Who we are and what we do
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The Housing Authority: an overview

The Housing Authority is an affordable housing provider, operating in land development, housing construction and property management. The agency delivers quality housing that people can afford, and provides people with opportunities to buy a home.

Housing works in partnership within the private, government and not-for-profit sectors to supply affordable homes. In many cases, the agency provides housing for people who would otherwise struggle to rent or buy.

The Housing Authority also assists with housing finance through its Keystart Home Loans business, and provides rental assistance options for people in need.
Fast facts:

1,660 STAFF in 42 locations manages over 36,000 public housing dwellings

biggest landlord in Western Australia

5,300 properties for GROH
Who we are and what we do

- Housing has nearly 1,660 staff working from 42 locations across the State.
- The Housing Authority manages over 36,000 public housing dwellings that provide a home for more than 64,000 Western Australians on low incomes, making Housing the biggest landlord in Western Australia.
- Housing also manages around 5,300 properties for Government Regional Officers’ Housing (GROH).
- The Housing Authority also provides housing to 114 Aboriginal communities in remote locations involving 2,662 properties.
- The Housing Authority is one of the biggest land developers in Western Australia.
## Terminology

Terms that are commonly used in the WA housing sector include:

**Social housing:** a ‘catch-all’ term for housing that is provided for people on low and moderate incomes that is supported by some form of direct or indirect government subsidy. It includes rental housing that is owned by governments, non-profit organisations, corporations or individuals.

**Public housing:** housing that is owned, or leased and managed, by the Housing Authority. If you live in public housing, the Housing Authority is your landlord.

**Community housing:** housing that is owned, or leased and managed, by not-for-profit organisations or local governments. If you live in community housing, your landlord will be the dwelling’s owner or lessee, which will be a not-for-profit organisation or a local government. It is not uncommon for community housing providers to lease dwellings from the Housing Authority and manage the tenancies themselves.

In Western Australia, social housing is provided through a combination of public housing and community housing. The Housing Authority is the state’s biggest provider of public housing, managing over 36,000 public housing dwellings. In addition, various community housing organisations manage more than 9,400 community housing properties across WA.
The affordable housing continuum: the system traversing the complete range of affordable housing tenures, from crisis accommodation and social housing, through to private rental and affordable home ownership. Affordable housing options are developed for, and targeted to, low to moderate income households to help them overcome housing stress and/or move along the housing continuum toward increased self-reliance.

Affordable home ownership: dwellings that are developed to be priced at levels that make ownership possible for households on low-to-moderate incomes. It includes full ownership as well as innovative financing methods such as shared equity. To access affordable home ownership, buyers generally are required to qualify, usually by way of their household income being below a set level.

Affordable private rental: dwellings in the private rental market where financial assistance is provided to households on low-to-moderate incomes to enable tenancy where there is insufficient social housing to meet demand. To access affordable private rental, tenants generally are required to qualify, usually by way of their household income being below a set level.
Affordable home ownership

The Housing Authority believes that home ownership, not public housing, is the preferred option of most Western Australians. The agency is a major provider of affordable new homes in Western Australia and this is an important but little-known role.

Housing is also one of the State’s largest land developers and keeps the prices of its lots low to assist people on moderate incomes to own their own homes. Housing’s home loan arm Keystart provides innovative home loan options with low deposits for people who are striving to achieve ownership.

A period of unprecedented population growth and housing demand in Western Australia, spurred sharply rising house prices with the result that many people on lower incomes struggled to find housing they could afford. The State Government’s Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020: Opening Doors to Affordable Housing was the response to this.

Housing is on track to achieve its goal to provide 30,000 new affordable housing opportunities by 2020, through smart partnerships across government, the private sector and not-for-profit organisations.
Public Housing

Public housing: who is it for?
Public rental housing is provided for very low-income households who are often unable to obtain secure and affordable accommodation in the private rental sector.

Some client groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people, people with disabilities and singles also experience difficulties accessing housing in the private market.

The State Government currently provides subsidised public housing to over 69,000 Western Australian low income households.

Who is eligible?
Eligibility for public housing is determined by a number of factors, including household income, savings, residency and age. An eligibility estimator is available on the Housing Authority's website at www.housing.wa.gov.au/housingoptions/EligibilityEstimator/Pages/default.aspx

Applicants for public rental housing must have an income that falls within the Housing Authority's current income limits and remain within those limits for the duration of their application/waiting time.

The limit on household earnings varies, according to a household’s size and location. To be eligible for Housing Authority assistance, the combined gross weekly income of the applicant, partner or co-applicant must be below the limits indicated in this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of people in household</th>
<th>Metro and country</th>
<th>North West and remote areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single income</td>
<td>Dual income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$430</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$580</td>
<td>$670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$695</td>
<td>$790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$815</td>
<td>$930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For households with more than four people, add $115 per additional person.
Other household members’ incomes are not assessed for eligibility but are considered when calculating rent.

Higher, more generous income limits apply to people with a disability and to families with a person with a disability.

**How much rent do tenants pay?**

The rent paid for public housing is calculated at 25 per cent of a household’s gross assessable income or the market rent, whichever is lower. Assessable income includes most Centrelink and Veterans’ Affairs benefits and any pay derived from employment. Assessable income will not always equal actual income received. For example, a smaller proportion of child support payments, Family Tax Benefits and Youth Allowance is counted as part of assessable household income.

The ‘up front’ costs to a tenant moving in to public housing are lower than those for private rental. Where in the private rental market a ‘letting fee’ is commonly charged along with a bond and rent in advance, the only ‘ingoing costs’ Housing requests is two weeks’ rent in advance.

**Public housing tenants receive significant rental subsidies.** The level of benefit provided through subsidised rents relative to private market rents totals over $400 million in forgone revenue per year, or $12,000 per tenancy annually.
Relocation

The Housing Authority’s role is to provide long-term accommodation solutions for people who need them, but a public housing tenant may be required to live in a number of different dwellings over the course of their tenure.

People’s accommodation requirements change over time, influenced by things like children growing up, age, health and location.

As houses age, they become more expensive to maintain and Housing has an ongoing program of renovation, redevelopment and sale of its dwellings that enables Housing to continually update its housing stock.

Housing expects its tenants to be mindful that they may at some point need to relocate. Housing will only relocate tenants once suitable alternative has been found, and will always gave tenants plenty of notice of an impending relocation.

Housing’s responsibilities and tenants’ rights

The Housing Authority is the State’s biggest landlord, managing more than 36,000 properties for more than 69,000 tenants in need of subsidised housing.

As a property owner and landlord, the Housing Authority has the same responsibilities and restrictions as any private landlord and must comply with the Residential Tenancies Act.

Like any private landlord, Housing must maintain its properties and respect the rights of tenants to enjoy our properties in privacy.

Tenants’ responsibilities and Housing’s expectations

As a landlord, Housing asks its tenants to meet four simple, basic rules:

- pay the rent
- look after the property
- respect the neighbours
- be ready to transition to other accommodation when the time is right.

The overwhelming majority of tenancies managed by the Authority follow these rules.
The appeals process
The Housing Authority understands that the decisions it makes can affect its customers. An appeal process allows customers to have an unfavourable decision made by the Housing Authority reviewed.

The appeals process is there to make sure that decisions can be independently reviewed by people who were not involved in the original decision.

Customers can appeal an unfavourable decision that relates to:

- rental housing, priority assistance or transfer application
- bond assistance
- assessment of tenant liability charges
- continued eligibility for public housing.

Some decisions made by the Housing Authority cannot be appealed, such as:

- decisions that apply generally to all customers (such as market rent increases and subsidy percentage rates)
- decisions made more than 12 months earlier
- decisions which are or have been the subject of a Notice of Termination or strikes issued under the Disruptive Behaviour Management Policy
- decisions that are being or have been considered by the Minister or the State Ombudsman
- water consumption charges, as they are not determined by the Housing Authority.

Helping people enter the private rental market
The Housing Authority operates a Bond Assistance Loan scheme to assist people who are homeless or likely to become homeless, have limited finances or moving out of public housing, in securing private rental accommodation.

The interest-free loan helps people obtain accommodation in the private rental market by assisting in meeting the bond and/or rent in advance charges for private rental accommodation.

Limits apply to the amount that can be borrowed (up to $1080 for singles and up to $1380 for families) and the loan is repaid in regular payments of $25 per fortnight.
Things the Housing Authority can’t do

The Housing Authority looks after people’s housing needs. However there are some things Housing can’t do because, under legislation, it is limited mainly to providing housing services.

Emergency accommodation/homelessness

The Housing Authority provides long term housing options. It does not provide crisis accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) is the lead agency in this area. CPFS proactively works with government agencies and community service providers to plan and deliver homelessness services to respond to the needs of vulnerable Western Australians. These services include crisis and transitional accommodation, rough sleeper programs, day centres, soup kitchens, tenancy support services, and family and domestic violence services.

Law enforcement

The Housing Authority is a housing provider and landlord—not a law enforcement agency.

If Housing is made aware of illegal acts being committed at its properties by its tenants, the police will be informed. Housing cannot ‘arrest’ people, nor does it have the power to investigate suspected illegal activities.

If a tenant commits a crime such as assault or theft, like any landlord, Housing is not responsible for their behaviour, nor does it condone it.

If a neighbour of one of Housing’s tenants believes that the tenant has committed a crime, they should first contact the police.
Support services

The Housing Authority is primarily a housing service-provider but as a government agency acknowledges it has a higher level of social responsibility than a private landlord would have for the wellbeing of its tenants.

A key service Housing recommends to tenants in need of support is the Support and Tenant Education Program (STEP). This is a voluntary early intervention program for tenants who are having difficulties sustaining their tenancy who may also be facing eviction. STEP assists tenants with issues such as property standards, rent payments or behaviour. Housing does this to offer its tenants some practical assistance to help them and their neighbours enjoy a peaceful and happy tenancy.

Tenants may also qualify for the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS), a State Government scheme that provides financial assistance to help people in financial hardship pay their water, gas and electricity bills so their supply is not cut off.

Housing does not employ social workers nor is it expert in dealing with the complex social and personal issues some tenants face. There are other organisations with expertise in these areas that provide these services.

Where tenants are in financial difficulty, and this is affecting their ability to pay rent, Housing will refer tenants to community-based financial counselling for personalised advice. This is provided free of charge, and is not compulsory.

Housing also has Aboriginal Customer Support Officers, based in regional offices, who have a specific role in working with Aboriginal clients who may need support in securing or maintaining a tenancy.
Terminating a tenancy

Termination proceedings are only initiated by the Housing Authority when tenants fail to utilise all the opportunities provided to them to pay outstanding debts, improve behaviour or improve poor property standards.

Where tenants fail to pay arrears, fail to take care of the property or disrupt the lives of their neighbours, the Housing Authority—as a landlord—must take appropriate action in line with the Residential Tenancies Act.

The termination process involves the Housing Authority issuing a breach notice to a tenant requiring them to remedy the breach. Should the tenant fail to rectify the breach within 14 days, Housing will issue a termination notice which advises tenants that they are required to return the property to the Housing Authority.

Should the tenant fail to relinquish the property (or remedy the initial breach), the Housing Authority may apply to the Magistrates Court to terminate the tenancy agreement.

If the Housing Authority’s application to the Magistrates Court is successful, the court order will stipulate a date when the tenant is required to provide vacant possession of the property.

Should a tenant fail to relinquish a property by that date, Housing must engage a bailiff to evict the tenant; that is, to physically recover the property by removing the occupants and securing the property.

An eviction only occurs when a tenant fails to relinquish the property in accordance with a court order, so the ultimate decision to evict a tenant always rests with a Magistrate.
Public housing issues

Waiting lists
Applicants for public housing need to meet a number of income and asset limits to firstly be eligible, then to remain on the waiting list and subsequently to remain in public housing.

The time an applicant waits for public housing is influenced by several factors: the area in which housing is being sought, the turnover of properties in that region, the type of accommodation and number of bedrooms required, and the number of people ahead of the applicant on the waiting list.

The priority waiting list
An applicant with no viable housing options, and an urgent housing need which cannot be met by waiting for an offer of accommodation through the usual ‘wait turn’ process, may apply for priority listing. This means they will be offered accommodation as soon as possible, depending upon their specific situation.

Factors that may make an applicant eligible for the priority waiting list include—but are not limited to—medical conditions, escaping from domestic violence, child abuse or harassment, homelessness and child care related issues.

Priority listed applicants must still wait until a suitable property becomes available. Every applicant on the priority waiting list has demonstrated an urgent need, and Housing is unable to further prioritise them.

At 31 May 2017, the waiting list had 16,898 public housing wait-turn applicants, of which 1,653 are public housing priority applications.

The average wait time for public housing priority listed applicants at 31 May 2017 was 58 weeks (median 31 weeks).

In May 2017, 410 public housing wait-turn and priority applications were housed (excluding transfers), bringing the total number of public housing wait-turn and priority applications housed between 1 June 2016 and 31 May 2017 to 3,551.

Applicants on the general wait list are typically not homeless, nor at risk of homelessness. They are usually in private rentals, shared housing or living with other family members.
Vacancies

At any time, a small percentage of the more than 36,000 properties managed by Housing will be vacant, and this can be for a number of reasons. Properties may be undergoing repairs or maintenance prior to new occupants moving in, being readied for sale or prepared for demolition as part of a redevelopment.

Maintenance

As the State’s biggest landlord, Housing manages more than 36,000 public housing properties as well as housing for government and community employees around the State, which takes the total number of properties managed to more than 41,500. The Housing Authority issues between 12,000 and 14,000 work orders for maintenance jobs every month: an average of 470 work orders a day.

All maintenance tasks are prioritised into one of four categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Maximum time for work to be completed</th>
<th>Examples of maintenance covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
<td>No power, faulty smoke alarm or smell of gas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent</td>
<td>24 hours</td>
<td>No hot water, blocked toilets or burst water pipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>48 hours</td>
<td>Faulty stove, leaking taps or security lights not working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>28 days</td>
<td>Rehanging internal doors, replacing washing line or rewiring flyscreen to window and/or door</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of maintenance requests are completed on time. However, given the high number of requests, there are inevitably times when jobs are not completed as quickly as Housing, and the tenant, would like.

There are various reasons for this. A common one is that a contractor will attend a property, but the tenant is not at home despite being informed that a tradesperson is coming and agreeing to arrangements.

Inspections

Social housing rental properties are inspected annually and more regularly if deemed necessary. As a landlord, Housing is required under the Residential Tenancies Act to provide to tenants a minimum of seven days’ written notice and maximum of 14 days’ written notice of an inspection.
The Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy

Housing’s Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy (DBMS) provides an appropriate balance between supporting tenants and protecting their neighbours and the wider community from unreasonable and illegal behaviour.

The DBMS sets clearly defined standards of behaviour and has processes and sanctions for handling disruptive tenants. When a complaint is made against a tenant, Housing, as the landlord, will investigate the matter and take appropriate action where the complaint can be substantiated. The Housing Authority is bound by the Residential Tenancies Act and can only act on complaints that occur on or in the immediate vicinity of the tenant’s property.

Each complaint is investigated and if a complaint is substantiated it can result in a ‘strike’.

If a strike is issued for

- dangerous behaviour (for example, assault, arson, the manufacture of drugs);
- activities that pose a demonstrable risk to the safety or security of residents or property;
- activities that have resulted in injury to a person in the immediate vicinity with subsequent Police charges or conviction;

Housing will take immediate action to evict those responsible.

If the strike is for serious behaviour—including vandalism to neighbours’ properties—the tenant may receive a first and final warning. If the substantiated behaviour is deemed ‘disruptive’ (for example, excessive noise) the tenant will receive a strike. Not every complaint will result in a strike. This is because Housing must be fair to the tenant and a complaint must be substantiated with sufficient evidence for a strike to be recorded.

If a tenant reaches maximum strike action within a 12-month period, Housing will move to terminate. Ultimately, the decision to terminate a tenancy rests with a Magistrate.
Who we are and what we do
Housing development

There was a time when entire suburbs were established where every house was public housing. The term ‘housing commission suburb’ was a commonly used one. Much of what the Housing Authority has been doing in recent years has been making ‘housing commission suburbs’ a thing of the past by de-concentrating public housing and integrating it into the wider community.

This way, our tenants are able to actively participate and contribute to their local communities and neighbourhoods, creating a more diverse and socially better outcome.

In recent years Housing has sought to achieve a mix of no more than one in nine dwellings within any particular location. However, given the nature of urban development, demographics and public housing provision across Western Australia, there are some locations where the proportion of public housing may be higher or lower.

The Housing Authority regularly enters into urban development projects with private sector partners. As part of the planning of these developments, Housing aims for an appropriate mix of owner-occupied affordable housing, public housing and private residences.

When planning the location of public housing in new developments, Housing takes into account the affordable and social housing requirements of the area, the appropriate residential densities and service requirements for public housing clients, including accessibility to shops, medical facilities and public transport.

These projects also provide new affordable purchase opportunities in a range of housing options, including full-market sales and shared home ownership.
**The Social Housing Investment Package**

A $560 million Social Housing Investment Package (SHIP) was announced in May 2015.

This investment will halve the priority waiting list for families with children, and seniors, by 30 June 2017, and along with other Housing Authority initiatives, will deliver 1,000 additional homes to benefit those most in need in our community.

The focus of the package will be on a combination of new constructions, spot purchases and private rental leases.

SHIP supports an important part of the State Affordable Housing Strategy—delivering a dividend for social housing and supporting transition through the system from crisis accommodation and social housing, through to private rental and affordable home ownership.

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**Other services the Housing Authority provides**

**Remote Indigenous Housing**

Remote Indigenous Housing is provided to residents of remote Aboriginal communities in what are some of the most inaccessible and challenging parts of the country. The Housing Authority provides housing services to 118 communities and around 2,575 houses.

**Government Regional Officers’ Housing (GROH)**

The Government Regional Officers’ Housing (GROH) scheme provides WA Government employees in regional areas with accommodation so that they can deliver essential services to communities. These tenants typically include police officers, teachers, and staff from the Departments of Fisheries, Corrective Services and Parks and Wildlife. Housing manages around 5,500 GROH properties (3,200 owned by Housing and 2,300 leased from private owners) throughout WA.

Under the GROH scheme, Housing provides dwellings to government departments and those agencies determine what rent they set for their employees.
Frequently asked questions

‘I have been informed about a woman and three children who are sleeping rough – what are you going to do about it?’

The waiting list for homes is currently over 18,000. This figure reached a peak of 24,100 in November 2010.

In the short term, it is the Department for Child Protection and Family Support that helps with emergency accommodation; sometimes through motels, hostels and also not-for-profit organisations.

In the long term, an applicant for social housing is placed on the Housing Authority’s waiting list.

The time it takes for an eligible applicant to be offered a home will depend on the area they are applying for and the type of accommodation they need, and whether they are on the priority list.

An applicant who can demonstrate an urgent need may apply for priority listing, however, they must still wait until a suitable property becomes available. Housing is unable to further prioritise the priority waiting list, because everyone on that list has demonstrated an urgent need.

Housing is usually able to provide journalists with the average waiting times for accommodation for a particular region at any given time.
‘Why have you taken so long to evict a disruptive tenant?’

Evicting a tenant is not something the Housing Authority does lightly, and the eviction process itself is regulated by the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

In simple terms, Housing expects four simple, basic rules:

- pay the rent
- look after the property
- respect the neighbours
- be ready to transition to other accommodation when the time is right.

It is important to note that the majority of Housing’s tenants comply with these rules.

It is essential however that the agency acts when a tenant’s actions adversely affect the peace and quiet of their neighbours or endanger their neighbours’ safety.

Housing has a Disruptive Behaviour Management Strategy and a specialised unit to deal with these issues. Each complaint is investigated and if a complaint is substantiated it can result in a ‘strike’.

If a strike is issued for dangerous behaviour (for example, assault, arson, the manufacture of drugs), Housing takes immediate action to evict those responsible.

If the strike is for serious behaviour—including vandalism to neighbours’ properties—the tenant may receive a first and final warning.

If the substantiated behaviour is deemed ‘disruptive’ (for example, excessive noise) the tenant will receive a strike.

Maximum strike action is reached when a tenant receives three ‘disruptive’ strikes within a 12 month period, two ‘serious’ strikes within a 12 month period or one ‘dangerous’ strike.

Not every complaint will result in a strike. This is because the Housing Authority must be fair to the tenant and a complaint must be substantiated for a strike to be recorded. Ultimately a Magistrate has the final say if a tenant is to be evicted.
Over the past three financial years, the following strikes were issued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>13/14</th>
<th>14/15</th>
<th>15/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>1410</td>
<td>1171</td>
<td>1090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2102</td>
<td>1868</td>
<td>1647</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The drop in the number between first and final strikes—along with the overall reduction in the number of strikes issued overall—is evidence that the policy is having a positive impact on tenants’ behaviour.

‘Was it fair to evict that tenant – why did you not take into account the impact on the kids? You will only be moving the problem somewhere else.’

When a tenant receives a ‘strike’ and children are involved, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) is informed.

The tenant is then offered support by CPFS. This support may come in the form of its Stronger Families Program, or other services.

The Housing Authority also assists tenants to meet its three simple rules through its Support and Tenant Education Program (STEP).

Under this voluntary program, tenants learn budgeting and housekeeping skills.

Housing will also help tenants with the process of declaring their house an alcohol-free zone.

In addition, Housing encourages rent to be paid directly from Centrelink payments.

However, if a tenant does not look after the property, does not pay the rent, or disrupts or allows their visitors to disrupt the lives of their neighbours, Housing has no choice but to move to evict them.

Before a tenant with children is evicted, CPFS will meet with the tenant. If the tenant has no clear plans regarding alternative accommodation, then CPFS will help find emergency accommodation.

It is important to remember that it generally takes a long time to get to the point of eviction and tenants usually have many chances and offers of support to change their behaviour.
‘Why has that Housing Authority house on a certain street been vacant for so long?’

At any point in time, around one or two per cent of the Housing Authority’s dwellings are vacant. If a house has been badly damaged by a tenant who has moved out, there are several processes that have to be followed – all of which take time.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act, if a tenant leaves possessions behind, Housing is not allowed to remove them until it receives an indemnity certificate from the Department of Commerce.

Secondly, if the property requires work valued at more than $20,000 (which is common), the job must go to tender. It can take a number of months for the tender to be awarded before the work can start.

In other cases, it is possible that the property is being assessed for its suitability for redevelopment to create more affordable and social housing. This could be the case if, for example, a single house sits on a large block that can be subdivided.

‘A tenant says her plumbing has not been fixed. Despite contacting the Housing Authority many times, nothing has happened – why?’

In 2015-16, the Housing Authority received 207,774 requests for maintenance: an average of 568 requests a day.

The majority of these maintenance requests are completed on time. However, given the high number of requests, there are inevitably times when jobs are not completed as quickly as Housing and its tenant would like.

There are various reasons why this happens; a common one is that a contractor will come to do a job, but the tenant is not at home despite being informed that a tradesperson is coming and agreeing to arrangements.