

Winda-Mara Housing Program (WMHP) Eligibility and Allocations Policy

Contents

1.	Introduction and Purpose	2
2.	Scope	2
3.	Aim	2
4.	Definitions	3
5.	Principles.....	4
5.1	Information to Clients	4
5.2	Allocation and Eligibility	4
5.3	Decision Making.....	4
6.	Eligibility for WMHP Housing.....	5
6.1	Victorian Housing Register	5
6.2	Other Eligibility Criteria	5
6.3	Carers	6
7.	Allocation.....	6
7.1	Matching Households to the Right Home	6
7.2	Number of Bedrooms.....	7
7.3	Offer of Housing	7
7.4	Supporting Sustainable and Harmonious Communities.....	8
8.	References.....	8
8.1	External or Statutory Requirements	8
8.2	Internal Requirements and Forms	8
9.	Monitoring and Review	9
	AMENDMENT HISTORY.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

WMHP Eligibility and Allocations Policy

Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation ('WMAC') and Winda-Mara Housing Limited ('WMHL') work together to deliver safe, secure and affordable housing solutions for eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members living in far southwest Victoria.

The activities, principles, policies and elements that contribute to and regulate the housing schemes of WMAC and WMHL are collectively referred to as the Winda-Mara Housing Program ('WMHP').

The WMHP's policies and procedures are designed so that its practice and service delivery align with the following cultural statement:

Our vision is to create a thriving community where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing. We aspire to empower individuals and families through improved health, education, and wellbeing, fostering a strong sense of identity and pride in our cultural heritage. Through collaboration and sustainable development, we aim to build a future where every member of our community has the opportunity to flourish and succeed.

1. Introduction and Purpose

WMAC and WMHL are responsible for managing the allocations of tenancies across their Affordable Housing and Aboriginal Community Housing portfolios.

WMAC and WMHL practice clear and transparent processes when allocating properties to customers.

This policy establishes the approach of the WMHP to:

- eligibility for its rental housing programs;
- the prioritisation and allocation of vacant properties in its rental housing portfolio; and
- successful and sustainable tenancies and communities through the matching of applicants to properties.

This policy should be read in conjunction with WMHP Sustaining Tenancies Policy.

2. Scope

This is a WMHP Policy. It applies to all residential tenancies managed by WMAC and WMHL.

3. Aim

This policy aims to:

- ensure WMHP has a selection process that is accountable, meets all legislative requirements, industry standards and guidelines and appropriately matches individual housing needs with available properties. Within this, WMHP conforms to agreed state allocation policies as part of maintaining its registration to provide community or social housing:
- optimise the use of the rental properties that WMHP owns and manages; and
- wherever possible, ensure the housing requirements of households are matched with the type, size and location of properties available for offer.

4. Definitions

Aboriginal person	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
Advocate	A person who assists the client or tenant making a complaint. The advocate can be a friend, independent person, an employee or a person from an external advocacy service
Appeal	When a person asks for a review of a decision made by WMHP
Applicant	A person who applies for community housing via the VHR.
Client	WMHP applicant, tenant, prospective tenant or stakeholder with a legitimate interest in the matter
Community Housing	Community housing is delivered and managed by not-for-profit organisations that focus on the needs of tenants, ensuring tenants have a new, secure and modern place to call home.
Complaint	an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.
Complaint Register	A document or database/system that contains the details of all complaints raised including those made anonymously. The Housing
Complainant	An employee, client, tenant, advocate, entity or member of the public who expresses their dissatisfaction about an organisation to either the organisation itself or an external body
Compliment	An expression of satisfaction with one of WMHP's services or with the way the service has been delivered by one or more employees
Corrective Action	An action taken to preclude occurrences of an identified hazard or to prevent recurrence of a problem.
Escalation	A process of reporting complaints to the relevant external body for example, Victorian Disability Services Commissioner if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint
Feedback	Can be a positive or negative expression of a person's experience of WMHP's services. It can also take the form of opinions, suggestions, or comments about areas for improvement made directly or indirectly, explicitly, or implicitly, to or about WMHP, about its services or complaint handling system.
Tenant	For the purpose of this policy, the term 'renter' is inclusive of the term resident.
Service Request	A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly
WMAC Catchment Area	Within an 80 kilometre radius of Heywood, Victoria

Victorian Housing Register (VHR)	The Victorian Housing Register, the statewide common application for people seeking social housing, which can be accessed via MASP, DHHS, the MyGov portal or designated support providers
WMHP	Winda-Mara Housing Program - For the purposes of this policy, this term is inclusive of all WMAC and WMHL Housing services and programs.

5. Principles

5.1 Information to Clients

- Prospective customers are provided with clear and detailed information about the eligibility requirements (including income and assets), potential location and features of the accommodations available.
- An offer letter is provided to each customer with acceptance timelines for accepting the offer, acknowledging that in the instance the offer is not accepted it will be offered to the next eligible customer. Language support is also provided when advertising a vacancy if required.

5.2 Allocation and Eligibility

- During all eligibility assessments (of prospective and current WMHP customers) and at the time of allocating housing, WMHP will comply with National and State laws regarding equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.
- WMHP will adhere to any contractual arrangements that apply to program specific, funding or government stated eligibility criteria as stated in any such agreement.
- WMHP will allocate from waitlists and central registers in appropriate locations and adhere to the agreements surrounding their use for allocation purposes.
- WMHP will apply systematic instructions and tools to ensure operational staff carry out their duties using fairness, transparency and in line with required Acts, Regulations and Standards.
- Household composition plays a key role in determining the eligibility for and allocation of dwellings. WMHP aims to ensure appropriate use of properties to meet the housing needs of communities and may re-assess the eligibility for housing type throughout a tenancy if the household composition experiences significant changes.

5.3 Decision Making

All decisions will be made with care and diligence and with consideration of the program and/or contractual requirements under which the property may be managed. This includes under and over utilisation considerations and ensuring that household compositions are matched to appropriate dwellings.

Decisions that consider both the eligibility and the suitability of a customer and a property are necessary to ensure not only future customers are housed successfully in WMHP's housing programs, but also to ensure the future capacity for WMHP to sustain tenancies in them.

WMHP staff will undertake in-depth program induction, supervision and ongoing training.

6. Eligibility for WMHP Housing

To be eligible for the WMHP applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria.

6.1 Victorian Housing Register

WMHL is a participating registered agency in the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) and applicants seeking housing with WMHL must meet the VHR eligibility criteria:

- Proof of identity;
- Australian citizen or Permanent resident;
- Victorian resident;
- Income eligibility;
- Asset eligibility.

Applicants can find out more information on VHR eligibility criteria at www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility#eligibility-criteria or contact WMHP.

6.2 Other Eligibility Criteria

In addition to VHR requirements, WMHP applies the following additional eligibility requirements:

- applicants must be a current member of WMAC;
- applicant must be on the relevant WMHP Waiting List.
- applicants must be of Aboriginal descent. However, a parent/guardian of an Aboriginal child will be considered for tenancy at the discretion of the WMAC Board of Directors following a recommendation from the relevant WMHP Subcommittee;
- applicant must have lived in the WMAC catchment area for the previous six months;
- any outstanding loans or debts to WMHP are paid, or the applicant must have entered into and is regularly paying any such loans, debts or agreements. This is the policy even where WMAC is unable to actively pursue statute barred debts in a court or tribunal;
- an applicant or other household member who owns or has an interest in real estate is generally ineligible for WMHP. However, in exceptional circumstances, the application may be approved if the applicant/household cannot make 'effective use' of the property because:
 - it is not possible for the household to reside in the property or to continue to reside in the property; and

- the property is 'unrealisable', that is, it is not possible to sell their equity in the real estate.
- during the previous 12 months, the applicant(s) and/or household member(s) must not have been evicted as a renter of a WMHP property for non-arrears tenancy breaches;

Circumstances outside of the above will require approval from the WMAC Board of Directors.

6.3 Carers

Carers who live with the applicant on a permanent basis and are eligible for housing are included on the application.

Carers who live with the applicant on a permanent basis but are ineligible for housing are also included on the application. Following allocation of a WMHP property, ineligible carers have the status of a resident. If the applicant leaves the property, the carer/resident will also be required to leave.

Rostered attendant carers are not included as residents on the application.

7. Allocation

WMHP will allocate properties to eligible applicants through matching the needs of the applicant and the characteristics of the properties.

In its approach to allocation, WMHP will:

- only allocate housing to eligible applicants;
- comply with its contractual, legal, and regulatory obligations relating to eligibility for WMHP; and
- allocate housing to eligible applicants in a manner which is fair, transparent, and equitable.

7.1 Matching Households to the Right Home

In allocating housing, WMHP will also have regard to the VHR operational guideline - Clients with Special Accommodation Requirements.

WMHP will match applicants to properties so that an allocation:

- is the right size for the applicant's household;
- is in an area consistent with the applicant's needs;
- assists the applicant to access employment or any support services that they need;
- makes the best use of housing stock owned or managed by WMHP;
- encourages a sustainable tenancy; and
- meets any particular expressed needs of the applicant so far as they are known, such as modifications for people with a physical disability or mobility impairment, availability of car parking or room for carers.

WMHP aims to make sure that properties with specific features that are in high demand and short supply are only allocated to those applicants who need them, including:

- properties that are suitable for older people;
- properties that have been built or modified to meet the needs of people with a disability;
- properties on the ground floor;
- properties with level access; or
- properties with a yard or garden.

WMHP will ask applicants without a VHR application to provide evidence to substantiate any particular requirements.

7.2 Number of Bedrooms

WMHP allocates properties in accordance with the approved number of bedrooms on the applicant's VHR and with consideration of the VHR operational guideline, Clients with Special Accommodation Requirements.

It is important to note that WMHP has only a limited number of one-bedroom properties and properties of four or more bedrooms. As such, in areas where WMHP may have no dwellings suitable to the approved amount but does have properties with more or less bedrooms, WMHP will discuss this with the prospective renter during the allocation process. For example, a single person may be allocated a two bedroom should they be in greatest need and no one bedrooms properties exist in the area.

7.3 Offer of Housing

WMHP will only allocate housing to eligible applicants. Where a suitable applicant being considered for a vacancy does not have a current VHR application but is eligible for community housing under the VHR and suitable for that vacancy, then WMHP will ensure that such applicants complete a VHR application at the time of making an offer of housing.

When a dwelling becomes available, the relevant WMHP Subcommittee will in the first instance seek suitable applicants situated at the top of the WMHP Waiting List.

When reviewing the suitability of the applicant, the Subcommittee will also have regard to the following factors:

- previous rental payment history of the applicant;
- references of the applicant;
- condition reports for existing premises rented by the applicant;
- the number of bedrooms in the available dwelling. See 7.2 of this Policy for further guidance;
- the number of people (adults and children) an applicant has indicated will occupy the available dwelling should they be successful

- previous criminal activity of the applicant;
- other relevant circumstances known to the Subcommittee; and
- directions of information received from the CEO or WMAC Board of Directors.

An offer letter will be provided to each client with timelines for accepting the offer, acknowledging that in the instance the offer is not accepted it will be offered to the next eligible client.

WMHP reserves the right to withdraw an offer of housing provided a current Residential Rental Agreement has not been signed.

7.4 Supporting Sustainable and Harmonious Communities

WMHP may, to the extent necessary, adopt different strategies in allocation in response to:

- a high concentration of public and community housing stock in a particular area;
- existing tenancy management issues (or a potential for them to develop);
- existing neighbourhood tensions or disputes which may be exacerbated if allocations are not sensitively handled; and
- a mismatch of supply and demand making the property hard to let.

8. References

8.1 External or Statutory Requirements

This policy complies with the following external legislation or requirements:

- *Housing Act 1983 (Vic)*
- *The Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter Act 2006 (VIC)*
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies 2015 (Victoria Housing Registrar)
- Victorian Housing Register Operational Guidelines (Victoria, Department of Families Fairness and Housing)

8.2 Internal Requirements and Forms

This policy refers to the following internal documents, which are available in the WMHP Document Register:

- WMHP Complaints, Feedback and Appeals Policy
- WMHP Complaints, Feedback and Appeals Procedure
- WMHP Sustaining Tenancies Policy
- WMHP Customer Service Policy

- WMHP Waiting List Policy
- WMHP Pets Policy
- WMHP Arrears Policy
- WMAC Conflict of Interest Policy
- Victoria Housing Register Eligibility Criteria
- Victorian Housing Register Clients with Special Accommodation Requirements
- WMHP Residential Tenancy Agreement
- Residential Rental Agreement

9. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if the legal, regulatory, and contractual environment requires.

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