

# #9 INCREASE ACCESS TO TENANT ADVOCACY AND INFORMATION

## Make advocacy services and tenancy information available to all renters.

### THE PROBLEM

Every year thousands of West Australians are denied access to justice and basic information about their rights due to advocacy services being under-funded, over capacity or non-existent.

Community Legal Centres and Advocacy services are often the difference between people getting evicted or not, and they

help people learn about the rights and responsibilities of tenants to sustain secure housing. However, these services do not have the capacity to deal with every call for assistance and as a result, tenants suffer if they cannot have access to legal assistance when they need it.

Many tenants are unable to resolve disputes with their landlord on their own, and the matter ends up in Court.

"I've been involved in legal action with 3 property managers. I've been successful in having orders made in my favour each time... I've never been added to a database, breached any agreement or law, or had orders made against me. Every rental relationship has been unreasonable on the part of the lessor... 15+ years of fighting for my survival have led me here and I'm so exhausted."

### THE FACTS

Tenant advocates work in local centres across WA helping thousands of renters every year. Tenancy WA alone provides 4500 legal advices per year. However, funding for tenant advocacy was significantly cut by 25% as of 1 January 2017, equating to a \$1 million per year cut to the program.

Specialist tenant advocacy services for First Nations people were axed altogether.

**\$1 MILLION**  
per year cut  
from tenant  
advocacy  
from 2017.

"About 10 months into my lease there was water damage and movement from the top story. My son's bedroom ceiling began to collapse and had mould. There was also mould on the roof in the lounge room and dining room. This took several weeks for repair and the repairs created a lot of mess all over our furniture and belongings - the contractor was sandblasting dust everywhere. I didn't have the awareness at the time to complain to the real estate about the mess made by the repairs. Although the leaks were fixed and the roof was stable again, the mould was never treated in my son's room. We resided there for 24 months."

### THE SOLUTION

Adequate and reliable funding for tenant advocacy services is desperately needed. Assistance from a tenant advocate could potentially resolve tenancy issues much earlier, and help ensure that tenants know their rights for next time. Funding for tenant advocates ultimately saves money, by reducing Court costs, and reducing homelessness.

Access to justice involves increasing the advocacy capacity of Community Legal Centres and restoring funding for Tenants Advocates.

There is also a critical need for:

- specialist public housing advocacy programs
- Aboriginal outreach workers and tenant advocates
- peer support to improve relatability in advocacy, and
- tenant education to improve access to justice

These services exist in other states and would offer significant community benefit if introduced in WA.

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