

Housing Act 1983 amendments and information sharing

Questions and Answers for social housing applicants
October 2016

What is the Housing Act 1983?

The Housing Act 1983 (the Act) is the law that is responsible for social housing in Victoria.

What is being changed?

An amendment to the Act called *The Housing Amendment (Victorian Housing Register and Other Matters) Bill 2016* (the Bill) is being proposed.

It will add a new part to the Act called: 'Part VIIIA - Social Housing'.

This part will have two main sections – one will relate to the Victorian Housing Register (the register) and the other to information sharing.

- The register: This part describes establishing and operating the register. This includes detail about how organisations and their staff access the register as well as the rules for using information on the register.
- Information Sharing: This part describes information sharing more broadly within the social housing sector to help you achieve more sustainable housing outcomes.

Why have changes to the Act been proposed?

The law has to change so that the Director of Housing (the Director) and community housing organisations can share information with each other in the register.

The information sharing that will result from this Bill will help you to access housing that best suits your safety, support and health needs.

It also means that if you need it, we can give you more personalised and targeted support to help you to keep your current tenancy.

How will the changes benefit me?

These changes will mean that:

- You can be considered for different types of housing from many providers through the register.
- If you are already on a housing waiting list, your application can be moved over to the register without any disadvantage to your application. If you applicant have more than one application (for example, one application for public housing and another for community housing) each one will be considered to work out a fair place on the register.
- If you are a new applicant who wants to be considered for all types of social housing you will only have to tell your story once as there is now only one application.

Do I need to do anything?

No you do not need to do anything. This does not change your application for public or community housing.

What sort of information can be shared?

When you fill out the application for the register, only information that is needed to prove your eligibility is requested.

This will be different depending on the type of housing and support you might need.

For example: if you are applying for priority through the 'Homeless with Support' category you will need to give information about your support needs. If you are applying to the 'Register of Interest' you will only need to show you meet the income and asset requirements.

The information that can be shared is mostly the information that was provided as part of the application to the register. Information might also be created by the department and by community housing organisations. This could include assessment notes, recommendations, decisions and letters.

How will my information be protected?

In addition to strict security measures set in place for the register the department and registered housing agencies are bound by laws that tell them how they must handle your information.

This includes law that guides the department's delivery of services and supports, including the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, the *Disability Act 2006* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, as well as Victoria's *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*, and the *Health Records Act 2001*.

The register database will be stored in the department's current housing management system. The system will also be regularly checked by the department to make sure information is only accessed and used by those who need to access and use your information.

For more information on privacy and data collection contact the Department of Health and Human Services Privacy Unit on 1300 884 706 or email privacy@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Who can I speak to if I think my information has been misused?

If you think your information has been misused you should talk to your local housing office.

If you do not think you can talk to your local office or if you are not happy with their response you can either contact the department's privacy and complaints team <<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/making-a-complaint-to-the-department>> or the Commissioner for Privacy and Data Protection.

How do I find out what information about me is on the register?

You can find out what information is stored on the register and who has accessed that information through the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* or through the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

You can find out more about this by contacting the Department of Health and Human Services Freedom of Information Unit on (03) 9096 8449 or 1300 650 172.

If I want more information where can I go?

If you would like more information about the Victorian Housing Register please go to website <www.housing.vic.gov.au/apply>

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Available at www.housing.vic.gov.au/apply