

PRIVATE ROOMING HOUSE DECLINE IN METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE:
DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION AND RESOURCE GUIDE

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Introduction

The rooming house sector is an important component of private rental housing at the lower cost end of the market. It performs a role that cannot be duplicated in the mainstream rental market. Rooming houses provide essential lower cost and accessible accommodation in Metropolitan Melbourne for many people who are excluded from other forms of rental accommodation. Exclusion may be due to:

- An inability to afford rental or establishment costs;
- Lack of references;
- Agents and landlords not offering rental accommodation due to a person's situation; or,
- A person's lack of desire or inability to live in self-contained rental accommodation that entails payment of utility bills and managing cleaning.

Whilst rooming houses provide an important form of crisis accommodation not all residents are transient. A large proportion of residents have lived in the same dwelling for more than five years. Most rooming house residents are in receipt of government income payments, particularly disability income payments, as many residents have disabilities including psychiatric illness, cognitive impairment and addiction. In 2003 rooming houses provide an essential interface between homelessness and lower cost housing that is not duplicated by any other form of housing. This paper reports on a project undertaken for the Inner Urban Rooming House Project earlier this year.

Project Overview

The research project was commissioned by the Victorian Department of Human Services, the Cities of Yarra, Melbourne, Darebin, Stonnington and Boroondara (referred to hereafter as Inner Urban Rooming House Group). The research was prompted by two concerns:

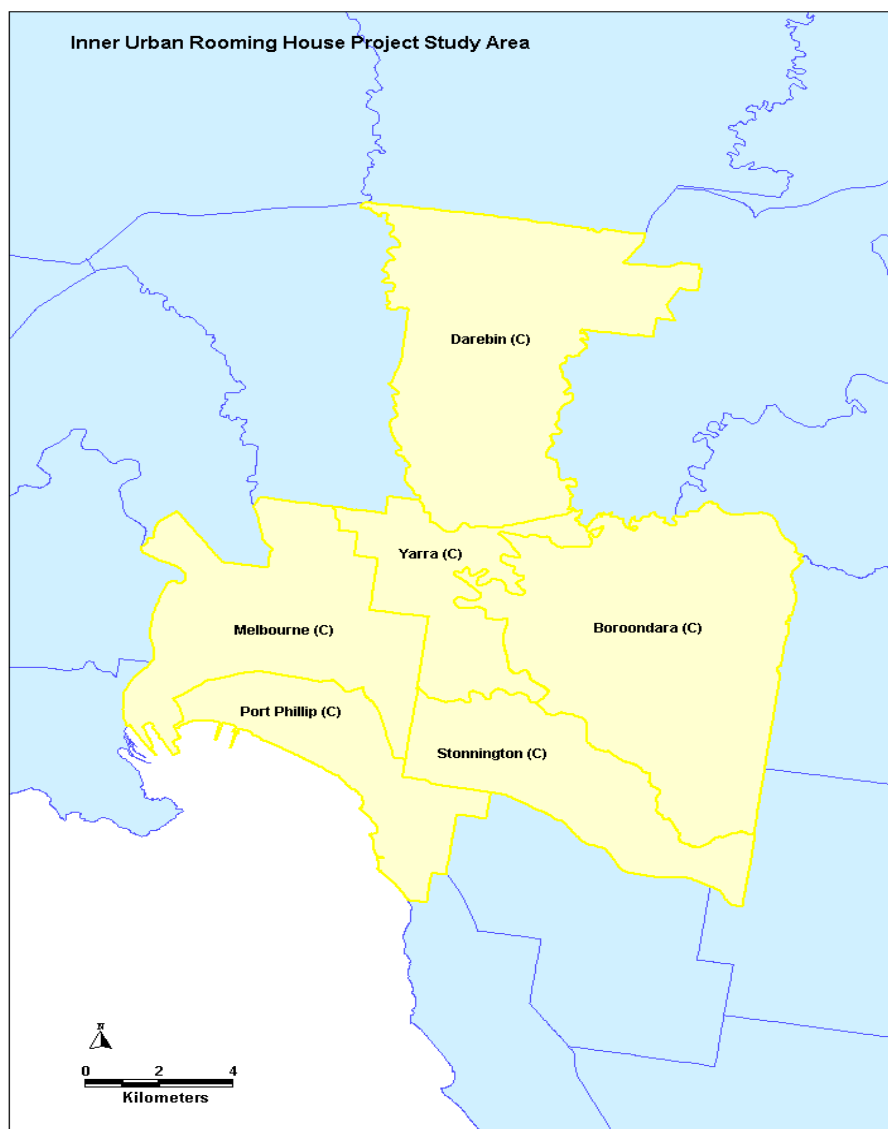
- That the decline of rooming houses would create further demand for crisis, transitional and public housing, and increase pressure on health and other homeless services; and
- The recognition that the private rooming house sector needs support in order to provide a good standard of housing to people with complex needs.

The policy relevance to the Inner Urban Rooming House Group, as stated in the project brief, is that the 'recent commitment by the Victorian Government to assist the proprietor of a private rooming house to continue as a singles housing provider demonstrates an understanding by government of the important contribution of this sector and a commitment to retain affordable rooming house stock where this is possible. The outcomes of the Inner Urban Rooming House Project will assist the Victorian Government to achieve this in a systematic, rather than an ad hoc, manner'.

Project Area

The research focused on the Local Authorities of Boroondara, Darebin, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra (referred to hereafter as 'study area') (See Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Project Study Area



Project Methodology

The project methodology was multi-faceted. The first stage of the research was the production of a research paper which reviewed current literature and policies relating to rooming houses, reviewed inter-state practices and procedures to retain rooming houses; and examined the issues that may be leading to rooming house decline. The second stage the project was a review of the management practices and procedures of private rooming house owners and managers. The third stage was the development of recommendations and actions to stimulate the retention and expansion of appropriate and responsive private rooming houses for low income people. The final stage was the production of a resource package to promote best practice of rooming house owners and managers.

This paper will provide an overview of the project with particular emphasis on the outcomes of primary data collection from rooming house operators in developing the resource package. For in-depth information on the research project refer to *'Rooms for the Future: Strategy and Action for the Retention and Development of Socially Responsible Rooming Houses'* and to *'More than a Landlord: A Practical Guide for Rooming House Operators and Managers'*. Both publications are available from the websites of Cities of Yarra and Port Phillip Community Group

What Do We Mean by a Rooming House?

There are many definitions of a rooming house. The use of different definitions by various State and Local government agencies affects the quantity and quality of data, and makes management of a rooming house complex and difficult. There is a range of legal and technical definitions of rooming houses contained in the *Victorian Residential Tenancies Act 2002*, *Victorian Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Regulations 2001*, and *Building Code of Australia*.¹ These immediately impact on the operation of rooming houses, and do not always correspond to popular thinking of what constitutes a rooming house.

¹ For example the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* regulates rooming houses that provide accommodation to four or more people. At the same time the *Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Regulations 2001* regulates rooming houses that provide accommodation for five or more people.

For the purposes of this research a rooming house is considered to have the following characteristics:

- The provision of primarily single room accommodation;²
- The provision of some shared facilities (bathroom, kitchen, laundry);
- Meals may or may not be provided;
- No 'formal' support for residents with disabilities;
- Registered or unregistered;
- Accommodates short and/or long term residents; and
- Run as private-for-profit.

This does not include licensed hotels. It is acknowledged that there are rooming housing owned and managed by various government and not-for-profit agencies, however the focus of this research was the private for profit component of the sector.

Overview of Rooming House Decline in Melbourne

Rooming houses have been in decline in Melbourne since at least 1954. In the 25 year period from 1956 to 1981 there was a loss of 60 establishments and 420 beds in inner Melbourne (Burke, 1984). In the City of Port Phillip (including the former City of St Kilda), between 1954 and 1992, there was a loss of 563 rooming houses, affecting possibly 46,000 persons.

Whilst this research is re-visiting well known issues there is now an urgent need to reverse the decline of private-for-profit rooming houses. In the research area there has been a dramatic decline in private rooming houses. For instance, in 2000 in the City of Port Phillip there were an estimated 72 rooming houses with 1,138 residents, split evenly between public and private ownership (City of Port Phillip). Fifteen private rooming houses have closed in the City of Port Phillip since May 1999, with over 450 beds lost. In the City of Yarra it was estimated that there were 31 private rooming houses in 1999 (Jope, 2000). Currently, it is estimated that there are 25 private rooming houses, some of which provide backpacker accommodation.³ As recently as May 2003 the largest private rooming house in the City of Yarra with 87 beds was sold.

Inventory of Inner Urban Private Rooming Houses

All attempts were made in the collection of information from rooming house operators. However, this proved to be difficult as some operators and residents responding to enquiries were suspicious and reluctant to provide information.

It is clear from the comments made by rooming house operators that some of the rooming houses and beds may be used for backpacker accommodation, particularly during the tourist season. However, switching uses of the rooms appears to depend on demand rather than changing the long term use of a rooming house. A total of 73 rooming houses provided information for the inventory. Of those, 5 were excluded for having a boarding cost considered higher than acceptable for a rooming house (i.e. more than \$350 per week). It must be noted that rooming house rents include the costs of services and facilities, such as the provision of furniture and linen and the cost of heat and lighting.

The low participation rate is evidenced by the fact that only 7 rooming houses in Port Phillip, out of a probable total in the municipality of 29, provided data (See Table 1). Data in the inventory is therefore indicative only.

Table 1. Number of Rooming Houses Participating in the Inventory by Municipality

Local Government Area	No. Rooming Houses	Per cent %
Boroondara	7	10.3
City of Port Phillip	7	10.3
Darebin	3	4.4
Melbourne City Council	17	25.0
Stonnington	9	13.2
Yarra	25	36.8
All	68	100.0

² Many rooming houses have double and group room accommodation as well as single rooms.

³ There were 407 beds in 21 rooming houses in 1999. Four of the 25 rooming houses did not provide information on the number of beds.

Table 2 shows data from 54 rooming houses. The size of rooming houses varies dramatically from 4 beds to 134 beds per house. The median reflects the most commonly occurring number of beds per rooming house. Across the 6 municipalities the median is 15 beds per rooming house.

Table 2. Number of Beds in Participating Rooming Houses by Municipality

Number of Beds ...		Local Government Area						
		Boroondara	City of Port Phillip	Darebin	Melbourne City Council	Stonnington	Yarra	All
Per rooming house	Mean	31	29	41	25	29	19	25
	Median	30	20	41	12	15	12	15
	Minimum	14	15	12	5	4	4	4
	Maximum	50	84	70	134	70	87	134
Per LGA	Total	184	143	82	331	202	407	1349
	Missing ⁴	1	2	1	4	2	4	14

Table 3 shows the cost of rooms in the participating rooming houses. Of the 68 rooming houses participating in the inventory, 10 were not forthcoming with information regarding the price of rooms. The researchers were not able to obtain comprehensive information regarding the costs by type of room i.e. single, double or dormitory. Anecdotal evidence indicates that rents can be as low as \$75 in the City of Port Phillip. Figure 1 graphically demonstrates the distribution of cost of rooms by local government area.

Table 3. Costs of Rooms in Participating Rooming Houses

Cost Per week	Local Government Area						
	Boroondara	City of Port Phillip	Darebin	Melbourne City Council	Stonnington	Yarra	All
	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost
Mean	\$135	\$111	\$120	\$136	\$125	\$112	\$123
Median	\$140	\$105	\$120	\$125	\$90	\$105	\$110
Minimum	\$110	\$95	\$110	\$50	\$83	\$60	\$50
Maximum	\$150	\$143	\$130	\$301	\$230	\$200	\$301
Missing ⁵	1	1	1	0	0	6	9

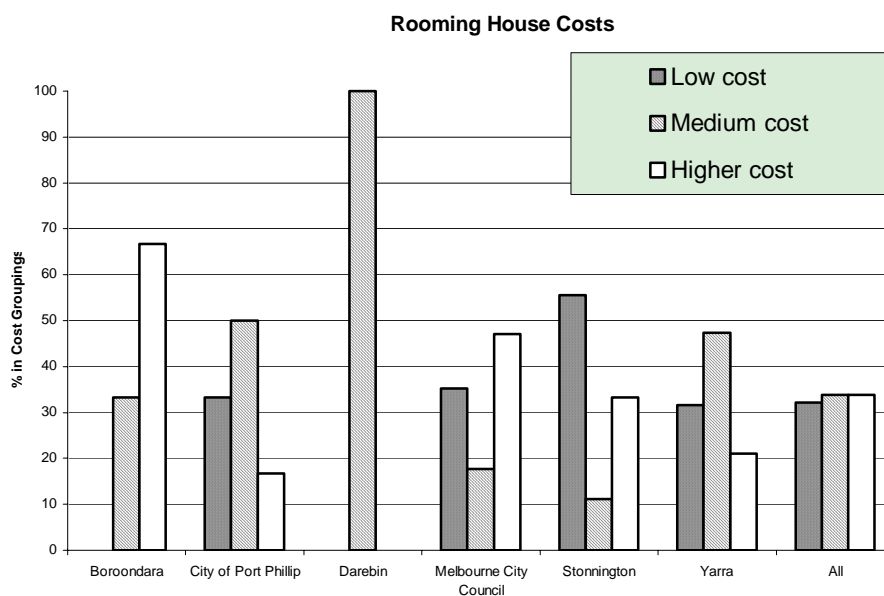
Across the 6 municipalities the costs vary dramatically from \$50 per week to \$301 per week for a room, with the most commonly occurring price per room at \$110 per week (See Figure 2). To facilitate an understanding of the cost of rooming houses in each of the municipalities, we have used the data to compile 3 cost levels: low cost, medium cost and high cost.

- Low cost rooming houses are defined as costing less than \$98.20 per week.
- Medium cost rooming houses are defined as costing between \$98.20 and \$138.20 per week.
- High cost rooming houses are defined as costing more than \$138.20 per week.

Figure 2. Participating Rooming House by Cost level

⁴ 14 rooming houses provided only an estimate of the total number of beds in the house.

⁵ 9 rooming houses would not provide room prices.



The cost groupings were determined by calculating a median cost per room per rooming house. Rooming house operators also provided information regarding rooming house facilities. Only 70 per cent (49) of the rooming houses contacted provided information about the supply of linen. Of these, thirty four rooming houses, (69 per cent) supplied linen as part of the provision of a room. It is interesting to note that although rooming house operators are not required to provide kitchens, the majority of those supplying information (61 rooming houses) did provide at least one kitchen for residents.

Private Rooming House Owners and Manager's Practices and Perceptions⁶

Although a range of techniques was used to contact all possible private rooming house operators in the research area (Cities of Yarra, Melbourne, Darebin, Stonnington, Boroondara and Port Phillip) only 32 rooming house operators were willing to participate. Table 4 illustrates participation rates by local authority.

Table 4. Rooming House Operators Participating in Issues Identification

Municipality	Number
Port Phillip	8
Melbourne	12
Yarra	7
Boroondara	1
Stonnington	2
Darebin	2
Total	32

The discussions with owners and managers covered topics relating to how the businesses are run and problems confronted in operating a rooming house.

These discussions led to the development of a typology of rooming house operators (owners and managers) in inner Melbourne (See Table 5).

Table 5: Typology of Rooming House Operators (Owners and Managers)

Type of Operator	Characteristics
Long Term Operator	Established the rooming house 20 or more years ago. Usually the only business they know, but the owner is now ageing and having difficulty with managing within the current regime of

⁶ Direct quotes from interviews and surveys are written in *italics*

		regulations. Owner-managed premises.
Unintended Landlord		Owner did not consciously set out to be a rooming house operator. Facility established and operated by parent. Children now operating the business on behalf of aged parent or as inherited owner.
Professional Operator	Commercial	Operator bought an existing leasehold (some also bought the freehold) of a rooming house and upgraded premises and business. Operators usually do not live on site. Some operate/own more than one rooming house. Impose a selection criterion that will exclude residents with complex needs.
'Socially Responsible' Professional Operator	Commercial	Established new rooming house, or inherited properties or bought an existing leasehold. Own freehold and/or lease hold. Understand the business and the resident group who prefer, or have no other option than, to live in rooming houses. Operators have both a commercial business focus and a social commitment to provide appropriate housing to people with complex needs.

It was heartening to find that a number of rooming house operators act in a socially responsible manner and are aware of the needs of their residents and try to provide appropriate housing. For example, some landlords allow local community and health workers to hold regular workshops and meetings in the rooming house to enable the residents to access support and health services. One rooming house has been involved in a local government community art program that focused on the lived experiences of rooming house residents and created paintings, collages, poems and prose works by residents. Another rooming house has given a key to some rooms to Royal District Nursing Service Homelessness workers to enable them to access their clients. However, the research revealed a range of problems that are leading to a shrinking private rooming house sector.

The key issues are:

The complexity and range of legislation and regulations causes hardship for rooming house operators who have limited experience and knowledge of legal and bureaucratic systems. Rooming house operators argue that the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* and the enforcement procedures at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) do not take into consideration the practice of operating a rooming house, the attributes of many residents, and difficulties confronted by operators.

Non-responsive planning legislation and policies embodied in local government planning schemes can inadvertently create restrictions on expansion or development of new rooming houses.

The lack of State Government financial assistance for private rooming house operators to maintain safe healthy and hygienic standards.

Increasing costs, particularly land taxation, building maintenance and upkeep, maintaining fire safety standards and insurance costs. These place substantial financial burdens on owners, jeopardising the continuing operation of the rooming house as lower cost accommodation due to a limited capacity to pass on increased costs to low income residents.

The changing nature of the resident population of rooming houses, reflected in the higher proportion of residents with mental disorders, addictions and associated challenging behaviours, creates difficulties in managing a rooming house.

Retirement of long term rooming house operators, moving out of the industry after 20 or more years in operation, either realising capital gains or passing on the property and business to children who do not want to remain in the industry.

Urban renewal and gentrification in inner urban areas creates pressure for capital gains. Government policies aimed at investing in urban renewal projects in the inner city negatively affect rooming houses by creating disinvestment in the industry because substantial profit can be made from sale or redevelopment.

Retaining Socially Responsible Rooming Houses

In an attempt to arrest the decline the Inner Urban Rooming House Project has developed a range of strategies to stimulate the retention and development of Socially Responsible Rooming Houses. The strategies reflects State and Local Government concern about housing affordability in Metropolitan Melbourne and proposes mechanisms for State and Local Governments to meet the Housing Affordability objectives of the State Government's *Metropolitan Strategy Melbourne 2030*, particularly by creating opportunities to provide appropriately located affordable lower cost rental housing for single people in activity districts located in close proximity to transport and services.

A Strategy for Stimulating Socially Responsible Rooming Houses has been developed. The aim of the strategy is to *'encourage and facilitate the retention and expansion of affordable, accessible and appropriate private rooming house accommodation in the inner urban municipalities of Boroondara, Darebin, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington, and Yarra'*. To facilitate the implementation of strategy the Inner Urban Rooming House Group coined the term 'socially responsible' rooming house operator and focused all proposals and actions on the retention and development of these operators. A socially responsible rooming house operator is defined as *'registered with the local government authority, offering low cost short and long term accommodation to a range of people in receipt of Centrelink incomes and have a commitment to provide appropriate housing to people with complex needs'*.

An Action Plan was then developed for campaigning for the retention and development of socially responsible rooming houses.

Inner Urban Rooming House Action Plan

Sector	Action and Tasks
1. Rooming House Industry	Assist Private Rooming House Operators conduct their business as Socially Responsible Operators by: ACTION 1: Producing a Practical Guide for Rooming House Owners and Managers; and ACTION 2: Undertake a feasibility study regarding the establishment of a Rooming House Owners and Managers Association (RHOMA).
2. State Government	ACTION 3: The Victorian State Government to provide a Financial Assistance Package (RHFAP) for Socially Responsible Private Rooming House Operators that has: <i>PART A:</i> An eligibility criteria for 'Socially Responsible Rooming House Operators'; <i>PART B:</i> Fire and Safety Protection Support Assistance Package; and <i>PART C:</i> Land Taxation Exemption. The RHFAP will enable the State Government to stimulate the growth of lower cost rooming house accommodation in Metropolitan Melbourne with a limited financial commitment due to the partnership with the private sector. Without this partnership the State Government would be required to input substantial capital funds to compensate for the loss of lower cost rooming house accommodation.

3. Local Government	<p>Local Councils in Metropolitan Melbourne to develop a uniform approach to encourage the development of socially responsible rooming houses by:</p> <p>ACTION 4: Ensuring transparency in implementation of the Health and Building Acts and associated regulations.</p> <p>ACTION 5: Establishing a formal collaborative working relationship between the health and building departments of local councils.</p> <p>ACTION 6: Developing an integrated and responsive approach to stimulate the retention and development of rooming houses.</p> <p>ACTION 7: Providing appropriate car parking solutions for Socially Responsible Rooming House Operators.</p> <p>ACTION 8: Advocating for the adoption of recommendations of the Inner Urban Rooming House Strategy to State Government and Melbourne Metropolitan Councils.</p>
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The Strategy is focused on growing the socially responsible component of the rooming house sector as all assistance is linked to the socially responsible private rooming house operators. The underlying purpose of the provision of practical information, improved local government practice and State Government support is to encourage operators to remain and embrace being socially responsible. The more socially responsible operators behave the safer and healthier are the living environment for rooming house residents. This is the ultimate function of the Strategy.

More than a Landlord Practical Guide for Rooming House Owners and Managers

A key action of the Inner Urban Rooming House Project has been Action 1, to produce *More Than A Landlord: A Practical Guide for Rooming House Owners and Managers* to stimulate rooming house operators to offer socially responsible housing. The guide provides a framework for good practice in operating and managing a rooming house to encourage operators to supply healthy and safe living environments for residents. The guide is more than a summary of regulations recognising the difficulty operators have in providing accommodation for people with complex needs and includes tips and communication strategies for operators in managing disputes, negotiating resident grievances and managing distressed residents. Other areas covered by the guide include, health, safety and hygiene of the building and facilities, operator's rights, management requirements.

The guide provides operators with:

- A short summary of important aspects of legislation and regulations; and,
- Assists them in understanding key aspects of legislation and regulations.

The practical guide is for rooming house operators who are:

- An owner of a rooming house both the freehold and leasehold;
- An owner of the leasehold of a rooming house; or
- A manager employed by an owner.

As the laws that govern rooming operations in Victoria have different classifications and definitions of a rooming house is defined in the guide as:

- A building or a group of buildings where:
- Four (4) or more rooms are available for rent for either short or long periods of time;
- Rent is paid by residents;
- There are different rental arrangements for each resident; and
- Residents rent a room and share communal facilities including bathrooms and toilets.

It can be called a rooming house, boarding house, guesthouse, hostel or hotel. Rooming houses do not have to provide meals or social support for residents.

As different legislation and regulation carries different legal obligations for the rooming house property and/or resident management the guide combined different obligations under headings relating to managing a rooming house.

Table 7: Outline of More than an Landlord- Practical Guide

Sections in the Guide	Classification	Relevant Legislation
Safety Requirements Management Requirements Inspections Checklist Handling Disputes	Small Rooming House – Class 1b ▶ up to 12 residents pay rent ▶ a total floor area of not more than 300m ² Large rooming House - Class 3 13 or more unrelated people live and pay rent	Building Code of Australia (BCA) Building Act 1993 (BA 1993) Building Regulations 1997 (BR 1997) Metropolitan Fire Brigade Act 1958 (MFB)
Safety Requirements Health and Hygiene Requirements Management Requirements Inspections Checklist	5 or more unrelated people pay rent, have separate renting arrangements and share bathroom and toilet facilities	Health Act 1958 (HA 1958) Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Regulations 2001 (HR 2001)
Operators' Rights Handling Disputes Management Requirements RTA Notices Checklist	A building where 4 or more rooms are available for rent and where people rent a room and share communal facilities	Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA 1997)

The innovative components of the guide related to inclusion of more than summaries of legislations and regulations with :

1. Checklists regarding notice provision required under the Residential Tenancies Act and the inspection regime of the health and building regulations; and,
2. Communication and negotiations strategies for dealing with resident disputes and managing distressed residents.

Some examples of the guide are set out below.

1. Safety Requirments

Description	Key Elements	Relevant Law
<p>1.1 Safety Protection means ensuring there is no danger to life or safety for anyone using the building i.e. not expose anyone to possible harm or injury.</p> <p>A building is <u>Fit for Occupation</u> when there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Adequate water supply or sewage disposal (no blockages) ▶ General hygienic conditions throughout the building ▶ No pest infestation of pests eg rats and mice ▶ Well located and adequate number of exits ▶ Existence of emergency lighting ▶ Installation of smoke hazard warnings 		<p>BA 1993 & BR 1997 sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ safety standards and ▶ a system of enforcement by local Council Municipal Building Surveyor (MBS) <p>HA 1958 & HR 2001sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ health and hygiene standards; and ▶ a system for Local Council Health officers inspections
<p>1.2 Accessing Rooms for Inspections</p>	<p>Residents cannot refuse a Health Officer or MBS, or Metropolitan Fire Brigade officer access to their room for a building health or safety inspection</p>	<p>HA 1958 Section 410 RTA 1997 Section 110-119</p>
<p>1.5 Ordered to make a Building safe</p> <p>Building Notices /Orders</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Building Notices</u> require an operator to explain why the action (work to the building or evacuation of the building) should not be done. The operator has at least 30 days to respond 2. <u>Building Orders</u> detail work required and timelines for completion and are issued following a Building Notice. 	<p>BA1958 Sections 106 –117</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Issued by MBS ▶ Work inspected by MBS
<p>1.6 Building a safety risk – danger to life</p> <p>Emergency Order</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. <u>Emergency Order</u> requires an operator to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Immediately carry out building work to make the place safe; or ▶ Evacuate the building within 48 hours 	<p>BA 1993 Section 232, Section 102</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Issued by MBS ▶ MBS can enter to inspect without notice or a search warrant
<p>Urgent Repairs</p>	<p>An urgent repair is damage or breakdown to rooming house fixtures, equipment or furniture that is an immediate danger to the health or safety of a resident and there are no alternatives services or facilities in the rooming house.</p> <p>The repairs must be arranged immediately after a resident has notified the operator of the damage or breakdown.</p> <p>A resident can organise urgent repairs costing up to \$1,000 if the operator does not organise the repairs</p>	<p>RTA 1997 Section 129 -130</p>

7. Negotiating Grievances

<p>Managing Resident Complaints</p> <p>Negotiation Strategies</p> <p>Treating residents with respect and dignity can reduce grievances and complaints</p>	<p><i>Here are some simple steps you could take to resolve a grievance:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Always treat people with respect and dignity2. Make a time to discuss the grievance with the resident3. Listen to the resident's problem or complaint4. Explain your understanding of their viewpoint – this makes sure that you and the resident are talking about the same thing5. Set out your viewpoint and suggestions for how the issue(s) can be dealt with and explain why you would take this action or not take any action at all6. Ask the resident if they understand your viewpoint and suggestion7. If the resident does not agree with your response ask what compromise they would accept8. If you cannot reach an agreement ask if they would accept the Tenants Union of Victoria assisting you to reach an agreement on what to do to resolve the dispute. Tenants Union Victoria ☎ 9416 25779. When an agreement is reached make sure you both have the same understanding of the actions and agreement10. Write up the agreement and give a copy to the resident
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8. Managing a Distressed Person

<p>What causes a person to become distressed?</p>	<p>Distress can be triggered by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• an event that the person considers an immediate threat to themselves;• difficult interactions for people who have limited tolerance for the habits and behaviours of others;• the person overreacting to or misunderstanding other people, e.g. thinking people are talking about them when they are not; or,• they may have other problems such as memory loss which means they can't relate to other people as expected. <p>Distress may be aggravated issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• lack of appropriate food• gambling and loss of income• drugs or alcohol• medication• psychiatric or other illness• memory loss• emotional distress and anxiety• trauma from a previous assault or abuse• a disability arising from a head injury
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<p><i>How does a distressed person act?</i></p> <p><i>Challenging Behaviour</i></p>	<p>A distressed person may display verbal or physical aggression directed at others, themselves or to their surroundings. This kind of behaviour usually occurs when the person is frustrated or experiencing a personal crisis. The behaviour can be at the extreme end of the spectrum of normal behaviours and is often called 'challenging behaviour'. For example, having the radio/TV on too loud may become 'challenging behaviour' when the person refuses a reasonable request to lower the volume.</p>
<p><i>Minimising the distress</i></p>	<p>Distressed (challenging) behaviours can be minimised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping good House Rules that ensure the equal rights and duties of all residents. • Appropriate and timely use of a Grievance and Dispute Handling Procedure (See Negotiating Grievance and Handling & Disputes) • Understanding how to manage challenging behaviour when it occurs

Conclusion

The Inner Urban Rooming House Project found that private rooming houses provide essential lower cost and accessible accommodation for many people excluded from other forms of rental accommodation in Metropolitan Melbourne. Rooming houses are home for many people with complex needs due to psychiatric and other illness and people unable or unwilling to live in self contained accommodation. They also offer essential housing for people facing imminent homelessness. But, private rooming houses are rapidly disappearing. This loss of private rooming houses is creating further demand for already overstretched crisis, transitional and public housing. The research also concluded that a range of problems that are contributing to the shrinkage, including the complexity of legislation and regulations, lack of financial assistance.

In response to these problems, a comprehensive Inner Urban Rooming House Strategy has been developed to

1. Assist operators to conduct their business;
2. To guide the development of a Financial Assistance package; and
3. To encourage the development of a uniform guide to the development of socially responsible rooming houses.

A key outcome of the development of this strategy has been the completion of the Action 1: the production of a Practical Guide for Rooming House Owners and Managers. It is anticipated that ultimately, the production of a user-friendly practical document for rooming house operators will encourage:

- Existing operators to remain in the industry, a better understanding of regulations and legislation so operators do not feel overwhelmed, resulting in better living environments for residents; and,
- More socially responsible operators as well as further investment in better quality dwellings. The recommendations in the strategy and the guide are currently being considered by the State government and the Inner Urban Rooming House Groups has developing a campaign for implementation strategy actions.

The production of a user friendly and practical document to assist rooming house operators can be applied nationally, by either State or Local Governments. It is a very real attempt to assist rooming house operators to negotiate the complex maze of regulations and legislation. It is hoped that it will encourage existing operators to remain in the industry and encourage further investment. It also will benefit rooming house residents by providing accommodation that is of a better quality and safer.

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