



Tenant Rights and Participation

Policy Category	1. Tenancy	Policy Number	1.27
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Position Responsible	HOW Executive	Scheduled Review Date	June 2022

Purpose:

This policy outlines the rights and responsibilities of tenants and applicants in their interactions with Homes Out West. It also outlines the way Homes Out West will engage with tenants and encourage tenant participation. It applies to all tenants, applicants, staff, and contractors.

Policy:

Homes Out West (HOW) will ensure that the rights of tenants and applicants are upheld in all aspects of the organisation's operations and that they are supported to exercise their rights and enhance their lives. HOW will also expect tenants to fulfil their responsibilities as stated in the Residential Tenancies Act (2010).

HOW will use a range of strategies to engage with tenants to achieve the following outcomes:

- Seek feedback from tenants
- Increase tenant engagement at all levels of the organisation
- Build rapport with tenants
- Highlight tenants' valued status as consumers of the services HOW provides.

Our commitment to tenant participation includes that we will:

- value input from our tenants and use their input to improve our services
- regularly tell tenants about opportunities to get involved and actively encourage such involvement
- help tenants to get involved in projects, activities and programs that help them to improve their lives.

Relevant Service Standards:	National Community Housing Standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 3.1 – Tenant Rights • Standard 3.2 Tenant Participation Legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) • Residential Tenancies Regulation 2010 (NSW) • Housing Act 2001 • Community Housing Providers (Adoption of National Law) Act 2012 (NSW)
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	National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) Performance Outcome and Performance Requirement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Outcome 1: Tenant and Housing Services
Related HOW Policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints and Appeals Policy • Tenant Access to Support Policy • Tenant Access to Advocacy Policy • Planned Maintenance Policy
Related HOW Forms & Internal Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Handbook • Tenant Engagement Strategy

Procedure and Guidelines:

Tenant Rights

All Homes Out West (HOW) staff and contractors will be committed to supporting the rights of tenants and applicants at all times, including but not limited to, the following:

- To be treated with respect, in a fair and non-discriminatory manner at all times
- To safe and secure housing at all times
- To be informed of (and have the opportunity to be involved in), decisions concerning the management of the organisation
- To form an independent representative body
- To have access to their individual records at a time to be negotiated during normal office hours
- To complain about services provided by the organisation
- To appeal against any decision taken by the organisation regarding their housing/application for housing
- To be fully informed of their rights and responsibilities as community housing tenants
- To use advocacy services.

Tenant Responsibilities:

Tenant and applicants will be expected to fulfil the following responsibilities:

- Meet their requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act (2010)
- Pay rent, water and any other charges on time
- Keep the property in reasonable condition allowing for wear and tear
- Respect staff and tenants of HOW
- Not engage in any behaviour that could disturb or cause distress to neighbours or staff
- Not engage in any abusive, threatening behaviour or any type of conduct that could be discriminatory or considered as harassment
- Not engage in any illegal activity at their property
- Supply HOW with all proof of evidence requirements (including income evidence of the household) on time, as requested.

All tenants will be clearly informed of their rights and responsibilities at the time of signing the lease agreement and throughout their tenancy.

The Tenant Handbook will include tenants' rights and responsibilities and will be provided to, and gone through with, all tenants at the commencement of their lease.

All tenants and applicants will be informed of their rights and responsibilities in all written correspondence from the organisation.

Tenant Engagement

Tenant engagement is critical to the improvement of service delivery and strategic planning for the organisation.

Tenant engagement includes tenants being able to provide feedback in numerous informal ways including during home visits, phone calls and face to face discussions. However, there are a range of ways that HOW will actively encourage tenant engagement and participation.

HOW will engage with tenants using the following strategies:

Tenant Engagement Strategy

HOW will seek the input from tenants into the development and monitoring of the Tenant Engagement Strategy. This may include:

- Formulating a Tenant's Advisory group/s to be actively involved in the development and monitoring of the strategy
- Seeking input at tenant forums
- Circulating surveys and questionnaires
- Seeking input during routine communication such as maintenance surveys, etc.

The focus of the strategy will be to have projects/tasks/targets that will seek to improve tenant lives and strengthen local communities. In particular, the projects/tasks/targets will seek to deliver:

- tenancies and marginalised (or vulnerable) neighbourhoods functioning in a more sustainable manner
- quality of life outcomes for communities of interest i.e. older people, Aboriginal tenants, etc.
- a reduction in social isolation by assisting tenants to become more connected to their communities
- an increase in the employability of tenants through increased access to education, training and employment opportunities
- support for families to stay together
- an increase in the overall health and wellbeing of tenants
- assist social housing tenants to enter pathways to more independent and suitable housing options.

The Tenant Engagement Strategy will include ways in which tenants can have active input into the decision making processes at HOW and the strategic direction of the organisation.

Home Improvements

HOW will involve tenants in the physical improvement of their homes and/or the complex of dwellings managed by HOW in accordance with the Planned Maintenance Policy – Tenant Initiated Upgrades and Home Modifications.

This will include, but is not limited to, giving tenants the opportunity to select from a range of options for upgrades undertaken at their home. For example: paint colour; type/style of kitchen upgrades; floor coverings etc.

In relation to a complex of dwellings this will include, but is not limited to, having input into the design/maintenance of communal gardens and other communal areas; lighting; access to communal parking etc.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

HOW will conduct tenant satisfaction surveys on an annual basis. The surveys will be independently conducted by an external provider. All tenants will have an opportunity to participate. The survey results will be used to:

- monitor tenant satisfaction
- engage with tenants
- seek feedback on specific areas
- inform HOW policy and operational planning processes
- improve service provision.

Tenant Forums

HOW will conduct tenant forums in all service locations twice per year in order to foster tenant involvement.

There will be two main focuses for the forums:

1. A workshop style presentation and discussion that provides tenants with the opportunity to have input into the following questions:
 - a. What is HOW doing well?
 - b. What areas can HOW improve upon?
 - c. What suggestions do you have for improvement?
2. Information sessions on topics of interest to tenants. This may include inviting representatives from external agencies to attend and present information.

It is recognised that there are other advantages of tenant forums. These include, but are not limited to:

- Assisting to break down social isolation
- Encourage tenant connections
- Support to link tenants to social events/activities/groups in their local area
- Supporting tenants to advocate for local area quality of life improvements i.e. better availability of community services, improved public transportation services, improved neighbourhood safety etc.
- Assisting tenants to access local employment, training and educational opportunities.

HOW will collate feedback from each forum in order to address concerns and make appropriate changes to procedures/service delivery as considered appropriate/necessary.

Newsletter

HOW will publish a newsletter on a quarterly basis. Newsletter content will include:

- Helpful tips for tenants
- Organisational updates and contact information
- Major issues or relevant information in the communities in HOW's portfolio
- Policy updates
- Human interest stories
- Social housing sector information.

The newsletter will be mailed out to all tenants and made available on the HOW website.

Complaints and Appeals

HOW will ensure tenants and applicants are aware of their right to lodge complaints and appeals. Complaints are considered to be a means to engage with tenants and

applicants and effect improvement in the services HOW provides. Appeals are an effective way for tenants and applicants to engage with decisions that are made.

Tenant Rent Statements

HOW will provide tenants with their rent statement on a regular basis and as requested to ensure they have a record of their rent payments and are clear on the current status of any debt.

Tenant Competitions

HOW will hold regular tenant competitions including the '*Impressive Gardener of the Year*' competition. On occasions and when/if the opportunity arises, HOW will have responsibility for a community garden/s and encourage tenants to engage with such local community gardens. Such involvement can be included in the competition.

Other competitions such as colouring competitions will be held on an occasional basis.

Annual General Meeting/Annual Report

Tenants are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and receive an Annual Report. The AGM is an opportunity for tenants to meet members of the HOW Board and other stakeholders. The Annual Report provides an update on the organisation's operations, strategic directions and financial status at the end of the financial year.

Regular Face to Face Outreach Visits

HOW will conduct regular outreach visits to the more remote service locations. The visits will be used to meet and conduct interviews with applicants, tenants and provide general information about our service provision. These visits will also broaden our agency connections and provide the opportunity to collect information from other service providers that may be relevant to housing provision.

Inter-Agency Liaison

HOW will participate in communication and liaison with external agencies including service providers. This will include attendance and participation in forums and meetings, arrange *meet and greet* sessions and routine communication. HOW will ensure that particular focus is on engaging with Aboriginal organisations in locations with a high level of Aboriginal tenants and Aboriginal specific housing (such as Aboriginal Housing Office properties).

HOW will also seek approval from tenants and applicants to refer them to service providers for additional supports as required. Referrals and resulting Support Agreements will be recorded for reporting purposes.