Temporary Absence Policy

This policy and related procedures are applicable to the CHL group of companies (CHL) in Australia, including: Community Housing Ltd, Community Housing (Vic) Ltd, Community Housing Investment (VIC) Ltd, Community Housing (Tas) Ltd, Community Housing (Qld) Ltd, Community Housing (WA) Ltd, Community Housing Investment (WA) Ltd, Community Housing (SA) Ltd, Community Housing Investment (QLD) Ltd, Community Housing Investment (NSW) Ltd, Community Housing Investment (NT) Ltd, Community Housing (Subi East) Ltd, Community Housing (Homes For Regions) Ltd, Building Communities Housing Ltd and any other entities within CHL which adopt this policy.

Purpose and scope

This policy defines CHL's approach to assessing and managing tenant absences from their home, in order to:

- Support tenants to maintain their tenancy during periods of absence
- Ensure community housing assets are used efficiently and appropriately
- Comply with relevant legislative, regulatory and program requirements.

This policy applies to all social and affordable (subsidised) tenancies, and specialist disability accommodation (SDA) tenancies.

This policy does not apply to market housing or affordable housing properties managed by Horizon Housing Realty (HHR).

Definitions

Absence: period during which a tenant is away from their property.

Reduced rent: temporary adjustment to the amount of rent payable by a tenant, approved by CHL in response to demonstrated financial hardship or exceptional circumstances.

Tenant: is used as a general term and includes Renter in Victoria, in line with Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) as amended.

For further definitions, please refer to the Definitions Register.

Policy statements

1. CHL recognises that tenants may need to be away from their home for valid and reasonable reasons. We will balance the tenants' right to maintain their tenancy as their principal place of residence, with the need to ensure fair allocation of limited community housing assets.

2. Reasons for absence

2.1. Acceptable reasons for absences include:

- hospitalisation, rehabilitation or medical treatment
- residential care or supported accommodation
- disability, mental health treatment, respite care or NDIS-supported arrangements
- caring for sick/frail family members
- escaping domestic and family violence, harassment or threats of violence
- cultural or kinship obligations
- employment, education or training
- imprisonment – except where related to a breach of the Residential Tenancy Agreement.

2.2. CHL recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants may have cultural, kinship, Sorry Business and community obligations that require temporary absence from their home. These circumstances will be considered in a culturally safe and appropriate manner.

2.3. Tenants experiencing domestic and family violence will not be disadvantaged in the assessment of temporary absence requests and may be supported through alternative evidence arrangements where appropriate.

3. Obtaining approval for absences

3.1. State and program specific absence limits, notification requirements and approval thresholds are contained within the *Temporary Absence Procedure* and must be applied in addition to this policy.

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3.2. Tenants are encouraged to notify CHL for short absences, in accordance with relevant timeframes determined by each state.

3.3. Tenants will be required to seek written approval for extended absences, in accordance with relevant timeframes determined by each state.

- Absences longer than 3 months will require management approval.
- Absences longer than 6 months will not be approved, unless in exceptional circumstances as determined by senior management.

3.4. Tenants will be required to provide updated and/or alternate contact details when away from the property for any length of time. This will assist in ensuring any emergencies are responded to and damage to vacant properties, that may otherwise result in debts to the tenant, is minimised.

3.5. Tenants must provide appropriate documentation to support their application for an extended absence. CHL will take a flexible and proportionate approach to evidence requirements where a tenant is experiencing vulnerability, family violence, homelessness risk, disability or cultural obligations.

3.6. CHL will assess temporary absence requests in consideration of:

- reason for absence
- duration and frequency
- tenancy obligations being maintained. This includes:
  - continued payment of rent and non-rent charges
  - ensuring the property is secure and properly cared for.
- supporting evidence provided
- relevant housing program objectives.

4. Unapproved or excessive absences

4.1. CHL will make all reasonable efforts to contact a tenant who has been absent from their property without informing CHL or has been away for longer than the approved period. We may take tenancy action, in accordance with the relevant CHL polices and tenancy legislation, to obtain vacant possession of the property where these efforts have been unsuccessful.

4.2. Cumulative or extended absences that exceed the maximum allowable timeframes within a multi-year period (in accordance with the requirements specified by each state) will not be approved.

4.3. CHL will reassess the tenant's ongoing need for subsidised housing assistance for unreasonable absences or for ongoing repeated absences.

4.4. CHL will determine whether a tenant is occupying their community housing property appropriately by considering its intent for supportive tenancy management practices, ongoing eligibility and property management policies, and with appropriate consideration of the tenant's human rights.

5. Tenants going into prison or care

5.1. Tenants going into prison or care (i.e. aged care) for more than 6 months may be asked to relinquish their property or, where applicable, have another household member apply for succession in accordance with the *Succession of Tenancy Policy*.

6. Care of property during absence

6.1. The tenant must appoint an agent to act on their behalf whilst absent from the property. The agent must:

- be over 18 and could be another household member, a family member, friend or solicitor.
- inspect the property regularly and maintain it to the standard required by the tenancy agreement.

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6.2. Agents who are not household members and wish to live in the property while the tenant is away, must apply to become an approved household member, with the written consent of the tenant named on the tenancy agreement.

6.3. The tenant remains legally responsible for meeting their obligations under the tenancy agreement despite being away and appointing an agent.

7. Minimum or reduced rents

7.1. Rent and non-rent charges, such as water charges, will remain the same during the period of absence.

7.2. CHL may consider a reduced rent in special circumstances – i.e. paying fees to a rehabilitation, respite or refuge facility – where continuing to pay full rent is not reasonable due to the tenant's temporary living arrangements.

- Tenants will be required to provide evidence of the temporary circumstances, including any applicable fees or charges, to support their request for a rent reduction.

7.3. Minimum or reduced rents will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the appropriate manager in accordance with relevant delegations and applicable rent and financial hardship policies.

8. Feedback and Appeal

8.1. Tenants have the right to lodge a service complaint or request an appeal of a decision made by CHL relating to temporary absences, in accordance with the *Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy*.

Accountability

Chief Operations Officer – accountable for authorising submission to the Executive Team for final policy endorsement by the Chief Executive Officer.

National Operations Manager – responsible for reviewing and maintaining the policy, overseeing its effective implementation and providing advice.

All Senior Leaders/Managers – responsible for demonstrating visible leadership and commitment to this policy, implementing this policy within their area of responsibility, promoting compliance, supporting employees to understand and meet policy requirements, monitoring compliance, and taking appropriate action where issues or breaches are identified.

All Employees – responsible for complying with this policy, understanding and meeting its requirements, actively supporting its implementation, and contributing to the achievement of its objectives. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Related documents

- Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy
- Financial Hardship Policy
- Succession of Tenancy Policy
- Temporary Absence Procedure

Legislation

Applicable legislation, regulatory requirements and standards are maintained within CHL's Legislative and Regulatory Obligations Register.

Approved by

Approved by Alicia Follent, Acting Chief Executive Officer on 16/09/2026.

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