SECTION ONE

DESCRIBING THE APPROACH, A POLICY AND PATHWAYS TOOL

CREATING SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES

FOR TENANTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

A TOOLKIT TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS STRENGTHEN PRACTICE IN NSW & QLD

nsw Federation of Housing Associations inc

SHELTER
because housing matters



A Toolkit to Support Community Housing Providers

Strengthen Practice in NSW and QLD

SECTIONS AVAILABLE IN THIS SERIES

SECTION ONE: Describing a sustainable tenancies approach, a policy template and a series of pathways to guide staff

SECTION TWO: Working with hoarding

SECTION THREE: Information on trauma informed care

SECTION FOUR: Tools and resources to support practice

nsw Federation of Housing Associations inc

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because housing matters

A JOINT PROJECT BETWEEN THE
THE NSW FEDERATION OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS & Q SHELTER

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Community housing providers (CHPs) support some of the most vulnerable members of the community to live independent, fulfilling lives. Giving people the right support and managing tenancies in the right way can make a real difference to whether a tenancy for someone with complex needs can be sustained.

This Sustainable Tenancies to Support Tenants with Complex Needs Toolkit has been developed to give community housing providers a resource specifically designed to help them to work with tenants with complex needs. We acknowledge the language is changing in regard to the term people with complex needs. Preferred terms such as people with multiple co-occurring needs or people with co-existing needs are emerging. For the purpose of this Kit we have used the term complex but this can be adapted to your organisation's language and preferred description.

The toolkit provides both a framework for understanding what it means to house people with complex needs, but also what is considered to be contemporary best practice in responding to those needs as a social housing manager. Whilst this toolkit has been designed for community housing providers, its use may be applied to other community and homelessness services which want to ensure tenancy sustainment.

The development of the toolkit has been a joint project of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations and Q Shelter and is an example of the way that partnerships across jurisdictions can help to build capacity for the community housing sector more widely.

The NSW Federation of Housing Associations would like to acknowledge the funds provided by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to help develop this resource under the NSW Community Housing Industry Development Strategy. The NSW Community Housing Industry Development Strategy is a partnership between the Federation and FACS

The Federation would like to thank SGCH for sharing the Vulnerability Assessment Tool as a resource in this toolkit to assist CHPs strengthen their assessment procedures to further build their sustainable tenancies practice. The Federation would also like to thank all the NSW CHPs who contributed to the development of the toolkit.

Q Shelter would like to acknowledge their partnership with the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW). Q Shelter's capacity to produce this resource is supported through its funding and support from the DHPW. Q Shelter would like to thank those housing and homelessness organisations from across Queensland who attended consultation sessions, provided feedback on the application of tools in their operational setting and enhanced the resources through case studies and good practice showcasing. In addition, the Greater Brisbane Hoarding and Squalor Strategies Group and NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation-Mental Health Network - Expert Working Party on Trauma Informed Care along with partners outside of the sector who provided valuable input into the guide replicating the collaboration that occurs in practice between agencies to achieve an effective response.

Both the Federation and Q Shelter look forward to working with all housing services to strengthen their practice through the application of these contemporary tools leading to greater tenancy sustainment.

Both the Federation and Q Shelter would like to thank Sue Cripps and Associates for leading the project and delivering such a ground-breaking resource for our members.

Wendy Hayhurst
CEO THE NSW FEDERATION OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Leone Crayden
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Q SHELTER

Introduction

The guidance and tools provided as part of the Sustainable tenancies to support tenants with complex needs toolkit may not apply to all organisations. CHPs are encouraged to select the tools and guidance that complement and help strengthen their housing practice.

As social housing landlords, CHPs play a key role in delivering ethical and values based innovative models of tenancy management that focus on supporting tenants to develop skills and behaviours that will help them to sustain their tenancies and build successful lives.

Increasingly, CHPs are seeing the value in having services and partnerships in place that can address factors which might impact upon tenants sustaining their tenancies. A well-executed approach to tenancy sustainment can reduce tenancy failures, improve tenant satisfaction and ultimately cost less. A well implemented tenancy sustainment approach across a CHP's business practices will reap benefits for the community more broadly as well as its staff.

The toolkit has been designed to support practice in both New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD).

Core principles underpinning sustainable tenancy practice are consistent, regardless of which state you operate in. However, where differences occur as a result of state based legislation and services available, separate advice has been provided for each state. This advice will be colour coded and consistent throughout the toolkit so that CHPs in QLD will consider advice that is colour coded **MAROON** and CHPs in NSW will consider advice that is colour coded **BLUE**.

The toolkit provides a range of tools and resources that a CHP can utilise across the full range of housing programs. **Where there might be specific tools required to be utilised by state housing program requirements, it is NOT the intention of this toolkit to replace those tools.** When adopting best practice, CHPs should take care to ensure they still meet the obligations of their State housing programs. An example of this is the Tenancy Response Plan. If your organisation uses a similar tool as part of program requirements, you would continue to use it to meet contractual obligations.

THE TOOLKIT IS STRUCTURED IN A NUMBER OF SECTIONS INCLUDING:

SECTION ONE
Describing a sustainable tenancies approach, a policy template and a series of pathways to guide staff

SECTION TWO
Working with hoarding

SECTION THREE
Information on trauma informed care

SECTION FOUR
Tools and resources to support practice

Creating sustainable tenancies to support tenants with complex needs

Changes in the profile of social housing tenants in recent decades have seen growth in the number of tenants with complex needs. These tenants are especially susceptible to the cycle of homelessness, and its damaging effects.

Further, the growth in the Housing First model across Australia that sees a range of services working in partnership to assist people who are homeless to access housing as they work to address issues that they have requires our social housing providers to have the skills and ability to work innovatively with homeless support services.

Many terms are linked with the concepts of 'complex' conditions, and they may be used by different services and across sectors.

Rankin and Regan (2004) identify the nature of complex needs as implying both:

- Breadth – multiple needs (more than one) that are interrelated and interconnected
- Depth of need – profound, severe, serious or intense needs.

Rankin and Regan (2004) define complex needs in terms of an active framework for response. These authors suggest the term offers:

'A framework for understanding multiple, interlocking needs that span health and social issues. People with complex needs may have to negotiate a number of different issues in their life, for example learning disability, mental health problems, substance abuse. They may also be living in deprived circumstances and lack access to suitable housing or meaningful daily activity. As this framework suggests, there is no generic complex needs case. Each individual with complex needs has a unique interaction between their health and social care needs and requires a personalised response from services.' [1]

The nature of complex conditions is such that they affect the individual and thereby require a multifaceted approach to support that person to maintain their tenancy, which means they need to be linked to multiple services. [2,3]

1. Centre for Training in Social Housing, (April 2017), CHCCCS004 Assess co-existing needs Participant Notes.
Rankin, J. & Regan, S., 2004. Meeting Complex Needs: The future of social care, London: emphasis.publishing.co.uk

2. Centre for Training in Social Housing, (April 2017), CHCCCS004 Assess co-existing needs Participant Notes

3. NSW Federation of Housing Associations, (11 July 2016), Draft Issues Paper, NSW Community Housing Industry Development Strategy: Project 4 – Capacity, capability and resources to respond to tenants with complex conditions

People may have a co-morbidity that can include two or more of the following:

- Mental health;
- Personality disorder;
- Physical health;
- Eating disorder;
- Social issues;
- Unemployment;
- Substance misuse;
- Gambling issues;
- History of offending behaviour;
- Homelessness;
- Trauma;
- Cultural issues (i.e. whereby having a disability or one's sexuality is shunned);
- A learning disability;
- Developmental issues;
- Cognitive impairment;
- Acquired brain injury; and/or
- Experience of domestic and family violence.

One condition often exacerbates the symptoms in another condition resulting in many people with complex conditions experiencing barriers to services as there can be confusion as to which issue to initially address.

Many such tenants also have difficulty engaging with services and are unwilling to accept support until their tenancy is at dire risk. Such tenants may have a history of dissatisfaction with previous attempts of support, personality clashes with support workers, paranoia about providing personal information, shame and embarrassment (e.g. hoarding, poor property care). At times, family and friends may discourage the person from seeking support.

There is a clear cycle that can be observed with tenants who move through social housing, into arrears, subsequent eviction to private rental accommodation, further eviction and homelessness.[4] This may then mean that tenants end up back in the social housing system with compounding problems as a result of personal difficulty, tragedy, mental health issues and related anti-social or problematic behaviours.

The social housing sector is in a unique position to break this cycle by integrating a sustaining tenancies approach into routine housing management practice[5]. **The evidence is that systematic and close support of tenants can be highly effective in enabling tenants to change their behaviour and remain in their homes.** [6]

This means incorporating into policies and practices a range of initiatives such as early intervention and multi-agency working. A sustaining tenancies approach is also sound housing management since improving housing stability reduces the social and financial costs associated with failed tenancies.

4. Slatter, M. & Crearie, M. (2003) Sustainable Tenancies: From public to private?, Flinders Journal of Law Reform, 7(1), pp. 15-26.

5. Habibis, D., Atkinson, R., Dunbar, T., Goss, D., Eashope, H. & Maginn, P. (July 2007) A sustaining tenancies approach to managing demanding behaviour in public housing: a good practice guide, Southern Research Centre: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

6. Nixon, J., Hunter, C., Parr, S., Myers, S., & Sanderson, D. (2006) Interim Evaluation of Rehabilitation Projects for Families at Risk of Losing their Homes as a Result of Anti-Social Behavior, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Retrieved 2 July 2015, from http://www.shu.ac.uk/_assets/pdf/ceir-InterimEvalRehabProjectsFamiliesRiskLosingHomes.pdf

A sustaining tenancies approach for tenants with complex needs will see community housing providers (CHPs) focus more strongly on preventative, rather than reactive, measures[7]

including:

- Allocating the right property for the applicant
- Helping to prepare applicants to take on and establish their tenancy.
- Delivering the right messages from the outset, for example with regard to paying rent, and focussing on the best ways of getting messages across to tenants during the lease sign-up process.
- Providing practical help to prevent debt from accumulating through such activities as making referrals to services who offer advice on benefits available, budgeting and utilities costs, helping to access furniture and equipment and emergency relief funds if needed.
- Assessing the risks to sustaining the tenancy and taking action to manage the risks, such as by supporting them through a referral to the appropriate service to assist them to claim benefits they are eligible for and/or a financial counselling service.
- Acting quickly when rent payments fall behind – not waiting until arrears have reached an unmanageable level.

A well-executed approach to tenancy sustainment can reduce tenancy failures, encourage tenant retention, improve tenant satisfaction and ultimately maximise rental income. Some tenancies such as those in transitional housing programs come with a higher level of support that is specifically designed to build a tenant's ability to transition to long term private or social housing tenancies.

The Sustainable Tenancies Policy for Tenants with Complex Needs included in Section One provides guidance to housing staff to respond effectively to tenants with complex needs. It is anticipated such a response will create more sustainable and positive outcomes for tenants as they are able to successfully manage their tenancy.

7. The Guinness Partnership, Tenancy Sustainment, Summary Report April 2015

What is a sustainable tenancy?

A sustainable tenancy is one that can be maintained successfully by the tenant throughout the life of the tenancy.

For this to happen, certain conditions need to be in place; the property needs to be appropriate for their needs, they need to possess the skills required to maintain their tenancy and they need to meet their tenant responsibilities.

A critical question for each CHP to consider is:

what does a sustainable tenancy mean to our organisation?

When you do this, it is helpful to think about your client's journey as they progress from applicant through to tenant; establish the risks as they progress through these stages and what skills, supports and services they need to help them sustain their tenancies.

Creating a sustainable tenancy approach requires the involvement and commitment of the whole organisation. This toolkit has been developed to guide you as you develop your practices across your organisation to deliver the best possible outcomes for tenants with complex needs.

Who is vulnerable to tenancy breakdown?

Sustaining a tenancy and managing the daily affairs of a household requires complex skills and competencies. Tenants who may be lacking in these skills or who have difficulties arising from personal circumstances are particularly vulnerable to tenancy breakdown, especially when this occurs in combination with rent arrears.

Particular groups who have been identified as being vulnerable to experiencing tenancy issues include young people, people with illnesses or disability, people with addictions, women and children escaping domestic and family violence, veterans and Indigenous Australians.[8]

Seelig and Jones (2004)[9] suggest various key factors that may threaten the sustainability of tenancies including poverty, prior household debt, lack of social supports, limited life skills, prior household instability and a variety of cultural factors.

They also suggest that precipitating life events such as unemployment, illness, unanticipated expenditure, income loss, financial difficulty, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, family conflict and the build-up of stressful life events are also important indicators of housing vulnerability.

It is important for CHPs to establish a model to help guide their business planning and service delivery approach to ensure that across all aspects of community housing work, effort is made to support the establishment of sustainable tenancies for people with complex needs.

8. Bisset, H., Campbell, S. & Goodall, J. (1999) Appropriate Responses for Homeless People Whose Needs Require a High Level and Complexity of Service Provision: Final Report, Melbourne: Ecumenical Housing and Thomson Goodall Associates.

9. Seelig, T. & Jones, A. (2004) Sustaining Tenancies in Public Housing: Motives, issues and options, Parity, 17(10) and Housing Works, 2(2).

MODEL FOR PREVENTING FAILED TENANCIES AND FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING SUCCESSFUL TENANCIES

VULNERABILITY (RISK) FACTORS

- Poverty & low income
- Prior debt or housing instability
- Mental illness / history of institutionalisation
- Ill health / disability
- Drugs / alcohol misuse or dependency
- Other addictions
- Household factors (lack of social supports, limited life skills, household / family instability)
- Age – young people
- People leaving care services
- Housing factors (location / estate size)
- Anti-social behaviour issues
- Hoarding & squalor

TRIGGER (RISK) INCIDENTS

- Rent arrears
- Financial difficulty
- Loss of employment
- Illness / mental illness / disability
- Relationship breakdown / death of a family member
- Incarceration / hospitalisation
- Personal / family change or crisis
- Domestic & family violence (DFV)
- Social isolation
- Anti-social behaviour / neighbourhood disputes
- Condition of property
- Breach of tenancy

PROACTIVE SUPPORTIVE INTERVENTIONS

- Understanding of impact of trauma / tenant centred approach /strengths based approach
- Early identification, assessment & intervention
- Tenancy support
- Financial management & life skills
- Customer focussed services
- Intensive case management
- Support into training & employment
- Tenant involvement & responsibilities outlined
- Neighbourhood improvement

RESPONSIVE INTERVENTIONS

- Understanding of impact of trauma / tenant centred approach /strengths based approach
- Tackling rent arrears
- Financial help & advice
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Processes for managing breach of tenancy
- Processes for managing eviction
- Referrals to debt advice services
- Processes for managing time away from tenancy
- Collaboration with DFV support services

Making referrals & sharing information with agencies & services with the expertise to carry out needs assessments & provide support services

TENANCY OUTCOME

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

TENANCY SUCCESS

- Tenant feels safe & secure
- Tenant believes they have a decent home that is affordable & meets their needs
- Rent is paid on time with no arrears
- Tenant is satisfied
- Thriving communities with homes & places where people want to live

TENANCY FAILURE

- Eviction
- Tenant left under threat of eviction
- Abandonment
- Tenant left because of negative housing experience

Monitor, review & evaluate to inform service development & design

Model for preventing failed tenancies and for creating and sustaining successful tenancies

The model on the previous page is a suggested resource that provides a list of possible vulnerability factors and trigger incidents that a CHP might consider as they review their policies and procedures to strengthen their practice response.

The model is based on a quality review cycle that would see a CHP review their service outcomes for tenants with complex needs and make adjustments to strengthen practice as required.

This will always be an iterative process with an ongoing review of practice to strengthen the service response for tenants with complex needs.



Policy Template NSW

POLICY NO:

POLICY NAME: SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES FOR TENANTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

APPLIES TO:

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY:

VERSION:

DATE APPROVED:

REVIEW DATE:

Policy Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to housing staff to respond effectively to tenants with complex needs. It is anticipated such a response will create more sustainable and positive outcomes for tenants as they are able to successfully manage their tenancy.

1. Policy statement

(Service name) aims to create homes and places where people want to live and to ensure that tenancies are sustainable.

(Service name) understands the importance of living in a secure environment – and how this enables people to flourish through education, employment and good health. We also understand the cost of tenancy breakdown – the personal, health, social and financial cost.

(Service name's) overall aim is to prevent tenancies from failing and this policy sets out our continued commitment and plans to deliver sustainable and successful tenancies that enable people to thrive, enjoy a better quality of life, and live in stable, strong and thriving communities.

(Service name) understands the complexity of needs tenants may experience. To ensure tenants are effectively supported to sustain their tenancies, it is critical that housing workers are able to recognise how complex needs influence a persons' behaviour and how to respond appropriately to the range of needs impacting the well-being and potential autonomy of a tenant.

References

Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW)

Housing Pathways Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement

Housing Pathways Matching and Offering a Property to a Client Policy

Definitions

COMPLEX NEEDS:
A framework for understanding multiple, interlocking needs that span health and social issues. People with complex needs may have to negotiate a number of different issues in their life, for example learning disability, mental health problems, substance abuse. They may also be living in deprived circumstances and lack access to suitable housing or meaningful daily activity .[10]

The following needs are considered as having a compounding effect: mental illness, substance misuse, hoarding, discrimination based on ethnicity, sexuality, domestic and family violence, history of homelessness, poverty and history of involvement with the criminal justice system.

SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES:
A sustainable tenancy is one that can be maintained successfully by the tenant throughout the life of the tenancy. For this to happen, certain conditions need to be in place, the property needs to be appropriate for their needs, the tenant needs to possess the skills required to maintain their tenancy and they need to meet their tenant responsibilities

10. Centre for Training in Social Housing, (April 2017), CHCCCS004 Assess co-existing needs Participant Notes.
Rankin, J. & Regan, S., 2004. Meeting Complex Needs: The future of social care, London: emphasis.publishing.co.uk

2. Procedure

(Service name) recognises the importance of effective tenancy management in providing homes and communities where people aspire to live, and understand that well managed tenancies can provide a positive impact on the wider community.

(Service name) will undertake the following considerations and procedures when responding to applicants/tenants with complex needs:

APPROPRIATE PROPERTY ALLOCATIONS

(Service name) believes that sustainable tenancies are created by allocating the right property to the right tenants where complex needs have been identified for the applicant. Our allocations team will ensure that all new tenants are allocated properties that maximise the opportunity to create a sustainable tenancy.

This will include contacting the applicant's support provider (if relevant) in relation to any proposed offer to the applicant (where appropriate consent has been provided by the applicant).

PREVENTION

It is recognised that prevention strategies are more effective than reacting to issues once they develop.

Therefore, our allocations team will undertake a risk assessment process for all priority housing applicants at the point of allocation to build a detailed profile of the risks an applicant might have in creating a sustainable tenancy. This assessment will help to determine appropriate referrals that could be made prior to the lease sign up to assist the new tenant to prepare to move to their new accommodation and to maximise opportunities for a sustainable tenancy.

The following documents will assist the assessment:

- Independent Living Skills assessment
- Support letters from service providers providing support to the applicant
- Letters and assessment forms from an applicants' clinical practitioners
- Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) or some other risk assessment tool.

The outcome of the risk assessment will be recorded in a Tenancy Response Plan to be handed over to the tenancy team/worker undertaking the lease sign up.

For applicants who have a history of debt and/or rental arrears, they will be encouraged to link in with financial counselling and/or financial management to assist with developing a budget and increase their budgeting skills. Establishing this prior to the tenancy commencing will assist the tenant to sustain their tenancy. Such referrals and agreement to link with support will be recorded in the Tenancy Response Plan.

LEASE SIGN UP

(Service name) will provide information in an easy to read format, if this is considered appropriate/necessary, to assist new tenants understand their responsibilities as a tenant and their requirement to meet tenancy obligations such as payment of rent on time and being a good neighbour. The new tenant will be encouraged to bring a support worker with them to the lease sign up in order to assist the tenant to understand what they can do to sustain their tenancy. The new tenant should be informed about what they should do if they do experience difficulties sustaining their tenancy. This will involve informing their tenancy worker and support worker if they are experiencing problems with their tenancy so strategies can be put into place to assist them.

The tenancy worker undertaking the lease sign up will review the Tenancy Response Plan developed during the allocation stage and make any appropriate changes in consultation with the new tenant and the support worker.

New tenants who have a previous history of debt and/or rental arrears will be encouraged to link in with financial counselling and/or financial management to assist with developing a budget and increase their budgeting skills. Establishing this at the beginning of their tenancy will assist the tenant to sustain their tenancy. Undertaking an early intervention approach through discussion with the tenant about possible supports they might need and referral to relevant support services will assist the tenant establish a successful tenancy.

TENANCY MANAGEMENT

In accordance with our Tenancy Agreements and associated procedures, **(service name)** will undertake a combination of tenancy management strategies to ensure tenants can be supported to sustain their tenancies and also remain an inclusive part of our communities.

(Service name) will conduct routine inspections to all properties in accordance with inspection procedures. There will be an inspection conducted within an agreed timeframe (typically 6 weeks) after the tenancy has commenced to determine if there are any early signs of tenancy issues and to reiterate the tenant's and landlord's rights and responsibilities as per the Tenancy Agreement. In addition to assessing the condition of the property, the routine inspections will allow **(service name)** to determine whether there are any tenancy issues; discuss any concerns the tenant may have; and refer tenants to any relevant services to help sustain the tenancy.

When an issue has been identified as placing the tenancy at risk, the housing worker will make a referral to the specialist housing worker (or equivalent) and/or support provider. The Tenancy Response Plan will be reviewed and modified to outline the response/s to the identified tenancy issues. Future tenancy visits to monitor the progress of the tenancy may be included in the Tenancy Response Plan and should be agreed to by the tenant.

SUPPORTING TENANCY SUSTAINABILITY

(Service name) understands that some tenants will need support for varying amounts of time to enable them to establish and sustain a tenancy. **(Service name)** has a range of partnerships with local support services that enable a collaborative plan to be established with the tenant to assist them with this goal.

Tenants may present with a range of needs throughout their tenancy. **(Service name)** will assess the needs of tenants and develop a response based on a tenant's individual needs. The Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) will be used to determine the severity and likelihood of a tenancy being at risk. The information can be used to indicate the tenants' vulnerability for sustaining their tenancy.

Based on the VAT outcomes **(service name)** will collaborate with the tenant and partner organisations to develop or modify a Tenancy Response Plan to address the identified risks/needs. The response plan will outline the required response/s to manage the identified risk/s and articulate the required interventions if the risk escalates.

The response plan will be implemented in consultation with all stakeholders and regularly monitored according to the changing needs of the tenant.

IMPROVED FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC STABILITY AMONGST OUR TENANTS

(Service name) is committed to supporting tenants to manage their finances and meet their debt commitments. **(Service name)** will promote a rent first approach that focuses on providing early advice and support to ensure that tenants do not fall into arrears and that any enforcement action is proportionate.

(Service name) has a range of strategies in place to support financial inclusion for tenants. A 'payment culture' will be fostered and tenants with identified complex needs (particularly those tenants that have a previous history of rent arrears/debt), will have regular direct contact (face to face/phone) during the first three months of their tenancy to establish a good rent payment habit. This process will continue for any tenants who have been identified as experiencing financial difficulties in paying their rent and other charges. Early, swift and direct contact will be made with the tenant once arrears are detected.

Tenants will be encouraged to contact **(service name)** if they are having trouble paying their rent. Tenants who are identified as being vulnerable to rental arrears will have a tailored approach in accordance with their needs. This approach will be outlined in the Tenancy Response Plan. Such a plan will include **(service name)** working with other services and partners to provide appropriate support services.

Tenants will be empowered through the provision of information, advise and support to determine how to address their rental arrears.

Strategies to assist tenants experiencing financial difficulties will include:

- Checking to ensure that the tenant is receiving the full amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance that they are entitled to

- Information and referral to appropriate financial counselling (including informing the tenant that linking in with financial counselling is about more than sustaining their tenancy, it's to assist with their financial life)
- Realistic and achievable repayment plans will be established – which could include the involvement of other support workers/financial counsellor assisting to determine the amount the tenant can realistically afford
- Providing information and referral to local brokerage programs if there are other non rental aspects of the tenants' finances that could be addressed through brokerage.

IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF TENANCY FAILURE AND ITS CAUSES

(Service name) seeks to understand the experiences of tenants who struggle to sustain their tenancies to support a quality review mechanism that strengthens service delivery practices.

During the tenancy, information will be collected to ensure that accurate and up to date records are maintained in relation to all tenants and other household members. Details in relation to support needs will also be collected. This information will inform our review of tenancy failures to determine the reasons why tenancies don't succeed and establish any reviews/changes that may be appropriate to our policies and procedures to improve tenant sustainability.

3. Related documents

- **List appropriate policies**
- **List appropriate strategies**

REVIEWING AND APPROVING THIS POLICY

APPROVAL:	**How often will this policy be reviewed**
PERSON RESPONSIBLE	**Position of person/group who apprives this policy**
APPROVAL:	**Position of person/group who apprives this policy**

POLICY REVIEW AND VERSION TRACKING

REVIEW	DATE APPROVED	APPROVED BY	NEXT REVIEW DATE
1.			
2.			
3.			

Policy Template QLD

POLICY NO:

POLICY NAME: SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES FOR TENANTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

APPLIES TO:

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY:

VERSION:

DATE APPROVED:

REVIEW DATE:

Policy Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to housing staff to respond effectively to tenants with complex needs. It is anticipated such a response will create more sustainable and positive outcomes for tenants as they are able to successfully manage their tenancy.

1. Policy statement

(Service name) aims to create homes and places where people want to live and to ensure that tenancies are sustainable.

(Service name) understands the importance of living in a secure environment – and how this enables people to flourish through education, employment and good health. We also understand the cost of tenancy breakdown – the personal, health, social and financial cost.

(Service name's) overall aim is to prevent tenancies from failing and this policy sets out our continued commitment and plans to deliver sustainable and successful tenancies that enable people to thrive, enjoy a better quality of life, and live in stable, strong and thriving communities.

(Service name) understands the complexity of needs tenants may experience. To ensure tenants are effectively supported to sustain their tenancies, it is critical that housing workers are able to recognise how complex needs influence a persons' behaviour and how to respond appropriately to the range of needs impacting the well-being and potential autonomy of a tenant.

References

Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD)

Allocations Policy for Funded Social Housing Providers

Definitions

COMPLEX NEEDS:

A framework for understanding multiple, interlocking needs that span health and social issues. People with complex needs may have to negotiate a number of different issues in their life, for example learning disability, mental health problems, substance abuse. They may also be living in deprived circumstances and lack access to suitable housing or meaningful daily activity .[11]

The following needs are considered as having a compounding effect: mental illness, substance misuse, hoarding, discrimination based on ethnicity, sexuality, domestic and family violence, history of homelessness, poverty and history of involvement with the criminal justice system.

SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES:

A sustainable tenancy is one that can be maintained successfully by the tenant throughout the life of the tenancy. For this to happen, certain conditions need to be in place, the property needs to be appropriate for their needs, the tenant needs to possess the skills required to maintain their tenancy and they need to meet their tenant responsibilities

11. Centre for Training in Social Housing, (April 2017), CHCCCS004 Assess co-existing needs Participant Notes.
Rankin, J. & Regan, S., 2004. Meeting Complex Needs: The future of social care, London: emphasis.publishing.co.uk

2. Procedure

(Service name) recognises the importance of effective tenancy management in providing homes and communities where people aspire to live, and understand that well managed tenancies can provide a positive impact on the wider community.

(Service name) will undertake the following considerations and procedures when responding to applicants/tenants with complex needs:

APPROPRIATE PROPERTY ALLOCATIONS

(Service name) believes that sustainable tenancies are created by allocating the right property to the right tenants where complex needs have been identified for the applicant. Our allocations team will ensure that all new tenants are allocated properties that maximise the opportunity to create a sustainable tenancy.

This will include contacting the applicant's support provider (if relevant) in relation to any proposed offer to the applicant (where appropriate consent has been provided by the applicant).

PREVENTION

It is recognised that prevention strategies are more effective than reacting to issues once they develop.

Therefore, our allocations team will undertake a risk assessment process for all priority housing applicants at the point of allocation to build a detailed profile of the risks an applicant might have in creating a sustainable tenancy. This assessment will help to determine appropriate referrals that could be made prior to the lease sign up to assist the new tenant to prepare to move to their new accommodation and to maximise opportunities for a sustainable tenancy.

The following documents will assist the assessment:

- Independent Living Skills assessment
- Support letters from service providers providing support to the applicant
- Letters and assessment forms from an applicants' clinical practitioners
- Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) or some other risk assessment tool.

The outcome of the risk assessment will be recorded in a Tenancy Response Plan to be handed over to the tenancy team/worker undertaking the lease sign up.

For applicants who have a history of debt and/or rental arrears, they will be encouraged to link in with financial counselling and/or financial management to assist with developing a budget and increase their budgeting skills. Establishing this prior to the tenancy commencing will assist the tenant to sustain their tenancy. Such referrals and agreement to link with support will be recorded in the Tenancy Response Plan.

LEASE SIGN UP

(Service name) will provide information in an easy to read format, if this is considered appropriate/necessary, to assist new tenants understand their responsibilities as a tenant and their requirement to meet tenancy obligations such as payment of rent on time and being a good neighbour. The new tenant will be encouraged to bring a support worker with them to the lease sign up in order to assist the tenant to understand what they can do to sustain their tenancy. The new tenant should be informed about what they should do if they do experience difficulties sustaining their tenancy. This will involve informing their tenancy worker and support worker if they are experiencing problems with their tenancy so strategies can be put into place to assist them.

The tenancy worker undertaking the lease sign up will review the Tenancy Response Plan developed during the allocation stage and make any appropriate changes in consultation with the new tenant and the support worker.

New tenants who have a previous history of debt and/or rental arrears will be encouraged to link in with financial counselling and/or financial management to assist with developing a budget and increase their budgeting skills. Establishing this at the beginning of their tenancy will assist the tenant to sustain their tenancy. Undertaking an early intervention approach through discussion with the tenant about possible supports they might need and referral to relevant support services will assist the tenant establish a successful tenancy.

TENANCY MANAGEMENT

In accordance with our Tenancy Agreements and associated procedures, **(service name)** will undertake a combination of tenancy management strategies to ensure tenants can be supported to sustain their tenancies and also remain an inclusive part of our communities.

(Service name) will conduct routine inspections to all properties in accordance with inspection procedures. There will be an inspection conducted within an agreed timeframe (typically 6 weeks) after the tenancy has commenced to determine if there are any early signs of tenancy issues and to reiterate the tenant's and landlord's rights and responsibilities as per the Tenancy Agreement. In addition to assessing the condition of the property, the routine inspections will allow **(service name)** to determine whether there are any tenancy issues; discuss any concerns the tenant may have; and refer tenants to any relevant services to help sustain the tenancy.

When an issue has been identified as placing the tenancy at risk, the housing worker will make a referral to the specialist housing worker (or equivalent) and/or support provider. The Tenancy Response Plan will be reviewed and modified to outline the response/s to the identified tenancy issues. Future tenancy visits to monitor the progress of the tenancy may be included in the Tenancy Response Plan and should be agreed to by the tenant.

SUPPORTING TENANCY SUSTAINABILITY

(Service name) understands that some tenants will need support for varying amounts of time to enable them to establish and sustain a tenancy. **(Service name)** has a range of partnerships with local support services that enable a collaborative plan to be established with the tenant to assist them with this goal.

Tenants may present with a range of needs throughout their tenancy. **(Service name)** will assess the needs of tenants and develop a response based on a tenant's individual needs. The Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) will be used to determine the severity and likelihood of a tenancy being at risk. The information can be used to indicate the tenants' vulnerability for sustaining their tenancy.

Based on the VAT outcomes **(service name)** will collaborate with the tenant and partner organisations to develop or modify a Tenancy Response Plan to address the identified risks/needs. The response plan will outline the required response/s to manage the identified risk/s and articulate the required interventions if the risk escalates.

The response plan will be implemented in consultation with all stakeholders and regularly monitored according to the changing needs of the tenant.

IMPROVED FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC STABILITY AMONGST OUR TENANTS

(Service name) is committed to supporting tenants to manage their finances and meet their debt commitments. **(Service name)** will promote a rent first approach that focuses on providing early advice and support to ensure that tenants do not fall into arrears and that any enforcement action is proportionate.

(Service name) has a range of strategies in place to support financial inclusion for tenants. A 'payment culture' will be fostered and tenants with identified complex needs (particularly those tenants that have a previous history of rent arrears/debt), will have regular direct contact (face to face/phone) during the first three months of their tenancy to establish a good rent payment habit. This process will continue for any tenants who have been identified as experiencing financial difficulties in paying their rent and other charges. Early, swift and direct contact will be made with the tenant once arrears are detected.

Tenants will be encouraged to contact **(service name)** if they are having trouble paying their rent. Tenants who are identified as being vulnerable to rental arrears will have a tailored approach in accordance with their needs. This approach will be outlined in the Tenancy Response Plan. Such a plan will include **(service name)** working with other services and partners to provide appropriate support services.

Tenants will be empowered through the provision of information, advise and support to determine how to address their rental arrears.

Strategies to assist tenants experiencing financial difficulties will include:

- Checking to ensure that the tenant is receiving the full amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance that they are entitled to

- Information and referral to appropriate financial counselling (including informing the tenant that linking in with financial counselling is about more than sustaining their tenancy, it's to assist with their financial life)
- Realistic and achievable repayment plans will be established – which could include the involvement of other support workers/financial counsellor assisting to determine the amount the tenant can realistically afford
- Providing information and referral to local brokerage programs if there are other non rental aspects of the tenants' finances that could be addressed through brokerage.

IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF TENANCY FAILURE AND ITS CAUSES

(Service name) seeks to understand the experiences of tenants who struggle to sustain their tenancies to support a quality review mechanism that strengthens service delivery practices.

During the tenancy, information will be collected to ensure that accurate and up to date records are maintained in relation to all tenants and other household members. Details in relation to support needs will also be collected. This information will inform our review of tenancy failures to determine the reasons why tenancies don't succeed and establish any reviews/changes that may be appropriate to our policies and procedures to improve tenant sustainability.

3. Related documents

- **List appropriate policies**
- **List appropriate strategies**

REVIEWING AND APPROVING THIS POLICY

APPROVAL:	How often will this policy be reviewed
PERSON RESPONSIBLE	Position of person/group who apprives this policy
APPROVAL:	Position of person/group who apprives this policy

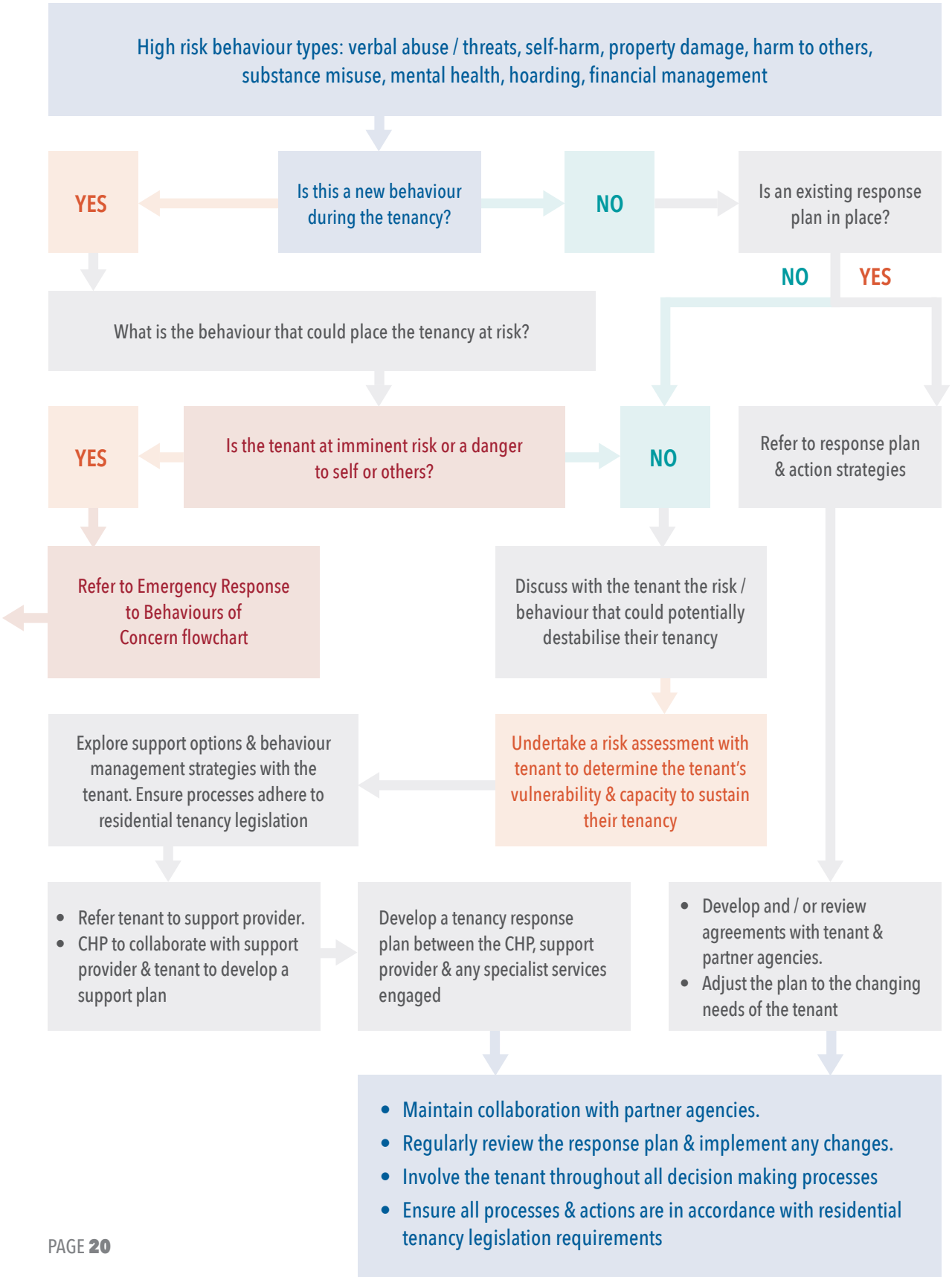
POLICY REVIEW AND VERSION TRACKING

REVIEW	DATE APPROVED	APPROVED BY	NEXT REVIEW DATE
1.			
2.			
3.			

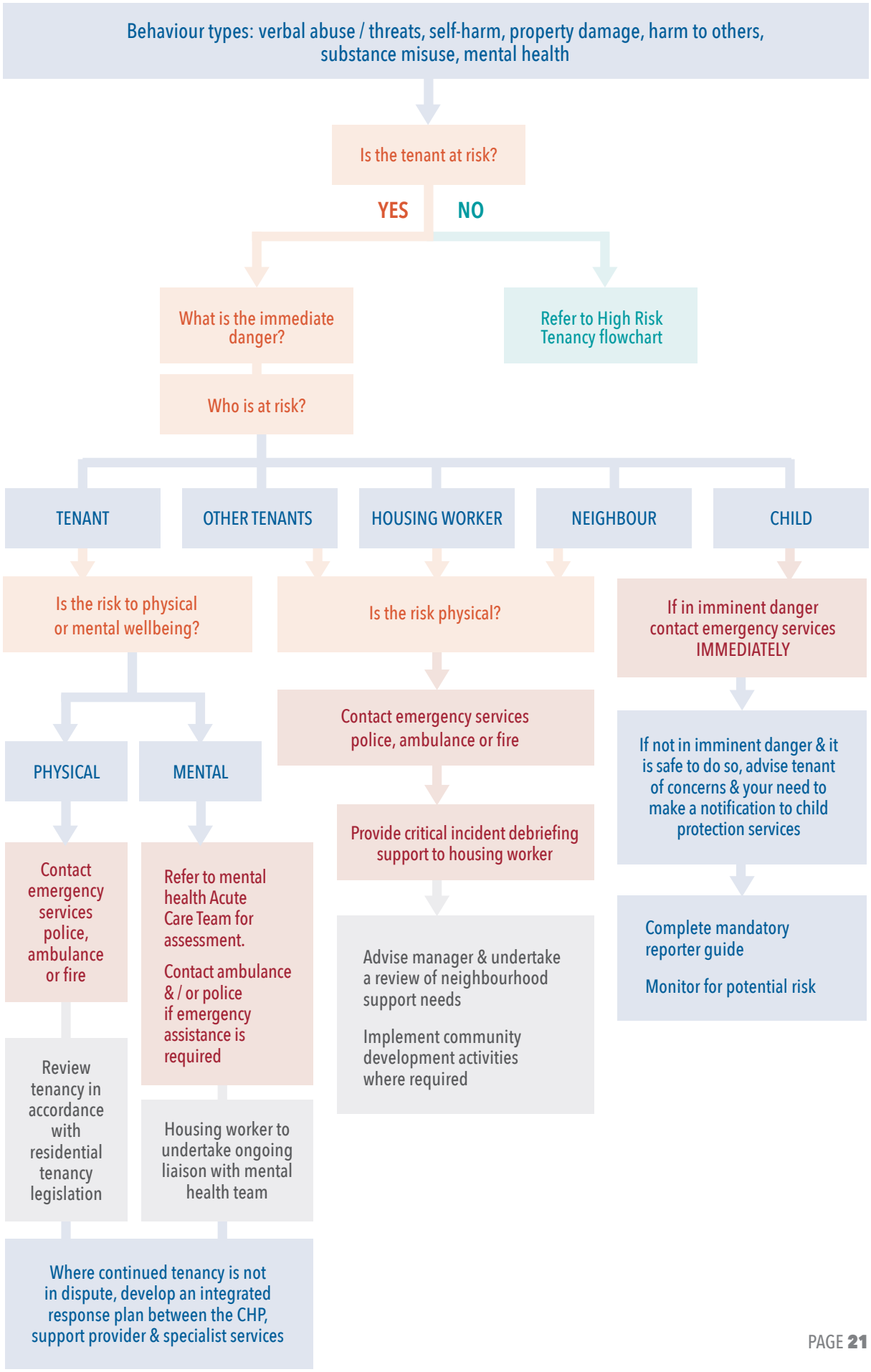
Pathways to assist management of high risk tenancies

These pathways provide guidance on possible responses that a CHP might take when managing high risk tenancies and behaviours of concern.

COMMUNITY HOUSING RESPONSE TO HIGH RISK TENANCIES



EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN (BOC) FOR CHPS



A note on Housing Pathways (NSW only)

Whilst CHPs who are part of Housing Pathways are required to utilise Housing Pathways policies and procedures, it is important to note that this should be done in accordance with a CHP's own allocations policy.

When matching clients to properties, a CHP should aim to promote a successful and sustainable tenancy by ensuring that the property will meet the applicant's known housing needs. Therefore, a CHP can apply restrictions to the shortlist so that it only contains applicants with needs or characteristics that match the elements of the vacant property. A CHP must apply any restrictions in accordance with their allocations policy.

It is important to note that if a CHP has matched a client to a property and the client has a Case Manager or support provider, the CHP must contact the Case Manager or support provider in relation to any proposed offer to the client.[12] [13]

12. Manage Offers of Social Housing – Process, Housing Pathways intranet http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/additional-information/policies/matching-and-offering-a-property-to-a-client-policy viewed 16/07/17

13. http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/additional-information/policies/matching-and-offering-a-property-to-a-client-policy viewed 16/07/17

A note on Housing Pathways (QLD only) [14]

Whilst the Housing Service Centre processes housing applications, for most housingproviders, they supply a referral report to the provider for the vacancy. The provider then assesses the referral report to determine which Eligible Applicant best matches the vacancy.

The provider must identify the Eligible Applicant whose requirements, needs and circumstances best match the vacancy, taking into consideration the match to the local community and access to services that the Eligible Applicant may require.

The provider must have in place a clearly documented decision-making process for matching, and keep records of matching decisions.

The provider is responsible for the final allocation decision. The provider must make an offer of housing to the Eligible Applicant whose requirements, housing need and circumstances best match the property vacancy.

14. http://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/AllocationsPolicyFundedSocialHousingProviders.pdf

Before a tenancy starts

CHPs engage in a variety of pre-tenancy activities associated with the allocations process. However, to create sustainable tenancies, these activities have to be more than just processing housing applications .[15]

They should focus on:

- providing applicants with the knowledge they will need to manage a successful tenancy and assessing whether they have the appropriate skills
- gathering applicant insight and assessing the risks to sustaining a tenancy
- timely and appropriate referral to support services, particularly if it is determined that the applicant may benefit from support to build up their skills to sustain a tenancy such as budgeting skills, debt management skills etc.
- allocating the right people to the right homes
- promoting a rent payment culture.

In order to assist CHPs to assess the skills of applicants to sustain a tenancy, you can request the applicant's health care professional or support provider to complete the Housing Pathways Independent Living Skills Assessment (NSW) or relevant assessment forms in Queensland.

To help inform assessment, there are five criteria that need to be addressed in an independent living skills report or assessment. Clients must demonstrate their ability to sustain a tenancy without support or with appropriate support in place:

1. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT:

- The person has the ability to manage their own finances, or
- Their finances are managed by the NSW/QLD Guardian, or

They can demonstrate that a third party is managing their finances.

2. PROPERTY CARE:

- The person has the ability to maintain their home in a satisfactory condition, and
- Not cause property damage.

3. PERSONAL CARE

- The person has the ability to look after their basic day to day personal care needs, or
- They are supported in this function by a service provider, or
- They are supported in this function by a carer.

15. It is acknowledged that in QLD in most cases applications are processed by the Housing Service Centres and in NSW there are an increasing number of applications being processed by the Housing Contact Centre and therefore CHPs in both jurisdictions have either no input or potentially limited input into the housing application process. However, CHPs in both jurisdictions are involved in the allocation process.

4. SOCIAL INTERACTION

- The person is able to live in close contact with others without being the cause of antisocial behaviour, and
- Is able to be responsible for their conduct as well as the conduct of their visitors.

5. DISABILITY SUPPORT

- Determines whether the client is a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant and is receiving support from a disability support provider.
- Identifies whether the client's NDIS support plan includes funding associated with sustaining a tenancy.

A housing provider can then use the results of the living skills assessment or independent living skills report or other relevant information to determine whether the provision of support services and social housing is the most appropriate response to the client's housing and care needs. Where the living skills assessment a CHP has received does not provide sufficient information to guide CHP assessment, you are encouraged to ask for further information across the 5 criteria identified.

Where a client is unable to demonstrate an ability to maintain a successful tenancy, the housing provider can refer the client to appropriate support agencies.

Providers need to determine whether they will consider requests for social housing in cases where:

- A person requiring support from a service provider refuses to access appropriate services, or
- A person has not demonstrated the ability to live independently and refuses permission for an external agency or their support worker to assess their living skills.[16]
- Support services are not able to be delivered effectively due to location (such as rural or remote locations).

16. http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/additional-information/policies/eligibility-for-social-housing-policy viewed 16/07/17

The pre-tenancy activities that a CHP can do to create sustainable tenancies include:

- Affordability assessments that include all the costs associated with managing a home.
- Educating prospective tenants on budgeting and referring where needs are identified to a financial support service to enable them to develop a budget management process.
- Risk assessments and self-assessment toolkits to identify support needs and signpost to services. CHPs might consider utilising the Vulnerability Assessment Tool here to undertake a risk assessment.
- Matching the applicant to the property – such as ensuring people with complex needs are not all housed in the same location/s.
- Allocating the most suitable type of property – for example where a tenant has a disability, ensuring the property is suitable for their needs.
- Ensuring debt management plans are in place.
- Providing information on costs associated with moving including information on services where applicants can access recycled/affordable furniture.
- Pre-tenancy training/workshops to ensure applicants have the skills to manage a tenancy such as the Rent It Keep It program (NSW).

CHPs can also undertake their own assessment of an applicant's abilities utilising a tool such as the SGCH Vulnerability Assessment Tool to provide a risk rating to inform tenancy planning.

The VAT is an excel document available as part of this toolkit.

SGCH (St George Community Housing)

SGCH, as a leading community housing provider in NSW, has developed a strong and effective service response when working with vulnerable tenants to assist them to sustain their tenancy through the establishment of a Support Coordination Team and the development of the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT).

The SGCH commitment to intervening early to support people establish and sustain tenancies is recognised as cutting edge, winning the inaugural Community Sector Banking Award for its sustainable tenancy initiatives in 2015. The VAT uses key indicators to help guide decisions and determine the level of risk and vulnerability associated with the individual tenant or household. The VAT assesses the level, extent and type of support required for people who are likely to be at a greater risk of losing their tenancy.

How does the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) work?

The VAT allows tenancy workers to objectively determine the support needs of vulnerable applicants and tenants. The tool comprises a set of key indicators that give a rating of needs relevant to personal health and wellbeing. By rating a person's level of need across 20 indicators, such as medical needs, age, family support, the VAT facilitates the development of a tailored support plan or Tenancy Response Plan. The VAT is currently used by SGCH as a tool to support assessment and tenant review.

The VAT is completed for all priority applicants once the applicant has accepted the property allocation.

The VAT is a simple tool that provides a rating scale for key indicators across a range of 20 domains that practice tells us are key factors underpinning tenancy failure. These include financial issues, health issues, age, self-care issues, living skills, addiction issues and previous tenancy issues.

The advantage and purpose of rating scales is the standardisation that they create. They provide a method to compare different objects, people or things in a structured fashion ranging from a quantitative to a qualitative analysis.

Rating scales are simple and easy to understand. They provide a significant amount of data and allow people to view it in a clear and concise manner, making decisions easier.

The VAT utilises three rankings of minor, moderate and major consequences to clarify the severity of housing issues currently being experienced by the applicant or tenant. These rankings provide clear direction to the Sustainable Tenancies Team (STT) in regard to the speed of response and type of actions required. When a STT member completes the VAT for an applicant or tenant, the score is checked by their colleague in order to ensure consistency and accuracy.

The VAT rating scale

ANY RATING OF G (GREEN)

Contact tenant within 5 days & assess need. Link tenant to support, if consent given, as soon as possible. Ongoing updates to Tenancy Manager & Manager STT of treatment & outcome.

ANY RATING OF A (AMBER)

Contact tenant within 3 days & assess need. Link tenant to support, if consent given, as soon as possible. Ongoing updates to Tenancy Manager & Manager STT of treatment & outcome.

ANY RATING OF R (RED)

Contact and/or visit tenant within 1 day and assess need. Link tenant to support within 1 week, if consent given. Ongoing reports to Manager STT, Operations Manager & Communications Manager. Ongoing and close monitoring until fully treated and resolved.

At SGCH, the VAT is used as a foundation document to guide planning and decision making as plans are developed to assist an applicant or tenant.

The pre-rating score is determined from the information provided in the internal referral (i.e. from the tenancy team), and the post-rating score is done after the STT member meets with the applicant or tenant. The staff member who made the referral gets updates from the STT's involvement with the applicant or tenant (including a copy of the completed VAT score) and they are sent the outcome of this involvement.

The VAT is also administered post intervention to provide a baseline measure of the effectiveness of work undertaken to assist a tenant to sustain their tenancy.

The data collected through the VAT allows for ongoing review of effectiveness of tenancy staff intervention in preventing tenancy failure. It will also identify the types of tenancies more easily sustained and has the capacity to inform ongoing service planning and support partnership development.

The VAT is an excel document available as part of this toolkit.

During a tenancy

Getting your tenants off to the right start will go a long way towards creating sustainable tenancies. However, once a tenancy starts, and throughout its duration, the services you provide can ensure they are successfully maintained.

CHPs can consider the following as they further develop their housing management practice to create sustainable tenancies:

- Spend time to ensure the tenant understands their obligations under their tenancy agreement. You might consider utilising an easy to read tenancy guide such as the one included in this toolkit.
- Monitor ongoing support service engagement as part of routine management of a tenancy.
- Focus on the best way to get key messages across to tenants. This might include easy to read tenancy guides, information sessions that bring together a group of tenants to hear about services or supports available or group activities such as the Rent It Keep It program (NSW)
- Make sure systems are in place to keep information about your tenants up-to-date.
- Make the most of opportunities to gather and check tenant information such as during the routine property inspections to assess for risk factors which may prevent tenancy sustainment.
- Utilise the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) to undertake ongoing risk assessments where tenancy sustainment risks have been identified.
- Explore ways that you might utilise data captured through implementation of the VAT or similar risk assessment tools to track the success of your work in identifying tenants at risk and establishing support strategies with them to support tenancy sustainment.

Good arrears management practice

An effective approach to collecting rent which is focussed on tenancy sustainment balances the need to support people to pay their rent while ensuring the income needed to run the business is collected.

A tenancy sustainment approach needs to:

- focus on early intervention and the prevention of escalating arrears
- encourage tenants to get in touch if they are having trouble paying their rent
- identify tenants in arrears who are vulnerable and tailor the approach accordingly
- work with other services and partners to provide appropriate support services.[17]

There has been significant research activity in the UK and Australia into the management of social housing rent debt. A review of landlord approaches to rent arrears in the UK found that even when approaches had been quite aggressive, with court action[18] being used fairly perfunctorily, rent arrears, for the most part, had continued to rise. Alternatively, more supportive approaches with early intervention and referral for financial and debt management advise had reduced rent debt.[19]

Delargy[20] reports upon an initiative in the UK where a 'customer valuing approach' has been adopted by housing staff, which has reduced arrears and cut court costs.

17. Chartered Institute of Housing, October 2014, How to create sustainable tenancies.

18. The equivalent approach in NSW and Queensland is the Civil and Administrative Tribunal in each State.

19. Department of Human Services, October 2006, Support for High-Risk Tenancies Strategic Project. Victorian Government Department of Human Services Melbourne, Victoria.

20. Delargy, M. (2004). What works. New trends in social housing practice. Tackling rent arrears', in Roof pp. 25 – 28

Increasingly, it is acknowledged that an important dimension of supportive tenancy management is the capacity of housing staff to be able to communicate appropriately so that they can engage vulnerable tenants. People in crisis or who have experienced trauma and/or disadvantage may need to be approached with sensitivity and understanding before they are willing to engage and be assisted.

It is worth noting that poverty is recognised to be the main cause of rent arrears, with the growing level of household debt an important factor in the equation. It appears that accumulation of rent arrears is more likely to involve people who 'can't pay' rather than people who 'won't pay'.[21]

Tenants on low income often have multiple debts and may not be fully aware of the benefits or assistance available to assist them. There are some tenants who may not be receiving CRA or may not be receiving the amount of CRA that they are entitled to. Community housing providers should check that tenants are receiving CRA and if they aren't receiving the amount that the provider has determined they are entitled to, they should be encouraged/assisted to follow up with Centrelink and/or their household rent should be recalculated.

It is noted that the Queensland Community Housing Rent Policy requires providers to charge the full entitled rate of CRA, whether the person receives it or not. It is important for CHPs to have a strong relationship with their local Centrelink office to explore any issues relating to a tenant's CRA.

Some community housing providers have established specialist rent arrears teams. There is debate as to whether this approach has more value than a generic approach.

Specialist teams have proved effective in reducing rent arrears but have the disadvantage of splitting responsibilities and risking fragmentation of communication.

Management by a generic housing worker and team with good referral networks is credited with providing a continuous and holistic approach for tenants.

Whether specialist or generic teams are employed, the principles of effective approaches to rent arrears in social housing as being considered effective include:

- Prevention – having discussions with tenants about the need to pay rent, facilitating discussion with them about what support they may need to prevent them from incurring rent debt.
- Early intervention – identifying early when rent is not paid and acting promptly to assist the tenant to develop a plan to manage any issues that are impacting their ability to pay rent on time.
- Tenant empowerment - through access to information, advice and support
- Individualised/personalised approaches – such as a phone call, home visit or letter rather than a mechanistic/automated approach.
- Persistence.

To explore these components further, they include:

- Flag prospective at-risk tenancies using risk indicators
- Good engagement early, which may include a pre-allocation financial assessment and debt history at interview with early referral for debt or financial counselling
- Skilful, varied and persistent communication
- Regular direct contact (face to face/phone) during the first three months of the tenancy to establish a good payment habit
- Establish an expectation of regular payment and provide options to tenant for early contact if a problem arises
- Early, swift and direct contact once arrears are detected

21. Department of Human Services, October 2006, Support for High-Risk Tenancies Strategic Project. Victorian Government Department of Human Services Melbourne, Victoria.

- Support/advice and referral where active referral may be required in the context of tenant consent
- Negotiate repayment plan agreements.[22]

It is critical for repayment plan agreements to be realistic and achievable by tenants. Whilst this needs to be balanced with the amount of time it will take the tenant to repay, if the amount is too high then the tenant will be unable to maintain the repayments and are likely to 'give up' trying. Negotiating repayment plans with the tenant and a support worker and/or financial counsellor can assist to create a realistic repayment plan that the tenant is more likely to adhere to.

The importance of building relationships is critical to assist tenants to sustain their tenancies. It is important to have continued dialogue with tenants in rent arrears and their support workers in order to assist tenants and to foster a 'payment culture'. [23]

Thinking 'outside of the box' is also important in relation to good arrears management practice. One such example is Bridge Housing's Hand Up Arrears program. This is based on the Work Development Order program which is a rent arrears / debt management program offering tenant's alternative, non-monetary ways of 'repaying' their rental arrears/ debts, including by enrolling into study, volunteering in the community or undertaking treatment to address underlying issues. The aim is to try and break the cycle of rent arrears and debt accumulation by tenants.[24]

Developing Tenancy Response Plans can also be an effective way to monitor tenancy issues such as rent arrears. This is similar to a case plan but isn't as detailed and is purely focussed on sustaining tenancies.

22. Department of Human Services, October 2006, Support for High-Risk Tenancies Strategic Project. Victorian Government Department of Human Services Melbourne, Victoria.

23. Social Services, Housing and Public Health Committee, (undated), Report of the Social Services, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee 2013/14 – Review of the causes of tenancy failure and how it can be prevented.

24. https://www.bridgehousing.org.au/pages/i-need-help-216.html viewed 17/07/17

Financial counselling & budget skills development

Community housing providers recognise the benefits of assisting tenants to link with financial counselling services to assist them to sustain their tenancies. Early intervention in this area is critical and therefore providing tenants with information about what services are available in a timely manner will mitigate the risk to rental income and assist the tenant to sustain their tenancy. Rent arrears or other tenancy related debt are clear indicators of potential financial issues being experienced by the tenant. There may be other financial difficulties a tenant is also experiencing such as having problems paying for bills or buying food. The intention of providing tenants with information and making referrals early assists the tenant to move from a crisis management approach to that of pro-active engagement. It is therefore critical for CHPs to have a close relationship with local financial counselling services.

This approach shifts from a traditional arrears enforcement approach to an approach that is focussed on prevention of rent arrears and other tenancy debts. For tenants who have previous housing related debts, early intervention would include encouraging a referral to financial counselling at the allocation stage or beginning of their tenancy.

Whilst the contact details for local financial counselling services are often included on arrears letters, this should be backed up by having a conversation with the tenant. Such a conversation could involve explaining to the tenant that linking in with financial counselling is about more than sustaining their tenancy, it's about assisting with their financial life.

Being proactive and aware of what services exist is important. This could include encouraging financial counselling services to attend the office periodically (based on demand). This could be open to all of the community, not just tenants.

TENANCY RESPONSE PLAN

For applicants, list the risks identified from the risk assessment.

For tenants, list issues and breaches experienced in the tenancy to date – e.g. rent arrears, damage to property.

List recommendations and referrals e.g. to specialist service, financial counselling, alcohol and other drug services, mental health services.

List actions required – e.g. liaise with support worker(s) about tenancy issues and concerns.

APPLICANTS: WHAT ARE THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SUSTAINING A TENANCY?

TENANTS: WHAT ARE THE TENANCY ISSUE/S?

RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERRALS

GOALS	ACTION/S REQUIRED	SERVICE PROVIDER / TENANT	REVIEW DATE
Type Here	Type Here	Type Here	
Type Here	Type Here	Type Here	
Type Here	Type Here	Type Here	
Type Here	Type Here	Type Here	
Type Here	Type Here	Type Here	
Type Here	Type Here	Type Here	

TENANT SIGNATURE

HOUSING WORKER SIGNATURE

Tenancy Sustainment Approach to Rent Arrears Checklist

EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- [ ] Rent calculation checked to ensure the amount tenant is being charged is correct
- [ ] Rent calculation back dated (if rent amount is incorrect)
- [ ] Check to see whether tenant is receiving correct amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance
- [ ] Inform tenant if they are not receiving the correct amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and refer them to Centrelink
- [ ] Referral to support (mental health, alcohol and other drugs, specialist homelessness services etc)
- [ ] Referral to financial and debt management services
- [ ] Breach proceedings commenced as soon as tenant has fallen into rent arrears
- [ ] Breach proceedings are at a pace to minimise escalating rent arrears
- [ ] Support worker involved in discussions about rent arrears

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- [ ] Tenant encouraged to contact office if having problems paying rent in order to explore options for support
- [ ] Explanation given to tenant over the phone or face to face re: breach letter sent or being sent, eviction process and reasons why
- [ ] Involvement of supports & collaborative approach
- [ ] Breach letters written in a trauma informed approach
- [ ] Sensitive, understanding and empathetic approach used whilst reminding tenant of their responsibility under the residential tenancy legislation
- [ ] Recognition that non engagement from tenant can be related to the communication approach and adapted approach to suit tenant (i.e. language/cultural; literacy/numeracy considerations)
- [ ] Had a persistent approach to contacting the tenant about their rent arrears which included a variety of communication approaches (i.e. breach letters, telephone contact, email, home visits etc).

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL (VAT)

- [ ] Identified level and type of complex needs
- [ ] Identified appropriate services to refer tenant
- [ ] Information given to tenant about relevant services available
- [ ] Referral made to relevant service/s
- [ ] Tenancy Response Plan created with tenant which outlines actions / outcomes for tenant to address rent arrears

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL (VAT)

- [ ] Realistic, affordable and achievable repayment plan negotiated with tenant
- [ ] Support worker or financial counsellor involved with negotiating repayment plan
- [ ] Option is given to tenant to review repayment plan if they are not able to adhere to the amount
- [ ] Referral made to brokerage or other such financial assistance to assist tenant to address other (non rent) financial issues

BROKERAGE

- [ ] Referral made to brokerage or other such financial assistance to assist tenant to address other (non rent) financial issues

How to manage continuing tenancy breaches

Tenants who frequently breach their tenancy agreement; don't adhere to repayment plans for rent arrears; and who choose not to engage with support services are often referred to as being 'challenging' or 'difficult' tenants. Whilst housing workers are not expected to be support workers, it is important for community housing providers to have an understanding of why people may behave in challenging ways. This can assist community housing providers in their attempts to assist tenants to sustain their tenancy and to link tenants with support.

The excerpt below is adapted from Michael J. Kendrick PhD - Kendrick Consulting Services. It highlights the importance of acknowledging unmet needs as a factor in behaviours of concern.

The rather illusive group of people that are referred to as "behaviourally challenging" are occasionally, but with certain regularity, raised as being troublesome for both social support agencies and housing providers. Many people are confused about how they might arrange matters so that they might be more successful in dealing with such persons.

PEOPLE WITH "UNMET NEEDS" VERSUS "BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS"

My advice is not to think of people as having challenging behaviour at all, but rather that they be seen as people who are poorly served or whose needs are not met very well in their present situation. The problem then becomes how to meet a person's needs so that their behaviour isn't as "needed" as before. The behaviour then is seen as a symptom rather than the cause.

This is not wishful thinking. Rather it is simply reporting a pattern seen with great regularity. When people in support roles eventually get around to really meeting someone's needs a lot of the poor behaviour gradually dissipates and may even disappear entirely. This is particularly true as the person, and the people around them, come to learn other ways of meeting the person's needs. All of us have a behaviour problem of some sort – so to isolate a group of people who are having behaviour problems is a little unfair, considering our own behaviour is likely to be as much of a problem for somebody else as theirs is to a particular service or situation.

ONE PERSON AT A TIME: PERSONALLY TARGETED SUPPORTS

People with behaviour problems are not all the same – the causes for the behaviour difficulties are diverse and should be understood in this heterogeneous way. Treating them as a homogenous group already suggests that you are going to have trouble. Similarly, prescribing that the remedies are going to be the same for each person suggests a stereotyping of people that is unlikely to hold up in practice.

What does work is carefully creating flexible individualised supports targeted on a person-by-person basis; not a single remedy but multiple remedies, one person at a time. The solutions should be "person centred" or "person-derived" and arise precisely as possible from the needs and identity of each person.

These remedies should not stem from a common programmatic template that says a person with a certain label always needs such and such. Such a rigid formula is a deception despite the allure contained in its false sense of concreteness. The only long-term surety will rest in properly understanding the person and what they most deeply need and providing this as best as one can.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND STABLE SUPPORTS

Most "behaviour problems", (i.e. unmet/misunderstood needs), will yield to responses that are both relevant to their needs and stable and long term. This tends not to happen where there is an unstable situation where people come and go, for example, rotation of staff, or where the people themselves are being moved involuntarily from setting to setting. It is reasonable to expect that for almost everybody whose life situation authentically stabilises, their behaviour will stabilise to a proportionate degree. At the very least, such stabilisation will enable those supporting the person to better understand what underlies the behaviour. However, many people with "behaviour difficulties" are moved often and have many people coming into and out of their lives.

The best solutions are found when someone makes a long-term commitment to the person. The more you recycle people through the lives of people with "behaviour problems" the more likely you will have to start at the beginning again and again.

However, when we think long term, that is, five to ten years rather than expecting outcomes in a few months or within the fiscal year, we enable the actual needs of the person to better emerge, be understood and be addressed.

Managing antisocial behaviour

Antisocial behaviour[25] (ASB) is behaviour which disturbs the peace, comfort or privacy of other tenants or neighbours or the surrounding community which causes a breach of the tenancy agreement under the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD).

What is regarded as antisocial varies according to local culture and practice and the degree of tolerance of difference within a community. However, ASB, at least in general terms, can include:

- Noise
- Intimidation through threats or actual violence
- Harassment
- Verbal abuse
- Homophobic behaviour
- Abusive behaviour aimed at causing distress or fear to certain people e.g. elderly or disabled people
- Hate crime targeted at a person e.g. ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation
- Dumping rubbish
- Animal nuisance, including dog fouling
- Vandalism, property damage and graffiti.

Noise caused by everyday domestic activities or noise caused by insufficient sound insulation would not be classed as ASB. CHPs may adopt the position that personal arguments are best resolved by those involved and encourage residents to try to resolve the matter for themselves. Providers may decide not to intervene or investigate allegations unless there is a breach of the tenancy agreement as personal arguments could be referred to mediation services, such as Community Justice Centres in NSW and Dispute Resolution Centres in Queensland.[26]

25. It is acknowledged that language such as 'antisocial behaviour' is not trauma informed language, however, this terminology is referred to in the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD) and it is terminology community housing providers (CHPs) are familiar with using. Therefore, this toolkit uses the term 'antisocial behaviour

26. Lynch, L., 2016. Best Practice Approaches to Tackling Antisocial Behaviour - Position Paper by NSW Federation of Housing Associations. Sydney: s.n.

How to manage long wait lists for support

Where you experience challenges in accessing support services to assist you and the tenant resolve their issues, it is important to raise these issues with your manager so that they are aware of them and are able to escalate them through established interagency mechanisms established across each district.

The following lists some of the meetings and other interagency mechanisms that you might consider utilising:

In NSW there are a variety of mechanisms in place that might be utilised to address these challenges including Housing and Mental Health Implementation and Coordinating Committees, District Homelessness Implementation Groups, Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) package support meetings and Safety Action Meetings to prevent or lessen the serious threat to life, health or safety of domestic and family violence victims and their children.

In QLD, there are a good range of formal and informal case coordination groups that provide a structured approach to addressing service access issues. There are also local interagency networks established to coordinate service responses across a range of issues.

Vulnerable Tenants

Perpetrators of ASB often come from vulnerable groups, are 'socially excluded', and have a range of complex support needs. To work effectively with targeted individuals and families, support needs must be addressed.

Whilst removing tenants from social housing tenancies who are responsible for serious crimes will help vulnerable tenants live in their community, special consideration should be given to vulnerable tenants causing ASB that have mitigating factors, such as domestic violence and mental health related conditions.

CHPs should have a full regard to mitigating factors when managing incidents of ASB. If a tenant has a support agreement in place with a support provider, CHPs should work with the support provider to deal with the ASB. Where a neighbourhood dispute has arisen from a tenant's mental health condition or other support needs, CHPs should provide advice and help in dealing with the ASB which may include making a referral to a support service or agency such as:

- Tenancy support programmes
- Social services
- Community mental health teams
- Substance misuse programmes.

CHPs should support perpetrators to change their behaviour where this is a reasonable remedy to addressing the ASB concerned. This may be linked to enforcement action where appropriate.

CHPs will need to balance supporting vulnerable tenants who commit ASB and their duty of care to other neighbours, to ensure their safety and their right to the quiet enjoyment of their residence. CHPs should ensure that they understand the requirements of tenant behaviour outlined in each state's social housing tenancy management policy.

It is important to inform tenants where they can find details of support services and independent and free advice. Accessing support may assist tenants to meet their tenancy obligations and reduce the risk to their tenancy. This information should be available in local offices and on any correspondence sent to tenants regarding enforcement action taken against their tenancy.

NEW SOUTH WALES
Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services
NSW Fair Trading
Tenants' Union of NSW
Law Access

QUEENSLAND
QLD Statewide Tenant Advice & Referral Service
Office of Fair Trading Queensland
Tenants Queensland
Community Legal Centres Queensland

27. Lynch, L., 2016. Best Practice Approaches to Tackling Antisocial Behaviour - Position Paper by NSW Federation of Housing Associations. Sydney: s.n.

What Works?

There are approaches and activities which have been proven to work well in engaging individuals and supporting perpetrators of ASB.

CHPs can adopt a range of approaches to addressing antisocial and offending behaviour in their local communities. The importance of intervening early to sheer individuals away from ASB and offending behaviours should be a policy priority through a number of direct and indirect approaches.

Diversionary activities

For young people in particular, boredom and peer pressure can result in individuals becoming involved in ASB and low level offending.

Engaging people in positive and enjoyable activities is an important first step in addressing ASB. Whilst CHPs may not have the capacity to provide diversionary activities directly, partnering with existing agencies and service providers can have notable impact when targeting in areas with limited local facilities.

Diversionary activities can be wide ranging:

- **Creative** – such as music, dance classes, theatre performances, art projects, including spray can art, murals and exhibitions
- **Sport** – such as organised team sport, such as football, swim nights, street games, mobile pitches
- **Educational** – such as access to information technology and computers
- **Leisure** – such as Friday night clubs, film nights and drop-ins
- **Vocational** – such as bike and motorbike maintenance and riding, vocational tasters.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Providing opportunities for personal and social development is essentially a diversionary activity which builds self-confidence and improves tenant outcomes.

CHPs are already active in linking tenants to employment, training and education opportunities. The presence of positive peer groups and learning new skills can influence behaviour change.

Activities already being undertaken by the sector include:

- Volunteer work placements
- Education bursaries / scholarships
- Adult non-vocation training
- Provision of IT equipment
- Life skills training.

THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Tenants who are actively involved in their community or within their CHP can bring about significant benefits to both themselves and where they live as involvement builds respect and promotes good relationships.

Active involvement can develop technical, personal and social skills to help people feel valued and promote community cohesion. Community projects are most successful when all key partners and stakeholders are involved.

Examples of effective community engagement initiatives include:

- Discussion groups and workshops
- Community fairs or events
- Tenant newsletters
- Supporting social enterprises
- Supporting tenant/community based cooperatives.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Early intervention can prevent ASB from escalating and for young people in particular, it can steer them away from criminal behaviour.

Early intervention in neighbour nuisance cases can involve a warning letter, but the timing of which provides the perpetrator with an opportunity to assess and modify their behaviour. Early interventions are an effective method of having a positive change in a person's behaviour.

SUPPORT REFERRALS

Referring tenants to agencies or activities which directly address the factors underlying ASB or offending behaviour can bring about significant benefits.

For example, unemployment, debt, substance abuse, poor relationships and social networks. Support can also involve access to mediation services and community justice centres as a useful way in dealing with lower level incidences of ASB, in particular neighbour disputes. Mediation should be encouraged as a key intervention tool.[28]

Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) and Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD) and Antisocial Behaviour

Social housing providers have acquired a range of powers to tackle ASB. The Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) and Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD) provides a layer of tools for social housing providers to deal with tenants who commit serious crimes or other types of antisocial behaviour.

CHPs who implement the ASB sections of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) and Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD) should be aware that this could raise expectations among tenants of the landlord's ability to resolve ASB. The ongoing challenge for landlords is to manage these expectations and be clear on how complaints of ASB are approached. Therefore, CHPs need a rigorous ASB management policy and a simple and transparent framework.

For further information about ASB in general and the ASB sections of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW), refer to Best Practice Approaches to Tackling Antisocial Behaviour – Position Paper by NSW Federation of Housing Associations, Lynch, L, 2016. For further information about ASB for Queensland CHPs, refer to section 3.5 Fair expectations of behaviour in the Social Housing Tenancy Management Policy, Department of Housing and Public Works, May 2016.

Aggressive Behaviour

A common example of ASB is aggressive behaviour.

The potential for aggression is identified as one of the most difficult behaviours to deal with due to fear and concern for one's own safety and duty of care you have towards ensuring the safety of others.

After assessing safety, you can attempt to defuse aggression using the following strategies:[29]

- Remain calm and act as if you are confident and in control even if you feel anxious. Projecting anxiety may increase anxiety in the other person and escalate their aggression.
- Use a calm and reassuring voice and non-threatening body language. Do not show any anger.
- Resist invitations to argue.
- Be respectful and use an even reassuring tone of voice. Maintain a non-judgemental attitude and ask what you can do to help. Allow the person to talk uninterrupted and keep your focus on the person.

28. Lynch, L., 2016. Best Practice Approaches to Tackling Antisocial Behaviour - Position Paper by NSW Federation of Housing Associations. Sydney: s.n.

29. Provided with permission of Tamworth Family Support Service: Achievement Awareness Training Course in Managing Aggressive Behaviour and Personal Safety – Threatening Situations.

- Maintain neutral eye contact and a relaxed facial expression. Be aware that smiling may be misinterpreted by an aggressive person. Use open body language but also be aware of keeping your distance and having access to an exit.
- Give time and space for the aggressive person to calm down and explain the consequences of the aggressive behaviour respectfully but firmly. Offer some suggestions as to how the situation could be resolved and give the person a few options to give them a sense of control over the situation.
- Always assess safety as a first priority and only attempt to defuse the situation if it is safe to do so.
- Attempt to defuse the aggression by redirecting the behaviour to the issue, moving to a quieter space if appropriate, conveying that you are there to help and using appropriate focus and communication skills to show you are listening.
- If the situation is escalating and the situation is getting out of your control, activate your organisation's emergency procedures which includes calling for assistance.
- Always follow policies and procedures and report and record incidents according to your organisation's requirements.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AND COUNSELLING ASSISTANCE

- Provides staff with the opportunity to debrief and encourages people to recognise and deal with reactions in a positive manner in a safe environment.
- Help normalise people's responses to an incident and lessen the negative impact on people involved.
- Facilitate recovery in people who are experiencing normal stress reactions to an **abnormal** event.
- Prevent the development of persistent problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of a critical incident.

Staff who are the victims of incidents, even relatively minor ones, may find them stressful and emotionally disturbing. It is important after an incident to talk to a friend, manager or colleague and utilise the counselling programs or peer support programs where available.

SELF-CARE:

Current WHS legislation emphasises the importance of individual workers being responsible for their own self-care, health and wellbeing when it comes to managing stress.

Organisations can put in place systems and supports to minimise risk to workers, however it is also the worker's responsibility to ensure work/life balance and that they engage in activities outside of the workplace to manage stress.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Training in how to manage incidents and crisis situations is vital for CHPs due to the nature of the work they do.

Organisations need to provide training options for staff in how to manage aggressive behaviour, and ensure they are trained and familiar with the WHS policies, procedures and guidelines and any training required to implement them.

Supervisors can assist staff to undertake relevant training by reviewing staff knowledge and skills during supervision sessions and annual appraisals which can inform professional development activities. This can assist staff to feel more confident in their ability to manage difficult situations and minimise the impact of incidents on staff wellbeing.[30]

REFER TO SECTION FOUR: Tools and Resources to Support Practice for some examples of relevant guidelines relating to WHS for home visits and managing aggressive behaviours.

30. Centre for Training in Social Housing, (May 2017), CHCCCS020 Respond Effectively to Behaviours of Concern Participant Notes

Responding to Behaviours of Concern

People living with complex conditions can sometimes behave in ways that can be viewed as challenging or threatening to others. It is important to consider that while they may cause others to feel unsafe or uneasy, often these behaviours are a way for the person to communicate their emotions and needs and this may be due to a limited ability to express themselves in other more appropriate ways. Being mindful of this can assist housing workers to respond more effectively.

Behaviours of concern may include: aggression, intoxication, self-harm, confusion or other cognitive impairment, intrusive behaviour, heightened noise, verbal offensiveness and disinhibition.

DEFINITION OF CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR OR BEHAVIOUR OF CONCERN:

"Culturally abnormal behaviour of such intensity, frequency and duration that the physical safety of the person or others is placed or is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to ordinary community facilities, services and experiences." [31]

When responding to behaviours of concern it is important to ensure that responses are targeted to the behaviour and not the person. Furthermore, it is helpful to describe the behaviour as opposed to labelling the behaviour.

While having some understanding of a person's history or diagnosis might provide relevant information, it is not necessary to know the diagnosis to deal with behaviours of concern effectively. When focusing on behaviour, housing workers should be mindful to use effective communication skills and a planned response in line with the organisation's policies and procedures, this will equip workers with the required skills to effectively respond to the behaviour.

Focusing on behaviours will:

- enable housing workers to correctly identify the type of challenging behaviour e.g. hostile, domineering etc.
- allow housing workers to focus on a person's behaviour and not their personality or them as a person
- help housing workers to describe the behaviour more accurately to their supervisor/manager or relevant specialist
- describe the behaviour to the person in order to confront the behaviour which can assist in bringing about change.

WORKING WITHIN THE SCOPE OF ROLES AND FOLLOWING THE ORGANISATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

Organisation have policies and procedures and housing workers have job descriptions which clearly outline their role and responsibilities and establishes clear guidelines on what is expected of them in their workplace. How workers respond to behaviours of concern will be informed by these guidelines with recognition that there are specific responsibilities associated with Work Health and Safety and duty of care obligations towards colleagues, tenants and others.

In specific situations where housing workers are faced with potential incidents or behaviours of concern, they may be required to take decisive action and confidently respond with a clear understanding of what is expected in such a situation.

31. Emerson, E. & Einfeld, F. N., 2011. Challenging Behaviours. Third ed. New York: Cambridge University Press

Being able to defuse situations where someone may be angry and frustrated, considering the safety of others, and following policies and procedures are all important when responding to behaviours of concern.

Organisational information and guidelines relevant to addressing behaviours of concern may include:

- Safety procedures such as when conducting home visits
- Identifying types of incidents or behaviours that require a planned response
- Communication strategies for calming people down and preventing situations from escalating
- Guidelines for responding respectfully and ethically regardless of the other person's behaviour
- Knowing when to seek advice and support
- Procedures for reporting and recording incidents.

Policies and procedures relevant to dealing with behaviours of concern may include:

- Duty of care
- Work Health and Safety
- Mandatory reporting (self-harm and child protection)
- Code of Conduct/Ethics
- Incident reporting
- Referrals
- Critical incidents
- Debriefing
- Home visits.

Duty of Care

While dealing with tenants who exhibit behaviours of concern can be challenging for housing workers, the guidelines provided by organisations are designed to protect workers and ensure compliance with legislation.

Meeting duty of care obligations to prevent foreseeable harm to oneself and others also includes a duty of care to the person who is displaying the behaviour of concern. Housing workers are required to adhere to ethical guidelines such as treating the tenant with respect and acknowledging their rights, maintain privacy and confidentiality, and work within the scope of their role.

Suggestions for responding to behaviours of concern:

- Regardless of the setting, be observant and alert to your surroundings. When you encounter behaviours of concern observe what is happening and remain calm.
- Don't make assumptions, gather information where you can.
- Use previous knowledge of the tenant if known to you. You may be able to use that knowledge to meet their needs and de-escalate the behaviour.
- Use appropriate communication skills to validate the tenant's feelings, show that you are listening and give reassurance you are there to help.
- Be aware of your own body language and observant of the other person's body language. Avoid gestures that could be considered threatening.
- Set limits and boundaries and be consistent.
- If safe to do so and appropriate, clearly and calmly explain why the behaviour is not OK and suggest an alternative.
- Be prepared for potential unpredictable behaviour and make safety a priority.
- If you are concerned about harm to others, move people away to a different area or move the person to a quieter space being aware of exit points.
- Seek assistance and support from colleagues and supervisors, and use alarm systems as appropriate.

Motivational interviewing as a technique to engage with tenants

Motivational interviewing is a method that was originally developed in the alcohol and other drug field by William Miller and Stephen Rollnick.[32] It involves enhancing a person's motivation to change and is a particularly effective tool in decreasing alcohol and other drug use but can be used for all behaviour change. It recognises that motivation is a dynamic state that can be influenced and acknowledges that an authoritative approach may in fact deter change by increasing resistance.

This approach utilises the principles and practices of person centred counselling to encourage the person to move through the stages of change and to make personal choices along the way. A person's resistance is viewed as evidence of conflict or ambivalence and is met with reflection rather than a confrontational style.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

The following are the key principles of motivational interviewing:

- Express empathy
- Acceptance facilitates change
- Skilful reflection is fundamental
- Ambivalence is normal
- Awareness of consequences is important
- A discrepancy between present behaviour and important goals will motivate change
- Avoid argument
- Arguments are counterproductive
- Defending breeds defensiveness
- Resistance is a signal to change strategies
- Labelling is unnecessary for change
- Roll with resistance
- Momentum can be used to good advantage
- Perceptions can be shifted
- New perspectives are invited but not imposed
- Support self-efficacy
- The belief in the possibility of change is an important motivator
- The person is responsible for choosing and carrying out personal change
- The person should present arguments for change.

EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU CAN USE MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES IN HOUSING PRACTICE

SECURING THE INVITATION: examples of phrases that invite participation in change discussion include:

1. ***"Do you mind if we talk about*** [insert behaviour or situation where change is being encouraged]?
2. ***I see/heard*** [blank] a***nd I am wondering if you would be open to discussing*** [blank]…"
3. "***They say there is no time like the present. I have a few minutes right now and want to know if you'd be interested in discussing*** [blank]…"
4. ***"I would like us to spend a little bit of time talking about*** [blank]. ***Are you up to that right now?"*** (If the answer is "no" you may want to follow up with, "So when would be a good time this week)?"
5. ***"I was reviewing your file*** (rent ledger that shows rent arrears, assessment, tenant response plan, housing assessment document, etc.) ***and noticed*** [blank]. ***How about we spend just a little time talking about that."***

32. Miller, W. R. and Rollnick, S. (1991) Motivational interviewing: Preparing people to change addictive behavior. New York: Guilford Press, 1991

AFFIRMATIONS: An affirmation can acknowledge discussion about change, attempts at change, and/or actual change accomplishments – including when that change has been maintained.

Affirmative statements that are too broad ("That is great") or ingratiating ("I always knew you could do it") must be avoided. The more specific you can be about what the individual is attempting to change and the situation/context in which it happened, the better.

Good examples of affirmative statements that can be used by housing professionals include:

1. ***"You showed a lot of*** [insert compliment/observation] ***in following*** [service name] ***household members policy."***
2. ***"When you got that bad news*** [or be specific of what the news was] ***you handled it well without putting your tenancy at risk."***
3. ***"In spite of our meeting being a tough one last week*** [or specify date], ***your willingness to engage in conversation with me again today shows that you are serious about changing*** [specify issue/behaviour that is changing]."

REINFORCING SELF-CONFIDENCE: Self-confidence comes about when the client realises that they have the ability to make changes in their life, and that they have the skills to do so.

To reinforce self-confidence the housing professional must observe a change that is occurring and then elicit a response from the tenant on why or how they were able to accomplish the change.

1. ***"It looks like you have been working hard to keep the kitchen tidy. That is different than when you first moved in. How have you been able to do that?"***
2. ***"Telling Tyler that he can't stay at your house long term without advising us that you have another household member living at the property was the right thing to do so that you weren't violating your lease, even though he is your best friend. How were you able to make this change happen?"***
3. ***"When I did my follow up to make sure the rent was paid, I could see that we haven't had one noise complaint about your apartment in the last month. I knew you previously said you were going to work on that, but I had no idea you had been working so hard to make it a reality. Why did you go about making the changes and how did you do it?"***

INSPIRING / EVOKING CHANGE TALK: Rather than providing advice or lecturing (which is proven not to work well) this strategy within motivational interviewing is focused on eliciting a response from the tenant about why a change may be personally important to them.

The approach to inspiring the change talk can come about from different approaches: noting discrepancies; forward looking; provoking extremes; measuring importance, confidence and readiness; and, suggesting change when the tenant is having difficulty changing. Inspiring/Evoking Change Talk is proven to be effective for successful outcomes in the change process.

1. ***"What makes you think you need to change*** [specify]***? What will happen if you don't change?"***
2. ***"What would your life be like in*** [insert time period like 3 months, 6 months, a year, 3 years, etc] ***if you changed your*** [specify behaviour]***?***
3. ***"Suppose you don't change*** [specify]***, what is the worst thing that might happen?" And if you made the change, what is the best thing you can think of that may happen?"***
4. ***"Tell me what changes you have made since the last time we met and why those changes are important to you."***

The Stages of change approach

Motivational interviewing includes the 'stages of change' approach proposed by Porchaska and DiClemente who identify a person's readiness for change as a vital indicator of behavioural change.

The stages of change and responses to these stages include:

PRECONTEMPLATION (NOT READY):
Increase the person's perception of the risks and problems with their current behaviour. Provide harm reduction strategies.

CONTEMPLATION (GETTING READY):
Weigh up the pros and cons of change with the person and work on helping them tip the balance by:

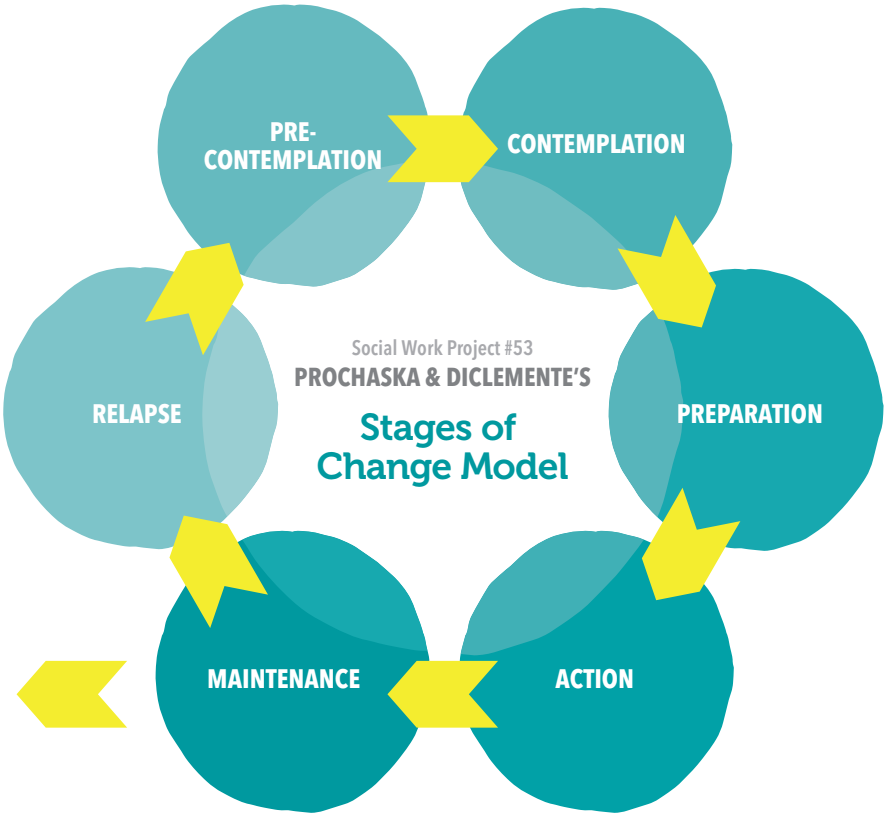
- exploring ambivalence and alternatives
- identifying reasons for change/risks of not changing
- increasing the person's confidence in their ability to change

PREPARATION – ACTION (READY):
Clear goal setting – help the person to develop a realistic plan for making change and to take steps towards change

MAINTENANCE (STICKING TO IT):
Assist the person to identify and use strategies to prevent relapse.

RELAPSE (LEARNING):
Assist the person renew the processes of contemplation and action without becoming stuck or demoralised. Relapse is normalised in motivational interviewing and is used as an opportunity to learn about how to maintain long term behaviour change in the future.[33]

33 https://www.racgp.org.au/afp/2012/september/motivational-interviewing-techniques/ viewed 22/10/17



Approaches to consider when a tenant with complex needs refuses to engage with support services

There are many reasons why a tenant may refuse to engage with support services. As CHPs typically don't engage in a therapeutic relationship with tenants, it may not be appropriate to explore in detail with the tenant the nature of such refusal.

However, it is important for CHPs to be aware that the reasons are likely to be far more complicated than the tenant simply not wanting to engage in support. There may be motivational reasons and applying basic motivational interviewing strategies may be considered appropriate (refer to above information on motivational interviewing).

Having close links with support agencies means that your organisation should have general discussions with support agencies about how to link tenants with support when the tenant is reluctant to accept a referral or engage with the support agency following a referral. Tenancy staff can seek guidance and advice from their support partners about how to approach tenants experiencing tenancy issues who are not willing to engage with support. If a tenant will not give permission to disclose their information to a support provider, generic discussions are appropriate about ways to engage with a tenant.

For example, the dialogue with the support provider could be:

"A tenant has accrued a lot of rent arrears and we have been unable to engage with the tenant to find out why. We have discussed making a referral for support to assist them with their finances but they have refused. Do you have any suggestions about how we can try and engage with the tenant to make a referral?"

It is also important to note that the manner in which CHP staff try to engage tenants with supports is important. Simply saying to the tenant '*do you want a referral*' or including referral options in a letter is usually not sufficient. A level of rapport is often needed with the tenant to assist CHP staff to have a 'general' discussion with the tenant, which includes a discussion about tenancy issues and potential support options.

If the Next of Kin details are obtained at the beginning of the tenancy and the tenant has given permission for the Next of Kin to be contacted if tenancy issues arise, then the Next of Kin could be contacted (if considered appropriate) in order to seek guidance on ways to assist the tenant address their tenancy issues.

It should also be recognised that sometimes it is not possible to assist a tenant to sustain their tenancy i.e. if their support needs are too high for independent living; the tenancy has reached crisis point where institutional care or rehabilitation options may be required; financial situation or support needs may require living with family and friends or transitional housing for a period of time. An independent living skills assessment may be appropriate to assist determining whether the tenant is able to live independently. In these situations, alternative permanent or temporary accommodation options should be explored with the tenant to avoid the tenant accruing substantial rental arrears and/or non-rent account debt that the tenant is unlikely to ever be able to repay.

Pathway to guide practice when a tenant with complex needs refuses to engage with support services

The flow chart on the right gives some guidance on the steps involved with a tenant with complex needs who refuses to engage with support services.

An enforcement approach (breach letters) may be appropriate to use along with these steps as long as sufficient explanation is given to the tenant as to why the enforcement approach is being used. A clear explanation of the tenancy issues needs to be given to the tenant.

PATHWAY TO GUIDE PRACTICE WHEN A TENANT WITH COMPLEX NEEDS REFUSES TO ENGAGE WITH SUPPORT SERVICES

Identification of tenant with complex needs experiencing tenancy difficulties

Tenancy worker strives to engage with tenant to explore issues & develop a tenancy response plan

Tenant engages with Tenancy worker & consents to a referral to a support service

Tenancy worker initiates a referral to a support service & participates with the tenant and support service to review & modify a tenancy response plan

UTILISE TRAUMA INFORMED CARE APPROACHES AND:

- communicate via letter & verbally with tenant, offering support options & advising of perilous nature of tenancy if tenant does not address tenancy issues
- ensure the CHP addresses all avenues it needs to so that it complies with residential tenancy law
- assess tenant capacity to make informed decisions (does your experience suggest a mental health or brain injury issue impacting ability to make informed decisions?)
- advise tenant about tenant advocacy services available to them & offer to initiate a referral to support the tenant in their dealings with the CHP

CRISIS POINT REACHED

- Tenant mentally unwell – seek mental health assessment
- Neighbours distressed & anxious & / or safety concerns for tenant – potential police involvement

Tenancy worker considers whether tenancy can be sustained & explores other housing options with tenant including:

- Residing with family / friends
- Transitional housing
- Supported accommodation

Tenant struggles to engage with Tenancy worker & refuses to consent to a referral to a support service or accepts referral but doesn't engage with support service

Tenancy worker seeks advice from senior staff member / Tenancy Manager to guide next steps

Discussion initiated with support services, seeking guidance on possible actions given the tenant has refused consent for referral to support or isn't engaging with support (confidentiality considerations to be made)

Explore possible family or community connections who might be able to assist with tenant engagement i.e. next of kin (confidentiality considerations to be made)

TENANCY WORKER

- continues trying to engage with tenant
- monitors impact of tenant behaviour on neighbours
- continues seeking guidance from support services

Tenancy Manager seeks a meeting with support service managers to:

- continues trying to engage with tenant
- monitors impact of tenant behaviour on neighbours
- continues seeking guidance from support

Establishing sustainable partnerships

An assessment tool such as the SGCH Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) is an excellent way to assist staff to identify tenancy issues which in turn can assist to identify the relevant services that may be able to assist tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The outcome of such a VAT assessment could be passed on to the relevant people within the organisation in order to follow up with the tenant and make the relevant referral/s (this may include the sustaining tenancies role/team, if such a role/team exists in your organisation).[34]

In order to identify such relevant services, close joint working relationships with other agencies is critical in order to establish an effective rapport and exchange information. Effective networking assists to build trust and enables community housing providers to link in with necessary support to assist with complex tenancies. It can also assist with breaking down barriers for clients to engage with support services.[35]

Through networking, community housing providers should identify key support services (such as their local domestic and family violence and homelessness services) and invest in establishing strong and effective relationships with such services in order to have a mutual exchange of advice.

For example, community housing providers can assist their local domestic and family violence and homelessness services with information relating to Housing Pathways. The local domestic and family violence and homelessness services could provide advice to community housing providers about which services would be most appropriate to refer a tenant to in particular circumstances. Such support services should be aware of which services are available and the referral process in order to assist their community housing colleagues. In this way, community housing providers don't need to be the 'expert' on service provision, but can seek advice from the experts.

Key staff in each community housing organisation should be identified as having a focus on networking and building up a positive rapport with key services on an ongoing basis. Before establishing new approaches to implement into the organisation to maintain sustainable tenancies, it is advisable to spend some time reflecting on the organisation's current practices – for example how the organisation make referrals to support services, and consider what improvements can be made. [36]

In QLD, some of the programs and services available to assist tenants in sustaining a tenancy include Homestay, Rent Connect and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) that are funded to provide mobile support to clients to sustain their tenancy.

If appropriate support services are not in place, the CHP should seek to identify any supports that would be of benefit to the tenant. This could include their own network of friends or relatives, cultural and support groups as well as government and non-government service providers.

Where local support services are engaged, CHPs should work collaboratively with support providers to identify sustaining tenancy barriers and opportunities. Ongoing communication with the support provider is required to determine if tenants are in a position to sustain their tenancy. www.mycommunitydirectory.com.au and www.oneplace.org.au can be accessed to identify service providers.

34. For organisation's that have a sustainable tenancy role/team, it is important to be very clear about the duties and responsibilities of such a role/s and how it 'fits' with the tenancy team and asset team to ensure the distribution of tasks are clear to all i.e. tenancy staff will refer to the sustainable tenancy staff member/team when risks/needs relating to the tenancy are identified. The level of qualification for such staff also need to be considered, such as qualified social worker or similar such qualification.

35. Anne Power, Laura Lane and Nicola Serle, May 2008, *Report to Incommunities on the About Turn Project*.

36. Chartered Institute of Housing, October 2014, *How to create sustainable tenancies.*

Case Coordination Networks (QLD)

Case coordination or care coordination provides a platform for integrated service provision and offers a range of housing and support options to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. They are a mechanism for community housing providers to refer a tenant to a multi agency group to address a range of housing and support needs in a coordinated way.

Case coordination groups remain primarily focussed on working with referred clients to achieve improved service integration and a collaborative housing and support plan. The meetings are used to refer individuals or families; and then harness the capabilities, knowledge and resources available across agencies to achieve an effective response.

There are various case coordination models operating in Queensland, including groups that are housing and homelessness focussed and also specialist case coordination models focussed in areas of mental health and young people.

Case coordination groups negotiate various matters including informed consent processes for sharing information and ways of working that require a mutual exchange of information and resources between diverse agencies with varied roles.

Case coordination groups currently operate in the following regions: Ipswich, Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast, Cairns, and Brisbane – inner north, outer north and south west.

CASESTUDY : Bridge Housing Building Successful Partnerships

What makes a successful partnership?

Bridge Housing provides homes for some of the most vulnerable people in society and recognizes the importance of effective support partnerships. Optimal outcomes can be realized through partnerships with high performing support partners, allowing tenants access to a range of services that assist them in sustainment of their tenancies as well as in reaching their personal goals.

Weave and Bridge Housing are one such partnership. Below are the main components of a successful partnership, and how they are being applied between Weave and Bridge Housing.

1) A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP HAS SHARED VALUES AND CLARITY OF PURPOSE

Bridge Housing and Weave's values and missions are aligned, with both organisations focused on improving the lives of vulnerable people and the communities in which we operate. With offices in close proximity to each other in Redfern and Waterloo, Weave's support services focus on assisting socially excluded young people, women, children and families in the heart of Sydney, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This focus clearly aligns with Bridge Housing's historical geographic base and our social housing delivery. Our Service Level Agreement (SLA) articulates our shared purpose and ways of working to support the partnership. It drives our collective focus on creating better outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness and women and children escaping domestic violence who are unable to access the private market without assistance.

2) A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP HAS EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Weave and Bridge Housing have a signed SLA with a clear term of two years, with outputs and outcomes reviewed annually. At this point the partnership and the SLA will be reviewed.

Each organisation has designated roles responsible for the management of the partnership, with the agreed responsibilities relating to housing management, support services, attendance of quarterly meetings, and joint annual reviews of the partnership. There are also clearly articulated steps for dispute resolution and systems are in place to ensure the partnership continues regardless of staff changes.

3) A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP HAS RECIPROCAL REFERRAL ARRANGEMENTS

Bridge Housing is afforded a direct referral pathway for those tenants within Weave's client base who are at risk of homelessness, as well as women who may need support relating to domestic violence or family issues.

In exchange, Weave is able to nominate clients for a pool of properties designated for transitional housing, and currently has 12 clients accessing transitional housing with Bridge Housing.

Bridge Housing's Pathways Team also works closely with Weave to provide pathways to support for applicants and regularly refer applicants who present for housing assistance.

4) A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP HAS CLARITY OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Both partners have clear roles set out in the SLA, with Bridge Housing responsible for all tenancy management functions including lease signing, rent and water charging, rental bonds, housing application assistance and tenancy management. It stipulates that Weave is responsible for the provision of support services and provides details of specific service expectations. Additional responsibilities set out in the SLA include client referrals pathways, support provision expectations, WHS requirements, vacancy management and information sharing and confidentiality. The clarity of roles and responsibilities leaves little room for ambiguity and ensures accountability.

BRIDGE'S PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE

OUTCOMES IN 2016/17

- additional 5 clients housed through the transitional housing program;
- no failed tenancies;
- 3 tenant initiated exits: 2 into private rental market and 1 into permanent social housing at end of transitional housing term;
- 10 of 11 current transitional tenancies have no tenancy risk indicators;
- 1 transitional tenancy with rent arrears but reducing arrears on a repayment plan;
- 2 referrals to WEAVE for early intervention from the general tenancy portfolio due to property care, nuisance and annoyance and rent arrears. Tenancies remain sustained with risk indicators, but rental arrears have improved.

5) A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP HAS A MUTUAL COMMITMENT TO CLEARLY IDENTIFIED TENANCY OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Success measurement should be clearly articulated and measured so that both partners are clear on what strong performance looks like, and are clear on their deliverables. The SLA details the outputs and outcomes to be measured between Weave and Bridge Housing. These include the number people housed in the transitional program, the length of tenancies, the tenancy turnover, type and quantity of assistance/ support required, any tenancy management issues encountered, effectiveness of referral processes and end of tenancy outcomes.

> **"Our partnership with Bridge has been beneficial in supporting our clients in finding stable accommodation. It has allowed us to provide the necessary assistance to our clients with their longer term goals and being able to move forward. Bridge has been very responsive and flexible with our needs. We are excited to continue our partnership with Bridge Housing and look forward to the future."**
>
> **FREYA CONOMOS** | TEAM LEADER, WEAVE

CASESTUDY : Coast2Bay

Strong partnerships to deliver effective housing solutions for people with complex needs

Coast2Bay has a number of MOU's with a variety of community agencies across the Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay regions to strengthen effective working relationships with the focus of sustaining tenancies.

Initial referring information assists with assessments to better understand the complexities some tenants may be experiencing. This information is critical to create a pathway for engagement and open the conversation to assist with identification of appropriate services/ supports required by each housing applicant to assist them to create a sustainable tenancy. We rely on transparency from referring services to enable the success of a tenancy.

Transitional Housing is a time limit opportunity to provide housing assistance for clients with a very high or high housing need (as assessed by the Department of Housing and Public Works). Transitional Housing complements and supports the effective delivery of housing outcomes by assisting with stabilising circumstances, building capacity to work towards identified exit options. This is completed by regular Tenancy Pathway Planning meetings. We rely on our partners to deliver the identified support component.

Penny is 20 years old, and was referred to Coast2Bay via the a local youth shelter. As a result of a complex family situation resulting in family breakdown, Penny became homeless.

Penny was referred to Coast2Bay by a local youth shelter. We were able to provide Penny a home in our under 25's accommodation in February 2016. Whilst a tenant at Coast2Bay, and knowing her housing was secure, Penny was able to minimize her stress, access counselling to get on top of things and focus on building the skills she needed as she focussed on her future.

Prior to the family breakdown, Penny had a plan in place for her future. She was enrolled in a training course to help her obtain an apprenticeship in cabinet making which she continued whilst she was at the youth shelter. Having stable housing at Coast2Bay enabled her to continue her plan. She was successful in obtaining a traineeship and is currently employed. Penny is now planning to travel overseas for a couple of years and hopes to be able to secure employment in her trade to continue to build her skills and expertise.

Through the Coast2Bay and local youth service partnership, Penny was supported to establish and maintain a transitional housing tenancy whilst she continued to receive support from the youth shelter to help her address the issues and challenges she faced. The transitional housing program provided a structured level of engagement via Tenancy Pathway Planning and the partnership with the local youth service to enable Penny to continue to address her issues and focus on her future. Penny has now exited Coast2Bay housing to share in a private rental, with a positive plan for her future.

Regional, rural and remote issues

There are many lifestyle benefits to living in regional, rural and remote Australia, and people living in regional, rural and remote areas are known for being down to earth, practical and resilient. But it can be challenging as some services aren't as readily available as in the city. Being familiar with the services in your area and other online support is critical.

Sometimes support over the phone and internet can be helpful. When searching on the internet for services, it is important to use reputable sources.

Whilst there are fewer in person mental health services in rural and remote areas, help is available through:

- helplines and online chat services (a list is available at the following link: **https://www.healthdirect.gov.au)**
- In QLD services are able to access **1300 MHCALL (1300 64 22 55)** to access mental health advice and support.
- online communities
- apps and online programs.

Online therapy (eTherapy) is psychological support, information, therapy and other help that is provided online or on a mobile devise. It can be great for some people, but does not suit others. Further information is available at: **https://www.healthdirect.gov.au**

There is a wealth of reputable and reliable information available online on specific areas of health and wellbeing, such as:

- rural & remote health
- healthcare professionals
- drug and alcohol
- family & child health services
- sexual health
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander medical/health services
- flood and storm recovery.
- aged care
- disability services
- support for carers
- dental care

Further information can be located at: **https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/rural-and-remote-health**

For health services, Healthdirect has contact details for services at: **https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services**

Such services include:

- General practice
- Emergency Departments
- Dentists
- Counselling
- Dermatology
- Chiropractic
- Pharmacy
- Hospitals
- Physiotherapy
- Psychology
- Podiatry
- Optometry.

It is also important for regional, rural and remote providers to link with local interagency networks in order to be aware of what services are available in the local area and how to make referrals. Due to the lack of specialist services in some locations, this may require a collective approach from the services available to effectively respond to issues and assist tenants to sustain their tenancy. It is imperative that all community services work collaboratively in order to pool their resources and achieve effective outcomes. Informal and formal arrangements can be developed in order to support such a collaborative approach.

The reality for many regional, rural and remote providers is that it can be extremely challenging to link tenants with complex needs to services. This may be because the required specialist service doesn't exist in the area; the services that are available don't have the capacity to work with the tenant; the tenant does not want to engage with the service (this can be a particular issue if the tenant has family or personal connections to the service and is concerned about potential privacy issues). In these situations, alternative options need to be explored including working with the tenant's next of kin or other family/personal supports.

The following case studies provide examples from both NSW and QLD on how CHPs manage to deliver high quality services across regional, rural and remote areas where there is often a lack of significant support services available to work with them to support tenants with complex needs.

CASESTUDY : Homes Out West

Managing a complex tenancy without use of formal supports in rural NSW

HOMES OUT WEST
Making a Difference

This tenancy was in a rural location and the property was part of the property transfers from FACS. The property was 3 bedrooms with a single man residing in the property with his dog.

The floors in every room in the house were covered in dog faeces; there was dog (and possibly human) faeces spread all over the doors and walls in the laundry; there was rubbish scattered throughout the kitchen and lounge room which indicated the dog was going through the rubbish looking for food; the dog was extremely underweight and its behaviour indicated it was frightened; there were hardly any furnishings throughout the house; and the tenant seemed distracted and slightly disorientated.

With the tenant's permission, the Housing Officer contacted the tenant's next of kin which was his mother. She informed the Housing Officer that she lived in the city (5 hours away) and had often urged her son to come and live with her but he refused. She was concerned about the mental state of her son and concerned that he was not able to look after his dog.

The Housing Officer informed the tenant of Homes Out West's duty of care to report the condition of the dog to the local animal rescue service. The tenant was devastated but indicated that he understood. The animal rescue service removed the dog and agreed to improve the dog's health with the potential of returning the dog to the care of the tenant, as long as his care for the dog was monitored.

The tenant agreed to transfer to a smaller property and agreed to temporarily live with his mother whilst awaiting a property to become available. A forensic clean took place at the property. The carpet was removed and a major upgrade occurred at the property and the property was allocated to a family.

Once a smaller property became available, the tenant was allocated to the smaller property. The tenant refused to be linked with formal supports but agreed that the Tenancy Officer could contact his mother regularly. The dog was returned to the care of the tenant and was considerably healthier and no longer frightened.

The Housing Officer initially visited the property (with the tenant's permission) every couple of weeks to monitor property care and the condition of the dog. The tenant was aware that this was the purpose of the visits. Over time, the visits reduced in frequency as the tenant was successfully maintaining his tenancy and it was evident that his mental state was improving. He continued to have regular contact with his mother and often visited her. He eventually decided that he was having trouble being able to maintain a tenancy and upon the insistence of his mother, he decided to end his tenancy and live with his mother.

This example shows that even without support from a support worker, having contact with family support can assist to address tenancy issues and assist the tenant to improve their mental state.

CASESTUDY : Horizon Housing

Managing a complex tenancy with limited formal supports in rural QLD

Horizon Housing has been delivering tenancy and property management services in the Maranoa region since 2012. Operating from the Roma local office, the Department of Housing Service Centre is located 4 hours away along with the closest regional network for sector peer support.

Horizon Housing looks at ways to improve the way it does things to get successful outcomes for tenants by working with local agencies and getting feedback from tenants. Our approach that has led to more tenancies being sustained and more feedback from partner support providers includes:

PRE-TENANCY KNOWLEDGE/EDUCATION

When an application is reviewed for matching with a vacancy, and the potential tenant identifies as indigenous, Horizon Housing can approach the Indigenous Advocacy Group consisting of staff from various indigenous support agencies within the community, and without identifying personal information of the tenant can ask if they are able to available to support the tenant should they have availability. To prevent a "sign anything" approach which is common in the circumstances when someone is presented with a home, the potential tenant is offered the opportunity to hold a separate discussion with the community advocate in their own environment where they can obtain a full understanding of the rights and responsibilities involved with signing documents beforehand. Providing the knowledge of what they will need to manage a successful tenancy is important but how this is done is the key to success.

A 4 page pictorial guide is given to new tenants and responsibilities are outlined using first person language of "I" rather than "you" with the tenant's name included. Accompanying this is a brochure setting out what is involved in having a pet, to again set expectations and reduce abandonments.

COMMUNITY SERVICES COLLEAGUES

Although building a network as a new practitioner and service provider in a remote and regional area can be challenging, once you keep to your word, trust can be built and informal and verbal processes are often the ways that work. The rallying of great community services colleagues is often what gets the results for our tenants.

Horizon provides its Support Agency Consent Form at the start of the tenancy and throughout the tenancy. With the majority of their social housing tenants identifying as indigenous, Horizon has listened to support provider colleagues in providing the first names of indigenous support colleagues. We have learned that clients relate to a worker's first name rather than the agency leading to engagement. We have an informal arrangement whereby even if contact is received to an individual worker and they are not the correct service for the need, they will do their best to work with the client and link them to the correct person. We find this brings greater success by reducing barriers once a client has made their initial contact.

EDUCATION

Having taken over the housing management from a different provider and working with communities who have community members with a different landlord, messages and expectations around a tenancy can be misleading. Educating other agencies on the right and responsibilities and consequences can assist with sustaining tenancies as this can be conveyed to the tenant. With the aim of being as transparent as possible, Horizon aims to build upon this by meeting with a neighbouring housing provider and the Department of Housing to further look at consistent messaging of practice.

Use of technology

The increasing access to technology has also assisted regional, rural and remote providers to access information and increase communication options.

Improvements in technologies such as: teleconference facilities; video conferencing such as zoom and skype; email; websites; improved mobile phone coverage; and online training platforms have allowed regional, rural and remote providers to become more connected and less isolated and have given applicants and tenants communication options (including online applications and reporting maintenance issues online).

However, there is an important balance that needs to be found to ensure such technologies do not replace the importance of face to face contact. There are sensitive, complex matters that should continue to be discussed with tenants' face to face and there is a need for workers to interact with their peers face to face through training, events and network meetings.

