

# *information sheet*

## INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY ADVOCATES ON HOMESWEST RENTAL PRACTICES

Shelter WA intends to provide community workers with information, on a regular basis, about current Homeswest practice which impacts on the accessibility of public housing for their clients. We would like to hear from you if you consider a Homeswest practice is having unfair consequences or if a particular practice is not being followed by your Regional Office.

### Applications for Priority Housing for Medical Reasons

Homeswest has a Medical Information Form which is sometimes used for when people seek to have their medical condition(s) considered as part of a priority application. The Form is not required as a matter of course. However, where a report from a Medical Practitioner is regarded by Homeswest as not sufficiently relating the applicant's medical conditions to housing needs, the applicant will usually be required to have their Doctor complete the form. Where a Medical Practitioner supports an applicant for Homeswest assistance the Doctor should be advised of the outcome. If the Doctor is not satisfied that Homeswest has all the information pertinent to the application, then further information should be considered.

It is important the advocate:

- Ensure the Doctor's report clearly links medical information to the need for priority housing. In that regard it may be helpful to get the Doctor to complete

the Medical Information Form because it contains the questions Homeswest ultimately wants answered.

- Encourage the applicant to appeal the decision to the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism if the priority application is not successful.

### Arrears Repayments

The basic rules about arrears repayments are:

- Where debts exceed \$300, a 50% up front payment is sought from the tenant; and
- Where debts do not exceed \$300, a payment in full is sought.

Where the tenant has a demonstrated inability to repay the required lump sum, a proposal to repay may be arranged. For all debts, Homeswest will seek a proposal so that the combined total of the tenant's arrears and current rent does not exceed 30% of their total assessed household income. Income in this regard is determined using the same exclusions and calculations when working out a rent to income subsidy.

Where a person has financial difficulties impacting on their capacity to pay the full 30% of income, Homeswest should adjust the repayments to a manageable proportion.

Should extenuating or special circumstances arise during the repayment period, the tenant has the opportunity to seek a variation to

the original weekly arrears payment. When this occurs a fresh assessment should be made and the payment adjusted accordingly.

It is important the advocate:

- Ensure a detailed Income and Expenditure Statement accompanies any application for a repayment proposal.
- Encourage the applicant to appeal the decision to the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism if the application is not successful.

## Homeswest Allocation Policy and Deferment

There are times when people (on the waiting list) are allocated a dwelling by Homeswest at a difficult time and they therefore wish to defer the allocation without losing their entitlement. In general, Homeswest will only allow deferment in what it calls extreme circumstances such as hospitalisation, convalescence, death in the family or problems with breaking private rental leases.

The issue of private rental leases is quite common. Homeswest policy on deferment in this regard is detailed in Allocations Policy 9.4 and 9.5:

### “9.4 Real Estate Lease

- The applicant has signed a lease for private rental which the applicant considers would be too costly to break;
- The applicant must provide a copy of the lease agreement as evidence of their claims;
- A deferment will be granted for the remainder of the lease only. This will be the only deferment. Discretion will be exercised where genuine difficulties are being experienced with a private real estate lease; and

- The applicant's file will be placed in 'bring-up' so that the search for a suitable property can begin prior to the end of the lease, with a view to having suitable accommodation simultaneously.”

The discretion to defer is usually delegated to the Manager Customer Services or Assistant Regional Manager and the decision is therefore appealable to the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism.

## Emergency Housing

Homeswest has recently advised us that they regard their Emergency Housing Policy working as follows:

*“Homeswest only offers emergency housing as short term accommodation for people who have no other viable housing option. The policy objective is to allow applicants in this situation to have some form of accommodation while making alternative housing arrangements. Homeswest housing stock is maintained in order to provide long term housing for eligible applicants on Homeswest's rental waiting list, therefore the availability of Emergency Housing depends on stock which is unsuitable for this purpose, ie housing which is earmarked for demolition in Homeswest's redevelopment areas.*

*At present, due to the extensive redevelopment being undertaken in Homeswest estates, there is an increase in Emergency Housing stock available. It should not however be seen as a housing option of choice for applicants who may have other options for short term housing while establishing alternative long term solutions to their problems.” (emphasis added).*