



Home front

Message from Executive Director

Dear Tenants

Welcome to the winter edition of *Home Front*.

Inside this bumper issue you will find updates about some new and innovative developments Housing ACT is creating. These developments include the *New Opportunities for Older Canberrans* with 297 new houses being built as part of the Commonwealth's Nation Building initiative. It is aimed at older tenants and will provide a quiet, secure, independent and social atmosphere. There are updates about the *Shared Equity Program*, and *Sale-to-Tenant Program* which provide tenants with an easier path to home ownership, and a new way in which tenants can SMS text message their maintenance issues to Spotless.

The Housing ACT Client Satisfaction Survey into public housing has been finalised, and

Ms Maureen Sheehan

I am delighted to announce that the overall satisfaction with services has risen to 75% this year, a rise from 69% in 2006 and 71% in 2008. In fact, 42% of tenants in 2010 said that they were 'very satisfied'. This is a great result for Housing ACT and I would like to assure everyone that the results of the survey are taken very seriously. The survey assists in informing service delivery and future policy directions of the department. I would like to take the opportunity to thank those tenants who participated.

Enjoy the winter season!

Executive Director
Housing and Community Services

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Each year Housing ACT provides one-off funding of up to \$5,000 to public and community housing tenants through the Tenant Initiated Grants (TIG) Program.

The funding supports projects that link public and community housing tenants to a range of support services and/or reduce poverty and isolation by fostering a stronger sense of community.

This year, 21 grants were approved for a wide range of projects and initiatives.

These include art programs; developing and maintaining community gardens; organised social events; and a social group for migrant women to further extend their knowledge of Australian culture and increase their English language skills.



Daphne's community spirit guided by her four-legged friend

Housing ACT tenant Daphne Mabbott has always been interested in helping the community. Even after being declared legally blind, Daphne's friends and family weren't surprised at her determination to maintain a strong community spirit.

Daphne began to lose her eyesight due to macular degeneration over 4½ years ago. Until then Daphne had worked and volunteered at a community organisation, and had been a keen gardener. As her vision deteriorated, she lost the ability to drive, read books, walk unaided and was unable to continue working. Determined not to give up, Daphne undertook the process required for a guide dog, and now Daphne and her black Labrador, Emily, are spotted all over Canberra, engaging with the community. Daphne, with the help

of a good friend, also altered her garden to include white flowers (as she can see white shades) and more scented plants that engage her other senses. She was awarded second prize last year in Housing ACT's annual Gardening Competition, *Courtyard Garden*. Daphne and her friend were inspired by the

gardening competition and decided to hold an open garden and fundraiser morning tea. The morning was a great success and over \$200 was donated to Guide Dogs Australia. Daphne is keen to hold another morning tea and is getting ready to enter this year's gardening competition. We wish her all the very best!



How maintenance is now **as easy as text messaging**

A new and convenient way to request maintenance is now available.

You can now SMS text to 0438 100 500

When texting a maintenance request, please include your address and a brief description of the work required. The request will be noted and a text message will be sent to you confirming the order number and the expected date of completion. **Do not reply to this message.** By using your order number you can SMS 0438 100 500 for further enquiries. If you do not receive a reply within 48 hours, please contact Housing Maintenance on 6207 1500 to confirm they have received your request.

New priority classifications for home maintenance

The Housing ACT Maintenance Helpdesk prioritises maintenance enquiries into the following classifications:

- Any work classified by the Maintenance Helpdesk as **URGENT (U4)** will be attended to within 4 hours.
- Any work classified by the Maintenance Helpdesk as **PRIORITY by 6pm on the next business day (PND)** will be attended to by 6pm on the next business day.
- Any work classified by the Maintenance Helpdesk as **PRIORITY 96 hours (P96)** will be attended to within 4 days.
- Any other work will be attended to within **20 days (N20)** or placed on the **planned maintenance program (OTH)**, depending on the nature and complexity of the work.

Note: It is important to keep a record of all your maintenance requests, particularly the work order number provided to you by the Maintenance Helpdesk.

Tenants who may be considering **purchasing their home**

There are now two ways to buy:

1 Sale-To-Tenant Program

- This process allows you to purchase 100% of your property.
- You must arrange 100% of the finance with your own Financial Institution.
- At settlement, you own your property and your relationship with Housing ACT ceases. You will make repayments to your financial institution as per your mortgage agreement.

2 Shared Equity Scheme

- This scheme allows you to purchase 70% of your property.
- The finance for the 70% is to be arranged through IMB Ltd.
- Housing ACT will retain 30% shared equity in the property. You will need to progressively purchase the remaining shared equity from Housing ACT by installments over a 15 year period from settlement.
- At settlement you own your property. You are no longer required to pay rent to Housing ACT. You are required to meet all maintenance costs.
- You will make repayments to your financial institution as per your mortgage agreement
- You will commence payments to Housing ACT after 5 years and complete the purchase of the equity share 15 years after settlement.

The process for both schemes are similar, however, the forms, letters and documentation are different. When applying please clearly identify which scheme you want. If you decide to change your application mid-way through the process, please contact your sales officer on 6207 4529 to ensure you receive the correct information and correct forms.

NOTE Some Housing ACT properties may not be available for sale.

Update:

A new option for older public housing tenants

Registrations for an Expression of Interest into *New Housing Choice for Older Canberrans* have now closed. Housing ACT was overwhelmed by the level of interest—over 375 registrations were received.

All registrations are being assessed and everyone who registered will be contacted and advised about the status of their registration.

Housing ACT continues to receive useful feedback through forums, such as the information sessions held in May, and from our tenant community. This allows us (where possible) to consider and incorporate your suggestions into the design of these new homes. For the latest on the design, construction and inclusions in the homes, visit our website: www.dhcs.act.gov.au/supportivehousing

Winter safety

Heaters, fire places and electric blankets help to maintain thermo comfort in homes during the colder months, but they can also increase the chance of a fire. Here are a few tips to stay fire safe in your home:

- Test your smoke alarm regularly to ensure it is working properly
- Your alarm should be 'hard wired' so do not remove the cover and never touch the battery
- Check electric blankets for damage or frayed cords and never leave them on when no one is home
- Keep curtains, tablecloths and bedding away from portable heaters
- Never leave cooking unattended
- Make a fire escape plan to ensure everyone knows how to safely exit your home if there is a fire.

If you have any concerns about the operation of your smoke alarm, please contact the Maintenance Helpdesk on 6207 1500.

Visit the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) website for more information and tips at www.esa.act.gov.au

Recipe corner

Gypsy soup | Courtesy Ian W, Belconnen

Fry 1 onion (chopped)

Add 1 tsp to 1tbsp Laksa paste (to taste)

1 can of chick peas (drained)

Add chopped carrot, celery, potato and pumpkin and coat vegetables with Laksa paste.

Add enough stock/water to cover and boil until vegetables are cooked.

Serve with crusty bread.



Community Linkages Program

Resilience and assertiveness

This course provides an overview of the concept of resilience. It focuses on the importance of building a healthy self esteem and good personal resilience through learning and coping techniques, strategies and basic skills.

Conflict resolution

Participants will find out about the nature of conflict, what it is, different levels of conflict, and the importance of its resolutions by the application of both personal and professional skills, and strategies to effectively manage this.

Healthy living

Learn more about the recommended Australian guidelines for physical activity and healthy eating. The course also provides information on the importance of sleep and maintaining your wellbeing.

Anger management

This course addresses the nature and cycle of anger, exploring some of the underlying causes and difficult emotions associated with it. The course also focuses on identifying positive ways of dealing with anger.

Dates for the courses are to be advised. For more information, please contact Tricia Eldridge on 6264 0200 or mobile 0438 485 909.

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible.

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an **alternative format**—such as large print or audio—please telephone **(02) 6205 0619**.

If English is not your first language and you require the **translating and interpreting service**—please telephone **131 450**.

If you are deaf or hearing impaired and require the **TTY typewriter service**—please telephone **(02) 6205 0888**.

Contact details — Housing ACT

Housing ACT General Enquiries
Phone **13 34 27**
www.dhcs.act.gov.au

Spotless Maintenance line
Phone **6207 1500** (24 hours, 7 days)

Housing ACT Complaints Unit
Phone **6207 1515**

Joint Champions Group
Secretariat
Phone **6207 1507**

Options for rent payments

Most people have competing financial obligations, but it's still imperative you regularly pay your rent. Housing ACT has a Tenancy Agreement with its tenants, which states that rent accounts must be paid a fortnight in advance to avoid the possibility of legal action being taken.

The following options are available for Housing ACT tenants to pay rent:

- over the counter at ACT Shopfronts
- over the counter at Australia Post
- Centrelink direct debit
- bank direct debit
- B Pay

If you wish to discuss payment of rent or perhaps change the way you pay your rent, please contact your Housing Manager. By keeping them informed of any difficulties, you can receive advice and help reduce associated problems.

If you are experiencing financial hardship, want to budget, want to negotiate with creditors, need information, or just wish to talk through the stresses of living on a low or restricted income you should contact Care Inc Financial Counselling Service on 6257 1788 or visit www.carefcs.org. Care Inc treat all matters confidentially, are fee free for eligible clients, and can advocate on your behalf.

Housing ACT Tenant's Handbook: an introduction to Housing ACT

The new and updated Tenant's Handbook is now available. If you would like to receive a copy please contact Housing ACT on 13 34 27 and one will be posted to you. Otherwise, your Housing Manager will have a new handbook available for you during your next client service visit.