

Policy name	Housing Applications
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 assisting applicants to apply for housing with Mission Australia Housing (MAH). Our aim is to ensure a client-focused application process that:
- Is fair and transparent;
 - Takes the needs of prospective tenants into account; and
 - Complies with the specific legal and contractual obligations placed upon MAH by government, funders and other providers of housing or housing-related products.

1.2 Coverage

- 1.2.1 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.
- 1.2.2 This policy applies to all forms of housing provided by MAH including social, affordable, and transitional housing.
- 1.2.3 Application rules and procedures can vary between housing categories, jurisdictions and projects. For that reason, the policy provides guidance on the differing rules that affect the application 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 application process.
- 1.3.2 The 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 **Allocation of Housing 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.
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.

Term	Definition
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.
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- or 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 applications process is applicant-focused:

- MAH aims to make the process as clear and simple as possible.
- MAH works with potential applicants to help them to determine the most appropriate housing options.
- MAH will assist applicants to understand the requirements applying to them and to prepare the necessary evidence required.

3.1.2 The MAH application process is fair and transparent:

- MAH collects evidence in order to make sound decisions in relation to the suitability of housing applicants.
- MAH upholds accountability and transparency through its record keeping practices.
- Applicants are given the opportunity to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.

3.1.3 The MAH application process complies with relevant laws and procedures:

- MAH fully complies with the jurisdictional requirements of operating states.
- MAH informs government and community partners of changes in the circumstances of applicants wherever required.

3.2 Application form

3.2.1 The application form and the required supporting evidence are central to the application and allocation process, because it provides the information required to determine eligibility and ensure that the applications process is fair and transparent.

- 3.2.2 Application forms and supporting documentation vary between programs and state and territory jurisdictions. This policy provides high-level guidance. Detailed supporting information is provided in the accompanying procedures.

3.3 MAH responsibility for application processes and decisions

- 3.3.1 MAH's responsibility for the applications process varies between states and programs.
- 3.3.2 For social housing:
- In New South Wales, MAH is responsible for assessing, approving and submitting applications for social housing via the Housing Pathways process. This is discussed further in **3.4**.
 - In Queensland and Tasmania, the state housing authorities decide on eligibility and control the social housing applications process. MAH's role is to assist applicants to gather any necessary evidence and, where appropriate, lodge their applications for housing. State-specific information on the applications process can be obtained from the Queensland Government's Homes and Housing website or the Tasmanian Government's Housing Connect website.
- 3.3.3 For affordable housing, MAH is responsible for processing applications for all properties that it owns or manages.
- 3.3.4 For supported and transitional housing:
- Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements for social housing in their jurisdiction. Where applicants have not already applied for social housing, MAH may assist.
 - Applicants will also be required to meet additional criteria associated with the specific supported housing program they are applying for. Staff should refer to the relevant support agreement/contract for more information relating to eligibility and the applications processes for supported housing programs.

3.4 Social housing applications in New South Wales

- 3.4.1 Applications for social housing in New South Wales are managed under Housing Pathways. Pathways may also include applications for assistance to set up a tenancy in the private rental market, or temporary accommodation if someone is homeless. See the **Client Products and Subsidies Policy** for further information.
- 3.4.2 Pathways is a partnership between the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and participating community housing providers, including MAH. It provides:
- Coordinated information about housing assistance;
 - A single application process;
 - Common eligibility criteria for housing assistance;

- A standard assessment process; and
 - A single waiting list – the NSW Housing Register.
- 3.4.3 MAH is required to assess, approve and submit applications for social housing in New South Wales from any social housing applicant, not just those wishing to be housed through MAH or who live in areas serviced by MAH.
- 3.4.4 Detailed information on the applications process can be found on the Housing Pathways website.

3.5 Updating social housing applications

- 3.5.1 Applicants should be encouraged to advise MAH or their state housing authority of any changes to their circumstances or housing needs.
- 3.5.2 In New South Wales, MAH is responsible for updating applicant information when requested, regardless of the original source of the application.
- 3.5.3 Applicants may also inform MAH of a change to their circumstances at any stage after they have submitted their application and request that their application be reassessed.
- 3.5.4 Where applicants inform MAH of a change in Queensland or Tasmania, MAH will relay the change to the relevant state housing authority on their behalf, with their written consent (as per the **Mission Australia Enterprise Privacy Policy**).

3.6 Affordable housing applications

- 3.6.1 MAH is responsible for assessing applications for affordable housing in all jurisdictions in which it manages such housing. See the **Affordable Housing Policy** for an overview of MAH's approach to affordable housing.
- 3.6.2 Eligibility requirements can vary depending on the affordable housing program. See the **Eligibility for Housing Policy** for further details.
- 3.6.3 In all cases:
- Eligible households wishing to apply for an MAH affordable housing property must complete an MAH Affordable Housing Application Form. This can be found on the Mission Australia Housing website. If there are no affordable housing properties available, MAH may keep a waiting list of applicants where feasible.
 - MAH will advertise vacant affordable housing properties using appropriate media outlets, detailing the eligibility criteria and property features.
 - MAH may invite applicants on the social housing waiting list to apply for affordable housing if appropriate. These applicants would have to be able to demonstrate a sound rental history through references.

3.7 Customised allocations

3.7.1 Subject to the availability of housing, MAH may make customised allocations for applicants with specific needs. These needs must be identified and evidenced during the application process, so that they can be taken into account during the subsequent allocation process. See the **Allocation of Housing Policy** for further details.

3.8 Interpreters and other applicant support

3.8.1 Staff will engage interpreters and/or other supports as required in order to assist applicants to complete an application for housing, or to update an existing application.

3.9 Rehousing previous MAH tenants

3.9.1 MAH will accept housing applications from former tenants of the organisation who are able to demonstrate ongoing housing eligibility and a satisfactory former tenancy history.

3.9.2 The organisation will not approve the applications of former tenants who:

- Committed multiple breaches or a serious breach of tenancy during their tenure;
- Left their former property in a poor condition or deliberately caused damage to the premises (fair wear and tear excepted);
- Owe an outstanding debt or debts (rent or non-rent) to MAH, and have resisted attempts by the organisation to recover a debt;
- Gave the organisation reason to have concern for their ability to manage a tenancy, either with or without support; or
- Are no longer eligible for social/affordable housing in their state jurisdiction

3.9.3 Where MAH has determined that rehousing a former tenant would not be appropriate, staff will wherever possible refer the former tenant to alternative external accommodation arrangements as per the **Providing Housing Information, Advice and Referral Policy**.

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

3.10 Mission Australia (MA) or MAH staff applying to live in MAH social or affordable housing

3.10.1 To avoid conflicts of interest, applicants are required to disclose to MAH at the time of making an application whether they work or volunteer for MA or MAH, and/or whether they have family or friends who work or volunteer for MA or MAH. In these cases, the application will not be able to be processed by MAH and will be sent to another office (either another community housing provider or state housing authority) for processing.

3.10.2 MAH staff will not be eligible to apply to live in MAH social or affordable housing properties.

3.10.3 Where MA staff are seeking to apply for social or affordable housing, MAH will review whether the applicant's role at MA could be in conflict with their tenancy if they were to be housed with MAH. Where there would be a conflict, or a perceived conflict, MAH will advise the applicant that they will not be eligible to apply to live in an MAH property, but that this will not affect their eligibility for housing with another community housing provider or state housing authority.

3.11 Confidentiality

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

3.11.2 Applicant information may be compiled in regular organisational reports only where identifying information is omitted as per the **Mission Australia Enterprise Privacy Policy**.

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**.

4 Responsibilities

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

- Assisting applicants to complete an application for housing, gather any necessary evidence and lodge their application where required.
- Coordinating the application process and assessing housing applications.
- Reconfirming the eligibility of housing applicants wherever required.
- Recommending improvements to this policy and associated procedures.

4.2 Team Leaders/Regional Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring good management of evidence in the tenancy management system.
- Incorporating this policy and the associated procedures into staff inductions and training.
- Escalating feedback about this policy to the policy owner and/or policy writer.
- Reviewing and approving housing applications on HOMES where required in New South Wales.
- Reviewing and approving affordable housing applications where required in operating states.

4.3 The National Housing Services Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring that MAH complies with this policy and the associated procedures.
- Authorising any changes made to this policy and the associated procedures.