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## **PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS STRUGGLE DURING HOTTEST SUMMER ON RECORD WITHOUT A FAIR AIR CONDITIONING POLICY**

The Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) today partnered with Mallee Family Care to call on the Victorian Government to revise their air conditioning policy for people living in public housing.

Right now, tenants can apply for air conditioning to be installed in their home for medical reasons if they meet strict illness or disability requirements. If they do not meet these requirements, they have to either buy and install air conditioning themselves, or suffer through the sweltering heat.

Mark Feenane, Executive Officer of the VPTA, said this wasn't good enough.

"During summer we had numerous phone calls from tenants who were unable to live in their public housing properties due to extreme heat."

"Tenants shouldn't be forced to suffer in these hot boxes just because they can't afford air conditioning. The department have a duty of care as a self-proclaimed "social landlord" to consider tenant's health and wellbeing during periods of extreme heat."

Tenants in Northern Victoria felt the full effects of the government's strict air conditioning policy during the hottest summer on record, with many seeking assistance from local service providers.

Mallee Family Care and other providers recorded a spike in health and wellbeing issues within public housing during periods of extreme heat, including family violence, alcohol and drug abuse, increased call outs of police and ambulance services, and higher rates of hospitalisation for tenants diagnosed with mental health issues.

Teresa Jayet, Chief Executive Officer of Mallee Family Care, said "the negative impact on public housing tenants who are living without air conditioning during extreme summer conditions in the Mallee is unacceptable."

"This summer there was numerous days where the temperature soared to 47 degrees across the Mallee Region. When this occurred, the department's 'one size fits all' approach to air conditioning placed public housing tenants' health and wellbeing at risk."

"The department have to provide heating for all tenants but do not consider the dire need for air conditioning during summer in areas like Mildura and Swan Hill."



Mr Feenane said the issue was only going to get worse as temperatures continue to climb during summer months.

“The poorest people in our state – many of whom live in public housing – have the least capacity to adapt to climate change. Most of their homes are old and energy inefficient and they cannot afford to foot the bill for air conditioning completely on their own.”

“Having a fairer air conditioning policy would improve vulnerable tenants’ health and wellbeing and improve the liveability of public housing properties.”

Both organisations are calling on the Victorian Government to take action on this issue by:

- Mandating the installation of air conditioning in all new public housing properties
- Installing air conditioning as a matter of course when gas heaters are replaced
- Expanding the EnergySmart Public Housing Program beyond the current upgrades to 1,500 homes

Mallee Family Care are partnering with the University of Sydney’s School of Public Health to research how prolonged periods of extreme heat are impacting Mildura residents living in public housing without access to air conditioning. The study has been co-funded by Mallee Family Care and the Jack Brockhoff Foundation, with results available by 2020.