

wellways



# The Way Home

Participant handbook

[wellways.org](http://wellways.org) | 1300 111 400

# Introduction

Sustainable and stable housing is vital in promoting health, wellbeing and an independent life.

The Way Home program, delivered by Wellways, aims to increase access to mainstream housing for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants with a psychosocial disability who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The Way Home will support participants to find sustainable housing within private and community housing markets, and to develop long term tenancy management skills and confidence. It also aims promote positive and sustainable partnerships between landlords and tenants.

This handbook will provide resources, advice and helpful tips for future and current tenants. These include beginning, maintaining and ending a tenancy, and also provides resources for health and wellbeing throughout this process.

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# Beginning my tenancy

## What is important to me in a home?

Before deciding where you will live and applying for a tenancy, there are a number of things to consider.

- Who are my support networks (family, friends?) What suburbs are my support networks located in?
- Do I need public transport options near my home?
- Are there local community services near my home (such as a library, supermarket and medical clinic)?
- What can I afford? Have I created a budget for my home and living expenses?
- What sort of home do I want to live in? A house, an apartment, a unit?
- Do I have strategies for my health and wellbeing in place?

Once you have a firm idea of what you need in a property and where you would like to live you can begin your search for a suitable home.

## How do I start a tenancy?

Below are the steps you need to take to begin your tenancy. Your The Way Home housing worker can assist with these.

- Prepare a tenancy application and organise your identification documents, references and proof of income or employment.
- Prepare a budget and ensure you have enough income to pay your rent, as well as pay for bills and other expenses.
- Carefully read and understand the tenancy agreement before you sign it, and make sure you keep a copy.
- Organise your bond and your first month's rent if required.
- Organise for your utilities to be set up for moving day, including water, electricity and gas.
- Speak with your real estate agent and ask any questions about the property or the area and get an emergency contact number.
- Complete and keep a copy of the Condition Report.
- Say hello to your neighbours and get to know your area! Make sure you know where your local doctor, hospital and other essential services are.

### TIP

When speaking to real estate agents or attending house inspections it can be helpful to have a support person with you. This could be a family member, friend or support worker.

## What is a tenancy agreement?

A tenancy agreement is a legal contract between you and your landlord. It outlines:

- The rent you need to pay and how to pay it.
- The length and type of tenancy.
- The amount of bond required.
- Your responsibilities as a tenant.
- The landlord's responsibilities.

## Why do I need to pay a bond and what is it for?

Most landlords or real estate agents will ask for a bond. The bond is an amount of money (usually four weeks rent) that acts as a security that you will meet the terms of your tenancy agreement. At the end of your tenancy, your bond will be returned provided you have maintained your property to a good standard, and you have paid your rent. However, your landlord can claim some or all of your bond if:

- You fail to keep the property clean
- If you cause damage to the property
- If you are in rental arrears

Your bond money is held by the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (RTBA) until the end of your tenancy. Your landlord or agent may claim some or all of the bond for cleaning, damage, or replacement of missing items at the end of your tenancy.

### TIP

**If you do not have money to pay rent in advance you can seek financial assistance from your local Housing Establishment Fund. Be prepared to take along documents from your landlord stating how much the rent is and when you are due to sign the lease.**

## What is a condition report and why is the condition report important?

The condition report is a record that makes note of the condition of the property before you move into your home. The condition report is important because it can be used as evidence if there is a dispute about cleaning or damage costs at the end of your tenancy.

### TIP

**Keep your copy of the condition report until the end of the tenancy. Make sure you take photos of the property and any damage when you move in as proof of condition.**

# Maintaining my tenancy

## What should my property look like?

When you undertake a residential residency, it is important you keep the property in a reasonably clean condition.

What this means:

- Cleaning each room to a reasonable standard.
- Mowing lawns.
- Garden upkeep.
- Reporting any accidental damage to ensure repairs can be done.
- Putting your rubbish in the bins for the council to collect.

## What if there is property damage?

Repairs are your landlord's responsibility. However, if you caused the damage, the landlord or agent can ask you to arrange to repair it or pay for repairs they undertake. If you are unable to pay for the repairs, you can ask your landlord for a payment plan. If this is not repaired within two weeks, speak to your support worker.

## Reporting safety issues and urgent damages

You should inform your landlord or agent of any defects that pose a threat to safety so these can be fixed by an expert. If you report a safety risk and it is not fixed, you can take further action. Speak to your support worker if you are concerned about this. If the problem is serious enough to make your home unsafe to live in, notify your landlord or agent and your support worker immediately. If the problem cannot be fixed, you may be able to end your tenancy agreement.

## How do I pay my rent?

Remember to pay your rent on time. The best way to manage this is to pay rent through Centrepay, if it is available. Centrepay takes the stress out of paying rent and other bills.

Other methods to pay your rent and bills include bank direct debit, BPAY or manual payments at the Post Office.

If you choose one of these methods here are some things to consider and some tips to manage this well:

- Set up a reoccurring reminder on your phone or calendar.
- Establish a routine on your payday.
- Remember that you will incur a fee from the bank if there are insufficient funds to cover the direct debit.

## What happens if I can't pay my rent?

Paying rent is an essential part of maintaining your tenancy. It is important that you consider this to be a key part of your budget.

If you experience difficulties and cannot pay your rent, here are some tips:

- Discuss your situation with your landlord and be prepared to negotiate a repayment plan (make sure this is an affordable amount for you).
- Advise your NDIS care team and support workers immediately to discuss financial assistance options.
- Seek support from your local Tenancy Assistance and Support Program (TAAP) – they can support you with negotiations and any VCAT support if required.

## What if I receive a notice from my landlord to vacate the property due to rental arrears?

Here's how you can manage this:

- Discuss your concerns with your NDIS care team and support workers.
- Seek support from your local Tenancy Assistance and Support Program (TAAP).

## Can my landlord or agent inspect my property during my tenancy?

Your landlord or agent may enter your property at a date and time that you have both agreed on. This agreement is made no more than seven days before the inspection. Your landlord or agent has the right to enter with 24 hours written notice to you if they are carrying out duties or repairs, performing an inspection or have reasonable belief that you are not performing your tenancy duties. If you are ever unsure about your privacy rights in your property, contact your support worker.

### TIP

Don't panic if you receive formal notices or are having financial difficulty. Contact your real estate agent with your worker immediately. Leaving it too late can cause stress and anxiety and may affect other areas of your life.

### TIP

When a real estate agent requests a property inspection at your home, there are simple measures you can take to ensure this is a positive process for you. Talk to your support network, ask for help from family and friends and create an action plan in advance.

# Ending my tenancy

## Deciding to leave

Before deciding to leave your current tenancy, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my reasons for leaving?
- Can any of my reasons for leaving be resolved with support from my NDIS care team, friends or family?
- What are my other housing options?
- Have I discussed this with my support network?

## Breaking the lease

If you decide you want to vacate the property before the lease is due to end there are a few things you need to know:

- You may be liable for rent until a new tenant is found.
- You may be liable for costs of advertising for a new tenant.
- You still need to give 28 days written notice to your landlord (allow time for delivery).

## End of the lease

If you decide to move on when your lease expires you still need to provide your landlord 28 days' notice to allow them to find a new tenant.

## Condition of the property

When you move out of a property it is important that you leave it in a reasonably clean condition – this does not necessarily mean you have to steam clean carpets.

You should:

- Take photos to prove the condition of the property when you moved out, share these with your real estate agent.
- Provide an up to date forwarding address in case the landlord wishes to contact you regarding the condition of the property.
- Keep your condition report to evidence any damage to the property before you moved in.

### TIP

Discuss the end of your tenancy with your NDIS care team before vacating – they may be able to advocate and renegotiate any liability of additional costs you may incur.

### TIP

Beginning, maintaining and ending a tenancy can be a stressful experience. Refer to your housing action plan and your wellness action plan on how to sustain a home, how to manage your finances and who to contact if you find that you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or confused.



## My health and wellbeing in my new home

Looking after your health and wellbeing is important during periods of change or stress. Here are some tips on building your social and community connections and practicing self-care.

**Health** – you can connect with your local community health centre and receive medical treatment and guidance around your wellness. You could consider attending your local swimming pool or community gym for some recreational exercise.

**Support** – why not consider joining a support group with like minded people. Contact your care team to find out further information about what is available in your area.

**Resources** – libraries are very interactive and have free Wi-Fi and access to computers. They are always a great place to meet someone, learn new things or just sit in a quiet and calming space.

**Community** – your local community centre will have information on where to access learning and development opportunities. Community centres hold events, classes and workshops, and are a great way to learn whilst meeting new people and becoming involved in your community.

**Open space** – get to know the outdoor recreational spaces available in your community. Explore and enjoy your surroundings.



# Useful contacts & supports

## Key tenancy contacts

### Consumer Affairs

Provides educational resources regarding renting and rental rights for Victorians.

1300 55 81 81

[www.consumer.vic.gov.au](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au)

### Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Program (TAAP)

TAAP supports tenants in private rentals through support, advice, referrals and services within local areas.

[www.tuv.org.au/contact/taap](http://www.tuv.org.au/contact/taap)

### Tenants Union Victoria

Promotes and protects the rights of tenants and residents in rental homes across Victoria, Australia. They provide education and awareness of tenancy rights and tenancy management.

03 9416 2577

[www.tuv.vic.org.au](http://www.tuv.vic.org.au)

### Victorian Office of the Public Advocate

Provides services to protect and promote the rights, interests and dignity of people with disability. These services include guardianship, advice, education, information, research, advocacy and support.

1300 309 337

[www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au](http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au)

## Key health and wellbeing contacts

### Wellways

Provides resources and services for people with a psychosocial disability, who are facing housing instability or risk of homelessness. Wellways also provides a helpline service for information, referrals and support, Monday-Friday, 9-9pm

Helpline: 1300 111 500

[wellways.org](http://wellways.org)

### Lifeline

Provides information, resources and 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Helpline: 13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### Mind Australia

Provides information, services, support and advice for people experiencing mental health concerns, including housing support for people with a psychosocial disability.

[www.mindaustralia.org.au](http://www.mindaustralia.org.au)

For further contacts and supports in your area, see our fact sheets.



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Wellways acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and play and pays respect to their Elders past, present and future.

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