Government of South Australia
SA Housing Authority

housing.sa.gov.au

Community housing – Housing Needs Assessment guideline

This guideline sets out how community housing providers do a Housing Needs Assessment to consider customers for Category 1 or 2 on the Single Housing Register.

This guideline applies to:
- providers registered under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) including volunteer member-tenant managed providers who
  o have a community housing agreement (eg Master Agreement) with the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) or the SA Housing Authority (the Authority) or
  o are party to a SAHT Transfer program for example Better Places Strong Communities (BPSC) and Renewing our Streets and Suburbs (ROSAS) or
  o are party to any other agreement which references the community housing policies
- non-government organisations which have housing leases with SAHT which reference this policy, including specialised housing programs
- community housing tenants transferring to a separate social housing provider

This guideline does not apply to internal tenant transfers (including internal relocations due to redevelopment work) within individual community housing provider portfolios. Internal transfers are covered by the provider's own policies.

Note: Providers cannot create shortlists for initial tenancies in SAHT-owned new builds in the SAHT Housing Transfer program - even where the provider has constructed the property. The Authority is responsible for those initial allocations. Where applicable, the property and tenancy may subsequently be transferred to a provider for management, and for allocating any future tenancies as a result of vacancies.

Completing a housing needs assessment form

Community housing providers, customers or customers' support agencies can identify or ask for a customer to be considered for Category 1 or 2 through a housing needs assessment process. Providers need to upload all documents related to registrations and assessments to 'Client documents' in the Single Housing Register and keep hard copies.

Initially a Housing Needs Assessment form is completed either by the primary contact organisation or by a customer's support agency.   If a support agency completes the form on a customer's behalf, the customer's primary contact organisation reviews it to determine if either:
- more information is required, for example more detailed information is needed from a health professional or
- the customer is eligible for Category 1 or 2 based on the information provided.

A housing needs assessment is not needed if the customer is automatically eligible for Category 2 (see Section 5 Category definitions).

Community housing providers may update the Single Housing Register to change the primary contact organisation to itself and recommend a category where required.

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Completing a housing needs assessment

During the Housing Needs Assessment interview, identify:
- the customer's need for housing and the urgency of their situation
- the customer's current housing situation, how long they can stay in their current accommodation and why it's not suitable for them
- where the customer has lived over the last 3 years and why they left
- why the customer hasn't been able to find, access or maintain other housing options
- what housing options and services are available and appropriate to the customer's situation that would meet their immediate and long-term housing and support needs, for example help paying bond and rent into private rental housing
- if someone in the household needs modifications at a property to accommodate a disability in line with the CH Disability Access and Inclusion Policy.
- if extra room is needed, for example because they have shared custody of a child

Recommend the category you think the customer is eligible for in line with the category criteria listed below.

Send the customer a Register audit outcome of review letter telling them about the outcome.

Things to consider when assessing need

Take all the below into consideration when assessing a customer's situation and housing need.

Homelessness

Customers are homeless if they're living in either:
- non-conventional accommodation or sleeping rough
- short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options

A customer is living in non-conventional accommodation if they're either:
- living on the streets
- sleeping in parks
- squatting
- staying in cars or train carriages
- living in improvised dwellings

A customer is living in short-term or emergency accommodation if they're either:
- in a refuge or crisis shelter
- couch surfing
- living temporarily with family or friends
- in insecure accommodation on a short-term basis, for example staying in a hotel or short stay caravan park
- in emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency or Housing SA or by a community housing provider

At risk

A customer is at risk if they meet all the below conditions:
- they're at risk due to an imminent and serious threat to their life, health and wellbeing
- they can't access alternative housing options, for example a shelter or boarding house, staying with family or friends
- the situation can't be managed another way and urgent housing is required

Barriers accessing and maintaining private housing

Assess the customer's ability to access and maintain private housing, for example renting private housing. A person is experiencing barriers to accessing private housing in any of the below situations:

- they have long-term and significant health or disability issues, for example chronic fatigue, that impacts on their ability to find, negotiate or maintain other housing options
- they face discrimination in the private rental market because of factors beyond their control
- they're leaving a medium to long-term period of institutionalised care, for example a prison or hospital
- they're experiencing chronic financial hardship that affects their ability to negotiate or maintain other housing options, taking into account their income and how much debt they're in
- they have a chronic lack of social or interpersonal skills that makes it difficult for them to access or maintain other housing options

Assess the customer's accommodation history. Indicators a customer can't maintain private housing could include, but isn't limited to:

- multiple stays in emergency or transitional accommodation
- they've been homeless for at least 6 months
- a history of difficulty accessing or maintaining private housing, for example multiple bond claims, their private rental applications are continually rejected.

Confirming a customer's situation

Determine what information is needed to confirm the customer's situation. Check the customer's case notes, to determine what assistance has previously been provided. You can ask the customer for their consent for you to talk to their supports directly. If you can't contact their supports, you can ask the customer to provide documents confirming their situation. This can include getting information from:

- government and non-government organisations
- police or other emergency services
- health or medical professionals
- the South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

You can ask the customer to provide more information at any time if you're in doubt or need more confirmation.

Category criteria

Customers who are eligible for community housing are placed in Category 1, 2 or 3. Note these categories are the same for public and community housing and are described here and in the SAHA Housing registration and allocation policy[1].

Customers eligible for public housing may also apply for Category 4 in line with the SAHA Housing registration and allocation policy. Community housing does not have Category 4.

Category 1

Category 1 is for registrants with urgent housing needs and long-term barriers to accessing or maintaining private housing options.

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[1] Where changes are made by the SA Housing Authority to public housing policy, changes will also be made to community housing policy, subject to consultation.

Registrants are approved for Category 1 if a community housing provider assesses that they meet all the below conditions:
- they're homeless and at risk
- their accommodation history and the housing options available to them indicate private housing is unsuitable in the long-term

Category 2

Category 2 is for registrants who aren't in urgent housing need but have long-term barriers to accessing or maintaining private housing options.

Registrants are approved for Category 2 if a community housing provider assesses their accommodation history and housing options to indicate private housing is unsuitable in the long-term.

Registrants are eligible for Category 2 <u>without</u> an assessment if they can verify that they, their partner, or a child in their or their partner's legal custody or guardianship either:
- receive the Disability Support Pension from Centrelink, including if they received it immediately before moving on to an Aged Pension, or they currently don't receive it because of WorkCover payments
- receive the Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension from the Department of Veterans' Affairs
- are a refugee living in Australia for less than 2 years, verified by either the Department of Home Affairs documentation, visa codes 200, 201, 202, 203, 204 or 866, or a letter from the Australian Refugee Association

Category 3

Category 3 is for registrants who don't have urgent housing needs or long-term barriers to other housing options.

Registrants are registered for Category 3 if they're eligible for community housing but haven't been approved for Category 1 or 2.

Victim of a natural disaster

Where people are victims of a natural disaster, for example fire or flood, conduct a Housing Needs Assessment, if a support agency hasn't already assessed their situation. During the assessment:
- confirm if the customer owns or rents the property
- determine the extent of damage to the property and the customer's personal belongings, for example inspect the property or check with emergency services
- estimate how long it will take for the property to be habitable again, for example reconstruction or renovation timeframes
- get details of the insurance cover and confirm with the insurance company if the policy includes compensation for accommodation costs
- identify any existing medical or social issues caused or exacerbated by the disaster

You do not need a detailed assessment of their accommodation history in this situation. Consider all alternative housing options available to the customer, including:
- renting privately, especially if accommodation costs are covered by insurance
- help from family and friends
- emergency or other short term housing options – for example caravan park.

If they're eligible, place their registration in Category 1.

Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Responsibility
Customer	Provide detailed information (for example from a health professional) to support provider or community housing provider for a housing needs assessment
Support provider	May conduct a housing needs assessment and send the information to a community housing provider to allocate a category
Community housing provider	Conduct a housing needs assessment, allocate customer to a category on the Single Housing Register

Related documents

- Community housing allocation policy
- Community housing allocation guideline
- Housing Needs Assessment Form
- Verifying special circumstances – www.sa.gov.au
- Community housing eligibility policy
- Community housing eligibility guideline
- Occupancy standards in public housing
- Community housing Disability Access and Inclusion Policy
- Register Audit Outcome of Review Letter