



# WNews

Wentworth Community Housing Tenant Newsletter

Issue 43 | March 2020

## Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to the Autumn edition of WNews. We are living in a different world from when we last sent a tenant newsletter to you. With the global COVID-19 pandemic well and truly upon us, we have put in place a range of strategies to ensure the safety of our clients, staff and the broader community.

We have been working hard to ensure our services are available to you. Due to the growing number of COVID-19 cases in Australia and the social distancing measures that the government has introduced, all our offices will be closed to tenants from Thursday 26 March until further notice. Even though our offices are closed, our staff are still working. You can still contact us during business hours via email or phone. We know that things are changing fast and we will stay in contact with you either through SMS, email and letters. We will be publishing regular updates on our website and Facebook page too.

Read this newsletter for more information on what we have been doing to deal with the crisis and changes to some of our services. We have also

brought you official sources of information about health and welfare and COVID-19.

As well as information about COVID-19, we have included some good news stories about events we were involved in before the pandemic.

In March, for example, we got to celebrate the power of women with our tenants and staff at Penrith's International Women's Day in St Marys. I've heard it was a wonderful event and we include an article about the great activities that participants enjoyed throughout the day. In February, two of our staff members attended the launch of the first travelling Stolen Generations education centre. The story is incredible.

We are also celebrating Journey's one-year anniversary. These are times when we

need to reinforce the message that secure, appropriate and affordable housing should be a universal right.

Another piece of good news is that we have enclosed a copy of the updated tenant handbook with this newsletter. I hope you find it helpful and easy to understand, so let us know what you think.

Back to our new reality now, this is a challenging time for everyone. We are all concerned about our loved ones—our family and friends and those around us. The best possible outcomes will come from staying calm and working together. I know that's what we will do.

Stay safe and protect yourself during the outbreak of this disease.

Enjoy your reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen McIntyre".

**Stephen McIntyre**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Important information all Wentworth tenants need to know about COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)

By now, you have probably received a flyer from us with information about how COVID-19 is affecting the way we operate. We are monitoring the situation daily and very closely. Because your wellbeing is very important to us, we have been working out the best way to adapt the services we provide to you. We know these services will be essential through these difficult times.

All the actions we have been taking are to protect our staff and organisation as well as to keep you and our communities safe. We know things are changing fast and we will stay in touch with you either through SMS, email or letters to keep you informed.

Keep an eye on our website, [wentworth.org.au](http://wentworth.org.au) for regular updates. We will also be posting on social media. Details are in this newsletter, so make sure to follow us and stay connected during this time.

## All offices are closed to tenants as of Thursday 26 March until further notice.

Even though our offices are closed, all Wentworth staff will be working and can be contacted by phone and email.

We are still here to help by phone and email. You can phone us on **4777 8000**, Monday to Friday, between 8:30am and 4:30pm. Alternatively, you can email us on [admin@wentworth.org.au](mailto:admin@wentworth.org.au)

## All non-essential Client Service Visits are suspended but we remain committed to helping you

As well as closing our office, all non-essential face to face meetings or visits will not be undertaken until further notice. This includes all property inspections and tenant engagement events, including Tenant Advisory Group meetings.

We will stay in touch by telephone, email or standard mail. Please reach out if you need assistance and we will do our best to help.

## We will continue to respond to emergency repairs and maintenance requests

Our Contact Centre team remains in operation and we are happy to assist you with any urgent enquiries. Common area cleaning and lawns servicing will continue as normal including any other compliance related maintenance. All other repairs have been put on hold until further notice.

While toilet paper has been in short supply recently please don't flush tissues, serviettes, baby wipes or paper towels into the toilets. These items don't break down as well as toilet paper and will block drains.

All our contractors have put in place safe work practices for any emergency work they may do at your home so everyone will be safe.

## What happens if you are no longer working

We know things are tough at the moment with businesses closing down and people having their hours cut or losing jobs. If your income has gone down, either because of a loss of work due to COVID-19 or for any other reason, you can request a review of your rent.

In order to review the rent we charge, you will need to provide us with proof of your new income. This may include:

- ▶ proof of the reduction in income i.e. a variation of payslips or a letter from your employer confirming reduced hours
- ▶ proof of no longer working i.e. separation certificate
- ▶ details of the new income i.e. a Centrelink statement.

You'll also need to complete a rent review form so that we can recalculate your rent.

Contact us on **4777 8000** and we will get a form to you as fast as we can.

Because of this crisis, the Federal Government has announced that additional short-term financial assistance will be provided to people on low incomes. This money will be available shortly for eligible people. It will not be used as part of the calculation of your rent.

Keep reading this newsletter for more details about this financial aid. We have included an article with more information and a link to the Treasury website.

## Government increases welfare payments due to the COVID-19 outbreak

Over the next six months, the Government is temporarily expanding eligibility to income support payments and establishing a new, time-limited Coronavirus supplement to be paid at a rate of \$550 per fortnight.

This Coronavirus supplement will be paid to both existing and new recipients of JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance Jobseeker, Parenting Payment, Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefit.

This means, for example, that someone on the JobSeeker Payment (formerly known

as Newstart) will get almost double the payment, taking the rate to \$1115.70 per fortnight.

The government has also announced a one-off \$750 stimulus payment to pensioners, social security, veteran and other income support recipients and eligible concession card holders.

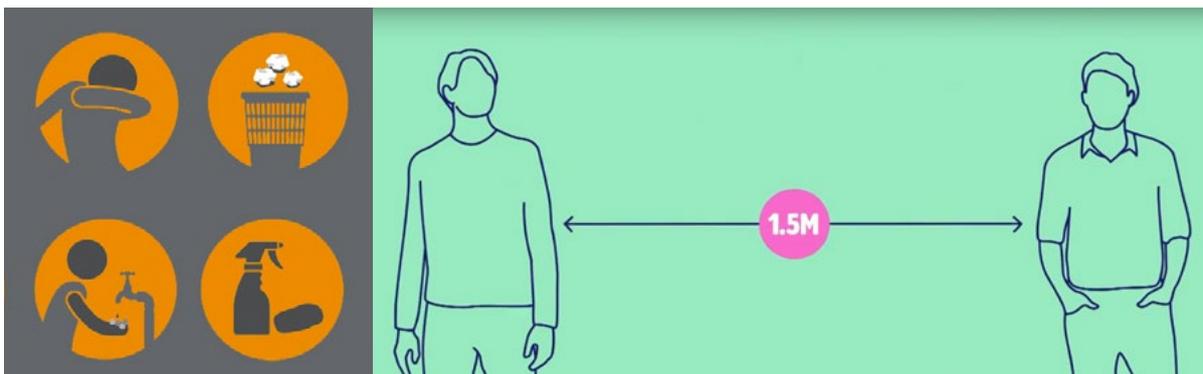
There is much more information on The Treasury website, including fact sheets. Go to <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/households-for-details>.

## Tips from NSW Health

We all need to do our bit to help stop the spread of this virus. There are simple things we can all do. By keeping our distance and staying indoors as much as possible and maintaining a hygiene routine of handwashing, we can all minimise the impact of the virus.

- ▶ Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as much as possible
- ▶ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your elbow when you sneeze or cough
- ▶ Make sure you throw your tissues directly into the bin
- ▶ Clean and disinfect surfaces
- ▶ If you are sick, avoid contact with others
- ▶ Practice social distancing - stay more than 1.5 metres away from people.

For more tips from NSW Health, go to [www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/covid-19-latest.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/covid-19-latest.aspx)



## International Women's Day—#EachForEqual

On Wednesday 4 March, Wentworth female tenants and staff got to celebrate equality and the power of women at the Penrith's International Women's Day in St Marys. It was an exciting morning with inspiring speakers, community performances and delicious refreshments.

Wentworth's Sustainable Communities Officer, Vanessa Tomas, said it was an honour to be part of the organising committee with nine other agencies.

"Our focus this year was to celebrate equality and how wonderful all women are."

"A highlight for me was to work alongside extraordinary Wentworth female tenants to design and deliver a very special group activity to over 300 local women and young people who attended the event," Ms Tomas said.

It is great to see our tenants involved in the local community and to build Wentworth's relationships with other vital community services and groups. Effective partnerships

are extremely important to Wentworth, as are opportunities to support and encourage other organisations doing great work across Western Sydney.



## Stories from Journey—celebrating its one-year anniversary

It's been one year since our Journey to Social Housing project, facilitated by CuriousWorks, brought together a group of older tenants to celebrate their experiences and perspectives on housing.

Back then, well over 100 people braved the rain—and hail!—to see, hear and read the stories of our social housing tenants at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre.

We know that sometimes it only takes one little thing for us to feel that life is getting

out of control and that's why access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing is so important.

A big shout out to the tenants who contributed to the project and to those who attended the event. What a memorable night that was!

If you want to know their stories, or revisit that night, go to [www.wentworthjourney.com.au](http://www.wentworthjourney.com.au)

## Updated Tenant Handbook

The new tenant handbook was produced with input from some of our tenants and Wentworth teams. Inside, you will find everything you need to know when you move into your new home. As there is a lot of new information, we are sending it to all our tenants, old and new!

As well as bringing information about your rights and responsibilities as a Wentworth tenant, we highlight Wentworth's role as a community housing provider, including the support and services we offer.

We hope you will find the refreshed handbook helpful. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or if you want to discuss anything else that relates to your tenancy.



## Getting to know Wentworth people

**Tanja Kalik, Senior Client Service Officer, Escalation Team**

**Can you tell us a little bit about the work you and your team are doing at Wentworth?**

As a team we have been working to prevent tenants from falling behind in payments to Wentworth and we are the ones who take over when complex cases escalate.

**What is your main focus right now as the Senior Client Service Officer?**

Right now, the focus is to work alongside Client Service Officers and make sure they get in touch with tenants as soon as tenants go into arrears. Then we assist with follow up, which includes giving options to those who need to negotiate their debt or sometimes referring people to specialists and services that provide support.

**What can tenants do to keep on top of their rent and other payments to Wentworth?**

The main reason why tenants fall behind their rent is due to not returning rent review documents on time and, therefore, being charged market rent.

Also, tenants need to make sure that Centrepay deductions from Centrelink payments are correct and paid every time.

It's tenants' responsibility to be on the front foot when it comes to checking if the amount is charged correctly, raise potential issues and submit all required documents. If a tenant's circumstances change, for example, they lose their job or start a new one, or if a family member moves in or out, the tenant needs to let us know so we can adjust the rent accordingly.

**What if tenants are having issues with paying their bills to us?**

Our role is to put tenancies back on track and early communication is key. It's important that people read mail they receive from us, respond to phone calls, and talk to us about any issues that could be making them fall behind financially. To pick up early on these issues, helps us avoid the snowball effect and prevent debts getting

bigger. We can always work with tenants with rent arrears to make sure they get on repayment agreements and do not miss payments once they are on these agreements.

**What do you like the most about your job?**

I love being able to put in processes and procedures to make sure we do the right thing for tenants and to pick up early on issues to avoid the snowball effect. I like seeing success stories and tenants clear their debts.

We all have rough patches in our lives, ups and downs, and it's good to see when people come out on the other side of that. I like working for an organisation that has services to support tenants with different needs to achieve their goals and sustain their housing.

**What's the first step a tenant should take if they are having difficulties to pay rent and bills?**

They should contact their Client Service Officer to discuss the options we have available in case they need to negotiate your debt.

## Rent statements

Your most up to date rent statement will be sent to you by separate mail. We have faced some technical issues while redesigning rent statements to serve you better, and we do appreciate your patience.

If you have any questions or want to know your account balance, you can call us on **02 4777 8000** or email [admin@wentworth.org.au](mailto:admin@wentworth.org.au) and we'll be happy to assist.





**OUT OF HOURS  
EMERGENCY  
MAINTENANCE LINE  
02 4777 8000  
(choose option 1)**

## Head office

### Penrith

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

**Phone:** (02) 4777 8000

**Fax:** (02) 4777 8099

**Email:** [admin@wentworth.org.au](mailto:admin@wentworth.org.au)

**Opening hours:**

8:30am-4:30pm Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri  
1:00pm-4:30pm Wed

## Branches

### Hawkesbury

**Address:** 409A George Street  
South Windsor

**Phone:** (02) 4777 8000

**Opening Hours:** 8:30am-4:30pm  
Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri (closed Wed)

### Blue Mountains

**Address:** Level 2, 98 Bathurst Road  
Katoomba

**Phone:** (02) 4777 8000

**Opening Hours:** 8:30am-4:30pm  
Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri (closed Wed)

## Connect with Wentworth on Social Media



Interested in what's happening in your community, Wentworth and the housing sector? Connecting with us has never been easier.

If you are interested in finding out the latest news, job ads or up to date information from Wentworth, please like the Facebook Page today.

 [www.facebook.com/  
WentworthCommunityHousing](https://www.facebook.com/WentworthCommunityHousing)

Or connect on

 **Twitter** | @Wentworth\_CH

 **Instagram** | wentworthcommunityhousing

 **LinkedIn** | Wentworth Community Housing

## Next WNEWS

Our next edition of WNEWS will be out in June 2020 and will be mailed and displayed on Wentworth's Website [www.wentworth.org.au/resources-newsletters](http://www.wentworth.org.au/resources-newsletters)

If you would like to see an article on a specific topic please email [admin@wentworth.org.au](mailto:admin@wentworth.org.au)

