

# National Housing Service Standards



| THE HOUSING CHOICES AUSTRALIA GROUP |



# The service you can expect from Housing Choices Australia Group

Housing Choices Australia (HCA) group is a leading national not-for-profit housing provider. The HCA Group is located in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales and comprises Housing Choices Australia (HCA), Housing Choices Tasmania (HCT), Housing Choices South Australia (HCSA) and Housing Choices New South Wales (HCNSW).

The HCA group is dedicated to creating safe, quality, affordable housing. Additionally, South Australia's Common Ground Program works with people who have experienced homelessness, and provides a range of services and support that helps people rebuild meaningful and productive lives.



## The HCA group Vision and Mission are outlined below

### Vision

All people affordably housed in neighbourhoods that support life opportunities.

### Mission

To be a leading provider of affordable homes across Australia, working with partners to create resilient and inclusive neighbourhoods.

We provide long-term solutions for people who:

- are disadvantaged by housing markets
- have a disability and/or mental illness
- are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- are ageing and/or frail.

## At the HCA group we are guided by a set of principles that is found in all of the work we do

### **We put our customers first**

Our customers are central to everything we do.  
We listen and respond with open and honest communication and a flexible approach.

### **We work together**

We work collaboratively and in partnership to achieve our mission.

### **We trust and are trusted**

We keep promises, are accountable and are transparent in our actions.

### **We learn and adapt**

We aim to inform the policy environment, support our actions with evidence, encourage innovation and continually adapt to a changing environment.

## Child Safety

**Housing Choices is committed to embedding a Child Safe culture throughout our organisation.**

For all children who come in contact with our services, we will:

- provide a warm, welcoming and safe service;
- at all times act in the best interests of children and work proactively to help prevent child abuse and neglect in our communities;
- appropriately address issues of potential or perceived child abuse and neglect, in compliance with our policies and applicable laws.

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## Creating Inclusive and Resilient Neighbourhoods

**HCA group owns, manages and develops various types of housing and mixed tenures in accordance with the housing design guidelines and standards.**

We provide long-term, secure housing that is indistinguishable from neighbouring properties and helps residents to integrate with their local community. We are dedicated to creating and managing safe, quality, affordable housing.

We are committed to building housing which is in close proximity to public transport, services and facilities.

We take a holistic approach to property management enabling us to provide better housing and services to our residents over the long term.

# Regulatory Framework

**The HCA Group is required to meet the National and Victorian regulatory performance requirements and annually report on our performance:**

- The National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH), sets out the performance outcomes and requirements for registered housing providers. Housing Choices Tasmania and Housing Choices South Australia are Tier 1 registered community housing providers under the NRSCH. Tier 1 is the highest level of registration, demanding high performance requirements and intense regulatory engagement.
- The Registrar of Housing Agencies sets out seven Performance Standards that registered housing agencies are required to meet at all times under the Victorian Housing Act 1983. Housing Choices is required to comply with the Performance Standards set by the Registrar.

## What are Housing Service Standards?

**The Housing Service Standards provide guidance about how we can more meaningfully engage with the people who access our services and meet their expectations. The standards prescribe actions and commitments that include:**

- asking people for feedback, listening and responding in a timely manner
- promoting people's rights to actively participate in decision making
- regularly reviewing and evaluating systems, processes and our engagement practices in line with the standards
- providing clear mechanisms for people to provide feedback and complaints to help shape and improve our service
- ensuring our staff comply with the principles and standards for improved service.

## Why do we have Housing Service Standards?

- We are committed to providing high quality housing services. We have introduced Housing Service Standards to make sure people understand the quality of service that can be expected to be received from us.
- People using our services are best placed to tell us what we're doing well and where we may need to improve. To assist in reviewing our services and monitoring our performance we have developed Housing Service Standards.
- Our Housing Service Standards will be monitored regularly.
- We will share details of our performance on our website, in our Annual Report, Newsletters and at our Resident Committee/Community Member meetings.
- Our Housing Service Standards will be reviewed annually and you will have a number of opportunities to be involved in this.





## Consultation Statement

**We welcome, respect and value the views and feedback of people who use our services.**

The Housing Service Standards sets expectations of our staff to support those who seek and use our services, make clear your rights and responsibilities, ensuring that your feedback will help improve services and that you will be supported to get involved in decision making.

We consult our people who use our service so that they can contribute to the development of the Standards through:

- Conducting an annual survey of residents/community members
- Holding forums on specific issues and circulate information via various mediums
- Sponsoring actions and representations on issues of importance to people accessing our services via Resident Committee and Community Member Group meetings.

As part of our continual quality improvement and monitoring, we will actively seek feedback and apply service improvement through:

- Seeking feedback from people using or seeking our services, stakeholders and advocates about their experience and outcomes.
- Listening to people seeking our services, and ensuring accuracy of recorded information is confirmed and issues of concern are fully understood.
- Acknowledging complaints and explaining the process used to review concerns and when an outcome can be expected.
- Reporting back to people about how and when their feedback will be used or has been used to improve services.
- Monitoring feedback to support good practice and apply as a measure of staff performance and service user outcomes.

The expected outcome is that Housing Choices Australia group services continually improve as a direct result of feedback and participation.

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## How you can help us?

**To help us provide the best possible service, tell us what is important to you and please consider the following:**

- Tell us as much as you can about any requirements you need us to be aware of.
- Tell us about other people or an advocate we can contact to better understand how we can assist and provide you with information.
- Let us know about changes in your circumstances or contact details as soon as possible.
- Consider all information we provide carefully.
- Please ask for help if you are unsure about anything, need more detail or time to think about it.
- Let us know in advance if you cannot attend appointments we make together.
- Provide your ideas and suggestions on how we can improve our service.
- Fill out the Residents Satisfaction Survey.
- Advise our staff if you have any feedback, complaints and compliments via phone, in writing, website or email.
- Advise us when you change your support provider.



# Service Standards Listing

As a community housing provider Housing Choices Australia group aims to provide a fair, transparent and responsive delivery of housing assistance. The following is a list of Housing Service Standards that you can expect to receive when accessing our services.

## Standard 1:

### Setting and meeting relevant housing service standards

Our offices will be open from Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm (excluding public holidays).

We will provide you with an After Hours Service to deal with maintenance emergencies.

We will answer all calls with our name and greet customers in a courteous, respectful and helpful manner.

We will call you back if you ask us to.

We will make every effort to respond to general phone enquiries, messages and emails within one working day. If we are away from our desks for more than one working day we will have an out of office automatic reply on emails which will include alternative contact details and we will re-direct our phones.

We aim to respond on receipt of your written enquiry within three working days.

At all times we will explain how we will make a decision about your enquiry or housing application (where we are responsible for applications), and how long a decision will take. We will contact you directly by telephone or in writing when a decision is made.

We will support people to discuss their needs and to make informed decisions.

We will offer free interpreter services.

We will keep to appointment times and always carry identification on arrival when visiting your home.

We will make every effort to resolve customer queries at first contact.

We will be clear about the information we require and contact customers if we have not received it.

Common Ground Community Members who access

support services are able to access an on-call worker via mobile 24/7 for assistance with emergency matters that may arise outside of office hours.

Your information and feedback will be kept confidential, in line with privacy laws and standards. We will seek your consent for information sharing where this may be necessary, and will comply with information sharing guidelines.

We will let you know how you can access your personal information and we will respond to your request for access to your personal information within 14 working days of having received all necessary information from you.

We will make available a copy of the Housing Service Standards and our policies to anyone who requests it and in an accessible format on our website and maintain up to date information.

Our offices will offer a welcoming and accessible space.

We will provide a culturally safe service for people whom we work with.

We will give you access to information that is accurate, accessible, consistent and clear.

We will work with your advocate and/or your (other) support agency to assist you with your housing needs.

We will support you on your housing journey by providing information and referral to service agencies that can assist to sustain tenancies.

We offer a safe and secure home. Where possible we:

- Help you integrate within your local community.
- Work in partnership with service providers to facilitate access to services; and
- Facilitate opportunities for you to get involved in training, education and employment.

We will provide housing information for people about their rights and responsibilities.

## Standard 2:

### Determining and managing eligibility, allocation and termination of housing assistance

#### *Allocation of Housing*

**When you apply for a house in the area where we manage the waiting list we will:**

- Assist you with the completion of your application form.
- Process fully completed applications within 10 working days and provide you with an application number in writing.
- Ensure all the information provided to us by you will remain confidential and only record information required for the assessment of the application.
- Allocate available property fairly and on the basis of individual housing need, compatibility to the property and current community profile.
- Ensure our allocations contribute to creating or maintaining communities.
- Allocate property as determined by our funding obligations, legislative and regulatory requirements.
- We will aim to carry out minor repairs to vacant properties within 14 days, complete an electrical safety check and ensure the property is at a tenable standard.
- When the property is ready to let we will aim to let vacant homes within 20 working days.

#### *Starting your Tenancy*

When you start your tenancy we will:

- Provide you with a copy of the booklet/guide on Renting – tenant rights and responsibilities.
- Provide you with a welcome pack
- Provide you with adequate information about your property and local area.
- Visit you in your new home within six weeks of the start of your tenancy

Where a support partner nominates a resident for a property, we will work collaboratively to establish your tenancy and visit your home within six weeks with your support agency if required.

#### *Managing Tenancies*

**We will inform you and/or your advocate of your rights and responsibilities under the legislation.**

We will visit your home as a minimum once per year to see how you are finding us as landlords and also to undertake a property inspection

#### *Repairs and Maintenance*

**In line with our Standards, Housing Choices will carry out repair and maintenance to your home and ensure it is maintained in good repair, and is safe and secure during the life of your tenancy.**

We will provide you with information about what is considered urgent, priority and non-urgent repairs.

When you report a repair we will:

- clarify what kind of repair is needed before we visit your home
- provide you with a reference number and confirm the timeline that your repair will be completed.
- attend 100% urgent repairs within 24 hours and make safe.
- as a minimum complete 90% of priority repairs within 7 days.
- as a minimum complete 90% of non-urgent repairs within 14 days.
- survey 10% of customers for all repairs completed each month to assist us in monitoring the quality of service.

If we are responsible for the repairs you will be notified in advance of the date of the appointment, if not, please let us know.

Our contractors will identify themselves on arrival at your home.

Where we are responsible, we will keep common areas in a safe, clean and secure manner.

Where we are not responsible for the maintenance of common areas we will work with the third party with the aim of keeping them clean, safe and secure.

We will keep our support partners informed of any issues or actions required for the property if the support partner has nomination rights to the vacancies of the properties we manage.

We will conduct Property Condition Surveys on a rolling three year basis to monitor the physical condition of properties. The information collected is used to help us plan upgrades and ensure your home meets our standards.

We prepare an annual upgrade plan in which we review all properties and plan upgrade works to be completed over the next year. When your property is deemed requiring an upgrade we will consult with you.

### *Ending housing Assistance*

**We will provide you with information when you take the next step in your housing journey so that you understand your rights and obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act**

Categories for ending tenancies include:

- Your decision to move to alternative accommodation.
- Tenancy breaches under the terms of your tenancy agreement or obligations and responsibilities under The Residential Tenancies Act.

We will take action if the following tenancy breach occurs and cannot be resolved:

- Non-payment of rent.
- Causing nuisance or interference for e.g. undue noise, threatening a neighbour.
- Causing damage to the premises or common areas for e.g. deliberately and/or maliciously (by resident or their visitor).
- Dangerous behaviour for e.g. resident has assaulted or made serious threats to harm a neighbour.
- Use of premises for illegal purpose

If a breach of the tenancy agreement occurs, we will:

- Contact you to investigate the tenancy breach and give you an opportunity to respond to the issues raised.
- Provide assistance where possible.
- If applicable, engage a support agency to assist you to sustain your tenancy as part of the response to the breach.
- We take actions where appropriate under the Residential Tenancies Act and issue a notice to vacate.

If you want to end your tenancy, you will need to give us written notice as outlined in your tenancy agreement, and we will:

- Arrange a suitable time to inspect your property and complete a property condition report. This may be with your support agency.
- Send you correspondence confirming the ending of your tenancy including a vacated tenancy check list.
- Ask you to complete the 'End of Tenancy Exit Survey'.
- Refund rent credit within seven to ten working days unless there are repairs arising from tenant damage to negotiate.
- Inform your support agency when you end your tenancy.



### **Standard 3:** **Determining and managing rents**

**In relation to the rent you are charged, we will:**

- Inform you about how your lease determines the rent setting with a maximum rent charge being 75% of the market rent.
- Review your rent annually.
- Consider individual circumstances under our Hardship and Change of Circumstances policy.
- Provide statements of your rent account on an annual basis and keep you informed if you are late or miss a payment (you may request a statement anytime).
- Process all rent payments within one working day of receipt of payment and tenant identification number.
- Offer a variety of easy methods of rent payment to assist you to meet your tenancy obligations.
- Provide advice and referrals to support services.
- Offer assistance with a repayment agreement as early as possible

### **Standard 4:** **Managing and addressing complaints, compliments and appeals relating to providing housing services**

**We will provide and publish, through a variety of formats such as websites and newsletters, ways in which a compliment or complaint can be made including in person, in writing, by phone, email and fax.**

We will welcome complaints made on your behalf by your advocates/support workers who have authorisation to act on your behalf.

We will acknowledge lodgement of your complaint/appeal within two working days.

We will notify you in writing of the outcome of your complaint as early as practical and will not exceed 30 days of the initial receipt of your complaint.

Where possible we will explain what action has been taken and why, while maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

### **Standard 5:** **Supporting tenant and resident engagement**

**We offer multiple ways for you to have a say about our services, through formal and informal opportunities such as:**

- Meetings
- Participation in surveys
- Suggestion boxes
- Feedback sheets
- Resident Committee/Community Member committee
- Feedback directly to staff
- Online contact via the website and social media

We will support the development of residents associations.

We will offer training and development opportunities for members to participate as resident committee members.

We will make every effort to make meeting venues accessible across the organisational and geographical boundaries.

Our website will provide information about current events, participative opportunities and consultation topics.

We will use easy to read printed materials to ensure accessibility of information to people with a cognitive disability or a visual impairment.

We will issue at least four newsletters to residents and other notices about activities in the area each year which will include information regarding our performance.

We will support and facilitate community events that encourage social interaction. To do this, we will work in a collaborative planning process with resident groups/community member committees and partner agencies.

## **Standard 6:** **Facilitating access to support for residents, applicants and including tenants with complex needs**

### **We will:**

- Work in partnership with agencies to build stronger communities and help maintain successful tenancies for our mutual clients.
- Provide information on support available including services provided directly or by other organisations.
- Identify and make appropriate referrals to support agencies and/or community services with consent.
- Work with our partner agencies to establish a process where appropriate action and support is offered when a tenancy is at risk.

## **Standard 7:** **Managing neighbourhood relations**

**People have the right to live in safe and harmonious homes and surroundings, free from the destructive, threatening and in some cases, illegal behaviour of others.**

### **We will:**

- Promote 'being a good neighbour'.
- Take your reports of anti-social behaviour seriously and act promptly.
- Attempt to identify the cause of the anti-social behaviour.
- Take steps in line with legislation against tenants who do not behave in an acceptable way and who refuse to take responsibility for their action or the actions of those visiting or living with them.
- Identify additional support services or practical strategies such as mediation to mitigate the risk of the anti-social behaviour continuing or escalating.
- Work in partnership with local law enforcement and statutory authorities to assist in resolving neighbourhood issues.
- Keep you informed.

## **Standard 8:** **Maintaining satisfaction with the overall quality of housing assistance**

### **We will:**

- Be responsible for maintaining the standards and outcomes set out in the Housing Service Standards.
- Seek feedback from you on all areas of operation.
- Identify any areas where we need to improve.
- Report to you and our stakeholders via the Annual Report, Resident/Community Member Committee meetings and the Home Stories Newsletter and our website on our performance.

## **Standard 9:** **Work collaboratively with our support partners**

### **We will:**

- Be clear about how and when we engage with our support partners/stakeholders under our Protocol arrangement.
- Meet with our support partners/stakeholders regularly to discuss issues or actions required to ensure residents/community members receive the appropriate support services required to maintain their tenancy.
- Work with our support partners/stakeholders and keep each other informed in a timely manner of any issues or actions required for the properties that we manage.



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