

# Housing

GETTING STARTED



2

# **This is Booklet 2 in the Getting Started Series.**

**Getting Started is a guide  
for people leaving prison.**

## **Booklets**

- 1** The First Week
- 2** Housing
- 3** Identification
- 4** Alcohol and Other Drugs
- 5** Centrelink
- 6** Community Corrections & Parole
- 7** Employment
- 8** Returning to Family
- 9** Women's Transition
- 10** Indigenous

## **Information Sheets**

- a** Money Matters
- b** Emergency Relief
- c** Getting Support
- d** Rights and Legal Assistance
- e** Health

This Booklet was last updated in September 2010. If any information has changed or you notice an error please contact Corrections Victoria on (03) 8684 6600 or email: [corrections@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:corrections@justice.vic.gov.au)

## Contents

Houses and Homelessness .....	2
Housing Options .....	3
Housing and Parole Plans .....	4
Crisis Housing .....	6
Community Housing .....	6
Private Housing Market .....	7
Private rental (houses and units) .....	8
Bond Loan Scheme .....	11
Housing Support Services .....	12
THMs .....	12
Public Housing .....	13
Keeping your Public House .....	17
Transfers and mutual swaps .....	17
Office of Housing Debts .....	18
Important housing numbers .....	18
Housing Agencies .....	19
Other Useful Contacts.....	21

For many people, finding a place to live is the hardest part of getting out.

For some people it can be a Catch 22. To get parole you need a place to live but you can't find a place until you're out.

Getting the right help can be tricky. There are lots of services but never enough houses. You will need to hunt around and talk to as many people as you can.

Always have a back-up plan. Your first option may not work out.

### **Houses and Homelessness**

Even if you aren't sleeping on the street, you can still get help from a homeless service. If you are staying somewhere unsafe or temporary you can go to a homeless service.

If you are worried about your housing after prison, you can speak to the Prison Housing Worker at any stage in your sentence.

Sign up for Public Housing as early as possible. It won't help right away but could be very handy in the future.

If you live somewhere that is inappropriate, you will still be eligible for public housing after release. Inappropriate housing means is housing that is unsafe, temporary or doesn't meet your needs.

### **Housing Options**

If you are worried about housing after prison, speak to the Prison Housing Worker as soon as possible.

There are many options. Most of them take time to organise.

#### **Options include:**

- Crisis Housing
- Community Housing
- Rental
- Housing Support Services
- Public Housing

These options are available to people on Parole or straight release.

## Housing and Parole Plans

Where you are going to live is an important part of your Parole plan. The Parole Board want people to have stable housing.

You might have conditions about where you can live and who you can live with.

**Community Corrections** will check out the address you have given. They will tell the Parole Board if they think it is unsuitable or a false address.

If you think your housing plan might not work out, have a back-up plan. The Prison Housing Worker can help you organise this.

## Other options

If housing is holding up your Parole talk to the **Prison Housing Worker**. There may be a temporary option to help you get out. If you have a support worker, they can refer you to other support services.

## Other Conditions

If you are a sex offender the CCO will need to do an environmental scan on the address you give them before you can move in.

## Living with Family or Friends

Family and friends may be an option. They can be the most supportive option, but it doesn't always work out. Think carefully about it and talk to them before you get out.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are they the right people to live with?
- Will they understand my Parole requirements?
- Will they support me?
- Will everyone in the house get along?
- Will I have my own space?

*See Getting Started 8: Returning to Family for more advice and info.*

## **Crisis Housing**

Crisis housing is also called emergency housing. It is a short-term option for people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Crisis housing can be arranged by a housing service.

*If you have nowhere to stay, call your nearest Transitional Housing Management Service (THM) on 1800 825 955. This number will transfer you to the service closest to where you are calling from. After hours you will be transferred to St Kilda Crisis Centre.*

*Not all mobiles can call 1800 numbers.*

## **Community Housing**

Community housing is low cost housing managed by community organisations. It includes rooming houses, one and two bedroom units, individual houses and large shared houses for groups of people.

*To find out about the Community Housing Providers call your local housing service on 1800 825 955 or go to the website:*  
**<http://www.housingregistrar.vic.gov.au/agency-register/registered-agencies>**

## **Private Housing Market**

### **Private Rooming Houses**

Private rooming houses can be the easiest and quickest way to get accommodation. But the standard is sometimes very low and they can be expensive.

They can also be dangerous and overcrowded. Facilities are often broken. Some are fine to live in, if you're happy to share kitchens and bathrooms. If you get a chance, check them out before you hand over any money.

### **Caravan Parks**

Caravan parks can be a cheap place to stay and can be a short-term or long-term option. You can find caravan parks in the phone book or online but the Parole Board may not support this option for you.

## Private rental (houses and units)

### Private Rental

Private rental is your best option if you can afford it and if you have references. There are large upfront costs and rent is expensive. In most places a lot of people will apply for each house.

Landlords will ask for rental histories and references.

*Some will use a 'black list' to rule out people who have had previous problems with housing.*

Landlords also prefer tenants who work.

Homelessness services may be able to help with rent in advance and the Office of Housing has a bond loan scheme.

If you are about to be evicted, homeless services may be able to help you keep your lease.

### Finding a rental property

Common ways to find a private rental are:

- Websites such as: **www.domain.com.au**, **www.realestate.com.au**
- Contacting a Real Estate Agent (by phone, email or in person)
- Looking through the weekend newspapers and local papers
- Checking share-house notice boards

Keep a record of all the properties you have applied for. If an application is turned down, try to get a rejection letter from the Real Estate Agent. This will help you to get on the Office of Housing priority list.

### **Upfront costs**

Before you move into a private rental property, you will have to pay one month's rent in advance **and** a bond.

The bond is usually equal to one month's rent. It is like insurance. If you damage the house or owe rent the landlord can use the bond. If you look after the house and pay the rent you will get your bond back when you leave.

## Up front Cost of private rental

Rent/week	Bond	Advance Rent	Total
\$150	\$650	\$650	\$1300
\$200	\$867	\$867	\$1734
\$300	\$1300	\$1300	\$2600
\$400	\$1733	\$1733	\$3467

### Rental Costs

Sharing a house with other people is the cheapest way to rent. It also cuts down on set up costs (furniture and appliances).

It can be cheaper to live further from the centre of town. Look for places close to public transport and with jobs or services nearby.

If you are having trouble meeting the cost of living you can speak to a financial counsellor for advice.

**Call Credit Helpline: 1800 803 800**

## Bond Loan Scheme

If you don't have enough money to pay the bond, ask the **Office of Housing** for a bond loan.

If you are eligible it will cover some or all of your bond. You won't have to pay it back until you leave the tenancy. If you have paid all your rent and not damaged the house you will have nothing to pay back.

Apply to your local Office of Housing directly by filling in a form. If you need help, speak to a housing agency.

If you already owe the Office of Housing money you will need to start repaying the debt to get a bond loan.

You must get the Bond Loan **before** paying the bond. The Office of Housing will not refund you for a bond you have already paid.

**Office of Housing 1300 650 172** or  
**(03) 9096 0000.**

## Housing Support Services

There are many different housing support services. These include crisis accommodation, transitional housing and other housing related supports.

The first place to go for help is your local **Transitional Housing Services** (THMs).

### THMs

THM housing workers will assess your housing needs and help you find the right option. They can also assist with applications for the Public Housing waiting list.

They are also a good place to find general information about welfare services in your area. Some have food vouchers or they can tell you where to find emergency relief.

THMs can sometimes help you to pay rent in advance or to pay back rent you owe.

Call **1800 825 955** to find your nearest service.

There are specialist THMs that are an extra resource for some people. For example, Women's Housing Limited provides services for women.

### Public Housing

The **Office of Housing** has long-term housing for people on low incomes.

There is public housing in most suburbs. It can be in high-rise apartments or houses.

Rent is about 30% of your income (including Centrelink payments).

The wait can be over 10 years. This depends on how many people you plan to live with and where you want to live. Ask the Office of Housing or the Housing Worker about areas with the shortest waiting times.

### Applying for Public Housing

Apply directly to your local **Office of Housing**. If you need assistance you can speak to a Housing Worker at a THM service.

## What you'll need

- Identification
- A debts repayment plan (you don't have to start paying until you are released)

## Applying from Prison

You can apply at any time during your sentence, so get on the Public Housing list as early as possible.

Everyone who applies will go on to the general waiting list or 'wait-turn' list. This is for anyone on a low income.

If you have special needs or a history of housing problems you can get on the early housing waiting lists.

## Early Housing Waiting Lists

You can apply for early housing 6 weeks before your release or after you get out. It takes time to complete an application so you should speak to a Prison Housing Worker at least 3 months before you get out.

To get on the early housing list, you need to be:

- Homeless
- Living in unsafe housing
- Living in unstable or temporary accommodation
- Able to show a history of housing breakdowns (including living on the street and couch-surfing)

A housing worker will need to assess you for early housing. For more information, contact your local Office of Housing or Homelessness Service.

Waiting times for early housing are generally more than 12 months, although it depends on the area and type of house you need.

*You can check your place on the list by calling the Office of Housing on 1300 650 172*

## Offer of Housing

### **Do I have to accept the first offer?**

If you don't accept the offer you could lose your place. If you have a reason you should try to negotiate it.

### **What if they can't find me?**

It is up to you to tell the Office of Housing when you change your address or phone number. If they can't contact you when you get to the top of the list, you will lose your place.

### **Can I Defer an Application?**

If you are in hospital, in a nursing home, in rehab, or locked up you can defer your offer for up to 3 months.

### **Special needs**

If you need to live in a certain area or need changes to your house for medical reasons you can apply for **Special Accommodation Requirements**. This includes modification of the house for people with disabilities.

A health care professional (like a doctor) will need to fill in the Office of Housing form with a list of your needs.

### **Keeping your Public House**

You may be able to keep your house for up to 6 months while you are in prison, a D&A rehab facility or a nursing home. This is only for people who live alone and can afford to pay reduced rent while they are away. This is usually around \$15 a week. When you enter Prison the Prison Housing Worker will be able to assist with this process.

### **Transfers and mutual swaps**

You can apply for a transfer if you can't go back to your public house because of conditions (court or parole). If you apply you will be put on a transfers list.

To go on the transfer list for a bigger house the extra people have to be living in the house for 6 months.

If you know someone else who needs to move you can arrange a mutual swap. You need to be eligible to live in each other's house.

*Talk to the Office of Housing for more information.*

### **Office of Housing Debts**

If you owe money to the Office of Housing from a previous tenancy or from a bond loan you must set up a repayment plan.

This has to be at least \$10 per fortnight until an offer of housing is made. You cannot be offered a house until you start repaying the debt.

### **Important housing numbers 1800 825 955**

will transfer you to the nearest housing and homelessness service. There are services available 24 hours per day.

**Office of Housing: 1300 650 172 or  
(03) 9096 0000**

This is a general number for the Office of Housing. Tell the person who answers that

you want to find out about getting public housing. They will ask what suburb you're interested in and put you through to speak to someone who works in that area.

*To find your nearest Office of Housing, Look up: 'Human Services, Department of Housing' in the White Pages, then look under the heading 'Housing Services'.*

## **Housing Agencies**

### **Flagstaff Crisis Accommodation Centre**

Short-term accommodation for men. Corner of King & Roden Street, West Melbourne

**(03) 9329 4800** (24 hour)

**Intake by HomeGround: (03) 9417 2500**

### **Hanover Southbank (03) 9699 4566**

A range of crisis accommodation and housing support options for single people and families. 52 Haig St, South Melbourne

**Ozanam House (03) 9329 5100** (24 hour)

Short-term accommodation for Men. 179 Flemington Rd, North Melbourne,

**Intake by St Vinnies Glenroy: (03) 9304 0100****St Kilda Crisis Centre (03) 9536 7730** or  
**1800 627 727**

Crisis accommodation and support services open 10am – midnight every day.

27 Grey St, St Kilda

**Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service**  
**(03) 9322 3535** or **1800 015 188**

24 hour state-wide support and intervention service.

**Women's Housing Limited (03) 9412 6868**

9:00am - 5:00pm

Suite 1, Level 1, 21 Cremorne St  
Cremorne 3121

## Other Useful Contacts

**Federation of Community Legal Centres**  
(03) 9654 2204

To find your nearest community legal centre to get legal advice.

[www.communitylaw.org.au](http://www.communitylaw.org.au)

**Office of Housing** (03) 9616 7426 or  
1800 807 702

Housing Appeals Office: If you want to appeal a decision made by the Office of Housing.

**Ombudsman Victoria** (03) 9613 6222

If you want to make a complaint about decisions made by the Office of Housing

[www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au)

**PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic**  
(03) 9225 6684

If you are homeless and need legal assistance to deal with the Office of Housing.

[www.pilch.org.au.au](http://www.pilch.org.au.au)

**Tenants Union Victoria (03) 9416 2577**

Offers free legal advice on housing.

[www.tuv.org.au](http://www.tuv.org.au)

**Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal  
(VCAT) (03) 9628 9800 or 1800 133 055**

If you need to go to the tribunal or are being taken to the tribunal.

[www.vcat.vic.gov.au](http://www.vcat.vic.gov.au)

**Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights  
Commission**

enquiry: **1300 292 153**

reception: **1300 891 848**

Provides free advice if you believe you have been discriminated against by the Office of Housing.

[www.eoc.vic.gov.au](http://www.eoc.vic.gov.au)







Published by VACRO

November 2010

© Copyright VACRO & State of Victoria, Department of Justice 2010

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

This Booklet was last updated in September 2010. For further information, or to notify of any change of information please contact:

Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice

GPO Box 123, Melbourne VIC 3001

Telephone: +61 3 8684 6600

Facsimile: +61 3 8684 6611

Email: [corrections@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:corrections@justice.vic.gov.au)

Also published on VACRO's website: [www.vacro.org.au](http://www.vacro.org.au)