

Report on a page

Social housing is rental housing that is funded, or partly funded, by the government. It is available to eligible Queenslanders who cannot access or sustain a tenancy in the private rental market. This audit examines whether social housing is effectively managed by the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (the department) to meet the needs of vulnerable Queenslanders.

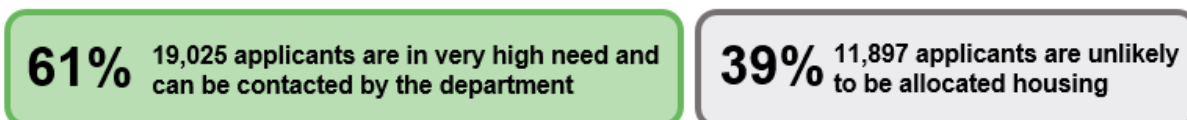
Managing social housing applications

The department assesses a household's eligibility and need for social housing based on established criteria. The housing register (the register) is a central list of all applicants approved for social housing. It has grown by 78 per cent over the last 4 years. In March 2022, there were 30,922 households on the register. The department does not forecast how the register will grow in coming years.

Social housing applicants are assigned to a need category on the register. The need categories are low, moderate, high, and very high. Around 61 per cent of the households on the register are classified as having very high need and are able to be contacted by the department. These are the only applicants likely to be allocated housing. Since 2019, the department has classified all new applicants as very high need. The department has not clearly communicated this to the existing households on the register and other stakeholders.

The remaining 39 per cent of applicants are in lower need groups, cannot be contacted or have inactive applications. These should be reviewed and removed from the register if they are no longer eligible.

Figure A
Applicants on the housing register in March 2022



Source: QAO analysis of data from the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy.

Some applicants on the register have circumstances that require urgent social housing. Each housing service centre prioritises these applicants for allocation using separate local lists. There is no central process to identify and monitor applicants for priority allocation.

The department's assessment and allocation processes have not been consistently applied. We found examples where needs were not recorded correctly in applications or eligibility was not confirmed before making a housing allocation. Some assessments and allocations were missing requisite internal checks.

Optimising housing outcomes

Around 15 per cent of government-managed social housing is under occupied. Tenants are not required to relocate to smaller dwellings if their needs have changed since the start of their tenancy. The department also lacks a formal process to proactively identify tenants that it can support to transition away from social housing and into the private rental market.

In March 2022, there were 74,133 social housing dwellings in Queensland. The department intends to commence building another 6,365 dwellings by 2025. While the style and location of new builds aligns with current social housing demand, these dwellings alone will not be sufficient as growth of the register is likely to accelerate with rising interest rates and a tightening rental market.

We made 8 recommendations to improve the department's management of the register and application process, its housing allocation procedures, and its approach to managing housing allocations over time.