

# Social housing policy

## Purpose

This policy provides the principles for providing secure, affordable and appropriate social housing 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.

Social housing is available for tenants for the duration of their need, as determined for eligible persons under the *Homes Tasmania Act 2022* and is provided within the requirements of the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* (RTA).

Rents are calculated as 25 per cent of the household's assessable income up to a maximum of market rent. Rents calculated by community housing providers also include 100 per cent of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance for which the tenant is eligible.

Social housing providers may require a rental bond of up to four weeks' rent and may arrange for tenants to pay this bond in instalments.

Social housing providers in Tasmania are:

- Homes Tasmania, a statutory housing provider
- community housing providers registered under the *Community Housing Providers (National Law) Tasmania Act 2013*
- an organisation declared by the Minister for Housing, under the RTA, to be providing social housing.

## Eligibility for social housing

To be eligible for social housing, applicants must:

- live in Tasmania
- 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 such as cars or household items.

Applications for social housing are made through Housing Connect and applicants are placed on the Housing Register, which is 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, eg family violence, and do not meet some eligibility criteria such as income and asset limits.

Social housing applicants may also apply 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 design standards or modifications are required.

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

## Assessing need for social housing

Housing Connect will prioritise applicants on the Housing Register by their level of assessed need.

Prioritisation for social housing 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 four key circumstances:

1. **Affordability** – how much rent an applicant and their household pay as a percentage of their household income.
2. **Homelessness** – where an applicant is living and their security of tenure. For example, whether they are sleeping rough, couch surfing, living in crisis accommodation, living somewhere that is not safe and healthy, or exiting crisis, emergency or institutional accommodation.
3. **Safety** – the capacity of the applicant and their family to live safe from harm and violence, including family and sexual violence.
4. **Health and mobility** – 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 with a modified living environment.

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

Social housing applicants – except for Aboriginal housing, which has a different set of assessment criteria and category of need – are prioritised on the Housing Register as:

- 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:

- moving from crisis or transitional homelessness accommodation or
- exiting from institutional care settings or a health facility – eg custodial arrangements, foster care or child safety residential placements, or a hospital – 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 their income in rent (excluding Homes Tasmania's 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 shelters, couch surfing
- safety, including:
  - sexual abuse
  - family violence
  - non-family violence
  - children exposed to abuse or neglect
- health and mobility that is assessed as a grade A health condition (see below) as evidenced by a health assessment report.

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

- affordability – in housing stress by paying more than 50 per cent of income in rent (excluding Homes Tasmania's supported accommodation facilities)  
in addition to 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 that is assessed as a grade B health condition (see below) as evidenced by a health assessment report.

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

- affordability – in housing stress by paying more than 30 per cent of income in rent (excluding Homes Tasmania's 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 that is assessed as a grade B health condition (see below) as evidenced by a health assessment report.

# Health and mobility assessment

If an applicant has health and mobility issues, an authorised health professional will need to provide a health assessment report using the Housing Connect health assessment form.

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 or treating doctor
- community health nurse
- clinical psychologist
- psychiatrist
- mental health support worker.

The report includes the applicant's current physical and mental health needs and how they affect their housing needs. This ensures social housing providers have the right information to make appropriate housing offers.

The health assessment form helps to determine if an applicant is assessed as priority or general by classifying their health and mobility issue(s) as either grade A or B.

Grade A conditions are:

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

Grade B conditions are:

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

## Allocation of social housing

Social housing providers allocate homes from the Housing Register, except for special allocations (see below).

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 affecting the appropriateness of the potential tenancy, such as safety, health and mobility, social and family support networks, and social cohesion.

Allocations into social housing properties are made to applicants who have been 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, Homes Tasmania may prioritise their application and allocate a social housing property.

In this event, social housing providers will work closely with Homes 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 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 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:

- new leases and lease renewals are non-fixed term
- 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 help the tenant 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 Tasmania Police, for the quiet enjoyment and wellbeing of neighbours and the community
- responding to appropriate requests from tenants for health and safety modifications consistent with the requirements of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998*
- seeking approval from Homes Tasmania in relation to major modifications to a property owned in whole or part by Homes Tasmania 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.

## 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 reduce 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.

Support can be put in place at the start of a tenancy if it is identified that it will increase the likelihood of a successful tenancy. It is 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 at risk by responding to the specific needs of the individual or household.

Tenancy support will help tenants 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 tenants to build their skills and maintain a successful tenancy and may also include referral to specialist or allied health professionals as appropriate.

## New supply of social housing

Homes Tasmania was established to increase social and affordable housing opportunities for Tasmanians.

Homes built or acquired for social housing with Homes Tasmania funding will 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 new builds will be delivered 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.

## 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 services on 000.

## Related documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with relevant documents, including:

- allocation review policy and procedure
- outstanding charges policy and procedure
- bedroom entitlements policy and procedure
- matching and offering a property to a client policy
- residential management agreements.

## Our contact details



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<http://www.homestasia.com.au>