

# What are my housing options?

Students often move from one accommodation type to another as their needs and circumstances change. For example, you might start your studies living on-campus before moving into a share house. Whatever your situation, it is worth examining the various options before you sign a lease or pay any money.

There are six housing options that students typically choose from:

- > homestay (boarding)
- > on-campus accommodation
- > student hostel accommodation
- > rooming house accommodation
- > share house accommodation in private rental
- > renting alone in private rental

➔ The first two options above, homestay and on-campus accommodation, are not covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) 1997*, which is the law that covers the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords in Victoria.

## homestay accommodation

Homestay is a popular choice for students who have moved to Victoria for the first time or have not lived out of home before, as it involves boarding with the owner of the house (and sometimes their family) in their home.

In most homestays you will have a room to yourself with a bed, desk and basic furnishings, and you will share common areas such as the lounge, kitchen and bathroom.

Generally you pay 'board' to cover your rent and expenses (such as electricity and gas), as well as a fee for any additional services. Some homestay providers, or 'hosts' as they are often called, offer additional services such as doing your laundry and providing meals, although the arrangement can be different from one host to the next.

When you are living in someone's home, it is reasonable to expect there will be certain house rules that you will be requested to follow. It is important that you and your host agree on house rules and the cost of

additional services before you make the decision to move in.

Homestay accommodation is usually arranged through your institution and is managed by either the institution's own student housing service or a homestay agency. Generally you are matched up with a host with similar interests to you and who can meet any special requirements you may have (such as a vegetarian diet).

Check with your student housing service about their process for recommending and/or screening homestay providers. Your student housing service can also advise whether you are being charged a fair amount for rent and any other paid services.

## the advantages of homestay

Homestay is generally an affordable option for students and it offers you flexibility in deciding how long you will stay.

Living in a homestay can take away the stress of household duties such as managing the bills, grocery shopping and doing your laundry—although you will still be expected to help out around the house with general cleaning chores.

For students who are studying away from home this option can provide an opportunity to live in a family environment, however this may not appeal to you if you would like to live more independently.

## on-campus accommodation

On-campus accommodation (often called 'colleges' or 'halls of residence') is university-owned accommodation located on or near the campus.

Larger universities often have several colleges, each accommodating hundreds of students and each with its own distinct character (for example, some have an affiliation to a particular Christian church or are single-sex colleges).

Like homestay accommodation, on-campus accommodation provides you with a fully furnished room of your own and shared

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common facilities. The range of services offered depends upon the college—for example, some fully cater for meals, while others offer accommodation only.

➔ Casual accommodation is often available (similar to that offered by commercial hotels and motels), although it is usually more expensive than longer-term accommodation.

On-campus accommodation is popular with students who are studying away from home. It is often more expensive than homestay, although being on or near campus is likely to minimise your transport costs.

## student hostels

Student hostels are similar to on-campus accommodation, except they are privately owned and not located on campus (although most are located near one or more city campuses).

The number of student hostels has increased rapidly in recent times to cater for students from rural Victoria and overseas who are looking for accommodation with the option of it being fully catered or serviced.

➔ Although most student hostel providers require you to sign a fixed-term lease (which means that you agree to stay and pay rent for a certain period of time such as 6, 9 or 12 months), there are some that offer short-term or temporary accommodation.

## rooming houses

Rooming house accommodation is where you rent a room in a privately-owned building that has one or more rooms available for rent to four or more people (who are not necessarily students), and you share common facilities.

Rooming houses must be registered with the local council and must meet some minimum standards. However some rooming house operators fail to register, and provide sub-standard accommodation. When considering a rooming house, make sure that you are dealing with a reputable operator and check with the local council that the rooming house is registered. If you are not sure, contact the Tenants Union for advice before paying any money or signing an agreement.

➔ If you rent a shared room (where the manager can choose to add more people to the room) you must be charged less rent than you would pay for a room of your own.

Sometimes hotels (or pubs), backpackers and homestay accommodation are considered to be rooming houses under the *Residential Tenancies Act* (RTA) 1997. Student hostel style

accommodation provided off-campus by private companies may also be considered by law to be a rooming house.

Rooming house rooms are usually furnished, although it is wise to check first as some rooms may not contain all the furniture you need (for example, there may not be a heater or a desk). The rooming house owner may or may not provide additional services such as a laundry service and meals.

## share house accommodation

Share house accommodation is where you jointly rent a private rental property with others. In a share house, you have your own bedroom but share facilities and furnishings.

The way a share house operates differs from house to house. In some share houses everyone makes a regular contribution to pay for meals and utility bills (sometimes called a 'kitty'), while others divide the bills and require each person to do their own shopping and cooking.

As costs are shared, this is less expensive than renting a house or flat by yourself, but a share house is not always an ideal environment for study. People tend to move in and out on a fairly regular basis and while this can be an exciting feature of life in a share house, it can be unsettling for some people.

➔ For more information on living in a share house see our **Shared households** fact sheet and **Keeping the 'mates' in housemates**.

## renting alone

Renting a house, flat or unit from a landlord or real estate agent on your own can be an expensive option. You will have sole responsibility for paying the bond and rent and for paying for the utilities (gas, water, electricity and telephone). Disadvantages include the possibility of feeling isolated and being solely responsible for shopping, cooking and housework.

The advantages of renting on your own include being able to maintain a suitable study environment and managing the household as you see fit.

➔ Before making your decision about your housing options, see our student housing fact sheet **Which housing option is right for me?**

**For more information phone the Tenants Union Advice Line on ☎ (03) 9416 2577.**

