



HOMES
OUT WEST

TENANT HANDBOOK



My client services officer is

**After Hours Emergency Maintenance
1300 038 233**

Homes Out West

Deniliquin
139 End Street
Deniliquin NSW 2710
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CONTENTS

Getting Involved	2
Who Makes The Decisions?	3
Who Controls Our Activities?	3
How Do We Operate?	3
About Homes Out West	3
Our Values	4
Your Rights	4
Your Responsibilities	5
Rent	6
Paying Your Rent	7
Rent Statements	7
Rental Bonds	8
Property Condition Report	9
Moving In	9
Property Inspections	10
Pets	10
Modifications	11
Adding Extras	11
Visitors And Relatives	11
Reporting Damages and Requesting Maintenance/Repairs	12
Repairs & Maintenance	12
Timeframes	13
Satisfaction	13
Tenant Transfers	14
Moving Out	16
Complaints, Appeals and Feedback	17
Appeals	19
Feedback	19
Useful Contacts	20

WELCOME TO HOMES OUT WEST (HOW)

On behalf of the team at Homes Out West, we warmly welcome you to your new tenancy. This handbook is designed to ensure our tenants are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and provide helpful information throughout your tenancy.

If you have questions or concerns during your tenancy with Homes Out West, please contact your Client Services Officer for assistance.

Getting involved

Homes Out West is proud to engage with our tenants and communities and involve them in shaping our services.

We hold annual Tenant Forums which allow all tenants to meet staff, hear about what is happening in the organisation, and express any concerns they may have. Tenants are also invited to attend the Annual General Meetings, which are usually held in November.

Homes Out West publishes a quarterly newsletter that includes a range of useful information including non-rent account refund dates, recipes, home and yard care tips, upcoming events and Forums, and services offered by other relevant agencies. Tenants are encouraged to contact their Client Service Officer for any contributions they would like to make to the newsletter.

Tenants may be asked to respond to surveys, attend tenant groups or be invited to participate in any special celebrations or events the organisation hosts.

We welcome any feedback tenants have during their time with us.

For more information, contact your Client Service Officer.

ABOUT HOMES OUT WEST

Homes Out West is a registered community housing provider which has been operating in the south western Riverina region of NSW since 1984. In the earlier years, the organisation was known as Deniliquin Community Tenancy Scheme. A government initiative in recent years to enhance community housing has seen Homes Out West grow significantly, with the transfer of all Housing NSW properties in the region to Homes Out West's management.

Today, with our offices located in Deniliquin and Albury, Homes Out West manages more than 400 properties in communities along the Murray River corridor from Albury to the South Australian border.

Who makes the decisions?

Homes Out West is governed by a community based Board of Directors. Directors are selected because of their skills and extensive knowledge. Implementation of the strategic direction and service provision are managed by an Executive Team, ably assisted by a professional team of staff in Deniliquin and Albury.

Who controls our activities?

The Housing Act and Housing Regulation 2009 provide the legislative framework for Homes Out West's operations. The NSW Registrar of Community Housing monitors our activities regularly to ensure compliance with the Act. We also have a funding agreement with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

How do we operate?

Homes Out West offers long term housing options under the Residential Tenancy Act. Applicants apply for housing and are assessed for eligibility, which is determined by NSW Government policy. Appropriate housing is then provided dependent on vacancies and movement within current housing stock. We welcome all people and cultures to our service.

We see a collaborative future with community service providers, businesses and other groups as we strive to encourage tenants in affordable housing to be aspirational, not generational.

Our values

Respect – We are people focused and respect the diversity, equality and rights of people we come in contact with

Community – We work as part of the community on common issues

Professionalism – Our work and interactions are based on respect, integrity, transparency, and accountability

Quality – We strive for quality and equity in our work, our houses and people's lives

Wellbeing – We strive for long term health, safety and wellbeing of people we come in contact with

Your rights

As a Homes Out West tenant, you have the right:

- To be treated with respect in a fair and non-discriminatory manner
- To safe and secure housing
- To be informed of, and have the opportunity to be involved in, decisions concerning HOW
- To have access to your own information
- To complain and appeal decisions.

Your responsibilities

As a Homes Out West tenant, you are expected to:

- Pay your rent on time
- Pay your water usage bills and any maintenance charges
- Keep to your agreement to pay off your Bond, if you are required to do so
- Take appropriate care of your property and leave it in the same condition as when you first started your lease
- Report the need for maintenance and repairs, including smoke alarms
- Not alter or make additions to the property without consent from HOW
- Not interfere with the peace, comfort and privacy of your neighbours
- Not use the property for any illegal activity
- To give correct notice when you intend to leave (minimum 21 days) and provide a forwarding address
- Treat our employees respectfully
- Contact your Client Services Officer if your income or household make up changes
- Provide feedback about the quality of our service so we can continue to meet your needs.

RENT

The rent you pay is calculated according to a formula that is set by Housing NSW. You may also be eligible to apply for a rental rebate or subsidy. The rebate is based on a percentage of the entire household's gross assessable income, plus 100% of their maximum entitlement for Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Income	Rate
Tenant and live-in partner	25%
Other household member 21 years and over	25%
Other household member 18 to 20 years (inclusive)	15%
Other household member <18 years	Nil
Family Tax Benefit Part A and Part B	15%
Rental Supplement	Assessment Rate
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	100%

If you do not provide a statement of income for all household members, you will be charged market rent for your property. To ensure you are paying the appropriate amount of rent and receiving the correct subsidy, Homes Out West will conduct Rent Reviews twice a year. You will be notified when the Reviews are coming up.

If your circumstances change between Rent Reviews, you are required to notify Homes Out West **immediately**.

Paying your rent

Paying your rent on time is your responsibility as part of the lease agreement you sign at the beginning of your tenancy.

Where possible, we encourage tenants to use the Centrepay Deduction System for rent payments. This is where rent deductions are taken directly from your Centrelink payment and paid to Homes Out West. The system ensures you don't have to worry about making payments while you are away, unwell or unable to attend your bank to make a deposit.

If you cannot utilise Centrepay, we encourage you to establish a direct debit where your rent is regularly paid directly to Homes Out West.

If neither of these options are suitable, we can provide you with a deposit book to deposit your payments at your Bank.

If at any time you are having problems paying your rent, please contact your Client Services Officer as soon as possible to discuss the problem. Where possible, we will make arrangements to assist you in maintaining your tenancy. With your permission, we may also refer you to a support service.

If you do not contact us or do not respond to attempts to contact you, Homes Out West will commence rent arrears recovery proceedings against you, which may result in the termination of your lease. These proceedings take place in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT), with all orders issued legal and binding.

Rent statements

You can request a rent statement at any time during your tenancy.

Your rent is calculated on a daily basis; therefore the amount stated on your rent statement may differ depending on the day the statement is sent.

Rental bonds

A rental bond is required to be paid by tenants who lease Homes Out West properties.

You have the option to lodge your bond directly with NSW Fair Trading through the Rental Bonds Online (RBO) service. Homes Out West will offer you the RBO service before accepting your bond. To use the RBO service, Homes Out West must first send you an email inviting you to open your own RBO account. Once you've set up your account, you can pay your bond using a credit card or BPAY.

If you prefer, you can pay your bond directly to Homes Out West – it's your choice. We will then lodge your bond on your behalf with NSW Fair Trading, you will receive a receipt in the mail from them, stating your name, amount lodged and the address of your property.

The Rental Bond Board hold the money until such time as you move out of your property. Provided there is not outstanding rent or non-rent charges on your account, and the property has been left in a similar condition to what it was leased to you in (excluding fair wear and tear), you will receive your bond back.

Once you have been allocated a property, a Client Services Officer will go through a lease agreement with you. As this is a binding legal document, you must ensure you fully understand what you are signing.

Once all the paperwork has been signed and finalised, you will be given a set of keys for your new property. Homes Out West does not keep spare copies of any keys; if you lock yourself out of home or lose your keys, you will be charged for a replacement set. Homes Out West can arrange a locksmith in these instances. You are not permitted to change the locks to any Homes Out West property without written permission from the organisation.


Before moving in, we will provide information about My Connect who will assist you to connect your utilities. Alternatively you will need to contact a utility company of your choosing to get the electricity connected in your name.

Property condition report

A property condition report is an important part of your tenancy agreement. It outlines the condition of your property at the beginning of your tenancy; Homes Out West uses the report as the base for property inspections and at the end of your tenancy. It is in your best interest to complete the report accurately.

As a Homes Out West tenant, you are responsible for taking care of your property and leaving it in a similar condition as to when you moved in, excluding fair wear and tear.

When you first move in to your property, ensure that you review your Property Condition Report. We ask you to check each item on the report and mark the report as to whether you agree or disagree. You must return this report to our office within seven days of moving in to your property. We will also provide you with a copy of the report for your records.



If you identify an urgent or emergency maintenance problem, please notify your Client Services Officer immediately.

Property inspections

Homes Out West carries out property inspections at least twice a year to check you are settling into your property, hear any maintenance concerns you may have and ensure that you are treating the property correctly. You will be given at least seven days notice, in writing, before an inspection takes place. We ask that you are at home during these inspections, which usually take around 15 minutes to complete.

When you move out of your home, we will conduct an outgoing inspection. You should attend this inspection.

Pets

Tenants are allowed to keep pets in some Homes Out West capital properties. Generally, pets are not permitted in leasehold or managed properties.

All tenants are required to seek written permission from Homes Out West before getting a pet. If we agree, you will be required to sign an agreement that notifies us of the pets you will be keeping at your property. This is a requirement of the Residential Tenancy Agreement. Any breach of this agreement may result in action being taken against you at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT).

Pet owners are expected to take appropriate care of all animals at their property. This includes providing the animal with food, clean water and shelter. Failure to do so will result in a report being made to the local Council and/or RSPCA.

If you have a dog at your property, you may be asked to restrain it while Homes Out West staff or tradespersons are at your property.

Modifications

If your situation changes because of health or disability, we may be able to modify your home to better suit your needs. You will be required to submit an assessment from a doctor or occupational therapist, which will then be reviewed by Homes Out West to determine if the modifications are possible.

For more information, please contact your Client Services Officer.

Adding extras

Anything you wish to add to your property must be approved by Homes Out West. This includes:

- Satellite dishes for Foxtel or similar
- Shade structures and carports, including shade sails
- Air conditioning
- Painting.

Visitors and relatives

Homes Out West understands that you might have visitors, friends or relatives staying with you from time to time. Generally, if a guest stays in your home for longer than four weeks, we will assume they have moved in with you and will include them in your rent calculations.

Under the Residential Tenancy Agreement, you are responsible for the actions of any person you allow on your property, including any damage or nuisance they cause.

Your tenancy agreement states how many people are entitled to live in your home. If this changes, you need to seek permission from Homes Out West as it will mean a change to your rent and may cause overcrowding in your property.

REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

Homes Out West is responsible for maintenance and repairs on the properties we own (known as capital properties). For other properties, we will notify and negotiate with the landlords for the properties we lease (known as leasehold properties) or manage for other organisations.

Reporting damages and requesting maintenance/repairs

To report damages or request maintenance/repairs, contact the Homes Out West offices on 03 5881 4182 or 02 6021 8899 as soon as possible during office hours. We will arrange for the repairs to be carried out within our time frames (see below) and ask your permission to give the tradesperson your contact details so they can arrange to complete the work.

Please have the following information ready when making your call:

- Your name and address
- The nature of the maintenance problem
- If you have reported the problem previously
- What time a tradesperson can get access to your property.

Timeframes

Type of Repair	Example	Timeframe
Emergency	Blocked toilet, serious roof leak, storm damage, break down of essential service eg hot water. Any other issue that leaves the property unsafe or unsecure.	24 hours
Urgent	Leaking tap outside, window broken, broken light switch.	Five days
Routine	Hole in flyscreen, gutter leak, broken tiles, internal door won't close.	28 days

If the damage is a result of tenant activity beyond fair wear and tear, you will be responsible for the cost of the repair.

If you are in a leasehold property, some agents/owners can take longer than our timeframes. In this instance, please contact our offices to notify us of the delay.

For any emergency after hours maintenance, please phone 1300 038 233. This phone is attended by a single staff member on call. If your call is not immediately answered, please leave a message with your name, a contact phone number and a description of your problem and the staff member on call will return your call.

Satisfaction

If you are unhappy with the quality of the repair or how you were treated by the tradesperson, please contact your Client Services Officer.

If the tradesperson does not turn up to do the work required within the specified timeframe, please contact our offices.

TENANT TRANSFERS


Tenants have a right to request a transfer to another property if their requirement for housing changes through the course of their tenancy.

Tenants requesting a transfer must complete a Housing Transfer Application form that is available at the Homes Out West offices. We can also mail this form to you.

To be considered, you must be able to demonstrate that you are still eligible for social housing and have no current outstanding debts or rental arrears with the organisation.

Homes Out West will only approve transfer applications where the tenant is able to demonstrate the need for rehousing due to:

- (a) health or medical problems which can be alleviated by the provision of alternative housing;
- (b) access to required services, including employment, which can only be resolved by a relocation to a more convenient location;
- (c) a change in the number of permanent household members which has resulted in the tenant's current accommodation being unsuitable;
- (d) issues of harassment, vilification or violence which can be alleviated by the provision of alternative housing;
- (e) for cultural reasons, where tenants are isolated and there is a lack of local provision of support.



If your application for a transfer is approved you will be notified in writing and placed on a waiting list. Our current policy in the allocation process is to allocate to approved transfer requests first.

If you are allocated a new property it will be treated as a new tenancy and you will be required to sign a new lease. You will also be responsible for all cleaning and repairs required at the property which you are vacating.

Your previously paid rental bond may be transferred to the new property once the End of Tenancy inspection has been finalised and there are no outstanding amounts for repairs, but may need to be adjusted to reflect the property size of the new property. If you are eligible for a rent subsidy, the subsidy will be reviewed and a new rental amount calculated.

MOVING OUT

If you decide to move out of the property you are leasing, you must notify our office within the appropriate timeframe. Generally, this is at least 21 days. If you leave without telling us, we consider the property abandoned and will commence legal proceedings against you to recoup any costs you are liable for.

After receiving your notice, your Client Services Officer will discuss your rent and non-rent accounts and will arrange for an outgoing inspection to take place. You should attend this inspection.

You will be asked to provide a forwarding address and contact number so your Client Services Officer can finalise your tenancy.

When you move out, it is your responsibility to ensure the house is thoroughly cleaned, all personal items and rubbish are removed and the lawns and garden are left neat and tidy. Don't forget to also redirect your mail.

If the property is not clean or the yard is not neat and tidy, we will be required to contact a tradesperson and charge you for the work.

You must return all keys for the property to your Client Services Officer. **You are liable for the rent of the property until you have returned your keys.**

COMPLAINTS, APPEALS AND FEEDBACK

Complaints

Applicants, tenants and stakeholders have the right to complain and will not be disadvantaged or penalised for lodging a complaint.

Applicants and tenants have the right to appeal decisions and will not be disadvantaged by lodging an appeal.

Complaint and appeals can be received through a variety of different avenues. This includes:

- Letters and emails sent to Homes Out West;
- Matters raised verbally with Homes Out West staff, either in person or by telephone.

All complaints and appeals are forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer and assigned to the appropriate staff member. All incidents are investigated considering such criteria as severity, complexity, impact and the need and possibility of immediate action.

After considering all the facts available the staff member handling the complaint will make a determination from the following options:

- Accept the complaint and take rectification action without offering redress
- Accept the complaint and offer redress
- Offer redress without accepting the complaint; or
- Reject the complaint and provide reasons for the rejection.

Offers of redress may include:

- Apology
- Indication of changes in products, services, process, policy or procedure
- Replacement
- Repair/rework
- Substitutes
- Technical assistance
- Information
- Referral
- Financial, refunds or other assistance
- Other assistance; or
- Financial compensation.

If the complaint cannot be resolved internally, a complainant may have access to various external resolution procedures. The complainant will be notified of any and all third parties who may be able to assist them further, including the Community Housing Registrar and relevant Ombudsman.

Appeals

The CEO is allocated to manage all appeals. If the appeal is declined, the client will be informed of their right to further review, including:

- The NSW Housing Appeals Committee (if the matter falls within their jurisdiction). HAC was established to ensure clients of government funded housing services have access to an independent system of review and redress; and/or
- The NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT); and/or
- Any other third party who may be able to offer further assistance to the client.

Feedback

Homes Out West welcomes feedback from applicants, tenants and stakeholders.

Feedback can be received through a variety of different avenues. This includes:

- Letters and emails sent to Homes Out West;
- Matters raised verbally with Homes Out West staff, either in person or by telephone.

For further information, please speak to your Client Services Officer or contact the office.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Fire, Ambulance, Police	000
Poisons Line	13 11 26
Centrelink	13 23 00
Housing NSW	1300 468 746
NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal	1300 135 399
Community Justice Centre	1800 990 777
Translator and Interpreter Service	13 14 50
Tenant Hotline	1800 251 101
NSW Housing Appeals Committee	1800 629 794
Edward River Council	03 5898 3000
Albury City Council	02 6023 8111
Murray River Council	03 5887 5007
Berrigan Shire Council	03 5888 5100
Murrumbidgee Shire Council	03 5886 1200
Balranald Shire Council	03 5020 1300
Wentworth Shire Council	03 5027 5027

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