

Bond Assistance

Policy

Date effective: 18 November 2016

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide consistent guidelines to assist people to access the private rental market through Bond Assistance.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all applicants who apply for Bond Assistance through the Department of Housing and Community Development ('the Department').

3. Policy

Bond Assistance is an interest free loan to help people access the private rental market, including private rental housing, permanent caravans, community housing, and non-government organisation accommodation.

4. Eligibility and limit

To receive Bond Assistance, applicants must meet all eligibility criteria stated in this section. Exemptions may be made in priority circumstances such as persons escaping family violence or sponsored refugees.

4.1. Residency eligibility

Applicants must:

- be an Australian Citizen; or
- be a permanent resident of Australia; or
- hold a Special Category Visa or Temporary Protection Visa; and
- be a resident in the Northern Territory for 3 months prior to the date of submitting their application.

4.2. Age limit

Minimum applicant age is 18 years.

4.3. Income and asset limit

Details of Income and Asset limits are available in the Income and Assets policy. If an applicant for Bond Assistance will be sharing accommodation with people who are not applying for bond assistance, then the income and asset limit will only be assessed for the person seeking bond assistance.

4.4. Outstanding debt

Applicants must not have an outstanding debt with the Department.

4.5. Rent limit

Applicants' rent must not exceed 53% of their income. Commonwealth Rent Assistance will be included in calculating household income if the applicant is eligible for this benefit, even if the applicant does not receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance or has not applied for it.

4.6. Bond assistance limit

Bond Assistance provides up to four weeks rent as security deposit and optional up to two weeks rent in advance. An applicant can request a loan amount less than the required bond.

If an applicant for Bond Assistance will be sharing accommodation with people who are not applying for bond assistance, then the level of assistance will be a pro-rata amount based on the number of signatories to the tenancy agreement.

If an applicant for Bond Assistance will be sharing accommodation with people who are not contributing to the bond payment, the rent limit will still apply and be based on 53% of the applicant's income (not household income). The tenancy agreement must state that the applicant is the only contributor to the bond. If the optional two weeks rent in advance is required, then the level of assistance will be a pro-rata amount based on the number of signatories to the tenancy agreement.

4.7. Other requirements

Applicants must have a copy of the tenancy agreement, or caravan park agreement if the property is a permanent caravan, to claim bond assistance. If the tenancy agreement is for a fixed term, the period must be for a minimum of three months.

If an applicant for Bond Assistance will be sharing accommodation and is only seeking their pro-rata amount, they must be listed as a signatory to the tenancy agreement.

5. Timeframes

After receiving the approval of their Bond Assistance applications, applicants have an initial four-week period to find a property. If applicants cannot find a suitable property within the initial period and there has been no change to their household income or structure, they can apply for a two week extension. If changes have occurred after the initial four weeks, a new application will have to be submitted.

6. Repayment arrangements

Bond Assistance loans are interest free. Repayment arrangements are detailed further in the Debt Management policy.

Bond Assistance loans are to be repaid using an Agreement to Pay. Repayments must be a minimum of 7% of applicants' household income, and no less than \$10 per week. The length of an Agreement to Pay must not be longer than 18 months. A recipient may elect to choose to make larger repayments, and pay off the loan in a shorter period of time.

A recipient may request that their bond be returned directly to the Department from the Landlord, to repay any outstanding amounts. This must be arranged directly between the recipient and the Landlord.

7. Discretionary decision making

Discretion can be applied to this policy using the Discretionary Decision Making policy.

8. Complaints and/or appeals

If a client is not satisfied with either a decision or action of the Department, they can access the Department's complaints and/or appeals processes. For further information, please refer to the Complaints and/or Appeals policies.

9. Review of the policy

If at any time the legislative, operating or funding environment is so altered that the policy is no longer appropriate in its current form, the policy shall be reviewed and amended accordingly. This policy will be reviewed within two years of release.

10. References

Legislation

Caravan Park Act

Housing Act

National Consumer Credit Protection Act

Residential Tenancies Act

Policies

Appeals policy

Complaints policy

Debt Management policy

Discretionary Decision Making policy

Income and Assets policy

11. Document change control table

| Release Date | Version Number | Approved by (position) | Section amended | Category |
|--------------|----------------|--|-----------------|---|
| 18/11/2016 | 2.01 | Director Policy | all | Editorial amendments |
| 15/12/2014 | 2.00 | Chief Executive | all | Revised |
| 2/09/2013 | 1.00 | Executive Director, Housing Operational Client Support | all | New separate policy derived from Housing Services Operational Policy Manual, Chapter 14 |