

Victorian Government  
response to the Standing  
Committee on Legal and Social  
Issues Inquiry into the Public  
Housing Renewal Program



## Introduction

On 9 August 2017, the Legislative Council of the Victorian Parliament agreed to a motion that the Legal and Social Issues Committee (the Committee) inquire into the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Public Housing Renewal Program.

In particular, the Committee was asked to consider:

1. the adequacy of a proposed 10 per cent increase in public housing (or 1,100 public units) on the sites given the size of the waiting list for public housing;
2. the ability to cater for all demographics including families, couples and singles with the proposed housing mix;
3. the effects on current public housing tenants, including:
  - a. whether they will be moved to accommodation that is secure, stable and fit for purpose;
  - b. whether they will be moved to accommodation that is close to existing social support networks, educational, health and welfare services;
  - c. whether current tenants will be able to return to the estates;
4. the allocation of parts of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units;
5. the lack of public condition assessments of the estates or alternative options such as refurbishment of all or part of the existing housing units;
6. the proposed significant increase in density and heights and any local environmental impacts, such as the loss of open space and mature vegetation;
7. the removal of planning controls from local councils, and planning implications surrounding communities including existing neighbourhood character, traffic flow and provisions of services;
8. the proposed loss of third party appeal rights;
9. the transparency and genuine community consultation with affected residents, neighbouring communities and the broader Victorian community regarding the short, medium and long term implications of the PHRP model as currently proposed;
10. public housing estates where similar models are envisaged or underway, including —
  - a. Markham Avenue, Ashburton;
  - b. Koolkuna Lane, Hampton; and
  - c. the corner of Stokes Street and Penola Street, Preston;
11. previous Victorian public housing renewal projects, including but not limited to the Kensington, Carlton and Prahran public housing estates;
12. best practice models for the provision of public housing from within Australia and overseas; and any other matters the Committee considers relevant.

The Committee received 172 submissions and held three public hearings. The Committee issued the report on its Inquiry on 5 June 2018. The report included 28 recommendations.

The Victorian Government thanks the Committee for undertaking the Inquiry. The government also acknowledges the important contributions made by the many stakeholders who participated in the Inquiry.

The Victorian Government is committed to providing better homes and stronger communities for all Victorians. That is why it is transforming ageing public housing estates in Melbourne and regional Victoria into vibrant well-connected neighbourhoods with homes that are comfortable, modern and energy efficient.

The commitment to redevelop aged public housing is one of the most important and significant components of *Homes for Victorians*, the Victorian Government's multi-faceted response to the challenges of housing affordability and homelessness. While other *Homes for Victorians* initiatives focus on areas such as new social housing, assisting first home buyers and renters, or providing more services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the investment in redevelopment tackles an equally important issue that has been neglected for a long time: the age, quality and appropriateness of public homes that were built in the post-war era.

Earlier this year, the government announced the successful development partners for the first major redevelopment projects at Northcote, North Melbourne and Preston. The partnership with MAB Corporation and HousingFirst demonstrates the outcomes that can be achieved through innovative project models that respond to the needs of tenants, the nature of the site, the wider housing market and the value that private and community sector partners can bring when they work effectively with government.

The projects will see 225 public housing properties replaced with 274 new homes and up to 64 additional community housing dwellings. This represents a fifty per cent increase – more than 110 additional homes - in the number of social housing properties currently on the sites. The result will be more homes available to those that need them. Some of the housing will be specifically allocated to women and children escaping family violence and Aboriginal Victorians.

In addition to the new social housing, over 150 homes within these projects will be prioritised for First Home Buyers, giving Victorians looking to enter the property market the opportunity to buy their first home.

The sites are close to transport, education facilities, employment, support services and shopping precincts, giving all residents the ability to access important services and become an integral part of the local community. The new homes will be modern and accessible, safe, secure and energy efficient with 5-star Green Star and 7-star NatHERS ratings.

The projects provide much more than housing. They include architecturally-designed buildings, high quality public realm, open spaces and children's play areas, a site for education purposes at North Melbourne, and dedicated community facilities such as artist studios and community rooms.

Housing First is partnering with MAB Corporation and will deliver property and tenancy management services for all social housing properties across the sites, connecting tenants with services that can enhance their mental and physical wellbeing and link them with education, training and employment opportunities.

The highly successful outcomes for these sites demonstrates the range of housing and community benefits that can be achieved with the right partners, through a carefully-considered approach to redevelopment that takes account of the strengths and opportunities that each site presents. The final design and outcomes for these sites will be further refined as development plans are prepared and lodged, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and the community, as required.

The project model for Northcote, North Melbourne and Preston is just one of many approaches to redevelopment, which has been effective for those sites, at a particular time, within specific context. Other partnership approaches will be more beneficial on other sites, at different times. Ultimately, redevelopment is likely to occur through a range of different methods at different sites, in ways that deliver the best outcomes possible, while staying true to the Government's core commitments of renewal, growth and ensuring that existing tenants have the right to return, should they wish to do so.

The government's response to each recommendation is outlined below.

Victorian Government response to the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

### **Recommendation 1:**

**That the Victorian Government clarify how much it intends to increase social housing through its current suite of programs.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

In recent years, the Victorian Government has committed over \$1.2 billion towards new social housing and homelessness assistance, as well as establishing more than two billion of financial instruments to support the growth of social housing through the community housing sector. Outcomes it will deliver include:

- the replacement of 225 aged and outdated public housing dwellings at Northcote, North Melbourne & Preston with at least 274 new public homes, plus up to 64 additional community housing dwellings – an increase of more than 110 homes (fifty per cent) from current numbers
- replacing more than 1,500 ageing public homes at other locations with at least 1,650 new properties, with potential for more through innovative approaches and competitive processes
- delivering approximately 2,000 new homes through the Social Housing Growth Fund
- 100 new public homes through the Inclusionary Housing Pilot

In addition, the Government has recently committed a further \$209.1 million to deliver 1,000 new public housing properties by 2022.

These new and renewed homes are made possible by record investment from the Victorian Government into social housing. Substantial additional and ongoing funding is required from the Commonwealth Government to deliver the sustained growth of social housing that is needed to respond to immediate and future needs.

The Victorian Government provides other housing assistance options, which complement social housing and support people in need. These include:

- bond assistance, which supports more than 10,000 people each year to enter the private rental market
- the Private Rental Assistance Program, which provides flexible support and practical assistance that is tailored to the needs of each household and is forecast to assist 4,000 households per year
- Flexible Support Packages for people who have experienced chronic homelessness each year to help them transition to stable and sustainable housing
- the Rapid Housing Program, which headleases private rental housing to facilitate the rapid re-housing of people experiencing homelessness and family violence.
- the Family Violence Refuges Program, developing new refuges across the state to provide secure accommodation for those escaping family violence.
- the Towards Home Program, providing further assistance to Victoria's homeless.

**Recommendation 2:**

**That the Victorian Government clarify how the procurement process for the Public Housing Renewal Program will ensure the desired level of affordable housing is achieved.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The Public Housing Renewal Program will deliver better homes and stronger communities at walk up estates that no longer meet the needs of current or future tenants. On each estate, old public housing properties that are no longer fit for purpose will be replaced with new homes that are modern, accessible, and energy efficient. In addition, the number of social housing properties on each site will increase, providing more housing for people in need.

Through the procurement process, successful bidders are also required to demonstrate that they will increase the supply of affordable housing. This includes a requirement to prioritise at least 10 per cent of the private housing at each site for first home buyers. Bidders are also invited to include innovative alternative approaches or methods to incorporate dedicated affordable housing.

The contractual arrangements for the Northcote, North Melbourne and Preston demonstrate how the base level requirements can be exceeded through a competitive procurement process, with development partner MAB Corporation committing to provide first homebuyers with priority access to at least 20 per cent of housing.

**Recommendation 3:**

**That the Victorian Government respond to the recommendations in this Final Report within three months of tabling.**

This recommendation is not supported.

The government has tabled its response after the announcement of development partners at Northcote, North Melbourne and Preston so that it can demonstrate to committee members and the wider community the tangible outcomes that can be delivered through the program.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

**That the Victorian Government fund Infrastructure Victoria to partner with the Department of Health and Human Services to measure the full social and economic value of social housing. The partnership should be based on the work previously undertaken by Infrastructure Victoria.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The Victorian Government notes the research undertaken by Infrastructure Victoria into improving evaluation for social housing, which identified the need for improved data and further research in this area.<sup>1</sup> The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will continue to work closely with Infrastructure Victoria and other academic institutions such as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), who are leading a number of research projects into the costs and benefits associated with social housing investment.

#### **Further information**

AHURI is undertaking a range of research programs that are relevant to this recommendation. This research includes establishing an evidence base on social housing exits and pathways,<sup>2</sup> establishing a policy rationale to define social housing as infrastructure and associated investment pathways,<sup>3</sup> and better understanding and reimagining social housing pathways to inform effective services, supports and pathways.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure Victoria, 2018, *Improving evaluation for social housing: methods and data*

<sup>2</sup> [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-research-projects/social-housing-exits-outcomes-and-future-pathways-a-data-analysis](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-research-projects/social-housing-exits-outcomes-and-future-pathways-a-data-analysis)

<sup>3</sup> [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-inquiries/evidence-based-policy-inquiry-53140](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-inquiries/evidence-based-policy-inquiry-53140)

<sup>4</sup> [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-inquiries/understanding-and-reimagining-social-housing-pathways](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-inquiries/understanding-and-reimagining-social-housing-pathways)



## **Recommendation 5:**

### **That the Victorian Government tie the Public Housing Renewal Program to a targeted decrease in the Victorian Housing Register.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The primary aim of the Public Housing Renewal Program is the renewal of existing dwellings that have come to the end of their useful life. The program will see the replacement of outdated and inappropriate public housing with new homes that are better aligned to the needs of current and future tenants. The program will also see a net increase in public housing dwellings across all sites, providing more housing to households on the Victorian Housing Register.

Homes that are renewed will be made available to former tenants in the first instance, honouring the Minister for Housing's pledge to give them the right to return to their former estates. Where tenants do not exercise their option to return, renewed homes will be offered to applicants on the Victorian Housing Register, alongside those that are delivered through growth.

A focus on smaller dwellings will also improve the capacity to assist the 80 per cent of applicants on the Victorian Housing Register who need one or two-bedroom properties, consistent with the findings of the Victorian Auditor-General.<sup>5</sup> The homes will meet accessibility standards, ensuring they are appropriate for and available to applicants with physical disabilities or mobility impairments and will allow tenants to age in place over time.

The Public Housing Renewal Program is just one of many initiatives within *Homes for Victorians* that are intended to collectively respond to the demand for social housing. These include \$2.1 billion of financial support for the community housing sector to kick start new forms of social housing investment and over \$1.1 billion in funding for housing and homelessness services. In addition to these initiatives, the Victorian Government has also committed to deliver 1,000 new public housing dwellings by 2022.

While this investment will improve the capacity of the Victorian social housing system to respond to demand, it is important to note that the number of households on the Victorian Housing Register is also influenced by a range of other factors, many of which sit outside the Victorian Government's control. These include the price and affordability of home ownership and rental housing in the wider market, and the adequacy of incomes, particularly Commonwealth pensions.

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<sup>5</sup> Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2017, *Managing Victoria's Public Housing*.

## **Recommendation 6:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services and the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee consider the issues raised in this Final Report when determining the process for future public consultation sessions. In particular:**

- **The Public Housing Renewal Program website must be updated frequently and accurately**
- **Provide a clearer explanation of what indicative plans are**
- **Stakeholders must be presented with the minimum number of documents possible to avoid confusion**
- **Improve communication for tenants using plain language and support for those with English as a second language.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The Terms of Reference for the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee outlined the roles and responsibilities for the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and DHHS for both the planning scheme amendment exhibition and community engagement for the renewal projects. DHHS is responsible for engaging directly with the tenants of each estate, and DELWP is responsible for engagement with the wider community on the proposed planning scheme amendments.

Throughout the Public Housing Renewal Program process to date, and during the Inquiry, the government has welcomed feedback on its stakeholder engagement, and has used this feedback to improve public consultation. To provide consistent and timely updates on the program, the communications and engagement function is now being managed centrally by the Victorian Health and Human Services Building Authority (VHHSBA) or, where appropriate, Development Victoria

The following has been put into place:

- all program-related information across the renewal sites features on the VHHSBA website, and has been removed from the housing.vic.gov.au website
- information for tenants seeking advice on relocations remains on the housing.vic.gov.au site, as this website provides a hub for public housing tenants seeking information
- to avoid confusion about the status of designs, including indicative plans, VHHSBA has added 'artist impression' watermarks to all relevant images
- the contact details of project managers are now available on the VHHSBA website, providing a point of contact for any public enquiries
- to support people with English as a second language:
  - at least one identified language interpreter is present at all engagement sessions
  - all communications provide advice on how to access language support via telephone
  - information on the VHHSBA and housing.vic.gov.au websites is accompanied by a function that translates the content into different languages.

DELWP and DHHS will continue to work together to ensure that there is clarity on the nature and method of engagement with tenants on future Public Housing Renewal Program sites where the engagement relates to the planning process. This will include simplifying and improving clarity around the information provided, the timing of when and how information is shared, as well as ensuring it is readily accessible for those with English as a second language.

## **Further information**

The VHHSBA website hosts individual project profiles for each Public Housing Renewal Program site or package of sites. These profiles are regularly updated and provide up-to-date information about the project scope, Victorian Government response to the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

benefits and timeline. Additional content such as videos and images are also shared on the project profile pages. Further, community engagement sessions will be listed on these project profiles and will be cross-promoted on social media in the future.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

**That in future responses to report of the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee, the Minister for Planning provide the rationale for recommendations that are supported in part or not supported.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

On 29 March 2018, the Minister for Planning made the existing Advisory Committee reports publicly available, along with his written response to each of the Advisory Committee recommendations.

The Minister for Planning will continue to ensure that the rationale for departures from the recommendations of the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee (the Advisory Committee) is clearly articulated in future decisions on amendments. The written responses to the recommendations of the Advisory Committee will encapsulate an appropriate level of detail and be proportionate to any departures from the Advisory Committee's recommendations.

In relation to the Public Housing Renewal Program sites, following consideration of the Advisory Committee's reports, the Minister for Planning approved planning scheme amendments to facilitate the renewal of seven public housing estates.<sup>6</sup> The amendments were gazetted on 29 March 2018.

#### **Further information**

The Advisory Committee was established by the Minister for Planning pursuant to s151 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act). Unlike other sections of the Act, there are no statutory obligations on the Minister for Planning to publicly release Advisory Committee reports, or timeframes for doing so.

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<sup>6</sup> Brighton, Brunswick West, Flemington, two sites (Bell/Bardia and Tarakan Estates) at Heidelberg West, Northcote and North Melbourne.

### **Recommendation 8:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services be precise in explaining what is involved in future consultation sessions for the Public Housing Renewal Program. The Department should manage expectations by paying particular attention to any power that tenants may or may not have to influence the Development Plan Overlay at their site.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

As noted in the Victorian Government submission to the Inquiry, DHHS will continue to engage with tenants, as well as other key stakeholders, such as neighbours and local councils, on site-specific issues. Once developers are appointed for the program sites, DHHS, in conjunction with each developer, will conduct further community engagement on the proposed Development Plan for each site that responds to the relevant Development Plan Overlay.

DELWP and DHHS will work together to ensure that there is a greater focus placed on the nature and method of engagement with tenants on future Public Housing Renewal Program sites, and will ensure that the purpose and intended outcomes of future information sessions is made clear to all participants. This will include simplifying and improving clarity around the information provided to tenants, explaining more clearly the nature and the impact of any proposed planning scheme amendments or development proposals, and providing clear guidance on tenants' opportunities to provide feedback or input at different stages.

### **Further information**

DHHS will also require developers to prepare a detailed Stakeholder Communications and Community Engagement Plan for each site to engage with the local community and key stakeholders, including:

- remaining and relocated tenants that might return to their estate after redevelopment
- the local council
- local representative bodies with a focus on the Community Consultative Committee DHHS has established for each site
- the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA)
- local support organisations
- local resident groups.
- Community legal centres
- Victoria Police
- Transport for Victoria (where relevant)

As part of this engagement developers will be required to undertake:

- design visioning, gaining ideas and key community aspirations to inform any negotiable design elements for both living and community spaces
- concept testing – refining and testing schematic designs to inform detailed design elements
- exhibition of final designs, including an animated fly through.

As part of the Development Plan approval process, the proponent for each site (i.e. DHHS and/or the developer) must also provide a Community Engagement Report, which outlines the consultation undertaken.

**Recommendation 9:**

**That the Minister for Planning take into consideration the views of relevant local councils when making planning decisions regarding the Public Housing Renewal Program.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

There will be further opportunities for the respective councils to be involved in the preparation of the Development Plan at each site.

All development plan applications must be prepared in consultation with the local council. In applications where the Minister for Planning is the Responsible Authority, the application will be referred to the relevant council for comment prior to a decision being made.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 8, DHHS will require developers to establish a detailed Stakeholder Communications and Community Engagement Plan for each site to engage with the local community and key stakeholders, which includes local councils.

The Schedule to the Development Plan Overlay, introduced as part of the planning scheme amendments that were gazetted in early 2018, requires the preparation of a Community Engagement Report, which will outline the consultation undertaken throughout the preparation of the Development Plan by the applicant (DHHS and/or development partner).

The Schedule to the Development Plan Overlay stipulates that the views of the relevant local council and other interested parties must be sought in the preparation of the Development Plan.

The Community Engagement Report will provide the Minister for Planning with an opportunity to review the engagement with, and input from, local councils when the Development Plan is assessed.

**Recommendation 10:**

**That the Victorian Government include the provision of employment opportunities for public housing tenants in the tender process for the Public Housing Renewal Program sites.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The Public Housing Renewal Program development projects will facilitate up to 24 Public Tenant Employment Program (PTEP) employees.

**Further information**

The development of the Northcote, North Melbourne and Preston site will employ six public housing tenants during construction and post-delivery.

Additionally, the Public Housing Renewal Program development projects will each facilitate:

- a minimum of 10 per cent of total estimated labour hours to apprentices, trainees and/or cadets through the Major Project Skills Guarantee Program
- a minimum of 91 per cent local content, as required through the *Local Jobs First* Victorian Industry Participation Policy, including maximising local steel content.

Other projects demonstrate the employment opportunities that are delivered through public housing construction and redevelopment projects. For example, Stage One of the Preston renewal project, which is adjacent to (but separate from) the current renewal site at Stokes and Penola Streets, is already delivering PTEP outcomes through the employment of three tenants as construction workers.

**Recommendation 11:**

**That where possible the Victorian Government involve public housing tenants in the design process for the Public Housing Renewal Program sites.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS is establishing a Community Consultative Committee for each site, which includes tenants, tenant representatives and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the Committees is to assist each project team by:

- ensuring effective communication arrangements are established with interested and affected residents, businesses, service providers and interest groups
- ensuring that residents, individuals and groups affected by the project have opportunities to participate in its development
- providing a local perspective on project issues, particularly in relation to minimising the impact on residents and local communities
- providing input into the development and implementation of the project.

There will be further opportunities for tenants to be involved in the preparation of the Development Plan for all renewal sites, including the seven that have been through the planning scheme amendment process. As noted in the response to Recommendation 8, the Stakeholder Communication and Community Engagement Plan that developers must prepare for each site includes a requirement to engage with stakeholders, including tenants, on the proposed designs.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 9, the Schedule to the Development Plan Overlay stipulates that the views of tenants and other interested parties must be sought in the preparation of the Development Plan and requires this consultation to be outlined in a Community Engagement Report.



**Recommendation 12:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services immediately review and improve how it collaborates with tenants such that it better assists tenants through the Public Housing Renewal Program.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

Throughout the Public Housing Renewal Program, DHHS has used feedback to review and improve its collaboration with tenants. DHHS is committed to continuing to do this as the program progresses.

Further, the establishment of a dedicated Client Engagement team has enabled the department to work one-on-one with affected households to identify their specific needs, find them a suitable home and support them through the relocations process. This approach has been well-received by tenants, with more than 700 already relocated to new homes aligned with their needs and preferences.

The Client Engagement Team will also facilitate the return of tenants that return to their former estate after its redevelopment, for those that wish to do so.

**Recommendation 13:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services continue to monitor future Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee consultation sessions for information about tenants' concerns.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS agrees that such sessions provide additional opportunities to understand tenants' concerns. Members of the department attend these sessions and will continue to note concerns and respond accordingly.

**Recommendation 14:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services strengthen efforts to ensure that all tenants at future Public Housing Renewal Program sites understand the difference between the Department and advisory committees set up under section 151 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and how they can contribute to both.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS accepts the Committee's findings that some affected tenants were confused about the differences between DHHS' role in the Public Housing Renewal Program and that of the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee. For future similar projects, DHHS will use the lessons from this process to ensure greater clarity is provided on the roles of each organisation and the purpose of any engagement and consultation processes.

Similarly, DHHS and DELWP will work together to ensure that tenants affected by future renewal projects better understand the role of the Advisory Committee. This will include emphasising that tenants may make submissions on planning scheme amendments to the Independent Advisory Committee and have the ability to appear at hearings.

**Recommendation 15:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services continue to communicate with Public Housing Renewal Program [tenants] at all times up to their relocation and throughout the remainder of the whole Program. The Department should continue to answer questions asked by tenants regarding any issue to do with their relocation.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS continues to proactively engage with tenants before, during and after relocation. As noted in the response to Recommendation 12, a dedicated Client Engagement team was established to work exclusively with each household to support them through their relocation. The Client Engagement team will continue to answer any questions tenants have about their relocations. The Client Engagement team will also ensure that each relocated tenant is connected with their local housing office for any day-to-day queries related to their home. Further, all tenants relocated from the renewal estates will be contacted prior to the completion of the redevelopment of their estate to offer them the opportunity to return, and facilitate their return should they choose to do so.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 11, Community Consultative Committees are being established for each renewal project, which will include representation from affected tenants and tenant advocates. The committees will, among other things, provide relocating tenants with the opportunity to stay informed about the progress of each project, and when offers to return are likely to occur.

### **Recommendation 16:**

**That the Victorian Government confirm with all tenants in the Public Housing Renewal Program that they will be able to return to their estates. All documentation and communication provided to tenants should reflect this.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The Minister for Housing has guaranteed all existing tenants the right to return to their estate once the redevelopment is completed. A deed poll has been developed and attached to relocated tenants' tenancy agreements, making the Minister's pledge commitments legally binding upon the Director of Housing and legally enforceable by tenants. It notes that:

- Tenants will have the right to return to a property that meets their household accommodation needs in the redeveloped estate upon completion of the redevelopment;
- If tenants elect to return to a property in the redeveloped estate, their tenancy will continue to be governed by all generally applicable public housing policy or practice manuals published by the Director of Housing and current at that time, and their landlord will be a public authority for the purposes of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic);
- If tenants return to a property in the redeveloped estate, their rent will be calculated in accordance with the generally applicable rent calculation policies of the Director of Housing current at that time.

The Minister's pledge has been communicated to tenants affected by the Public Housing Renewal Program through a number of channels, as follows:

- it is included in the *Priority Transfer for Major Redevelopment Relocation Application* that tenants will sign or have already signed
- it is outlined in the associated *Relocating From Your Home* fact sheet
- it is reflected in the publicly available *Relocations for the Public Housing Renewal Program Operational Guidelines*.

All tenants who had already relocated or signed relocation agreements have been sent a letter advising them of the deed and provided with a copy.

### **Further information**

The deed poll was developed in conjunction with the Federation of Community Legal Centres and the Victorian Public Tenants Association. It ensures that tenants relocated as part of the program retain the same rights as all other public housing tenants, even if the estate they return to is managed by a community housing provider.

**Recommendation 17:**

**That the Department of Health and Human Services publish the number of tenants who have returned to each estate at the conclusion of the Public Housing Renewal Program.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

As previously noted, all residents relocated from the estates will be contacted prior to the completion of the redevelopment of their estate to offer them the opportunity to return. The number of residents who choose to return will be recorded and can be made publicly available, subject to any relevant privacy conditions being met.

**Recommendation 18:**

**That DHHS provide tenants with the opportunity to review all documentation provided and access independent legal advice before being required to sign.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS operates on the principle that the signing of any documentation is voluntary and tenants have the right to review any documents and seek independent legal advice. The Client Engagement team ensure that any tenants who want advice are referred to local legal centres and/or the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA).

Further, the Client Engagement team proactively ask tenants if they have, or would like, a support worker to assist them through their relocation. They also work to create and maintain relationships with local service providers and support networks to ensure that tenants receive efficient and effective referrals for support.

**Recommendation 19:**

**That the Victorian Government resource organisations that are well placed to provide independent legal advice to tenants.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The Victorian Government currently funds community legal services through funding grants.

The Government provided \$8.1 million in direct funding grants to community legal centres in the last financial year (2017-18) including for a statewide specialist tenancy legal centre that supports all tenants, including those who live in public housing. In addition there are a number of funding grants available that Community Legal Centres are encouraged to apply for.

The Government also provides an additional \$3.6 million to housing agencies to assist private tenants with information and advice, negotiations with landlords and support and representation at VCAT.

Community legal services are already working closely with tenants affected by the Public Housing Renewal Program and are encouraged to apply for these and other similar funding grants when they are made available.

**Further information**

DHHS is continuing to engage with the Federation of Community Legal Centres and individual community legal services to understand and address legal concerns raised by tenants and tenant advocates.



**Recommendation 20:**

**That the Victorian Government publish the price paid for public land sold as part of the Public Housing Renewal Program.**

This recommendation is supported in principle.

Where required by and in accordance with government policy, DHHS will publish contracts for the Public Housing Renewal Program at an appropriate time. This will provide an overview of the parties, contract structure, key conditions and outcomes, including the price for any sale of land to development partners where applicable.

Any sale of land will be in accordance with Government Land Monitor oversight and at a price approved by the Valuer General.

**Recommendation 21:**

**That the Victorian Government publish the amount raised by the sale of land during the Public Housing Renewal Program that will be allocated to public housing throughout Victoria.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

All income from the sale or transaction of land by the Director of Housing is returned to the Director of Housing and used to support the provision of public housing. This is identified each year in the State Budget and DHHS Annual Report and will include any income from the Public Housing Renewal Program.

**Recommendation 22:**

**That at the completion of the Public Housing Renewal Program the Victorian Government provide evidence that all money raised by the sale of land during the Program has been allocated to public housing throughout Victoria.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

As outlined in the response to Recommendation 21, all income from the sale of public housing land, including any that may be sold as part of the Public Housing Renewal Program, is returned to the Director of Housing and used to support the ongoing provision of public housing.

**Recommendation 23:**

**That the Victorian Government develop and publish an ongoing, long-term monitoring and maintenance strategy for the Public Housing Renewal Program sites.**

This recommendation is supported in principle.

DHHS is currently developing an Asset Strategy in response to recommendations from the Victoria Auditor-General's 2017 report *Managing Victoria's Public Housing*. A key input into the Strategy is information derived from the ongoing monitoring of all public housing across the state. This information will inform asset management plans for the public housing portfolio as a whole, as well as different asset classes within it.

**Recommendation 24:**

**That the Victorian Government identify which public housing estates are suitable for refurbishment and those which are not.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 23, DHHS is currently developing an Asset Strategy in response to recommendations from the Victorian Auditor-General.

The current renewal sites were selected taking account of factors such as their age, condition, appropriateness for the current and future needs of tenants. These factors and others will be considered as part of the Asset Strategy so that DHHS can continually review and refine the method used to identify estates that are suitable for upgrade and refurbishment, as well as those that are more suitable for renewal.

Estates that are ultimately confirmed for refurbishment or renewal will be informed by the Strategy, as well as funding allocation through avenues such as the State Budget.

**Recommendation 25:**

**That the Victorian Government conduct a longitudinal study on the link between social mix and social outcomes at public housing estates, and lead research into local area effects in disadvantaged communities in Victoria. The results of the studies should influence future social housing policy.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS is conducting baseline studies of the Public Housing Renewal Program, which will inform longitudinal studies of the program, including the impact of social mix on social outcomes. Follow up surveys will be commissioned to measure outcomes and benchmark these against baseline results.

**Recommendation 26:**

**That the Victorian Government ensure that designs of public and private housing at each site are tenure blind, including equitable access of public tenants to common facilities where practicable.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The procurement documents for the redevelopment of the Public Housing Renewal Program sites require the integration of public and private housing on each site. This includes tenure blind design and equality of access to public realm and communal facilities. The Office of the Victorian Government Architect has provided advice throughout the program to ensure that high quality design is sought from, and incorporated within, proposals from development partners.

**Recommendation 27:**

**That the Victorian Government explain the rationale behind the final public-to-private ratio build at each Public Housing Renewal Program site. This rationale should help inform future decision-making for the Program.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

The model for the current Public Housing Renewal Program ensures that there will be an increase in public housing on each site from existing levels. The final public-to-private housing ratio is determined by a number of factors including planning approvals (which dictate total dwelling numbers on each site) and negotiated outcomes with development partners.

For example, the base agreement for redevelopment of sites in North Melbourne, Northcote and Preston includes a fifty per cent increase in social housing from existing levels across the estates. Other sites are likely to see different outcomes and tenure mixes, depending on factors such as planning approvals and developer negotiations.

Longitudinal studies, as per Recommendation 25, and other evaluations of the program will help to inform future projects.



**Recommendation 28:**

**That the Victorian Government work with social housing experts and developers to determine the most appropriate development mix for each Public Housing Renewal Program site.**

This recommendation is supported in full.

DHHS accepts the recommendation to seek the advice and input of social housing experts and stakeholders to determine the most appropriate development mix at renewal sites. The approach, including the experts and stakeholders engaged, will be tailored to respond to the individual objectives and circumstances of future projects.