

WATER CHARGES POLICY

October 2024, Version: Final

1 Purpose and objective

This policy explains how Housing Plus charges for water.

2 Scope

- This policy applies to Housing Plus and its subsidiaries' employees, management and other stakeholders including volunteers.
- This policy applies to all Housing Plus tenants, except for crisis housing programs which are exempt from paying water charges.
- This policy describes the organisation's objectives and policies regarding water charging.

3 Policy

Housing Plus charges tenants for water usage in accordance with the NSW *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* and the NSW *Ministerial Guidelines for Water Charging in Community Housing* which can be found here: www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/community-housing-policies/water-charging-guidelines.

3.1 Properties with separate water meters

A property has a separate water meter if the meter is readily accessible for reading by the local water authority and generates an individual water account.

Tenants who live in properties with separate water meters are charged for actual water usage. Housing Plus determines the amount to be charged by reviewing the quarterly Water Consumption Notice received from the local water authority. We place a charge on the tenant's water account equal to the metered water usage for the property listed in the water authority's invoice.

New, transferring or succeeding tenants who move into a separately water charged property, will pay \$10 per household member per week until Housing Plus processes the first water authority bill for their property where the tenant has been living in the property for the full billing period.

On receipt of that water bill, Housing Plus will compare the amount paid by the tenant since their tenancy started with the tenant's actual usage of that period. Housing Plus will place any credit adjustment arising for that reconciliation on the tenant's account. Any debt adjustment will be included as an adjustment in the calculation of the first actual water charge for that tenancy.

If a water meter is not accessible for reading by the local water authority and does not generate an individual water account, Housing Plus charges the tenant as if the property was a shared meter dwelling.

3.2 Properties with shared local water authority meter and sub meters

Properties with shared water meters are properties with a single water meter read by the local water authority and sub meters for individual units that are not read by the local water authority but read by Housing Plus staff.

Housing Plus will read these meters every 6 months in May and November and charge tenants the actual water usage. We place a charge on the tenant's water account equal to the metered water usage for the property.

New, transferring or succeeding tenants who move into a shared water charged property, will pay \$10 per household member per week until Housing Plus reads the meter for the first time.

Once read and allocated to the tenancy, Housing Plus will compare the amount paid by the tenant since their tenancy started with the tenant's actual usage of that period. Housing Plus will place any credit adjustment arising for that reconciliation on the tenant's account. Any debt adjustment will be included as an adjustment in the calculation of the first actual water charge for that tenancy.

3.3 Properties without individual water meters

Some Housing Plus properties do not have a sub meter. In this case, Housing Plus will divide the total usage by the number of units in the complex.

New, transferring or succeeding tenants who move into this type of property will pay \$10 per household member per week until Housing Plus processes the first water authority bill for their property where the tenant has been living in the property for the full billing period.

On receipt of that water bill, Housing Plus will compare the amount paid by the tenant since their tenancy started with the amount charged for that period. Housing Plus will place any credit adjustment arising for that reconciliation on the tenant's account. Any debt adjustment will be included as an adjustment in the calculation of the first actual water charge for that tenancy.

3.4 Common area water usage

Housing Plus pays the water usage charges for common areas. In properties with a shared water meter, Housing Plus allocates 20% of the water usage bill to common area usage.

In the case of duplexes, 2 units sharing a common wall, there is no common area.

3.5 Other water usage facilities

Housing Plus has other water usage facilities within its portfolio, these include shared laundry facilities. For these facilities the tenants will be apportioned an equal share of the water use charges.

3.6 Notification of water usage charges

Housing Plus advises tenants of the method being used to calculate their water charges at the start of their tenancy and provides tenants with a copy of the *Housing Plus Water Charges Policy* when they sign their tenancy agreement.

3.7 Water charges when vacating the property

Tenants who are leaving their current dwelling or are transferring to another social housing or affordable housing dwelling are required to pay any water charges outstanding at the end of the tenancy. For properties where there is a separate meter read by the local water authority or a sub meter for the property, Housing Plus will read the water meter when the tenancy ends and charge the tenant for water used using the existing water charge rate from the local water authority.

3.8 Payment of water usage charges

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

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

3.9 Household allowances

Tenants with health conditions that require significant water usage, such as kidney dialysis, may request a water usage allowance from Housing Plus.

Where the local water authority provides an allowance in such circumstances, Housing Plus will assist the tenant to obtain an allowance from the water authority. Housing Plus will not provide an additional allowance if the water provider is already providing the allowance.

If the local water authority does not provide an allowance, Housing Plus may grant an allowance based on a calculation of the cost of 100 kilolitres of water per quarter from the local water authority. An allowance of 100 kilolitres of water per quarter aligns with the allowance offered by Sydney Water for customers undergoing kidney dialysis at home. Housing Plus will then adjust the tenant's water usage account at the start of each quarter.

Housing Plus reviews each request for a Water Charge Allowance on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the individual situation as shown by supporting documents provided with the request.

3.10 Hardship

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

As set out in our *Sustaining Tenancies Policy*, Housing Plus is committed to supporting tenants to manage their finances and meet their debt commitments.

Housing Plus encourages tenants experiencing hardship to contact us and discuss options for a payment plan.

4 Appeals and review of decisions

Decisions made under this policy can be reviewed or appealed. For more information, refer to the *Customer Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy*.

5 Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure adequate resources are provided to implement and support this policy Manage the implementation of and adherence to this policy Model appropriate standards of behaviour
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all employees and other stakeholders are aware of this policy and understand their obligations Ensure effective implementation of and adherence to this policy Model appropriate standards of behaviour
Employee, volunteers and other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and comply with this policy Model appropriate standards of behaviour

6 Definitions

Term	Definition
Tenancy agreement	The <i>Residential Tenancies Act 2010</i> (NSW) ("RTA 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))
Crisis accommodation	Short term housing that is generally delivered in partnership with specialist homelessness providers

8 Related policies and legislation

Legislation

- NSW Housing Act 2001
- NSW Residential Tenancies Act 2010

Policy

- NSW Community Housing Rent Policy
- Housing Plus Sustaining Tenancies Policy
- Housing Plus Feedback, Appeals and Complaints Policy
- Housing Plus Ending a Tenancy Policy
- Housing Plus Start of Tenancy Policy

9 DOCUMENT CONTROL

3.11 Document history

Action	Responsible Person	Date
Created Draft	Sarah Priestley Jenelle Woolf Shay Robertson	June 2021
Reviewed	Liz Stamatelos Justin Cantelo	July 2021
Approved	David Fisher	August 2021

Reviewed	Therese Short Chris Maybin Lena Jenson Harmony Meath Sean Ashby Liz Stamatelos	August 2024 October 2024
Approved	Justin Cantelo	October 2024