

Policy name	Abandoned Properties and Goods
Policy date	August 2020
Authorisation	General Manager, Operations
Policy owner	National Manager, Housing Services
Policy type	Mission Australia Housing Operational Policy
Policy setting	

1 Purpose

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This policy outlines the principles to be followed where Mission Australia Housing (MAH) tenants:

- Abandon, or are suspected to have abandoned their tenancies without informing MAH, leaving the property vacant; and/or
- Leave behind personal belongings on vacating an MAH property.

1.2 Coverage

1.2.1 This document is a national policy and covers both Mission Australia Housing (MAH) and Mission Australia Housing Victoria (MAHV). All references to Mission Australia Housing, MAH and Housing include both MAH and MAHV unless specifically stated otherwise. Where state based variations exist in policies and procedures, these will be identified in the document.

1.2.2 This policy applies to all forms of housing provided by MAH including social, affordable and transitional housing.

1.3 Information on procedures and other related policies

1.3.1 This policy focuses on why certain things need to be done. It is supported by procedures that provide more detail on the what to do.

1.3.2 Other MAH policies also need to be considered in managing abandoned properties and goods. To assist you, these are identified where relevant in this policy and supporting procedures.

2 Scope

2.1 Parts of Mission Australia that this policy covers

- 2.1.1 This policy applies to MAH staff responsible for working with MAH clients, tenants and properties.

2.2 Definitions

- 2.2.1 Key terms used in this policy are defined in the following table.

Term	Definition
Abandoned goods	Personal belongings that are intentionally or unintentionally left behind by tenants who have vacated or abandoned their property.
Abandoned properties	Properties which tenants have left without providing MAH with appropriate state-based notice of their intention to leave.

3 Policy

3.1 Guiding principles

- 3.1.1 MAH is focused on the needs of tenants and their families:
- MAH seeks to support tenants to vacate their properties in a planned way.
 - MAH supports tenants to claim their goods wherever possible.
- 3.1.2 MAH protects the value of assets under its management:
- MAH acts to minimise damage that can occur where tenants abandon properties.
 - MAH seeks to minimise the time properties are vacant.
- 3.1.3 The MAH process for abandoned properties and goods is fair and transparent:
- MAH is consistent in its approach to managing abandoned properties and abandoned tenant goods.
 - MAH keeps accurate records in support of its decisions and actions.
- 3.1.4 The MAH process complies with relevant laws and procedures.

3.2 Abandoned properties

- 3.2.1 As part of the effective management of properties for which it is responsible, MAH requires tenants to provide notice of their intention to end their tenancy before they leave their property in accordance with the terms and conditions of their lease agreement.

- Where a tenant leaves their property without notifying MAH of their intention to do so, MAH may consider a property to be abandoned.
- 3.2.2 Where staff form the view that a property may have been abandoned, they should attempt to contact the tenant, or where appropriate the tenant's nominated person, to discuss the matter.
- Where there is a concern that the tenant may have passed away, staff should follow the **Managing Tenant Deaths Procedure**.
- 3.2.3 Where a tenant or nominated person is contacted and advises that the property is not abandoned, staff:
- Will need to satisfy themselves that this is correct; and
 - May need to take action under the **Absence from Dwelling Policy** if the tenant has been absent for an extended period with the intention of returning.
- 3.2.4 Where staff cannot contact the tenant or nominated person, they should:
- Issue the tenant with written notice of intention to inspect the property in order to determine whether it has been abandoned, adhering to the relevant state-based notice periods. In any subsequent inspection, staff should adhere to the guidelines set out in the **Inspections Policy**.
 - Take action under the relevant state legislation to terminate the lease and acquire vacant possession where the property has been found to be abandoned. See the associated procedures and the **Ending Tenancies Policy** for further information.
 - Take action under the **Arrears Management Policy** where costs have been incurred as a consequence of abandonment and/or where the tenant has an outstanding debt.

3.3 Abandoned goods

- 3.3.1 Where goods have been left behind after a tenant has vacated or abandoned their property, staff will:
- Dispose of rubbish and perishable items immediately, adhering to the **Staff Safety in the Workplace Policy**;
 - Create a detailed list of any goods remaining, specifying the condition of those goods and photographing any items to be used as evidence; and
 - Contact the tenant wherever possible to advise them of any items left behind and of the requirements relating to storing and disposing of leftover goods, as per this policy and associated procedures.
- 3.3.2 In addition to the guidelines outlined in this policy, the legal requirements governing the treatment of unclaimed goods vary between jurisdictions. Details on these are set out in the associated procedures.

3.4 Record keeping

3.4.1 Staff will:

- Develop accurate records of abandoned properties and abandoned tenant goods;
- Detail the quantity, type and condition of any abandoned goods and document the goods disposal process; and
- Ensure that all records are logged in the tenancy management system.

3.5 Appeals

- 3.5.1 Staff will inform tenants of their right to appeal organisational decisions and to complain about the services of MAH as per the **Appeals and Complaints Policy**.

4 Responsibilities

4.1 Housing staff including Housing Officers and Client Service Officers are responsible for:

- Inspecting properties wherever required in accordance with this policy.
- Ending tenancies wherever required in accordance with this policy.
- Documenting and keeping records of the condition of a property.
- Preparing evidence for state-based civil proceedings where required.
- Contacting tenants and/or their next of kin or alternate contact where required.
- Assisting tenants to claim their goods wherever possible.
- Keeping records related to the process in the relevant systems.
- Recommending improvements to this policy and associated procedures.

4.2 Team Leaders/Regional Managers are responsible for:

- Assisting housing staff to implement this policy.
- Ensuring good management of evidence in the tenancy management system.
- Incorporating this policy and associated procedures into staff induction and training.
- Ensuring staff are aware of and have access to this policy and associated procedures.
- Escalating feedback about this policy to the policy owner and/or policy writer.

4.3 The National Housing Services Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring that MAH complies with this policy and associated procedures.
- Recommending any changes to this policy and associated procedures.