



Tenants Queensland News

Dear Members

I hope you have all managed to stay safe since our last member newsletter in May. Such a lot has happened since then.

In May and June we continued to see a rush of Queensland renters needing advice and support, resulting in the majority of our current work being COVID-19 related.

Throughout this time we've continued to expand the range of information for members and others whose tenancies are COVID affected. You'll find a broad array of factsheets, draft letters and useful forms [on our website](#). Of course if you need additional assistance, or can't access the web, please call our advice service.

Despite our best efforts and active advocacy for strong COVID protections, the situation for many Queensland renters continues to challenge. The new COVID regulations have been helpful for some who have achieved genuine rent reductions – read Lucy's story below. However, others are dealing with protracted disputes where they feel pressured to agree to rent deferral plans following income and job losses. Those households are not only anxious about their health and well-being, but concerned about accruing crippling debts and fearful of eventual eviction.

The recent Federal government extension of the Jobkeeper and Corona Virus supplement payments (albeit at reduced rates) is welcomed. However, it's also an acknowledgement that the economy and jobs will not bounce back quickly. We think it is time to consider an extension of the evictions moratorium which will otherwise end on September 29 and we'll be advising government of our position. If you're not already, please follow up on social media to stay up to date.

On another note, the review of TQ's constitution is close to finalization. We're planning a general meeting of members before the end of the year to discuss the proposed changes. I look forward to seeing you there.

Warm regards

Penny



Keep yourself safe.
Keep your community safe.
Stop the spread.



TENANTS QUEENSLAND NEWS

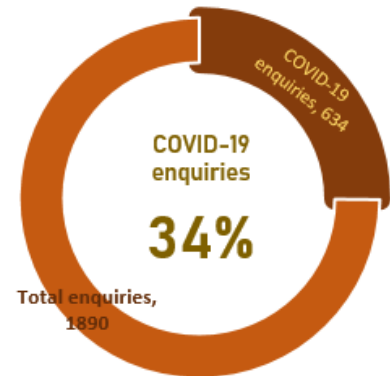
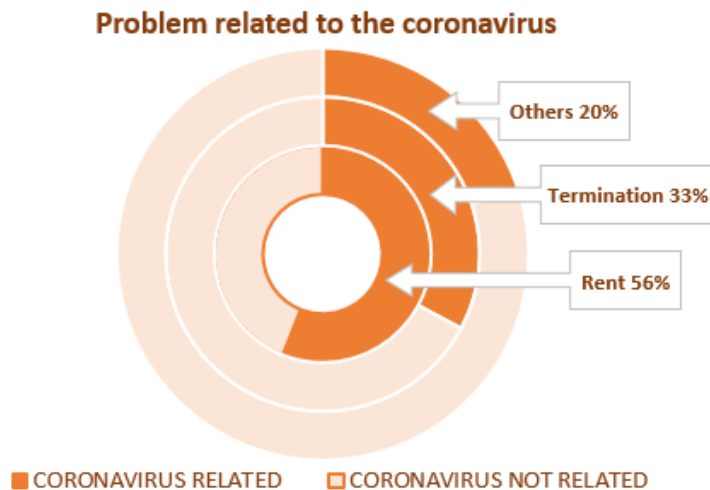
TENANTS EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19

Tenants Queensland has been participating on the Ministerial Housing Security Sub-Committee established by the Minister for Housing to monitor the impact of COVID-19 regulations on tenants.

COVID-19 TQ tenancy advice inquiries

During May and June 34% of calls our 1300 number were COVID-19 related inquiries. That is, 634 of 1890 calls.

Problem types for COVID-19 related 1300 inquiries 3 May-19 June 2020



Not surprisingly the majority of inquiries relating to COVID-19 were concerned with rent (56%) followed by termination (33%)

COVID-19 and Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) conciliations

For those of you who missed this RTA article, it provided some information on the numbers of conciliations that had been occurring during the COVID-19 period. Whilst the successful conciliation rate is quite high, there's no information on the substantive outcomes, for example, if tenants are succeeding in genuine rent reductions rather than simply deferrals. At the end of May, the RTA had conciliated 1281 disputes of which, they claim, 80% were successfully resolved.

<https://www.rta.qld.gov.au/news/2020/06/06/rta-responds-covid-19-dispute-resolution-data-article>

TQ understands that the conciliation figures are now around 2,000 with approximately a 70% success rate.

TENANT STORIES

COVID-19 affected family wins genuine rent reduction in QCAT!

(*The tenant's name has been changed to protect her identity)

Lucy* and her family were COVID affected. They sought a reasonable and genuine rent reduction which they pursued in the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) and won!

Since last month's changes by the state government to our tenancy laws for the COVID-19 emergency period, tenants seeking rent reductions have been left to negotiate with their agent or lessor. When agreement can't be reached, the dispute continues to RTA conciliation, and if not resolved there, can be decided in QCAT.

Several weeks into the changes, Lucy's story is one of the first QCAT outcomes we've heard and we're sharing it to give heart to all the Queensland renters still stuck in negotiation.

Lucy lives with her husband and small baby in a rental they've called home for ten years. Until COVID-19, the tenancy has been unremarkable. They've never been in arrears, never had to go to QCAT, and late last year welcomed their first child into their home.

However, when COVID struck, Lucy's husband was stood down from work and warned of a possible redundancy. With an uncertain family income and Lucy on maternity leave, she asked her agent for a rent reduction as soon as the Queensland COVID tenancy laws were made.



The agent said a rent reduction was not an available option because of the landlord's financial position.

Lucy met several requests from the agent to provide details and evidence, including completing the agent's checklist. When the agent made a further request to see financial records of savings Lucy drew the line. She considered, having proved she is in 'excessive hardship due to COVID', she should not be required to disclose additional information. On that basis, the agent decided it was not a formal rent reduction request.

The next day Lucy sent her request for dispute resolution to the RTA (Form 16a) along with evidence of the family's loss of income from COVID-19.

The RTA was quick to begin conciliation, during which time Lucy increased her rent offer from 25% to 30% of the family's income.

Throughout negotiation – before, during and after conciliation with the RTA – the landlord only ever offered a rent deferral. That is, any amount the rent was reduced now was to be paid back after the emergency is over. The landlord's offers only varied the length of time to pay the monies off. At one point they were offered an early termination of their agreement, something Lucy's family felt was unreasonable given their long tenure.

Lucy also considered the failure to offer any real rent reduction unfair. Despite proving they were in excessive hardship due to COVID-19, their only option if they accepted the landlord's offer, meant they would be saddled with future debt.

Lucy decided she would take her matter to QCAT for final resolution.

At QCAT, Lucy retold her story, including the landlord's refusal to negotiate a rent reduction on the basis they were not in a position to. No evidence of hardship was presented by the agent who appeared for the landlord.

Lucy's perseverance was rewarded. QCAT ordered a genuine rent reduction (not deferral), backdated to the QCAT application date, setting their rent at 30% of their little family's income. The order is in place until the family's income improves or to the end of the emergency period.

Lucy's story should give other renters in the middle of negotiations hope for a good outcome. No two circumstances are the same, so QCAT orders will always rely on the circumstances and evidence put to it.

Good evidence of the family's changed employment and income circumstances will have helped QCAT come to its decision as well and Lucy's evidence of attempts to negotiate a reasonable outcome. Of note, the RTA conciliation took only three days.

Tell us your story

If you have a story you would like to share please email stories@tenantsqld.org.au. The lived experiences of renters is valuable and will be used to inform our participation in the Housing security (COVID) sub-committee.



Maureen O'Regan, who has been undertaking some work on the campaign over the past six months painted her impression of the current situation for Queensland renters.

TENANCY LAW REFORM UPDATE

Make Renting Fair in Queensland Alliance and campaign

As you all know Tenants Queensland is part of the 14 member Make Renting Fair in Queensland Alliance (MRFQ). Whilst we all expected an announcement on tenancy law changes early in 2020, the process was overtaken by COVID-19 and the introduction of special COVID-19 regulations. These regulations extend to September and with a state election in late October, it's unlikely that any enduring changes to tenancy law will occur this year.

With this in mind, the Alliance will be approaching the political parties in the lead up to the election, about their intentions for Queensland tenancy law in the future, so that we can let supporters know. We'll also use that information and the election results to help plan the next stages of the campaign to Make Renting Fair in Queensland. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the [Make Renting Fair supporter updates](#) and follow them on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) to keep in touch of events and progress.

Constitutional review and special general meeting

The TQ steering committee has been working over the last couple of years to update our rather dated constitution. While we're still a little way off, once finalised, you'll receive further information about the changes proposed and a date for a general meeting at which the proposals will be formally put to members.

Members will consider four motions at the general meeting to:

- approve the application to change from an incorporated association to a Company Limited by Guarantee;
- give authority to three members of the Steering Committee to sign the application;
- propose the name under which the association is to be registered; and
- approve the new constitution.

If any members would like further information at this stage please contact our CEO, Penny Carr, at ceo@tenantsqld.org.au

First time renter project

A collaborative partnership between the [Queensland Youth Housing Coalition](#), Community Connections, the Youth Advocacy Centre and Tenants Queensland has produced a video resources targeting young people and first time renters. Look out for it as it's in its final stage and will be launched in the near future.

The group is also considering what additional resources are required to support young people entering the rental market for the first time.

TQ Strategic Plan 2020-2023

The updated Strategic Plan was endorsed at the committee's June meeting – see the Plan at end of this newsletter or access [on our website](#).

Strategic Planning in action during the age of COVID-19



L to R Top row: Philippa Murray (Facilitator), Jayson Tarawhiti (Southern Qld Regional Service Coordinator), Frank Stinson (Brisbane North Regional Service Coordinator), Marg Barnes (Staff Representative); *Row 2:* Chris Freney (Service Delivery Manager) Karen Butler (Central Qld Regional Service Coordinator); Laurel Devine (Northern QLD Regional Service Coordinator); Scott Pardey (Steering Committee); *Row 3:* Rohan Tate (Convener, Steering Committee); Penny Gillespie (Steering Committee); Julie Bartlett (Principal Solicitor). Alice Thompson (Executive Officer); *Bottom row:* Penny Carr (CEO); Sherryn West (Business Manager); Bryony Walters (Steering Committee).

OTHER NEWS

COVID-19

Research projects

Understandably there is a rush on research that has a COVID-19 focus.

AHURI has recently announced a COVID-19 research agenda comprising eight projects that will be fast-tracked to deliver findings in the second half of 2020. Findings will inform housing policy during and after the pandemic. The projects span the all housing issues with several focussing on renters including:

- The impacts of COVID on renters;
- Housing affordability stress during COVID-19;
- Post-pandemic renter-landlord relationships; and
- The impacts of COVID-19 on marginal renters.

TQ, through the National Association of Tenant Organisations, is also collaborating with UNSW City Futures on a project that will examine housing and homelessness policy changes brought about by COVID-19 as well as post-pandemic recovery policy.

In addition, TQ is about to launch its own COVID project to allow us to reach out to more marginal COVID-impacted renters, through other housing and homelessness services. In

addition and amongst others, we'll partner with Queenslanders with a Disability Network to support any of their members across the state with any COVID tenancy issues.

The project will also allow TQ to analyse the incidents and outcomes from our work with COVID-impacted renters. We'll keep you posted on this.

Other COVID-related news

Stage 2 of the Queensland government economic recovery strategy

A focus on the housing industry is included in the government's 2nd stage economic recovery strategy. A key measure is the allocation of \$100m for the construction of 215 social housing homes on the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Wide Bay, Moreton Bay, Toowoomba and Ipswich.



Changes to the RTA COVID Hotline

The RTA's COVID-19 information hotline ceased mid-June reverting to the RTA tenancy information and support 1300 366 311 line or customers could call the Smart Service Queensland COVID hotline (134 268 43). For more information <https://www.rta.qld.gov.au/contact>

Domestic & Family Violence and COVID

The Queensland Government has launched a new awareness campaign to support Queenslanders affected by domestic and family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information go to www.qld.gov.au/dfvsupport

SERVICE UPDATES



QCAT launches minor civil dispute case status tool

The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) has launched an online service for minor civil disputes (including tenancy) making it easier for people to keep track of their matters before the Tribunal.

QCAT deals with almost 24,000 minor civil disputes a year and says that the online service will allow parties involved in such matters to see when their hearings are scheduled, see what documents have been lodged and what decisions have been made.

This service will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at www.qcat.qld.gov.au/mcdcasestatus,

Horizon Housing Company change of name

Horizon Housing Company has changed its name to Community Housing (Qld) Limited as part of the transition commenced in 2018 to integrate its operations with Community Housing Ltd. The "Horizon" name will remain in Horizon Housing Reality that will continue to provide realty services for Community Housing Ltd affordable housing tenancies located in Robina, Roma and Maryborough. For more information <https://chl.org.au/wp-content/uploads/History-Horizon-Housing-Company.pdf>

QDN (Queenslanders with Disability Network) NDIS Targeted Outreach Project

There are many eligible Queenslanders who have not yet applied for the NDIS, particularly those in regional, rural and remote regions in Queensland, and for many people experiencing additional complex challenges such as homelessness, release from correctional facilities and juvenile justice. We also know that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children in Special Schools are not accessing the NDIS. The Targeted Outreach Program, led by QDN, is specifically targeting people with disability who traditionally fall through the gaps in our service system.

Through this project, QDN along with QCOSS and ADA Australia are helping more Queenslanders who have a disability join NDIS and experience the benefits of NDIS. The Targeted Outreach Project can assist anyone who wants to learn about the NDIS, decide if the NDIS is for them and how it can support them and help people connect with the team. For more information go to QDN's website <https://qdn.org.au/our-work/ndis-targeted-outreach/>. To talk to someone about the project contact QDN on 1300 363 783 or email targetedoutreach@qdn.org.au.

RTA Web Services

The Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) continues to develop with web services (which require a QGov account to access). In August, the RTA will introduce a new Change of Bond Contributors to allow those using the QGov online services to change the names of bond contributors.

They're also introducing an 'end of fixed term' tenancy email, six weeks before the term expires. The RTA say this is to remind people of their bond number and request an update of their details. TQ will be contacting the RTA to discuss messaging. We don't want the text to confuse tenants into thinking they have to sign a new fixed term agreement or that their tenancy will end on that date.

[For more information read online](#) or call the RTA on 1300 366311

Remember, remind your friends and family that they can now join TQ Online

Just go to our website and click the link at <https://tenantsqld.org.au/about-tuq/join-tuq/>

Social Media - Don't forget to check out and like our pages

Tenants Qld   | Make Renting Fair Qld  

Tenants Queensland Strategic Plan - (2020 – 2023)



Tenants Queensland Inc

	STRATEGIC THEMES:	YEAR ONE FOCUS AREAS:
<p>VISION: Working towards a society where renting is a secure and respected housing tenure</p>	<p>A connected and influential voice for tenants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand organisational capability by building TQ profile, partnership and connections with similar organisations Engage with a partner to build reputation and a compelling voice outlining the implications for tenants and for society of the COVID19 economic fallout Use new methods of engagement to build a community of people within Queensland or across Australia who are informed and engaged on tenant rights and create a 'community who care'
<p>PURPOSE: To unequivocally advocate for and empower tenants to protect and improve their rights through access to information, advice and representation</p>	<p>Delivery of quality services to Queenslanders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and build on quality delivery of contracted service requirements and ensure ease of reporting on outcomes to ensure funding security of current contracts Engage in innovative ways to promote education of younger generations entering the rental markets
<p>VALUES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We empower tenants We show respect for all stakeholders We act with integrity We commit to furthering tenants rights We promote a culture of continuous improvement We will be accountable for our work 	<p>Building resilience and readiness for the future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building capability for the future TQ leadership and workforce including succession planning and knowledge sharing priorities Improve our organisational capability in data analysis and data led decision making and bring to forefront of future strategic and operational decision making Conduct a strategic review of our Future Service Delivery Options to improve readiness for future and become nimble in changing times
	<p>A sustainable organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constitutional change and embedding of sub-Committee approach to key areas of organisational performance or risks Improve focus on strategic and operational KPI's including clear targets and regular measurement