

# INSTALLING SOLAR ON STANDALONE PROPERTIES



Community Housing  
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION **VICTORIA**



SouthEast  
Housing Cooperative Ltd  
*Housing Futures*

## VPF ENERGY EFFICIENCY UPGRADES: SOUTHEAST HOUSING COOPERATIVE CASE STUDY

### About SEHC

SouthEast Housing Cooperative (SEHC) is the largest Rental Housing Cooperative in Victoria. Its mission is to provide affordable, secure, financially and environmentally sustainable housing for people on low incomes, primarily in the South and East of Melbourne, who are committed to cooperative democracy and engagement.

### Motivation

SouthEast's CEO, Steven Morrissey, says his organisation leapt at the opportunity to apply for the Victorian Property Fund (VPF) Environmentally sustainable housing grants.

**'Our cooperative is all about housing and helping people on low incomes, and this is another way of making a difference.'**



Providing environmentally sustainable housing is part of SEHC's mission and the cooperative was keen to install solar on all of its properties. Once the VPF grants became available, it carried out desktop audits of its properties and determined all but 14 would be suitable, due to their orientation, roof size and other factors. However, as the project progressed under budget, a second site visit was conducted to the final 14 homes that determined it would be worthwhile to include them in the rollout.



CHIA Vic acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

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# Project overview

SEHC took on the role of lead agency in a combined funding submission to the VPF funding round with United Housing Cooperative. SEHC installed PV solar systems on all 162 of the freestanding properties it manages (152 of which are owned by the Department of Health and Human

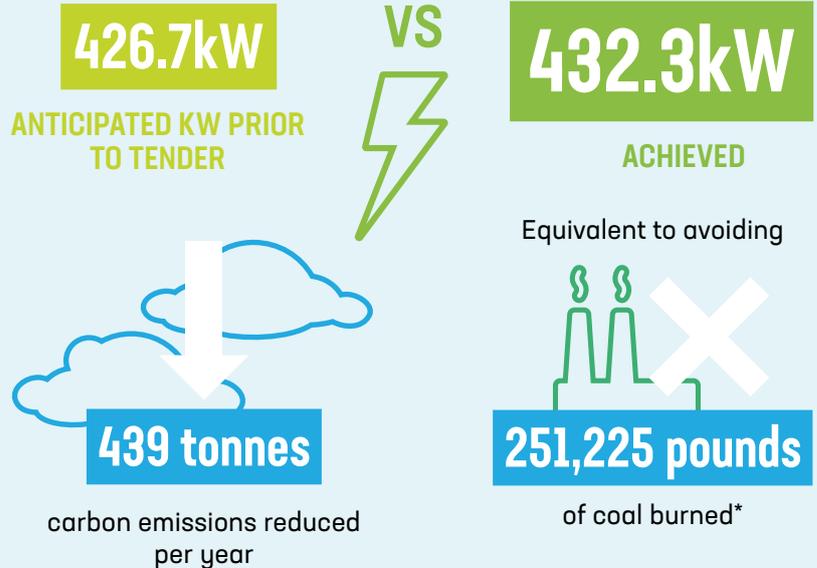
Services). This leaves only four of its properties, which are in a seven-star energy rated apartment building, without solar.

SEHC contributed over \$300,000 towards the project in 2018-2019 and absorbed the significant addition staff time required to run the project, estimated to have been about 11 hours a week for nine months.

## Impact



**162** FREESTANDING PROPERTIES INSTALLED WITH SOLAR



\*[epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator](http://epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator)

## Challenges

The four-month window to submit applications for funding proved challenging as SEHC had to complete energy audits on 166 properties in that short timeframe.

SEHC's tenant cohort includes people with mental health issues, including anxiety, and a few of those tenants did not want to be involved in the solar project. As SEHC had made the business decision to upgrade all suitable properties to enable the benefits to be enjoyed by future, as well as current, tenants, this created issues that needed to be overcome, including reluctant tenants not being home when they had committed to being there.

Some tenants also experienced delays with retailers crediting their feed-in tariffs for solar they generated but had not used. For some, it was a case of being reluctant to contact the retailer to advise them of the solar install, for others there were delays on the retailers end in making the change. The speed of the response varied from retailer to retailer.

## Learnings

### Staff considerations and working with tenants



Having the right people involved in assisting tenants and empathetic installation personnel was vital to the project's success. This included housing staff who were personally familiar with tenants and could identify those likely to have issues with the project.

Following up with tenants to ensure they made contact with their retailer was also important to ensure they received the full benefit of the panels.





## The impact of the VPF grants

The solar installation has alleviated financial pressure on low-income tenants.

**'So many of our members are struggling financially so to reduce that burden is just fantastic. A few have marked their bills or sent emails in to tell us about the difference that it's made and they're very grateful.'** – SEHC CEO Steven Morrissey.

## Next steps

SEHC held a session for tenants at its AGM on how to maximise the benefits of solar, which attracted a record turnout.



## Tenant's voice

Few renters would expect their landlord to install solar power for their benefit but SouthEast Housing Cooperative Ltd has done just that.

Andrew Phillips\*\* is the sole community housing resident in a small block of two-bedroom units in Croydon, yet his is the only home sporting solar panels.

'My owner occupier neighbours are jealous,' Andrew says.

Andrew's home is one of the 162 properties managed by SouthEast that have had solar panels installed with the support of the Victorian Property Fund's Environmentally Sustainable Housing Funding Round.

Andrew's panels were installed in August 2018 and the impact was instant, despite his power company taking until February 2019 to begin crediting him with a feedback tariff for the energy his home was generating in excess of his usage.

'But I noticed a difference in my bills immediately,' Andrew says, with his bills dropping from an average of \$5 a day to \$3 a day.

Andrew says he was pleased SouthEast took advantage of the opportunity to reduce the energy consumption of its properties from an environmental, as well as financial, point of view.

'I am really happy to be part of the bigger environment picture and I think this is something that should be rolled out throughout the country.'

\*\*Not his real name



## Input from CHIA Vic and

## BOOM! Power

CHIA Vic notified SEHC about the VPF funding and the Solar Homes rebate.

'I think it's critical the peak body is involved in this because you raise awareness amongst the sector that these things are actually possible,' Steven says.

SEHC used the BOOM! platform to undertake all of the energy assessments in record time and procure pre-approved suppliers, which assisted in streamlining the

whole process. BOOMPower also provided advice and assistance throughout the project, as required.

## About CHIA Vic

The Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic) is the peak body that represents the not-for-profit community housing sector in Victoria.

CHIA Vic works to support the growth of community housing as the most effective and efficient means of ensuring more disadvantaged Victorians can enjoy the dignity of safe, secure and appropriate housing.