

Policy for Housing Connect Flexible Funds

Purpose

This policy provides the principles for using Housing Connect flexible funds to help Tasmanians who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or in housing need to find and keep a safe, affordable, appropriate home and live a full life.

Policy context

The Tasmanian Housing Strategy prioritises safe, secure and affordable housing for all Tasmanians. The Strategy and its action plans will provide a framework to develop a housing system in Tasmania that is affordable and responsive to the needs of the Tasmanian community.

Housing Connect is a key component of the housing system in Tasmania, supporting people to access appropriate housing solutions including:

- crisis accommodation and support including shelters and transitional housing
- social housing including supported accommodation, public and community housing and specialist accommodation for people in exceptional circumstances
- affordable housing including private rentals and home ownership.

Housing Connect Front Door services are the principal referral point for Tasmanians aged 16 years and over who need housing support or assistance. Housing Connect services connect people to the support they need to find and keep a home. Housing Connect provides services tailored to the circumstances of each person while working with them to strengthen their connections to family, friends, community, and services to promote their wellbeing and opportunities.

The life course perspective

A life course perspective underpins the services, people, pathways, and practices in Housing Connect. Housing Connect is structured around four pathways combining life stage with household type: young people, single adults, families (adult couples with or without children and single parents with children) and older adults. This approach supports tailored responses to individuals and households in ways that attends to people's needs and leverages the opportunities, resources and networks required by their stage of life.

Housing Connect recognises that people and service systems are embedded in and shaped by place. Place is critical for developing and sustaining community connection, drawing on family, friends, and communities to enhance system responses. Place is also necessary in approaches that facilitate sustainable positive outcomes for people experiencing housing stress and crisis.

Housing Connect services are provided statewide with offices in the north, north-west and south, as well as providing access to services through mobile outreach. Housing Connect information and assistance will also be available through the new Housing Connect Portal.

Housing Connect flexible funds are provided to help people to secure housing and improve their health and wellbeing. Flexible funding assists people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness with tailored support focussed on a person's goals and circumstances. Flexible funds can be used in a range of ways to attend to immediate needs or increase people's independence from the Housing Connect system.

Advantaged Thinking

Housing Connect is guided by Advantaged Thinking practice.

An Advantaged Thinking practice combines individual and structural approaches to change and works with people to develop and invest in their talents and aspirations. Practicing Advantaged Thinking goes beyond only focussing on people's immediate needs and identifies and reinforces the factors that enable people to thrive.

Advantaged Thinking recognises people's capabilities, talents and potential and creates opportunities to realise them. Using Advantaged Thinking helps people improve their circumstances while attending to structural barriers that may be limiting opportunities. Instead of starting with deficits and problems, Housing Connect builds people's skills, and invests in sourcing the opportunities, networks, and resources for people to use their talents effectively.

Housing Connect principles

Housing Connect is based on the following principles:

- the safety and wellbeing of the person is always the primary consideration
- people must be supported to play a key role in shaping the services and practices that affect them, and to make and enact choices
- people need to be connected to community, drawing on family, friends, and communities to enhance system responses to support sustainable positive outcomes
- capability and relationships are built by connecting people with the resources, networks, and opportunities to find and keep a home
- collaboration and integration are central, as is mobilising resources across service systems, sectors, and community
- practice must be tailored to people's needs and capabilities by shaping service responses to people's life stage while also addressing their specific circumstances, matching intensity of support and housing to capabilities and needs

- timely action to create the conditions and relationships must be prioritised so that people can thrive (prevention); addressing housing related issues early (early intervention) and addressing housing related problems as they arise so people can thrive (secondary intervention)
- practice should be driven by evidence, and service delivery and practice should be shaped and based on shared expertise, data, evidence and experiential learning.

Risk factors

The root causes of homelessness in Australia are income

poverty and disadvantage. A range of structural, community, familial and individual level issues also affect homelessness in Australia.

Other known causes of homelessness include lack of access to affordable housing, relationship breakdown and family violence, low income and unemployment, mental illness, disability, and drug and alcohol use.

Transitions from institutions to public life, such as exiting prison, mental health services or other institutional care are also risk factors for homelessness.

The deal

A deal is a supportive agreement between a person accessing Housing Connect services and their connections or key development coach. A deal is individually planned and negotiated with the person who is accessing flexible funding. The deal focuses on some or all elements of the five key life domains, depending on the person's goals and individual circumstances.

A deal highlights that people accessing Housing Connect services are held in high regard and each party has a contribution to make towards achieving the agreed goals outlined in the person's action plan. Housing Connect coaches work with people across a range of connected life domains, all of which are crucial to people's wellbeing and support positive long-term housing outcomes, including:

- housing and living
- employment and income
- health and wellbeing
- education and learning
- social and community connections.

The deal establishes the offer and expectations between Housing Connect and a person accessing flexible funds and fosters shared ownership of the planning, opportunities and services offered by Housing Connect. A deal may initially outline a person's expectations and accountabilities during their accommodation or support period, focused on their safety and the safety of others including staff. Once a person's immediate needs for safe and secure accommodation are met, the deal will be expanded to focus on longer term goals, such as securing housing and progressing goals across relevant key life domains.

Flexible funds

Flexible funds are used to purchase goods and services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. To receive flexible funds, recipients must be accessing, or agree to access, Housing Connect front door and personalised support services. The use of flexible funds is prioritised to meet the immediate crisis needs of people that cannot be met by other means or services. Flexible funding supports the provision of tailored and innovative responses to help people to achieve their goals, find a home and live a good life.

Flexible funding does not duplicate other service responses or provide financial support which is available from other programs. Flexible funds are only used when there are no other means available to achieve agreed goals.

Flexible funds are provided as part of a person's immediate response plan or action plan to achieve agreed goals.

Immediate support

Flexible funds can be used to provide immediate support to people who are 16 years of age or older to stabilise a crisis. Flexible funds for immediate support are ideally used when other options are not available or are unsuitable, including:

- providing immediate emergency accommodation in a hotel, motel, or cabin if shelter accommodation is not available, and the person cannot draw on their own resources or networks
- funding to support an accommodation outcome, such as transport, or funds to leverage accommodation through personal networks
- providing one-off funds to stabilise a tenancy such as payment of a large and unexpected bill
- funding for necessities such as food or toiletries.

Immediate support through flexible funding is provided as part of an immediate response plan. People who are not engaged with a connection or key development coach will also be offered a personalised deal outlining the support available to connect with a coach to establish or sustain stable housing.

Supporting capabilities and opportunities

Flexible funds can be used to support people who are 16 years of age or older to develop their capabilities and opportunities. The use of flexible funds is tailored to support people achieve the goals in their agreed deal. Personal goals are connected to one or more of the five wellbeing domains.

Supporting capabilities and opportunities can include:

- membership fees for a sporting club, to pursue a hobby or participate in cultural activities
- services or materials supporting personal or vocational development such as educational resources
- costs associated with establishing housing, such as furniture and whitegoods

- activities linked to increasing people's independent living skills, such as cooking and financial management
- costs associated with education, employment, and training
- job readiness expenses including clothing for interviews
- specialist counselling
- access to health and community services that are not provided free of charge.

Eligibility

A Housing Connect connection coach or key development coach will assess whether the use of flexible funding is appropriate for the person seeking support. Use of funds is documented in a person's immediate response plan or action plan.

Brokering emergency accommodation with flexible funding is a short-term solution when a person has no other accommodation options. This type of accommodation is not suitable for everyone and will depend on the age, life stage, support needs and goals of the individual. Duration of brokered accommodation and exits from brokered accommodation are negotiated as part of a person's Housing Connect action plan and deal.

The primary consideration for brokering emergency accommodation is the inherent duty of care to the person receiving flexible funding, the community and accommodation providers. A person's capacity to utilise their own networks and resources is also considered when accessing flexible funding.

The use of flexible funding is targeted to those most in need, where funding will support a person to secure or sustain housing.

Unless a person can demonstrate exceptional circumstances, flexible funding cannot be used when a person:

- has been in receipt of an income in the previous three days
- has relocated from interstate in the previous seven days
- does not want to engage with a coach to help them secure or maintain longer-term housing.

A connection coach or key development coach may apply discretion to use flexible funding for a person who does not meet all eligibility criteria. A common example of discretion is funding brokered accommodation for a person who is not a permanent Australian resident and who is escaping family violence. Please refer to guidelines for flexible funding for information about discretionary use of flexible funds.

Focus of support

Coaches provide flexible funding and other support to help people capitalise on their skills, abilities, and resources. Coaches assist people to focus on the goal finding and keeping an affordable, stable, safe, and appropriate home. Flexible funding helps people advance their goals and aspirations outlined their action plan including:

- being tailored to the strengths and needs of each person
- attending to the individual goals of each person with consideration of the goals and needs of any accompanying children

- using an [Advantaged Thinking](#) approach and reinforcing a person's capacity and agency in making decisions relevant to their goals and aspirations
- encouraging people to engage with key services and opportunities in their local community
- delivering a connected response focused on enhancing people's skills and resources to live outside the service system.

Life course approach

A life course perspective underpins the services, people, pathways, and practices in Housing Connect. Housing Connect is structured around four pathways combining life stage with household type: young people, single adults, families (adult couples with or without children and single parents with children) and older adults. This approach supports tailored responses to individuals and households in ways that attends to people's needs and leverages the opportunities, resources and networks required by their stage of life.

Reporting abuse or neglect

In Tasmania, people under the age of 18 who present to homelessness services unaccompanied (without a parent or legal guardian) are formally recognised as children.

The Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line (ARL) must be contacted on 1800 000 123 whenever an unaccompanied child under 18 presents to a homelessness service.

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

If elder abuse is reasonably suspected, housing support providers should call the Tasmanian Elder Abuse Hotline on 1800 441 169.

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

Relevant documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with relevant policies and procedures, including:

- Tasmanian Housing Strategy (www.tasmanianhousingstrategy.tas.gov.au)
- Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework (www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/child-and-youth-wellbeing-framework)
- Policy for Housing Connect Front Door (www.homestasmania.com.au/front-door-policy)
- Policy for Housing Connect Personalised Support (www.homestasmania.com.au/personalised-support-policy)
- Housing Connect Practice Framework (www.homestasmania.com.au/housing-connect-practice-framework)
- Policy for Social Housing (www.homestasmania.com.au/social-housing-policy)
- Advantaged Thinking practice (www.efyfoyers.org.au/background/theoretical-framework)

Our contact details



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