

Older Persons Housing Rights Service **Program Guidelines**



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1. About the OPHRS Guidelines

The Older Persons Housing Rights Service Program Guidelines (OPHRS Guidelines) define and describe the role and responsibilities of community agencies funded by Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) to provide rental and housing support to older Victorians.

The OPHRS Guidelines are the contractual service and reporting requirements of the Older Persons Housing Rights Service (OPHRS) and form part of the terms and conditions of the funding agreement for delivery of the OPHRS to be entered by CAV and the agency (Funding Agreement).

Note: All guidelines documents are available to download at consumer.vic.gov.au/renter-rights.

The OPHRS Guidelines describe:

- the purpose and operation of the OPHRS
- OPHRS service components
- program management
- reporting requirements.

The OPHRS Guidelines may be updated by CAV from time to time to reflect current service requirements and practices. CAV will notify the provider whenever the OPHRS Guidelines are revised and make the latest version available.

The OPHRS Guidelines should be read in association with:

- the OPHRS Request for Service guidelines
- the service delivery requirements listed in Table 1.

Table 1: OPHRS – Service delivery requirements

No.	Service delivery requirement
1	The Provider must operate in accordance with the principles of practice set out in Section 2.
2	The Provider must comply with the eligibility and prioritisation criteria set out in Section 3.
3	The Provider must deliver the Older Renter Support Service set out in Section 4.
4	The Provider must deliver the Retirement Housing Assistance Service set out in Section 5.
5	The Provider must deliver the Residential Parks Assistance Service set out in Section 6.
6	The Provider must deliver campaigns, media, advocacy and policy set out in Section 7.
7	The Provider must comply with the referrals process set out in Section 8.
8	The Provider must comply with the program management requirements set out in Section 10.
9	The Provider must comply with the reporting requirements set out in Section 11.

2. Introduction to OPHRS

Overview

The Victorian Renter Rights Program (VRRP) supports Victorian renters and older people most at risk of renting and housing issues. There are four components:

- Renter Rights Service (RRS)
- Renter Central Service (RCS)
- Older Persons Housing Rights Service (OPHRS)
- Victorian Renters Helpline (VRH)

VRRP objective

The objective of the VRRP is to keep Victorians in safe and secure housing.

OPHRS service model

The OPHRS is an integrated state-wide service that supports older Victorians who live in retirement housing, private rentals or residential parks. Retirement housing is defined as a retirement or rental village, and residential park housing includes a permanent residency in a caravan or residential park. A private rental agreement is an agreement under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (RTA).

The OPHRS service model is designed to complement and strengthen the existing rental support sector. The OPHRS introduces the following services:

- the older renter support service (ORSS)
- the retirement housing assistance service (RHAS)
- the residential parks assistance service (RPAS)
- campaigns and media, policy and advocacy relating to housing rights for older persons.

Principles of practice

The principles of practice describe the experience through the expectations of clients, service providers and CAV.

Table 2 – Principles of practice for OPHRS

Principle	Clients	Outcome Service Provider	Consumer Affairs Victoria
Accessibility	I can talk to someone at the OPHRS within a reasonable time.	We are empowered to respond to the communities we serve.	We are confident that residents of private rentals, retirement housing and residential parks are able to access support services.
Consistency	I can expect the same level of service no matter who I first make contact with.	We have a clear understanding of DGS's expectations of the nature and extent of services we will provide. We work collaboratively and in partnership with other service providers.	We are confident that there is reasonably consistent service experience for clients. We are confident that the resources we provide are being appropriately used.
Quality	I will have a clear understanding of what the OPHRS worker will do, and what my rights and responsibilities are. I do not feel judged. I can trust the advice and support provided, and I will feel culturally safe	We have qualified staff who are supported to maintain and improve their skills through professional development. We provide a culturally safe space for all people facing hardship. We use best practice processes and tools to guide our practice.	We are confident that the services we fund are of good quality and competently delivered.
Efficiency	I get directed to a service that can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help me as quickly as possible without having to explain the same thing over and over, and 	We provide clients with the least intensive service that meets their needs. Our reporting requirements demonstrate	We are confident that the funding we provide is used efficiently

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I am not able to get help from OPHRS, they will tell me this as soon as possible. 	accountability but are not onerous.	
Empowerment	<p>I will be supported to play whatever role I can to solve my own problems.</p> <p>I will be better able to deal with retirement housing problems if they arise again.</p>	<p>We can work in a way that suits our context and fits with other services our organisation delivers. We are supported to trial innovative ways of delivering services to address broader systemic problems.</p>	<p>We are confident that funded organisations provide improved outcomes for clients and the community.</p>
Integration	<p>I will be supported to work with other support services and programs which can benefit me and I am eligible for.</p>	<p>We provide clients with an integrated service model with other support services, including linkages to other organisations and complementary programs.</p>	<p>We are confident that funded organisations have connections, partnerships and capacity to integrate with other support services and programs.</p>

3. Client eligibility and prioritisation

Eligible clients

All Victorians 55 years of age or older and living in rentals, retirement housing or residential parks are eligible to receive support from the OPHRS.

Clients who are: financially disadvantaged; experiencing family violence; or, at risk of losing their housing, should be prioritised for more intensive support over those who are at risk and not yet at crisis point. For further details, please see the prioritisation section below.

The service the client is eligible for will be dependent upon their form of housing:

- A client will receive assistance under the ORSS if they have housing matter and are living in a property covered under the RTA, except Part 4A.
- A client will receive assistance under the RHAS if they are living in a property covered under the *Retirement Villages Act 1986* (RVA).
- A client will receive assistance under the RPAS if they are living in a property covered under Part 4A of the RTA.

Family violence

A person is experiencing family violence if they are subject to any behaviour from a family member (which includes a domestic or intimate partner) that:

- is physically or sexually abusive,
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive,
- is economically abusive,

- is threatening or coercive; or
- controls or dominates the family member and causes them to feel fear for their own or another person's safety or wellbeing.

Indicators of financial disadvantage

A person is experiencing financial disadvantage if:

- they have no income, or
- they receive a Centrelink benefit, or
- their income is insufficient to sustain their personal financial commitments, and they are at risk of defaulting on payment of rent, utility bills or other personal debts.

Ineligible clients

People who are under 55 years of age are ineligible for OPHRS services.

Prioritisation of waitlists

The Provider should prioritise waitlisted clients based on urgency and the potential severity of consequences.

The Provider should consider the following when prioritising cases:

- the personal circumstances of the client,
- whether the issue is of an urgent nature, and
- Whether the client is part of a vulnerable cohort

Urgent personal circumstances of the older person

When assessing whether the personal circumstances of an older person are urgent, relevant considerations include:

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- the likelihood the client will experience significant detriment if OPHRS services are not provided as soon as possible.
- the older person's ability to access services
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Residents of rooming houses
- People affected by family violence
- People living with a disability
- Neurodivergent people.

Any case involving family violence is likely to be considered urgent.

Urgent issue

When assessing whether the matter is urgent, relevant considerations include the nature of the problem and any time deadlines are involved. For example:

- the rental property requires urgent repairs under the RTA
- a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) hearing in three days' time that may result in loss of accommodation
- the client has been served with a VCAT order for possession of their premises.

Vulnerable cohorts

Some cohorts of clients are more likely to experience housing insecurity or have faced difficult issues over their lives, which makes them more likely to need support. Being from a vulnerable cohort is not required to be eligible for OPHRS services but can be considered in the prioritisation of cases.

OPHRS clients may also be part of an overrepresented group or be particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity, and OPHRS workers should be aware of intersectionality of disadvantage and its impacts, while maintaining a culturally safe environment without stigma.

Examples of priority cohorts include:

- First Nations people

Response times

Applicable response times are:

- for urgent cases, the agency must contact (or make reasonable attempts to contact) the client within two (2) business days
- for non-urgent cases, the Provider must contact the client within four (4) business days.

4. Older Renter Support Service

The Older Renter Support Service is comprised of the following main components:

- a workers' advice line
- specialist legal support for older persons with a rental agreement.

Workers' advice line

The Provider will operate a workers' advice line via a discrete workers telephone line and email address, to provide information, advice and support to assist VRRP workers who are assisting older clients that have a private rental agreement under the RTA. This includes both renters with private rental agreements and rooming house residents.

Specialist legal support for older persons

The Provider will also provide select specialist legal support (discrete legal tasks and representation services) to older renters who are eligible for the RRS, but in circumstances when the client's matter is assessed by the ORSS as complex and benefiting from specific legal expertise in older persons housing. The Provider may also elect to provide legal support services to demonstrate priority campaign and policy issues.

5. Retirement Housing Assistance Service

The RHAS supports residents whose dwellings are covered by the RVA. It is comprised the following main components:

- a workers' advice line
- retirement housing support service

Workers' advice line

The Provider will operate a workers' advice line via a discrete workers telephone line and email address, to provide information, advice and support to assist VRRP workers with clients who are living in retirement housing covered by the RVA.

Retirement housing support service

The Provider will provide a support service for older Victorians who have a retirement housing matter. The RHAS will have capacity to provide:

- early intervention support
- information and referral
- negotiation and advocacy
- assistance with RDRV matters and VCAT cases
- specialist legal support
- service enhancements.

Early intervention support

Early intervention support includes:

- intake and referral to relevant support services
- triage assessments of clients

- providing early intervention support services to prevent crisis.

Information and referral

Information and referral includes the provision of general information, initial or one-off tailored advice based on the client's circumstances, or a referral to another service.

Negotiation and advocacy

Negotiation on behalf of a client to resolve an issue and/or prevent a RDRV matter or a VCAT hearing and may include ensuring appropriate responses have been made to documents/notices.

RDRV and VCAT assistance

RHAS workers may provide support to clients for a matter proceeding to RDRV or VCAT, including assistance with completing forms, preparation and attendance at hearings

It is expected the RHAS worker will attend the venue (or online hearing) where the client's matter is heard.

Specialist legal support

The Provider will provide specialist legal support to clients in circumstances when the client's matter is assessed as complex and benefiting from specific legal expertise in retirement housing.

Service enhancement

Service enhancement activities should focus on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients who are unlikely to directly access housing support services and will include:

- establishing working partnerships and referral pathways with other community organisations

- providing advice to another community worker on behalf of a client
- program promotion activities, such as attending a network meeting to raise awareness of RHAS services
- providing educational sessions for older Victorians
- travel time for support services and travelling to VCAT venues for RDRV and VCAT representation
- professional development.

6. Residential Parks Assistance Service

The RPAS supports residents who live in a property covered under Part 4A of the RTA. It is comprised of the following main components:

- a workers' advice line
- residential park support service

Workers' advice line

The Provider will operate a workers' advice line via a discrete workers' telephone line and email address, to provide information, advice and support on residential parks issues.

The workers' advice line will assist VRRP workers with clients who are living in a property covered under Part 4A of the RTA.

Residential park support service

The Provider will provide a support service for older Victorians who have a residential parks matter. The RPAS will have capacity to provide:

- early intervention support
- information and referral
- negotiation and advocacy
- assistance with RDRV matters and VCAT cases
- specialist legal support
- service enhancements.

Early intervention support

Early intervention support includes:

- intake and referral to relevant support services

- triage assessments of clients
- providing early intervention support services to prevent crisis.

Information and referral

information and referral includes the provision of general information, initial or one-off tailored rental advice based on the client's circumstances, or a referral to another service.

Negotiation and advocacy

Negotiation on behalf of a client to resolve an issue and/or prevent a RDRV matter or a VCAT hearing and may include ensuring appropriate responses have been made to documents/notices.

RDRV and VCAT assistance

RPAS workers may provide support to clients for a matter proceeding to RDRV or VCAT, including assistance with completing forms, preparation and attendance at hearings

It is expected the RPAS worker will attend the venue (or online hearing) where the client's matter is heard.

Specialist legal support

The Provider will provide specialist legal support to clients in circumstances when the client's matter is assessed as complex and benefiting from specific legal expertise in residential parks.

Service enhancement

Service enhancement activities should focus on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged clients who are unlikely to directly access housing support services and will include:

- establishing working partnerships and referral pathways with other community organisations

- providing advice to another community worker on behalf of a client
- program promotion activities, such as attending a network meeting to raise awareness of ORSS services
- providing educational sessions for older Victorians
- travel time for support services and travelling to VCAT venues for RDRV and VCAT representation
- professional development.

7. Campaigns and media, policy and advocacy relating to housing right for older persons

Retirement housing and residential park campaigns and media

The Provider is required to deliver retirement housing and residential park campaigns and media activities that address emerging and systemic retirement housing issues identified through the retirement housing assistance service, the Residential parks assistance service, and other sources.

The Provider must give prior notice to CAV of any campaigns or media activities expected to result in significant public exposure of issues to which the Government will likely be required to respond by sending an email to communityprograms@dgs.vic.gov.au.

The OHPRS providers are expected to coordinate with the RCS provider, and other relevant bodies, where there may be a cross-over of interest in campaigns and advocacy activities.

Retirement housing and residential park policy and advocacy

The Provider is required to engage in retirement housing and residential park policy and advocacy work that will impact on older Victorians, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. The Provider must participate in policy-making processes, networks, forums and reviews to improve government and industry policies that impact on retirement housing and residential parks, or that affect older Victorian renters.

8. Referrals

Clients may come to OPHRS through several referral pathways including:

- self-referral by a client
- referral from CAV
- referral from another community agency, including an RRS, VRH or RCS provider
- referral from RDRV or VCAT member or registrar

The OPHRS worker should:

- assess the eligibility of the client for OPHRS services
- attempt to contact the client within the response timeframes above.

Making a referral to RRS

The OPHRS will make referrals to RRS agencies if the client meets the RRS eligibility criteria and is under 55 years of age.

Accepting referrals from RRS

RRS workers can refer clients to OPHRS for support if the client is 55 or older. OPHRS also includes support for clients who are:

- an older renter whose housing matter is too complex for the RRS worker,
- a resident in a retirement village or rental village ('for profit' and 'not for profit'), or
- a permanent resident of a caravan or residential park, and their

retirement housing matter is too complex for the RRS worker.

Referrals from CAV

The CAV Contact Centre can assess and refer eligible renters to the OPHRS.

If you receive a referral from CAV, please acknowledge receipt of the email as soon as possible to the referring officer and to: consumer@dgs.vic.gov.au

Referrals to CAV

If a case involves a clear or apparent breach of the RTA or RVA, and the client has made a reasonable attempt to resolve the matter, OPHRS agencies should consider referring the matter to CAV Front Line Compliance and Response (FLCR) for review.

The FLCR team assists renters and rental providers to come to an agreement that is consistent with the RTA.

You can also refer closed cases to help CAV identify systemic or emerging issues.

9. OPHRS workers

OPHRS workers will be required to have:

- a sound knowledge and practice of the RVA and the RTA,
- expertise and knowledge of the RDRV process and VCAT Civil Claims and Tenancies Lists with the capacity to address complex retirement housing cases, and
- skills and capacity to support clients experiencing family violence and to make appropriate referrals to other support services.

Training requirements

The OPHRS should consider the training requirements its workers require to provide the level of specialised support to clients and expert workers advice commensurate with being a statewide provider of specialist information and advice.

This should include appropriate induction training, and ongoing professional development to ensure OPHRS workers maintain a contemporary understanding of the legislation and the impacts of any changes.

OPHRS workers are eligible to attend training provided by the RCS provider.

Family violence training requirements

The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) has been established in law under Part 11 of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (FVPA) to ensure relevant services contribute to the identification, assessment and

management of family violence risk. The Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVIS Scheme) is enshrined in Part 5A of the FVPA and describes legislative obligations for collecting and sharing family violence risk information.

OPHRS workers should be trained in the MARAM and FVIS Scheme. New OPHRS workers will be required to complete foundational family violence training as well as customised FVIS and MARAM training, as directed by DGS.

regarding other housing options, or for supports to remain living in their home.

Rental tools and resources

The Provider of the RCS will provide an online knowledge base of residential rental law and practice resources to help OPHRS workers and supervisors research the law, update their skills and knowledge, and share information. Resources include basic and advanced information on specific rental topics, RDRV processes, VCAT decisions and training videos.

Older persons housing related supports

The provider of the OPHRS is expected to maintain ongoing contemporary understanding of the full range of supports that are available to older Victorians with regard to their housing options.

This should include knowledge of where self-help resources are available, and what options are available to pursue assistance independently.

Consistent with a no wrong door approach, the provider of the OPHRS should ensure that they can refer older Victorians for assistance with associated housing related issues, such as for advice

10. Program management

Insurance

The Provider must have professional indemnity and public risk insurance, as detailed in the Schedule to the Funding Agreement.

The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) provides insurance to most community service organisations funded by DGS.

Client satisfaction survey

CAV may from time to time evaluate the quality of services. The design and development of the evaluation process and techniques will be done in consultation with agencies.

Complaints handling

All OPHRS agencies must have in place a client complaints policy. Renters who use the service (and others acting on their behalf) can make a complaint to either the agency or to CAV.

Privacy policy

The Provider must have a privacy policy that explains how client information will be managed, and that the policy:

- aligns with current privacy legislation, including the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*
- includes information on how conflicts of interests can occur and what the agency will do if a conflict is identified

- acknowledges the requirements of a prescribed Information Sharing Entity under the FVPA

Other Requirements

Read the OPHRS Request for Service Guidelines for further details on program management.

11. Reporting requirements

Under the funding agreement, the Provider must provide reporting to assist CAV to assess service delivery performance. Agencies are required to provide the following reports:

- quarterly data reports
- six-monthly narrative reports
- annual funding acquittal
- annual audited financial statement regarding the agency's finances

The timeframes and reporting requirements you will need to adhere to are outlined in the OPHRS Request for Service Guidelines.

