

Policy for Safe Homes

Purpose

This policy provides the principles for operating the Safe Homes program to deliver transitional housing and support for women (with or without children) who are experiencing family and domestic violence.

Policy context

Family and domestic violence is a significant driver of homelessness for women and children in Tasmania, resulting in increasing numbers seeking support from specialist homelessness services.

The *Family Violence Act 2004* defines family violence as including both domestic and intimate partner violence, accounting for economic, physical and emotional abuse. Homes Tasmania also recognises coercive control as a type of abuse constituting family violence.

As part of Tasmania's specialist homelessness service system, crisis accommodation provides short-to-medium-term accommodation and support through shelter and transitional settings.

The Safe Homes program moves towards a Housing First approach for women, with or without children, who are experiencing family and domestic violence by providing a pathway from crisis accommodation to long-term housing through the provision of transitional accommodation and support for the duration of need.

This policy sets out the provision of transitional accommodation through the Safe Homes program. This policy does not apply to other crisis or transitional accommodation programs, which remain accessible for women and children experiencing family violence.

Eligibility

To be eligible for Safe Homes, applicants must be:

- a current applicant for social housing
- a woman with or without children experiencing family and domestic violence, as recorded on their social housing application
- recorded as 'Exiting Crisis' (highest priority) on their social housing application, including applicants residing in shelters, shelter-managed transitional accommodation or other temporary family violence accommodation arrangements (including Family Violence Rapid Rehousing), and
- able to live independently with no recent history of issues in maintaining a rental property.

Applications

People with a social housing application that meet the eligibility criteria will automatically be considered for Safe Homes.

Allocations

When a property becomes vacant, the Safe Homes provider will allocate tenancies from the Housing Register based on wait time and property suitability, including location preferences and bedroom entitlement (allowing allocation to applicants eligible for that bedroom size or one bedroom fewer – for example, a two-bedroom property should be offered to one- or two- bedroom eligible applicants).

Allocations are to be made in accordance with program targeting, with priority given to households transitioning from crisis or temporary family violence accommodation arrangements.

The Safe Homes housing provider may liaise with the person, shelter and/or other support (if consent is provided) to determine property suitability and capacity to sustain a tenancy in the available property.

Where an applicant's tenancy history has been adversely affected by family and domestic violence, this should be taken into account in assessing capacity to sustain a tenancy and should not, of itself, exclude the applicant from consideration.

Unlike a standard social housing offer, if an applicant accepts a lease with the Safe Homes program, their social housing application will remain open, and they will retain their current level of priority. No penalty will apply if a Safe Homes offer is rejected.

In-program transfers will only be considered in exceptional circumstances (e.g. safety concerns).

Exceptions within standard allocation pathway

The Safe Homes program operates within fixed capacity. The following provisions do not create an additional access pathway but allow limited flexibility within existing allocations where the standard crisis or rapid rehousing accommodation pathway is not appropriate for a household's specific needs or circumstances.

The Safe Homes provider may allocate to an applicant outside the standard crisis or rapid rehousing accommodation pathway only where:

- the applicant meets eligibility requirements relating to family and domestic violence, and
- there is a clear and documented reason why the standard crisis or rapid rehousing accommodation pathway is not appropriate for the household's specific needs or circumstances, and
- the allocation supports the intent of the program to provide safe and appropriate housing outcomes.

This may include circumstances where household composition limits the suitability of standard crisis or rapid rehousing accommodation arrangements (for example, women with older male children).

All allocations made under these defined circumstances must be documented, including the reason the standard crisis or rapid rehousing accommodation pathway was not appropriate for the household and how the allocation aligns with program intent.

Special allocations in exceptional cases

When a person with exceptional needs is identified, Homes Tasmania may determine the need for immediate prioritisation and placement in a housing support program.

In this event, the Safe Homes provider will work closely with Homes Tasmania to identify available and appropriate accommodation.

Tenancy and property management

Upon accepting a property offer, households will be provided with a two-year fixed-term residential tenancy agreement (lease) with the Safe Homes provider, who will manage the tenancy in accordance with the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* (RTA) and the Homes Tasmania social housing policy, except for lease length

Tenants may be offered a lease renewal if they have not secured long-term housing, remain eligible for the program and are consistently meeting the conditions of their lease.

Rents are calculated in accordance with Homes Tasmania's Social Housing policy as 25 per cent of the household's assessable income and 100 per cent of the Commonwealth Rent Assistance for which the tenant is eligible. Rent will be capped at the market rent amount.

The Safe Homes provider may require a rental bond of up to four weeks' rent and may arrange for tenants to pay this bond in instalments. The Safe Homes provider is responsible for tenancy and property management including rent collection and arrears management, conducting property inspections, addressing anti-social behaviour, maintenance and property damage. The Safe Homes provider must also ensure compliance with the RTA and access to complaints mechanisms.

Tenancy support

The intent of Safe Homes is to provide supported transitional housing for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, for the duration of need.

As the entry point for housing support and assistance for all Tasmanians, Housing Connect will work closely with the crisis accommodation provider to provide support to eligible households. Housing Connect and the crisis accommodation provider will ensure that people are ready to live independently to increase the opportunity for a successful placement into the Safe Homes program.

Upon commencement of the Safe Homes tenancy, support responsibility will transition from Housing Connect and the crisis accommodation provider to the Safe Homes provider. If more intensive intervention and support is required to sustain a tenancy (e.g. where a Notice to Vacate has been issued), the Safe Homes provider will engage the support of Housing Connect.

The Safe Homes provider may arrange for furniture to support tenants to establish their tenancy. Provision of furnishings and whitegoods is dependent on the tenant's personal circumstances and needs.

Items that may be provided include, but are not limited to:

- beds
- refrigerator
- washing machine
- couch
- coffee table
- dining table and chairs.

Items supplied by the Safe Homes provider are for use during the tenancy and are not to be removed.

Leaving the program

The Safe Homes provider will work to ensure that any program exits are into safe, secure and affordable long-term housing. Support may involve a referral to the Housing Connect front door to access advice and assistance to access housing programs.

Unplanned exits from Safe Homes should be avoided and no household should exit into homelessness. Where long-term housing is not available, the lease may be extended for a further term. If a tenant secures alternative safe and secure housing they will not be penalised for breaking the lease early.

Where termination of a tenancy is unavoidable, alternative accommodation needs to be secured and a referral for support made to Housing Connect.

Reporting abuse or neglect

Service providers have a responsibility to recognise and report any concerns of abuse or neglect through the appropriate channels:

- Children (under 18): Contact the Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line on 1800 000 123 if an unaccompanied child presents.
- Family violence concerns: Contact the Family Violence Response and Referral Line on 1800 633 937.
- Suspected elder abuse: Contact the Tasmanian Elder Abuse Hotline on 1800 441 169.
- Immediate danger: Call 000.

Providers must also follow their organisation's internal procedures for incident reporting and safeguarding.

Relevant documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Social Housing Policy – www.homestasmania.com.au/social-housing-policy

Our contact details



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