

Joint statement on the redevelopment of seven public housing towers dedicated to older Victorians

The redevelopment of Victoria's 44 public housing towers is a major infrastructure project that impacts the lives of thousands of Victorians, and entails considerable investment at a time when Victoria urgently needs a large-scale social housing build.

Such a project requires careful planning, genuine consultation and a commitment to transparency in order to ensure Victoria uses its resources most effectively to end homelessness, and that we bring the public – in particular residents of the housing towers – on the journey in a genuine, informed way.

We, the undersigned organisations, believe it is timely for the Government to review the execution to date of the redevelopment program generally, and we look forward to having that conversation with you in the near future.

But today we wish to raise and focus on a number of concerns we have regarding the latest announcement for redevelopment of seven towers currently dedicated to providing public housing to Victorians over the age of 55:

- 29 Crown St, Flemington
- 159 Melrose Str, North Melbourne
- 150 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park
- 94 Ormond St, Kensington
- 25 and 27 King St, Prahran
- 150 Inkerman St, St Kilda

It is essential to maintain dedicated older persons' housing

We call on the Government to commit to maintaining dedicated older persons' housing in any redevelopment, and not just dedicated floors for residents over the age of 55.

Older residents report dedicated buildings give them a feeling of safety and security.

Dedicated buildings also make it easy for older people who are ageing in place to access bespoke services in the home. If a revised model results in older residents being dispersed, it will be difficult to maintain the same levels of support due to services already being overstretched.

Offers of new homes must be appropriate

Given the age of some residents in these towers, the next home they move to will be their final home before moving into aged care.

We call on the Government to commit that all offers of accommodation will be appropriate, provide long-term tenure and not be headleased, and maintain the current rent.

Planning for support of residents through the transition

We call on the Government to present its plan for how residents will be supported throughout their move and once they are settled in their new homes.

We need to be presented with a plan for how residents will be:

- clearly communicated with;
- supported once they move to ensure they can continue to access their current support services; and
- prepared for the significantly different living conditions that will affect them in their new housing, such as higher bills, and tied access to embedded infrastructure networks.

Additional support services must be properly resourced

Any additional support services committed to older people as part of the relocation must be properly resourced.

The Commonwealth Aged Care support system is not equipped to provide the support residents need, due to eligibility criteria, assessment, long wait times and service availability. For example, under this approach, residents may need to be reassessed if they change areas, reassessed when and if they move back and then wait for the supports to come in at all. This in an environment where there is already a long waitlist for assessments.

Residents' existing Victorian service providers are the most appropriate organisations to provide addition support, but they are already at capacity and cannot scale up without additional funding.

We call on the Government to commit to increasing resourcing to the existing Victorian service providers to provide additional support services to residents during the relocation.

Support workers must be independent

The Government has stated that each resident will have a dedicated relocation support worker.

We call on the Government to commit that these support workers will be independent, not employed by Homes Victoria. The principle of distinct housing and support workers is a key Housing First principle. As Homes Victoria is the landlord for these tenants, having the resident's support worker also be from Homes Victoria would be contrary to best practice.

Certain right of return

Residents' right to return after redevelopment is currently expressed in Government documentation with the significant qualification "Residents can also come back to the neighbourhood after it is redeveloped *if their eligibility and needs are the same and the new homes are suitable for them*" [our italics]. This qualification makes it impossible for any resident to know if they will actually have a right to return.

Residents subject to relocation experience extreme destabilisation and understandable stress, and the uncertainty of this statement extends their anxiety.

Government representatives have informally indicated to us that residents will have a right to return, and we ask the Government to put that same commitment in writing to provide certainty and reassurance to residents.

We also call on the Government to commit that residents will be returning as public housing tenants, and they will be returning "for life".

Clarity around the future of the towers

Finally, we call on the Government to provide more clarification around the ground lease model for these sites, and confirmation that the land and properties will revert to government control.

Signed by:



COTA Victoria



Council to Homeless
Persons



Elder Rights Australia



Housing For the
Aged Action Group



Tenants Victoria



Victorian Council of
Social Service



Victorian Public Tenants
Association