

Submission to the Senate Committee On Intergenerational Housing Inequity

May 2026

About Better Renting

Better Renting is a national housing justice organisation working with renters to secure stable, affordable, and healthy homes for people who rent.

We work alongside renters to elevate their experiences and drive the systemic changes needed to establish renting as a desirable alternative to owning a home. Through research, campaigns, and community organising, we highlight how high housing costs, poor quality homes, and insecure tenancies affect renters' wellbeing, productivity, and economic opportunity.

Introduction

Better Renting welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Intergenerational Housing Inequity. We also note and endorse the submission from Everybody's Home and we are an active member of the coalition.

Better Renting has witnessed the impacts of Australia's housing and cost of living crises on individuals, families, and communities across generations. Framing the housing crisis as a generational issue is problematic because it focuses on inequity between generations, instead of the considerable inequity that exists within and across age groups. Housing inequity is largely driven by government economic and housing policies that have, over decades, created disparities in income, wealth, and accumulation of assets. These structural conditions have resulted in the current, inequitable reality in which each generation comprises people living in stable, affordable, high-quality homes, people buying additional homes to increase their wealth, and people who are unhoused, experiencing housing precarity, or living in unaffordable, unstable, poor-quality homes.

Renters in all generations experience significant housing inequity caused by government policies. Around Australia, government action—and inaction—has created the current rental housing crisis in which renters of all ages live in unaffordable, unstable, and unhealthy homes. Responding to this

crisis along generational lines could worsen housing inequity for renters by prioritising interventions for younger people and condemning older people to ongoing housing precarity. Further, the generational focus risks continuing the policy fixation on increasing home ownership among young people and ignoring the considerable improvements to housing equity that governments could achieve through strong, overdue rental reforms.

“I drained my savings, borrowed money, and sought emergency payout of leave from work just to afford the move and food. I also had to take time off from work to attend inspections.”

– Renter, ACT, from the [Cost of Renting report](#)

Australia’s housing system has undergone significant structural shifts in recent decades. Today, around a third of households rent,¹ and this proportion is growing². However, government policies have not kept pace with this shift, and continue to reflect apparent beliefs that renting is a transitional stage of life, even as renters increasingly believe they will be renting for life³. These policies have led to sharp declines in the rental affordability, quality, and stability.

Housing affordability is a fundamental determinant of wellbeing, shaped by the relationship between housing costs and household income as well as border structural and policy settings, including tenure type and access to housing assistance⁴. This means that rising housing costs directly impact living standards, financial security, and broader wellbeing outcomes.

Rental unaffordability is a dominant feature of housing inequity in Australia. Over the decade leading up to March 2025, median asking rents increased by 48% across Australia⁵. And, on average, renting households are spending a higher proportion of their pre-tax income on rent, with a record high of 33% in December 2025 compared to 26% in September 2020⁶.

Rental stress occurs when renters spend over 30% of their income on rent⁷. It is unacceptably high, with around 70% of renting households experiencing rental stress in January 2024, and sharply contrasts with the 31% of mortgage holders considered to be “at risk” of mortgage stress at the same time.⁸ For many renting households, housing costs are completely unsustainable, leaving little room for other essential expenses and undermining long-term financial security⁹.

¹<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/snapshot-australia/2021>

²<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/431>

³<https://www.betterrenting.org.au/essential-homes>

⁴<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/housing-affordability>

⁵<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/housing-affordability>

⁶<https://discover.cotality.com/hubfs/441896203/Gated-Content/AU-Quarterly-Rental-Review-Q1-2026.pdf>

⁷https://everybodyshome.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/EH_Housing-Crisis-Snapshot.pdf

⁸https://everybodyshome.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/EH_Housing-Crisis-Snapshot.pdf

⁹https://www.betterrenting.org.au/cost_of_renting_2024

And while rents have increased, rental housing conditions are often poor due to inadequate maintenance and repair and the absence of improvements that would provide healthy living conditions, like insulation, draught sealing, and mould prevention.¹⁰ Better Renting's research has documented widespread rental housing quality issues including mould¹¹, energy inefficient homes that do not provide safe or comfortable temperatures¹², and homes left in disrepair¹³.

“High heat triggers my asthma and migraines and vertigo. My son also lives with several disabilities which are harder for him to manage in high heat. He is on numerous medications and the heat has an impact on this and the side effects. Because he can't sleep in the heat, it exacerbates his disabilities.”

– Renter, NSW, from the [Hot Homes report](#)

Renters are now paying record-high rents for homes that are often poorly maintained, inefficient, and unsafe. This combination means many renters are unwilling to ask for the repairs, maintenance, or improvements needed to ensure their home is safe and comfortable, as they fear a rent rise or even eviction¹⁴.

“The house has slowly been crumbling around us, the floors are collapsing, the roof was a disaster, the gutter used to backflow into the ceiling, and it's just of crumbly and depressing, there's not a single tile in the house - there are painted walls in the bathroom, after a while it becomes taxing because of how crumbly it is.”

– Renter, Victoria, from the [Power Struggles: Renting in Winter report](#)

Renting has become a long-term reality for an increasing number of people in Australia, yet governments have shifted responsibility for housing to the private market and failed to protect renters. To address the growing inequity experienced by renters across generations, governments must deliver the policy measures needed to ensure renters across generations live in affordable, stable, high quality homes.

Renters' experiences of housing inequity

In recent years, Better Renting has witnessed significant changes in both the scale and nature of renting in Australia. We have seen renters struggling to deal with steep rent increases along with broader cost of living challenges. We also know that renters are dealing with the stress and financial costs of rental instability, living with the fear—or reality—of having to find a new home every year or two when their landlord wants to sell, renovate, move in a relative, or push the rent above breaking

¹⁰<https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.26193/SLCU9J>

¹¹https://www.betterrenting.org.au/renter_researchers_winter_23

¹²https://www.betterrenting.org.au/boiling_point_report

¹³https://www.betterrenting.org.au/cost_of_renting_2024

¹⁴https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Rights-at-risk_rising-rents-and-repercussions_3.pdf

point. At the same time, vacancy rates remain low, making it increasingly difficult for people to find a home, even when they can afford rising prices.

A large part of Better Renting's work involves advocating for minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes. We have researched and understood how renters' lives are adversely impacted by poor rental housing conditions resulting from inadequate maintenance and repair, as well as the failure to provide the upgrades needed to ensure a healthy indoor environment, like insulation, draught sealing, and mould prevention. Rental housing quality is inextricably linked to unaffordability and instability, as the fear of rent increases and eviction discourages many renters from seeking repairs or maintenance, let alone the improvements that would make their home safe and comfortable.

"I have had to move three times in eight years... Each time I have had to move further away to get cheaper rent but the houses [are] gradually getting worse. I'm now in a situation [where] there is no more cheap rent and I have to try and make ends meet."

– Renter, Western Australian, from the [Cost of Renting report](#)

We are also witnessing changes in the duration of renting and profile of renters. While renting has been viewed by some as a temporary, transitional housing option for young people progressing towards home ownership, we are increasingly seeing people renting long-term, while many tell us they expect to rent indefinitely—or for the rest of their lives. We see diversity among renters today: families raising children in rental homes, people remaining in the rental market into their retirement years, and people entering the rental market at a later stage in life, particularly among older women¹⁵.

Better Renting hears about the ways renters experience housing inequity in their everyday lives.

Renters consistently report the impacts of housing instability and unaffordability, such as:

- **Skipping essential expenses such as food, healthcare, and use of utilities such as heating and cooling to afford their rent.**
- **Remaining in unsafe, poor-quality, or overcrowded housing due to lack of alternatives.**
- **Moving frequently due to insecure leases or rent increases, at great personal expense,**
- **Being unable to find housing despite stable employment, income, and rental history.**

Affected cohorts of renters

The impacts of Australia's housing system are not evenly distributed. While this inquiry focuses on intergenerational housing inequity, the evidence suggests that housing outcomes are better understood through a divide in income, wealth, and access to assets rather than age alone. Intergenerational differences are real, but they are shaped and amplified by underlying structural inequalities in the housing system. Better Renting works with a diverse cohort of renters across ages,

¹⁵<https://www.olderrenters.org.au/content/older-women-the-private-rental-sector-unaffordable-substandard-and-insecure-housing>

incomes, and housing situations, and life stages. What we see across this work is that housing stress and insecurity are increasingly widespread, affecting people across the income distribution at different points in life.

“I only survive out here...I am not living my life...I’m just existing until I die and I’m only one increase from living in my car with my children.”

– Renter, New South Wales, from the [Cost of Renting report](#)

Low-income renters experience the most severe impacts of housing stress and insecurity. For these households, rental costs frequently exceed sustainable levels, leaving little or no capacity to pay for other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and utilities¹⁶. These households are also the most likely to experience persistent housing insecurity and exclusion from parts of the private rental market, reflecting long-standing affordability constraints in the lowest end of the market¹⁷. However, the pressures now emerging in the rental market are no longer confined to the lowest-income households alone.

“Being on a pension the rent increases make you have to sometimes skip meals as once I’ve paid rent and other bills there’s no money left for groceries.”

– Renter, Western Australian, from the [Cost of Renting report](#)

Housing pressures are increasingly extending beyond the lowest-income households. Low to middle-income families and couples make up a significant share of the rental population we work with, and many are experiencing growing difficulty securing housing that is affordable relative to their incomes¹⁸. Even households with two full-time incomes are increasingly required to devote a substantial share of earnings to cover their rent, particularly in metropolitan areas and high-demand regional markets. This reflects a clear structural tightening of the rental market, where affordability constraints are no longer confined to the lowest-income households but are increasingly affecting working households and dual-income families¹⁹. These pressures are particularly acute for younger renters, many of whom are navigating the rental market on lower incomes and with limited financial security.

“My kids don’t do any after school activities and our weekends are spent mostly at home as we can’t afford to go anywhere, not even day drives like we used to”.

– Renter, New South Wales, from the [Cost of Renting report](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/431>

¹⁷ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/housing-affordability>

¹⁸ https://www.betterrenting.org.au/cost_of_renting_2024

¹⁹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/housing-affordability>

Young people continue to face significant barriers to housing equity. While renting is becoming more common among all age groups, 84% of households aged 15-24 rent²⁰. Declining affordability, low-vacancy rates, and strong competition for rental properties have contributed to longer-term renting trajectories, with renting increasingly functioning as a long-term rather than transitional tenure. This is compounded by the fact that younger renters typically have lower household incomes²¹. At the same time, housing inequity is not confined to younger people.

Older people represent a growing cohort of renters in Australia, and the number of older renters who own their home is decreasing²². Between 2011 and 2021, the number of older people renting privately increased by 73%²³, with nearly 700,000 people aged over 55 renting in the private market by 2021. Increasingly, older Australians are entering retirement without the security of home ownership, despite Australia's retirement system being built on the assumption that most people will own their homes outright later in life²⁴. These pressures are increasingly apparent for older women²⁵, who are overrepresented among older renters and are more likely to experience housing insecurity later in life due to a range of factors including lower lifetime earnings, interrupted workforce participation, relationship breakdown, and lower superannuation balances²⁶. Beyond age and income, renters with disability and chronic health conditions face additional structural barriers within the private rental market.

"I'll probably be doing hardship programs when I get the next bill. It's destroying my health even with the damn air conditioner on for 20 days. It's too expensive to be this disabled with no support. I have to choose between spending money or spending pain and fatigue."

– Renter, Western Australia, from the [Sweaty and Stressed](#) report

People with chronic health conditions and disability experience compounded disadvantage in the rental market. Renters with disability often face additional barriers in securing housing that is affordable, accessible, and appropriate to their needs²⁷. Research from Anglicare Australia found that just 0.1% of rental listings surveyed nationally in 2023 were affordable and appropriate for a single

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<https://rea3.irmau.com/site/pdf/3b22652f-3417-486f-a433-38443e3f0587/REA-Group-Rental-Affordability-Report-2025.pdf>

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<https://rea3.irmau.com/site/pdf/3b22652f-3417-486f-a433-38443e3f0587/REA-Group-Rental-Affordability-Report-2025.pdf>

²² https://www.olderrenters.org.au/sites/default/files/ageing_in_a_housing_crisis_-_full_report.pdf

²³ http://www.olderrenters.org.au/sites/default/files/ageing_in_a_housing_crisis_-_full_report.pdf

²⁴

<https://superconsumers.com.au/journalism/people-who-rent-face-impossible-financial-challenge-in-retirement/>

²⁵

<https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/news/archive/2020/uprooting-no-matter-how-small-a-plant-you-are-is-a-trauma-older-women-renters-are-struggling>

²⁶ https://humanrights.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0032/77297/Ahrc_ow_homelessness2019.pdf

²⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P5pHlpQD-SI-Ww28k8NnWPuNxiTy7751/view>

person receiving the Disability Support Pension²⁸. There is a persistent shortage of accessible housing in Australia, with many existing homes not designed or built to meet accessibility requirements and limited mandatory standards for accessibility in mainstream housing supply²⁹. In addition to this lack of accessible housing supply, Better Renting's Renter Researchers consistently report that the overall quality of rental housing further compounds disadvantage for people with chronic illness and disability. Poor housing conditions, including damp, mould, inadequate heating and cooling, and low energy efficiency, can significantly worsen existing health conditions or make homes difficult to safely and comfortably inhabit³⁰. Combined with limited ability to request repairs or modifications without fear of rent increases or eviction, many renters are effectively required to remain in housing that undermines their health, wellbeing, and independence.

“I got a \$100 a week increase, and have been hit with another \$40 a week increase... My physical and mental health continues to deteriorate because I can't afford treatment, food, [and] keeping a roof over my head all at the same time.”

– Renter, New South Wales, from the [Cost of Renting report](#)

Across all of these groups, housing outcomes are increasingly shaped not by life stage or age alone, but by access to income stability and wealth. There are broader structural issues at large that reflect a shift in the housing system, a shift where secure and affordable housing is becoming less accessible for people without access to wealth and assets, regardless of age.

Systemic drivers of rental housing inequity and barriers to reform

Government policy decisions are driving the housing inequity renters experience in Australia. Across the country and over decades, governments have shifted responsibility for housing to the private market and failed to hold landlords accountable for providing affordable, stable, and comfortable homes.

The Federal Government has driven rental housing inequity in three important ways:

- Providing insufficient funding for to build enough affordable, high-quality public housing to ensure everyone who needs a home;
- Maintaining tax concessions for housing investors that have supercharged inequity across Australia's housing system and contributed to rental instability and unaffordability; and
- Failing to provide the leadership through federal processes needed to secure meaningful rental reforms from all states and territories. This is well-illustrated in the 2023 “[Better Deal for Renters](#)” that contains weak commitments yet to be implemented by all jurisdictions,

²⁸ https://assets.anglicare.org.au/m/79984c290ffc040b/original/Sydney_RAS_Report_2025.pdf

²⁹ <https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/human-rights/adaptable-housing-people-disability-australia>

³⁰ https://www.betterrenting.org.au/renter_researchers

including a particularly uninspiring agreement to phase in minimum rental quality standards such as a working stovetop and hot and cold running water.

Better Renting details these drivers in the recent, landmark report, [Essential Homes: Why renting is an essential service](#).

Our report also addresses significant barriers to reform. Current barriers to improving equity in the housing system for renters include:

- Governments avoiding their responsibility to provide stable housing with genuinely affordable rent, shrinking the safety net for people who need these homes and increasing strain on those in the private rental market.
- Political influence and public scare campaigns by powerful lobby groups promoting profits for housing investors over the need for affordable, stable, high-quality rental housing.
- Inadequate regulation of lending practices that facilitate irresponsible investment in the provision of rental housing.
- The lack of political recognition of renters as an important constituency, even as renters increasingly identify as long term or even lifelong renters and the broader community increasingly understands the fundamental shifts in the housing system.
- An absence of political will to introduce or enforce the policy reforms needed to increase stability, affordability, and quality in rental housing.

Recommendations

Improving housing equity will require action from all levels of government in Australia. Below, Better Renting identifies the key actions for the Federal Government. We set out a broader range of reforms in the [Essential Homes](#) report and also endorse the recommendations from Everybody's Home.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should urgently initiate a national reform process to deliver a new Better Deal for Renters that commits states and territories to implementing strong reforms that will address current housing inequity for renters, including:

- a. Strong minimum rental standards, including comprehensive energy efficiency standards, accompanied by protections for renters from rent increases and eviction.
- b. Further eviction reforms to support long-term tenancies, provide renters with greater control over when their tenancy ends, and compensate renters in circumstances of unavoidable eviction.
- c. Hardship schemes to support renters in financial crisis to remain in their homes.
- d. Rent stabilisation policies that protect renters from excessive rent increases, accompanied by measures to limit unintended adverse consequences.

Recommendation 2: The Australian Government should improve the quality of rental homes by funding:

- a. Incentives for landlords to meet state and territory minimum energy efficiency standards, conditional on protections for renters from rent increases and eviction.
- b. Upgrades to existing public and community housing, including energy efficiency.

Recommendation 3: The Australian Government should increase investment in the supply of housing needed to meet to meet current and future need by:

- a. Providing sufficient investment in building new, high-quality public housing; and
- b. Supplementing investment in new public housing with funding for well-designed community and affordable housing models in which new homes are built to high standards and rents are capped at a portion of income.

Recommendation 4: The Australian Government should legislate and strengthen the investor tax reforms announced in the 2026-27 Federal Budget by:

- a. Legislating the abolition of the capital gains tax discount for existing homes.
- b. Legislating the abolition of the negative gearing on existing homes.
- c. Strengthening negative gearing reforms by removing the exclusion for existing investors.
- d. Monitoring the impact of the exclusions for investment in newly built homes to ensure they deliver meaningful increases in affordable, high quality rental supply.

Recommendation 5: The Australian Government should direct the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to provide clear guidance to lenders that ensures people borrowing money for an investment property can afford repair and maintenance costs.