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Q1

Name of organisation

Victorian Public Tenants Association

Q2

Your name

Katelyn Butterss

Q3

Position

CEO

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Q10

Describe the experiences of people struggling to access affordable and suitable housing in the context of your organisation's work.

We are the peak body for people who live in public housing as well as people who are waiting for social housing in Victoria. We have noticed a shift in types of issues people are contacting us for assistance with, as well as a substantial growth in demand in recent years.

This change can be best illustrated through the numbers of particular case types that our team have assisted callers to our free advice line with over the last five years.

In 2018-19, 50% of these calls were related to a maintenance issue, and 20% were stock related - meaning they were to do with a housing need in some way that had not, or could not urgently, be met due to a lack of public housing.

In 2022-23, 32% of cases were maintenance related, and 42% were stock related.

A growing proportion of the people that we speak to are experiencing homelessness or severe housing insecurity. They are incredibly distressed.

Q11

Describe the flow-on impacts of the housing crisis in the context of your organisation's work.

Managing staff morale has become more difficult, as the nature of the work has become more emotionally taxing than it had been previously.

We are also attempting to assist more people without seeing additional growth in base funding which would allow us to hire the number of staff we need to maintain our prompt turn around times.

Q12

Describe how current policy settings impact housing affordability and access to housing from your organisation's perspective.

It is not new policy settings that have contributed to housing affordability and accessibility issues. Rather, it is stubbornness in adhering to old policies that drives ongoing inequality.

This has been exacerbated by a relatively recent willingness by Governments of all types to again begin to invest in housing construction at a scale lower than is required, and ignoring the public housing tenure type.

Q13

Describe what actions your organisation believes should be taken by governments to most improve affordability and access to housing.

There is no one policy that will address housing affordability and accessibility on its own. A combination of measures will be needed to target the broad spectrum of need. Federally, changes to tax settings that incentivize the accumulation of property as a wealth creation strategy need to be reformed, in conjunction with substantial increases to income support payments.

States need to more actively participate in direct investment to drive public housing growth, as well as requiring more from the private property industry via mandatory inclusionary zoning or other levies.

Q14

Is there anything else your organisation would like to share with the Commission?

Public and community housing are not the same. Although both types of social housing have an important role to play in addressing Australia's deep and persistent housing issues - one alone is not the answer. While there are similarities, they are not the same and too frequently renters in community housing have more expensive rent, more difficulties being housed, and fewer places to turn to when things go wrong.

In recent years governments have prioritised growth in community housing almost exclusively, even where this leads to a reduction in public housing stock. This approach cannot continue.
