

Alterations and Disability Modifications

Purpose

This policy outlines how Bridge Housing will manage requests from tenants to make alterations or requests disability modifications to a property. The aim of this policy is to ensure that each application is responded to in a fair, transparent and systematic way that clearly explains options, choices and decision-making processes.

Scope

This policy applies to all tenants who live in Bridge Housing properties. In leasehold properties and properties managed on a fee for service arrangement, the approval of the property owner/agent will be required. In these instances, Bridge Housing will approach the owner to seek permission for the alteration or modification to be approved.

Alterations

Bridge Housing acknowledges that tenants may want to alter and improve properties to improve the amenity for themselves and their family.

An alteration occurs where a tenant changes, removes, replaces, or makes an addition to an existing property. Existing property means the building itself, yard or boundary fences. For example, the tenant wishes to install air conditioning or removes an existing floor covering and replaces it with one of a similar size and quality.

Types of Alterations

The NSW Residential Tenancies Act 2010 does not define what a minor or major alteration is. The table below provides an example of what Bridge Housing considers minor or major alterations:

Minor Alterations	Major Alterations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting a reasonable number of picture hooks in a wall • Installing flyscreens that meet Australian standards • Planting flowers, shrubs or a border in the garden • Installing a telephone line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security shutters and security grilles that meet Australian standards • Pay television, satellite dishes and antennas • Painting - internal only • Kitchen and bathroom remodelling • Built-in-cupboards or wardrobes • Fixed appliances, such as air-conditioners and heaters • Carpets • Rainwater tanks • Solar panels • Floor and wall tiles • Carports, awnings and garages
<p>If approval for a minor or major alteration is granted, the tenant will be responsible for any remedial works caused by negligence or poor workmanship.</p> <p>In leasehold and fee for service properties, the property owner/agent or provider will be required to provide permission for any alteration.</p>	

Bridge Housing will not grant permission for tenants to undertake the following alterations due to health and safety and ongoing maintenance issues:

- install a swimming pool, pond or spa,
- painting the external façade of a property.

Applying for an Alteration

Before a tenant can make a change to the property, they must first get written permission from Bridge Housing by submitting the *Bridge Housing Alterations and Modifications To a Property Form* for approval.

To help Bridge Housing approve or decline an application, tenants should provide as much information as they can about the proposed works including details of the proposed contractor and a full description of the alteration or modification required.

Submitting an Alterations Application

For all alterations, tenants must use *Bridge Housing's Request for Alterations or Modifications to a Property Form* when applying for permission to undertake an alteration or modification. Bridge Housing will use the information the tenant provides and in may inspect the property to assess an application.

Tenant Responsibilities

Tenants must submit an Alterations and Modifications to a Property Form **before** undertaking any alterations in their home. Tenants should supply all necessary information for Bridge Housing to assess the request.

Once an application is approved by Bridge Housing, the tenant:

- Is expected to pay the full costs for any alterations
- Is responsible for repairing and maintaining any alterations
- Must pay for all remedial works caused by negligence, poor workmanship or failure to complete an alteration in full. This includes the cost of rectifying any damage caused by any alteration
- Is responsible for repairing any damage the alteration may cause
- Must, if requested by Bridge Housing, remove an alteration at their own expense and restore the property to its original condition at the end of the tenancy.

Bridge Housing Responsibilities

- Review alteration applications within 21 days
- Inspect alterations on the property
- Inspect alterations and removal of these at the end of the tenant.

Assessing an Alterations or Modifications Application

Bridge Housing will consider a number of factors when assessing an application, including:

- Impact on the structural integrity of the building
- Impact on a heritage listed property
- Impact on neighbours
- Australian Standards, legal requirements and Local Council regulations
- If the alteration increases the maintenance liability for Bridge Housing
- Conflict with Bridge Housing's approach to environmental sustainability
- If the alteration is able to be being rectified, repaired or removed at the end of the tenancy
- Impact on the entry or exit point to the dwelling
- If the alteration is consistent with the nature of the property (e.g. installing modern fixtures on an old property)
- Whether the home has asbestos or any hazardous building products and the degree to which those products will be altered (for example drilled, cut, removed)

- Whether the tenant intends to use licensed qualified contractors to manage the work around the hazardous building product
- Rent or non-rent arrears. In general, Bridge Housing will not approve alterations for tenants with arrears to ensure that the focus on sustaining the tenancy is first addressed
- The approval of the owner where the property is owned by an entity other than Bridge Housing
- Any applicable standards imposed by the owner, such as the NSW Land and Housing Corporation Asset Standards
- If there are any prohibition by law such as a strata by-law.

Tenants will be informed in writing about the outcome of their application. This may include any conditions attached to an approval. If the tenant has supplied all the relevant details, Bridge Housing aims to decide within 21 days. If there is a delay, Bridge Housing will inform the applicant about the expected timeframe and the reason for any delay. Where an application is refused, the tenant may submit a revised proposal.

Standard Conditions for Approval

All approved applications will be subject to the following conditions:

- That all alterations conform to relevant Australian Standards, legal requirements and Local Council regulations
- That the tenant is responsible for obtaining any further approvals, such as Council approval
- That a Certificate of Compliance is supplied for all electrical and gas installations
- All works are completed by licensed contractors
- That the tenant agrees to maintain the alteration during the tenancy
- The work is started within 8 weeks and completed within 3 months of consent being issued. The tenant will need to negotiate different time frames with Bridge Housing if these timeframes are not achievable. If the agreed timeframes are not met a tenant may be required to complete a new application
- Bridge Housing is informed when the work is finished. For major alterations, the tenant must allow Bridge Housing access within 4 weeks of the works being completed for inspection purposes.
- If an inspection identifies that the alteration does not meet Bridge Housing's standard, the tenant will be required to carry out further work within a specified timescale to meet the necessary standards. Failing this, the tenant will have to reinstate the property to its original condition. The tenant will be responsible for all costs associated with this work.

When a Tenant Moves Out of a Property

When a tenant moves out of a property they have altered, Bridge Housing may request them to remove any alterations. If Bridge Housing has contributed towards the work, the tenant must obtain permission from Bridge Housing to remove it.

Tenants are responsible for the removal of the work and restoring the property to its original condition, this includes rectifying any damage caused by the work. If a tenant fails to do this, Bridge Housing will charge for any rectification required.

Once the tenant hands back a property, any alterations that have not been removed cease to belong to the tenant.

When Bridge Housing Requests a Tenant to Move Out of a Property

On occasion, Bridge Housing may ask tenants to move home in line with Bridge Housing's Management Transfer Policy. If Bridge Housing requests that a tenant moves out of a property they have altered, a contribution to the costs of the alteration for work that had been approved in writing by Bridge Housing. This reimbursement will be based on a depreciated value. Depending on the type of alteration, Bridge Housing may remove and reinstate the alteration to the new property.

Unapproved Alterations

An alteration without written permission is a breach of your Residential Tenancy Agreement.

Where an unapproved alteration is identified, Bridge Housing will first undertake a technical inspection of the alteration. If there are no problems with the alteration in terms of design, amenity or safety, Bridge Housing will ask the tenant to seek retrospective written approval, including any relevant Local Council approval.

If Bridge Housing has any concerns about the quality, safety or amenity of the unapproved alteration, Bridge Housing will require the tenant to reinstate the property at their own cost within a specified timescale, according to Bridge Housing's standards and using appropriately qualified contractors. If the tenant refuses or the work is not undertaken to appropriate standard, Bridge Housing may take action at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) for an order to remedy or possession of the property and termination of the tenancy. Bridge Housing may also undertake this work and recharge the cost to the tenant.

Disability Modifications

Bridge Housing recognises that the needs of tenants or household members may change because of illness, injury, age or disability and that as a result, their home, in its current form, may no longer be suitable. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Bridge Housing (and other landlords) have an obligation to provide 'reasonable adjustments' (disability modifications or relocation) to support a tenant with a disability.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) defines home modifications as *"changes to the structure, layout or fittings of the participant's home that are required to enable the participant to safely access and move around their home as a result of their disability"*.

Types of Modifications

Minor Disability Modifications	Major Disability Modifications
<p>We define a minor modification as one that does not require structural changes to a property. Each individual modification would usually cost \$5,000 or less (including GST and installation).</p> <p>Examples of minor modifications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handheld shower sets• Lever style taps• Grab rails <p>Bridge Housing will require an Occupational Therapist Report (OTR) for minor modifications or in some cases a medical certificate or letter of recommendation from a healthcare professional.</p>	<p>We define a major modification as one that requires structural changes to a property and where the cost is likely to exceed \$5,000 (including GST and installation). Examples of major modifications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Widening door ways• Modifying the kitchen, bathroom or laundry• Replacement of floor coverings• Providing entrance and exit ramps, and• Installing hoists <p>Bridge Housing will require an Occupational Therapist Report (OTR) before it will consider undertaking major modifications. Bridge Housing will work with the Occupational Therapist and the tenant and/or their advocate to make an assessment of any proposed major modifications in order to achieve the best outcome for the tenant.</p>

Applying for a Modification

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Bridge Housing (and other landlords) have an obligation to provide 'reasonable adjustments' (disability modifications or relocation) to support a tenant with a disability.

Submitting a Modifications Application

When Bridge Housing receives a request for disability modifications, we will review the application and the modifications required to support our tenant to remain in the property if it is suitable. We will assess the modification to ensure that the modification is structurally safe and economically viable. In capital properties managed or owned by Bridge Housing, we will review the application within 21 days. This does not include timeframes for obtaining any further approvals, eg from landlords.

Where further approval is required e.g. from landlord in the case of leasehold or fee for service properties, Bridge Housing will approach the owner on behalf of the tenant with the written application.

To ensure that capital properties comply with the Disability Discrimination Act for some minor modifications, Bridge Housing will finance the modification if this is deemed to be reasonable. For major modifications, where the tenant is eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Bridge Housing will work within the rules of the NDIS to ensure modifications are carried out as required. Where the tenant is not NDIS eligible, Bridge Housing will seek funding and approval from NSW Land and Housing Corporation in accordance with their Home Modification Guidelines.

Where consent for property modifications has been declined by the owner of the property or a modification is determined to be unfeasible or non-economically viable, alternative housing options will be discussed with the tenant.

Tenant Responsibilities

Tenants must submit an Alterations and Modifications to a Property Form **before** undertaking any modifications in their home. Tenants should supply all necessary information for Bridge Housing to assess the request including an Occupational Therapist report and evidence of NDIS eligibility/ineligibility.

Bridge Housing Responsibilities

- Review modifications applications within 21 days
- Seek approval from the owner or agent of a leasehold or fee for service property before undertaking any modification
- Undertake minor modifications for those we have agreed to undertake
- Inspect modifications funded by the tenant on completion at the property
- If permission to undertake the modification is not granted, discuss other options including transfer to an alternative property which already meets their needs or which can be easily modified.

Assessing Modification Requests

Bridge Housing will base its assessment of modification requests on a number of factors including:

- long term value of the property, i.e. cost of the modification in relation to the value of the property
- impact on the heritage of the property and any council requirements
- cost of alternative approaches
- availability of alternative properties already modified to meet the tenant's needs
- availability of funding, where applicable
- suitability of the property for the proposed modification
- suitability of the modification for the tenant or household member's current and future needs
- suitability of the modification for future tenants
- status of the property, i.e. is the property likely to be retained by Bridge Housing for the long term, and
- tenant's ability to sustain a successful tenancy.

Bridge Housing will only engage approved contractors to complete all modifications and will monitor the work to ensure they comply with legislative and regulatory requirements.

Compliments, Complaints and Appeals.

This is an appealable policy. If a tenant is not satisfied with a service provided by Bridge Housing or does not agree with a decision it has made, they can ask for a formal review. Bridge Housing's *Compliments, Complaints and Appeals Policy* outlines how we will undertake a review of our decision. A copy of our policy and information leaflet, is available from Bridge Housing's office or downloaded from our website www.bridgehousing.org.au.

If a tenant is unhappy with the outcome of an appeal to Bridge Housing they can lodge a second level appeal with the Housing Appeals Committee. The Housing Appeals Committee is an independent agency that reviews certain decisions made by staff of Community Housing organisations and Housing NSW. For information on the Housing Appeals Committee call 1800 629 794 or go to www.hac.nsw.gov.au