

# Allocations manual

Offers of housing



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# Definitions

Refer **Introduction and conditions of public housing offers** chapter of this manual.

## Offers of housing policy

### Introduction

Refer **Maintenance manual**

Refer **Tenancy Management manual**

Refer **Victorian Housing Register's Eligibility policy framework and operational guidelines**

Refer **Victorian Housing Register's Matching clients with housing and special accommodation requirements operational guidelines**

The Offers of housing policy is to be used in conjunction with the Victorian Housing Register's (the register) **Eligibility policy framework and operational guidelines**.

Offers of housing are made in accordance with the register's Allocations framework and each social housing organisation's Allocations policy.

When a property becomes vacant, maintenance works are completed on the property so that it meets the department standards for reletting vacant properties.

The department offers housing as soon as it becomes vacant to ensure that properties are tenanted as soon as maintenance works are completed. If the property requires extensive maintenance, it is offered to applicants once the works have commenced and an estimated completion date has been determined as referred to in the **Maintenance manual**.

If there are abandoned goods, the property is offered once the goods have been removed as referred to in the **Abandoned properties and goods operational guidelines** in the Tenancy Management manual.

### Human rights considerations

In deciding what action to take, staff will consider the potential impact of proposed action taken through these procedures on the person's (and their household's) rights under the **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)**.

Any person taking action in line with this manual must:

- understand the objective and rationale of the actions they are taking under these operational guidelines
- consider the impact of proposed action on the person's Charter rights
- consider whether the proposed impact is balanced and proportionate and necessary to achieve that objective, and
- choose the least restrictive measures available.

The [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities – A guide for Victorian Public Sector Workers](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au) is available at <[www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)>

### The order of housing offers

For the order of allocations from the register, refer to the register's **Eligibility policy framework Table 1**.

However, if the vacant property has special features, it is offered to the applicant highest on the waiting list who requires that type of housing. For example, if there are no suitable applicants in the Priority access categories, the property is offered to a Register of Interest applicant who requires that type of housing and has the earliest effective date.

*Note: Properties with special features will vary from area to area. For example, in inner metropolitan areas a ground floor property without any entrance stairs may be a special features property due to its scarcity.*

If the vacant property is suitable for major or full modifications, it is offered to the highest Priority access applicant on the register who requires a property with major or full modifications. If the applicant accepts the offer, the necessary works will be undertaken to modify the property.

Where there are no applications on the register, applicants from other preferred areas, or on the same preferred area for smaller accommodation (i.e. approved for less bedrooms), are offered the property. The Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above) approves the offer of housing where the applicant is not eligible for the size of the property on offer.

Wherever possible, the department inspects properties of current tenants prior to an offer of transfer being made. At the inspection, an exit tenancy condition report is completed, and maintenance for which the tenant is responsible is arranged and completed prior to transfer. This ensures that any costs for which the tenant is responsible are charged to the tenant's account and repayment requirements are met before transferring out of their current property.

## Number of offers

If an applicant has Priority access status, they will be made a maximum of two reasonable offers of housing.

If an applicant declines two reasonable offers, their application will be removed from Priority access and placed on the Register of Interest in effective date order.

Refer to the register's **Matching clients with housing and special accommodation requirements operational guidelines** for what is considered a reasonable offer.

In limited circumstances, the Tenancy and Property manager (VPS5 and above) may approve further offers of housing to be made for applications approved for Priority access on the grounds of Declared state emergency or Priority transfers – Move out of property, Stock utilisation and Uninhabitable housing.

## Confirming household details and preferred areas prior to offer

The department contacts applicants by letter or telephone to inform them that a property is available.

Prior to doing so, authorised housing staff, with client consent, should use [Centrelink's Confirmation eServices online service](http://www.humanservices.gov.au) <www.humanservices.gov.au> to access and view current address and contact details in order to confirm the details held by the department or locate a client so a housing offer can be made.

If applicants are contacted by telephone, a letter is sent on the same day confirming the information discussed in the telephone conversation.

Where contact is made by letter only, the applicant is required to respond within four working days from the date the letter is sent. If the offer letter is sent using normal mail, additional time is to be provided for the applicant to respond as the delivery of the letter may take three to four working days.

Where applicants are connected to approved support providers, have carers or representatives acting on their behalf, contact is attempted by telephone and a copy of the offer letter is sent where consent is provided.

When the applicant contacts the department, their application details are confirmed to ensure the household is still eligible and to make sure that the proposed offer of housing is reasonable. This includes whether the household still meets the register's eligibility requirements and other conditions the department requires to be satisfied before an offer will proceed, such as payment of outstanding charges. Where applicants attend the local office, they are required to complete a *Property offer form* to confirm these details and their interest in public housing. If contact is made by telephone, the applicant's response to each question is recorded in HiIP.

*Note: The department does not advise the applicant of the property location until the household's details are confirmed.*

The following details are confirmed with the applicant:

- current contact details (such as address and telephone)
- income and asset details of the household
- household composition
- preferred areas, including providing the applicant with the details of all suburbs/towns included
- any SAR that the applicant may have been approved for previously
- current circumstances where an applicant has been approved for Priority access.

If the applicant advises that they have a need for a SAR (e.g. request for ground floor only) which they have not notified the department about, they can choose to defer the offer until they have provided the necessary documentation to confirm their housing needs. The offer is cancelled and the application is removed from the register until documentation to support the SAR is provided and further assessment occurs. If an applicant is no longer eligible and their circumstances have been confirmed in writing, their application is removed from the register. In the case of applications approved for Priority access, the Priority access status can only be removed with the approval of the Team Leader (VPS4 or above).

The issues taken into consideration are:

- whether the applicant's current housing circumstances still meet the requirements of their Priority access category
- whether they still meet the income and asset limits of their Priority access category
- in the case of broken repayment agreements, whether:
  - the original agreement was affordable
  - the household's circumstances have changed, for example, they have incurred additional housing costs or have experienced health or other issues.

### **Applicants approved under the Housing Pathways initiative (Homeless with support) who are still in prison**

Offers of housing are not made to applicants approved under the Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative until they have been released from prison.

In general, the Housing Pathways workers will inform the department of the applicant's release, and forward documentation to confirm eligibility that was not available at the time of the original assessment. However, housing staff may also confirm the applicant's status with the Housing Pathways worker when the applicant nears the top of the register list.

Offers of housing are only made to persons approved under this initiative who are not subject to restricted release conditions such as day/early release. Details of these conditions can be confirmed by the Housing Pathways worker.

Where an offer is made in error prior to release from prison, the offer is cancelled and the application maintained on the register.



## No response to offer letter

Where an applicant does not respond to an offer of housing or an eligibility check, the offer is cancelled and the application is removed from the register.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

## Deferring offers

### Register of Interest applications

Applicants may remove their application from the register prior to or after an offer of housing is made.

If the applicant decides to defer their application after their household details have been confirmed and the property address has been given to them, the offer is considered reasonable and is recorded as a refused offer.

### Priority access applications

If a Priority access applicant requests to defer an offer, or is unable to accept an offer of housing due to one of the following circumstances:

- in hospital
- temporarily in a nursing home
- undergoing drug or alcohol rehabilitation
- in prison,

the offer is cancelled with Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above) approval, and their application is removed from the register.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact to advise they are now able to receive an offer, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

## Reasonable offers of housing

If the property on offer meets the applicant's housing needs, i.e. preferred area, bedroom size, special accommodation requirements, etc., and appears that they are eligible to accept the offer (verbal advice of income, assets, etc.), the applicant is advised of the property address, and the offer is counted as a reasonable offer after the applicant is provided the opportunity to walk through the property.

*Note: The applicant must be the person to walk through the offered property and make any subsequent decisions in relation to the offer. No other household members (e.g. spouses, joint applicants) are entitled to make decisions regarding the application, such as acceptance or refusal of offers.*

*If the applicant has an approved support provider or representative acting on their behalf, they should also be contacted to be part of the offer process.*

Appointments to view the property are made within two working days of initial contact with the applicant. If the property is undergoing maintenance (i.e. at status 'Vacant Untenantable'), a housing staff member accompanies the applicant to the inspection as outlined in the **Maintenance manual**.

Applicants are required to advise the department of their decision regarding the offer by close of business the day after they walked through the property.

If the applicant is advised of the property address and then fails to make contact as agreed (e.g. to walk through the property, and to provide documentation to demonstrate eligibility, etc.), the offer is recorded as refused.

## Applicants under 18 years of age

Offers of housing made to applicants 18 or under are to be considered by the Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above).

It is expected that applicants under 18 years of age will have a support connection with an approved support provider at offer stage. The suitability of the property to be offered will be considered in consultation with the relevant support worker or care team. Team Leaders and Tenancy and Property Managers are to be involved in the decision about the long-term suitability of the property to be offered.

## Applicants under 15 years of age

If an offer of housing is accepted by an applicant under 15 years of age, the Tenancy and Property Manager must approve the signing of the residential tenancy agreement. A legal guardian will be required to co-sign the tenancy agreement or sign it on the applicant's behalf.

Applicants under 15 years of age must also have an independent income.

## Sleepouts

Refer Sleepouts chapter – Tenancy Management manual

### Vacant properties with sleepouts

Properties with sleepouts are appropriate to offer to households:

- who require an extra bedroom according to the housing size guidelines (the sleepout is equivalent to one bedroom)
- with a resident or dependant 15 years or over.

An offer that satisfies the above criteria is considered a reasonable offer. Accommodation with sleepouts may be offered to households with children under 15 years old. However, if the applicant does not accept the offer, it is recorded as cancelled, not refused, with the effect that the number of reasonable offers to which the applicant is still entitled remains unchanged as outlined in the **Sleepouts chapter** of the Tenancy Management manual.

### If the offer is refused

If the applicant refuses a reasonable offer of housing, the offer is counted as one of the two reasonable offers available to the applicant if approved for the Priority access category. If the applicant has an offer outstanding, their application is returned to the register on Priority access. If the applicant has a Priority access status and refuses their second reasonable offer of housing, the application is referred to the Team Leader (VPS4 or above) to consider if there are exceptional circumstances and the applicant is eligible for another Priority access offer. If a further offer for Priority access is not approved, the application is returned to the register as a Register of Interest application.

### Offer refused due to special accommodation requirements

If after walking through the property, the applicant refuses the offer of housing and gives the reason for refusal as being that the property does not meet their SAR, the offer is recorded as refused. However, the applicant is advised to provide a completed *Application for special accommodation requirements* and other supporting documentation if necessary. If the SAR application is provided, and the SAR approved, and the requirement means that the offer was not reasonable, the offer status is changed from 'refused' to 'cancelled'. Where the approved SAR does not change the appropriateness of the offer, or the

applicant does not provide the completed *Application for special accommodation requirements*, the status of the offer remains refused.

## If the offer is accepted

Refer **Signing the residential tenancy agreement** chapter of this manual

### Documentation and reassessment of eligibility

Applicants who accept an offer of housing are required to provide necessary documentation to confirm the entire household's eligibility for the register within two working days of the offer being accepted. If a pre-sign up information session is conducted with the applicant, the applicant may submit the documentation when they attend the session.

*Note: The department may conduct a pre-sign up information session with the applicant to enable the applicant to ask questions and to fully understand the conditions of the new tenancy. The information session can be held at the time the applicant accepts the offer. For applicants approved to the Homeless with support category or for other applicants receiving support from an approved support provider, this is a relevant time to discuss with support workers details about future support plans, including support referrals to be made to establish the tenancy.*

Eligibility criteria relate to meeting the register's requirements and other conditions the department requires to be satisfied by sign up stage. They include:

- Australian citizenship or permanent residency of Australia
- income and assets
- have an independent income
- ownership of real estate
- Victorian residency
- outstanding debt repayments
- specific Priority access category eligibility criteria, where appropriate.

If the household is no longer eligible for public housing, or for the size or type of the property, the offer is cancelled.

### Conditions of sign up

Applicants in receipt of a Centrelink benefit or pension are advised that the housing allocation will only proceed if they agree to pay rent via the Centrelink Rent Deduction Service (RDS). Applicants are also advised of their right to withdraw from this service at any time after signing their tenancy agreement.

An additional condition of signing a tenancy agreement is that all tenants of separately-metered properties must sign a *Release of information to water authorities form* to permit the department to release tenant billing details to the appropriate water authority.

If applicants decline to sign either the *Centrelink RDS form* or the *Release of information form* as required, they are informed that it is a condition of sign up, and that their offer will be marked as refused if they do not complete the forms.

### Sign up

Eligible applicants who have accepted an offer of housing are required to sign a residential tenancy agreement as soon as the vacated maintenance has been completed and the keys to the property are available as outlined in the **Signing the residential tenancy agreement** chapter of this manual.

Prior to signing a residential tenancy agreement, applicants are advised:

- when maintenance is expected to be completed and when they will be contacted to arrange the signing of the residential tenancy agreement and handover of the keys
- what maintenance items will be completed prior to sign up, and what may be listed for future works
- that the tenancy will commence from the Sunday following the sign up
- if the tenancy commencement date is more than three weeks in the future, aspects of the household's eligibility may need to be reconfirmed at the time of sign up
- if they have not already done so, they should walk through the property prior to signing the residential tenancy agreement
- what tenancy review conditions will apply to their tenancy, i.e. reviewable or non-reviewable
- of any non-standard items in the property or owners' corporation conditions.

For applicants approved to the Homeless with support category or for other applicants receiving support from an approved support provider, discuss with support workers details about future support plans, including if other support referrals are to be made to establish the tenancy. If support cannot continue after sign up, consideration is to be given to referring the applicant to the local Social Housing Advocacy Support Program provider to assist with the establishment of the tenancy.

For the Homeless with support category, the approved support provider is expected to assist with any referral process and continue to be the point of contact for the department until the new support arrangements are in place.

## New housing developments

**Refer Priority transfers: Stock utilisation and Uninhabitable housing chapter of this manual**

When making housing available for the first time in new housing developments of 30 properties or more, the Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above) may develop a special strategy for initial offers of housing.

In developing the special strategy, the following issues are taken into consideration:

- demand for housing within that area, including the number of transfer applications
- relevant sponsorship criteria
- existing department properties in the area
- under-utilisation of current stock
- possible community development requirements.

The strategy may be developed in consultation with local community organisations or tenant groups.

## Hard to let properties

The department defines a property as 'hard to let' when:

- three reasonable offers have been made
- the reason for refusal in all three cases has been that the property is unsuitable or unsatisfactory due to either of the following reasons:
  - the characteristics of the housing, such as age, construction type, floor level
  - the location and availability of community services and amenities.

*Note: The above reasons are only used to determine whether the property is hard to let and to provide a reason for any delay in tenanting the property. Offers made against the property are considered reasonable.*

Offers of hard to let properties are made in the same manner as other vacant properties, that is, applicants are offered these properties according to the relevant category for the register and effective date order.

A property deemed to be 'hard to let' will automatically have a vacancy reason of 'Multiple Refused Offers' applied against it in HiiP upon the third refusal.

## Offers of housing procedures

### Selecting an application for offer

**Refer Maintenance manual**

Vacant properties are to be offered within two working days, from the date the previous tenant returns the keys or the date the property is made vacant.

Check the details of the vacant property, in HiiP, noting the information recorded in the property's profile, such as the number of bedrooms, the property access type, access to transport and any disability modifications, as outlined in the **Maintenance manual**. An inspection of the vacant property may be required to confirm or determine additional features.

HiiP will display applications that are most suitable and match the property. Where a property has all of the following modifications, HiiP will display applications with all of the six approved SAR at the top of the list.

- bath
- toilet
- lowered kitchen benches
- lowered laundry benches
- full wheelchair access
- wheelchair charging bay.

Select the application at the top of the relevant register list, according to the order of priority in the register's **Eligibility policy framework Table 1**.

Check the details in the 'History' tab of the housing application and the free text in any approved SAR to reconfirm suitability. Also check in HiiP whether any repayment agreements have been maintained.

If the property has specific features such as disability modifications which meet the requirements of an applicant within the same housing allocations category e.g. Homeless with support, consideration is given to whether this applicant should be offered the vacant property ahead of another applicant without a need for those features.

Where a vacant property is suitable for applicants requiring 'Full' disability modifications, the property may be offered to the next application on the relevant register list which has the relevant SAR approved for 'Full' disability modifications. If no applicant exists with that criterion, the highest ranked application that requires a structurally-modified property should be offered.

If an application is selected for offer outside the highest 20 applications, on the relevant register, HiiP escalates the approval to the Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above), and places a filenote in HiiP. Check details in HiiP for any SAR, or any sponsorship requirements. If the application file is held at another local office, request that the file be transferred immediately.

### Check repayment agreement for applicants

**Refer Introduction and conditions of public housing offers chapter of this manual**

After checking the household's service history, check in HiiP to ensure that the household has made payments according to any repayment agreement, including any requirement for a lump sum payment.

## Offering housing to Priority access applicants

### Refer Appointed representatives of tenants and applicants operational guidelines of the Tenancy Management manual

For applicants approved to the Homeless with support category (and for other applicants approved for Priority access categories with connection to approved support providers), contact the support worker to discuss the applicant's current circumstances and whether there are any eligibility issues that may impact on the offer for housing. If the property available is considered reasonable for the applicant, send an offer letter and if possible arrange an offer appointment with the applicant and support worker.

If the support worker or applicant cannot be contacted by telephone, send an offer letter to the applicant and a copy to the support worker where consent is provided,

Where the applicant is no longer residing in transitional housing managed or crisis arranged/managed accommodation, but is staying in alternative accommodation, for example, with friends or family, seek advice from the approved support provider in terms of whether the offer of public housing should proceed.

If the support worker considers that the applicant's current accommodation status continues to be unsuitable and/or temporary and the applicant retains the criteria which resulted in their approval to the Priority access category, then the offer of housing should proceed.

If there has not been recent contact with an applicant approved under exiting short term/treatment services or leaving a secure facility under the Youth Justice Pathways or Corrections Housing Pathways initiatives, contact the relevant worker to confirm that the applicant has been released and is eligible to receive an offer.

Applicants approved under the Corrections Housing Pathways initiative should not be offered accommodation if subject to restricted release conditions such as day/early release. Confirm with the applicant's Housing Pathways worker or support worker whether they are subject to such a condition prior to making an offer.

If it is agreed to proceed with the offer based on any of these circumstances, send the offer letter to the applicant (and if consent is provided, to approved support provider), and organise for the support worker to be at the offer appointment and walk through of the property with the applicant.

*Note: Offer letters and any other letter sent to applicants will be automatically sent by HiiP to approved support providers, carers or representative where the applicant has requested this.*

If eligibility issues arise that will affect whether an offer of housing is made to the applicant, recommend the removal of the Priority access status and refer to the Team Leader or Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 and above), for consideration prior to removing the Priority access status and/or the application from the register.

### Confirm the Priority access details

When the applicant (and their support worker, carer or representative) attends the local office to arrange a walk through of the property, check HiiP and using the *Property offer form*, verify with the applicant that all details are correct and still apply.

Complete the *Property offer form* and include confirmation of the relevant approval category and SAR. Scan this back into HiiP.

This enables the department to confirm whether their housing circumstances have changed since their original application was submitted and whether they still meet the eligibility requirements of the register.

## **Applicant responds to contact**

### **Applicant responds by telephone**

If contact is made by telephone regarding the offer of housing, explain that before an offer is made the applicant must complete the *Property offer form* and may need to provide documentation to support their responses.

Ask the applicant to attend the local office to complete the form, or alternatively complete the form by asking the applicant the questions over the phone and recording their responses on the form.

Ensure that the applicant is aware of all the suburbs/locations within their preferred area and that they may be offered any type of property (house, flat, unit, etc.) in the area subject to any approved SAR.

For applicants approved to the Homeless with support category or for applicants from other categories who have a connection with an approved support provider, it is expected the offer process is completed with the involvement of their support worker.

### **Applicant responds in person to the offer**

If the applicant responds to the offer in person, before advising them of the property address ask them to complete the *Property offer form*. Ensure that the applicant is aware of all the suburbs/locations within their preferred area and that they may be offered any type of property (house, flat, unit, etc.) in the area subject to any approved SAR.

Record the responses provided on the *Property offer form* in HiiP.

### **Number of offers to be explained**

In addition to the offer procedures described above, advise the applicant (and if relevant, their support worker, carer or representative) that, consistent with the policy for offers under each of the Priority access categories:

- they will be made two reasonable offers of housing (if they refuse this offer, and it is their second refused offer, their application will be returned to the Register of Interest category), and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their Priority access status from their application.

## **If the applicant does not respond to the offer letter**

If the applicant does not respond within four working days of the letter being sent (remember if normal mail is used, the delivery times are now three to four working days), attempt to make contact with the applicant on the telephone number/s recorded in the application file. Where applicants are connected to approved support providers or have carers or representatives acting on their behalf, also attempt contact with them by telephone. If telephone contact cannot be made, cancel the offer in HiiP with a reason code of 'no contact'. The application will be removed from the register.

Send a letter via HiiP to the applicant advising:

- their application has been removed from the register
- the reason it was removed, and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their application from the register..

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

## Check the suitability of the property on offer

Once the *Property offer form* has been completed, check with the applicant that the vacant property on offer continues to meet their needs and that their circumstances have not changed.

Advise the applicant of all the suburbs/locations within their preferred area, and that they may be offered any type of property (house, flat, unit, etc.) in the area, subject to any approved SAR.

Ensure that the applicant is aware of the requirement for applicants in receipt of a Centrelink benefit or pension to participate in RDS.

Scan and upload the completed *Property offer form* into HiiP.

## Applicant advises they have SAR

If the applicant advises that they have a SAR that they have not yet applied for in writing, check whether the property on offer would meet these, for example, the applicant has advised that they require a step-in shower. If the property on offer meets their needs, continue to offer it by providing the address details.

If the property on offer does not meet these needs, cancel the offer of housing and advise the applicant that their application will be removed from the register until they have provided documentation to support their SAR. This is to ensure other housing staff do not attempt to offer the applicant another property which may not be suitable.

If, after the address is given and the opportunity to walk through the property is provided, the applicant advises that they cannot accept the property as they have a SAR which they have not yet applied for in writing, advise them that the offer is 'refused'. However, this offer status can be changed to 'cancelled' provided the applicant provides documentation which demonstrates a need for the SAR.

Send the applicant the letter via HiiP explaining:

- their application has been removed from the register
- the reason the application has been removed, and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their application from the register..

If documentation is provided and it is decided the offer was not reasonable, where the offer was entered as 'refused', the offer status is changed to 'cancelled'. The application is then returned to the same category with the original effective date. However, if it is determined by the Team Leader (VPS4 or above) that the offer was reasonable, the offer status remains 'refused'.

For applicants approved for Priority access categories, where the offer was the second refused offer, approve the application to the Register of Interest only. If it was an applicant's first refused offer, return the application to the same category with the original effective date as the applicant is able to receive a second offer.

For information about when applicants can reapply for Priority access after two refused offers, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

## The household size has changed

If the household is no longer eligible for the property size on offer, cancel the offer of housing in HiiP and record the appropriate reason. Advise the applicant that their application will be removed until they have provided in writing the details of the new household and all documentation to assess the household's eligibility for the register. This will ensure that other housing staff do not attempt to offer the applicant



another property which may not be suitable, If the applicant has been approved for Priority access, determine if the change in household size affects their Priority access eligibility.

Send the applicant a letter via HiiP explaining:

- their application has been removed from the register
- the reason the application has been removed, and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their application from the register.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

### **A member of the household or applicant is no longer eligible**

If a member of the household is no longer eligible, cancel the offer in HiiP, recording the appropriate reason. Advise the applicant that they can only be offered a property size that matches the number of eligible household members on their application.

Request that the applicant provide written details of the changes, and update the application details and assess the household in HiiP to determine eligibility, including the appropriate housing size.

Send the applicant a letter explaining:

- the housing size that their application is now approved for
- the reason the housing size has been changed
- their housing size can be reassessed at any time that the eligibility of household members change.

If the applicant is no longer eligible, cancel the offer in HiiP, recording the appropriate reason. The application will automatically be removed from the register. Send the HiiP-generated letter to the applicant explaining why the application has been removed.

If a Priority access applicant is no longer eligible, recommend the removal of the Priority access status and refer to the Team Leader (VPS4 or above) for consideration prior to removing the Priority access status and/or the application from the register.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

### **Applicant wishes to change preferred areas**

If the applicant requests to change preferred areas prior to being advised of the property address on offer, cancel the offer of housing in HiiP, recording the appropriate reason.

Request that the applicant update the details of their application via a letter generated in HiiP.

If the application has been approved for Priority access, determine if the change in preferred areas affects their Priority access eligibility.

If an applicant with a SAR advises that they wish to change their preferred area and there is low housing availability in the new preferred area due to the SAR, discuss how their opportunity of being housed could be increased.

### **Register of Interest applicant wishes to defer their application**

If the applicant advises that they are not ready to accept housing when an offer is made and they advise the local office prior to receiving the address, cancel the offer in HiiP, recording the appropriate reason. Remove their application from the register.

Send the applicant a letter via HiiP explaining:

- the application has been removed from the register
- the reason the application has been removed, and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their application from the register.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

### **Priority access applicant wishes to defer their application**

If a Priority access applicant is unable to accept an offer due to one of the following circumstances, seek approval from the Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above) to cancel the offer.

The applicant is:

- in hospital
- temporarily in a nursing home
- undergoing drug or alcohol rehabilitation
- in prison.

Once endorsed, cancel the offer and remove the application from the register. Send a letter via HiiP to the applicant.

*Note: Applications approved for Homeless with support under the Corrections Pathways initiatives or approved because they are exiting care or treatment facilities and are not yet released should not be removed from the register.*

Advise the applicant to contact the department when they are able to accept housing.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

### **If the household is eligible and interested in housing**

#### **Refer Signing the residential tenancy agreement chapter of this manual**

Provide the address of the property to the applicant so they can walk through the property.

Advise the applicant that they can accept the offer prior to walking through the property. However, if they want to walk through the property prior to making a decision, arrange a time to provide them with the keys (if vacant maintenance is complete) or if the property is still undergoing maintenance works.

Arrange a time to walk through the property with them.

Advise applicants in receipt of a Centrelink benefit or pension that their housing allocation will only proceed if they agree to pay rent via RDS, and that they may withdraw from this service at any time after signing their tenancy agreement.

The applicant is also advised that in addition to the residential tenancy agreement, they must sign a *Release of information to water authorities* if offered a property with a separately-metered water utility. This will enable the department to disclose information to the relevant water authority for water utility billing purposes. Refusal to sign the *Release of information to water authorities* will result in the application being marked as 'refused'.

If the applicant is contacted by telephone, give the applicant their signed *Property offer form* when they collect the keys to walk through the property. This ensures that the applicant is aware that the department must adhere to certain property standards before a household moves in.

Advise the applicant:

- that the keys need to be returned to the local office the same day
- the date that the tenancy agreement is likely to commence
- the type of tenancy review conditions that will apply
- that they must advise the local office of their decision by the close of business the next working day, otherwise the offer will be marked as 'refused'.

## **Pets**

Ask the applicant if they or other household members own pets. If so, check that the number and type of pets complies with the department's guidelines as outlined in the **Signing the residential tenancy agreement chapter** of this manual.

If they do not comply with the guidelines, ask the Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 and above) whether or not the household may keep the pet(s) in the property.

If approval to keep the pets is not given, advise the applicant that they will have to make alternative arrangements for the care of the pets. Otherwise, the offer of housing cannot be made.

Local government by-laws concerning the ownership of pets must not be breached at any time.

*Note: A person with a visual, hearing or mobility impairment is not prevented from keeping a guide dog in the property. (Refer Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (s.52))*

## **Offers to applicants under 18 years of age**

If an offer of housing is to be made to an applicant under 18 years of age:

- it is expected that applicants under 18 years of age will have a support connection with an approved support provider at offer stage. The suitability of the property to be offered is to be considered in consultation with the relevant support worker or care team. Team Leaders and Tenancy and Property Managers are to be involved in the decision about the long-term suitability of the property to be offered.
- for applicants under 15 years of age, seek approval from the Tenancy and Property Manager (VPS5 or above) to proceed with the sign up. Applicants must have an independent income, and residential tenancy agreements must be signed or co-signed by the applicant's legal guardian.

## **Offers for redevelopment or new housing project**

Offer the housing to applicants according to the register's **Priority transfers operational guidelines** or initial allocations strategy for new housing developments as outlined in the **Relocation manual**.

## **Applicant does not contact the local office**

If, after walking through the property the applicant does not contact the local office with their decision by the close of business the next working day, the offer will expire. After attempting to telephone the applicant, and if relevant the support worker, carer or representative, refuse the offer in HiiP, recording the appropriate reason. The application will automatically be removed from the register.

Send the applicant a letter via HiiP advising of the application's current status and explaining that:

- the application has been removed from the register
- the reason the application has been removed, and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their application from the register.

If the applicant still has the keys to the property, arrange for a contractor to change the locks.

For information about reviving applications after an applicant makes contact, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

## **Offer is accepted**

If the applicant accepts the offer of housing, record the recommendation 'ACCEPTED' against the offer in HiiP. Arrange an appointment for the applicant to sign a residential tenancy agreement at the local office.

Where a transfer applicant accepts an offer, contact the Tenancy and Property Team (TPT) at the relevant local office to inform them of the accepted offer. Request that the 'Transfer Pending' (TRP) code is recorded against the tenancy.

A pre-sign up information session may be conducted to enable the applicant to ask questions and to fully understand the conditions of the new tenancy. The information session can be held at the time the offer is accepted.

Applicants approved to the Homeless with support category are expected to have involvement from their support worker during this stage. Discuss with the support worker whether they will continue to support the applicant with the establishment of the tenancy after sign up.

If the approved support provider is not able to continue to assist the applicant, they are expected to indicate the arrangements that are in place to transition support to another support provider to establish the tenancy. Inform them that they are to continue to offer their support until the new support arrangements are in place. This may also occur where an offer is made outside the support provider's catchment area. It is expected a case transfer to another support provider will involve a hand over of the applicant's circumstances.

If applicants from other Priority access categories are connected to an approved support provider, carer or representative, their involvement after sign up to assist with the establishment of the tenancy may also be discussed.

Refer to the **Signing the residential tenancy agreement chapter** in this manual for more information on the sign up process.

Refer applicants who may have difficulties maintaining private rental lease commitments to their landlord and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). If the applicant has used a department bond loan to secure the private rental property, advise them that the loan will not need to be repaid if the landlord withholds it because they have been unable to give sufficient notice of termination on their lease, as referred to in the **Bond Loan Scheme manual**. Filenote this advice in HiiP.

## **Offer is refused**

If the applicant refuses the offer of housing, advise them that the property will be offered to another applicant on the register and will not be available to them if they decide at a later date that they want to accept the housing.

If the reasonable offer is refused and the applicant is entitled to another offer for Priority access, record the refused offer in HiiP and return the application to the same category.

If this was the applicant's second reasonable offer for Priority access, with the approval of the Team Leader (VPS4 or above) refuse the offer in HiiP. The application is to be returned to the Register of Interest category if the applicant meets the register's eligibility criteria.

Send the applicant a letter via HiiP advising of the application's current status and explaining that:

- the application has been removed from the register,
- the reason the application has been removed, and
- they have a right to appeal the removal of their Priority access status from their application.

Where an applicant refuses a reasonable offer of housing as they believe the property to be of an inappropriate type or location, the offer is recorded as 'refused' and the application is removed from the register. This is to ensure other housing staff do not attempt to offer the applicant another property which may not be suitable (this applies to both Register of Interest and Priority access applications). The applicant is advised to provide documentation supporting their need for a SAR, as referred to in the register's **Matching clients with housing and special accommodation requirements operational guidelines**.

If documentation is provided and it is decided the offer was not reasonable, where the offer was entered as 'refused', the offer status is changed to 'cancelled'. The application is then returned to the same category with the original effective date. However, if it is determined by the Team Leader (VPS4 or above) the offer was reasonable, the status of the offer remains 'refused'.

For applicants approved for Priority access categories where the offer was the second refused offer, approve the application to the Register of Interest only. If it was the applicant's first refused offer, return the application to the same category with the original effective date as the applicant is able to receive a second offer.

For information about when applicants can reapply for Priority access after two refused offers, refer to the register's **Assessing and managing applications operational guidelines**.

*Note: For Priority transfers –Stock utilisation, Uninhabitable housing and Move out of property, there may be additional procedures to consider regarding refused offers. Refer to the **Priority transfers: Stock utilisation and Uninhabitable housing chapter** in this manual and **Relocation manual**.*

## **If the applicant no longer meets the eligibility criteria**

If the applicant is no longer eligible, update the currently approved Priority access tab in HiiP, providing reasons for the new recommendation below the existing comments, and then changing the recommendation to "not approved" or "removed" and have this reviewed by the Team Leader (VPS4 or above ) for a decision.

In reassessing applications, the following are considered:

- whether the applicant's current housing circumstances still meet the criteria for the Priority access category for which they were approved
- whether they still meet the relevant category's income and asset limits (if applicable)
- the reason for their refusal of the offer of housing (if applicable)
- in relation to the outstanding charges agreement, consider whether:
  - the outstanding charges repayment agreement was affordable
  - the applicant's circumstances have changed since the agreement was signed, and they have incurred further housing costs and the original agreement amount is no longer affordable
  - they have been unable to make repayments for health reasons
  - a lump sum payment has been made by the applicant
- for applicants approved to the Homeless with support category, whether the applicant is willing to engage with the required support.

After considering the above factors, if appropriate, request that a further agreement be negotiated with the applicant and be maintained for a further three-month period prior to making an offer of housing.

If the Team Leader agrees that the applicant no longer meets the criteria for Priority access, the Team Leader records their decision in HiiP, including reasons for the decision, removing the Priority access status from their application in HiiP. If applicable, the application will be approved to the Register of Interest category. The effective date will be the date the application was received.

Send the applicant (and if indicated, their support worker, carer or representative) a letter via HiiP advising that:

- they no longer meet the eligibility criteria for Priority access
- the reason for the decision
- the application will either remain on the register in the Register of Interest category, or has been removed from the register (where the application no longer meets the Register of Interest eligibility), and
- they have the right to appeal the decision.

If, however, the Team Leader (VPS4 or above) decides that the Priority access status should remain, cancel the offer so that another offer can be made when an appropriate property is available.