

Policy OPS.008

Access, Fairness and Rights

Carry On (Victoria) Ltd and its subsidiaries. Operating as Veteran Housing Australia (VHA).

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1 Purpose

Veteran Housing Australia (VHA) is committed to delivering high quality intake, assessment, management and referral practices to:

- appropriately assess the needs of housing applicants and tenants, as well as assist in the minimisation of risk and incidence of homelessness and housing crisis, by referring applicants and tenants to ancillary services.
- achieve successful, sustainable tenancies. VHA recognises the complexities associated in maintaining tenancies for tenants experiencing high levels of disadvantage, discrimination or with complex needs.

2 Aim

The overall aim of this policy is to ensure so far as is practicable that the tenant is provided with safe and secure housing.

3 Policy Responsibility

CEO – Oversight of policy in action and regular review.

Veteran Services Manager – Operational management of interactions with tenants with complex needs.

Board – Reserved approval for “no reason” evictions.

General Manager – Operation responsibilities of role covered by the policy

4 Definitions

DVA – Department of Veterans Affairs

ESO – Ex Service Organisation. Another non-government organisation focused on the Veteran Cohort.

5 Intake and assessment

Principles of the Intake, Assessment and Referral Policy

5.1 Staff skills and knowledge

VHA will maintain skilled Intake, Assessment and/or Tenancy Administration staff that have:

- A concise understanding of homelessness and housing crisis,
- consequential effects on a client/tenant’s behaviour and coping ability.
- An understanding of legislative requirements, industry standards, and frameworks that inform work practices, and how to access them.
- An ability to engage with people

- Operate with a client/tenant centred approach.
- Ability to work with challenging behaviours.
- Expertise in housing options.
- Robust intake, assessment and crisis and early intervention skills.
- Clear and concise communication skills, including empathy.
- Understanding of the needs of Veterans and their families.

5.2 Role of workers

The following methodology of intake, assessment and referral broadly applies across a range of tenants and tenants who access VHA services:

- Engagement
- Identify need
- Assess requirements
- Identify resources
- Identify resources which match client need
- Secure resources
- Arrange access to resources
- Monitor the risks until the referral is complete

5.3 Measuring outcomes

VHA will monitor and assess the appropriateness of intake, assessment-to-referral outcomes regarding timeliness and resource matching, to inform ongoing service improvement and client and tenant outcomes.

6 Sustaining Tenancies

Principles of VHA Sustaining Tenancies

6.1 Clear communication

All tenants will be given clear information about their tenancies regarding their rights, responsibilities, rent and any associated costs, status of their tenancy, maintenance reporting, dispute resolution options and legislative requirements under the various State Residential Tenancies Acts.

6.2 ELIGIBILITY AND ALLOCATIONS

Working within program guidelines and legislative requirements, VHA will use allocation strategies to facilitate sustainable tenancies. During application, eligibility assessment and allocation processes, VHA will work proactively with tenants to identify any barriers to sustaining tenancies, and will take tenants' needs, preferences and tenancy skills into account in making allocations. Where applicable, VHA will also take into account the needs and preferences of other household members.

Further details are found in VHA Policy **OPS.003 Eligibility and allocations**.

6.3 Affordability

VHA will always endeavour to avoid practices that disadvantage tenants. VHA will maintain rents that are affordable and use fair and transparent processes when handling arrears or rent adjustments within the requirements of the relevant Residential Tenancies Acts and contractually stipulated rental rates. V

HA makes every attempt to develop and manage housing which is affordable, suitable and of quality to support and enhance liveability in our properties for our tenants.

VHA sets rents as per **OPS.002 Rent Setting**.

VHA will work with tenants to identify any supports that may be required to prevent debt and other financial difficulties, to ensure the higher probability of housing stability.

6.4 Arrears

VHA will work very closely with tenants during the first three months of tenancies to build a relationship of trust and respect, establish regular rent and tenancy related payment practices. This will continue for any tenants who have been identified as experiencing financial difficulties or tending to fall into arrears. VHA understands that non-payment of rent is one of the primary issues that can place pressure on the sustainability of the tenancy.

VHA will work closely with tenants and/or their supports to ensure continuity of payment in changing circumstances, for example, in cases where there is hospitalisation, residential respite or treatment stays and/or short-term imprisonment, rent can still be collected and paid by electronic methods, including Centrepay or Direct Debit.

VHA manages all client debt with discretion in accordance with operating procedures. VHA is committed to ensuring tenants are empowered to access support and develop strategies and payment agreements that increase their financial confidence. VHA will communicate with tenants quickly to act on minor arrears as it recognises that prevention strategies are more effective than reacting to issues once they develop.

All efforts will be made to mitigate the risk of progressing to actions under **OPS.006 Ending tenancy and termination**.

6.5 Assistance for impacts of Emergency situations

VHA is committed to assisting its tenants to sustain their tenancies during times of emergency and/or crisis, such as but not limited to, bushfires, floods, and pandemics. VHA is aware that such situations may affect its tenants' ability to meet their financial obligations in relation to the payment of their rent and/or other payable tenancy charges.

VHA will consider its capacity to assist tenants during such times and may introduce practices that assist tenants to sustain their tenancies during difficult times, such as postponing or cancelling rent reviews and/or putting a moratorium on rent increases for a certain period of time.

Tenants will be notified in writing by VHA of any decisions it may make during such situations and encourages its tenants to speak with their VHA Housing Officer if they are affected by such an event.

6.6 Client engagement

VHA values its relationships with its tenants and understands the importance of early intervention with vulnerable tenants and those most at risk of not being able to sustain their tenancy. VHA will tailor its engagement with its tenants to meet their needs and ensure the method is appropriate for the environment and circumstance.

VHA housing officers are mentored to ensure that each incident of a failing tenancy is assessed based on its own circumstances and a suitable strategy is developed to work with the client using a capacity building approach. This would take into account various challenges the client may have including financial, health, mental health, living skills, responsiveness to contact, age/frailty, youth, incidences of domestic and family violence. This assessment will directly inform the methods and types of engagement used to correct a failing tenancy and support the client into sustainability.

6.7 Support co-ordination

VHA will work with tenants to identify proactively, any additional tenancy skills they require in order to maintain their own tenancies. VHA will also engage with tenants to identify any other supports, resources or opportunities which would help overcome any barriers to successful tenancies. Acknowledging the importance of separating housing management from provision of support, VHA will coordinate support for tenants where appropriate, including via referral to support partners.

VHA works closely with tenants and, if required, relevant support providers to assist tenants to maintain their tenancies. This may include resolving neighbour disputes, identifying where tenants may need assistance with household tasks, daily occupations and/or yard work, putting arrears management and debt management plans in place as an alternative to eviction, linking people to support services through agreements and protocols developed with other agencies such as DVA or other ESOs.

6.8 DISPUTES

VHA will promptly respond to any disputes that arise in relation to tenancy issues. This includes issues that affect a client based on decisions made by VHA, including neighbourhood issues and client to client issues. VHA ensures it provides clear and accurate information to tenants and prospective tenants, however, from time to time, a client or prospective client may feel adversely affected by a decision. If this situation arises, tenants or prospective tenants are encouraged to raise their concerns with their local VHA office and in case it is needed, utilise VHA's Client Feedback System **OPS.005 Feedback**, to ensure VHA has considered their concerns.

Refer to the VHA Client Feedback and Appeals Policies and the Client Feedback and Appeals procedures for further information.

6.9 Ending tenancies

VHA views evictions as a last resort option and will only initiate proceeding with the eviction of a client when all other means of engagement and issue rectification options to assist the client with sustaining their tenancy, have failed. With all evictions, VHA will make available information regarding an external tenancy advocate to represent the client at a Tribunal/Court Hearing.

At all stages of the eviction process, VHA will make it clear to tenants the actions they can take to restore their tenancy. VHA will be fair and reasonable in seeking performance orders and will be flexible and responsive in adjusting performance orders to maximise the client's capacity to comply and maintain their tenancy. VHA will always consider the human rights of its tenants throughout this process.

VHA will comply with all legislative requirements and processes prescribed under state residential tenancies acts and contract requirements

6.10 Use of “no reason” evictions

VHA is a national provider of social and affordable housing and operates strictly under the tenancy legislation and regulations in each of its jurisdictions. Termination of a tenancy without a breach of agreement is a provision in many state residential tenancy legislations across the country.

VHA employs the mechanisms of the legislation and its operating contracts to manage all properties and tenancies within its portfolios. Where VHA is required to handback a property under leasehold or other contractual arrangements and/or in extraordinary circumstances where tenancy sustainability actions have substantially failed and rectification options have been exhausted, VHA may need to end a tenancy under these provisions. Where appropriate and possible, VHA will make all attempts to rehouse a client and/or connect them with suitable alternative accommodation.

Any eviction proceedings seeking initiation under a “no reason” provision must be recommended by the CEO and approved by the Board before being undertaken.

7 Changing Needs

VHA acknowledges that tenants' and household members' needs and priorities change over time. VHA will endeavour to meet tenants' changing needs within program guidelines, legislative requirements and available funding. VHA will work closely with tenants whose circumstances change suddenly for example as a result of ill health, domestic and family violence, bereavement or other life event, to coordinate additional supports as required.

Requests from tenants to modify their property or transfer to another property because of changing needs will be managed fairly and flexibly. VHA will consider safety issues regarding location and/or family breakdown, any required property modifications to meet the client's needs, including disability modifications (refer to VHA Disability Modifications Policy), and overall housing and asset strategies.

7.1 Tenant transfers

A tenant transfer is any transfer that the tenant initiates to another VHA property. The tenant must contact VHA in writing with supporting documents to request a property transfer and VHA staff will assess if this tenant meets the criteria to transfer.

To meet the criteria the tenant must have fully repaid any outstanding rental accounts, be up to date with their current rental accounts and have satisfactory property care and no tenant damage to the property.

When a tenant applies for a transfer, they must be able to show their circumstances have changed and that their current property or location is no longer suitable for their housing need. Or they must show that moving will resolve or improve their current situation.

Tenants must be able to meet the transfer assessment criteria for one of the following grounds:

- 'At risk'
- Family re-unification
- Medical condition and/or disability
- Serious and ongoing harassment
- Uninhabitable housing
- Employment
- Compassionate grounds
- Severe overcrowding
- Family breakdown/separation
- Tenancy reinstatement

Tenants who are approved for a transfer will work with VHA staff to determine the appropriate property to suit their needs. Where a property is not available, VHA may assist the tenant in finding suitable accommodation using the Victoria Housing Register or other means.

7.2 Management transfers

VHA may initiate the transfer of a tenant for management purposes. Reasons could include:

- Sale or redevelopment of a property
- The property is not owned by VHA and the lease with the private landlord has been terminated
- The property has been targeted to a specific tenant group and the current occupants do not meet this group
- The property has specific features for people with a disability and they are no longer required by the tenant living in the property
- The property requires significant upgrades and the property is required to be vacant for several weeks for the works to be carried out
- In order to address a serious or ongoing tenancy management issue
- The property is being underutilised, for example a single person living in a three-bedroom property
- In these circumstances, VHA will work with the tenant to initiate a transfer.

7.3 Human rights considerations

In deciding what action to take, VHA employees must give proper consideration to the relevant human rights in accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

This consideration should include the potential impact the proposed action they are undertaking through this policy may have on the person's (and their household's) rights under the Charter.

8 Reasonable adjustments

Veteran Housing Australia (VHA) houses many customers with a disability or mobility impairments and is committed to ensuring the accommodation in which they are housed is appropriate for their needs. VHA understands that a customer's needs can change over time and seeks to support residents with a disability or mobility need affecting their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, to live independently in their home and enjoy a good quality of life.

Disability modifications cover a number of items, which include but are not limited to:

- Grab rails
- Suitable access options
- Flick mixer tapware
- Switch mechanisms
- Level access showers

This policy will support VHA operations to:

- Provide appropriate adaptations to allow for independent living.
- Ensure consistency through the development of a national approach.
- Improve internal communication between departments of VHA.
- Improve tools and training for all VHA staff working in operational environments.
- Enhance the ability of asset maintenance and housing teams to communicate effectively with
- renters/tenants.
- Reduce maintenance costs.
- Ensure consistent use of terminology across jurisdictions.

8.1 Assessment and evidence of need

Tenants can make requests for adaptations and modifications to better meet their needs and VHA will formally assess all requests for disability modifications. Requests should be through the General Manager (GM).

The tenant will need to demonstrate that the request is for mobility, health or safety reasons and obtain the relevant supporting documentation. VHA will support tenants where possible, to

access funding for major works such as widening of doorways, air conditioning systems or accessible facilities.

Requests made must be accompanied by an Occupational Therapist's (OT) report and/or a letter from the tenant's general practitioner, specialist, or other healthcare professional. In some cases, minor requests such as grab rails may be considered without an OT's report or supporting documentation, at VHA's discretion.

Completed requests will be assessed by CEO. As part of the assessment, the GM may need to inspect the property to assess the building for the modifications requested.

Should a tenant wish to install adaptations, either permanent or temporary in nature, for facilitating independent living in their home, VHA will not unreasonably deny such a request.

It must be noted that as a condition of the adjustment, it may be required to be returned to its former state by VHA at the cost of the tenant.

8.2 Determination of appropriate adaptations

The General Manager will make a recommendation for appropriate adaptations based on:

- The circumstances of and the evidence supplied by the tenant
- A sound knowledge of building regulations and asset maintenance.
- The total cost of the required upgrade.
- The cost-effectiveness of the upgrade in relation to the economic life of the dwelling.
- Consultation with the tenant and/or health care professional.
- Alternative strategies, including re-housing the tenant in more appropriate housing.
- The likelihood of further adaptations or modifications being needed by the tenant in the near future.

A response will be provided to the tenant in writing, within 10 business days of receipt of the request. If external assessment is required for the modification, we will ensure the tenant is kept informed of progress.

9 Disputes

Tenants have a right to appeal any decision made by VHA they believe is incorrect, unfair or unlawful. Tenants who wish to appeal a decision made by VHA can do so using the VHA Appeals Process.

10 Other policies referenced

Policy reference	Name
OPS.002	Rent setting
OPS.003	Eligibility and allocation
OPS.005	Feedback management
OPS.006	Ending tenancies and termination

11 Review & Approval

Action	Details	Date
1 st Issue		2023
Current Version	Incorporated and redacted 4 policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake, Assessment and Referral Policy • Sustaining Tenancies Policy • Working with Communities Policy • Changing Needs 	April 2026
Next Review		April 2027