

TENANT'S HANDBOOK

**THE LAO COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT
(NSW) COOPERATIVE LIMITED**

COMMUNITY HOUSING
December 2019

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SECTION 1: About the Lao Community Advancement (NSW) Cooperative Limited

1.1 Introduction

The Lao Community Advancement (NSW) Co-operative Limited (LCAC) is constantly looking at ways to improve the quality of services it provides to its tenants. To enable us to deliver an improved service and keep our tenants better informed we have developed this handbook, full of useful information for our tenants.

1.2 The Organisation

The LCAC is a not for profit, community based organisation, that provides community housing, welfare and sporting and cultural services for the Lao community in the Fairfield Local Government Area. It is managed by an independent board of directors. Paid staff members are responsible for daily operations and are supported by a team of enthusiastic volunteers.

1.3 History

When refugees from Laos first arrived in Australia in 1976 they began to set up community groups to provide mutual support and friendship. An informal group known as the Association of Lao Opanyob (Refugees) in NSW was soon established, which became the LCAC in 1982 and began providing community housing in 1994.

1.4 The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is made up of volunteers from the Lao community. None of the Board Members get paid. Elections to the Board are held every two years and Board members are selected with the aim of establishing a sound knowledge of all the services which the LCAC provides.

1.5 Properties

The LCAC manages 18 properties in the Fairfield Local Government Area, including eight units in Bonnyrigg for older people, six community housing units in Edensor Park, two supported housing units in Bonnyrigg and two in Edensor Park.

1.6 Contact Us

You can contact the LCAC on 9753 3947 or send an email to pierre@lcac.org.au or admin@lcac.org.au Alternatively you may wish to write or attend our office in person. The LCAC office is located at 711-715 Smithfield Road, Edensor Park, NSW, 2176. The housing support worker, Mr Pierre Vathavong can be contacted on 0424 558 991.

1.7 Office Hours

The office is open from 9.00am to 5.00pm on Monday to Friday for general enquiries.

1.8 Translating and Interpreting Services

If you prefer to speak with a member of staff in Lao, staff and volunteers at the LCAC speak and write Lao and are able to assist you with English language services.

1.9 How to Find Us

The LCAC office is located at 711-715 Smithfield Road, Edensor Park, NSW 2176.

The closest train station to the office is Cabramatta.

1.10 Office Staff

The Housing Manager, Mr Pierre Vathnavong, can be contacted on 0424 558 991 or by sending an email to pierre@lcac.org.au or you can contact the Administration Officer, Mr Bountham Vongsaya on 0433 807 173 or 9753 3947 or by sending an email to admin@lcac.org.au

1.11 Service Commitment

The LCAC is committed to providing the highest quality of service to its tenants. The staff at LCAC are friendly, helpful and polite and willing to assist tenants with their inquiries. If you have a problem with the service let a member of staff know so that we can resolve the matter as promptly as possible. You may also wish to contact a member of staff if you have a suggestion to improve your service.

SECTION 2: Your Tenancy

2.1 The Tenancy Agreement

The tenancy agreement is a contract between you and the LCAC. It contains a number of rights and responsibilities, many of which are also mentioned in this handbook. You should always keep a copy of your tenancy agreement in a safe place.

2.2 The Property Condition Report

When tenants sign a tenancy agreement with the LCAC they receive a Property Condition Report, as part of the tenancy agreement. The LCAC Housing Manager will conduct a thorough inspection of the property shortly before a tenant moves in and fill out a report. A tenant or their carer is responsible for:

- Checking the completed report;
- Making additional comments to the report, if they wish to do so;

- Signing and dating the report; and
- Returning the yellow copy of the report to the office within seven working days of commencement of the lease.

The report is an important document, which will be referred to at the termination of your tenancy. As a result, you should keep a copy of it in a safe place, along with your tenancy agreement.

If you need assistance to complete your report please contact the office on 9753 3947.

2.3 The Market Rent

The cost of your rent is on the front page of your tenancy agreement or on your recent rent report. The LCAC conducts a rent review of similar properties for rent in the private market to determine a comparative market rent value for the properties it manages every six months. The market rent then acts as a ceiling for the amount of rent the LCAC can charge for that property. If there is an adjustment to your rent, you will be notified in writing.

2.4 Rental Assistance

LCAC tenants may be entitled to financial assistance from Centelink to pay their rent. If you think that you are eligible for a subsidy, because of your current circumstances, you should discuss this with the LCAC. The Housing Manager will be able to assist you to apply for financial assistance. However, you should also notify the Housing Manager of any change in your circumstances, as this may affect your payments from Centrelink.

2.5 How your Rent is calculated

The LCAC currently charges its tenants 25 per cent of total household income. However, if the total household income exceeds the current rental market value of the property the tenants will only pay the current rental market price.

2.6 Changes in Household Circumstances

A change in circumstances may affect your rental subsidy. You should contact the LCAC if:

- A household member stops or begins working;
- There is a new household member, or a member of the household leaves;
- A member of the household has a change in work hours;
- If there is a change in Centrelink payment; or
- A child turns 18 years of age.

2.7 Income Reviews

A rental review is conducted every six months to assess a tenant's income and make any necessary adjustments in payment.

2.8 How to Pay your Rent

The safest and most convenient way to make a rental payment is via direct debit. Tenants should obtain the LCAC's bank details from the Housing Manager to set up a direct debit payment. For tenants who are entitled to receive rental assistance from Centrelink, payment can be made using the Centrepay direct bill paying service. The LCAC Housing Manager will assist tenants to fill out this form. Tenants are discouraged from making cash payments and should seek permission from the Housing Manager before-hand.

2.9 Rent Arrears and Rent Reminders

If a tenant falls behind with their rent LCAC will contact them to discuss the matter. As a rule, LCAC will contact a tenant by telephone to remind them that the rent is overdue by more than one week. If the tenant fails to make the necessary rent payment following the telephone conversation a written reminder will be sent to the tenant's residence. If a tenant is more than 14 days behind with their rent payment and fails to reach an agreement with LCAC legal proceedings may commence.

2.10 Problems Paying Rent and Financial Hardship

If a tenant is experiencing problems paying the rent, they should contact the Housing Manager straight away. The Housing Manager will discuss the problem with the tenant and assist them with a repayment agreement or refer them to a Financial Counselling Service.

2.11 Disputes and Problems with Neighbours

As part of the tenancy agreement with LCAC, tenants, family members and their guests are obliged to show consideration for the people around them. The homes that the LCAC manages have shared common walls and open spaces and a certain level of noise and difference in lifestyle is unavoidable and expected. Sometimes this difference in lifestyle or noise can cause resentment. Raising a problem with your neighbour in a polite and calm manner is often the best way to resolve the issue. Your neighbour may be unaware of the problem and it may be possible to resolve the issue without involving the LCAC. If the problem persists or it is too serious to discuss with your neighbour, you should notify the Housing Manager. If the Housing Manager is unable to resolve the issue, to the satisfaction of both you and your neighbour, it may be necessary to refer the matter to a mediation service.

2.12 Pets

It is important tenants take responsibility for their pets. Tenants' pets should not disturb the peace of their neighbours and tenants should take responsibility for cleaning the mess of their animals.

2.13 Sub-letting

The practice of sub-letting your home is not permitted under any circumstances. Sub-letting occurs when a tenant allows a person who is not listed on the tenancy

agreement to reside in their home and charges them rent. However, the LCAC does permit a tenant to have family and friends visit and stay at their home periodically for a short period of time.

2.14 Going Away

Tenants need to make provision for paying their rent whilst they are away from their home. Tenants should notify the Housing Manager if they are planning to be away from their home for more than six weeks. It may also be of benefit to the tenant to provide the Housing Manager with an emergency telephone number whilst they are away from home.

2.15 Transfers

Tenants may wish to apply for a transfer if their home is no longer suitable following a change in circumstances. While it is unlikely that the LCAC will be able to find alternative accommodation given its limited number of properties, the Housing Manager may be able to work with other community housing providers to assist tenants.

2.16 Ending your Tenancy/ Moving Out

A tenant who decides to move out should provide the LCAC with 14 days notice in writing. Tenants should be mindful of their obligations to pay their rent in full, remove any rubbish or goods, carry out cleaning, and any necessary repairs, and disconnect services. Tenants should consult with Fairfield Local Council regarding rubbish collection. The Housing Manager will arrange a convenient time to conduct an inspection of the premises with the tenant after the tenant has moved out and finished cleaning. The LCAC also has a Termination of Lease Survey that is sent on to a tenant's forwarding address for additional feedback on tenant satisfaction levels.

SECTION 3: Your Home

3.1 Looking after Your Property

Tenants are obliged to keep their property clean and tidy and leave the property in a condition similar to when they moved in. The LCAC will take into consideration allowances for fair wear and tear. Tenants should notify the LCAC straight away of any damages to their home.

The LCAC is responsible for providing clean and tidy premises for its tenants when they move in and to conduct repairs and maintenance in a timely manner.

3.2 Repairs

Tenants should contact the Housing Manager, Mr Pierre Vanthavong, on 0424 558 991 to arrange for repairs to be carried out. Tenants can also contact the office on 9753 3947 to report a problem. To assist staff, you should provide your name, address, contact details and a brief description of the problem.

3.3 Emergency Repairs and Maintenance

Tenants may have emergency problems that need to be resolved outside of office hours. These could be:

- A burst water pipe;
- A blocked toilet;
- A gas leak or electrical fault;
- A loss of service such as gas, water or electricity; or
- A serious leak to the roof or severe flooding.

In the case of an emergency electrical fault tenants should contact Roger Praseuth on 0414 271 293 or Ngeun Sinpraseuth on 9823 2616 or 0403 141 752. If the problem is with the electricity supply tenants should contact Integral Energy on 13 10 02.

In case of an emergency plumbing problem tenants should contact Wild Plumbing on 0418 612 538. Tenants at Edensor Park Supported Housing who experience an emergency problem regarding their hot water should contact Volvan Hot Water on 13 10 02.

All other tenants who experience a problem regarding the supply of hot water should contact Hardiedux Hot Water on 9727 2633.

The LCAC takes its duty to respond to repairs and maintenance seriously and will endeavour to respond to emergencies within 24 hours and urgent repairs within five working days.

The Housing Manager will discuss routine maintenance issues with the tenant and a decision to respond within 28 days or to refer the issue to the planned maintenance program will be made on a case by case basis.

3.4 Access to the Property

Under the terms of the tenancy agreement the LCAC is entitled to inspect a property up to four times a year to make sure the premises are in good order. Should the LCAC decide to conduct an inspection it will provide the tenant with a minimum of seven days written notice.

3.5 Keys

Tenants are responsible for their keys. If you lose your keys or lock yourself out of your home you may have to pay for a locksmith. To avoid this expense some tenants get a copy of their keys cut and leave them with a relative or trusted friend.

3.6 Security

Always check the identity of all visitors to your home. Usually the LCAC will contact you before a member of staff intends to visit. If you are suspicious of any person who calls at your home, do not let them in. Never attach your address to your house keys as this could result in a security problem if you lose your keys.

3.7 Alterations and Decorations

The LCAC will ensure that its premises are in good decorative order when a new tenant moves in. Properties are decorated in neutral colours, for example white or cream. If tenants decide to decorate they are obligated to choose a neutral colour. Tenants are allowed to hang paintings and similar furnishings. If tenants are unsure about what is permissible they should contact the Housing Manager.

3.8 Pay TV, Satellite Dishes and Antennas

Some LCAC premises have Pay TV, satellite dishes and antennas installed. Should new tenant wish to install Pay TV or a satellite dish they should contact the Housing Manager for permission.

3.9 Communal or Shared Areas

Under terms of the tenancy agreement tenants, residents and their guests keep shared areas clean, safe and free from obstruction. Shared areas may include parking and driveways, garbage bin areas, entrance halls and stairways and gardens.

3.10 Rubbish

Rubbish should be placed in the appropriate bins provided by Fairfield Local Council. If tenants have large items to dispose of they should contact Council for details of collection dates.

3.11 Garbage Bins

Tenants are responsible for ensuring their bins are emptied and collecting them afterwards.

3.12 Pests

Tenants should keep work surfaces and floors clean and store food in air tight containers or the fridge to help prevent pests such as cockroaches in their homes. Tenants should purchase products from a shop to eliminate pests from their home prior to contacting the LCAC.

3.13 Parking

Parking is provided for tenants at their homes. Tenants in premises with shared parking should consider their neighbours and request visitors use on-street parking, where necessary.

3.14 Gardens

Tenants with their own garden should keep it neat and tidy, keeping lawns to a reasonable length and borders free from weeds. Tenants should act responsibly when watering their gardens and follow any government restrictions.

3.15 Fire Safety

Tenants can reduce the risk of fire in their home by following some basic fire safety principles and take precautions to:

- Keep a watch on pans when cooking, especially when using chip pans and cooking with oil.
- Turn off electrical sockets when you are not using them.
- Be careful when using heaters.

3.16 Smoke Alarms

All of the LCAC properties have smoke alarms fitted and tenants should not remove these alarms under any circumstances. Tenants should regularly test their smoke alarm by pressing the test button. If the smoke alarm begins to beep at regular intervals this could mean the battery needs to be changed.

3.17 Home Contents Insurance

The LCAC recommends tenants take out home contents insurance to insure personal belongings, furniture and decoration against damage or loss.

SECTION 4: Your Rights

4.1 Statement of Rights

The overriding objective of the LCAC is to ensure that its tenants feel secure and comfortable. To meet this objective, it has established the following Statement of Rights.

- Tenants are offered safe and secure accommodation.
- Tenants are treated with respect and members of staff and volunteers are instructed to behave in a polite and courteous manner when dealing with tenants.
- The LCAC will work to establish good relations with its tenants so that they feel confident to discuss their tenancy without any fear of reprisal.
- Tenants will be consulted before hand on any proposed substantial changes to the way their tenancy is managed.
- Security of tenure is upheld through all current legislation including the Housing Act and the Housing Regulation 2009.
- Decisions affecting tenants are made in a fair and open manner.
- Tenants have the right to make a complaint or appeal against a decision.
- Tenants have the right to participate and contribute to the decision making process.
- Tenants have the right to prompt handling of urgent repairs and to contribute to decisions regarding maintenance.
- Tenants have the right to complain about repairs and maintenance.
- Tenants have the right to access their file on request.
- Tenants have the right to access the LCAC's Policies and Procedures Manual.

4.2 Tenant Participation

The LCAC actively encourages tenants to become involved in decision-making and events. Tenant participation is varied and could include:

- Completing the Tenant Satisfaction Survey;
- Providing informal or formal feedback including complaints and appeals;
- Attending events such as fundraisers and parties;
- Contributing to the LCAC's newsletter; and
- Attending the LCAC's Annual General Meeting.

4.3 Confidentiality

To enable the LCAC to carry out its activities it may be necessary to collect personal information. However, the LCAC will only collect personal information that is necessary to carry out its activities. The LCAC board members, staff and volunteers will also ensure privacy is protected and personal and sensitive information is safeguarded in accordance with the relevant legislation.

4.4 Access to Information

Tenants may request access to their own personal information contained in the LCAC's records. Access will normally be granted within fourteen days.

4.5 Complaints

As a provider of community housing the LCAC cares about the well-being of its tenants and aims to provide a close and personal service. The best way to ensure that the LCAC is meeting its stated aim is to hear what its tenants have to say. As a result the LCAC encourages its tenants to follow the complaints procedure set out below if they are unhappy with the level of service.

The LCAC has established the following complaints procedure for its tenants:

- Wherever possible the tenant should begin by making an informal verbal complaint to the LCAC staff member you have been dealing with. If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction you may wish to make a formal complaint in writing to the Housing Committee.
- A Formal Complaint will be considered by another member of staff on the Housing Committee and the tenant will be given a response in writing.
- A Stage 2 Formal Complaint can be made in writing if a tenant is still not satisfied. It will be reviewed by an LCAC Board Member within seven days and the tenant will be given a response in writing. During this time the tenant may be contacted for additional information.
- The LCAC aims to investigate and resolve all complaints within 28 days of receipt of the formalised written complaint. If this time frame cannot be met, the tenant will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative time frame for resolution.

- All complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, and will not affect the complainants right to use the LCAC services.
- Copies of all complaints and details of actions taken are filed in a confidential complaints file, held by the Secretary. Within six months of the complaint being resolved, the Secretary will review the actions taken to ensure adequate follow-up.

4.6 Appeals

All of the LCAC's tenants and prospective tenants have the right to appeal or request a review of a decision.

An appeal or request for a review may come about as a result of a decision regarding:

- A prospective tenant's eligibility for housing;
- The removal of a prospective tenant from the LCAC's Tenant Waiting List;
- The LCAC's allocation priority;
- A tenant's eligibility for a transfer of housing;
- The suitability of an offer of housing;
- A tenant's level of rental subsidy;
- A tenant's request to decorate or make alterations; or
- Keeping a pet.

As with its complaints process the LCAC encourages tenants to have their say. If a tenant, or prospective tenant, is not satisfied with a decision they can ask for the decision to be reviewed. Should the outcome of the review not be satisfactory, a formal written appeal can be submitted. At this stage a formal review will be conducted by a person who was not originally involved and a response will be provided in writing.

Tenants who are not satisfied with the LCAC's internal complaints procedure can contact a number of other external supporting agencies who are available to investigate complaints about the compliance of registered community housing providers. These include:

Family and Community Services (FACS):

FACS Housing Services provide support to clients of public housing through financial assistance, information and advice. FACS accepts and investigates complaints from tenants through its client feedback unit by phone or email. The FACS feedback email can provide initial direction to tenants on how and where to make a complaint or appeal.

P:1800 422 322

W: <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au>

E: feedback@facs.nsw.gov.au

A: FACS, Housing Fairfield Office

360-362, The Horsley Drive

Fairfield 2165 NSW

NSW Housing Appeals Committee:

The NSW Housing Appeals Committee is an independent agency that deals with appeals from tenants who are not satisfied with the outcome of complaints made to their social housing provider. It ensures that clients of government funded housing services have free access to an independent system of review and redress. The two-step appeal is explained on the website and involves the provider completing an internal review before the Housing Appeals Committee makes their independent review.

P: 8741 2555 or 1800 629 794

W: <http://www.hac.nsw.gov.au/>

A: 1-7 Elsie Street Burwood NSW 2134 or write to The Housing Appeals Committee, PO Box 1030, Westfield Burwood NSW 2134

Opening Hours: Monday to Friday between 8.30am and 4.30pm at 5-6 Ground Floor

Registrar of Community Housing

A tenant who is concerned about whether LCAC is meeting its responsibilities under the Regulatory Code can notify the Registrar of Community Housing and make a complaint. Complaints can be provided in writing, by telephone or via an online form.

P: 1800 330 940

E: registrar@facs.nsw.gov.au

W: http://www.nrsch.nsw.gov.au/complaint_form

A: Registrar of Community Housing
Locked Bag 4001
Ashfield BC 1800

NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal:

The NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) is an independent body which deals with certain kinds of disputes between landlords and tenants in NSW. NCAT can make legally binding and enforceable decisions on a wide range of tenancy disputes such as rental bond, rent increases, unpaid rent, termination of tenancy agreements, compensation, repairs and other breaches of the residential tenancy agreement. Tenants can apply to NCAT to resolve a tenancy dispute by completing an online application available on their website.

P: 1300 006 228

W: <http://www.ncat.nsw.gov.au/Pages/cc/Divisions/Tenancy/tenancy.aspx>

A: John Maddison Tower, 86-90 Goulburn Street Sydney.

Hours: 9.00am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday except public holidays

4.7 Survey

The LCAC has developed an Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey for its tenants to complete in confidence so that it can more accurately assess its tenants' satisfaction.

SECTION 5: Service Directory

5.1 Index of Services in your Local Government Area.

Lao Community Advancement Cooperative	9753 3947
Emergency (Police, Fire, Ambulance)	000
Centrelink Information	131 021
Telephone Interpreter Service	131 250
AGL (gas leak emergencies)	131 909
AGL (connection and disconnection)	131 606
Integral Energy (emergencies)	131 003
Integral Energy (connection and disconnection)	131 002
Sydney Water (emergencies)	132 090
Telstra (connection and disconnection)	132 200
Optus	
Electrician: Roger Praseuth	0414 271 293
Electrician: Nguen Sinpraseuth	9823 2616 0403 141 752
Plumber: Wild Plumbing	0418 612 538
Hardiedux Hot Water Services	9727 2633
Volvan Hot Water Services (Edensor Park Supported Housing)	131 002
Fairfield City Council	9725 0222
Liverpool City Council	9821 9222
Campbelltown City Council	4645 4000
Department of Community Services Fairfield	9205 6000
Department of Community Services Liverpool	9602 8044
Domestic Violence Counselling and Advice	1800 656 463
The Salvation Army, Fairfield	9727 3380
The Salvation Army, Liverpool	9601 2813
St Vincent de Paul Society, Fairfield	9724 5057
St Vincent de Paul Society, Fairfield Heights	9609 4098
St Vincent de Paul Society, Liverpool	9602 3039
St Vincent de Paul Society, Mount Pritchard	9823 2299
St Vincent de Paul Society, Macquarie Fields	9618 3533

Cabramatta Community Health	9728 7233
Fairfield Community Health	9794 1700
Liverpool Community Health	9828 4844
Women's Health Centre, Liverpool	9601 3555
Campbelltown Public Hospital	4625 9222
Fairfield Public Hospital	96168111
Liverpool Public Hospital	9828 3000
Fairfield Dog Pound	9606 6118
Liverpool Dog Pound	9821 9319
Department of Housing, Liverpool	9821 6111
Housing Appeals Committee	1800 629 794
Cabramatta Police Station	9725 8999
Fairfield Police Station	9728 0399
Green Valley Police Station	9607 1799
Liverpool Police Station	9821 8444
Macquarie Fields Police Station	9618 2777
Crime Stoppers Hotline	1800 333 000
Train timetable enquiries	131 500
South West Community Transport	1300 138 794
Taxis Combined	8332 888
St George Cabs	132 166