

Modifications

Scope

This policy applies to all St George Community Housing (SGCH) properties. This policy relates to tenant requests for SGCH to carry out modifications to a property, it does not relate to alteration requests. Alterations are works carried out by tenants, at their own cost, with approval from SGCH.

Purpose

- To assist tenants to remain in their current property where possible.
- To meet the requirements of applicants with disabilities/special needs.
- To modify capital or SGCH owned properties to suit people with disabilities/special needs if it is economically viable to do so.
- To comply with the legal requirements of the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW)*, *Housing Act (NSW)*, *the Housing Regulation*, *the Home Building Act*, *Disability Discrimination Act* and other relevant laws and codes.

What are modifications?

Modifications are changes which are made to a property by SGCH because an applicant, tenant or household member has an identified need that means their current property is no longer suitable.

Modifications can improve quality of life and may give the tenant the option of staying in their current property rather than moving elsewhere i.e. moving into a nursing home or transferring to another property.

Applicants, tenants or household members with an identified need are usually tenants or household members who:

- are elderly
- have a disability or medical issue

Alterations are different to modifications. Alterations are improvements that are made to a property at the tenant's cost.

Categories of modifications

Modifications are grouped into two categories: minor or major modifications.

Minor modifications involve non-structural work. Examples of minor modifications include:

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- Adding grip rails
 - Installing a hand held shower set, and
 - Changing to lever style taps.

Major modifications usually involve structural changes. Examples of major modifications include:

- Widening door ways,
- Providing ramp access,
- Modifying the kitchen, bathroom or laundry,
- Replacement of floor coverings, and
- Modifications that require Development Application (DA) approval.

Capital properties

SGCH must request approval from the owner of the property to make major modifications.

SGCH owned properties

SGCH will undertake modifications where the modifications:

- are assessed to be economically viable,
- will help the tenant to remain in their home,
- comply with any program, regulatory or environmental standards, restrictions or covenants that apply to the residential premises (for example, tenants may not be allowed to install air conditioning or heating at the premises), and
- are approved by other relevant parties.

Leasehold properties

SGCH will not undertake modifications of leasehold properties. SGCH may assist tenants residing in leasehold properties by negotiating with the landlord to undertake modifications.

Economic viability

Factors considered by SGCH in determining whether a modification should be made include:

- Long term value of the property
- Costs of alternative approaches
- Consideration of any funding sources available

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- Cost/benefit of relocating the tenant and household members
 - Undertaking an assessment of the request to ensure that the modifications meet both the current and the likely future requirements of the tenant and future tenants.

If the required modifications are economically viable and will allow the tenant to remain in their current property, SGCH will, after obtaining necessary approvals modify capital properties to suit people with disabilities/special needs.

What if modifications cannot be undertaken?

If modifications are not economically viable or will not alleviate the problem, SGCH may transfer the tenant to another property that meets their needs when one becomes available. See Transfer policy.

Requests for modifications

If a tenant or household member has a disability or medical need that means their current property is no longer suitable to their needs they can request SGCH to undertake modifications to the property. Similarly, a request for a modification may be made internally for an applicant who has an identified need.

The tenant must complete a Modification Request form and supply appropriate supporting documentation as stipulated on the form. For minor modifications appropriate documentation may include a medical certificate or a written recommendation from a doctor or other health care professional. For major modifications an Occupational Therapist and/or specialists report must be provided.

Assessing requests for modifications

Once the completed form and supporting documentation is received, SGCH's Senior Asset Officer will assess and consider the required modifications in consultation with the relevant Manager, Housing Services and Renewal, and the Manager Operations, Property Services. They will consider the following factors when assessing requests for modifications:

- Whether the tenant will be able to sustain their tenancy if modifications are undertaken.
- Whether it is economically viable to undertake modifications.
- Whether approval must be obtained from other parties. For example: the owner of the property, local council or the Owners Corporation.

If further information is required SGCH's Tenancy Manager will arrange an in-home meeting with the SGCH's Senior Asset Officer, the tenant and any support person they require, as well as any relevant medical personnel (if possible).

SGCH standards in responding to requests for modifications

Once the Request for Modification has been assessed and a decision has been made, the Manager Operations, Property Services will advise the tenant or applicant of the decision in writing within 28 days of receiving the request. If a decision cannot be made within 28 days the Manager Operations, Property Services will advise the tenant or applicant of the reasons for the delay and the expected timeframe for a decision to be reached. The letter will also advise the tenant of their right of appeal. If approved, the Senior Asset Officer will arrange for the modifications to be undertaken by a selected contractor.

Related documents/resources

- Policy – Housing Transfer
- Form – Modification Request

Policy/Procedure information

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