

# **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

## **PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR GROUP HOMES**

**June 2007**

## Acknowledgements

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## 1. Foreword

Group homes are residences where the occupants of the dwelling live. They are not conducted as a business in the manner of commercial public accommodation such as boarding houses or hostels. They do however represent a community accommodation service for students or other groups of people who do not currently have the capacity to provide for their own accommodation.

Unlike traditional family homes, some group homes may accommodate larger numbers of people on a regular basis. This may increase the potential transmission and impact of communicable disease on the inhabitants of the dwelling. It also may adversely impact on the existing infrastructure of the premises to the detriment of the occupants, surrounding properties or environment.

These Guidelines have been prepared to ensure group homes are designed, constructed, operated and maintained to consistently high public health standards, to minimise the occurrence of disease transmission and other health-related issues associated with the use of this type of accommodation.

Note: Owners and operators of these types of facilities need to be aware that approval from other regulatory mechanisms not documented herein may be required.

### **Standards Adopted by Reference**

*Building Code of Australia*

*Australian and New Zealand Standards:*

*AS/NZS 4220:1994 Bunk Beds*

*AS/NZS 2195:1999 Folding Cots*

*Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Code*

*National Plumbing and Drainage Code*

*NHMRC Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 2004*

*NT Code of Practice for Small On-Site Sewage and Sullage Treatment Systems and the Disposal or Reuse of Sewage Effluent*

Northern Territory legislation and supporting documents, the Building Code of Australia, and the Australian and New Zealand Standards are widely referenced in these Guidelines. Only their most recent version and amendments are to be used as source documents.

## 2. Introduction

Following a review of Northern Territory public health legislation, the Department of Health and Families (DHF) has developed Public Health Guidelines for Group Homes. These guidelines offer operators of group homes with clear, relevant, up to date and user-friendly guidance to enable compliance with legislative requirements. The resulting document offers a clear set of minimum standards.

The general requirements outlined in these Guidelines were prepared on a risk assessment basis, which acknowledges two factors that are important public health determinants in the transmission of infectious disease:

- Overcrowding
- Sharing of facilities (such as kitchen, ablution and laundry facilities).

The objective of these Guidelines is to:

- Meet community expectations of health standards in group homes and emergency accommodation
- Provide guidance to prevent overcrowding
- Ensure design criteria are met which provides an acceptable standard of sanitation, amenity and safety for people being accommodated in group homes
- Prevent the spread of communicable diseases
- Consider the public health impact of group homes on their surroundings.

If you would like to comment on any aspect of the Guidelines, please contact the DHF Environmental Health Program Directorate on (08) 8922 7152.

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### 3. Definitions

<b>Authorised Officer</b>	A person authorised and appointed by the Chief Health Officer.
<b>Bedroom</b>	A room or dormitory used for sleeping accommodation, which complies with BCA requirements.
<b>BCA</b>	Building Code of Australia
<b>DHF</b>	Department of Health and Families
<b>Emergency Accommodation</b>	Emergency or crisis accommodation is short-term housing provided to people who need help with somewhere to live immediately.
<b>Floor space</b>	The area of floor available to guests as free space. It does not include an en suite floor area, but may include the area of a bed.
<b>Dwelling</b>	A building, or part of a building, designed, constructed or adapted for human habitation as a self-contained unit.
<b>Group Home</b>	(As defined in the NT Planning Scheme) is a dwelling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) occupied by persons who are not necessarily related and who live together as a single household, with or without paid supervision or care; and</li> <li>(b) managed by a community organisation, education establishment, or recognised religious or charitable organisation, or a department or institutional establishment of the Crown.</li> </ul> includes <b>emergency accommodation</b> but does not include <b>supporting accommodation</b> .
<b>Local Authority</b>	Includes local DHF Environmental Health Offices, Health Boards and other authorities as appointed.
<b>Premises</b>	As defined in the <i>Public Health Act</i> . Includes land, building, pontoon, vehicle and structures. Facilities may be private or shared.
<b>Proprietor</b>	A person who is the owner or person in charge of a business or the head of an organisation providing group home accommodation.
<b>Register</b>	A record of occupancy in a group home and can be in hard copy form or in electronic form.
<b>Resident</b>	Any person (including owner, operator, or houseparent) hiring or occupying a room or dwelling for living or sleeping purposes.
<b>Supervisor</b>	Any individual who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of a group home. May include houseparents.
<b>Supporting Accommodation</b>	A convalescent or nursing home, an orphanage, a children's home, an institution for poor or disadvantaged persons or a home for the care of aged persons; or Premises used for the care of resident persons receiving medical treatment but not full-time medical treatment; or Premises used by people moving from their homes or an institution and living for a short time in shared, supporting or rehabilitating accommodation.

## 4. Administration

### 4.1 Application

These Guidelines apply to all premises used as group homes. These facilities do not need to be registered with the local authority, however they should be established and operated in accordance with these Guidelines.

### 4.2 Approval Process

This does not remove the requirement to obtain approval from or comply with the requirements of other agencies.

Examples of other agencies from which approval may be required include but are not limited to:

- Building Advisory Services – Department of Planning and Infrastructure
- Development Consent Authority - Department of Planning and Infrastructure
- Department of Local Government and Housing – Water Safety Branch
- NT Fire and Rescue Service

Your local town council may also have requirements, which need to be met.

### 4.3 Compliance Criteria

The Guidelines are both performance based and prescriptive. Compliance is considered to have been met by the operator of a group home if the performance criteria and nominated requirements in the Guidelines have been met or satisfactory alternative solutions can be demonstrated to an authorised officer.

### 4.4 Record Keeping

It is the responsibility of the proprietor of a group home to keep specified documents on site for inspection by an authorised officer, if required.

These documents include:

- An up to date register (electronic or hard copy) of all people residing on the premises, if not in breach of any individual's privacy or security requirements
- Copies of pest control reports, cleaning schedules where they are in use
- Swimming and spa pool monitoring results and management plans, where appropriate.

## 4.5 Fire Appliances / Safety

**NT Fire and Rescue Service has specific fire safety requirements for group homes which are designed to save lives and must be complied with at all times.**

You will need to ensure that:

- You have an up to date fire safety inspection report from **NT Fire and Rescue Service**
- The requirements of NT Fire and Rescue have been met in regard to an evacuation plan, smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, hose reels and signage
- Bed, luggage, fixtures and fittings are located to provide clear egress from rooms and buildings at all times
- Emergency exits are kept free of obstruction at all times
- Locks are not fitted to an exit door, preventing it being opened from inside the premises.

For further information on any aspect of fire safety in group homes please contact NT Fire and Rescue Service. NT Fire and Rescue Service administer and monitor compliance with the *Fire and Emergency Act* and Regulations and the fire safety provisions of the Building Code of Australia.

## 5. Design and Construction Criteria

A minimum standard of comfort, cleanliness and safety is to be maintained in the bedrooms and facilities and equipment contained within.

### 5.1 Allocated Space in Bedrooms

You will need to have:

Minimum Room Size Requirements	
People Permitted	Minimum Room Size (m <sup>2</sup> )
1	7.5
2	10
3	12
4	16
5	20
6	24
7	28
8 (and additional people)	32 (add 4m <sup>2</sup> for every extra person)
1 child < 3 years old	Do not count
2 children < 3 years old	= 1 adult

**Figure 1: Minimum Accommodation Room Size Requirements (m<sup>2</sup>)**

- Room sizes include areas “occupied” any cupboard or other built-in furniture, fixture or fitting but does not include any area occupied by any bathroom or toilet in or attached to the bedroom
- A minimum floor area for each bedroom of 7.5 m<sup>2</sup>
- A minimum space between each bed or bunk and the next of 0.9 m
- Rows of bunks, which have a 1.8m passageway separation distance.

### 5.2 Determining the Number of Residents

The number of residents in a group home shall be designated by the amount of beds available (including those for the use of supervisors and their family members) within the home at any one time.

**It is important to note that Development Consent Approval is required for Group Homes accommodating 13 or more people including supervisors and children under the age of 3.**

### 5.3 Beds

You will need to have:

- A minimum bed size of 0.8 m x 1.9 m
- Bunks fitted with safety rails and complying with AS/NZS 4220: 2003: Bunk Beds
- Where cots are supplied they must comply with AS/NZS 2195: 1999: Folding Cots
- A minimum space between each bed or bunk and the next of 0.9 m.

### 5.4 Storage

You will need to have:

- Adequate storage for linen, blankets, pillows and towels
- Secure and adequate storage provided for guest's personal possessions, which does not interfere with cleaning tasks.

### 5.5 Ceiling Height and Fan Safety

Ceiling fans pose a potential safety risk and their correct positioning is extremely important. A safe distance is to be provided between floor and ceiling as well as any ceiling fan and bunk bed.

You will need to have:

- A ceiling height of no less than 2.4 m
- Ceiling fan blades a minimum of 0.75 m from the edge of any bunk bed
- Bunk beds positioned to avoid contact with lights or fans
- A minimum distance of 1.0 m between the surface of the top bunk bed mattress and the ceiling.

### 5.6 Kitchen Facilities

Kitchen storage and preparation areas are required to be structurally sound and able to be maintained in a clean and hygienic condition. It is important to provide an environment that is hygienic for the preparation, cooking and serving of food.

You will need to have:

- Walls, floors, ceilings, cupboards and benches are to be in good condition, with no chips, or cracks. Painted or rendered block walls, painted plasterboard, laminate, linoleum or painted wooden surfaces are appropriate so long as they can be adequately cleaned
- An acceptable water supply
- A double bowl sink or dishwashing machine
- Adequate crockery, cutlery, cooking utensils and equipment provided for guest's use
- Adequate refrigeration to ensure that cold food is maintained below 5°C.

## 5.7 Laundry and Drying Facilities

Adequate and conveniently located washing and drying facilities are to be provided for residents.

You will need to have:

- A clean and adequately equipped laundry area constructed in accordance with the BCA
- A minimum of one washing machine and a washtub
- An external washing line or a minimum of one dryer
- An adequate supply of hot and cold water under pressure.

## 5.8 Ablution Facilities

A minimum standard of ablution facilities must be provided depending on the number of residents. The following table sets out the minimum requirements for group homes.

No. of Residents	Toilets	Showers	Handwash Basins
1 - 7	1	1	1
8 - 12	2	2	2

**Figure 2: Minimum Requirements for Ablution Facilities**

\* A ratio of 1 additional toilet, shower and handwash basin for every 4 additional residents or part thereof is required.

## 5.9 Ventilation

Sufficient ventilation is to be provided for occupants. All air conditioning units and heating units are to be regularly serviced and suitably maintained and where possible, located in such a position to not cause a noise nuisance to adjoining properties.

## 5.10 Safety and Storage of Equipment

Chemicals and maintenance equipment are dangerous, and should be kept in secure areas and always used according to the instructions and/or the labels.

You will need:

- All chemicals, maintenance facilities and equipment appropriately secured
- All chemical storage areas protected from the elements, which are well ventilated and located away from food preparation or food storage.

## 5.11 Lighting

Adequate lighting is to be provided and must be positioned so as not create a nuisance to neighbours.

## 5.12 Water Supply

Group homes must be provided with a clean and continuous supply of water.

You will need to have:

- Water supplied for drinking and cooking purposes complying with the NHMRC *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines* or as directed by the Chief Health Officer
- A continuous supply of hot and cold water under pressure for drinking, cooking, laundry, cleaning and ablutions.

## 5.13 Sewage and Wastewater Disposal

Sewage and wastewater will be discharged to the sewer or to an on-site septic tank system.

You will need to have:

- Discharge to the sewer
- A septic tank system that complies with the *Code of Practice for Small On-Site Sewage and Sullage Treatment Systems and the Disposal or Reuse of Sewage Effluent*.

## 6. Cleanliness, Maintenance and Operational Requirements

### 6.1 General Cleanliness of the Premises

The dwelling, facilities, equipment and associated grounds are required to be kept in a clean condition and the premises maintained so that it is free from accumulated refuse.

Any storage within stairwells, on landings, adjacent to fire stair doors and in the area to which the stair leads has the potential to endanger life.

You will need to:

- Meet the requirements of relevant public and environmental health legislation
- Keep both internal and external areas of the dwelling clean. This includes exits, kitchen equipment, staff facilities, grounds, garbage storage areas, structure, walls, floors, ceilings, roof, stairs, paintwork, cladding, tiling, screens to openings, woodwork, floor covering, furniture, fittings, windows, doors, linen and all equipment supplied for residents.

### 6.2 Linen

Clean linen and bedding is to be provided for residents. A clean mattress protector and a plastic impermeable mattress cover will ensure a high level of hygiene and extend the life of the mattress.

You will need to have:

- All beds made up with a clean pillowcase, bottom and a top sheet (whether supplied by the guest or the operator) and a clean mattress protector
- Warm bedding where appropriate, for the climatic conditions
- Sheets and pillowcases where supplied, washed at least weekly and on each change of occupancy
- Plastic impermeable mattress covers wiped over with a sanitiser when sheets are changed.

### 6.3 Garbage Disposal

Waste is to be collected regularly and not allowed to accumulate on-site.

You will need to have:

- A waste collection system operated by the relevant authority or a contractor
- Garbage collection receptacles and recycling areas maintained in a sanitary condition
- On-site disposal is not permitted unless authorised by the Chief Health Officer.

## 6.4 Exclusion of Pests and Vermin

The premises is to be kept free of pests and vermin.

You will need to have:

- The premises inspected by a licensed pest control operator at 12 monthly intervals or as directed by an authorised officer
- A pest control program in place for the premises to demonstrate what you do to control pests
- Records of pest control inspections and treatments on site for inspection by an authorised officer.

## 6.5 Mosquito Control

The prevalence of mosquitoes in the NT is due to many factors such as climatic conditions and the time of day/year. The intention of this section is to ensure that residents and neighbours have minimal exposure to mosquito borne disease. This can be achieved by providing mosquito proofing to key areas of the premises that have a high usage by patrons. Premises design should also incorporate features that offer minimal opportunities for mosquito breeding. Habitable rooms and bathrooms can be both enclosed and provided with mechanical ventilation or be provided with insect screening.

You will need to:

- Ensure that all indoor areas including bedrooms, internal bathrooms, internal communal areas and kitchens are maintained to prevent ingress of insects including flies and mosquitoes
- Where feasible, ensure that no ornamental or man made feature is allowed to become a breeding site for mosquitoes on that premises
- Comply with the mosquito control regulations.

## 6.6 Noise

The proprietor must comply with the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act* and the *Summary Offences Act* and Regulations regarding environmental nuisances. Noise-generating appliances (particularly pool pumps and air conditioners) installed at the premises are not to create a noise nuisance and no environmental nuisance is to arise from activities carried out on the premises.

## 6.7 Tobacco Control

Areas where smoking is permitted in shared accommodation are restricted. You will need to comply with the *Tobacco Control Act* and Regulations.

Further information on Tobacco legislation can be viewed at the DHF web site:

<http://www.health.nt.gov.au/>

## 6.8 Swimming Pool and Spa Management

All pools on the premises are to be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times.

You will need to:

- Comply with *AS1926.1-1993 Swimming Pool Safety – Fencing for Swimming Pools* and amendments
- Keep a management plan that documents the dosing and maintenance regime as well as the procedure to follow in the event of water quality failing to meet legislative standards
- Carry out and record daily the results of water quality testing and monitoring
- Disinfect pool water as necessary according to water quality test results
- Display safety and rescue signage and rescue equipment around the pool.