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| Policy name | Absence from Dwelling |
| Policy date | February 2026 |
| Authorisation | Executive Housing & Property |
| Policy owner | Executive General Manager, Housing Operations |
| Policy type | Mission Australia Housing Operational Policy |
| Policy setting | Housing – Tenancy Management |

1 Purpose

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This policy outlines the approach to be adopted where Mission Australia Housing (MAH) tenants take planned or unplanned absences from their property.

1.2 Coverage

- 1.2.1 This document is a national policy and covers Mission Australia Housing (MAH), and its entities. All references to Mission Australia Housing, MAH and Housing means MAH and its entities unless specifically stated otherwise.
- 1.2.2 This policy applies to tenants in all forms of housing provided by MAH including social, affordable and transitional housing.
- 1.2.3 This policy applies to housing provided by MAH in the jurisdictions of New South Wales (NSW), Tasmania (TAS), Victoria (VIC), Queensland (QLD), Western Australia (WA) and the Northern Territory (NT). Where jurisdiction-based variations exist in policies and procedures, these will be identified in the document.

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 what to do.
- 1.3.2 Other MAH policies also need to be considered in managing tenant absences. 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 |
|---|--|
| Absence from dwelling | A period of time in which a property is not used as a full-time dwelling by the tenant or tenants listed on an agreement for housing. |
| Affordable housing | Housing for individuals or families on low to moderate incomes who are having difficulty affording housing in the private rental market. It is generally targeted at working households. Rent for affordable housing is usually calculated as a discounted market rent. |
| Household member | Any person who resides in a property as an approved occupant. Unauthorised occupants and visitors are not considered household members. |
| Lease or rooming accommodation agreement | A legal contract which sets out the terms and conditions for living in an MAH property, in return for payment of an agreed rent. |
| 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. |
| Rental rebate | A subsidy made available specifically to eligible tenants housed under social housing and supported tenancy programs. Tenants in receipt of a rental rebate will pay a percentage of their income as rent, up to the market rent. |
| Social housing | Subsidised housing for individuals and families on very low and low incomes. Social housing applicants are generally in receipt of Centrelink benefits. |
| Tenant | Under state-based residential tenancy and rooming accommodation legislation, a tenant is a person who has specifically entered into a lease agreement. The term is used more broadly in this policy to refer to tenants and residents under rooming accommodation agreements, unless explicitly distinguished. |
| Transitional housing | Short- to medium-term accommodation (generally three to twelve months) with access to support services. It acts as an interim step to more permanent public, community, or private market housing. |

3 Policy

3.1 Guiding principles

- 3.1.1 MAH is focused on the needs of tenants and their families:
- MAH supports tenants to balance their tenancy with other life responsibilities and goals.
 - Tenants are given approval to take an absence from their property where necessary and appropriate.
- 3.1.2 MAH protects the value of assets under its management:
- Recognising that social and affordable housing is a scarce resource, MAH ensures that properties are not vacant for extended periods of time.
 - MAH acts to minimise damage that can occur where tenants are absent from properties.
- 3.1.3 The MAH process for managing tenant absences is fair and transparent:
- The basis for decisions is explained to tenants.
 - Tenants are given the opportunity to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.
- 3.1.4 The MAH process complies with relevant laws and procedures:
- Properties are managed in accordance with the requirements of residential tenancy and rooming accommodation legislation, taking property owner requirements into account.

3.2 General approach

- 3.2.1 Tenants are not required to seek approval for absences from MAH where the absence:
- Is four weeks or less in transitional housing and rooming accommodation; or
 - Is six weeks or less in general social or affordable housing.
- 3.2.2 While tenants are not required to seek approval for shorter-term absences, tenants should be encouraged to notify MAH as this aids the management and protection of the property.
- 3.2.3 Tenants in transitional housing with support agreements in place should also notify their support provider.
- 3.2.4 Where tenants will be absent for periods in excess of those set out in **3.2.1**, they must seek approval for their absence from MAH.

3.3 Approval of tenant requests

- 3.3.1 Where tenants seek approval for a longer absence, staff:
- Will assess tenant requests on a case-by-case basis, considering the purpose and/or necessity of the absence;
 - Will ask the tenant to confirm details of the arrangements set out in section **3.4** below; and
 - May ask the tenant to provide evidence to support the absence.
- 3.3.2 Requests for absences greater than three months may only be approved in very

exceptional circumstances by the State Manager.

- 3.3.3 The State Manager should consider the reason for the extended absence, risk of damage to the property and ability to pay the rent.

3.4 Tenant responsibilities

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

- Continue paying normal rent and utility costs during their absence, unless covered by the reduced rent provisions discussed below;
- Provide their contact details and those of their nominated agent to staff whenever they take an approved absence, to facilitate communication as required;
- Ensure that arrangements have been made for any pet or companion animal to be looked after; and
- Ensure that the property is kept secure at all times and take measures to reduce risks to property.

3.5 Reduced rent

3.5.1 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.

3.5.2 Reduced rent (including any further extensions) is available on a one-off basis only for each tenancy or at the discretion of the State Manager or their delegate.

3.5.3 Tenants will not be eligible for a reduced rent where they are incarcerated for a serious breach of tenancy.

3.5.4 See the **Rents, Bonds and Other Charges Policy** for further details on reduced rent.

3.6 Failure to seek approval

3.6.1 Where a tenant fails to seek approval from MAH for an absence, staff may:

- Seek to remove the rental rebate given to the tenant as per the **Rents, Bonds and Other Charges Policy**; or
- Seek to terminate the tenancy as per the **Ending Tenancies Policy**.

3.7 Absences longer than the approved timeframe

3.7.1 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. Further action may then be taken as required.

3.8 Succession of tenancy

3.8.1 Where a tenancy is terminated or the tenant gives up their tenancy, staff may need to consider whether succession of tenancy is an option.

3.8.2 Staff will, where applicable, identify whether transferring an existing occupant into an

agreement for housing is appropriate, following the processes set out in the **Transfer and Other Changes to Tenancy Policy**.

3.9 Abandoned property

3.9.1 Where a tenant has been identified as having abandoned their property, staff will manage the abandoned property and goods as per the **Abandoned Properties and Goods Policy**.

3.10 Appeals

3.10.1 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:

- Informing tenants of their rights and responsibilities in accordance with this policy.
- Approving absences of up to three months.
- Verifying standards of appropriate property care.
- Liaising with nominated agents where required.
- Coordinating the succession of tenancy process.
- 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.
- Assessing applications for reduced rent.
- 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 Operations and State Manager is responsible for:

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