

Policy name	Allocation of Housing
Policy date	August 2020
Authorisation	General Manager, Operations
Policy owner	National Manager, Housing Services
Policy type	Mission Australia Housing Operational Policy
Policy setting	

1 Purpose

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This policy sets out the principles to be followed in allocating Mission Australia Housing (MAH) properties to eligible applicants. Our aim is to ensure a tenant-focused allocation process that:
- Is fair and transparent;
 - Takes the needs of prospective tenants into account; and
 - Meets the specific legal and contractual obligations placed upon MAH by governments, funders and other providers of housing or housing-related products.

1.2 Coverage

- 1.2.1 This policy covers all aspects of the allocation process from application, to offer, to acceptance, including:
- Confirmation of eligibility;
 - Matching the needs of applicants to available housing;
 - Appropriate treatment of applicants with special needs or property requirements;
 - Offers of housing;
 - Appealing decisions related to allocations; and
 - Confidentiality.
- 1.2.2 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.

- 1.2.3 This policy applies to all forms of housing provided by MAH including social, affordable and transitional housing.
- 1.2.4 Allocation rules and procedures vary between housing categories, jurisdictions and programs. For that reason, this policy provides guidance on differing rules that affect the allocation process.

1.3 Information on procedures and other related policies

- 1.3.1 This policy focuses on why certain things need to be done. It is supported by procedures that provide more detail on the what to do, the steps involved in carrying out the allocation process.
- 1.3.2 This policy is one of a number of interlinked policies that support MAH's delivery of housing services. Along with the **Eligibility for Housing Policy** and the **Housing Applications Policy**, it determines how housing will be allocated.

2 Scope

2.1 Parts of Mission Australia that this policy covers

- 2.1.1 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
Affordable housing	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.
Allocation principles	The rules and standards which govern the provision of properties to applicants and tenants of MAH.
Application for housing	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.
Eligibility	Criteria such as income limits that must be met by applicants to obtain housing through a specific program.

Term	Definition
Eligible applicant	One who meets the specific criteria applying to individual housing through a specific program.
Housing Connect	The Tasmanian system providing a single assessment process for all housing and support needs.
Housing Pathways	The way in which applications for social housing assistance are managed in New South Wales. It may also include help to set up a tenancy in the private rental market, or temporary accommodation if someone is homeless.
Local allocation strategy	Allocation requirements for particular local areas specified by funding or program requirements.
Offers of housing	The process by which MAH invites eligible applicants to view and accept a property that has been identified as meeting their requirements.
Reasonable offer of housing	<p>When a property matches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of bedrooms the household requires; • The allocation zone requested (the property may be in any suburb within the allocation zone); and • Any other property or location features the client has been assessed as needing. This may include requirements relating to level access or stairs; distance from services or facilities; or locational needs relating to safety (such as escaping family or domestic violence). <p>If an offer meets the above criteria and is rejected on the grounds of personal preference, this would be treated as a rejection of a reasonable offer of housing</p>
Social housing	Subsidised housing for individuals and families on very low and low incomes. Social housing applicants are generally in receipt of Centrelink benefits.
Transitional housing	Short- to medium-term accommodation (generally three to twelve 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 The MAH allocation process is tenant and community-focused:

- MAH aims to promote stable and sustainable neighbourhoods and reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour through proactive allocation decisions.
- MAH facilitates successful tenancies by ensuring that the allocation of housing strikes a balance between the needs of the organisation, the tenant and the community, in order to minimise future tenancy problems and maximise tenant satisfaction.
- MAH ensures that an allocated property meets the identified needs of a tenant and their household.
- MAH seeks to maximise the utilisation of scarce housing resources through its allocations decisions.
- MAH seeks to support applicants to remain connected to or build connections with support services, local opportunities and their community.
- MAH aims to encourage equity through the housing allocation process.
- Where required, applicants are assisted to maintain their independence and improve their quality of life through the MAH allocation process.

3.1.2 The MAH allocation process is fair and transparent:

- MAH follows consistent processes where offers of housing are made to eligible applicants.
- MAH upholds accountability and transparency through its record keeping practices.
- To avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest between the applicant's employment and their tenancy, MAH will not allocate properties to MAH staff.
- Applicants and tenants are given the opportunity to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.

3.1.3 The MAH allocation process complies with the relevant laws and procedures within each operating state.

3.2 Allocation decisions

3.2.1 The purpose of the allocation process is to best match tenants to available properties. Decisions are based on:

- Information about the applicant's needs and preferences collected on the application form, at interview and in discussion with the applicant and/or their advocate or support worker (where required permission has been given);

- Information about the property and neighbourhood;
- The application of standard MAH allocation criteria to determine whether the potential tenant and property are a good fit; and
- Any local allocation strategy that may be in place.

3.3 Confirmation of eligibility and household type

- 3.3.1 Housing allocations will generally be made from state-based housing waiting lists based on previous applications. Waiting lists may also be maintained for specific affordable housing programs.
- 3.3.2 Where a waiting list exists, the information in the original applications will need to be checked to reconfirm interest, eligibility and housing needs. Where eligibility and/or needs have changed, staff should, as appropriate:
- Advise the respective housing authorities in Queensland and Tasmania who are responsible for approving applications for state-based social housing programs, and for maintaining a waiting list that MAH draws from in making offers.
 - Update HOMES for social housing applicants in New South Wales.
 - Amend the relevant records for affordable housing.

3.4 Social housing allocations

- 3.4.1 Where possible, MAH will allocate approved applicants a property in their preferred location, as identified in their application for housing.
- 3.4.2 Given the limited supply of social housing, MAH adheres to the following minimum standards in the number of bedrooms allocated to applicants, depending on family/household size and the age of family/household members:
- Single people will be allocated a studio unit, bed-sit, or one-bedroom property.
 - Couples (without children) will be allocated a one-bedroom property.
 - Single people and couples with one or two children will be allocated a two- or three-bedroom property.
 - Single people and couples with three or four children will be allocated a three- or four-bedroom property.
 - Single people and couples with five or more children will be allocated a four- or five-bedroom property.
 - Household members aged 18 years of age or over will be allocated their own bedroom unless they are part of a couple.
 - Children of the same sex may be required to share a bedroom unless there is five or more years' difference between them, or until the eldest is over 10 years of age.

- Full-time live-in carers (non-spousal) will be allocated their own bedroom where applicable.
- 3.4.3 MAH may make customised allocations for applicants with specific needs, where that need can be established and housing is available. For example, MAH may make customised allocations for additional bedrooms. Examples might include:
- Requests for two separate bedrooms for couples.
 - Requests for two separate bedrooms for children of the same age.
 - Requests for an extra bedroom in shared custody arrangements.
- 3.4.4 Other property specifications that require supporting evidence might include:
- That the allocated property be a house, not a unit.
 - Ground floor ramp or lift access and parking because a household member has a disability or, in the case of an older applicant, that the property not have significant stairs.
 - Any other special property features such as a garden; a bath; gas appliances rather than electric; a private laundry area; floorboards rather than carpet; a garage or shed; a parking facility; grab rails as part of disability access; built-in wardrobes or cupboard space in bedrooms and hallways; or painting and renovations.
- 3.4.5 Evidence requirements for customised allocations are set out in **Appendix A**.
- 3.4.6 MAH will generally allocate a vacant property to the applicant with the highest priority who is an appropriate match for the property. In some circumstances MAH may use a sensitive allocations approach or a local allocation strategy. This may mean making an offer to a household on the general waiting list, rather than the priority list. Instances where sensitive allocations will be used include where:
- The vacant property is located within a neighbourhood or building complex which has specific management issues, such as high levels of anti-social behaviour;
 - Applicants have a history that would make certain allocations more or less appropriate for them, such as applicants escaping family or domestic violence; and/or
 - There are cultural considerations, particularly for allocations in high-density building complexes.
- 3.4.7 Where properties are hard to let, MAH may take a more flexible approach to allocations. For example, if a two-bedroom property has been difficult to let, MAH may make an offer to a couple without children who would be a good match for the property even though they would usually be offered a one-bedroom property.

3.5 Affordable housing allocations

- 3.5.1 Affordable housing will be allocated to low and moderate income households (and on exception very low income households), and a range of household configurations. 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;
 - 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.
- 3.5.2 Bedroom categories for affordable housing properties are the same as for social housing properties.

3.6 Transitional and supported housing

- 3.6.1 MAH receives nominations for clients from support providers for transitional housing. Before allocations can be made for transitional housing, clients must apply and be found eligible for state-based housing.

3.7 Offers of housing

- 3.7.1 Offers of housing in New South Wales (social housing):
- Social housing applicants in New South Wales will receive no more than two reasonable offers of housing based upon the information they have provided in their application. MAH is responsible for determining the reasonableness of an offer of housing that has been made to an applicant.
 - Where applicants decline two reasonable offers of housing, they will be removed from the waiting list.
- 3.7.2 Offers of housing in Queensland and Tasmania (social housing):
- In accordance with the policies of the housing authorities in Queensland and Tasmania, MAH is required to inform state housing authorities where applicants decline an offer of housing. These authorities are responsible for determining whether the offer made was reasonable.
- 3.7.3 Offers of housing (affordable housing):
- MAH will generally be unable to give more than one offer of housing to affordable housing applicants due to the limited availability of housing stock.

- Where an applicant refuses an offer of housing within an affordable housing program, the applicant may be required to reapply for another affordable housing property.

3.8 Withdrawal of offers

3.8.1 In all operating states, MAH reserves the right to withdraw an offer of housing made where:

- Applicants are no longer eligible for social/affordable housing;
- The type of property that will be required has changed;
- False information has been supplied;
- An applicant has become incarcerated, hospitalised or is in care;
- An applicant has previously received the maximum number of offers of housing;
- An applicant has not responded to an offer within a reasonable timeframe;
- An offer of housing is unsuitable or unsafe;
- Repeated attempts to contact an applicant have been unsuccessful;
- MAH is required to use a property for an alternative purpose; or
- MAH has concerns for the capacity of an applicant to manage a tenancy, either with or without support.

3.9 Applicant support

3.9.1 Throughout the process, staff should ensure that applicants have access to their advocate or support worker as required.

3.10 Appeals

3.10.1 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**.

3.11 Confidentiality

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

4 Responsibilities

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

- Making housing allocation decisions in accordance with this policy.
- Keeping records in the tenancy management system in accordance with this policy.

- Recommending improvements to this policy and the associated procedure.

4.2 Team Leaders/Regional Manager are responsible for:

- Ensuring good management of evidence in the tenancy management system.
- Keeping records in the tenancy management system in accordance with this policy.
- Reviewing evidence and making decisions where required.
- Incorporating this policy and associated procedures into staff inductions 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 and associated procedures.
- Authorising any changes made to this policy and associated procedures.

5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix A: Evidence Requirements for Customised Allocations

Appendix A: Evidence Requirements for Customised Allocations

Situation	Description	Evidence Required
Ground floor unit	Applicant requires either a ground floor property or a property with a limited number of internal and external stairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical report • Letter from specialist doctor substantiating the need for limited stairs • Age of applicant • Letter from support provider
Modified property	Applicant requires a modified property due to one or more household members having a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report from occupational therapist or Aged Care Assessment Team • Medical report
Backyard or garden	Applicant requires an animal for assistance with daily living such as a guide dog, large space for rehabilitation and exercise equipment, or children with disabilities who require a secure outdoor space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters from support provider • Medical report • Confirmation letter from Guide Dogs NSW • Report from occupational therapist
Separate bedrooms for couples	Applicant requires an extra bedroom due to medical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical report from a specialist detailing why the couple requires separate bedrooms <p><i>Note that snoring and sleep apnea are not considered valid reasons for separate bedrooms.</i></p>
Specific furnishings eg no carpet	Some applicants may require specific furnishings such as floorboards instead of carpet due to allergies or other serious medical conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical report completed by a specialist
Extra bedroom	Applicant requires an extra bedroom: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accommodate a carer or family member who stays regularly to care for applicant • For storage space for medical and rehabilitation equipment • To accommodate custody visits of children • Due to cultural obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter from support agency detailing care needs • Medical report • Occupational Therapy or Rehabilitation Report • Copy of court-ordered custody arrangements • Details of children or family members who stay • Certification of Aboriginality