

Water Charging Policy

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this document is to explain the policy for water charging. This includes social housing, affordable housing, and transitional housing.

Scope

- This policy applies to all clients (including applicants, former tenants and existing tenants) who accept accommodation in properties owned or managed by Housing Plus
- This policy applies to all Housing Plus properties except Crisis Housing.
- This policy describes the organization's objectives and policies regarding *Water Charging*.

References

Housing Plus will start a tenancy in accordance with:

- a) The Housing Act 2001
- b) Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and Regulations
- c) Housing Plus Policies.

Both the client and Housing Plus have rights and obligations under the above Acts, the residential tenancy agreement and this policy.

Definitions

Term: Tenancy Agreement

Definition: The Residential Tenancies Act 2010(NSW) (the RT Act 2010) defines a residential tenancy agreement as 'an agreement under which a person grants to another person for value a right of occupation of residential premises for the purpose of use as a residence' (section 13(1)).

Legislation

Housing Plus applies water usage charges in accordance with the RTA (section 139) which provides that: "a tenant under a social housing tenancy agreement must pay to the landlord any charges, determined in accordance with guidelines approved by the appropriate Minister, in respect of water usage by the tenant".

Responsibilities

Executive

- 1) Establish policy objectives

Management

- 1) Develops policies and procedures to achieve policy objectives
- 2) Coordinates and implements policy for *Water Charging*
- 3) Oversees training and ensures adoption by all employees responsible for *Water Charging*.
- 4) Reviews policy and procedure on biannual basis to ensure compliance with legislation and adopts accordingly

Employee responsibilities

- 1) Understand and comply with Housing Plus policies regarding *Water Charging*.

Water Charging

Housing Plus will:

- Charge clients for water usage in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and the relevant Ministerial Guidelines for Water Charging on Community Housing.
- Charge clients for water usage in a manner which is fair and consistent.
- Advise clients of any change to this policy.

Properties with Separate Water Meters

Housing Plus will charge clients who live in properties with separate water meters for the actual water usage as per the invoice received from the Council. In accordance with the ministerial guidelines, a separate water meter must be readily accessible for reading by the water authority and generate an individual water account.

If a water meter is not accessible for reading by the Council and does not generate an individual water account, Housing Plus will charge the clients as if it is a shared meter dwelling.

Housing Plus will calculate an estimated water use at the commencement of a tenancy and clients will be required to pay this rate for water in advance on a weekly/fortnightly basis with their rent payments.

Water charges will be added to the clients account each water billing cycle. Water charges will be calculated on a daily rate for clients that have vacated a property during a billing period to ensure appropriate charges are recovered.

Properties with Shared Water Meters

Housing Plus will use the quantity of bedrooms calculation for charging clients for water usage in properties with shared water meters where Housing Plus pays a water usage account.

The quantity of bedrooms calculation calculates all bedrooms within a share meter facility and apportion costs respectively.

For example;

Number 1, 2, 3 and 4 Smith Street all share the same water meter, property configurations are;

Total bedrooms on the shared water meter equals 10. Quarter water charge for this shared water meter is \$1,000 equating to \$100 per bedroom, Therefore the distribution of costs would equate to:

Address	Number of Bedrooms	Water Charge
1 Smith Street	1 Bedroom	\$100
2 Smith Street	2 Bedrooms	\$200
3 Smith Street	3 Bedrooms	\$300
4 Smith Street	4 Bedrooms	\$400

This would ensure the charges are apportioned fairly. Clients will initially be charged a daily rate based on the previous 12 months usage. This will be reconciled every 6 months so that

accurate daily rate charging will be effective. Daily rates will increase or decrease based on the actual water charge. Listed below is for illustrative purposes only.

Example:

Client A is living in a property that has a shared meter. The actual water usage charges for the previous 12 months equate to \$365. Therefore the Client pays \$1 a day for water usage.

- After 6 months the accounts are reconciled and the actual cost is \$200.
- The Client has been paying \$1 a day for 6 months equaling \$182
- The outstanding water charge is \$18.
- This can be charged direct to the Client or the Clients daily amount can be increased slightly to account for the deficit.

Other Water Usage Facilities

Housing Plus has other water usage facilities within its portfolio, these include shared laundry facilities. For these facilities the using clients will be apportioned an equal share of the water use charges only, based on a simple equation calculation.

Common Area Water Usage

Housing Plus will pay the water usage for all common areas. In properties with a shared water meter, Housing Plus will ensure that 20% of the water usage bill is allocated against the common area usage.

Payment of Water Usage Charges

Any payments for water must be specified as water payments. If a water charge remains unpaid for more than 21 days from date it is charged to the clients account, Housing Plus may take action through the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) to recover the unpaid water usage charges.

Allowances

Housing Plus may consider granting allowances to clients with separate water meters if -

- The client or a household member is on a home based dialysis.
- The client of a household member has a medical condition or disability that requires them to use significantly more water than usual.

In order to be considered for a water usage allowance, clients must complete the Water Allowance Application Form, the client must also provide documented medical evidence to support their application. Allowances will be credited to the clients account at the end of each quarterly billing cycle.

Exemption due to Absence from dwelling

There are no exemptions or allowances for clients who are temporarily away from their properties.

End of Tenancy Water Costs

Clients that transfer to another Housing Plus property or terminate their tenancy and move away from Housing Plus will be charged for water usage up to the end of the Residential Tenancy Agreement.

Hardship

Hardship refers to a situation where a person is unable, reasonably, because of illness, unemployment (recent) or other reasonable cause, to pay for their rent, water and other living expenses in full when they become due, this may be short term or long term,.

Financial Assistance and a payment plan may be available to clients who are suffering hardship.

Appeals and Complaints

Clients can appeal decisions relating to Water Charging in Community Housing. In particular the following appeal mechanisms exist -

- Appeal to Housing Plus via the Complaints and Appeals process.
- Appeal to the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) for any issue related to the application of the water charging method on properties with shared meters.
- Appeal to the Housing Appeals Committee regarding decisions to grant a water usage allowance.

The Housing Appeals Committee will not hear appeals relating to the actual water usage charges for clients in properties with separate water meters.

Concerns about the fairness and transparency of this policy in relation to compliance with the Regulatory Code can be referred to the NSW Office of the Registrar of Community Housing. www.housingnsw.gov.au