



Servants Community Housing Limited

ABN: 86 623 370 034

Sustaining Tenancies Policy

Incorporating Arrears, Hardship and Anti-social behaviour, and
Support Linkage

1. Introduction

Servants Community Housing is passionate about housing vulnerable individuals with dignity and respect. Servants recognises that many residents have complex needs and require extra support to sustain their tenancy. The Sustaining Tenancies Policy ensures that all residents are supported if they are facing financial difficulties, changed circumstances or display behaviours that could put their tenancy at risk.

2. Purpose

Servants rooming houses provide accommodation with shared facilities to a large group of people, many of whom have complex needs. Servants has policies in place to provide a safe, peaceful environment for all residents.

Servants is aware that life circumstances can change, and sometimes very suddenly, at times placing a resident's tenancy at risk. This policy provides a clear framework for managing rent arrears, hardship, anti-social behaviour, and linkage to supports in the wider community.

Servants aims to sustain tenancies and treats eviction as a mechanism of last resort.

Though tenancies will inevitably end, Servants strives to create safe and positive environments for our residents and avoid unfavourable exits.

Favourable Exits	Unfavourable Exits
Leaving Local Area	Eviction
Offered independent housing	Abandoned Property
Changing Needs eg. aged care	Housing not affordable
Housing in the private sector	Conflict with neighbours/residents
	Unsuitable Housing

Servants is committed to this Sustaining Tenancies Policy being aligned with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

3. Definitions

Arrears - a debt owed to Servants Community Housing as a result of a resident failing to make the required rent payments, constituting a breach of the Residential Tenancy Agreement

Hardship - when unforeseen events occur that fundamentally place a resident's tenancy at risk due to the excessive burden involved

4. Policy

4.1. Arrears

When a resident's rent account goes into arrears, Servants recognises that early intervention is crucial to protect the resident from further debt. Servants is committed to providing transparent information and fair processes to support residents in clearing their debts.

Servants recognises that a proactive approach has the most positive outcomes, and therefore provides residents the opportunity to use Centrepay for automatic rent deductions.

Servants monitors each resident's fortnightly rent payments and if a resident's rent account goes into arrears, Servants will visit, phone or email the resident as soon as possible to discuss the cause of non-payment and offer assistance, including a payment plan, and may include referrals to external support agencies (3.4).

If the resident is 14 days behind in rent, the resident has breached their duty under the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act. If there is no response from the resident, Servants may issue a Notice to Vacate, or seek a compliance or possession order from VCAT.

At all times through the process, Servants will strive to engage the resident and support them to maintain their tenancy.

4.2. Hardship

Servants recognises that from time to time, residents will have a change in circumstances that will bring additional costs associated with their health, disability or other circumstances that impact on their cost of living.

In such a scenario, residents must inform the Tenancy Manager of their changed circumstances. Servants will work with the resident to maintain their tenancy, which may include payment plans, or referrals to other support organisation for assistance with funds. Residents are encouraged to involve their support worker or advocate in this process.

A resident will never be charged less rent than the set rent for their room to meet operational costs. This is to ensure that Servants' houses remain sustainable for all residents. However, due dates and additional arrears contributions may be adjusted to consider the consequences of the hardship faced by the resident and allow them to sustain their housing with Servants.

4.3. Anti-Social Behaviour

Servants' houses have a culture of safety and respect for staff and other residents and work proactively to maintain high standards of behaviour. New residents sign an agreement to follow the house rules and to report any non-compliance to staff.

Servants will attempt to engage with residents that are struggling to comply with the house rules, and where appropriate refer or seek support from external organisations.

Where appropriate, residents will be given multiple opportunities to seek assistance and demonstrate behaviour change before an eviction process is implemented. However, in the event of serious disruption, endangerment, damage, or illegal activity at the rooming house, or serious threats or intimidation towards a staff member or volunteer, the resident may be given a notice to vacate on the first instance.

4.4. Linkage to Support

Where possible, Servants aims to proactively link residents with appropriate external supports to address unusual or unexpected behaviours to avoid the need for a breach notice where additional support would be an appropriate remedy.

Linkage to supports may include providing residents with the contact details for other organisations, temporarily facilitating phone calls on Servants owned devices so that the resident can establish their own form of communication, or directly referring or enquiring on behalf of a resident.

Servants will continue to maintain our relationship with Access Health who are currently providing an additional outreach service to help connect our residents to services.

Servants will continue to maintain support linkage as a first line approach to unusual, unexpected, or inappropriate behaviour. Support services we have assisted in linking our residents to have included tenancy plus, financial counselling, drug and alcohol support, gambling support, job network agencies, health services, psychology and counselling, men's behaviour change, NDIS support, wider community engagement activities, and case management.

Related policies

- Complaints and Appeals Policy
- Resident Engagement Policy
- Community Engagement Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Evictions
- Housing Eligibility
- Housing Allocation
- Rent Setting Policy
- Neighbours
- Resident Transfer Policy

Legislation and standards

This policy implements the obligations of Servants under:

- Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)
- Housing Act 1983 (Vic)
- Guidelines for Registered Housing Agencies published by DFFH
<https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/guidelines-registered-housing-agencies>
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies
- Charter of Human Rights

Transparency and accessibility

This policy is available on the Servants Community Housing website
<https://www.servants.org.au/policies-procedures/>.

Review

This policy was written in January 2023. It is scheduled for review in July 2024.