

Allocations (Rental Housing) Policy and Procedure – Retirement and Independent Living

Applies to Property and Housing

Retirement and Independent Living (All Rental Programs)

Policy Statement

This policy describes Uniting's commitment to allocate rental tenancies fairly and consistently, in keeping with the requirements of each rental program.

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1 Purpose

This Allocations Policy and the associated Guidelines and Procedures describe how tenancies will be allocated under the different rental programs managed by Uniting.

The policy is intended to ensure that, for each rental program, there is a consistent approach to selecting applicants to be allocated a tenancy in Uniting's rental dwellings.

2 Scope

This policy and procedure apply to all rental programs within Retirement and Independent Living.

3 Compliance

This policy and procedure become part of retirement and independent living suite of documents.

4 Policy statements

- Uniting will distribute limited housing resources consistently, fairly and equitably.
- Tenancies will only be allocated to persons/households who are eligible for the applicable rental program, and will be made in accordance with the criteria described in the Guidelines attached to this document. Different criteria apply to each rental program.
- Tenants (and, generally, members of their household) are required to be 55 years of age or over or 45 years of age or over if Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Selection and allocation will not discriminate against any person on the basis of gender, race, marital status, disability, religious faith or sexual preference.
- Staff will be sensitive to and plan to meet, the cultural and linguistic needs of the applicant particularly those from ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island), CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) backgrounds, and people who identify as LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex).
- Uniting staff will consider the property's attributes (for example if the housing is in a retirement village environment or wheelchair accessible) and the impact on existing tenants and communities when assessing applications.

5 Procedure

5.1 Allocation Guidelines and Procedures

Social Housing

In relation to social housing, this policy aligns with the Housing Pathways Eligibility for Social Housing Policy and Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement. Only those eligibility criteria and entitlements that are specific to Uniting are included in this policy.

As a registered community housing provider, Uniting manages a portfolio of social housing that is part-funded by the NSW Government including the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF). Eligibility criteria and application procedures for Uniting's social housing are set out in Eligibility Policy (Rental Housing) - Retirement

and Independent Living. Under this policy, applicants (and, in general, their household members) must be aged 55 years of age or over or 45 years of age or over if Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Tenancies will be allocated to eligible people from NSW Housing Register in accordance with Housing Pathways policies and Uniting's eligibility criteria. Information about how social housing properties are matched to applicants can be found at:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/policies/matching-offering-property-client-policy>

Local allocation strategies

In some instances, management may determine a local strategy for allocations in a particular location or village. These strategies may be implemented for vacancies when:

- There is a high concentration of tenants/residents with multiple health, social or economic issues.
- There are existing issues which will be exacerbated if allocations are not sensitively managed.
- There is a mismatch of supply and demand making the property hard to let.

Any Local Allocation Strategies will be signed off by the Property & Housing Senior Leadership Team and will be time limited.

If a social housing applicant disagrees with a decision Uniting has made, they should first discuss their concerns with the relevant person and if the matter is not resolved may ask Uniting for a formal review of the decision by requesting an Appeal form. If they are unsatisfied with the outcome of the review they can appeal to the NSW Housing Appeals Committee (HAC):

<http://www.hac.nsw.gov.au/how-to-appeal>

5.2 Affordable Housing and National Rental Affordability Scheme

Affordable rental housing is provided through a number of government-funded programs including the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF).

Applicants must meet eligibility criteria (relevant rules and income criteria are different for each program) along with Uniting's age eligibility criteria.

National Rental Affordability Scheme

These units will be allocated to applicants from Uniting's waiting list in wait turn (date) order. We may send applications to several applicants on the waiting list in date turn order. Applicants must meet the NRAS eligibility criteria (including income limits) and Uniting's age eligibility criteria. In cases where there are more applicants than properties available, applicants will be prioritised by housing need.

Affordable Housing (SAHF program)

Uniting will allocate Affordable Housing to households 55 and over or 45 and over if Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (and, in general, their household members) in accordance with the NSW Affordable Housing Guidelines who are:

- Living in social housing, including those exiting social housing,

- Spending more than 30% of the gross household income towards rent and whose housing need cannot be met in the short to medium term,
- Have the potential to transition into home ownership in the medium term,
- Are on the Housing Pathways register seeking another choice of housing which may be more suited to their needs.

When an affordable housing property funded through SAHF becomes vacant, applicants will be considered in the following order of priority:

1. Uniting's social housing tenants who are eligible and ready to move to affordable housing will receive first priority
2. If there are no suitable Uniting social housing tenants, Uniting will contact other social housing providers for referral of social housing tenants who are interested in transferring to affordable housing with Uniting.
3. If there are no suitable social housing tenants, Uniting will consider applicants from the NSW Housing Register who are able to afford a discounted market rent.
4. If there are no suitable social housing tenants or applicants on the NSW Housing Register, allocations will be made from Uniting's waiting list for affordable housing.

Successful applicants must have the capacity to sustain an affordable housing tenancy. To help with this assessment, Uniting will:

- Identify and match applicant needs to dwelling attributes.
- Establish that applicants have the means to afford and sustain an Affordable Housing rent.

5.3 Uniting funded rental dwellings

Tenancies in dwellings owned and funded by Uniting will be allocated from Uniting's waiting list. Applicants must meet Uniting's eligibility criteria which include the requirement for the applicant (and, in general, their household members) to be aged 55 years of age or over or 45 years of age or over if Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Tenancies will normally be allocated to applicants who match the available property, by wait turn order. We may invite applications from several applicants on the waiting list in date turn order. In cases where there are more applicants than properties available, applicants will be prioritised by housing need.

5.4 Matching applicants to properties

Uniting will match allocations to the needs of applicants. The table below outlines the standard bedroom entitlements for social housing, affordable housing and Uniting's rental accommodation. (Most of Uniting's rental dwellings are studio and one bedroom units, with a small number of two bedroom Affordable Housing and NRAS units.)

Table 1: Social, Affordable Housing, NRAS and Uniting funded

Household type	Standard bedroom entitlement
Single person	Studio or one bedroom Only single person households will be offered a studio unit.
Couples	One bedroom or two bedroom subject to availability and need
Single person or couple with one other household member	Two bedroom subject to availability

Uniting does not provide additional bedroom entitlements for specific cultural groups.

Generally, applicants may not specify the type of housing they would prefer. However, if an applicant has special accommodation requirements for medical, social or other reasons, they must provide evidence to support the specific need, for example a medical report from a health care professional, or a report or letter from a health care worker or support agency. Examples of requirements that may be approved include:

- Level Access (no steps)
- Modified property (to cater for a disability)
- Property with wheelchair access

Table 2: Information required where additional bedroom space is sought

Situation	Information required
Extra bedroom needed due to medical condition or disability or requires carer accommodation.	Documentation from the applicant's health care professional e.g. doctor, occupational therapist or psychiatrist, that supports the need for an extra bedroom.
A studio unit is not suitable due to a medical condition or disability, or need to accommodate a carer	Documentation that demonstrates that a studio would adversely affect the applicant's health including: Medical assessment from the applicant's health care professional Report or letter from a health care worker or support agency

If an applicant needs a specific location or type of location this must be substantiated, for example the need to be close to medical services or the need for access to cultural facilities or family support. Uniting will inform the applicant of the type of evidence needed.

When allocating to a property Uniting will consider the need to support the peace and enjoyment of existing tenants and communities. This is particularly important if the housing is in a retirement village environment.

5.5 Procedures for making offers of housing

These procedures apply to all housing programs unless otherwise stated.

Contacting an applicant about a possible offer

Before making any offer, Uniting will contact the applicant by phone or, if unable to contact the applicant, send an email and/or letter by priority post requesting the applicant contact Uniting urgently, within 3 working days.

In the case of applicants from Uniting's waiting list, if there is no response to requests for contact within the specified timeframe a note will be made on Uniting's waiting list and their application closed. If the applicant is able to demonstrate a valid reason for not responding, for example, illness or hospitalisation, overseas or away on holiday, they will be retained or reinstated on the waiting list in the original date order.

Housing Pathways policies applies to social housing applicants from the NSW housing register: <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/policies/managing-nsw-housing-register-policy>

Responding to an offer

Before an offer can be made, Uniting will reconfirm the applicant's eligibility and, if eligible, advise the applicant of the type and length of lease they will be offered and, where applicable, that the accommodation is in a retirement village.

When Uniting makes an offer, the applicant will be invited to meet the Village Manager and view the property. They will be required to let Uniting know if they will accept the offer within 2 working days of viewing the property.

If an applicant contacts Uniting and has a valid reason for not being able to view the property and make a decision within 2 working days Uniting will consider extending the timeframe for a short time. See Extension of Timeframes below.

Confirming an offer

Uniting will write to confirm an offer, giving the details of the property, rent and bond payable, terms and conditions of the program, timeframe for commencing the tenancy, etc and will provide an example of the tenancy agreement they will be asked to sign and details about the option to pay the bond online or by instalments.

When an applicant accepts an offer, Uniting requires the tenancy to commence within 5 working days of accepting the offer or from the date the property is ready to occupy, unless otherwise agreed.

Once an applicant has accepted an offer and before a tenancy agreement is signed, Uniting is required to disclose any relevant property information under the provisions of Section 26 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and Clause 7 of the Residential Tenancies Regulations 2010. Examples of the types of disclosure required include flood or bushfire or a serious violent crime at the property within the last five years.

Rejecting an offer

If an applicant or transfer applicant from Uniting's own waiting list rejects an offer and gives a valid reason, the applicant may remain on the waiting list in the same date order with a note updating their information and stating why the offer was rejected. If no acceptable reason is provided they will be moved to the bottom of the waiting list. In most cases Uniting will provide two offers of housing that matches the

applicant's requirements. If both offers are rejected then the applicant will be advised that they will be removed from Uniting's waiting list.

If an applicant from the NSW housing register rejects an offer, Housing Pathways policies apply. See <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/policies/matching-offering-property-client-policy>

Extension of timeframes

Timeframes for inspecting an offered property or for signing a tenancy agreement may be extended in certain circumstances, for instance:

- Applicant is genuinely unable to inspect the offered property within 2 working days of receiving the offer, for instance due to:
 - Unable to travel due to illness;
 - Long distance to travel;
 - Disability or medical condition which requires additional support to view the property; or
 - A third party must approve the suitability of the property under a formal support agreement or guardianship.
- Applicant is unable to sign a tenancy agreement within 5 working days of accepting the offer due to serious health reasons or disability, or a family emergency.

Relevant evidence that substantiates the applicant's reason is required. This could include a doctor's certificate or a letter from a support worker.

Timeframes

The whole offer process should be completed within 14 days for properties that are 'tenantable' (i.e. where no or minor maintenance is required) or within 28 days for properties that are 'untenantable' (i.e. major maintenance required)

6 Roles and responsibilities

All relevant Retirement and Independent Living staff to comply with this policy.

This policy applies to all Uniting's rental dwellings. Specific guidelines for each rental program are provided in the Guidelines accompanying this policy.