

Your Home is a quarterly magazine published by the Department of Family and Community Services, distributed to Housing NSW tenants. It is supported by the Australian Government and the NSW Government.

We welcome your feedback and encourage you to share your handy tips, recipes and take part in competitions.

Please contact us:

Your Home, Media and Communications, Housing NSW
Locked Bag 4001 Ashfield BC 1800

You can send us an email at yourhome@facs.nsw.gov.au.

Visit www.housing.nsw.gov.au.

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Growing the Community Greening program

Tenants have helped to build, plant and grow communal gardens across the state through the Community Greening Program, which will continue to flourish following the recent renewal of the joint Housing NSW and Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust program.

Over the next five years, tenants will continue to receive advice, training and education about establishing community gardens and improving their local area.

At the award-winning Bidwill Community Garden and Nursery Community **Greening** project, local tenants plan, maintain and grow the garden and nursery, regular community events are held in the thriving garden and tenants are provided with plants for their own gardens.

Marjorie Mead has volunteered at the garden since 2004 and said she has seen many changes over the years.

“We have brought the garden a long way from what it used to be - overgrown with grass and there were weeds everywhere.

“We all work together to make it what we want and we have won lots of prizes for the garden.

“The community is very proud of it, more local people are involved and we get good results, with people stopping to look at it as they go past.”

The volunteers have just started a gardening group for young children.

Housing NSW hopes to grow our programs to provide 300 community gardening projects and six regional hubs in communities.

For more information or to get involved in the Community Greening program in your area, speak with your Housing NSW Client Service Officer or visit the Community Greening website at www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/education/community_greening

Minister's message

Over the last few months, I have been visiting tenants and staff across the state. I have heard stories from our tenants about the difficulties they face, and witnessed the support they receive from their tight-knit communities and Housing NSW staff.

During one of my visits, I met with tenants in East Hills and viewed the new purpose-built seniors units which have been specifically designed for our older residents to meet their housing needs as they age.

Housing NSW staff and tenants showed me the wonderful work done to revitalise the Rosemeadow public housing estate which has made a dramatic difference to the local community.

I also met with Housing NSW staff at Bankstown, Wagga Wagga, Blacktown, Parramatta, Campbelltown and Gosford offices to gain an understanding of the local issues.

I also toured the busy Housing Contact Centre, giving me the chance to see first hand the kinds of issues tenants raise with Housing NSW and the support they receive.

Lastly, Christmas is almost here and I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy holiday season and a very safe and happy new year.

Easy options for making payments

With the added expenses of Christmas and the holidays, it is important that tenants maintain their rent payments to avoid falling into arrears. Making payments has never been easier.

You can pay your Housing NSW accounts by:

- Rent Deduction Scheme (RDS). If you receive Centrelink income, you can have your Housing NSW payments automatically deducted from your pension/allowance. Simply complete an Authority for Rent Deduction form available at your local Housing NSW office.
- BPAY contact your bank and give them the Housing NSW biller code (33492) and the relevant payment reference

number found on your quarterly statement and choose what you want to pay from which accounts.

- The internet www.housing.nsw.gov.au 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- In person – at any Australia Post Office with your Rent Payment Card. You can pay by cash or EFTPOS.

Housing NSW tenant pleads guilty to fraud

Recently Housing NSW prosecuted a tenant who received a compensation payout and purchased a house in Western Sydney.

The tenant did not tell Housing NSW about the payout or the new property and he continued to live in the Housing NSW home and received a rental subsidy, even though he was not entitled to it.

The matter was referred to the Housing NSW Fraud Unit and he was criminally prosecuted. The tenant pleaded guilty, was charged and evicted from the Housing NSW property.

He has currently repaid some of the debt to Housing NSW and legal action is continuing to recover the remainder of the money owed.

If there are changes in your household income or if you receive a lump sum payment you must advise Housing NSW so your

rental subsidy can be reviewed and updated.

If you would like to update your income details or report any fraudulent activity, please call 1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746).

Changes to housing

Two Ministers are now responsible for the social housing portfolio – the Hon. Pru Goward, Minister for Family and Community Services and the Hon. Greg Pearce, Minister for Finance and Services.

Housing NSW continues to be responsible for new and existing tenancies, processing applications and for providing housing assistance. Under the Minister of Family and Community Services, Housing NSW continues to focus on tenants and people experiencing housing stress.

The responsibility for building and maintaining public housing homes has been transferred to the Department of Finance and Services. This agency is now responsible for undertaking the maintenance, upgrade and redevelopment of public housing properties.

However, the Housing Contact Centre remains the point of contact for your maintenance enquiries, so please continue to phone them on 1800 HOUSING for your maintenance requests

and for general assistance. You won't notice a change in the way your tenancy or maintenance are managed.

Both agencies are committed to providing a high standard of accommodation and housing services for the people of NSW.

Living together in the Community

In the summer months and lead up to Christmas, we often spend more time outdoors and have family and friends to visit. While the holiday season is a time to celebrate, it is important to respect your neighbours which means making sure that celebrations do not get out of hand.

Tenants are responsible for making sure that people in their home don't behave in an unreasonable manner which overly disturbs neighbours.

If neighbours behaviour is creating a serious disturbance, you should consider reporting them to the NSW Police or your local Council. If this behaviour is violent or illegal, you should immediately notify NSW Police.

Tenants behaving in an antisocial manner may be in breach of their lease. In these cases, Housing NSW may issue a warning to stop the behaviour and, if the behaviour continues, we take the matter to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal. The

Tribunal may order the tenant to comply with their tenancy agreement and, in extreme cases, may even terminate their tenancy.

If you are experiencing minor problems with a person in your neighbourhood, you may consider using free mediation services at the Community Justice Centre. Mediators will listen to you and the other person involved to help you reach an agreement. Please contact your local Housing NSW office for more information about the Community Justice Centre.

Digital TV upgrade

We are getting our multi-unit apartment blocks ready for the switch over to digital signals in country NSW areas in 2012 and Sydney in 2013. To date, over 18,000 apartments have been made digital ready. Tenants will be advised when the upgrade work is completed in their building and will need a correctly tuned digital television or set-top box to receive digital TV.

For tenants in homes and cottages, you will need to check that your aerial can receive digital TV signals. A household assistance scheme run by the Australian Government is available to assist older Australians, veterans and people with disabilities, or their carers. For more information on the

household assistance scheme, visit www.digitalready.gov.au or phone 1800 201 013.

Need help with energy bills?

The NSW Government has a range of programs to help tenants pay their energy bills including:

- a yearly \$200 Low Income Household Rebate for electricity account holders with eligible concession cards.
- a yearly \$200 Medical Energy Rebate for electricity account holder holders with eligible concession cards who live with a person who can't regulate their body temperature.
- the Life Support Rebate for people who use approved life supporting medical equipment such as home dialysis. The rebate varies between \$20 and \$600 a year.

To apply for these rebates, please contact your electricity retailer. Detailed eligibility criteria for the rebates is available at www.energy.nsw.gov.au

For further information on how to reduce your energy bills please phone the Energy Information Line on 1300 136 888 or visit www.cutyourpowerbills.nsw.gov.au

The Red Cross calls for volunteers

Tenant Connect is a reassuring service that improves the safety of our older tenants who live alone through a simple phone call to check on their well-being. Funded by Housing NSW and managed by the Red Cross, this vital service is now calling for volunteers to assist with providing this service – can you help?

Tenant Connect volunteers are rostered on a weekly or fortnightly basis at one of the two call centres situated at Parramatta and Broadmeadow in Newcastle.

Every Wednesday 23-year-old Sonia visits a Tenant Connect call centre to contact older social housing tenants who live alone.

“We are trying to get some younger volunteers – it helps to develop your communication skills,” says Sonia.

“It’s also a good way to overcome shyness; at first I was a bit worried about what to talk about.”

“So by volunteering here, you’re benefiting yourself, and at the same time helping out,” she said

Volunteers will receive ongoing support and training. Breakfast will be provided and travel costs such as public transport as well as mileage and parking fees for drivers will be reimbursed.

If you are interested in finding out more about volunteering please contact the Australian Red Cross on 1800 827 677.

Five tips to keep you cool this summer

Summer is well and truly here, so with longer, hotter days, here are some tips to keep cool during summer:

1. Be sun smart - wear loose, light coloured clothing, a hat and sunglasses. Don't forget sunscreen when outside and reapply frequently. Remember to take extra care between 10am and 3pm when UV radiation is most intense.
2. Combat dehydration by drinking plenty of water. You can freeze bottles of water and take them with you when you go out so you always have access to cool fresh water.
3. If you don't have air-conditioning, you can visit local shopping centres, community pools, cinemas, or other public spaces that are cool.
4. Do not leave your children alone in a parked car – even if it's only for a minute. Temperatures inside cars rise quickly, especially in summer, placing children at serious risk of harm.
5. Look after your neighbours - on very hot days older people can suffer from heat stress easily, so please keep an eye out for your older neighbours.

Four top tips to keep pets cool this summer

1. Provide adequate shelter from the sun and hot winds.
2. Provide cool fresh water – don't leave their bowls in the sun.
3. Exercise your pets only when it's cooler.
4. Never leave your animal in a car or tied up on the back of a ute.

Your Contacts

1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746)

- Maintenance (24 hours, 7 days)
- General enquiries (24 hours, 7 days)
- Home Purchase Advisory Service (24 hours, 7 days)
- Feedback – suggestions, compliments and complaints (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm) or
 - fax 9612 6099
 - email feedback@dhs.nsw.gov.au
 - post PO Box 7150 Liverpool BC NSW 1871
- Rentstart (Monday to Friday, 8.00 am – 6.00 pm and Saturday, 10.00 am – 3.00 pm)
- Mortgage Assistance (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm)

- Reports of fraud or corruption (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30 pm)

Note: If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, you can request to speak to an Aboriginal staff member (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am – 4.30pm).

Housing Appeals Committee

An independent appeal system for public housing clients

- 1800 629 794 (Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 4.30 pm)
- fax 9715 7966
- www.hac.nsw.gov.au

Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS)

13 14 50 (you can call TIS if you need help understanding English, and they will phone Housing NSW for you at no cost).

Website

www.housing.nsw.gov.au

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