



FREE GUIDE

When a home becomes too much

A gentle guide to hoarding: for the person whose home it is, for worried family, and for the professionals who support them.

Maybe it's your own home. Maybe it's your mum's, or a client's. Either way, you're probably carrying some worry, and maybe some shame that was never yours to carry. This guide gives you the plain facts, what helps, what tends to backfire, and where to find support. Every fact in it was checked on an official or established source in October 2026.

A few true things, before anything else

Hoarding isn't laziness, and it isn't a character flaw. Healthdirect describes hoarding disorder as finding it very hard to get rid of things, even when they don't have much value, and says it is a recognised mental illness. People living with it often feel a lot of shame about it.

It often sits alongside something else. Healthdirect lists mobility problems, dementia, intellectual impairment and mental health problems among the reasons hoarding can begin. Things inherited from someone who has died can be especially hard to part with, because they're tied up with grief.

And the clutter is usually the visible part of something bigger. Healthdirect notes that simply clearing the rubbish away won't solve the problem, and the clutter often builds up again. SANE Australia puts it plainly: focus more on the person, and less on the stuff.

This is general information, not medical advice. If you think you or someone you love may be living with hoarding disorder, a GP is a good first step. The healthdirect helpline (1800 022 222) has a registered nurse available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If someone needs urgent medical help, call triple zero (000).

If it's your home

If you're reading this about your own place, that took courage. You don't have to tell anyone yet. Here's what tends to help, in an order that's gentle on you.

Step 1: Talk to one person you trust

A GP is a good place to start. Healthdirect says your doctor can refer you to a psychologist with experience in hoarding, and check that any other health conditions are being looked after.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is the recommended treatment. It works on things like goal setting, organising, problem solving and sorting, at a pace you can manage.



Not ready for an appointment? You can talk to someone first. Beyond Blue is on 1300 22 4636, and Medicare Mental Health (1800 595 212) can connect you with local mental health services.

Step 2: Start small. Really small.

SANE Australia suggests choosing one small area to begin with: a box, a drawer, or one room. Another idea is letting go of just one item a week, like a piece of mail.

It might take a long time to go through a handful of papers, and leave you tired. That still counts. Small, finished goals build confidence.

Step 3: Make the home safer first

Fire and Rescue NSW says hoarding can raise the risk of fire and make it harder to get out. Its general advice:

- make sure you have working smoke alarms
- keep exits and the main paths through the house as clear as you can
- take care with cooking and heating
- get unsafe or disconnected electricity or gas sorted by the right service provider.

A practical place to start: a clear path to the front and back doors, then to your bed, toilet, shower and kitchen. Healthdirect also warns about trips, falls and piles that could collapse.

Step 4: Choose who you let in, and how

You get to decide who helps. It might be a friend, a support worker, or a clean-up team that works at your pace.

Before anyone starts, ask how they'll treat your things. A good helper will agree that nothing goes without your say, and will keep a "decide later" pile for anything you're unsure about.

Free help through My Aged Care

My Aged Care lists hoarding and squalor assistance for older people, including care planning, links to specialist support and one-off clean-ups. It's provided through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme, and an aged care assessor decides whether you can get it. Call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

That is a separate program from Kinship's. Our CHSP grant covers domestic assistance only, in Northern Sydney and the Southern Highlands.

If you're worried about someone you love

Watching someone you love live like this is hard. You might feel angry, embarrassed and scared for their safety, all in the same afternoon. SANE Australia names those feelings too. They're normal, and they don't make you a bad son, daughter, partner or friend.

What tends to help

- Lead with the person, not the stuff. SANE suggests reminding them often what you love about them.
- Use their words. Healthy WA suggests saying “your things” or “your collection”, never “junk”, “mess” or “hoarder”.
- Talk about safety and comfort, not how the house looks.
- Use “I” statements, like “I feel worried when I see you struggling to get to the bathroom.”
- Let them stay in control. Ask how you can help, and agree together what's OK in their space.
- Offer to go with them to the GP.
- Celebrate small wins. One cleared drawer is a real win.

What usually backfires

- Criticism, or blunt words like “this place is a dump”. Healthdirect lists this as something to avoid.
- Clearing the house while they're away, or hiring a skip and doing it for them. SANE says this can feel very violating, and healthdirect says the clutter often builds up again.
- Taking over the sorting. SANE warns it can lead to resentment and burnout, for both of you.
- Giving up after one hard talk. SANE notes it can take several conversations before someone is ready.

Words you could try

These are adapted from Healthy WA (WA Department of Health). Pick one, and say it gently, somewhere private.

- “How do you feel about the way your home is right now?”
- “Are there any parts of the house that feel hard to get around, or unsafe?”
- “Would a few small changes help you feel safer or more comfortable?”
- “How would you feel about us working on one small area together, when you're ready?”



If they're not ready, that's not the end. Healthy WA suggests being patient, raising it again another time and letting them know you're there. If you're worried about the safety of children, an older person or animals in the home, or about the person's ability to make safe decisions, talk to their GP or get advice. For someone older, My Aged Care is on 1800 200 422.

Look after yourself as well

Supporting someone through this is draining. If you're their carer, Carer Gateway (1800 422 737, Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm) offers free support for carers, including counselling.

If you support a client

You may have noticed it over a few home visits: the hallway that's a little narrower each time, the spare room nobody opens. Here's a practical approach that keeps the person at the centre and the plan on track.

Seven steps that respect the person

- 1 **Lead with the relationship.** Talk with your client privately about what they want for their home, not about the clutter.
- 2 **Work with consent.** Nothing should happen in someone's home without their agreement. If you're concerned about capacity, follow your organisation's process and get advice.
- 3 **Map the risks.** Exits and paths, smoke alarms, cooking and heating, electricity and gas, pests, trip hazards, and anyone else living there, including children, older people and animals.
- 4 **Get health input.** A GP can refer to a psychologist experienced in hoarding. Healthdirect notes CBT is the recommended treatment.
- 5 **Stage the work.** One area at a time, agreed with your client, with a "decide later" pile so nothing goes without a yes.
- 6 **Match the help to the home.** Some homes need a specialist first (sharps, significant mould, biological waste, structural damage). Others need a calm team and a steady support worker.
- 7 **Plan for afterwards.** Regular help at home makes it more likely the space stays liveable.

Where to look, in general terms

- **NDIS participants.** Healthy WA (WA Department of Health) notes that support for hoarding may be available through the NDIS. What a plan can pay for depends on the participant's plan and the NDIS rules, so check with the NDIA or the participant's NDIS partner before using funds.
- **Older clients.** My Aged Care hoarding and squalor assistance (care planning, specialist links, one-off clean-ups) through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme, after an aged care assessment. Call 1800 200 422.
- **Fire risk.** Fire and Rescue NSW has an online Hoarding and Squalor Fire Risk Report. It says it will notify the local council and let local crews know, for awareness only. It has no regulatory role, and firefighters only enter if the resident invites them for a Safety Visit.
- **Councils.** Councils may step in where a home poses a risk to public health. The City of Sydney, for example, says its officers visit and assess, try to resolve things informally first, and can issue an order if there's a risk to public health. Check your client's own council.

When you'd like us to step in

Call 0437 733 744 and tell us a little about your client and the home. We'll talk it through with you, assess before we quote, and tell you honestly whether it's a job for us or for a specialist. We'll keep you updated, with your client's agreement.

When to stop and call a specialist

Some things are beyond a family weekend, and beyond a general clean-up team too. Stop and get specialist help if you find:

- needles or other sharps
- significant mould
- large amounts of rotting food, or animal or human waste
- signs of structural damage, like sagging floors or ceilings
- unsafe, altered or disconnected electricity or gas
- many animals in the home. Healthdirect warns that animal hoarding can quickly lead to squalor, with risks of parasites and diseases caught from animals.

If anyone is in danger right now, call triple zero (000).



We understand, and we can step in

We know how much it takes to let someone into a home that's become hard to live in. Kinship has worked in disability and aged care since 2017, and we're a registered NDIS provider (4-GWVHCEY). We work at the person's pace, alongside family and supports, and for ongoing help it's the same support worker every visit.

Our honest limits. We assess before we quote. If we find sharps, significant mould, pests, large amounts of rotting food or biological waste, or structural damage, we'll say so plainly and recommend a specialist. We are not a biohazard, trauma or forensic cleaning service. Our private services are fee-for-service and aren't covered by our NDIS registration or our CHSP grant.

If you'd like us to help, for yourself, someone in your family or your client, call 0437 733 744 and we'll talk it through. No pressure, and no judgement.

- **Hoarding clean-up.** Private and without judgement, one area at a time, with the person's agreement. We assess first and confirm the price in writing before any booking.
- **Decluttering and reorganising.** For when the hardest part is done and the home needs a system that works. Sessions from \$380 + GST (\$418 incl GST) for two hours.
- **Home help.** Regular help around the house, so the space stays liveable once it's clear.
- **Support work for NDIS participants.** Daily living support and life skills from a registered NDIS provider, where those supports are in the participant's plan.

First steps checklist

- ☐ Talk with the person privately, and without judgement.
- ☐ Book a GP appointment (offer to go along).
- ☐ Check the smoke alarms work.
- ☐ Clear a path to the front and back doors.
- ☐ Clear a path to the bed, toilet, shower and kitchen.
- ☐ Get unsafe electricity or gas checked by the right service provider.
- ☐ Agree one small area to start with.
- ☐ Agree a "decide later" pile, so nothing goes without a yes.
- ☐ For an older person, call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.
- ☐ Save healthdirect (1800 022 222) and Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636) in your phone.
- ☐ If you're a carer, call Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 for your own support.

Questions people ask



Is hoarding the same as being messy, or collecting?

No. Healthdirect explains that collectors usually display or store their things carefully and enjoy them. With hoarding, things are kept because they might be useful one day, they're stored without a system, they take over living areas, and letting go is distressing.

Can I clear out my parent's house while they're away?

We'd gently advise against it. SANE Australia says this can feel very violating to the person, and healthdirect notes the clutter often builds up again. It usually works better to talk first, start small and get support for the person as well as the home.

What treatment helps with hoarding disorder?

Healthdirect says cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is the recommended treatment. A GP can refer to a psychologist with experience in hoarding. This is general information, not medical advice.

Is there free help for older people?

My Aged Care lists hoarding and squalor assistance, including care planning and one-off clean-ups, through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme after an aged care assessment. Call 1800 200 422. It is separate from Kinship's services.

Can NDIS funding help with hoarding?

Healthy WA notes that support may be available through the NDIS. What a plan can pay for depends on the participant's plan and the NDIS rules, so check with the NDIA or the participant's NDIS partner first. Kinship's private hoarding clean-up isn't covered by our NDIS registration.

Will Kinship throw things away without asking?

No. We agree with the person what stays, what goes and what's donated before anything moves. Anything they're unsure about goes in a "decide later" pile, not the bin.

What if the home has needles, mould or pests?

We'll tell you plainly. Some hazards need a specialist cleaner, pest controller or tradesperson, and we'll recommend one rather than take on work we shouldn't. We are not a biohazard or trauma cleaning service.

Talk to a real person. Call Kinship Uniting Services on **0437 733 744** or email info@kinshipunitingservices.com. Deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment? Contact us through the National Relay Service: Speak & Listen 1300 555 727, TTY 133 677, SMS relay 0423 677 767.

Sources

healthdirect: Hoarding disorder: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/hoarding-disorder>

SANE Australia: Five tips to help someone who hoards:

<https://www.sane.org/the-sane-blog/caring-for-others/five-tips-to-help-someone-who-hoards>

Healthy WA (WA Department of Health): Help with hoarding:

https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Help-with-hoarding

Fire and Rescue NSW: Hoarding and squalor fire safety: <https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=913>



My Aged Care: Hoarding and squalor assistance:

<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/aged-care-services/hoarding-and-squalor-assistance>

City of Sydney: Understanding squalor and hoarding:

<https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/guides/understanding-squalor-hoarding>

Carer Gateway: <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>