SA Housing Register

Information about the replacement of the community and public housing registers into a single register for people seeking housing assistance

FOR CONSULTATION PURPOSES, 7 July 2019

This paper has been written for the purposes of consultation with community housing providers. It continues to be updated through workshops and feedback from the sector.

1. What is the SA Housing Register?

The SA Housing Register is a web based platform that allows registrations for both public and community housing to be processed in the one system.

Public and community housing providers use the register to select tenants for public and community housing and identify under which program an allocation has been made.

Providers of transitional and supported housing also use the register to record housing allocations.

2. What is changing?

The new SA Housing Register will combine the functions of the community housing register (CHCR) and public housing register. Currently, customers can apply once for public and community housing, but the lists are administered on two different systems with some variations in registration forms.

The new register will combine and simplify the registration forms. It will also provide better controls to ensure that the register is maintained, providing current information regarding people's needs and allocations across the various publicly funded housing programs. These features will in turn support a more efficient service and data return.

The SA Government have purchased an off the shelf web based system used in many other states, which will be implemented in 2020/21. Before then, work is underway to align information in the current systems and prepare for the changes.

3. Are housing providers required to select tenants from the SA Register?

For most programs funded by the South Australian government, a customer must be selected from the register when a public or community housing property becomes vacant.

There is a requirement to use the common register for all properties with a state government financial interest. Affected properties and programs are set out in relevant lease, contract, or master agreements. Where a provider has rental properties that are not subject to a state government contractual agreement, they may choose to, but are not required to use the register.

Households with urgent housing needs and long-term barriers to accessing or maintaining private housing are offered housing ahead of others.

As a new feature of the SA Register, providers will be required to select customers for allocation according to the criteria for each program, and record reasons for bypassing

shortlisted registrations, ensuring transparency in allocation practices.

It will continue to recognise that some housing providers also apply their own eligibility and placement criteria when selecting from the register.

4. How do people at risk of homelessness with an urgent, immediate need get assisted?

Housing SA and homelessness services, including the Homeless Gateways, assist people in housing crisis where there is an immediate risk to health or safety. Assistance can include emergency accommodation such as hotel/motel stays or crisis accommodation.

Transitional housing (at risk of homelessness) and supported housing (chronic homeless) which provide support services and temporary housing up to 18 months may also be available.

When a vacancy becomes available in supported or transitional accommodation, an allocation is nominated through **service panels** which meet regularly to prioritise service responses to people at risk, including case management and commitment of support services. The transitional or supported housing allocation is recorded in the register.

A customer housed through emergency, supported or transitional programs will typically also register for a public or community housing allocation if they require longer term housing.

5. Which housing providers are able to add or update the SA Housing Register?

A housing provider must be an approved Primary Contact Organisation (PCO) to add and update registrations.

PCOs will provide a consistent first point of contact for customers accessing the publicly funded housing system. They will assess potential risks a customer may be facing (initial triage) and ensure warm referral (i.e. with phone call) to support services or emergency

services when there are risks to health or safety. Once registered for housing, the PCO is the contact point for the registrant and is responsible for the ongoing management of their registration.

Ongoing management includes updating the register as people's circumstances change (eg housing needs assessments and contact information) and undertaking annual audits of registrations to keep information current.

The PCOs will limit access to the register to authorised users. Authorised users will be required to attend mandatory training to use the register and agree to the terms and conditions relating to system use.

All Housing SA offices and Community Housing Providers registered as a Tier 1 or Tier 2 providers are approved PCOs. Other providers that agree to the terms and are capable of supporting the PCO service model may also be approved.

In principle 'a no wrong door principle' applies for PCOs. However, some specialised agencies (for example, a disability only or small regional provider) acting as a PCO may not be required to register a household that does not meet their eligibility. Some agencies may also utilise their support agencies as the customer's access point.

Further, agencies are not expected to provide access services that are disproportionate to their share of all social housing dwellings.

A registration with a PCO can be transferred to another PCO if management of that registration is no longer appropriate (eg customer needs change). This should be done with the consent of the receiving agency.

All PCOs will have access to key information and contact details for customers on the register, however they will only update information for the registrations they manage.

Other providers will continue to have access to the register for shortlisting and to record allocations.

6. Can a support service add a person to the register on behalf of a PCO?

A support service can assist a customer to register by undertaking a housing need assessment, which may include a 'recommended' category outcome.

PCOs will have the option of providing support partners with access to the system so that they can enter ROI and HNA details directly into the system.

The PCO, not the support agency, is responsible for determining and assigning a category of need and registering the application. With consent of the customer, the PCO may contact the support service for more information if required or let them know what the customer's registration status is. This will reduce the need for multiple support letters and reduce the need for the customer to retell their story.

7. Will homeless service providers still use H2H?

Yes. Homelessness providers will continue to use the H2H case management and referral system.

The PCO may also have limited access to information held in H2H. When registering a customer, a PCO will be able to identify if a customer has an active support provider to facilitate a joined up service response. The details of the support services a customer is receiving will only be available by contacting the support service and with customer's consent in line with legal requirements regarding the sharing of personal information.

8. Will eligibility or category assessment policy change?

No. There will be no change to existing public and social housing eligibility criteria as part of the system implementation.

However, the SA Housing Register will improve consistency and transparency across the

system as well as reduce administrative duplication.

Customers applying for public housing through the register (regardless if through Community housing or Housing SA) have the right of appeal regarding registration decisions (eg Category assessment) – refer to public housing appeals policy. There is no legislative appeal mechanism for Community Housing registrations, however customers have access to relevant customer complaint policy. Further information will be available for PCOs as part of training/ guidelines.

The registration forms will be simplified and aligned with the new system.

9. What is a Primary Contact Organisation (PCO) and how can customers access them?

A customer must submit a registration with a PCO to be placed on the SA Housing Register.

PCOs are approved by SAHT and provide a consistent and fair way for people to apply for housing assistance. A list of PCO offices across the state is available online at sa.gov.au.

Customers can also contact Housing SA on 131 299 for information, make an appointment or to confirm status of their registration.

10. Who doesn't need to register?

Private rental assistance for low income households is available without registering. People can apply online through PR Connect at sa.gov.au for help paying a bond or rent in advance. Centrelink recipients may also be eligible for rent assistance.

Consumer and Business Services provides free, advice and information about tenancy rights and obligations and help with disputes call 131 882.

The Tenancy Information and Advisory Service (TIAS) is a state-wide service which provides free and independent information, advice and advocacy to help people on low incomes to

sustain their tenancies in private rental, community housing or public housing.

For those wishing to buy a home of their own, information about the Affordable Homes program is available online and HomeStart Finance offers a range of loans specifically designed for low and moderate income households.

Education and support services for tenants who need help accessing or staying in their private rental can attend a Service Options meeting at Housing SA.

11. Can people without urgent and complex needs still register?

Yes. There are some programs which are made available for low income households (regardless of complexity of need) such as affordable rental, some low demand properties or co-op housing.

However, there is limited supply of properties compared to demand and customers are encouraged to access other forms of housing assistance such as private rental assistance.

12. What customer details will providers have access to?

Information relevant to the application and housing needs assessment will be available for providers to access online without the need to contact the PCO directly. Consultation with providers will occur on the specifics of this and informed by legal advice regarding information sharing guidelines and privacy principles.

13. What will change for people already registered?

Customers who have only one Housing SA or Community Housing Provider as their PCO for their public and community housing registrations don't have to do anything as their registration will be migrated to the new system.

Customers who have two PCOs - Housing SA for their public housing registration and a community housing provider for their CHCR

registration - will have their details merged in by March 2020 and assigned one PCO.

Customers will receive a letter advising them of the change and asking them to update their information if required with their PCO.

Customers with a category one registration that haven't been assessed within the past year will be contacted to have their current needs reviewed. Information will also be provided regarding other services that may be available for them.

Customers on either register will require a new needs assessment for their category one status to continue beyond a year.

Regular audits will be undertaken to ensure currency of those registered. If a customer doesn't respond, in line with current policy, their registration may be deferred or cancelled.

14. Will providers be required to keep hard copy of applications?

The Authority is seeking to gain certification from State Records for the new BST system to enable hard copies to be destroyed. If approved, the Authority will also manage anything that a Provider upload to the portal (the sharing makes them the Authority's document as well).

The Authority has no responsibility for a provider's documents that aren't uploaded. This may include support services or other customer information which is inappropriate to be shared.

Providers will need to seek their own advice with regard to retention of its hard copy files.

15. How will housing providers be involved in setting up the SA register?

A series of workshops are being held with community housing providers and SAHT staff to consult on the requirements for the new register.

In 2019, configuration and system testing will occur. In addition, SAHT is working individually

with community housing providers to update and start aligning customer details currently held across the two registers.

Training for staff in public and community housing on the new SA Housing Register will be a combination of online and face to face sessions in 2020 and will continue into the future.

The new web based SA Housing Register will be available at end 2020/ early 2021 as part of the broader replacement of the public housing mainframe system.

16. How will we prevent duplicate customers from being created on the register?

Before entering a customer, the PCO must first do a search to check if the customer already exists. A customer may be a head tenant or any household member. Fuzzy matching can be checked against name, contact details and date of birth.

Connect will assign customers with a new number. PCOs will be able to search by historical CHCR registration number for those listed on the register prior to go-live.

17. When will customer self-serve be available?

The Customer Self Serve portal will go-live at the same time as the Community Housing portal. Customers will be able to select their preferred method of communication (SMS, letter, email) and also be able to log in line to see the status of their application and associated documents.

In 2021 (tbc) Customers will be able to apply online and update registrations. Other innovations such as choice based letting are under consideration.

18. Will PCOs be required to provide customers with information on co-ops or other affordable housing options?

PCOs will be able to direct customers to general information regarding other housing options as updated on sa.gov.au. PCOs are not expected to be experts or provide specific advice regarding alternative housing options, however will have the ability to list registrants for co-op housing.

Shortlists can be targeted to show registrants who have been marked as being specifically interested in co-op housing.

19. What system administration access will PCOs have?

A PCO will be given a single administration account, which will be able to add and delete users. The PCO can also manage functionality when a staff member is out of the office to reallocate actions or approvals.

Automatic password resets are provided through the system.

A PCO can have multiple offices or a single office set up (referred to as admin units). The pros and cons of this will be discussed with individual providers.

Only Housing SA can add or delete a property in Connect (consistent with CHCR).

20. Can a PCO override a category assessment derived by Connect?

Yes, however, approval of the PCO's operations manager/ team leader (or equivalent) is required for any manual assignments to Category 1 or Category 2.

21. Can a PCO see properties managed by other agencies?

No. A PCO can only see properties that it either owns or manages.

22. What filters can be applied when shortlisting customers?

Most filters currently used by CHCR will be available in Connect. This will be workshopped further with providers.

23. Will Connect be able to integrate digitally with a providers software to minimise double entry?

Not in 2020. However, if this is a shared longer term goal of providers, the Connect system has technical capability to support the development of APIs. Interfaces can be placed on the program's roadmap into the future. Agencies interested in pursuing should contact the BST team.

24. What help/ technical support will be available?

Housing SA will provide first level support for users as well as regular training opportunities. An online user help manual will also be provided to support agencies. Higher level technical support is provided by the vendor Northgate Services. A single contact number will be available.

25. How can providers get more information?

For further information you can contact the BST Connect team by email: housingsabstocm@sa.gov.au

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