

PUBLIC HOUSING INQUIRY SUBMISSION WRITING GUIDE

Use this document to help to write your submission to the public housing inquiry

About the Inquiry

This inquiry is an important opportunity to force the Labor government to tell the truth about this disastrous project and to save public housing in Victoria.

- The Victorian Parliament is holding an inquiry into the **Victorian Labor Government's plan to demolish and privatise 44 public housing tower estates**.
- The inquiry will investigate the government's reasoning for the decision, whether alternatives were considered, as well as the plan's impact on the towers' residents.
- The inquiry will be **accepting submissions from the public to inform its recommendations**.
- Groups that will profit from the government's decision will make submissions in support of demolishing the towers, including property developers and wealthy investors.
- It is really important that as a public housing resident, you make your voice heard. If hundreds of residents make submissions disagreeing with the government's plans, the inquiry and the government won't be able to ignore residents' voices anymore.

How to make a submission

You can make a submission in **writing or as an audio or video recording**. Your submission must address one or all of the Inquiry's 'Terms of Reference'.

The Greens are hosting workshops across Melbourne to support public housing residents and other community members to create their own submission.

Submissions must be made between 30 September 2024 and 31 March 2025.

Contact
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for help with your submission

About this guide and how to use it

- This guide can help you to write your submission by giving you some guidance on how to address the Terms of Reference (ToR). The ToR outlined in this guide are the most relevant ones for public housing residents.
- [You can see the full ToR here](#).
- You can use the information in this document to guide what you include in your submission. You can also use the words in this document as your own.
- To submit your submission head to <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publichousingtowers>.

Submission Summary

An overview of points you could include in your submission

ToR (a) - The rationale and cost modelling for demolishing and redeveloping the 44 towers

1. The government has failed to share any documents which provide a rationale for demolishing the 44 towers.
2. The government does not appear to have done any cost-modelling or an investment case before deciding to demolish the 44 towers.
3. The government has failed to consider the impact of demolition and redevelopment on current residents.
4. The government has not provided a rationale for using public land to build predominantly private housing.
5. The government did not adequately consider alternatives to demolition of the 44 towers before making its decision.

ToR (b) - The impact of the plan on public housing residents

1. The health and wellbeing of public housing tenants will be seriously impacted by compulsory relocation and displacement and the government has failed to consider this impact in their plans.
2. Many residents do not want to leave public housing to move into community housing because of the higher rents and insecure tenure.
3. Residents do not have a right to return to public housing and if they do want to return after many years of displacement, this is not guaranteed either.
4. Many residents are concerned that the dwellings they are being relocated to do not meet their needs.
5. Residents and the community have been organising to protest and resist the government's plan to displace them.
6. There are concerns about the government's commitment to delivering any community and public housing, because similar projects have been delayed or abandoned.
7. Retrofitting, refurbishment and renovation of these towers would be cheaper and less disruptive to residents' lives.

ToR (c) - The findings and adequacy of consultations with tower residents and other local stakeholders

1. Public housing residents and their representatives were not consulted before the decision to demolish the towers.
2. Government consultation following the announcement has left many residents confused and without answers to many of their questions.
3. Residents who don't speak English as a first language have faced many barriers to accessing information and support.
4. Residents have reported feeling harassed by Homes Victoria, with some feeling pressured into signing documentation they do not fully understand.



A: The rationale and cost modelling for demolishing and redeveloping the 44 towers

This is about the government's reasoning and evidence (or lack of these) for deciding to demolish and redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing towers.

You should write about what evidence you have heard from the government to justify their plans. If you have not seen or heard anything that justifies the government's plan, you should write about that.

Here are some questions that you could answer in your submission:

- Have you seen any evidence from the government about why the towers need to be demolished?
- Did the government consider the impact on residents before deciding to demolish the towers?

You could also include the following points:

- The government has **failed to share any documents** which provide a rationale for demolishing the 44 towers.
- Public housing residents, housing advocates, community members and politicians across the political spectrum **have been requesting documents from the Labor government that provide a rationale for the plan for months.**
- The community has been asking for condition reports for the 44 buildings, reports showing that alternatives to demolition were considered, feasibility studies for refurbishment and renovation, cost-modelling for the project, and documents relating to resident or stakeholder consultation. After over a year of these requests, **not a single document has been provided that justifies this plan.**
- The government **does not appear to have done any cost-modelling or an investment case** before deciding to demolish the 44 towers.
- The government has only recently engaged KPMG as consultants to develop an investment case for the demolition and redevelopment of the towers. This investment case seems to have been commissioned long after the decision was made to demolish the towers. It confirms the community's suspicions that the government's plan to demolish the towers was not founded on the basis of any evidence, feasibility work or logic. The government has now hired consultants to undertake investment cases as a way of justifying its decision after the fact.
- The government has **failed to consider the impact of demolition and redevelopment on current residents.**
- According to the government, this is "Australia's biggest ever urban renewal project". It will require Australia's largest ever public housing relocation program and a huge stock of vacant dwellings to house relocated tenants. **That stock simply does not exist** due to decades of chronic under-funding of public housing supply and maintenance as well as privatisation of existing stock. The government failed to consider the harm that will be caused to residents in carrying out thousands of relocations. See ToR (b) for more on the impact of the plan on residents..
- The **government has not provided a rationale for using public land to build predominantly private housing.**
- The government is redeveloping a majority of the 44 towers under Labor's '**Ground Lease Model**' program, which has been spruiked as a private-public partnership model for increasing Victoria's housing stock. Under this program, the public land which the 44 towers stand on, will be leased for 40 years to private developers to build predominantly private housing for private profit.
- Victoria's **public housing waitlist has been growing and as of June 2024 consists of 51,602 households and a majority of these are priority applications.** That is approximately **100,000 people who are waiting for a home.** A further 10,000 households are on the transfer list, awaiting a home that actually meets their needs. When so many Victorians need a home, it is unacceptable that the government is demolishing public housing and giving public land to private developers for private housing.
- The **government did not adequately consider alternatives** to demolition of the 44 towers before making its decision. See ToR (b) for more on this.

B: The impact of the plan on public housing residents

This is about the impact of the government's plan on current residents of the 44 towers.

You should write about all the big and small ways the government's plan will impact you, your family and your community. Your personal story is the most powerful part of your submission.

Here are some questions that you could answer in your submission:

- Are you happy with where you are living right now? How could it be improved?
- How long have you lived in your home?
- How would moving out affect your daily life?
- What worries do you have about moving?
- Do you think you'll be able to come back after the redevelopment? Why or why not?

You could also include the following points:

- **The health and wellbeing of public housing tenants will be seriously impacted by compulsory relocation and displacement and the government has failed to consider this impact in their plans.**

The impacts on public housing residents of compulsory relocation is well-studied here in Victoria, across Australia and around the world. Tenants experience the relocation process as displacement and this creates a range of negative impacts that include economic hardship, deteriorating health, social isolation, homelessness and for some incarceration. These impacts reverberate through a resident's life long before and after a physical move. They often continue even after the resident's housing has improved materially.

Residents are extremely concerned about being torn away from their communities for an extended period because they rely on the networks they have created. Those who are elderly, do not speak English as a first language or have young children are particularly reliant on their familiar networks for support.

Relocations will significantly disrupt the lives of school-aged children who will have to transfer to different schools. Residents who access community services will also face challenges as they will have to move away from their local, trusted providers and find new ones further afield. Many residents are being relocated to suburbs that are further from the city and they are worried they will not easily be able to access essential services. Meanwhile, local schools and organisations are also at risk of losing funding or fees when these students and clients move away.

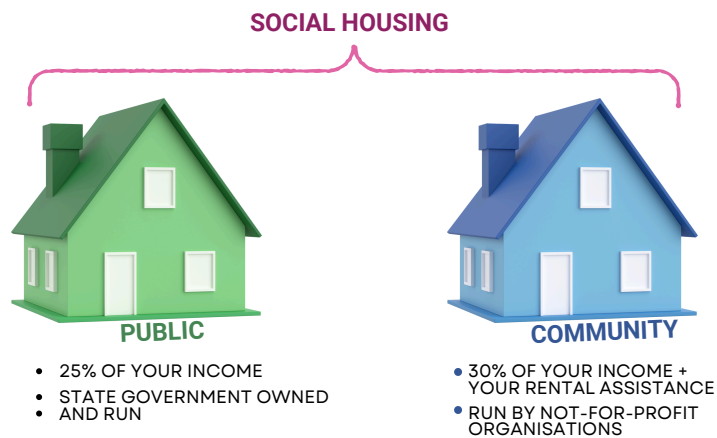
The government has evidently not considered the wellbeing of residents in their plans. They are forging ahead with the redevelopment without considering options that would minimise disruptions to residents, such as renovation and refurbishment. See ToR (b) section VII for more on this.

- **Many residents do not want to leave public housing to move into community housing because of the higher rents and insecure tenure**

Under the Ground Lease Model, community housing will replace public housing in almost all instances. Most residents want to stay in public housing because rent is set fixed at 25% of their income with no surprises and tenure is much more secure. Whereas community housing can be and often is more expensive with less security of tenure and service flexibility. Residents are feeling forced into community housing as they are being told this is their only option.

B: The impact of the plan on public housing residents

What is 'social' vs 'community' vs 'public' housing?



Social housing | A term that includes both public and community housing.

Public housing | Housing that is fully owned and operated by the government. Rent is capped at 25% of household income. Tenancy is more secure and long-term. The government's plan would see almost all the public housing in the towers replaced with community housing and private housing. Saving the towers is about saving the public housing system in Victoria.

Community housing | Housing that is either owned or managed by a not-for-profit organisation. Rent is generally higher than public housing, capped at 30% of household income plus the provider takes any Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) received by tenants. Leases tend to be short-term so tenancy is less secure. The quality of service is highly dependent on the housing provider and they do not always cater to individual tenant's preferences. Community housing can be good for those with specialist needs, but it is a more expensive, less secure and sometimes less flexible option to public housing.

- **Residents do not have a right to return to public housing and if they do want to return after many years of displacement, this is not guaranteed either.**

The redevelopment of these towers is going to take many years, making the displacement of residents permanent for most. The redevelopment of the Kensington public housing estate took 14 years and saw only 20 percent of residents return following their displacement. A similar fate seems to be in store for residents impacted by the current redevelopment plan. The government started relocating residents from the two Carlton red-brick towers (20 Elgin Street and 141 Nicholson Street) in 2020. Apartments in those buildings have sat empty for years and it is still unclear when the redevelopment will be completed and residents would be allowed to return. For those who do eventually want to return, there is no guaranteed right to return. This right is instead conditional upon many factors that are not in the residents' control.

Many residents in public housing moved to Australia in search of a better life, sometimes fleeing war, violence or persecution. These towers have become their home and the people in them their family, especially for those whose relatives remain overseas. Integrating into a community is difficult when you are a migrant in an unfamiliar place. Despite this, many public housing residents have managed to do just that. Now they are afraid that this will be taken away from them against their will and they will have to start all over again.

B: The impact of the plan on public housing residents

- **Many residents are concerned that the dwellings they are being relocated to do not meet their needs.**

North Melbourne and Flemington residents who are being made to relocate have reported several issues about the new community housing dwellings being offered to them. They are smaller in size, lack privacy, do not have car parking, are more expensive, and for those with mobility and accessibility needs, they do not have the necessary features and amenities.

Fourteen African-diaspora leaders from the North Melbourne and Flemington estates wrote an open letter to the Housing Minister and CEO Homes Victoria expressing these concerns and many more. Their letter outlines that residents have been told to place their kitchen tables on the balcony, downsize to a smaller fridge, couch and bed, and sell their vehicles. However, residents cannot afford to do this and the government has not provided any payments to facilitate this.

- **Residents and the community have been organising to protest and resist the government's plan to displace them.**

Since the government announced its intention to demolish and privatise the 44 towers, dissent within the tower communities has been growing. A resident from one of the 44 towers collected over 2,000 signatures on a parliamentary petition from other residents and concerned community members expressing their opposition to the government's plan. Residents have been speaking out about their opposition to Homes Victoria, their elected representatives at all levels of government and to the media. Residents have been meeting within their own communities to try to figure out what they can do.

Sadly, many residents have been made to feel powerless about their circumstances. They fear persecution or exclusion from the housing system if they speak up. Residents from the Flemington and North Melbourne towers who would be the first to lose their homes are in a particularly vulnerable position as they feel their housing offers may be impacted by any advocacy they participate in. Residents in these towers have long faced discrimination. They recall the trauma and dehumanisation of the lockdown that breached their human rights and they fear that the government has the power to take their rights away again if they resist. Despite these very real fears, residents are organising themselves to resist the government's displacement of their communities and destruction of public housing.

- **There are concerns about the government's commitment to delivering any community and public housing, because similar projects have been delayed or abandoned.**

The government removed 15 projects from the Big Housing Build which means hundreds of social and affordable homes that would have been built have now been abandoned or significantly delayed. There have also been several examples of the government promising they will build public housing on government land, only to later give away that land to private developers for private development instead. The government's track record on abandoning public housing has left many residents feeling concerned about their future.

- **Retrofitting, refurbishment and renovation of these towers would be cheaper and less disruptive to residents' lives.**

If it is possible to retrofit and refurbish the 44 towers, the government should be doing this rather than demolishing them. Demolishment requires whole communities to be displaced for many years as residents are relocated to housing wherever it is available across the city. However, refurbishment can be done without this significant disruption to residents' lives. For example, it can be done floor by floor, with residents relocating for shorter periods. There are many options and examples of how this can be done. It should be the duty of this government to explore whether this is a viable option as resident safety, satisfaction and quality of life should be the primary guiding factor for the project. To date, the government has not shown any evidence that it considered refurbishment of the towers as an option. This is despite many residents being happy with their homes and despite some towers being very recently renovated.

C: The findings and adequacy of consultations with tower residents and other local stakeholders

This is about how well the government and Homes Victoria have communicated with you and other residents before and after their announcement to demolish the towers.

You should write about whether you feel like the government has listened to you and you have enough information about this plan.

Here are some questions that you could answer in your submission:

- Have you been to any meetings about the changes? How many?
- Did you understand what was said at these meetings?
- Did you get to ask questions? Were they answered clearly?
- Do you feel like your opinions have been listened to? Why or why not?

You could also include the following points:

- **Public housing residents and their representatives were not consulted before the government decided to demolish the towers.**

Residents learned of the planned demolition of their homes at the same time as the rest of Victoria because they were not consulted prior to the Premier's announcement. Following the announcement, the government's plans have continued to be shrouded in secrecy. Many residents have only learned about the plans when non-government support organisations have reached out to offer support and information, or when Homes Victoria has come knocking at their door with offers for relocation.

- **Government consultation following the announcement has left many residents confused and without answers to many of their questions.**

Upon being criticised for this lack of consultation, the government began hosting information forums at each of the towers. At these forums, Homes Victoria staff briefly told residents about the government's plans for demolition and relocation. Many residents also did not receive answers for the many questions they had about the plans. Homes Victoria staff did not have answers for residents because they themselves do not know the details of the plan. The government's secrecy has left many residents and community members to wonder whether the government has any plan at all or if they simply decided one day that they would demolish all the towers and the rest is being worked out along the way. The community forums hosted by Homes Victoria have left residents feeling '*consulted*' rather than consulted.

One community leader says a Homes Victoria worker told her outright that the government is not really ready for this plan but they will learn along the way. They hope that any mistakes made in relation to the Flemington and North Melbourne tower communities will hopefully be worked out when they relocate residents from the rest of the towers. The lack of consultation and planning is simply unacceptable for any government policy, let alone one that will upend thousands of lives.

- **Residents who don't speak English as a first language have faced many barriers to accessing information and support.**

Homes Victoria officers have been visiting residents in the towers slated first for demolition to speak to residents about their options for relocation. Unfortunately, many of these conversations have occurred without legal support for residents. The government has failed to inform residents that they can seek legal advice and learn about their rights as public housing residents before speaking to Homes Victoria or signing any relocation forms. Homes Victoria has also failed to provide interpreters and other language support for residents who do not speak English as a first language, resulting in many residents signing relocation forms that they do not even understand.

C: The findings and adequacy of consultations with tower residents and other local stakeholders

- **Residents have reported feeling harassed by Homes Victoria, with some feeling pressured into relocation agreements that do not meet their needs.**

Many residents do not want to leave their home and they are concerned about the housing offers being made by Homes Victoria. However, Homes Victoria is evidently on a deadline as the first towers are slated for demolition next year. They have been visiting or calling some residents multiple times a week to apply pressure on these residents to accept their offer, even if it does not meet their needs. Some residents have been told that they will only be given one relocation offer and if this is not accepted they will not receive another offer and may face eviction regardless. It is unclear whether Homes Victoria can legally evict residents into homelessness through this process, but residents are afraid that this is what will happen to them if they do not bend to the will of the government. Those without language or legal support are particularly vulnerable to these threats.

- **Instead of a community-led, consultative approach to redevelopment, the government is evicting residents who do not comply with their plan.**

The government has signed demolition contracts for five of the 44 towers and they plan to use this as an excuse to start evicting residents. This was a tactic used by the government during the demolition and privatisation of the Barak Beacon public housing estate. Residents from that estate were dragged through VCAT and one resident even passed away, in part because of the stress caused by the relocation process. There are fears that this is the fate awaiting tower residents if the government steamrolls ahead with its plans.