them most.

Conclusion

This inquiry was an important opportunity to consider the condition of the 44 public housing towers, listen to the evidence from residents, and assess what is the best approach for the future.

Unfortunately, the Liberal-Greens majority report has failed to undertake a serious analysis of the evidence received and fails to properly consider the best approach for the future.

The ageing public housing towers need a plan to address their deteriorating condition.

Victoria needs more social housing to be built, and these sites are well located, well serviced by infrastructure and support services, and can accommodate more social housing.

The only viable option is for these tower sites to be redeveloped and continue to be used to provide social housing for generations to come.



Ryan Batchelor MP



Michael Galea MP



Lee Tarlamis MP