

# Tenant Relations in Your Community

## *Tenant Counselling*



### TENANT COUNSELLING

#### When should you counsel tenants?

As a housing manager, you will be required to provide counselling to tenants throughout their occupancy of a home. There are three points in time when you should counsel a tenant: before they move into the home, as they move in, and approximately six months later, as a follow-up.

**Note:** If you are not responsible for coordinating medium- to large-scale maintenance, make sure to bring the appropriate personnel for these counselling visits.

#### COUNSELLING TENANTS BEFORE THEY MOVE IN

##### Discussing responsibilities

New tenants should receive counselling before they move into the home. You should meet with them to explain their responsibilities. Discuss your community's housing policies regarding maintenance and repair, tenant damage, occupancy charges, and any other relevant items.

Keep in mind that they may be reluctant to ask questions or voice concerns. Therefore, be sure that you listen carefully and do the following:



- Review the program requirements and the ongoing responsibilities of both the tenants and the housing department.
- Review their file and look for responsibilities that may be new to them. This includes things such as maintenance, minor repairs and housing charges. For some tenants, these responsibilities may mean that they need to learn new skills. For example, they may be unfamiliar with the mechanism of a forced-air furnace.
- Let them know what equipment/tools they may need to maintain the home (for example, lawn mower, rakes, and vacuum cleaner). If they need to purchase these items, they may appreciate advance notice.

## Housing Charges or Rental Payments

If your community enforces a housing charge or rental payments, you will need to discuss with tenants how payments can be made. There are four common payment methods:

- If tenants are receiving social assistance benefits, see if you can arrange to have the payments sent directly to the housing department. This will ensure that tenants do not fall into arrears.
- Tenants may wish to pay by cheque. Be sure that they write their account number and their full name on the cheque. Post-dated cheques are acceptable and can be provided for several months at a time.
- Alternatively, tenants may wish to pay in cash. If they choose this option, stress that the payment must be made on or before the first of each month. Tenants should always ask for, and be provided with, a receipt.
- Others may choose to make preauthorized payments that are automatically taken from their bank account on the due date. Ask tenants to give you a void cheque so that you can record the account number.

Remind tenants that they should contact the office right away if they have a problem with their payment.

## COUNSELLING TENANTS WHO ARE READY TO MOVE IN

When tenants are ready to move into the home, you will need to conduct another counselling visit. You may want to consider bringing a technical support representative with you during this visit. You will be covering a lot of information at this stage, some of which was discussed previously, but which is worth repeating.

Some of the counselling activities that you should plan:

- Review the rental-lease agreement to ensure that tenants know and understand their responsibilities and the consequences of violating the lease.
- Complete a move-in inspection report to confirm the condition of the home before occupancy. The tenants should be with you to help identify any problems. Provide them with a copy of the report and keep one for your files.
- Explain and demonstrate the purpose of items such as the home's air exchanger, heating system, exhaust fans, circuit breakers and smoke detectors. Explain how they work and the importance of using and maintaining them properly.



- Check for household appliances or features that are covered under a warranty or manufacturer's guarantee (such as air exchangers and furnaces). Review the warranties with tenants and discuss the importance of reporting defects. Fill out the warranty forms and return them immediately to the manufacturer. Make copies for your files.
- Remind tenants of the importance of practising safety in the home. Suggest that they plan and practise using a fire escape route.
- Suggest that they prepare an emergency kit in case of power loss. This could include a flashlight (with batteries), candles and matches. It is also a good idea to have a supply of water and a basic first-aid kit stored in the house.
- Provide a list of emergency numbers to keep by the telephone (for example, the fire department, police, hospital, ambulance).

### COUNSELLING AS PART OF A FOLLOW-UP VISIT SIX MONTHS LATER

Post-occupancy counselling provides an opportunity to visit tenants in their home and discuss concerns or problems. A follow-up visit should take place about six months after occupancy. Remember that preparation is the key to successful counselling interviews.

Your visit starts before you arrive at the home, so be sure that you:

- Make an appointment;
- Suggest that tenants prepare a list of questions or concerns they have about the house; and
- Review their file to see if there have been any problems.

Complete the following activities during the home visit:

- Review the responsibilities of the tenants and the housing department. Although you've already discussed these items, try to be patient. Tenants can only benefit from hearing the important points one more time.
- Walk through the home to determine if there are maintenance problems and repair needs. If necessary, develop an action plan to resolve the issues.
- Monitor and keep records of home deficiencies. If action is required, plan to follow up.
- Look for health and safety hazards around the home, such as items stored too close to the wood stove or furnace, or matches or other hazardous products within the reach of children. Discuss why these are unsafe and suggest that they be removed.



**For more information on this and other housing management topics, be sure to contact your CMHC specialist.**

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name  
Email  
Phone