

Specialist Disability Housing

Purpose

This policy outlines how Bridge Housing operates the Specialist Disability Housing (SDH) Program in order to meet our legal and contractual requirements.

Scope

The policy applies to all Specialist Disability Housing properties managed by Bridge Housing. The policy applies to all Bridge Housing staff and contractors, Specialist Disability Housing applicants and tenants.

Policy Statement

Specialist Disability Housing is designed to improve the lives of people with extreme functional impairment and/or very high support needs by providing access to appropriate rental housing in the community.

Specialist Disability Housing is a separate Bridge Housing program. As a separate program stream, it sits alongside and builds upon Bridge Housing's existing work with tenants with lower levels of disability support needs housed that are housed in social and affordable housing.

The Specialist Disability Housing Program ('SDH Program') provides homes for vulnerable people with disability disadvantaged in the current housing market. Specialist Disability Housing properties are built specifically to meet the needs of tenants that, due to their level of impairment, are usually unable to be housed in the standard forms of housing currently available in the market.

Due to the level of need of tenants, Specialist Disability Housing is usually linked to formal support services through ongoing partnership with specialist disability support providers. Support providers ensure that tenants have the necessary support they need to live independently within the community.

NSW and Commonwealth Policy Settings

Bridge Housing operates its Specialist Disability Housing program under two main policy settings, both of which have different contractual arrangements.

Commonwealth Government Policy - National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Policy & Guidelines

Bridge Housing is a registered Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) provider under the NDIS. As a registered SDA provider we are required to operate under the NDIS Act 2013, and relevant NDIS Rules. The NDIA has established general policy and operational guidelines that all SDA providers must adhere to. Under the NDIS, the accommodation provider must work in partnership with registered Supported Independent Living (SIL) provider who provides specialist support to enable people with disability to live independently in the community.

NSW Government Policy

All specialist disability housing owned by the NSW Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ) is managed by the non-government sector. The NSW Government's Disability Accommodation Contract Management Framework outlines the conditions under which Accommodation Providers (such as Bridge Housing) must operate.

Bridge Housing manages 28 group homes across Sydney on behalf of DCJ in partnership with Achieve Australia. Under this arrangement Bridge Housing is the NDIS SDA Provider and is responsible for property and tenancy management. Achieve Australia is the SIL Provider with overarching responsibility for disability support provision.

For any current or future vacancies:

- Eligibility is in accordance with the NDIS SDA and Reasonable Rent Contribution policy
- Allocations are administered by Achieve Australia, with oversight by Bridge Housing
- The NSW Government approved Accommodation Agreement must be utilised in place of a Residential Tenancy Agreement.

Allocation of properties and management of vacancies

Applications for vacancies are managed on a day-to-day basis by the relevant partnering SIL Provider, with oversight by Bridge Housing. To minimise property vacancy period and ensure best tenancy fit, Specialist Disability Housing property vacancies are advertised by our SIL Provider partners through a number of channels, including:

- Membership of disability support, support coordination and disability advocacy peaks to promote vacancies via member networks
- Advertising vacancies on key disability accommodation real estate websites (e.g. Nest, the Housing Hub)
- Advertising on Bridge Housing and partnering SIL Provider's website and social media, and
- Approaching local disability support providers and support coordinators with disability accommodation waiting lists for potential applicants.

Residential Tenancy Agreement/Occupancy Agreement

Bridge Housing supports the use of Residential Tenancy Agreements where tenants are able to meet all their tenancy obligations with support. Where tenants are not able to meet their tenancy obligations with support, an occupancy agreement (called an 'Accommodation Agreement') is used.

The contract arrangements for all NSW Government Disability Accommodation Transfer tenancies require use of an NSW Government-approved Accommodation Agreement.

Tenant change of circumstances & information provision

Tenants are responsible for notifying Bridge Housing of any changes to their circumstances and providing necessary information to gauge SDH Program eligibility, including:

- Notifying if planning any holidays or other absences
- Giving the required notice if intending to end Accommodation Agreement/lease
- Providing a copy of your NDIS Plan (or an extract that relates to your SDA payments and eligibility) or your COS Plan
- Providing an updated version of your NDIS Plan (or an extract that relates to your SDA payments and eligibility) or your COS Plan in a timely matter when your Plan changes
- Notifying of any changes you would like made to your NDIS Plan or COS Plan relating to your ongoing eligibility for SDA funding, the type of SDA you are approved for and the amount of funding in your Plan
- Notifying if something affects your ability to live in the house safely
- Notifying if you stop getting funding for Supported Independent Living (SIL)
- Providing updates to information about you, your family, your guardianship or financial trustee arrangements, if or when this influences housing arrangements and/or accommodation payments
- Notifying if there is any other change in circumstances that may influence your housing situation and/or your accommodation payments

Rent setting

Rental bonds

Bridge Housing does not collect rental bonds for SDH Program tenancies.

Rent charges

Under the SDH Program, tenant rent is usually set according to the NDIS Reasonable Rent Contribution (RRC) policy. In line with this the following rent settings apply to SDH Program tenants:

- In the vast majority of cases, RRC is calculated at 25% of the basic single rate of the Disability Support Pension (DSP), plus 25% of the Pension Supplement, plus 100% of CRA.
- For tenants under 21 years of age, the same RRC calculation applies, but is based on the single rate of Youth DSP and the Youth Supplement.
- Where tenants are not eligible for DSP, the RRC is set at 25% of the current basic single rate of the DSP, plus 25% of the Pension Supplement, plus 100% of CRA, if they are eligible for CRA.

Rent payment period

Rent is charged on a weekly basis. Rent payments can be paid on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis provided it remains two weeks in advance.

Rent arrears

Bridge Housing will work proactively to manage tenant accounts so that all tenants are 2 weeks in advance at all times. For arrears 3 days and over, Bridge Housing will advise via phone call to tenant/guardian that the account is in arrears and offer ways to remedy. For all arrears over 14 days with no repayment plan in place Bridge Housing will issue written notice to the tenant/guardian.

Review of Market Rent and Eligibility

Market rent or maximum price¹ for SDA properties is reviewed annually in line with CPI changes and /or through a Rent Review Event issued by the NDIA. Tenants will be given 60 days' notice of a market rent increase and requested to provide updated income details every 6 months, in line with the Commonwealth's changes in pensions and benefits to be assessed for the RRC. If they continue to meet the eligibility criteria they may be approved for an extension on their current lease.

To ensure rents are set accurately, Bridge Housing will:

- Agree the market rent for all properties according to Bridge Housing PBI status requirements and adjusted annually to account for changes in CPI, and
- Confirm the Reasonable Rent Contribution (RRC) amount relevant to the tenant based on current NDIA information

Ending an Accommodation Agreement / Lease Termination

Tenant's right to end an Accommodation Agreement

A tenant can end an Accommodation Agreement and vacate the property at any time by giving Bridge Housing 60 days' notice in writing of intention of vacate. Bridge Housing staff will follow up with tenant/advocate and the relevant SIL Provider to confirm this intention to vacate and to schedule an exit interview, if possible. The tenant will be required to make all the Accommodation Payments until the end of their notice period, unless Bridge Housing agrees in writing that they do not have to. Bridge housing will perform an exit interview with the tenant, tenant representative (if applicable) and the SIL provider to ensure that the exit is positive, and to provide feedback to us around our service delivery.

Bridge Housing's right to end an Accommodation Agreement

Before giving the tenant notice to end their Accommodation Agreement for any reason, Bridge Housing must arrange a meeting with their SIL Service Provider, the tenant (and/or representative), a NDIS Support Coordinator or a COS Support Coordinator and other relevant supports to consider whether the tenant requires additional supports to enable them to remain at the property or if relocation is a more appropriate solution.

¹ Maximum price or market rent for a SDA property is based on the maximum total SDA payments plus maximum total RRC payments.

If the issues are resolved, Accommodation Agreement will continue. If the issues are not resolved a further meeting will be held to determine next steps to end the Agreement with appropriate notice (at least 90 days). Where an Accommodation Agreement ends, Bridge Housing and the NDIA will support the tenant to identify alternative accommodation and relocate.

Bridge Housing may end an Accommodation Agreement with less notice if:

- a) The tenant uses the property for an illegal purpose;
- b) The tenant has not paid the Accommodation Payments and any other payments required under their Agreement and do not pay these amounts within 14 days of receiving an overdue notice;
- c) The tenant ceases to have SDA as a reasonable and necessary support in their NDIS or COS plan; or
- d) The tenant cannot be supported at the property without serious risk of harm to themselves, staff or other occupants.

Termination of a Residential Tenancy Agreement

Bridge Housing may terminate a tenant's lease if there is a breach of the Residential Tenancy Agreement. Before giving the tenant notice to end their tenancy, Bridge Housing must arrange a meeting with their SIL Service Provider, the tenant (and/or representative), a NDIS Support Coordinator or a COS Support Coordinator and other relevant supports to consider whether the tenant requires additional supports to enable them to remain at the property or if relocation is a more appropriate solution.

If the issues are resolved, the tenancy will continue. If the issues are not resolved a further meeting will be held to determine next steps to end the Agreement with appropriate notice (at least 90 days). Where an Residential Tenancy Agreement ends, Bridge Housing and the NDIA will support the tenant to identify alternative accommodation and relocate.

Feedback, Compliments and Complaints

If you wish to give Bridge Housing feedback or make a complaint about your specialist disability housing, your SIL provider or another resident in your home, please contact us on T: 02 8324 0800 or email: customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au.

Bridge Housing's Specialist Disability Housing Officer can register your complaint and investigate the matter for you.

If you are not satisfied with Bridge Housing's response to your feedback or complaint, or you do not feel comfortable raising it, you can make a complaint to the NDIS Commission by calling 1800 035 544 or visiting <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/about/complaints> to complete the online complaint form.

If you have a NDIS plan and you are not satisfied or do not want to talk to the SIL Service Provider or Bridge Housing directly, you can contact the National Disability Insurance Agency by calling 1800 800 110, visiting one of their offices in person, or visiting [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au) for further information.

If you have a COS plan and you are not satisfied or do not want to talk to the SIL Service Provider or Bridge Housing directly, you can contact the Commonwealth Department of Health by calling 1800 020 103 or visiting <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/programs-services/commonwealth-continuity-of-support-programme> for further information.