



Home Stories

Resident Newsletter Summer 2021

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We've updated our website!

The new format should make it easier for our residents to find relevant information. In our new and improved Resident Hub, you will find links to report a repair, what to do in an emergency, information about how your rent is calculated, resources to help access advocacy services and more.

Head over to www.housingchoices.org.au/residents/Victoria to see what resources are available to you!

From the General Manager

Covid Safe in 2021 & Happy New Year

Hi Everyone!

Welcome to the Summer Edition of Home Stories. I'd like wish all of our Victorian residents a Happy New Year and extend a warm welcome to 2021! We've seen in the past few weeks the importance of being flexible and adaptable both as an organisation and as a community, as restrictions continue to be adjusted to suit the current situation. The health and safety of all our residents, contractors, staff and the community remain our first and foremost priority. We strongly suggest that you continue to access updates from: www.health.gov.au/news

www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus

As part of our COVID-Safe Plan, we will continue with the measures outlined in our Spring Edition of Home Stories to help prevent the spread of the virus:

1. We will continue to ask you some additional questions when staff/contractors require access to your property. Please let us know if you are feeling unwell before we visit.
2. If you or a member of your household have tested positive for COVID-19, we need you to tell us as soon as possible.
3. Our staff will continue to practice social distancing and wear appropriate personal protective equipment (e.g. masks, gloves, eye gear) when attending the office or when they are out in our communities. In addition to this, staff have been instructed to stay home if there is a risk, or if they are feeling unwell.
4. We will continue the very robust cleaning regime we implemented at the start of the pandemic at our medium and high-density sites, specifically in the common areas. More frequently touched surfaces and high traffic areas will continue to be sanitised regularly.

In addition to the above, we have also begun a phased return to working at the office that aligns with Premier Daniel Andrew's directions for workplaces. The office will remain closed to all visitors (i.e. residents and stakeholders), unless a private appointment has been made.

Melissa Palframan, General Manager
Housing Services Victoria



Rent Review & Eviction Updates

[Government Policy Change]

In September of 2020, the Victorian government extended the Emergency Measures Bill until **28 March 2021**. This legislation meant there were temporary changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, including a temporary freeze on rental increases and evictions.

These changes will be replaced by the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2018 which comes into effect **29 March 2021**. The Act includes more than 130 reforms designed to increase protections for renters, while ensuring those who provide rental housing can still effectively manage their properties.

For more information on the amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 2018, visit:

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/residential-tenancies-amendment-act-2018>

<https://www.rentingcommissioner.vic.gov.au/the-rental-sector/the-law>

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/fairersaferhousing>

Please remember, if you are experiencing financial hardship, we can help and assist you in several ways, including applying for assistance under our Financial Hardship Policy. If your household income has reduced as a result of COVID-19, or for other reasons, we can conduct a new household income review and adjust your rent. Additionally, we may also be able to assist through our HELP Voucher Program (grocery bill assistance) or our Resident Assistance Fund (utility bill help). Please contact your Housing Officer if you need assistance on **1300 312 447**.

Residents may also be able to access rent relief grants of up to \$3000 from the Victorian Government. To see if you're eligible, visit: <https://www.tenantsvic.org.au/advice/coronavirus-covid-19/rent-relief/>

We will be doing our very best to keep you informed of any news and updates regarding COVID-19 and relevant information about restrictions or government advice. If you'd like to keep up to date via social media, you can follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Focus Groups on Customer Service

Housing Choices is committed to the continuous improvement in the delivery of our service provision.

As part of this process, we are hoping to establish a resident focus group, made up of 6-10 interested residents who will attend a series of workshops in 2021.

Each workshop will target a specific area of the business to identify areas for improvement and workshop solutions that will ensure our residents are placed at the centre of all that we do.

Are you...

- A Victorian resident of Housing Choices OR a person who represents one of our residents (e.g. carer or support person)?

- Interested in participating in a focus group to improve HCA's service delivery?
- Able to commit to attending a majority of workshops?

We'd love to hear from you!

Contact our Community Development Team on **1300 312 447** or communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au to register your interest or if you would like more information!

The Keeping Connected Project has Been Extended!



Housing Choices Australia has committed to further support residents with the financial burden of creating and maintaining the digital connection that has become so critical to health, wellbeing, education and social connection during the coronavirus pandemic. This program will now remain available until June 2021.

Under our Keeping Connected Project, Victorian residents of Housing Choices Australia will be able to apply for contributions to the cost of either:

Maintaining their digital connection
(eg: internet or phone bills) up to \$100

Improving digital connection
(eg: accessing new internet connections, upgrading to smart phone) up to \$100

Accessing technology
(eg: accessing devices or accessories) up to \$150

We are also offering our residents referral to free, remote, one to one digital education lessons with ReadyTechGo. Lessons will be available over phone or video call and can be tailored to your individual needs. Lessons can be used to help set up devices or connections or learn about any programs, functions or online services you choose.

Housing Choices Residents who have taken up lessons already have been able to learn more about their mobile phone, iPad or laptops, how to store and sought files, how to access email, use video calls and how to shop, bank and pay bills online!

If you are interested in applying for support under the three options listed above, and/or you are interested in being referred for a personalised, remote digital education lesson with a technician from ReadyTechGo, please contact the Community Development Team for more information, application forms and assistance.

CALL 1300 312 447 or email:
communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

Financial Hardship & Assistance

Our Housing Services Team has two streams of financial funding to help and support residents who may need it:

1. The HELP Voucher Program provides tenants with grocery vouchers to one of the two major supermarket chains (Coles or Woolworths)
2. The Resident Assistance Fund (RAF) allows Housing Choices to make a payment or co-payment on a resident's bill/s

If your household has experienced a reduction in income and/or grocery or utility bills that are noticeably higher because of the pandemic, please contact your Housing Officer as we may be able to assist you.

P: 1300 312 447
E: communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

Celebrating 2020 with Our Residents

Due to COVID-19, Housing Choices was unable to celebrate another year working together with our residents the way we had in previous years. Sadly, large gatherings and social events were not possible. Instead, we developed an end of year giftpack to help us wish our residents season's greetings and a Happy New Year, as well as to thank them for their ongoing support and patience as we adapted to COVID-Safe work practices.

A substantial portion of our Victorian portfolio signed up to receive a giftpack! It was a delight for all of us at HCA to hear from so many of our residents.

The Victorian Community Development Team distributed **791 gift packs** across 42 Local Government Areas or a total of 139 suburbs and regions with the help of our Client Services Team. We would like to acknowledge and thank Good360 for providing generous donations that assisted us to compile the items for these gifts.

Here's what our residents said about the program:

"A lovely surprise when I received my Christmas gift late yesterday a big thank you to all at Housing Choices much appreciated!"

"Thank you so much for the lovely Christmas hamper. It is very much appreciated I hope you have received my Christmas card. Merry Christmas to you all!"

"I would like to thank you for my gift, very thoughtful, much appreciated. Hope you all have a safe and relaxing end of year and a very Happy New Year."

"Thank you very much for your concerned gift. Kind of you for the caring gesture. Have wonderful safe festive season."

"Thank you soooo much for my Christmas presents, much appreciated. Very kind, thoughtful and generous."



2020 GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARDS

Housing Choices Australia has been seeking Good Neighbour nominations from our residents and awarding the Good Neighbour Awards for the past seven years! Even with all the changes last year, 2020 was no different - we continue to recognise and appreciate the huge impact our residents have on each other and their neighbourhoods.

Neighbours play a critical role in looking out for the well-being of others in their communities. This became even more apparent during the

coronavirus pandemic, when staying home while staying connected presented a challenge for all of us. The team at HCA were delighted to hear such wonderful stories about our residents on all the nominations we received in 2020.

We were able to award Twelve Good Neighbour prizes in mid-December and we would like to acknowledge and congratulate them here, here are a few of their stories!



Michael from Preston was nominated by a neighbour for being a friendly neighbour who is always polite and positive.



Martin from Melbourne was nominated by a neighbour who said 'Any help I need, I always find one person helps us all the time, and this person is Martin. Martin will be using the gift voucher awarded to add to the resources of his local resident's association and community garden association to further neighbourly interaction and community.'



Wil from North Melbourne was nominated for checking on his neighbours during difficult times, providing his neighbour with an ear and some advice, and for being role model by treating everyone equally and pleasantly. Such a comfort for his neighbours!



Helena from Sunshine West was nominated for looking out for her neighbours and watching over their whole family ever since they moved in. Great neighbours can become great friends!



Spiros from Ringwood was nominated for going 'above and beyond in the Good Neighbour Department' as he regularly cares for common areas, takes care of his neighbour's parcels, looks out for everyone and is friendly to all. Thank-you Spiros!



Fatima from Wantirna was nominated by her neighbour for being a very nice Neighbour from the very beginning when we moved in!



Jason from Yarraville was nominated for being welcoming and making his neighbour feel at home. Jason has shared plants, books and skills with his neighbours in 2020. What an amazing neighbour!



Glen, also of Yarraville, was nominated for being really helpful to his neighbours by taking out the bins, picking things up at the shops for them and sharing coffee and conversation in the common space.

Congratulations to all our Good Neighbours who received nominations and prizes in 2020 and many thanks to all who placed such thoughtful nominations!

If you know anyone who you would like to recognise for being Good Neighbour please tell us who and why by emailing: communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au or contacting the Community Development Team at Housing Choices Australia on **1300 312 447**.

Your Futures Scholarship Program – Open Again for 2021

Our Futures Scholarship Program is now open for applications for those studying in Semester 1, 2021.

Housing Choices' residents, and their dependents, are eligible to apply for **up to \$500** towards out-of-pocket expenses incurred whilst studying one of the following accredited courses:

- Year 11 or Year 12
- VET Course
- Certificate Courses Levels 1 to 5
- Diploma Certificates
- Bachelor
- Apprenticeship course
- Short courses and certificates

Successful applicants in the past have used the fund to:

- Pay student amenities fees or tuition
- Purchase equipment (e.g. laptop, software, power tools, study desk, etc)
- Purchase art supplies
- Contribute to travel expenses (e.g. myki top up)

Semester 1, 2021 applications are open **until 1st March 2021**.

For more information, or to obtain an application form, please contact our Community Development team on phone **1300 312 447** or email communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au

Energy Assistance Program – Brotherhood of St Laurence

Having trouble paying your energy bills?
Want to lower your energy costs?



The Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Uniting, and the Australian Energy Foundation have launched a **FREE** service – the Energy Assistance Program – designed to help eligible Victorians save on their electricity and gas bills. This service is independent of energy companies and supported by the Victorian Government. This program can help you to:

- Find a cheaper energy offer – this could save you hundreds!
- Ensure you are receiving any energy concessions you are entitled to – to help lower your energy bills
- Get help from your retailer if you are struggling to pay your energy bill or get help fixing a billing error
- Access a utility relief grant or develop a payment plan with your retailer
- Get advice on how to improve the energy efficiency of your home

- Assist you to apply for up to \$250 of Power Saving Bonus via the Vic Energy Compare website (available for those in receipt of Job Seeker, Pensioner or Youth Allowance payments).

If you would like to access the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Energy Assistance Program you can contact them directly on **p1800 830 029** or visit their website www.bsl.org.au/energy-assist

The Brotherhood of St Laurence can assist clients in language or through the National Relay Service where needed.

In the Your Energy Broker pilot, households that switched to a cheaper electricity offer saved on average \$270. Households that switched both electricity and gas saved on average \$503.

Home DIY Tips

How to Keep Your Tiles Clean!

As time goes on, the grout between tiles may become mouldy and appear grey or discoloured. Keeping the grout between your tiles clean will go a long way to freshening up your bathroom or kitchen. You can clean the grout between your tiles in just a few easy steps, using a few cheap tools.

Follow the steps below to make your bathroom or kitchen tiles look brand new!

First, you will need to buy a couple of household items which can be found at a local hardware store, such as Bunnings or Mitre10:

- Bucket
- Dustpan and brush
- Gloves
- Safety glasses
- Grout cleaning kit
- Rags
- Scrubbing brush



Step 1. Clean tile area and grout

With a damp cloth, wipe down your bathroom tiles and grout. You can also give the floor a sweep to get rid of any dust and grit in the area.



Step 2. Apply grout cleaner

Before applying grout cleaner, make sure you have all of your safety gear on, including eye protection and gloves. Spray your grout cleaner along the grout and then give it a couple of minutes to sink in. You can give problem areas a few sprays with the cleaner.



Step 3. Brush down the grout

With some warm water and a scrubbing brush, brush along the grout lines. You can then use a grout tool to rake any mould from the grout that is still remaining



Step 4. Touch up areas with a grout pen

You can also use a grout pen to paint along the grout lines to brighten them up. Shake your pen well before use and then carefully follow the line of the grout to rejuvenate your tiles.