

No vacancy: private rental in Australia

Jennifer Beveridge

Tenants Victoria



A background image of a city skyline, likely New York City, with a bridge and water in the foreground. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. A white geometric shape is on the left side of the slide.

Resilience for renters: ensuring their homes are safe and secure havens during COVID-19

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CEO, Tenants Victoria

Story of disruption

- › Housing is a basic human right
- › Disruption is a common experience for renters

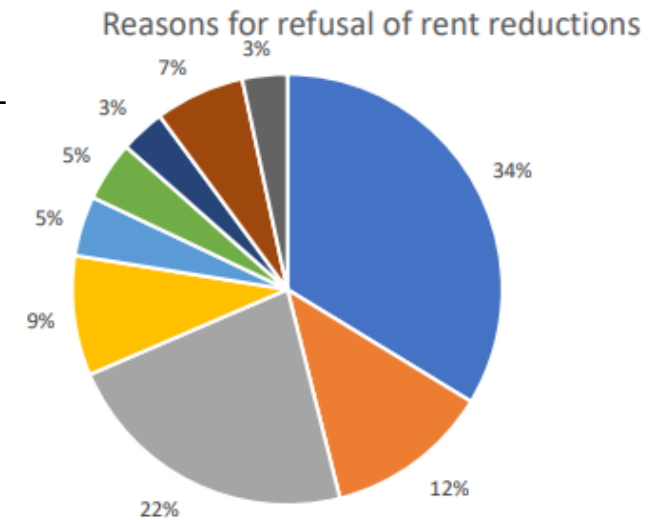
- › Vic had the laws to protect renters and ensure their housing was safe and secure during the pandemic
- › BUT safe and secure housing relies on an interplay between:
 - › the law,
 - › cultural issues and
 - › socio-economic factors

Eviction moratorium, rent reductions and rent relief grant

- › Eviction moratorium for 12 months from March 2020 to 28 March 2021
 - › No rent increases
 - › No notices to vacate except in exceptional circumstances
 - › No evictions for rent arrears

- › Assistance to negotiate rent reductions with dispute resolution
 - › 75,000 rent reductions were registered with Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV)

- › Rent Relief grant paid to landlord
 - › Up to \$3000 in 2020
 - › Required a rent reduction to be registered with CAV
 - › \$1500 in late 2021 without support from CAV



- No reason given/ignored
- Landlord said no/needed income/not eligible
- Get centrelink or other financial advice
- land tax relief wouldn't help landlord; rent already low
- Still negotiating
- Only deferral offered
- Not enough evidence provided
- process onerous or other;
- Question skipped

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- › “I received a very nasty email telling me we would be evicted and stating the laws of renting. Also was threatened with a bad reference upon vacating.”
 - › “The next day she replied to my email and gave us a 90-day Notice to Vacate. The Landlord said no rent reduction. My rent is still paid up to date.”
 - › “Our situation was handled privately and was at the discretion of the landlord, who’s been great.”

RT Amendment Act (2018) with 132 changes

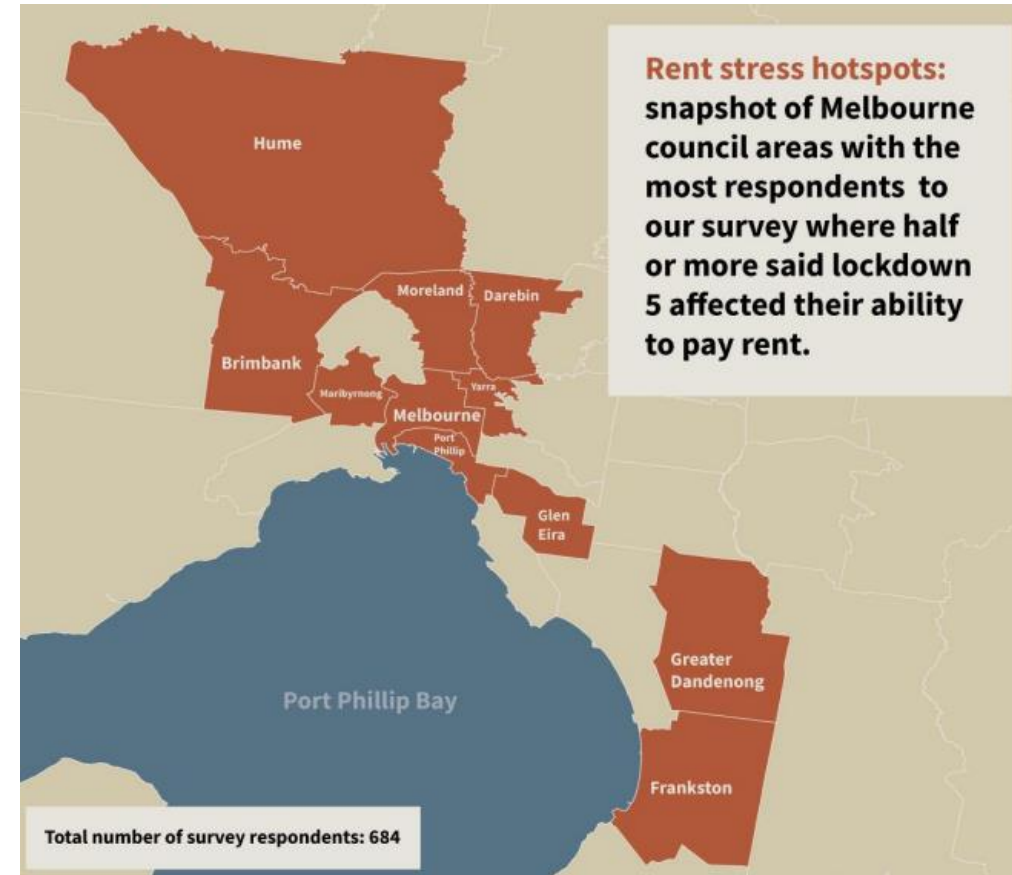
- › Implemented at the end of the Eviction moratorium – 29 March 2021
- › Intent to strengthen the rights of and provide more security for renters
 - › Minimum standards
 - › Urgent repairs
 - › Pets
 - › Family violence provisions
 - › No reason notice to vacate abolished
 - › Reasonable and Proportionate test

- › BUT the continuing impact of the pandemic had other outcomes
 - › Delays at VCAT
 - › Continuing poor standards of housing property

- › ‘I’m in an old home in a low-income area. There are some major repairs that need sorting, but I’m not game to push too hard to get them done as in the past I’ve been pushed out of rentals by high rent increases after repairs, or by the owners deciding it’s too much hassle owning a rental and selling the place. I’m on disability, have severe chronic illness and live alone. To move at the moment would be a nightmare and it frightens me. COVID has brought with it more expenses too as I have tried to self-isolate and cope with being hospitalised in the middle of it all. On top of that the rents in low-income areas are climbing due to the demand for lower rents at the moment due to job losses.’
- › “At the 3rd VCAT hearing, when the Member [the person who decides cases] said I would be given a reduction to 30% of my income, the agent responded that they would sell the house and evict me.”

Clearly more than laws are needed

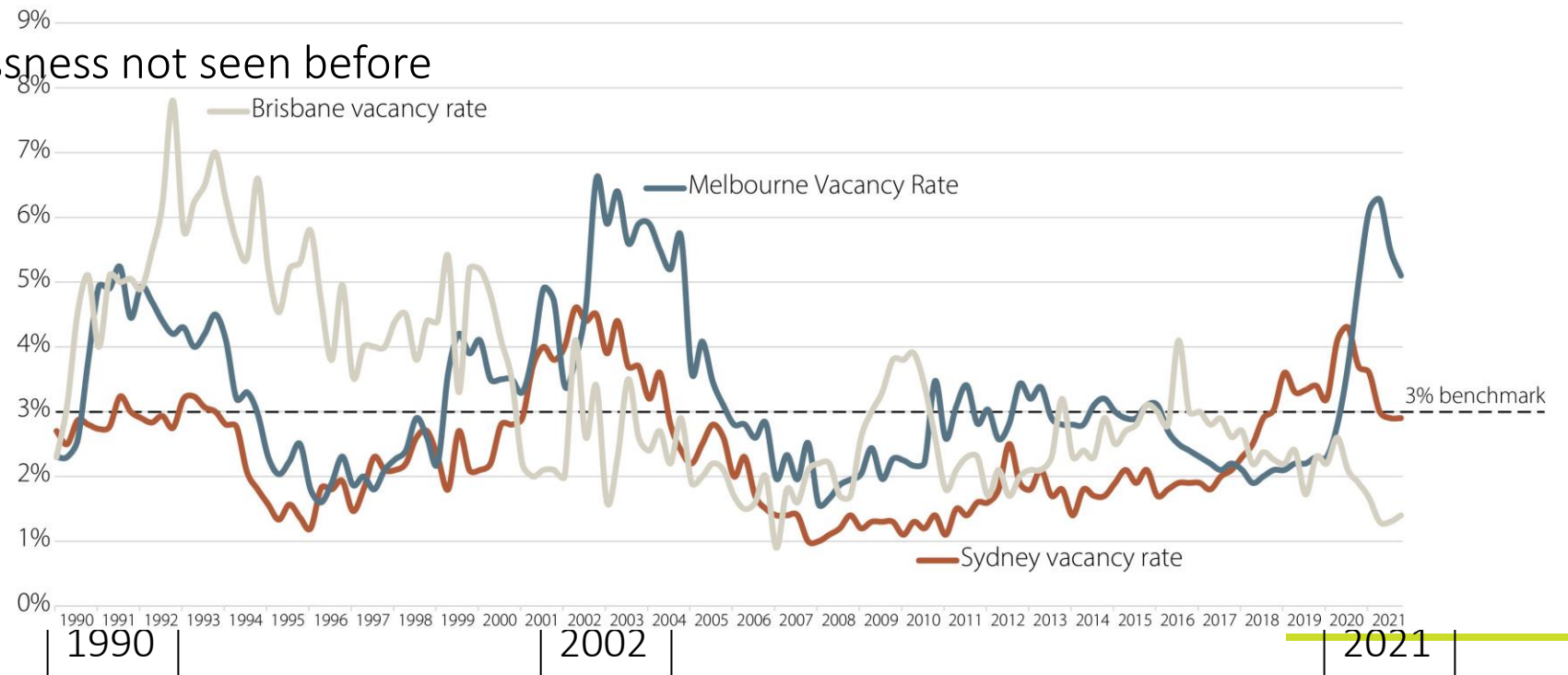
- › Increased tenancy literacy
- › CALD community engagement
- › Dispute resolution mechanisms
- › Training for property managers and rental providers
- › Operate within the intent of law



- › I am currently unemployed. Each lockdown constrains my ability to gain employment. Last year towards the end of the year I asked for a rent reduction. My landlord said, 'No the house is too heavily geared.' I'm now left paying \$900 in rent receiving \$1200 in job seeker payments ... Each lockdown sends me closer to despair. I've had to sell as much of my property as I can to make ends meet. I don't know what will happen when I'm completely out of savings because I know subsidised housing isn't readily available but I'm not going to be able to afford this rent for long."
- › Being in repeated lockdowns basically forced us to move as the place we had been living in wasn't fit to work and live in 22-23 hours a day. In the new place we noticed our landlord had added a note (after we'd signed the lease): 'If you lose income due to COVID lockdowns, or lose your job, we cannot negotiate rent down to help you with your circumstances.' Fortunately, that hasn't been the position we've been in, but it seemed like a total s*** thing to add.

And on it goes....

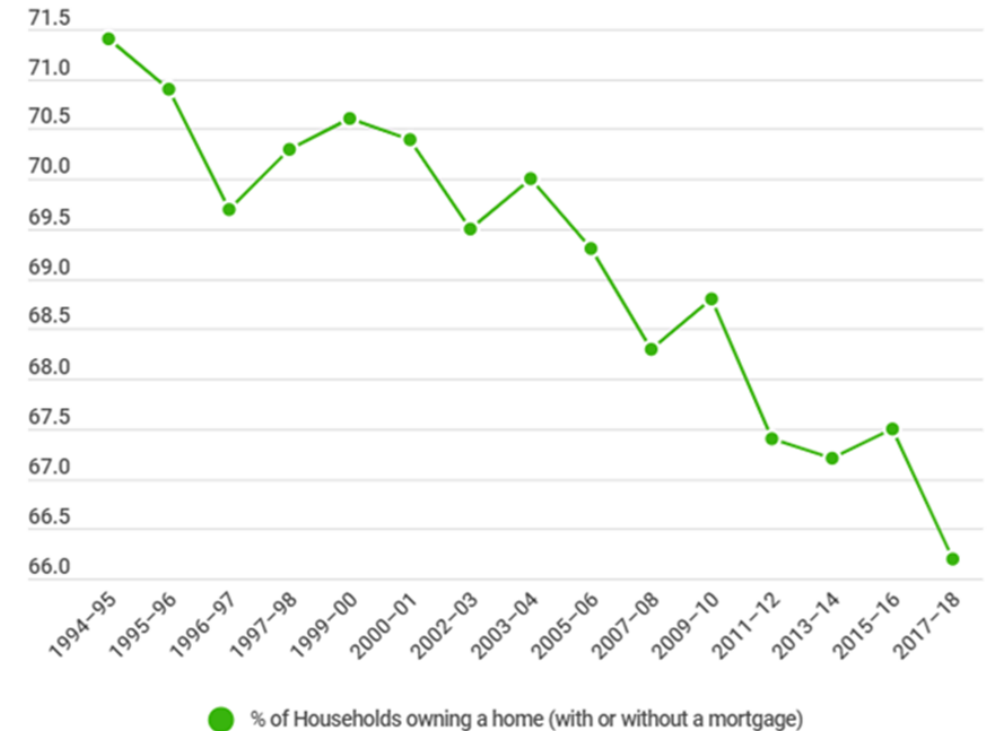
- › People moving in search of more space and cheaper rents
- › Rental vacancy rates
- › New risk of homelessness not seen before



What next...

- › Financial costs to both renter and rental provider
- › Social costs in a system where renters are 'fair game'
- › Embed law in practice
- › Improve our understanding of renting as viable long term housing option

Australia's falling home ownership rate



Source: ABS

Share

Savings.com.au

Provision of safe, secure and affordable housing in the 21st century can't be simply seen through the lens of home ownership.

www.tenantsvic.org.au

← → ↻ 🔒 <https://tenantsvic.org.au>

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Making renting fair

Covid-19, pets, bonds 🔍

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- New rental laws →
- Starting your tenancy →
- Ending your tenancy →
- Common problems →
- Problems with landlord →

Quick Exit

