



Sunday 5 July 2020

## **Public Housing Hard Lockdowns**

**The remarks below are attributable to IMCL CEO, Damian Stock:**

Inner Melbourne Community Legal (**IMCL**) is extremely is alarmed at the unprecedented impact on liberty of public housing residents in our area. We are working with others to assess the proportionality of the response to what is a health crisis, not a law and order issue.

We know that right now tenants are confused and scared and that they need information, economic support and care.

To provide urgent legal information and help, we have established a dedicated phone number for legal information and advice in partnership with other local community legal centres and Victoria Legal Aid. Residents can call **1800 113 432**. The help line will be open 8am - 6pm Monday to Friday.

We remain seriously concerned about the over-policing of public housing estates residents, a community that has a long history of racist and violent police interactions. The extreme police presence is causing fear and re-traumatisation and stoking racist community sentiment that further stigmatises already marginalised people. We know there is heightened potential for racial profiling and other forms of discriminatory policing. We will monitor this closely and provide legal help to any residents experiencing issues with police or to anyone issued with a fine.

The inability for people to leave their homes for any reason is causing extreme stress and anxiety. More than ever we are extremely worried about the health and safety of vulnerable tenants in lockdown, including those living in severely overcrowded conditions or in units that are in a longstanding state of disrepair, as well as women and children experiencing family violence. The lock down is creating a pressure cooker environment and putting residents at risk of other equally serious forms of health and safety problems.

We have long been concerned about the lack of investment in public housing, including the provision of social supports for tenants. We will speak with our community to ensure they receive the essential help they need in the coming days, and continue to press for long-term housing reform to address the underlying systemic issues that have contributed the conditions for this emergency to unfold.

We call on the government to:

1. implement the orders fairly and flexibly, to accommodate existing individual vulnerabilities, such as people living with disability, mental health issues, victims of family violence or substance dependency;
2. ensure proper coordination and access to essential services, including legal assistance, which is crucial to preserving rights during these unprecedented measures; and
3. provide an assurance that they will not use this as an opportunity to police these already disadvantaged communities so that people are not subjected to further legal problems.

### **For further comment contact**

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