

## Visibility and Accessibility of Information in the Community Housing Sector



### What is this report about?

The NSW Registrar of Community Housing (the Registrar) conducted a campaign to identify if providers' behaviour is impacting on visibility and accessibility of information in the community housing sector, and, if so, what this means for tenant outcomes more broadly. While administrative in nature, the accessibility and usability of tenant guidance is important to maximise tenant outcomes and is a measure of organisational and sector health. Hence, the Registrar initiated preventative action to assure these fundamentals were in place.

### Campaign findings

The campaign found that all assessed CHPs conform to the National Regulatory Code to varying degrees. While almost all providers had policies and procedures available on their websites, the accessibility of this information and its adequacy varied considerably amongst CHPs. Some of the key findings of the campaign led to recommendations for providers to improve:

- website information for complaints and appeals
- accessibility and visibility of tenancy management information on websites
- accessibility and visibility of ending tenancy policies
- the currency of policies and procedures and remove some incorrect references

### The context of this research

In 2017, feedback was received by the Registrar from advocate and appeals bodies indicating that information from some community housing providers (CHPs) is not easily visible and/or readily accessible to applicants, tenants or residents and other relevant parties. The Registrar also sought to identify if there had been a decline in such information being made available in a readily accessible format.

The Registrar made visibility of policy and procedures an area of focus and, using the most recent annual compliance round, a targeted campaign was conducted in relation to Performance Outcome 1: Tenant and Housing Services. No evidence of providers refusing to make information available to tenants, residents and applicants was found. The Registrar has identified some areas of policy guidance and system improvements necessary for increasing accessibility and visibility of information to tenants and other key stakeholders.

### Methodology used

The Registrar assesses the compliance performance of the larger (Tier 1 and 2) CHPs annually. The November 2017 – May 2018 assessment programme was used to test the

voracity of the accessibility and visibility of CHPs key information. The Registrar used audits, interviews and documentary evidence collection to support enquiries.

Prior to the compliance round, CHPs were advised that the Registrar would be seeking further information and evidence about the visibility and accessibility of information.

### Positive practices

Almost all of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 CHPs have policies and/or procedures publically available on their websites and available to tenants and residents in other formats.

Overall, CHPs who received recommendations during the 2017-2018 compliance assessment round responded positively. Indications are that all of the CHPs assessed are prepared to move to better practice. While there has been an increase in the number of recommendations made under Performance Outcome 1 in 2017-2018, the response from CHPs has been overwhelmingly positive, with a majority of them already committing to improve practices before the next scheduled assessment.

### Implications and Considerations

As a result of the campaign the Registrar has identified some areas of policy guidance and system improvements necessary for greater visibility and accessibility of information, including:

- Some policies would benefit from clearer definition of the circumstances under which tenants can make a complaint and/or appeal, and in addition circumstances under which providers would make appealable decisions.
- Further monitoring by the Registrar is required post the transfer of public housing stock to the CHP sector including engagement with representative and peak bodies that would provide insights on whether the property management transfer program impacts on tenancy outcomes and accessibility and visibility of information.
- Improving communication with tenants was noted as an area of improvement as some CHPs were providing information that was incorrect or overly prescriptive.
- Clearer guidance is needed for CHPs seeking assistance: some CHPs are unclear on where they can go to seek assistance with development of policies and procedures in general.
- CHPs need to be more innovative: as the community housing sector continues to evolve and CHPs are entering into new markets, it is critical they continue to adopt an innovative approach to ensuring their information is accessible and visible to residents, tenants and other key stakeholders.

*Note: These findings are an interpretation of a sample of provider performance at a point in time.*

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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The Registrar of Community Housing

[www.rch.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rch.nsw.gov.au)

[registrar@facs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:registrar@facs.nsw.gov.au)

P:1800 330 940



Registrar of  
Community Housing