

POLICY TITLE: AHA Establishing & Maintaining Tenancies Policy

Policy Category:	Tenancy and Property Management - AHA
Date Authorised by Exec:	11 February 2019
Review Responsibility:	Executive General Managers Housing North and South, GM Mallee
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Related Policies:	Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy, AHA Access to Services of the Organisation Policy, AHA Planned Maintenance Policy, AHA Rent Calculation Policy; Ending Tenancies Policy; Eligibility and Allocations Policy; Preventing Debt and Recovering Arrears Policy; Ending Tenancies Policy; Centrelink EVOR Policy; Rent First Strategy
Related SOP:	
Related Forms:	Affordability Checker, Tenancy Management Plan, Tenancy Management Framework
Related Standards:	National Community Housing Standards 1.2 Establishing and Maintaining Tenancies, Residential Tenancies Act 1997

PURPOSE:

To outline Haven; Home, Safe (HHS) Affordable Housing Association (AHA)’s approach to establishing and maintaining tenancies to ensure the best outcome for tenants.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

One of our key objectives is to provide a range of sustainable and affordable housing options for people who are homeless or at risk of a housing crisis and eligible low-income Victorians.

HHS recognises the importance of sustaining tenancies for the wellbeing of tenants and to ensure the AHA’s ongoing financial viability. HHS is tenant-focussed and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

POLICY:

1. Introduction

HHS strives to ensure successful tenancies through an open and transparent operation and a tenant focused approach. We aim to ensure that all our tenants and potential tenants have equal access to our services, providing a safeguard for the most vulnerable. In accordance with our Rent First Strategy, it is our intention to sustain tenancies rather than terminate them. Early intervention is essential in achieving this.

Our Policy is to focus on practical ways of sustaining tenancies by working in partnership with other agencies to achieve an optimal outcome for our clients.

We will always operate within the agency’s rights and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA) and will proactively seek to develop good relationships with tenants and to facilitate open communication.

2. New tenants

- 2.1. We will make every effort to ensure that the property is suitable for the household's physical needs. We will identify vulnerability prior to the start of a tenancy using the tenancy management framework and the affordability checker.
- 2.2. HHS will ensure a Condition Report is completed prior to occupancy and tenants know their rights to comment on the Condition Report if they disagree with any point/s.
- 2.3. Direct Debit or Centrepay deductions are the preferred methods of payment. Forms will be completed by the tenant at sign-up.
- 2.4. Tenants will be informed at sign up of the feedback mechanisms available to them and will be encouraged to provide comment and opinions on HHS services and how they could be improved.
- 2.5. New tenants will receive a comprehensive sign up pack outlining both the tenants' responsibilities and those of HHS. The signup pack will contain statutory information, local information and information pertaining to HHS policy and procedure.
- 2.6. All new tenants will receive a welcome letter within the first week of their tenancy commencing.
- 2.7. We aim to carry out a property inspection for new tenants 3 months after the commencement of the tenancy and again at 9 months. Tenants identified as vulnerable will also receive either an agreed home visit or office interview at 6 months.
- 2.8. To ensure that rent calculations are transparent and understood HHS will conduct annual Rent Reviews on the anniversary of the tenancy and provide the tenant with a clear explanation as to how the rent is calculated against their income.
- 2.9. General Information will be updated regularly and in a format that is easy to understand and delivered through the HHS website, in Tenancy Information Packs and at sign-up.

3. Assessing vulnerability for applicants and new tenants

- 3.1. Individuals may be considered vulnerable for several different reasons, some for just short periods and some long term or permanently. Some examples of situations that can result in a person becoming vulnerable are:
 - history of homelessness
 - drug or alcohol addictions
 - history of rent arrears
 - literacy problems or learning difficulties
 - mental health problems
 - elderly becoming infirm
 - difficulty reading, speaking or understanding English

- major life changes such as bereavement, relationship breakdown or ill health
- domestic violence
- Disability

3.2. Factors such as a tenant's financial resilience and financial exclusion may impact on their ability to maintain their rent payments. The Affordability Checker balances an applicant's income and expenditure against the rent calculation to identify those applicants who may have trouble sustaining their rent payments.

3.3. Applicants will be assessed using the Tenancy Management Framework as a guide. If after assessment, the applicant is assessed as posing either a red or amber risk, an offer of tenancy will be at the discretion of the Executive GM/GM Housing in accordance with the Eligibility and Allocations Policy.

3.4. If a financial risk is highlighted, an offer will be conditional upon a successful referral for money advice/debt counselling prior to sign up.

3.5. Full details of the process for dealing with new tenant risk assessments can be found in the supporting Tenancy Management Framework.

4. Assessing vulnerability of existing tenants

4.1. Assessing vulnerability is not limited to new tenancies. Tenancy and Property Managers are expected to identify potential vulnerability at other key points, such as: -

- reports of harassment or abuse towards the household
- reports of neighbour nuisance by the household
- rent arrears and other debt problems
- poorly maintained home and/or poor hygiene standards
- hospitalisation or period in prison

4.2. The tenancy management framework enables Tenancy and Property Managers to ask the tenant appropriate questions to assess any additional support or tenancy management requirements and, if the tenant falls within a high-risk category, agree a tenancy management Plan with the tenant.