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**SPRING
2021**

Cover Photo:
Melanie

**HOUSING
CHOICES**
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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From the General Manager Community Housing

Welcome to the Spring edition of the newsletter and, hopefully, the start of some fabulous weather!

We had some great feedback on the new format of the newsletter, which was wonderful to hear. I hope you all enjoy this edition as well, especially since there are some fabulous spotlight articles on our tenants, inspiring new events and programs (including a Spring Garden Competition) and information about our activities during Homelessness Week.

While you enjoy reading about the fun stuff, don't forget to take in the tips around fire safety and reminders about our Pet Policy. You will also find some important rent reminders in this edition, particularly

about checking you are claiming the maximum Commonwealth Rent Assistance you are eligible for and a reminder to let us know when your household income changes.

You will also notice we have the results from the 2021 Tenant Survey. Amy, our Tenant Communication and Consultation Officer, has a big piece of work to do to analyse the results of this survey and we look forward to having more information to share with you about what you told us and, more importantly, what we are going to do about it.

Stay safe and well. I look forward to catching some of you at our upcoming events, which will be here before we know it. Please get in touch if you would like to be involved.

Natalie Sangalli
General Manager
Community
Housing



You are invited to our End of Year Lunch for Tenants!

Join Housing Choices WA tenants and staff over lunch to celebrate the end of 2021.

In 2020, we held our first End of Year Lunch for Tenants and it was a huge success. This year, we will hold two events so more tenants can attend!

The event will include a **FREE** two course catered lunch, speeches from Housing Choices WA staff, a quiz, raffle prizes and more!

Our events this year will be at Rockingham and Hilton. Tenants from all areas are invited to attend their preferred function.



Places at each event are limited, so please register your interest in attending ASAP to our Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes on 0437 887 675 or via alex.kepes@hcau.org.au and let her know which lunch you would like to attend.

Once you have registered, we will send you a formal invitation closer to the date with more details.



Housing Choices WA seeks State Stimulus Grant funding

The WA Government has announced a \$319 million housing stimulus package called the *Social Housing Economic Recovery Package (SHERP)* to provide funds towards the construction of new social housing and the refurbishment and maintenance of existing homes.

The Community Housing sector was allocated a portion of the funding and, as a Community Housing Provider, Housing Choices WA could apply for SHERP grants across three areas.



Regional Maintenance Success for Housing Choices WA!

Housing Choices WA was successful in May in obtaining **\$20,000** to assist with kitchen and bathroom replacements at several properties in the South West!



New Homes Preparing application

We are preparing an application to get funding to assist with the development of NEW homes in areas of demand.



Refurbishments Preparing application

Funding is available for refurbishing major items in homes including kitchens, flooring and painting!

Help Housing Choices WA seek funding for home refurbishments

To apply for the funding, we need quotes and photos of the items to be refurbished i.e. kitchens and flooring. To get these photos, we will be sending contractors and/or staff to **eligible properties** in September and October.

If your property is eligible for refurbishment works through SHERP funding, we will let you know when contractors and/or staff will be attending your property.

We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause, but we are really excited by these opportunities to apply for funding to enhance the quality of our properties.

Please keep in mind that while we are seeking quotes, there is no guarantee we will be able to do the work as it will all depend on the amount of funding we receive.



If you have any questions about this information, please contact your closest Housing Choices WA office.

Spring Gardening Competition



Share your garden with us for your chance to win a \$100 Bunnings voucher!

We are launching our Spring Gardening Competition in recognition of the care tenants put into maintaining their outdoor areas and to encourage tenants to try their hand at gardening.

All gardens can be entered!

You could have a flower garden, herb or veggie patch, potted plant or balcony garden, patio area or front garden!

All tenants who enter the competition will receive a free seed packet for participating. Winners will receive a \$100 Bunnings voucher.



Entries now open!

How to enter

To enter or find out more about the competition, please contact our Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes on 0437 887 675 or via alex.kepes@hcau.org.au.

Entries close on Friday 12 November 2021.

Allan grows his garden

Allan is a Housing Choices WA tenant who recently found a hobby in gardening. He has since transformed his backyard into a bountiful veggie patch.

Allan wrote into Home Stories to share how he got started in the garden.

Hello fellow tenants!

Last year I moved to a property in Willagee and was delighted to find a patch of dirt in the back yard large enough for a veggie garden.

My first act was to dig out some of the sand and replace it with soil mix from Bunnings and some cheap fertiliser. I was also lucky enough to find pavers to use as steppingstones.

I then needed to figure out what to plant, so I visited my local library and borrowed a book called *Vegetable and Fruit Gardening in Australia* by Michael Pollock. I chose easy stuff like cucumber, tomatoes, radishes, beetroot, corn and chillies. I later planted passion fruit and a grape vine, both of which grew quickly, and the

passion fruit plant even produced a few fruit.

Before I knew it I had enough healthy fresh veggies to supplement my diet very nicely! I am chomping at the bit for Spring and have raised seeds for this year's planting.

I receive untold joy, relaxation and a deep sense of accomplishment from this endeavour and have spent hours sitting and admiring my handy work.

I strongly recommend looking into gardening as a recreational activity for increased mental and physical health in these difficult times.

Regards,
Allan



WA Government Safety and Security Rebate for Seniors!



West Australians with a Seniors Card can now claim up to \$400 per household towards the purchase and installation of eligible home security equipment through the WA Government Safety and Security Rebate.

Rebate applicants must first purchase and install the home security equipment **before** applying for a rebate.

The following home security items are eligible for the rebate:

- home alarm and CCTV systems
- security window screens or shutters
- security sensor lights
- Wi-Fi video doorbells
- residual current devices*
- smoke alarms*
- deadlocks*
- fire extinguishers and fire blankets.

*You will see that residual current devices, smoke alarms and deadlocks are eligible. As a landlord, Housing Choices WA already provides these by law to meet minimum security standards.

To meet the requirements to receive a Safety and Security Rebate you must:

- be a tenant or household member
- be a WA Seniors Card holder
- **get approval from your landlord before purchasing and installing equipment**
- ensure items purchased meet the relevant Australian Standards
- ensure any installation work required is carried out by a licensed tradesperson
- keep receipts of goods or services purchased.

Housing Choices WA is supportive of tenants making the most of the Safety and Security Rebate for seniors, but we do need you to complete an Alterations and Additions form prior to purchasing and installing any additional security equipment.

The Safety and Security Rebate is administered by the WA Seniors Card Centre. For more information on terms and conditions and how to apply, please call 1800 671 233 or visit www.seniorcard.wa.gov.au.

I'm interested in the rebate. What do I do next?

1. Contact the WA Seniors Card Centre

to get all the information you need about the rebate and how it works.



2. Do your research!

Shop around to compare prices and find a qualified tradesperson to install the item (if installation is required).



3. Get approval from Housing Choices WA

by completing an Alterations and Additions form and wait for permission from Housing Choices WA in writing.

To request an Alterations and Additions form, please visit our website or call your local Housing Choices WA office.



4. Purchase

and install the security equipment (make sure you keep receipts).



5. Apply for the rebate through the WA Seniors Card Centre.



Fire safety in the home



Household fires are often accidental and preventable. Here are some fire safety tips for the home to help keep you and your belongings safe.



Most house fires start in the kitchen.

Stay safe when cooking by never leaving food unattended on the stove and avoid hanging items such as tea towels near stoves or on cooking appliances.



The second biggest cause of house fires is smoking.

Please do not smoke indoors. Make sure you never leave lit cigarettes unattended and completely extinguish cigarette butts in an ashtray.



If you have a heater, please make sure all items are at least a metre away and never dry clothes on the heater.



Avoid overloading power points and power boards and always replace appliances that have frayed or damaged cords.



Never leave a candle or incense burning

in an unattended room and ensure they are not near any flammable materials or curtains.



Be Insured!

Housing Choices WA's building insurance does not cover tenant possessions. It is your responsibility to protect your furniture and belongings by getting contents insurance. Contact your preferred insurance company to discuss your needs and make sure you shop around to ensure you are getting the most competitive prices!



What to do in a fire emergency

If a fire starts in your house, do not try to put it out. Get everyone safely out of the house and call 000.

If you live in a unit and a fire starts outside your unit and it is not safe to leave the unit, close all the doors and all the windows and call 000.



Rent reminders for tenants

Have you had a change to your income or household lately?

Every year we will ask you to complete and return an Eligibility and Rent Review form to ensure you are still eligible for Community Housing and are paying the correct rent.

However, if you have had a change to your income or someone has moved in or out of your home, it is important you notify us as soon as possible so we can adjust your rent accordingly.

It is important to advise us of any change in your income or household composition within 14 days to avoid rent backdating charges.

If your income increases and you do not let us know, you may face backdated rental charges when your annual Rent Review occurs.

Are you claiming Commonwealth Rent Assistance?

Did you know you may be eligible to claim Rent Assistance from Centrelink, which contributes towards your rental payments?

Your rent is calculated to include the amount of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) you are eligible for.

When we review your rent, we advise you of the CRA amount we assess you being entitled to, but it's important to check with Centrelink that you are receiving the full amount of CRA you are eligible for.

Financial support for tenants



Housing Choices WA resumed our award-winning Managing on a Low Income Financial Wellbeing groups for tenants this year.

So far, we have run groups with tenants at Bunbury, Fremantle and Gosnells.

Our Managing on a Low Income groups encourage tenants to share their cost saving knowledge and financial tips with each other. Tenants are also joined by Housing Choices WA staff and a local financial counsellor.

The majority of tenants who have attended these groups didn't know what a financial counsellor could do for them, so we wanted to let you know how a financial counsellor could help you!

How financial counsellors can help

Financial counsellors are a one stop shop for information, advice and advocacy for people in financial difficulty.

Financial counsellors help people to:

- access grants, concessions and emergency relief
- develop budgets and money plans
- negotiate with creditors and access dispute resolution services
- understand their rights and access legal help

They're also trained in counselling and can offer emotional support and a listening ear when people really need it.

Their services are non-judgmental, confidential and FREE.



Do you want to talk to a financial counsellor over the phone?

Call the National Debt Helpline on **1800 007 007**.

Do you want to find a financial counsellor near you?

Call our Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes on **0437 887 675**.

Look out for more financial tips from tenants in our Summer edition of Home Stories.

Homelessness Week in review



Housing Choices WA participated in multiple events and committed to new initiatives for Homelessness Week 2021 including housing rough sleepers and attending events to support tenants and people experiencing homelessness across Perth, Peel and the South West.



Housing solutions to end Homelessness was the theme for Homelessness Week this year, which ran from 7-14 August. In recognition of this theme, Housing Choices WA spent the week prioritising housing for those sleeping rough and experiencing chronic homelessness.

Housing Choices WA also committed to visiting our new tenants who came from rough sleeping and delivering a small welcome gift to help them settle into their new home. One of our newest tenants, Scott, chose a sandwich press as his welcome gift.



Housing Choices WA tenants were also in the spotlight during Homelessness Week. Trish Owen, a Housing Choices WA tenant and Chairperson of our Advisory Committee of Tenants, spoke at the launch of the HOME (Hear of My Experience) Lived Experience Co-design Toolkit and Engagement Framework.



The HOME Project brought together people who have experienced housing insecurity to develop resources to support the housing and homelessness sector to better engage with people with lived experience. Trish was a co-author of the toolkit and framework and participated on the day as a presenter and lived experience expert on the Q&A panel.

Multiple staff from our Community Housing division attended the event, including GM Community Housing Natalie Sangalli who was also a Q&A panellist.

Staff from our Mandurah office also attended Homelessness Week events at Mandurah and Rockingham. During these events, rough sleepers were able to access a range of services including housing, health advice, hairdressers, dentists, laundry facilities and food.

Our Tenancy Services Manager for the Peel region, Claire Quinn, commented on the positive impact of attending these events.

"It was great to network with other agencies working in collaboration to assist people experiencing homelessness," Claire said.

"The events also enabled us to spread the word of Housing Choices and educate people on the different types of accommodation we offer and what support agencies we work with.

"We even bumped into a few of our tenants who were volunteering for services assisting at the event, which was lovely."

2021 Tenant Survey results are in!



Earlier this year, 665 Housing Choices WA tenants gave feedback on our services via our Annual Tenant Survey. Below is a snapshot of some of the results.

What We Did Well

Overall satisfaction with our services

You said we have done a good job in most of our service delivery areas. The National Regulatory System for Community Housing sets a 75% satisfaction benchmark for several service areas. We have comfortably exceeded these benchmarks for overall satisfaction, condition of the home and maintenance and repairs.

Satisfied with condition of home



Overall satisfaction



Satisfied with repairs and maintenance



Communicating tenant rights and responsibilities

Last year you told us we could do more to help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities. This year **91% of respondents** said they were aware of their rights and responsibilities, which was an increase from last year.



Our maintenance staff and contractors



90% of respondents said our contractors were courteous and respectful and left your homes clean and tidy. You also told us our Maintenance Hotline staff were helpful and attentive (**88% satisfaction rate**).

Where We Can Improve

How we handle anti-social behaviour complaints



While tenants reported it was easy to make a complaint and the information provided by staff was helpful, tenants said we could improve the speed with which we handle anti-social behaviour complaints and how tenants are kept informed during the process.

How we involve tenants

You told us we could improve how tenants are able to influence Housing Choices WA decision making and how we listen to tenant views and act on them.



Our maintenance response times



You told us that we can improve our repair response times and could communicate better about our planned maintenance and refurbishment timeframes.

Tenants told us what activities they would be most interested in getting involved in:

	Social and wellness activities
	Activities for older people
	Learning about local community services
	Help dealing with anti-social behaviour and nuisance
	Understanding more about repairs and maintenance

We would like to thank all Housing Choices WA tenants who took the time to complete the survey.

We will be reviewing the results closely and will report back in the Summer edition of Home Stories with details about the actions we will undertake to continue to improve our services.

Technology Tips with Melanie

Melanie has been a Housing Choices WA tenant since 2015. She loves gadgets that make life easier and increase her independence. Melanie wrote to us to share the technologies she uses that may be of use to tenants, especially those with disabilities.



There are so many devices that can make life easier and they are becoming more affordable. Many of the gadgets I have use Wi-Fi (wireless internet) and a Google or Alexa voice activated assistant device.

Wi-Fi light globes



I use a Google assistant and Wi-Fi light globes to control the lights in my home. There is something satisfying about turning lights on and off with my voice!

Wi-Fi plugs



Wi-Fi plugs allow you to turn appliances on and off remotely. I have a heated blanket plugged into a Wi-Fi plug so if I'm cold in bed, I ask Google to switch it on!

Video doorbell



With a video doorbell I can see who is outside before opening the door by using an app on my phone. I can also speak to the person at the door via the microphone.

Robovacuum



There are so many robotic vacuums to choose from now - even ones that empty themselves or mop the floor! I love that I can vacuum the dog hair off my floor before friends come over.

Smart IR devices



IR stands for infrared. It uses Wi-Fi to send a signal to an IR device, like a TV. Basically, you can turn your phone into a remote control!

What about Wi-Fi?



For most of these devices, you need Wi-Fi in the house. I have a prepaid pocket Wi-Fi device that I recharge annually or when I run out of credit. It's the cheapest option I have found. You can find many of the devices I mentioned at Kmart, JB Hi-Fi and Harvey Norman. If you receive NDIS funding, sometimes you can claim the cost of the device from your NDIS plan, so check with your planner before purchasing.

I can't wait to see what technology brings next!



Update from the Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT)

Melanie is a member of the ACT and has an update on what they have been working on!

At our last meeting, we reviewed the new Housing Choices Australia Privacy Statements. We all agreed that tenants should have a summary of this information so they can better understand how their privacy is being protected.

We also discussed how Housing Choices WA could better empower tenants to resolve antisocial behaviour issues. We know this is a big concern for tenants and certainly made for a lively discussion.

The ACT also gave feedback on Housing Choices WA staff training. We thought that staff could benefit from training in disability awareness, assisting the elderly and homelessness.

We are excited to be involved in the development of staff training and will keep you updated!

Thinking of getting a pet?



In WA, tenants must ask a landlord for permission to keep a pet and the landlord can refuse the request.

Housing Choices WA knows how important pets can be in maintaining mental and physical wellbeing and we do grant permission wherever possible. However, there are some factors we must consider before we give permission to keep a pet.

These are:

- 1.** Is the property suitable for pets?
- 2.** If the property is part of a Strata, do Strata Company rules allow pets?
- 3.** If the pet needs to be enclosed, is there a suitably sized secure garden / yard?
- 4.** Will the peace, enjoyment and safety of neighbours be unaffected?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, permission is unlikely to be granted.

How many pets?

Local council regulations specify how many cats and dogs can be kept at a property. Where there are no regulations, we do have our own limits on how many pets can be kept to make sure there are no problems with hygiene, impacts on other residents or damage to the property.

Is the pet permitted?

We don't allow Restricted Breeds (Dog Regulations 2002) or dogs that have been deemed as a Dangerous Dog by a local council as pets. Some animals are not considered to be pets – these generally include poultry or fowl, livestock, bees and native and exotic animals. Such animals will not be permitted as pets.

How to apply for permission for a pet

You must apply for permission in writing before you get your pet. Housing Choices WA has a Pet Request Form that you can download from our website or obtain from any of our offices.

If your application is approved, we'll let you know in writing. A \$260 Pet Bond must be paid in full if the pet is capable of carrying parasites

(such as fleas and ticks) that can affect humans. You don't need to pay a bond if you already paid one for another approved pet. The Pet Bond will be used to pay for fumigation of the property at the end of your tenancy.

Permission may be withdrawn if the Pet Bond is not paid, any legal or council requirements such as micro-chipping and sterilisation have not been met or the pet causes a nuisance to other residents, damage to the property or poses a safety risk.

Special note on Assistance Dogs

Trained Assistance Dogs are not pets and we do not decline permission for these, nor is a Pet Bond required. You must, however, still apply for permission as a means of letting us know you have a Trained Assistance Dog.

What do I need to remember?

- Not all properties are suitable for pets
- Written permission from Housing Choices WA must be granted before you get a pet
- A \$260 Pet Bond may apply, which needs to be paid in full
- If you obtain permission for a pet, please be a responsible pet owner.



Spring Puzzle - Win a \$50 Bunnings voucher!

Find all the words in the word search except for one, which is not actually in the grid. Words may be forward, backward, up, down or diagonal.

P	O	T	W	T	R	V	E	G	G	I	E	T	G	G
A	S	D	F	G	H	P	J	R	E	F	B	C	T	A
E	R	T	Y	U	I	A	O	P	G	C	V	O	E	R
S	P	R	I	N	G	I	Y	U	O	G	B	U	C	D
R	A	S	F	G	H	N	W	J	D	K	H	N	H	E
V	E	B	N	Y	R	T	E	I	Y	H	C	S	N	N
C	X	B	D	Q	Z	I	X	C	F	B	T	E	O	I
E	W	V	A	R	T	N	Y	H	N	I	A	L	L	N
T	R	Y	U	T	I	G	T	N	A	L	P	L	O	G
A	I	E	W	C	E	V	B	N	M	Z	S	I	G	W
C	O	M	P	E	T	I	T	I	O	N	H	N	Y	T
O	F	I	N	A	N	C	I	A	L	I	P	G	T	S
P	L	K	J	S	A	F	E	T	Y	Q	S	C	X	T
S	E	C	U	R	I	T	Y	V	B	N	M	U	Y	E
Y	W	I	L	D	F	L	O	W	E	R	S	Z	Q	P

FIND THESE WORDS IN THE GRID

SPRING	PATCH	SAFETY	PETS
GARDENING	GROW	SECURITY	CAT
COMPETITION	POT	REBATE	DOG
WILDFLOWERS	PLANT	FINANCIAL	TECHNOLOGY
VEGGIE	PAINTING	COUNSELLING	WIFI

Write this leftover word on a postcard or piece of paper with your full name, address and contact number and post it to Home Stories Spring Puzzle, Housing Choices Western Australia, PO Box 105, Burswood WA 6100 or hand it in at your local office. Competition closes Friday 19 November 2021.

The winner of a \$50 Bunnings voucher will be drawn from all the correct entries after this date. Only one entry per household. Good luck!

Congratulations to Fahima, last edition's puzzle prize winner.

Upcoming tenant groups!



Painting and Consultation Session for ILP tenants

Independent Living Program (ILP) tenants will be joined by Housing Choices WA staff and tenant artist Sharon (pictured) for a fun plant pot painting workshop!

Come and create your own unique plant pot to take home. Afternoon tea and materials will be provided. Following the pot painting will be a consultation session where we will ask for your feedback on the Tenant Support Planning process.

Rent Setting Q&A Sessions

Do you have any questions about how your rent is calculated?

Housing Choices WA is looking at holding Question and Answer sessions with tenants to talk about rent setting.

If you would like to attend either of these groups, please contact Alex Kepes on 0437 887 675 or via alex.kepes@hcau.org.au to register your interest.



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Level 7, 25 Rowe Avenue
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P (08) 9430 0900

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4 Stevenson Street
PO Box 1200
Mandurah WA 6210
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