

C 1.19 Financial Hardship Policy and Procedure



1. Purpose

The aim of this policy and procedure is to ensure that applications of financial hardship by tenants are treated in a consistent, fair, and transparent manner.

2. Scope

Applies to all tenancies either directly managed by Common Equity or by a Housing Cooperative.

3. Exceptions

Nil

4. Definitions

4.1. CENSW – Common Equity NSW Ltd

4.2. Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) – means financial help to people who pay rent and receive a Centrelink payment from the Department of Social Services

4.3. Financial hardship – means the genuine inability to meet financial commitments, rather than an unwillingness to do so. Financial hardship can result from several factors including unemployment, illness, family breakdown or a natural disaster.

4.4. Tenant- The person who has the right to occupy residential premises under a Residential Tenancy Agreement.

4.5. Co-operative Housing- Governance structure where residents become ‘members’ of the co-operative and play and active part in running the organisation.

5. Responsibilities

5.1. Operations Manager

- Review recommendations from CDO’s in relation to cases of financial hardship and provide authority for action.

5.2. Co-op Development Officers (CDO)

- Provide tenants with appropriate information in relation to financial hardship.
- Liaise with tenants and staff when financial hardship is identified.
- Be familiar with community support on offer to those experiencing financial hardship.
- Provide appropriate referrals as required.

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5.3. Staff

- Adhere to this policy and refer tenants experiencing financial hardship to a CDO for further advice.

6. Policy Statement

CENSW will:

- Treat tenants who are experiencing financial hardship with sensitivity.
- Assess each situation on a case by case basis.
- Help tenants who are currently experiencing, or may in the future experience, financial hardship.
- Work with tenants to help maintain tenancies

7. Procedure

7.1. Identifying financial hardship

Tenants who may be unable to pay rent due to financial hardship should be encouraged to contact their co-operative's rent officer or a CENSW Co-op Development Officer (CDO) to discuss the situation.

We will consider the following factors to work out if a tenant is experiencing financial hardship:

- The tenant requests payment arrangements for rent, or debt or goes into arrears.
- The tenant tells us that they are having trouble paying their rent or other charges.
- The tenant has had a change in circumstances that has negatively affected their finances, for example health problems and/or increased medical expenses, death in the family, loss of employment and income etc.
- A support worker or financial counsellor has told us that the tenant is experiencing financial hardship.
- A tenant has had essential services disconnected due to inability to pay suppliers

If financial hardship is considered likely, additional information to substantiate financial hardship may be requested, this includes but is not limited to:

- financial records
- medical costs
- additional expenses

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- reports from health providers, support staff

7.2. CENSW response to financial hardship:

Based on the above, the CDO will put forward recommendations to the Operations Manager for consideration of hardship.

The CDO may also refer the tenant to other services including (but not limited to):

- Referral to the CENSW Tenant Support Program or work with the CDO/Co-op's Rent Officer to determine suitable flexible payment options.
- Referral to free community based Financial Counselling Services. Financial counsellors can provide a full assessment of a person's financial situation, information on government assistance, help with negotiations with credit providers and other businesses and information on credit laws, debt recovery processes and other areas.
- Referral to the Credit and Debt Hotline. The Credit and Debt Hotline is a financial counselling information, advice and referral service available to consumers in NSW on credit, debt and banking issues.
- Government rebates and incentives. The State and Federal Governments fund rebates and allowances that can help customers to pay their utilities bills. We will encourage tenants to contact their service providers for further information
- Water and energy vouchers Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers and Water Assistance Payment Scheme (PAS) vouchers are distributed by a range of community welfare organisations and may be able to assist tenants who are having difficulties paying their water or energy bills and have been unable to make payment arrangements with their supplier. Community welfare organisations that distribute EAPA and PAS vouchers include St Vincent de Paul Society, The Salvation Army, Anglicare, Lifeline, and some community/neighbourhood or migrant resource centres.
- Referral to other community organisations who may be able to provide other assistance such as food vouchers, or food banks, to people who are experiencing financial hardship
- Referral to low interest loan schemes (NILS loans) available for items that will improve the health and wellbeing for tenants and their families such as white

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goods, computer, furniture, medical equipment and essential repairs

8. Data Collection

All information collected will only be used to support the tenant through financial hardship and will be treated with the utmost privacy and confidentiality. Referrals to external organisations will only be made with the explicit written approval from the tenant.

9. External References

- No Interest Loan Scheme www.nils.com.au
- Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers
www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/energy-accounts-payment-assistance-eapa-scheme
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cwth)

10. Internal Associated Documents

- Rent Policy
- Tenant Support Program Referral Form
- Tenant Support Program Guidelines
- Privacy and Information Management Policy

Name, Designation and Signature of Approver	Operations Manager
Contact/Responsible Delegation	Co-op Development Manager
Date	October 2020
Date Committee/Board Approved	n/a
Date Staff Informed	13 October 2020
Upload to Website and Date	October 2020
Review Date	October 2023
Version	2