



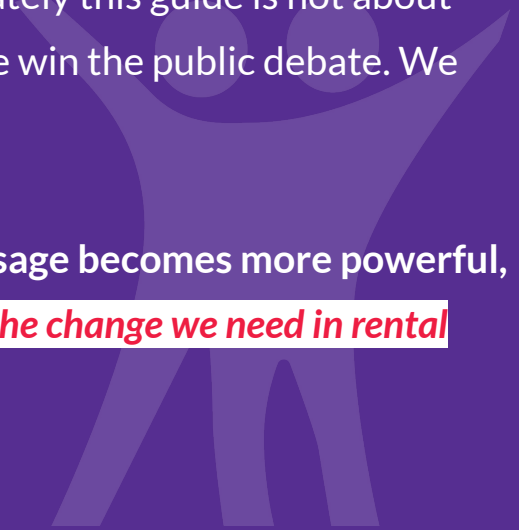
#HealthyHomes

Messaging Guide 2024

Purpose

This guide exists to help the Healthy Homes for Renters collaboration established a consistent and informed approach to public communication. The focus is on how we persuade the public with messages that move people and change how they feel about the issue. This has some relevance when talking to politicians, because we want to use effective messages with them **and demonstrate for them effective messages to use in their own public communication.** But ultimately this guide is not about the policy detail or conversations behind closed doors -- it's about how we win the public debate. We win over MPs by winning over the public.

When organisations and individuals speak with a unified voice, our message becomes more powerful, resonating with decision-makers and the public. ***This is crucial in driving the change we need in rental housing standards.***



Executive summary: background

Healthy Homes for Renters is calling for minimum energy performance requirements for rental properties.

Current housing has bad energy performance, and rental homes are especially bad. This means higher energy costs, unhealthy indoor temperatures, and increased pollution. Renters can't make changes to their homes to address this.

Heating and cooling are the biggest energy cost for households. These costs can be reduced through things like ceiling insulation (that reduce the need for heating/cooling) and efficient appliances (that can heat/cool more cheaply).

By implementing minimum energy performance standards for rental homes, governments will help ensure that renters can afford to keep their homes at a healthy and comfortable temperature.

State/territory governments would specify a standard that a rental property must meet before it can be rented out. In the ACT, there is a minimum ceiling insulation requirement, and Victoria requires a heater that meets a certain minimum standard for efficiency.

Executive summary: tips and tricks

It's all about emotions and values: persuade by reaching the heart with personal stories.

Start with a positive vision: how we want the world to be. **Everyone should have a healthy home.**

Know your key messages and repeat them. Repetition is persuasive!

Make sure to communicate that renters have limited agency: there's not much they can do to improve their situation. Renters don't have much choice, and they aren't allowed to change their homes. In contrast, governments could act to make rental homes better.

Focus on outcomes, not process: the positive result, not how we get there. Wherever possible, be concrete about harms and benefits, avoiding vague or abstract language.

Executive summary: key messages

Everyone should have a healthy home. Your home should be a place that helps you to stay healthy and well.

But this isn't the case for many people who rent their homes. Their home is too cold in winter and too hot in summer, which is bad for your health. Renters also face higher energy costs compared to people who own their homes.

This is because **landlords aren't required to take basic steps to ensure the properties they rent out are decent to live in.** And renters can't make the changes themselves.

Nowadays, **about 1 in 3 Australians rent, and many more people are renting long-term.** People are retiring as renters, and more children are growing up in rental households. Like everyone else, these people should have a decent home.

That's why governments need to introduce minimum energy performance standards. If we make sure that rental homes meet a minimum standard, people will be warmer in winter, cooler in summer, and have more affordable energy bills.

How to use this guide

We encourage you to read through this whole guide. And do so critically: you can add comments or ask questions, or provide feedback, either through the document or by emailing us. The more 'alive' this document is, the more valuable it will be.

You might also refer back to this guide before working on an interview, or a submission, or a blog post. In this case you might want to focus on the key messages, or brush up on messaging around specific topics.

You're also welcome to share this resource with others: more people using it makes our messaging more impactful, and also creates more opportunities for input and feedback. And if others aren't already part of Healthy Homes for Renters, that's also a great chance to encourage them to join!

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Background to Healthy Homes for Renters

This section of the guide is to give you information to help understand the campaign and the issues. Understanding the issues and the context will help you have the confidence to communicate about the campaign. However, this is not intended to be used directly for your messaging.



Background to HH4R

Healthy Homes for Renters is a coalition of over 120 Australian organisations calling for every state and territory government to commit to implement minimum energy performance requirements for rental properties (including private rental and social housing) by the end of 2025.

The policy context for this work is that Australia's energy ministers agreed in late 2019 to the [Addendum to the Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings - Existing Buildings](#). This work sits within the Federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). The addendum included the establishment of a **national framework for minimum energy efficiency requirements for rental properties**, to enable implementation of requirements by the end of 2025.

All jurisdictional ministers agreed to the Addendum, but there was not a binding commitment to actually implement rental standards. Since then, Victoria's Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, DEECA, has led on developing the framework.

The framework was initially promised for late 2022 and is now well overdue.

Background to HH4R

The issue is that [Australia's housing has poor energy performance in general](#), and rental housing tends to be even worse. Renters are less likely to have homes with ceiling insulation or efficient heating/cooling, and solar PV is a distant dream. Renters can't make changes to their homes, and in the current rental market they've got negligible leverage to ask their landlord to make changes.

The effects of this are:

- Higher energy bills due to increased heating/cooling costs: [renters spend about 8% more on energy compared otherwise similar non-renters](#).
- Indoor temperatures that are bad for health. The WHO recommends a healthy temperature band of about 18-24C. Our 'Renter Researchers' work shows that renters are routinely outside this band in summer and in winter. This has effects on cardiovascular and respiratory health.
- Higher pollution/emissions. Using gas heaters or electric appliances connected to a coal-powered electricity grid, results in emissions. When homes have worse energy performance, people need to burn more fossil fuels to get them to a decent temperature.

Background to HH4R

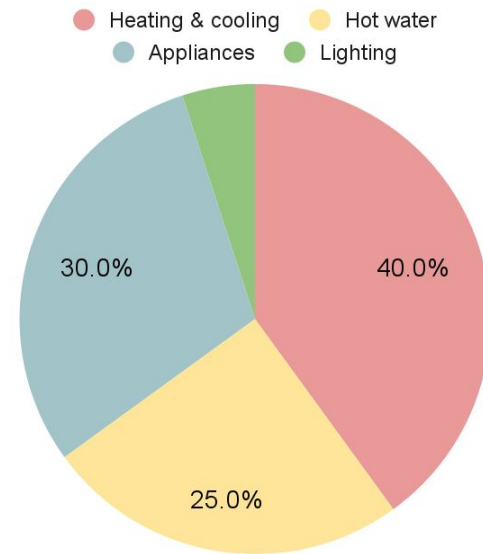
Most household energy usage is for heating and cooling. Most people in Australia live in cities where heating is more common than cooling (although this may be changing due to global warming). This is particularly true in cooler cities (Melbourne, Canberra, Hobart).

The next single biggest thing is hot water systems: standard electric storage systems use a lot of energy. The more efficient option is 'heat pump' hot water which is much more efficient when heating the water.

Major appliances/white goods come next: fridge, washing machine, dryer, dishwasher.

Things like lighting, cooking, microwaves, kettles, make a very small contribution to energy costs: LED lights are great, but they aren't going to do much these days for energy costs or improving thermal comfort.

Household energy use



[energy.gov.au, 'quick wins'](http://energy.gov.au/quick_wins)

Background to HH4R

The policy solution is minimum energy performance standards for rental homes.

Governments would specify a standard the property must meet. This could be having specific features (eg ceiling insulation, efficient heating) or meeting a certain standard of modelled performance, such as through a rating scheme.

In the ACT, there is a requirement for ceiling insulation, and in Victoria, a requirement for an energy-efficient heater in the main living area. Tasmania has a requirement for a heater in the main living area, but no efficiency requirements. In both Queensland and SA the minister has the authority to regulate rental standards, but they have not used this power.

Healthy Homes for Renters has a “[Community Sector Blueprint](#)” which goes into much more detail on the policy issues. In short, we support initial features-based steps (like Victoria and ACT), ultimately moving towards a “modelled performance” standard.

General communication tips

This section of the guide is to share general advice about communication. It will be followed by more specific ideas about Healthy Homes for Renters.



It's all about emotions and values

Persuasive communication speaks to the heart. Facts and figures can help to establish your credibility as a speaker, but they aren't compelling or convincing. **What we want to do is activate an emotional resonance in our audience, establishing connection based upon shared values.** This is true even when speaking to 'serious' people like MPs.

Mother of eight struggles to find new rental as prices spike across South Australia

By [Josephine Lim](#)

Posted Thu 7 Jul 2022 at 5:49am, updated Thu 7 Jul 2022 at 9:58am



Start with a positive vision

Part of this is **Vision**: “everyone should have a healthy home”. This is a great place to start from. It’s an inclusive and unifying general proposition – and “home” is itself an emotive concept to tap into.

You can then use individual stories – your own, or those of others – to highlight how far we are from this vision, and the human impact of this gap.

In Amity and Mickie's rental home in Sydney, there's a room connected to the main living space by a doorway that has no door.

A note stuck to the wall reveals the family's pet name for this room: "Antarctica".

"It's got a ceiling that's just plastic sheeting and no insulation," Mickie tells [ABC RN Breakfast](#).

"It's absolutely freezing."

Repeat your key messages

And, very importantly: think of your **key messages**. Know what you are trying to say, and say it at every opportunity. This is probably the **#1** thing, especially for a media context. **Repetition is persuasive.**

"Minimum energy efficiency standards for rental housing would mean that renters don't have to choose between heating and eating.

"Rental standards will ensure that renters can afford to have a healthy home," he said.

"Everyone needs a healthy home. Governments have a responsibility to act so that renters can afford to keep their home at a healthy temperature.

"This means changing how the system works by introducing minimum energy efficiency standards to ensure that rental homes are decent to live in."

The importance of 'agency'

'Agency' is about who in the story can do something to change the status quo. When an audience hears about this issue, they naturally wonder: who is responsible? Who could change this?

It's critical that renters are understood as using the limited agency they have. **We need to emphasise that renters already do everything they can, but they are limited: they aren't allowed to make major changes, and the rental market is so tight they have few options.**

You know who does have agency? Governments. They could act to do something about this issue, but they are choosing not to.

General communications tips

Another rule of thumbs is to emphasise **outcomes not process**. Things like government consultation, a regulatory impact statement are process: what we really care about is the end result, which is renters having healthy homes.

Aim to be **concrete, not abstract**. This is most relevant when describing harms/benefits. “Renters face higher energy costs” is less powerful than “Renters hesitate to turn on the aircon, because they don’t know how they’ll be able to afford groceries on top of an electricity bill.”

Key messages for Healthy Homes for Renters

This section drills down into messaging for Healthy Homes for Renters. We start by going through key messages in detail, then discuss renters' specific challenges, and some positive stories we can point to.



Key messages

Everyone should have a healthy home. Your home should be a place that helps you to stay healthy and well.

But this isn't the case for many people who rent their homes. Their home is too cold in winter and too hot in summer, which is bad for your health. Renters also face higher energy costs compared to people who own their homes.

This is because **landlords aren't required to take basic steps to ensure the properties they rent out are decent to live in.** And renters can't make the changes themselves.

Nowadays, **about 1 in 3 Australians rent, and many more people are renting long-term.** People are retiring as renters, and more children are growing up in rental households. Like everyone else, these people should have a decent home.

That's why governments need to introduce minimum energy performance standards. If we make sure that rental homes meet a minimum standard, people will be warmer in winter, cooler in summer, and have more affordable energy bills.

Key messages

Everyone should have a healthy home. Your home should be a place that helps you to stay healthy and well.

- This is our central vision and value proposition: we want to be getting it across at every opportunity.
- Note that it's not just renters: it's everybody.
- 'Home' has deep resonance and meaning; nobody needs to be convinced of the value of home, and we understand already that it's more than just shelter, it's also a place of comfort and security.

Key messages

But this isn't the case for many people who rent their homes. Their home is too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Renters are facing higher energy costs, and indoor conditions that make them and their families sick.

- Next we introduce the problem: the gap between our values and reality. This creates interest!
- State the problem in qualitative terms and human impacts - potentially you could use specific individual examples here as well (“We’ve heard from renters who are so worried about having to raise children in mouldy, cold houses.”)

Key messages

This is because **landlords aren't required to take basic steps to ensure the properties they rent out are decent to live in. And renters can't make the changes themselves.**

- Now we offer a causal explanation: why are things the way they are? People want us to explain things. Note that the problem isn't that landlords don't act (individual) it's that landlords aren't required to act (governmental, systemic).
 - [\[See more on talking about landlords\]](#)

Key messages

Nowadays, about 1 in 3 Australians rent, and many more people are renting long-term. People are retiring as renters, and more children are growing up in rental households. These people should have a decent home.

- Here we emphasise the scale of the issue, ie, it affects many people. We also counter stereotypes about who renters are by bringing in retirees and children.
- We want the audience to feel a connection with the affected community: these people are like me, or this could be my children.
- And we connect it back to values: a decent home.

Key messages

That's why governments need to introduce minimum energy performance standards. By fixing substandard rental homes, people will be warmer in winter, cooler in summer, and have more affordable energy bills.

- We offer our solution: government has a responsibility, they can fix this, this is how.
 - Ideally you might go deeper to talk more clearly about the specific change, not just the process/policy: this would mean more rental homes having simple features like ceiling insulation, and efficient heaters.
- Talk about the benefits in terms of human beings and how their life is made better. This example focuses on cost of living and comfort/health, but you could also talk about climate emissions.
- For bonus points you might use an example/story: “One renter we spoke with moved to a place with ceiling insulation from one without. She said, even when it got hot in summer, the new place was much cooler and comfortable inside. This is the positive benefit we could create for all renters, and you shouldn’t have to move home to get it.”

Key messages

“Energy performance” (not “energy efficiency”)

- Energy performance is a broader concept that can also capture rooftop solar and electrification of appliances. These can both contribute to making rental homes healthier and more affordable.
- ‘Performance’ has an implication of abundance: warm homes in winter, friends cooking up a storm together, hot water in the shower. ‘Efficiency’ brings to mind woollen jumpers, rationing, and energy conservation. We want a vision of plenty, not ‘getting by with less’.
- **However**, at a policy level solar/electrification should complement measures like insulation that make it easier to keep your home at a healthy and comfortable temperature. We should be wary of governments doing solar (&c) without addressing dwelling quality.

What makes renting different?

One common retort is that 'I get cold in winter too'. It's useful to highlight how the experience of renters differs. But, also, remember that our vision is for everyone to have a healthy home: we want owner occupiers to also have healthy, affordable homes! We talk about renters because there are specific barriers, and it will need a tailored response.

For one, this is a systemic issue. It can't be solved by individual renters changing their behaviour, nor even by individual landlords deciding to put in a ceiling fan. We've seen governments try, and fail, to fix this with bandaid or small-scale responses. It's clear that we need a response from government that ensures every rental home is fit and healthy to live in.

And this isn't something renters can drive themselves. The rental market is very tight, so renters have basically no market power: when you're desperate for a place to live, are you thinking about ceiling insulation? And once you move into a place, you've got little power, you're worried about eviction or a rent increase. So it's really hard for renters to be the ones to drive change here.

In short: we want everyone to have a healthy home. For renters, achieving this will require minimum energy performance standards.



Some more details on our positive vision

Some of the specific changes that could come about through minimum energy performance standards:

- Ceiling insulation in rental homes, so that your roof space doesn't cook you from above in summer, and in winter when you heat your home it doesn't just go out through the ceiling.
- Curtains or blinds to stop the winter chill creeping in through your windows; external shading to stop the sun beating down on you in summer.
- Sealing up draughts, cracks and gaps. It's simple and easy to stop air blowing through a rental home, and it makes a huge difference -- it makes your home much colder and it feels terrible when you can feel a draught blowing through in winter.
- Energy efficient heating and cooling: some measures make it easier to keep heat in in winter, but renters still need an affordable way to get the heat in the first place. Efficient electric appliances make it practical and affordable for renters to keep their home at a healthy temperature.
- Ceiling fans -- especially in Northern Australia
- Rooftop solar PV

Some more details on our positive vision

Everyone needs a healthy home. But, living in a cold and mouldy home in Tasmania, Lisa faced serious health issues that affected her every day.

Lisa was lucky though — she had a social housing landlord who responded to her requests for help. When she brought them evidence of the unhealthy temperatures in her home, they were able to secure changes like better insulation and a new energy efficient reverse-cycle heater. Her quality of life has dramatically changed:

"My health has vastly improved, my house is comfortable, my bills are lower. I feel like my life has returned to normal, and I can just get along with things without that constant sense of panic and despair."

Lisa's story highlights the profound difference it makes to have a healthy home. But we can't rely on the initiative of individual landlords to make these changes. We need minimum energy performance standards for all rentals, so that everyone can experience these benefits.



Some more details on our positive vision

Lisa's story is a great example of an individual win. But over the years we've seen some great policy wins from both the ACT and Victoria.

In March 2021, Victoria implemented its first minimum energy efficiency standard, requiring a fixed energy-efficient heater in the main living room of the rental home. Since then, we've heard from renters who got upgraded heaters, who describe being able to decently heat their home for the first time, even as their energy costs go down. In late 2023, the Victorian government committed to expanding upon these standards to include insulation, cooling, efficient hot water systems and draught proofing. If these expanded standards are rolled out effectively, Victoria will become the gold standard for rental standards in Australia.

In April 2023, the ACT began the rollout of a ceiling insulation requirement for rental homes. This is estimated to save each rental household thousands of dollars, even if, hypothetically, there were rent increases. And better yet - since April 2023, the ACT's vacancy rate has been going up, and rents have been going down.

Messages for specific topics

Here we offer more detail on how to talk about hot homes, air conditioning, cold homes, cost of living, climate, and electrification & solar.



Speaking about... Healthy Homes for Renters

Language to use	Language to avoid
People/families who rent their homes	Tenants/households
Homes	Properties
Property investors / amateur landlords	mum and dad investors
Everyone needs a healthy home	Renters' rights
It's been done in ...	It's too hard
The savings to renters...	It can be very expensive
Renters will be better off	Rents will go up
Energy performance	Energy efficiency

Speaking about... Cost of living

In the past we avoided the ‘cost of living’ frame because we wanted to emphasise health. These days, however, ‘cost of living’ is super salient and it’s a major concern for politicians — it’s a good way to get traction on the issue.

At the same time, ‘saving money’ isn’t that emotionally compelling: so still try to make it about the tangible difference in someone’s life, not an abstract benefit. You can also get into the emotional challenge of having to trade off between ‘heating and eating’, between paying rent, or paying your energy bill, or being able to afford groceries — these are real challenges people face due to high housing costs.

- “A lot of people are struggling with energy costs at the moment. It’s especially tough for renters, because they tend to be in substandard homes that take more energy to heat and cool: one study found that renters spend on average 8% more on energy because they are renters. Renters also don’t have the option to make changes to their home to reduce their energy costs - they aren’t allowed to!. Combined with massive rent increases, lots of people are having to give up on heating/cooling altogether, just to try to make ends meet.
- “This takes a big toll on mental health: so many renters describe anxiety and fear about energy bills. One renter told us about having panic attacks every time her child had a hot shower, because of the impact it would have on bills. People shouldn’t have to be living like this.”
- “By ensuring that rental homes have basic measures like insulation and efficient cooling, we can give people the confidence to keep their home healthy and comfortable, without having to panic over their energy costs.”

Speaking about... **Hot homes**

- Because of climate change, summers are getting more dangerous: heatwaves are becoming more frequent, more severe, and longer-lasting.
- Extreme heat events are deadlier than all other natural disasters combined. ([source](#))
- Your home should keep you safe: it's unacceptable that indoor temperatures are putting people's health at risk.
- People in inefficient homes are at more risk in hot weather. Lifting up the standard of rental homes will save lives: [analysis suggests](#) that 90% fewer people will die in future heat waves if inefficient homes are upgrade to perform better.

Speaking about... **Air conditioning**

Be careful when talking about AC. Although it is [the single best thing](#) to reduce heatwave mortality, it is generally bad for the climate, and it's too expensive for many people to use. It can also be challenging optics: AC is often seen as a luxury. In isolation, it is not a solution.

Focus instead on the outcome: everyone should have a home that is safe to live in during a heatwave. You can talk about basic things that also help that many renters don't have: ceiling fans, fly screens, shading. AC combined with solar can be a climate solution: solving both the cost and climate concerns!

- “Air conditioning has a role to play in helping keep people safe in heatwaves. For this to work, we also need to stop how hot homes are getting in the first place, and ensure that people can afford to use their appliances. Governments should require measures like ceiling insulation so that homes don't get so hot in the first place, and then look at combining AC with solar so that it's affordable to run and won't add to climate change.”

Speaking about... Cold homes

- Surprisingly, cold is a major killer in Australia. [6.5% of deaths are attributable to cold](#): about 1 in 15.
- When you get cold, your blood vessels shrink, to try to reduce heat loss. This increases blood pressure. This can lead to things like stroke or heart attacks.
- We can achieve really substantial health benefits by reducing cold. One study showed that if you eliminated exposure to unhealthy cold below 18C, it'd mean [people living longer, healthier lives](#), due to the reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. The effect is greater than lifestyle or dietary interventions. And that's just for heart disease: there would also be benefits for mental health, and respiratory disease.
- A trial by Sustainability Victoria improve the energy performance of a bunch of homes at a relatively minor cost, less than \$3000 per property on average. They found this made a big positive difference for people. People benefited from lower energy costs, but, perhaps surprisingly, the biggest positive difference was found in improvements in health.

Speaking about... Climate

This can be tricky, and it probably depends on your audience. When we talk about climate mitigation we risk getting too abstract and minimising the human dimension. But when we talk about adaptation, resilience, or the benefits of the energy transition, we're on better territory.

- **Making it easier to endure extreme heat:** climate change means that heatwaves are going to be longer and more severe. We need to make sure that people have homes that will keep them safe in a heatwave. We know rental homes currently aren't good enough. Governments have a responsibility to address this.
- **Helping renters share in the benefit:** plenty of households are cutting their energy bills and their carbon emissions by improving their energy performance and installing solar panels. But renters are being locked out of this. We can cut emissions while also making sure people have better, healthier homes, and lower power bills, and governments should implement minimum energy performance standards for rentals to make sure that the 1 in 3 Australians who rent their homes can share in these benefits.

Speaking about... Electrification & Solar

Electrification and rooftop solar can make a big difference for renters. We want renters to share in these benefits, but we don't want government to use this as an excuse to avoid acting to address substandard rental homes.

When it comes to gas appliances, it's significant that renters don't currently get choice: you just take what you can get. In practice, this means renters might rent a place that is all-electric except for gas cooking, which means you're paying a lot just to be connected to gas. In a situation like this, a renter could save hundreds of dollars a year if they had an induction stove and didn't have to connect to the gas network; it would also mean a healthier home, due to avoiding indoor pollution from gas.

Overall, electrification can be beneficial, and we want renters to share in this. At the same time, we also want improvements to the thermal shell of a home: the best outcome for a renter is having a decent home that doesn't need as much heating in winter, and then having the option to heat that home with an efficient heating system, powered by free solar power.

Speaking about... Landlords

Landlords are not the villain of this story. Some are making an effort to improve properties. Others are a bit crap. But generally, they are getting away with what governments let them get away with. It's the responsibility of government to set and enforce a standard, not to rely on the voluntary initiative of individual landlords.

This is important to create a consistent experience for renters. Some landlords are good, some are bad, but we need to ensure that every rental home is healthy to live in. Minimum energy performance standards will help make this a consistent experience for renters, instead of relying on the whim of individual landlords.

Q&A and mythbusting

Here are some curly questions that can come up in a meeting or an interview, and some ideas on how to respond.



General Q&A

Q: Won't this lead to higher rents?

A: Reject the premise of the question, but avoid simple contradiction. Instead, make a positive statement about how things actually work.

“Rents are set by supply and demand. When vacancy rates are low, landlords are charging as much as they can get away with, regardless of what their own costs are. Rental standards are a way to ensure that renters, already paying high rents, are at least getting a decent home.”

You can make an ‘even if’ argument, that renters would still be better off anyway, because renters are currently paying the cost of substandard rental homes.

“Remember, renters pay rent, but they also pay energy bills. So even if rents were higher, the evidence is that renters would still be better off. An analysis of the ceiling insulation standard in the ACT found that even if rent increases did somehow happen, renters would still end up ahead because of the bill savings.”

Q: How would this be funded?

A: Emphasise that this is fundamentally a landlord responsibility to ensure they are renting out a decent home.

“Our proposal is that the person making money renting out the property is responsible for complying with regulations and making sure the property is healthy to live in. This is the way any industry works!”

You could suggest there is also a role for governments in supporting the transition.

“Governments could play a role in supporting landlords through the transition. For example, the ACT Government offers zero-interest loans to landlords to help them spread out any upfront cost. Ultimately what we need to get to is everyone having a healthy home, and if governments support can encourage compliance and make that transition happen faster, that’s a good thing for renters.”

Q: Won't landlords leave the market?

A: This is unlikely - evidence suggests that landlord investment decisions are mostly about their life circumstances and how their investments are doing more broadly. Most landlords don't even really know what's going on with rental laws, and it doesn't play a big role in their decision-making. ([see this study!](#))

If they do leave, the house still exists. It doesn't get wiped off the face of the Earth! If some first home buyers buy it, maybe they move out of a rental and someone else moves in. The total amount of housing remains the same.

Q: Questions about how much it costs, eg “So roughly how much would it cost a landlord to comply with this standard?”

“It depends how much the property is below the standard. This is a minimum standard, and lots of properties will already meet it, or maybe require minor changes. As a ballpark figure, a study in Victoria found retrofit costs of \$2800. Landlords are running a business renting out housing, and just like any other business, we need to make sure that housing is safe and decent, and rental standards are the way to achieve that.”

Avoid giving a specific figure. The amount will depend upon how lacking the property is. Emphasise that it’s normal and common for businesses to be expected to meet standards for health and safety. But don’t be evasive: you could point to the [Sustainability Victoria study](#) where retrofits had an average cost of \$2800, the average cost saving over winter was \$972.

Appendix: Renter Researchers

We've heard that some people would like a bit more detail on Better Renting's 'Renter Researchers' work — read on!



Renter Researchers reports & key findings

Renter Researchers is a citizen-science and advocacy project that Better Renting has run every Summer and Winter since the Summer of 2022. Renters apply from across Australia to take part; Better Renting sends them devices to track temperature and humidity in their homes and induct them into a community of other renters also taking part in the project. The team gathers qualitative data from participants through surveys and interviews and combine this with the quantitative tracker data to create a powerful portrayal of the challenging experiences that renters are enduring in their homes.

All Renter Researcher reports can be found [here](#).

Renter Researchers: Summer findings

- The latest study, Summer 23-24, showed that renters were spending almost half their time above 25°C, and about 2 hours a day above 30°C. The temperature band that we're confident is healthy is 18-24°C.
- These patterns were repeated overnight: it wasn't any cooler. Hot nights pose a big threat to health, because the body doesn't get any relief from the heat. At the milder end, it also has a big negative effect on health: to get to sleep, your body needs to cool down, and this is very hard in a hot bedroom.
- Across Australia, when it was hot outdoors (21°C+) it was hotter indoors about 1 third of the time - or 8 hours a day on average. Typically it would be about 26°C outdoors and about 29°C indoors.
- Things were especially bad for renters with lower housing quality &/or greater cost of living challenges. These people had far fewer options: they may not have an air conditioner, they may hesitate to run it, and they may lack the resources to leave their home for a cool space.

Renter Researchers: Winter findings

- Our latest winter study ran in 2023. The average median temperature was 16.9°C: people are spending 50% of their time *below* this level. 72% of people had a median temperature below 18°C, with the average minimum temperature across Australia being 11.3°C.
- Properties were colder inside than out over 3 hours a day. In NSW, properties were colder inside than out 21% of the time. On average, NSW properties were only 2.8° C warmer inside than out - ie, they aren't doing very much to keep you warm.
- A key dynamic here is renters' sense of powerlessness: people can't do anything to get warm or fix their home, and in a tight rental market it's not possible to look for a better option or negotiate with the landlord.
- Negative effects on renters include: economic costs from higher bills, physical health impacts, mental health impacts, and the dehumanising experience of living in an intolerable home.

Appendix: Resources



Resources

[Modelling shows](#) that improving the energy efficiency of homes could reduce future heatwaves deaths by up to 90%.

80% of homes in southern Australia are [unhealthily cold](#), with median temperature below 18 degrees in Winter.

[Great summary](#) on health impacts of heat, or [health impacts of cold](#).

[Social research](#) on attitudes to energy efficient housing.

Experiences of heat for [public housing tenants](#) in the Kimberley.

Renters spend [8% more on energy costs](#) than other similar households.