

Guidelines: Natural Disaster Management for Community Housing

Last updated: 3 November 2016

Table of contents

Table of contents	2
1.0 Housing Recovery Framework.....	3
2.0 Disaster Recovery – Role of Community Housing	3
3.0 Responding to Tenants	4
4.0 Referrals and Allocations for Vacancies	4
5.0 Use of Surplus Funds to Meet Expenses.....	4
6.0 Housing Recovery Coordination Centre.....	5
7.0 Housing Services – Emergency Housing Assistance Request (EHAR).....	5
8.0 Further Information – Products and Services.....	6

1.0 Housing Recovery Framework

Following a disaster event, government funded community housing organisations may have a number of specific responsibilities to assist impacted households, both in community housing and in the broader housing market. These responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- direct (legal) responsibility for people residing in community housing properties, in accordance with usual landlord responsibilities within the legislative framework of the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (RTRAA)*.
- a critical responsibility to directly respond to social housing tenants in the disaster affected areas who have been displaced from their housing
- participating in a department coordinated approach between agencies that have responsibility for housing related strategies in relation to medium and long term community recovery.

The response by Community Housing providers may require different strategies depending on the scale and geographical spread of the disaster event, volume of households impacted by the disaster and available housing options both within the social housing system and the broader housing market. The response could include:

- participating in a coordinated response with the department to identify the appropriate emergency / short term housing options for impacted community housing tenancies and for impacted households in the broader housing market (renting or home owners). Identifying housing options for the people in the broader housing market may include: housing ineligible applicants, referring and assisting households with Emergency Housing Assistance Request (EHAR) and referring households to Housing Service Centres.
- reviewing short term housing arrangements to transition people from emergency/short term housing into medium/long term housing solutions where necessary
- working with key partners such as the department's Building Assets Services (BAS) to assess and remedy property damage
- working with other community housing organisations to provide a coordinated housing response and to maximise the available housing options for impacted clients.

2.0 Disaster Recovery – Role of Community Housing

For each disaster recovery event, the scale and delivery of the response from the department, in conjunction with other agencies including government departments and community housing providers, will be determined by several factors including but not limited to:

- the size / scale of the disaster event i.e. have significant geographical areas been affected or only localised communities;
- an initial assessment of the number of properties damaged and population affected;
- what the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS), also known as the Human Social Recovery Group, proposed response will be e.g. they will establish specific recovery centres or undertake outreach services only;
- what the Australian Government's response will be; and
- any other relevant information impacting on the disaster recovery response.

Community Housing providers should coordinate their response with the Department who will remain flexible when determining the most appropriate response, while also ensuring that responses and activities complement the Queensland Government and broader disaster recovery responses, to ensure recovery activities are cohesive and provide the most appropriate services for clients in a timely and responsive way.

The department will continually monitor the disaster recovery response as alternative service delivery and program responses may be identified as the disaster recovery activities progress.

3.0 Responding to Tenants

There are a range of options that can be considered to respond to tenants who have been impacted by a natural disaster. The department puts the following provisions in place for public housing tenants affected by natural disasters in Queensland. Community housing providers are encouraged to implement similar strategies for their tenants affected by natural disasters.

The DHPW approach is to:

- suspend rent arrears payments and debt collection processes
- waive assessing the income of temporary occupants in household rent assessments, where the temporary household members are staying in the household because their own housing is uninhabitable directly due to the disaster event
- credit households that have been impacted by significant property damage or are displaced and paying other accommodation costs, with four weeks rent to help alleviate their housing costs.

These provisions can be implemented for an initial four-week period and then extended if required at the community housing provider's discretion.

The *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008* includes provisions for reducing or waiving rent where properties have reduced liveability. More information is available from the Residential Tenancies Authority at www.rta.qld.gov.au.

4.0 Referrals and Allocations for Vacancies

To ensure that households affected by natural disasters are assisted in a timely manner, the following provisions will be put in place to fill any social housing vacancies that Community Housing providers manage:

- Existing social housing tenants affected by natural disasters will be assisted to transfer as a priority and can be provided with immediate allocations. As per the existing transfer policy, department/provider initiated transfers may occur with no reassessment of tenant eligibility.
- Applicants affected by natural disasters will be assessed with the highest order of allocation, subject to availability of stock and the needs of other Very High Need applicants.
- Assistance can be provided to ineligible households affected by natural disasters. These households will be reviewed after six months to assess their continued need for housing assistance.
- Allocations will continue to be made directly from the Housing Register. Housing Service Centres and community housing providers will work collaboratively to manage any vacancies and the level of housing need.

5.0 Use of Surplus Funds to Meet Expenses

Funded community housing providers delivering services within a declared disaster area are able to use surplus program funds to meet disaster recovery related expenses and respond to additional demand for assistance.

It is important to note that a disaster must be officially declared by the Premier, Minister or district disaster coordinator before surplus program funding can be used to meet disaster recovery related expenses. For more information about *Provision for declarations of disaster situations* please refer to the *Disaster Management Act 2003*. <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au>

To check if the area that you provide services to has been activated as a natural disaster area, please visit the following webpage <http://www.qldreconstruction.org.au/ndrra/ndrra-activations>.

Use of surplus program funds should be in accordance with the 'Allowable Expenditure and Surplus Policy', relevant funding agreements and program specifications. Providers should ensure they have covered all normal business expenses and maintenance of their properties prior to using any of their surplus funds.

Providers using surplus program funds to respond to declared disaster events are requested to email their Contract Manager once a month briefly outlining additional services provided to disaster affected households and include an estimate of expended surplus funds. Program funds expended under these provisions will also need to be acquitted by organisations via the Community Housing Annual Financial Return.

Current Community Rent Scheme head-lease providers funded to operate within a declared disaster area may use surplus funds to increase their funded quota to respond to increased demand for housing within the declared disaster area. However, any new head-lease arrangements should not extend past the term of their current service agreement. Providers should advise the department as soon as possible of additional properties sourced in order to maintain the integrity of the department's property record systems and Housing Register data.

Funded providers may also be approached to determine if they are able to support Housing Service Centres by taking on the tenancy management of some departmental properties in areas affected by natural disaster via temporary accommodation leases. For example, demountables on vacant land owned by the department or funded providers.

For more information, contact your Contract Manager.

6.0 Housing Recovery Coordination Centre

The establishment of a Community Recovery Centre usually occurs in a location that enables services to be delivered to the majority of disaster affected clients and allows for the co-location of a range of government, non-government, industry and community bodies under the one roof to provide easy access to information on recovery services, financial assistance (provided this has been activated), and referrals to other required services.

If appropriate and required, Community Housing providers can establish a presence within these centres. Any requests for the involvement of a Housing Recovery response in a Recovery Centre should be negotiated and actioned through the Director of Recovery Operations for the region.

7.0 Housing Services – Emergency Housing Assistance Request (EHAR)

Housing and Homelessness Services (a division of the Department of Housing and Public Works) has developed a process known as the Emergency Housing Assistance Request (EHAR) which is

activated in response to disaster events in order to identify clients in housing need as well as collect data and report on the housing needs and support provided to displaced members of a community.

Community Housing providers should notify Housing and Homelessness Services when they have a shortage of available accommodation options for re-housing their tenants who have been displaced by the disaster event. . This will ensure that these people are included in the needs analysis that will inform provision of broader accommodation options.

Providers can also assist tenants and members of the broader community who have been impacted by a natural disaster to fill out an EHAR form. EHAR forms are made available online when a disaster is declared and can be found on the department's website at <http://www.qld.gov.au/housing>.

8.0 Further Information – Products and Services

The Queensland Government has a range of information, products and/or services that funded providers may find useful when responding to clients and tenants that have been impacted by a natural disaster. Information about the available services can be found at <http://www.qld.gov.au/housing>, otherwise please talk to staff at your nearest Housing Service Centre.