

A GUIDE TO CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT FOR TASMANIAN HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Our Sector: an overview



INTRODUCTION

Shelter Tasmania's mission is to provide a united voice for services and service users that creates a framework to effect positive change in the housing and homelessness sector. To do this, mainstream services need to understand our sector, what we have, why we sometimes can't assist someone, and what we can do.

This resource has been developed as a result of feedback from consumers and service providers who participated in Shelter Tas' 'Tasmanian Housing and Homelessness Workforce Symposium' held in June 2016, with input from the Workforce Development Reference Group's Resources Advisory Sub-Group.

This resource will assist us to easily communicate to external service providers about the system we work within, the specific services we provide, and how these services can be accessed.

THE HOUSING SYSTEM IN TASMANIA

Tasmania's housing system includes the provision of all forms of residential tenure – from public and community housing to private rentals and home ownership. It includes the provision of supported accommodation for vulnerable tenants who need this form of integrated housing and support, and the provision of emergency and medium term supported accommodation to assist people out of crisis into independent living.

To meet the diverse needs of consumers, there are a range of housing options and services available, with assessment focusing on eligibility, choice and sustainability. Options include:

- Remaining in existing housing with support
- Entering crisis accommodation
- Accessing medium term supported accommodation
- Accessing long term supported accommodation
- Accessing social housing (either through community housing or public housing)
- Accessing affordable housing through a community housing provider
- Accessing the private rental sector (either as a tenant or in share housing)
- Moving in with friends or family.

Housing Connect, Tasmania's "one stop shop" for housing and support needs across Tasmania, provides a coordinated assessment point for individuals seeking anything from emergency accommodation to a long-term home.

Housing Connect can help with:

- Applying for public and community housing
- Support and advice for private rental, including bond, private rent assistance and rent arrears
- Accessing emergency accommodation
- Support and advice on how to stay at home
- Seeking assistance during or following family violence
- Information and advice on housing options.

For more information on Housing Connect, call 1800 800 588 (24 hours).

SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

The specialist homelessness sector refers to those services who provide specific assistance to vulnerable individuals and households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

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WHO CAN BECOME HOMELESS?

Homelessness can affect any member of the Tasmanian community, including the very young or elderly, families and single people, Aboriginal people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The most common reasons for homelessness in Tasmania (2012-13) were financial difficulties (21%), and interpersonal relations – including family violence (26%) and accommodation crisis (32%).

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

The most commonly accepted definition of homelessness is one which comprises three categories, to reflect the diversity of homelessness:

- **Primary homelessness** is experienced by people without conventional accommodation (e.g. sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings, including tents)
- **Secondary homelessness** is experienced by people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another (e.g. emergency accommodation, youth refuge/shelter, “couch-surfing”)
- **Tertiary homelessness** is experienced by people staying in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards (e.g. boarding houses and caravan parks).

WHAT WE DO

Housing assessments are undertaken with consumers by Housing Connect. This involves a critical assessment to understand a consumer’s housing needs and preferences, and which types of housing are most appropriate for them. In addition, there is a need to match preferences with realistic outcomes.

Workers often have to assist clients in balancing housing affordability with their preferences around location and amenity. Key activities that workers undertake include:

- Explaining various housing options to consumers, including eligibility criteria
- Discussing potential wait times for various housing options
- Preparing a budget with consumers to determine affordability
- Examining how much money people will have left over, based on rent paid
- Looking at properties in a range of suburbs to compare affordability and amenity
- Determining household needs, including proximity to child care, schools, hospitals and transport
- Assessing an individual’s links to social supports and services in particular areas
- Assessing level of risk of the current housing situation to contribute to a safety plan
- Understanding how trauma has influenced a person’s housing history and how the current housing circumstances may contribute to trauma
- Identifying barriers consumers face in gaining housing
- Assessing sustainability of current housing (including tenancy experience)
- Identifying sustainability of housing opportunities (including previous tenancy experiences, previous work history, eligibility for housing)
- Assessing income and debt – and working with consumers to resolve financial issues
- Gauging rent readiness and skill development needs
- Identifying issues additional to housing but relevant to case plans, assessing eligibility for other services, gaining consent to share information and providing referrals to other programs.



A GUIDE TO CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT FOR TASMANIAN HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

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TOOLKIT: REFERRAL PATHWAYS

What information you can give a service provider, what can an individual do and what is the decision-making process?

TOPIC	ACTIONS
<p>What a person can do</p>	<p>Contact Housing Connect if they need help with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying for public and community housing • Support and advice with private rental, including bond, private rent assistance and rent arrears • Accessing emergency accommodation • Support and advice on how to stay at home • Seeking assistance during or following family violence • Information and advice on housing options. <p>If they are on a Housing Tasmania waiting list they need to let Housing Connect know each time their circumstances change. This information will be sent to Housing Tasmania. If their category changes, they'll receive a letter from Housing Tasmania.</p> <p>It's important to attend the assessment interview, if they have an appointment with Housing Tasmania for a transfer assessment. Any future contact about their application after the assessment must be made at a Housing Connect office.</p> <p>Suspended application - If someone's circumstances change, they need to contact Housing Connect to update the application. This information will then be sent to Housing Tasmania.</p> <p>If a review form is received, it will need to be completed and returned to Housing Tasmania.</p> <p>If someone is a Housing Tasmania tenant, there is no need to contact Housing Connect unless they want to apply for a transfer or need support with their current tenancy. Housing Tasmania (1300 665 663) manages current tenancies and maintenance issues.</p>
<p>Referral pathways</p>	<p>Consumer consent must be obtained prior to making the referral.</p> <p>People who contact Housing Connect are appropriately referred where a need is indicated. This referral may be required for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New applications for housing assistance and/or support; • Existing housing tenants who require assistance and support to sustain their tenancy; and/or • Existing housing tenants applying for relocation (previously referred to as transfers). <p>An outcome of this assessment may be that a referral to another service provider for assistance and support is required. Based on the assessed need, support will follow the person along their pathway to stable independent housing.</p> <p>An outcome of an assessment may be a referral to one of the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer term social housing providers • Crisis accommodation providers • General or specialist support providers, and • Housing Connect for further planning, coordination and support. <p>Social housing is only one of a suite of options available and it may not always be the most appropriate option.</p> <p>Consumers will be encouraged to consider general support to help them maintain their current tenancy. This might include things like monetary private rental assistance, tenancy information and education, financial counselling and management programs.</p> <p>Before a referral is generated it is assigned a priority rating. This priority rating is determined from the person's level of housing and support need. Depending on the urgency, each referral will be allocated a specific timeframe in which the receiving service provider will need to respond to the referral.</p> <p>The service receiving the referral will need to draw on information contained in the assessment and use the information to confirm eligibility for assistance and support.</p>

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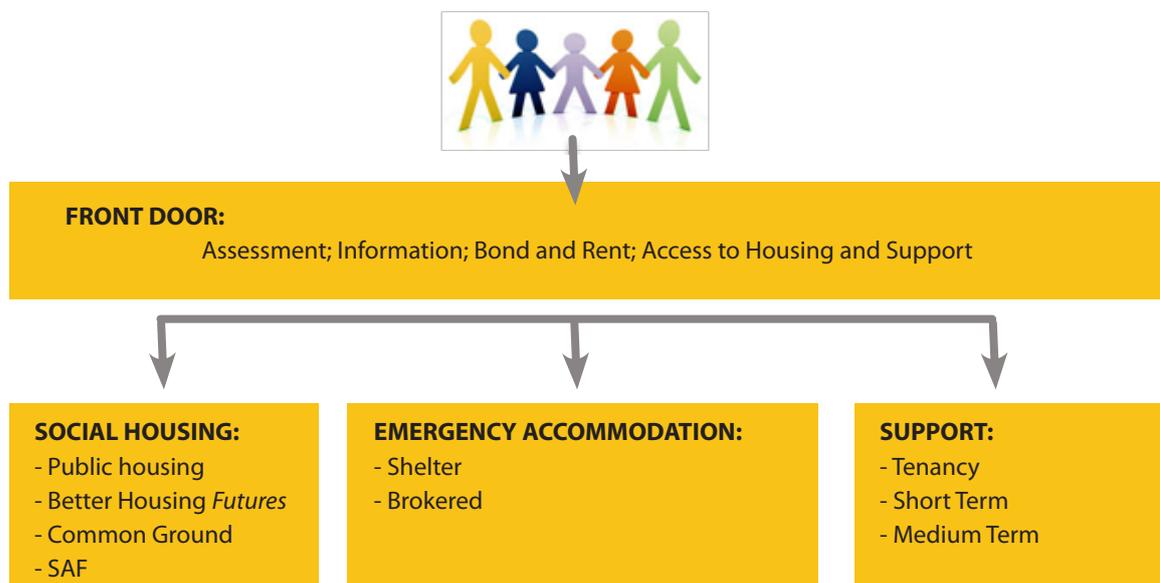
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<p>Explain Housing Connect Process</p>	<p>Housing Connect connects Tasmanians on low incomes and in crisis, with long-term stable housing and support where it is needed.</p> <p>There are three key parts:</p> <p>Part one At the front end, Housing Connect is a one-stop shop for people to access all housing and support needs. It provides immediate assistance, assessment and intake service for people who need help with housing or who are homeless.</p> <p>People will get one housing and support assessment instead of going to numerous services to get help.</p> <p>Part two Housing Connect also improves how we provide support to people who need it. Ongoing support is available to people with high needs to prevent a return to housing crisis.</p> <p>Part three Housing Connect expands emergency accommodation capacity to help groups in the community that need more help: families, men with children, pregnant women, people with high and complex needs.</p>
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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ACCOMMODATION ISN'T IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE?

There are a range of external factors that impact the availability of appropriate accommodation (supply), including the high demand for accommodation services in Tasmania. Immediate access to accommodation is sometimes not possible, in these instances interim assistance may be offered (such as brokerage), until other accommodation options become available.

TOOLKIT: CONSUMER PATHWAY FROM ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT



The guide was informed by the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) 'Providing Housing-Focused Support' and 'A Tasmanian Consumer Engagement Report' 2015, as well as participants of Shelter Tas' Tasmanian Housing and Homelessness Workforce Symposium' held on the 23rd June 2016, (overseen by the Workforce Development Reference Group and Sub-Group).

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