

# 10. Housing issues for families of inmates

If your housing situation has changed because your family member has gone into prison and you need help with accommodation you can apply for social housing (public housing and community housing) or housing support.

FACS Housing NSW and community housing provide social housing for people who have low incomes and additional needs, such as health issues or disability, which make it hard to get private rentals. You can apply for social housing on one application form. You can also use this form to apply for a transfer if you are already a tenant in social housing.

Putting in your application for housing as soon as possible is helpful as you may have a long wait. Some community housing providers have transitional housing and partnerships with support organisations. Contact FACS Housing NSW on **1300 468 746**. Applications for After Hours Temporary Accommodation and Rentstart can be lodged in person or by mail or over the phone.

Link2home provides information, conducts assessments and makes referrals to homelessness services across NSW. It brings together several homelessness telephone services including Homeless Persons Information Centre, Y Connect and the After



Hours Temporary Accommodation line and is being delivered by the Housing Contact Centre. The service is for people who are homeless or who are worried they will become homeless, as well as for advocates acting on a person's behalf.

Link2home is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year on **1800 152 152**.

## What if the lease is in the name of my family member in prison?

If a lease is in the name of your family member now in prison, contact FACS Housing NSW or the relevant community housing provider to explain that the tenant is in prison. FACS Housing NSW may let people keep their tenancy

for up to six months if they stay in prison for a short time, and pay a nominal rent, usually \$5 per week. Community housing may also be flexible. FACS may allow friends or family of the inmate to stay in the property to safeguard the inmate's belongings and to maintain the property. They'll need to pay rent as if they were a FACS Housing NSW tenant during that time. If the tenant is incarcerated for a longer period, they'll need to give up their tenancy and reapply for FACS Housing NSW accommodation before they're released.

Being rehoused depends on availability of a suitable property. Major rental arrears or histories of tenancy issues such as damaging property can make it difficult to get rehoused. This means it's important to tell FACS Housing NSW or the relevant community housing provider what's happening when someone is incarcerated so they don't get into debt. Past tenants who give up their properties do not automatically get rehoused post release. Family members can often negotiate with a housing provider to clean out and store the inmate's belongings and return keys. However, there are time limits on how long these belongings can be stored.

If the tenant's partner and/or children remain in the house after the tenant has gone into prison contact FACS Housing NSW for a review of the situation. In some

cases it may be possible for the tenancy to be transferred. You will need to fill in the *Application for Housing Assistance and Recognition as a Tenant Supplement* form and send or take it to a local housing office with the required supporting documents. See [www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au) for fact sheets and forms.

If you are already a tenant and need help with tenancy issues contact Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service NSW. See [www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au) to find a local service near you.

## Private rental

If you need to move into private rental accommodation, you may be eligible for help through FACS Housing NSW Private Rental Assistance scheme. This provides a range of financial assistance for eligible clients to help them set up or maintain a tenancy in the private rental market. The types and level of assistance provided are based on individual circumstances and needs, and are intended to:

- > assist clients to establish or keep a sustainable tenancy in the private sector;
- > provide quick financial help with housing-related costs to clients in need, particularly those facing homelessness;
- > assist tenants whom Housing NSW has assessed as ineligible for a public housing lease

extension due to their income and assets, to make the move to private rental accommodation.

There are five types of Private Rental Assistance or Rentstart assistance:

- > Rentstart Bond Loan;
- > Advance Rent;
- > Rentstart Move;
- > Tenancy Assistance;
- > Temporary Accommodation.

Rentstart is available over the phone from FACS Housing NSW Contact Centre (**1300 HOUSING**) and in some FACS Housing NSW offices during normal office hours. Under Housing Pathways, community housing providers can give access to Rentstart help too.

FACS Housing NSW will assess applications for Rentstart Bond Loan, Advance Rent, Tenancy Assistance and Temporary Accommodation within one working day of receiving the application and all necessary supporting information from the client.

The following clients may also apply for Rentstart:

- > clients currently receiving a Private Rental Subsidy;
- > former unsatisfactory social housing tenants who owe money to the social housing provider or who have been evicted;
- > clients exiting social housing at the end of a fixed-term

provisional lease (3 or 6 months) who are not eligible for Recognition as a Tenant (RaaT).

## Difficulties meeting mortgage payments

If you have a mortgage and your partner is imprisoned, you may have a reduced income, and difficulty meeting mortgage payments. Talk to your mortgage provider about your circumstances to see if you can negotiate your payment arrangements. Do this as soon as you have difficulty meeting payments – it will be harder to do once you have significant arrears.

## Housing options for Aboriginal people

If you are Aboriginal you can apply for Aboriginal housing as well as



applying for social housing through FACS Housing NSW.

## Moving to be close to your family member's prison

Some families move closer to a prison so they can visit their family member more often. Bear in mind that if your family member has a lengthy sentence they can expect to be transferred to various prisons. It can be expensive to try to follow

them around to different prisons across the state. It can also be very disruptive, especially for children. Also think about what it will mean to leave your support networks behind, and where you will want to live once your family member leaves the prison. Where possible, CSNSW will try to locate inmates

as close to family as possible. Classifications accommodated in centres and availability of beds are two of the factors that have to be considered. You can ask for your family member to be located close to you by writing to the CSNSW.

## Need help?

Note that 1800 numbers are free for calls from a landline but may only be available in certain locations, e.g. outside Sydney. Some may charge for calls from mobile phones, so check this if you need to call from a mobile. Check with your local library for free internet access.

## Housing

### FACS Housing NSW (Department of Family & Community Services)

Contact for information about social housing, Rentstart Bond Loans and other help.

**1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746)**

(8.30am–4.30pm weekdays)

[www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)

### Rentstart and other financial assistance

For details of types of support and eligibility see the website or call:

**1300 HOUSING (1300 468 746)**

[www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au)

### Women's Information and Referral Service (WIRS)

Information about organisations and services for women in NSW, including housing and other support services.

**1800 817 227**

## Crisis accommodation

### Link2Home Homelessness Line

Link2Home provides 24/7 information for people who are homeless

or at risk of homelessness about local services, assess what kind of help people need, and refer people to appropriate specialist homelessness services, support services, temporary accommodation and other services.

**1800 152 152**



## Tenancy advice

### Tenants NSW

Find your local Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service by using the website. Type in your postcode to find services near you that give advice and information about renting, tenants' rights, etc.

[www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au)

See also:

[www.tenanthelp.com.au/nsw](http://www.tenanthelp.com.au/nsw)

### Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services

[www.nswats.com.au](http://www.nswats.com.au)

Assists with public and private tenancies, including bond, temporary accommodation and tenants' rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Greater Sydney..... **9698 0873**

Northern NSW ..... **1800 248 913**  
or **6643 4426**

Western NSW ..... **6884 0969**

Southern NSW..... **1800 672 185**  
or **4472 9363**

