

Policy name	Managing Hoarding and Squalor
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 approach to be followed where Mission Australia Housing (MAH) staff become aware of, or suspect, hoarding and/or squalor at 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 hoarding and squalor. 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 managing MAH tenants and properties.

2.2 Definitions

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

Term	Definition
Hoarding	The excessive accumulation of items, regardless of actual value. In the extreme, homes may be filled to capacity, with limited or no room for tenants and/or occupants.
Squalor	A state of extreme filth and degradation resulting in public health and property risks, often a result of neglect. Squalor is not the same as hoarding, although it is often associated with extreme hoarding.

3 Policy

3.1 Guiding principles

3.1.1 MAH is focused on the needs of tenants and their families:

- All tenants have the right to enjoy safe and secure living environments.
- MAH has a responsibility to intervene when living conditions are affecting the ability of tenants and neighbours to live happily and healthily.
- MAH takes an early intervention approach to hoarding and squalor to sustain tenancies wherever possible.

3.1.2 The MAH process for managing hoarding and squalor is fair and transparent:

- The basis for MAH actions and decisions are explained to tenants.
- MAH acknowledges the complexity behind hoarding and squalor issues, and takes a collaborative, partnership-based approach to address these.
- Tenants are assisted to access support in order to sustain their tenancies wherever possible.
- Tenants are given the opportunity to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.

3.1.3 MAH protects the value of the housing that it manages. Tenants are responsible for maintaining the condition of their property and for paying any non-rent debts relating to the condition of their property.

3.1.4 The MAH process complies with relevant laws and procedures.

3.2 General approach

3.2.1 Hoarding and/or squalor can pose significant risks to tenants and neighbours including fire or other property damage, vermin, as well as reduced amenity. In this context, MAH:

- Promotes and respects the right of tenants to organise properties in a manner of their choosing, where tenant choice is consistent with applicable agreements;
- Does not condone or permit the use of its properties for purposes outside of applicable agreements;
- Supports tenants wherever possible to live independently, and will assist them to comply with the terms and conditions of their agreement; and
- Will promptly assess and address identified property hazards and risks relating to hoarding and/or squalor.

3.2.2 Further information is set out in the **Managing Hoarding and Squalor Procedure**.

3.3 Early intervention

3.3.1 From the time a tenancy is entered into, staff will use the routine inspection process to identify potential tenancy management issues including hoarding and squalor, as per the **Inspections Policy**.

3.3.2 Where hoarding and/or squalor is identified, suspected or reported, staff will regularly monitor properties to develop accurate records of evidence. Where necessary, staff will:

- Advise tenants that they are in breach of their tenancy responsibilities, providing them with the opportunity to rectify the problem as per the **Breach of Tenancy Policy**; and
- Refer identified tenants to support services in order to build their capacity to sustain their tenancy as per the **Working with Support Services Policy**.

3.4 Protection of children

3.4.1 Staff will comply with the legislative requirement to keep children safe by reporting significant child risks as per the **Identifying, Managing and Reporting on Incidents and Risks Policy**.

3.5 Response escalation

3.5.1 Where early intervention attempts are unsuccessful, or the risk to the property and other tenants is high, staff will treat the matter as a serious breach.

- Staff will work with government agencies and other community-based organisations where required to address the identified risks associated with hoarding and/or squalor, and enforce the right of all tenants to safe living environments.
- Staff will take action under the **Breach of Tenancy Policy**, which may include advice to the tenant that a termination notice will be issued as per the **Ending Tenancies Policy**.
- Staff will, wherever possible, refer tenants to alternative housing and support options in the event that resolution cannot be reached.

3.6 Asset management issues

- 3.6.1 Where a property has been or may have been damaged as a result of hoarding and/or squalor, Housing staff will inform and work with the Assets team to determine what action needs to be taken.

3.7 Fines, fees and charges

- 3.7.1 There are often costs associated with managing hoarding & squalor including the removal of hoarded material, vermin control and repairing damage to the property or adjoining properties. Tenants are responsible for:
- Paying fines, fees or charges incurred through negligible treatment of property, whether this treatment is intended or unintended as per the **Managing Tenant Payments Policy** and **Bad Debt Management Procedure**; and
 - Any costs incurred to other properties, where their negligence impacts on the surrounding properties.
- 3.7.2 Staff will use remedies available under residential tenancy and rooming accommodation legislation to recover costs for fines, fees and charges where applicable.

3.8 Record keeping

- 3.8.1 Staff should keep accurate records including but not limited to:
- Property inspection reports and photographic evidence;
 - Referral forms and tenant consent forms; and
 - Warning letters for breach of tenancy and/or notice letters for termination.

4 Responsibilities

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

- Informing tenants of their rights and responsibilities in accordance with this policy.
- Inspecting properties, and identifying and responding to issues as required.
- Issuing notices where required in accordance with this policy.
- Keeping records of 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 Manager, Housing Services is responsible for:

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