

Tenants' Union of NSW welcomes the 6-month extension on support measures for NSW renters

The Tenants' Union of NSW welcomes today's announcement from the NSW Government confirming the extension of moratorium protections for renters through until the end of March. During the COVID-19 health crisis many renters have lost jobs or income, and faced significant financial hardship as a result.

"The pandemic and its' impacts are ongoing. We know many renters across the state are finding it hard to make rent and cover all their bills," said Leo Patterson Ross, CEO of Tenants' Union of NSW. "Minister Anderson's announcement today will come as an enormous relief for all those renting who've been worrying about how they'll keep a roof over their head in the coming months".

Extending the emergency protections means impacted renters can continue to initiate negotiations with their landlord to reduce rent, and provides greater certainty for renting households who are needing to extend or renegotiate an earlier reduction. But while the extension of existing protections is very welcome, the NSW Government must ensure the moratorium measures are able to provide the support renters require.

"We welcome the extension, but we'd also like to see the moratorium framework around negotiations strengthened to ensure where negotiations have broken down or failed, the Tribunal (NCAT) can step in and set a 'fair rent' that takes into account both parties' financial situation".

"We're also very concerned that many renting households may have been covering rent by juggling other bills, or resorting to paying rents or other housing related bills on credit."

"Some form of financial assistance or debt relief is needed for these households. Not only to ensure they are able to stay safely in their home through the pandemic, but to help them avoid building up debt that might impact their financial situation for years to come."

The Tenants' Union of NSW has put forward a number of proposals for financial assistance for renters who are facing hardship because of COVID-19, including:

1. Extending the NSW Government's Rent Choice Assist (COVID-19 Response) scheme.¹
2. Expanding eligibility for private rental assistance available from the Department of Communities and Justice during the COVID-19 health crisis to include renters on temporary visas (i.e. all temporary visa holders) who are not eligible for many of the Covid-19 income supports or assistance payments
3. Introducing a Relief Grant Scheme to provide one off payments towards housing costs or debts of up to \$2000
4. Introducing a No Interest Loan Scheme to provide no interest loans of up to \$3000 towards housing costs or debts

We look forward to continuing to work constructively with Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation Kevin Anderson and Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services Gareth Ward to ensure renters get the support and protections they need to help them stay safe in their homes through this health crisis.

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¹ This well targeted, well designed assistance package was made available to eligible renters facing hardship as a result of COVID-19 from April through June of this year in response to the crisis.