

Housing and Accommodation

■ Public housing with the Department of Housing

Public housing is low-cost housing for people who find it hard to get the housing they need. You must be on the Housing Register and there are long waiting times. From prison you can apply for public housing or check if you can go back to public housing if you used to be a public housing tenant.

■ **Rentstart** The Department of Housing (DoH) can give help with bond money. Within a month of leaving prison you may get extra help through Rentstart Plus. Contact DoH 24 hours a day on 1800 629 212.

■ For Crisis Accommodation ring

Homeless Persons Information Service on:

Ph: (02) 9265 9087

1800 234 566 from outside Sydney

Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line (DoH)

4.30pm – 10pm Monday – Friday, 10am – 10pm weekends

Ph: 1800 152 152

Can I get help to rent privately?

Rentstart

DoH can also help you get started in private renting with Rentstart. Standard Rentstart payment is three weeks rent towards your bond to help you set up a new lease. To get Rentstart or Rentstart Plus, the rent for the property should be 50% or less of your income. Rentstart help is usually available once a year. You may be able to get Rentstart even if you're an ex-DoH tenant with problems with your record with DoH.

Ex-prisoners within a month of leaving prison can get Rentstart Plus. Rentstart Plus can pay the full bond and two weeks' rent for private rental or a boarding house. You must:

- Be eligible for public housing
- Have less than \$1,000 in savings
- Be able to stay in the property for 12 months.

To apply for Rentstart Plus, go to your nearest DoH Office and bring:

- Any ID
- Your DCS Discharge Certificate
- Centrelink income statement
- Bank statement.

Rentstart Tenancy can pay rent you owe so that you can stay in an established lease. You can only get this payment once a year. Talk to DoH about your options.

Rent Assistance

You may be eligible for Rent Assistance from Centrelink with your regular Centrelink payment.

What if I need accommodation in a crisis?

Contact the Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) on (02) 9265 9087 any day from 9am to 10pm to get information about emergency accommodation.

Contact the Department of Housing Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line on 1800 152 152 from 4.30pm to 10pm Monday – Friday and 10am to 10pm on weekends. They may be able to help with temporary accommodation. This is only for a short period and there will be limits on how much temporary accommodation you can get and what you have to do to show that you're trying to find accommodation.

What is community housing?

Community housing is subsidised housing managed by local organisations. Rent is usually about 25% of your income. Apply for this when you apply for public housing by ticking that option on the form. That way DoH can refer you to community housing. You can also apply directly to a particular organisation if you're on the Housing Register for public housing. There are lots of community housing associations in NSW. Look in the phone book under 'Community Tenancy' or 'Community Housing' or ring your local DoH office. Another option is to ring your local council, as councils often keep lists of community organisations in the area. In some community housing services (e.g. in housing co-ops) you'll be expected to go to meetings and do some work around the place.

What if I'm Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

If at least one member of your household is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you can apply for housing with the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), as well as public housing and community housing. You'll have to meet eligibility requirements, including that you're not adequately housed when you apply, providing a confirmation form to show that you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and that you meet income criteria. For more information about the AHO contact (02) 8836 9444. There are also AHO offices in some regional centres.

Supported housing: CRC and others

CRC offers an information and referral service to people leaving prison. This includes some assistance with housing, usually organised in advance through caseworkers in prison. There are also several hostels and short-term accommodation services in NSW. All of these places have special criteria you have to meet. Many of these places need you to book well in advance, so it's a good idea to start ringing around a few months before you get out. To find these organisations, call Homeless Persons on (02) 9265 9081 (or 1800 234 566 from outside Sydney).