

# NEIGHBOURHOODS HOUSING CHOICES AUSTRALIA

Autumn  
2021

## In this issue:

- From the General Manager
- Keeping Connected
- The Vic Government's Power Saving Bonus
- Maintenance to-do list & tips
- Energy Assistance Program
- Housing in Brunswick Precinct



Drill Hall  
Community Garden  
Officially Opened

pg 6

New innovative  
housing project for  
Brunswick precinct

pg 11

**HOUSING**  
**CHOICES**  
AUSTRALIA

## Find us online

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram.



Housing Choices Australia

# Home Stories Resident Newsletter



## From the General Manager

### Welcome/Returning to the Office

Hello everyone!

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Home Stories. I hope that all of our Victorian residents had a wonderful Easter break, as we wave goodbye to Summer and embrace the cooler weather. In the last few months, life in Victoria has slowly been returning to normal 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](http://www.health.gov.au/news)  
[www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus](http://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus)

As part of our COVID-Safe Plan, we will continue with the measures outlined in our

Summer Edition of Home Stories to help prevent the spread of the virus:

- 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.
- If you or a member of your household have tested positive for COVID-19, we need you to tell us as soon as possible.
- 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.
- 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.

### Our Office is Reopening

In the Summer Edition of Home Stories we outlined our phased approach to returning to working at the office that aligns with Premier Daniel Andrews' directions for workplaces. I am pleased to share that as of April 19th, we will be able to return to the office as a whole. As we make this transition, we will continue to maintain good hygiene practices, and encourage anyone who is feeling unwell to avoid coming to the office.

### Residential Tenancies Act Changes

New rental laws have recently been announced. These changes will improve the rights and responsibilities of renters and rental providers (landlords) and will make renting in Victoria fairer and safer.

The *Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2018* came into effect on March 29th and may impact on the following:

- Starting a tenancy
- Living in a rental property
- Leaving a rental property
- Repairs, modifications and property conditions
- Reforms unique to rooming houses
- Reforms unique to caravan parks and residential parks
- Family violence and personal violence
- Long-term leases

**To learn about these changes please visit the Consumer Affairs Victoria website, by following this link:**

[www.consumer.vic.gov.au/housing/renting/changes-to-renting-laws](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/housing/renting/changes-to-renting-laws)

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

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 to register your interest or if you would like more information!

 [communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au](mailto:communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au)

 **1300 312 447**

**Melissa Palframan, General Manager**  
Housing Services Victoria



# Keeping Connected

A reminder that our Keeping Connected Program is still available until the end of June 2021.

If you have not yet applied, you may be eligible apply to our Keeping Connected Program for contributions to the cost of either:

**Maintaining 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**

## Ready to Connect

With community restrictions easing, we are now ready to host our Ready to Connect Program! Housing Choices Australia has partnered with ReadyTechGo & the City of Melbourne to deliver a free, digital course to residents.

This course will assist participants to learn more about using digital devices, such as iOS devices (iPhones, iPads, Macs), android devices, tablets, and laptops, and will consist of six (6), two (2) hour workshops, held once a week at our Melbourne Office.

Due to covid safe protocols, places are limited, and registrations are essential!

If you would like to register to enrol in the Ready to Connect course, please contact our Community Development Team by Monday 10 May 2021.

## The Victorian Government's Power Saving Bonus



The Victorian Government's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning are currently offering a \$250 Power Savings Bonus to eligible households in order to assist with energy bill stress during the pandemic.

### You are eligible if:

- You have a Victorian residential electricity account
- You have a:
  - Centrelink Pension Concession Card
  - Department of Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession Card
  - Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card; or
- You get JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Abstudy or Austudy

To apply for the Power Savings Bonus go to <https://compare.energy.vic.gov.au/>

Just click on the grey button labelled '**Submit a Power Saving Bonus Application**' and follow the prompts.

One of our residents applied and had this to say...

"The application takes (literally) 5 minutes: you get an email confirming the application, then an email notifying you you've been approved, then you go to a secure section of the government website to give your bank account details. The \$250 is not paid to your power company, but instead deposited directly into your bank account. For me, the whole process, from application to funds delivered, took just 4 working days!"

If you do not have access to the internet, or need assistance applying, please contact the Housing Choices Australia Community Development Team so that we can assist you.

 [communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au](mailto:communitydevelopmentvic@hcau.org.au)

 **1300 312 447**





It went very smoothly, everyone enjoyed themselves – the speeches and stories were humorous, cheerful and well received. Ron “Uncle Ringo” Terrick, in particular, who presided over the Smoking Ceremony, really brought us all together in ‘Welcome to Country’ for the ancestral land on which our garden stands. Ron donated the Smoking Ceremony Bark to the Drill Hall Community Garden and Cohealth worker Leanna Helquist has undertaken to arrange its framing as a commemoration of the Opening Ceremony.

Lord Mayor Sally Capp, who has visited the garden previously and has helped plant it, spoke to the garden as an example of the sense of connectedness and community to which the city aspires for its residents. Michael Lennon, Managing Director of Housing Choices Australia (HCA) spoke warmly of what the garden means for community and particularly of course for the local affordable housing residents. Adam Bandt, our local Federal Member of Parliament spoke of the cultural diversity, which the garden hopes to encourage and is pleased that the plant boxes obtained under a federal grant supported by his office, are flourishing.

Maria Tsopanis, Manager of the Multicultural Hub, spoke of the rich tradition of cultural diversity, which is so much part of Melbourne generally, as well as our local area.

## Drill Hall Community Garden opens during Cultural Diversity Week

by Martin Mulvihill of DHRA

Despite the threatening weather and it being our first gathering since the outbreak of the COVID crisis, the Drill Hall Community Garden opening can count as a great success. Attendance was much greater than expected and would probably have been greater still with better weather.

Addressing the design of the garden, she made particular reference to the generous contribution of landscape architect Elliot Summers, to which the design of the garden owes so much. Also mentioned was the contribution of City of Melbourne officers Michelle James and John Yovanches and the work of local resident Sam Weaner as the ‘works manager’ and mainstay of maintaining the garden infrastructure. And not to forget too, the work of artist Tika Moon Ramone whose work does so much to encourage the sense of reflection and harmony that is integral to the garden’s purpose and mission.

Jie Fan of Wormlovers P/L did great work organising the plant workshop and ensuring that our winter planting was all set to take on that fickle Melbourne weather.

Other welcome guests were Jennifer Kanis, who as a Melbourne City Councillor and former local state MP, did so much to transform the Drill Hall site and so make the garden possible.

Nicole Bartholomeuz, CEO of Cohealth, which does great work to address the needs of the homeless and the marginalised and socially disadvantaged members of our society, was a very welcome guest. Roberta Buchanan, Chief Operating Officer of HCA, well known to residents at the Drill Hall was, as always, a welcome presence. Very welcome too were

City of Melbourne Councillors accompanying Lord Mayor Sally Capp - Cr Davydd Griffiths, Cr Jamal Hakim and Cr Olivia Ball.

Good to see some of our regular homeless visitors to the garden were also present. Catherine Scarth, CEO of AMES, which is the parent body of the Multicultural Hub, was a very welcome guest, particularly given AMES association with Cultural Diversity week. The Multicultural Hub’s involvement in the Community Garden has always been a crucial element in its development and success and in its commitment to cultural diversity, social inclusion and accessibility.

There are many other residents, local workers, City of Melbourne and Housing Choices Australia officers who, over the years, have helped develop and build the garden. Mark Brown, Clynton Cooper Alyn, Lyn Kennedy, Sarah Lindermeier, Rachel Maguire, Naomi Board, Milenko Barbaric to name just a few. Not all could be present and there is not space to mention them each, but their dedication, inspiration and hard work will not be forgotten and will live on in the garden itself as its own tribute to their efforts.

Special thanks to Reshma Mandahar, who led the organising committee for the event and to its members Kara Barnett, Leanna Helquist, Michelle James, Jie Fan and Martin Mulvihill.





# Get Active Kids

Get Active Victoria are currently offering their Get Active Kids Voucher Program to assist eligible families to get their kids involved in organised sport and recreation activities.

This program can help by reimbursing the cost of membership and registration fees, uniforms and equipment. Eligible children may be able to receive up to **\$200 each**.



To be eligible Children must be:

- Aged 4 to 18 years old
- Named on a valid Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card
- Named on a valid Medicare card

**Expenses incurred between 11th April and 11th July 2021 can be applied for between 31st Mar and 11th July.**

To find out how to apply, what costs are covered and how much can be reimbursed please visit:  
<https://www.getactive.vic.gov.au/vouchers/>



## Maintenance to-do list & Maintenance Tips

**Vacuum or dust your heat pump filters every 3 months.**

This will keep them working efficiently.

**Is your heat pump leaking a small amount of water?**

**Tip:** It might be set too low, which can cause a drip. Please turn to 20 degrees and monitor. If there is no change, please call our office.

**Clean all ventilation fans and outside ducts and attend to mould issues**

**Tip:** clean with a mixture of two parts baking soda and one part vinegar mix.

**Pest Control**

Please keeps lawns low, yards free from rubbish and/or old unwanted items, and bins emptied when full.

**It is FIRE season**

So please be extra attentive to unwanted rubbish and check that your gutters are free from leaves and other flammable items.

**Check and clean your smoke alarm**

REPORT ANY ISSUES TO US and **DO NOT** use Gasmate cookers inside your home at anytime.

**Important:** Please contact our office before undertaking any modification This includes NBN installation. Only some modifications can be approved. Please contact our office for our Modifications Policy on **1300 312 447**.





## Everyone Has a Right to Complain

Following feedback received from our residents, we have updated our complaints process. Our updated process has:

- Greater communication while investigating and resolving complaints.
- Dedicated point of contact during complaint process.
- Clear letter templates and step-by-step guide to help you track your complaint progress.
- Feedback survey included in the complaint closure letter to share your thoughts of our new process.

**Enclosed is a copy of our brochure and process change letter.**

For further information please call our office **1300 312 447** or email **info@hcau.org.au** and speak to your Housing Officer or our Quality Assurance Manager, Mel Sutton.



## Brotherhood of St Laurence's New Energy Assistance Program

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 **1800 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.

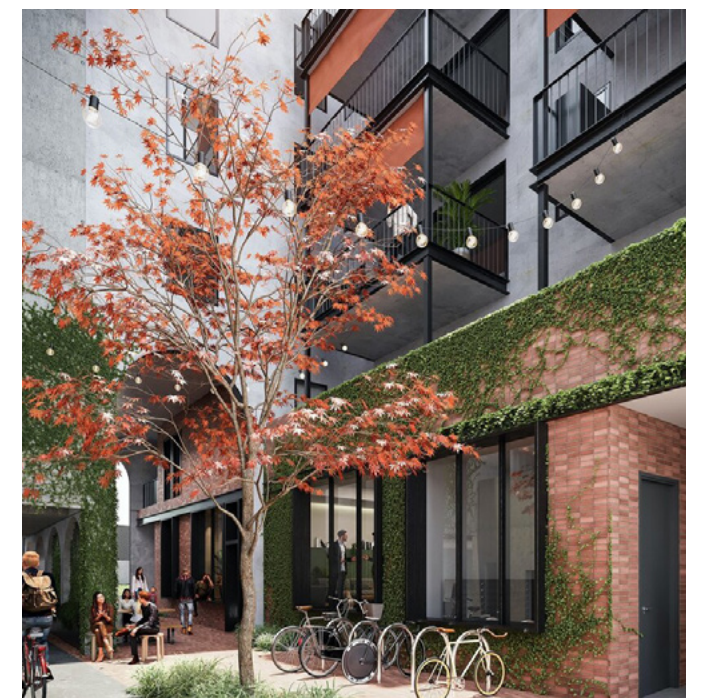
In the Your Energy Broker pilot, households that switched to a cheaper electricity offer saved on average \$270. Households that switched both electricity and gas saved on average \$503.

## Housing Choices Australia & Nightingale Housing Provide Housing in Brunswick Precinct

Housing Choices Australia and Nightingale Housing are teaming up to provide housing in what will be Australia's first carbon neutral residential precinct in Duckett Street, Brunswick.

Six neighbouring buildings, each designed by a different award-winning architect, are based on social, environmental, and financial sustainability principles. Housing Choices is proud to be a part of this visionary project and will deliver 16 dwellings for people on low incomes and people living with a disability.

**Construction due to be completed end of 2021.**





# Upcoming HCA Events & Observation Days

## April

23 April	Artists in Action returns to Preston Hub fortnightly at 10am-12pm on Fridays from April 23*
25 April	ANZAC Day
28 April	Welcome Event for New Buildings*
30 April	Walkie Talkies Walking Group returns to Preston Hub at 10am-12pm on Fridays from April 30*

**Skip Bin Days for medium and high-rise buildings return in April for 2021**

## May

**Ready to Connect Workshops commence in May\***

**Community Garden Working Bees return for 2021 in May\***

**Skip Bin Days for medium and high-rise buildings continue in May**

9 May	Mothers Day
12-13 May	Eid al-Fitr
17 May	May Shavuot
26 May	National Sorry Day

## June

**Ready to Connect Workshops continue in June**

**\*As part of our COVID-Safe Plan, registration is essential for all Housing Choices community events.**

## You've Got Talent!

We know there are so many talented and creative people in our communities and are on the search for story ideas as well as people who want to contribute articles or pictures to Home Stories.

If you're a photographer, a writer, a cook, a gardener, a knitter, a film buff, a model builder, a painter, a poet – a hobbyist of some kind – let us know, we'd love to write a story about you – and/or commission one from you, about your area of passion and expertise! Please contact us at: [communications@hcau.org.au](mailto:communications@hcau.org.au) for more information.

### Artwork:

The Birth Of Planets by Con Papageorgiou

**HOUSING  
CHOICES  
AUSTRALIA**

**Head Office**  
Level 3, 350 Queen Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

**Preston Hub**  
137 High Street  
Preston VIC 3072



**General Enquiries**  
P 1300 312 447

**Maintenance**  
P 1300 321 185

[www.housingchoices.org.au](http://www.housingchoices.org.au)