

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

Absence from dwelling policy

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Policy: 1.2.11

Section name: Establishing and maintaining tenancies

Document name	Absence from dwelling
Applicability	Mission Australia Housing
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1 Purpose

- 1.1 To outline the responsibilities of tenants of Mission Australia Housing (MAH) who take a planned or unplanned absence from their property.
- 1.2 To outline property care and rent requirements where absences are approved for tenants.
- 1.3 To outline eligibility criteria for the provision of reduced rent to tenants taking an absence from their property.
- 1.4 To describe requirements for staff who become aware of tenants taking an unapproved absence from their property.

2 Related policies

- 2.1 This policy is to be read in conjunction with the:
 - 2.1.1 Rent and Rebate Policy, which outlines how MAH sets rent including references to special consideration for absences.
 - 2.1.2 Abandonment of Properties and Goods Policy, which outlines the steps MAH takes in managing abandoned properties and goods.

3 Scope

This policy applies to staff responsible for managing tenants and properties of MAH.

4 Guiding principles

- 4.1 Tenants are supported to balance their tenancy and other life responsibilities and goals by MAH.
- 4.2 Tenants are given approval to take an absence from their property where necessary.
- 4.3 Properties of MAH accommodate approved tenants and resources are allocated to those most in need of affordable housing.
- 4.4 MAH acknowledges that social and affordable housing are scarce resources. MAH seeks to optimise the use of these resources by ensuring that properties are not vacant for extended periods.
- 4.5 Tenants are given opportunities to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.

5 Policy

5.1 Notification of extended absences

- 5.1.1 Absences of four weeks or less for transitional housing and rooming accommodation, and six weeks or less from mainstream housing, do not require approval from MAH. Tenants taking absences of this length of time are encouraged to notify their Housing Manager.
- 5.1.2 Tenants under rooming accommodation agreements or support agreements in transitional housing must seek organisational approval for absences of more than four weeks and failure to do so may make them subject to clause [5.2.1](#). They are also encouraged to notify MAH of absences less than four weeks.
- 5.1.13 Tenants on standard lease agreements must seek organisational approval for absences of more than six weeks and failure to do so may make them subject to clause [5.2.1](#). They are also encouraged to notify MAH of any absences less than six weeks.

5.2 Failure to notify and seek approval

- 5.2.1 Staff may seek to remove the rental rebate given to tenants, or, depending on the nature of the situation, terminate their tenancy where they take an extended absence without seeking organisational approval.

5.3 Approval of tenant requests

- 5.3.1 Staff will assess tenant requests on a case-by-case basis, considering the purpose and/or necessity of the absence.
- 5.3.2 Tenants may be asked to provide evidence in order to substantiate their request.

5.3.3 Requests for absences of between three and six months may only be approved by a senior manager in very exceptional circumstances, not including the incarceration of a tenant.

5.4 Responsibility of tenants

5.4.1 Tenants are responsible for their property during an absence, including for the actions and/or inactions of occupants residing in their property.

5.4.2 Tenants must continue paying rent and utility costs as per agreements in place during an absence from their property, unless they are exempt under clauses [5.5.1](#) or [5.5.2](#).

5.4.3 Tenants must nominate an agent to care for their property who will liaise with MAH staff on their behalf as required while they are taking an approved absence.

5.4.4 Tenants must provide their contact details and those of their nominated agent to staff wherever they take an approved absence in order to facilitate communication as required.

5.5 Reduced rent

5.5.1 Tenants may be eligible to pay a **reduced rent** where they are absent from their property in order to access centre based health, social or residential care requiring an accommodation fee as per the [Rent and Rebate Policy](#).

5.5.2 Tenants may be eligible to pay a reduced rent where they are in custody, rehabilitation, a refuge, or other safe accommodation for a period of up to three months on a one-off basis as per the [Rent and Rebate Policy](#).

5.5.3 Tenants will not be eligible for a reduced rent where they are incarcerated for a serious breach of tenancy. Staff may also act to terminate their tenancy as per the [Ending Tenancies Agreements Policy](#).

5.6 Absences longer than the approved timeframe

5.6.1 Where staff members obtain evidence that tenants either will not or may not return to their property by the approved return date, they will wherever possible liaise with them to discuss their tenure and identify their continued need for housing.

5.6.2 Where tenants are unable to be contacted during their absence and have given prior consent to liaise with their next of kin, staff will contact the nominated person to clarify matters.

5.7 Grievances

5.7.1 Staff will inform tenants of their right to dispute and appeal organisational decisions as per the [Appeals and Complaints Policy](#).

5.8 Record keeping

5.8.1 Staff will store all correspondence relating to absences in the tenancy management system.

6 Definitions

Absence from dwelling: a period of time in which a property is not used as a full time dwelling by tenant/s listed on an agreement for housing.

Reduced rent: MAH charges a reduced rent in special circumstances, down to a minimum of \$5 a week, for a limited period to reduce hardship on tenants and household members. This is available on a one-off basis.