

## Service delivery and tenant experience

### What is this Review about?

The Review will consider whether the regulations – both formal and informal ‘rules’ – that apply to social housing in Victoria best support the long-term wellbeing of existing and prospective tenants, and the growth of social housing.

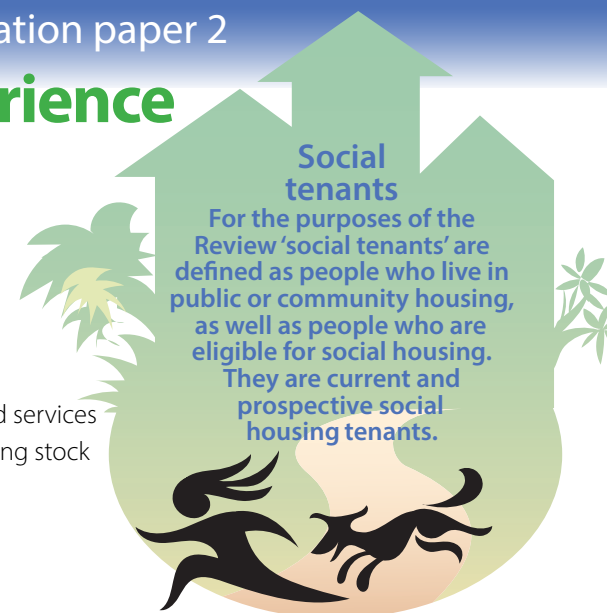
These regulations govern many aspects of a tenant’s experience in social housing – from whether they are allocated a property and the type of property they are allocated, to the support and services they receive and how they can resolve disputes and complaints.

It is being conducted by an independent panel, which will report directly to the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing. [\[Click for link to document.\]](#)

### Regulation of housing for social tenants and residents should:

- Serve the interests of tenants
- Be equitable – people in similar circumstances should have similar services, rights and protections
- Support long-term viability and growth in the sector
- Support integration of housing assistance and other related services
- Be flexible to enable a diverse range of providers and housing stock
- Be efficient and proportionate, and drive transparency, accountability and continuous improvement

Do you agree with these principles?  
What else should be included?



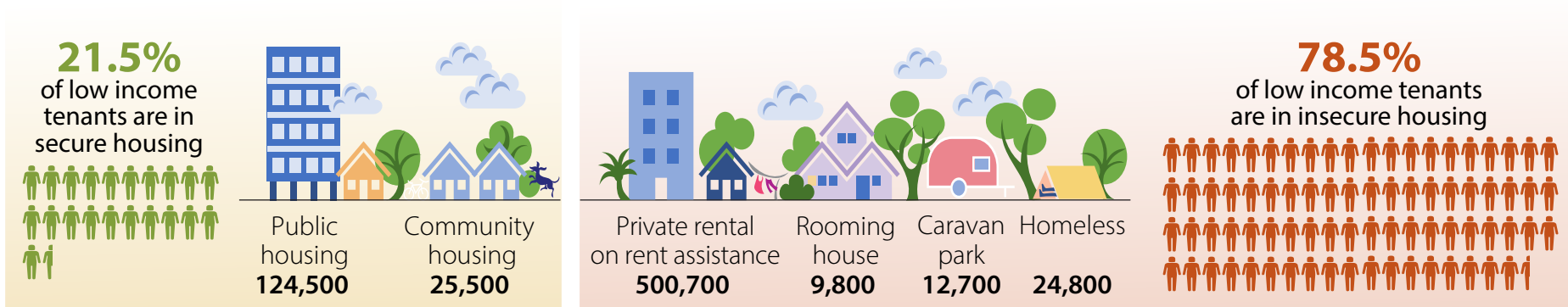
### Why is regulation needed for social (and lower-cost rental) housing? What should regulation aim to do?

#### Characteristics

- Essential service needed on an ongoing basis
- Demand is always greater than supply – limited choice and mobility for tenants leads to a lack of competitive pressures
- Many tenants are on low incomes with complex needs
- Sector is heavily subsidised by government (via funding to providers and direct income support to tenants)
- Provided at below market rents (social and affordable housing only)

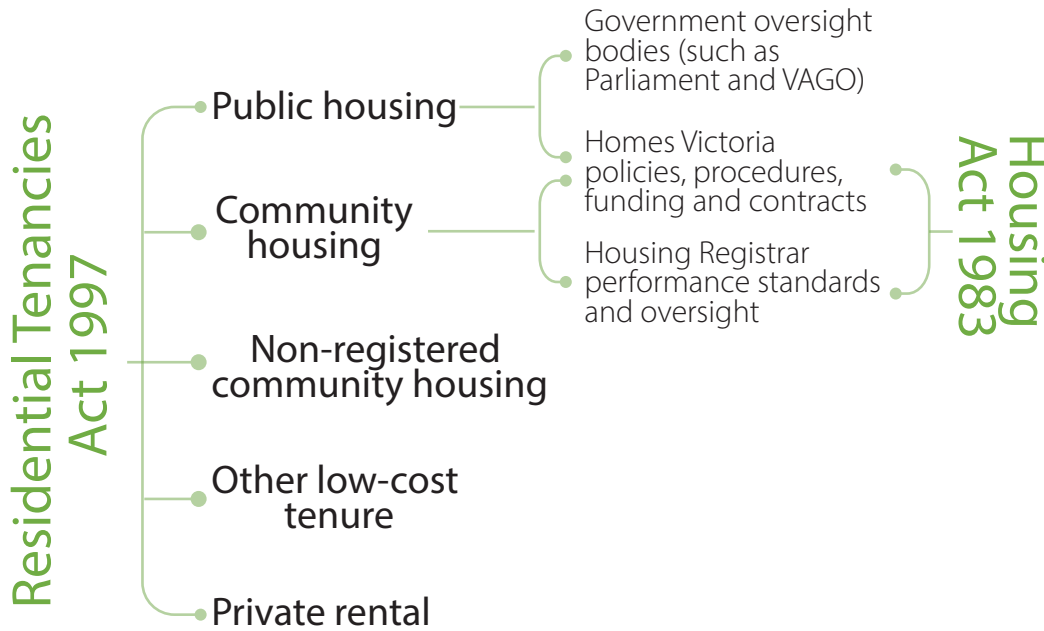
#### Role for regulation

- Provide protections to address power imbalance between tenant and landlord
- Impose accountability measures on providers
- Require providers to focus on sustaining tenancies and make eviction a last resort
- Encourage providers to increase their efficiency and service quality
- Encourage investor confidence in the sector



The first consultation paper was released in June, which provided a profile of tenants and providers. [\[Click for link to document.\]](#) A third paper will be released in August focusing on how regulation can support long-term viability and growth in the sector.

## Current regulation in the sector



### What are the key issues with the current regulation?

- The system is inequitable – there are different standards applying across public and community housing, and other forms of lower-cost tenures
- The focus on service delivery and tenant experience should be stronger
- The system can be unclear and complex for tenants
- Providers can lack transparency and accountability
- System governance arrangements can be unclear – Homes Victoria performs several functions that could conflict
- Dispute resolution mechanisms can be confusing and intimidating for social tenants
- The broader system of social support is not well integrated with housing support

Do you agree that these are issues?  
Are there others?



### How could these issues be addressed?

- Strengthen tenant voice and influence
- Improve allocations settings and processes
- Provide cultural safety
- Greater transparency and accountability of housing providers through performance reporting
- Greater availability of data
- More proactive monitoring
- Professionalisation of the workforce

What other options are there to address the issues?

### Greater equity for tenants across public and community housing

Public and community housing providers operate according to different policies and regulatory regimes. This can result in different outcomes for tenants in similar situations. There could be scope to raise and strengthen the standards for all tenants by taking the best of both sectors.

A common set of service and delivery standards\*



**Public housing:** Currently set and managed by Homes Victoria

**Community housing:** Currently set and managed by the Housing Registrar

Do you think there would be benefits to harmonising public and community housing service standards?

\*Over and above the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997

## How well does the system support tenants to exercise their rights and resolve disputes?

### Some key issues

- Tenants are unable or unwilling to exercise their rights (particularly lower-income and vulnerable tenants)
- The existing system for social housing tenants can be unclear and difficult to navigate
- Delays exacerbate problems for tenants
- Unclear processes and double handling are a cost to the agencies involved
- There is limited monitoring and enforcement for tenancies covered only by the Residential Tenancies Act.

### Some possible reform options

- A Housing Ombudsman
- An administrative dispute resolution function with determinations that are binding on the parties
- A Housing Appeals office covering public and community housing
- Any reforms should seek to facilitate the resolution of issues and disputes rather than apply additional compulsory requirements.

## Are there any additional mechanisms that could be used to help tenants exercise their rights and resolve disputes?

## Better integration of housing and other support services

Access to ongoing support services before and after someone enters social housing is important.

Once people gain a tenancy, although their housing need may be addressed, their need for support may continue in some respects and change in others. Support services could be better integrated with housing assistance, both before and after a person gains a social housing tenancy. There are several programs in Victoria designed to provide support to at-risk tenants. However, these programs can be difficult to access and provide support only for a specified period of time.

## Many social tenants are not in social housing

Many people who are eligible for social housing and require a social landlord approach do not have access to public or community housing. Many live in unsuitable accommodation or are homeless. Time spent waiting for social housing can compound existing issues and cause long-term harm.

## What is the scope for bringing the supports and services of a social landlord to people living outside the social housing system?

### Social landlord services (not only more affordable rents)

- Security of tenure
- Interest in tenant wellbeing
- Assists to sustain tenancies
- Tenants can access other supports
- Dispute resolution mechanisms to support tenants

### Key questions

- What additional services and supports could be made available to social tenants?
- Which types of providers should be asked to provide more social landlord functions?
- How else could social tenants living outside social housing be assisted?

## A single housing regulator?

The roles of a single housing regulator could include:

- Service delivery standards for public and community housing, and social tenants outside the social housing system
- Regulating public and community housing providers, and housing providers to social tenants
- Referring tenants to dispute resolution services
- Offering administrative dispute resolution?



## Get involved in the review

Make a submission via the Engage Victoria website [link] or leave a comment by 17 September 2021

Email the Review at [info@shrr.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@shrr.vic.gov.au)

Post your submission to Social Housing Regulation Review, c/-Old Treasury Building, 20 Spring Street, East Melbourne VIC 3002.

