



Social Housing Policy

POLICY FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS

Purpose

This Policy provides the principles for achieving good social housing outcomes for tenants of social housing providers in Tasmania.

Policy Context

Social housing is a type of affordable and secure rental housing for Tasmanians on low incomes. Social housing providers allocate social housing properties to Tasmanians in need who would otherwise not be able to find or keep a home in the private market.

Social housing is available for tenants for the duration of their need, as determined for Eligible Persons under the Homes Act 1935 and is provided within the requirements of the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 (RTA).

Rents are calculated based on 25 per cent of the household's income up to market rent. Social housing provided by community housing providers are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Social housing providers may require a rental bond of up to four weeks rent and may make arrangements to pay this bond in instalments.

Social housing properties in Tasmania are managed by several social housing providers including:

- Housing Tasmania, a Government service provider, that manages premises owned in whole or in part by the Director of Housing, or
- a community housing provider registered under the *Community Housing Providers (National Law) Tasmania Act 2013* that manages premise owned whole or in part by the Director of Housing or owned by the provider or another entity, or an organisation declared by the Minister for Housing to be providing social housing.

Eligibility for Social Housing

To be eligible for social housing, applicants must:

- live in Tasmania, not another state or territory
- be an Australian Citizen
- be a Permanent Resident including Refugee visa subclasses 200, 201, 202, 203 and 204
- be 16 years or older
- be on a low income and eligible for a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- not own land or a home of their own
- not have financial assets worth more than \$35 000. This amount includes the assets of any people who live in the household including shares, property and money in the bank. It does not include things like cars or household items.



Applications for social housing are made through Housing Connect and applications are placed on the Housing Register as the single access point for social housing in Tasmania.

Housing Connect may use discretion for applicants to be eligible for social housing if they are experiencing exceptional circumstances (such as family violence) and do not meet some eligibility criteria (such as income and asset limits).

Social housing applicants may also have applications for other types of housing assistance including affordable home ownership, Aboriginal Housing and private rental assistance.

Social housing applicants can indicate broadly where they wish to live, and they can also identify suburbs that may be unsafe for them to live.

Housing Connect will assess how many bedrooms are needed for a household and if any accessible standards or modifications are required.

Applicants can also choose if they wish to apply for social housing that is managed by Housing Tasmania and/or by community housing providers.

Assessing Need for Social Housing

Applicants will be prioritised on the Housing Register by their level of assessed need by Housing Connect.

Prioritisation for social housing in Tasmania considers the applicant's circumstances, to determine their level of need and ensure that those in greatest need receive housing offers first.

Eligible applicants are assessed on the basis of four key circumstances:

- 1. Affordability**
Affordability is how much rent an applicant and their household pay as a percentage of their household income.
- 2. Homelessness**
Homelessness is where an applicant is living and their security of tenure. For example, whether they are sleeping rough, couch surfing, live in short-term accommodation, live somewhere that is not safe and healthy, or exiting short term, emergency or institutional accommodation.
- 3. Safety**
Safety is the capacity of the applicant and their family to live safe from harm and violence and includes family and sexual violence.
- 4. Health and mobility**
Health and mobility refer to the impact of an applicant's physical and mental health on their capacity to achieve and/or sustain a private tenancy and requiring social housing often with a modified living environment.

Applicants need to provide evidence about the circumstances of their household.

Social housing applicants are prioritised¹ on the Housing Register as either:

¹ Except for Aboriginal Housing, which has a different set of assessment criteria and category of need.



- Highest Priority – people in the highest need, including those leaving homelessness services, prison or hospital, or who are leaving care and protection
- Standard Priority – other high needs based on health, homelessness, safety and affordability
- General – in need based on health, homelessness and affordability.

Determining Priority

Highest Priority is determined if an applicant shows evidence of either:

- transitioning from emergency crisis or transitional homeless accommodation or
- exiting from an institutional facility (such as custodial arrangements, foster care and child safety residential placements, hospitals and mental health facilities) into homelessness.

Standard Priority is determined if an applicant shows evidence of at least one of the following:

- Affordability – in critical housing crisis by paying 80 per cent or more of income in rent (excluding Supported Accommodation Facilities).
- Homelessness – either in:
 - primary homelessness – without conventional accommodation (eg sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings) or
 - secondary homelessness – frequently moving from one temporary shelter to another (eg brokered emergency accommodation, youth refuges, couch surfing).
- Safety – including:
 - sexual abuse
 - domestic and family violence
 - non-family violence
 - children exposed to abuse or neglect.
- Health and mobility (must be evidenced by Health Report) – must be:
 - assessed as a Grade A health condition.

Standard Priority will also be determined if an applicant shows evidence of:

- Affordability – in housing stress by paying between 50 per cent and 79 per cent or more of income in rent (excluding Supported Accommodation Facilities) and one of the following:
- Homelessness – either in:
 - tertiary homelessness – accommodation falls below minimum community standards (eg boarding house and caravan parks) or
 - insecure tenure – has no tenure or their tenure is short and not extendable or
 - their home is unsuitable for independent living – has no access to space for social relations or needs to move closer to essential services.
- Health and mobility (must be evidenced by Health Report) – is:
 - assessed as a Grade B health condition (see below).



General need will be determined if an applicant shows evidence of at least one of the following:

- Affordability – in housing stress by paying between 30 per cent and 79 per cent or more of income in rent (excluding Supported Accommodation Facilities) or
- Homelessness – either in:
 - tertiary homelessness – accommodation falls below minimum community standards (eg boarding house and caravan parks) or
 - insecure tenure – has no tenure or their tenure is short and not extendable or
 - their home is unsuitable for independent living – has no access to space for social relations or needs to move closer to essential services.
- Health and mobility (must be evidenced by Health Report) – is:
 - assessed as a Grade B health condition (see below).

Health and Mobility Assessment

If an applicant has health and mobility issues, an authorised health professional will need to complete a Health Assessment Report. The report must be applicable at the time of assessment with Housing Connect. An authorised health professional includes:

- occupational therapist
- aged care assessment officer
- general practitioner/ treating doctor
- community health nurse
- clinical psychologist
- psychiatrist
- mental health support worker.

The report covers the applicant's current physical and mental health needs and how that impacts on their housing need. This ensures social housing providers have the right information to make suitable housing offers.

The information informs if an applicant is Priority or General by classifying their health and mobility issue as either Grade A or B.



Grade A conditions are:

- long term and considered of high seriousness or
- permanent and considered of high seriousness or
- permanent and considered of medium seriousness.

Grade B conditions are:

- permanent with low seriousness or
- long term with medium seriousness or
- medium term with high seriousness.

Allocation of Social Housing

Social housing providers allocate homes from Tasmania's single Housing Register for properties owned by the Director of Housing, with the exception of special allocations (see section below). Community housing providers may allocate from the Housing Register for properties they own.

The Housing Register ensures that applicants in greatest need are being housed first and are being matched with appropriate properties.

When determining a suitable allocation, a social housing provider will consider, in order of importance:

- priority of need
- wait time
- any special modifications or design-standards required by a household member
- the area preference (suburb selections)
- the number of bedrooms
- any other circumstances impacting the appropriateness of the potential tenancy, such as safety, health and mobility, social and family support networks and social cohesion.

Allocations into vacant social housing properties are made to Priority Applicants (who are assessed as Highest Priority and Standard Priority), and only to other applicants from the Housing Register if no offers by Priority Applicants have been accepted.

Social housing providers may transfer tenants within their own managed portfolio or to other social housing providers based on the circumstances of the tenant and members of their household including matters of safety, health and mobility and to ensure no unreasonable financial or social disadvantage to the tenant.

Special Allocations

When an applicant with exceptional needs is identified, the Department of Communities Tasmania may determine the need for immediate prioritisation and allocation into social housing.

In this event, social housing providers will work closely with the Department of Communities Tasmania to identify an available and appropriate home.



In most cases, Special Allocations will be made to vulnerable people who are experiencing exceptional and multiple needs and who are receiving support services to help them keep their home.

Where appropriate, social housing providers should work in collaboration with their tenants' support workers to achieve good housing outcomes for these tenants.

Tenancy and Property Management

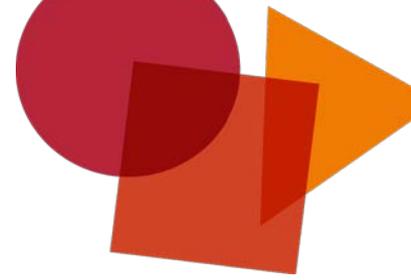
Social housing providers will enter into a Residential Tenancy Agreement with tenants and manage tenancies in accordance with the RTA including responsibility for:

- collecting rent and managing rent arrears
- managing the condition of properties including property inspections
- managing, reviewing, renewing, extending and ending of tenancies
- undertaking maintenance, repairs and planned works to maintain the property and reduce deferred maintenance liability over time and
- coordinating and providing support to tenants at risk of eviction.

Each social housing provider will have their own operational policies and procedures in place for managing their portfolios. This information will be publicly available on the website of each provider. The operational policies and procedures must be consistent with this policy, including:

- leases are entered into on a fixed-term basis
- tenants are not charged the cost of water usage, which is met by the social housing provider
- in the event of breaching a tenancy agreement, the reason for the breach and the actions to remedy the breach must be explained to the tenant in person and in writing. Support appropriate to the tenant's circumstances will be coordinated and/or provided to assist the tenant to remedy a breach
- providing a tenant three opportunities to remedy a single breach episode
- providing tenants with clear information about the review mechanisms available to them including the Residential Tenancy Commissioner or the Tasmanian Ombudsman
- documenting disputes that may arise between a tenant and provider in the event of being required for legal reasons
- managing anti-social behaviour including referring potential criminal matters to the Tasmania Police for the quiet enjoyment and wellbeing of neighbours and the community
- respond to appropriate requests from tenants for health and safety modifications consistent with the requirements of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998*
- seeking approval from the Department of Communities Tasmania in relation to major modifications to a property owned by the Director of Housing in part of whole prior to undertaking works and in relation to the proposed disposal of properties.

Where appropriate, social housing providers must maintain all relevant training and certifications for tenancy and property management, including training by the Tasmanian Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.



Reporting Abuse or Neglect

Social housing providers who are concerned for the safety, risk or welfare of a child should call the Advice and Referral Line on 1800 000 123.

Where there are safety, risk and wellbeing concerns relating to family violence, social housing providers should call the Family Violence Response and Referral Line on 1800 633 937.

Where there are safety, risk and wellbeing concerns for older tenants social housing providers should call the Elder Abuse Hotline on 1800 441 169.

If the social housing provider believes a member of household is at immediate risk and Police or medical assistance is required, they should call Emergency on 000.

Tenancy Support

Social housing providers will provide tenancy support if a tenancy is considered at risk of breach.

Tenancy support is the process and resources used by a social housing provider to help a tenant to prevent the risk of a breach or to remedy a breach if it does occur.

The success of tenancy support is based on intervening early and having good relationships, processes, information, skills and experience to identify when to intervene and what support is needed. The aim of sustaining a tenancy will require an agreed plan between the social housing provider and the tenant, and it may require a tenancy support worker to provide direct support to a tenant household and/or referral to services specific to their needs.

Where appropriate, early intervention may begin from the commencement of a tenancy, if the new tenant is considered to be at risk of tenancy failure, as it will be important to build a strong relationship with the tenant to establish good practices and to ensure that the tenant is not isolated and remains engaged.

Throughout a tenancy, a social housing provider will provide tenancy support if a tenancy is considered at risk by responding to the specific needs of the individual or household.

Most tenants in risk of breach are willing to engage with their social housing provider. Tenancy support will help these tenants to understand the legal framework of rectifying a breach and by developing and monitoring an agreed plan that identifies strategies to address their housing issues. Tenancy support will help these tenants to build their skills to prevent future episodes of risk, including referral to allied health professionals as appropriate.



Some social housing tenants may have high or complex and multiple support needs that require therapeutic intervention. These tenants may either be unable or show an unwillingness to engage with tenancy support to prevent or rectify a tenancy breach. The aim of tenancy support in this circumstance will be to identify the need and to connect these individuals to an allied health professional to build their willingness to address their tenancy issues and prevent tenancy failure. Ongoing tenancy support will monitor closely and intervene as appropriate to keep the tenancy stabilised.

If tenancy support is unsuccessful for tenants with complex needs, then it is likely that a tenancy is at risk. Alternative forms of housing should be considered, such as transitional or long term supported accommodation, if appropriate.

Tenancy support is not likely to be successful for tenants with low supports needs that, by choice, refuse to engage to rectify a breach. In these circumstances, an administrative response may be appropriate to protect other social housing tenants and the community in which they reside.

New Supply of Social Housing

Tasmania is increasing the number of social housing properties by building new homes under its Affordable Housing Strategy and associated action plans. Social housing providers may be contracted to increase the supply of social housing.

New social housing supply funded by the Director of Housing will be constructed to meet the requirements of Tasmanians in need of social housing as per expressed demand from the Housing Register noting accessibility standards, preferred locations and bedroom entitlements.

New social housing will provide quality housing for tenants and be built to the standards set out in the [Design Policy for Social Housing](#).

All new social housing will comply with relevant planning laws and building codes for Tasmania. Social housing providers will work closely with other government agencies, local businesses and communities in the development of new social housing.

Relevant Documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the operational policies and procedures of relevant social housing providers.

Our contact details



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www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing