



Fact Sheet 3: Paying Rent

There are a number of ways to pay rent to Housing ACT. Some of the most common methods are described below.

Centrepay

If you receive a regular Centrelink payment, a convenient and easy way to pay rent is by Centrelink direct deduction. This means that you authorize Centrelink to deduct your rent from your pension or benefit and pay it directly to Housing ACT.

You can pick up a form at any Housing ACT shop front to set up this payment method. It is important to note that there will usually be a few days delay between lodging the form and the rent being deducted, so you may still have to make a manual payment in the meantime. You can ring Housing ACT to check if the rent has been paid.

This is a good method of payment because your rent will come out before the Centrelink money goes into your bank account, meaning that Housing ACT will always be paid.

A problem with this method is that if your Centrelink payments are reduced or cancelled, the direct debit will stop operating and the rent will not be paid, causing a rent debt. If your Centrelink payments are reduced or cancelled, contact Housing ACT immediately. You can then arrange to pay rent manually or by another method and you may need to submit a new rebate application, depending on the reason why your Centrelink payment stopped.

BPAY via the Telephone

Another way to pay rent is to use telephone BPAY. To set this up you will need to contact your bank and get a password. You will also need to contact Housing ACT to request their biller code and your payment reference number. It can take a few days for Housing ACT to receive a payment of this kind. Make sure you keep a record by documenting each payment date and

reference number; a calendar is a good place to record these details and will be very useful if there is a disagreement between you and Housing ACT regarding your rental account.

A problem with telephone BPAY is that you have to remember to make the payment every time rent is due, but the benefit is that you are in control and know exactly what is going on. Remember that you are required to keep your rent account two weeks in advance, so if your income fluctuates a lot, you might need to pay weekly or in large lump sums to make sure that your account never slips below two weeks in advance.

BPAY via the Internet

You can also pay your rent with BPAY on the internet. To organize this, you will need to contact your bank to set up internet banking. Once you have obtained a BPAY biller code and a pay reference number from Housing ACT, you can then use your bank's website or app to make payments. You can choose between making manual one-off payments on rent day or setting up a scheduled payment that will happen automatically. Ring Housing ACT and/or your bank for further advice on this method.

Bank Direct Debit

For this method, you authorise Housing ACT to take rent money directly out of your bank account. Forms to do this are available at Housing ACT shop fronts. This can be a good method where you are not on a Centrelink income and have a regular income.

A problem is that, if there is ever insufficient money in your account on rent day, the direct debit will bounce and you may incur a bank fee in addition to falling behind on your rent. If it keeps bouncing, the direct debit may drop out entirely, requiring you to start it again. For this method to work, you need to keep an eye on

your bank balance and ensure there is enough money every rent day. You need to pay particular care around public holidays, because at these times the bank may debit your account earlier than usual.

Paying at a Post Office

It is possible to make payments to Housing ACT at any Australia Post Office using a Housing payment card. Remember that payment cards have two barcodes on them: one for your rent account, and one for your sundry account. Make sure payments go into the right account. If payments are accidentally made into the wrong account, Housing ACT may assume that you have not paid the rent and this may trigger the beginning of the legal process to end your tenancy.

This method of payment takes a couple of days to go through, so if you use it you may need to pay the rent earlier than the day it falls due.

Direct Manual Payments

Good if you work or live near a Housing ACT shopfront and don't mind standing in a queue!

Repaying a Debt

If you are behind in the rent in your current tenancy and you are not in a position to pay it off in a lump sum, you can enter into an arrangement with Housing to pay an extra amount, on top of rent, to reduce the debt gradually. If you pay rent by Centrelink direct deduction or by bank direct debit, the extra instalment amount can be added into the arrangement so it comes out automatically with the rent.

If you owe rent from a previous tenancy, this is called a vacated debt. Housing ACT cannot take legal action to recover debts that arose on a date more than six years ago unless: (1) you have admitted liability for that debt; or (2) Housing ACT begins the debt recovery process before the six year time limit has elapsed.

If you have a vacated debt with Housing ACT, you can use most of the methods listed above to make payments, but unfortunately the Centrelink direct deduction method cannot be used. That method can only be used for current rent accounts.

If you dispute some or all of a vacated debt, you should contact us for advice.

Disclaimer

This fact sheet contains general information available at the time of printing. It does not constitute legal advice. If you have a specific legal problem, please contact Canberra Community Law's advice line on 02 6218 7977.

Canberra Community Law is entirely independent of Housing ACT. All assistance is free.

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