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| 5. Assessing and Managing Applications |
| Operational Guidelines |

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# When do these operational guidelines apply?

These operational guidelines provide information for staff from participating registered agencies, designated service providers and the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) when assessing and managing applications for social housing under 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.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework) <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework>.

# Purpose statement

The purpose of these operational guidelines is to support the day to day management of housing applications in the register.

# 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 you (and your 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.dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-client-focused-decisions>.

# Submitting applications

Applications can be submitted by an individual, designated service provider or social housing organisation that is the tenancy manager of the current tenancy, on behalf of an individual or household. Applications can be submitted online or by paper application.

See the [*Eligibility Policy Framework*](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework) <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-policy-framework> for more information about how to submit applications to the register.

Where an application is submitted on behalf of the applicant, the designated service provider or social housing organisation determines which type of application is lodged based on their assessment of the applicant’s circumstance, and that the applicant meets the eligibility and related criteria of the register.

Designated service providers can submit applications for assessment or recommend applications for approval.

Participating registered agencies can approve applications to the register. Alternatively, they may only submit applications for assessment or recommend applications for approval.

All new and transfer applications are to be submitted to the Housing Call Centre to ‘data capture’ the application details.

Paper forms are directed to be submitted to the Housing Call Centre, with Online applications automatically being sent to the Housing Call Centre. Where paper applications are submitted at a local department office, staff should check to see if the application is complete prior to accepting the application. If the application is not complete, staff should request the applicant to submit the application when they are able to provide relevant documentation. If the paper application is complete, the application should be sent to the Housing Call Centre.

# Preparing online application forms for submission

## Applications submitted by agencies

Designated service providers and participating registered agencies can submit applications on behalf of applicants using the Victorian Housing Register online application through [*eBusiness*](https://hns.dhs.vic.gov.au/dhsportal/wps/myportal)<https://hns.dhs.vic.gov.au/dhsportal/wps/myportal>. The online application is designed to help ensure that applications are fully completed when submitted so that they can be finalised. This will also reduce the requirement for follow-up to complete assessments.

For security and privacy, while an online application is being prepared it is held in a secure portal accessed via eBusiness. This means that only the submitting organisation can view their applications.

When an agency chooses to complete an application online, the application is automatically given a status of ‘draft’ and only the agency responsible for the draft application can access it until it is submitted. If it is not submitted or updated, after six months the application is archived and removed from the screen.

If an applicant chooses not to proceed with submitting an application or disengages with the agency, the agency may choose to update the status of the application in eBusiness to ‘withdrawn’. A withdrawn application may be reinstated to ‘draft’ status for a period of six months until it is archived and removed from the screen automatically.

## Applications submitted by applicants

Similarly, when an applicant is completing an online form using their [*myGov*](https://my.gov.au) <https://my.gov.au> account, only that applicant can view their application.

Once submitted, applications cannot be updated until the Housing Call Centre has captured the data in the Housing Integrated Information Program (HiiP). Updates to applications are then managed via HiiP by department staff.

# Performance standards

It is intended that the Housing Call Centre capture data within the following maximum turn-around times:

* + Priority transfers and fast track registration process – within one working day of receipt by the Housing Call Centre
	+ Priority access applications – within three working days of receipt by the Housing Call Centre
	+ Register of Interest – within ten working days of receipt by the Housing Call Centre.

While performance standards for local department offices have yet to be finalised, it is proposed that the local department offices aim to complete the initial assessment of new priority access or transfer applications within seven working days of receiving the application.

These timelines must be met to ensure the applicant is provided with a timely service and up to date documents are supplied.

# Data capturing applications into HiiP

The capture of application data is conducted by the Housing Call Centre. Entering housing application details in HiiP involves uploading all the documents as well as capturing the information related to the housing application itself. This includes details of each household member and their financial details and support needs.

1. For each household member, search the HiiP client register. Where a household member exists in HiiP, link them to the housing application. This will ensure there is no duplication of applicants in HiiP. A careful comparison must be made between any matches displayed by HiiP to confirm that they are the same person, before adding any household member to an application
2. Where a household member will be part of an existing active application and no current record exists, a new client record is created in HiiP and linked to the housing application. Note: A dependant may be included simultaneously on two social housing applications if the documentation confirms that their care is shared
3. Where permission to use Income Confirmation has been given, that information is accessed via Centrelink then entered into HiiP, and the relevant documents uploaded into HiiP
4. Enter each household member’s income and asset details. Make sure that the Centrelink Reference Number is entered for all household members in receipt of a Centrelink payment
5. Both assessable and non-assessable incomes should be entered in HiiP. HiiP will then determine which incomes are assessable for housing eligibility purposes
6. By contrast, only assessable asset information is required to be captured.

With the applicant’s consent, staff can use Centrelink’s Contact and Address Verification Service to access and view current address and contact details in order to confirm the details held on the register. The service can also be used to access and view the following information:

* + the address history (up to two years) to support an applicant’s application for priority access, and
	+ current address and contact details to locate a person so a housing offer can be made, or prior to removing an application or where an eligibility confirmation review is being undertaken and the applicant’s address and contact details are now unknown.

## Checking applications that are received

When an application is received the application should be checked for completeness including the following:

* + check that the application is complete and if all of the necessary documentation is supplied
	+ make sure that the income and asset documents they have provided are up-to date (less than 28 days old) and that other documents are current (for example, a current driver licence or passport)
	+ make sure that the application has been signed by the applicant.

For detailed information regarding eligibility refer to the [*Eligibility Criteria o*perational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-criteria) *<*https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-criteria*>.*

**Debt**
Where an applicant has a public housing debt, the department will give applicants the opportunity to discuss, review and then negotiate their debt before they agree to a repayment plan and commit to a payment start date.

Applicants are not to be denied access to the register on the basis of an outstanding debt.

## Effective dates

The appropriate effective dates for each category are listed in the table below, with further information being found in the relevant operational guidelines.

Table 1. Effective dates by category

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Category | Effective dates  |
| Priority Transfers­ | The date the household was assessed as requiring a transfer.The effective date is decided by the approved support provider or Tenancy Manager submitting the application. |
| Homeless with Support (HWS) | **Homeless and Family Violence** - the date the individual or family were assessed through an initial assessment and planning interview or equivalent, as requiring support that meets the Homeless with Support threshold.The effective date should not be backdated to more than six months from the date of the application.The effective date is decided by the approved support provider submitting the application.If a Notice to Vacate was issued, the date applicant vacated the property is used as the effective date, not the date they were assessed as requiring support.**Exit Pathways from Refuge and Crisis Accommodation for Victim Survivors of Family Violence initiative** – when a private rental tenancy cannot continue, a new HWS can be submitted, and the original effective date is retained. Refer to the HWS operational guidelines for other scenarios regarding effective dates.**Housing First** – the date the client first engaged with services that in effect failed to effectively support a resolution to homelessness. The earliest date a Housing First application can be set back to is 01 January 2001.T**enant (Housing First applicant)** – if tenancy breaks down in first 6 months, new HWS can be submitted with original effective date retained.**Downgrading application:** If new application is approved to:Another priority category – HWS effective date is effective date of new priority application.Register of Interest – date household demonstrated eligibility. |
| Supported Housing | The date the individual or family were assessed as requiring social housing by the support provider. The application must be submitted within six months of that assessment. |
| Special Housing Needs | **Application submitted by approved support providers** -- the date the individual or family were assessed as requiring social housing through an assessment and planning process, or equivalent assessment. Application must be submitted within six months of that assessment.**Application submitted by applicant** – the date the individual or family demonstrates they are eligible under the Special Housing Needs category, that is, all documentation was received that confirms their eligibility for this category. |
| Special Housing Needs Aged 55 years and over | **New applications** - the date the individual or household demonstrates that they are eligible under the Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over category, that is, all documentation was received that confirms their eligibility for this category.**Existing applications** – for Register of Interest applicants/households turning 55 years of age, and where their application is reviewed by the department, the effective date is the Register of Interest effective date. |
| Register of Interest | The date the individual or family demonstrates they are eligible for the Register of Interest, that is, all documentation was received that confirms their eligibility for the Register of Interest. |

## Notify applicant of submission and provide copies to third parties if required

When an application is submitted, but is not able to be immediately assessed, HiiP will generate an acknowledgment letter, advising of the date on which the application was received.

When an application has been assessed, the applicant will receive a letter advising them of the outcome of the assessment.

Copies of any letters sent to an applicant will also be sent to a third party if the applicant has provided consent.

# Assessing Priority Access applications

The Housing Call Centre will data capture Priority Access applications and assign applications to the relevant processing office to carry out assessment of the Priority Access applications.

New and transfer applications will be assessed at the local department office closest to where the applicant resides, also known as the processing office.

This is a key function of a local department office. The delegation for decisions on priority applications now sits with staff who are HSO3 and above. This delegation level also applies to Special Accommodation Requirements.

Where an application is submitted using the online form, no application file is made. Where an application has been submitted using the paper form ,the Housing Call Centre will data capture and scan a copy of the form to HiiP, no application file is made.

## Assessing Register of Interest and Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over applications

The Housing Call Centre will data capture and assess ‘Special Housing Needs aged 55 years and over’ applications.

Applications that require additional documentation will be captured and held in the Housing Call Centre office.

Once the application has been fully completed and assessed the application will be assigned to the relevant processing office. No further action is required by the processing office until further contact with the applicant occurs.

# Delegations in approving applications

For department staff that are involved with reviewing and assessing applications in HiiP, the following delegations apply.

Table 1. Department staff delegations in approving and removing applications

| Application Type | Delegation  |
| --- | --- |
| Priority Transfers | Team Leader (VPS4) or above |
| Homeless with Support | Housing Services Officer 3 (HSO3) or aboveVictorian Public Servant (VPS3) or above |
| Supported Housing |
| Special Housing Need |
| Special Housing Need 55 years and over |
| Register of Interest | Housing Services Officer 1 (HSO1) or above (where HSO1 is formally assessed as competent for Accelerated advancement)Housing Customer Services Officer 2 (HSO2) |

Consistent with the intent of the register as a collaboration between community housing organisations and the department, where an application is submitted by a participating registered agency with the status of approved, the department will use its delegation to formally approve the application to the register in line with relevant eligibility criteria.

# Incomplete and ineligible applications

## Incomplete applications

An application is defined as incomplete if documentation establishing the household’s eligibility is not supplied, or relevant sections of the application form have not been completed.

Incomplete applications must be captured in HiiP and a letter sent to the applicant, including the incomplete form where applicable, telling them:

* + the sections of the form that are incomplete
	+ what documentation they are required to provide
	+ that the required information must be submitted within 28 days or their application will be rejected.

If the applicant does not return the required documentation within 28 days of when the letter was issued the application will be rejected. However, before this occurs, where appropriate, the applicant’s support provider should be contacted, and the applicant’s address should be confirmed.

If only some of the requested documentation is supplied, the department will write to the applicant again explaining what is still required. Allow the applicant a further 28 days since the letter was issued to provide the remaining documentation.

If the documentation is not provided within the required time, reject the application and advise the applicant in writing that:

* + their application has been rejected
	+ the reason that the application has been rejected
	+ that they may reapply in the future.

## Ineligible applications

If an application is assessed as ineligible according to the eligibility criteria the applicant must be advised in writing within 14 days of receipt of all documentation.

If the applicant becomes eligible at a later date, they are able to submit a new application.

Ineligible applications may only be revived when the applicant can prove that they were eligible at the time they applied and that they provided the necessary documentation within the required timelines.

## Requesting additional information to establish eligibility

If necessary documentation has not been supplied the application is considered incomplete.

When additional documents are required to confirm eligibility, requests should be as comprehensive as possible to reduce the risk of more delays requesting other documents.

Processing counting time will be amended on applications when additional information has been sought from an applicant and this information is yet to be submitted.

For detailed information regarding eligibility refer to the [*Eligibility Criteria o*perational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-criteria)<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/eligibility-criteria>

# Duplicate applications

If an application is received which contains the same primary applicant as an existing application, it is called a ‘duplicate application’. When entering the details of the new (duplicate) application into HiiP, select the option ‘duplicate application’ which will make this application ineligible.

When a person is found to be part of an existing application, the primary applicant of the new application is contacted to discuss how they would like to proceed.

The department sends a letter to the primary applicant via HiiP advising that they have submitted a duplicate application and provides details of their existing application.

The department updates the existing social housing application with the details contained in the new (duplicate) application and re-assesses the existing application for eligibility.

# Split applications

A new housing application created in the name of a household member (as the primary applicant) who is included in an existing application is called a ‘split application’. An application may be split where the following occurs:

* a primary applicant requests to remove a household member from their application and the removed member completes a new register application
	+ a household member on the application (not the primary applicant):
		- requests that their name be removed from an existing application and would like their own separate application for housing
			* submits a new application unaware that they are already included on an existing application.

This process ensures that eligible household members retain the effective date of the existing application.

The Housing Call Centre will data capture split applications and assign them to the relevant processing office for assessment.

In the case of dependants, where documentation has been provided confirming custody arrangements, the dependants role may be changed from ‘dependant – full custody’ to ‘dependant – shared custody’, allowing the dependant to be on two applications.

## Effective date of a ‘split’ application

The effective date of the new application is backdated to the date the household member joined the application they are being removed from, provided they met the eligibility criteria for social housing at the time of joining their original application.

If the member was not eligible when they were included in the original application, then the new application cannot be backdated, and the effective date of the split application is the date it is submitted. The effective date of the split application cannot be backdated beyond that of the original application.

Subject to eligibility, the effective date of the new application is automatically backdated by HiiP to the date the person joined the existing application.

However, it is important to check the existing application and determine when the person joined the application. If the person was not considered independent when they joined the existing application (for instance, they were a dependant on the existing application), this is not considered a split application.

The applicant is then removed from the existing application, and the primary applicant of the existing application is contacted to clarify which people are included in the household. The person that has been removed can now be added on to the new application outside of the split application process and their effective date will be the date the new application was received.

# Transfer applications

Applicants who are current tenants of social housing, including moveable units, can submit a request to transfer to another social housing property by completing the appropriate application.

## Priority transfers

The reasons under which a household may be considered eligible for the Priority Transfer category are listed in the [*Priority Transfers* operational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/priority-transfers)<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/priority-transfers>.

The reasons under which a household may be considered eligible for a transfer application under the Special Housing Needs category are listed in the [*Special Housing Needs o*perational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/special-housing-needs) <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/special-housing-needs>.

Applications for Priority Transfer can be submitted by an individual, designated service provider or social housing organisation that is the tenancy manager of the current tenancy, on behalf of an individual or household. Applications can be submitted online or by paper application.

### Dependents aged 18 to 24

In some situations, a transfer application is received that includes dependants aged 18 to 24 who are not eligible because their income exceeds the income limits. These dependents are exempt from income eligibility requirements and are considered eligible if they have lived in the property for a minimum of six months prior to the submission of a transfer application. The dependants are then included in the housing size.

# Special Accommodation Requirements

Special Accommodation Requirements can be approved in accordance with [*Clients with Special Accommodation Requirements (SARs)* operational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/clients-special-accommodation-requirements)<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/clients-special-accommodation-requirements>SARs can be approved by HSO3s and above.

The following table outlines what SARs must be approved to match an applicant to the appropriate property attributes:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **If a property has these Attributes** | **and a Housing Application has** |
|   | “Full modification” | an approved SAR = “Full disability modifications” |
| **OR** | “Wheelchair Accessible Dwelling” AND“Int wheelchair access”   | an approved SAR = “Wheelchair accessible dwelling” |
| **OR** | “Full modification” AND“Wheelchair Accessible Dwelling” AND“Int wheelchair access” | an approved SAR = “Full disability modifications” |

Ensuring that the correct SARs are listed will help match applicants to suitable properties sooner by accelerating the applicant in HiiP if a property with the required attributes becomes available.

Where an applicant’s special accommodation requirement leads to a significant reduction in their opportunity to be housed, the applicant should be advised to ensure they understand the impact on their opportunity to be housed when making their choices.

# Dependants

Where a dependant is listed on another application and documentation has not been provided in relation to custody arrangements, the department contacts the primary applicant.

Where documentation has been provided showing the primary applicant of the new application has full custody, the dependant is removed from the existing application.

Where documentation has been provided showing that the primary applicant has shared custody, the dependant’s role is changed to ‘dependant – shared custody’ on both applications.

# Applying changes to number of bedrooms

HiiP automatically assigns bedroom sizes based on the household composition in accordance with the [Clients with *Special Accommodation Requirements* operational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel/clients-special-accommodation-requirements)<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel/clients-special-accommodation-requirements>. In some situations, this reduces the applicant’s opportunity to be housed. For example, large families may be approved for five bedroom properties in a location where this requirement cannot be met.

## Approving less bedrooms

In some situations, applicants who qualified for a particular sized property, in accordance with the Housing Size Guidelines, may accept a smaller sized property to increase their housing opportunity. The applicant must be consulted in these situations.

Should this cause overcrowding, the household cannot, for this reason, later request a transfer on the grounds of unsuitable housing or severe overcrowding. However, they may make an application for a [Register of Interest](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/register-interest) <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/register-interest > transfer to a larger property within their current preferred area.

Refer to [*Clients with Special Accommodation Requirements o*perational guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel/clients-special-accommodation-requirements)<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel/clients-special-accommodation-requirements> for more information about the Housing Size Guidelines.

# Preferred areas and housing availability

Applications can have up to five preferred areas.

Applicants should be encouraged to select as many preferred areas as they can where they have a connection (for example, to community, services or work). Generally, the more preferred areas selected, the greater the likelihood the applicant will get housed.

Where an applicant only chooses areas that will provide them with a low chance of being housed, contact should occur with the applicant to suggest considering other preferred areas to increase their chances of getting housed.

# Applying discretion

Where an applicant has circumstances that affect their capacity to be housed appropriately, discretion can be used to help maximise their opportunities.

For example, Indigenous people 50 years of age and over, and similarly people with multiple episodes of homelessness and poor health, can be considered for the older persons stock in public housing.

# Updates to applications

Only primary applicants, a designated service provider or participating registered agency can advise of updates to an application.

Updates to applications fall into two broad groups:

* changes to phone number, address, preference areas or similar
	+ more significant changes that may impact on their eligibility and therefore require a reassessment.

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Application changes can be made in writing or by phone.

Where the primary applicant makes telephone contact advising of a change to their application, their details are updated in HiiP. Most changes to an application – including removing an application – can be made over the phone. Adding a new household member should be done in writing to ensure there is enough information in HiiP to assess their eligibility. A letter is sent to the primary applicant confirming the details that have been updated.

If a change results in a need for an eligibility reassessment, the local department office that manages the application is responsible.

# Regular eligibility reviews

Under current policy, each application for social housing under the register requires a reassessment at a minimum of every two years. Applications that reach 70 days prior to the two-year period have an eligibility review automatically forwarded to the applicant by HiiP.

If there is no response within 28 days of the letter being sent a further eligibility confirmation request is sent automatically.

After 56 days, the application status moves to ‘re-assessed’ and the local department office responsible for the application has 14 days to complete a reassessment or removal process.

For applications merged from participating registered agencies, applicants will be informed where minimal and necessary information is required to ensure applications are merged correctly, for example, the type of social housing they wish to apply for.

# Reassessments of eligibility/category

In some circumstances, primary applicants may choose to withdraw their application, or they may be assessed as being no longer eligible for housing. In these instances, the application is removed from the register.

Eligibility is reassessed before an offer of housing is made or when the applicant contacts the social housing organisation to advise of one or more of the following:

* the application was previously removed from the register and they wish to have the application reinstated
* there has been a change in household composition
* there has been a change in the households' housing situation
* there has been a change in household income or assets
* the applicant wishes to apply for Priority Access or Special Accommodation Requirements (SAR)
	+ there has been a change that may affect the status of their application or SAR
	+ the change in housing circumstances may impact on their eligibility for Priority Access.

Where an application has a change in circumstances but has remained eligible for their current Priority Access category or Register of Interest, the original effective date is retained.

# Removing applications

Applicants are removed from the register if:

* they have been housed in long term social housing
* they are unable to be contacted
* the household no longer meets the eligibility criteria
* the primary applicant advises that they are no longer interested in continuing with their application
* the primary applicant requests that their application be temporarily removed from the register, for example they are unable to accept an offer of housing at the present time
	+ an applicant has received the maximum number of reasonable offers that they are entitled to and have refused them. Applicants are provided with a maximum of two reasonable offers on Priority Access and a further two offers under Register of Interest.

### No contact

Where applicants are unable to be contacted at least two contact attempts should be made. Contact attempts, at a minimum, should consist of a phone call, and where this type of contact has been unsuccessful, a letter should be sent to the applicant.

In addition, where an applicant has support, the relevant support person or organisation must be contacted.

Where the applicant has provided consent to use Centrelink Confirmation eServices’ contact and address verification, staff must use this service to confirm whether the applicant has provided alternative contact details.

### Refused offers

Where an applicant has refused an offer based on medical or other reasons which they had previously not flagged in their application, they will need to submit appropriate evidence if they wish to review the reasonableness of the offer.

### Incomplete applications

Where more than six months has elapsed since an incomplete application has been submitted and a request for further information was not responded to, the application should be removed and a new application will need to be submitted.

# Reinstating applications

Applications can be reinstated when the applicant makes contact (in writing, person or on the phone) within two years from the date their application was removed from the register and the applicant can prove they meet the eligibility criteria.

Where an applicant’s application is no longer active because they were unable to be contacted or for similar reasons, an assessment needs to be made to determine whether the previous application can be reinstated or whether a new application is required.

If the applicant’s housing circumstances remain unchanged then the original application should be reinstated. However, if the applicant was housed during the period the application was removed then a new application is required.

Where the application is reinstated, eligibility for Priority Access or the Register of Interest is reassessed.

Once reinstated, the application retains the original effective date. Application details should also be updated including contact information, income and assets, preference areas and support details.

# Contacting and taking enquiries from applicants

Before any personal information or details regarding an application are discussed with an applicant (or their representative), it is necessary to confirm their identity to protect their privacy. Confirmation of at least three of the following personal details is required:

* service ID number
* full name
* date of birth
* telephone number
	+ names and dates of birth of family members (for example children or spouse).

Alternatively, applicants can choose to be registered as a ‘sensitive client’. To do this they need to supply a password, a security question and answer which is then recorded in HiiP. Where the ‘sensitive client’ indicator is flagged, the applicant must provide the password before any personal information can be discussed or provided.

If the person gives an incorrect password or cannot recall it, the security question can be used to verify the person’s identity.

* + If they cannot recall their password or answer the security question, confirmation of at least three pieces of personal information mentioned previously is required.

If, after following the above procedure, there are still doubts about the identity of the person the application is being discussed with, they must provide proof of their identity (for example a driver licence or passport).

# Questions and clarification

If you have any questions about these guidelines, please email Victorian Housing Register <VictorianHousingRegister@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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