

# AT HOME WITH **ACCESS HOUSING**

WINTER 2020

## ACCESS HOUSING RECOMMENCES SERVICES WITH SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Access Housing is pleased to announce it has moved to the next phase of its return to normal business operations as Western Australia continues its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access Housing offices are now open by appointment only and we have recommenced tenancy and property inspections, home visits and tenant focus groups. We have also reinstated the actioning of all maintenance works inside and outside the home.

These updates to our service delivery and business operations have carefully considered the safety, health and wellbeing of tenants, staff, contractors and the broader community.

Access Housing has developed a range of protocols to ensure the health and safety of tenants, staff and contractors. We ask that tenants respect and adhere to these protocols so we can ensure they are effective in keeping us all safe and healthy.

### SOCIAL DISTANCING AND HYGIENE MEASURES



When entering your home, Access Housing staff and contractors will;

- practice safe distancing at all times and, if we cannot, we will not enter the property;
- sanitise our hands before we enter your property;
- minimise touching of surfaces;
- carry out tasks as quickly as possible; and
- not visit if we are sick.

When you attend tenant groups we will;

- practice safe distancing at all times;
- minimise touching of surfaces;
- sanitise before entering the venue and provide sanitiser for participants;
- wipe down all surfaces;
- wear gloves while handling food and provide individual servings; and
- maintain a register of attendees.

### INCREASED COMMUNICATION



Prior to anyone entering your home for inspections or repairs, or prior to you attending a tenant focus group, you will be provided with information about our hygiene and safety protocols.

However, we also need you to let us know if you or anyone in your household is feeling unwell **prior** to us attending your home. Similarly, we ask that you do not attend tenant focus groups or come into Access Housing offices if you are ill.

### ENSURING YOUR SAFETY



Access Housing staff and contractors will be required to complete checklists so we can ensure our safety and hygiene protocols are being followed at all times.

Access Housing will also be auditing maintenance works completed by contractors by contacting tenants to make sure protocols were adhered to.



## Words from our Community Housing General Manager Natalie Sangalli

Welcome to a slightly later than normal winter edition of *At Home with Access Housing*. With all the big news we have to share, we hope you will agree that it was worth the wait!

Firstly, you will have seen by now that we are slowly and safely returning to normal tenancy services operations including re-starting inspections and tenancy visits and completing maintenance tasks inside homes following several months of disrupted service delivery due to COVID-19. We are doing everything with your and our staff's health and safety front of mind, so I ask you to please be patient if there are delays. Also, if you are feeling unwell when our staff are scheduled to visit you, it is important that you let us know beforehand.

Secondly, as you will have seen in our mail-out a few weeks ago, Access Housing has merged with Housing Choices Australia. This is very exciting for the business and, particularly, our tenancy services provision as it will allow us to grow in how we provide industry leading tenancy

management and engagement services to you. It will also offer opportunities for our fabulous staff to expand their skills and knowledge. Michael Lennon, our new Managing Director, is a powerhouse in the Community Housing industry nationally and we welcome his vision and leadership into WA.

I want to reiterate that there will be no changes to the standard of services we provide to tenants as a result of the merger. Our Tenancy Officers and Tenancy Assistants remain the same, you will hear the same voices on the phone and you will see the same faces in the newsletter and at your door when we visit.

I want to thank the Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT) for helping us develop the information that was mailed out to tenants about the merger. The ACT also raised some pertinent questions about the merger, which we are committed to answering in the near future.

Finally, you will see that, on the advice of the ACT, we have included some information about the changes to the Residential Tenancies Act as a result of COVID-19 in the newsletter. These changes will remain in place until the end of September 2020. However, the WA Government may choose to extend these new provisions based on how the COVID-19 situation is looking in WA closer to that time.



### BREAKING NEWS!

Access Housing and Housing Choices Australia have joined forces and merged to become one of Australia's largest Community Housing Providers as of Wednesday 1 July 2020.



Housing Choices Australia is a Community Housing Provider in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and, now, Western Australia following the merger with Access Housing.

**The merger will not impact our service delivery to tenants and residents in any way. It is very much business as usual for our staff in WA.** The services our staff provide to tenants, residents and the community will continue as usual, but with the additional support of interstate colleagues who we will be working with to help determine and deliver best-practice affordable housing solutions and programs.

Please continue to contact and engage with the company and our staff as you always have, as our local WA offices, phone numbers, email addresses and bank details for rent payments have not changed.

This is an exciting time and, while nothing will directly change for tenants and residents, the companies joining together will give us greater capacity to improve our services and deliver more homes to address the great need in our communities in WA and across Australia.

More information about the merger can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the next page, which were developed in consultation with the Access Housing Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT).



# ACCESS HOUSING AND HOUSING CHOICES AUSTRALIA MERGER FAQs



## What does the merger mean for my tenancy and the services Access Housing provides to me?

Please be assured that the merger has no impact on your ongoing tenancy and housing. Your home is still your home, your Tenancy Officer is still your Tenancy Officer and your Tenancy Agreement with Access Housing remains unaffected. Our staff are, as always, here to support and assist you.

Access Housing tenancy and property management services will continue as usual, including our award winning tenant engagement programs and the Access Housing Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT). Please continue to contact our staff as you always have, as our local WA offices, phone numbers, email addresses and bank details for rent payments have not changed.

## Who are Housing Choices Australia?

Housing Choices Australia are one of Australia's largest Community Housing Providers, providing affordable homes for more than 8,500 people in owned and/or managed properties across five states – Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales and, now, Western Australia as a result of its merger with Access Housing. Please visit [www.housingchoices.org.au](http://www.housingchoices.org.au) for more information.

## Who will lead the newly expanded Housing Choices Australia Group?

The Housing Choices Australia Group will be led by Housing Choices Australia Managing Director Michael Lennon. Neil Starkie, who joined Access Housing as Interim Chief Executive Officer in February this year, will continue to lead operations in Western Australia as Executive General Manager. Former Access Housing Chairman David Lantzke and former Access Housing Director Matt Raison have also joined the Housing Choices Australia Board of Directors.



*Neil Starkie,  
Executive General Manager*



*Michael Lennon,  
Managing Director*

## Why did Access Housing merge with Housing Choices Australia?

Access Housing merged with Housing Choices Australia to form a national Community Housing Provider that will be able to achieve more for people needing secure, sustainable and affordable homes than what either company could achieve on their own. The new national organisation will deliver a far broader and more innovative range of positive housing and community outcomes for some of Australia's most vulnerable people. The companies are committed in their shared vision of delivering positive outcomes for current and future tenants.

## How will we be kept informed about the merger?

This information is the first of regular updates about the merger that you will see in the tenant newsletter. Access Housing consulted with the ACT to inform the merger information and FAQs that were posted to all tenants in mid-July. We will continue to work with the ACT and our broader tenant cohort as we strive to keep tenants updated, involved and informed throughout this process.

## Who should I contact if I have more questions?

We are committed to answering your questions and finding the answers if we don't have them right away. If you have any queries about any of this information, please contact your Tenancy Officer directly. Alternatively, please call 9430 0900 and our reception team will put your call through to your Tenancy Officer or another member of our Tenancy Services team who can assist you.



## TENANCY SERVICES UPDATE

### OFFICE CONTACT

Access Housing's offices in Rivervale, Mandurah and Bunbury have reopened **by appointment only**. If you plan to attend one of our offices, please phone ahead to arrange a meeting time with a member of our staff.

Many of our staff continue to work remotely, however, our reception staff are now back in the office to answer your calls. Please call 9430 0900 and our reception team will put your call through to your Tenancy Officer or another member of our Tenancy Services team who can assist you.

### INSPECTIONS

Property inspections have now recommenced and all tenants due to have an inspection will be posted a 14 day notice and cover letter detailing social distancing and personal hygiene requirements that will need to be adhered to during their inspection.

### YOUR RENT

Access Housing continues to do annual eligibility and rent reviews as they become due. However, any rent reviews completed that result in an increase to rent payable will not become effective until the first rent due date on or after **Thursday 1 October 2020**. If your rent has decreased, we will, as usual, apply the decrease from the date we are advised of your change of circumstances.

### ALLOCATIONS

Access Housing has recommenced housing some individuals into lodge accommodations and commenced pre-allocation interviews for our Independent Living Program.

### TENANT FOCUS GROUPS

Our Tenant Support and Capacity Building team has recommenced tenant focus group planning for the rest of the year.

Over the coming months, we will be running focus groups based on issues raised through Tenant Hardship Fund survey, Annual Tenant Survey and ACT feedback. This includes focus groups discussing topics such as maintaining mental, physical and financial wellbeing and focus groups about the Access Housing and Housing Choices Australia merger.

## ILP SERVICE UPDATE



### Tenant Support Planning

Tenant Support Planning has also recommenced for Independent Living Program tenants with social distancing and physical hygiene protocols in place. Your ILP Tenancy Officer will contact you when your Tenant Support Plan is due for a review. If you would like a copy of your Tenant Support Plan, please contact your ILP Tenancy Officer.

### NEW! ILP Feedback Form

You can request a feedback form at any stage but one will always be given to you at the end of the Tenant Support Planning process.

### NEW! Information about ILP Tenant and Carer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

Information brochures have been developed specifically for ILP tenants and carers. These are now available upon request and will be provided in sign up packs and during Tenant Support Planning meetings.

### ILP Policy Updates

We have reviewed a number of policies and procedures in relation to the ILP including our Service Delivery Policy, Intake Policy and Tenant Support Planning Procedure. If you would like a copy of any of these updated policies and procedures, please speak with your ILP Tenancy Officer.

### Mental Health Accreditation

Access Housing is undergoing an accreditation process with respect to the National Mental Health Standards and will be working with your Advisory Committee of Tenants' ILP tenant representative, Anton, to ensure that ILP tenants are represented during this process.



If you would like to be involved in these focus groups, or to find out more, please contact Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes by calling 9430 0945 or texting 0437 887 675.





## MAINTENANCE UPDATE

### RETURN TO FULL MAINTENANCE SERVICE

Access Housing is pleased to announce the full recommencement of our maintenance services. This includes the actioning of all internal and external routine, priority, urgent and emergency maintenance works, with safety and hygiene protocols in place.

### BUILDING CONDITION ASSESSMENTS

Access Housing's Property Asset team will also recommence Building Condition Assessments (BCAs). Every three years we do an assessment of your property to make sure the building is in good condition and to plan any long term maintenance that may need to be done. A BCA inspection is **not** the same as a tenancy inspection. A BCA looks at the condition of the building, not how a tenant is looking after a property.

### DEALING WITH MOULD IN YOUR HOME

With the winter months upon us, so too is the increased chance of mould developing in homes. Mould is a fungal growth that grows in areas that are damp, dark and/or have poor ventilation.



When mould is left to grow unchecked, it can spread and eat away at paint, which could result in costly repairs to your home.

To prevent mould:

- wipe down any dampness and condensation on walls or windows;
- open doors and windows as often as possible when you're at home; and
- use the exhaust fan in the bathroom and extractor fan when cooking.

To remove mould build up, put white vinegar into a spray bottle and spray directly onto mould and wipe it away with a damp cloth.

Another cause of mould is water penetration into ceilings, walls or floors because of a leak or poor drainage. You may also notice peeling paint, rotting wood or a damp smell. If you have this type of damp or mould in your home, or you have a mould problem you cannot remedy, please contact the Maintenance Hotline on **1800 203 383**.

### REPORTING ELECTRIC SHOCKS AND TINGLES

Access Housing wants to remind tenants of their responsibility to report electrical shocks or tingles directly to Western Power as soon as they occur. The safety of our tenants is our priority.

#### What is an electric shock or tingle?



An electric shock is a zap or possibly painful force that runs through you. You should notice the difference between an electric shock and the shock you get from static electricity.

A tingle is a low-level electric shock. It may feel more like a warm, fuzzy feeling that runs through you – kind of like pins and needles. You may not think it's an issue or not know what has happened. Regardless, it's still an early warning sign that there may be a wiring issue.

#### What should I do if I have had an electric shock or tingle?

Call Western Power immediately on **13 13 51** and they will send someone out as soon as possible to investigate.

If you're not sure whether it was a shock or tingle please still report it to Western Power by calling **13 13 51**.

It is important that once an electric shock / tingle has been experienced and reported, do not touch or 're-test' the location of the incident again.

### BE WATER WISE THIS WINTER

As a reminder, the Winter Sprinkler Ban came into effect on 1 June and will end on 31 August.

Most reticulation controllers are very simple to turn off and will either have:

- a dial that you move to the off position; or
- a tap timer that can be turned off at the tap.



*Complexes will have their common area reticulation turned off automatically.*



## SUPPORTING TENANTS DURING COVID-19

Access Housing has been committed to supporting tenants and providing quality services while working remotely. While our services have looked different over the past four months, we have been busy delivering positive housing outcomes for our tenants.

### OVER THE PAST FOUR MONTHS:

Tenancy staff completed **1,213** wellbeing check ins. This involved pro-actively calling tenants to make sure they were managing during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Staff administered **214** tenant surveys to understand the financial and wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 and identify where we could provide assistance.



Access Housing housed **60** people into secure accommodation during remote/revised service provision.



Access Housing staff developed a **COVID-19 resource directory** to help tenants access COVID-19 related services in their area.




### COVID-19 HARDSHIP FUND MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The Access Housing Board of Directors donated their meeting sitting fees to support tenants affected by COVID-19. Over the past four months the Hardship Fund has:

approved more than **\$10,000** of financial assistance for tenants to access groceries, essential household items and bill reductions.



 assisted more than **60** households in the Perth Metropolitan, Peel and South West Regions.

We also signposted **40** tenants to local Emergency Relief and community services.



*"It is just good to know help is there if needed."*  
- Tenant beneficiary of Hardship Fund



### ACT Update from the Chairperson **Trish Owen**

I am extremely impressed with the diligence in which the ACT has progressed during this time.

Having attended only one face to face meeting prior to COVID-19 restrictions, members have shown a fantastic commitment to making sure the ACT is still a vehicle for communication between Access Housing and tenants.

Topics we have provided feedback for over the past few months have included;

- How Access Housing communicates with tenants about the merger;
- Communication around tenant rental statements and water bills;
- Tenant involvement and communication around maintenance processes;
- How the ACT will progress next year; and
- How tenant focus groups can proceed (building on previous discussions regarding the types of groups that are favourable to tenants)

The move to digital communication has been an evolving one. We were providing feedback via email and phone. This then progressed to a simple form online where we could each provide feedback on the topics. The responses were collated by Access Housing staff and then fed back to the ACT group. Our remote working has now become a much smoother process. Thanks to the staff of Access Housing for adapting in this time and their commitment to keeping tenant voices heard.

Prior to each ACT meeting, the Deputy Chair and I have a meeting with Access Housing staff to decide the agenda. It is important that tenant voices are heard, and we have limited means to hear tenants' concerns at the moment. It is important that the ACT hear from you, so I strongly encourage you to have your say!

I encourage you all to provide feedback and suggested items for the ACT agenda via email to [act@accesshousing.org.au](mailto:act@accesshousing.org.au). If you would like your email to go directly to the ACT Chair/Deputy Chair, please put this in the subject line and this can be passed on.



## YOU ASKED, ACCESS HOUSING ANSWERS

The Access Housing Advisory Committee of Tenants said it was important to include information about the COVID-19 Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) amendments in the newsletter and answer some questions tenants have raised regarding these amendments.

### What are the COVID-19 RTA amendments?

In April 2020, the WA Government passed an RTA amendment, bringing into law a range of measures to deliver protections for tenants suffering rental stress as a result of COVID-19 and to provide greater housing security during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### How long will the COVID-19 RTA amendments be in effect?

The COVID-19 RTA amendments are effective between **Monday 30 March 2020 – Wednesday 30 September 2020**, but the length of this period is subject to change by the Government depending on the evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Who does this impact?

The law applies to all Western Australian residential tenancies including boarding house residents and lodgers, who have not previously been covered under the RTA. This means that the COVID-19 RTA amendment applies to all current Access Housing tenancies and lodging house residencies.

### Where do I go if I want more information about the COVID-19 RTA amendments?

For more information on the COVID-19 RTA amendments, please visit the Department of Mines, Industry, Regulation and Safety's website.

### Key points from the Residential Tenancies Act COVID-19 amendment are:

#### **No terminations of tenancies will take place except in the following situations:**

- Tenant causing serious damage to the property or injury to a person;
- Family Domestic Violence;
- Mutual consent of lessor and tenant;
- Abandonment; and
- Not paying rent and/or refusing to enter into a rent repayment agreement.

#### **Q: What do I do if I can't pay rent?**

**A:** Rent must continue to be paid. Any rent not paid will be a debt due and owing to Access Housing at the end of the COVID-19 emergency period.

If you are struggling with paying your rent during this time, please contact our Tenant Accounts Team on **9534 0425** who will work with you to arrange a repayment plan that works for you in your current circumstances.

#### **Fixed term tenancies will become periodic tenancies if they are not renewed during the emergency COVID-19 period.**

#### **Q: What type of tenancy agreement do I have?**

**A:** Your tenancy agreement will indicate whether you are on a fixed term or periodic tenancy. If you are unsure, please contact your Tenancy Officer for more information.

#### **No rent increases are effective between 30/3/20 – 30/09/20**

#### **Q: What do I do if my income changes?**

**A:** If your household income has gone up or down, you still need to let us know within 14 days so we can review your rent.

Access Housing continues to do annual eligibility and rent reviews as they become due during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rent reviews that result in a rent decrease will be actioned immediately. Rent reviews completed that result in an increase to rent will not become effective until the first rent due date on or after **Thursday 1 October 2020**.

*We understand that tenants may be experiencing difficulties during this time and, therefore, this date will be continually reviewed in line with Government advice and may be extended if appropriate.*

#### **Landlords do not have to carry out non-urgent repairs if they are not able to access the premises due to restrictions of movement.**

#### **Q: What maintenance is Access Housing doing?**

**A:** All repairs outside of the home have been continuing as normal, as well as emergency works inside the home. Our maintenance team is now also actioning all repairs inside and outside the home, with safety and hygiene protocols in place.

## WINTER PUZZLE - WIN A \$50 BUNNINGS VOUCHER!

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G	V	R	G	A	T	I	Y	U	I	P	T	O	P	E
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FIND THESE WORDS IN THE GRID - GOOD LUCK!

MERGER  
HOUSING  
CHOICES  
AUSTRALIA  
WINTER  
WILD  
WEATHER  
CARER  
HYGIENE  
PROTOCOL  
DAMP  
MOULD  
ELECTRIC  
SHOCK  
TINGLE  
STAY  
WARM  
SAFE  
WELL  
HAPPY

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. Write this leftover word on a postcard or piece of paper with your full name, address and contact number and post it to **At Home Winter Puzzle**, Access Housing, PO Box 105, Burswood WA 6100. Competition closes Friday 4 September 2020. 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 Mishak, last edition's puzzle prize winner.

## NEW POLICY TO SUPPORT TENANTS WITH A DISABILITY AND THEIR CO-RESIDENT CARERS

On Monday 6 July 2020 Access Housing put into effect the new Co-Resident Carer Rent Policy.

The policy incentivises people to become or remain a co-resident carer for people with disability who are living in social or Community Housing.

Under the new Co-Resident Carer Rent Policy, an approved co-resident carer will have their contributable rent capped at the current full rate of the Centrelink Carer Payment, regardless of their total income that would otherwise be considered assessable under general rent setting policy. This ensures that the household rent remains affordable for the tenant, who is ultimately responsible for making sure rent is paid.

If you would like more information, or if you would like to discuss whether the Co-Resident Carer Rent Policy is applicable to your tenancy, please contact your Tenancy Officer or our Rent Review Team on **9534 0400** or email [rentreview@accesshousing.org.au](mailto:rentreview@accesshousing.org.au).



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