

**Policy Name:** Alterations and Disability Modifications

**Approved by:** Chief Executive Officer

**Date effective:** May 2019

**Due to be reviewed:** May 2022

## Section 1 – Introduction

### PURPOSE

This policy outlines VincentCare Community Housing's (VCCH) position with regard to alterations and disability modification requests.

VincentCare Victoria operates a diverse range of accommodation and support services for people experiencing disadvantage, and is committed to applying an appropriate duty of care to all people in contact with VincentCare services. This includes protecting people's personal and cultural safety regardless of ability, cultural background, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation or religion.

### SCOPE

This policy applies to all eligible tenants managed by VCCH, whilst residing in properties owned or managed by VCCH including transitional properties.

For the purpose of this policy, the term 'tenant' is inclusive of the terms 'resident' and 'client'.

### REVIEW CYCLE

This policy will be reviewed every three years. It will be modified or replaced whenever VCCH becomes aware that this policy no longer complies with the requirements of the organisation.

## Section 2 – Policy Statement

VCCH will be guided by medical advice in the form of an Occupational Therapist report and/or medical authorisation from a General Practitioner prior to VCCH approving any alterations or disability modifications. Such alterations and disability modifications works will only be approved by VCCH where appropriate documented evidentiary medical advice exists. Where an alteration or disability modification is deemed by VCCH to be needed by a tenant to ensure safety, accessibility or quality of life needs, VCCH will control the implementation of such alterations and modifications.

VCCH will also determine whether it will fully fund or part fund the alterations or charge tenants either fully or partly for the cost of any property alterations or disability modifications.



## Guiding principles/approach

Tenants or approved housing applicants with an identified need for a disability modification may apply for a modified/adaptable home or to have a property altered or modified. VCCH commits to ensuring that all tenants requiring property alterations and disability modifications will be treated fairly, equitably and that such alterations and disability modifications will be provided speedily and efficiently.

The approach to property alterations or modifications will involve:

### 2.1 Alterations

Tenants can apply to make alterations to their rented VCCH property. Alteration applications are considered in the context of the following:

- tenant's acceptance of responsibility and conditions
- the extent of work required
- consistency of the alteration with the nature, classification and future use of the property
- compliance with any relevant building regulations and guidelines
- conditions and standards set down by relevant statutory authority (i.e. local council).

Approval may be given by VCCH 'in principle' when considering alterations which require third party (i.e. council) authorisation. Final approval will be granted only when the third party issues that authorisation.

### 2.2 Tenant Responsibilities and Conditions

An alteration to a VCCH property without written permission breaches the Residential Tenancy Act. VCCH can take action at the Victorian Administrative Appeals Tribunal (VCAT), to request that the tenant remove any unauthorised alteration, make good any damage caused by the removal of the alteration, or to terminate the tenancy.

### 2.3 Tenant Funded Maintenance Repairs

Tenants must comply with the following conditions relevant to alterations funded by them:

- Submit to VCCH a detailed written request of the alteration and copies of any plans or drawings.
- Obtain and provide copies of all required approvals, including 'in principle' approvals, final approvals and those from the local Council, if required
- Oversee the construction of the work and repair any damage to the property caused during construction work.
- Ensure work is carried out in accordance with building regulations and by qualified/licensed contractors (where required).
- Pay all costs associated with installing, maintaining and removing the alteration.
- Notify VCCH when work is completed and submit copies of any certificates issued.
- Maintain the alteration throughout the tenancy.
- Remove the alteration at the end of the lease and make good any damage caused by the removal, unless provided with a written authority for the alteration to remain. Failure to remove the alteration when requested may result in charges under regulatory provisions.

- If written authority is provided that the alteration can remain in the property, it then becomes the property of VCCH

**Completed alterations must:**

- match the current design as far as possible (both internal and external)
- not impact on any entry or exit
- not impact on adjoining neighbours
- not impact the structural integrity or asset standard of the property
- be consistent with the nature of the property
- not change the current property configuration.

**Applications for alterations will be declined if the proposed alteration:**

- cannot be maintained or removed easily
- involves major internal or any external painting
- is not consistent with the nature of the property
- is prohibited under any law or fails to comply with any caveats or covenants.

**Extent of work**

Minor alterations to a VCCH property are permitted without obtaining written approval. These include the following:

- installing telephones
- installing picture hooks
- installing garden sheds no bigger than 7 square metres
- installing a worm farm or compost bin
- building a garden bed that must be more than 1 metre away from existing buildings
- laying lawn
- planting trees or shrubs that will grow no more than 3 metres in height, when fully mature and are planted at least 3 metres from any existing structure.

All other alterations to the leased premises and any common area require written consent and approval prior to commencing work. These may include:

- built-in-cupboards or wardrobes
- carpet
- carports and garages
- fences
- floor tiles
- fixed appliances, such as air-conditioners and heaters
- minor internal painting (decorative coat)
- paving
- pergolas or gazebos
- rainwater tanks
- security shutters and security grilles, Alterations to a Home Policy Supplement
- solar panels.

## 2.4 Disability Modifications

Tenants or approved housing applicants with an identified and certified need for a disability modification may apply for a modified/adaptable home or to have a property modified.

Major modifications require an Occupational Therapist report. Requests for modifications not requiring an Occupational Therapist Report (minor modifications) require a letter of recommendation from a General Medical Practitioner.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) defines home modifications as “changes to the structure, layout or fittings of the tenant’s home that are required to enable the participant to safely access and move around their home as a result of their disability”. VCCH has distinguished Home Modifications as either Minor or Major Modifications.

The NDIS will only include funding for home modifications if the property is the applicant’s primary residence.

## 2.5 VCCH Funded Disability Modifications

- The Occupational Therapist report or letter of recommendation from a General Practitioner must detail the tenant’s medical condition, required disability modifications and drawings (including measurements) to inform the exact placement of the modification/s.
- For approved VCCH housing applicants, once a suitable property has been identified and accepted by a tenant with a disability any application for major modifications must include an Occupational Therapist’s report.
- VCCH will assess these applications and if a property is not suitable for modification, clients may be transferred to another property.
- If the person with a disability moves out of their modified property, VCCH may relocate the remaining occupants so that the modified dwelling can be offered to others with similar disability requirements.
- Home modifications may require a combination of Minor and Major modifications. These should be undertaken together and if undertaken for an NDIS participant, all costs coded appropriately as NDIS funding responsibility for later funding adjustments.

This policy will not apply to tenants who do not have appropriate certification from an Occupational Therapist or equivalent certification from a General Medical Practitioner for major modifications.

## COMMUNICATION

VCCH will provide clear information to tenants on this policy, and will inform tenants of their rights and obligations in relation to alterations and disability modifications.

## Section 3 – References

### Related policies

Policy name	Description
VCCH Maintenance and Repairs Policy	<a href="https://vincentcare.org.au">https://vincentcare.org.au</a>
VCCH Inspections Policy	<a href="https://vincentcare.org.au">https://vincentcare.org.au</a>
VCCH Complaints and Appeals Policy	<a href="https://vincentcare.org.au">https://vincentcare.org.au</a>

### Legislation and standards

This policy implements the obligations of VincentCare Community Housing under:

- Residential Tenancies Act 1997
- Housing Act 1983 (Vic)
- Guidelines for Registered Housing Agencies published by DHHS
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013

### Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on VincentCare's website <https://vincentcare.org.au>

## Section 4 – Governance

### Responsibility

<b>Process Owner</b>	General Manager Housing
<b>Content Holder/s</b>	Housing Program Managers
<b>Recommending body</b>	Quality Committee
<b>Endorsed by</b>	Chief Executive Officer

### Change history

Version	Effective Date	Author	Change
1	May 2019	General Manager Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is a new policy for publication on VincentCare's website</li><li>• This policy is a compliance requirement for registered agency participation in</li></ul>

			the Victorian Housing Register (VHR)
--	--	--	--