

PRAP: the program ending homelessness before it starts

In a tight housing market where public and social housing are in such short supply, we need to be looking towards the private rental market as a key part of the solution to homelessness.

The State Government funded Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) provides practical support and financial assistance that helps people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access and maintain private rental housing.

“By assisting households secure or sustain private rental tenancies, we are reducing pressure on the demand for public and social housing and keeping families safe and in their community,” said Unison’s Chief Executive Ed Holmes.

Unison’s PRAP program supported nearly 2,000 households between January 2017 and April 2019. Just under two thirds of these households were in private rental but were struggling to maintain their housing. About one in three had already lost their housing.

Strong relationships between real estate agents and community housing organisations are key.

Laura Grech, Senior Property Manager at Greg Hocking Real Estate has been working with Unison for several years. “Unison is one of our key partners in assisting at risk households to sustain their tenancy. We assist with initiating early intervention and Unison is always there to help our tenants who are going through a difficult patch with temporary support,” Grech said.

Michelle Evans, Director of Property Management at Eview Werribee added, “Through our cooperation with Unison, we have been able to house a number of families that otherwise would have been homeless or placed on waiting lists to access public or social housing.”

One aspect of the program is to provide short-term support to people who have experienced challenges in securing private rental. Organisations like Unison work closely with property managers to get families into homes quickly and reduce the time spent in the homeless population.

“With Unison, we are able to give many people hope that they will be able to obtain rental history and join the private rental market permanently without fear of being evicted; because together, we have been able to ensure they budget well, maintain the property and are good tenants that landlords want to keep,” Evans added.

“At the end of the day, it’s a win-win for the tenants who access affordable housing, the real estate agencies who can fill vacant properties, and our community,” Holmes said.

“The PRAP program enables the private, not-for-profit and public sectors to work together to provide critical, long-term accommodation to families in temporary financial distress,” said Professor Guy Johnson, Australia’s first Professor of Urban Housing and Homelessness and Chair of the Unison Housing Research Program at RMIT University.

“By tapping into the private rental market, we are diverting people from public and social housing, which is already unable to cope with the growing demand,” Johnson added.

“I am proud that, by delivering the PRAP program, we are able to make a difference in the lives of hundreds of people. By helping them to maintain and achieve housing security at a moment of crisis, we are also indirectly providing support to their mental and emotional well-being,” Holmes said.

“We are excited by the outcomes that have been achieved by the PRAP program to date and look forward to the continued success of the program in partnership with the Victorian State Government and real estate agents in our local community,” Holmes said.



***About Unison:** Unison is a not for profit organisation that works to reduce disadvantage and social exclusion by creating communities that thrive. We develop and provide a diverse range of housing services across Victoria and in Adelaide, including social housing, affordable housing, private rental, transitional housing and owners corporation services. Unison is also one of the largest providers of services for people who experience or at risk of homelessness in Melbourne's West. Find out more at unison.org.au*

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Media Contact: Aline Riche, Marketing & Communications Manager 0437 594 811, (03) 9349 0272 or ariche@unison.org.au