



### Fact Sheet 1: Applications for Housing Assistance

#### 1. What is Public Housing and how do I get it?

Public Housing is government-owned housing rented to eligible low income earners. Housing ACT is responsible for managing public housing in the ACT. If you would like Housing ACT to offer you a place to live, then you need to lodge an application.

You can collect an Application Kit from the Gateway Services' office (see address below) or you can arrange for it to be sent to you by calling 133 427.

##### Gateway Services

Ground Floor Nature Conservation House  
Corner of Benjamin Way & Emu Bank  
Belconnen ACT 2617

The Application Kit contains several fact sheets and a *Registration to apply for Social Housing Assistance in the ACT* form. This form is used for all applications for housing assistance including Public Housing, Community Housing, Affordable Housing and shared accommodation.

#### 2. Eligibility for Public Housing

You will be eligible for public housing if you can satisfy all the eligibility criteria in the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program. (This is the piece of legislation that governs how public housing works in the ACT.)

To be eligible, you must:

- Be at least 16 years of age;
- Be living in the ACT for at least the previous 6 months;
- Meet an income and assets test;
- Be an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident, or hold a special category visa (issued to eligible New Zealanders upon entry into Australia), or hold a Temporary Protection Visa; and

- Have no interest in residential real estate property anywhere in Australia (subject to certain exceptions).

In circumstances where you are suffering severe hardship, which cannot be alleviated in any other way, Housing ACT has the power to waive any and all of these eligibility criteria (except for the age limit).

#### 3. How to Apply

It is important that you take care to ensure that all of the sections of the application are properly completed and that all of the necessary supporting documentation is attached to avoid any delays in the processing of the application. The necessary documents are listed in a fact sheet in the Application Kit titled *Registering for Housing Assistance—important information from Housing ACT*.

You can hand-deliver your application to Gateway Services (see address given above) or put it in the courtesy mailbox located within the Tuggeranong Access Canberra shopfront and the City and Phillip Health Centres. You can also post your application to:

Housing ACT  
Locked Bag 3000  
Belconnen ACT 2616

Alternatively, you can apply by making an appointment for an interview with an assessing officer. You can bring your application and any supporting documentation you have to this interview. This gives you the opportunity to talk about your application and your circumstances. Also, if there is any missing information that Housing ACT needs in order to consider your application (for example, documents that establish your identity or income) then the assessing officer will be able to tell you on the spot what is needed.

#### 4. What happens to my application?

If your application is approved you will receive a letter from Housing ACT stating the area, number of bedrooms and needs category (or waiting list) of your application.

There are three needs categories:

- **Priority Housing:** Applicants who demonstrate **exceptional, urgent and critical needs** which cannot be resolved by any other reasonable means other than the **early provision** of social housing;
- **High Needs Housing:** Applicants who demonstrate **significant needs** that cannot be resolved by any reasonable means other than the provision of social housing **within a reasonable timeframe**; and
- **Standard Housing:** Applicants who demonstrate **significant affordability issues** in obtaining housing on the private market.

How long you will have to wait before Housing ACT offers you a property will depend on the areas you have nominated to be housed in and the number of bedrooms you are eligible for, but primarily it will depend upon the needs category to which you have been assigned. The Priority Housing list generally has the shortest waiting time.

A decision will first be made as to whether you should be allocated to the High Needs or Standard List. You will be advised of the decision in writing. If you have been allocated to the High Needs list you should check with your assessing officer whether you are being considered for Priority Housing and whether there is any further supporting documents which can be provided to support your case. Allocation to the Priority Housing Category is usually a decision of a committee called the Multi-Disciplinary Panel (MDP) following a recommendation by the assessment team.

Your application may be considered for Priority Housing if your circumstances include:

- Homelessness;
- Families with children;
- Formally diagnosed mental health issues;
- Serious and chronic health issues;
- Disability including frail-aged;
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander persons;
- Women with or without children escaping domestic violence; and
- Children at risk of abuse or neglect.

#### 5. Letters of Support

To be placed on the Priority Housing List or the High Needs List, you will need to provide evidence of your circumstances. One way to do this is by providing Housing ACT with letters of support.

A letter of support is a letter written by someone who is aware of your circumstances and can write something in support of your application. Housing ACT may ask for letters written by particular professionals, for example a doctor or social worker.

You can never be required to approach someone for a letter of support—it is always your choice to do so or not. However, in order for your application to be placed on the Priority Housing List, Housing ACT will require strong evidence of your need, and letters of support are an excellent way for you to provide this.

Housing ACT has a standard Letter of Support which busy people like doctors, counsellors and teachers should find quick and easy to complete. On the other hand, the form is quite limited, and both professionals and friends or family may prefer to write a more full and more personal letter in support of your application.

A letter of support that doesn't use the standard form should include:

- How long the writer has known you and in what capacity (e.g. professional, friend, family etc);
- The writer's knowledge of your circumstances (e.g. a doctor might describe a medical condition that makes it very difficult for you to climb stairs);
- The writer's opinion as to your housing needs, given your circumstances;
- The writer's opinion as to the likely consequences if your housing needs are not met, or if there is a long delay in meeting your housing need; and
- The name and contact details (including a daytime telephone number) of the writer if further information is needed.

## 6. Reassessment of Applications for Housing

If your application has not been placed on the Priority Housing List and your circumstances have changed or if you have new information about your circumstances, you can request reassessment of your application for housing at any time.

It is best to make a request for reassessment in writing and to keep a copy of this request for your records. Along with this request, you should submit any new evidence you have to support your application for housing.

### Access to Interpreters

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that all Canberra residents, regardless of their background have equal access to its programs and services. It is ACT Government policy to use these professional interpreters when speaking with people who have difficulty communicating in English.

You are entitled to an interpreter free of charge when dealing with an ACT Government directorate or agency (such as Housing ACT and shopfronts).

Simply ask the staff member you are dealing with to arrange an interpreter.

### Disclaimer

This fact sheet contains general information available at the time of printing. It does not constitute legal advice. If you have a specific legal problem, please contact Canberra Community Law's advice line on 02 6218 7900.

Canberra Community Law is entirely independent of Housing ACT. All assistance is free.

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