

Working with Tenants who Hoard

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this document is to explain the policy for *Working with Tenants who hoard*. This includes social housing, affordable housing, and transitional housing.

Housing Plus is committed to ensuring that our houses and communities are places where people want to live and feel safe. It is necessary to ensure that the safety of tenants is paramount and that they all live in comfortable conditions.

The Hoarding Policy supplements Housing Plus' fire safety policy arrangements and contributes to the health and safety management system established and in place.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance in managing tenants and household members who are identified as people with hoarding tendencies.

Scope

- This policy applies to all clients (including applicants, former tenants and existing tenants) who accept accommodation in properties owned or managed by Housing Plus
- This policy applies to all Housing Plus properties
- This policy describes the organization's objectives and policies regarding *Working with Tenants who hoard*

References

Housing Plus will start a tenancy in accordance with:

- a) The Housing Act 2001
- b) Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and Regulations
- c) Housing Plus Policies.

Both the client and Housing Plus have rights and obligations under the above Acts, the residential tenancy agreement and this policy.

Definitions

Term: Hoarding Disorder

Definition: Hoarding Disorder is a psychiatric condition (Diagnostic Statistical Manual V) characterised by excessive collecting and extreme inability to discard worthless objects. In some cases, it can lead to squalid conditions that interfere with normal living, which in turn can affect the health, safety and quality of life for the sufferer and those who live with them, their neighbours and the community.

Responsibilities

Executive

- 1) Establish policy objectives

Management

- 1) Develops policies and procedures to achieve policy objectives
- 2) Coordinates and implements policy for *Working with Tenants who hoard*

- 3) Oversees training and ensures adoption by all employees responsible for *Working with Tenants who hoard*
- 4) Reviews policy and procedure on biannual basis to ensure compliance with legislation and adopts accordingly

Employee responsibilities

- 1) Understand and comply with Housing Plus policies regarding *Working with Tenants who hoard*

Policy

Tenant Rights and Obligations

Tenants in New South Wales have rights under the Residential Tenancies Act 2010.

They also have obligations which include:

- To care for the premises
- To pay for any damage caused by the tenant or their guests
- To report the need for any repairs or maintenance
- Not to make alterations or additions without the landlord's permission
- Not to alter, remove or add a lock or security device without the landlord's consent (except in certain domestic violence situations)
- Not to cause or permit a nuisance
- Not to interfere with the peace, comfort or privacy of neighbours.

Working with tenants who hoard

It is recognised amongst professionals that work with hoarding that agency intervention has a low success rate and that reoccurrence of hoarding is high.

Multi-agency approaches are often the most effective and long-term support is recommended.

Hoarding can be brought to Housing Plus staff attention through many different ways including:

- Tenancy visits
- Maintenance visits
- Complaints from neighbours
- External agency contact
- Fire service initiatives.

When a hoarding issue is first identified, review the tenant management record to see if a previous issue has been identified. It is important to see if any support agencies are involved with the tenant already.

Undertaking an Assessment of a Tenant with Hoarding Issues

It is important to use all the avenues available to you to undertake an assessment of the tenant's care of the property.

Housing Plus will utilise the Hoarding Screening Assessment Form as a standard tool that can be utilised during routine property inspections. This tool will provide an initial assessment to inform (Service name) as it plans intervention with the tenant to manage the hoarding or squalor identified.

Housing Plus may also utilise the Clutter Image Rating Scale and the Environmental Cleanliness Clutter Scale as a means of accurately recording the extent of hoarding or squalor at a given point in time within a property.

Support

Where family and friends are already involved and willing to cooperate, their assistance can be valuable and it can give insight into the tenant's situation. It is important to manage this sensitively. The priority has to remain on engaging with the tenant personally where ever possible.

Where an individual is already engaging with a support service, work with the tenant and support service to establish a discussion about the hoarding issues.

Where an individual is not engaged with a support service, but appears to be open to accepting a referral for support, explore with them a referral to a relevant support service for assessment.

Short, sharp solutions might resolve immediate issues that need to be dealt with but tend not to be sustainable. Hoarding behaviour can often return if the underlying cause is not dealt with.

Some support solutions include:

- Development of an action plan to guide planning and intervention
- Establishment of a support package
- More frequent visits from the tenancy manager
- Regular updates / meetings with relevant agencies
- Homecare or health care package
- Counselling support
- Cognitive behaviour therapy (such as the Buried in Treasures program available through some areas in NSW)
- Assistance with moving home or property adaption
- A home safety check by the local fire service
- Power of attorney provision.

Where support is offered and refused, it is important to note this in the tenant's records as this may be crucial evidence later if legal action is required. A joint meeting with any agencies attempting to offer support to the tenant might be useful at this stage to explore options.

Enforcement

In some cases, enforcement action may be required in line with the Residential Tenancy Act 2010 (NSW).

This may be to:

- gain access to the property
- examine / execute necessary work
- gain possession of the property.

Enforcement action should only be taken where:

- other action has been attempted and refused or failed
- the case poses serious and immediate risks that require a legal resolution.

Partnership working

Where the tenant is already known to one or more agency, establish a meeting to discuss concerns and explore possible action, including the tenant in discussions.

Where the tenant is not engaged with any support services, with the support of the Tenancy Officer or equivalent, explore referral to relevant support services.

Fire and Rescue NSW should be informed of any high risk hoarder, especially if they are within a property which may affect others, such as an apartment block. Referrals should be made through the Team Leader or equivalent.