

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

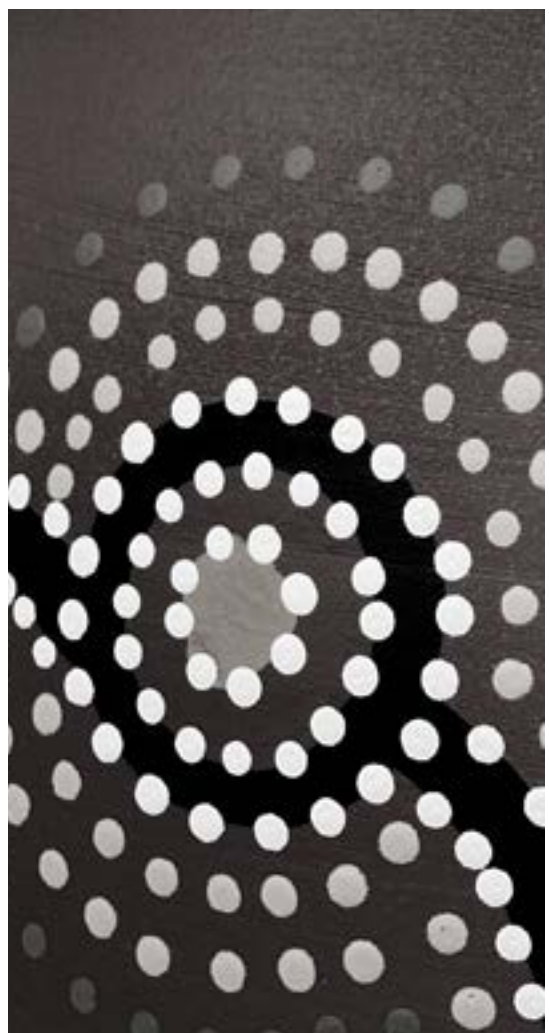
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**Victorian  
Public  
Tenants  
Association**



**VPTA** 

The VPTA acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Victoria and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and Elders of past, present and future generations.



# CONTENTS

2	Vision, Values, Purpose
3	The Year in Review
4	Note from the Chairperson
5	Executive Officer's Report
7	Tenant Support
8	Policy and Communications Report
10	Community Engagement Report
11	Treasurer's Report
12	Auditor's Report



The Victorian Public Tenants' Association acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

# VISION VALUES PURPOSE

## *Vision*

Safe, secure and accessible public housing for every Victorian that needs it.

## *Values*

**Integrity** - treating all tenants with dignity and respect.

**Quality** - striving to do our best and improve the way we do things.

**Collaboration** - working together to achieve results.

**Responsibility** - committing to achieve the best possible outcomes for tenants.

**Client focus** - working towards improving the living environment for tenants.

## *Purpose*

To provide benevolent relief and social welfare support, including counselling, advice, referral and advocacy for public housing tenants and those on the waiting list.

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

## In 2019-20



### APPROXIMATELY 7,000

The number of calls staff received from, and made to (or on behalf of) people who live in public housing.

564

The number of cases VPTA staff managed for people who live in public housing. This is an increase from the previous financial year.



### MAINTENANCE IS STILL AN ISSUE

Maintenance is still the most commonly raised problem, accounting for 217 cases, almost half. This is fewer than last year, but shows us that there is still more work to be done to make sure maintenance is done properly.

### THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH HOMES

After maintenance, cases involving the waitlist, (44) or transfers and swaps (91) were the next most common issues raised. Confirming once again that there is a serious lack of housing stock.



### NEIGHBOURHOOD DISPUTES ARE INCREASING

We have also seen an increase in the number of people who are experiencing serious problems with their neighbours. In the previous financial year 5.9% of our cases were assisting someone who was experiencing problems with a neighbour. This increased to 9% in the most recent financial year.

4 STAFF

The VPTA has just four full-time staff. In the 2019-20 financial year, we had two casual staff members. We are pleased to report that a third casual staff member began working with us for the 2020-21 financial year.



# NOTE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON: A REWARDING YEAR

As Victoria, and the world, grapples with the covid-19 pandemic and all that we have had to face, it might seem a little odd to be saying that the VPTA has had a good year. Yet the view I have as Chairperson of our Association is that the last 12 months have proved successful and rewarding.

The VPTA has a new office to be proud of; one that is spacious, professional and well-equipped; one that those who have been involved with the VPTA in past years could only dream about.

We have (marginally) increased funding and staffing levels; we are better resourced and better equipped!

Both the Housing Minister's office and various staff members of the Department contact us to consult, advise and/or inform and our outreach program continues to expand our community contact. We are respected; our opinion is sought by the Department, other organisations and the media.

Our Association is well managed, efficient, financially prudent, and continues to serve our mission of advocating for more public housing and improved service delivery. We compile evidence to support our mission and present the facts to the decision makers...who sometimes take note.

Our Subscribers' Bulletins and social media posts have extended their reach, while more people know about us and the services we provide - as evidenced by the continuing volume of requests for assistance we receive.

Numerous public housing tenants have been helped by the VPTA over the last year. Sometimes our assistance takes the form of explaining the Department's processes or advising of a tenant's rights and obligations. At other times the VPTA may contact Housing staff to sort out a dispute, a maintenance issue or some problem that has not been resolved appropriately. We have helped hundreds of public housing tenants over the last twelve months.

We receive positive feedback from tenants, family members, housing staff and others for our work, our help, our constructive input, our advocacy and our assistance with various housing related matters. When folk say "thank you so much for doing what you do", we know we are making a difference for the better - and that's really the most rewarding!

*Margaret Guthrie*  
**Chairperson**



# EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT: A TIME OF CHANGE AND CONSOLIDATION

Once again, we have had a very busy year dealing with enquiries from tenants and attending meetings as a part of the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance, and with other colleagues in the community sector, Housing staff across the State and also meeting with politicians and executive staff from the Department of Health and Human Services.

We had a very strong social media presence and our posts attracted a great deal of positive comments and were on occasion shared broadly.

We have been and will continue to be a strong voice for tenants and we have written numerous submissions throughout the year strongly in support of tenants.

Staff continued to produce our high quality monthly newsletter which is emailed to our subscribers. This contains information about matters affecting public housing tenants including new policy initiatives announce by the Government and where appropriate our response to these which we provide without fear or favour. The VPTA continues to provide solid feedback to the Government on behalf of tenants and continues to remain independent from Government or political allegiance.

This year we managed to get a slight funding increase which covered many of the initiatives we were involved in at the appropriate Award rate for the staff involved. We are funded by tenant rents, as are the departmental housing staff. We have an effective full time staff component of 4.6 EFT - 4 full time staff and 3 part time staff working up to two days each week, servicing the entire State. Ours is a very busy workplace and we certainly punch well above our weight.

We moved from Walker Street, Northcote in April to our new premises in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, just in time for the full impact of covid-19. We set up the office and then proceeded to work from home - which has been a challenge. When we can, we have a fabulous purpose-built office to work in. Many thanks are due to the Director of Housing who owns the building and everyone who helped make it happen.

In setting up the office, we introduced a new IT system and computer network, and a full featured and economical telephone system which has allowed us to work seamlessly from home. So now when someone rings us (and we process over 7,500 calls per year) we have an unlimited message bank that staff can access from home. We continue to call back within 24 hours, and often within a few hours depending on whether the message is left during business hours.

Perhaps the best innovation is the client database we developed which is custom built for our needs with all staff having input into the design. This means we can keep an accurate and up to date record of everyone who contacts us, noting trend information which we use to inform improvements in policy with the Department. This live database means that anyone can assist the client and information is always current - an invaluable tool and a significant improvement over the old Excel spreadsheet we had to endure for years.

Our new office will be used for many purposes, including holding our Annual General Meetings, training forums and meetings at scale. It is equipped with the latest technology for presentations and meeting attendance including remote video and telephone conferencing facilities. In the future, we will be able to hold meetings with tenants online and by appointment at the office where appropriate.

Covid-19 will pass and the VPTA will expand its services and value to the public housing tenant community in Victoria.

There are exciting times on the horizon.

*Mark Feenane*  
**Executive Officer**



# SUPPORT FOR TENANTS

All names have been changed to protect privacy.

Alex moved into their home in late 2019. Since that time, they had only been able to have a few showers, because the bathroom needed modifications in order to be accessible, and the Department were being too slow to act on the problem. After speaking to a couple of different organisations, Alex contacted the VPTA. We talked to Housing and got the bathroom fixed.

The Xi family relocated, as their home was on a PHRP site. The property that Housing offered them had a number of maintenance issues, which the family wanted addressed before accepting the property. Housing were reluctant to do the work. The VPTA spoke to Housing on behalf of the family and the work was completed. Further maintenance issues arose after the family moved, which the VPTA also negotiated to have resolved.

Zuri's son had been suffering from allergies and respiratory issues from a young age. Zuri provided multiple documents over a two year period from specialists requesting that Housing remove the old carpet and install vinyl flooring in their home. On multiple occasions this request was rejected by Housing. With the assistance of the VPTA, they agreed to replace the carpet with vinyl flooring. Zuri called back two weeks later reporting an improvement in her son's condition.

Angela had not been able to return to her property due to an uninvited person refusing to leave the home. The police had removed the person on multiple occasions however he continued to return and repeatedly threatened Angela with violence. She had not been offered a transfer at the time and had been told to relinquish the tenancy by Housing. The VPTA assisted Angela with a priority transfer application and she was offered a property in a safe location.

# POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The 2019-2020 Financial Year will hold a unique place in the memory of Victorians for decades to come.

The first six months were effectively 'business as usual', but by the last days of 2019, everything had changed.

As Victoria faced first devastating bushfires that blanketed our skies in acrid smoke and then a global pandemic, the nature and severity of which few would have predicted in their worst nightmares, we were forced to pivot from our original plans for 2020 and reimagine what work for the VPTA would look like. Despite these challenges, we have remained strong and consistent in our calls for significant investment in public housing.

With more than 100,000 Victorians currently waiting for housing assistance, and homelessness constantly on the rise, our Government must respond by drastically increasing the public housing stock figures.

We have also continued to advocate strongly on behalf of individual tenants (you can read some of their stories on page 7 of this report) and for system wide policy improvements to make public housing better for everyone who calls it home now, and will in the future.

Further, we have contributed strongly to social policy analysis and debate in Victoria and nationally.

This year we prepared the following policy submissions:

- Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart and related payments (including providing in person evidence at the Melbourne hearing)
- Response to discussion paper regarding a potential ban of Open Flued Gas Space Heaters in Victoria
- Submission regarding the Regulatory Impact Statement regarding proposed Residential Tenancies Regulations
- Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness
- Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia
- Submissions to the Victorian Government regarding budget priorities for the 2021-22 Financial Year.

These documents are available to read on our website, on the Policy and Advocacy page (under the 'Our Work' tab).

In addition, we have provided direct advice to the Building Victoria's Recovery Taskforce and the Director of Housing about the role enhanced public housing construction must play in Victoria's economic recovery from the covid-19 recession we are currently experiencing.

We remain an active member of the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance, which released the well-publicized report, *Make Social Housing Work: A Framework for Victoria's Public and Community Housing 2020-2030*, as well as continuing to be a member organisation of the national Everybody's Home campaign to end homelessness in Australia.

Our presence on social media continues to grow. Our Twitter following grew by 8 per cent over the financial year, while our Facebook following grew by 25 per cent. Our engagement rates (the number of people interacting with our posts) on each platform are above the benchmarked average for not-for-profit organisations as reported in the Rival IQ Social Media Benchmarking Report 2020.

Although we have been working remotely since March, the VPTA team remains committed to working with and for people who live in public housing in Victoria, as well as the people on the waiting list. We will continue to adapt and respond to the changing circumstances in Victoria, with optimism for a brighter 2021-22.

*Katelyn Butters*  
**Manager, Policy and  
Communication**

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Community Engagement got off to a strong start this Financial Year. I attended more than 80 community events and expos, meetings with tenants and the Department, consultative committees, and round table discussions.

I met with representatives from 8 housing offices including Box Hill, Fitzroy, Sunshine, Cheltenham, Footscray, Seymour, and Warrnambool and participated in Community Capacity Building Initiatives at South Melbourne and North Richmond estates. Over the last two years I have met with all but a few housing offices across Victoria. The relationship with housing staff has played a key part in the VPTA's advocacy and has enabled us to achieve better outcomes for tenants.

A highlight for the year was my trip to Warrnambool. Here I met with a group of tenants and the maintenance contractor for the area, Programmed. Tenants were able to provide honest feedback to the team regarding the service provided, contractors and areas for improvement. The tenants were appreciative of the opportunity to give feedback on a service they regularly engage with. The casual environment provided opportunity for an open and frank discussion however, it was clear that everyone enjoyed themselves. The VPTA intends to take part in similar forums in the future and hope that housing offices are up for the challenge.

The wheels for a successful year were in motion, project partners were being formed and trips around the State were mapped out, however, due to covid-19 many plans have been put on hold.

As a team we have worked together to ensure tenants and services continue to have access to information about housing, while providing information on covid-19 and how to stay safe during this time. We are doing our best to listen and work with tenants and services to ensure we provide their critical feedback to the Department.

Covid-19 has brought new relationships, new challenges, and different ways of engaging with our community. We have Zoom called, spent hours on the phone, sent emails, posted on Facebook and Twitter, and recently rebooted the VPTA Instagram as we aspire to reach more tenants and services. This new way of living has highlighted a lack of access to digital platforms for many tenants and something we must be mindful of in our engagement and advocacy moving forward.

Working from home has had its challenges and I have certainly missed the face to face interaction with our tenants, however I believe the future of community engagement looks bright. As a result of challenging times, there is a sense that Government departments are starting to properly understand the importance of community participation and the value of lived experience.

*Matilda Hooper*  
**Community Engagement Officer**

# TREASURER'S REPORT

## Treasurer's Report For the period Financial Period 1st July 2019 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020

I, Dragan Todorovic, hereby table the Special Purpose Financial Report of the Victorian Public Tenants Association for the period 1st July 2019 to 30th June 2020, which has been completed by our External Auditor, Ryk Eksteen of Collins & Co.

I believe that the Profit and Loss Balance Sheet Reports, as prepared by Nina Xinnou (Administration and Finance Officer) and shown here at the 2020 Annual General meeting online via Zoom , are true and correct.



Dragan Todorovic (Treasurer)



**VICTORIAN PUBLIC TENANTS ASSOCIATION INC**  
**A.B.N. 88 548 550 316**  
**INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS**

**Opinion**

I have audited the accompanying financial report of Victorian Public Tenants Association Inc (the Association), which comprises the balance sheet as at 30 June 2020, and the income statement, statement of changes in equity and cash flow statement for the year ended on that date, a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory notes and the statement by the members of the Board.

In my opinion, the financial report of the Association is in accordance with the *Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission Act 2012* and the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012*, including:

- i. giving a true and fair view of the Association's financial position as at 30 June 2020 and of its performance for the year ended; and
- ii. complying with Australian Accounting Standards as per Note 1, the *Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission Act 2012* and the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012*.

**Basis for Opinion**

I conducted my audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report section of our report. I am independent of the Association in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the Code) that are relevant to my audit of the financial report in Australia. I have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

**Emphasis of Matter - Basis of Accounting and Restriction on Distribution**

I draw attention to Note 1 to the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report has been prepared to assist Victorian Public Tenants Association Inc to meet the requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission Act 2012* and the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012*. As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose. My opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

**Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Report**

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with the financial reporting requirements of the applicable legislation and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation and fair presentation of a financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, management is responsible for assessing the Association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Entity or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Association's financial reporting process.





# Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd

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## Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial report.

As part of an audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards, I exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. I also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the registered entity's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the responsible entities.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the responsible entities use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the registered entity's ability to continue as a going concern. If I conclude that a material uncertainty exists, I am required to draw attention in my auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial report or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify my opinion. My conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of my auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the registered entity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial report, including the disclosures, and whether the financial report represents the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal controls that I identify during my audit.

**Auditor:** Frederik Ryk Ludolf Eksteen

**ASIC Registration Number:** 421448

**Address:** Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd, 127 Paisley Street, FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**17 August 2020**