

Thrive

community newsletter

Welcome to your winter edition of Thrive.

In this edition meet renter Luka, discover energy-saving tips, prepare for the winter months ahead and learn about our new Tenant Advisory Group (TAG).

Message from James King, Unison CEO

Hi everyone,

Attending the first full meeting of the refreshed Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) left me feeling really optimistic about the future. TAG is made up of Unison renters, and they're already bringing fresh perspectives and valuable insights to the table.

One of the key things they've helped us with is improving how we communicate about rent charges. Thanks to their feedback, we're making changes to ensure our messages are clearer and don't cause unnecessary concern. You can read more about this on page 2.

A big thank you as well to everyone who completed the Renter Satisfaction Survey. Your feedback helps us understand what we're doing well, and where we need to do better. We'll be sharing the results and how we're responding in the next newsletter.

I'm also pleased to share that Make Room, our transitional housing project for people experiencing chronic homelessness in the CBD, is now fully tenanted. You may have seen it in the news—it's being recognised as a great example of how empty buildings can be turned into homes. We're proud to see this approach gaining momentum at such an important time.

Wishing you all the very best. Stay warm and stay connected.

— James



Market rent: what it means for you

Some renters, including our Tenant Advisory Group (TAG), have raised concerns about the recent letter showing a new market rent amount. We want to reassure you: this is not a rent increase.

Each year, Unison reviews market rent to help calculate the reduced rent you pay. This figure is based on data from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and reflects the rental value of your home on the open market.

Important: This change will not affect your current rent. It will only be used at your next rent

review to help Unison calculate the reduced rent you will pay.

We're sorry if the letter caused any confusion or concern. We're taking your feedback seriously and are working with the TAG to make future communications clearer and avoid unnecessary worry.

We're committed to supporting our renters and keeping rents as low as possible.

Questions? Call us on (03) 9288 9200 or email info@unison.org.au

Your Tenant Advisory Group is giving renters a voice

Unison's refreshed TAG was onboarded in April, and all 9 members hit the ground running. At their first full meeting on May 26, they tackled a packed agenda with energy and focus.

A key issue raised was the recent Market Rent letters. TAG is now working with Unison management to ensure future communications are clear, consistent, and easy to understand.

The group also reviewed new development plans, pest control info, and maintenance fact sheets—providing practical feedback to make them simpler and more renter-friendly.

TAG members also got a first look at the upcoming Unison website, which will feature a new Renter Centre with multilingual pages and accessibility tools.



First TAG Meeting, May 2025

They'll keep working with Unison to ensure the site includes the right resources—designed with renters, for renters.

Thank you TAG members for your commitment to helping improve the quality of housing provided and the lives of Unison renters.

2025 TAG members: Ahmed Dahir, Andrew Johnston, Andrew Morriss, Belinda Lee, Colin Cook, David Worthley, Garry Liakoureas, Janie Miller & Frank Otis.

Stay flu safe this winter

Vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu. The virus that causes the flu changes each year, so the vaccine is updated every year to target these strains.

Under the National Immunisation Program (NIP), the flu vaccine is free for certain groups including children aged 6 months to 5 years, pregnant women, First Nations people and people aged 65+.

NIP-funded vaccines are available at many GPs and community health centres. If you're not eligible for a free vaccine, ask at your local GP or pharmacist about getting vaccinated.

Meet Luka



Luka, a Kensington resident, finds peace and joy in his community garden, where he tends his plants with his beloved cat, William. What began as a hobby has now grown into a meaningful career—Luka now works as a Unison Groundskeeper, caring for greenery across Unison properties and helping to maintain Unison's award-winning food forest.

Originally from South Sudan, Luka grew up on a family farm before war forced him to flee. After arriving in Melbourne alone as a teenager, he worked hard to rebuild his life. Gardening connects him to his past and brings calm and purpose to his days. Luka's story is part of our Unison Renter Story Series.

Read more about his journey here: unison.org.au/news/a-garden-a-cat-and-a-home-that-is-sanctuary

Fire safety starts at home

Help protect yourself, your home and your neighbours from a fire with these fire safety tips:

- **Dispose of cigarettes properly** – always use an ash tray and never throw cigarettes off balconies or in gardens.
- **When cooking, keep looking** – don't leave your stove unattended and set timers while grilling and baking.
- **Keep heaters clear** – maintain at least a one-metre gap between heaters and furniture, clothing or curtains.
- **Switch off appliances** – Before leaving a room or your home, double-check that appliances are turned off.
- **Call 000** – In the event of a fire, don't delay. Get to safety immediately and call 000.

Stay warm and save energy this winter

Victorian winters can be chilly, but there are ways to stay warm and keep your energy bills in check:

- **Rearrange furniture** to allow for better airflow from heaters.
- **Dress for the colder weather** and wear layers so that you can reduce heater use and stay comfortable.
- **Close windows at night** to keep the warm air inside.
- **Use draught stoppers** so that warm air doesn't escape under doors.



For more energy saving tips, visit: energy.gov.au/households/household-guides/seasonal-advice/winter

Free pads and tampons now available

The Victorian Government is providing free pads and tampons in public places to make it easier for everyone to access essential sanitary products. To learn more and find a location near you, visit betterhealth.vic.gov.au/free-pads-and-tampons

Reminder: Please don't flush sanitary products down the toilet, as this can cause plumbing issues. Always dispose of them in a sanitary bin instead.

Food relief and support services

As the weather gets colder and cost-of-living pressures continue, we know many of our renters are going through hard times. If you're struggling to get a hot meal, don't forget Vinnies Soup Vans are running in the Inner West and Inner City, offering free meals and support.

You can find dates and locations on **Ask Izzy** – a simple, easy-to-use website that connects people

with a wide range of services, including meals, financial assistance, family violence support, housing and counselling.

Scan the QR code to access:



Winter blues

Winter can be a tough time, especially if you're prone to a lower mood during the winter months. Here are some ways to support your mental well-being:

- **Get outside in the morning sunlight** as it sets your circadian rhythms—your body's internal clock.
- **Let sunlight in** by opening your curtains during the day. Consider a Vitamin D supplement if you're not getting much sun.
- **Exercise regularly**—consider an indoor activity if you don't like getting out in the cold.



Most gyms offer a free trial period.

- **Stay connected**—socialising with friends and family can help to lift your mood. Consider joining local support groups or community groups too.

Help is available if you need support

- Beyond Blue (24/7): 1300 224 636 (www.beyondblue.org.au)
- Lifeline (24/7): 13 11 14 (www.lifeline.org.au)
- Suicide Call Back Service (24/7): 1300 659 467
- 1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732

Feedback

Unison is committed to providing quality services to our clients, renters and the community. We welcome your feedback and ideas to improve your Thrive newsletter. Please email us at communications@unison.org.au to contribute.