

VHR COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Statement of Policy

Purpose

This policy establishes the approach of Eastcoast Housing to complaints and appeals in respect of housing, social housing applications and related services.

Scope

This policy applies to complaints and appeals made to by:

- renters and prospective renters of Eastcoast Housing in respect of rental housing; and
- people whom Eastcoast Housing has assisted to make an application for social housing under the Victorian Housing Register (VHR).

This policy does not apply to complaints or feedback received from people who are **not** renters, prospective renters or applicants for social housing. See Eastcoast Housing policy 6. 2022 Complaints Handling.

This includes:

- complaints or grievances by employees of Eastcoast Housing
- complaints by contractors of Eastcoast Housing, and
- complaints or registration of concern by other member of the community (for example, neighbours).

Guiding principles

All renters and prospective renters of Eastcoast Housing and applicants (**customers**) have the right to:

- complain about the way that Eastcoast Housing has gone about delivering housing or related services, and
- appeal a decision made by Eastcoast Housing in relation to their housing, application or services.

Eastcoast Housing welcomes complaints from clients as a key way by which Eastcoast Housing receives feedback, responds to the needs of clients and improves its service delivery.

Accordingly, Eastcoast Housing will:

- provide clients with clear information about how they can make a complaint or lodge an appeal with Eastcoast Housing and about any external complaint-handling bodies that are relevant (such as DFFH or the Housing Registrar),
- support clients to make a complaint or appeal in a way that is accessible to them,
- respond to complaints and appeals promptly, fairly and transparently
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of clients who make a complaint or lodge an appeal
- not take any adverse action in respect of a client simply because the client has made a complaint or lodged an appeal, and
- keep records of complaints made and appeals lodged, and
- use the outcome of complaints and appeals to improve Eastcoast Housing's service delivery and minimise future complaints and appeals.

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1. Complaints by renters or prospective renters about rental housing

Renters or prospective renters of Eastcoast Housing who are affected by decisions of Eastcoast Housing on matters relating to rental housing may ask for their complaint to be dealt with under the complaints and appeals procedure.

Under this procedure, Eastcoast Housing must take all reasonable steps to resolve such complaints within 30 days after the complaint is made to Eastcoast Housing.

An individual who is a renter or prospective renter of Eastcoast Housing and who has made a complaint to Eastcoast Housing may refer the complaint to the Housing Registrar for investigation if the complaint is not resolved within 30 days after it is made.

2. Complaints or appeals about applications for social housing under the Victorian Housing Register

Eastcoast Housing participates in the VHR by:

- providing applicants with information about applying for social housing under the VHR;

Where an applicant wishes to:

- make a complaint about the way in which Eastcoast Housing has provided service to them in making an application for social housing, or
- appeal a decision made by Eastcoast Housing in relation to the person's application for social housing to:
 - recommend or not recommend an application for approval
 - approve or not approve an application
 - remove an application from the register, and
 - determine if an offer of social housing is a reasonable offer,

Such applicants should first ask that the complaint be reviewed or decision be reconsidered by Eastcoast Housing under the complaints and appeals procedure.

Applicants for social housing who are unhappy with the resolution of a complaint under the complaints and appeals procedure may refer the complaint to the DFFH Housing Appeals Office.

3. Procedures

Eastcoast Housing will regularly monitor the effectiveness of this complaints and appeals procedure.

4. Definitions

Appeal	When a person asks for a review of a decision of Eastcoast Housing to which this policy applies
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Applicant	A person who Eastcoast Housing assists to apply for social housing
Client	An applicant or a renter or prospective renter of Eastcoast Housing
Complaint	A complaint is a client's registered expression of dissatisfaction with any service delivered or action taken by Eastcoast Housing to which this policy applies.
DFFH	The Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing
Social housing	Both public housing (housing owned and managed by DFFH) and housing owned, controlled or managed by participating registered agencies (that is, registered housing agencies that participate in the VHR)
VHR	The Victorian Housing Register, the statewide common application for people seeking social housing, which can be accessed via Eastcoast Housing, DFFH, the mygov portal or designated support providers

5. Legislation and standards

This policy implements Eastcoast Housing's obligations under:

- Housing Act 1983 (Vic) Part VIII Division 5 Subdivision 2 (Dispute Resolution)
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies
- DFFH Victorian Housing Register Operational Guidelines

6. Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on the Eastcoast Housing website www.eha.org.au

7. Procedures

7.1 *Complaints coordination*

Eastcoast Housing will appoint a person to coordinate complaints, which will include to:

- act as the point of contact with the Housing Registrar and DFFH Housing Appeals Office;
- monitor compliance with the policy and this procedure (for example, the requirement to resolve complaints within 30 days); and
- maintain the register of complaints and appeals.

7.2 *Informal resolution*

Eastcoast Housing encourages all clients who are unhappy about the way that they have been treated by Eastcoast Housing or decisions made by Eastcoast Housing to take up the

issue with the person who delivered the service or made the decision. This can be a way of getting the matter resolved quickly.

However, if a client does not wish to do this then it is their right to have the matter dealt with under the complaints and appeals policy and this procedure.

8. How clients can complain or appeal

Clients may make complaints or lodge appeals:

- in person
- via a representative or advocate
- in writing (hard copy or electronic)
- by telephone.

Eastcoast Housing encourages clients to make complaints in writing as a way by which the issues can be most effectively identified and then resolved. However, Eastcoast Housing recognises that some clients face barriers to doing so and will therefore:

- accept complaints and appeals in a variety of means, and
- take reasonable actions to assist that client to clarify the issues in their complaint or appeal.

8.1 Acknowledgement of complaint

Eastcoast Housing will acknowledge receipt of all complaints and appeals within 2 working days. This acknowledgement should advise the client of the process that Eastcoast Housing will follow.

8.2 Investigation of complaint or consideration of the appeal

The procedure should assign a manager responsible for ensuring that Eastcoast Housing responds appropriately to the complaint or appeal by investigating the matter and/or reconsidering any decision made.

This person should not be directly involved in the complaint or appeal – i.e. be the original decision-maker or the person whose conduct has given rise to the complaint.

8.3 Outcome of complaint or appeal

Responses to complaints and appeals must:

- be in writing
- explain the outcome of the complaint or appeal and the reasons for Eastcoast Housing's decision, and

- advise the client of their right to refer the matter to the Housing Registrar or DFFH Housing Appeals Office (as appropriate).

9. Investigation by the Housing Registrar

Eastcoast Housing staff must co-operate with any such investigation by the Housing Registrar.

10. Privacy and confidentiality

Eastcoast Housing must comply with the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy when undertaking this process.

11. Register of complaints

Eastcoast Housing will maintain a register of complaints made and appeals lodged which complies with the requirements of the Housing Registrar.

12. Review

Eastcoast Housing will use the outcome of complaints and appeals to improve Eastcoast Housing's service delivery and minimise future complaints and appeals by the following:

- Consideration of outcomes of complaints at team meetings (on a de-identified and non-judgmental basis)
- Bi-monthly reporting of complaints data to the Board/ Executive
- Regular consideration of complaints data by Renter Reference Group (or similar).