

Accessibility Modifications Policy

1. Policy Statement

Uniting Vic.Tas (Uniting) provides tenancy and asset management services for community housing to Uniting Housing Victoria (Uniting Housing), a Registered Housing Provider.

This policy explains how Uniting receives and assesses requests for accessibility modifications to Uniting community housing dwellings, to address the needs of renters, and/or household members, with disability.

Uniting promotes and respects the human rights of all renters and is committed to responding to the diverse needs of renters.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Uniting Housing community housing tenancies which include, but are not limited to, tenancies in:

- Properties owned by Uniting Housing (Victoria) and Uniting Vic.Tas for use as long-term community housing (social and affordable); and
- Properties leased by Uniting Housing (Victoria) from Homes Victoria or other owners for long term community housing (social and affordable).

This policy does not apply to transitional housing programs or temporary crisis accommodation.

3. Guiding principles

In applying this policy Uniting will ensure:

- All renters are treated with compassion and sensitivity
- We focus on the individual needs and circumstances of renters and how their needs may change over time
- We use fair, consistent and accountable processes and renters are kept well informed about these processes
- We help renters understand their rights and responsibilities under their Residential Rental Agreement
- We meet our contractual, legal, and regulatory duties and obligations

4. Types of accessibility modifications

Modification works can range from minor works (e.g. grab rails, lever taps, changes to floor and window coverings) to structural works such as major kitchen and bathroom changes, door widening and ramps.

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Some structural works may not be feasible in the current dwelling, depending on the nature of the works and the physical/structural constraints (including site constraints) to undertaking works. The cost of major works and the availability of funds to meet costs will also be a consideration in determining the feasibility of proceeding with modifications.

5. Funding of accessibility modifications

Uniting will support renters to access external funding for home modifications where possible and appropriate. External funding sources include:

- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- Aged Care programs including Commonwealth Home Support Program, Home Care packages and Short Term Restorative Care program
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Transport Accident Commission
- Worksafe Victoria

If external funding is not available to pay or partly pay for accessibility modifications, renters can ask Uniting to fund the works required.

6. Responding to accessibility needs

Uniting renters with accessibility needs may require changes to the structure, layout, fixtures and fittings of their home to enable safe access and comfortable movement in their home.

Uniting will ensure that requests for accessibility modifications are responded to in a fair, transparent and systematic way. Options, choices and decision-making processes will be clearly explained.

Where appropriate evidence of need is provided and where possible and justifiable, Uniting will provide dwelling modifications and/or provide consent for modifications funded by an external agency (such as the NDIS).

In some cases, and in consultation with the renter, alternative housing may be a more feasible or preferred option to meeting the household's housing needs than undertaking significant property modifications.

7. Requesting modifications

To request accessibility modifications, renters submit a Modifications Application form to Uniting. Unless agreed otherwise by Uniting and the renter, all requests will need to be prescribed by an Occupational Therapist, or other suitably qualified professional, with a report outlining the need for the works and expected benefits/outcomes for the renter household.

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The following matters may be considered in assessing an application for modifications for a renter or household member:

- nature of the impairment
- ability to use/ not use current home environment
- extent of modifications required
- supporting documentation from an occupational therapist or other relevant professional
- suitability of the property for the proposed modification/s
- length of tenancy
- availability of other property options that may be more suitable
- eligibility for external funding for major modifications
- minor modification works that Uniting can provide

Modification applications will be considered on the merits of the individual request in terms of the beneficial outcomes for the renter household.

However there will be circumstances where the requested works are not feasible for Uniting to provide, including:

- The works require significant structural changes due to the structure, design and/or floorplan of the property
- Works are significantly hampered by the dwelling site, e.g. slope of land
- The works are specialised and/or structural and/or substantial
- The works are prohibitively expensive for Uniting to install and maintain at this property
- The property is owned by another party who does not give permission for the works to proceed

If Uniting decides that major modifications would not be feasible to provide, Uniting will advise the applicant in writing including the specific reasons for the decision that the works cannot be undertaken.

The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with disabilities in many areas of public life, including access to goods and services. Community housing providers are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to help a person with a disability access suitable housing, through allocation processes and provision of home modifications where required.

However, the Act provides an exception if the cost or difficulties of providing access will place an unjustifiable hardship on the organisation (such as high cost of works to provide dwelling modifications).

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8. Undertaking modification works

All modification works will be decided according to the relevant Uniting delegation. Where major modification works are approved, all designs and works will be carried out by suitably qualified and accredited professionals.

Where particular expertise for installing certain modifications is required, Uniting will engage builders specialising in disability modifications to complete the works to best ensure that adjustments are safe and effective. Additionally, Uniting will be responsible for the compliance of the works with the *Building Act 1993* and National Construction Code.

Works funded externally

If a renter proceeds with modifications funded and organised externally, Uniting must provide written permission for works to proceed. The renter must provide evidence prior to the works commencing that works will be completed by suitably qualified persons and will comply with the *Building Act 1993* and National Construction Code. Where external funding covers the cost of maintaining modifications, the ongoing costs will be the renter’s responsibility.

Removal of modifications

Where an agreement is made for accessibility modifications, this will include specific details in relation to retention or removal of modifications at the end of the tenancy and who is responsible for the removal (renter or Uniting).

Considerations about keeping or removing modifications include:

- If the modifications would be of benefit to future occupants of the dwelling
- Ongoing costs and liabilities with retaining the modifications
- Removal and restoration works and costs
- Availability for external funding to remove the modifications

9. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Accessibility modifications	Changes to the structure, layout, fixtures, or fittings of homes of older people and people living with disability to enable safe access and comfortable movement throughout frequently used areas. For the purposes of this Policy, accessibility modifications include assistive technology
Affordable housing	Rental housing where rent is charged at less than market level

Term	Meaning
Community housing	Rental housing owned and/or managed by a registered community housing provider
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
Occupational Therapist	Occupational Therapists (OTs) work with people whose health or disability makes it hard to do things. OTs can identify strengths and difficulties and prescribe supports to enable everyday life at home
Structures, fixtures and fittings	For this policy, structure generally means: all components of walls, floors, ceilings, and roofs including linings and/or coverings thereto; Fixtures generally means: toilets, basins, baths, or similar elements not forming part of the home's structure but require connection to the structure through, for example, plumbing components; Fittings generally means: kitchen benches, bathroom cupboards, or similar necessary elements that are required for a home to function but that can be relatively easily removed. In practice, all terms are often used interchangeably
Unjustifiable hardship	the cost or difficulties of providing access (through home modifications) will place an unjustifiable hardship on a person or organisation
Transport Accident Commission	A Victorian government agency which promotes road safety and supports those who have been injured on Victorian roads.
WorkSafe	Victoria's workplace injury insurer and workplace health and safety regulator

10. Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on the Uniting Housing and Uniting Vic. Tas websites

If you require this policy in a language other than English, or in accessible format please contact Uniting.

This policy will be fully reviewed within 3 years of the approval date.

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11. Legislation/Regulations

This policy implements the obligations of Uniting under:

- Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Victoria)
- Housing Act 1983 (Victoria)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Victoria)
- Building Act 1993 (Victoria)
- National Construction Code
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 1023 (Commonwealth)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

12. Related Documents

Eligibility and allocations policy and procedure
Repairs and maintenance policy and procedure

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