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| 12. Supported Housing |
| Operational Guidelines |

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When do these operational guidelines apply?

These operational guidelines should be followed by designated service providers and social housing organisations when making decisions related to the Victorian Housing Register (the register).

These operational guidelines form part of a set of guidelines that together sit under the [*Eligibility Policy Framework*](https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework) https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework.

# Purpose statement

The Supported Housing category is for individuals or households whose existing housing is highly unsuitable (including social housing) because:

* Major Modifications - major structural modification is required of their existing housing due to a household member’s disability or health condition, but such modification cannot be made and/or
  + Significant Personal Support - they are unable to access, from their housing, required assistance of personal support through a designated support provider to be able to live independently or their housing is detrimental to, or exacerbates, their physical or mental health condition.

In addition, applicants must demonstrate that they have no alternative housing options.

These operational guidelines outline the criteria an applicant must meet to be eligible for the Supported Housing category and the pathways through which an application can be made.

People who have disabilities or long-term health problems may need physical alterations made to their accommodation and/or the assistance of personal support services to be able to live independently. Often the private rental market does not provide suitable and accessible housing for people who require modified housing or have significant personal support needs.

This category recognises that successful housing for these people require a coordinated approach, where they are linked to a designated service provider and are homeless or exiting short term care/treatment facilities, with links and advice from relevant services.

# Human rights considerations

In deciding what action to take, staff must give proper consideration to the relevant human rights in accordance with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* s38(1) (the Charter). This consideration should include the potential impact the proposed action they are undertaking through these operational guidelines may have on the person’s (and their household’s) rights under the Charter*.*

For more information see [*Making Client Focused Decisions operational guidelines*](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-client-focused-decisions) https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-client-focused-decisions.

# Eligibility for Supported Housing

The Supported Housing category is only available for new applicants. Individuals and households eligible for the Supported Housing category are people who:

* meet the eligibility criteria including the Priority Access income and asset eligibility criteria
* demonstrate that their current housing is unsuitable
* meet the eligibility criteria for one of the reasons of Supported Housing
  + - Major Modifications - require accommodation that has either major or full modifications
    - Significant Personal Support - are in receipt of formal support through a designated funded program
  + have no alternative housing options.

## Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for social housing, in general primary applicants should live in Victoria and:

* be an Australian citizen or permanent resident of Australia
* meet the income and asset eligibility limits for their household
* have an independent income
  + not own a property in which they could live.

Up-to-date documentation to confirm the above criteria must be provided. Income and asset documentation should be less than 28 days old.

For further information see the [*Eligibility Criteria operational guidelines*](https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/eligibility-criteria-0) https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/eligibility-criteria-0.

### Income eligibility

The income limit for the Supported Housing category is the Priority Access income limit, which is set out in the [Social housing eligibility](http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility) http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility.

To determine total household income, the assessable incomes of the household are added together to determine whether the household meets the Priority Access income limit. If the total household income is less than or equal to the maximum income limit for Priority Access, the household is considered eligible.

### Asset eligibility

The asset limit for the Supported Housing category is the Priority Access asset limit, which is set out in the [Social housing eligibility](http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility) http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility.

To determine the total household assets, the assessable assets of the household are added together to determine whether the household meets the Priority Access asset limit. If the dollar value of the total household assets is less than or equal to the maximum asset limit, the household is considered eligible.

Where a household member requires full or major modifications to the property, the ­disability modification asset limit is applied.

A policy consideration can be applied to exempt households from the Priority Access asset limit who are in receipt of formal support as specified under the Significant Personal Support priority reason of the Supported Housing category. These applicants can instead be assessed against the higher asset limit which is the Register of Interest asset limit.

For this to occur, the agency submitting the application on the household’s behalf needs to confirm that the household is at a significant disadvantage in the private rental market, their cash and readily realisable assets cannot, or will not, materially improve their prospects of securing private rental housing, and social housing is the only viable long-term housing option for them.

### National Disability Insurance Scheme participants

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants who apply under the Supported Housing category are identified separately within the broader sub-category of applicants. Where these applicants require full or major disability modifications or are eligible under the significant personal support priority reason, any NDIS amounts assigned to the applicant is exempt from the income and asset eligibility assessment.

Any income generated from lump sum payments or funds that are kept to pay for future disability expenses are also exempt.

## Supported Housing reasons

A person may be considered eligible for the Supported Housing category if they meet the criteria that fall under either the Major Modifications priority reason or the Significant Personal Support priority reason, in addition to the social housing eligibility criteria.

Applicants are not required to meet both the ‘Major Modifications and ‘Significant Personal Support’ priority reasons.

Where an applicant requires housing with major modifications, and is also in receipt of significant personal support, the application is assessed under the Major Modifications priority reason.

### Major Modifications

The Major Modifications priority reason is for people requiring major modifications, where such modifications cannot be made to their existing housing, to improve their health and wellbeing including the ability to live independently.

Applications should be submitted under the priority reason of Major Modifications if the applicant can demonstrate that they are currently living in housing where major modifications cannot be made to their existing housing.

Depending on the circumstances, one, some or all of the following modifications may amount to a major structural modification:

* disabled (step-less) shower
* disabled toilet
* wheelchair access to some parts of the property
* wheelchair charging bay
* internal fire safety sprinkler system
* structural reinforcement for bathroom and bedroom hoists
  + fully-modified property which is wheelchair accessible (includes full kitchen and laundry modifications in addition to the other modifications listed above).

To submit an application under the Major Modifications priority reason the treating health practitioner is required to complete the relevant sections of the Special Accommodation Requirements form confirming the modifications required by the applicant. The heath practitioner must detail the applicant’s medical condition or disability, and how it relates to the need for the Special Accommodation Requirement. In some cases, additional documentation may also be required to support the application.

The assessment that a client requires major or full modifications is based on the professional advice and recommendations of the treating health practitioner.

Applicants or household members who do not require one, some or all of the major modifications as detailed above, may be eligible instead for the Special Housing Needs category under the Urgent Medical Needs priority reason.

#### Evidence for Major Modifications

To submit an application under the Major Modifications priority reason an applicant must submit:

* a Special Accommodation Requirements form completed by the treating health practitioner
  + evidence as to why the modifications cannot be made to existing housing for new applicants.

### Significant Personal Support

To be eligible under the Significant Personal Support priority reason, applicants must be in receipt of formal support through a designated service provider.

Support under these programs indicates a degree of dependence on funded support to enable the applicant or household member to live independently in the community. The intensity and duration of funded support across the range of programs varies in accordance with the needs of the applicant or household member. Therefore, there is no requirement for an applicant to demonstrate the quantity or level of support they actually receive from the program.

The critical features of the designated funded programs are they:

* assist the applicant to sustain their own accommodation in the community and maximise their levels of functioning and independence
* are delivered on a case management, care coordination, care planning or individual planning framework involving assessment of needs, development of a case plan, implementation of the plan, and monitoring/maintenance and review
* Include a response to the holistic needs of the applicant through linkage to other existing generic or specialist services as required
* can provide a social housing organisation with a key worker contact for the applicant
  + can provide the social housing organisation with clear advice on how the program can actively assist the applicant in the event assistance is again required following any case closure.

Support services such as home help, meals on wheels or assistance with shopping are not considered to be sufficient indicators of need for this category.

The programs that are recognised as being appropriate support/care providers for people to gain access to social housing through the Supported Housing category fall under the following priority reasons:

* Acquired Brain Injury
* Aged Care
* Children, Youth and Families
* Disability (non NDIS)
* Mental Health – for people with a mental health support need who do not need the evidence requirements for Mental Health with Support
* Mental Health with Support – for people who need ongoing (12 months or more) intensive treatment, care and support to maintain housing due to the impact of sustained mental health challenges (including the impacts of trauma they experience)
  + NDIS.

#### Current housing criteria

Applicants applying under the Significant Support priority reason of the Supported Housing category are required to demonstrate that they are currently living in unsuitable housing. The unsuitable nature of their housing situation may be caused by factors such as:

* an inability to access the designated service provider, or to access critical medical care. For example, access to a medical care or support service is required on a regular basis, and the distance to be travelled precludes reasonable access to the service
  + current housing that is detrimental to, or exacerbates the applicant’s condition. This may include applicants with an inability to live successfully, while receiving designated support, in housing with shared facilities such as a private rooming house, boarding house, hotel or caravan park.

Applicants who need to transition from a mental health residential facility, or a disability residential facility, back into the community with the support of one of the designated service providers and who have no alternative housing options, may be eligible for the Homeless with Support category. Refer to the [*Homeless with Support operational guidelines*](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/homeless-support) https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/homeless-support for further information.

#### Evidence for significant personal support

To submit an application under the Significant Personal Support priority reason, the designated service provider must confirm that the applicant or household member is in receipt of formal support through one of the funded program areas and that the current housing is highly unsuitable.

In making an application under the Significant Personal Support priority reason, the designated service provider must:

* detail the priority reason area and specific program that meets the care package/funding program requirements
* provide the contact details for the responsible support worker
* give an undertaking that the support required by the applicant to stabilise their social housing once allocation is made will be provided
  + undertake to provide the social housing organisation with clear advice following case closure on how their service can actively assist in the event the applicant falls into tenancy difficulty and further support intervention is required.

#### Evidence for Mental Health with Support

An application under the Mental Health with Support priority reason can be submitted by a designated service provider (currently Area Mental Health and Well Being Services such as Austin Health, Peninsula Health etc, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), by the applicant, social housing organisation or a homelessness service provider.

In addition to the broader requirements of the Supported Housing category and Significant Personal Support reason, a designated service provider must authorise the release of information about the application and confirm:

* that the current housing is highly unsuitable
* that the applicant is receiving, or is eligible to receive, ongoing (12 months or more) mental health and wellbeing support from the designated service provider
* confirm that the applicant is receiving, or eligible to receive, appropriate State or Commonwealth funded psychosocial or daily living supports integrated with their mental health treatment
* that the applicant consents to receiving offers of social housing
* any special accommodation requirements or preferences

## Alternative housing options

Individuals and households are required to demonstrate that alternative housing is not an option. Individuals and households applying for the Supported Housing category are expected to use other available options in an attempt to resolve their urgent housing need, such as attempting to obtain accommodation in the private rental market where possible.

It is understood that a household’s capacity to access alternative housing may be compromised by a range of factors, including:

* the availability and cost of private rental accommodation that matches the individual’s or household’s housing requirements in their preferred area, as well as other suitable areas
* a personal circumstance or characteristic of the household, which is likely, or has been shown, to reduce their access to private rental. Examples may include psychiatric, developmental, physical or intellectual disability or mental illness which makes it difficult for the household to rent in the private market
* a history of housing breakdowns due to factors such as inability to make rental payments, manage relationships with landlords or other renters, or to manage their housing commitments while other significant issues are affecting them
* an inability to access private rental housing due to a negative listing on a renter database
  + an inability to access private rental brokerage funds or services.

For some, a combination of these factors may mean that a social housing tenancy may be the only realistic and sustainable housing option. For many however, there may be a number of alternatives.

It is expected that the relevant worker should confirm the assistance they are providing the applicant to find alternative housing and detail the reasons that alternative housing options, including private rental housing, cannot be secured.

Note: Transitional Housing and Crisis Accommodation are not considered to be alternative housing options.

### Evidence to demonstrate no alternative housing options

Where the applicant is assisted by a designated service provider, the worker is required to briefly document the assistance they have provided the applicant in securing alternative housing. The worker is also required to briefly document why they have been either unable to assist the applicant to obtain alternative housing, or why they believe this is not a viable option for the applicant.

Where an applicant requires housing with major or full disability modifications and is not assisted by a worker, then the applicant is required to provide a brief explanation of their housing history detailing why the private rental market is not a viable option.

An applicant is only approved under the Supported Housing category when they are able to detail their attempts to secure alternative accommodation or are assessed as being unable to seek or secure private rental.

# Applying for Supported Housing

Applications for Supported Housing can be submitted by the applicant, designated service provider or social housing organisation.

For more information about how to apply to the register, including submitting applications online, refer to the [*Elibility Policy Framework*](https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework) https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework.

## Application effective date

Where an application is submitted by an agency the effective date for the Supported Housing category is decided by the agency submitting the application.

Generally, the effective date is the date the individual or household was assessed as requiring social housing by the agency through an assessment and planning process, or equivalent assessment. The application should be submitted within six months of that assessment.

Where an application is submitted by the applicant, the effective date is the date the individual or household demonstrates that they are eligible under the Supported Housing category. That is, the date that all documentation was received that confirms their eligibility for the Supported Housing category.

# Application approval

If an application for Supported Housing is submitted by a designated service provider, the lodging organisation should make a recommendation as to whether the application should be approved.

If an application for Supported Housing is submitted and approved by a participating registered agency, the department will accept that:

* the application meets the eligibility criteria for one of the Supported Housing priority reasons
  + applicants have no alternative housing options.

The department will only find the application ineligible if the household does not meet the eligibility criteria for social housing.

If the application is approved the number of bedrooms for the application will be determined according to the Housing Size Guidelines and special accommodation requirements will be assessed according to the [*Clients with Special Accommodation Requirements operational guidelines*](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/clients-special-accommodation-requirements) <https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/clients-special-accommodation-requirements>.

# Decision review

Applicants who are not recommended or have been assessed as ineligible for Supported Housing may request to have the decision reviewed. For more information see the [*Complaints, Appeals and Feedback Processes operational guidelines*](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/complaints-appeals-and-feedback-processes) https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/complaints-appeals-and-feedback-processes*.*

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