

M11 Hoarding

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance on how YWCA National Housing and YWCA Housing (YWCA) are to approach and manage situations of compulsive hoarding in YWCA properties.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all YWCA staff, contractors and volunteers involved in tenancy management and property maintenance (Employees). The policy applies to both residential rental agreements and rooming house agreements. Unless stated otherwise, references to “renters/tenants” include rooming house residents and references to “tenancies” include rooming house residencies.

3. Policy Aim

YWCA aims to ensure that people living in their properties achieve and maintain a functional and independent life that supports their capacity to sustain their tenancies and creating housing stability.

4. Definitions

Compulsive hoarding	A behavioural pattern involving an excessive accumulation of possessions and causing significant distress or impairment to the individual.
Renter/tenant	A person who is a signatory to the lease/rental agreement with YWCA for the home they live in and includes rooming house residents.
Obsessive collecting	Any excessive accumulation of items that the person collecting has little to no control over.

5. Policy Statement

YWCA seeks to balance the following four key principles when approaching, assessing and remedying instances of hoarding:

- Renters/tenants must be treated with dignity and their legal rights respected;
- The safety of the household is paramount;
- The safety, health and amenity of neighbours should not be adversely affected;
- YWCA’s property assets must be properly maintained.

When compulsive hoarding is identified in a YWCA property, Employees will engage with relevant service providers to help put strategies in place for the renter to reduce clutter or squalor, and address the renter/tenant’s hoarding behaviour.

Employees are to ensure they have adequate protection (this may include gloves, foot protection, face mask, coverall, goggles, and/or handwashing and sanitising items) when entering a property in which hoarding has been identified.

Employees are not to intervene without the consent and cooperation of the renter/tenant unless the amount or nature of the accumulated goods poses an immediate and significant risk to the property and/or to neighbours or the household occupants, such as due to the risk of fire, emergency access, pests or noxious odours. YWCA has both a duty and a legal right to insist on urgent action to reduce such risks.

If the renter/tenant is unwilling or unable to consent and cooperate in circumstances where their hoarding poses an unacceptable risk, YWCA may take legal action to obtain a compliance order or, as a last resort, to end the tenancy.

6. Hoarding

Hoarding may involve obsessive collecting of items, but more often it is an inability to dispose of standard household items that are no longer needed. Commonly hoarded items include personal papers, newspapers, clothing, furniture, appliances, food, household rubbish, animals and hard rubbish.

Most people have most of these things in their home, but compulsive hoarding takes this to an excessive level, often severely reducing access to essential areas of the property such as the bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. Hoarders may experience a high degree of discomfort, distress or shame, but feel powerless to change their behaviour.

People affected by hoarding may experience a high level of isolation; they may be unaware that their behaviour is a risk to themselves and others, and will often reject offers of assistance, fearing this will result in removal of their possessions.

Situations involving hoarding behaviour and/or squalid living environments are complex, and a broad range of service providers need to be involved. Progress can be slow, and many cases are not resolved. Often, the goal is simply to ensure the safety of the household and to minimise risk.

7. Assessment and Referral

YWCA will make all efforts to achieve the consent and cooperation of the renter/tenant when making assessment of hoarding and /or squalor in its properties and will always prioritise safety.

YWCA employees will inspect the property and ensure that safety devices such as smoke alarms and RCD's are working and have appropriate clearance from hoarded goods and utilities are connected. Assessment regarding welfare concerns for occupants, animals or significant safety risks will also be made and the renter/tenant informed of the outcomes.

Referral to appropriate and experienced support services will be made and every effort to assist the renter/tenant to stabilise and sustain their tenancy will be made. Follow-up inspections will continue until the issue is rectified and YWCA is satisfied that the renter/tenant is safe, and the property standards are adequately maintained.

8. Further action

YWCA will use the mechanisms available to it under state residential tenancy legislation to assist a renter/tenant to remedy and/or rectify issues of hoarding and access the support services they may require. This may include issue of breach notices and application for compliance/performance orders from a civil administrative tribunal or magistrate's court.

If all efforts to remedy and sustain the tenancy fail, YWCA may move to end the tenancy. Renters/tenants human rights will always be considered throughout any end of tenancy processes.

8. Complaints, Feedback, and Appeal of decisions

YWCA has an effective and appropriate response in place to deal with complaints and ensures that accurate information and records of investigations are maintained. YWCA will ensure that privacy principles are followed at all times and tenant confidentiality is maintained throughout the incident management process.

YWCA welcomes anyone to query any decisions we make and/or ask questions about our work practices. If a customer wishes to provide feedback to YWCA and/or believes a decision made by us is incorrect, they can register their feedback and/or lodge an appeal using the YWCA Feedback and Appeals Policy.

Document Control Data	
Policy Framework	
Responsible Body	Chief Executive Officer
Accountable Officer	General Manager, Community Housing
Application	All employees of YWCA
Supersedes	All previous local policies
Associated documents	YWCA Housing Policies and Procedures YWCA Feedback and Appeals Policy and Procedures YWCA Privacy Policies and Procedures YWCA Customer Service Charter
Legislation, Frameworks, Standards, Codes and Agreements	Housing Assistance Act 1996 (COM) Housing Act 1983 (VIC) Housing Act 2003 (QLD) Housing Regulations 2015 (QLD) Housing Act 1982 (NT) Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (VIC) Residential tenancies & Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD) Residential Tenancies Act 1999 (NT) National Affordable Housing Agreement Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 Queensland Human Rights Act 2019 National Community Housing Standards Department of Human Services Standards (VIC) Consumer Charter for Community Managed Housing and Homelessness Services (VIC)

	National Community Housing Regulatory Code Victorian Community Housing Regulatory Code State based agreements between YWCA and statutory bodies		
Approval and Amendment History			
Review period – 2 years			
Approval Date	Version	Amendments	Next Review
June 2022	1.0	Superseded Hoarding	June 2024