

Renting in Queensland
Strategic Policy and Legislation
Housing, Homelessness and Sport
Department of Housing and Public Works
GPO Box 690 Brisbane QLD 4001



Submission in response to Queensland Parliament's *Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement on Renting Reform in Queensland*

About Queensland Alliance for Mental Health

Queensland Alliance for Mental Health ('QAMH') is the peak body for community mental health service providers and the wider mental health community in Queensland. Through advocacy and support, we work alongside our members to foster better outcomes for people with mental health issues.

QAMH is a member of the Making Renting Fair in Queensland (MRFQ) Alliance.ⁱ This Alliance consists of organisations who support progressive reform of renting laws so that all Queenslanders can make the place they live a home, whether they rent or not. We support the position of the MRFQ Alliance and the submissions of fellow MRFQ Alliance members.

Renting Reform and Mental Wellbeing

QAMH strongly advocates for renting reform that promotes **accessibility, affordability, equity and safety**. Recent studies have found that prospective renters who disclose their mental illness are less likely to receive a response to rental requires, more likely to be advised a unit is unavailable, and less likely to be invited to inspect available unit.ⁱⁱ In Queensland, the Queensland Mental Health Commission has acknowledged that people with a lived experience of mental illness have greater housing instability, poorer quality of housing and less choice over living conditions than people without mental illness.ⁱⁱⁱ

"Strong, inclusive and resilient mental health communities."

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People with mental illness make up a greater proportion of households in the private rental market compared with those who own their own homes. The recent Productivity Commission into Mental Health Draft Report has highlighted that 16% of Australians with a diagnosed mental illness were living in ‘unsuitable’ accommodation in 2016-17.^{iv} Unsuitable housing included overcrowding, substandard living conditions, risk of eviction or other housing problems which negatively impact individual’s lives and inhibit recovery and management of mental illness.^v Rental reform will have beneficial impacts for vulnerable people by creating a safer and more equitable system.

There is a close relationship between people’s health (including their mental health and wellbeing) and the living and working conditions which form their social environment—being the social determinants of health.^{vi} Poor-quality housing impacts physical and mental health, and disproportionately impacts young people, Indigenous Australians, people with long-term health conditions, people living in low-income households, and the unemployed.^{vii} It is well established that access to safe, secure and affordable housing is an import factor in keeping people well.^{viii} Access to stable housing can mitigate the risk of individuals being socially excluded by factors such as homelessness, overcrowding and poor physical and mental health. QAMH supports renting reform for its ability to positively impact the lives of persons with mental illness, or those at risk of developing a mental illness. The rental reform proposals will go a long way to addressing some of the difficulties experienced by renters by taking a more human-centred approach to supporting recovery, health and wellbeing, and accessible housing.

Renting with Pets

QAMH welcomes the recommendation that places requirements on a lessor to have reasonable grounds (as prescribed by law) to deny a tenant’s request for a pet, where that request is compliant with law. This recommendation will break down barriers for tenants with pets. Pets are integral for the wellbeing and mental health of our community. Pet ownership has been found to decrease physical and mental effects of stress—from reducing anxiety, to lowering blood pressure and decreasing muscle tension.^{ix} By allowing tenants to rent with pets, it increases happiness and wellbeing—without requiring a tenant to decide between a suitable home, or their pet.

We are however, concerned about recommendations that place further financial strain upon tenants renting with pets, like pet bonds in unreasonable circumstances (where the pet is unlikely to require pest control, for example). Renting with pets must be affordable, further financial burdens may impact upon affordability of renting for vulnerable and low-income populations.



Domestic and Family Violence

Uncertainty and fear about future housing is a common concern for people in domestic and family violence situations. In 2016-17 72,000 women, 34,000 children and 9,000 men sought homelessness services due to domestic and family violence.^x Renting reform that promotes safety and takes a human-centred approach to ensuring the individual is protected and free from harm will ensure that housing does not become an additional barrier to help-seeking or result in homelessness being the only option for safety.

QAMH supports the recommendation to allow a tenant or co-tenant experiencing domestic and family violence to end their tenancy with 7 days' notice where there is evidence from a specialist worker. Safety and wellbeing of all individuals must be a paramount consideration, and we support this being elevated in the recommended reform. Safety will be further enhanced by the recommendations permitting the individual to provide notice of intention to end the lease, change locks and install safety cameras (without needing consent of the lessor), and have their privacy maintained by the lessor/agent. We support these recommendations for their human-centred approach to domestic and family violence experienced by tenants.

Summary

We support all recommendations that make strides towards affordable, safe and equitable renting reform. Minimum housing standards form a crucial component of safe and adequate living—we support safe and accessible housing as a human right.

This submission has considered **two key** areas of reform proposed which have the potential to impact on a person's mental health and wellbeing:

1. Support for renting with pet reform that promotes accessibility and fairness for tenants seeking to rent with pets; and
2. Support for reform to promote safety and wellbeing for tenants experiencing domestic and family violence.

QAMH welcomes this reform and looks forward to further consultation.

Kind Regards,



Jennifer Black
CEO – Queensland Alliance for Mental Health



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- ⁱ Making Renting Fair in Queensland: *Supporters* <<https://makerentingfairqld.org.au/supporters/>>.
- ⁱⁱ Hammel, J., Smith, J., Scovill, S., Campbell, R. and Duan, R. 2017, Rental Housing Discrimination on the Basis of Mental Disabilities: Results of Pilot Testing, Final Report, August, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Queensland Mental Health Commission, *Shifting Minds Report* <https://www.qmhc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/qmhc_2018_strategic_plan.pdf>.
- ^{iv} Productivity Commission into Mental Health Draft Report. 2019. <<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/mental-health/draft/mental-health-draft-volume1.pdf>>.
- ^v Productivity Commission into Mental Health Draft Report. 2019. <<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/mental-health/draft/mental-health-draft-volume1.pdf>>.
- ^{vi} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2018, Australia's Health 2018 <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/746ded57-183a-40e9-8bdb-828e21203175/aihw-aus-221-chapter-4-2.pdf.aspx>>.
- ^{vii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2018, Australia's Health 2018 <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/746ded57-183a-40e9-8bdb-828e21203175/aihw-aus-221-chapter-4-2.pdf.aspx>>.
- ^{viii} Queensland Mental Health Commission, *Shifting Minds Report* <https://www.qmhc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/qmhc_2018_strategic_plan.pdf>.
- ^{ix} Barker, Randolph, J Knisely, S Baker and Rachel Cobb. 2012, Preliminary Investigation of Employee's dog presence on stress and organisational perceptions, in *International Journal of Workplace Health Management* 5(1); McConnel, A, C Brown, T Shoda, M Shayton and C Martin. 2011, Friends with benefits: on the positive consequences of pet ownership, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101(6).
- ^x WAVVS: *Understanding DV* <<http://www.wavss.org/understanding-dfv---wavss.html>>.

