

# 1. Information sheet for the consultation draft

## Community Housing Allocations Framework for the Victorian Housing Register

August 2017

Victorian  
housing register

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# 1. Invitation to provide feedback

Registered Housing Agencies (RHAs) and other interested organisations are invited to provide written feedback on the *Community housing allocations framework for the Victorian Housing Register – consultation draft* (the framework). Feedback from RHAs will inform the final framework.

Written feedback will be accepted by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) up until 15 September 2017 via <[allocations@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:allocations@dhhs.vic.gov.au)>.

All submissions received will be treated by DHHS in the strictest of confidence and no submission will be made publicly available. DHHS will release summarised and de-identified feedback and responses on its website at the conclusion of the consultation period.

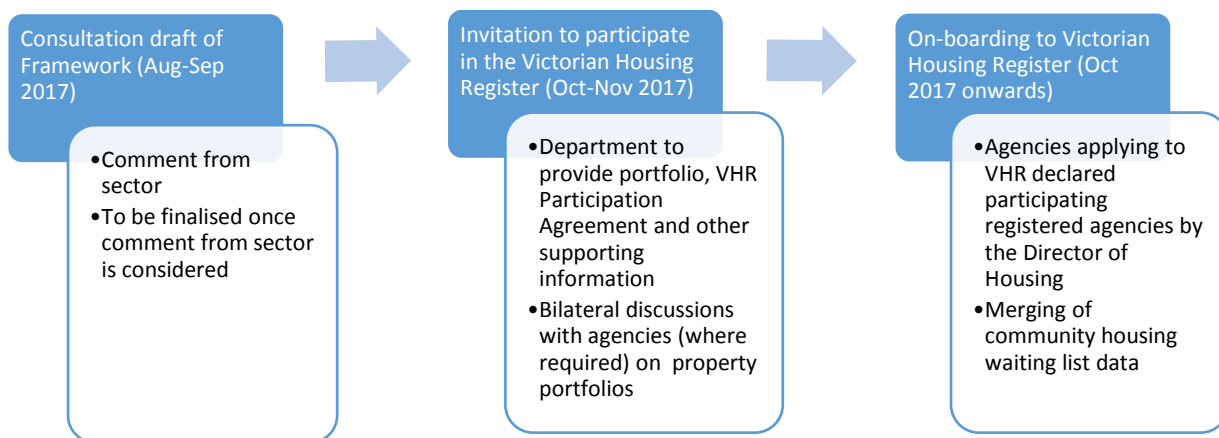
DHHS welcomes written feedback on any issue that might be raised by the framework and is of concern to RHAs, such as whether:

- We might have missed something important – tell us what?
- Is there something about the framework that doesn't work for your organisation or doesn't seem to make sense?
- Do you have any concerns about moving onto the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) or meeting one or more of the requirements of the framework?

We would welcome any comment on the draft framework or analysis to support your concerns.

DHHS will also work with individual RHAs where necessary to resolve any agency-specific concerns that cannot be addressed in this way.

The final draft of the framework will be reviewed by the VHR Senior Leadership Group before being made available.



# 2. Background to the Victorian Housing Register

The VHR will manage long term social housing applications in Victoria. It brings together public and community housing applications so that people only need to apply once for social housing. Through a single online application, the VHR will provide an easy, transparent and fair way for Victorians to access a range of social housing options.

This means that the VHR will be the single entry point for social housing in Victoria.

### 3. How the Victorian Housing Register will work

As the single point of entry to social housing in Victoria, any Victorian who applies for social housing will do so via the VHR. Although most applications are expected to be completed online, there will also be a paper-based process available.

Applicants on the VHR will cover many different kinds of households located across Victoria and with a wide range of incomes. Applicants can agree to be considered for community housing or public housing, and can apply in one of two categories:

- *Priority Access* – for people who have an urgent need for housing and meet low-income thresholds.
- *Register of Interest* – for people who do not have an urgent need who may benefit from social housing, and may have higher household incomes.

Information outlining how the VHR works is available at [www.housing.vic.gov.au](http://www.housing.vic.gov.au)

### 4. How agencies can join the Victorian Housing Register

RHAs will be invited to apply to join the VHR in the second half of 2017. Once this invitation is extended, RHAs will be able to join at any time. However DHHS has made available dedicated, time-limited resources to assist organisations that decide to join the VHR early to merge their waiting lists and provide staff training. In order to best utilise these time-limited resources, agencies will be encouraged to sign on to the VHR within three months of the invitation being issued. DHHS recognises that some agencies will need additional time to have more detailed discussions about the details of their participation, and will make their participation decision at the conclusion of those discussions.

Although there is an application process to join, all RHAs are eligible to apply. Once the application is approved, successful organisations will be known as ‘participating registered agencies’. They will then be required to make all their long term housing allocations, including to rooming house accommodation, from applicants on the VHR.

### 5. Benefits of participating in the Victorian Housing Register

There are a range of benefits for organisations who opt-in to the VHR. Importantly, participating registered agencies will be eligible to:

- apply for *Homes for Victorians* opportunities totaling \$799 million in additional homeless and housing support and \$2.1 billion in financial instruments
- apply for future government funding for social housing
- enter and renew Director of Housing general leases
- access Tenancy Plus for their tenants, with packages to help support tenancy sustainability, and manage arrears, and reduce evictions and abandonment.

In addition the VHR will improve organisations’ operational efficiency by:

- allowing them to access a single database of social housing applicants in Victoria to find suitable applicants and allocate vacant properties
- removing the need for agencies to maintain their own waiting list and application process
- removing the current housing association referral protocol process
- reducing manual annual reporting to government

- enabling access to real time allocations performance data
- potentially reducing vacancy turnaround time – agencies will be able to access a larger volume of potential tenants for vacancies and drill-down to identify suitable candidates based on housing need and agency mission.

DHHS has made available dedicated, time-limited resources to assist organisations to opt in early to the VHR. Support will include DHHS staff working with individual agencies to merge the agency's waiting list onto the VHR; and training for participating registered agency staff to support them operating effectively and legally in the VHR.

## 6. Relationship between the Victorian Housing Register and partnership opportunities under Homes for Victorians

Through *Homes for Victorians* the Victorian Government is committing \$799 million in additional homeless and housing support, and \$2.1 billion in financial instruments including a \$1 billion Victorian Social Housing Growth Fund to deliver a pipeline of social housing projects, \$100 million in low-cost loans, and \$1 billion in government guarantees to housing associations to enable them to grow their stock.

The Government has stated in *Homes for Victorians* that RHAs' eligibility to participate in the new social housing funding initiatives will be conditional on them joining the VHR and allocating at least 75 per cent of their social housing vacancies to the Priority Access Group on the VHR.

Only agencies that choose to be part of the VHR – which will include agreeing to allocate housing in line with the Government's allocations target – will be eligible to participate in the *Homes for Victorians* social housing initiatives and new leases on Director of Housing properties. This means that only RHAs that participate in the VHR will be eligible to access future opportunities.

For more information about accessing this funding, see *Homes for Victorians* at <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/homes-for-victorians>.

## 7. A new framework for allocating community housing

The *Community Housing Allocations Framework* (Paper two) will be the authoritative source of allocations policy and guidance to RHAs that participate in the VHR managed by DHHS.

The new framework will cover long term housing (including rooming house accommodation), will include the Government's 75 per cent allocations target, and provide consistent measuring and reporting for participating RHAs' annual allocations performance.

Complying with the framework will be one of the requirements of RHAs that decide to join the VHR. Participating in the VHR will also bring other requirements, for example in relation to eligibility for social housing applicants, privacy, an Information Sharing Arrangements Charter, training for employees authorised to access the VHR, and the business requirements for operating in the VHR.

More information on the VHR can be accessed through the [Funded Agency Channel](https://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel) at <[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel](https://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/funded-agency-channel)>.

## 8. The VHR Participation Agreement

RHAs that decide to join the VHR will be required to agree to be bound by the target and other requirements of the framework under a VHR participation agreement. The VHR participation agreement will supersede the allocations targets within existing contracts with the Director of Housing, including the

*Protocol for the referral of public housing applicants to housing associations, leases and historical funding agreements.*

The properties to be included in the target will also be detailed in each RHA's VHR participation agreement.

Once the framework has been finalised, the Director of Housing will develop a compliance and enforcement plan that is transparent about a graduated response to non-compliance with the VHR participation agreement.

Invitations will then be extended to the community housing sector to participate in the Victorian Housing Register, commencing a period of direct discussions about the details of their participation. Invitations will include a VHR participation agreement that the agency and the Director of Housing will need to sign before the agency is declared a participating registered agency.

## 9. Prioritising those most in need

The focus of the allocations target will be Priority Allocations, which are defined in the framework as allocations made from the Priority Access Group.

All other applicants will be in the 'Register for Interest' category.

The Priority Allocations that will be counted towards the allocations target are listed in the Priority Access Group at Appendix 1 of the framework.

## 10. The allocations target

Under the *Housing Act 1983*, RHAs are required to meet the performance standards. Some of these standards relate to tenancy management and housing allocations.

When RHAs join the VHR, the allocations target in the framework will replace the current measures against which DHHS and the Housing Registrar monitor performance. Participating RHAs will be required to allocate at least 75 per cent of their targeted social housing vacancies (see the proposed definition for 'targeted social housing' in the framework) to the Priority Access Group in line with the new allocations framework.

**The target will not apply to current tenants or tenancies. It will only be applied when properties become vacant and new tenants are needed.** No current tenancies will be affected by the introduction of the allocations target.

The Priority Access Group has more than 12,000 applicant households. Any Priority Allocation from the Priority Access Group at Appendix 1 in the framework – including allocations to rooming house accommodation – will count towards performance against the target. This will preserve agencies' flexibility to choose tenants to meet their individual organisational missions and property portfolios.

In recognition that agencies have different property portfolios, DHHS will work with individual RHAs where required to determine which of their properties will be included in the target. For many RHAs this process will be relatively straightforward, as all Director of Housing owned properties leased to agencies will be defined as 'targeted social housing'.

## 11. Choosing tenants from the Victorian Housing Register

Participating RHAs will still be able to apply their own mission and policies when allocating new tenancies. RHAs may wish to prioritise tenants by characteristics that are consistent with the organisational mission, and use selection processes such as interviews and mandatory information sessions.

The VHR allows agencies to filter applications according to location, income, tenant profile and a range of other groupings, enabling participating RHAs to choose tenants according to their own organisational mission.

Under the performance standards allocations must be fair, transparent and responsive to housing need and length of wait (where relevant), among other factors.

## 12. Monitoring performance

The VHR will significantly improve the information currently available on how participating RHAs are tracking against their contractual and regulatory obligations. Participating RHAs in the VHR will be able to generate reports so they can monitor their performance against the allocations target and other business goals.

As currently occurs with allocations performance monitoring in the community housing sector, DHHS will manage the allocations performance information from the VHR and will routinely provide data to the Housing Registrar.

RHAs that choose not to participate in the VHR will continue to manually report their allocations information for the foreseeable future.

## 13. Opting out of the Victorian Housing Register

Participating agencies may leave the VHR in one of two ways: they may apply to the Director of Housing to opt out; or in the case of non-compliance under the VHR, the Director of Housing may decide to revoke a participating agency's access to the VHR.

Withdrawing from the VHR may have implications for RHA-owned, State-funded assets acquired since the date of participation in the VHR, and for the management of State-owned assets including leases. The Director of Housing will develop a compliance and enforcement plan once the framework has been finalised to clarify the graduated potential implications for RHAs of withdrawing from the VHR.

It is proposed that agencies that are not current participants in the VHR (whether they have opted out or never joined) will also be ineligible for future funding opportunities. These requirements will be contained in the VHR participation agreement and in documentation about future funding opportunities.

## 14. How people will apply for housing

Applicants can lodge an application in their own right or a support worker can apply on their behalf.

Applications can be lodged online via MyGov (for applicants) or eBiz (for support providers) or by completing a paper application which can be submitted at a local housing office or community housing organisation.

## 15. Reviewing the operation of the Victorian Housing Register

DHHS will periodically review the VHR operational policies and guidelines to assess to their efficacy in consultation with the Housing Registrar, Victorian Housing Register Senior Leadership Group, or other appropriate representatives of the community housing and homelessness services sector.

The first review of the allocations framework will be after the first year of operation to ensure it is achieving the Victorian Government's policy objectives.

## 16. Next steps for consulting the community housing sector

DHHS has issued a high-level timeline for fully implementing the VHR. The timeline details three distinct phases of work with the community housing sector during the second half of 2017, as follows:

**Phase 1 (August – September 2017):** Consultation with RHAs on draft framework and the allocations performance target, and finalisation of the framework.

**Phase 2 (September – November 2017):** The VHR participation agreement will be available to the sector following finalisation of the framework. Invitations to RHAs to participate in the VHR and commencement of direct discussions with RHAs (where relevant) to agree the properties that will be included in their targeted social housing vacancies (see the proposed definition for 'targeted social housing' in the framework) to the Priority Access Group in line with the new framework.

**Phase 3 (October 2017 – June 2018):** On-boarding of RHAs to the VHR and merging of waiting lists.

## 17. More information

For more information:

- visit our [social housing website](http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorianhousingregister) at <www.housing.vic.gov.au/victorianhousingregister>
- send us an email at [allocations@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:allocations@dhhs.vic.gov.au)
- refer to our Q&As on the framework.

To get this publication in an accessible format, call your local office, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or get it from our website at <[www.housing.vic.gov.au](http://www.housing.vic.gov.au)>.

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