

Service/Area: Housing Services
Applicable Entity: HCAL
Approver: State Manager, Victoria
Approval Date: 10 July 2019
Executive Lead: General Manager, Housing Services

Purpose:

Housing Choices Australia are committed to creating and managing safe, quality affordable housing. Part of our role as a responsible landlord is to effectively and efficiently manage our portfolio of assets. This policy outlines the process and commitment Housing Choices Australia apply in meeting our property inspection responsibilities whilst respecting the right and dignity of our residents to the quiet enjoyment of their home.

Following feedback from Drill Hall Residents Association (DHRA) and the Victorian Residents Advisory Committee (VRAC), Housing Choices Australia developed this policy in consultation with DHRA and VRAC.

Scope:

This policy applies to all properties owned or managed by Housing Choices Australia Limited (HCAL) in Victoria.

Policy Statement:

Housing Choices Australia are committed to this policy being aligned with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Residents can expect that Housing Choices Australia will provide them with a property that is in reasonable condition. Residents are required to take care of their property, to keep it reasonably clean and to take responsibility for property damage other than what has been caused by fair wear and tear or criminal activity of a third party which has been reported to the police.

We respect the privacy and dignity of our residents to the quiet enjoyment of their home. At the same time, we are required to carry out our duties to efficiently and effectively manage our assets. This includes completion of repairs and maintenance and carrying out routine property inspections to our tenanted properties to assess the condition of the dwelling. For properties that smoke alarm testing is not undertaken by essential service contractors, staff will also carry out a smoke alarm test the same time as the routine inspection. The Residential Tenancies Act 1997 provides the right for Housing Choices Australia, as a landlord, to carry out a property inspection every 6 months following a notice of entry being served.

Housing Choices Australia understand that for some residents, being notified of a pending inspection may feel like a disruption and/or cause them to feel worried. We want to assure residents that property inspections are to manage our properties effectively: we are not there to judge or comment on our

resident's lifestyle. There may be times that we do have to raise and discuss with residents' concerns that need to be addressed that we notice when carrying out inspections;

- if damage has occurred to the property over and above fair wear and tear;
- if rules stipulated by the Owners' Corporation are being breached;
- If there is a health and safety risk e.g. fire risk

Housing Choices Australia conducts routine property inspections as a minimum in accordance with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Victoria)*. We aim to provide notice of an inspection in writing with **5 business days'** notice prior to the scheduled inspection.

Types of Property Inspections:

Inspections are conducted to ensure we can carry out our duties as a landlord. The main types of inspections include:

Prospective tenant inspections: where an applicant for housing is shown the premises prior to an offer for housing being made (section 86.1a).

Routine and planned inspections: routine inspections are planned and occur annually or twice per year if required (section 86.1f). Inspections help us to learn about the current condition of the property to best use our resources in planning potential cyclical and responsive maintenance.

Pre-exit tenant inspections: where the premises are inspected before the tenant has vacated the property (section 86.2).

Post-exit tenant inspections: where the premises are inspected after the tenant has vacated the property. Housing Choices as landlord may enter any untenanted property at any time.

Housing Choices can also undertake other home visits to a property to meet with a tenant. These include:

- home visit at the request of a tenant;
- A settling-in visit with a new tenant: after commencement of a tenancy, usually 6 weeks, we will make a time in agreement with you to see how you are settling into your new home. This is written into our tenancy agreement and assists us to support new tenants to discuss any issues early to help support a sustainable tenancy.
- visits about specific housing issues such as neighbour disputes, noise levels, rental arrears management, applying for a Housing Choices scholarship;
- joint visits with a support agency who is known to the tenant.

How often will Housing Choices carry out routine and planned inspections?

- for new residents, inspections will take place following 6 months of the start of the tenancy and annually thereafter should there be issues of concerns raised.
- for existing residents, inspections will be on an annual basis unless there have been concerns raised regarding the property at the previous inspection. If concerns have been raised property inspections will continue every 6 months until 2 inspections have been completed without concerns being raised.
- for large sites close to the CBD, we will endeavor to complete routine planned inspections over a 2 week period rather than carrying out inspections to the whole building at once. This was requested by DHRA as preferred practice and adopted by Housing Choices Australia.

In all instances residents' rights will be considered and respected, with consideration to minimal disruption.

Housing Choices Australia aim to provide tenants with a minimum of 5 working days written notice. The notice of entry will be provided by post or in person to the tenant unless electronic communication has been agreed to by the tenant.

We will only arrange to conduct the inspection between 10am and 6pm on any business day (Monday to Friday).

It is appreciated if the tenant be present at the date and time agreed. We will enter the premises with a duplicate key to undertake the inspection if the tenant is not home and leave a note indicating that the inspection was carried out.

What a tenant can expect at an inspection visit:

Inspections will be undertaken at all Housing Choices Australia properties in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act. At an inspection a tenant can expect a staff member (a Property or Housing Officer) to:

- introduce themselves and wear a photo identification badge
- clearly explain the purpose of the visit;
- inform a tenant that they can invite a support person to attend the inspection with them if they choose;
- be prepared for the inspection and arrive with relevant paperwork and information;
- explain the outcomes of the inspection – what was seen and what will happen next and any estimated timeframes agreed at the visit;
- keep a written or online record of the inspection while in the property and of the agreement made with the tenant;
- not inspect the contents of cupboards, wardrobes or drawers without the tenants' permission;
- follow Housing Choices National Housing Service Standard at all times.

Responsibilities:

Housing Choices Australia has responsibilities under the *Occupational Health & Safety Act 2004* to ensure our staff members' health and safety requirements are met. Housing Choices Australia staff are required to follow procedures which enhance their own safety when they undertake a property inspection or other home visit.

Where there is an assessment and there is an unacceptable level of risk for our staff member to attend a property, then a process will be put in place that addresses safety and ensures quality standards of service. This could include two-person visits, visits with a support partner or identified appropriate third party.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act it is the duty of all of tenants to report to us all damage, defects, and any relevant property issues as early as possible for action to be taken at the property.

A tenant has a duty to permit Housing Choices Australia staff exercising a right of entry in accordance with Section 89 of the RTA. If a time is inconvenient, we will re-arrange the property inspection time with you. If you do not permit access, Housing Choices will issue a Breach of Duty Notice. If a tenant still refuses to comply, Housing Choices Australia will need to apply to the Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for a Compliance Order to gain access.

The Housing Services Manager, Victoria, is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of this policy by Property and Housing Officers. The State Manager, Victoria, is to be advised of any non-conformance with this policy and corrective action (such as training for staff) is to be taken within 5 working days of being notified. This action is part of our commitment to being transparent in how we support our tenants.

Communication:

Housing Choices will provide clear information to our tenants and housing applicants on the Inspection policy. The policy is readily available on the website and in new tenant 'welcome packs'. Housing and Property Officers will also refer to the policy when preparing and completing inspections. This helps tenants to fully understand what to expect from our organisation during the inspection including rights and responsibilities in the property.

If an inspection results in Housing Choices Australia seeking to rectify damage and recover the costs for any damage caused by tenants, we will discuss options with the tenant. Refer to the Tenant Damage Policy.

Support Workers Attendance at Inspections:

We actively encourage tenants with support workers to be present at the inspection. This helps for joint working between all parties.

Monitoring and Review of Policies:

This policy will be periodically reviewed every 2 years. Revisions will be made as required due to legislative requirements. Training will be provided to each staff member as a component of their induction to Housing Choices and as policies are altered.

As representatives of our diverse residents, Housing Choices Victorian Resident Advisory Committee (VRAC) members play a key role in reviewing and providing feedback on our tenancy management and tenancy rights and participation policies. Importantly, the VRAC members assist Housing Choices Australia in assessing the content and accessibility of policies.

Legislation, standards and related policies:

- Residential Tenancies Act 1997
- Housing Act 1983 (Vic)
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Tenant Damages Policy
- National Housing Service Standard 2018