

Immediate Housing for Families (IHRF) Guidelines, specifications and requirements

June 2023



Queensland
Government

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1. Introduction

The Immediate Housing Response for Families (IHRF) is a \$54 million investment to support Queensland families in housing need including First Nations people, people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence, young people and older people.

Initially, the package included allocations for three service components:

- an expanded Rental Security Subsidy (RSS);
- emergency brokerage funding for SHS to enable them to purchase short-term emergency accommodation (e.g., hotel or motel accommodation) and other essential items including tenancy commencement and sustainment costs; and
- funding for support workers to provide case management and support for families in short-term emergency accommodation to assist them transition to safe and stable housing.

Over the course of 2022-23, the RSS component of the package was transitioned to an alternative funding source, leaving the 2022-23 \$26 million allocation to be utilised solely for brokerage funding and support workers.

In 2022-23 this funding was distributed to 40 organisations delivering 48 -funded specialist homelessness services (SHS), with the objective of providing short-term emergency accommodation to approximately 700 families and assisting them to transition to safe and secure housing.

Demand from families greatly exceeded expectation and as of 30 April 2023 the IHRF emergency brokerage had assisted more than 5000 families. On the night of 28 February 2023, the initiative was housing 731 families in short-term emergency accommodation.

On 28 March 2023, the Government announced an additional \$28 million to continue the IHRF for the 2023-24 financial year.

These guidelines have been developed to provide department staff and funded service providers with information regarding the aims and purpose of the IHRF, and its operational requirements and expectations. These guidelines replace the *Emergency Brokerage Funds Guidelines and Procedures, Immediate Housing Response for Families – October 2022* and provide a more detailed guide for SHS with emergency brokerage and support worker funding under the IHRF in 2023-24.

The guidelines outline the purpose, scope, principles, and operational procedures for the use of IHRF funds, and provide guidance on the use of this additional funding made available under the Homelessness Program.

2. About the IHRF

The IHRF aims to provide immediate short-term emergency accommodation for families experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Queensland, and to assist these families transition to safe and secure housing including home ownership, the private rental market or in the social housing system.

In some cases, families may also be transitioned from short-term emergency accommodation to immediate temporary supported accommodation (crisis accommodation) funded by the Queensland Government.

The IHRF is a part of the Homelessness Program and is one initiative contributing to achievement of Homelessness Program objectives.

The package is for Queensland families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including First Nations people, people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence, young

families, and families including older people. The package is particularly targeted to assist families, including single parent families, who are living in unsuitable and unsafe situations including sleeping in cars and in tents.

IHRF funding is distributed to SHS funded by the Department of Housing.

The IHRF is comprised of two funding streams:

- Emergency brokerage is provided to SHS so that they can:
 - deliver an immediate short-term emergency accommodation response to families who are experiencing, or at imminent risk of homelessness and have no alternative housing options; and
 - assist families in short-term emergency accommodation, and crisis accommodation, to stabilise their situation and transition to longer-term housing.
- Funding is also provided to deliver additional support worker capacity. This funding is intended to:
 - assist in the distribution of the brokerage including securing short-term emergency accommodation for families; and to
 - increase the capacity within SHS to deliver and coordinate appropriate case management support to families in short-term emergency accommodation and crisis accommodation, with the aim of assisting families to transition to safe and secure housing.

3. Related guidelines

All SHS must operate in accordance with the Homelessness Programs Guidelines, Specifications and Requirements [Homelessness Program Guidelines](#), Guidelines for the Use of Brokerage Funds in Specialist Homelessness Services [Homelessness Program Brokerage Guidelines](#). The *IHRF Guidelines, specifications and requirements* are in addition to these guidelines.

4. Program outcomes

Families experiencing or at risk of homelessness are to be assisted through existing housing and homelessness service system in the first instance wherever possible including, for example: through crisis accommodation; SHS mobile support or private housing products available via Housing Service Centres.

Where a family is experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness, and is unable to secure or retain housing through other service options, IHRF funds can be utilised to:

1. immediately address families' homelessness by providing them with immediate access to short-term emergency accommodation; and
2. transition families to safe and secure housing, as quickly as possible.

It is acknowledged that in some cases, SHS may be unable to complete a full assessment of families' housing options prior to assisting a family with short-term emergency accommodation via the IHRF. In such limited circumstances, the assessment should be completed the next business day wherever possible.

IHRF funding can also be used to assist families housed in properties through the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) to exit to longer-term housing.

5. Underpinning approaches to service delivery

In addition to the approaches described in the Homelessness Program Guidelines, it is expected that the delivery of SHS funded under the IHRF will be underpinned by the following approaches:

- No exits to homelessness – where possible
- No wrong door
- Accommodation with support
- Service engagement and coordination
- Client consent to information sharing

5.1 No exits to homelessness

The *Homelessness Program guidelines* state that services are required to: 'where possible, not exit any client into homelessness' and to 'provide support that is proactive, persistent, reliable, practical and comprehensive'.

Services funded under the IHRF will pursue every strategy possible to ensure that clients do not exit IHRF funded accommodation into homelessness. Strategies include:

- engaging with the local Housing Service Centre/s (HSC) to access the department's private housing products, social housing, and Regional Discretionary Fund to alternatively accommodate clients;
- transitioning clients to other SHS services offered by the same organisation, including accommodating clients in properties within CAP;
- engaging with other SHS offered by another organisation to identify options for transitioning the client to an alternative SHS, including CAP; and
- engaging with other government services, for example, drug and alcohol, mental health or disability, to identify alternative accommodation solutions in alternative sectors, including through referral to Care Coordination where available.

IHRF funds should not be used to assist clients who have access to other appropriate housing options.

5.2 No wrong door

If a client is not appropriate for the service – e.g., because the clients is not within the SHS' geographical catchment or is not within the SHS client group, the minimum acceptable level of service is a warm referral to an appropriate SHS.

5.3 Accommodation with support

When emergency accommodation arrangements are being SHS will consider:

- Household make-up, including gender identity and ages to ensure room/unit is able to accommodate family size and make-up
- Disability or medical needs, including any related to sleeping/bed arrangements
- Ensuite in room
- Kitchenette facilities

Under the IHRF, any short-term emergency accommodation provided must be in the context of case management services delivered by staff employed through the IHRF support worker component.

As per the *Homelessness Program guidelines*, case management is a mandatory service approach for all services as it puts identifying and responding to the client's expressed needs at the centre of all aspects of service delivery. The main elements of case management, relevant to the IHRF, are:

- entry assessment, with a focus on a comprehensive process to determine households' existing housing options and establish the need for assistance under the IHRF;
- planning;
- direct service;
- co-ordination (including referral);
- exit planning; and
- follow-up.

SHS will work with specialist DFV services to ensure safety plans are in place when assisting families experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence with emergency accommodation.

It is expected that services will proactively seek to engage clients in case management; however, clients are not required to formally agree to case management in order to receive temporary emergency accommodation and support under the IHRF.

5.4 Service engagement and coordination

The IHRF offers only a limited array of services, targeted specifically at families in immediate crisis. While support worker and case management capacity is funded under the program, the objective of this funded component is to assist people sustain their short-term emergency accommodation and to transition to safe and secure housing as soon as possible.

There is an array of other, associated services which families will require, and which can be sourced from the service system in many Queensland locations. Organisations should make every effort to source readily available services to deliver a holistic set of services to clients.

Key service delivery partners include:

- the network of local Housing Service Centres across Queensland, which can assist households access private market products and social housing;
- SHS funded by the department, and the domestic and family violence (DFV) SHS funded by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General including DFV Shelters and mobile support; and
- other specialist support services including, for example, mental health services, drug and alcohol services, child and family support and emergency relief services.

6. Underpinning definitions

Definition of 'family'

A family is defined as a single parent/ guardian or couple with at least one dependent, or an expectant mother, or a family unit – e.g., parents with adult children or sibling families.

Young families – i.e., families where one or both parents/guardians are under 25 years of age, are a key cohort to be assisted under this Program.

7. Service delivery framework

The IHRF service delivery framework comprises two service categories:

- Emergency brokerage; and
- Support worker funding.

7.1 Emergency brokerage

Emergency brokerage is the primary element of the IHRF.

Eligible expenditure

SHS can use this emergency brokerage funding flexibly to secure a short-term emergency accommodation response for families experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. As such, a critical category of eligible expenditure is the purchase of short-term emergency accommodation, including but not limited to motel, hotel and apartment accommodation and pet boarding.

Emergency brokerage can also be used to pay for damage to emergency accommodation where this cannot be appropriately recouped from the client or is not the responsibility of the client.

SHS can also use this emergency brokerage funding for goods and services that effect or support the transition of families from an emergency or crisis accommodation setting to a stable, longer-term housing option. Funds can be used to effect or support this transition, regardless of whether the accommodation was secured using brokerage funds under the IHRF or in the course of usual SHS service delivery.

In addition, the following is a non-exclusive list of eligible emergency brokerage expenditure items, where this secures an emergency accommodation response or sustains existing accommodation:

- purchase of essential services that are not offered by the agency or available from a free service including but not limited to:
 - health and allied health, including medications
 - hygiene
 - mental health and alcohol and other drug services
 - childcare services
 - legal services
 - pet boarding
- tenancy commencement or sustainment items, such as:
 - pay utility bills
 - moving costs
 - pay bond (if ineligible for a bond loan)
 - pay private rental market rent arrears
 - purchase of material aid such as food and white goods.

Before funding tenancy commencement or sustainment items through the IHRF, it is expected that SHS will assist or refer clients to other SHS delivering tenancy sustainment support.

Limitations

Organisations should not expend emergency brokerage funds on items that can be purchased under other emergency response initiatives, for example through Community Recovery assistance packages or Emergency Relief.

It is anticipated that emergency brokerage funds will not be directed toward administrative/overhead costs or the purchase of temporary structures, including tents, swags or other items similar to a tent or swag.

In circumstance where a SHS identifies a temporary structure is considered part of addressing a client's immediate needs, the SHS is required to escalate the client's needs to the relevant Regional Director, Service Delivery, Housing and Homelessness Services, Department of Housing who can assist with alternative solutions.

It is noted that while emergency brokerage cannot be directed to administrative/overhead costs that the support worker funding component does include a built-in contribution to vehicle costs, insurance, administration and other costs that are incurred due to the employment of the position.

Client contributions

Although the short-term emergency accommodation is not formally secured under CAP, it is intended that the *Community Housing Rent Policy* (CHRP), with specific reference to the *Program Specific Requirements – Crisis Accommodation Program*, be considered in the securing of an appropriate 'contribution' from clients for the accommodation.

Under the terms of the CHRP, with respect to crisis accommodation, providers may negotiate a service charge¹ with clients accommodated in temporary accommodation. It is appropriate for clients to pay a service charge where their circumstances support this.

Any service charge should be set with due consideration for the case management process, and providers have discretion to set this from a base of \$0 to 25 per cent of gross assessable household income.

Access to accommodation or support services should not be affected by a household's ability to pay a service charge.

The responsibility sits with the IHRF service provider to engage with households and to make assessments regarding clients' ability to pay a service charge, and to negotiate an agreement with clients about a reasonable amount.

Management of clients in temporary accommodation

- Where families are provided with an emergency accommodation response, SHS must work with families to facilitate their short-term stability in the accommodation and their transition into safe and secure housing. The service must seek to provide a flexible and tailored response, in accordance with the purpose of funding and work collaboratively with local Housing Service Centres (HSCs) to support pathway planning including assistance to access longer-term housing options
- Families' duration of stay in emergency accommodation must be managed closely, recognising that hotel or motel accommodation is not an ideal accommodation option for families. The SHS will collaborate with its local HSC and Care Coordination group (if applicable) to manage the transition from this environment in as a timely manner as possible.

¹ Any contribution is considered a 'service charge', rather than 'rent', as households assisted under the IHRF will not be covered by the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008*.

Sustainment of funding

From 2023-24, organisations will receive one allocation of IHRF emergency brokerage funding per financial year, paid quarterly, and have the responsibility for balancing demand for emergency brokerage and the funding available to ensure that the organisation's funding allocation is sustainable, and families are appropriately supported.

Tracking and monitoring

Organisations in receipt of IHRF emergency brokerage funds are required to complete the IHRF Brokerage Reporting template (**Attachment One**) for all expenditure.

Each organisation is required to submit the completed IHRF Brokerage Report template to their Contract and Partnership Officer within ten business days after the end of each month, to enable the department to have oversight of expenditure and the responses being delivered in each region.

Each organisation is also required to submit the IHRF Financial Acquittal (**Attachment Two**) within five business days of the conclusion of the Financial Year, demonstrating the expenditure of all or a portion of the brokerage funds provided.

SHS must continue to capture all client data for clients supported in their reporting to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC).

7.2 Support worker funding

Support worker funding is provided to enable SHS to increase support worker capacity to support families assisted.

Eligible expenditure

SHS should use this funding to employ additional staff or increase the hours of existing staff. It is reasonable for these support workers to be engaged in the following work:

- case management and support of families in emergency accommodation, with a focus on supporting families to sustain the emergency accommodation;
- developing plans for the transition of families from emergency accommodation, or other crisis accommodation, into safe, long-term accommodation, and the execution of these plans;
- engaging with a range of stakeholders, local government and sectoral service providers, and other community support, to source additional client support services and transitional services;
- sourcing of emergency accommodation – e.g., booking and purchasing accommodation, establishing bulk purchase arrangements with suppliers where appropriate; and
- completion of reporting required under the IHRF.

Limitations

Support worker hours allocated under IHRF should not be responsible for the delivery of services funded under other SHS.

Outputs

IHRF support worker funding is provided to each organisation to fund multiples of a Full Time Equivalent (FTE). Through each FTE, the SHS must deliver 1,260 hours of support and assist 42 service users each year.

Support worker funding includes a contribution to vehicle costs, insurance, administration and other costs that are incurred due to the employment of the position

Reporting

Activity delivered by support workers is reported in accordance with *SHS Data* and *Performance Data* in section **6.7. Data, statements and reports You are to submit** within the *Homelessness Program Funding Schedule*.

8. Payments and contracting

The department is responsible for determining the allocation of emergency brokerage funding to SHS across Queensland. Determinations regarding allocations of emergency brokerage are based on experienced demand and more general considerations of demand for homelessness services across Queensland, alongside the capacity of the broader housing and homelessness service system in relevant locations.

IHRF funding is provided only to existing SHS. The department will contract with organisations delivering SHS for the provision of IHRF funding through the most appropriate method, which will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Funding allocation and contractual processes will take into consideration surplus IHRF funds from prior years where practicable.

9 Further information and assistance

For further information contact your local Contract and Partnership Officer.