

# TENANT GUIDE

**CALGARY ACORN**

**Housing  
Justice**

**Tenant  
Union**

**Eco  
Justice**





# WHAT IS ACORN?

ACORN - the largest, most influential tenant organization in Canada - has been active in Alberta since 2021, organizing on issues that matter most to tenants. Simultaneously non-partisan and political, ACORN uses direct action to ensure that the issues of its low-to-moderate income members are addressed by the powers that be.

ACORN believes it's time for a rewrite of how Alberta tenants are treated. A province is possible where tenants have affordable housing that is healthy for the tenants and the world around it.

## CONTACT US

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# TENANT RIGHTS

Most provinces fund community legal clinics that support tenants by providing legal advice and, at times, representation at housing tribunals. Unfortunately, Alberta doesn't bother to. This makes it harder for Alberta tenants to access what few rights they do have.

Alberta ACORN is getting organized and building power for tenants! We also have some capacity to provide information on your rights as a tenant.



**Still, you do have some rights.....**





# HAVING MAINTENANCE ISSUES?

The issues you have in your unit or building may be in violation of **Alberta's Minimum Housing and Health Standards**

Use this QR code to see if they are:



## **Standards that landlords must abide by:**

- Apartment kept at 22 degrees celsius
- Stove and Refrigerator work properly
- Apartments and building common areas need to be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition
- All walls, windows, ceilings, floors, and floor coverings need to be maintained in good repair, free of cracks and holes.

## **If your landlord is not following these standards, here is what to do:**

- Contact ACORN
- Write a letter to your landlord clearly stating the date, your name and apartment, and what needs to be repaired
- If the landlord does not comply, call 811 and ask to speak to a Public Health Inspector about conditions in your apartment.

**REMEMBER: Tenants who make formal complaints to a Public Health Inspector cannot be retaliated against.**



# RENT INCREASES

Increases can happen once every calendar year. Unfortunately, that is the only good news we have when it comes to rents in Alberta.

Rents in Alberta can be raised every year by as much as the landlord wants or the market allows. That's frightening, because **Calgary's rents are rising as fast as anywhere** in Canada.



**Periodic Lease:** The lease automatically renews, usually on a month to month basis. It means you have a right to the place unless evicted or you decide to leave. Your landlord must provide three months notice for a rent increase

**Fixed Term Lease:** Your lease ends at the end of the lease. Tenants who sign fixed-term leases have no guarantee they can stay in their homes when the term ends. Your landlord can raise rents at the end of every lease.

**It's up to the Provincial Government to enact rent controls. Get involved with your local ACORN chapter to push for Rent Control in Alberta!**

# EVICTIIONS

Alberta tenant law is serious about paying rent on time. If you are behind on your rent, the landlord can issue a 14 day eviction notice:

- If you did indeed pay your rent on time, you can dispute the notice by contacting the RTDRS. If you have proof you paid, you will not be evicted.
- If you are behind on rent, you have 14 days to come up with the full cost of the rent owed, or you will be evicted.

## Get an eviction notice?

Check out this QR code for tips and to make sure your eviction is legit.



**It's up to the Provincial Government to enact rent control. JOIN ACORN and push for Rent Control in Alberta!**



# BENEFITS

## Housing

**TRAB:** The Temporary Rent Assistance Benefit provides a rental supplement to households who are below income thresholds:

Unfortunately the provincial government cut funding to the program and the number of people who can receive the benefit is capped.

More info about TRAB with this QR code



## Energy

Unlike other provinces, Alberta does not have a monthly benefit for low-to-moderate income people to help off-set high energy costs. The government had a one-time payout, but it was only given to people on AISH, social assistance, and people earning up to \$180,000 annually with children under 18.



# ENERGY SAVINGS TIPS

**Weather Stripping:** Sealing small gaps in your windows and doors stops cold drafts.

**Clean the Coils:** Clean the dust off the coils on the back of your fridge. Dust keeps the heat in and makes the fridge work harder to keep your food cold!

**Use your Curtains:** If your landlord won't replace your drafty windows, you can keep your curtains closed at night and when not home.

**Installing Window Insulation Film:** Put the film over your windows, which will allow you to see through the windows and stop the drafts at the same time!

**Cooking or reheating a small meal:** Use a toaster oven instead of your oven!

**Unplug Kitchen Appliances and electronics** when not in use.

- Newer toasters, microwaves, and coffee machines use phantom power when not on.
- TV's, cable boxes, and computers can use very large amounts of electricity when not in use.

While tenants don't have full control over their energy use, they do have some. With rising rents and energy costs, every dollar counts! Save energy and keep your money when you can. Companies like EnMax have enough of it!



# ECO-TENANT SURVEY RESULTS

ACORN conducted a survey of 120 household tenants between October 2022 and February 2023 that was focussed on energy poverty, energy use, affordability, and housing standards.

The common theme throughout the survey results is that energy poverty, substandard housing, and energy inefficiency are far too common in Calgary's tenant community.

Here is what Calgary Tenants told us found:



# STAYING WARM?

## 60%

Of tenants surveyed 60% reported having cold apartments in the winter.

### Good news:

Most tenants have heat included in their rents.

### Bad news:

- **43%** rate their heating system as poor to bad
- **12%** have used their ovens to heat their apartments
- **43%** have bought space heaters to deal with the cold

Many tenants still have to pay rising costs to heat their apartments, despite having their heating included in their rent. **Heating your home with space heaters is not only a fire hazard, it's a budgetary hazard!**

### Are we heating the outdoors? YES!

Of the tenants who reported poor to bad heating in their apartments:

- 51.5% have drafty windows;
- 33% report poor insulation

Heating homes through the Albertan winter is what uses the most amount of power in apartment buildings and homes. It is unfortunately also something that tenants have little to no control over.

*"I have bought space heaters, fans, heated blankets and heating pads consistently over the last 10 years to keep warm."*

**Calgary  
Beltline  
tenant**



# SUBSTANDARD HOUSING

Of the 80% of tenants who reported at least one chronic maintenance issue in their unit 58% also reported having heating problems. Of the 20% of tenants who reported having no chronic repair issues in their unit 0.0% reported having bad heating in their units.

Our survey shows a clear relation between having maintenance issues in your building and having heating issues. Having mold or bugs is bad enough, you should not have to be cold as well!

Our survey asked tenants to report the reasons for the poor heating. The most common answer was drafty windows, followed by an old heating system, and then, poor insulation. No matter what the reason is, cold apartments are bad for your health. They are also a clear signal that the building is in need of an energy retrofit and a more efficient heating system.

Fact is that heating the outdoors is bad for tenants, landlords, and the environment. It's too bad there are no government standards for energy efficiency in Calgary Apartments.

Remember, a cold apartment is a clear violation of housing standards. Go to page 4 of the guidebook to see how to file a complaint to Alberta Health Services.

## **BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

# AC IS BECOMING MORE COMMON, AND NEEDED!

84% of tenants say their apartments get either too hot, or way too hot in the summer. But only 8% report having air conditioning.

With weather experts predicting extreme summer heat becoming commonplace, more people will be requiring air conditioning to remain safe in the summers. Energy inefficient buildings coupled with most tenants paying for their own electricity means that increased AC use will be costly, both for the environment and tenant household budgets.

Did you know that some Canadian cities are exploring maximum heat bylaws?

Similar to the minimum heat standards Alberta Health Services is supposed to enforce, this law would make landlords responsible for keeping people cool in the summer.



# BEAT THE HEAT!



# HOUSING JUSTICE IS CLIMATE JUSTICE

## Tenants agree

**Collective action is the way to solve  
the Climate Crisis!!**

# 82%

of tenants want to do more to fight climate change, while 4% aggressively denied climate change was happening at all. That is encouraging!

The results showed that tenants understood that something needs to be done to combat climate change, but that individual acts alone won't solve the problem.

The majority of tenants are eager to work with their landlord and fellow tenants (including ACORN!) to make their buildings more energy efficient to both lower their energy bills AND help reduce their building's impact on the environment!

# ORGANIZE A TENANT UNION IN YOUR BUILDING!

Whether you have maintenance issues in your buildings, are pushing back against large rent increases, or you just want to improve communication amongst tenants in your building, building a tenant union is the way to go!

FOUR easy steps to get started in your buildings:

1. Talk to the people you know in the building - even just 3 or 4 tenants - and develop your organizing team. Choose a date and location for your first meeting
2. Develop an outreach strategy to reach people in your building.
3. Hold your first meeting. Things to discuss:
  - when meetings will be held;
  - what the common issues and concerns are that tenants share
  - drafting a letter to the landlord to announce the tenant union, to request a meeting, and to detail the common issues tenants are having that you want addressed.

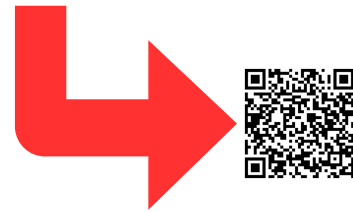
Don't know anyone in your buildings? Talk to your ACORN organizer who is there to help no matter what stage you are at.



# TENANT ACTION

## ACORN's Alberta Needs Tenant Rights Platform

- Rent Control
  - Cap all rent increases
- Rental Registry
  - Rental price of every rental unit in the province tracked in a registry in order to get a fuller understanding of where, how, and if rents are rising to affordable levels
- Eviction Protections
  - Give Alberta tenants full security of tenure and make displacing tenants something that is done as a last resort
- Review the Residential Tenancies Act
  - Perform a full policy review of the RTA where landlords and tenants are equal stakeholders







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