

Preamble

Women's Housing Company (WHC) is a community housing association as part of the social housing system in NSW. WHC provides long term housing for single women and medium term housing through support partnerships.

Services, programs, projects and activities conducted through WHC will operate on and promote principles of access, equity, anti-discrimination and social justice.

This means that people, regardless of age, race, religion, socio-economic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, literacy levels, disability and physical or mental health will be treated equally and will enjoy full access to the services and conditions to which they are entitled, as specified in the eligibility criteria.

The Access & Equity policy aims to identify and remove barriers, which prevent people from knowing, using and participating in the services provided by WHC to which they are entitled.

Service provision will be flexible and respectful of the differing values, beliefs and cultural practices of applicants, tenants and staff.

The principles of access and equity are legislated in:

- the Racial Discrimination Act, 1975 (Commonwealth),
- the Sex Discrimination Act, 1984 (Commonwealth),
- the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 (Commonwealth), and
- the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW).

These acts make discrimination and harassment in the provision of education, employment and the provision of goods and services unlawful.

Definitions

Discrimination occurs when someone is treated unfavourably because of one of their personal characteristics. Discrimination may involve:

- Intimidation and harassment of people verbally, physically or emotionally because of a dislike of their personal characteristics, beliefs, values or perspectives.
- Offensive jokes or comments about another person's personal characteristics, beliefs, values or perspectives;
- Display of pictures or posters which are offensive or derogatory;
- Expression of negative stereotypes of particular groups of people;
- Judgments and assessment of people based on their personal characteristics, beliefs, values or perspectives rather than their actions, abilities and/or needs;
- Undermining another person's authority and confidence because of a dislike of their personal characteristics, beliefs, values or perspectives, such as being dismissive, non-responsive, disrespectful, ignorant or arrogant.

POLICY

Women's Housing Company will promote a culture of inclusiveness amongst staff, applicants and tenants. WHC is committed to the following approaches as part of our access & equity policy.

- Promote Equal Opportunity Employment policies in staff, management and Directors' recruitment thus actively pursuing a diverse team in all levels of the organisation.
- Collect and collate data on service use and **community need** for different target groups, and respond to information gained from data analysis.
- Liaise and link with agencies and **networks** relevant to different population groups, in order to develop service knowledge and experience, and to promote WHC's services to a range of target groups.
- Applicants and tenants receive supportive **direct service** encouraging them to develop an understanding of social justice, access and equity and anti-discrimination principles and practices.

PROCEDURE

The office of Women's Housing Company is located close to Central Station and is accessible by public transport.

Public office hours are 9 - 4.30 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; 1- 4pm Wednesday.

Wheelchair access is limited via the garage but workers will make alternate arrangements for applicants/tenants who cannot attend the office due to age and limited mobility. Home visits by staff are encouraged and are a normal part of work.

Data

- Women's Housing Company collects data on indicators such as ethnicity, age, disability, language group and self identified need in regards to housing, support needs.
- Data is formally collected starting with the application process, through updates of personal details, and on exit of housing with Women's Housing Company.
- Data is informally collected (anecdotal data) through tenant participation activities, self identification, and case meetings.
- The Senior Housing Manager reports on data to the Board of Directors, the Office of Community Housing, the National Data Collection Agency (SAAP – Supported Accommodation Assistance Program data).
- Delegated staff will prepare submissions and tenders for funding which will include requests for resources that will promote and develop WHC's capacity to cater for people from diverse backgrounds and/or those with special needs.

Date developed: 1/12/06

Date/s policy was ratified and/or changed by Board: 31/1/05; 28/8/07

Note: Procedures are designed to guide the implementation of a policy and will be updated on a regular basis as part of ongoing best practice service improvement.

Networks

- It is a shared responsibility of all staff to maintain positive working relationships to other services as part of the day to day work.
- In addition designated staff will be identified by the CEO and given a clear mandate to ensure networking, liaison and information exchange occurs with relevant ethnic, indigenous, disability and/ or specific population support groups and services including domestic violence, alcohol and other drugs, gender / sexuality, mental health services.

Direct Service & Tenant Participation

- WHC will display written and oral/visual information material in various relevant languages in the foyer area.
- Applicants will be assisted to fill in forms at the office when need is identified and / or requested.
- On lease signing, the renting guide will be provided to the tenant in their language; a telephone interpreter will be utilised for the lease signing unless the tenant has brought along their preferred interpreter.
- The tenant manual is translated in the key languages of the WHC tenant community.
- All applicants and tenants are informed about access to interpreting services via a language sheet in 21 community languages; this sheet is regularly included in all bulk mail outs to tenants.
- Tenants are informed about social justice issues via the three monthly newsletters and designated, voluntary tenant participation initiatives.
- On-site interpreters will be offered and arranged for tenant meetings such as block meetings and community development meetings.
- The annual tenant survey is translated in the key languages of the WHC tenant community.

Decision Making

- All Women's Housing Company Ltd staff and Board of Directors are required to declare real or perceived conflict of interest.
- Staff who have declared a conflict of interest in relation to an applicant and / or tenant are disqualified from participating in decision making processes with respect to the relevant person.
- Staff or Directors are disqualified from the decision making process when it comes to staff recruitment, once a conflict of interest has been declared.

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