

Otautahi

## Reducing tenant anxiety

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Community housing across New Zealand has moved into unknown territory due to the COVID-19 Alert level 4 lockdown. It is anticipated that this will be particularly relevant around the issue of tenant levels of anxiety.

As we all know community housing provides accommodation for a range of demographics. Not all tenants are vulnerable, and most will cope with the lockdown and any associated anxiety.

However, many tenants will have anxiety issues as a result of social needs and there is the potential for this anxiety to escalate the longer that we remain in lockdown. Hopefully the steps being taken in New Zealand now, enable us to minimise the lockdown period.

Community housing providers predicted the need to support tenants through this situation, particularly those vulnerable tenants, at an early stage. It is now clear that early actions taken by community housing providers were aligned and consistent.

Many of those actions are worth sharing as we move forward and face the growing potential of an escalation of tenant anxiety. It is beneficial to all community housing providers to share measures that effectively support tenants to manage behaviour caused by increased anxiety.

Initial methods to reduce tenant anxiety included the following suggestions, with the onus on consistency and open communication.

Initiate contact with all tenants by phone to ensure tenants are aware that their provider cares about them and their health and security. Take the opportunity during the conversation to update the database of important information including health status, next of kin, and social support contact numbers.

Establish the need for 'check in' calls and if necessary, create a call schedule to suit the requirements of the individual tenant. Reiterate the need for the tenants to report illness, and confirm the importance of self-isolating and social distancing for the benefit of both the nation and the individual.

The conversation should include a directive to look out for neighbours while adhering to the social distancing guidelines. Provide information on how to navigate to the social supports available by various government and NGO services.

Complete the call by outlining how communication with the provider will continue through the pandemic. These communication methods could be via:

- phone calls
- letters
- newsletters

- media platforms
- provider 0800 number.

Be sure to detail provider services that can and cannot be delivered, along with the assurance that updates will be given as and when they become available.

Communication is identified as one of the main successful controls for anxiety and many of the actions outlined above will be used during the lockdown for on-going tenancy management.

Additional methods advised by providers for anxiety control for day to day tenancy management under the lockdown include:

- provider well-being patrols
- early intervention for anti-social behaviour
- security assistance
- navigation to support lines
- community police assistance.

No doubt providers will be able to add to the lists and we encourage you to share successful actions that have worked for you. It is predicted that the longer the lockdown continues the greater the escalation of anxiety will be. Higher anxiety will result in an increase in poor behaviour. It is in the interest of all providers to work collaboratively, sharing knowledge and experience, acting in the best interest our tenants to reduce tenant anxiety.