Scrutiny of Acts & Regulation Committee
Parliament of Victoria

Victorian Charter of Rights & Responsibilities: Review

Submission by: Housing Resource and Support Services

2 June 2011
Housing Resource & Support Service (HR&SS) is a not-for-profit disability support service that operates from a model of consumer empowerment and believes in housing and support options that are equally accessible for everyone in the community. As such, HR&SS adheres to and strongly supports the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, the Victorian Disability Act and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Australia has enormous unmet need for modified buildings and homes. As a disability support agency and housing specialist, HR&SS witnesses increasing demand for modified housing on a daily basis due to insufficient supply of modified housing. This has a significant impact on the 25 per cent of Victoria’s population who live with a disability, as well as other Victorians who need modified housing at different times of their lives, for example aging people, people with temporary injuries and families with babies and small families.

To articulate the importance of consumer rights in the everyday work of our organisation, HR&SS undertook a human rights project to develop, in consultation with our consumers, a Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. This document and its development process empowered consumers to participate in the wider community in a meaningful and effective manner while advancing human rights awareness in Australia.

HR&SS strongly recommends that the Victorian Government continues to support a Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. As a rights document, the Charter is an important advocacy tool in supporting and extending tenant rights as well as promoting housing access and equity issues. HR&SS advocates that tenant rights be enshrined at a regulatory level. Ratifying human rights at a state government level is crucial in promoting the obligation of all housing organisations to provide accessible properties and services for everyone in the community, including people with disabilities.

HR&SS sees evidence that the Victorian Charter of Human Rights makes a genuine difference for individuals and communities. As a result of the Victorian Charter of Consumer Rights, HR&SS has found a positive cultural change take place within government. An example? The further entrenchment of human rights considerations in government practices and procedures will create more concrete and tangible improvements in outcomes for individuals and communities. This will create a more just, equitable and inclusive Victorian community.

A consistent approach and application of the Charter would enable public authorities to deliver better and greater outcomes for all Victorians. Since the
development of the Charter, public authorities, organisations and businesses are training, reporting on the Charter, using it to assist decision making processes, enhancing accountability and raising service standards. These actions have resulted in the creation of fairer, more inclusive and high quality of services for all Victorians. Examples?

HR&SS has similarly observed greater clarification in the use of the Charter in the courts and VCAT. The Charter has provided valuable guidance on the interpretation of the meaning and scope of human rights, which clarifies government responsibilities and strengthens the law and policy-making process. It has also created awareness of the need to increase accessible housing stock and respond to growing building demand caused by general population growth, an increase in the aging population and the demand for universal standards by people with disabilities. Examples maybe?

The development and implementation of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities has been the single most exciting human rights development in recent years in Victoria. The Charter plays a central role in promoting human rights considerations in Victorian laws and government policies. It is also a key advocacy tool for both individuals and organisations in the broader community. Creating a fair, equitable, accessible and inclusive Victoria is important to Victorians and in the interests of the entire community. HR&SS strongly supports the Victorian Government’s ongoing support of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.