

<b>Policy name</b>	Affordable Housing
<b>Policy date</b>	August 2020
<b>Authorisation</b>	General Manager, Operations
<b>Policy owner</b>	National Housing Services Manager
<b>Policy type</b>	Mission Australia Housing Operational Policy
<b>Policy setting</b>	

## 1 Purpose

### 1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This policy sets out the principles followed by Mission Australia Housing (MAH) in its management of affordable housing.

### 1.2 Information on procedures and other related policies

1.2.1 This policy focuses on why certain things need to be done. It is one of a number of interlinked policies and procedures that support MAH's delivery of housing services. To assist you, these are identified where relevant in this policy.

## 2 Scope

### 2.1 Parts of Mission Australia that this policy covers

2.1.1 This document is a national policy and covers both Mission Australia Housing (MAH) and Mission Australia Housing Victoria (MAHV). All references to Mission Australia Housing, MAH and Housing include both MAH and MAHV unless specifically stated otherwise. Where state based variations exist in policies and procedures, these will be identified in the document.

2.1.2 This policy applies to MAH staff responsible for working with MAH clients, tenants and properties.

### 2.2 Definitions

2.2.1 Key terms used in this policy are defined in the following table.

Term	Definition
<b>Affordable housing</b>	Housing for individuals or families on low to moderate incomes who are having difficulty affording housing in the private rental market. It is generally targeted at working households. Rent for affordable housing is usually calculated as a discounted market rent.
<b>Allocation principles</b>	The rules and standards which govern the provision of properties to applicants and tenants of MAH.
<b>Application for housing</b>	A written request completed by an applicant or their guardian which details the reasons why they require housing. This would include specific property or location requirements to meet their housing needs.
<b>Discounted rent</b>	The amount of rent actually paid by the tenant.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Criteria such as income limits that must be met by applicants in order to obtain housing through a specific program.
<b>Eligible applicant</b>	An applicant who meets the specific criteria applying to individual housing through a specific program.
<b>Local allocation strategy</b>	An allocation strategy tailored to the circumstances of a particular area.
<b>Opportunity cohort</b>	Social housing tenants who have the potential to transition out of social housing into affordable housing or the private rental marketplace with appropriate support.
<b>Market rent</b>	The rent that would be charged for the property if the rent wasn't discounted.
<b>Offers of housing</b>	The process by which MAH invites eligible applicants to view and accept a property that has been identified as meeting their requirements.
<b>Reasonable offer of housing</b>	When a property matches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of bedrooms the household requires;</li> <li>• The requested allocation zone (the property may be in any suburb within the allocation zone); and</li> </ul>

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any other property or location features the client has been assessed as needing. For example, requirements relating to level access, stairs or steps; distance from services or facilities; or locational needs for safety reasons (such as escaping family or domestic violence).</li> </ul> <p>If an offer meets the above criteria and is rejected by the applicant on the grounds of personal preference, this is treated as a rejection of a reasonable offer of housing.</p>
<b>Social housing</b>	Subsidised housing for individuals and families on very low and low incomes. Social housing applicants are generally in receipt of Centrelink benefits.
<b>Tailored Support Coordination Service (TSCS)</b>	<p>A specialist service focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting particular needs of tenants and their households;</li> <li>The development of new partnerships to support tenants, their households and communities; and</li> <li>Capturing the resultant lessons to improve future service delivery.</li> </ul>
<b>Tapered rents</b>	Rents structured in such a way so as to ease the transition from one housing type to another.
<b>Tenant Engagement Strategy</b>	A local strategy incorporating a range of activities required to successfully engage, inform and introduce tenants to their location, neighbours and local community support services.
<b>Transitional housing</b>	Short-or medium-term accommodation (generally three to 12 months) with access to support services. It acts as an interim step to more permanent public, community or private market housing.

## 3 Policy

### 3.1 Guiding principles

#### 3.1.1 MAH is tenant and community focused:

- MAH ensures that an allocated property meets the identified needs of a tenant and their household.
- MAH supports tenants to sustain their tenancies and to achieve their objectives.

#### 3.1.2 MAH protects the value of the properties it has under management:

- MAH applies effective tenancy and asset management approaches.
- MAH seeks to maximise the utilisation of scarce housing resources through its allocations decisions.

3.1.3 The MAH approach is fair and transparent:

- MAH communicates clearly with applicants and tenants.
- MAH upholds accountability and transparency through its record keeping practices.
- Applicants and tenants are given the opportunity to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.

3.1.4 MAH complies with relevant laws and procedures within each operating state, as well as the requirements laid down by particular funding bodies or property owners.

### 3.2 Introduction

3.2.1 Affordable housing is generally aimed at low to moderate income households where one or more household member is employed. There are a number of affordable housing programs, each with its own rules that must be met by applicants and tenants.

3.2.2 Subject to the rules of particular programs, MAH is responsible for:

- Advertising properties;
- Assessing applications;
- Allocating properties; and
- Providing tenancy and property management services.

3.2.3 In carrying out these tasks, MAH seeks to maximise the social value of the limited supply of affordable housing, while complying with the requirements set out by particular laws, regulations, programs and funding arrangements.

### 3.3 Importance of clear information

3.3.1 Given the variety in affordable housing programs, MAH staff need to ensure that clear information is provided to applicants and prospective applicants to help them understand the program to which the vacant property belongs.

### 3.4 Rent

3.4.1 Affordable housing tenants pay a discounted rent. This is often set at 74.9 per cent of market rent, but may vary between programs. In some cases, income-based sliding rents may be charged. In others, a proportion of market rent may be paid but subject to a cap of 30 per cent of household gross income, plus the tenant's maximum Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) entitlement.

3.4.2 Both market rents and household incomes are subject to reviews that may lead to changes in rent payments. Reviews are usually annual, but may be carried out at other times if required by program rules or when households advise MAH of a change in circumstance.

- 3.4.3 Housing staff will explain the rental arrangements that apply to particular programs at the time of application. Further information on rents can be found in the **Rents, Bonds and Other Charges Policy**.

### 3.5 Tapered rents

- 3.5.1 MAH seeks to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. To this end, MAH may offer suitable tenants (known as the opportunity cohort) the opportunity to transition from social to affordable housing, and then to private rental or home ownership by providing:
- Tapered rents to reduce transition costs; and
  - Support services tailored to the needs of tenants and their families.
- 3.5.2 The details and implementation of rent tapering may vary between programs and individual circumstances. Staff should refer to local allocation strategies and operational management plans for details.

### 3.6 Tenure

- 3.6.1 Individual tenancy agreements for affordable housing programs are normally for 12 months.
- 3.6.2 The maximum period of tenancy varies between programs:
- Programs that focus on affordable housing as a transition to private rental generally have maximum tenancy periods.
  - Other programs may not have maximum time limits, but may have specific occupancy requirements.
- 3.6.3 Tenure for all programs relies on ongoing eligibility.
- 3.6.4 Housing staff will explain the tenure arrangements holding at the time of application.

### 3.7 Eligibility

- 3.7.1 Each affordable housing program has its own eligibility rules. In broad terms:
- Applicants must show that they need housing and cannot resolve their own housing needs without help.
  - Applicants must show that they can meet their obligations with or without support.
  - There is usually an upper household income limit at which eligibility ceases. This varies with household size and is normally adjusted on an annual basis, in accordance with Consumer Price Index (CPI) changes.
  - Some affordable housing programs may accept applications from very low income workers or seek applicants from social housing waiting lists, where those applicants

meet program requirements or where there is little demand from other affordable housing applicants.

- Some programs may require applicants to live in or demonstrate a connection with an area, or (as in key worker programs) may be limited to certain occupational categories.

3.7.2 Eligibility requirements are summarised in property advertisements and explained by housing staff at the time of application.

### 3.8 Application and allocation

3.8.1 MAH is responsible for inviting and assessing applications for the affordable housing it manages, although in some programs the final decision on individual tenancies may rest with the owner or program manager.

3.8.2 As vacancies arise, MAH will advertise the properties using appropriate media outlets, detailing eligibility criteria and property features. MAH may also invite applicants from its waiting list, where this exists, and may also invite suitable applicants from the social housing waiting list.

3.8.3 Subsequent allocation decisions will be based on:

- The associated state or Commonwealth affordable housing program guidelines, together with specific requirements that might be laid down by funders, councils or property owners;
- The match between the property and applicant needs;
- Achieving a mix of income bands;
- Additional criteria specific to the property or program, such as a demonstrated connection to an area or a requirement to live in a seniors living unit; and
- Priority/preference given to low to moderate income earners, where at least one household member is engaged in regular employment.

3.8.4 For further information, see the **Housing Applications Policy** and **Allocation of Housing Policy**.

### 3.9 Maximum number of offers

3.9.1 MAH will generally be unable to make more than one offer of housing to affordable housing applicants due to the limited availability of housing stock.

### 3.10 During the tenancy

3.10.1 MAH general tenancy and asset management policies apply to affordable housing.

3.10.2 Market rents are reviewed annually, or at other times if required by program rules. If the market rent is going to change, tenants are advised as required by the residential tenancy legislation for that state or territory.

3.10.3 Tenants' continued eligibility for their property is assessed annually, and before the ending of their tenancy. This includes an income review that may affect both eligibility and discounted rent. Where a tenant ceases to be eligible for a property, staff will explain the options open to them and assist them where possible to find alternative rental accommodation.

### 3.11 Provision of support services

3.11.1 MAH staff will assist tenants to access support services should they be required in order to sustain a tenancy, or to comply with particular program responsibilities.

### 3.12 Appeals

3.12.1 Staff will inform tenants of their right to appeal organisational decisions and to complain about the services of MAH as per the **Appeals and Complaints Policy**.

### 3.13 Confidentiality

3.13.1 Staff will hold in confidence any personal or sensitive information disclosed through the allocations process unless disclosure is permitted under law or consented to by the person subject of that information, as per the **Mission Australia Enterprise Privacy Policy**.

## 4 Responsibilities

### 4.1 Housing staff including Housing Officers and Client Service Officers are responsible for:

- Making affordable housing decisions in accordance with this policy.
- Keeping records in the tenancy management system as required.
- Recommending improvements to this policy.

### 4.2 Team Leaders/Regional Manager are responsible for:

- Assisting staff to implement this policy.
- Reviewing evidence and making decisions where required.
- Incorporating this policy into staff induction and training.
- Escalating feedback about this policy to the policy owner and/or policy writer.

### 4.3 The National Housing Services Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring MAH complies with this policy.
- Recommending any changes to this policy.