

# HOARDING AND HOUSEKEEPING ISSUES<sup>1</sup>

## Hoarding

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Hoarding is recognized as both a mental health issue and a public health problem. It is typically not an immediate crisis. Usually the hoarding behavior has been occurring for a long time and therefore requires a long-term solution. In addition, interventions without the individual's cooperation can prove ineffective as the resident is central to overcoming the hoarding behavior. Careful assessment of the individual situation is essential for a successful outcome.

Property Managers and Service Coordinators should collaborate with the individual, family and agencies including local hoarding taskforces, mental health providers, adult protective services, child protective services, code enforcement, inspectional services, animal control and housing court. The following steps should be considered:

- Contact the resident face-to-face.
- Treat the resident with respect and dignity.
- Remain non-judgmental and factual.
- Evaluate for health and safety. Explain specific health and safety issues to the resident.
- Make appropriate referrals.
- Reassure the resident that others will try to help work with him/her.
- Involve the resident in developing solutions.
- Consider whether the resident has a right to a reasonable accommodation, such as time and assistance.

**Hoarding** is a complex disorder that is made up of three connected problems:

1. collecting too many items that are purchased or free (including animals)
2. difficulty getting rid of items
3. problems with organization

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency's *Resident Services Coordinator's Handbook*

These problems can lead to significant amounts of clutter which can severely limit the use of living spaces for their intended purpose, cause significant safety and health hazards as well as lease violations, and result in significant distress and/or impairment in day-to-day living, including home life, health, family, work and social life (to tenant, others in building, owner, etc.).

## **Addressing Issues**

A reasonable accommodation never means the lease violation can continue indefinitely and it never means a delay in addressing an imminent serious health or safety issue. It needs to be made clear to the resident that hoarding, which causes health and safety issues, constitutes a lease violation, and that the safety and health hazards must be addressed if the individual is to retain his or her tenancy.

If the resident cooperates in trying to address the hoarding problem, a timeline should be set for the home to be free of safety and health hazards.

## **Housekeeping**

Issues with housekeeping may or may not signify a lease violation. It is important to distinguish between poor housekeeping that results in a messy, cluttered, dirty home, which is not necessarily a lease violation, and poor housekeeping that constitutes a health and safety hazard or destruction of property, such as flammable items on the stove or in the oven, rotting food, or stopped up plumbing. These could be lease violations.

Housekeeping problems may be reported first by maintenance staff, since they are more frequently in residents' homes. Property managers should always follow up on these reports by going to the resident's home and evaluating whether the poor housekeeping constitutes a lease violation. If so,

- The manager should send the resident written notice of the lease violation and a date, when the manager will return to re-inspect the apartment. The notice should describe the current housekeeping problems and the standards that the resident is expected to meet. The lease must be reference as it helps insure compliance.
- For sites with Service Coordinators, the letter should refer the resident to the Service Coordinator if the resident feels he or she needs assistance from an outside agency.

## **What can the Service Coordinator do?**

If the resident is eligible, the Service Coordinator can refer the person for homemaking services through the local Area on Aging, or local Center for Independent Services maybe available if a person's housing is in jeopardy.