

PUBLIC HOUSING

ENGLISH



The Victorian government provides limited public housing for people on low incomes. Public housing is allocated and managed by the Office of Housing. This guide has information to help new migrants to Victoria to access public housing as quickly as possible.

This guide also has information on how the Office of Housing can help you apply for public housing (see **Who can help me?**).

Who can apply for Public Housing?

If you want to apply for public housing, you will need to provide the Office of Housing with documents that prove that:

- > you are an Australian citizen, a permanent resident or you have a temporary protection visa
- > you are currently living in Victoria
- > you do not own a house, unit or flat
- > you have an independent income that does not exceed the limits set by the Office of Housing. (Generally, you are eligible if you are on a low income or you are receiving Centrelink benefits)
- > if you have been sponsored by your family to migrate to Australia but the sponsorship arrangement has expired or broken down due to conflict
- > you have repaid or are repaying the Office of Housing any money you owe them (eg you have repaid the Office of Housing money loaned under the Bond Loan Scheme)

How do I apply for Public Housing?

You will need to obtain an application form from the Office of Housing. The Office of Housing has offices across Victoria. To locate your nearest office, look under Human Services/Housing Services in the *White Pages Business & Government* telephone directory.

There are four public housing application forms – one for each of the categories detailed below. You can apply for more than one category, depending on your circumstances. The Office of Housing can assist you if you do not understand the application form (see **Who can help me?**).

How will the Office of Housing assess my needs?

The Office of Housing will assess your needs based on your current circumstances and will then place your application on one of two waiting lists: Wait-Turn or Early Housing.

Wait-Turn

Wait-Turn is the general waiting list for public housing. The waiting period for this type of application is lengthy.

Early Housing

Early Housing is a quicker way to access public housing, although you must be able to demonstrate an urgent need for housing. The waiting time will depend on factors such as the number of bedrooms you need and the area you want to live in.

There are three Early Housing categories: Recurring Homelessness, Supported Accommodation and Special Housing Needs.

Recurring Homelessness

To be eligible for the Recurring Homelessness category you must have a history of homelessness or be at risk of homelessness. You must also be living in accommodation that is managed by a Transitional Housing Manager or a crisis accommodation agency. If this is your situation, your Transitional Housing Manager will help you to apply for public housing.

Supported Housing

To be eligible for the Supported Housing category you need to show that you need significant personal support, housing with major disability modifications, or wheelchair accessible housing in order to live independently. Your current accommodation must be unsuitable because it:

- > needs major modifications so that you can live there
- > cannot be made wheelchair accessible
- > is making a serious medical condition worse
- > is too far from where you receive treatment for a serious medical condition

The Office of Housing will ask you for proof that you need to live in a particular area or type of housing (eg a letter from your doctor). The Office of Housing can give you details about these requirements (see **Who can help me?**).

Special Housing Needs

You can apply for the Special Housing Needs category if:

- > your current accommodation is temporary and you have been asked to leave, or
- > you are in danger of physical or family violence, or
- > your accommodation
 - is a rooming house or caravan park that does not give you and your family access to your own cooking and bathroom facilities
 - prevents you from living with your children because of its size or location
 - is overcrowded and in need of at least two more bedrooms
 - involves the inappropriate sharing of bedrooms by people of the opposite sex, where at least one person is over six years of age or where parents are sharing with children
- > you can also apply if you have a serious medical condition that is affected by your accommodation or there is no space in your accommodation for the person who cares for you full time

If you are unsure about which category matches your needs and circumstances, ask the Office of Housing for advice (see **Who can help me?**).

What should I do before I lodge my application?

Before you lodge your application with the Office of Housing you should:

- > complete every section of the application form and attach any necessary documents (eg a copy of your visa, a statement of income from Centrelink, a medical assessment from your doctor, other documents that demonstrate your urgent need for housing)
- > ask a community organisation worker to check that you have filled in the application form correctly and that you have attached all the required information
- > photocopy your completed application form and attached documents in case your application is lost or rejected

What happens after I lodge my application?

After you have lodged your application, the Office of Housing will write to you (usually within 14 days) to acknowledge receipt. If you do not receive this confirmation, contact the Office of Housing.

Most applications for public housing are processed in a few weeks. The Office of Housing should inform you in writing of their decision. If your application is approved, the Office of Housing will place you on the waiting list or lists that match your application category. If you change address after your application is approved, remember to notify the Office of Housing.

What if my application is rejected?

You can appeal Office of Housing decisions if they make a mistake or do not apply their own policies correctly. The Tenants Union and Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP) agencies can help you to appeal Office of Housing decisions or to lodge an official complaint.

For the contact details of your nearest SHASP agency, phone your local Housing Office or the Tenants Union Advice Line on ☎ 9416 2577. If you need an interpreter call the Tenants Union through the Telephone Interpreting Service on ☎ 131 450.

You also have the right to protection from discrimination. The Office of Housing cannot reject your application on the basis of marital status, race, sex, disability, illness, sexual preference, or religious or political belief. If you believe you have been discriminated against, you can apply to the Equal Opportunity Commission who can award you compensation.

How long will I wait for an offer of Public Housing?

The waiting time depends upon the type of housing and the area you applied for. For example, it will take longer to access ground floor accommodation in the inner city than it will to access similar accommodation in an outer suburb. It will also take longer to access accommodation if you have applied for a property with four or more bedrooms, as such properties are in short supply.

Depending on your situation, the waiting time can be from three months to several years. In general, people who apply under the Recurring Homelessness category are the first to be offered accommodation. Next are those who apply under the Supported Housing category, followed by those who apply under the Special Needs category. If you apply under the Wait-Turn category the waiting time can be several years.

How many offers will I get?

If the Office of Housing places you on the Recurring Homelessness, Supported Housing or Special Needs waiting lists, you will receive one offer of housing. If you reject this offer you will automatically be placed on the Wait-Turn waiting list. You can appeal an offer of housing if the property does not meet your medical or special needs.

If you reject a further offer from the Wait-Turn waiting list you will be removed from all waiting lists. If you were originally placed on the Wait-Turn waiting list you can receive two offers of public housing.

The Office of Housing will contact you by letter to let you know that a property is available. You will be asked to respond to the offer as soon as possible. The Office of Housing will also ask you if there have been any changes in your situation since you lodged your application.

What are my rights and responsibilities once I become a public tenant?

Once you have been allocated a property by the Office of Housing, you will be asked to sign a tenancy agreement or lease. This is a legally binding agreement between you and the Office of Housing. If you do not understand this document or if you have any questions, contact the Tenants Union or the Office of Housing (see **Who can help me?**).

Once you have signed the lease, you have the same rights and responsibilities as other tenants in Victoria. (The Tenants Union can provide you with free publications that explain these rights and responsibilities.)

Who can help me?

The following services are knowledgeable about public housing applications and vacancies and can help you to complete your public housing applications.

Local Housing Office

The staff at your local Housing Office can help you apply for public housing. They can:

- > help you to fill in public housing application forms
- > give you current details on public housing income and asset limits
- > refer you to other community organisations

For the contact details and address of your local Housing Office, look under Human Services/Housing Services in the *White Pages Business & Government* telephone directory.

Transitional Housing Managers

Transitional Housing Managers provide medium-term accommodation to:

- > families and single people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- > women and their children who are escaping domestic violence
- > young people (15-25 years) who are homeless or escaping domestic violence

If you are placed in transitional housing, your Transitional Housing Manager can help you to apply for public housing under the Recurring Homelessness Segment.

Migrant Resource Centres

Migrant Resource Centres can give you information in your language about services in your local area. These centres have workers who speak languages other than English. To locate your nearest Migrant Resource Centre, look under Organisations/Migrant in the *L-Z Yellow Pages* telephone directory.