

Submission: Improving NSW Renting Laws

I'm a 54 year old renter in Sydney's [REDACTED]. I've been renting my whole adult life. I rent with my husband. The brief rent reductions that happened during COVID allowed us to move from a studio to a one-bedroom apartment, where we enjoy the luxury of a door that can be closed, creating separate spaces. A door should not be such a luxury.

I'm a power wheelchair user. Finding rental accommodation that is "accessible enough" is a huge challenge even when the market is not extraordinarily tight. (I don't qualify for SIL.)

I am greatly relieved that we don't have to move right now. When our fixed term lease ends in [REDACTED] there's every chance we will be required to move because our landlord is in the process of selling the property. Where does a power wheelchair user go if they can't find a home? Both my husband and I work. We live on a low income but earn enough that I don't believe we qualify for "social housing".

All renters need and deserve homes that are affordable, secure, safe, and feel like home. NSW renting laws should be reformed, in order to make renting fair for the 1 in 3 people in NSW who rent our homes.

Ending unfair evictions

Renters need homes that are stable and secure. We deserve to live without fear of unfair 'no grounds' evictions from our homes.

All renters should be provided with a valid reason for ending a tenancy. Landlords should be required to provide a reason to end a rolling (periodic) lease, and a fixed term lease after the end date.

They should be required to provide a generous period of opportunity for a tenant to find a new home. Tenants should not be evicted into homelessness.

'The property will soon be sold' should not be added as a ground for eviction.

If we are asked to move at the end of our current fixed term lease, we could have just 30 days to pack up all our belongings and find a new home that needs to be accessible for a power wheelchair.

Most affordable rental properties are not accessible for a wheelchair user. The vast majority of affordable rental properties in the [REDACTED] have a shower over the bath, steps to enter, or both. If I find a property with a lift, as we live in now, then I am at risk

of not being able to get in and out of my home when the lift breaks down and also at risk of death in the case of a fire because I am less able than others to get out quickly and there is no safe place that I can get to in my wheelchair.

On previous occasions when we've been required to move out, it has taken longer than the time allowed to find something suitable . That wasn't during a rental crisis and I was using crutches not a wheelchair. Couch surfing is really quite impractical with a power wheelchair. Where am I supposed to go? Most of my friends don't have accessible homes either.

Keeping pets in rental homes

Renters need homes that feel like home. Renters should be allowed to make simple choices to make the houses we live in homes, including hanging pictures and whether or not to keep pets.

Landlords should only be able to refuse a pet by obtaining a Tribunal order allowing them to do so. This model is similar to those that apply in Victoria, the ACT and the NT.

Many people who live alone find They easily become lonely. Having a pet can do a lot to support people's mental health.

Rental affordability

Renters need homes that are affordable and physically accessible. Renters need to be able to afford to pay our rent without worrying that it will mean we go without other life essentials. If we request improved physical access to our homes such as ramps or railings, they should be installed.

There should be fair limits on rent increases in NSW tenancy law.

Housing is an essential service. Having a secure, safe, affordable disability accessible home is vital to ensure a decent life. There are other essential services – energy, health, education and more – where cost is regulated to ensure the service is accessible for everyone. Fair limits on rent increases and rent setting should apply in rental housing too.

Renting, working, disability and precarious employment

Finding and keeping work has always been a challenge for me as a person with a disability and that makes renting much harder. Many of my positions have been casual and I'm only able to work part time. Even when I am employed, as I am now, I want to be renting a property that I know I can afford if I lose my job (as I previously have), or if my contract ends, as this one is due to do next year.

My current and previous position both included working from home. That makes it a lot easier for me to find work as a disabled person.

It also means it's more important to have a bit of space. My employer provides equipment for me to use but I need space to put it in my home.

Working from home makes it more important to be in a one-bedroom place rather than a studio. If my husband is home from work for any reason, suddenly he's in my workspace.

We have lived much of our adult life in rental stress. As a result, we have found it difficult financially. I rarely visit the dentist. I've spent long periods on unemployment benefits, despite being very keen to work, because it's hard to find an employer that is willing and able to take on someone with disability – especially when the DES/compliance police is so lacking in the skills required to assist disabled people into appropriate work that they need prompting, even in a jobs boom. It's scary to sign a lease when your employment is precarious and you know that the next job will be really hard to find.

NSW must sign up to the National Construction Code that requires basic accessibility for every new home built - like at least one entrance without steps, and a toilet on the entry level. Most of those properties won't be affordable for another 20 years but at least they will be both affordable and accessible then.

Renters in NSW need housing security. Disabled renters in NSW need to be able to rent homes that are safe, comfortable affordable and accessible, where we can live with whomever we choose to live with.