

COVID-19 Rent Relief – tenants



The Tasmanian Government has established the COVID-19 Rent Relief Fund to provide rent relief payments of up to \$2,000 to support Tasmanians experiencing rental hardship due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The scheme started Monday 25 May 2020 and is available until 30 June 2021.

A third round of financial help for residential tenants who are experiencing rental hardship due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been announced. If you have already received rent relief but are still in hardship you can apply for extra support, see COVID-19 Residential Rental Relief Extra Support fact sheet.

What is the COVID-19 Rent Relief payment?

The COVID-19 Rent Relief payment is paid directly to landlords or their agents who have entered into an approved temporary rent reduction agreement with their tenant to keep them securely housed in their principal place of residence.

The payment is made directly to the landlord or agent to contribute to the tenant's modified rental payments, under their temporary rental reduction agreement.

The value of the payment will contribute to or be equal to the rent reduction provided until 30 June 2021 but will not exceed \$2,000.

Who is an eligible tenant?

A tenant is eligible for rent relief if:

- you are a tenant renting in the private rental market
- you have experienced and can demonstrate financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- your rent is more than 30 per cent of your household income
- your household has less than \$5,000 in savings

How do I apply for rent relief?

1. Speak with your landlord or agent to discuss the scheme, your eligibility and the terms of a potential rent reduction.
2. Together with your landlord or agent, complete a Rent Relief Application Form. Forms are available from 25 May 2020 from Housing Connect at www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing/rental-services or by calling 1800 800 588. If you are eligible but are unable to reach agreement with your landlord for a rent reduction, you should contact the Office of the Residential Tenancy Commissioner to discuss your options.
3. As part of the application:
 - » You will need to provide income statements, payslips, bank statements recording 6 months' activity.
 - » You will also need to provide your tenancy agreement and Rent Relief Application Form.
 - » Further bank statements may be requested to ensure your eligibility.

If approved as eligible, the Department of Justice will process your application.

Once approved, the reduced rental amount will apply for the specified period and your landlord or agent will receive payment of the rent reduction.

Example:

Jane currently pays \$350 per week in rent for a private rental property she shares with her partner. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jane lost her regular shifts in a local retail outlet. Jane contacted her landlord to discuss temporarily reducing her rent for the next few months to make things easier for her until her work picks up again.

Together they follow a simple process to agree and implement a rent relief agreement that allows Jane's rent to be reduced by 25 per cent for the next 3 months:

- Together, they discuss the situation and complete a Rent Relief Application Form (from www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing/rental-services) to confirm the agreed reduction in rent and time period it applies.
- Jane contacts the Department of Justice and provides them with a copy of this application and her income information confirming the financial impact of COVID-19. The Department of Justice then checks that Jane meets all other eligibility requirements for the assistance.
- If eligible, the Department of Justice will approve or decline the application within nine business days. If approved they'll confirm the date the rent reductions starts and authorise payment of the grant to the landlord or agent.
- Jane starts paying the reduced rental amount once the agreement has been approved.

Where can I find out more?

You can find out more from Housing Connect on **1800 800 588**.

Tenants – FAQs

What should I do if I can't afford my rent?

If you are unable to pay your rent due to financial hardship, in the first instance you should contact your landlord or property manager as soon as possible to negotiate an alternative arrangement such as rent reduction.

When you reach an agreement, make sure it is in writing. A template for recording your agreement can be found at www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing/rental-services as part of the application form for rent relief. You may then be eligible for the COVID-19 Rent Relief.

Please note that until **30 June 2021**, landlords are not able to increase rents. Any rental relief is therefore not to be paid due to rent increases.

Should I stop paying my rent?

No. To avoid breaching your tenancy agreement it is important you continue to pay your rent.

If you are experiencing rental hardship, in the first instance you should contact your agent, lessor or landlord to negotiate an alternative arrangement such as rent reduction.

What if I can't reach an agreement with my agent or landlord?

If you are experiencing rental hardship and cannot reach agreement with your landlord on a rent reduction, you can contact the Office of the Residential Tenancy Commissioner.

What if my landlord wants to know if I am eligible before agreeing to a rent reduction?

Landlords have been encouraged to negotiate in good faith. You will be required to provide a copy of your tenancy agreement and rent reduction agreement before your eligibility can be assessed.

Am I eligible if I live with other people and have a shared lease?

Yes. If you are one of the lease holders in your home and meet the eligibility criteria you may qualify for a

payment that represents your portion of the rent.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty paying your rent due to a loss or reduction of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the first instance you and the other tenants on the lease should contact your agent, lessor or landlord to negotiate an alternative arrangement such as rent reduction.

Can I apply if I sub-let a room?

Yes, you can apply if you have a sub-let agreement in a tenancy. You will need to provide your written sub-lease agreement and rent reduction agreement, and meet all other eligibility criteria.

I'm not an Australian Citizen. Am I able to access the payment?

Yes, there are no citizenship or permanent residency requirements for applicants. Applicants that may be eligible include casual workers on holiday and working visas, skilled visas, seasonal workers, New Zealand citizens and all refugee and temporary protection visa holders.

How do I apply for a rent reduction?

To determine your eligibility for COVID-19 Rent Relief, contact Housing Connect on **1800 800 588**.

Applications for the scheme can be found at www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing/rental-services.

You will be required to provide your rent reduction agreement (which is part of the application form) and information to confirm your eligibility.

If you are eligible, the Department of Justice will approve your temporary rent reduction and will authorise the Rent Reduction Payment to your landlord.

Will my landlord have to pay the payment back?

No. Your landlord will not have to pay the payment back.

What if I'm not eligible but I'm at risk of losing my tenancy for other reasons?

A range of additional protections have been put in place to prevent termination of leases during the COVID-19 emergency period. Rents must not be increased, leases must not be terminated by the landlord, and you can break a lease due to severe hardship.

Housing Connect may be able to help you sustain your tenancy. Information on your rights as a tenant can also be found at <http://tutas.org.au>

Am I eligible if I have a social housing tenancy?

No. The COVID-19 Rent Relief scheme aims to support tenants experiencing rental hardship in private rentals. If you are experiencing rental hardship in your social housing tenancy, you should contact your housing provider in the first instance.

How can I stay updated?

Advice is updated frequently as the COVID-19 situation evolves in Tasmania. Please refer to the following for the latest information:

- Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au
- Australian Government Department of Health www.health.gov.au
- Tasmanian Public Health Hotline **1800 671 738**