

Improved security for private renters

What are we asking for?

Recognition that more and more Tasmanians are renting their home and for longer periods of time. Shelter Tas calls for improved housing security provisions in the Residential Tenancy Act, 1997 and to make sure it provides for the needs of our young, elderly and disabled community members who are renting. Better regulation of online short-term accommodation (such as Airbnb and Stayz) is also needed.



Renting a home is no longer a short-term option. Housing security is an issue for thousands of Tasmanians who rely on the private rental market to provide their home. Most have leases of one year or less, or have no fixed term at all.ⁱ Action is needed to encourage the use of long term leases to improve security for tenants and protections against poor quality housing and discriminatory leasing practices. We also need to support older people to age in their rental homes. Shelter Tas calls for a multi-stakeholder approach to work out how we can do this.

The rapid growth of online short-term accommodation is diverting entire houses away from the rental market. **We need to strengthen Tasmania's planning provisions to better protect our long-term housing supply.**ⁱⁱ We can learn how to do this from other cities that are successfully managing the impact of online accommodation platforms on the availability of housing for their residents.ⁱⁱⁱ



Why is this important?

Being able to access secure and affordable housing directly affects individuals and families, it underpins our community's health, education and economy. Security of tenure affects more than 1 in 4 Tasmanian households renting their home privately, with more than 40% renting for longer than 10 years.^{iv}

With competition for rental housing extremely high for a declining number of available properties, there is no requirement for a landlord to renew a 'fixed term' lease and rents can be increased at each renewal. Many renters worry about not being able to afford the next rent rise or the lease not being renewed. They are anxious about the possibility of having to leave their familiar neighbourhood, their local school or church community, and the cost of moving. For older renters, the death of a partner or loss of mobility is an added anxiety and can end their housing security.

What is the issue?

Tenancy insecurity forces many people to accept living in poor quality housing. Most tenants (62%) are afraid to ask for repairs or complain about the poor condition of their home, for fear of eviction.ⁱ This fear is heightened in markets like Hobart and Launceston where rental housing is in such short supply.

62%

of tenants are afraid to complain or ask for repairs, due to **fear of eviction**ⁱ

Around half of all tenants report experiencing discrimination when looking for a place to rent. Most often they are people who have children or pets, who receive government payments (such as Private Rental Support Scheme bond payments), or who are young.ⁱ Adopting standardised rental application forms would help reduce discrimination. There is also a long outstanding need to progress amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act, that currently prevents low income renters in community housing from paying their bond in instalments.

Hobart's vacancy rate is

0.4%

The number of properties available to rent has been declining across the State over the last two years.^v Rental vacancy rates in Hobart are now at an all-time low of just 0.4%. In this context, the diversion of some 1,200 entire homes state-wide and 600 entire homes in Hobart, to online short-term accommodation (such as Airbnb and Stayz) reduces a much needed housing supply.^v While the solutions to Tasmania's housing needs are complex and various, one relatively simple one is to strengthen the regulation of short-term online accommodation to better protect our existing supply of rental housing.

We know that the most effective way to end homelessness is to provide secure and affordable housing. We need to do more to look after the interests of people in private rental housing. A cross-sector Housing Summit would give us a starting point for working together on this.

Shelter Tasmania asks all parties to bring together government, community and private sector stakeholders in a Tasmanian Housing Summit, to find ways to work together to solve the housing crisis.



Further Information

Please see Shelter Tasmania's Election Priorities Overview for further information, available online at www.shelkertas.org.au/news/tas-election-2018/

End Notes

ⁱ Choice (2017). *Unsettled: Life in Australia's private rental market*.

ⁱⁱ *Interim Planning Directive No.2, S31.(b)* sets out Tasmania's current regulatory provisions.

ⁱⁱⁱ Examples include: London City limits renting to 90 days; New York limits renting of whole homes to 30 days; Berlin restricts the proportion of residences and applies rent controls linked to market rents; Barcelona prohibits Airbnb; a number of Australian councils are in the process of updated their planning controls.

^{iv} Census 2016; Choice (2017).

^v Anglicare Tasmania 2017. *Rental Affordability Snapshot Tasmania*