

# Immediate Housing Response

## Operational Guidelines

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### Purpose

The operational guidelines support Queensland's 'Immediate Housing Response' (IHR).

### Eligibility and Intake

The IHR provides short-term and temporary refuge accommodation assistance to Queenslanders experiencing, or at imminent risk of homelessness. The IHR is delivered by government funded Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS).

For the purposes of the guidelines the term "IHR provider" is used to reflect service delivery by SHS, unless specified otherwise.

The intake into an IHR is only applicable where:

- the customer can demonstrate they are experiencing homelessness, or are at imminent risk of homelessness; and
- all other options for housing assistance have been exhausted; and
- the customer would otherwise be without shelter; and
- the customer is eligible for social housing; and
- Exclusions to the program apply to the customer seeking assistance, refer to section "Exclusions to the program" below.

Young people aged 16 years and under should be referred to a SHS specifically funded to provide housing assistance to this age group and must not be accommodated in IHR accommodation.

Customers experiencing DFV should be referred to DVConnect or other suitable funded DFV specialist services. Any IHR provider should only accommodate a household experiencing DFV if all efforts to accommodate the household by a DFV service have failed. An IHR provider must make all efforts to ensure a specialist DFV service is engaged, and safety plans are in place.

IHR providers must work collaboratively, sharing information appropriately to ensure the effective delivery of assistance through the IHR.

### Exclusions to the program

IHR assistance will not be offered to a customer who has:

- Has the financial means to manage self-sustaining accommodation.

- Been deemed ineligible for social housing.
  - A customer must demonstrate they have lodged an application for social housing within 7 days of being accepted for an IHR, failure to do so may result in their IHR accommodation ceasing. Customers must disclose to an IHR provider, when asked, the status of their social housing application.
  - Customers in IHR accommodation who are found to be ineligible for social housing will have their IHR accommodation cease and will be supported by IHR providers to explore alternative housing pathways.
- Had previous IHR accommodation terminated by an IHR provider or accommodation provider within a six-month period, due to behaviour or damage to the property.
  - Customers will be expected to disclose if they have had IHR accommodation terminated within a six-month period.
- Left safe and stable accommodation in favour of motel/hotel style accommodation.
  - Customers will be expected to disclose if they have left safe and stable accommodation.
- Has declined a reasonable offer of alternative accommodation within a six-month period, that may include safe accommodation with family and friends, private rental options, support accommodation, or social housing.
  - Customers will be expected to disclose if they have declined a reasonable offer of alternative accommodation within a six-month period.

Customers exited from social housing will only be able to access IHR assistance when delivered by an SHS. These customers have been unable to sustain a social housing tenancy, indicating that they require the additional support offered by SHS to sustain their housing.

## Scope

This policy does not apply to customers placed into short-term temporary accommodation provided by the department through other programs / funding, including but not limited to:

- Next Step Home
- Flexible Assistance Packages
- Disaster responses.

## Short-term temporary accommodation

If a customer is eligible for the IHR, short-term temporary accommodation (accommodation) including self-contained motel/hotel style accommodation should be sourced noting accommodation is subject to availability and must represent a cost-effective option.

The period for the initial booking in customer's name needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis but should be for no more than 2 weeks and there is a requirement for customers to engage with the IHR provider within five business days to commence planning their pathway into longer-term accommodation.

As IHR is short-term and temporary refuge accommodation, IHR providers must actively engage with customers for the duration of their IHR accommodation, to explore and promote all other housing pathways.

Temporary structures including tents, swags or other improvised dwelling, are not considered appropriate accommodation options and must not be utilised.

In seeking an accommodation option, consideration should be given to a customer's household composition, locational needs to remain close to supports and services, and the opportunity to have any family pets remain with the household. If family pets cannot be accommodated, customers should be encouraged to explore pet boarding families and/or temporary re-homing options.

While a customer's preferences will be considered, they cannot be guaranteed. One reasonable offer of IHR accommodation will be made, with discretion in exceptional circumstances e.g. domestic and family violence. If the reasonable offer is declined by the customer, no further offers of IHR will be made. It is expected that a customer will be asked if a reasonable offer of IHR has been refused.

Under the IHR, customers:

- must be advised prior to accepting IHR accommodation that it reflects short-term and temporary refuge accommodation and is not a long-term housing solution
- must have identification to access the accommodation
- are responsible for their transport to the accommodation unless offered by an IHR provider, noting referrals to support services can be made for a customer experiencing financial hardship
- will not be guaranteed any accommodation for a specified period or in a specific location, as all accommodation is subject to availability
- cannot request the IHR provider to take over an existing accommodation booking they have self-funded
- must check in and stay full-time at the accommodation that has been offered through IHR, not doing so will result in assistance under IHR ceasing
- are to pay a contribution towards their accommodation after five days in the IHR, direct to the hotel/motel and from a base of 0 to 25 per cent of gross assessable household income, unless extenuating circumstances apply e.g. customer is not in receipt of Centrelink payments.

Where customers have support needs and complexities associated with securing and sustaining accommodation, consideration should be given to a referral to Service Integration for care coordination.

## Residing in short-term temporary accommodation

Customers residing in accommodation provided through the IHR are:

- to be advised prior to accepting IHR accommodation that it reflects short-term and temporary refuge accommodation and is not a long-term housing solution
- required to comply with the terms and conditions determined by the motel/hotel provider
- must demonstrate they have lodged an application for social housing within 7 days of being accepted for an IHR, failure to do so may result in their IHR accommodation ceasing. Customers must disclose to an IHR provider, when asked, the status of their social housing application.

- required to pay for any charges incurred during their stay which are in excess of their room rate, e.g. phone bills, extra cleaning
- responsible for actively seeking alternative accommodation and engaging with the IHR provider and other services for assistance
- required to respond to the IHR provider's requests for contact and information within 5 business days of a request being made
- required to advise the IHR provider of any changes in their circumstances
- unable to add any additional individuals to an accommodation booking unless prior endorsement has been provided by the IHR provider.

Failure to comply with these requirements or a breach of the motel/hotel's rules and regulations will result in assistance through the IHR ceasing.

## Transitioning from short-term temporary accommodation

Customers will be actively supported through pathway planning, to transition from assistance provided through the IHR, into alternative accommodation, this includes:

- accommodation with family and friends
- support accommodation
- accredited residential services
- private rental options (e.g. headlease housing or a private rental tenancy with assistance through the department's private rental products)
- offers of social housing.

Customers transitioning from IHR assistance into alternative accommodation will be encouraged to accept a referral to service providers delivering tenancy sustainment support.

Customers must remove all personal belongings from their accommodation upon exit, any items left will be disposed of.

Motel/hotel providers or IHR providers can conclude assistance through the IHR in the following circumstances:

- advice the customer is not eligible for social housing
- failure to actively engage with the provider within 5 business days
- failure to pay the nominated co-contribution amount for the provision of accommodation
- a breach of the motel/hotel's rules and regulations
- negligence resulting in damage, deliberate damage or behaviours that contribute to a disturbance and/or breach of hotel/motel guidelines by the customer or their visitors
- aggressive or abusive behaviours, or harassment towards other residents of any motel/hotel, IHR providers and motel/hotel staff
- criminal or illegal activity within IHR funded accommodation (including alleged criminal and illegal activity)
- refusal of a reasonable offer of alternative housing assistance (as described above); noting the Cancelling Social Housing Application Policy remains applicable and a customer's application for social housing will only be cancelled if they refuse two offers of housing for ground considered to be unreasonable.

Customers may voluntarily end assistance through the IHR. In these circumstance customers must notify the IHR provider of the intention to do so in order to cancel any accommodation booking.

## Review rights

The application of the guidelines is subject to discretion by an appropriately delegated officer, acknowledging all customer's individual circumstances.

If a customer is dissatisfied with a decision relating to assistance provided through the IHR, the customer can make a complaint to the IHR provider. All complaints will be managed and reviewed in accordance with the IHR provider's Complaints Management policy.

## SHS Funding

IHR providers must provide an IHR response regardless of a household's composition.

Under the Homelessness Program, the department provides funding to SHS to deliver the IHR via two components – emergency brokerage and support worker funding.

If an SHS determines it no longer has the capacity to deliver the IHR program, because it has expended its funding, is unable to attract suitably qualified staff to deliver the program, is unable to secure short-term temporary accommodation, or for any other reason, the Chief Executive Officer from the SHS must formally write to the department of their intention to cease additional intake into the provision of service. Service provision must continue prior to this notification being provided to the department.

### Emergency brokerage

Emergency brokerage enables SHS to purchase essential tenancy commencement and/or sustainment items to assist households to access or keep a home and the purchase of accommodation. Additionally, brokerage can be used for goods and services that affect or support the transition of households from temporary accommodation into a stable, longer-term housing option.

The following is a non-exclusive list of eligible emergency brokerage expenditure items, where this secures an accommodation response or sustains existing accommodation:

- purchase of essential services that are not offered by the agency or available from a free service including, but not limited to, health and allied health, medications, hygiene, mental health and alcohol and other drug services, childcare services, legal services, pet boarding
- tenancy commencement or sustainment items, such as the payment of utility bills, moving costs, payment of bond (if ineligible for a bond loan), payment of private rental market rent arrears, purchase of material aid such as food and white goods, travel costs for households to access alternative, safe and sustainable housing options, including interstate and overseas.

Before funding tenancy commencement or sustainment items through the IHR, it is expected a customer will be assisted by an SHS delivering tenancy sustainment support.

Emergency brokerage funds are not to be directed toward administrative/overhead costs. Some provisioning for these costs is made through the support worker funding component.

### Support worker funding

Support worker funding enables the SHS to employ professional workers to deliver case management support to households in accommodation to assist them sustain their accommodation and deliver pro-active assistance to transition to safe and stable housing.

The SHS should primarily use this funding to employ additional support workers or increase the hours of support workers. It is reasonable for these support workers to be engaged in the following work:

- case management and support of people in accommodation, with a focus on supporting households with short-term stability in the accommodation
- developing and implementing plans for the transition of households from accommodation, or other crisis accommodation into safe, long-term accommodation and the execution of these plans
- engaging with a range of stakeholders, local government and sectoral service providers and other community support, to source additional support services and transitional services.
- acknowledging the increased administrative workload of the IHR, funding for support workers includes an increased amount for on-costs including administration to assist with:
  - sourcing short-term temporary accommodation (for example, booking and purchasing accommodation, establishing bulk purchase arrangements with suppliers where appropriate)
  - completing required IHR reporting.

Support worker capacity allocated under IHR must not be responsible for the delivery of services funded under other SHS.

## Reporting and Data Capture

All IHR providers must use the department's CMS for entering customer details and case work. Data entry must be accurate and timely to support the effective delivery of IHR.

SHS in receipt of IHR funds are required to complete the IHR Brokerage Reporting template for all expenditure.

Each organisation is required to submit the completed IHR Brokerage Report template to their Contract and Partnership Officer within the timeframe listed in their Funding Schedule.

SHS are required to submit acquittals according to the requirements of their Funding Schedules.

SHS must continue to capture all customer data for customers supported in their reporting to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC).

### **Activities delivered by SHS support workers**

Activity delivered by support workers is reported in accordance with SHS Data and Performance Data in section 6.7. Data, statements and reports are to be submitted according to the Homelessness Program Funding Schedule.

## SHS Payments and contracting.

The department is responsible for determining the allocation of IHR funding to SHS across Queensland. Determinations regarding allocations of IHR funding are based on experienced demand and more general considerations of demand for homelessness services across Queensland, alongside the capacity of the broader housing and homelessness service system in relevant locations.

The department will make contact with organisations delivering SHS for the provision of IHR funding through the most appropriate method, which the department will determine on a case-by-case basis.

Funding allocation and contractual processes will take into consideration surplus IHR funds from prior years where practicable.

## Related guidelines

The IHR Operational Guidelines are in addition to the Homelessness Programs Guidelines, Specifications and Requirements [Homelessness Program Guidelines \(The Homelessness Programs Guidelines\)](#).

## Further information and assistance

SHS should contact their local Contract and Partnership Officer for further information.