

Information for sharehouse tenants affected by COVID-19

Loss of income due to COVID-19

Due to the emerging and evolving situation of the COVID-19 virus, you, or others you live with in shared accommodation, may have recently lost employment or anticipate losing income due to the closure of your workplace, or because of becoming infected with the virus. This may impact on your ability to pay rent.

On 22 March 2020, the Government announced it will provide a temporary Coronavirus Supplement and other increases to income support payments to new and existing income support recipients from 27 April 2020 for six months. There may be other income support payments available to you. Please visit the following websites for fact Sheets for Australian Government payments for households:

<https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/households>
and individuals:
[www.dss.gov.au about-the-department/coronavirus-covid-19-information-and-support](http://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/coronavirus-covid-19-information-and-support)

Rent arrears due to loss of income

If your ability to pay your rent, or those living with you in shared accommodation are unable to contribute to the rent, you are likely to fall into rent arrears which may impact on your ability to sustain your tenancy agreement.

If you, or other rent contributors living with you, can no longer pay their share of the rent, talk to your agent or lessor.

The Australian Government is currently working on policies and subsidies which may assist with mortgage repayments and the major banks have offered mortgage repayment relief and interest rate reductions. Therefore lessors will not have to make repayments for a period of time. A decision to waive or reduce your rent may be in the lessor's

interest given the high vacancy rates due to the current crisis.

You could request that the lessor consider significantly reducing your rent for a period of time to enable you, and others living with you in shared accommodation, to sustain your tenancy during the COVID-19 period.

If an arrangement to reduce the rent cannot be made, you may have no other option but to apply to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) seeking to terminate the tenancy on grounds of excessive hardship, in accordance with the provisions of the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008.

Reducing the spread of COVID-19

It is important that everyone in your home is taking extra precautions with their hygiene to reduce the spread of infection. Currently, you must self-isolate if any of the following applies to you:

- you have COVID-19
- you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- you arrived in Australia after midnight on 15 March 2020

Self-isolation lasts for 14 days. If you live in shared accommodation and need to avoid contact with other people please follow the following guidance on what avoiding contact with other people means in practice.

Separate yourself from other people: Keep away from other people in your home. As much as possible, you should stay in your room with the door closed, only using communal kitchens, bathrooms and living areas when necessary. You should use a separate bathroom, if available. Avoid using the kitchen while others are using it. Take your meals back to your room to eat.

Limit contact with pets and animals: You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while

you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people.

Avoid sharing household items: Avoid sharing dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items. Use a dishwasher (if available) to clean and dry your used crockery and cutlery; if this is not possible, wash them by hand using detergent and warm water and dry them thoroughly, using a separate tea towel.

Entry or inspections

If you have received an entry notice and are concerned about persons entering your home due to the current health risk of COVID-19, try to negotiate to postpone the proposed entry time or request that the entry does not proceed during this time.

You may consider requesting that anyone entering the home is required to wash their hands, wear a mask and not touch anything, and to keep a safe social distance from all members in your shared accommodation at all times. Social distancing means less contact between you and other people. Remember that it is in the interest of both parties to take all necessary precautions.

Ending your tenancy

If you or others you live with in shared accommodation is affected with COVID-19, you may want to leave, while others may want to stay, or vice versa.

To change the term of a tenancy agreement there must be an agreement in writing between all parties to that agreement. *All parties* means all the co-tenants as well as the lessor or agent.

[You can review our fact sheet to find out more about when a housemate is a co-tenant, sub-tenant, rooming accommodation resident or lodger:

<https://tenantsqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Share-Housing-Your-Legal-Status-2016-A.pdf>

If you want to leave, whether you are in a fixed term or periodic agreement, you cannot terminate

either the whole of the tenancy or even your part of it alone. You must either:

- A. Get an agreement in writing; or,
- B. Get an order from the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (the Tribunal) which terminates your responsibilities as a co-tenant.

If you simply leave and your name is still on the lease, you will remain jointly and severally liable for the premises.

Once you know you need to leave you should start discussing the situation with the other tenants. Find out if they want you to find a replacement housemate or not. If you are leaving a fixed term agreement early you may need to discuss compensation.

If you are trying to find a replacement housemate, you should put any proposals in writing and keep records. This will be useful as evidence if you cannot resolve the situation and a dispute arises.

For more information about transferring your interest or finding a replacement tenant, see our factsheet:

<https://tenantsqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Termination-of-Co-tenancies-2016.pdf>

Useful websites

For further information on COVID19 from Qld Health and the Australian Government, please visit:

Queensland Health:

<http://health.qld.gov.au/coronavirus>

Australian Government Department of Health:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

Further advice

If you need further advice, please contact Tenants Queensland's free tenancy advice service on 1300 744 263. Tenants Queensland delivers QSTARS, the Queensland Statewide Tenancy, Advice and Referral Service.