

ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK SA

NOVEMBER 2023



**“I’M SCARED
OF MY NEXT
RENT INCREASE”**

**A SNAPSHOT FROM 301
LOW-INCOME RENTERS**

“Our rent has just gone up by \$80 per week and we feel we are stuck. We can't afford such a rise, but have been told it's comparable to the area, and we're too scared to move as at least we have security for 12 months.”

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Summary of Results	4
What We are Calling For	6
About the Survey	8
Financial Hardship	9
Heating & Cooling: Unhealthy Homes	15
Discrimination	18
Other Rental Issues	21
References & Resources	27

INTRODUCTION

Australia is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and Australians have some of the highest standards of living, even among wealthy countries. And yet, so many of us do not have access to affordable, healthy, secure housing. Despite growing community pressure, and some positive reforms, we still have one of the toughest, most unaffordable rental markets in the developed world.

In particular, skyrocketing rents – and the refusal of governments to decisively act to stop huge rents and unlimited rent rises – continue to cause deep pain and stress for renters, especially those on the lowest incomes. In Adelaide, median rents have increased by 12.5% over the last year.^[1]

For the third year in a row, Anti-Poverty Network SA has surveyed its community of South Australian renters who, mostly, are living on very low incomes. Particularly, those renters who are receiving income support payments, who tend to be living hundreds of dollars per week* below the poverty-line.^[2]

We asked renters about how the rising cost of their rent affects key aspects of their life; their ability to eat regularly and purchase nutritious food, their ability to pay their utility bills on time, their ability to cover medical expenses.

We also asked about how renters cope with the challenges of keeping their homes cool in summer and warm in winter, whether they have experienced discrimination in the private housing market (either while house-hunting, or in their dealings with their real estate agent or landlord), and other questions relating to the rental experience such as maintenance and repair issues.

We received 301 responses, mostly from South Australian renters, and the findings present yet another grim picture of what our cruel rental market means for people's wellbeing and stability.

***“Rent is going up next week.
We eat very little and rely on food charity.
I don't know how we'll find the extra money.”***

*Anti-Poverty Network SA uses [the Henderson poverty-line](#), which is approximately \$88 a day, for a single working-age adult.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Financial Hardship

Across the **301 renters** who completed our survey:

- **80%** were experiencing '**rental stress**' (spending more than 30% of their income on rent)
- **41%** were experiencing '**rental crisis**' (spending more than 50% of their income on rent)

For people who were **on Centrelink payments**, and had no other source of income, i.e., no income from paid work, things were naturally even worse:

- **85%** were experiencing '**rental stress**'
- **54%** were experiencing '**rental crisis**'

High rents obviously impacted people's spending on other essentials:

- **70%** said the cost of rent impacted their food budget, that they sometimes had to **skip meals, or cut back on fresh food**
- **69%** said huge rents were impacting their **mental health**
- **67%** said the amount of their rent sometimes made it **hard to pay bills** on time
- **62%** said high rents made it **harder to cover medical expenses**

Alarmingly:

Over ¼ – 27% – of people reported having to **leave a rental property**, because of a **rental increase that was too large** for them to afford

For people receiving no income from paid work, **45%** reported having to **leave a rental property, because of the size of their last rent rise**



Cooling And Heating

- **55%** thought their house **did not have adequate cooling and heating**
- **61%** felt that lack of heating negatively affected their health

Discrimination

59% thought they had experienced discrimination **while applying** for rentals, with 27% unsure

Of those who thought they had discriminated against, the **most common reasons** selected were:

- Receiving a Centrelink payment (**35%**)
- Health or disability status (**7%**)
- Relationship status (**5%**)

46% thought they had been discriminated against by a **current or previous landlord or real estate agent**, with 26% unsure

Of those who thought they had been discriminated against, the **most common reasons** selected were:

- Receiving a Centrelink payment (**38%**)
- Health or disability status (**21%**)
- Relationship status (**19%**)
- Gender (**12%**)
- Sexuality (**8%**)

What Renters Want

95% of renters want **stronger regulation of the rental market**

93% of renters want some version of **rent-capping**, with **75% backing a temporary, emergency rent-freeze**, followed by limiting rents to inflation, and 18% supporting rents being capped to inflation (with no rent freeze)

WHAT WE ARE CALLING FOR

Renters, particularly those on low incomes, are dealing with a brutally expensive, competitive market. Governments have long prioritised the profits of investors and landlords over the needs of those trying to keep a roof over their heads.

There has been some progress recently: in particular, as part of the ongoing review of the Residential Tenancies Act, the State Government's plans to ban 'no-cause' evictions and lease non-renewals (which at the time of writing, are before Parliament), are an important step forward and will give renters far more stability.

But, we have continued to see huge rent increases of 10% or more; increases that have devastated people's budgets, especially for those on the lowest incomes, such as job-seekers, students, pensioners, and sole-parents. We have members on Centrelink payments who have copped \$40 a week, \$50 a week, \$60 a week, increases. Rent increases that have put them in impossible positions, where they cannot afford to pay for food, and other essentials.

**Ending 'no-cause' evictions, by itself,
will not stop these unfair, painful rent rises.**

We know there are people being forced out of rentals, not because they are being evicted, but because it is impossible for them to afford the rent. In our tight rental market, landlords still have far more power than renters. We cannot have a truly fair rental market, until we no longer have unlimited rent rises. **We are calling for the State Government to build on its existing renting reforms, by implementing an emergency two-year rent-freeze, transitioning to rent-capping, with rent rises limited to inflation.**

This is an emergency, and in emergencies you drop what you are doing, and you act. Governments can act, and every year they choose not to act, is another year of huge rent rises, and renters continuing to live in poorly-insulated homes that literally make them sick. During the COVID emergency, governments have shown how quickly they can act to protect people: we now face a cost-of-living emergency, with soaring rent costs being compounded by significant increases to power bills, fresh food, and other basics.

This is an emergency. Governments must act.

Here is What Governments Can Do

State Government:

- Implement an emergency, two-year rent-freeze, followed by rents being strictly capped to inflation.
- Re-introduce a moratorium on rent evictions, so renters do not have to worry about being kicked-out of home during these very stressful times.
- Massively **expand its public housing build**: 564 new public homes over 3 years (3 new homes per week) is nowhere near enough, when there are **over 15,000 people on the waiting list**, and **over 3,000 people** on the most-urgent **category 1**.^[3]
- **Strengthen basic protections for tenants**: introduce minimum energy-efficiency and heating and cooling standards for rentals, fully-ban rent-bidding,^[4] fully-implement its commitments to ending 'no-cause' evictions and lease non-renewals, and allow renters a reasonable right to keep pets.^[5]

Federal Government:

- Ensure a liveable, dignified income for all, by raising JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, and other **Centrelink payments above the poverty-line, to at least \$88 a day**. This year's \$2.86 a day raise (in real terms) to JobSeeker and other payments was a pitifully-increase that left JobSeeker over \$35-a-day (\$250 a week) below the poverty-line.
- Massively expand the number of new public homes it will fund. **Australia has a public housing shortfall of over 520,000 homes, expected to grow to 671,000 by 2032**. Recent housing announcements will not even keep up with the increased level of demand.
- **Cancel the Stage 3 Tax Cuts** – which will cost us over \$200 billion over 10 years, and largely benefit high-income earners – and put extra funds into building more public housing, and lifting income support payments.
- **Scrap the Negative Gearing and Capital Gains tax concessions** that have contributed to have benefitted investors, and contributed to soaring housing prices and use the estimated \$15 billion a year in savings, to build more public housing, and cost-of-living measures.

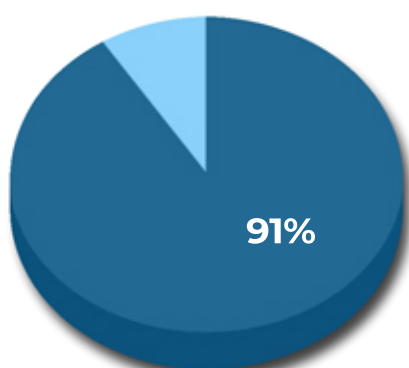
ABOUT THE SURVEY

Over the last 10 years, Anti-Poverty Network SA has campaigned for policies that would dramatically improve quality-of-life for low-income people: higher Centrelink payments, a less punitive welfare and employment-services system, and more affordable, healthy, secure housing.

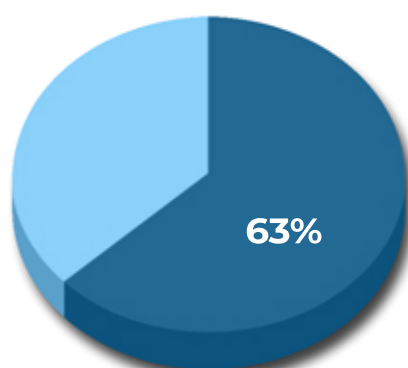
We have never encountered more overwhelmed low-income people who have been pushed to breaking-point by our housing market. We have never encountered more people locked-out of housing, or who have been homeless, or on the verge of homelessness, even among our volunteers.

This is our third renters survey; our first we conducted over the winter of 2021, and released in October of that year, and the second we conducted over the winter of 2022, and released in September of that year.

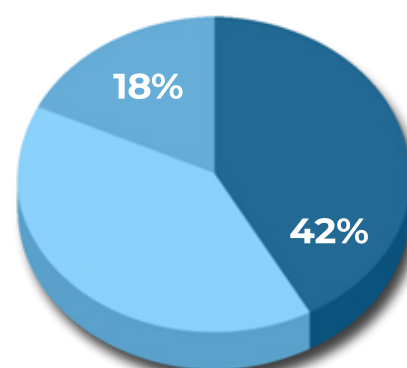
This year's survey of 301 renters largely focused on people from SA (**91%** of respondents were from SA).^{F1} Most survey participants were receiving Centrelink payments (**63%**),^{F2} of which the largest payment categories were people on JobSeeker (**42%**) and people on Disability Support Pension (**18%**).^{F3}



F1 Respondents Residence
91% South Australia
9% Outside SA



F2 Welfare Status
63% Receiving Welfare
37% Not Receiving Welfare



F3 Welfare Payment Type
42% JobSeeker
40% All Other Payments
18% Disability Support Pension

Interestingly, **61%** of people were receiving some income from paid work, but these people were mostly casual workers (**32%**) or part-time workers (**36%**).

The survey was advertised through Anti-Poverty Network SA's social media channels, and while it is not a perfectly representative sample of renters, the findings are consistent with much of the existing research on the experiences of renters, particularly those living in poverty.

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

The following section includes responses to questions about how both huge rents and huge rent rises have affected people's health and wellbeing.

As mentioned in the introduction, across the 301 renters who completed our survey:

- **80%** were experiencing '**rental stress**' (spending more than 30% of their income on rent)
- **41%** were experiencing '**rental crisis**' (spending more than 50% of their income on rent)

For people who were **on Centrelink payments**, who had no other source of income, i.e., no income from paid work, things were naturally even worse:

- **85%** were experiencing '**rental stress**'
- **54%** were experiencing '**rental crisis**'

How Has the Cost of Your Rent Impacted the Rest of Your Life?

- **70%** said the cost of rent impacted their food budget, that they sometimes had to skip meals, or cut back on fresh food
- **69%** said huge rents were impacting their mental health
- **67%** said the amount of their rent sometimes made it hard to pay bills on time
- **62%** said high rents made it harder to cover medical expenses

When we limited our attention to survey participants who were not in paid work, whose **only income** was from a **Centrelink payment (118 people, 39.2%)**, the results become even more alarming.

- **86%** said the cost of rent impacted their food budget, that they sometimes had to skip meals, or cut back on fresh food
 - **75%** sometimes found it hard to pay utility bills on time
 - **75%** said huge rents were impacting their mental health
 - **68%** said high rents made it harder to cover medical expenses
-

Some renters told us:

“My weekly rent is now over half my pay each week. This causes me major stress and anxiety, sometimes panic attacks, and meltdowns, over not being able to do the things I used to be able to do, like affording fresh food, keeping the pantry stocked. Savings have all gone. No chance of being able to save for a house loan now.”

“I get food at food pantries and try to eat leftovers.”

“The cost of rent is a constant concern. I'm scared of losing the roof over my head so it's the first thing I pay. This leaves me constantly going without the bare essentials, food, medical etc.

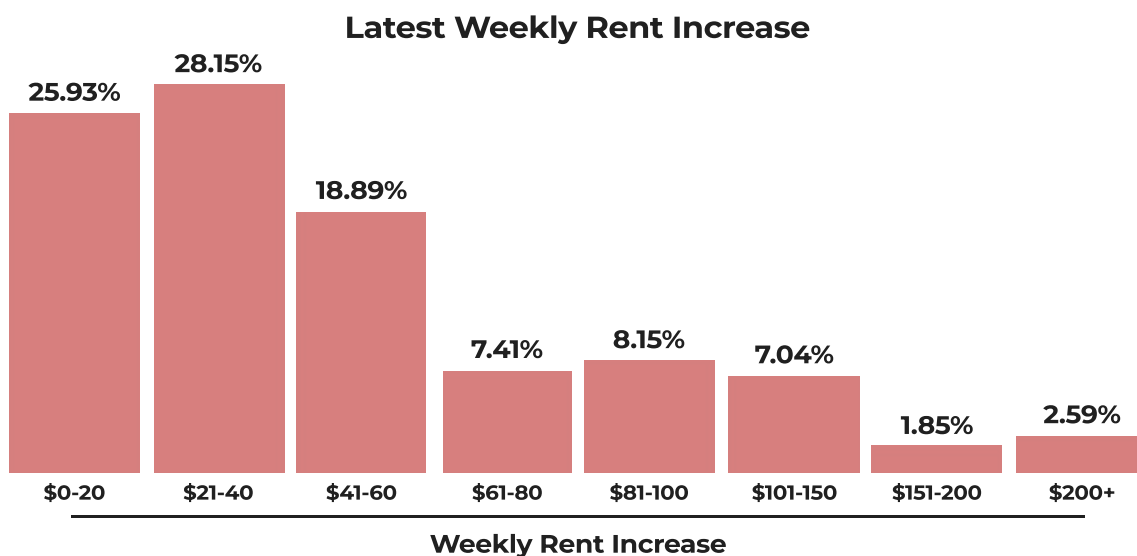
It also means that I have zero social life as every penny not spent on trying not to get too far behind in my bills goes on finding bargains so that I'm able to eat.”

How Much was Your Last Rent Increase?

Rent increases (currently limited to once a year, but unlimited in terms of amount) are a feature of renting life that fosters huge stress and uncertainty.

Often, such increases do not reflect the increased cost of maintaining the rental, but take advantage of the power-imbalance in the rental market. The fact that demand for homes is, in a sense, unaffected by price changes, regardless of how expensive housing gets, people still need shelter.

Surveying the latest rent increases faced by renters provided further insights into the pressures faced by many South Australians.



Across all renters surveyed, the **median rent increase** was in the range of **\$21-\$40 per week**, and **46%** of rent increases were **in excess** of \$40 per week.

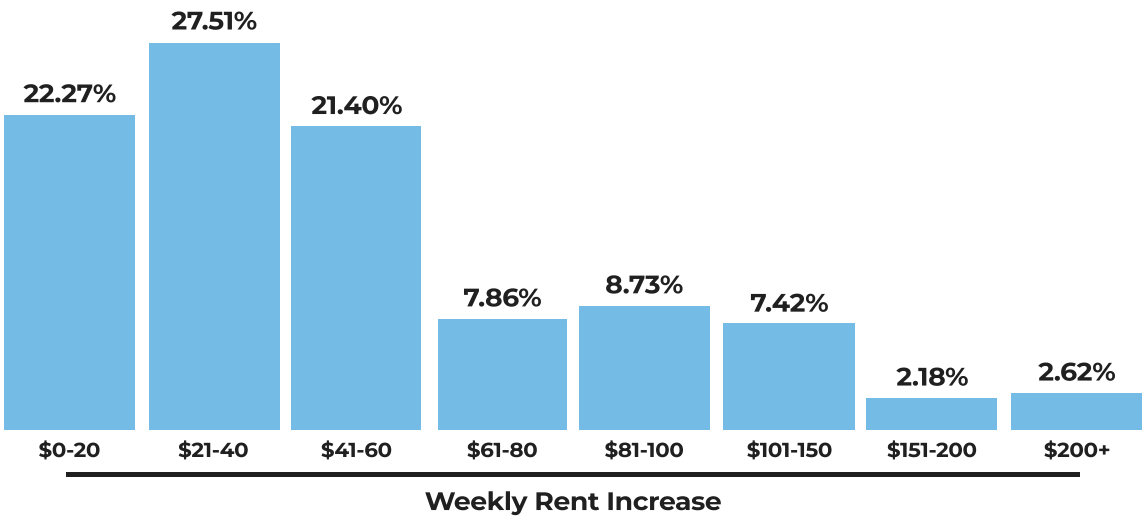
71% of the renters facing a rent increase less than or equal to \$40 were also experiencing rental stress, while **32%** were experiencing rental crisis. With half of this group having less than \$250 per week remaining after rent, an increase of \$20-\$40 does far more harm than may appear.

One renter in the \$20-\$40 per week range, told us their last rent increase:

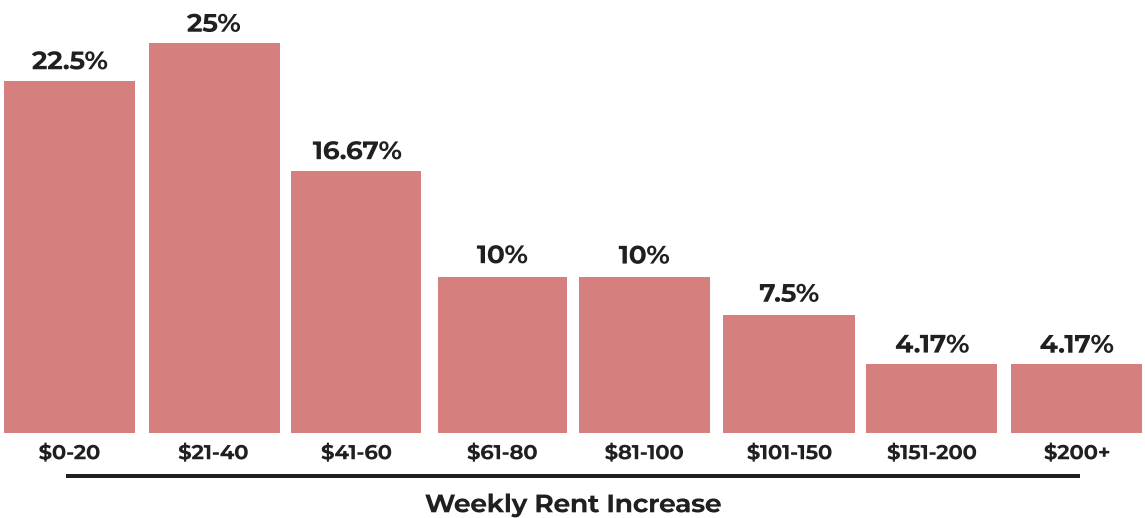
“Definitely impacted my ability to afford things like bus tickets and phone and internet which is needed for job interviews. No chance of having a suitable outfit to wear.”

For renters experiencing rental stress or rental crisis, the distribution of rent increases is shown below.

Latest Weekly Rent Increase for People in Rental Stress



Latest Weekly Rent Increase for People in Rental Crisis



For both groups, the **median rent increase** was within the **\$41-\$60** range.

The percentage of rent increases in excess of \$60 for people facing rental crisis was 26%, compared to the 20% for the whole sample, meaning **people in rental crisis are more likely to have experienced a larger rent increase.**

The cost of these rent increases are felt in one's sense of housing insecurity, an inability to afford basic goods, and isolation from loved ones.

A renter facing a rent increase in the \$100-150 per week range, said they faced:

“Potential homelessness. I renewed because I was terrified of having to apply for places on a pension. My existing tenancy, I'd used my previous salary info. But if they knew I was now on a pension there is no way they would have renewed.”

Another renter, who copped a devastating rent increase in the \$200+ per week range, commented:

“Utilities have gone up, can barely afford to eat but need a roof over our heads and security for our children.

When we asked for a negotiation on the amount we were threatened with the fact they could fill the property within 24 hours with someone willing to pay more than the asking price.”

A low-income renter, who copped a rent increase in the \$61-\$80 per week range, stated that:

“It has restricted my ability to transport my granddaughters to out of school activities, so these have been significantly reduced. I also can no longer catch up with my friend.”

Have You Ever Had to Leave Your Home, as a Result of a Rent Increase Being Too High?

Huge, unsustainable rent increases have often left some households with no choice but to relocate, often at great personal and financial risk. And with such low rental vacancy rates, leaving one's home does not guarantee finding another.

- **Over ¼ (27%)** of people reported having to leave a rental property, because of a rental increase that was too large for them to afford
- For people receiving **no income from paid work, 45%** reported having to leave a rental property, because of the size of their last rent rise

The latter group (people without paid work) made up the vast majority of renters who responded (**77%**).

But many renters who had copped huge rent rises had **not left their current home, because they felt they had no other viable options.**

“Moving house is so expensive that I take any rent increase I have to pay, especially in such a tight market where you literally risk being homeless if you don't.”

“I need to leave as my rent is too high, however there is nothing to move to.”



And some thought having to move elsewhere **was only a matter of time.**

“Not yet! But it's happening very fast. Another year of rental increases and we will be in a car. That's myself, 2 children, and 2 animals.”

What Renters Want: Ending Unlimited Rent Rises

Given the huge pain caused by very high rents, and enormous rent rises, it is not surprising that there was **very strong support for rent controls**.

93% of survey participants supported **some version of rent-capping**,

- This included **75%** who backed a temporary, emergency rent-freeze, followed by limiting rent rises to inflation
- **18%** who supported rents being capped to inflation (with no rent-freeze)

We provided space for renters to freely share their own ideas and reflections on tackling rental unaffordability.

Unsurprisingly, putting a cap on the rent increases was the most popular idea (24 mentions), as rent increases can put tenants in significant financial and mental stress and instability. Furthermore, this can lead to a fear of homelessness (5 mentions), as people may not afford the higher rent or they may not be able to find an affordable rental place.

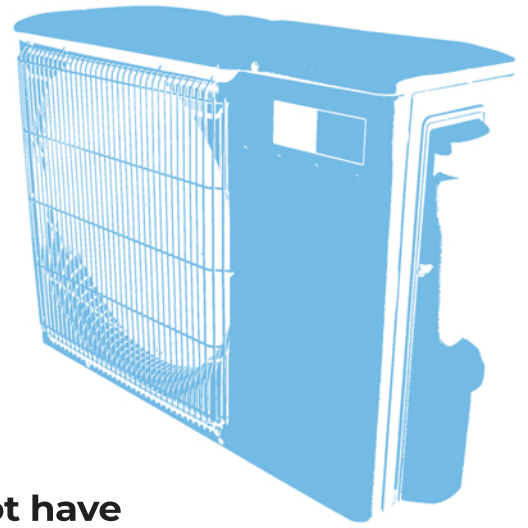
A smaller number of people supported the idea of a rent freeze (8 mentions).

One renter told us:

“100% I have seen friends/clients through my work who have rent increases for \$100 per week and it's because of the real estate agents and their ability to earn commissions as well, for everything they do for the property owner, the owner gets charged a fee.

Honestly, I think that most of it is just pure greed, if they can do it, they will, regardless of understanding how their tenants might cope or understanding their tenants situation. A friend of mine is now homeless because of this greed...how is this even possible?”

HEATING & COOLING: UNHEALTHY HOMES



This section explores how poor energy efficiency, and lack of heating and cooling infrastructure, affect renters' health.

When we asked renters about these issues:

- Just **over half (55%)** thought their house **did not have adequate cooling and heating**
- The majority (**61%**) felt that lack of heating negatively affected their health

There is **no mandate in South Australia** for landlords to provide any heating or cooling, and building standards in South Australia, particularly for pre-existing older homes, leave a lot to be desired for thermal efficiency.

Other jurisdictions in Australia have minimum standards for heating, with Tasmania and Victoria both requiring fixed heating in the main living area of rentals, and Victoria being unique in mandating that this heating be energy efficient.

While the past year has seen several changes to the South Australian Residential Tenancies Act, none of these changes have resulted in improvements to the minimum standards for energy efficiency, heating, or cooling, despite calls from many community advocacy organisations, including Anti-Poverty Network SA.

The lack of these basic minimum standards is negatively affecting renters, who are unable to make modifications to their homes, leaving them with few viable choices to regulate their home's temperatures. Many are forced to suffer the consequences of unhealthy indoor temperatures.

One renter told us:

“We have a tiny heater that’s not efficient at all which has meant we haven’t used it as much and relied on blankets. We’ve all been far sicker this year than previous as the heater we purchased and installed broke.”

These sentiments of adverse health effects of extreme indoor temperatures were echoed by many respondents, and are backed up by the research literature. **The World Health Organisation has made recommendations for the last three decades that indoor temperatures should be maintained within a range of 18-24°C.** Temperatures both above and below this range can have a negative effect on cardiovascular health, respiratory health, and may aggravate chronic conditions.

The Australian housing advocacy organisation, Better Renting, conducted research tracking the indoor temperatures of renters across the country, and found **that a majority of homes had unhealthy temperatures in both winter and summer.**

From our survey, **2/3 of respondents** renting in South Australia reported that the temperature in their home was **leading to negative health issues.** This was most evident for those with pre-existing chronic health conditions, with a number of respondents reporting that their chronic respiratory illnesses, such as asthma, were exacerbated by cold temperatures, or that their chronic pain was made worse by extremes of temperature. Others reported that they and their children experienced more frequent viral and bacterial illnesses that took longer to recover from.

A common theme among many of the survey respondents was that **extreme temperatures** affected their **stress levels and mental health.** Some attributed this stress directly to the cold and being unable to continue their normal activities of daily living, while for others stress was attributed to worry about the costs of utilising heating and cooling devices.

One renter told us:

“We have had nothing but illness the last couple of winters...tonsillitis, croup, bronchitis etc. We sleep out in the lounge room together to keep warm. The windows and doors rattle and have large gusts blow through.”

Another renter reported:

“It is mostly mental health issues because I feel less productive and less capable of doing things that I enjoy or are needed.”



Many respondents reported that they are **not able to afford to use heating or cooling devices** as often as they would like to. This reflects poor minimum standards of rentals without energy-efficient heating or cooling devices, as well as the low thermal efficiency of dwellings in South Australia in general.

This is exacerbated by high energy costs, with **South Australia having the highest power costs in the country**. For those in the community living in poverty, often in rental stress/crisis, these high energy costs are a frequent concern and cause of stress.

A recurring theme in the responses was that people chose not to use heating or cooling, even if it exists, out of concern for cost. Respondents choose instead to use blankets, thick clothing, or even go to bed early in winter.

There is a further cost burden in the decision not to heat the home: cold homes are more likely to experience mould, which can have disastrous effects on respiratory health.

One renter reported to us:

“There is no heating or cooling. The house is usually colder inside than outside, as low as 5 degrees at night. It's given me very poor circulation that takes hours to go away.”

DISCRIMINATION

This section covers renters' reflections on whether they had ever been treated in a way that was discriminatory, either:

- While searching for a private rental, or
- In their interactions with their real estate agent, or their landlord

Do You Feel You Have Been Discriminated Against When You Have Been Applying for a Private Rental, and if so, Why?

59% felt they had experienced discrimination while applying for rentals, with **27%** unsure

Of those who felt they had discriminated against, the most common reasons selected were:


- Receiving a Centrelink payment (**35%**)
- Health or disability status (**7%**)
- Relationship status (**5%**)

The most significant reason (**35%** of those who chose to answer the question) provided was **due to receiving payments from Centrelink**. Many comments from renters highlighted this theme.

One renter commented:

"I became homeless about three years ago, and applied for a lot of private rentals as well as putting my name down for the Housing SA waitlist. A lot of the applications I made were either ignored or I received a generic "you have been unsuccessful" response.

A couple of agents made explicit responses stating that they did not believe that I had the capacity to pay the rent with my income from the DSP, or that I was unsuccessful due to my lack of recent rental history (which was only absent due to homelessness)."



While people on Centrelink payments are, of course, on very low incomes, renters relying on these payments did not appreciate simply being ruled-out from being able to rent a property, simply because of their receipt of a government payment.

“People offer higher rent to beat the others,^[4] I can’t afford to do that on my Centrelink payments and limited work hours. Property managers raise concerns about me not being able to be trustworthy because I am on Centrelink.”

Other respondents indicated that **health and disability (7%)** and **sexuality** were reasons why they may have been discriminated against when applying for an available rental.

One renter shared:

“I was abused by a real estate agent for being a member of the LGBTIQ community. I’m proud of my sexuality and refuse to change to suit a landlord.”

Respondents also indicated that they had been unfairly disadvantaged due to **having children or pets.^[5]**

“Our small indoor dog was forced to live outdoors as despite lino, except for bedrooms, they wouldn’t let us leave him even in the laundry. He didn’t shed, didn’t chew stuff, he laid around inside or would be out under a bush, ‘sunning’. This house, tiled except for bedrooms, they wont let us have the dog in, and I often find her shivering. It’s cruel.”

“When my kids were little we had so much trouble getting even an awful squat to live in. Of course these days the situation is even worse for families.”

Do You Feel Like You’ve Ever Been Discriminated Against by a Current or Previous Landlord, and if so, Why?

46% felt they had been discriminated against by a current or previous landlord or real estate agent, with **26%** unsure

Of those who felt they had been discriminated against, the most common reasons selected were:

- Receiving a Centrelink payment (**38%**)
- Health or disability status (**21%**)
- Relationship status (**19%**)
- Gender (**12%**)
- Sexuality (**8%**)

46% of respondents indicated that they believed they had been discriminated against by a current or previous landlord or real estate agent. Again, a large proportion of respondents (**38%**) indicated that they believed the discrimination they had experienced was **due to them receiving Centrelink payments**.

One renter told us:

“My last two most recent private rentals, both landlords wanted to raise the rent but felt I couldn't afford it so instead of giving me a rise notice, and seeing if I could manage it, they gave me a notice to vacate instead.”

Another renter commented:

“I'm currently living in a rental I share with my ex-husband and kids. We started renting this house before the rental crisis began. The first year after I separated from my husband, the landlord put the rent up by \$100, knowing full well that he could get more, and that I am in a vulnerable position when it comes to finding another rental. He left me with no other choice than to pay the extra. I feel that he took advantage of my situation at the time.”

Health and disability status (**20.5%**) and **relationship status** (**18.5%**) were the other key primary reasons that respondents believed that they had been discriminated against by landlords.

One renter stated:

“My landlord believes my partner and I are able-bodied despite us describing our disabilities multiple times. And he shames us for hiring help to do jobs “we should do ourselves” and constantly berates us for “not maintaining the property” despite us meeting all our tenant obligations.”

Another renter told us:

“We had a property manager want to know how long my partner and I had been together, and want to know the ins and outs of our relationship. My partner and I have a large age gap but in order for us to secure a rental together we had to prove our relationship, despite us both having had great rental history as singles.”

OTHER RENTAL ISSUES

This section covers other rental matters:

- The need for longer leases
- The need for stricter rules around responding to maintenance and repair issues
- Renting with pets, and
- The need for renters to be treated with fairness and respect by landlords and real estate agents

A clear, recurring theme throughout the survey data was the need for greater regulation to give renters more protections.

When we asked renters whether they felt the rental market needed to be more regulated, the results were quite emphatic:

Of 301 responses:

95% answered **Yes**

4% were **Unsure**

and **less than 1%** said **No**

Renters Need Long-Term, Stable Leases

Sometimes, when landlords increase the rent, renters face the dilemma of accepting the rent increase or leaving the rental property. In the current market, where getting a new rental place is very difficult, people often face the stress of becoming homeless. Even if the tenant does not become homeless and manages to find a new rental home, moving comes with the exorbitant price of paying for the bond of the new place, end-of-lease cleaning, moving home furniture, buying new furniture, and other expenses.

Moving may also lead to being farther from work for adults, and moving to new schools for kids. Both of these changes can create major problems for people and their families, and can be a serious threat to their mental and physical wellbeing. South Australia, like most of the country, has relatively short 6-month and 12-month leases, meaning for many renters if the lease is not renewed, there is the need to relocate happens regularly.

“I am sick of moving. One house has storage so you don't need any, next house, no storage, no wardrobes, etc., so buy them. Next house has storage, sell everything, next house, no storage. If someone wants to rent their house, they need basics: storage, solar, reticulation, heating and cooling. I have brought and disposed of heaps of wardrobes, drawers, storage containers, hoses, sprinklers etc.

Sick of uprooting children and moving them away from their friends to new houses, new schools over and over!! My oldest grandson is 18, he went to 4 primary and 3 high schools. Youngest is 2, we wrote on our application letter that we want a long lease, we have little ones to school. Renters don't get the opportunity to be settled. I am never settled.”

Another renter made similar comments about how short-term leases and constant moving affects one's wellbeing and stability:

“It's so hard to do things to improve your life when you don't even know where you're going to cook dinner that night. The obstacles to stay in employment, study, keep kids enrolled at school aren't talked about enough.”

To be immune from the instability and stress of having to constantly move, some survey participants suggested longer leases (9 mentions).

“Longer rental terms, just like the rest of the world. Offers more peace of mind so people can plan ahead, study, get more skills, and earn more to be healthier.”

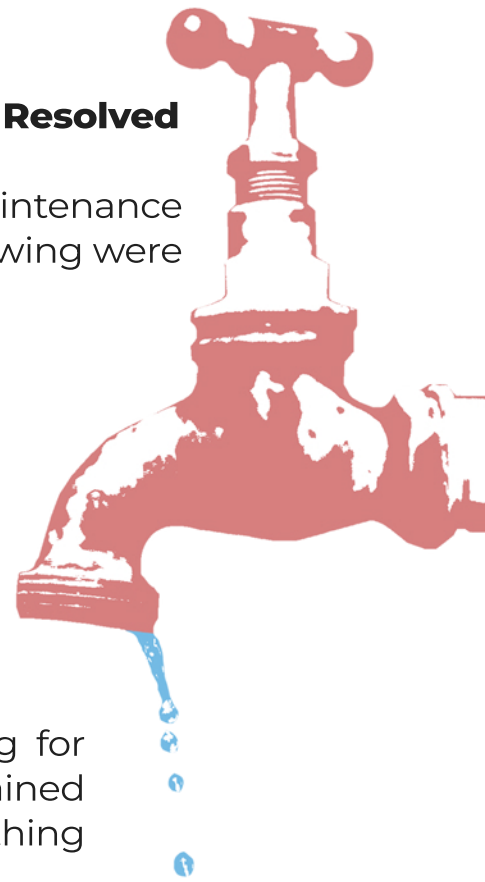
Another renter commented:

“Stable long-term housing should be a human right, not a privilege afforded to the few that are rich.”

Renters Need Action on Maintenance/Repair Issues Resolved

We asked renters about what were the common maintenance and repair issues that they were experiencing. The following were the five most commonly-reported issues:

- Major issues with doors or windows (**48%**)
- Major issues with water, i.e., leaking taps, leaking windows (**44%**)
- Mould (**44%**)
- Major issues with the ceiling (**28%**)
- Electrical issues, i.e, faulty or exposes wiring (**28%**)



A major frustration for survey participants was asking for maintenance and repair work to be done. They complained that sometimes landlords and real estate agents did nothing to fix the reported problems, or moved very slowly.

One renter told us:

“In all the properties I have been in over my life, only one had a really good landlord and agent. All the rest were bullies, couldn't give a toss about making sure buildings were safe, appliances were working. Most avoid doing repairs, even essential ones. I have lived in properties without functioning sewerage, stoves and other essential stuff for months on end. Some properties have had dangerous electricals exposed to water and uninsulated wires open to the elements.”

Another renter commented:

“We had pigeons above our slither of a “backyard” for 2+ years, with pigeon faeces building up to a disgusting amount. Nothing was done for 2+ years even though I complained about it being a toxic health hazard. We were expected to pay a rent increase while living amongst piles of poo. It finally got fixed, but they missed so many spots that it was almost pointless.”

Another concern was landlords sometimes doing the repairs themselves, leading to a poorer outcome than if a qualified professional had been contacted to do the work.

One renter told us:

“Landlord refuses to call professionals first to fix things. Insists on coming over first to fix it herself but often makes it worse and then calls a professional.”

They also mentioned that they dreaded asking for a repair as it may be interpreted as being a demanding tenant, and that may lead to receiving a no-cause eviction notice – a common fear for renters.

As one renter mentioned,

“No one I know ever asks for repairs as we are all too scared of being evicted.”

This highlights how significant it is, for giving renters the ability to advocate on maintenance and repair issues, and other matters, that no-cause evictions and lease non-renewals are being scrapped.

Another renter told us:

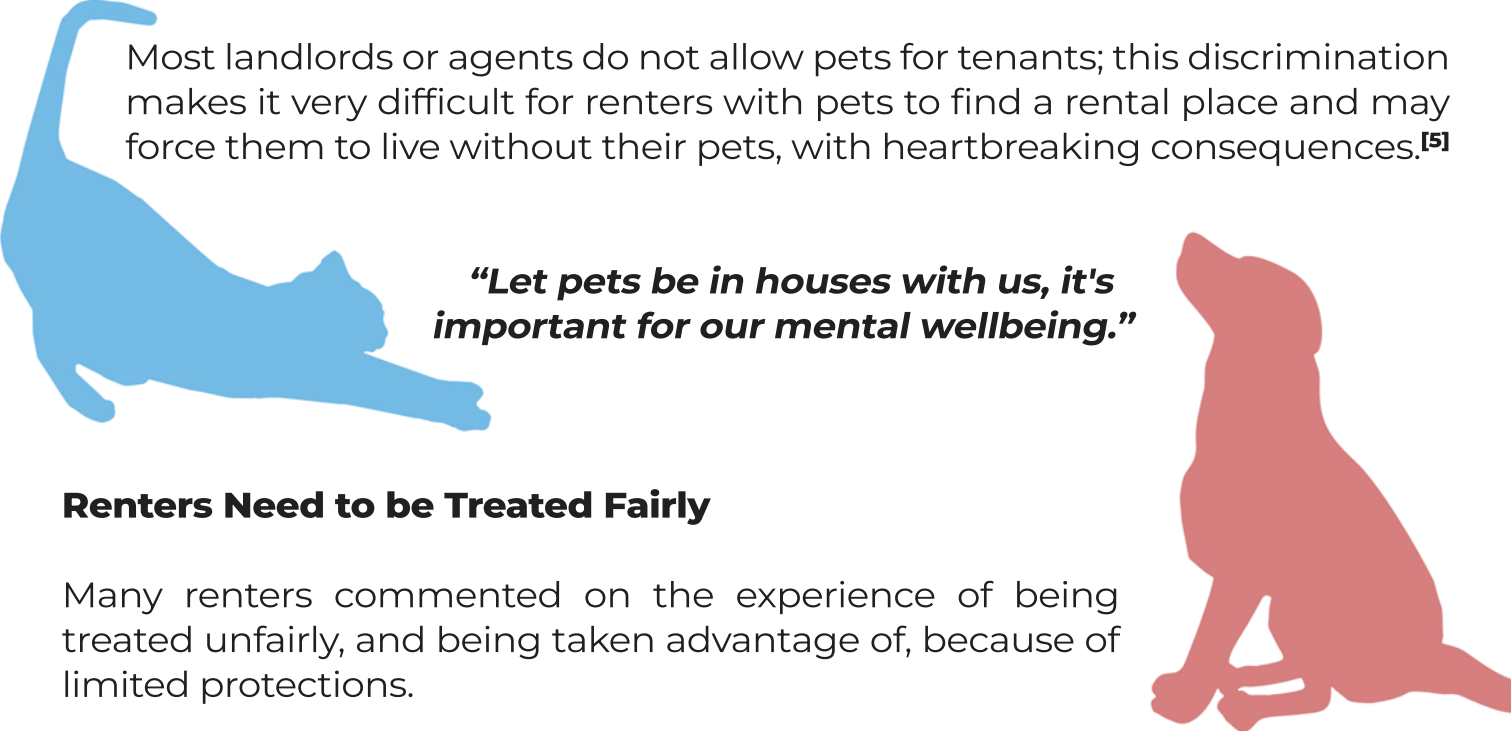
“At one stage where I’m renting we had no hot water, only lukewarm water. Had solar panels with no back up. Complained and got told where the front door was. They told me it was the council that made them have no hot water. We now have hot water due to others at the property complaining.”



Renters Need to be Able to Keep Pets

Another major concern for many survey participants was renting with pets (15 mentions).

Most landlords or agents do not allow pets for tenants; this discrimination makes it very difficult for renters with pets to find a rental place and may force them to live without their pets, with heartbreaking consequences.^[5]



“Let pets be in houses with us, it's important for our mental wellbeing.”

Renters Need to be Treated Fairly

Many renters commented on the experience of being treated unfairly, and being taken advantage of, because of limited protections.

One renter told us:

“In all the properties I have been in over my life, only one had a really good landlord and agent. All the rest were bullies, couldn't give a toss about making sure buildings were safe, appliances were working.”

Another renter commented:

“We were given 28 days' notice^[6] to find a new property to rent and due to the limited time we were forced to accept the first rental we were offered, even though it is located 45 kms away from our workplace.”

One participant compared the state of renter rights in Australia to Germany:

“The high frequency of inspections is insane. Are we children that need looking after? I'm from Germany and I've never had an inspection in 28 years. 3 years in Australia and after 12 inspections I know the rental agent better than my friends. You aren't allowed to do anything in rentals without landlord approval.”

'They Increased The Rent By \$100 A Week': Em's Story

"I am a 49-year-old single woman, currently receiving Disability Support Pension, though until 4 years ago I was working part-time for a credit union in the city.

I moved into my house 6 years ago; it is a 3-bedroom private rental. I live alone. 14 years ago I had a stroke leaving me permanently disabled. When I was originally looking for a new home, I was fleeing a domestic violence relationship, and while I did go to Housing SA to try and secure **emergency housing**, I was told the **waitlist was 5 years** and I had to stay with my now-ex.

The only smaller places that were in my price range were all 2-story townhouses, but these were not suitable due to my mobility issues. These mobility issues mean I use a mobility scooter to access shopping, etc. The scooter needs a power source for charging and needs to be kept out of inclement weather. Most unit complexes have a shared parking area, with no power or shelter. So ideally I need a single car garage to meet my needs.

When I initially moved in my rent was \$290 per week. Which was affordable on my wage, with a Centrelink top-up. At my first lease renewal my rent was increased by \$5 per week. It stayed at this rate for the next 4 years.

Last year my house was sold to a new investor, the first thing they did at my lease renewal was to increase my rent by \$45 per week. Making my new amount \$340 per week.

This year, as part of the lease renewal, they increased the rent by \$100 per week. Making my new and current rent \$440 per week. **I am now spending 75% of my fortnightly payment on rent.**

I am extremely concerned that I will not be able to afford another rent increase, or be able to secure any affordable property here in Adelaide. My elderly parents who live overseas are supplementing my rent, so that I am able to stay in a home. There has been no opportunity to negotiate with my landlord/real estate agent.

I am concerned that in the current climate and being on a welfare payment, my ability to secure another home is almost impossible. I have no family or close friends in the area that I could 'stay' with whilst looking for a home."

– Em.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

FOOTNOTES

- [1] See Domain's June 2023 Rental Report.
<https://www.domain.com.au/research/rental-report/june-2023/>
- [2] According to Anglicare's latest Rental Affordability Snapshot, nationally less than 1% of rentals are affordable for someone on JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, and virtually all other Centrelink payments.
<https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2023-rental-affordability-snapshot/>
- [3] According to modelling commissioned by Homelessness Australia, and the Everyone's Home campaign, SA has a shortfall of 32,500 social homes.
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/05/rents-rise-again-across-australia-with-sydney-seeing-fastest-rise-in-20-years>
- [4] The state government has banned solicited rent-bidding (landlords or real estate agents requesting that potential renters pay more than advertised amounts); however, it has not banned unsolicited rent-bidding (desperate people offering, unprompted, to pay more than the advertised rent).
<https://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/news/south-australia-bans-rent-bidding>
- [5] This is an area where the state government has expressed its plans to act, to give renters with pets greater protections. At time of writing, there is currently legislation before the SA Parliament.
<https://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/campaigns/review-of-sas-renting-laws>
- [6] We are glad that the state government is acting on this space, by intending to increase the notice period for renters having their fixed leases ended from 28 days to 60 days. This will give renters much more warning and time to be able to find a new property. At the time of writing, there is currently legislation before the SA Parliament.
<https://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/campaigns/review-of-sas-renting-laws>

IN TEXT LINKS

- Page 03 "Median rents have increased by 12.5% over the last year"
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/05/rents-rise-again-across-australia-with-sydney-seeing-fastest-rise-in-20-years>
"The Henderson poverty-line"
https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/4710153/Poverty-Lines-Australia-March-Quarter-2023.pdf
- Page 06 "There has been some progress recently"
<https://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/campaigns/review-of-sas-renting-laws>
- Page 07 "\$15 billion a year in savings"
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-03/negative-gearing-and-capital-gains-tax-budget-cost/101612854>
- Page 08 "2021" (Our first survey)
<https://antipovertynetworksaorg.files.wordpress.com/2023/05/renters-survey-october-2021.pdf>
"2022" (Our second survey)
<https://antipovertynetworksaorg.files.wordpress.com/2023/05/broke-cold-stressed-september-2022.pdf>
- Page 16 "The World Health Organisation has made recommendations for the last three decades that indoor temperatures should be maintained within a range of 18-24°C"
<https://7news.com.au/news/public-health/how-cold-aussie-homes-are-falling-below-world-health-organisations-recommended-safe-temperature-c-7530922>
"A majority of homes had unhealthy temperatures in both winter and summer"
https://www.betterrenting.org.au/renter_researchers_winter_23

2023 RENTERS SURVEY REPORT



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