

Rooming House information

What is a rooming house?

Historically, rooming houses were large-scale purpose built facilities that were predominantly located in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. During the early 20th century, at the height of their popularity, rooming houses accommodated between five and 10 per cent of Melbourne's population.

The rooming house sector is now characterised by small rooming houses, mainly utilising suburban homes with multiple bedrooms for accommodation.

Given the continuing decline in housing affordability and shortage of affordable rental options, rooming houses continue to play an important role in the housing market by providing accommodation to a significant number of Victorians.

Rooming houses offer accommodation for many low income and disadvantaged members of the community, particularly for those who cannot access, afford or sustain a tenancy in the private rental market.

A rooming house is a building where one or more rooms are available to rent, and four or more people in total can occupy those rooms.

A rooming house resident is a person who rents a room in a rooming house as their only or main residence and shares common facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens and laundries with other residents.

Rooming houses are regulated through a number of different agencies, including Consumer Affairs Victoria, Victoria Police and Council's Public Health, Building and Planning business units.

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) conducts inspections and monitors rooming house compliance against standards relating to privacy, security, safety and amenity. CAV also administers the rooming house operators licensing scheme which requires all rooming houses to be licensed. In addition, CAV maintains a public register of all licensed rooming house operators across Victoria which is available at www.consumer.vic.gov.au

Victoria Police

Victoria Police plays a vital role in addressing anti-social behaviour and illegal activity that may be associated with rooming houses to ensure community safety. If your matter is of an urgent nature where there is a risk to the safety of rooming house residents, the public or property, please contact Victoria Police, Fire or Ambulance on Triple Zero (000).

Council

Council's role in relation to rooming houses is to regulate and enforce planning, building and public health requirements outlined in State Government legislation:

- Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, a rooming house must be registered with Council where there are four or more occupants.
- Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and through the implementation of the *Glen Eira Planning Scheme*, a planning permit may be required for a rooming house if it does not meet the requirements of Clause 52.23 of the *Glen Eira Planning Scheme* which dictates the building itself, number of bedrooms and number of persons accommodated.
- The *Building Act 1993*, *Building Regulations 2018* and *Building Code of Australia* have technical provisions that apply to rooming houses including the design, construction and fire safety of rooming houses.

Common neighbourhood concerns

You may not even realise that there is a rooming house operating in your street — the majority of rooming houses are well maintained and do not cause concerns for local residents. However, like any property in a residential area, you may experience some minor concerns relating to noise, rubbish and anti-social behaviour. It is recommended that you have a good relationship with the rooming house operator to be able to communicate any issues that you may experience.

How do I get along with the operator?

Rooming houses are managed either by the operator or a person who is appointed to manage the dwelling. Whilst this person is not required to live at the property, they should visit the rooming house regularly. It is recommended that you introduce yourself to the manager and request their contact details if you need to contact them for any reason. They will be your first point of call to rectify any concern relating to the operation of the rooming house.

How should they be maintained?

It is important that rooming houses, like any dwellings, are in a good condition, well maintained and ensure that rubbish is removed on a regular basis.

Council officers are able to investigate complaints relating to unsightliness, fire hazards, rubbish, waste collection and harborage of pests.

Common occupant concerns

Rooming house operators must comply with minimum standards set out in the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* and Residential Tenancies (Rooming House Standards) Regulations 2012. These standards relate to privacy, security, safety and amenity in rooming houses. The minimum standards apply to a rooming house and its rooms, irrespective of whether the resident is on a rooming house agreement or individual tenancy agreement.

When moving into a rooming house, an operator must provide a new resident with a copy of the Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) '*Rooming houses: A guide for residents and operators*' brochure which outlines a residents rights before, during and after residing at a rooming house. To download this brochure, please visit the CAV website www.consumer.vic.gov.au or call 1300 55 81 81.

Overcrowding — how many people are allowed in a rooming house?

The size of the dwelling and the size of the rooms dictate the number of residents who are able to stay in a rooming house. Generally speaking, small rooming houses (less than nine bedrooms and total floor area of all buildings less than 300 square metres) can have up to 12 occupants whilst large rooming houses (that have a floor space of more than 300 square metres) can have more than 12 occupants depending on the sizes of the bedrooms.

There are also minimum standards that relate to rooming houses to ensure that they are well maintained to protect the health and hygiene of the residents.

What are the fire safety requirements?

Rooming houses must have adequate and well-maintained hard wired smoke alarms to protect residents in the event of a fire. The Building Regulations also require some operators to install an automatic fire sprinkler system to dwellings that were constructed before 1 July 2003.

In addition, operators need to maintain clear pathways to exits and in some instances fire-fighting services and equipment (eg. portable fire extinguishers, hose reels and hydrants). These requirements are designed to protect the residents in event of an emergency. Concerns relating to fire safety should be referred to Council's Building Department.

I have concerns for the occupants' health and wellbeing — who can I contact?

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) administers laws about all residential tenancies in Victoria, including rooming houses. They give information and advice about disputes between owners and tenants including rental bonds, rent increases, rights and obligations of tenants and operators, notice periods and goods left behind. Any concerns relating to the residents of rooming houses should be directed to CAV.