

Tenants with a disability at greater risk during COVID

December 4 2020

New findings released today by the University of South Australia paint an alarming picture for people with a disability who are renting in the private sector.

COVID-19 has left a black financial hole for many tenants whose incomes have been slashed in 2020, but the mental health toll and stress on renters with a disability has been particularly savage, according to UniSA Professor Andrew Beer.

"Almost 30 percent are struggling to make ends meet, and close to a quarter of them have withdrawn money from their superannuation fund this year," Prof Beer says.

In a national survey of private tenants with a disability, the housing expert and Executive Dean of UniSA Business found that 18.8 percent had been forced to ask for a rent reduction and reported a significant decline in their mental health in 2020.

"This is almost double the rate for tenants without a disability, and they were also twice as likely as other tenants to be retrenched this year."

More than 10 percent of tenants with a disability said their rent had become unaffordable, compared to 7.7 percent without a disability. There was also a small—but significant—number (5.5 percent compared to 3.1 percent) who were evicted from their homes and 20 percent who were skipping meals to save money.

"Overall, private tenants affected by disability are in a bad set of circumstances that has become worse through 2020," Prof Beer says.

"We already know that Australians with a disability are among the most disadvantaged in the [housing market](#), especially in the private rental market, as many have precarious employment."

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2012 has provided specialist accommodation for people with an impairment, but this scheme only subsidizes housing for six percent of NDIS recipients, leaving most at the mercy of private landlords.

"There is no single risk factor that we can address to ease the burden for people with a disability. Disadvantage stems from a combination of factors, including lack of jobs, low income, high housing costs and insecure tenancy," Prof Beer says.

"It is clear from the data that people with a disability are not as resilient at responding to shocks in the [housing](#) and labor markets when compared to the rest of the population. We need to provide targeted accommodation to make them less vulnerable to eviction," he says.

Professor Beer's findings are contained in a [Rental Insights: COVID-19 Collection](#) released today. The report is available [here](#) and contains findings from a survey of 15,000 renting households.

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Tenants with a disability at greater risk during COVID (2020, December 4) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-12-tenants-disability-greater-covid.html>

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