

National Shelter MEDIA RELEASE

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Aussie renters facing insecurity and poor quality housing, with 50% reporting discrimination

National Shelter has partnered with CHOICE and the National Association of Tenants' Organisations to call for governments to prioritise rental security and quality issues, alongside housing affordability, as a national study reveals widespread fear and discrimination faced by thousands of Australians.

"Governments across Australia are rightly focused on the issue of housing affordability. Affordability is extremely important to renters, but it can't be addressed without also looking at the quality and security of housing," said Adrian Pisarski, National Shelter's Executive Officer.

"It's hard to imagine a product or service this poor in any other sector. As consumers of rental properties, tenants have to deal with major quality issues like mould or flooding and are systematically denied access to a timely remedy," said Alan Kirkland, CHOICE CEO .

"Worryingly, we found that renters with more experience in the market were less likely to complain when something goes wrong which illustrates the entrenched culture of fear among renters. This is all the more of a concern when you consider the rising number of long-term renters across Australia," said Ned Cutcher, National Association of Tenants' Organisations spokesperson.

Key findings

- 83% of renters in Australia have no fixed-term lease or are on a lease less than 12 months long
- 62% of people say they feel like they can't ask for changes
- 50% of renters report experiencing discrimination when applying for a rental property
- 50% of renters worried about being listed on a residential tenancy database
- 20% renters experiencing leaking, flooding and issues with mould
- 8% of renters are living in a property in need of urgent repairs

Quotes attributable to Alan Kirkland, CHOICE CEO

"For Australians who don't own a home, renting should be a secure and affordable option free of fear and discrimination. Unfortunately, the research reveals a significant power imbalance between tenants and landlords, leading to a culture of fear that means many renters stay silent when something goes wrong.

"It's deeply concerning that common features of everyday life like having children, receiving a government payment or owning a pet can be major barriers for renters trying to find a home."

Quotes attributable to Ned Cutcher, National Association of Tenants' Organisations spokesperson

"All too often, we hear that people are reluctant to complain to agents or landlords because they're worried about rent increases or eviction. This research shows that this fear is widespread with 50% of renters worried about being listed on a so-called "bad tenant database.

“When people do raise an issue with a property, landlords and agents can really drag their feet before they fix the problem with 21% of renters waiting over a week to get a response about an urgent repair request.”

Quotes attributable to Adrian Pisarski, National Shelter’s Executive Officer

“Tenants are often the last group to be asked about the housing challenges Australia faces. This research has tenants talking about their experiences of the system in a way that’s not often considered in debates about housing.

“Renters face constant insecurity, 83% are without a fixed-term lease or are on a lease less than 12 months long.”

"Federal Government investment in social housing of approx \$1B per annum and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) of \$4.5B per annum is dwarfed by the more than \$11.5B per annum cost of negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions."

"Of those who receive CRA, only a third are helped enough to achieve affordability benchmarks."

“As more Australians enter the rental market, we need a national plan to boost supply, especially for low income households, whilst also addressing security, rights and amenity.”

Background

CHOICE, the National Association of Tenants’ Unions and National Shelter jointly commission this nationally representative research of the Australia’s renting population. Quotas were sourced from the ABS 6523.0 - Household Income and Wealth, Australia, 2013-14 and the 2011 Census for gender split. 1005 respondents completed the online survey in-field from 12th - 31st October 2016.

Set up by consumers for consumers, CHOICE is the consumer advocate that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.

The National Association of Tenant Organisations (NATO) is a federation of State- and Territory-based Tenants’ Unions and Tenant Advice Services across Australia. NATO’s membership comprises the Tenants’ Union ACT, the Tenants’ Union of New South Wales, the Tenants’ Queensland, the Tenants’ Union of Tasmania, the Tenants’ Union of Victoria, the Tenants Advice Service (Western Australia), Tenants' Advice Service, Darwin, and Shelter South Australia.

National Shelter is a non-government peak organisation that aims to improve housing access, affordability, appropriateness, safety and security for people on low incomes.

ENDS

Representatives from National Shelter, CHOICE and NATO will be available on the lawns in front of Parliament House, Canberra, on Thursday 16 February at 10am.

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