

# Financial Hardship and Temporary Absence Policy

## Purpose

This policy outlines how CatholicCare Victoria Housing Ltd (CCVH) assists renters who are experiencing financial hardship or who are required to be temporarily absent from their property.

## Scope

This policy applies to all tenancies managed by CCVH.

This policy applies to both residential rental agreements (rental agreements) and rooming house agreements. Unless stated otherwise, references to “renters”, “tenancies” and “rental agreements” also applies to rooming house residents.

## Policy Statement

### Guiding Principles

CCVH is committed to:

- Meeting our contractual, legal, and regulatory duties,
- Helping renters understand their rights and responsibilities in their rental agreement,
- Treating renters who are experiencing financial hardship and temporary absence with sensitivity and on a case-by-case basis,
- Sustaining tenancies through early intervention and appropriate referrals to support services,
- Giving due consideration to human rights and considering the impact of any decisions we make under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006*.

### Financial Hardship

Financial hardship occurs when a renter is unable to pay their rent without impacting on their ability to meet their basic living needs. This may be due to:

- Loss or significant reduction of the household’s primary income
- Spousal separation or divorce
- A change in circumstances that has negatively affected finances, for example health problems, increased medical expenses or death in the family
- Family violence (see *Family Violence Policy*)
- Other significant and unexpected financial circumstances.

## Temporary Absence

A temporary absence is when a renter is required to be absent from their property for a short period of time. Renters must inform CCVH if they will be absent from their property for a period greater than six weeks and up to a maximum of six months.

If a renter is required to pay for temporary accommodation (e.g., respite, rehabilitation, and nursing homes), or will not have access to their regular statutory income due to the absence (e.g., prison), they can apply for reduction to their weekly rent payment. For any other reason (e.g., a holiday) the weekly rent payment must still be paid for the approved period of absence.

As the level of demand for community housing is high, extensions to the six-month period can only be granted in extremely exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis by the Chief Executive Officer of CCVH. The six-month timeframe commences from the date the renter left the property.

Where a renter is absent for longer than six months, and an extension has not been approved, CCVH may take action to regain possession of the property (see *End of Tenancy Policy*).

## Applying for a Rent Reduction

CCVH assists renters by offering a reduction in rent where there is demonstrated financial hardship. To apply for a reduced rent, a renter must complete a *Rent Reduction Application Form* and supply supporting documents which verify:

- The loss or significant reduction of the household's primary income that impacts on a renter's ability to pay their rent; and/or
- The date the renter entered temporary accommodation, the length of stay and estimated date of return, and confirmation that they are paying a fee for accommodation costs or will not have access to their regular statutory income.

CCVH will assess the application and inform the renter of the outcome in writing within 10 business days. If approved, CCVH will temporarily reduce the rent due to CCVH. The rent reduction will apply until either:

- The renter returns to the property,
- The renter is no longer in financial hardship,
- The maximum period of approved absence from property has passed.

Approval to grant a rent reduction will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Chief Executive Officer of CCVH.

## Related Information

- CCVH Rent Setting Policy
- CCVH Identifying and Responding to Family Violence Policy
- CCVH Breach of Rental Agreement Policy
- CCVH End of Tenancy Policy

- Rent Reduction Application Form
- Housing Act 1983 (Vic)
- Residential Tenancies Act 2021 (Vic)
- Victorian Housing Registrar Performance Standard 1 (Tenant and Housing Services)
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)

### Transparency and Accessibility

This policy will be publicly available on our website.

### Version Control

<b>Version</b>	#1	<b>Review frequency</b>	Approved: June 2023 Next Review: June 2025
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