

# Uniting

Tenant handbook



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# A bit about us.

## Our purpose

At Uniting WA, we exist to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

We act with impact. We work to address the causes of vulnerability and disadvantage, and we stand for a just society where individuals and communities are valued and connected.

Our team listen without judgement and walk alongside the people we support, amplifying the voices of those in our community who need to be heard.

As an organisation, we celebrate our diversity and welcome all people regardless of ethnicity, faith, age, ability, culture, language, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

## Housing at Uniting

The community housing initiatives supported by the Uniting Housing team are driven by our commitment to support people and communities to be more valued and connected. This includes people with disability, those experiencing homelessness or mental illness, and men who are reintegrating into the community after being incarcerated for life or long sentences.

Uniting WA is registered as a Tier 2 Community Housing Provider under the Community Housing Regulatory Framework with the Department of Communities. The Community Housing Regulatory Framework is a system designed to contribute to a well-governed and managed community housing sector. This registration was obtained by going through a rigorous audit and application process and is reviewed annually.

# What you need to know about moving into your new home.

## Your Residential Tenancy Agreement

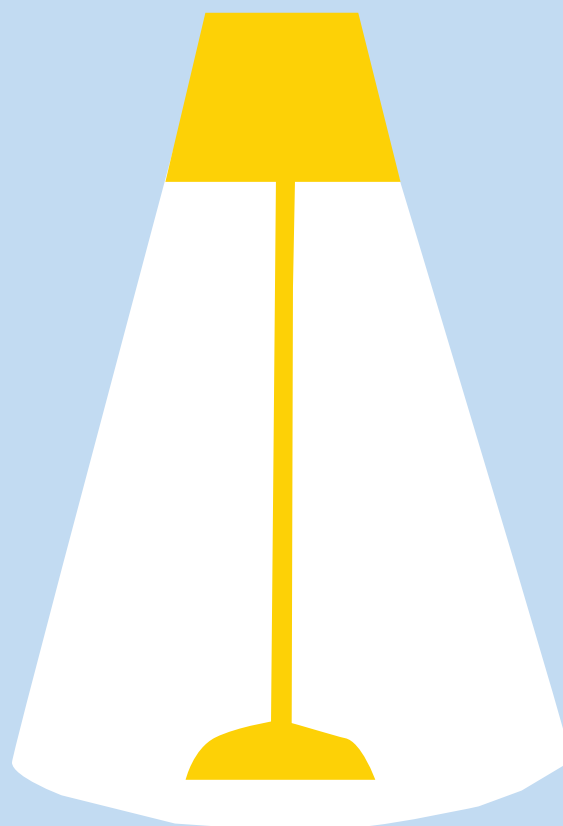
People who become tenants in a Uniting property sign a Residential Tenancy Agreement (agreement) before moving into their home. As a new tenant, you'll receive a copy of this agreement.

Your agreement is an important document that sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. You'll need to sign the agreement before you move into your home as it states your fortnightly rent, your maintenance responsibilities, and other conditions of your tenancy.

The agreement also sets out what is expected of Uniting, such as providing you with a home that's secure and well maintained. A copy of your agreement will be given to you after you sign it — it's an important document to keep throughout your tenancy as you might need it for things like Commonwealth Rent Assistance applications.

## The Residential Tenancies Act

The Residential Tenancies Act (1987) governs all rental housing in Western Australia. All Uniting WA Housing Service tenancies are managed in accordance with the Act.



# Your rent

## Your rent assessment and calculation

Your rent is calculated in line with the Community Housing Rent Setting policy set by the Department of Communities. Your rent is calculated at 25% of total gross assessable household income (except some transitional properties who are charged 30%) plus any entitlement to Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). Total gross income is your income before tax.

## Household income

Household income is the total gross income of all adults (over 16 years old) who are living in your home. Your rent is 'income related', so it will change if the people living in your home or the income of any household member changes.

If your household circumstances change, please get in touch with us. You can ask for a rent review at any time.

## Commonwealth Rent Assistance

Depending on your circumstances, you might be eligible to claim Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) from Centrelink to help pay your rent. It's an income supplement that's based on the type of accommodation you live in and the amount of rent you pay.

The amount you're entitled to is factored into your rent assessment and calculation.

Please be aware that you'll need to submit a copy of your Tenancy Agreement when applying for CRA.

## Market rent

We never charge more than 74.99% of the current market rent, which is the rent you would pay for a property of the same size, type and location if you were renting privately (this figure is set by the Australian Tax Office).

The rent you pay will either be 25% of total gross assessable household income plus any entitlement to CRA, or 74.99% of the current Market Rent — whichever is the lower amount.



# Bills and insurance

## Water consumption

You pay for all the water you use at your property. We'll issue you with a water usage invoice every second month and you pay the amount owing directly to us.

If you'd like to pre-pay an amount every fortnight to go towards your water bill, please get in touch with your Tenant Support Worker. They'll calculate the amount you'll need to pre-pay and set it all up with you.

## Gas and electricity

Gas and electricity are also your responsibility as a tenant. If your property is in a strata complex, the strata might send invoices for your charges to us. In this situation, we'll issue you with an invoice for the charges and you pay the amount owing directly to us.

## Insurance

Tenants are responsible for insuring their own personal property. This is called Contents Insurance.

## Concessions

If you have a concession card, you might be able to get discounts on things like:

- Electricity and gas bills
- Water bills (contact your Tenant Support Worker for your water account number, then contact Water Corporation on 1300 659 951)
- Public transport fares
- Ambulance costs
- Motor vehicle registration
- Cheaper medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- Bulk-billed doctor visits (check with your doctor)
- A bigger refund for medical costs when you reach the Medicare safety net
- Help with hearing services
- A discount to redirect your mail through Australia Post
- Selected entertainment activities, such as movie tickets and entry to events.

For more information about concessions, contact Centrelink or ask your Tenant Support Worker.

## Your Property Condition Report (PCR)

A PCR is a report that details the condition of the property at the time you move in. It's completed and signed by a Uniting team member and then provided to you when you move in. We recommend you keep your PCR in a safe place.

If you disagree with anything in the PCR or want to add extra comments, you have 7 days to do this and return it to us. If you don't provide us with an amended copy of the PCR within 7 days, it's taken that you agree with the condition of the property stated within the report.



# What you need to know during your tenancy.

## Paying your rent

### How to pay

Your rent should be paid fortnightly in line with the rent charge dates set by Uniting. You can get a copy of the rent charge dates from your Tenant Support Worker at any time.

Your Tenancy Agreement will state the fortnightly amount payable and you'll receive advance notification of any rent reviews and changes during your tenancy.

### There's a few different ways you can pay your rent:

**Centrelink deductions** — Centrelink will pay your rent directly to Uniting, with the amount deducted from your regular Centrelink payment. If you decide to use Centrelink, please speak to your Tenant Support Worker. They'll provide you with the form(s) you need to set this up.

**Direct debit** — a payment is made directly from your bank account to Uniting. If you decide to use direct debit, ask your Tenant Support Worker to provide you with the account details for Uniting and a personal reference number to use when you make payments.

**Direct bank deposit** — at any Westpac bank. Please ensure that the teller uses your personal reference number so that your payment is credited to your rental account. Please remember that you must always keep your receipts as proof when using direct bank deposit in case your payment doesn't reach Uniting.



## Rent reviews

In line with the Community Housing Rent Setting Policy, Uniting reviews the amount of rent you pay annually. This is to ensure that you are charged an affordable rent based on your household income.

We'll notify you by letter when your rent is due for review. It's important that you provide the documents and information requested, as we need to review them in order to make sure you're paying the right amount of rent.

If your annual rent review results in a decrease in your rent, this will take effect from the next rental charge immediately after your rent review. If the review results in an increase in your rent, you'll be given 14 days' notice before your new rent amount takes effect.

As well as an annual rent review, we will also re-assess your eligibility and rent if your household income increases or decreases or someone moves in or out of your home. If your rent change is a direct result of a change in circumstances, the increase or decrease in your rent will take effect from the next rental charge immediately after your rent review.

If you have any questions about the rent eligibility and review process, get in touch with your Tenant Support Worker.

## Financial hardship

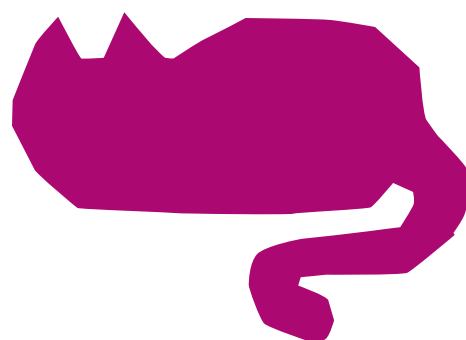
If you ever have difficulty paying your rent, you should contact your Tenant Support Worker immediately. If you make us aware when you're facing difficulties, we're better able to support you and make an arrangement that helps you get back on track and avoid rental arrears.

Uniting has a financial counselling service that may be able to assist you if you're in financial hardship. If you'd like to get in touch with them, speak to your Tenant Support Worker.

## Furniture package (for Independent Living Program tenants)

If you're a tenant in the Independent Living Program and you've opted in to receive a furniture package from Uniting, you'll be charged a small fortnightly fee on top of your fortnightly rent. Please take care of the furniture provided to you and report any damage or maintenance issues.

Repairs and maintenance can be reported to your Tenant Support Worker, or any member of the Housing Team on 1300 663 298. This service operates from 8:30am-4:30pm Monday to Friday.



# Repairs and maintenance

## Response times to maintenance requests

Your maintenance request will be assessed based on the information you provide. Below is a guide on the estimated response times to expect when reporting repairs or making a maintenance request.

<b>Urgent (1-3 hours)</b>	Gas leak, burst water pipe
<b>High (same day)</b>	Major water leak, blocked toilet, no hot water, faulty smoke detector
<b>Medium (3 days)</b>	Leaking tap, low water pressure
<b>Low (7-10 days)</b>	Broken blinds, pest control, broken towel rail
<b>Non-urgent (14+ days)</b>	Torn fly screen, property alteration requests.



## Emergency maintenance

Any event or repair needed that might affect the safety of residents or lead to property damage could be considered an emergency maintenance request.

Examples of emergency maintenance requests:

- Gas leaks or electrical faults
- Fire damage, burst water pipes or blocked drains
- Broken external doors or windows.

## After hours maintenance (emergencies only)

If there's an emergency situation after hours please phone 1300 663 298 for assistance.

Examples of emergency after hours situations:

- Gas leak
- Burst water pipe or damaged water fitting that causes a large water loss
- Electricity, gas or water supply loss or fault
- Faulty smoke alarms or Residual Current Devices (RCDs).

## Regular maintenance

If you need a repair that doesn't cause a risk to tenants or is unlikely to lead to damage to the building, it's considered a regular maintenance request.

Examples of regular maintenance requests:

- Leaking taps and tap washers
- Torn fly screens
- Repairs to doors and cupboards.

## Long-term maintenance

Properties will need long-term maintenance work from time to time.

Examples of long-term maintenance work:

- Renovating bathrooms or kitchens
- Replacing floor coverings
- Replacing hot water systems or stoves.

If this type of work needs to be carried out in your home, our team will work with you to organise a time that best suits you.

## Home improvements and property alterations

Tenants aren't permitted to carry out any structural changes or alterations to their property without the permission of Uniting. Please contact your Tenant Support Worker beforehand if you want to alter something in your home.

Things like installing picture hooks and shelving, air-conditioning, a garden shed or painting a room would all be considered property alterations. Please remember that these are just some examples - please get in touch with us before you make any alterations.

If you get permission to go ahead with the property alteration, it will be at your cost and the work will need to be done by a qualified contractor. You might also have to restore the property to its original condition at the end of your tenancy, at your own cost.

## Lock outs or lost keys

If you accidentally lock yourself out of your property or you lose your keys, please contact your Tenant Support Worker or a member of the Housing Team on 1300 663 298. If you lock yourself out and it's on a weekend or before 8:30am or after 4:30pm on a weekday, please contact the After Hours Service on 1300 663 298.

Arrangements can be made to provide you with a new set of keys if you need them, but please note that this could be at your own cost.

## Tenant liability

You pay for any repairs to the property that are caused by neglect, misuse, accidental or wilful damage. If there's an insurance claim associated with repairs, you could be asked to pay any excess payable on the claim.

As a tenant, you don't have to pay for fair wear and tear such as fading paint or normal wear on floor coverings.

## Pests and vermin

Uniting is responsible for the treatment of white ants (termites), Singapore ants and bees in all of its properties. You are responsible for the eradication of mice, rats, fleas, bed bugs and cockroaches, except where an infestation occurs within one month of moving into the property.



# Property inspections and notices

## Property inspections

The Residential Tenancy Act requires Uniting to carry out property inspections at your home on a regular basis.

Inspections aren't something to be worried or anxious about — think of them as an opportunity to chat with your Tenant Support Worker about any support you need, or anything else to do with your tenancy.

Tenancy laws allow a landlord to enter a tenant's premises for reasons such as routine property inspections, up to a maximum of 4 per year. We'll write to you and give you 7-14 days' notice of your upcoming property inspection. If the time or date isn't suitable, please get in touch with your Tenant Support Worker in advance. We'll always try and negotiate a date and time that suits you.

We prefer it if you're present during our visit so you can let us know how things are going and whether there's any maintenance issues. If you're not available and you're happy for Uniting to attend in your absence, we'll use the keys we hold to gain access, in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act. Please leave your Tenant Support Worker a note if there's any issues you'd like to address.

If there are property standards issues identified during an inspection, we'll notify you in writing. Depending on the situation, we might organise a follow up visit to check that property conditions have been improved.

## Accessing your home in your absence

Tenancy laws allow a landlord to enter your home in your absence to carry out inspections. The landlord may also enter if there's an emergency, if they think the property has been abandoned or if necessary repairs need to be inspected or carried out. 72 hours of written notice is required from the landlord.

We'll always try and negotiate a time and date that suits you to access your property, but if we can't contact you we may issue a Form 19 advising you of our intended entry to your home. This enables our team and associated contractors to access your property to carry out necessary repairs or maintenance.

# Neighbours and your community

## Your rights as a tenant

You and your neighbours have an equal right to the quiet enjoyment of your homes. Situations that disturb this 'quiet enjoyment' include high levels of noise, inconsiderate actions and illegal or anti-social behaviour that disturbs other people.

If you feel that your neighbour's actions are unfairly disturbing you, you should first have a polite word with them to explain your concerns. If this doesn't work or you don't feel comfortable enough to do this, your Tenant Support Worker can provide you with further advice.

It's important that you also report antisocial behaviour to other appropriate agencies:

- If you are hearing excessive noise, you should also contact the Environmental Health department at your local council
- If a crime has been committed, you must also report it to the police
- In an emergency, phone 000.

## Your responsibilities as a tenant

As a tenant you have an obligation not to disturb your neighbours.

Please remember that, as the primary tenant (the person holding the lease), you're always responsible for the behaviour of anyone living in or visiting your home.

## Pets

Pets are allowed in some properties on a case-by-case basis. If you're considering getting a pet, please get in touch with your Tenant Support Worker before the pet moves in and they'll be able to advise you what you need to do to seek permission.

Please note that properties where Strata Rules apply may not be able to have pets.

Restricted dog breeds are not allowed. This includes Pit Bull Terriers and cross breeds of the same dog (Dog Regulations 2002 – restricted breeds).



# Keeping safe in your rental property

Domestic and family violence is any behaviour that results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation or behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear.

If your tenancy is being affected by domestic and/or family violence, please speak to your Tenant Support Worker. We can refer you to other agencies that can offer help and support.

**In an emergency, call 000.**

**Women's Domestic Violence Helpline**

08 9223 1188 or 1800 007 339 (free call)

**Men's Domestic Violence Helpline**

08 9223 1199 or 1800 000 599 (free call)

**Kids Helpline (people up to 24 years old)**

1800 551 800 (free call)

## Domestic and family violence and your tenancy rights

Everyone has the right to feel safe.

If you are a tenant dealing with a family or domestic violence situation, you have options on managing your tenancy agreement. Remember, whatever path you choose, your safety is the most important thing and there are support agencies around to help you.

Tenants affected by family and domestic violence (FDV) are able to:

- GO - leave a tenancy agreement without going to court and with as little as seven (7) days' notice (you can leave right away for safety but will need to pay rent until the end of the notice period)
- STAY - apply to court to have a perpetrator's name removed from a lease
- Make a rental home safer through lock changes or security upgrades
- Sort out disputes about property damage, unpaid rent or bonds
- Seek removal from, or avoid being listed on, a tenancy database if the listing was because of FDV.

For more information, please visit <https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer-protection/safe-tenancy-wa> or contact your Tenant Support Worker.





# What you need to know when ending your tenancy.

## Moving on

### Vacating your unit

The amount of notice you need to give Uniting before you leave your property depends on what type of tenancy agreement you're on (fixed-term or periodic). If you don't know what type of tenancy you're on, check with your Tenant Support Worker.

**Fixed-term tenancy** – you must give 30 days' written notice of your intention to vacate.

**Periodic tenancy** - you must give 21 days' written notice of your intention to vacate.

If you don't provide written notice of your intent to vacate, you might continue to be charged rent.



## Other responsibilities when leaving your property

- You must provide Uniting with a forwarding address - this is a legal obligation
- Keys must be given back to Uniting on the day you move out (if keys aren't returned you might be charged for a lock change)
- Your property must be clean and free of all belongings and rubbish.

A final property condition inspection will be carried out on the day you move out. Any damage, cleaning and carpet cleaning may be charged to you, though you'll have the opportunity to do this yourself where possible.

If you've got money owing on your account, you'll be asked to settle the balance before you move out. If for any reason this isn't possible, please get in touch with your Tenant Support Worker before you move out, as they might be able to negotiate a payment plan with you.

## Transfers to other properties

Sometimes tenants ask or need to transfer to another property. There are limited properties available, so priority is given to people with medical needs or other urgent requirements. If you believe this situation applies to you, please discuss it with your Tenant Support Worker.

## Abandoned goods

If you can't take all of your personal items with you when you leave the property, please talk to your Tenancy Support Worker before you move out. Items left behind when you leave the property will be dealt with in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act.

# Contacting Uniting and working together.

## Phone calls and messages

At Uniting, we have a supportive landlord approach, which provides you with a Tenant Support Worker for all of your needs. We'll give you their contact details before you move in.

Sometimes it might not be possible to speak directly to your Tenant Support Worker. If you need to leave a message for your Tenant Support Worker, it's important that you leave a message about why you called as well as your name and your contact phone number, so that we can do our best to help you. You can also contact the Housing Team on 1300 663 298 and another member of the team will help you with your query.



## Access to information

As a tenant, you have access to all the personal information we hold about you. To access your personal information, you'll need to complete a Request for Information Form. Ask your Tenant Support Worker for a form and within 20 days of receiving your request we'll either:

- Provide you with access to all or some of your personal information, or
- Provide you with a reason why we can't provide access to your personal information.

If you believe that the personal information that Uniting holds about you is wrong, you can request that we change the information. We'll either change the information or make a permanent notation that you believe the information is incorrect.

## Confidentiality

Uniting is committed to managing the personal information of all people we support in accordance with the requirements outlined in the relevant legislation.

## Feedback and complaints

We appreciate all forms of feedback — good and bad. And we acknowledge the rights of tenants to complain if they're not satisfied. We're committed to providing tenants with a complaints process that is accessible, responsive, prompt and fair.

This is the process to follow if you'd like to make a complaint:

- In the first instance, you should try to resolve the complaint by speaking with your Tenant Support Worker or the Uniting team member concerned.
- If it's not possible to resolve the complaint at this level, you'll have the opportunity to put your complaint in writing. Please ask your Tenant Support Worker for a copy of the **Uniting complaints brochure** if you'd like to make a complaint, or visit the feedback and complaints page on the Uniting website at [unitingwa.org.au](http://unitingwa.org.au).

## Advance care directive

An advance care directive is an important part of your end-of-life care. An advance care directive formalises your advance care plan. For more information, please check out [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) or ask your Tenant Support Worker.

# Useful contacts.

## Crisis numbers and helplines

### Emergency Services

000

### Alcohol & Drug Information Service

08 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024

### ATAPS On The Line – suicide support

1800 859 585

### Crisis Care WA

08 9223 1111 or 1800 199 088

### Lifeline WA

13 11 14

### Men's Domestic Violence Helpline

08 9223 1199 or 1800 000 599 (free call)

### Mental Health Emergency Response Line

1300 555 788

### Police

13 14 44

### Samaritans

13 52 47

### Sexual Assault Resource Centre

**Emergency Crisis line: 08 9340 1828**

Counselling: 08 9340 1899

### Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

### Women's Domestic Violence Helpline

08 9223 1188 or 1800 007 339 (free call)

## Utilities

### **Alinta Gas**

13 13 58

### **Gas (ATCO Gas Australia) faults and emergencies**

13 13 52

### **Synergy**

13 13 53

### **Synergy faults and emergencies**

13 13 51

### **Water Corporation**

13 13 85

### **Water Corporation faults and emergencies**

13 13 75

## Perth Metropolitan Adult Community Mental Health Clinics

### **Clarkson Clinic**

08 9404 0094

### **Inner City Clinic**

08 9224 7120

### **Joondalup Clinic**

08 9400 9599

### **Lower West (AVRO) Clinic**

08 9489 7200

### **Mirrabooka Clinic**

08 9344 5400

### **Osborne Park Clinic**

08 9346 8350

## Your rights and advocacy

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

9221 5711

### **Community Legal Service Joondalup**

9301 4413

### **Community Legal Service Mirrabooka**

9440 1663

### **Mental Health Law Centre**

9328 8266

### **Tenant Advice Service**

9221 0088

### **Welfare Rights & Advocacy**

9328 1751

# Uniting

1300 663 298

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