



Housing ACT Fact Sheet

Changes to Public Housing

Background

In June 2006 a range of reforms were introduced to the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP) to sharpen the Program's focus on those in the ACT community in most need of housing assistance.

These reforms included a reduction in the in the qualifying income criteria, a tightening of the ACT residency requirements, and major changes to the priority needs system. Under the new priority system it is expected that applicants with the most critical needs will be housed within three months.

Further reforms

To build on these reforms, the Government has decided to introduce additional changes to the Program to further increase its capacity to provide assistance to those most in need. These changes will involve the review of existing tenancies.

The changes relate to:

- tenants whose incomes exceed \$80 000; and
- tenants whose current housing significantly exceeds the current "housing size" guidelines.

Household incomes over \$80 000 (tenants not receiving a rent rebate)

Tenants, including joint tenants, with annual incomes of more than \$80 000 over two consecutive years will be offered the opportunity to purchase their current property or asked to consider purchasing or renting alternative housing in the private market. This will release more public housing for those in greater need of public housing assistance.

These changes will be phased in over a period of two-years or more.

Housing ACT will expand its "Sale to Tenant" program so that more tenants will be able to purchase their home. Additionally the Government will move to introduce a "Shared Equity" scheme to assist people into home ownership who cannot borrow the full value of their home.

Further details of the Shared Equity scheme will be made available as this scheme is developed jointly with other areas of government.

A move to the private market will not always be appropriate or reasonable. In some cases, for example, equivalent housing will not be available because the tenant needs a dwelling with significant disability modifications. In other instances, eg because a person has retired or is about to retire from the work force a home loan may not be appropriate.

The individual circumstances of affected tenants will be fully considered.

How will higher income households be identified?

Legislation to give the Commissioner for Housing authority to request income details from tenants who are not claiming a rent rebate has been tabled in the Legislative Assembly and is likely to be approved by the end of May 2007.

Following the passage of this legislation Housing ACT will write to tenants who do not receive a rent rebate to ask them to provide income details. This will be an ongoing requirement.

Tenants who do not meet the current "housing size" guidelines

Because public housing is a limited resource it is critical that the available housing is utilised to maximise its potential to assist those most in need. This is particularly important with larger dwellings.

Where a tenant has two or more extra bedrooms above the housing size guidelines, Housing ACT will review the appropriateness of housing provided. Where a tenant's family circumstances have changed since original allocation, consideration will be given to relocating them to housing more consistent with their current needs.

This will be a phased process over a number of years.

Tenants' individual circumstances will be carefully considered including their period of occupancy, their age, ongoing housing and support needs, and the availability of suitable alternative housing.

Where, after full consideration of a tenant's circumstances in consultation with the tenant, it is decided that a move to alternative housing is appropriate, assistance by way of payment of removal costs and connection fees for telephone and other services will be available to affected tenants. Where it has been identified that the tenants circumstances warrant a move we will work with them to identify a suitable alternative.

Consultation

The guidelines will be developed in further consultation through an extensive community consultation process held in August 2007.

This process will include seven public forums, seven focus groups with specific groups of tenant (e.g. aged, ATSI, market renters) and workshops with community sector organisations and the Joint Champions Group (JCG) - a representative group of housing tenants.

Further information

General information about the changes can be sourced through Canberra Connect on 133 427. Housing ACT has also a Housing Information Officer who can assist tenants with their individual enquiries. The Housing Information Officer can be contacted on 6205-2463.