

Tenant Information Handbook

as at July 2009



About us

Wentworth is a not-for-profit housing company that provides affordable, community-based rental housing and other housing assistance for eligible people on moderate to low incomes in the outer western suburbs of Sydney.

Wentworth is overseen by a Board of Directors, who are members of our local communities.

Tenant Handbook

Welcome to Wentworth Community Housing. This handbook contains information about your tenancy with us.

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Membership

When you become a tenant of Wentworth you can also become a member of our organisation. Being a member of Wentworth entitles you to vote at our Annual General Meeting. To become a member you pay a joining fee of \$1 and an annual fee of \$2.

Commitment to a quality service

Wentworth aims to provide you with a quality service.

We are committed to meeting National Community Housing Standards set for all community housing organisations, and to following the NSW Code of Practice for Housing Associations.

- ▶▶ As a tenant, you have the right to receive a high standard of housing management service from us.

If you think we are not meeting the standards we have agreed to provide, let us know. We will respond to your questions and comments quickly and honestly.

If you are not satisfied with our response, follow our complaints and appeals procedure (see page 10).

Your rights

Wentworth is committed to the fair and just treatment of all tenants. As a tenant, you have the right to:

- be treated in a fair and non-discriminatory way
- be treated with respect
- access safe and secure housing
- be consulted about your housing needs and preferences
- have your personal information treated as confidential and private
- be consulted on changes to the way your tenancy is managed
- complain and appeal decisions
- use advocates
- participate in the organisation and to contribute to decision making
- access your own information on file

Tenant participation

Wentworth supports tenants becoming more involved in the management of their housing. So during your tenancy we will:

- seek your feedback or comments on the way we provide our services
- give you opportunities to become involved in decisions about how your housing is managed. This could mean that we ask you to attend tenant planning days, help us put together a tenant newsletter, respond to surveys, attend tenant groups or even volunteer.

If you are interested in participating in any of these ways, or would like more information about how to become more involved, please contact us.

Rent

Your rent is calculated according to formulas set by Housing NSW (Community Housing Division). All community housing associations use these formulas.

For most of you, rent is assessed at 25% of the gross income of your household plus 100% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance to which you are entitled.

An outline of this formula is listed below. Please remember that this may change subject to government policy.

INCOME	RATE
Tenant and live-in partner	25%
Other household member 21 yrs and over	25%
Other household member 18 yrs to 20 yrs (inclusive)	15%
Other household member < 18 yrs	Nil
Family Tax Benefit Part A and Part B	15%
Assets	> \$5,000 @ rate set by Centrelink

RENTAL SUPPLEMENT	RATE
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	100%

We will give you a copy of your Rent Assessment each time your rent is assessed (twice a year).

Some properties are subject to different rent formulas. We will tell you about this at the start of your tenancy.

- ▶▶ If your income changes or the income of any other persons residing in your premises changes, please notify us within 14 days so we can make the necessary adjustments to your rent. It is your responsibility to give us this information.

Income reviews

Wentworth is required to review the income of all its tenants at least twice a year (every six months).

We will ask you to supply up-to-date information about your household income so we can reassess your rental rebate.

We will send you a form asking you for information and verification of your current income.

- ▶▶ It is important that you give us this up to date information. If you do not supply the information we ask you for, we will assume you do not wish to apply for a rebated rent and your rent will be set at the market rate.

You should not wait for an income review to advise us of any changes to income. Please notify us within 14 days so we can make the necessary adjustments to your rent. It is your responsibility to give us this information.

Rent arrears

Rent must be paid in advance. This is part of the lease agreement you sign at the beginning of your tenancy. Paying your rent on time is important. We rely on your rent to pay, for example, for maintenance and other property care costs.

If you are having difficulties paying your rent, please contact us **immediately**. It is usually possible to come to a payment agreement.

If you fall behind in your rent (this is called falling into arrears) by more than two weeks, especially if you have not been in contact with us, we will start proceedings with the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal for either an order for you to pay the rent or an order for possession of the property (also known as eviction).

- ▶▶ It is important to contact us if you get behind in your rent. If you do, we can usually organise a way for you to catch up your rental arrears. We do not want your tenancy to fail.

The Residential Premises Condition Report

A Residential Premises Condition Report (or property condition report) is Part 2 of your tenancy agreement. It is proof of the condition of the property at the start of your tenancy.

The condition report will be compared to the condition of the property at inspections during and at the end of your tenancy. You are responsible for taking care of the property and leaving it in a similar condition to when you rented it, except for 'fair wear and tear'.

As your landlord, we are responsible for 'wear and tear'; you may be held responsible for damage, cleaning or lawn mowing, if you cannot prove it was like that when you moved in.

We will do a routine inspection of the property within the first 3 months of your tenancy and then generally once a year (annually). If we need to look at a problem before then, please tell us by calling or visiting the office.

What you need to do

1. Inspect your property to see if we recorded everything correctly. Check whether we:
 - missed something
 - said something is there when it isn't
 - said something works when it doesn't
2. Fill in the 'tenant agrees' column with a **Y** for yes or an **N** for no. If you put **N**, write your reason in the space next to it.
3. Sign the report. Keep one copy as you will need it when you move out. Return the other copy to us within 7 days.
4. If a maintenance problem written on the report is urgent, do not wait for us to receive the report. Phone or call into the office and tell us about it.
5. Some problems are not obvious until you live in a property. If you find a problem after you have sent back the report, please tell us as soon as possible.

Property inspections

Wentworth will carry out an inspection on your property generally once a year. We will give you a minimum of 7 days notice of this happening.

This inspection helps us assess the condition of the property and keep it in good order.

Inspections may happen more frequently if you live in a leasehold property and the agent/owner requests this. They can visit up to 4 times per year. We will also do an inspection at the end of your tenancy.

Repairs and maintenance

WHAT TO DO

If you have a repair or maintenance problem, please report it as soon as you can to our Penrith head office. We will arrange for the repairs to be carried out.

We will contact either a tradesperson or the agent/owner (if you live in a leasehold property).

We will give the tradesperson or agent/owner your contact details so they can make an appointment with you to come and do the work.

TIMEFRAMES

Emergency repairs will be attended to within 24 hours, urgent repairs within 5 working days and normal repairs within 21 days. Usually our response time is much quicker than this. However, in a leasehold property some agents/owners can take longer than this. Please let us know if it's taking too long to fix your problem.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS OUTSIDE BUSINESS HOURS

All repairs are to be handled by Wentworth unless the problem occurs outside business hours and is an emergency. Phone numbers of tradespeople to contact in an emergency are on the bottom of the first page of your tenancy agreement.

We will send you an updated emergency contact list once a year.

PROBLEMS

We randomly check completed repairs to make sure the work has been completed and that you are satisfied. If you have any problems with any tradespeople or the quality of their repair work, please let us know, so we can rectify the problem.

DAMAGE

If you break or damage any fixture, fitting or other part of the property you are responsible for its repair or replacement.

You can ask Wentworth to do this repair, but you will be charged for the cost. We can arrange a payment plan to help you pay off the cost if needed.

Changing needs

Wentworth understands that people's circumstances change, and that sometimes this means your housing is no longer suitable for you. Please let us know.

HOUSING TRANSFER (REHOUSING)

If the number of people in your household changes significantly, or you need to be in a different area, or there are other reasons you cannot continue to live in your current housing, you can apply for a transfer to another Wentworth property.

We will ask you to complete a Wentworth Housing Transfer (rehousing) form and to discuss your reasons with us. We will rehouse you based on an assessment of your needs.

Wentworth has limited resources, though, and may only be able to help those who can demonstrate a high need for rehousing. In some circumstances we can also arrange for you to be housed with another housing provider if we can no longer meet your needs.

MODIFICATIONS

If your needs change because of health or disability we may be able to modify your existing housing. We will ask an Occupational Therapist to provide a thorough assessment of your housing needs. If your house cannot be modified we will help find a more suitable property for you.

LEASEHOLD PROPERTY CHANGES

Some of our properties are rented by us through the private market, from private owners. When that landlord ends our lease it automatically ends your tenancy with us. Please note that these situations are outside our control. We will discuss your needs at the time, and if you are not in breach of your lease, we will offer you somewhere else to live and a new tenancy with us.

Complaints

Wentworth aims to provide you with a good quality housing service. If you have a question or a problem about the quality of our service please let us know so we can sort it out. This is the best way help us improve the quality of our service.

A complaint can be lodged if you are unhappy or dissatisfied with the service you receive from Wentworth.

LEVEL 1 – INFORMAL COMPLAINT

We encourage you in the first instance to tell us what the problem is so that we can try and resolve it quickly.

LEVEL 2.1 – FORMAL COMPLAINT (STAGE 1)

If you are not comfortable talking with us or you have tried and are still unhappy/ dissatisfied with the outcome then you can lodge a formal complaint in writing to the Executive Officer. To do this you can send us a letter or use our Complaint Form.

Your complaint will be investigated by the Executive Officer and you will be notified of the outcome within 28 days.

LEVEL 2.2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT (STAGE 2)

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint or the way it has been handled, you can ask to have your complaint referred to the Board of Directors. The Board will review your complaint and send you a written response within 28 days.

LEVEL 3 – INDEPENDENT RESOLUTION

If you remain dissatisfied with the resolution of your complaint you have the right to approach the Office of the Registrar of Community Housing (ORCH). You can check if the ORCH can investigate your complaint by calling them on freecall 1800 330 940.

Appeals

An appeal is a request to have a specific decision reviewed.

If you disagree with a decision made by Wentworth, you have the right to lodge an appeal. The decisions that can be appealed are generally made under Wentworth housing policies. You can access these policies via our website www.wentworth.org.au. The sorts of decisions that can be appealed are:

- rent subsidy assessment
- application for housing transfer
- property modifications relating to medical needs
- absence from a dwelling

LEVEL 1 – INTERNAL APPEAL

If you are not satisfied with the original decision made by Wentworth, you have the right to request in writing that the decision be reviewed by the Executive Officer of Wentworth. To do this you can send us a letter or use our Appeal Form.

The Executive Officer will review your case and the decision made. You may be offered an interview as part of this process. You will be advised in writing of the outcome of this appeal within 28 days.

LEVEL 2 – EXTERNAL APPEAL

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the internal appeal, you can access the independent appeals process via the NSW Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). Contact HAC on 1800629 794 or visit www.hac.nsw.gov.au

Neighbour disputes

If you have a disagreement with a neighbour that you just can't settle, it may be best to get some help. Community Justice Centres have trained mediators who can help solve problems quickly and fairly. Mediation can help solve problems on issues like:

- pets
- children
- noise
- garbage
- unreasonable behaviour
- family disputes

The central contact number for Community Justice Centres is 1300 990 777.



Visitors and relatives

Wentworth understands that you might have visitors, friends and relatives staying with you in your home from time to time.

Generally, if a guest stays in your home for longer than 3 weeks we will assume they have moved in with you and will include them in your rent calculations.

The tenancy agreement you signed with us clearly states how many people are entitled to live in your home. If this changes, you need to let us know immediately. Having extra people living in your home needs to be approved by us first as it will usually mean a change in your rent. It may cause overcrowding.

Pets

Please let us know if you want to have a pet, particularly a cat or dog. Agents or owners will generally not allow pets, particularly dogs, in leasehold properties. We will have mentioned this to you at the start of your tenancy. In our own properties, pets such as dogs may be OK if they are not large, and your property has a fully fenced yard of a reasonable size. Please get written permission from us **before** you get a pet.



Ending your tenancy

If you wish to end your tenancy with us, please give us 21 days notice in writing. This is the agreed length of time written in your lease.

If there are special reasons why you can't give us 21 days notice please contact us as soon as possible to discuss them.

If no notice is given and there are no exceptional circumstances, you will be charged rent to the end of the 21 day period.

WHEN YOU MOVE

1. Do not leave without telling us. If you do this, we consider the property to be abandoned. You will be charged any unpaid rent up to the time we take possession of the property, and the costs of any repairs that are needed.
2. Take all your personal belongings and furniture with you. If you leave anything of any value behind we are legally required to store it for 30 days, and you will be charged the cost of this if you want to reclaim your belongings.
3. Leave all our fixtures and fittings etc. These will be listed on the residential premises condition report prepared at the start of your tenancy (see page 07)
4. Remove any fixture or fitting that you installed and agreed to remove at the end of your tenancy. You must repair any damage caused by its installation or removal. If you want to leave anything you have paid for that has improved the property, check with us first if this is okay.

5. You must aim to leave the property in a similar condition to the start of your tenancy. Repair or replace anything you have broken or damaged, but remember, you are not responsible for anything that is caused through normal wear and tear. Report all repairs that you know are needed to the property and that are our responsibility.
6. Leave the property clean. Remove any rubbish from inside and outside, and attend to the lawns and gardens. The property must be in a similar (or better) state of cleanliness than when you moved in.
7. Attend the end of tenancy property inspection with us. This makes it easier to sort out disagreements about who is responsible for any cleaning or repairs. You will be charged for any cleaning or repairs necessary to bring the property back to the condition it was in at the start of your tenancy, allowing for normal wear and tear. We will give you a reasonable opportunity to fix or clean anything you would otherwise be charged for.
8. Return all the keys to the property. This includes any sets you gave to your family members or friends. Tell us if any keys are missing or any locks are not working.
9. Pay your rent and other charges up to the vacate date. You will be charged rent until your keys are returned or we take possession of the property. When you return the keys we will let you know if there are any other costs that may be charged to you (water usage, damages, cleaning, replacing locks if keys are lost).
10. Give us your new contact details. We will send you a final account, and your bond (or the amount remaining after any costs charged to you have been paid), within 28 days of your vacate date.



Information about your property

Information about charges other than rent:

Water use

If your property has a separate water meter you will be charged for the water you use. We will send you a bill every 3 months. You should pay the full amount within 14 days. The meter reading at the start of your tenancy is shown on your Premises Condition Report.

About water charges

Every 3 months the Water Board will read the meter, calculate how much water has been used, and send a bill to the owner. Please use water carefully. If a tap is leaking, or left running, a lot of water is wasted and the bill will be higher. Please report leaking taps as soon as you notice them.

Excess garbage

Tenants are not charged for the normal weekly garbage collection, using the Council bins. You will not be charged for anything you leave out on Council clean up days.

BILLS YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

Electricity

Tenants are responsible for the cost of connection and use of electricity. Any faults with the wiring or the meter are our responsibility.

Gas

Tenants are responsible for the cost of connection and use of gas to their property. Any faults with the gas pipes or meter are our responsibility.

Telephone

Tenants are responsible for the costs of all phone calls and for line and handset rental charges. It is our policy to pay the cost of installing a telephone service in our own properties, if there is not one already there.

Household contents insurance

We pay insurance for the property itself, but you are responsible for insuring your own possessions against fire, theft or other damage.

Costs of running the property

You have to pay for getting services such as electricity and gas connected, and then for using them. Some points to note are:

- electric appliances are usually more expensive to run than gas appliances
- turning off appliances when you are not using them can save you quite a lot on your power bills
- faulty appliances may use more power

KEYS

You will get one complete set of keys: to all the external doors, security screen doors, window locks, and internal and garage doors (where required). You are responsible for the cost of cutting extra sets.

THE ELECTRICITY METER

The electricity meter is where the mains switch and fuses are. If the power or lights stop working, the first thing to check is whether a fuse has blown. If you think the electricity is dangerous (for example if there is a fire, or the smell of burning from a power point), first turn off the mains switch. This will cut the electricity supply to the property. Then follow our procedure for getting an urgent repair fixed.

THE GAS METER (IF APPLICABLE)

The gas meter is where the mains tap is. If you think the gas is leaking, turn off the gas supply immediately. Then follow our procedure for getting an urgent repair fixed.

THE WATER METER AND MAINS TAP

The water meter is where the mains tap is. If you have a badly leaking tap or a burst water pipe, turn off the water supply at the mains. This will stop the water flow to the property completely. Then follow our procedure for getting an urgent repair fixed.

▶▶ SMOKE DETECTORS

It is law in NSW for all new premises and rental properties to be fitted with smoke detectors. We will inspect the smoke detectors in all our own properties once a year to make sure they are working. If you are in a property that does not have a smoke detector or yours is not working, please let us know immediately.

Service Directory

HOME EMERGENCY

Integral Electricity	13 1003
Sydney Water	13 2092
AGL Gas Company	13 1245
Poison Information Line	13 1126

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS

Blue Mountains City Council	4780 5000
Penrith City Council	4732 7777
Hawkesbury City Council	4560 4444
Blacktown City Council	9839 6000

SERVICES FOR WOMEN

Penrith Women's Health Centre	4731 8749
Blue Mountains Women's Health Centre	4782 5133
The Women's Cottage	4578 4190
Blacktown Women's and Girls Health Centre	9831 2070

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Katoomba	4782 2133
Penrith	4724 6300
Hawkesbury	4560 5714
Blacktown	9881 8700
Doonside	9881 8650
Lawson	4759 8700
Mt Druitt	9881 1200
Springwood	4751 0100



CENTRELINK

13 23 00

www.centerlink.gov.au

If you are claiming benefits, let Centrelink know your new address. You should also make a claim for Rent Assistance.

HOUSING NSW

Housing Contact Centre

1300 468 746

If you are in one of the leasehold properties we manage, make sure you stay on the Housing NSW waiting list, and tell them your new address.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL SERVICES

Credit Line (Wesley Counselling Service)

1800 808 488

Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre

1300 363 967

Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre

4587 8877

Mount Druitt and Area Community Legal Centre

9675 2009

TENANCY ADVICE AND ADVOCACY SERVICES

Western Sydney Tenant's Service (WESTS)

1800 625 956

Tenants Hotline

1800 251 101

This service can help you if you have any problem with us as your landlord, or if you want independent legal advice about something we have told you about your tenancy.

TENANT PARTICIPATION RESOURCE SERVICES

Western Sydney Regional Public Tenants Council 9676 5200

FURNITURE, FOOD AND BILLS ASSISTANCE

St Vincent de Paul (state head office) 9560 8666

List of Local offices www.vinnies.org.au/centres-national

Salvation Army

Salvo care line 1300 363 622
www.salvos.org.au/need-help

Community Aid

Katoomba 4782 1555

Penrith 4731 1380

Hawkesbury 4588 3506

Blacktown Community Aid and Information Services 9621 5788

COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTRE

1300 990 777

Mediation is free, voluntary and confidential.

HOUSING APPEALS COMMITTEE

1800 629 794

HOSPITALS

Nepean Hospital 4734 2000

Blue Mountains Memorial Hospital 4784 6500

Hawkesbury District Hospital 4560 5555

Blacktown Hospital 9881 8000

Mt Druitt Hospital 9881 1715



Any questions?

If you have any questions about this information please contact Wentworth



HEAD OFFICE

Penrith

Address: Borec House, Suite 1002, Level 1
29-57 Station Street, Penrith NSW 2750
PO Box 4303, Penrith Westfield NSW 2750

Phone: 4731 5851

Fax: 4721 5336

Email: admin@wentworth.org.au

Web: www.wentworth.org.au

Opening hours

8:30am–4:30pm Monday to Friday

1:00pm–4:30pm Wednesday

If you want to meet us but you are unable to come to the office, please phone us during office hours and arrange an appointment for us to visit you.

If you need an interpreter, please contact the Translating and Interpreter Service on 131 450.