# Australian developer integrates annual 'pay the rent' contributions for First Nations in housing projects



An Australian apartment developer has incorporated a unique 'pay the rent' scheme into its housing projects, which involves an annual contribution to First Nations organisations as part of the owners’ fees. This initiative has been introduced by Nightingale Housing, a not-for-profit development group that has completed 21 projects across Australia, with a significant concentration in Victoria.

One of Nightingale Housing’s notable developments is located in Preston, a suburb in north-east Melbourne. The Preston project includes apartments as small as 27 square metres. Completed last year, these 'teilhaus' apartments have been promoted as having “a fraction of the carbon and a fraction of the cost” compared to typical one-bedroom dwellings. The apartments were sold through a priority ballot system to means-tested first home buyers for $280,000 each. Jeremy McLeod, co-founder of Nightingale Housing, highlighted that the building operates on 100 per cent renewable energy and stated it has “no operational carbon attached to it,” underscoring the environmental focus of the development.

Mr McLeod explained the rationale behind the 'pay the rent' scheme, which requires all apartment owners to pay an annual fee to First Nations groups. Speaking to Never Too Small, he said: “Nightingale has a pay the rent scheme, which means that every resident in this building pays rent annually to the traditional owners, in acknowledgment that this country was stolen, that these lands were never ceded, and that there's no treaty with the traditional owners.”

The developer elaborated on how the scheme operates, stating that residents at Nightingale’s Preston apartments contribute $100 each year to First Nations Organisations or Land Councils through their annual Owners Corporation fees. According to a statement from Nightingale Housing, the company recognises that it builds on land taken from First Nations peoples and operates within an economy influenced by systemic racism. In 2024, residents and commercial tenants at Nightingale developments collectively donated close to $50,000 to the Traditional Owners of the land on which they live and benefit from. The payments are seen as a form of compensation for resources drawn from Indigenous lands.

The developer encouraged others to consider donating to First Nations-owned organisations as part of their acknowledgment of the unceded status of the land. Nightingale Housing aims “to lead the Australian housing, property and development sector towards this simple act of reconciliation that, when adopted across the entire country, could lead to substantial funds for tackling issues of inequality faced by Indigenous Australians.”

The 'pay the rent' scheme parallels a campaign led by the Pay the Rent Grassroots Collective, a charity that urges non-Indigenous Australians to regularly contribute a portion of their income to support First Nations peoples. This campaign has garnered support from notable figures such as feminist author Clementine Ford and Greens Senator Lidia Thorpe. Ms Ford has previously stated, “We need to stop paying lip service to decolonisation and start paying the rent to the first nations people.” Senator Thorpe added, “Pay the rent from grassroots for grassroots. No strings attached to government agenda. It assists sovereign grassroots fight the many campaigns and struggles we face everyday.”

However, the initiative has attracted criticism from conservative commentators. Prue MacSween dismissed Nightingale’s scheme as a “marketing exercise.” Speaking to Daily Mail Australia, she said: “There clearly are some people residing in this country - probably all the YES voters in the failed referendum - who love the idea and have bought into the concept. No one has forced them to purchase a property under this scheme, and they probably wear it as a badge of honour, sleeping soundly in their community of like-minded self-righteous neighbours. Good luck to them.”

Ms MacSween also took issue with the developer’s assertion that it builds on “stolen land,” accusing it of using a “schtick” to distinguish itself and claiming the description of the economy as “bound by systemic racism” was “despicable and tiresome.” She further criticised what she described as an enduring Indigenous industry, alleging significant funds do not effectively reach poor remote communities.

Beyond the Preston project, Nightingale Housing is undertaking three additional developments in Melbourne suburbs Brunswick, Coburg, and Coburg North, all of which are set to implement the 'pay the rent' scheme. The developer’s only New South Wales project, Nightingale Marrickville, focuses on rental units with studios as small as 22 square metres. This development was achieved through a partnership with Fresh Hope Communities, the benevolent arm of Churches of Christ in NSW and ACT, which owns the land. The collaboration enabled the rental prices to be set well below market value, ranging from $395 to $440 per week.

In recent developments, Nightingale Housing engaged the restructuring firm Rodgers Reidy in October to assist with creditor negotiations. The company reportedly owes $410,000 to the Australian Taxation Office. The restructure followed the departure of six directors and the chief executive late last year.

Daily Mail Australia has reached out to Nightingale Housing for further comment on its scheme and financial restructuring.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nightingalehousing.org/approach/principles> - Details the 'pay the rent' scheme where Nightingale apartment owners contribute ~$100 annually through OC fees to Indigenous organizations, as part of reconciliation efforts.
2. <https://www.instagram.com/nightingale.housing/p/DFW_hwNMycW/> - Confirms Nightingale households pay $100 annually to First Nations groups via Owners Corporation fees.
3. <https://www.nightingalehousing.org> - Outlines Nightingale’s not-for-profit model prioritizing sustainability, community, and affordability, aligning with its Preston project’s renewable energy and cost-efficient housing approach.
4. <https://www.nightingalehousing.org/faqs/financing> - Reiterates the $100 annual OC fee contribution to Aboriginal-led organizations ('pay the rent').
5. <https://www.nightingalehousing.org/faqs/general> - Clarifies Nightingale’s geographic focus (including Victoria), smaller apartment sizes, and partnerships with community housing providers for affordable housing allocation.
6. <https://www.nightingalehousing.org/approach/principles> - Repeated URL (no alternative found for detailed project specifics like Preston’s 27 sqm units or renewable energy claims). Original source likely required for exact project data.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14637805/pay-rent-Melbourne.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data