

# **Tenant and Community Engagement Strategy**

**2020-2024**

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## 1 Introduction

The Women's Housing Company (WHC) is a not-for-profit community housing provider which has operated for over 35 years and provides social and affordable housing, as well as crisis and transitional accommodation for women on very low to moderate incomes. This Tenant and Community Engagement Strategy has been prepared to support WHC operations, tenants and clients, and to respond to the Community Engagement Good Practice Guide published by the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) in April 2019.

Through influencing and advocating for housing, homelessness and support services for women, the WHC aims to improve the range and quality of services it provides. The WHC promotes best practice in tenant and community engagement and the delivery of appropriate services, particularly for older women.

## 2 Purpose

This Tenant and Community Engagement Strategy outlines how the WHC will work together with tenants, the community and other WHC stakeholders from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024, to improve the wellbeing, strength and resilience of tenants and clients, and build linkages to the broader community. The Strategy was created under the umbrella of the Women's Housing Company Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which is the overarching document that guides the organisation's direction and informs operational strategies.

Tenant and community engagement in the WHC and the wider community is essential to delivering successful housing outcomes. A key way the WHC delivers its objectives to meet tenant needs is to encourage tenant involvement in the organisation's planning and decision making and in their communities. The WHC encourages tenants to use their voice to influence decision making, to build their confidence through a range of supported activities and to link to their communities of choice. Strong, engaged tenants are more likely to sustain their tenancies and have better life outcomes.

## 3 Background

The WHC believes tenant and community engagement strategies are core business in supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies and in building and maintaining their wellbeing. This Strategy incorporates tenant views, is informed by WHC values and builds on the previous WHC Community Building and Tenant Engagement Plan (2016-2019).

Tenants were active in developing and updating this Strategy, with staff also providing ideas. Tenants will also be active in implementing the Engagement Plan. The outlined capability building and participation activities will be jointly managed.

In developing this Strategy, tenants and staff were aware that not all WHC voices were represented. Part of this Strategy is to seek out the diverse needs and views of a greater number of tenants and clients.

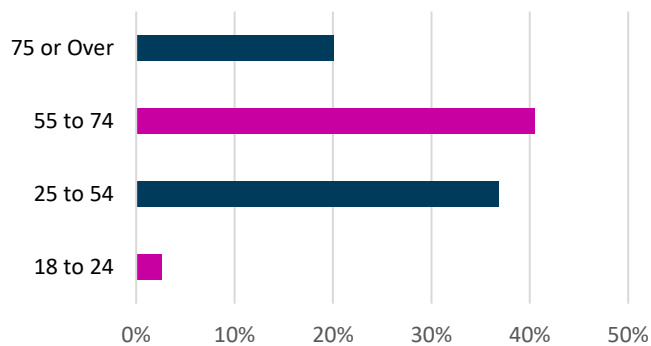
## 4 Stakeholders

### 4.1 Our tenant community

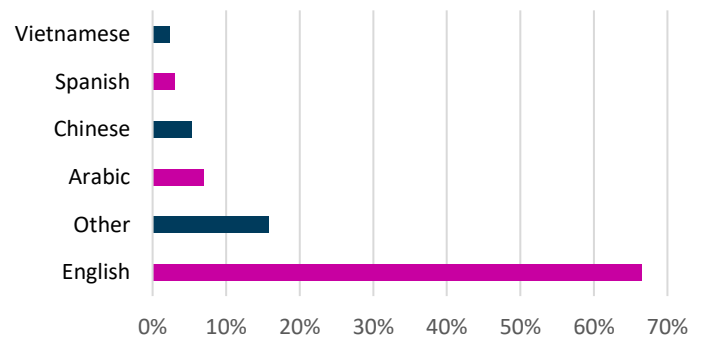
In 2020, the WHC housed over 1,000 women. Within this group:

- 61% were aged 55 and over
- only 2% were aged under 24
- 49% of women were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds
- 5% of women were from an Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander background
- The main community languages spoken were Arabic, Cantonese or Mandarin, Vietnamese and Spanish
- Significantly, at least one in three had a disability

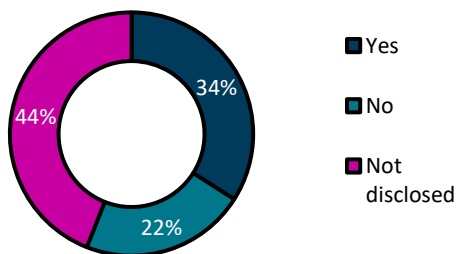
#### Age Group



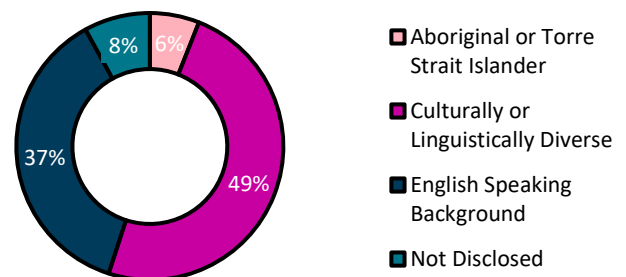
#### Main Languages



#### Tenants With A Disability



#### Cultural Identity



## 4.2 Our team and partners

The WHC has 33 staff, predominantly working across two sites – Surry Hills and Liverpool, along with the Brookvale office. The team is diverse in terms of age, qualifications, cultural backgrounds and languages spoken. These skills and diversity enable us to genuinely engage with a broad tenant and client community while providing high quality social and affordable housing. The WHC employs a dedicated Tenant and Community Engagement Coordinator and believes all operational staff have a role in supporting tenant engagement.

The WHC has a range of formal and informal partnership arrangements across the community with local government, community organisations, and support services where there is values alignment and common purpose.

## 4.3 Our neighbourhoods

Tenants are housed by the WHC in flats, studio apartments and houses all over Sydney, the Hunter Region and Coffs Harbour. From Penrith in the west, to Coogee on the coast; Sutherland Shire in the south, to Newcastle in the north, WHC's tenancies are spread over 29 local government areas. Some tenants are in properties that the WHC leases from Government or owns, while others are in properties leased from the private rental market.

The WHC seeks opportunities to increase and enhance its property portfolio to meet the demand for affordable, secure, well located accommodation for women, with a particular focus on housing that is well designed and allows women to age in place.

## 5 The Women's Housing Company vision, purpose and values

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*'Empowering women to improve their lives through the provision of housing that is affordable'*

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WHC vision, purpose and values inform the actions, messages and objectives in this Strategy. These are:

### **Purpose**

*Providing quality, safe and stable housing and homelessness services for women*

### **Values**

- *Collaboration*
- *Integrity*
- *Courage*
- *Respect*
- *Focus*

## 6 Engagement Strategy

### 6.1 Objectives

Tenancy sustainment sits at the heart of tenant and community engagement. Strengthening wellbeing through knowledge-sharing, capability-building and community connections means tenants and clients are better equipped to remain independent and age in place. By shaping the homes and communities they live in, tenants and clients also engender an increased sense of belonging. Tenant and community engagement in this Strategy has been designed to achieve tenancy sustainment through four main approaches:

1. *Enable a strong tenant voice*

Through initiating and encouraging tenant participation in WHC activities, especially the Tenant Advisory Group, tenants will have input into decisions that affect them or their housing.

2. *Strengthen community connections*

Actively encouraging tenant and client involvement in their communities of choice to strengthen wellbeing. This will involve:

- recognising current connections, interests and strengths,
- identifying opportunities provided by a tenant or client's neighbourhood, other agencies or communities of choice;
- harnessing government and philanthropic programs that support community connections.

Furthermore, the WHC will continue to build strong community connections and partnerships to ensure tenants and clients can access the services and programs they need.

3. *Build skills and capability*

Through the recognition of strengths and access to opportunities, tenants and clients can grow skills and knowledge to support themselves to increase their physical and mental wellbeing.

4. *Engage and communicate effectively*

Communication will be effectively targeted, clear, concise and accessible to keep tenants and clients informed of relevant issues and events. The WHC will address barriers to communication, especially digital inclusion.

### 6.2 Benefits

Through active tenant participation, engagement and capability building, the WHC tenants and the broader community benefit from:

- effective communication, involvement and trust
- improved tenant and client services that are fit for purpose and offer value for money
- better service delivery and improved customer satisfaction
- a stronger tenant voice, with informed and knowledgeable tenants who are empowered with the skills and confidence to influence decisions

- greater appreciation for diversity, with participants being more aware of each other's perspectives
- reduced social isolation and improved wellbeing through stronger relationships
- increased sense of connection, security and belonging through community cohesion
- improved asset management and tenancy sustainment
- opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and capabilities for better life outcomes

### **6.3 Resources**

The WHC Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) in conjunction with the Senior Management Team at the WHC is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the activities listed in this Strategy. Successful outcomes will require adequate resourcing, both in terms of staff time and funds. The WHC employs a Tenant and Community Engagement Coordinator and believes all operational staff have a role in supporting tenant engagement. A yearly budget is allocated to support the objectives of this Strategy with supplementary grants being externally sourced where possible.

### **6.4 Roles and responsibilities**

The key roles and responsibilities are outlined below to make sure that engagement activities are coordinated and clear:

WHC Board

- Overall strategic direction of tenant and community engagement at the WHC.

WHC Senior Management Team:

- Overall ownership and accountability for tenant and community engagement at the WHC
- Responsibility for allocating resources for activities in the Strategy
- Making decisions on the recommendation of the Tenant Advisory Group
- Leading collaboration and engagement by example through reflecting the WHC values.

Tenant Advisory Group:

- Recommending actions to the WHC Senior Management Team
- Reviewing policies and procedures and making recommendations
- Implementing agreed actions and helping build community spirit
- Leading collaboration and engagement by example through reflecting the WHC values.

Tenant and Community Engagement Coordinator:

- Responsibility for day-to-day coordination of the Strategy's activities and initiatives
- Sourcing resources for activities
- Seeking out partnerships to foster community connections
- Responsibility for managing escalations by tenants and timely responses from management
- Ensuring activities and initiatives reflect tenant and client need and diversity
- Communicating activities and initiatives to stakeholders.

All tenants and clients

- Participating in activities and initiatives to the best of their abilities.

## 6.5 Monitoring and evaluation

The WHC will regularly monitor and evaluate this Strategy through tenant, staff and external feedback. The Strategy will be reviewed annually, and changes may be made to reflect progress, learnings and the operating environment.

Bi-annual reports against the Strategy will be provided to the Chief Executive Officer, the Board and the TAG, tracking progress against actions and the key performance indicators (KPIs) below. Information about progress will be shared in staff and TAG meetings, the Newsletter and the Annual Report.

Key performance indicator	Year 4 Target
The WHC involves tenants	80% tenant satisfaction
The WHC takes tenant views into account	75% tenant satisfaction
Tenants are able to influence WHC decisions	65% tenant satisfaction
Satisfied with information provided	90% tenant satisfaction
My WHC home helps with health and wellbeing	85% tenants agree
Study, training or employment has improved during my tenancy	30% tenants agree
Tenant participation in engagement activities	70% participation
Tenant participation in Annual Survey	40% participation

## 6.6 Definitions

*Capability building*: the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

*Community engagement*: the commitment to ensure tenants and clients are actively involved in shaping the community they live in.

*Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)*: generally defined as people born overseas, in countries other than those classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as “main English-speaking countries”.

*Digital inclusion*: the ability to access and use a broad range of digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs, all of which are seen as network rather than computing devices.

*Financial inclusion*: the availability and opportunity to access financial products and services which are appropriate, affordable, and timely.

*Key performance indicator (KPI)*: a measure used to evaluate factors that are crucial to the success of a plan or organisation.

*Placemaking*: a people-centred approach to the planning, design and management of spaces. Placemaking capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating spaces that promote health, happiness, and well-being.

*Tenant engagement*: the commitment to ensure tenants are actively involved in influencing decisions about housing policies, conditions, and services.

*Well-being*: a state characterised by health, happiness, wellness and comfort.