

# tenant handbook

## Important Details

Your Housing Manager is

Your Client Number is

- Your home is a  Leasehold Property  
 Capital Property  
 Special Project Property

Your Council Area is

Local Council contact details are located in Section 6 Useful Contacts of the Tenant Handbook.

Don't forget to let Bridge Housing know if you change your contact details, especially if your phone number changes.

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Bridge Housing Limited

Editing John Nicolades, Kathy Wight

Design JAS Creations Pty Ltd  
jas@jascreations.com.au  
www.jascreations.com.au

All information in the Tenant Handbook is correct at June 2009. The information in this booklet is subject to change, please contact your Housing Manager and check the Policy and Procedures section of Bridge Housing's website [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) for policy updates.

For a copy of Bridge Housing Limited Tenant Handbook please contact Bridge Housing on 02 9699 6055 or email [reception@bridgehousing.org.au](mailto:reception@bridgehousing.org.au)

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# 1. Welcome to Bridge Housing

## 1.1 Introduction

Thank you for becoming a tenant of Bridge Housing. Bridge Housing will do its best to provide you with good quality accommodation and a friendly and efficient service. The *Bridge Housing Tenant Handbook* has been prepared to assist you settling into your Bridge Housing tenancy and we hope you find the information helpful.

Please visit our website [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) for further information on Bridge Housing.

## 1.2 Who We Are

Bridge Housing Limited (Bridge Housing), provides affordable, community based rental housing for people in housing need and on low incomes.

Bridge Housing Limited (formerly known as South West Inner Sydney Housing Cooperative Ltd [SWISH]) was established in 1984 and is one of 32 housing associations operating in NSW. Bridge Housing receives leasehold and operational subsidy funds from the Community Housing Division of Housing New South Wales. The Community Housing Division also acts as the regulator of housing associations.

Bridge Housing's area of operation predominately covers the inner metropolitan Sydney and the eastern suburbs. We operate across several local government areas including: Ashfield, , Botany, Burwood, Canada Bay, Canterbury, Leichhardt, Marrickville, Sydney City, Strathfield, Randwick, Waverly and Woollahra. Bridge Housing aims to secure a mix of long term housing stock in each of the LGA's so as to have a fair distribution of differently sized secure properties across its area of operation.

## 1.3 What We Do

Our business is to offer a responsive service that provides affordable, appropriate housing, meeting the needs of a diverse range of people on low to moderate incomes in inner metropolitan Sydney.

Our aim is to provide the best possible service to tenants by:

- **Being open and fair** in selecting tenants and in all dealings with tenants.
- **Encouraging a mix of tenants** that reflects housing needs in the local community and being non-discriminatory. We welcome tenants who may have problems in the private rental market due to their culture or background, age, disability, lifestyle or sexual preference. All tenants will be treated with respect.
- **Working with you to help keep you in safe, secure and affordable housing.** We seek to develop a friendly and trusting relationship with you so that any problem is quickly resolved. You can expect to be told about anything that affects your housing and to be consulted about any decisions or changes that need to be made. We will always take your needs and views into account. Your Housing Manager is available during office hours, please call or make an appointment to meet with them.
- **Recognising the changing housing needs of tenants.** If your needs change, we will work with you to try to meet them. There are, of course, limits laid down by our guidelines and resources.

The Tenant Handbook provides general advice and is subject to change.

Before acting on any of the information please contact your Housing Manager and visit the Bridge Housing website [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) to check for any changes or updates in Bridge Housing policy.

## 1.4 Our Location

### Address for visits and mail

Level 9, Tower 1  
1 Lawson Square  
Redfern NSW 2016

PO Box 1835  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

### Operating Hours:

**Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday**

9.00 am to 4:30pm

**Wednesday**

9.00 am to 1.00 pm

**Phone:** 02 9699 6055

**Fax:** 02 9699 7055

**Email:** [reception@bridgehousing.org.au](mailto:reception@bridgehousing.org.au)

**Website:** [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au)

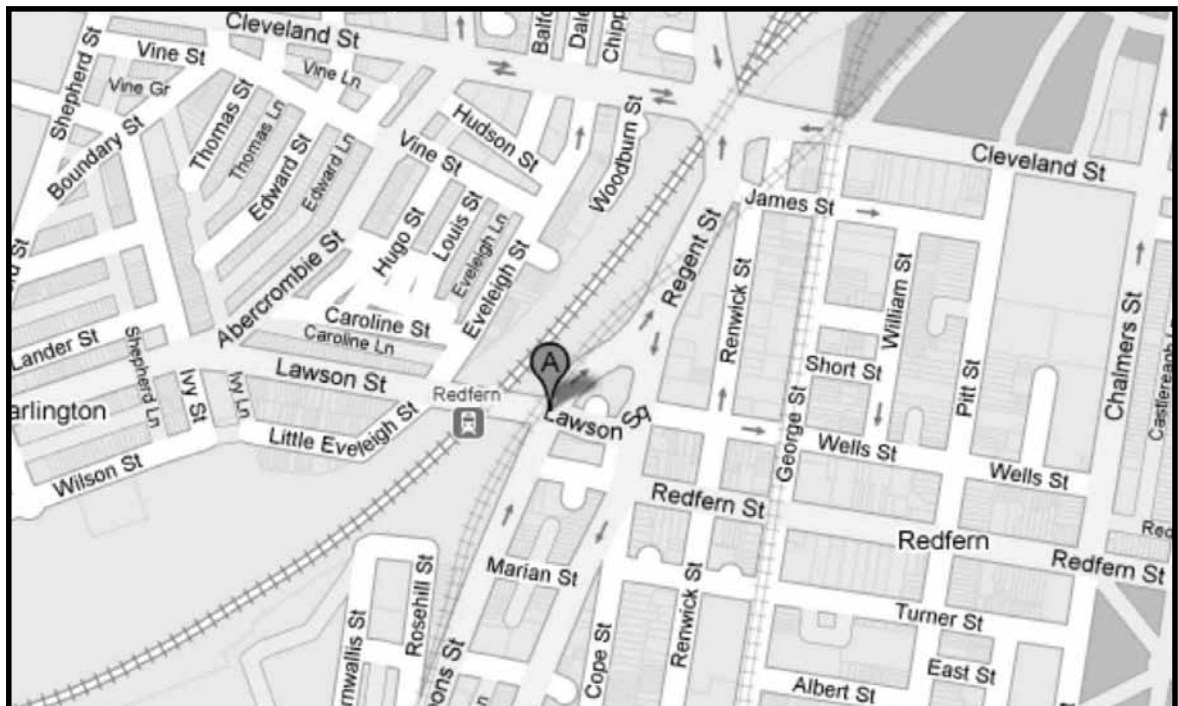
**Transport:** We are directly opposite Redfern Railway Station and 10 minutes walk from Central Railway Station. Also call the Transport Info Line on 131500 or [www.131500.info/realtime/default.asp](http://www.131500.info/realtime/default.asp) for further travel information

### Disability Access

The Bridge Housing office is located in Tower 1 which has ramp and lift access. Please advise your Housing Manager if you require assistance. Alternatively, arrange a home visit with your Housing Manager.

### Visiting the Bridge Housing Office

Housing Managers are often out of the office so if you wish to see your Housing Manager we ask that you make an appointment before you come to the Bridge Housing office.



# 2. Before you move in

## 2.1 What is a Leasehold/Capital/ Special housing

### Leasehold

Bridge Housing rents your home from a real estate agent or private owner. As with any private rental, it is possible that the owner may end the agreement some time in the future and that you would have to move. If this happens, Bridge Housing will try to rehouse you as long as you are still eligible for housing and your rent is up to date. You can remain on the Housing NSW waiting list for permanent housing and you should keep your Housing NSW application active.

You are not likely to have any contact with the owner or agent apart from property inspections and repairs. Bridge Housing will contact the owner about any property issues on your behalf. If the agent or owner contacts you directly, please refer them to your Housing Manager.

For repairs and maintenance, please contact Bridge Housing or refer to the bottom of page 1 of your Residential Tenancy Agreement.

### Capital

This is a Bridge Housing property and you are unlikely to have to leave it. Because you now have permanent housing, Housing NSW will not keep you on their waiting list.

Bridge Housing is responsible for responsive and planned maintenance work on the property.

For repairs and maintenance please contact Bridge Housing or refer to the bottom of first page of your Residential Tenancy Agreement.

### Special Projects

Bridge Housing has a number of special housing projects. These include:

- **Social Housing Subsidy Program**  
The Social Housing Subsidy Program houses people whose income may make them ineligible for Housing NSW accommodation. SHSP tenants pay between 25% and 30% of their gross income in rent, depending on their income.

- **Waverley Affordable Housing Program**  
Bridge Housing manages this project on behalf of Waverley Council. To be eligible applicants must live and work in the Waverley Council area. Tenants pay 75% of the market rent.

If you think you may be eligible for any of these programs please contact your Housing Manager for further details or visit the Bridge Housing website [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au).

## 2.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

Bridge Housing is subject to the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (PPIP Act) and the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (HRIP Act), which govern the collection, security, use and disclosure of personal information and health information respectively.

We may:

- Confirm your name, address and lease start date with essential services (electricity, gas and telephone)
- Give your phone number to contractors to arrange repairs with your consent
- Discuss tenancy issues with your support worker
- Share information with other organisations who may have an interest in considering your application or tenancy, including where relevant; Housing New South Wales, Aboriginal Housing Office, the Community Housing Division or a community housing organisation, Housing Appeals Committee, survey companies for the purpose of determining client satisfaction and related long term service enhancement
- Provide information to third parties for the purposes of debt recovery
- Release information where this is required by law, for example, on written request from authorities such as Centrelink, Australian Taxation Office
- Disclose information to other government agencies or statutory bodies for purposes including child protection, health reasons, law enforcement and investigation, where authorised to do so under the PPIP Act, HRIP Act, or by another Act or law

All information about your tenancy is kept in our office either in your tenant file and/or in our electronic Tenant Management System. These include items such as your original application, tenancy agreement, rent reviews and copies of all letters sent and received. These are mainly used by your Housing Manager but may also be used by other Bridge Housing staff when necessary.

You have a right of access to, and correction of, your personal information held by Bridge Housing to ensure it is accurate.

If you have any questions about privacy and your personal information, please contact the Bridge Housing office.

If you want us to give tenancy details to an outside person not listed above, please contact your Housing Manager beforehand.

### **Audits and Evaluations**

From time to time, a sample of applicant and tenant files may be inspected by auditors from our funding body or evaluators from the accreditation unit. This is to make sure that proper records are being kept and that we are operating according to best practice guidelines. The audit and evaluation teams keep all your information confidential and do not use it for any other purpose, but if you DO NOT want your file to be looked at, please let your Housing Manager know in writing.

### **Access to files**

All tenants have the right to look at their own information. If you need to do this, please ring your Housing Manager for an appointment.

## **2.3 Connecting Utilities**

Before you move in, don't forget to have the electricity, gas and phone connected in your name. You are responsible for all connection and usage charges. If you are on a pension, check with the service provider regarding your eligibility for a rebate. If your home has a separate water meter, you are also responsible for paying for water usage. It is a good idea to take a meter reading before you move in. Water payments need to be made to Bridge Housing and paid by cheque, money order, EFTPOS (available in the office) or by using your deposit book. If you use a deposit book, the payment needs to be made separately to your rent payment.

### **Electrical fuses**

Once you have the keys to your new home, make sure you know where the fuse box is. In houses, this is most likely to be attached to the front of the house. In units, it may be in a kitchen cupboard. Make sure all the switches are on, including the hot water. If you have problems with hot water or power during your tenancy, always check the switches or fuses before reporting the problem.

## **2.4 Pets**

Regrettably, keeping dogs and cats is not possible in most of our properties. You cannot keep a dog or a cat in your property unless we have provided you with written permission. Keeping dogs and cats without written permission of the property owner can result in you losing your housing. If you think your house may be suitable for a pet, and you are interested in having one, please contact your housing manager.

## **2.5 Calculating your Rent**

### **Market rent**

The current market rent for your property is the rent on your lease. It is the amount that Bridge Housing pays the owner (on leasehold properties) or the amount that similar homes in your area cost to rent (for capital properties). It is the most that you can be asked to pay. However, nearly all Bridge Housing tenants will be entitled to a rebated rent payment. If your market rent changes, you will be advised in writing, usually at the annual income review.

## Rebated rent

This is the payment you must make each fortnight. It is based on your household income and calculated according to the *NSW Community Housing Rent Policy*. For most Bridge Housing properties, the rebated rent is:

- 25% of the gross (before tax) income of the leaseholder
- 25% for all other adults 21 years and over living in the home
- 15% for household members 18 - 20 years old
- 15% of Centrelink benefits for children (Family Tax Benefit Parts A & B)
- 100% of any Commonwealth Rent Assistance to which you are entitled

Gross income is income from all sources and includes wages, pensions and benefits, rent assistance, interest and child maintenance.

For full details of your rebated rent calculation, please ask your Housing Manager.

Bridge Housing undertakes periodic rent reviews to ensure that you are paying the correct rent.

**Please note that your rebated rent calculation may be subject to change during your tenancy.**

Bridge Housing will inform you of any changes and provide adequate notice of any rent increases.

Further information on our rent review process is available from [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or your Housing Manager.

## 2.6 Commonwealth Rent Assistance

If you receive a Centrelink Benefit, you are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA).

We will print a Centrelink Rent Assistance (CRA) form showing your **rebated rent** at the time of sign-up. The Housing Manager will sign this and either forward this to Centrelink on your behalf (after you have signed it) or return to you to hand in at your local office. The rent assistance will be based on the rebated rent **you pay** to Bridge Housing. Centrelink calculate your CRA entitlement, of which Bridge Housing will charge 100%.

Bridge Housing assumes that all Centrelink beneficiaries have applied for rent assistance and your rent calculation will be based on this assumption.

## 2.7 Bond

All Bridge Housing tenants must pay \$100 bond as a single person or \$200 bond per couple or family. We lodge your bond with the Rental Bond Board (RBB). The RBB will send you confirmation that we have done this. The bond, plus any interest earned, will be refunded to you when you leave the property as long as you do not owe any rent and you leave the property in the same condition as when you began the lease, allowing for normal wear and tear.

## 2.8 Property Condition Report

At the signing of your lease you will receive a Condition Report prepared by Bridge Housing. This details the condition of your home before you moved in, so it is important to fill it out and return it to Bridge Housing within seven (7) days from the start of your tenancy. The Condition Report will be referred to at the end of your tenancy to assess whether or not your bond will be refunded.

Make sure you write details of any items or damage that may have been missed in the report. You can attach written notes if there is not enough space on the form. Keep your copy in a safe place so that you can check it if you leave. This is very important to prevent problems later if the bond is in dispute.

Your Housing Manager can help you if you need assistance completing the report.

# 3. While you are a Bridge Housing Tenant

## 3.1 Your Rights and Responsibilities

Bridge Housing recognises the rights of tenants to

- Safe, secure and affordable housing
- Security of tenure within the constraints of funding and program guidelines
- Fair open and non-discriminatory treatment, both in the selection process and in all other dealings
- Privacy and confidentiality of information unless disclosure consent is given
- Consultation on all changes to their tenancy conditions
- Be kept informed of all action in relation to their tenancy and rent payments
- Be treated with respect at all times, to have their culture and background respected
- Have their changing needs recognised; to have these met where possible within the guidelines and resources of the organisation
- Appeal and complain if they do not agree with action taken or decisions made by the organisation
- Have complaints welcomed and know they can complain without being penalised and to be encouraged to use an advocate
- Participate in decision making and know how to do this

The rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords are set down in law in *The Residential Tenancies Act 1987*, and in *The Renting Guide* that you were given at sign-up. Please make sure you read it and keep it handy for future use. *The Renting Guide* is printed in several languages. If you have not been given one in your first language, please ask your Housing Manager if it is available.

If you are unsure of your rights please contact The Office of Fair Trading or one of the Tenants Advice Services listed in *Section 6. Useful Contacts*.

## 3.2 Repairs and Maintenance

### Requesting repairs

Contact your Housing Manager for any repairs. The more information you can provide regarding the nature of the repair, the quicker it is likely to be rectified. If the problem concerns a stove or hot water system, before you contact us check the make and model, whether it is gas or electric, concerns pilot lights or fuses, and if electricity or gas supply is still on. If the problem is broken glass, specify whether it is a door or window, timber or aluminium, fixed or sliding.

Always provide phone contact details when you request a repair and confirm that it is acceptable for Bridge Housing to give your details to the repairer. If you have no phone, leave details of days and times when you will definitely be at home. When you ring, we will tell you as much as we can about the likely timeframe. If the repair is not done as expected or you are not happy with the work, please call us again. Your feedback on repairs is valuable.

**Emergencies** have a way of happening at night or on weekends. If something happens which is extremely dangerous or is so serious that it can't wait until the Bridge Housing office opens, you will need to arrange an emergency repair. The phone contacts for emergencies are found on the first page of your Tenancy Agreement. If the repair is a landlord responsibility, please pass the bill or receipt on to Bridge Housing.

## 3.3 Making Changes

Your home must be kept in much the same condition as when you got it, unless the landlord makes changes or you have written permission to do so. It is very important that you don't make any changes to the house or garden without consent, even if you pay for it. This includes taking up or changing floor coverings, painting inside or outside, changing fittings, improving security with doors, grills or locks, attaching insect screens, removing plants or lawns and creating gardens.

Most people like having a garden but trees planted in the wrong place can be very expensive to remove.

If there is an improvement that you would like to make, please write to your Housing Manager and we will reply in writing or contact the owner for you. Making changes without permission may jeopardise your continuing tenancy. It can also be expensive to restore the property to its original condition.

### 3.4 Keys

It's all too easy to lose them, lock them inside your home or have your bag stolen. To make sure that you can get into your home at times like this, make a copy of all your keys and leave them with a trusted friend, neighbour or relative.

Keys are your responsibility and if you lose them you will have to pay for the cost of new locks and keys. This is expensive costing around \$150. You will need to provide Bridge Housing with a copy of the keys if the locks are changed.

If you live in a security block where the front door key cannot be copied, please ask us where you can obtain an additional key. Bridge Housing may sometimes have a spare set of your keys in the office but we cannot guarantee it. If we do, you are welcome to borrow them for half an hour to have copies made. You will need to leave a deposit of \$20.00.

To save an unnecessary trip, please contact Bridge Housing to check whether keys are available. If you are locked out and there are no spare keys available, you will need to call a locksmith. You will be responsible for paying the locksmith.

Do not attempt to break in through doors or windows. Repair to the damage is likely to cost you more than the locksmith.

### 3.5 Common Areas

Parking, use of drying lines and garbage can often be a source of neighbour disputes, particularly when living in units. Please be sensitive to the following issues, they are simple and can avoid a great deal of frustration.

#### Parking

Do not block people's parking spots, garbage areas or garages. Make sure that your visitors also respect this rule.

#### Garbage

It is a good idea to check with your local Council about garbage collection and help with taking out and bringing in bins. There are separate bins for items which can be recycled.

Please familiarise yourself with which items can be recycled and which bins you should use. You can do this by checking with the Council. Discarding of excess furniture is your responsibility.

Contact your local Council regarding pick up services in your area.

Contact numbers for Councils are found in *Section 6. Useful Contacts*.

#### Drying Areas

If you are sharing a common clothes line please remember to remove your clothes once they have dried to allow other tenants access to the line.

### 3.6 Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms save lives and are there to protect you.

#### Capital Properties

Bridge Housing's capital properties have hardwired alarms, and Bridge Housing is responsible for replacing the batteries in these alarms.

#### Leasehold properties

These are properties Bridge Housing leases from the private rental market.

Owners of these properties are required by law to have smoke alarms fitted by 1 November 2006.

If you have a smoke alarm that has a replaceable battery, the landlord must put a new battery in at the commencement of a tenancy; thereafter you are responsible for replacing the battery if required.

If you are physically unable to change the battery you must notify your Housing Manager so we can notify the landlord as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the need for it to be replaced.

If your alarm is hard wired, the landlord is responsible for replacing the battery. Please notify Bridge Housing as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the need for it to be replaced.

The Condition Report section of your Tenancy Agreement includes a specific reference to smoke alarms so you and Bridge Housing are able to note and comment on the presence of smoke alarms at the beginning and end of the tenancy.

### Problems with alarms

Noisy alarms can be very annoying. Always use the exhaust fan if you have one and keep the bathroom door or kitchen door closed if the alarm is just outside the room. If your alarm goes off when cooking or showering, always use the exhaust fan, try opening the window or close the kitchen or bathroom door.

### To stop an alarm

When there is no fire, create a sudden draught of air by flicking a tea towel under the detector.

### Batteries

Where the smoke alarm is of the type that has a replaceable battery, tenants are responsible for replacing batteries in these smoke alarms if needed. However, if you are physically unable to change the battery you must notify Bridge Housing as soon as possible after becoming aware of the need for the battery to be replaced.

### Smoke alarm maintenance

Alarm malfunctions can be caused by dust build-up, so run the nozzle of your vacuum cleaner around the detector from time to time. Also do regular checks on your alarm to make sure it is working properly. Most individual detectors have a test button. If yours is connected to a fireboard in the common area and you are concerned, please phone Bridge Housing.

#### **WARNING**

**Never disconnect or damage smoke alarms. This endangers the lives of you and your family. If your smoke alarm is malfunctioning and it is a hardwired detector, please call Bridge Housing to arrange the repair.**

## 3.7 Paying Rent

### Methods of payment

Please choose the method that suits you best:

#### Centrelink

Bridge Housing Limited works with Centrelink to make rent and other payments easier and more convenient for you.

**Centrepay** enables you to make automatic deduction from your Centrelink to Bridge Housing Limited. This gives you peace of mind as you know that your rent has been paid. You need to sign a **Centrepay Deduction Form** available from the Centrelink Office. For further information please contact your Housing Manager, email [reception@bridgehousing.org.au](mailto:reception@bridgehousing.org.au) or go to [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au).

**Multiple Deduction Scheme.** This is a new Centrelink service and subject to your written approval enables Bridge Housing Limited to increase or decrease any current deduction eg rent. The advantage is that you do not need to notify Centrelink and sign a new deduction form every time there is rent change, following a rent review. You must sign a **Centrelink Multiple Deduction Consent Form** for this service to commence. Bridge Housing limited and Centrelink will notify you when the rent payment is changed.

For further information please contact your Housing Manager, email [reception@bridgehousing.org.au](mailto:reception@bridgehousing.org.au) or go to [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au).

#### Deposit book

This can be used at any branch of the Commonwealth Bank.

#### Direct Debit from your bank account

Ask your Housing Manager for a form to take to your bank. Remember to check the bank charges first.

#### Cheque or money order

Made out either to "Bridge Housing Limited" or "Bridge Housing". You can post the order to Bridge Housing or pay it in person at the office. If posting to Bridge Housing **you must write your name and address on the back of the cheque or money order otherwise we may not know who it is from.**

## EFTPOS

Bridge Housing has an EFTPOS facility in the office.

### Bridge Housing does not accept cash payments

Bridge Housing does not accept cash payments. If you wish to pay your rent, please go to the Post Office to get a Money Order and bring this to the Bridge Housing office. Bridge Housing is located near the following post office 196 Redfern St, Redfern or 219-241 Cleveland Street, Strawberry Hills (opposite Prince Alfred Park).

## 3.8 Income Reviews

Periodically we will write to you telling you of the current market rent for your property and inviting you to apply for a rental rebate. You will need to fill out and sign the Tenant Declaration which tells us who is living in the house, and to supply new income details for you and all other household members.

Once we receive this information Bridge Housing will recalculate your rent and write to inform you of the outcome. The Tenant Declaration must be returned by the date specified in the rent review letter.

Please return all requested information by the due date.

If we do not receive this information by the due date this means that you no longer require a subsidised rent and your rent will increase to market rent.

## 3.9 Centrelink Authorisation for Income Details

Centrelink has an internet based scheme that allows Bridge Housing to access tenants' income details via the internet. We can only do this with your authorisation.

The advantage of this for you and your family members is that you no longer need to visit or contact your Centrelink office for an income statement, when Bridge Housing conducts an income review.

If you have not already given authorisation and would like to do so please contact your Housing Manager for a Centrelink Authorisation Form.

## 3.10 Changes in Your Household Income

If there are any significant income changes for any household member, you need to notify Bridge Housing within two weeks of the change and provide confirmation from employers or Centrelink. Examples of changes are when you or a member of your household:

- Commences or ceases working
- Changes from full-time to part-time work or vice-versa
- Is promoted and receives a pay-rise
- Changes jobs and increases or decreases income
- Commences or ceases to receive maintenance payments

You must also inform Bridge Housing if a new income earner joins your household.

Bridge Housing's *Change in Household Income Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

## 3.11 Rent Arrears

By signing your Tenancy Agreement, you have agreed to pay your correct rent every fortnight and in two weeks advance. If you experience any difficulty in paying your rent, please ring your Housing Manager before the payment is due and let them know when it will be made.

It is **important** that your rent does not get behind (in arrears) **because** if it does:

- Bridge Housing will not be able to rehouse you if you are a leasehold tenant and the owner of your home ends the lease or
- You will not be able to get a transfer to another Bridge Housing property if you need one and
- You can lose your housing if you get too far behind to catch up and the Consumer Trading and Tenancy Tribunal ends your tenancy ([www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/cttt.html](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/cttt.html))
- Bridge Housing will pursue any unpaid rent and non-rent debt through a debt collection agency.

### Arrears procedure:

- **If you are a few days behind** in your rent – you will be contacted by your Housing Manager
- **If you are more than 14 days behind** we will issue you with a Termination Notice. If you clear the arrears before the date stated on the notice and then pay fortnightly in advance, no further action will be taken. If you are unable to do this, it is very important for you to contact your Housing Manager and negotiate an agreement to pay your arrears
- **If you are not able to pay the arrears** – before the Termination Notice expires, Bridge Housing will apply to the Consumer Trading and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) for termination of your tenancy. If this happens, it is important that you attend the hearing to put forward your case. If this is the first time that you have had a CTTT Hearing, you may be able to negotiate a Specific Performance Order (SPO). An SPO is an agreement between you and Bridge Housing to pay off your arrears
- **If you already have a Specific Performance Order** and fail to make the ordered payments, we will request the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) to end your tenancy

Bridge Housing's aim is to maintain your tenancy, if you are having payment problems, please work with your Housing Manager to reduce your arrears.

Bridge Housing's *Rent Arrears Management Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

## 3.12 Non-rent Debts

As part of your tenancy agreement you are responsible for:

- Paying for water usage if your property is separately metered
- Ensuring the property is clean and rubbish is removed after you have vacated or transferred
- Any damage to the property
- The cost of a locksmith to replace locks or provide new keys

These are all non-rent debts. It is important that you pay these debts. Bridge Housing can go to the tribunal to terminate the tenancy if you have not paid these debts. If you leave with any unpaid non-rent debt Bridge Housing will seek recovery through a debt collection agency. It will also mean that Bridge Housing will not rehouse you if you require assistance in the future. For more information about non-rent debts please see [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) for updates.

## 3.13 Who is Living There Now?

When you signed your tenancy agreement with Bridge Housing we agreed how many people could live in your home and who these people are. However we recognise that families change – relationships start or break up; children are born or grow up and leave home.

Please keep us informed of the changes as approval is needed for most additional household members and changes usually affect your rent.

### New live-in partners

If you wish your partner to move in, please contact your Housing Manager. If approved, you will need to list the person as an “additional household occupant”, supply income details and pay the new rent. You will continue to be the leaseholder. This means that you are responsible for the total rent payment and that you will keep your housing if you and your partner no longer want to live together.

### Other additional occupants

We have taken care to offer you a property which is the right size for the eligible applicants. It is unlikely that we will be able to approve additional adults moving in.

You cannot sublet, take in boarders or set up a share house in a Bridge Housing property. If you want to have another family member move in, please talk to your Housing Manager about it.

You can, of course, have guests to stay. If they stay more than three weeks, they are no longer classed as guests and you need to contact your Housing Manager about the situation.

Bridge Housing's *Additional and Unauthorised Occupants Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

### 3.14 Going Away?

If you are leaving your home for more than six weeks you must inform Bridge Housing. We will need keys to your home or contact details for someone with keys in case there is any emergency while you're away. If possible arrange for a friend to check on it from time to time and have the mail held or collected. Also, make sure the rent is paid while you're gone.

Except in exceptional circumstances, it is not possible for you to leave your property for more than six months. If you are leaving for an extended period, you may need to give up your housing and reapply when you return.

Bridge Housing's *Absence from Dwelling Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

### 3.15 Neighbours

Everyone has the right to quiet and peaceful enjoyment of their home. Having good relationships with neighbours makes your home a safer and more pleasant place to live. Please always consider your neighbours, especially when listening to music, entertaining and coming home late at night. If you have problems with a neighbour, it is always best to try to sort it out with them. If this doesn't work, please contact your Housing Manager. Depending on the problem, we may be able to:

- Contact the neighbour to discuss the matter
- Call a tenant meeting or
- Advise you to contact your local Community Justice Centre for mediation. ([www.cjc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cjc.nsw.gov.au))

#### Harassment

**You should not have to put up with harassment of any kind. If you are being harassed by neighbours because of your race, disability or sexual preference, please contact your Housing Manager for assistance.**

### 3.16 Getting Involved

Bridge Housing is a non profit company limited by guarantee. As a tenant of Bridge Housing you can become a member of the Company. This entitles you to vote at Annual General Meetings of Bridge Housing. There is a small membership fee, and you are liable to pay a \$1.00 to the company if it liquidates and has more liabilities than assets. At sign up you will be asked if you want to be a member and given a membership application form to sign.

You can be involved with Bridge Housing by:

- Becoming involved in the Tenant Advisory Group
- Responding to our annual Tenant Survey
- Attending tenant social activities organised by Bridge Housing
- Becoming involved in the State wide Tenant Network

Bridge Housing's *Tenant Participation Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

# 4. Leaving Bridge Housing

## 4.1 Rehousing

### When you can no longer live where you are

If you are in a leasehold property and the owner ends the agreement, or if your home is not habitable for other reasons (eg fire, serious storm damage), Bridge Housing will do its best to rehouse you in a similar property. We can also help with removal expenses. To be rehoused you must:

- Be up to date in your rent
- Have no CITT orders or serious complaints against you
- Still be on the Housing NSW waiting list and
- Not be the cause of the owner ending the agreement

Bridge Housing's *Rehousing Policy* provides further information. A copy of the policy is available on the Bridge Housing website [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

## 4.2 Transfer

### To be accepted to go onto the transfer list:

- You must have lived in your present home for at least 12 months
- All people to be included in the transfer have lived with you (and been declared to Bridge Housing) for at least 12 months – your new baby excepted
- Your rent payments are up to date
- There are no CITT Orders or serious complaints against you and
- If in a leasehold property, you must still be active on the Housing NSW waiting list

When you apply for a transfer because of medical reasons you will be asked to provide supporting documentation.

### If you are accepted onto the transfer list you need to

- Wait for a suitable property to be available. This may take some time, especially if you have special needs such as ground floor access, require a specific location, or you need a 3 or 4 bedroom house and
- Meet your own removal expenses

Bridge Housing's *Transfer Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

### When you want to move to a permanent property

If you have been a Bridge Housing leasehold tenant for 5 years or more and you would like to go on the capital properties waiting list, please speak to your Housing Manager.

### Mutual Exchange Program

The Mutual Exchange program helps tenants housed by Bridge Housing to find other tenants who might want to exchange their Bridge Housing dwellings. This is subject to approval from Bridge Housing.

Bridge Housing may consider a mutual exchange between a Bridge Housing tenant and a tenant of another housing association. The exchange is subject to the written approval of both housing associations.

Bridge Housing's *Mutual Exchange Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

### 4.3 Getting Your Bond Back

When you leave a Bridge Housing property, we would like to return your full bond and offer the property to someone from our waiting list as soon as possible. You can help with both of these by:

- If you are leaving Bridge Housing, giving us as much written notice as possible of your moving date. A condition of your tenancy is that you give 21 days notice in writing of your intention to leave
- Removing all rubbish, both inside and outside. Small items can go in the bin. Contact the Council for larger items
- Cleaning the property so that it is as clean as when you moved in. People often forget to clean the windows, walls, skirting boards, inside cupboards, the oven and grill, stains on flooring or carpets
- Repairing or replacing anything you have damaged
- Arranging an inspection of the property with your Housing Manager
- Returning the keys without delay
- Giving us your new address or bank account details for the refund of your Bond

### 4.4 Debt Recovery

Regrettably Bridge Housing has been forced to use a debt collection agency to recover unpaid debts owed to Bridge Housing from ex-tenants. These debts include unpaid rent arrears and non rent debt such as unpaid water bills or cost of repairs caused by tenant damage and unpaid bills for cleaning and rubbish removal. It is in your interest to ensure that any unpaid accounts you have with Bridge Housing are settled before you leave the tenancy.

If during the course of your tenancy you experience financial difficulty which means that you cannot pay your rent please discuss this with your Housing Manager.

### 4.5 Succession

While we all hope it won't happen, we need guidelines as to what happens if the lease-holder dies or is permanently hospitalised. In this case, another member of the household can ask to take over the tenancy, if:

- There is written evidence of death or permanent hospitalisation
- The application to succeed is in writing
- The person applying is currently on the Housing NSW waiting list and
- The person applying has been a declared household member and had their income included in the household rent assessment for at least 12 months

Please note that if the person is approved but the property is not suitable because of size or special needs, another property may be offered. Bridge Housing's *Succession Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

### 4.6 Feedback

If you are leaving Bridge Housing, your feedback can help us to improve our service for the tenants who remain behind. Please let your Housing Manager know why you are leaving and send us your comments and suggestions.

# 5. Appeals and Complaints Policy

Bridge Housing sometimes makes decisions that you feel are contrary to our stated policy or we simply make mistakes. If this happens, it is important that you let us know. Knowing about your problem helps us improve our service. If you are unhappy with a service or decision, you should use our **Appeals and Complaints process**.

The *Appeals and Complaints Information* pamphlet provides information on this policy and how you can use it.

Bridge Housing makes this guarantee to you:

- You can have an advocate or support person help you at any point. A list of Advocacy and Support Agencies are found in *Section 6: Useful Contacts*
- Tenant will not be “victimised” for appealing a Bridge Housing decision or raising a complaint about Bridge Housing services

You may access the independent Housing Appeals Committee ([www.hac.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hac.nsw.gov.au)) Free Call: 1800 629 794 to appeal about a Bridge Housing decision. The Housing Appeals Committee will consider your appeal only after you have used Bridge Housing’s internal appeals process.

Please contact your Housing Manager if you have any questions about our Appeals and Complaints Policy or wish to make an appeal or complaint about Bridge Housing.

Bridge Housing’s *Appeals and Complaints Policy* is available on [www.bridgehousing.org.au](http://www.bridgehousing.org.au) or from your Housing Manager.

# 6. Useful Contacts

## 6.1 Utilities

### Electricity

**Energy Australia Connections** 131 535  
[www.energyaustralia.com.au](http://www.energyaustralia.com.au)

**Emergencies** 131 388

**Repairs and maintenance** 132 604

### Telephone

**Telstra Connections** 132 200  
[www.telstra.com.au](http://www.telstra.com.au)

**Optus** 1800 501 064  
[www.optus.com.au](http://www.optus.com.au)

### Gas

**AGL Connections** 131 245  
[www.agl.com.au](http://www.agl.com.au)

**Gas Leaks** 131 909

### Water

**Sydney Water Emergencies** 132 090

## 6.2 Local Councils

**Ashfield Council** 02 9716 1800  
[www.ashfield.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ashfield.nsw.gov.au)

**Auburn Council** 02 9735 1222  
[www.auburn.nsw.gov.au](http://www.auburn.nsw.gov.au)

**Bankstown Council** 02 9707 9999  
[www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au)

**Botany Council** 02 9366 3666  
[www.botanybay.nsw.gov.au](http://www.botanybay.nsw.gov.au)

**Burwood Council** 02 9911 9911  
[www.botanybay.nsw.gov.au](http://www.botanybay.nsw.gov.au)

**Canada Bay Council** 02 9911 6555  
[www.canadabay.nsw.gov.au](http://www.canadabay.nsw.gov.au)

**Canterbury Council** 02 9789 9300  
[www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au](http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au)

**Leichhardt Council** 02 9367 9222  
[www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au](http://www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au)

**Marrickville Council** 02 9335 2222  
[www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au](http://www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au)

**Randwick Council** 02 9399 0999  
[www.randwick.nsw.gov.au](http://www.randwick.nsw.gov.au)

**Strathfield Council** 02 9748 9999  
[www.strathfield.nsw.gov.au](http://www.strathfield.nsw.gov.au)

**Sydney City Council** 02 9265 9333  
[www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)

**Waverly Council** 02 9369 8000  
[www.waverley.nsw.gov.au](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au)

**Woollahra Council** 02 9391 7000  
[www.woollahra.nsw.gov.au](http://www.woollahra.nsw.gov.au)

## 6.3 Tenancy Advice

### Renting Services

#### NSW Department of Fair Trading

General 1800 451 301

Bonds 1800 422 021

#### Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services

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

**Inner Sydney Tenants Advice** 02 9698 5975

**Inner West Tenancy Advice Service** 02 9559 2899

**Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service** 1800 772 721

**Eastern Area Tenants Service** 02 9386 9147

**Western Sydney Tenants Service** 02 9413 2677

**South West Tenants Advice Service** 1800 631 993

**Southern Sydney Tenants Service** 02 9787 4679

## 6.4 Financial Advice

### Advice on budgeting or your finances.

**Financial Counsellors' Association of New South Wales:** [www.financialcounsellors.asn.au](http://www.financialcounsellors.asn.au)

**Credit and Debt Hotline** 1800 808 488

#### Redfern

St Vincent De Paul 02 9698 1529

#### City

Credit Line 02 9951 5544

#### Surry Hills

The Salvation Army Moneycare 02 9212 1065

#### No Interest Loan Scheme (Nils)

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

Provide no interest loans for essential household items, such as a washing machine, refrigerator or medical appliances. A typical loan is for around \$600-\$1,000 and can be repaid over a year.

**Jubilee Resources** 02 9387 2300

Inner City, Eastern suburbs, Redfern, Erskineville, Surry Hills

**Dominican Sisters** 02 9554 3172

Inner West

**Bobbi Goldsmith** 02 9287 1104  
(HIV Aids)

## 6.5 Disputes

**Community Justice Centres** 02 9722 6044  
([www.cjc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cjc.nsw.gov.au))

Community Justice Centres provide **free** mediation and conflict management Services to help people resolve disputes. These disputes can involve:

- Neighbours – fences, trees, noise, pets, children, access, music
- Families – separating couples, extended families, parents and children, carers
- Civil and small claims matters

## 6.6 Advocacy Organisations

**Inner City Legal Centre** 02 9332 1966

**Kingsford Legal Centre** 02 9398 6366

**Marrickville Legal Centre** 02 9559 2899  
[www.mlc.asn.au](http://www.mlc.asn.au)

**City and Inner West Disability and Advocacy** 02 9212 2020

**Aboriginal Womens – Warringa Baiya Legal Centre** 02 9569 3847  
[www.warringabaiya.org.au](http://www.warringabaiya.org.au)

**Womens Legal Centre** 02 9749 5533  
[www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au](http://www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au)

**Domestic Violence Advocacy Service** 02 8745 6999  
[www.womenslegalnsw.asn.a](http://www.womenslegalnsw.asn.a)

**Macquarie Legal Centre** 02 9760 0111  
[www.macquarielegal.org.au](http://www.macquarielegal.org.au)

**Redfern Legal Centre** 02 9310 6500  
[www.rlc.org.au](http://www.rlc.org.au)

**South West Sydney Legal Centre** 02 9601 7777  
[www.swslc.org.au](http://www.swslc.org.au)



