



## Working with Tenants Who Hoard

Policy Category	1. Tenancy	Policy Number	1.34
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### Purpose:

The primary purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to client services staff in managing tenants and household members who are identified as people with hoarding tendencies. It is anticipated such a response will create more sustainable and positive outcomes for tenants as they are able to successfully manage their tenancy. This document applies to all staff members of Homes Out West (HOW).

### Policy:

HOW 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 HOW's fire safety policy arrangements and contributes to the health and safety management system established and in place.

### Definitions:

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.

Relevant Service Standards:	National Community Housing Standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard 1.2 – Establishing and maintaining tenancies</li> <li>• Standard 1.4 – Ending tenancies</li> <li>• Standard 3.1 – Tenant Rights</li> <li>• Standard 3.4 – Access to services of the organisation</li> <li>• Standard 3.5 – Confidentiality and privacy</li> <li>• Standard 3.6 – Complaints and appeals</li> <li>• Standard 4.1 – Tenants' access to support</li> <li>• Standard 4.3 – Providing housing information, advice and referral</li> </ul> Legislation
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW)</li> <li>• Residential Tenancies Regulation 2010 (NSW)</li> <li>• Housing Act 2001</li> <li>• Community Housing Providers (Adoption of National Law) Act 2012 (NSW)</li> </ul> National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) Performance Outcome and Performance Requirement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Outcome 1: Tenant and Housing Services</li> </ul>
Related HOW Policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing and Maintaining Tenancies Policies</li> <li>• Ending Tenancies Policy</li> <li>• Tenant Rights Policy</li> <li>• Confidentiality and Privacy Policy</li> <li>• Complaints and Appeals Policies</li> <li>• Supporting Tenants Policies</li> <li>• Working with the Community Policy</li> </ul>
Related HOW Forms & Internal Documents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoarding Screening Assessment Form</li> <li>• Clutter Image Rating Scale</li> <li>• Environmental Cleanliness and Clutter Scale</li> <li>• Tenancy Response Plan Template</li> <li>• Support Agreement</li> <li>• Support Referral Register</li> <li>• Resource Directory</li> <li>• Home Visit Risk Assessment</li> </ul>

### **Procedure and Guidelines:**

It is recognised amongst professionals that work with hoarding that agency intervention has a low success rate and that recurrence of hoarding is high. Multi-agency approaches are often the most effective and long-term support is recommended.

HOW staff will utilise the pathway located in Appendix 1 to respond to tenants identified with hoarding concerns.

Hoarding can be brought to HOW 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, Client Service Officer's (CSO's) will 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 HOW to undertake an assessment of the tenant's care of the property.

HOW 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 HOW as it plans intervention with the tenant to manage the hoarding or squalor identified.

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

## INTERVENTION

### 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 wherever possible.

Where an individual is already engaging with a support service, the CSO will 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, the CSO will explore with them a referral to a relevant support service for assessment.

Short, sharp (punitive) 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 (Tenancy Response Plan)
- Establishment of a support package
- More frequent visits from the CSO
- 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 HOW decides to proceed to the tribunal to seek a Specific Performance Order (SPO) or termination. A joint meeting with any agencies attempting to offer support to the tenant might be useful at this stage to explore options.

### Enforcement

Prior to sending breach letters or enacting any enforcement action, HOW will send a letter inviting the tenant to address the hoarding issues.

In some cases, enforcement action may be required in line with the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) and may include proceeding to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT).

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 tenancy poses serious and immediate risks that require a legal resolution (in the below flowchart, this relates to 'emergency access procedures').

#### 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, the CSO will explore referral/s 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.

■ Managing hoarding pathway

