

## Water Charge

### Purpose

Bridge Housing Limited's (Bridge Housing's) water charge policy has been developed to ensure that all tenants are responsible to pay their water usage charges.

### Scope

This policy is for all Bridge Housing tenants except those in crisis or transitional accommodation.

### Guiding Principles

The following principals guide this policy:

- All tenants are responsible for water usage charges to their property
- Bridge Housing will charge tenants for water usage under Section 139 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and the relevant Ministerial Guidelines for Water Charging in Community Housing.
- Tenants will be charged for their water usage in a manner which is transparent and consistent.

### Water Usage Charging Methods

Bridge Housing will calculate water charges based on the following methods:

#### Properties with Separate Water Meters

Bridge Housing will charge tenants who live in properties with separate water meters the actual water usage cost, as per the invoice received from the Water Authority. In accordance with the Ministerial Guidelines, a separate water meter must be readily accessible for reading by the Water Authority and generate an individual water account. If a water meter is not accessible for reading by the Water Authority and does not generate an individual water account, Bridge Housing will charge the tenants as if it is a shared meter dwelling.

Water charges will be added to the tenant's account each water billing cycle - approximately quarterly.

#### Properties with Shared Water Meters

Bridge Housing will charge a percentage of the tenants rent for water usage in properties with shared water meters where Bridge Housing pays a water usage account. The percentage will be publicly available on Bridge Housings website and will be reviewed annually. Water usage for social housing properties with shared meters will be capped at a maximum charge per household per week. This cap rate is also available on Bridge Housings website and will be reviewed annually. Water charges for affordable housing properties will not be capped.

As it is impossible to determine an individual usage charge for shared metres, the water charge is considered the tenants' contribution towards water usage costs only and is not intended to reflect their individual water usage. Water charges will be added to the tenants' account each week.

On a quarterly basis, Bridge Housing will ensure that the charges for all of the tenants combined do not exceed the total water bill received from the Water Authority for that period. If the total amount paid by all tenants exceeds the total bill from the Water Authority for that period, Bridge Housing will reimburse tenants the amount that was overpaid.

#### Common Area Water Usage

Bridge Housing will pay the water usage for all common areas. In properties with a shared water meter, Bridge Housing will ensure that a portion of the water bill is allocated against the common area usage.

## Payment of Water Usage Charges

Tenants can pay their water usage in a lump sum payment or set up an agreement to pay an amount each week/fortnight. Any payments for water must be specified as water payments. If a water charge remains unpaid for more than 14 days from the date it is charged to the tenant's account, Bridge Housing may take action through the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) to recover the unpaid water usage charges.

## Exemptions

Bridge Housing may consider exemptions / reduction to the water charging policy for tenants with separate water meters if:

- The tenant or a household member is on a home based dialysis and/or;
- The tenant or a household member has a medical condition or disability that requires them to use significantly more water than usual.

In order to be considered for a water usage exemption, tenants must complete the Water Exemption Application form. If the application is based on the tenant or a household member being on a home based dialysis or a medical condition or disability, the tenant must provide documented evidence to support their application.

Bridge Housing will not charge water for tenants in crisis accommodation or transitional accommodation in recognition that this is a short term housing option and not general social housing.

Allowances will be credited to the tenants account at the end of each quarterly billing cycle.

There are no exemptions or allowances for tenants who are temporarily away from their properties.

## Tenants Moving Properties or Exiting Bridge Housing

If a tenant is transferring to another property or exiting Bridge Housing services, Bridge Housing will charge for water usage up to the end of the Residential Tenancy Agreement. In the case of tenants with separate water meters, this will be based on a pro rate estimate based upon the previous quarters actual water bill.

## Hardship

Bridge Housing will assist tenants who are experiencing financial hardship in accordance with Bridge Housings' Financial Hardship Policy.

## Appeals and Complaints

Tenants can appeal decisions relating to water charging in community housing but can not appeal the decision to charge for water usage.

The first stage of the process is to contact Bridge Housing and request a review of the water charges. This is called a first level appeal.

If you are not satisfied with Bridge Housing's decision, you are entitled to lodge a second level appeal to the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). The HAC is an independent agency that reviews certain decisions made by staff of community organisations and Housing NSW. This includes decisions in relation to the way Bridge Housing has calculated its water charges. For more information on the Housing Appeals Committee call 1800 629 794 or go to [www.hac.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hac.nsw.gov.au).

Further information on making an appeal is contained in the Bridge Housing Compliments, Complaints & Appeals policy.

## Related Documents

- Residential Tenancies Act 2010
- Ministerial Guidelines for Community Housing Water Charging