

Public & Environmental Health Guidelines for Group Homes

February 2016

Disclaimer

These Guidelines reflects the current state of infection control and communicable disease transmission knowledge, and while every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, operators should be aware that it could be altered in the future to reflect changes in knowledge concerning transmission of disease.

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- Government of Queensland, Queensland Health; and
- Brisbane City Council, Queensland.

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1: Introduction

The Public and Environmental Health Guidelines for Group Homes (Guidelines) have been prepared to provide a clear set of updated minimum public health requirements and provide safe and healthy group homes in the Northern Territory.

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; and
- sharing of facilities (such as kitchen, ablution and laundry facilities).

The provisions of these Guidelines do not remove the need to comply with other laws of the Northern Territory specific to the operation of group homes.

For general enquiries on these Guidelines, please contact the Environmental Health Branch, Department of Health by emailing envirohealth@nt.gov.au or calling the environmental health hotline on 1800 095 646.

2: Administrative Provisions

2.1 Documents Adopted by Reference

- Building Code of Australia
- Australian and New Zealand Standards:
 - AS 4674:2004 Construction and fitout of food premises;
 - AS/NZS 4220:2010 Bunk Beds and other elevated beds;
 - AS/NZS 2195:2010 Folding Cots – safety requirements;
 - AS/NZS 2172:2010 Cots for household use – safety requirements;
 - AS/NZS 1668.2:2002: The use of ventilation and air conditioning in buildings;
 - AS/NZS 3666.1:2002 Air handling and water systems of buildings - microbial control – design, installation and commissioning;
 - AS/NZS 4146:2000 Laundry Practice;
 - AS 1680.1:2006 – Interior lighting – General principles and recommendations; and
 - AS 1926.1:2007 Swimming pool safety – safety barriers for swimming pools.
- Australia and New Zealand Food Standard Code
- National Plumbing and Drainage Code
- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 2011
- Queensland Development Code: Residential Services Building Standard 2002
- Queensland Local Law Accommodation Draft Code of Practices 1999 and Brisbane City Council's Accommodation Information Kit have been widely sourced in this document.
- NT Code of Practice for On-Site Waste Water Management

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

2.2 Definitions

Authorised Officer means a person appointed by the Chief Health Officer under the Public and Environmental Health Act 2011.

Bedroom means a room used for sleeping accommodation, which complies with these Guidelines.

Building has the same meaning as in the Northern Territory Building Act and includes a structure and a part of a building or structure.

Building Area has the same meaning as in the Northern Territory Building Act.

Building Classification has the same meaning as in the Building Code of Australia and this document relates to Buildings Classed 1(a).

Building Code means the Building Code of Australia (BCA).

Building Certifier has the same meaning as in the Northern Territory Building Act.

Building Permit means a permit to carry out building work issued by a building certifier in accordance with the Northern Territory Building Act.

Building work means work for or in connection with the construction, demolition or removal of a building or plumbing or drainage services, whether or not connected to a building.

Construct has the same meaning as in the Northern Territory Building Act.

Construct, in relation to a building includes:

- build, re-build, erect or re-erect the building;
- repair the building;
- make alterations to the building;
- enlarge or extend the building; and
- place or relocate the building on land.

Dwelling means a building, or part of a building, designed, constructed or adapted as a self-contained residence. This type of building is Class 1(a) within the terms of the BCA.

Floor area in relation to a room, means the area of the room measured within the finished surfaces of the walls, and includes the area occupied by any cupboard or other built-in furniture, fixture or fitting. It does not include the floor area of an ensuite but may include the area taken up by a bed.

Group home means a dwelling occupied by persons who are not necessarily related and who live together as a single household, with or without paid supervision or care. Management of a group home is assisted by a community organisation, education establishment, or recognised religious or charitable organisation, or a department or institutional establishment of the Crown.

Group homes are not considered commercial visitor accommodation e.g. boarding houses, hotels or supporting accommodation e.g. nursing home.

Habitable room has the same meaning as in the BCA and

- (a) includes a bedroom, living room, lounge room, music room, television room, kitchen, dining room, sewing room, study, playroom, family room, home theatre and sun room; but

- (b) excludes a bathroom, laundry, water closet, pantry, walk-in wardrobe, corridor, hallway, lobby, photographic darkroom, clothes-drying room, and other spaces of a specialised nature occupied neither frequently nor for extended periods.

Non-habitable building or structure has the same meaning as in the BCA and is a private garage, carport, shed, or the like. Such buildings are Class 10(a) and cannot be used for either private or commercial accommodation.

Occupancy permit means a permit to occupy issued by a registered Building Certifier in accordance with the Northern Territory Building Act.

Premises includes:

- tract of land whether built on, vacant, or not;
- a house or building or part of a house or building with the grounds, etc., belonging to it;
- a structure or part of a structure whether temporary or permanent;
- a pontoon; and
- vehicles.

Proprietor means a person who is the owner of the group home, or the person operating the group home on behalf of the owner, or if that person cannot be identified, the person in charge of the group home.

Register means a record of occupancy for the group home. It can be in hard copy form or in electronic form.

Supervisor means any person who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of a group home. This may include houseparents.

2.3 Acronyms

To assist in using these Guidelines, please refer to the acronym quick guide below:

AS/NZS	Australian Standard/New Zealand Standard
BCA	Building Code of Australia
CHO	Chief Health Officer
DoH	Department of Health
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NT	Northern Territory

2.4 Application

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 in group homes. It also may adversely impact on the existing infrastructure of the premises to the detriment of the residents, surrounding properties or environment.

These Guidelines have been prepared to ensure that group homes are designed, constructed, operated and maintained to consistently high public and environmental health standards, in order to by minimise the potential occurrence of disease, injury and other health-related complaints potentially associated with this type of accommodation.

These Guidelines are primarily aimed at designers, builders, owners and operators of group homes together with authorised officers and other agencies.

2.5 Objectives

The objectives of these Guidelines are to:

- meet community expectations of appropriate minimum health standards in group homes;
- provide guidance to prevent overcrowding;
- ensure design criteria are met which provides an acceptable standard of sanitation, amenity and safety for residents;
- prevent the spread of communicable diseases; and
- consider the public health impact of group homes on surrounding properties and the environment.

2.6 Public Health Registration

Group homes are not subject to registration under the Public and Environmental Health Act or Food Act, but must be operated so as to not cause a public health nuisance in accordance with the Public and Environmental Health Act 2011.

2.7 Record Keeping

It is the responsibility of the proprietor of a group home to keep specified documents on site.

Where applicable, the following must be made available for view during an inspection by an authorised officer:

- an up to date register (electronic or hard copy) of all group home residents, if not in breach of any privacy or security requirement(s);
- copies of pest control reports and/or cleaning schedules where they are in use;
- swimming and spa pool monitoring results, and management plans where appropriate;
- details of any on-site wastewater system or wastewater treatment plant including any maintenance plan and inspection schedule; and
- records of water quality analysis.

2.8 Fire Appliances/Safety

NT Fire and Rescue Service (NTFRS) administer and monitor compliance with the Fire and Emergency Act and Regulations, the fire safety provisions of the Building Code of Australia and Australian Standards.

NTFRS have 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 the requirements of NTFRS have been met, namely that you have:

- an evacuation plan (in accordance with Fire and Emergency Regulation 11 and Australian Standard 3745);

- photo electric smoke alarms (NTFRS strongly recommend the interconnecting of alarms)
- emergency lighting facility as per BCA Volume 2; Lighting to assist evacuation 3.7.2.5;
- fire extinguishers (3A40BE DCP) installed in the kitchen and near emergency exits;
- bed, luggage, fixtures and fittings located to provide clear egress from rooms and buildings at all times; and
- emergency exits kept free of obstruction at all times.

NTFRS strongly recommend the installation of suitable Public Safety Hardware Locks to exit doors, ensuring they may be opened from the inside of the premises at all times.

Note: Works conducted on premises will require certification from a Building Certifier.

For further information on any aspect of fire safety in group homes, please contact NTFRS Community Safety.

3: Design and Construction Requirements

3.1 Allocated Floor Area in Bedrooms

The table below details the required minimum floor area in bedrooms. The floor area includes the area occupied by any cupboard or other built-in furniture, fixture or fitting but does not include any area occupied by a bathroom or toilet in, or attached to, the bedroom.

Minimum Room Size Requirements	
People Permitted	Minimum Room Size (m ²)
1-2	7.5
3	12
4	16
5	20
6	24
7	28
8 or more	32 (add 4m ² for every extra person)
1 child < 3yrs old	Do not count
2 children < 3 yrs old	= 1 person

Note: Any proposed variation to the above minimum floor area requirements must be approved by DoH.

3.2 Number of Residents

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

Note: Development Consent Approval is required for group homes which accommodate more than 12 residents in the group home (including supervisors and children under the age of three).

3.3 Ceiling Height and Fan Safety

All bunk beds and other elevated beds must comply with the Australian/ New Zealand Standard AS/NZ 4220:2010 Bunk Beds and Other Elevated Beds.

In order to meet this Standard a safe distance is to be provided between floor and ceiling fans as well as any ceiling fan and bunk bed. The upper bunk must be at least 2m from any ceiling fan at its closest point. Ceiling fans pose a potential safety risk and correct positioning is extremely important. Where there is insufficient space from any bed to the ceiling, fans should be wall mounted and encased by a safety cage.

3.4 Beds

You will need to have:

- a minimum bed size of 800mm x 1900mm;
- bunks fitted with safety rails and complying with AS/NZS 4220: 2010, Bunk Beds and other elevated beds;
- where cots are supplied they must comply with AS/NZS 2195: 1999: Folding Cots; or AS/NZS 2172:2010, Cots for household use – safety requirements; and
- all beds, bunks, cots including their frames and mattresses must be kept clean and free from any insect pests. They must be easy to clean, designed and positioned in such a manner that will enable cleaning around and under them.

Note: Any proposed variation to the above bed requirements must be approved by DoH.

3.5 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.

The kitchen will need to be equipped with:

- walls, floors, ceilings, cupboards and benches that are 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;
- a potable water supply;
- a double bowl sink or dishwashing machine;
- sufficient crockery, cutlery, and cooking utensils to meet the needs of the residents;
- adequate refrigeration to ensure that all perishable food can be stored below 5 °C; and
- adequate dry storage to ensure that all dry goods can be stored away from vermin.

3.6 Laundry and Drying Facilities

Adequate and conveniently located washing and drying facilities should be provided.

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; and
- an adequate supply of hot and cold water under pressure.

3.7 Lighting

Adequate lighting is to be provided. It must be positioned so as not create a nuisance to residents or neighbours. You will need to:

- comply with the BCA Part F4 and AS 1680.1-2006: Interior and workplace lighting - General principles and recommendations; and
- provide lighting in the hours of darkness for paths of travel to ablution, laundry and other facilities used by residents where appropriate.

3.8 Ablution Facilities

A minimum standard of ablution facilities must be provided for both sexes depending on the number of residents. Residents must have either an ensuite or access to shared facilities which include toilets, hand wash basins and baths or showers.

Ablution facilities will be provided in accordance with the BCA Part F2 Sanitary and Other Facilities.

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

3.9 Ventilation

Sufficient ventilation is to be provided for residents. You will need to have either:

- natural ventilation complying with BCA Part F4; or
- comply with AS1668.2-2002: The use of ventilation and air conditioning in buildings and AS/NZS 3666.1:2002 Air handling and water systems of buildings - microbial control – design, installation and commissioning and BCA Part F4.

In addition, you must:

- regularly service air conditioning units (and heating units); and
- locate air conditioning units and heating units in such a position not to cause a noise nuisance to adjoining properties.

4: General Sanitation & Operational Requirements

4.1 General Cleanliness and Maintenance

All Group Homes must be maintained in good repair, and in compliance with the structural requirements of these Guidelines. All parts of the premises must be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition, free of litter and vermin, so as to prevent the transmission of infectious and communicable disease.

Note: Where DoH has approved a cleaning schedule for the premises, satisfactory compliance with the terms of the schedule will be considered as complying with the requirements of the Public and Environmental Health Act.

4.2 Linen

Clean linen and bedding is to be provided for residents.

You should have:

- all beds made up with a clean pillowcase, bottom and a top sheet (whether supplied by the resident or the operator) and a clean mattress protector;
- 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;
- bedding and linen such as towels where provided are to be frequently, laundered i.e. minimum weekly and more often if subject to frequent soiling
- accessible warm bedding, as appropriate, for the climate.

4.3 Storage Areas

You should ensure that:

- maintenance equipment is stored in a secure area;
- chemicals are stored in a secure area that is protected from the elements, well ventilated and located away from food preparation or food storage areas;
- there is adequate storage for guest's linen, blankets, pillows and towels; and
- there is secure and adequate storage provided for guest's personal possessions which does not interfere with cleaning tasks.

Note: It is important to recognise that any items stored within stairwells, on landings, adjacent to fire stair doors and in the area to which the stair leads have the potential to endanger life.

4.4 Water Supply

Water supplied for drinking and cooking purposes must comply with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'Australian Drinking Water Guidelines'. Premises using a private water supply e.g. bore water, rainwater etc. will be required to demonstrate that they have a potable water supply.

A continuous supply of hot and cold water delivered under pressure must be supplied to the kitchen, laundry and ablution facilities.

4.5 Sewage and Wastewater Disposal

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

You will need to have:

- a connection to mains sewerage; or
- an on-site wastewater system that complies with public and environmental health legislation.

4.6 Garbage Disposal

Waste should be collected regularly and not 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; and
- suitable facilities for washing and disinfecting garbage storage containers.

Note: No on-site disposal is permitted unless authorised by the CHO.

4.7 Swimming Pool and Spa Management

All pools in premises must be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times.

You will need to comply with:

- the Northern Territory Public Health Guidelines for Aquatic Facilities; and
- AS1926.1- 2007 Swimming pool safety – Safety barriers for swimming pools and amendments.

4.8 Exclusion of Vermin

Premises need to be kept free of vermin, and should be inspected by a licensed pest control operator at 12 monthly intervals or as directed by an authorised officer. Records of pest control inspections and treatments should be kept on site for inspection by an authorised officer.

4.9 Mosquito Control

It is a requirement that certain parts of premises be kept free of mosquitoes. You will need to:

- ensure that all indoor areas including bedrooms, internal bathrooms, internal communal areas and kitchens are maintained so as to prevent ingress of insects including flies and mosquitoes;
- ensure that no ornamental or man made feature is allowed to become a breeding site for mosquitoes on the premises; and
- comply with Part 4 Mosquito Control of the Public and Environmental Health Regulations.

Note: 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 guests 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.

4.10 Noise

You should ensure that excessive noise does not arise from activities carried out at the group home. Any complaints regarding noise will be forwarded to the appropriate Northern Territory Government Agency for action.

4.11 Tobacco Control

You will need to comply with the Tobacco Control Act and Regulations.

Further information on Northern Territory's Tobacco legislation can be found at:
<http://www.health.nt.gov.au/>

Appendix 1: DoH Environmental Health Contact Details

Greater Darwin Region

2nd Floor Casuarina Plaza
258 Trower Rd
CASUARINA
PO Box 40596
CASUARINA NT 0811
Ph: 8922 7377
Fax: 8922 7036

Endeavour Square

Barkly

Health Development Building
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TENNANT CREEK
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TENNANT CREEK NT 0861
Ph: 8962 4302
FAX: 8962 4420

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Peter Sitzler Building
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