

*Your step-by-step guide
to applying for private rental*



Tenants Union Services

The Tenants Union of Victoria is a free and confidential service for residential tenants living in Victoria

The Tenants Union may be able to:

- > Help you to fill in forms or agreements related to your tenancy
- > Advise you on specific problems, eg. repairs, rent increases
- > Negotiate and advocate on your behalf with your landlord or real estate agent
- > Assist or represent you at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

If you need an interpreter call us through the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450

Drop-In Advice

Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri: 9am-4.30pm
Wed: 1pm-8pm

55 Johnston Street Fitzroy 3065
PO Box 234 Fitzroy 3065

Telephone Advice

Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri: 9am-4pm
Wed: 1pm-8pm

Ph 9416 2577

www.tuv.org.au

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Looking for a place

Set a budget before you start looking for a place

Include all 'setting-up' costs: bond, rent in-advance, connection fees, removal expenses, furniture, household goods, household contents insurance.

Check if you are eligible for financial assistance such as:

- > Rent assistance (for more information contact Centrelink)
- > A bond loan (you can get information about the Bond Loan Scheme from your local Office of Housing)
- > Rent in-advance (contact your local housing service and ask about the Housing Establishment Fund – HEF)

See Tenants Union fact sheet
'Bond Loan Scheme'



Where to look

There are a number of places you can look for property listings.

Good places to start are:

- > Rental lists: these are available from real estate offices
- > Internet: real estate agents list rental properties on a number of websites.

Tip > Search for 'real estate Victoria'.

- > Newspapers: The Age (Wed/Sat), Herald Sun (Sat), Local papers.
- > Community Noticeboards: You might find these at your local cafes, bookstores, universities or TAFE.

See Tenants Union fact sheet
'Shared Households'



Inspecting the property

To inspect a property advertised through a real estate agent you will need a key deposit. This is usually \$50, but it can sometimes be \$100 (make sure you ask for a receipt). It is also a good idea to take some photo identification with you, as you may need ID to be given the keys. The real estate agent may want to photocopy your ID to keep while you inspect the property. If they make a copy, you can ask them to return it when you take the keys back.

A landlord or real estate agent will sometimes choose to hold an 'open inspection', which means that you may be inspecting the property with other people. 'Open inspections' are often not open long so it is important that you arrive at the property at the scheduled time. You do not have to pay to inspect the property, and you do not have to pay a deposit.

Inspect the property carefully

It is very important to check the property thoroughly. Make sure that you are happy with the property before you sign the lease or pay any money. Remember that once you have signed the lease you have accepted the property with its existing services – for example, if there is no heater the landlord does not have to provide you with one. The landlord will have to repair any items that are at the property that are damaged or not working.

When you are inspecting the inside of the property check:

> Is there gas or electricity?

Tip> *Gas is cheaper than electricity.*

> Is there heating and is it energy efficient?
(There is no legal requirement for rented properties to have heating)

> Is the property insulated?

> Are there smoke detectors? (By law all properties MUST have smoke detectors installed)

> Is the hot water system large enough for the household? What is the water pressure like? Are there laundry taps? Is there space for a washing machine?

> If there are large windows, are they fitted with safety glass?

> Do the windows open and close properly?

Do they have curtains? (It will be an added expense if there are no curtains). Are there flyscreens?

> What types of locks are on the windows?

Do the front and back doors have deadlocks? Is there a security door?

Tip>

Most insurance companies will not give contents insurance if the windows do not have keylocks and the doors are not deadlocked.

> Is there a phone line and socket? (Ask whether the phone has been connected recently)

> Is there a TV antenna outlet?

> Are there enough power points? Light fittings?

> What is the overall condition of the property? (eg. Floor coverings, paintwork)

Check outside the property and think about the location

> Is it close to public transport, shops and schools?

> Are the fences and gates adequate?

> Look to see if there is an antenna
(it's often on the roof)

> Is it close to a nightclub, main road or train station?
(Will the noise bother you?)

> Is there parking? (Is it off-street?)

> Does the property have a garden?
Will you be able to maintain it?

Tip>

It is also a good idea to check whether the landlord has any intention of selling during the tenancy, however they are under no obligation to disclose this to you. They must tell you if the property is currently for sale.

See Tenants Union fact sheet
'Starting a Tenancy'

Starting
a Tenancy



Making an application

After you have inspected the property and you decide you like it, you will need to fill in an application form.

You can be asked questions about your...

- > Income and bank details
- > Previous rental history
- > Employment details and history
- > References. You will usually be asked for at least one reference, but they often request two.

Tip>

Ask your local Migrant Resource Centre, school, church, community group or support worker. If you have rented before ask your previous landlord or real estate agent.

You cannot be asked questions about your....

- > Race
- > Marital status
- > Disability or impairment
- > Sexual preference
- > Religious or political beliefs.

Application deposits

The agent or landlord may ask for an application deposit. Be sure to ask for a receipt. If you make a deposit it must be refunded to you.

Credit reference checks

Real estate agents may want to check your credit history. The law does not allow them to do this. Contact the Tenants Union for further advice if a real estate agent insists on conducting a credit reference check.

Tenant databases

Real estate agents sometimes use a tenant database to check if you have been recorded as having a poor rental history. You can see if you are listed on one by contacting your previous estate agent or the database company – unfortunately you may have to pay to check.

*See Tenants Union fact sheet
'Tenant Databases'*



Utility connections

Some real estate agents offer a utility connection service. Be careful about signing any agreements about utilities. Check the terms and conditions and any additional fees that may apply. Remember that there is no obligation to use this service and that you may end up with a better result if you arrange these connections yourself.

Signing up & paying up

Lease

Read the lease carefully and know what you are signing. A lease is a legally binding contract.

Do not sign anything you do not understand.

Remember that you are entitled to negotiate the terms of the lease.

Tip>

A written agreement is more secure than a verbal one. If the landlord or real estate agent make any promises (eg. to put a new heater in), make sure you get it in writing.

See Tenants Union fact sheet 'Bonds'



How long would you like to live there? 6 months? 12?

Fixed term agreements offer more security than a periodic lease (e.g. month to month) – although the downside is that to end a fixed-term agreement early could cost you money.

You must be given a signed copy of the lease within 14 days.

You will generally be required to pay one-month rent in advance. Remember – always ask for a receipt!

Bond

Generally the bond amount should not exceed the monthly rental amount.

Make sure you fill in a Bond Lodgement Form and keep a copy for your records.

Even if you are renting through a private landlord you must fill in a Bond Lodgement Form and your bond must be sent to the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (RTBA).

See fact sheet 'Keeping the 'Mates' in Housemates'

Keeping the 'Mates' in Housemates



Moving In & Settling In

The condition report

If you are required to pay a bond you must receive two copies of the condition report. The condition report is a written record of the state of the property (both inside and out) at the time that you moved in. This will help determine if there are damage or cleaning costs that you may be liable for at the end of the tenancy. Make sure you complete your section of the report – be very thorough! Write down all of the things you don't agree with – no matter how minor. It can also be a good idea to take photos! When it comes time to move out, you can't be blamed for damage that was already there when you moved in. After you have moved in you can ask for repairs to the property.

If the property is not reasonably clean when you move in you can claim compensation.



*See Tenants Union fact sheet
'Claiming Compensation'*



*See Tenants Union
fact sheet 'Utilities'*

Call to connect services

Contact the local utility companies to connect your electricity, gas, water and phone. There are a few providers so shop around for the best deal.

Tip >

Be cautious of fixed term contracts and do not agree to a service if you do not understand the conditions.

