

August 2020

New protection for renters affected by coronavirus (COVID-19)

If you are a tenant who is struggling to pay rent because of coronavirus (COVID-19), there are new laws that can help you.

From 29 March 2020, you can only be evicted by order of VCAT and your rent can't be increased. You can contact your landlord or property manager directly to reach agreement on rent reduction.

Consumer Affairs Victoria can help with resources, information and advice.

For more information, go to consumer.vic.gov.au/coronavirusandrenting

If the matter is urgent, call **1300 558 181**

What has changed?

Temporary protections are in place to help tenants from being evicted and allow you to negotiate a rent reduction with your landlord if you're suffering financial hardship due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Who does it apply to?

This will apply to tenants or sub-tenants in a residential property, or residents living in a rooming house, social housing, under a site agreement at a caravan park, or in specialist disability accommodation.

How do I negotiate a reduced rent agreement?

You should contact your landlord or property manager and request a rent reduction.

It is not intended that you end up in debt at the end of the reduced rent agreement period. If the landlord is asking you to defer payments to a later date, rather than reduce the amount, you should not agree to this request if it does not suit your financial situation. You may end up with a debt you're unable to pay later.

Information about negotiating a rent reduction is available at: consumer.vic.gov.au/coronavirusandrenting

When agreement is reached, the details should be registered with Consumer Affairs Victoria so everyone is clear on what has been decided. A template is available on the Consumer Affairs website to help you record your agreement.

If you don't hear back from your landlord or property manager, or you are not happy with their response, you can contact Consumer Affairs Victoria for help at: consumer.vic.gov.au/contact-us

Tenants who have reached an agreement with their landlord may be eligible for a rent relief grant. Learn more about the grant and check your eligibility at: housing.vic.gov.au/help-renting/rentrelief

If you are not eligible for a rent relief grant, there is a range of information and other services available to support you. You may also be eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance through Centrelink.

Is there other help available?

Consumer Affairs Victoria's service is designed to be simple and easily accessible to most tenants. You do not need a lawyer or other advisor to get a positive outcome, and the process is designed to be fair for all parties.

You may need additional support to represent your interests or communicate details about the hardship you face as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), and that person may be with you or represent you at any stage. You should make sure you both understand what they are authorised to say or agree to on your behalf.

Examples of the support that might be useful:

Service	Your need	How to access
Translator	You speak a language other than English	1300 405 282 Free translation service 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, except public holidays
Tenancy agency	You have issues with your lease or rent	Go to tenantsvic.org.au to find a service
Financial counsellor	You need help for several financial matters, including your ability to pay rent	Go to moneysmart.gov.au to find a service
Community legal centre	You have a range of complex issues	Go to fclc.org.au to find a service
SafeSteps	You need advice, help and support for a family violence situation	1800 015 188 or email safesteps@safesteps.org.au . If you feel unsafe at home and it is an emergency, call police on 000