

Applying for a private rental property

When looking for a rental property, there are a number of things you should consider before and during the search for your next home.

The cost of renting

Set a budget before you start looking for a place to rent. Include all the set up costs including:

- > bond
- > rent in advance
- > gas, electricity and telephone connection fees
- > moving expenses
- > furniture and household goods

Check if you are eligible for financial assistance such as:

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

Ongoing costs include rent, bills and ideally, home contents insurance. You may also need to consider the cost of regular travel. If you can't find a place or afford to rent close to work, school or university, you may need to budget for travelling expenses.

➔ If possible, your rent should be no more than 25% of your total income.

Where to look

There are a number of places you can look for property listings through real estate agents. Good places to start are:

- > rental property listings provided by real estate agents
- > the internet (real estate company websites and house hunting sites such as domain.com.au and realestate.com.au)

Private rental properties or share houses are usually advertised in:

- > newspapers: *The Age* (Sat), *Herald Sun* (Sat), local papers
- > community noticeboards at local cafes, bookstores, universities or TAFEs

Arranging an inspection

To inspect a property that is advertised through a real estate agent you will need to pay a key deposit. This is usually \$50, but it can sometimes be \$100 (make sure you ask for a receipt). Your money will be refunded to you when you return the key.

It is also a good idea to take some photo identification with you, as you may need photo ID before you are given the key. The agent may want to photocopy your ID and keep the copy while you inspect the property. If they make a copy, you can ask them to give it to you when you bring the keys back.

An agent or landlord will sometimes choose to hold an 'open inspection', which means that you may be inspecting the property at the same time as other people. Open inspections are usually only for 30 minutes 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.

Be aware that the agent or landlord will be looking at the people who come through the door so you should try to make a good impression in case you decide to apply for the property.

Inspecting a rental property

Check the property thoroughly, both inside and outside. Make sure that you are happy with the property before you sign a tenancy agreement (lease) or pay any money. Remember that once you have signed the tenancy agreement you have accepted the property as it is. For example, if there is no heater in the property when you sign the tenancy agreement, the landlord does not have to provide you with one.

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(However, the landlord will have to repair anything that is already in the property that is damaged or not working properly.)

For more information see the **Property Inspection Checklist**.

➡ Most insurance companies will not provide home contents insurance unless the windows have key locks and the doors can be deadlocked.

Applying for a rental property

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

You may be asked questions about your:

- > income
- > bank account details
- > previous rental history
- > employment details and history
- > references (you may be asked for at least two)

➡ If you are new to Australia, you may not have all of the documents that you are asked for. For more information see **Renting a Home in Victoria: A guide for newly arrived migrants and refugees** available in 14 languages from the Tenants Union of Victoria or Consumer Affairs Victoria.

It is illegal for a landlord or real estate agent to ask you about your:

- > race
- > marital status
- > disability or impairment
- > sexual preference or gender identity
- > religious or political beliefs

It is illegal for a landlord or agent to discriminate against tenants with children, however the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* allows a landlord or agent to refuse to allow children to live in a rental property if:

- > the landlord lives in the same property
- > the property is unsuitable for children
- > the government has provided the property exclusively for single people or childless couples

If you think that you have been discriminated against, you can lodge a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission ☎ 9281 7100 or ☎ 1800 134 142 (Freecall).

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 advice if a real estate agent insists on doing 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 of these by contacting your previous real estate agent or by checking with the database companies. For more information see the **Tenant databases** fact sheet.

If your application is successful

If the landlord agrees to rent you the property, you will be offered a Residential Tenancy Agreement (lease) to sign. This is a legal contract so you should read it carefully and make sure that you are happy with it before you sign.

Utility connection services

Some real estate agents offer a utility connection service to have the gas, electricity, water, telephone etc connected in your name. Be careful about signing any agreements about utilities. Check the terms and conditions and any additional fees that may apply. There is no obligation for you to use this service and you may end up with a better deal if you shop around and arrange for the utility connections yourself. For more information see the **Utilities** fact sheet.

For more information on tenancy agreements, rent, bond and other considerations when starting a tenancy, see the **Starting a tenancy** fact sheet or contact the Tenants Union for advice.

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